i. Introduction

All of us who live in Upton can think of aspects of our village that we value and would like to preserve, and other features that we would like to change or improve in some way. And we all deserve an equal say in the future of our village. Recognising this, the Parish Council supported the creation of a Parish Plan in order to establish what we want and how to achieve it.

This Parish Plan is intended to:

- Reflect the views of all interested residents
- Identify features and characteristics of Upton that we value
- Identify opportunities and threats relevant to our village
- Document how we want Upton to develop in the future

Most importantly, the Parish Plan sets out an Action Plan. This encompasses actions that we can undertake to make life in Upton even better, and further actions that will need the assistance of outside bodies or authorities.

The process of creating this Parish Plan has been truly inclusive, and could not have been achieved without the hard work and support of many people within Upton. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have worked on or supported the Steering Group and assorted Working Groups. We are also grateful to the Parish Council, the Countryside Agency and the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council for financial support, encouragement and advice.

Of course, this is not the end of the process. There is still much to be done - our Parish Plan will only be useful if it is used as a basis for action. We should expect our Parish Council and other village bodies to refer to this plan, and to implement its recommendations. In return, we owe them our support and our appreciation.

The Parish Plan Steering Group

ii. Upton Village

Upton is a small village of approximately 170 houses within the Vale of the White Horse in Oxfordshire. The village lies on a spring line on the edge of the North Wessex Downs, designated in 1972 as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, between the villages of Blewbury, the Hagbournes and Chilton.

From its mention in the Domesday Book ("a land of nine ploughs"), for many centuries Upton consisted of a number of farms, served by local labourers and craftsmen with the principal landowners living elsewhere. The enclosure award (circa 1760) fixed patterns on the landscape that survive today in the form of hedgerows, tracks, paths and lanes.

The village once had its own railway station, opened in 1883 on the Didcot to Newbury line. The line was closed in 1964, and the remaining railway embankment now serves as a cycle track to Didcot.

A serious fire in 1933 destroyed a number of the historic houses and farms in the centre of Upton. Some remain, but many of the village's houses were built in the 20th century. The village retains its Anglican church and a Methodist chapel, along with a Pub and Post Office. Upton also has a village hall and children's playground, both sited within a large recreation ground. A memorial Chestnut tree stands on the small village green.

PART A: The Action Plan

This Parish Plan is presented in two parts:

- Part A summarises the actions identified in the planning process
- Part B provides details of the process and the basis for the recommended actions.

1. Recommendations

The Action Plan has been developed by a series of consultations with the residents of the village. The details of the consultation process are given later in Part B for those who wish to read in depth about the process and the arguments.

The recommendations are based upon the results of an initial Survey sent out to every household to find out what residents liked and disliked about the village, followed by a detailed Questionnaire sent out to every resident of Upton in December 2004. A separate Questionnaire was sent to those aged between 9 and 17 years. 204 replies were received from the adults and 29 from the youth of the village. The results of the Survey and Questionnaires can be seen on the Upton Village website.

Aim	Priority	Action	Responsibility
Provide Cycle Track To Blewbury	1	Establish a cycle track linking Upton and Blewbury, working in conjunction with Blewbury Parish Council	Parish Council
Preserve Upton As A Small Rural Village	1	Note support for the Vale planning policy, and resist new development within Upton or any extension of the village other than that allowed by the proposed planning policy	Parish Council
Protect The Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty To The South Of The A417	1	Note the importance of protecting the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty from any form of development	Parish Council
Protect Upton Against The Effects Of The Proposed Expansion Of Didcot	1	Take measures to protect the rural nature of the area south of Didcot, to mitigate the effects of increased traffic on surrounding roads and keep the residents informed on the development plans	Parish Council
Improvements To Village Hall	2	Consider the feedback from the Questionnaire when forming plans for the Village Hall	Upton Village Hall Amenity Trust
Improvements To Recreation Ground	2	Set up a working party to consider options for the Recreation Ground and car park and to recommend / implement a way forward.	Parish Council / UVHAT
Improve Safety Of A417	2	Continue to work with the Highways Authority to limit the speed of traffic through the village.	Parish Council
Improve Safety Of A417	2	Press for measures to improve the safety of those crossing the A417	Parish Council
Improve Village Lanes	2	Press for better maintenance of internal village lanes, repairing pot holes	Parish Council
Improve Footpaths	2	Protect footpaths from inappropriate use by motorbikes and horses	Parish Council
Improve Footpaths	2	Act to improve the condition of the path to Blewbury, working in conjunction with Blewbury Parish Council as appropriate	Parish Council
Provide Off Street Car Parking	2	Assess options for providing off street parking, based on a needs analysis provided by the Parish Plan Questionnaire replies.	Parish Council

Aim	Priority	Action	Responsibility
Resist Street Lighting	2	Note strength of resistance to street lighting within Upton	Parish Council
Improve The Web Site	2	Encourage the use of the web site. Make it easier for villagers to log on and send in items of interest. Provide news by regular e-mail to those interested.	Parish Council
Improve The Upton News	2	Support the Upton News, noting requests to provide more information	Parish Council
Form A Youth Club	3	Seek organisers to form and run Youth Club	Parish Council
Promote Activities For Younger Children	3	Invite those interested in activities for younger children to find organisers and agree on a way forward	Parish Council
Improve Village Social Activities	3	Invite those who have expressed an interest to get together and find ways to organise social and indoor sporting activities activities	Parish Plan Steering Group / Parish Council
Improve Communications For Younger Residents	3	Establish sections on the web site and in the Upton News for younger residents	Parish Council
Improve Communications For Younger Residents	3	Appoint a member of the Parish Council to act as a Liaison member to young residents	Parish Council
Establish Voluntary Projects	3	Establish visits to the elderly and infirm. Appoint a volunteer administrator for the scheme, and assist in establishing the scheme	Parish Council
Establish Voluntary Projects	3	Establish a transport scheme. Arrange a meeting with the Didcot Volunteer Organisation to explore the possibility of the Upton group working under the D.V.O. umbrella	Parish Council
Establish Voluntary Projects	3	Call upon the services of the volunteers to improve the appearance and the amenities of the village	Parish Council
Provide Mains Gas Supply	3	Investigate the possibility and cost of providing mains gas to those who have expressed an interest	Parish Plan Steering Group / Parish Council
Provide Feedback To Pub	3	Collate feedback and pass comments to the Landlord	Parish Plan Steering Group
Consider Post Office Hours	3	Follow up replies to assess support for a change in hours	Postmistress

PART B: Development of Upton Parish Plan

2. Creation of the Parish Plan

Upton Parish Council initiated the Parish Plan on 29th November 2003 at an open meeting attended by about 30 residents where David Fisher from the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC) presented the case for producing a Plan. A unanimous show of hands supported the idea and a Steering Committee consisting of eight residents and two Parish council members was formed. This committee obtained funding from the Countryside Agency, ORCC and the Upton Parish Council to carry out the tasks.

In order to start the process, a Survey was sent to each household in February 2004 asking the residents to identify what they liked and disliked about Upton and to suggest improvements. It also invited residents to offer their services to help. 119 replies were received (a response of 68% from the 168 households), which clearly showed that there was much interest in the village and the Plan. The results were reported back to the residents through a summary published in the Upton News.

Five Working Groups were then set up to consider aspects relating to Environment and Planning, Transport and Roads, Social and Welfare, Facilities and Youth. Their objectives were to look at the ideas, work out what might be done and the costs.

As these groups started work, it became clear that it would be necessary to return to the residents again to ask their views on specific questions before an Action Plan could be proposed. A draft of the Questionnaire was made available for consultation at the Village Fete and was finally sent out, this time to every resident, in December 2004. A separate Questionnaire was sent to those aged between 9 and 17 years. 204 replies were received from the adults and 29 from the youth of the village. These replies were collated, audited to confirm accuracy and presented to the village at an Open Meeting held on 23 February 2005.

The full results of the Survey and Questionnaires can be found on the Upton Village website: www.uptonvillage.co.uk

3. The Survey

The Survey asked residents to identify up to three items they liked or disliked and invited them to make suggestions for improvements. 119 replies were received, a response of 68% which clearly showed that there was much interest in the village and its future. There were also over 60 offers to help with the plan and with various skills.

A few items were identified in many replies, especially a very strong endorsement for the village to retain its present character. Several concerns were also common and strongly felt. The following table summarises the most commonly mentioned "likes" and "concerns":

Likes	Replies
"A small quiet village"	86
Peaceful	68
Friendly neighbours	48
Rural location	49
No Street lighting	26
Good access to road and rail links	16

Items of concern	Replies
Safety of main road	35
Pot holes	26
Obstruction by parked vehicles on internal roads	26
Speeding on internal roads	15
Motorbikes on footpaths	8
Damage to verges	9
Dog fouling	5

There were also a great many suggestions made covering a wide range of interests. The lack of a village shop featured most prominently (36 replies), and 10 identified the need for a gas main. There were many suggestions that Upton should try to develop more of a sense of village community and increase the number of activities and should encourage more residents to support these activities. The lack of facilities for under 18's and over 60's was highlighted. There was some support for building some affordable housing and for improving the appearance of the village by planting trees and improving the verges. It was also felt that the way news and information is distributed to the village could be improved.

4. The Questionnaire

Questions in the Questionnaire to Adults reflected issues that were raised in the Survey and focused on Social Activities, Planning, Communications, Roads, Street Lighting, Footpaths, the Village Hall, Recreation Ground and Community Projects. 204 replies were received to the Adult Questionnaire. Of these over 70% thought that we had asked the right questions and a further 25% felt that we had asked some of the right questions.

A separate Questionnaire was sent out to young people aged between 9 and 17. The questions for this Questionnaire were derived with input from the Youth Group, with others added by the Steering Group to find out the opinions of the young residents to some of the adult questions. 29 completed Questionnaires were received.

5. Planning and Environment

Over 90% of respondents would like Upton to remain as it is, and agreed with the proposed planning policy of the Vale of White Horse. They would like Upton to be treated as a small village, with new building development limited to sites within the existing village envelope and limited to 1 or 2 dwellings per site. 75% think that development of more houses will not benefit the village.

Action: Parish Council to note the overwhelming support for the Vale planning policy, and to resist new development within Upton or extension of the village other than that allowed by the proposed planning policy.

5.1 Planning Enforcement / Village Features requiring Protection

The area of the Parish southwest of the A417 is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). 40% of respondents felt that the AONB was not adequately protected and expressed concern about unauthorised development. However 85% of replies are satisfied that listed buildings and significant trees within the parish are adequately protected.

A number of replies noted a desire to protect the site of the old railway and associated cutting. The playing fields, memorial tree, stream, hedgerows and verges are valued by respondents and should be protected.

Action: Parish Council to note the importance of protecting the AONB from development

5.2 Planned Expansion of Didcot

Many adults made comments regarding the plans to expand Didcot. Many commented upon the lack of information made available to villagers regarding the development of Didcot, and in particular on the impact of this development on surrounding villages such as Upton. Of particular concern to residents are the erosion of the green belt, the threat of assimilation of Upton into the urban area, increased traffic volumes on nearby major and minor roads and a concern that vandalism would increase. Set against these concerns, the regeneration of central Didcot along with the provision of improved facilities and new employment prospects were welcomed.

Action: Parish Council to do its part to protect the rural nature of the area south of Didcot, to protect Upton from the effects of increased traffic on surrounding roads and keep the residents informed on the development plans.

6. Roads, Street Lighting, Footpaths and Cycle Tracks.

While only a third of young respondents expressed concern with respect to road safety, the speed of traffic on the A417 and lack of pavements were recurrent concerns.

6.1 A417

A major issue of concern to the village is speed of passing traffic through the village on the A417 and the safety of vehicles and pedestrians attempting to use or cross this road. A large majority of residents supported the proposed measures to control speed and improve visibility.

Action: Parish Council to continue to work with the highways authority to control the speed of traffic through the village and to monitor the effectiveness of the measures recently installed. If traffic speed is not reduced successfully then additional measures should be considered.

Action: Parish Council to press for measures to assist the safety of those crossing the A417.

6.2 Internal Village Roads

Over 80% of respondents do not support any internal village roads being made one-way, but a number suggested that it would be safer if traffic were not allowed to turn right from Prospect Road onto the A417. It was noted that making roads one-way tended to increase traffic speed and thereby reduced safety.

A number of villagers currently park cars on village roads, but would use convenient off-street parking, if available. Other respondents who noted the potential hazard and obstruction caused by cars parked on narrow village lanes would welcome this.

Action: Parish Council to investigate funding, and assess options for providing off street parking, based on a needs analysis provided by the Parish Plan Questionnaire replies.

6.3 Street Lighting

A large majority of respondents do not want any street lighting within Upton and many are vociferous in their opposition. Of the minority of respondents who would like some street lighting within the village, the bus stop, phone box and village hall were highlighted as areas that would benefit. Many villagers commented that any lighting should be dim, and in keeping with the village environment.

Action: Parish Council to note strength of opposition to street lighting within Upton.

6.4 Footpaths and Cycle Tracks

The vast majority of respondents believe Upton has a reasonable number of well-maintained footpaths – as one villager wrote: "there can be few villages with better access to and from village to surroundings". However, a considerable number of villagers noted the poor condition of the path to Blewbury which is uneven and not usable with pushchairs. Dog litter and poor drainage were also cited as concerns. The need to deter motorbikes and horses from using the footpaths was also highlighted.

The importance of footpaths and tracks to respondents is accompanied by the strong interest in a suggested cycle track to link Upton and Blewbury. 136 adult respondents are in favour of a cycle track, with many reporting cause to use it every week. Among young people, support was even higher with almost 90% of them supporting a cycle track, with over 50% expecting to use it on a daily or weekly basis. As one young villager noted "All my friends live in Blewbury. Sometimes I cycle along the road and it is very dangerous." Some adult respondents cautioned that it would be necessary to protect a cycle track from abuse by motorbikes. Others noted that it would be a useful amenity for walkers with pushchairs. Overall, it is clear that this could be "a very positive development for the village given the risks of cycling on the A417", as one villager commented.

Action: Parish Council to investigate ways to protect footpaths from inappropriate use by motorbikes and horses.

Action: Parish Council to work to improve the condition of the path to Blewbury.

Action: Parish Council, working in conjunction with Blewbury Parish Council, to give top priority to the establishment of a cycle path linking Upton and Blewbury.

7. Clubs and Societies

7.1 Youth Club

The overwhelming majority of young respondents felt that Upton is a friendly village. Over 70% stated that they had a safe place to meet friends. 16 young respondents indicated support for a Youth Club, meeting weekly. There was considerable support for potential Youth Club activities such as table tennis, skittles and music. A significant number of respondents would also like to be able to swap and exchange books, videos, tapes and the like.

Action: Parish Council to seek organisers from those adults and young residents who are keen to help maintain and develop an active youth club. Facilities exist to host the club and to play table tennis and skittles, and should be made available to the youth club.

7.2 Under 9's

Considering the relatively low number of under 9s in the village the demand for activities is high. Interest was expressed in Mothers and Toddlers Club, Baby Sitting Circle, After School Play Scheme, Young Persons Fun Sessions and Visits to Places of Interest.

Action: Parish Council to invite those interested in activities for the under 9's to a get together to identify volunteer organisers and to agree on a way forward.

7.3 Indoor sporting Activities

The numbers of replies indicating interest in indoor sports activities were:

Activity	Adult	Youth
Skittles	12	9
Table Tennis	11	11
Martial Arts	8	4
Short Mat bowls	9	n/a

Action: Parish Council to invite those interested in indoor sporting activities (such as skittles and table tennis) to get together and organise them.

7.4 Other Social Activities

Many replies indicated an interest in social activities, with some also volunteering to organise them. The numbers are shown in the table below:

Activity	Adult Responses
Wine tasting Club	49
Theatre Trips	45
Walking	42
Musical Events	34
Skittles	29
Sightseeing coach trips	26
Cycle Trips	20
Jigsaws	18
Village Society	18
Dances	17
Bingo	13
Coffee and Chat Group	13
Bridge	12
Drama	12
Older Persons club	12
Discussion Group	11
Group holidays	10
Whist	9
Chess	4

Action: Parish Council to seek and encourage existing volunteer organisers for social activities to bring participants together

7.5 Learning Activities

The number of adults interested in participating in learning activities is shown in the table below.

Activity	Adult Responses
Keep fit	37
Computer based subjects	29
Bridge	17
Flower arranging	16
Art	15
Upholstery	14
Hand bell ringing	7
Dress Making	7
Needlecraft	7
Bee Keeping	7
Drama	6
Chess	3

Action: Parish Council to bring together those interested in learning activities.

8. The Village Hall

The Upton Village Hall Amenities Trust (UVHAT) owns and manages the Village Hall. They are currently raising funds to install facilities for the disabled, to build an extension store and replace the roof. The Questionnaire asked how the Village Hall could be improved to promote greater use. The most popular suggestions were to:

- enlarge the Village Hall
- enlarge the car park
- add changing facilities to the Village Hall

Action: UVHAT to consider the feedback from the Questionnaire when forming their plans for the Village Hall

Action: Parish Council to note the suggestion to enlarge the car park

9. Recreation Ground

9.1 Usage

A majority of young respondents use the recreation ground at least once a week. The main uses of the recreation ground by young people in the village are to play football and as a place to socialise with friends. It is also used for cycling and dog walking.

The Recreation Ground is used regularly by only 25% of adult respondents. The main use was for walking, often as part of a longer route including the railway embankment. The recreation ground was well used by adults taking children to the playground.

9.2 Support for activities

The Questionnaires asked whether young and adult residents would participate in activities on the Recreation Ground if they were made available. There was a considerable response as shown in the table below:

Activity	Adult	Youth
Tennis	35	7
Running	16	7
Football	14	10
Cricket	13	8
Croquet	12	n/a
Netball	11	4
Target golf	10	n/a
Archery	8	8
Volleyball	6	8

9.3 Support for an all weather play area

29 young respondents gave their opinions on the potential development of a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA), or a more simple tarmac play area with a wall to kick or hit a ball against. A clear majority of 21 requested some form of all-weather games area – this could be a MUGA or a more simple play area. On average, respondents expect to use such a facility for about 3 hours a week each. Of these 21, 7 stated a preference for a MUGA. 9 preferred a simple tarmac play area with a wall. The remaining 5 indicated that either solution would be acceptable. While the representatives of the young working on the Plan reported that their members do not need a MUGA, 11 Questionnaire respondents belong to groups or teams that could use a MUGA, predominantly to play tennis or football.

Of the remaining 8 respondents, 5 indicated that they did not want either a simple tarmac play area or a MUGA. The remaining 3 respondents wanted to play basketball or volleyball, but did not express their opinion regarding an all-weather games area.

55 adults indicated that they might be interested in activities on a MUGA and identified activities such as tennis, netball, basketball, cricket and skateboarding as their main interests.

9.4 Other Uses of Part of the Recreation Ground

Adults were also asked whether they would like to see part of the Recreation Ground used for other purposes. 91 were in favour of part of the recreation ground being used as a nature or conservation area, with only 5 expressing opposition to the proposal.

9.5 Future Plans for the Recreation Ground

From the results of the Questionnaires it is apparent that there is strong support for changes and improvements to the Recreation Ground to cater for sporting and leisure activities.

Various popular options for improvements to the Recreation Ground have been identified from the responses to the Questionnaires:

- A goal with a net to play informal football would benefit a significant number of Upton's younger residents
- An all weather tarmac play area with a wall to kick or hit a ball against would be supported by approximately three quarters of Upton's young respondents and many adults.
- Provision of a tennis court would be popular with both the young and adults
- The recreation ground could be landscaped, providing a path for joggers and walkers.
- Part of the recreation ground could be converted to a nature or conservation area.
- An all weather tarmac area might be used as an overflow car park when needed.

Action: Parish Council to set up a working party, representing all interested parties in the village, including the young and UVHAT, to consider all the options for the Recreation Ground in the light of the replies to the Village Questionnaire and to prepare a costed recommendation for the way forward.

10. Other Amenities

10.1 George and Dragon Public House

Many suggestions were made by residents on factors that would encourage them to visit the George and Dragon pub more often. In summary, residents said that they valued good food, a friendly welcome and many appreciated a smoke free atmosphere. Crossing the A417 was felt to be difficult. Support was expressed for games and clubs, including quizzes, Aunt Sally, darts and pool.

Action: Parish Plan Steering Group to collate feedback and pass comments to the Landlord

10.2 Post Office

Two thirds of respondents used the Post Office. 19 replied that they would prefer it to be opened at other times.

Action: Postmistress to follow up replies to assess support for a change in hours.

10.3 Shop

Replies to the Survey indicated that many would like to see a village shop reopened. A specific Questionnaire to assess the level of demand was sent out, but it was found that there was insufficient interest in the village to support a shop.

11. Mains Gas Supplies

99 respondents indicated that they would welcome a mains gas supply, suggesting a market for connections to approximately 50 houses.

Action: Parish Council to liaise with gas suppliers to establish feasibility of providing a gas main.

12. Communications

Over 60% of adults replying felt that they were well informed on what was happening in the village, leaving one third of respondents who felt that they were poorly informed. The Upton News and leaflets were considered to be good means of communication. The notice boards and posters on telegraph poles were rated as only fair. Few people were aware that they could read the Parish Council minutes at the Post Office. The Upton village website is not widely used. Some respondents commented that they could not access the site, though 58 people rated it as good or fair.

Several respondents suggested that the Upton News could be larger and carry more information - for example, a village calendar, details of dates for refuse collection, extracts from the Parish council minutes and news of crime. It was recognised that the Editor found it difficult to assemble contributions to the newsletter, which made it difficult to publish regularly. Similar suggestions were made for the web site and 85 respondents indicated that they would welcome a weekly e-mail to keep them informed of village news.

Although most young respondents know what is happening in Upton, approximately one third felt uninformed despite having an interest in village activities. The Upton News and leaflets provide the best available sources of information, while the village website is widely regarded as not useful. A large majority of Upton's younger residents would like content relevant to their interests in the Upton News and on the website. The ideas of chat pages and weekly e-mails received only limited support. There was a strong interest in having a member of the Parish Council to represent the views of Upton's younger residents.

Action: The Parish Council to encourage the use of the web site and establish regular e-mails providing village news to those interested.

Action: The Parish Council to arrange that villagers are able to log on to the web site and send in items of interest to the village.

Action: The Parish Council to continue to support the Upton News, so that it provides more information to those unable to access the web site.

Action: A member of the Parish Council to act as a liaison member for young people in the village.

13. Community Projects

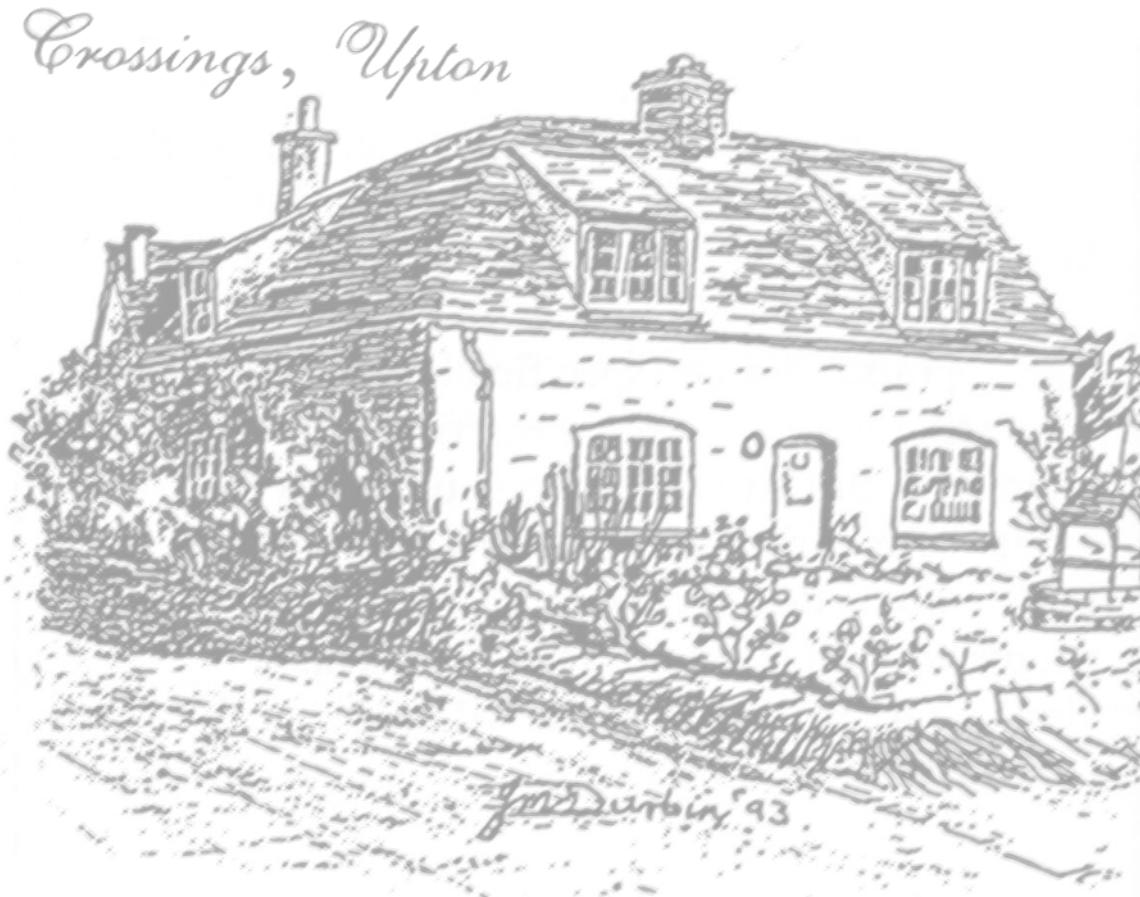
Residents were asked if they would volunteer to carry out work for the benefit of the parish.

Many residents volunteered their time to make visits to help the elderly or infirm, offering a total of 77 hours visiting per month. 5 residents indicated that they would like to receive such visits.

31 residents volunteered to be drivers and 12 residents offered to administer a scheme to provide transport to those in need, with journeys to medical facilities and other services.

Many residents volunteered their services to help out with activities such as Litter Picking, Manual Tasks, Gardening, Carpentry, and Cleaning. Several young respondents offered their help to pick litter, prevent and repair vandalism and to plant and look after trees. They also highlighted that the recreation ground, children's play area and bus shelter were areas of the village that would benefit from being better looked after.

Action: A volunteer administrator to coordinate resident visits should be identified, and the services made available as soon as possible subject to satisfying the regulations.

Action: Those prepared to administer a volunteer transport system to meet with a senior representative of the Didcot Volunteer Organisation, to explore the possibility of the Upton group working under the D.V.O. umbrella.

Action: The Parish Council to call upon and to utilise the services of the volunteers to improve the appearance and the amenities of the village.