



### What is a Parish and Community-Led plan?

A Parish & Community-Led Plan is a document which sets out a vision for a community's future based on sound local research, looking at social, environmental and economic life.

It celebrates positive features and activities, highlights community needs and contains a detailed action plan to help the community meet those needs. A Parish & Community-Led Plan is produced by and for the community, based on a detailed survey and consultation process which involves the whole community. It prompts action and influences others.

A robust Parish & Community-Led Plans is inclusive and can demonstrate a robust process that ensures its quality. It is steered by a group of people from within the community, including representation from the parish or town council and follows good practice and advice from a neutral independent body. In Gloucestershire, GRCC is the lead provider of advice and support for parish and community led planning.

### Introduction

The parish of Awre is situated on the Roman Gloucester to Chepstow road and lies 16km south west of Gloucester between the River Severn and the Forest of Dean. Its nearest town is Lydney and its immediate neighbour is Newnham.



The parish covers an area of about 2500ha (5800 acres) of which some 400ha (920 acres) is located within the river and foreshore. Interestingly, Roman remains have been found within the parish of Awre dating back to 75AD, whilst Awre manor can be traced back to Edward the Confessor in 1066 and has for much of its existence been connected with royalty until sold in 1600.

Historically the parish consisted of farmsteads, fisheries, the industrial and trading village of Blakeney (which over time replaced Awre village as the principle centre of population) and the small but commercially significant riverside hamlet of Gatcombe. Today, the parish comprises the villages of Awre, Blakeney, Gatcombe and Etloe and surrounding hamlets of Blakeney Hill, Hagloe, Brains Green and parts of Viney Hill and Two Bridges.

Interestingly, in the Middle Ages, ironworking was carried out in the Forest of Dean and a forge operated in Etloe in 1220. The Etloe forge was thought to be responsible for the large quantity of cinders dug out during road building in 1750s.

The Severn's fisheries and river trade were prime sources of income and employment in the parish. The River Severn and numerous streams powering mills and forges and extensive woodlands all contributed to the strong trading and industrial element of the local economy. Nevertheless, the dangers of the river are evident from the number of burials in Awre churchyard, where some older headstones can still be seen today. One of the heaviest losses was in 1732 when 17 people drowned in the wreck of the Newnham trow.

Much of the parish in the 1500s comprised arable land. Orchards, mostly for cider apples, were widespread. Fruit growing and cider making had become specialised in the early 20th century. A Perry pear tree, known as the Blakeney Red, was widely planted and cider orchards at Bledisloe were acquired by Schweppes Ltd in the 1920s. Unfortunately, the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 hit the parish badly, resulting in the loss of livelihood for a number of local farmers and change in working practice for most others.



### How does Awre the process alive?

- Through the use of an annual calendar
- The village website – regularly updated
- Monthly newsletters
- Parish Council meetings and the AGM
- Parish events through the Parish Plan table
- Surgeries
- Local newspapers

### Community benefits

Through ‘joined up’ thinking. It has also made the community better informed, bringing the community together from all the villages in the parish.

The community has seen things happen, change and be rejuvenated – projects have been achieved by public voice, making everyone feel part of something.

## The Process

At the start of the Parish Plan process, the Parish Council started off with a feasibility study, which led to the formation of an open interactive event being held where parishioners were asked to comment on 14 key themes. The event was publicised through local newspapers, flyers and posters to try to encourage as many people as possible to attend, resultantly drawing in over 120 people. A steering group was formed with an ‘army’ of volunteers assisting when needed.

The next step was to develop a questionnaire, which was hand-delivered to every household, giving the steering group a chance to assist with any form filling and have one-to-one talks with parishioners. Usefully, there was a good 56% response rate to the questionnaire. The steering group analysed the data and the information gathered was fed back to parishioners, community groups, churches and local businesses via a number of drop-in sessions and individual meetings, enabling people to comment on the concerns, issues and themes that were collated. The steering group invited partners and the local authority to comment on the information, with a disappointing response. Nonetheless, in all, 76% of the community provided input as part of the consultation process.

The draft Parish Plan document was compiled, and for the community there were “Themed Packs” which included:

- Community Facilities
- Tourism
- Crime & Safety
- Education
- Business & Community Skills
- Roads / Traffic
- Health
- Public Transport
- Housing
- Environment
- Local Economy

There were concerns within the community about the size of projects and the timescales. The steering group listened and addressed the concerns by implementing ‘quick wins’:

- Since 2005 a community calendar has been published updating the community with actions and community information.
- The draft parish plan was ratified in 2005 by the Parish Council.



**The village hall was used as a meeting point during the consultation and is used by many community groups in Awre including the luncheon club.**

## Awre's achievements

### Roads and Traffic

Joint working with Highways, partners and neighbouring parishes:

- addressing the problems of reducing the heavy vehicles using the A48 through the parish
- involving the youth with the project to introduce speed restrictions
- involving the community to improve access
- restricting roadside parking to improve the flow of traffic
- reviewing the number of road signs, improving driving conditions and safety
- using dial-a-ride for commuters
- encouraging use of public transport by Arriva trains offering a special fare rate for those users who get on at Lydney

### Leisure

- holding a 2 day festival annually
- running a luncheon club
- linking with neighbouring parishes for joint use of facilities

### Health & Social Services

- setting up a website, working with the GP surgeries to improve communication about health advice

### Public Transport

- working with Gloucestershire County Council to improve communication about transport services and displays
- installing two bus shelters in Blakeney

### Tourism

- developing the "Book to Walk" project
- introducing improved signage for footpaths and cleared grounds, with a maintenance programme in place
- working with the Forest Commissions to look at the charge arrangements for parking in the forest to bring prices to a more acceptable level for local people and visitors
- putting day trips in place

### Crime and Safety

- PSO in place
- call centre in place
- improving the communication of self-help advice through the police safety unit working with the parish council and the steering group

### Education and Training

- improving communication about the training opportunities and setting up electronic links with providers and organisers
- putting in place a Learning Ambassador scheme to improve opportunities for training and development

### Local Economy, Business and Employment

- Lydney partnership working with the hinterlands to generate innovative ideas to grow the local economy
- working with local businesses to reduce the number of heavy vehicles passing through the parish
- promoting 'local people for local work'

### Religion

- introducing a church magazine to improve the integration of the church within the community

### Children

- linking into the Play Strategy to provide improved play areas and facilities
- working with the school to provide accommodation and storage facilities for the under 5s

### Young People

- working with the youth to improve their facilities, setting up a youth forum and reviewing the interest in the youth club, held in the village hall



### Funding secured

- Luncheon club: £5,000
- Youth club: £6,000
- Bus shelters: £8,000
- New accommodation for the under 5s: £92,000
- Young People: £5,000 (Gloucestershire County Council)
- Young People: £2,000 (Forest of Dean District Council)

## Working with partners

The Awre Parish Plan has enabled the parish to form partnership links with neighbouring parishes and this in turn has created a much stronger voice when presenting ideas to local authority agencies with regard to securing funding and support.

### Key advice for others

*“Don’t underestimate the size of the project you are about to undertake. However, don’t be dissuaded/put off by it because there are so many benefits in the process. Do bear in mind that without the necessary support the plan can become a full time job.”*



**Money was secured to pay for a new bus shelter, using information from the parish plan**

*“In my opinion do it! Get the community involved, prepare a plan, consult the community. This is a future vision and will create projects that will bring in funding... and it’s fun!”*

**Bob Watters, Parish Plan Co-ordinator**

## Lessons learnt and future projects

Creating a parish plan takes a lot of resources (people, time, skills) and the complexity of the document and the amount of work that is entailed is something that needs to be set out from the start.

The Parish Council needs to be the governing body with thematic groups/working groups taking on the parish plan work, with further support from local authority agencies.

In the future, as a result of the Parish Planning process Awre is looking at Affordable Housing, further addressing the crime in the area and producing a local directory

*With thanks to  
Awre Parish  
Council members  
for their  
contributions to  
this case study*

GRCC is the lead provider of support for **parish and community-led plans** in Gloucestershire and can offer support to communities, dependent on the location of the parish. If you would like further information please contact  
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