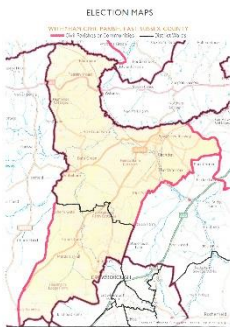


Withyham Parish Council – Our Community Parish Plan (2020 – 2024)

ABOUT THE PARISH



Withyham parish is a beautiful rural parish that is part of Wealden District and East Sussex County. It is bordered by Kent, with its principal village split across the two counties, resulting in Old Groombridge being in Kent and New Groombridge in East Sussex. As well as Groombridge, there are three other villages with their own identities and requirements – Blackham, Withyham and St John's.

In close proximity to the parish are the towns of Crowborough (East Sussex) and Tunbridge Wells (Kent), these are key destinations for residents in terms of shopping, social activities, work and access to commuter services to London. All our parish is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and it is a beautiful place to live, work and visit.

THE PLAN

The aim of the plan is to reflect the needs of residents of Withyham Parish and to ensure that the character of the community is maintained, whilst embracing change in a manner that enhances or strengthens the quality of life of its residents. It builds on the 'Forward for 5' plan (<https://www.withyhamparishcouncil.org.uk/about-the-council/forward-for-5-parish-plan-2016-2021/>) developed in 2016.

The purpose of this document is to outline the **key short and long-term objectives** that will drive the work of the Parish Council over the next five years. These objectives have been split into **ten key areas** and to ensure that the plan is cohesive there is some overlap in these tasks.

Central to achieving the objectives will be continuing our close relationship with residents and organisations in the community and ensuring we are working together and listening to each other. Opportunities for residents to get involved in initiatives are pivotal for the plan's success. That is why **community involvement** is an important focus in the plan and is a key theme throughout. The cooperation of Wealden District Council (WDC) and East Sussex County Council (ESCC) will also be invaluable in achieving our objectives, as will learning from what is happening in other parishes and sharing our own practice with others.

The timeline for the plan is for the duration of the current Council and includes the first year of the next Council, who will be elected in 2023 (as their budget will be set by the current administration to include 2023/2024 budget year).

THE GOLDEN THREAD AND PRIORITY ACTIONS

The plan also includes 'The Golden Thread', which highlights four core themes that our work is centred around; and four priority actions for us in the short term.

OUR THANKS

Withyham Parish Council would like to thank the residents of the parish and organisations within the community for their valued input into this plan.

If you have any comments regarding the plan or would like to find out more about the Parish Council, please contact the Parish Clerk: Tel no: 01892 864557 or clerk@withyhamparishcouncil.org.uk

OUR OBJECTIVES

1. PROMOTING DIVERSITY – Supporting and working with different demographic groups and organisations within the parish; and ensuring our work reflects the views and needs of all residents.

Shorter term objectives (2020-2022)	Longer term objectives (2023-2024)
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with existing groups and agencies to understand and support their work rather than duplicating it. • Seek to identify ways to better engage with young people in the parish to listen to their views and meet their needs. • Actively seek councillors that reflect the demographics of our parish, particularly in the 18-40 age range. Ensuring representation from all wards. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where there are gaps in the provision of services, identify existing groups and agencies to work with to bridge those gaps. • Support, where appropriate, local groups and societies to ensure there continues to be activities that reach out to different demographic groups and interests. • Ensure the needs of all geographical areas of the parish are considered.

2. THE ENVIRONMENT – Ensuring that reducing environmental impact is paramount in effecting the decisions we make as a council; and encouraging residents to take action to protect the environment.

Shorter term objectives (2020-2022)	Longer term objectives (2023-2024)
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete programme of changing streetlights across the parish to LEDs. • Complete the programme of streetlights being switched off after midnight • Consider a loan for replacement streetlight columns where LED lantern replacement is not possible. • Use our communication channels to highlight initiatives to help residents better protect the environment. • Investigate the installation of electric charging points (to include rapid chargers) for cars in public areas in the parish. • Continue (through the Withyham Parish Council Air Traffic Committee (insert link?) to monitor air traffic and engage with agencies and consultations, as appropriate. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider (using evidence of its success elsewhere) investment in solar streetlights. • Replicate best practice in the town and parish councils' sector on climate initiatives and energy generation where appropriate to our parish. • Work with residents and community organisations to identify initiatives to enhance and protect the environment of the parish such as wildflower verges; opportunities for additional tree planting; and exploring the involvement in a parish in bloom.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support initiatives to reduce waste, use less energy, improve recycling and develop green efficiency. • Work with residents to strengthen tree preservation and encourage the planting of additional trees across the parish. • Inform residents in how they can protect the environment; and share ideas/tips, through sharing social media from other agencies and initiatives. • Support Wealden District Council in their continued work to influence environmental change. (Look at inserting link to information on Wealden recycling initiative) 	
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3. INVOLVING RESIDENTS IN COMMUNITY PROJECTS – Working with residents and local organisations to facilitate new initiatives and support existing volunteering opportunities to enhance parish life.

Shorter term objectives (2020-2022)	Longer term objectives (2023-2024)
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to explore and move forward the involvement of volunteers in community projects to support the different objectives within this parish plan and ensure any necessary training for volunteers is in place. • Continue to facilitate the monthly Groombridge Community Cafes at Groombridge Village Hall and the monthly Amblers' group, when COVID-19 restrictions allow. • Develop a Footpath Volunteer Group with the Withyham Parish Council Rights of Way Committee. This group to work closely with East Sussex County Council (ESCC) and residents on any outstanding issues relating to the footpaths, gates and stiles across the parish. • Build on our list of volunteers and identify ways to further engage the community in meaningful and well-organised volunteering opportunities. For example, involving volunteers in the retail element of Groombridge Post Office. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Wealden District Council to expand <i>Keep Britain Tidy</i> (insert link) initiatives. • Investigate how other parishes are successfully training and involving supervisors and volunteers in litter picking and road sign cleaning activities. • Work with residents and community groups to facilitate new volunteer projects where local needs and requirements arise. • Identify councillor or resident leads to take forward new volunteering initiatives. • Keep abreast of and build upon best practice and innovation in volunteering initiatives happening in other parishes.

4. SUPPORTING A STRONGER COMMUNITY – Working with residents and local organisations to ensure that the parish is resilient and can respond effectively at all times.

Shorter term objectives (2020-2022)	Longer term objectives (2023-2024)
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with volunteers and organisations in the community who deliver COVID-19 support to our residents. For example, assisting people shielding with shopping and prescription requests. • Continue to deliver Withyham Parish Council (WPC) grants programme (insert link) to support groups that operate in and support our community. • Signpost residents to groups and organisations dealing with faster broadband and mobile phone signals. This is to support our many home-based businesses and workers. Share information and updates with the community. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore and implement (where appropriate) ways we can continue to build resilience following the community response during COVID-19. • Continue to promote and strengthen the WPC grants programme and identify ways to reach local groups and service providers not accessing the grants system. • Facilitate engagement with relevant agencies where infrastructure is not fit for purpose as technologies and demands change.

5. HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT – Working with residents, local organisations, WDC, ESCC and East Sussex Highways to address and resolve matters relating to speed, road safety, road management, pavements and public transport.

Shorter term objectives (2020-2022)	Longer term objectives (2023-2024)
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on relations with East Sussex Highways and ESCC. • Install Speed Indicator Devices at agreed location(s) and investigate other measures to reduce speed across the parish. • Continue to report and monitor issues across the parish (through the work of the volunteer Highways Coordinator); and continue to promote the ways residents can report any issues they are aware of with the roads such as blocked drains; potholes etc. • Continue to support Wealdlink (insert link) in providing community transport to our residents. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep open dialogue with East Sussex Highways about the potential of volunteers doing more such as cleaning road signs and undertaking litter picks at the roadside. • Monitor current speed indicator devices (SID) locations and consider new ones. • Join with other parishes to support and encourage more residents to use Wealdlink. • Consider other complementary community travel initiatives, should opportunities arise.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help promote and administer Speedwatch (insert link) at approved sites across the parish with a councillor lead. • Continue to engage with WDC, ESCC and the Police on matters relating to speed, road safety, road management and pavements. • Make requests to ESCC regarding the infrastructure needs of the parish (through the work of WPC's Road Safety Committee) and if necessary, consider match funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review effectiveness of verge cutting and alternative delivery mechanisms.
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6. HOUSING AND PLANNING – Ensuring the parish continues to effectively feed into housing development planning (based on evidence of housing needs), working together with residents and WDC.

Shorter term objectives (2020-2022)	Longer term objectives (2023-2024)
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and contribute to WDC Local Plan (insert link) development. • Monitor and contribute to the Government White Paper on Planning Policy/Law. • Continue to work closely with Wealden District Council on matters related to housing and planning. • Ensure that the housing needs of the parish are heard locally and regionally by continuing to respond to Wealden and national planning consultations. • Consider ways in which trees can be better protected in the parish and apply for tree preservation orders (TPOs) to WDC, where appropriate. • Signpost annual training for councillors on planning matters. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review whether a Neighbourhood Plan would be appropriate to ensure a community say in future development. • Review WPC's Planning Policies/requirement for a Neighbourhood Plan as a result of any Government changes (White Paper).

7. CRIME AND POLICING – Working with residents, Sussex Police, our Community Warden and local organisations to help reduce levels of crime in the parish.

Shorter term objectives (2020-2022)	Longer term objectives (2023-2024)
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the Community Warden continues to support the parish, responding to various issues including parking concerns. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage more involvement from residents in looking out for their neighbours by working together and sharing

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on existing links with Sussex Police to progress actions that are relevant to the parish, such as through the Community Safety Action Group (insert link). 	<p>information to reduce crime. Building on existing ‘Our Watch’ (insert link) coverage in the parish, supporting new local neighbourhood groups with information and introductions.</p>
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8. LEISURE AND TOURISM – Encouraging people to visit the parish to explore the beautiful area and bring economic benefits to local businesses.

Shorter term objectives (2020-2022)	Longer term objectives (2023-2024)
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help publicise and encourage the use of our 40 miles of footpaths. • Work with local businesses; facilities and tourist attractions to promote increased use and awareness. • Promote local events in the parish through the ‘What’s On’ page (insert link) on the WPC website. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better utilise social media platforms such as the WPC Facebook page to provide easy access to information about local facilities. • Recognise and support (where appropriate) the zest for keeping active and healthy. • Promote and support through WPC grants, small group local initiatives such as those enhancing mental and physical wellbeing.

9. PROTECTING ASSETS AND SERVICES – Continuing to support and strengthen assets (buildings and land) that the Parish Council own; and protect and enhance assets and services of community value across the parish.

Shorter term objectives (2020-2022)	Longer term objectives (2023-2024)
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the newly set up Withyham Parish Community Interest Company (WPCIC) to deliver Groombridge Post Office as a thriving community-based business. • Continue to work closely with the village halls across the parish. • Work with the community by to realise a new play-area at Groombridge Recreation Ground. • Continue to monitor existing Assets of Community Value (insert link about what this is) that further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community: and identify further applications. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where required by the community, consider other community initiatives upon which WPCIC might help deliver. • Consider repeating the previously successful Spring Market for local businesses. • Review leases and maintenance/arrangements at appropriate times. • Consider buying the freehold of the Parish Office in Groombridge should the opportunity arise.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support local community groups as required, through information, introductions and grant funding. • Continue to invest in and maintain WPC owned assets such as bus shelters, fingerposts and benches. • Work with ESCC to keep public footpaths open and in good order through our Rights of Way Committee. • Continue to support the community areas and green spaces across all parts of the parish. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review use of meeting rooms at the Parish Office for local businesses and voluntary groups.
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10. THE COUNCIL – Being an effective, representative and well-run council; enabling community life to thrive; and listening and responding to residents’ needs.

Shorter term objectives (2020-2022)	Longer term objectives (2023-2024)
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet our legal responsibilities as a Council in a transparent and professional manner. • Deliver on our new website which complies with regulations and includes a diary of community events. • Provide information and ways of consulting via existing paper-based and social media channels. • Facilitate informative and engaging Annual Parish Assemblies that showcase local clubs and initiatives. • Build on our relationships with other agencies, influencing wherever we can. • Seek more involvement by residents from villages, hamlets and rural areas across the parish, in WPC committees and working groups. • Ensure councillors and staff have the skills and training to carry out their roles effectively on behalf of the parish. This includes all new councillors attending the ‘Being an Effective Councillor’ course. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where cuts are made by other agencies, and the community values the provision, consider what WPC can do to maintain delivery (within budget constraints) of services throughout the parish. • Develop our communications strategy to ensure various routes of engagement seek community views and evidence local need to facilitate Council decisions; and allow flexibility within our Parish Plan to deliver what is important to residents. • Review councillor representation on local organisations and initiatives to ensure WPC is informed and engaged. • Develop recruitment initiatives which contribute to the council being sufficiently representative of our community, by the time of the 2023 elections.

THE GOLDEN THREAD – THE FUNDAMENTAL FOUR

- Supporting climate protection initiatives.
- Building resilience in terms of promoting community self-help.
- Continuing to listen to and respond to community needs.
- Effectively promoting the work of WPC throughout the parish.

OUR PRIORITY ACTIONS IN THE SHORT TERM

- Recruiting and retaining a full complement of councillors, who are actively engaged and undertake training for the role.
- Developing an active group of volunteers.
- Saving Groombridge Post Office – procuring the building and increasing community usage through funding the Withyham Parish Community Interest Company (WPCIC).
- Working with the community to install a new play-area at Groombridge Recreation Ground.