

GELDESTON

**1950s Photo of Wherry
On Dyke in front of
Railway Bridge
(?Kistruck)**

The Parish Plan

2006

In 2003, with funding from the Countryside Agency, a team of volunteers began to work on a Parish Plan for Geldeston. After a year's preparation they carried out a detailed survey of parishioners' wishes, needs and concerns. The first results were made public in May 2005.

Two thirds of those living in the parish filled in the questionnaire (page 5). This was a very good response and enabled us to begin making a detailed action plan for the parish. Thanks are due to all who took the time to answer the many questions. We are grateful to our funders and to the Parish Plan working group, which was aided and supported throughout by the clerk to the parish council. Over several months the team and its helpers informed parishioners about the Village Survey and persuaded a great many to take part.

The Survey caught Geldeston at a turning point. The village shop had closed. Soon after, the post office shut as well. There was concern about the village hall. Recently it has been suggested that many new homes might be built within the parish. These changes make it all the more important for us to find ways to save and support what we most value in our community.

Members of the working group:

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Marcia Fenwick, Alison Norman, Lorna Pugh,
John Crowfoot, Richard Gibson, Snowy Rolt
and Colin Barrett (parish clerk)



OUR PARISH

Dockeney and Dunburgh. The names are old. They date back hundreds of years, to a time when the north side of the Waveney was bordered by a great fen. The name Dockeney suggests raised ground, an island even; Dunburgh indicates a fortified site. Somewhere between the two settlements lay a homestead called Geldeston.

Over the centuries the fen was drained. In the 1600s locks were built on the upper reaches of the river to improve navigation. Finally, a canal was dug, which linked the Waveney to the road running through the parish. Where canal and road met became the historic heart of Geldeston. Many of the buildings of that time have gone. The Old School, the former shop, the pub and two imposing merchant houses are among those that still stand.

Today the centre of Geldeston forms a recognised Village Conservation Area, distinguished by its architectural and historical significance (page 12). The southern half of the parish falls within the area of the Broads Authority, with its threefold responsibility for conservation, navigation and appropriate forms of tourism.

THE SURVEY RESULTS

What we agree on

Geldeston, people agree, is a pleasant place to live. Asked in our survey what they find most appealing, villagers frequently use the words "peace" and "quiet" and refer to the parish as "friendly".

The quality of the surrounding countryside is important for everyone. Naming the aspects that matter, 91% choose tranquillity. Almost as many of us say wildlife. How should the local environment be protected and enhanced? "Wildlife conservation" is the second most popular reply (Chart 3). Recycling comes first.

Asked (November 2004) if we would keep certain items separate for recycling almost all of us said that we would. Those good intentions were rapidly fulfilled. In spring 2005

the district council introduced separate refuse containers for disposal and recycling. Some time after, the parish council helped to install a bottle bank on the pub car park. A community composting scheme is now being organised.

Things we miss — and things we don't

The old-fashioned red telephone box by the Village Hall seems likely to vanish, sooner or later. According to the survey it has 7 frequent and 20 occasional users.

In 2003 the combined post office & village shop gave up trading as a general store. Several parishioners insisted we include a call to "Bring back the shop" (Chart 3) in the questionnaire. The appeal drew support, particularly from pensioners; almost all disabled people and those of school age gave it their vote as well. In spring 2005, however, the post office itself closed. A quarter of those in our survey said they went there at least once or twice a week. Many of us used it to pay bills and to draw pensions and allowances. The post office was also a regular source of information about events in Geldeston.

The closure of the shop and then the post office has caused inconvenience for some, and a degree of hardship for others. Some of us say we came to live here because of a love of village life (Chart 2). In the end, neither shop nor post office received enough support from the parish as a whole to make it worth their continuing.

When asked what is, or once was, especially attractive about Geldeston we give different answers. "Location", "ideal housing, good location" say some; "within easy reach of market towns and Norwich" adds another. "Was village life. Not anymore," an elderly couple (one born here) lament. Development would spoil Geldeston, another old inhabitant replies: "It is becoming too commuterised anyway. The village community as it was has gone. All died."

Some opinions

Geldeston is a welcoming village and there are no sharp divisions between newcomers and longer established residents. The survey did uncover differing views.

Police coverage is one example. Under the age of 60 our opinion is evenly split. Half see police coverage as reasonable, half consider it poor. Add the critical view of pensioners concerning the local police ("you never see one") and the majority opinion becomes negative. Most who replied disapprove of shooting as a visitor activity: it disrupts tranquillity and is a threat to wildlife. A long-resident minority are as firmly convinced that shooting is compatible with both country life and wildlife conservation. Asked, "How would you like the parish to develop?" a majority say we want Geldeston to stay as it is (Chart 6). The other most strongly-supported choice is for the parish to become, or remain, a working community.

Views on housing and jobs

On housing development (Chart 5) there is no serious disagreement. Those who want Geldeston to stay as it is and those of us who favour a working community both support the most popular proposals: "single dwellings in controlled locations" and "conversion of redundant buildings". The stay as it is majority account for those who favour no new housing. Only a minority, even among those that support a working community, are for small groups of less than ten houses.

Overall, 12% in our survey are firmly opposed to "more jobs in Geldeston". Some are wary of the proposal, others have no opinion. The remaining third, however, are in favour of increasing local employment and, in particular, they support "small business development" and "tourism development / attractions". Naturally, most who are for a working community would like to see more employment closer to home. Few who want Geldeston to stay as it is approve of local job creation.

Given three choices, those for a working community clearly favour "small business development" but are split over "small-scale industrial workshops" and show little interest in "tourism development". Those of us who want the parish to stay as it is are, in most cases, opposed to all these activities and especially workshops and tourism (though quite a few would tolerate small business development).

“Nothing ‘stays as it is’,” comments someone first here as a wartime child evacuee. There was more work in Geldeston until a generation ago: four farms were then in operation, for instance, as was a small factory at the old railway station. These and other changes lie behind the regrets of some who recall an older, more local economy.

Who lives here today?

Almost a third of us have been here for less than 5 years (Chart 1). Others have been settled in the parish from between 16 to 50 years (39%). Just over a quarter who replied are pensioners: that is the same proportion as in the 2001 census and no higher than for Norfolk as a whole.

Many 45-59 year olds filled out the questionnaires. They were better represented than other age groups. This partly explains a strong interest in “evening classes or adult education”. The fund-raising volunteers who created the children’s playground are probably disappointed that many have no opinion about those facilities. The 18-44s are not indifferent, however: more than three quarters of them appreciate this new resource.

Some over-60s think local provision for their age group is poor: more think it reasonable (39%) and almost half offer “no opinion”. The 45-59s display a similar balance of attitudes. Those of us aged 11-24 and 25-44 are in no doubt that facilities for the under-24s are “poor”. The present state of the sports field is a sad footnote to that comment. It is under-used partly because of its distance from the village centre and a battle to prevent travellers camping there. More important, anyone going to the field must face the hazards of speeding cars and a traffic danger spot. The parish council has been working to ensure safer pedestrian access.

HOW THE SURVEY RESULTS HAVE BEEN USED

There were 55 questions. Most were to be answered by individual members of each household who were 11 years of age and older.

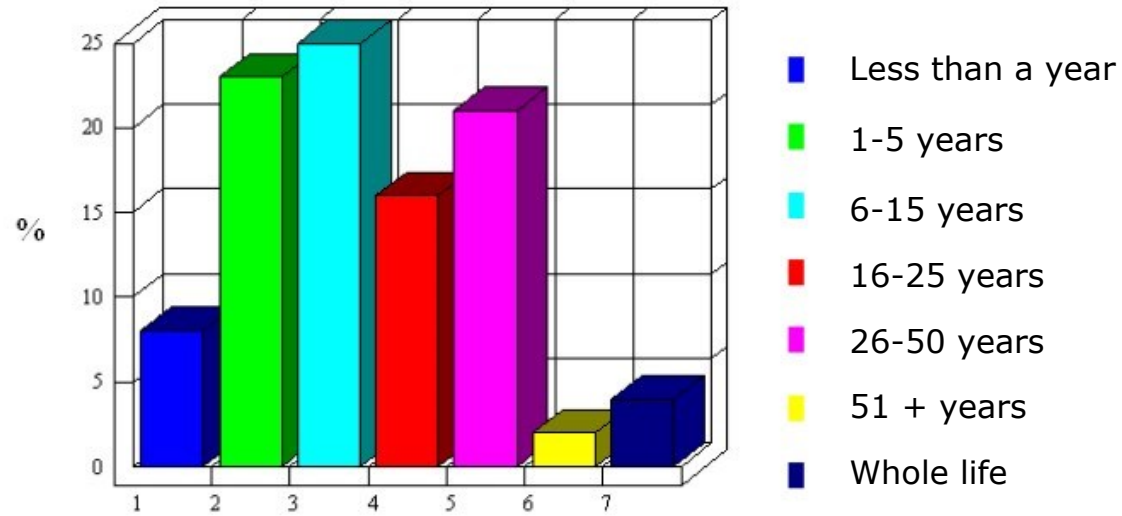
More than one hundred households participated. People all over the parish took part and so did all age groups, though some were better represented than others. Around two hundred of us filled out answers to the six questions that follow, e.g. 198 replied to No 5 and 210 to No 1.

The responses are presented in three ways. A few charts and tables follow: more detail of that kind is available from the survey pages on the Geldeston website (www.geldeston.org). Replies to over thirty further questions are summarised in the text. A third, more complicated use of the information is to link replies to different questions.

In the last case the completed questionnaires were treated as a data base and it was possible, without infringing confidentiality, to gain a fuller picture of people's opinions. For example, we linked age (What age group do you belong to?) and attitudes to the playground (Are the facilities in the children's playground good / reasonable / poor / no opinion?).

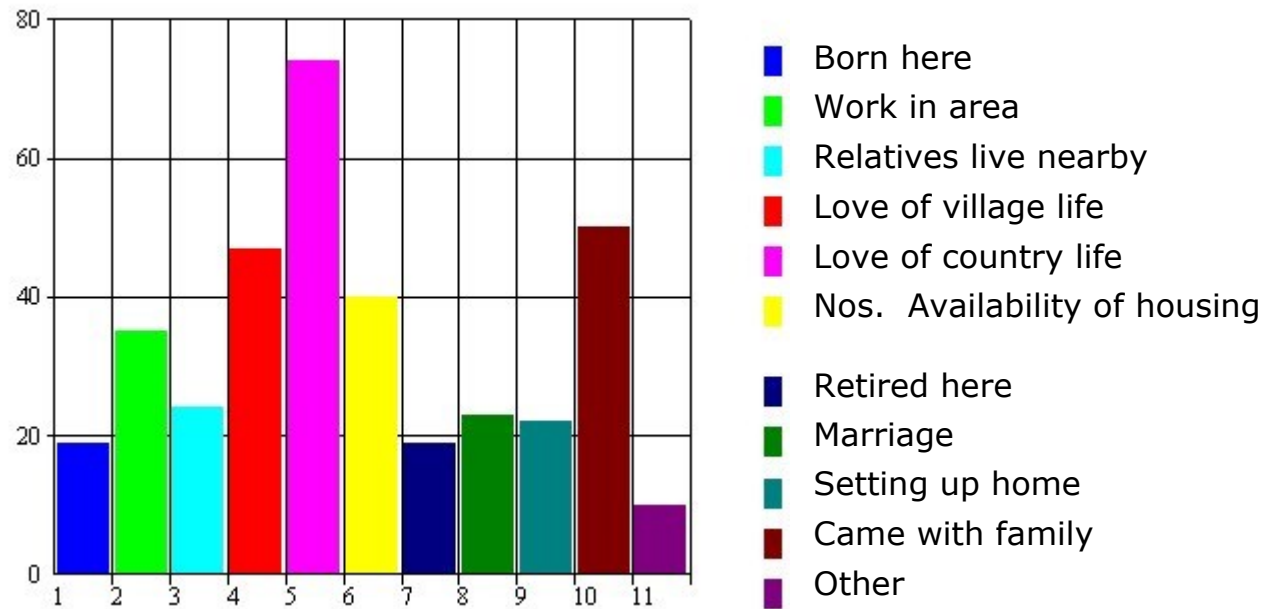
Important note

In all but the first chart and table included here, it was permitted to tick more than one box. This means that the total number of responses exceeds the number of those replying. Likewise the percentages in which the various replies are given add up to more than 100%.



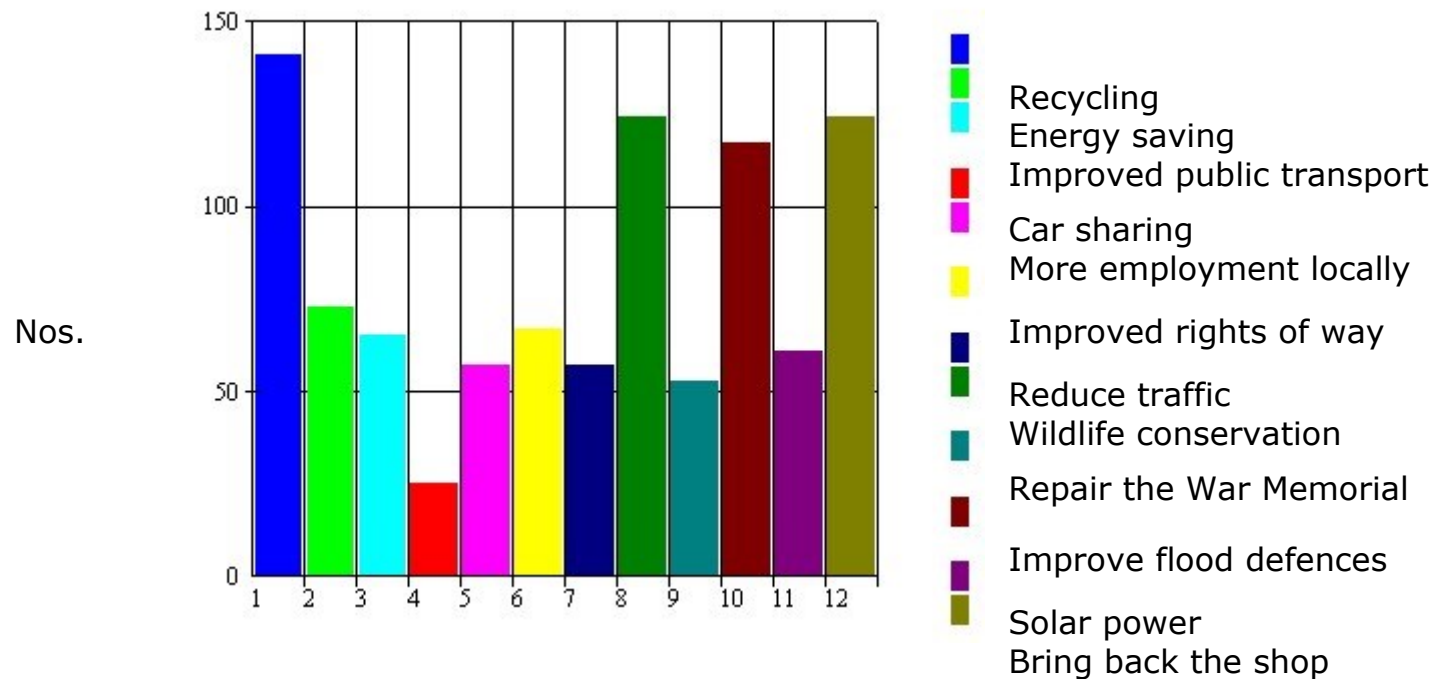
1. HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED IN GELDESTON?

Less than a year	16	(7.6%)
1-5 years	49	(23.3%)
6-15 years	53	(25.2%)
16-25 years	33	(15.1%)
26-50 years	45	(21.4%)
51 + years	5	(2.4%)
Whole life	9	(4.3%)



2. HOW DID YOU COME TO LIVE IN THE PARISH?

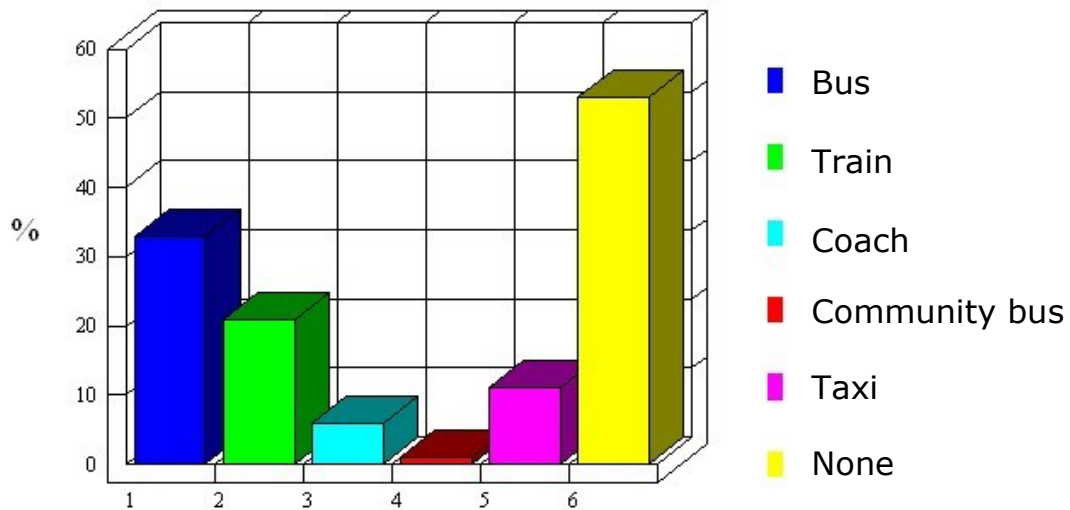
Born here	19	(9.1%)	Marriage	23	(11.1%)
Work in area	35	(16.8%)	Setting up home	22	(10.6%)
Relatives live nearby ...	24	(11.5%)	Came with family	50	(24.0%)
Love of village life	47	(22.6%)	Other	10	(4.8%)
Love of country life	74	(35.6%)			
Availability of housing ..	40	(19.2%)			
Retired here	19	(9.1%)			



3. WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT?

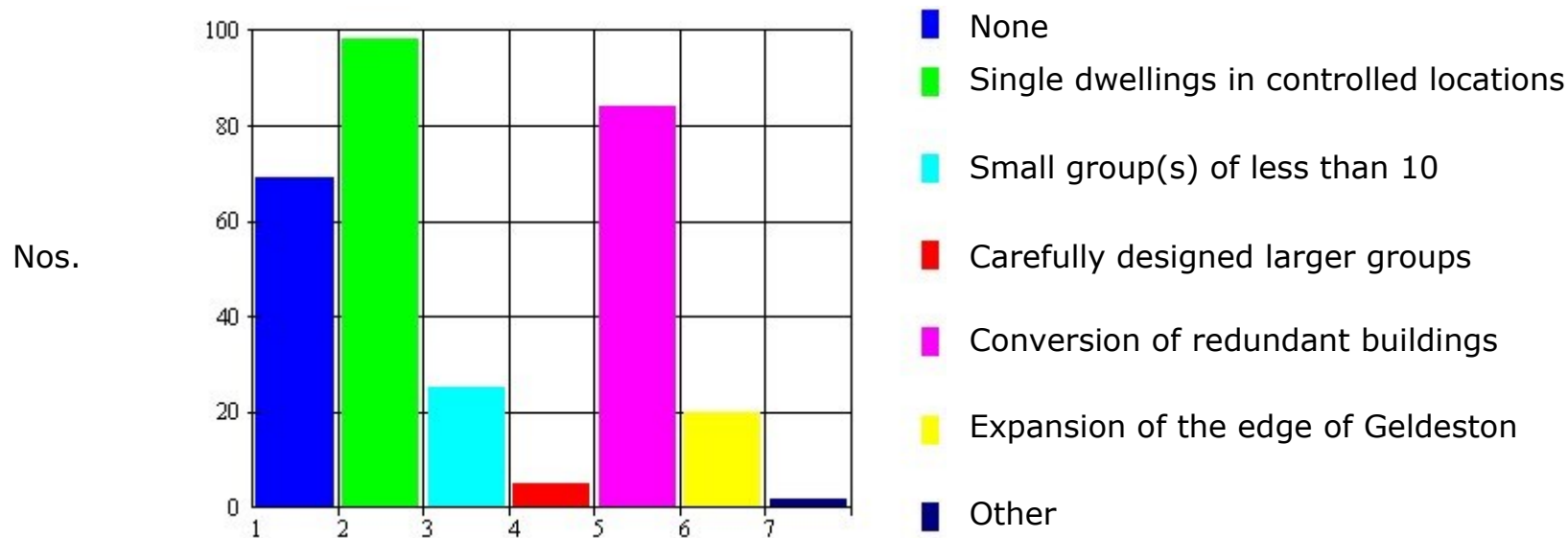
Recycling	141	(70.9%)			
Energy saving	73	(36.7%)			
Improved public transport ..	65	(32.7%)			
Car sharing	25	(12.6%)			
More employment locally	57	(28.6%)			
Improved rights of way	67	(33.7%)			
Reduce traffic	57	(28.6%)			
			Wildlife conservation	124	(62.3%)
			Repair War Memorial*	53	(26.6%)
			Improve flood defences	117	(58.8%)
			Solar power*	61	(30.7%)
			Bring back the shop*	124	(62.3%)

Includes suggestions made by parishioners (*)



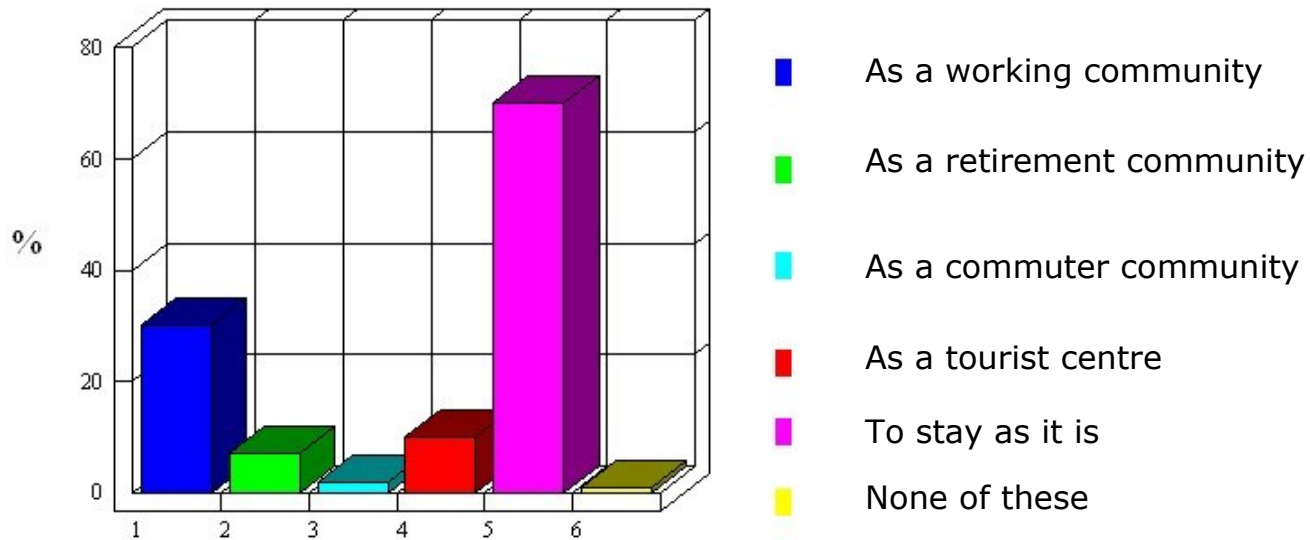
4. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING MEANS OF TRANSPORT DO YOU USE?

Bus	67	(33.2%)
Train	42	(20.8%)
Coach	13	(6.4%)
Community Bus	2	(1.0%)
Taxi	23	(11.4%)
None	107	(53.0%)



5. WHAT TYPE(S) OF HOUSING DEVELOPMENT WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE IN GELDESTON?

None	69	(34.8%)
Single dwellings in controlled locations	98	(49.5%)
Small group(s) of less than 10	25	(12.6%)
Carefully designed larger group(s)	5	(2.5%)
Conversion of redundant buildings	84	(42.4%)
Expansion of the edge of Geldeston	20	(10.1%)
Other	2	(1.0%)



6. HOW WOULD YOU LIKE OUR PARISH TO DEVELOP?

As a working community	60	(29.7%)
As a retirement community	15	(7.4%)
As a commuter community	5	(2.5%)
As a tourist centre	21	(10.4%)
To stay as it is	141	(69.8%)
None of these	3	(1.5%)

MAP OF CONSERVATION AREA
Already distributed to parish councillors

(Shows 5 remaining LDF plots)

THE VILLAGE CONSERVATION AREA

The Conservation Area, established in 1984, is intended to monitor plans to build here or to convert and extend existing properties that give the village centre its character. It also aims to preserve the general appearance of the area by providing added protection for trees and certain hedgerows.

Recent proposals for development just outside the Conservation Area boundary seem to run counter to its spirit and purpose. So far the high-density housing on Local Development Framework (LDF) plots is no more than a suggestion.

The survey asked what new clubs and activities would interest the parish. There were only 36 responses. Asked why we do not take part in leisure pursuits the commonest reply, especially from those aged 11-24, is that we "do not want to".

The Parish Council

In 1974 villagers went to court and successfully asserted the rights of the parish over the small green (The Sawing Pit) in the centre of Geldeston. In 1988 a proposal to build a new village hall on an outlying plot of parish-owned land was decisively vetoed at a crowded meeting. For the most part people in Geldeston feel no pressing need to get involved in local politics.

Over half in the survey say the parish council is doing a good or reasonable job of publicising its decisions and activities. A third of us have attended the monthly council or Annual Parish meeting at least once: but only when someone has lived in the parish for more than 6 years is he or she likely (in one out of three cases) to have "ever" been to such an event. Attendance at regular council meetings has long been a rare and exceptional activity. This makes the work of the Parish Plan team of parish councillors and parishioners all the more important.

The most common reply (42%) to a question about money raised through the council tax by the parish and district councils is that we do not know how it is spent. Among the "don't knows" are half of those who think street cleaning services are poor. How will we "pay for a road sweeper" to keep Geldeston neat and tidy? Who will pay for dog mess bins to be bought and then regularly emptied?

Occasions for involvement:
church, pub and village hall

No one activity or event brings everyone in the parish together. Most of us say we make use of the two pubs, footpaths and riverside at one time or another.

Once villagers were obliged to attend the local church and contribute to its upkeep. Today our parish council makes donations to the monthly magazine and towards churchyard maintenance. Some parishioners regularly go to church. More of us consider St Michael's Church important for weddings, funerals, Christmas and festivals (40%). Almost one hundred say they never go there to attend a service but many regard the *Parish News* magazine as an important source of local information. Unlike such publications

elsewhere its reports do not just concern church matters and it is consulted by 86% of those surveyed.

One in eight say they use neither of our two pubs, never visit the village hall and do not attend the local church. Some are teenagers but there are also adults among them. If more households had taken part, the “commuting” population in the parish might have proved larger than our survey suggests.

Nothing can replace the post office for the village’s older inhabitants. Still, a quarter of pensioners say they make regular use of the Wherry Inn, and more than a third of over 60s frequently attend events at the hall.

Of those who replied 60% think the village hall adequate for the needs of Geldeston. They and many who think it inadequate want a variety of improvements (e.g. ramp access). Capable of accommodating up to 100 people, the hall shows how rapidly village life has changed. When it opened in 1923 local people sought much of what they needed in their own community. Today, abundant private and public transport makes it incomparably easier for most of us to find goods, services, amusement and company elsewhere.

Using Roads and Paths

The commonest recreational activity is the use of footpaths and bridleways. This semi-solitary pastime is pursued by 168 of our respondents of all ages, often with great frequency. It goes with a love of country life, which is the reason most often mentioned for coming to live here (Chart 2).

At the same time, most of us name the car as our major form of transport. Not all local motorists agree that both traffic danger spots and speeding are a hazard in and around Geldeston. A great majority (85%), however, are worried about one or the other.

According to the survey, local walkers who are also car-drivers feel just as alarmed by the behaviour of their fellow motorists. Speeding and sometimes reckless drivers may be part of the through traffic — or they may be found yet closer to home. The three most frequently mentioned danger spots are Station Road (especially Locks Lane turn), the Old Yarmouth Road by the West End, and “Cowpat Corner” next to Dunburgh Farm. These are each clearly marked with a variety of warning signs: in many cases only someone who knows the road well could take those bends “too fast”.

The walkers among us are knowledgeable and active. Of those who replied 72% know where the local footpaths run and most use them.

Forty six regular walkers have stated their willingness to help "maintain the paths". There is a demand, especially from newcomers, for footpath maps and leaflets. Each of the three circular parish walks indicated on our new map-board passes through one or more of the mentioned traffic danger spots. Promoting a confident and responsible attitude to local footpaths and roads by walkers and other users may also help to curb the dangerous driving of a few.

Buses and cars

A third of us (Chart 4) say we make some use of the local bus services, the most frequent of which runs to Beccles and back ten times a day. Eighteen people are entirely dependent on a coach or bus; there are eight who rely on their bicycle.

In our survey most people who take the bus consider the car their main form of transport: they include many of the 25 pensioners and 13 schoolchildren who use buses. Five years ago, one in ten households in the parish did not have a car (2001 census). The rest were then divided between those running one motor vehicle (49%) and those running two and more (41%). In 2004 one hundred and five of us said we never use anything but a car.

Over a quarter of those who replied mention occasional or frequent transport difficulties in getting out of Geldeston to other places. The majority are accustomed to the convenience of the car. This also refers to the problems faced in travelling further afield on public transport, e.g. the one in six respondents who often or occasionally have difficulty in getting to hospital.

The call for "improved public transport" (Chart 3) comes from all who depend on buses and from many of the car users who sometimes take the bus. Calls for "traffic reduction" (Chart 3) likewise come from those who use all kinds of transport. Local buses often seem under-used and to travel almost empty through our village; at times they are an additional traffic hazard. Information about special services and new routes was formerly available at the post office. Perhaps a bus-users group might take on that task? Since there is a clear demand for improvement such a group could also collect practical suggestions as to how public transport might better serve our community.

The river, marshes and flooding

Access to the staithe and the riverside and to the peaceful opportunities it offers (for fishing, boating, walks and nature study)

is, for the most part, happily unspoilt by noise or most other kinds of pollution. We have little or no objection to sharing most of these activities with visitors.

Many of the marshes support plants and animals that are plentiful here but rare or even endangered species in other parts of the country. They fall within the Broads Authority environment protection area and include a site judged to be of national, even international, importance.

Proximity to the river has less welcome aspects. During exceptional high tides the water rises to within metres of the village centre. Less sudden and extreme rises in the water level lead to "many problems" with flooding for 13 of the households in our survey. A further 28 households experience occasional problems with surface water or storm drainage. Many of us support a call to "improve flood defences" (Chart 3).

In the 1970s an extensive system of banks and sunken concrete walling was installed to protect vulnerable houses on Station Road. This did not solve the problem to the satisfaction of the villagers and the parish council has a standing flood management committee. A new multi-million pound Flood Alleviation Project is now well under way. We do not know what effect it will have on the inhabitants of our parish or on the environment and local wildlife. So far consultation of our views and experience has been limited.

CHANGE IN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

For a small parish Geldeston has, in the past, enjoyed an unusual variety of scenery and wildlife: heath and reed-bed, common and marsh, ploughed fields, large formal gardens, cottage plots and allotments. As more and more land was farmed ditches and hedges extended across the parish. By the 1930s it was criss-crossed with such "wildlife corridors".

Other changes have been less gradual. We appreciate our peaceful access to the river. Yet Geldeston Dyke (the "Cut") was dug so that wherries, the HGVs of their day, could reach the village. This fostered a flourishing industry. Geldeston owes much of its present shape to the 18th and 19th centuries when the village was dominated by grain and coal stores, by maltings, and, for a time, by a brewery that met the needs of over thirty pubs up and down the Waveney valley. The

rumble of drays and carts and the smoke drifting from the many malt-houses are hardly a picture of rural tranquillity.

Things have changed in the past; they will change in the future. Conservation is an active and evolving process. It works better when we understand what we have, and where it came from. It is more successful when we can agree what we want to save and pass on to others.

WHAT NEXT?

Some of the tasks in our first action plan (see summary in the pocket opposite) will involve South Norfolk Council as well as the parish. Some tasks may require more funds. We can begin to tackle other tasks ourselves.

On the whole, we are satisfied with public services, for instance. The one exception is street cleaning. Some want a road sweeper. No less than 84 of us think a "spring-cleaning day" each year would be an important contribution. That just needs organisation.

Keeping in touch

The survey was the most ambitious attempt to share and circulate information and ideas between parishioners.

There are a number of ways we can keep in touch. A current list of contact numbers and organisations is enclosed here. There are also the hall notice boards, the *Parish News* magazine, the *Parish Papers* file at the Wherry Inn and, latest of all, www.geldeston.org.

The Village Survey offered everyone a chance to have their say. The enclosed Action Plan provides an opportunity to join together and work to protect and improve our community