

Aldworth Community Plan
2011





This project is supported through the North Wessex Downs
AONB Sustainable Development Fund



Contents

Introduction	2
Map.....	4
Aldworth – Past and Present	5
Consultation	9
Film Project	10
Action Plan	14
Acknowledgements	20

Introduction

Aldworth Community Plan has been produced by the people of Aldworth with support from Community Council Berkshire and West Berkshire Council. The aim of the Community Plan has been to try to engage the whole community in a consultation process, in order to identify aspirations and potential projects. These ideas have been turned into an action plan which will be implemented by the people of the parish, with expert advice and guidance from external agencies.

The plan has been produced after several public consultations, and incorporates information gathered from a questionnaire which was given to each person on the electoral register.

We had a respectable 50% return from the 215 individual questionnaires delivered and as a result have been able to highlight what we truly value in our community, as well as the issues that are important to us.

We value:

- The peace and quiet of the countryside
- Our two pubs
- The Saturday Market
- Our beautiful parish church
- Our cricket club
- The sense of community
- The good walks
- Our local history
- Our wildlife

The people of the parish have identified areas where they would like to see improvements and the young people have made their own film to share their views. The information gathered has highlighted these priorities:

- Traffic management – parking, speeding and access
- Village hall improvements
- A children's play area
- Improvements to footpaths – access to the village from the Four Points pub
- High-speed broadband
- A bus service on a Saturday
- Provision of grit bins

Further actions would be:

- The restoration of a village pond
- Leisure and social events such as an art club, IT classes, cinema club and exercise classes
- Goal posts for the young people
- Finding out about alternative fuel sources
- Producing a wildlife survey
- Producing a welcome pack
- A regular litter pick
- Improved mobile phone reception

Some of these actions lie within the remit of the Parish Council, local organisations and committees, but some will be put to West Berkshire Council for their attention.



Fifty of the sixty-three parishes in West Berkshire are currently developing and implementing their parish plans, with thirteen already undertaking a five-year refresh to review progress.

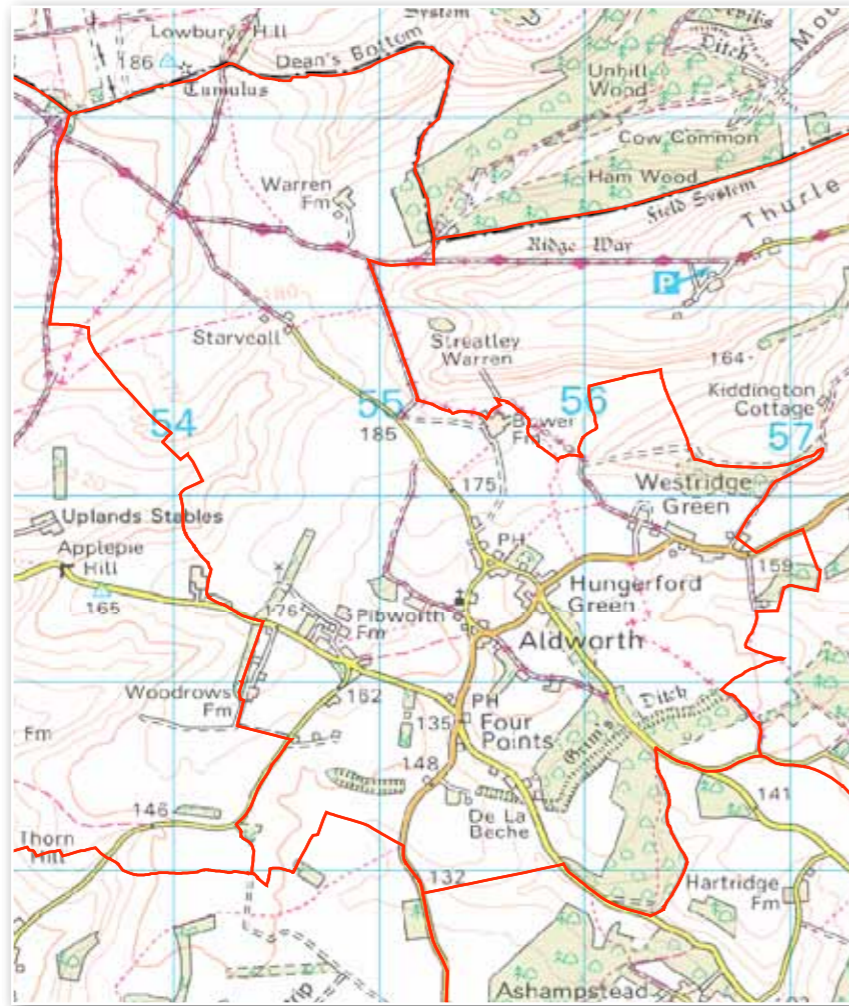
By producing our Community Plan we will be more able to access funding for the projects we have put forward, and because we now understand the needs of our community we can take the opportunity to work together to ensure the success of the plan. Some of the projects will be taken on by focus groups and expert guidance will be sought to get them up and running.

We have made great progress, and now we can look ahead to putting the plans made by our community into action. Thank you for your support so far.

You can find out more about the questionnaire results on the Aldworth website:

www.aldworthvillage.org





Aldworth is a civil parish with an elected parish council, the current head of the council is Tim Chapman. It falls within the area of the unitary authority of West Berkshire.

Aldworth - Past and Present

Aldworth is a small village high up on the Berkshire Downs. The slope of the land is from north to south rising from a height of 460 to 600 ft. It lies in the rural area between Reading and Newbury and is close to Stratley, just off the B4009 at grid reference SU564797, within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is a designated Conservation Area.

The parish of Aldworth has an area of about 1,806 acres. The soil is chalk and clay; there are a number of old chalk pits in the district. The Ridgeway path runs through the parish from north-east to south-west.

There are around 250 inhabitants in the parish, which includes the neighbouring hamlet of Westridge Green. Interestingly, John Marius Wilson's Imperial Gazetteer of England and



Wales of 1870 records the number of inhabitants at that time to be 275.

The Domesday Book, compiled from 1086 onwards, records Aldworth as Elleorde, an Old English name meaning Old Enclosure or Old Farm, and assessed the land value at one hundred shillings with tillage potential of five ploughs and woodland sufficient for ten swine. The inhabitants seem to have numbered not more than twenty-five souls, all of them simple folk, villeins, serfs and swineherd.

The village was once home to the de la Beche family, who arrived from Flanders shortly after the Norman invasion of 1066. They built a castle near the crossroads at the Four Points, which is the site of the present de la Beche Manor. The church of St Mary's contains nine stone effigies of members of the family, which are unique in the country. Some of the effigies appear to be up to seven feet tall, thus earning the figures the nickname of the 'Aldworth Giants'.



Changes in the village

Aldworth as a village has evolved slowly, its residents not keen to rush into change for change's sake. Most love the village as it is, a kind of time warp an hour's journey from London, and this is part of its charm. Changes, like the proposed small extension to the church to provide kitchen and toilet facilities, are discussed and planned long before any work begins.

In days gone by the villagers worked in the immediate vicinity. Local occupations listed in

the census of 1851 include Wainwright, Ostler, Butcher, Baker, Straw Bonnet Maker, Blacksmith, Carpenter, Cordwainer, Boot and Shoe maker, Woodman, Shopkeeper, Grocer, Chelsea Pensioner and Pauper.

In the centre of the village stood the school and school house. The school opened in 1871 and closed in 1961, its two classrooms converted into a private house. Children now travel to schools in neighbouring villages.

Opposite the school was the village shop and Post Office, the closure of which in 2002 was quite devastating for the village as this was the true centre of the community. The shop provided a much needed daily meeting point for those who did not use the pubs and a valuable 'bush telegraph' of who was ill, who needed help or just somewhere to gossip for the lonely or the elderly or the 'just downright fed up'.



In the distant past bread was baked regularly behind the shop and when the bakery ceased to operate the shop had bread deliveries 3 times each week. Milk and papers were delivered daily to the shop and collected by villagers from a central point. It sold locally produced eggs, cakes and vegetables in season, coal in the winter and even paraffin at one time.

The shop owners delivered groceries regularly to those who could not get to the shop for one reason or another, and they even ran a 'tab' for those who sometimes found it hard to make ends meet.

The Post Office was run from the shop. When the shop closed the villagers had to travel to either Compton or Goring for their stamps and pensions.

Following the closure of the shop the villagers opened a market in the village hall, which runs every Saturday of the year. This cannot fill the gap left by the shop's closure but it is well attended and provides a very valuable service for the village. Bread, newspapers, stamps, plants, groceries and cakes can all be bought at the market and it provides a valuable meeting point for the village. It is entirely run by volunteers from the village.

The village hall dates from the First World War. It was originally a Canadian Army hut, obtained by the village after the war. It was HQ to the Aldworth Home Guard during the Second World War and has been a social venue for the village since the 1920s. It is now in need of some modernising and updating.

Aldworth's well was dug in 1867 for the benefit of the village. It is 372 feet deep. No longer used, the well and its housing are a well known and loved feature of the village.



As time moves on other changes have affected life in Aldworth. A fish van from Brixham used to visit weekly, but no longer. A laundry service used to call once a week and take dry cleaning too. Local farmers used to clear the roads with their tractors during periods of heavy snow. This no longer happens. There is no longer a regular bus service and the car is the primary means of transport locally.

The village is not on the mains gas network so most properties rely on oil for heating. Water is supplied from a tank at Bower Farm, pumped up from nearby Compton. There is no mains drainage so the properties rely on a variety of septic tanks and cesspits, many of which were not designed to cope with the demands of modern families.

Broadband is available but the village is unlikely to benefit from the high-speed connections which are being rolled out in cities and towns, unless technology improvements make this

feasible and worthwhile for broadband suppliers or government policy forces them to upgrade rural services.

Mobile phone reception is patchy at best, which many villagers, especially the younger ones, find very frustrating.

Aldworth is a very special place and its residents want to keep it that way, while still being part of the modern world. Changing working patterns mean that a once busy village is now fairly quiet on working days but with better facilities the community would benefit and become stronger. New technologies may allow new businesses to flourish in the village and surrounding areas. The future of Aldworth is as full of potential and possibilities as its past is fascinating and worth preserving.



Community Plan Consultation



- **Consultation event**
People drew their houses and added them to the map
Aldworth September Fair 2008
- **Public consultation**
Meeting at the Village Hall
8th October 2008
- **Public consultation**
Meeting to formulate questions for the questionnaire
11th February 2009
- **Film project planning**
Funding applications
Spring 2009
First filming workshop
7th March 2009
- **The Questionnaire**
Distributed and gathered
August/September 2009
- **Public Consultation**
To show the film project and the questionnaire results
September 2009
- **Public Consultation**
Feedback event to discuss findings of the questionnaire
8th February 2010
- **Aldworth Viewfinder**
Film Screening
26th February 2010

Aldworth Viewfinder Film Project

The young people of Aldworth ran a film project as part of the Community Plan consultation. The Community Plan team thought it was important that they had their say and that the community should support their ideas.

The young people aimed to find out more about their community; past, present and future. Through discussion with each other and local interviewees they had the chance to actively voice their

opinions. They were able to highlight aspirations and opportunities for improvement in the future while exploring local stories, history and heritage. By talking to longstanding residents of the parish the young people gained a valuable insight into how changes have affected the community over the years and, by airing their views through the film, we now know what they think.

With the help of 'Real Time Video', a professional community film company who guided them through the process, the young people planned the project and gained an understanding of new technology and digital media by making and editing the film themselves. They worked together to present information clearly to their audience, devising the interview questions and content for the film.

A DVD was produced and their findings were shared with the community at a screening event which took place in February 2010. They told us that:

- They would like a bus on a Saturday to take them to Goring Station or to Reading

- They would like goal posts which they can use on the village recreation ground
- There is a need for better mobile phone reception
- They would like to slow down speeding cars
- They would like a better village hall
- Litter is a problem
- They would like a village pond

The young people involved in the project told us that they are happy to 'do their own thing' and don't feel the need for any organised activities such as a youth club.

There are not many opportunities for the young people of the parish to get to know each other and it is hoped that by bringing them together they formed new connections. With young and old in conversation with each other, new insights and perspectives were gained. The young film makers have learned new skills which they can take into



the world. Now we know what they would like for their parish, we can move on from here.

We were grateful to the Youth Opportunity Fund, Youth Capital Fund and the CCB Buzz Challenge for their financial help in making the film. As a direct result of the project, the young people have already been successful in applying for a CCB 'Speak Out' grant of £422.00 to purchase their goal posts.

On receipt of the grant, one of the young applicants thanked the CCB and said "The goal posts will provide a great resource to the youth in the village, and encourage socialising and healthy activity within the community. They will be put to use immediately and be valuable to future generations growing up in the village."



Aldworth Viewfinder Film Project



The Action Plan

The consultation process – which included events, the questionnaire and the young people’s film – has identified a number of issues, needs and projects which can now be taken on in order to improve life in the parish and benefit the whole community.

The information gathered and the thoughts of our community have been looked at closely and these important contributions have provided a valuable insight into the opinions of the respondents.

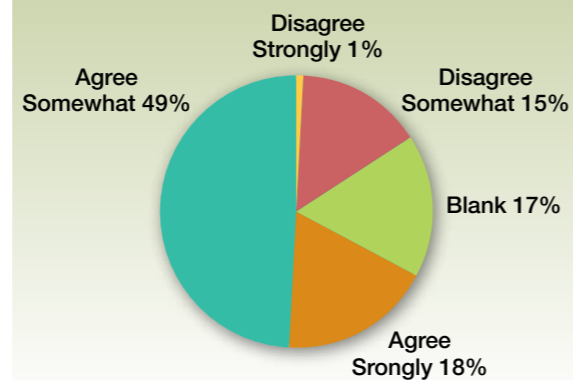
In order to put the identified improvements into practice, the Aldworth Community Plan Steering Committee has put together a plan of action under the headings; *Safer, Prosperous, Healthy, Greener* and *Stronger*. The Action Plan takes into consideration all the information gathered during the consultation with the community of Aldworth parish.

Safer

Our questions about traffic and footpaths brought to light a number of issues for consideration. Suggestions to improve traffic management and footpaths were:

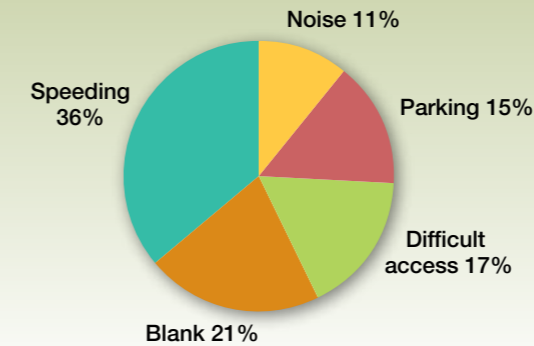
- Improve parking in the centre of the village to make access easier, especially for emergency vehicles. Use the new village hall parking area for visiting walkers and encourage better use of the Bell Inn car park by making the signs more visible
- Investigate ways of improving safety at dangerous road junctions
- Review speed limits to slow down cars speeding through the parish
- Improve road maintenance

Q14. Paths could be improved



- Provide grit bins for icy conditions
- Create a new footpath between the Four Points pub and the centre of the village and seek permitted access to Lower Points.
- Improve footpath signage

Q13. Traffic problems experienced



- Improve paths

Our vision is to make the parish of Aldworth a safer place by reducing the speed of traffic and making sure that access is clear in the centre of the village for all vehicles. We would like to improve safety at dangerous junctions by installing mirrors and to provide grit bins for icy weather conditions.

We would like to make journeys on foot safe for people who normally have to walk on the busy B4009 to and from the Four Points pub from the

centre of the village, by creating a new footpath.

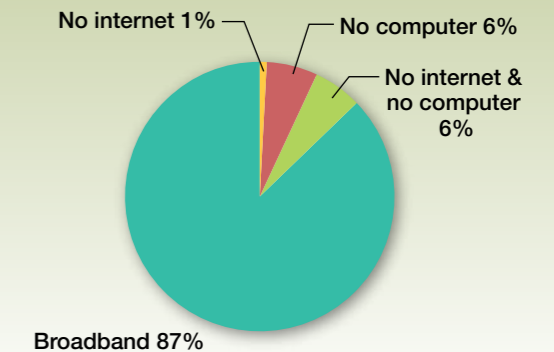
Prosperous

As a rural community we have businesses, home workers, students and many other individuals who would benefit from improved infrastructure. From the information gathered we found that there is a need for:

- High speed broadband for internet users
- Better mobile phone reception

Our vision is to enable our parish to have these facilities in order for rural businesses and individuals to prosper.

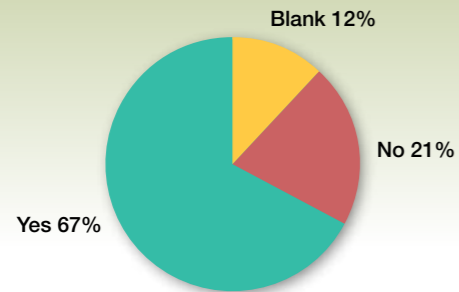
Q27. Do you have home access to the Internet?



Healthy

We asked the community about our young people and their needs. 67% of questionnaire respondents said that they would like to have a children's play area on the village recreation ground.

Q20. Would you like to have a children's playground facility in the parish?



- Families would like the toddler group to run all year round, as it cannot currently function in the winter months due to the poor condition of the village hall.
- We found out through the film project that the young people would like goal posts on the village recreation ground.
- People concerned about pesticide spraying in the fields close to their homes said that it would be helpful to have notification of when the spraying would take place and information on what chemicals the farmers use.

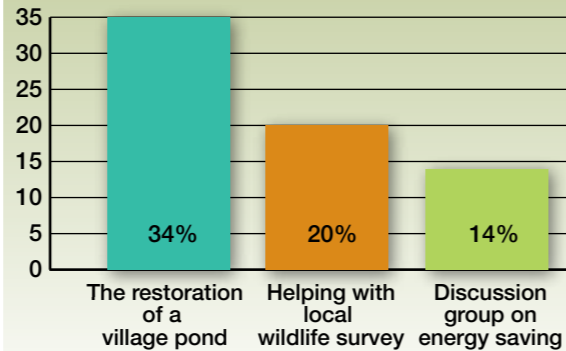
- Many people who filled in their questionnaires would like exercise classes in the village hall. The current state of the village hall floor and the temperature during the winter prevents any such activities being organised.

Our vision is to support our young people by giving them good outdoor facilities and making better use of our recreation ground. We would like to improve the village hall to make sure that the toddler group survives and that the hall can be used for healthy activities for the whole community.

Greener

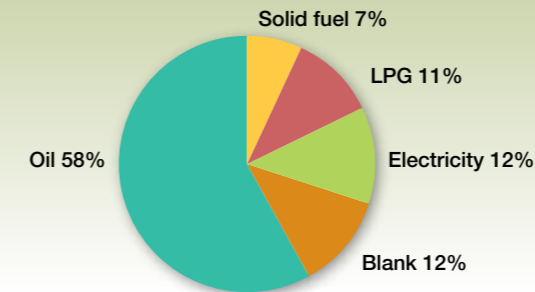
- A number of questionnaire respondents would like a village pond; there is a potential site in mind for restoration. A focus group is currently being set up and expert guidance will be sought.

Q29. Environmental Projects

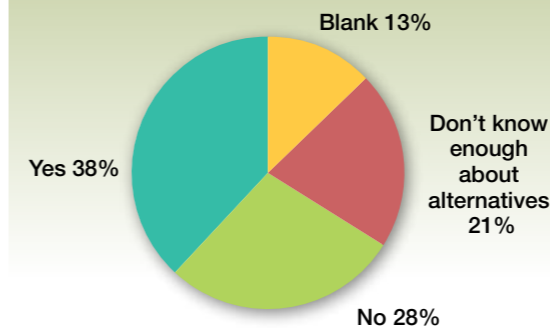


- A number of questionnaire respondents would like to carry out a wildlife survey to record the diverse and plentiful collection of animals, birds and plant life in the parish. A focus group will be formed.
- We have found that the people of our parish are interested in finding out about alternative fuel sources. We will invite experts in this field to come along and talk about the possibilities open to us. 58% of questionnaire respondents said they used oil and 38%

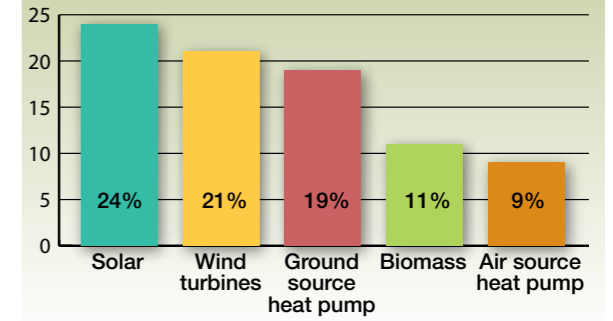
Q3: What is your primary source of heating?



Q4: Would you be interested in any alternative fuel sources?



Q5: If yes to question 4, which alternative fuel source would you be interested in?



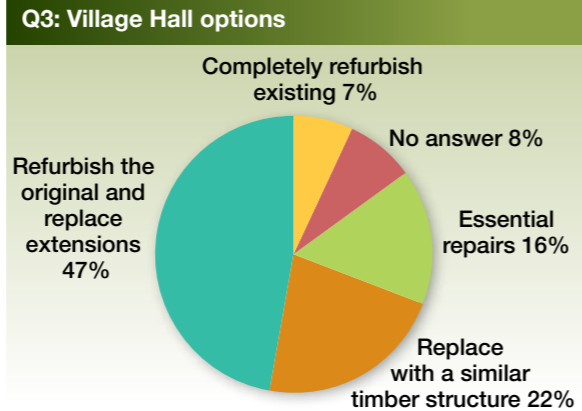
would like a cost-effective and greener alternative. People are also interested in finding out about energy saving ideas and we plan to invite an expert along to give us advice.

- On July 18th 2010 the parish embarked on a very successful litter pick. 16 bags of rubbish and other larger items were collected. The people of the parish would like to have a regular litter pick to keep the countryside as it should be. It has also been noted that there is a need to address dog fouling problems in the parish.
- People in our community would like to improve recycling facilities in the parish. Currently there is no provision for recycling plastics other than plastic bottles and there is no food waste recycling facility.

Our vision is to make our parish greener by introducing different sources of fuel and by learning about ways in which we can save energy. We aim to resurrect a village pond, carry out a wildlife survey and endeavour to reduce the amount of litter in the parish. We will explore ways to introduce better recycling facilities for the community.

Stronger

Throughout our consultations it was made clear that improvements to the village hall are necessary. The toddler group cannot function in the winter months without these improvements and exercise classes cannot be held. The hall is an old World War One army hut which is in great need of attention. There is no insulation and repairs are frequent. From the questionnaire we have found that 47% people who gave their views would like to refurbish the original hall and replace the existing extensions with bigger and



better facilities. The next step is to get a survey done to see what we are dealing with. We have a village hall committee who are currently looking for funding for the improvements. Some funding has already been given, which has enabled us to create a new and improved parking area for the hall.

Most people who completed the questionnaire are happy with information and communication in the parish. We have the monthly 'Leaflet', which we share with Ashampstead. The Leaflet imparts information on events, advertises local businesses and contains articles of interest. The Aldworth Saturday Market is an essential place for parishioners to meet and we now have a new Aldworth website



– www.alldworthvillage.org – which is updated regularly. The only improvements would be to provide more notice boards in the parish, especially at Westridge Green and to make maps of walks in the area available in places other than St Mary's Church, for example on the Aldworth website.

We would like to provide a welcome pack to new residents in the parish which would contain all the local information needed. A resident from Aldworth has volunteered to take on the task of producing the pack.

From the information the young people gave us in their film we now know that they would like a bus service on a Saturday, to and from Reading or Goring station. This service would be of benefit to the whole community. The options are currently being researched.

Our vision for supporting community life is to improve facilities for the people of the parish by making changes to the village hall. This will make our community stronger by enabling us to provide more opportunities for parishioners to get together. We will continue to support our Saturday Market which is held in the village hall and provides a valuable meeting place.

We aim to continue to provide information and to look at ways to improve communication.

We aim to continue to organise activities for the community to enjoy, such as the Aldworth fête, the skittles evenings and the village quiz. When

the improvements to the village hall are made, we aim to run more activities for the residents of the parish.

We aim to look into ways of providing a bus service on a Saturday.

We aim to continue to support St Mary's PCC with their quest for funding to improve facilities and for maintenance costs.

We hope that having found out the views of the community, discovered areas of interest and where there is room for improvement, this action plan will provide a focus for the future.



Acknowledgements



Aldworth Community Plan was produced with the help of a small band of volunteers who gave up their time to find out the views of the community. We would like to thank the Steering Committee:

Mandy Clark – Chair
Josie Williams – Treasurer
Barbara Carmichael – Secretary
Kathy Neville
Pauline Sheppard
Claire Smith
Sally McEwan

We would also like to thank the following organisations and individuals for their essential guidance, support and assistance:

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Aldworth Parish Council

West Berkshire Council

Real-Time Video

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The Community Council Berkshire's 'Speakout' grant

All participants of the 'Aldworth Viewfinder' film

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Robin Tandy – Chair of the Hamstead Marshall Parish Plan

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