

**A 21st Century  
Village Design Statement  
for Walsham le Willows**

# Foreword

In 2002, a wide ranging Village Appraisal of all aspects of community life in Walsham le Willows, was conducted with the support of the Countryside Agency and Mid Suffolk District Council. Over 90% of households replied and the analysis of this very strong response in an Appraisal Report, led to public discussions as to how the village should respond to the findings.

A number of issues were identified and an Action Plan was drawn up at a well-attended public meeting in November 2002. This Action Plan was subsequently adopted, with key organisations taking responsibility for particular issues. In 2003, a further, simpler survey sought to collect more anecdotal views on 'What do you like about the village?' and 'What does Walsham need to make it a better place?' There is broad agreement about what residents value in our community and it is their wish that the findings of these surveys and discussions are presented, formally, in a document for reference and information.

The Parish Council prepared an initial draft document and had the benefit of feedback from the whole community via the 'Walsham Observer', our monthly magazine, published by the Community Council and distributed free to all 493 households. A second revised draft document was circulated to all village groups, organisations and businesses for further contributions and comment. Throughout, David McHardy, of Mid Suffolk District Council, has provided much valuable professional advice.

A sub committee of the Parish Council prepared further revisions of the draft document, which were considered by the full Council and finally adopted at its meeting on 15th January 2007.

We believe the document, in its finished format, will be a reference point against which villagers and village organisations can assess progress on issues identified in the Action Plan and consider the impact of future situations. The document will contribute evidence of local character to the countywide landscape character assessment that will underpin design guidance in the Mid Suffolk Local Development Framework. It may also form a basis for the parishes comments on the appropriateness of future development proposals.

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# Introduction

Walsham le Willows is a medium sized village of about 1100 persons, situated away from major highways and about 13 miles distant from each of the small towns of Diss, Stowmarket, Bury St Edmunds and Thetford.

In the past it was a largely self-sufficient community with a range of provision shops, skilled craftsmen and workshops, and a thriving social life based around religious groups, a Temperance Band, a Reading Room, sporting events, shows and gymkhanas, public houses, and a calendar of regular meetings and events. Some of this social infrastructure has been lost as the development of mass media and an externally oriented economy have taken over. Yet a strong sense of community still obtains and small developments of new housing, together with the intermittent flow of new residents, have been assimilated relatively easily.

- Monitor the progress of the action plan every three years.
- Maintain dialogue between community members, village groups and organisations on the future of the village.



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# The Landscape and Environment

Unless approaching from the southeast, along the Westhorpe Road, you come upon the village suddenly. The broad valley, with its stream meandering at 40 to 48 metres above sea level, is well wooded and the approach roads from Hepworth, (5) Ixworth, (3) Finningham and Badwell Ash are lined with good hedges and belts of mature trees which are an especially valued feature, hiding the presence of the village until the last minute of approach. The arable uplands, at around 60 to 65 metres above sea level, are more open and extensive with large fields and consequently fewer hedges and trees, although small copses mark the location of ponds once so vital when cattle grazing was important in a mixed farming economy.

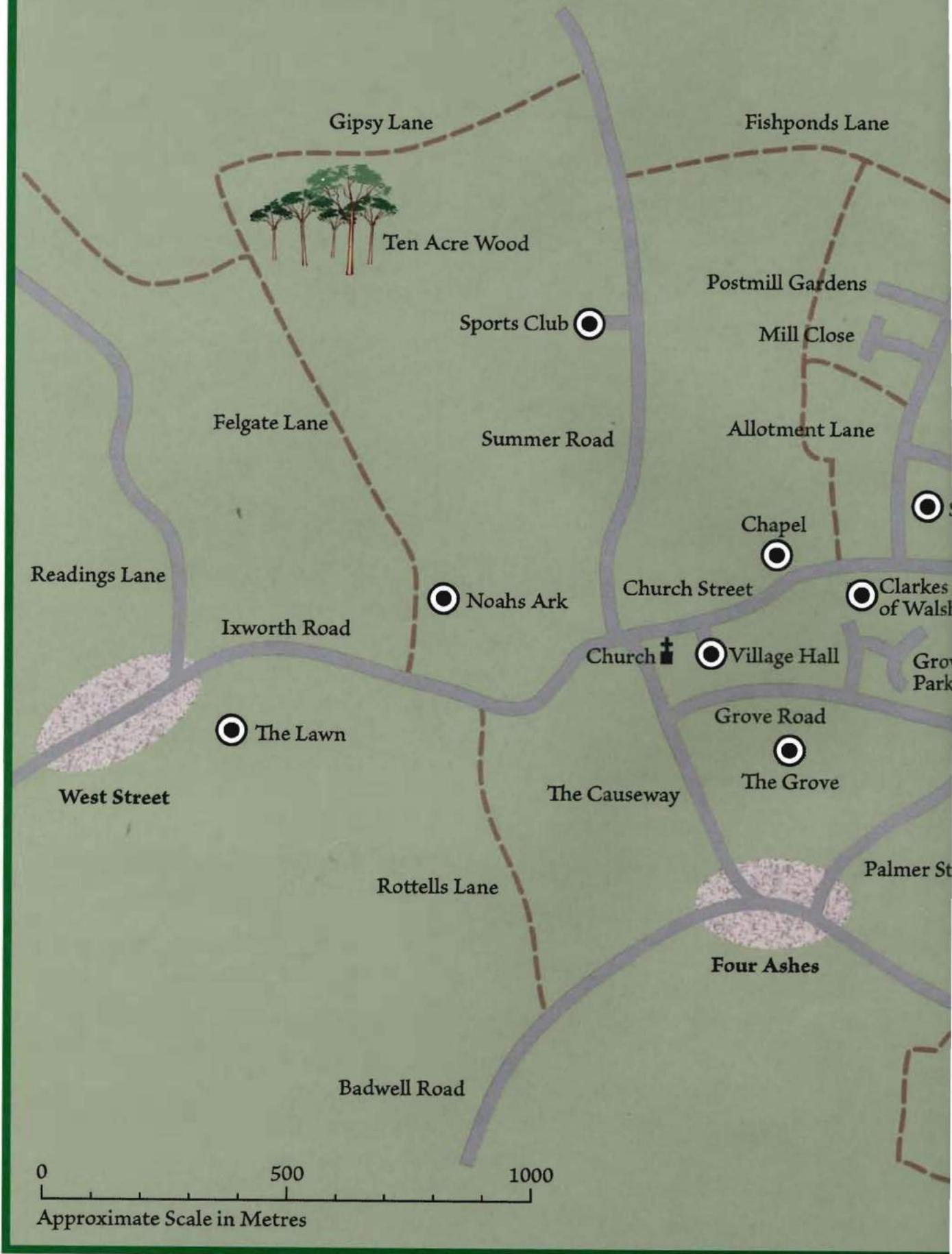
Close to the village, fields are smaller, hedges common and of great variety and antiquity, as a survey of 1989 demonstrated. Apart from the tree lined approach roads there are many mature trees in hedgerows, surrounding the churchyard, leading from The Street along The Avenue (8) towards The Grove, and within the grounds of private properties such as The Beeches, The Rookery, Hall Green, The Park, The Elms, The Lawn and Sunnyside House.

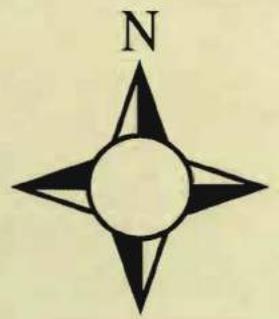
Away from the central core of buildings in The Street, (15) an uncrowded openness characterises the general village layout along some eight roads. There are significant gaps between properties giving pleasant views out of the village along Palmer Street, The Causeway, Wattisfield Road, and Finningham Road. (7) Elsewhere, housing looks out over areas of mown grass, as in Staple Close, (16) Grove Park and Townhouse Road. The loosely structured hamlets of West Street, Cranmer Green, Four Ashes and Crownland, situated well away from the central core, reinforce the feeling of spaciousness and of winding roads linking one area with another.

New development that poses a significant threat to any of the landscape and environment features identified in the survey should not be permitted.

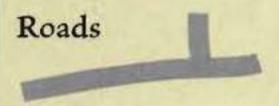
- Protect the visual importance of the tree-lined stream and approach roads.
- Continue work with Suffolk Hedgerow Survey to monitor hedgerows.
- Where the existing environment is of an open, spacious nature, this should be respected in any future housing proposals.
- Identify and protect visually important green areas.
- Value views into, out of, and through, the built up areas.

# Walsham le Willows





### Key



Footpaths



Hamlets





9

- Use existing vernacular buildings as an inspiration for new buildings.
- Encourage new building which is sympathetic to the character of its surroundings.



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# The Character

The 15th century church of St Mary (9) is the dominant feature of the village – a large airy building of knapped flint. The early Victorian Maltings (11) in Wattisfield Road, converted into nine dwellings in 1979, is also of flint. There are other buildings with individual flint walls, and numerous boundary walls are built of flint nodules with brick capping.

The over-all picture is of mostly unpretentious cottage style properties, many of them colour washed to hide a brick, or more often, a plastered exterior. Often the plaster covers a timber frame. Architectural Historian, Leigh Alston, has identified sixty-two pre 1700 timber framed houses. Most of these are modest in size; some are thatched, often with first floor dormer windows. There are a few weather-boarded properties including, situated opposite the Church, the former Guildhall, now converted into three dwellings.

Mock Jacobean estate houses, (12) built in Summer Road and The Causeway at the turn of the 19th/20th century by John Martineau are very striking. There are tall hexagonal chimneys, some herringbone brickwork, and exterior heavy timbers carrying carved texts.

There are several substantial houses scattered throughout the village, timber framed with colour washed plaster and with impressive, and often very ornate, chimney stacks, as at Crownland, Green Farmhouse, The Rookery and The Priory. Buildings in the main street mostly abut the roadside pavement, yet their front facing or gable facing positions, their brick, plaster and weather boarded exteriors, roofs of slate, tile and thatch, combine with such a variety of size and style (15) to create an intensely varied and exciting streetscape enhanced by occasional views into the distance glimpsed between properties. (4) The village welcomes plans to underground electricity and telephone cables in The Street. The removal of the current invasive clutter will enhance the intrinsic character of the village.

Wattisfield Road, Grove Road, Palmer Street and Townhouse Road are predominantly an uncrowded mixture of houses and bungalows built in groups of ten to twenty in different styles, and at different times, over the past eighty or so years.



# Facilities and Infrastructure

Farming is no longer a labour intensive activity and only small numbers earn a direct living from the land. By contrast, Clarkes of Walsham employ about 98 people at their builders merchant business. Drivers, vehicle mechanics, metal fabricators, carpenters, store men, sales personnel, accountants, secretaries and management staff are all needed here and many live locally. Some work opportunities also exist on the Shepherds Grove Industrial Estate at Stanton.

There are a number of small businesses run by self-employed skilled artisans. To builders, plumbers, carpenters, heating engineers and gardeners can be added art and craft specialists, tele-cottage workers, and specialist retail traders. An increasing number of professionals live here: doctors, nurses, architect, solicitor, educationalists, photographer, and journalist. For many people their workplace is not in Walsham and commuter traffic is now common, particularly towards Bury St Edmunds. The census of 2001 recorded over 80% of employed people travelling to work by private vehicle and an average journey of 20.41 km.

To this growth of individual car movements along narrow winding roads with soft verges and sagging edges is added increased commercial traffic. Some of this serves Clarkes of Walsham but, worryingly, heavy 12 wheeler lorries now make short cuts between the A14 and A143, and the A1088 and A140, along these unsuitable country roads. In 2002 they were the impetus for a traffic survey conducted by the Parish Council with the assistance of Suffolk County Council.

Public transport to Bury St Edmunds is poor, with nothing after 18.30. Services to Diss, Thetford and Stowmarket, are intermittent or nonexistent. Service 306 was a joint venture between the Countryside Agency and Walsham, Rickinghall and Botesdale parish councils to provide a weekend evening service to Bury St Edmunds and it went some way to satisfying demands for improved public transport, until its withdrawal.

Doctors' surgeries are between four and eight miles distant, but a system of voluntary drivers collect repeat prescriptions for those with travel problems. The closure of the Post Office Stores in 2003 created similar problems for those 10% of households without access to a car and a further 41% of households where the one vehicle is needed for the journey to work. The situation is only partially mitigated by a Community Council initiative to set up a Satellite Post Office facility for two mornings a week in the Village Hall, alongside a Coffee Shop.

There are two public houses, a hairdresser, a specialist niche retailer in wine and a cheese, delicatessen and butcher's shop. A strong sense of community and self-help underpins village life. (18) This has already been responsible for the purpose built pre-school facility opened in 1997, allotments and a skate park. There are now plans to extend the current provision of football, cricket, snooker, table tennis and darts at the Sports Club and to improve facilities at the Memorial Village Hall. These proposals are in line with equal opportunity objectives and the 2002 Action Plan, which highlighted the need to improve facilities for young people. Both these projects will require considerable outside funding.

The village of Walsham le Willows, as we see it today, has evolved over a long period of time. The speed of change and the pressures for development will necessitate a regular review of the data and surveys which have informed this visual design statement.



# Appendices

**1. The 2001 Census Abstract.**

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**2. The 2003 Village Action Plan.**

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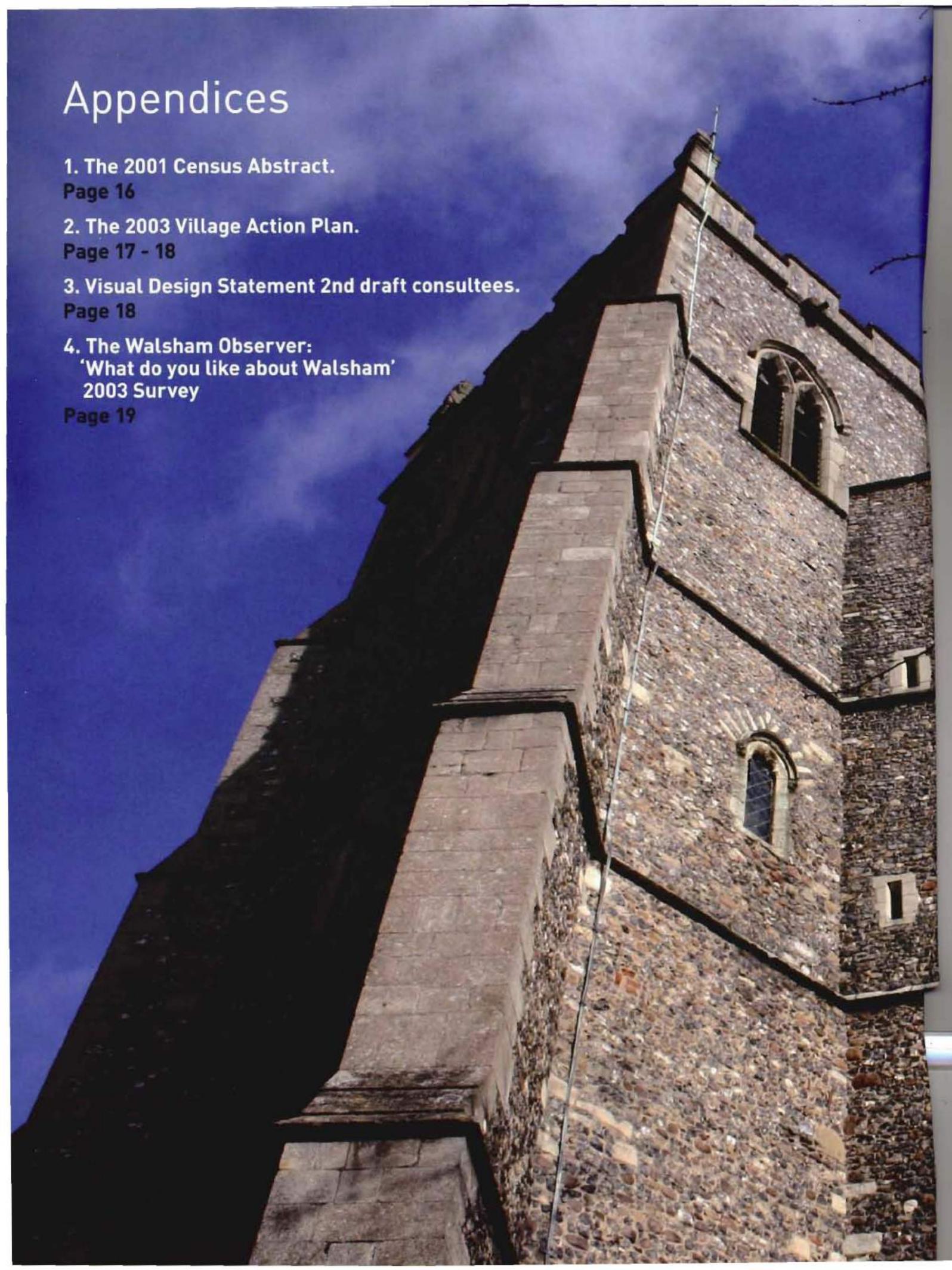
**3. Visual Design Statement 2nd draft consultees.**

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**4. The Walsham Observer:**

**'What do you like about Walsham'  
2003 Survey**

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# 1. The 2001 Census Abstract

Total number of persons		1122
Number of persons aged	0 - 4	68
	5 - 15	169
	16 - 24	105
	25 - 44	304
	45 - 64	294
	65 - 74	103
	75+	79
Number with limiting long term illness		150
Number aged 16 - 74 in employment		538
unemployed		23
Number of working persons who travel by public transport		22
Number of working persons who travel to work by car, van or motorcycle		402
Average distance travelled to work		20.41km
Total number of households		402
Number of households with no private vehicle		48
one private vehicle		190
two private vehicles		163
Owner occupied households		307
Public rental households		79
Private rental households		71

## 2. The Village Action Plan resulting from the 2002 Village Appraisal

Issue	Action	Lead Organisation	Partner
1. Road Safety	To raise the issues of danger spots identified in the survey, increases in car and lorry traffic and speed limits with Suffolk County Council. Also the need for a footpath to the Sports Club.	Parish Council	Carol Baker and others, Suffolk Police
	To consider the issue of parking in the village, particularly near the school.	Parish Council Community Council	Walsham School, Suffolk Police
2. Housing	To ensure Mid Suffolk District Council Planning Committee is aware of the results of the Village Appraisal and takes the views of local people into account.	Parish Council & Cllr. Alec Russell	
	To continue to monitor the planning application for housing development in the village and to clarify priorities for improving infrastructure with MSDC.	Parish Council & Cllr. Alec Russell	
	Request a site inspection and inform the public of the date and time	Parish Council & Cllr. Alec Russell	
3. Crime	To introduce measures to reduce the level of anti-social behaviour in the village, such as a 'youth shelter'.	Suffolk Police	Neighbourhood Watch
	To consider the pattern of reported/unreported crime and encourage support for the Police and Neighbourhood Watch.		
4. Leisure	To support existing clubs and activities and encourage the creation of new ones.	Community Council & Parish Council	Play Council, Sports Club, Community Council
	To develop a funding bid to provide extra sporting facilities for families and improve access for all.	Walsham Sports Club	
	To develop more regular leisure opportunities in consultation with young people in the village, and ways to inform and involve them	Parish Council	

## 2. The Village Action Plan resulting from the 2002 Village Appraisal (Continued)

Issue	Action	Lead Organisation	Partner
5. Environment	To install more litter bins and dog mess bins in consultation with local people.	Parish Council	
	To encourage local people to donate their spent printer ink cartridges to Walsham School for recycling.	Walsham School	
	To protect existing trees and hedges and take opportunities for further tree planting.	Parish Council	Tree Warden
6. Village Hall	To support plans for the expansion and improvement of the Memorial Hall and grounds.	Community Council	Parish Council
	To consider improving access for young people, such as a 'cyber café'.		

## 3. Consultees to second draft

Babe and Toddler Group  
 Blackburn B, Plumbing and Heating Engineer  
 Blue Boar Inn  
 Clarke N D, Electrical Engineer  
 Clarkes of Walsham, Builders Merchants  
 Congregational Church  
 Drama Group  
 Farrow R D, Builder  
 First Impressions, Interior Design  
 Horticultural Society  
 Little Willows Pre-school  
 Mid Suffolk District Council  
 Millmouse Design - Design for Print and Pixel  
 Moores Transport  
 Rolfes Butchers  
 Rudderham P J, Motorbody and Welding Engineer  
 Six Bells Inn  
 Uppercuts Hair and Beauty  
 Walsham le Willows CEVCP School  
 Walsham le Willows Community Council  
 Walsham le Willows and District W I  
 Walsham le Willows Housing Action Group  
 Walsham le Willows Parochial Church Council  
 Walsham le Willows Sports Club  
 Walsham Village History Group  
 Wattisfield Wines  
 Willow Club  
 Willowserv Ltd, Plumbing and Heating

## 4. The Walsham Observer

### ‘What do you like about Walsham’ 2003 Survey

<b>Landscape and Environment</b>	
Always views of fields and hedges	95%
Compact core of old buildings	88%
Gaps in housing offer views through: Palmer St, The Causeway	86%
Hamlets on the outskirts: Cranmer, West Street	73%
Lots of trees	95%
Mixed ages of buildings	88%
Open spaces, meadows, mown greens: Staple Close, Townhouse	88%
Stream running through the centre of the village	100%
Tree-lined approach roads: Badwell, Ixworth, Hepworth, Finningham	90%
Uncrowded mix of small housing developments added over the past 100 years	78%
Variety of housing styles: Timbered, brick, thatch, plaster, flint	80%

<b>The sense of community</b>	
Active Church Groups to join	54%
Busy Sports Club	69%
Choice of Pubs to use	64%
Different events during the year	76%
Having our own Primary School	95%
Pre-School facility at Little Willows	78%
Some opportunities for employment	69%
Village magazines to keep us informed	100%
Wide range of interest groups to join	80%
Recognising people in the street	67%

<b>What does Walsham need to make it a better place?</b>	
A Post Office	98%
Big increase in house building	0%
Doctors Surgery	38%
Extra Street Lights	17%
Improvements to facilities for young people	76%
General convenience store	57%
Heavy (12 wheeler) lorry restriction	83%
Increased use of litter and dog fouling bins	62%
Library facility in Village Hall	45%
More bench seats around the village	48%
Modest increase in house building	57%
Nature reserve area of woodland	52%
Improvement in Public transport service	73%
Resident Policeman	57%
Some affordable 3 bedroom housing	38%
Village Hall improvements	76%
Wider choice of sport at Sports Club	24%