

## **Siston Community Parish Plan**

### **PART 1: THE MAKING OF SISTON COMMUNITY PARISH PLAN**

#### **Introduction: What is a community parish plan?**

A Community Parish Plan sets out the arguments, logic, evidence, advice and background information to support the direction that community action is most likely to take in the coming years and, as such, it can be used in support of funding applications by community projects working to address the priorities set out in the Plan. It does not cover every aspect of community activity in a neighbourhood, but focuses on what might be described as the 'core issues' that will impact on community life as a whole in the coming years. Therefore it does not say, for example, that there should be a new luncheon club in a parish; but focuses instead on whether there is a suitable and accessible building for a luncheon club to operate. A Parish Council can also use a Parish Plan to argue for a slice of Community Infrastructure Levy (roof tax) derived from developers who build large new housing schemes within or adjacent to the parish. However, it is important to understand that a Community Parish Plan differs entirely from a Neighbourhood Plan, which is concerned with the planning and economic aspirations of a parish. A Parish Plan is wholly about community aspirations and is delivered only by community-led projects. It therefore does not presume to tell a local authority how to address issues in a parish, but it does point to where community-led projects need to work in partnership with their local authority and how this may be done.

A Community Parish Plan therefore needs to address the most pressing community concerns and issues of its time because it is something that a parish does only once every few years. It should not be a wasted opportunity. By the same token it needs to be realistic and, ultimately, achievable. This means that it cannot include issues that are beyond the decision-making reach of communities as this can raise unrealistic expectations which, if they fail to be realised, can feed a sense of cynicism that 'nothing ever gets done.' Of course, this is frustrating where, for example, issues like traffic congestion or pollution impact locally on the wellbeing and health of residents, but cannot easily be challenged or changed locally because the relevant decision-making bodies are at a national or regional level. Therefore, a Parish Plan needs to recognise that there are issues that we *can* tackle as a community through our collective vision and effort; but there are also issues that are principally the domain of what each of us individually and privately must decide at the ballot box on election days. That is the way that our democracy works. Each part of the democratic process, either as community engagement or individual democratic engagement, are of equal importance, because if we do nothing, then sure enough, nothing will ever get done. This does not mean that local politics are 'out of bounds' to communities. Indeed, at least part of local government relies on communities to raise local issues and engage in partnership to solve local problems where possible. Therefore if people are sometimes cynical about local government then it is often because it is misunderstood and does not explain itself well; but by the same token local government can also sometimes be cynical about taking communities seriously.

The timescale for this Parish Plan is five years. This represents a realistic estimate of the time needed to achieve most of the goals set out in the Plan. Other goals may take much longer, so the five year timescale may also be seen as a way of measuring progress towards longer term objectives.

Part 1 of this Parish Plan explains the methods and rationale used to identify its community priorities. It also includes guidance on the building blocks of community action and on understanding how local government can help. Part 2 sets out each of the areas identified as a community priority in the Plan and explains what community-led actions can be taken to achieve goals and bring about change.

### **How is 'community' defined for the purpose of a Parish Plan?**

It is essential for the purpose of a Parish Plan that the concept of 'community' is clearly defined. It is a term that is widely misused, often for purposes that are not always in the best interests of a community. For example, public authorities quite often claim that they have 'consulted with the community,' when in reality they have consulted with a few people who have turned up to a public meeting. A Parish Plan obviously requires a more robust approach. Community is most commonly defined in three ways: as a community of locality, as a community of identity and as a community of shared interests. The strongest bonds of community come where these different kinds of community are combined: where people live in a particular locality which they choose to identify as their own neighbourhood and in which some of their interests are shared with their neighbours – e.g. their children go to the same local school, or they enjoy communal activities at the local community centre, or there is an annual village fete which most of the community attend. There are elements of infrastructure that may not necessarily be provided by residents but which are also important to a sense of community. These are things like local schools, shops, parks, pubs, churches, village halls, community centres and other local amenities. These provide a framework around which communities can develop and bond. But the focus of a Parish Plan must be on local residents themselves because its aim is to reflect what they think about their locality and how they can act to address their neighbourhood concerns.

To achieve this, a plan requires information drawn from two different types of community sources: individual residents and organised community groups. It achieves the first by means of a household survey which captures the broad concerns that people have about their neighbourhoods; and it achieves the second by engaging with the ways in which communities organise themselves as voluntary groups and projects to address the issues and needs that are seen locally as neighbourhood priorities.

### **A Parish Plan for Siston**

Parish Plans began in the 1990s principally as a tool for rural communities, organised through a national organisation called ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) and its country-wide network of village hall advisers. The process presumed that certain conditions

existed around which a Plan could be developed. These conditions included: a clearly defined local community based on locality and identity together with a variety of shared interests; a clearly defined community boundary; a central meeting place such as a village hall; and a sufficiently organised community with pre-existing groups that could provide the infrastructure for community actions to address local needs and issues. A committee would be formed of representatives from local groups and other volunteers and this would be the body to drive the Parish Planning process. In a village setting, these conditions are easy to understand. People know what the community is that they belong to and they have a central meeting place where they can hold community events. However, this process becomes far more complicated if it is extended into more diverse and fragmented urban areas.

This is especially true for Siston Parish, for whilst there are other urban parishes in South Gloucestershire, as well as rural parishes with more than one village, Siston is unique in having four entirely separate and seemingly disconnected neighbourhoods with divergent characteristics: urbanised Warmley with its busy industrial and business parks, the quiet residential suburbia of Bridgeyate, the large new isolated estate at Siston Hill with its mix of owner-occupied and social housing, and the hamlets, farms and cottages of the Commons. It has no natural centre and no common community identity. Indeed where once Warmley High Street might have acted as a *de facto* parish centre, this changed when the Siston Hill estate was built adding 700 new dwellings and nearly doubling the residential population of the parish. In so doing it shifted the centre of gravity away from Warmley.

Siston's communities are further separated by major road transport routes, including the Avon Ring Road and the A420 which bring serious traffic congestion, noise, dust and pollution into the parish. Indeed the parish has been largely defined by transport systems, at least since the industrial revolution, firstly with the historic dramway hauling coal from the pits and collieries of Coalpit Heath and the East Bristol coal seam down to the River Avon, followed by the Avon and Gloucestershire freight Railway and later the Midland passenger railway which finally closed at the end of the sixties. The expansion of Bristol to the east, especially into Northavon in the 1980s, led to a significant increase in road transport and a corresponding expansion of the road network. Latterly, the Bristol to Bath Railway Path (for cyclists and pedestrians) has become a popular route which has encouraged some local regeneration with the café and rest area at Warmley Waiting Room and Station. However, even for cyclists, Siston has become a location which most road users either pass through or commute from; and this problem is reinforced by the fact that many of the usual services and amenities enjoyed by other parishes lie outside of Siston's parish boundaries. Even its last remaining shopping area, Warmley High Street, provides challenging trading conditions for shopkeepers due to traffic noise and parking problems. The main secondary school serving the parish closed in 2016, although it was replaced by a smaller specialist technical school on the old Grange site. There is no infant or primary provision in the parish and no health centre or surgery. Whilst there are four community meeting places within the parish, none provide the full services of a community centre and there is nothing at all to serve the population of Siston Hill.

These then were the obstacles to the traditional approach to parish planning: a lack of community identity and cohesion, the lack of a parish centre, the lack of adequate meeting places and a lack of shared interests around which community could be developed. A Parish Plan for Siston, given its diverse and disconnected neighbourhoods, needed a rethink. The answer lay in what several members of the Parish Council, together with some of Siston's more vocal residents, had been saying for years, which was that Siston's neighbourhoods were not necessarily *divided* by the spaces between them but on the contrary were *connected* by the spaces between them – the spaces in question being the ancient Commons of Siston, Bridgegate, Webbs Heath and Goose Green, which together comprise a unique community landscape steeped in heritage and rich in biodiversity. Therefore by viewing the Commons as the centre of the parish and as the meeting point connecting each of the neighbourhoods, it became clearer what would be the primary focus of the Plan in terms of community identity and common interests.

### **Parish planning and community development**

The point of a Parish Plan is to assist community-led organisations to build good community relations and improve their neighbourhoods. The Plan provides a sense of direction for community action and evidence of local consultation that communities can use to inform and justify their projects, not least to potential funders. In this way, the Plan provides the context for the process called 'community development' – which means building networks of groups, projects, activities and amenities that enable all local people whatever their age or income or background or family status to experience a sense of shared and supportive community identity and interest. The term 'community cohesion' is often used to describe this experience, the outcome of which can be measured in a range of social indicators including the willingness and ability of a community to take action to sustain its quality of life and to protect the environment in which it lives. Of course community development is easier said than done, so it is worth noting what building blocks are needed to successfully sustain those community groups and projects that take up the challenge of addressing the priorities set out in this Parish Plan. This is a quick guide.

1. Simply bringing people together without a clear sense of purpose and direction is unlikely to achieve results. Many community groups and associations have formed with the best intentions of a few enthusiasts only to peter out after a few meetings which the dwindling participants describe as 'talking shops.' Therefore the first thing that is needed is some kind of robust and realistic structure or purpose around which people are willing and wanting to organise. This might be a campaign for a pedestrian crossing, or a proposal for a community festival, or a fundraising event to repair a war memorial, or a group of residents who want to improve a local park.

2. Once the structure or purpose for community action has been established, a supporting infrastructure is needed to sustain its development. This will need to include some agreed aims and objectives, setting out an overall vision for the group and the steps that will need to be taken to achieve its goals. When the group is ready, it is likely to also need a set of

rules - usually called a constitution - defining who its members are and how it is to be run. It will certainly need leadership to hold the group together, as well as the means to communicate with its existing and potential members.

3. The group will need capital - not capital as money (not yet, anyway) - but capital as people's voluntary time, energy, good will, values and commitment. This is sometimes called 'social capital' and is based on good working relationships that help to bind communities together. This can be squandered, like money can be, by negativity, disagreements and petty arguments, which can suck the life out of any community project leading to its early demise. This is especially important where different groups achieve better results by working together in partnership. Therefore the social capital of community action should be nurtured and protected with the same care as it might protect its monetary reserves.

4. Community action also needs capacity – the capacity needed to carry out the project's aims and goals – which means skills, knowledge, an accessible meeting place, training if needed, funding (when appropriate) and the support of relevant local authority officers or councillors and other useful partners.

5. Finally, the group will need some 'staying power' and momentum, because as a rule of thumb the ability of community action to realise its goals tends to take longer than is initially envisaged. Therefore groups and projects need to be prepared to build in a strategy for renewing themselves by constantly seeking ways to widen their membership and their diversity to ensure that they retains and grow their social capital and capacity. Time is a critical issue for community action, but it can work both ways. Effective community action often takes a long time, but conversely community groups cannot risk allowing potential opportunities to pass them by because they were not adequately prepared. Therefore community groups need to combine the will to work over the long term with the skill to react to events and opportunities as they arise.

It is therefore important to ensure that these building blocks are put in place in developing community action to deliver the aims of the Parish Plan. Siston's history of community action has been mixed. On one hand some amazing achievements have been driven by local volunteers, such as the community restoration of the old railway signal box at Warmley. Yet at other times opportunities have been squandered because projects were not ready to rise to the challenge.

### **Parish planning and political context**

Whether we like it or not, whenever we take some form of community action to bring about improvements to our neighbourhoods, we will usually have to liaise with our local authority, which in the case of Siston means South Gloucestershire Council. All of the community priorities set out in this Parish Plan require some level of partnership with the local authority. However, there has been, and continues to be, a culture of inconsistency in relationships between community groups in Siston and officers from South Gloucestershire Council. For

whilst community partnership is an espoused principle of the council, this is not always implemented effectively on the ground. It is therefore important that communities understand something about how local councils work.

Firstly, Councils are not monolithic organisations. There are actually very few decisions that councils make *as* councils and these usually represent only the highest strategic and budgetary matters. Most everyday decisions are made within a framework of pre-determined service plans, contracts or procedures managed by individual departments or teams. It is rare that individual officers can act beyond their given roles and budgets, although some senior managers may have some discretion. It is therefore important for communities to maintain positive relationships with the officers with whom they liaise, whilst it is unhelpful to view officers as somehow 'representing' an imaginary monolith called 'the council,' especially if they are being criticised for failing to make decisions when they have neither the authority, the ability, the time or the budget to do so. Further realism must be applied to the fact that all local authorities have been decreased in size by the reduction of their central government funding over the last decade or so. South Gloucestershire Council's budget, for example, has shrunk by about a third, so there are inevitably less staff to deal with the increasing demand of a locally expanding population.

Secondly, a local authority has two main functions. On one hand it is a provider (directly or by contract) of statutory (and some non-statutory) services determined by legislation set out by central government. This legislation defines not only what services should be provided but also, in many cases, how they should be provided too. On the other hand a local authority is a political organisation, run by the elected representatives of the local population, usually through a political party system. The political element of local government is there to make the service provision functions of a council accountable to local people, as well as allowing for the interpretation and prioritisation of statutory responsibilities based on the preferences of the elected administration. Therefore it is important that communities learn when to liaise with officers and when it is more appropriate to liaise with elected councillors.

Thirdly, councils are rational organisations where actions are accountable through a chain of command and where expenditure is accounted for by audit. Councils receive and expend large amounts of tax-payers money both from council tax and from central government. Therefore strict rules are in place to ensure that decisions are legal and that budgets are spent in accordance with predetermined plans and procedures. These procedures are subject to internal supervision and external inspection. This may seem like bureaucracy but it actually represents accountable governance. Even so, there are still some areas of officer discretion, as long as these are within prescribed limits and authority. This means that communities must be realistic in their expectations. This does not mean that change is impossible, but it does mean that if communities want a change in policy, then sound evidence must be provided on which new decisions can be based.

Having said that however, a local authority's rationality can become its own worst enemy. If a wrong decision is made and then becomes embedded in an impenetrable bureaucratic

procedure, then the continuing failure of service can become compounded over and over again, sometimes for years, causing a waste of expenditure and frustration to the public. Often communities can see these failings better than officers who may be over-fixated with an internal compliance to 'set ways' of doing things. This is probably the area of greatest potential friction between communities and local authorities and certainly underpins one of this Parish Plan's main priorities.

Fourthly, despite their bureaucratic rationality, councils have internal competitive pressures. Such competition may be between different political parties, but are just as likely to be between elected members from different wards who are determined to promote their own local causes, especially where these have strong local backing. Therefore, although many community groups and projects are uncomfortable with the idea of 'politicking,' sometimes being politically aware is a necessary skill of community development. It is part of the community capacity needed to achieve goals. Therefore it is always important that groups and projects build good relationships with their local district councillors and keep them informed about their plans and achievements. It may also be important to counter-balance potential internal competitiveness within the Council by building links with similar projects in other areas. Sometimes a network of similar community projects from different areas have a stronger voice than individual projects on their own.

Fifthly, although they may at times appear to be lumbering and unresponsive bureaucracies, the reality is that local authorities are subject to constant change, both in terms of internal political direction and in terms of national legislative requirements. It is a fact that communities always outlive local political administrations, national governments and even local authority boundaries and administrative structures. Community-led change is therefore always possible, so it is important the projects never to lose sight of their long-term vision and goals. The history of community action in the UK demonstrates time and again that there is very little that communities cannot achieve for the benefit of their neighbourhoods, although such achievements often take time.

Question: But what is that thing called Localism? The Localism Act (2011) was the main legislation designed to drive what the Coalition Government of the time called the 'Big Society.' Its aim was to rebalance decision-making powers and allow and encourage local communities to have more say in - and even more control over - some of their local services and amenities. It was left to local authorities to interpret and implement Localism and South Gloucestershire Council did this through its 'Localism Framework and Action Plan.' Therefore where Localism impacts on issues and actions in this Parish Plan it will be shown.

### **How the priorities of the Siston Parish Plan were identified**

Five community priorities were identified as being important to residents of the Parish, although one of these represented an issue that community action cannot easily address except indirectly – and that is the issue of traffic congestion, speeding, pollution, parking and their impact on the environment. Of the others, it was clearly apparent that existing

community activity was mostly centred on industrial heritage and community buildings. This was confirmed by early consultation with voluntary groups involved in these activities. However, the issue of the protection and conservation of the ancient Commons was a major concern of the public and had generated many complaints over the years, although there was no existing community group to speak on this matter because there were no remaining farmers with commoners' rights who used the land for grazing animals. Therefore the process of collating a Parish Plan included an element of community development in its support for the foundation of a community group focused on the Commons, called the Friends of Siston Commons. In addition the Parish Council hoped that young people's voices could also be included in the Plan.

These then were the community priorities initially identified, which were then tested against a household survey of all properties in the parish:

- Local heritage
- Conserving the commons
- Community buildings
- Road safety
- Young people.

### **The household survey**

A household survey was undertaken in 2015. A total of 199 completed surveys were returned, which represents just over a 10% response rate out of a total of 1,852 households within the parish (based on the last census). Of these, 99 were from residents who identified themselves as living in Warmley, 41 from Siston Hill, 33 from Bridgegate, 21 from Siston Village and its rural surrounds and 5 who did not identify a neighbourhood. The survey was based on two types of questions. The first asked whether respondents either agreed or disagreed with the priorities listed above, or whether they had no opinion either way. The second was an open question asking about what issues or needs were considered to be most pressing in each of the four neighbourhoods that make up the parish of Siston.

Two thirds of respondents agreed with the five community priorities identified in the survey. Of these, two priorities stood out very clearly. The first was road safety, speeding, traffic congestion and parking problems; and the second was preservation and maintenance of the ancient Commons. These two issues also ranked strongly in the open question about neighbourhood issues. The priority that received the least endorsement was the involvement of young people in the Plan. There was what appeared to be a mismatch between the issues that presently attract the most voluntary activity (local heritage and community buildings) and residents' lower ranking of these as community priorities, but heritage was ranked strongly in Warmley and the need for a community building was ranked strongly in Siston Hill.

Whilst respondents from all of the neighbourhood cited the issue of road safety and parking as their main community concern, there was a disparity between the new neighbourhood of

Siston Hill and the other three neighbourhoods. Warmley, Bridgegate and Siston village and its rural surrounds cited the preservation of the ancient Commons as their next community concern, whereas respondents from Siston Hill cited a need for community amenities such as a children playground and a community meeting place as a priority concern.

What can be learned from the household survey? These are the key points:

1. Traffic congestion and parking problems are the greatest community concern but are beyond the decision-making reach of a community Parish Plan. However, some indirect community actions can be taken, which are highlighted later in the Plan.
2. The next greatest community concern – the protection and conservation of the ancient Commons – will be central to the Siston Parish Plan.
3. Heritage groups and organisations need to become more accessible to local communities and involve communities in the preservation and understanding of local history in order to encourage greater interest.
4. The new community of Siston Hill will ultimately need an accessible community meeting place nearer to their neighbourhood than existing venues.

## **PART 2: THE COMMUNITY PRIORITIES OF THE SISTON PARISH PLAN**

### **1. Protection and conservation of the ancient common lands of Siston**

The ancient Commons within Siston parish (which formerly abutted the royal hunting forest of Kingswood) are more important than simply an historical site, despite the presence of Roman and pre-Roman archaeological remains. Common land in the UK is unique because it has not been cultivated for centuries, only grazed; and this has produced precious habitats for plants and wildlife. For example, 57% of registered Common land in England is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest because of their unique habitats. Likewise, because of their unploughed soils, Commons often have important archaeological and historic features which have been lost on intensively managed farmland elsewhere. For example, 11% of all Scheduled Ancient Monuments are sited on Common land. Therefore ancient Commons like those within Siston parish represent both a heritage landscape and a special ecological history. Their habitat biodiversity is due to their agrarian antiquity and these twin aspects of Common land are symbiotic. Change one and you change the other. It is for these reasons and not just because the Commons are valued green open spaces that they must be protected from encroachment, development and degradation. This principle is highlighted in the Department of the Environment's 'Common Land Consents Policy' (2015), which states the importance of the *“protection of important archaeological and historic sites”* by *“preserving landforms and features in uncultivated soils (common land and greens have often been left*

*undisturbed by ploughing for centuries).*” It also notes that *“celebrating the value of open, unenclosed common land and greens as a ‘communal’ resource” “provides a sense of belonging.”* One would therefore expect that the Commons of Siston would be regarded as the ‘crown jewels’ of South Gloucestershire’s green assets, but sadly this has not been the case, until now.

The importance of the ancient Commons in Siston cannot be underestimated. Their origins lie in the division of lands by the Normans after the Conquest, when substantial areas of England were granted to Norman aristocrats or so-called Barons under royal charter as noted in the Domesday Book which cited the Roger de Berkeley, Lord of Dursley, as the owner of lands around Siston. At the time of the Normans (St Anne’s church was built at this time) most of the area remained part of the original Saxon royal hunting forest. However, by 1228 Henry III granted ‘Charters of Disafforestation’ whereby several extensive tracts of land, previously within the original forest bounds, were converted into common land, or land held in common by the various inhabitants of the parishes affected. The old Kingswood Forest was reduced in status to that of a Royal Chase and its size cut down to about 4,500 acres in what is now the Kingswood area. This was the early period of Commoners rights.

There is archaeological evidence that in the early fourteenth century some land around Siston had been improved for agriculture. Medieval agriculture was based on the feudal manorial system (under the so-called lords of the manor) who granted certain rights of agricultural tenancy to farmers and peasants occupying their land in exchange for agricultural tithes or rents. This was in the form of what historians call the ‘open field system’ where narrow strips of land were leased to tenant farmers and their descendants in perpetuity by the titled landowner, with the administration of the arrangement overseen by a steward or bailiff. At the end of each harvest it was common practice to allow tenants and peasants to freely graze their livestock on the open fields (this also helped to fertilise the land). Manorial courts defined the ‘rights of common’ allotted to each tenancy, rights that were tightly controlled and specified how many and what type of animal could be grazed in this way. This was the middle period of Commoners rights.

This medieval agrarian system continued through the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII (the lands around Siston were held by the Abbott of Glastonbury for a while and then passed back into private hands), through the Elizabethan era when the Tutor Siston Court was built as the manorial seat of the area, through the seventeenth century English Civil Wars (some of Cromwell’s men used St Anne’s Church in Siston as a temporary base and Cromwell himself was said to have stayed at Siston Court), and into the eighteenth century when neighbouring Bristol grew in wealth as the main port for the triangular slave trade, profits from which would later be invested in early industrial developments at Warmley. Therefore, throughout the great historical events that shaped England’s fortunes, the simple agrarian land use in and around Siston remained undisturbed, despite the growing extraction of coal from shallow pits in the surrounding area.

All this changed with the agricultural revolution of eighteenth century when new intensive farming methods offered greater yields. But these new types of farming required larger tracts of enclosed farmland - literally enclosed by ditches and hedging - and this brought an end to the open field system of strip farming. This change of land use was facilitated by a series of Acts of Parliament known as the 'Inclosure Acts' (the term meant 'enclosure') which allowed landowners to rent or sell fixed acreages of farmland, pushing the price of land beyond the means of the rural poor. To do this landowners were legally empowered to remove commoners (peasants and poor tenant farmers) from their land, although compensation was sometimes offered to larger tenancies. The motivation behind the process of Enclosure was to make the management of land more efficient, productive and profitable than the open field system, thus increasing the market for traded produce. Of course the effect of Enclosure was the displacement of thousands of landless peasants who no longer had the means of making a living from the land; and this displacement of surplus labour became an important factor in driving the industrial revolution of the same period as the rural poor sought paid employment in the coal mines, kilns, furnaces, mills and factories of the newly emerging industrial economy. These two technological 'revolutions' – agricultural and industrial - reinforced each other because the growing population of workers in the new industrialised towns relied on food grown elsewhere. Farming efficiencies were therefore essential to feed the growth of the industrial revolution. What common land remained was largely rough pasture that was deemed unsuitable for the new agricultural practices and was left for grazing by selected Commoners under the old rules of manorial courts. However, the legal status and protection of these areas of Commons was reinforced by government legislation in the nineteenth century, creating the later period of Commoners rights.

It is therefore likely that the ancient Commons within Siston Parish have three different and overlapping historical origins: the Royal Charter, the Manorial Courts and the Enclosure Acts, spread over a period of eight hundred years. This means that the Commons have been left uncultivated for at least two centuries following a period of four or more centuries of grazing and simple open field farming, whilst some areas have been left entirely uncultivated for at least eight hundred years. It is this special ecological and edaphological (soil) heritage that gives them their unique environmental character today. The geographical boundaries between these overlapping origins may account for differences in soil composition and ecological character across the four Commons, although a detailed archaeological survey would be needed to verify this.

There are four areas of ancient Common land in Siston parish: the large expanse of Siston Common, which is divided east and west of the Ring Road and north of Station Road Link continuing up Siston Hill to meet Goose Green; Bridgegate Common, which lies on both sides of the A420 by the White Hart and extends down the A4175 Bath Road and up Chesley Hill; Goose Green Common, which is a corridor of grassland linking Webbs Heath with Siston Common; and Webbs Heath Common which is divided north and south of Webbs Heath Road at the junction with Siston Lane. Across the Commons there are still thirty seven properties with certain Commoners' rights. Over the years, less and less grazing has taken place, although grazing remained the main method of land management within the memory of

those residents who have lived on and around the Commons since their childhood. Instead, a switch has taken place from the natural maintenance of habitat by grazing animals to the municipal intervention of seasonal grass cutting and other forms of horticultural management. This is because the local authority (now South Gloucestershire Council) became responsible under statute for the maintenance of all of the Commons' schemes of management as set out in bylaws in 1904. This is despite the fact that only two of the Commons are in the Council's ownership: Siston and Webbs Heath; whilst Bridgegate and Goose Green Commons are in private ownership.

However, in recent years many residents have become concerned and frustrated that important habitats have become degraded due to the nature of the management, or lack of management, employed by the Council in maintaining the Commons. This led to repeated complaints. As a result two actions were instituted from both 'sides' of the arguments. On the Council's side, a sympathetic local government officer with responsibility for maintaining South Gloucestershire's green spaces (since retired) commissioned an independent and detailed habitat condition survey of all the Commons in Siston Parish, which was undertaken by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (South West). This report, known as the FWAG Report, surveyed ninety individual habitat 'compartments' and make recommendations about their future conservation and maintenance. On the community's side, and in response to the FWAG Report, a Friends of Siston Commons group was formed, with a legal constitution as a voluntary organisation, with the following aims:

*To provide a local community voice concerning all matters in the public sphere that involve or impinge upon the protection, preservation, maintenance, management, heritage, natural biodiversity, registration, use and promotion of ancient common lands located at Siston, Bridgegate, Webbs Heath, Goose Green and Chesney Hill within the Parish of Siston (hereinafter referred to as "the Commons");*

*To work in partnership with South Gloucestershire Council, Siston Parish Council, commoners, residents, neighbouring farms and businesses, relevant organisations, walkers and other users of the Commons within Siston Parish, to maintain and protect the historic and natural integrity of the Commons in perpetuity;*

*To undertake physical, educational and promotional activities in pursuance of the protection, preservation, maintenance, management, heritage, natural biodiversity and use of the Commons, within the scope of the byelaws as they pertain to common lands within Siston Parish and with relevant permissions of landowners and the local authority where required;*

*To consult on, and/or act as consultees for, all community matters relating to the Commons within Siston Parish;*

*To undertake any other relevant activities in support of and in pursuance of these Objectives;*

Support for the formation and constitution of a Friends of Siston Commons group has been one of the aims of the Parish Plan in addressing the community priority of protecting and conserving the Commons. 'Friends Groups' attached to green spaces like parks and nature areas are widely accepted as community stakeholders and partners in South Gloucestershire and beyond, and are a recommendation of Natural England's Foundation for Common Land. They are also seen as one of the community partners in the Council's approach to Localism. The FWAG Report provided the structure around which the Friends of Siston Commons group is organising its aims and goals. However, the existence of a Friends Group and the publication of the FWAG Report will not solve the problem of the decline of the Commons on their own. There are what might be described as three 'blocks' to change, which will ultimately need to be overcome in the long term if a proper programme of conservation is to be implemented to protect the ecology of the Commons.

#### *Block 1: Designation of Common Land*

South Gloucestershire Council, which was formed in 1996, manages over 40,000 individual areas of green open space spread across 2,500 acres. These assets include municipal parks, playgrounds, sports pitches, recreation grounds, woodlands, nature areas and Commons, together with thousands of verges and small grassed plots and planted beds. Like most local authorities, the Council accounts for its expenditure in maintaining its green spaces using a simple designation of type, which are: natural and semi natural open space, informal recreational open space, outdoor sports provision, provision for children and young people, allotments, and cemeteries. All this information is contained on spreadsheets and digitalised maps, which are not available for public scrutiny. These are used to manage and cost seasonal maintenance schedules, whether by the Council or by its contractors. A small team manage this service, the budget for which has been reduced by a quarter in recent years. The problem is that there is no specific designation for the maintenance of Common land. There is a conservation area on the edge of the Commons around Siston Court and Siston village; and South Gloucestershire's Biodiversity Action Plan (2016-2026) has a general description of the Commons as "*Lowland Farmland*" in a category that includes "*Roadside verges, footpath and cycle path edges, recreational sites, commons, old churchyards and dry stone walls*" as "*Local Priority Habitats*." But the ancient Commons are not given the priority status that they deserve because they are not designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Furthermore, some of the existing designations applied to the Commons are unhelpful or erroneous, for example, showing (on digital maps) areas as 'amenity land' which is a 'catch all' term for land that offers a visual outlook, but which does not take into account the ecology of the area in question. Elsewhere, the maps designate areas of ancient unimproved grassland as 'informal recreational open space,' which in one sense is true, but which does not take account of the special ecology of Common land.

The FWAG Report was written with the intention that the ninety habitat compartments it surveyed could be coterminous with the South Gloucestershire Council's Geographical Information System and its individual site management codes. However, the FWAG Report is not a Council report, nor does it represent Council policy. It was not commissioned by 'the Council' but by a Council officer with responsibility for green spaces who has since retired; and it has not been presented to Elected Members as a recommended strategy for the conserving the Commons. It is what might be described as an 'advisory' document.

### *Block 2: Special Expenses*

Parish and Town councils in South Gloucestershire are subject to something called *Special Expenses*, where a pre-set amount of a parish's precept (its element of council tax) is taken by the Council to pay for certain services. This was part of the way that the Council chose to deal with its reduction in government funding, by splitting its services between its statutory functions, which it calls its 'core strategy' and its non-statutory functions, which it calls 'enhanced services.' The cost of providing enhanced services, such as the maintenance of parks and green spaces, was to be shared with town and parish councils. However, not all of South Gloucestershire is parished, so a calculation was introduced to create a level budgetary playing field between parished and non-parished areas. This created two unintentional problems for the Commons. First of all, the calculation of special expenses used the same spreadsheets as the existing grounds maintenance schedules, so this 'locked in' the errors in designation of Common land and consequently the under-pricing of the cost of their maintenance. In Siston, for example, about £11k of special expenses is allocated for the maintenance of all of the Commons, which is patently not enough. The second problem is that the special expenses calculation inadvertently advantaged and empowered some of the larger town and parish council's because they had the population size to contribute to the cost of enhanced services through their own precept. In some cases this has meant parishes taking over direct management of some of these services entirely. But small parishes like Siston simply do not have the size of population to raise a precept to cover the true cost of maintaining the Commons, so the special expenses calculation effectively 'locks in' the underfunding of these important habitats.

### *Block 3: Localism*

The Council's Localism Action Plan further 'locks in' this disparity, because it divides its 'Streetcare' services, which include the maintenance of the Commons, between a basic service under the Core Strategy called a 'Core Standard' and the aforementioned 'Enhanced Services' which are of a higher standard of maintenance but which must be paid for by town and parish councils themselves. Once again, small parishes like Siston do not have the population size to pay for enhanced services. Therefore there is an element of cynicism in Council's Localism Framework and Action Plan where it says that it "*reflects the spirit of the national Localism initiative, which encourages people to come together to take responsibility for their communities and to get more involved in the design and delivery of local services. It*

*will also help us ensure that we are using our resources effectively at a time of significant reductions in local authority funding.”*

What this all means is that the mis-designation of the Commons has ‘locked in’ the underfunding of their maintenance, whilst the Council’s spreadsheet maintenance schedules have ‘locked’ this underfunding into the Special Expenses calculation. Now the inequality caused by the Special Expenses calculation is ‘locked in’ by the Council’s Localism Action Plan.

These apparent blocks to a better scheme of conservation and maintenance for the Commons has therefore led to the issue that has caused so much concern amongst residents: the season-by-season and year-on-year degradation of important and historic natural habitats through poor maintenance. The frustration has been that no one seems to be to blame for this failure and so no one seems able to take responsibility to put it right. But this is because the failure is institutionalised within the spreadsheet management systems of the Council, whilst current Council staff with responsibility for direct oversight of green spaces do not have the authority to substantially alter the way that the system works. They can only respond to complaints as best they can. In terms of maintenance, they cannot go beyond the Council’s ‘Core Standard’ in a small parish that cannot afford to pay for ‘Enhances Services,’ despite the ecological importance of the Commons.

Therefore many residents have come to the view, fairly or unfairly, that there exists a general lack of respect shown towards the Commons by the Council, the Police and others, where problems such as anti-social behaviour, vandalism, littering and fly tipping, trespass and damage caused by motorcyclists and travellers, together with encroachment by householders and developers and repeated failures of proper maintenance, are not addressed with sufficient timeliness or rigor. There is also a local perception that if the Commons are treated as a kind of neglected wasteland, then it increases the danger of further large scale housing development on or around the fringes of the Commons. This is a genuine concern because developers have already earmarked two of the Commons for housing schemes, whilst private landowners tried at one stage to re-designate some Common land as ‘manorial wasteland,’ which was a term used during the Inclosure Acts to describe land that was not considered to be of any worth, not even as grazing land.

The FWAG Report offers for the first time an evidence-based survey of the state of the Commons and as such offers a way forward for protecting, conserving and maintaining these habitats and landscapes. For this reason it has become the catalyst for the organisation of community action in defence of the Commons and so keeping the Report ‘live’ will be a key task of the group. But the bottom line is that the Friends of Siston Commons and their partners and supporters will ultimately have to challenge and change Council policy if the Commons are to be properly protected and maintained. This would involve changing the way that the Council designates Commons land as well as changing the way that maintenance schedules are designed and costed (the FWAG report has done most of this work for Siston’s Commons). Perhaps the more difficult task would be to change the Council’s policy on Special Expenses and Localism which ‘locks in’ the inequality that leads to some Commons becoming

degraded whilst other Commons in larger, richer parishes are given enhanced levels of service. Such a change of policy would mean taking ecologically and historically important landscapes like the Commons out of the 'core standard/enhanced expenses' divide altogether and treating them as district-wide assets instead.

Impossible? Perhaps the Council's commitment to Localism may paradoxically offer a solution. Its Localism Framework states that "*places are different and need local solutions to solve their problems.*" [There should be] "*Locally responsive services – not a one size fits all approach, but services tailored to meet local needs and priorities*" [and] "*the performance of all service providers held to account by local communities.*" In the coming years, if the ancient Commons of Siston parish are to survive as special habitats and landscapes, then local communities are going to have to test the Council's commitment to these principles.

### **The work the Friends of Siston Commons**

The Group was formally constituted in the autumn of 2016. Since then the group has organised task groups for conservation work and stream clearance and as well as undertaking training in health and safety and the use of various tools. They have made positive relationships with relevant officers with a view to influencing maintenance schedules and they have responded to public consultations about proposed development on or around the Commons. They have been allocated funds by the Council, which will in part be used for new explanatory signage around the Commons. Their next goals are to launch a website and expand their membership.

The group's long term goal is to get the FWAG report adopted as the blueprint for conserving and maintaining the Commons. If necessary, and if local authority officers do not have the time or authority to change the current maintenance schedules, they will, over time, write their own schedules of maintenance for each of the ninety compartments of habitat surveyed in the FWAG report. Members are already gathering and recording evidence of both of biodiversity and of damage and decline to support the recommendations of the FWAG Report; and with an increased membership they hope to link groups of members to specific habitats so that a systematic approach to monitoring can be undertaken over time. They have already made relationships with relevant outside bodies and will continue to do so. Links with other Friends groups linked to Common land will also be developed. External funding opportunities for conservation works are also being explored. At some stage the group may seek to initiate the commission of an archaeological survey in each of the Commons.

The Group's overall goal is to change the culture of how the Commons are viewed, especially as they are viewed by South Gloucestershire Council. This is likely to include some lobbying to try to change the current blocks that presently prevent the proper designation, management and funding of the precious and historic ecology of the Commons. Although this may take years to achieve, there are positive examples elsewhere in South Gloucestershire of Friends groups transforming important green spaces by challenging Council practices. It is likely, therefore, given the size and importance of the Commons as well as the scale of the

tasks needed to save them from further decline, that the Friends of Siston Commons will grow into the principle community project in Siston Parish over the next five years or more, similar in many ways to the Friends of Page Park in Staple Hill, who not only saved their municipal park from years of under-investment and decline, but also organise many of the events and amenities that the park now offers.

## **2. Local Heritage**

The main reference to Warmley in Wikipedia notes that it “*has some minor landmarks, such as a war memorial site, and a statue of Neptune.*” No other mention is made of its history. Given how much time, effort and money has been expended to preserve and interpret the importance of Warmley’s industrial past, this statement is a disaster. But it was sadly foreseen in the *Champion’s Brass Works & Gardens Conservation Management Plan* which was commissioned by South Gloucestershire Council and English Heritage in 2007 and which noted that:

*Despite its significance and list of industrial ‘firsts’, the Warmley site is little known both locally and further afield. It lacks the profile of other nationally and regionally significant industrial attractions, such as Ironbridge, Quarry Bank Mill, Cornish Mining etc, not least because so much of the site has been lost over the years, predominately before the importance of industrial heritage was fully recognised.*

The Brassworks Conservation Management Plan (2007) was a detailed survey and management assessment of the Warmley Brassworks site, undertaken by consultants *Atkins Heritage* and is similar in its depth and importance to the FWAG survey of the Commons. Its importance to the Siston Parish Plan, however, even apart from the substance of its findings, is that in the ten years since it was published, so few of its recommendations have been realised. A lesson to be learned here is that major assessment reports like the Brassworks Conservation Plan and the FWAG Report only happen once in a generation. If they are ignored, or if potential actions are hampered by internal disagreements, then their subsequent failure can leave a negative legacy in terms of community engagement in future projects. Furthermore, if community action does not take advantage of the opportunities that such reports provide, then there is a danger that the local authority, having spent money commissioning these reports in the first place, may assume that a lack of action means that there is a lack of community interest and this may make such council interventions less likely in the future.

Having said this, there is another reason why the two respective reports are comparative. They both demonstrate that the decline in historical assets are mostly due to poor governance by local authorities since the 1960s. Lack of vision, insufficient investment, environmental neglect, unchallenged encroachment, a blasé acceptance of unsympathetic development, together with a general disinterest in the degradation of sites, has meant that local enthusiasts and community groups have had to defend the heritage of the area, often with limited resources and minimal support. For example, there is little doubt that if the Kingswood

Heritage Museum Trust had not lobbied to acquire the Dalton Young building which was once part of the archaeologically important Champion brass foundry, then it would probably have been sold and demolished like other parts of this historic site. Similarly, if voluntary projects had not kept the mid-eighteenth century Clocktower factory building open since the 1970s, then this pristine example of early industrial architecture would have fallen into disrepair and would today probably resemble the derelict Whitfield Tabernacle on the other side of Kingswood. But we must not fall into the trap of regarding local authorities as 'monoliths.' Whilst there may have been poor governance by some departments in some councils during some administrations, there have also been individual officers who have fought hard for local heritage, both industrial and environmental. However, both the Brassworks and the FWAG reports, albeit separated by ten years and viewing entirely different aspects of local heritage, make exactly the same recommendation, still unrealised, that both the Champion site and the Commons need a single senior officer with the authority to co-ordinate the multiplicity of Council services and functions that impact on the sites if further decline is to be avoided.

Why is the Warmley brass works site so important? William Champion (1709-89) and his partners established the Warmley works in 1746 to produce copper, brass and zinc which was used to manufacture wire, pins and utensils, with all the various stages of production being located on this single industrial site (the first of its kind) which was designed and constructed to meet this purpose. Champion, a metallurgist and Quaker entrepreneur, had patented a process in 1738 for producing zinc metal from calamine ore, the first instance of zinc being produced commercially in Europe. In fact the Warmley brass works site is the only remaining eighteenth century industrial complex that covered all stages of metal working, from the smelting of ores to the manufacture of finished articles. This made Warmley one of the hubs of the industrial revolution and for this reason the site has been awarded the highest level of classification in the Scheduled Monuments Protection Programme in recognition of its national historic significance.

But if its industrial heritage is important, then its social history adds another level of significance to the site. One of Champion's investors was the Goldney family of Bristol. Thomas Goldney II and later his son (related to Champion by an earlier family marriage) had invested in the famous Coalbrookdale ironworks of Abraham Darby, eventually taking control of the business by 1718. By 1751 Thomas Goldney III had bought shares in three slaving ships sailing out of Bristol; and both the Coalbrookdale and Champion's Warmley factories produced goods for Goldney's slaving enterprise, including manillas or slave armlets and everyday brass utensils which were used to barter for slaves in West Africa in order to abduct and forcibly transport them to the Americas. Therefore the Warmley Brassworks represents an example of the capitalisation of the industrial revolution from the proceeds of the slave trade. There is another small but perhaps telling fact. Thomas Goldney built an elaborate underground grotto in the grounds of Goldney House in Clifton, constructed from coral and shells collected by his ships on their return journeys from America. William Champion copied this by building a grotto of his own in the gardens of Warmley House, only his was constructed from the industrial slag from his furnaces.

The failure of the Brassworks Conservation Management Plan and subsequent efforts by the Avon Industrial Buildings Trust and others to better link up the various aspects and features of the site in order to improve public awareness and increase community involvement has meant that the site remains fragmented and, without guided tours, largely inaccessible and incomprehensible to the non-expert eye. The two principle industrial buildings, the Museum and Clocktower, remain as disconnected as ever. Moreover, the Clocktower building, Champion's pin factory which is the most well preserved of all of the site's industrial buildings, recently lost its carpark to industrial encroachment, further isolating the building. The implications of this are discussed in the section on Community Buildings. Nevertheless, Kingswood Heritage Museum has steadfastly acted as a repository and guardian of Siston's heritage in the form of artefacts, publications and interpretive displays, as well as providing a base for researching, explaining and where possible preserving Champion's industrial legacy in Warmley. The efforts of the Museum's volunteer historians, archaeologists and researchers have recently been acknowledged by Arts Council England which has awarded the Museum full accreditation status, thus opening up opportunities for grants to further develop the windmill tower and the ice house, among other projects. This work will be ongoing.

However, in terms of creating new opportunities for community engagement in Siston's heritage, which is what the Parish Plan is all about, then perhaps the time has come to focus on other heritage priorities elsewhere in the parish. What can the Siston Parish Plan do for local heritage? It has three important roles to play. Firstly by evidencing community interest in local heritage through its household survey and subsequent consultations, it can add credibility to funding bids by local heritage groups and organisations, such as the Kingswood Heritage Museum. Secondly, it can take a rounded view of local heritage and identify where new community action is most likely to draw interest and support. Thirdly, it can promote the area's heritage as one of the building blocks of community identity. In fact, although other parishes possess different elements of heritage such as the country houses at Dyrham and Acton, the medieval barn at Winterbourne, the mummers at Marshfield and the Avon Valley Railway at Bitton, no other parish in South Gloucestershire offers such a wide scope of visible history spanning a thousand years. Yet South Gloucestershire Council's tourism guide makes no mention of Siston at all.

Siston's heritage can be summarised into six areas of historic interest:

The history of the Commons, from the appropriation of lands after the Norman Conquest to the medieval open field system under the lords of the manor, to the Inclosure Acts that drove the rural poor off the land into the coal pits and factories of the industrial revolution;

The history of Siston Village, with the Tudor Siston Court as the seat of the lords of the manor and St Anne's church with its Norman door and 12<sup>th</sup> Century font and its arts-and-crafts period wall paintings in the Pre-Raphaelite style;

The history of the East Bristol coal seam, the mines, pits, collieries and the Dramway;

The history of the Midland Railway Branch Line, the Warmley Station and signal box and the Bristol and Bath Railway Path;

The history of zinc smelting and brass making at Champion's industrial complex in Warmley and its relationship with Bristol's triangular slave trade;

The history of Bristol's chocolate-making, with Packers, Carsons and Charles Bond and the factory at Siston Hill which was Britain's biggest producer of chocolate liqueurs.

To encourage a stronger community identity across Siston's neighbourhoods by raising public interest in local heritage requires local history projects in which local people can take part directly. There are already examples of this community-based approach to reclaiming local heritage. The restoration of the Warmley signal box by local volunteers brought this Grade II listed building back from dereliction for the benefit of the community; and in combination with the restoration of Warmley Station Waiting Room as a popular café as well as the earlier transformation of the old Midland Railway into the Bristol and Bath Railway Path, these developments have brought about local regeneration and a greater public awareness of Siston's railway heritage. It is hoped that over the coming years the Friends of Siston Commons will succeed in conserving and restoring the historic habitats of the ancient Commons with the same effect, whilst the traditional annual summer fete at Siston village will keep alive local interest in the beauty and historic importance of St Anne's church and its surrounds. The two areas that are missing from the point of view of community heritage projects, however, are the coalfields and Dramway and the Carson's chocolate factory.

**Proposed community heritage project to survey, preserve and where possible restore sections of the Dramway currently in imminent danger of decline**

The old horse-drawn coal railway from Coalpit Heath to Londonderry Warf on the River Avon near to Keynsham, known as the Dramway, was one of the last of its kind built before the coming of steam locomotion in the mid-nineteenth century. It was in use for thirty years until 1866. What remains of it has been renamed the 'Dramway path,' which is a misleading term because the Dramway was never a path: it was a carefully engineered technology that enabled the movement of large volumes of coal by rail using gravity and gradient. Horse-drawn waggons or drams would be controlled by a brakeman on the southward (downward) journey powered by gravity; and then horse power alone would haul back the empty waggons on the return journey. Being on rails, the weight of the waggon was distributed through its four wheels to the tracks, thus enabling a single shire horse to pull the dram. Thus the advent of steam locomotion was not conjured out of thin air by George Stephenson's 'Rocket'. The steam engine merely replaced the horse on this tried and tested method of moving goods by waggon on iron rails. The reason that the steam railway was quickly adopted as the

preferred method of transport was because of its superior speed and particularly its ability to travel over longer distances, although it was still necessary to mitigate hills and inclines with cuttings and tunnels in the same way as the dramways. However, it was necessary for hauliers using the dramways to link their journey to the canal network, as is the case of the Dramway in Siston, because they could not be engineered to traverse long distances using gravity alone. Neither were even the strongest horses capable of pulling rail waggons for more than a few miles. So heavy goods like coal were taken to canal or river wharfs to be loaded onto horse-drawn barges and narrow boats instead. The steam railway obviated the need for barges because locomotives could pull waggons from one part of the country to another, eventually linking all major towns and cities. Therefore, as is well documented, the railways undermined the economic benefit of canals in just a few short decades, thus also obviating the role of dramways.

Once again the history of Siston encompasses a critical moment in Britain's industrial heritage: the change from horsepower for the transportation of coal and quarry stone on rails, to the power of the steam railway. But more than this, the Dramway, while it remains, is almost the only visible reminder of the coal pits and collieries of the East Bristol coal seam which were once such an important part of Siston's past. It is a history that is being eroded to a point where it may soon be lost. Some sections of the Dramway have been restored in neighbouring parishes and two features of it have been granted scheduled monument status within Siston (a tunnel and a bridge), but most of its route across the Commons has become what South Gloucestershire Council's guide to the Dramway describes as "abandoned." Nevertheless, local residents have expressed the hope that some sections of the Dramway are still capable of rescue and restoration – at least those sections that have not be subsumed under the Railway Path or otherwise covered with asphalt. This particularly applies to a section that runs south across Siston Common from the old 'gin house' (winding house), which is particularly suffering from erosion and scrub encroachment. The level of its deterioration can be seen by comparing how it looks today with photographs taken thirty years ago.

Although several residents have expressed an interest in taking part in a project to survey and restore damaged sections of the Dramway, a note of caution must be raised here. The Dramway runs across Common land – in fact the Dramway itself might actually *be* Common land although there seems to be no consensus on that particular point. Even erecting survey posts may be contrary to the bylaws. Permission from the landowner (South Gloucestershire Council) would need to be obtained, whilst it may be necessary to obtain Section 38 Planning Permission (from the Secretary of State for the Environment) for certain kinds of restoration works. However, the Department of the Environment's 'Common Land Consents Policy' (2015) asks "*will the proposals help protect archaeological remains and features of historic interest*" and "*how do the proposals fit into the historical context?*" and "*what effect would they have on the local heritage?*" So if an application for consent was necessary, then a positive argument could be made to justify restoration works. However, even without such an application, a full understanding of and compliance with the Commons' bylaws would be essential.

The most important thing is that any community project which seeks to undertake restoration works on the Dramway is properly organised. It will need structure, leadership, capacity and longevity, following guidance set out in Part 1 of this Parish Plan. The project would certainly need to consult with and if possible involve relevant stakeholders such as the local authority's Heritage Officer and Commons Enforcement Officer; and advice and expertise would need to be sought from the Kingswood Heritage Museum, the South Gloucestershire Mines Research Group, the Avon Industrial Buildings Trust and the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society. Links with a university archaeological department might also prove useful.

The project, if undertaken, would need to start with an archaeological survey. There are four reasons for this. Firstly, although the history of the Dramway has been recorded, this does not appear to include detailed physical information about its dimensions and gradients. Such information would help to explain how the Dramway worked. Secondly, a survey is needed to record evidence its deterioration, especially if, thirdly, an attempt is made to have all the remaining sections of the Dramway listed as a Scheduled Monument as a means of protecting it against future encroachment or damage. Fourthly, a survey can identify how potential repairs can be made to prevent further erosion and to preserve remaining sections. The second phase of the project would comprise the repair and conservation works themselves, where these are possible within the bylaws of the Commons. As with the restoration of the Warmley Signal Box, this project is likely to take several years of voluntary work, particularly since any physical work may need to be undertaken seasonally to avoid further damage during wetter months.

A conservation plan for the Dramway has been widely talked about and several residents have expressed interest in taking part if a project can be organised. This is therefore the most prominent opportunity for a new community heritage project at present. What is needed now is a structure and some leadership to coordinate a group of volunteers and assess the scope of the task and the steps that need to be taken to make it happen. The Kingwood Heritage Museum is presently not in a position to offer leadership, although it may be able to send a representative to the group. The most likely structure therefore, given the need for accountability and responsibility and awareness of the sensitivity of the Commons, would be request the Friends of Siston Commons to allow the formation of a sub-group (which is allowable under their constitution) to progress the Dramway project. This would mean that volunteers taking part in the Dramway project would also need to join the Friends of Siston Commons, but this would be a positive move in connecting up different aspects of Siston's heritage.

### **Future heritage projects**

Unless visiting the Kingswood Heritage Museum (which is highly recommended) it is difficult to find much physical evidence of Siston's coalmining past. The remains of the old engine house at Webbs Heath drift mine is probable the only recognisable surviving structure of the coal industry that is locally well known. Yet mining played an important part in Siston's heritage. When the Avon Ring Road was built and the Railway Path cycle-walkway was

improved, South Gloucestershire Council and national charity Sustrans commissioned several works of public art that drew attention to the heritage of coalmining, the railway and the Commons in and around Siston. These included works by nationally important artists like Lorna Green and Sebastien Boyesen, but also included several community arts projects led by local artists who encouraged community participation, especially by local children and young people. Already some of these artworks have been subjected to vandalism and a general lack of upkeep. This neglect contrasts with the pride attached to public works of art in other parts of South Gloucestershire and again seems to reflect a culture of indifference towards the heritage of the Commons.

It is therefore likely that local community volunteers, with appropriate permissions, will eventually have to institute an annual programme of cleaning and, where needed, repairs to artworks that celebrate Siston's past, otherwise these will be lost. But why stop there? Since the community arts theme has already been used in Siston to promote local heritage, it would be a shame not to continue with it. Community arts do not necessarily have to mean fixed visual public artworks. They can encompass a wide range of creative activities: festivals, performance, poetry, writing, dance, exhibitions, painting, sculpture, music and more. For example, it would take little effort to organise an annual '*en plein air*' painting weekend to celebrate the landscapes of the Commons and their heritage. Although no known community arts group currently exists in Siston, the Parish Plan calls for local residents who are interested in the arts to come forward with a view to forming a project to restore and promote community arts in the Parish, particularly with its already existing heritage theme. Once again the best structure for such a group may be as a sub-group of the Friends of Siston Commons.

It has been shown in many situations that community arts are an effective way of building a sense of community identity, especially where this can include intergeneration work. The new community at Siston Hill has arguably more important issues to address at present, but in years to come, especially for young people growing in the neighbourhood, a connection to the past – in this case the area's significant role in Bristol's long tradition of chocolate making – can be a way of encouraging a sense of place. Community art is always a good tool for achieving this. Therefore, if a community arts group can be formed for Siston, the Parish Plan recommends that links are made with the Siston Hill Residents Association with a view to future projects.

### **3. Community Buildings**

In the introduction to the Siston Parish Plan it was explained why its approach differed from other parish plans, due to both its four separate and disconnected neighbourhoods and because of its lack of a central community hub to act as a focus for community life. In 1992 the old Avon County Council commissioned a survey of community centres and village halls to add to its directory of voluntary groups and projects, which was held at the central library in Bristol. Although it had not necessarily been its intention, what emerged was a clear picture of the role that such buildings played in community life, because whether in urban or rural areas, the presence of a welcoming, well-used neighbourhood centre contributed to

community identity, cohesion and activity. Where there were well-run halls, there were community festivals, summer fetes, luncheon clubs, playgroups, parent and toddler groups, keep fit classes, adult education classes, art exhibitions, drama performances, hobby groups, youth activities, summer play schemes, local history talks, U3A groups, as well as opportunities for community meetings and wedding receptions and family celebrations. Such buildings were and are the hubs of community life.

Following its transition to unitary status, South Gloucestershire Council continued to support the role of community buildings, firstly by ensuring that new housing developments like Emersons Green included a community centre funded by Section 106 developer contributions (sometimes called 'roof tax' and more recently renamed Community Infrastructure Levy); secondly by setting aside part of its community and voluntary sector grants programme (when it had one) to allow for three-year renewable cycles of funding for those older community centres that were an essential hub of their neighbourhood but which needed help to meet basic costs; and thirdly by investing in or supporting investment in new 'community hub' centres in partnership with other agencies and town councils, such as in Patchway and Cadbury Heath.

Community buildings – community centres, village halls and other community meeting places – are arguably the hardest voluntary organisations to run. They have high running costs, high maintenance costs and high insurance costs, whilst, without project funding, their only source of income are the fees they charge for renting out rooms for community activities. If these are too high, then groups will go elsewhere. If the centre becomes run down, then it can become less popular until it reaches a tipping point where it can no longer make ends meet. The most difficult challenge, however, is keeping up with the ever-changing regulatory requirements that impact on public buildings: fire safety regulations, electrical regulations, accessibility regulations and building materials regulations; and also external regulations such as OFSTED's assessment of playgroups which includes the size and quality of their environment. Many community centres and village halls have closed down over the years because they could not afford to keep up with the increasing costs of meeting the burden of new regulations. Now, after the Grenfell Tower disaster, there is a justifiable expectation that the Grenfell Inquiry will recommend the fitting of sprinkler systems in certain kinds of public building, especially those with more than a single storey. If so, this will be likely to hasten the closure of more community buildings.

Siston has four community buildings, plus a small room at the Warmley Forest Park visitor centre. Siston village is served by the church rooms at St Anne's and likewise Bridgegate has the larger church hall at St Barnabas. Warmley has two buildings, each of which face challenges that need to be explained. The first is the Warmley Clocktower, which is the well preserved mid-eighteenth century three storey factory that is the most important and complete surviving structure of the Champion brass-making complex. It is consequently the most significant industrial heritage building in South Gloucestershire and is Grade II listed. The building itself is owned by South Gloucestershire Council. Since the nineteen-seventies it has housed various youth and community projects; and since the mid-nineties it has been run

by the Clock Tower Association as a base for Kingswood-wide community and voluntary projects, including the offices of Community Ignite (now Southern Brooks Community Partnerships) and a park for the Kingswood Youth Bus Project. It also provides a permanent workshop for the Warmley Weavers craft group, and two rooms that are hired by regular groups and classes for martial arts, yoga, tai chi, music therapy, AA and a drop-in coffee morning, but which can also be hired for individual events. It does not see itself as a neighbourhood community centre, but rather as an outward-looking base for voluntary sector activity across the wider Kingswood area.

The challenge for the Clock Tower Association is, and always has been, the fact that the building is a Grade II listed heritage site and has therefore proven difficult and expensive to maintain and adapt. Its interior reflects its heritage and so is not to everyone's tastes, having low ceilings and limited natural light, but it has a reasonable kitchen and toilets and a stair-lift that enables most parts of the building to be accessible. By running it as a community building, the Clock Tower Association has kept this historic factory 'alive' for the last twenty-five years, even as Council support has lessened over time. A setback occurred two years ago, however, when an adjacent industrial unit, a linen hire and laundry business, discovered that it owned the carpark in front of the Warmley Clocktower, which South Gloucestershire Council believed had been transferred into the ownership of Kingswood Borough Council in the 1970s. However, it transpired that this alleged transfer had never been registered and therefore had no provenance. The 'new' owners therefore wanted to reclaim the carpark for their own use and instituted a parking enforcement scheme. The Clock Tower Association negotiated a small allowance of daytime parking permits (the evenings are presently less of a problem), but this still inevitably impedes their operation to some extent.

The bigger issue, however, is the future of the building itself, now that it is in effect sitting in isolation in somebody else's private carpark. If the building eventually became too expensive for the Clock Tower Association to run, then the Council's options for an alternative change of use (conversion into apartments for example) are limited by it being landlocked and without parking access. If the building needed major renovation works, then it might not even be possible to get access for construction equipment or scaffolding. And whilst the present 'new' owner has been amenable towards the Clock Tower Association, they may not always be the owners of the business. Indeed if their business failed and their assets were frozen, what would this mean for South Gloucestershire's most important industrial heritage building? This issue was raised with South Gloucestershire Council as soon as it occurred, but the Council was unable, or unwilling, to try to resolve the problem. Nor could the Council's Localism Action Plan help, because whilst there is provision for a 'Community Right to Bid' in situations where a precious local resource is threatened and a community may seek to purchase it themselves, the land in front of the Clocktower was not being sold, it was merely being claimed by what turned out to be its rightful owner. At present the Clock Tower Association is content to accede to the parking permit arrangement with the new owner as the best solution to this unexpected predicament. However, this loss of land ultimately threatens the future of one of Siston's community buildings and heritage sites. This situation

therefore places much more emphasis on securing the future of Warmley's other community building.

The Warmley Memorial Hall is perhaps the nearest thing to a traditional community centre within Siston. It was built after the Second World War in memory of those local men and women who lost their lives in service to their country. It has therefore been an important landmark in the life of Warmley for seventy years, once even including a swimming pool. The building is now divided between a community hall with a stage and side rooms; and a private members' social club which uses one of the building's larger function rooms which has a performance podium and a bar and a private entrance. The two entities have separate constitutions, although the trustees of the Warmley Memorial Hall are ultimately in charge of the site.

The trustees would not be offended if it was said here that the Memorial Hall is looking a little tired and outdated. It does not offer a welcoming exterior and its internal spaces are not configured in ways that reflect a contemporary use of community buildings. The trustees have considered the possibility of demolishing and rebuilding the Hall either within the same site or even somewhere else if suitable land was available for lease. To this end South Gloucestershire Council was asked to include the possible relocation of the Hall when it conducted a feasibility study of the Grange School site. Since then, another school has taken the site and no other leasable land was found to be available.

The existing Hall has advantages and disadvantages. Firstly, as a charity it owns the land that it stands on, including its carpark. This could be valuable real estate if the trustees decided to sell the land in order to rebuild the Hall on another site, but this would be dependent on gaining planning permission either for housing or retail on the existing site and it is likely that local residents would justifiably oppose any such development because of the additional traffic congestion it would inevitably generate at an already busy junction. Therefore in practical terms this option is probably not viable at present. The disadvantage of the Hall is that it is expensive to maintain and has experienced problems of damp and leaks, so it will have to modernise eventually. It also has a concreted asbestos roof which meets current building materials regulations, but if became damaged or seriously worn then there would be a legal obligation on the trustees to commission a risk assessment by a licensed contractor and to act on their recommendations. This could lead to considerable costs. The Hall also sits on hard standing without easy access to main services. Therefore the trustees have discussed the possibility of building a new hall in the car park, while keeping the existing hall open until completion. However, the costs of combining a new-build centre with the demolition of the old building together with site clearance and disposal, would be prohibitive and could take decades of fundraising.

Having recently revised its constitutional relationship with the social club, the trustees have launched a new website rebranding the Memorial Hall as the 'Warmley Community Centre,' which is a positive move. Warmley needs a proper hub community centre - indeed the whole of Siston does - especially if the Clocktower is eventually lost to community use. Therefore,

with the publication of a Parish Plan that can be used by the Hall to support fundraising, it seems that this is the time to plan for the future. The most likely option, apart from doing nothing until it is too late, if the Memorial Hall is to return to being the parish's main focus for community activity, is to institute a planned incremental refurbishment *in situ*, including a new roof, a side extension for early years provision, a welcoming front entrance, a reception area for the main part of the centre, an upgrade of the interior décor and an office. This would be the cheaper and more viable option than the options of either an on-site or off-site new-build and could be accomplished in stages in partnership with St Barnabas Church Hall with minimum disruption to most of the existing user-groups who could be temporarily relocated. To move this option forward the trustees would need to commission a set of architects' plans and an assessment of costs, together with outline planning permission. This would require some up-front investment, but would enable the trustees to set a realistic target for the level of fundraising needed to achieve this kind of modernisation.

However, a hub community centre is more than simply a venue with rooms for hire; it also has to be able to reach out and bring the community in. This means being proactive in building community links and being responsive in addressing community needs. Therefore if Warmley Community Centre chooses to modernise its building in the coming years, then it would benefit by also modernising its approach to community development. Other community centres in South Gloucestershire have achieved this, either by integrating with a community associations or by working as part of an area partnership or by linking with voluntary organisations and service-providers that have outreach capabilities. This issue therefore brings us back full circle to the beginning of this Parish Plan, which describes Siston parish as having four separate and disconnected neighbourhoods without a community centre or village hall to acts as a central community hub. In ten years' time, a revised Parish Plan should instead start with the sentence, *'the four neighbourhoods of Siston are connected by their hub community centre at Warmley.'*

If the Warmley Community Centre chooses to modernise it this way, how will it be funded? Many parish plans include a recommendation about which local projects are a priority for a community fundraising campaign (although all local community groups and projects have a right to use the Plan for their own fundraising if they are working towards its objectives). Therefore, given that the theme of community buildings was seen as a community priority in Siston's household survey and likewise given the need to connect Siston's four neighbourhoods with a community hub, this Parish Plan identifies the modernisation of the Warmley Community Centre as the priority project for a local fundraising effort. A recommendation is that a public charitable fund be initiated for the modernisation of the Centre, to which residents, groups, businesses, sponsors, events and external funders can contribute in the coming years. Periodically the National Lottery makes capital grants for community assets like village halls and community centres, although at present these grants are only available in Scotland. But the Lottery changes its programmes every few years (for example the Lottery funded many village halls for the Millennium) and the Lottery is not the only national funding body that supports local community projects with capital grants. Most funders will take into account the level of local support for a project as well as efforts already

made to raise funds, so by starting a fundraising campaign now it may help the Warmley Community Centre in future applications to external grant-making bodies, if that what it chooses to do. But it will be important to be realistic just how long it can take for projects like this to achieve their goals. Therefore, conversations with other community centres that have modernised in recent years would be a useful start to the journey.

### **A community building for Siston Hill**

In the introduction to this Parish Plan it was stressed that the community-led actions it identified would be realistic and achievable. However, not all community action can be self-sustaining. Sometimes the best a community can do is raise awareness of a problem and ‘get the ball rolling’ by inviting others, perhaps with greater influence and resources, to can act in partnership to bring about change. Even so, sometimes such change can take decades to achieve.

Part 1 of this Parish Plan offered some guidance for community groups wishing to work in partnership with the local authority, but there is one more aspect of local government that needs to be mentioned here. All local authorities are obliged to follow two models of governance: a business model and a municipal model. The business model ensures that services are delivered cost effectively and follows central government regulations about how this should be done. The municipal model ensures that councils provide a framework of services and partnerships through which communities can engage and flourish. Different councils around the country place different emphases on how they deliver these two models. South Gloucestershire, since its inception in 1996, has placed a strong emphasis on the municipal model. Its commitment to supporting community engagement and development was spelled out as one of its original guiding principles following a public consultation and since then this commitment has been written into South Gloucestershire’s Council Plan (2016-2020) where it lists priorities such as *“To have strong, resilient, cohesive communities”* [and] *“To have a voluntary and community sector which contributes to local communities by stimulating the sector and strengthening resilience and robustness.”* Likewise, the South Gloucestershire Partnership’s Sustainable Community Strategy (2016) speaks of *“Engaging communities in decision making”* [and aspires to] *“increase the extent to which local people understand and influence decisions in their locality.”*

The history of the development at Siston Hill is that South Gloucestershire initially turned down planning permission for the estate in its present form, but that this decision was overturned by the government of the time. South Gloucestershire Council then successfully appealed the level of Section 106 contribution that the developer should pay towards social infrastructure and community amenity, but for whatever reason this amount was not spent in the ways that had become customary in other developments of a comparable size. The outcome is that the estate, pleasant though it is in terms of neighbourhood design, lacks the basic amenities that most large communities expect: a shop, a post office, a pub or church or community hall, even a bus stop. It is isolated from surrounding neighbourhoods by busy roads that are unpleasant for pedestrians and unsafe for children, although it does link to the

Railway Path cycle-walkway. Yet given its reliance on car ownership as its main mode of commuter transport, its parking was poorly designed and its limited access routes contribute to traffic congestion.

There is actually no other community of this size in South Gloucestershire that is so lacking in community amenity. The estate has been waiting for a children's play area for over a decade, a delay caused by land transfer issues, although it is likely that this will materialise soon. However, a key issue is the lack of a community meeting place, as was highlighted in the household survey. The most basic building block of community development is the ability of people to meet and interact. Whilst an emergent Siston Hill residents association has a Facebook group, which is a good start, social media on its own cannot provide the kind of diverse groups and communal activities that are the building blocks of community. Therefore, impossible though it may seem at present, the community at Siston Hill must have their own village hall or similar meeting place at some point in the future.

There is a precedent for this. Only a mile or two from Siston Hill is the Kingsmeadow estate in Kingswood, which is a similarly mixed estate of both private and social housing (albeit much smaller than Siston Hill). It was built (long before South Gloucestershire's time) without a community meeting place. Residents complained for years about isolation and a lack of community spirit, especially new parents with young children and older people in later retirement. In the mid-1990s a partnership was formed between the Council's community development team (first Kingswood Borough's and then South Gloucestershire's) and local residents, together with a voluntary organisation with the capacity to deliver local community services; and with the support of the ward's district councillor this partnership eventually persuaded a very reluctant social housing provider to allow one of its flats to be used as a temporary community building for one summer so that a children's play-scheme could be organised. This proved to be so popular that the flat became the estate's permanent community building - the Kingsmeadow Community Flat – a community project in its own right that became the hub of neighbourhood activity and support for years.

The project achieved this by building effective partnerships with a range of relevant voluntary organisations, supported by community development workers from the voluntary sector and the Council. Now in 2018 the Kingsmeadow Community Flat has become *Kingsmeadow Made For Ever* by taking over the closed youth centre at Fisher Road and turning it into South Gloucestershire's newest community centre. This proves the point: community action like this really can achieve its goals. But the important factor here was partnership – and it relates to the municipal model of local government in the form of what is called the 'South Gloucestershire Compact.' This is (in the words of the document itself),

*“an agreement between the public sector and voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations in South Gloucestershire. It sets out a way of working to strengthen the relationship between the sectors, for the benefit of residents and communities.”*

The South Gloucestershire Compact is a version of the National Compact which most local authorities have adapted and adopted for themselves. It is a tool for partnership-building and is relevant to Siston Hill because, as with Kingsmeadow, the goal of a community building will only be achieved through partnership with relevant agencies and interested stakeholders. The use of the Compact may also help with fundraising efforts by demonstrating a commitment to best practice. Therefore the Compact is an essential tool in enabling the kind of partnership-working that projects like Kingsmeadow Made for Ever needed in order to achieve their goals. Similarly the Compact will be a factor in any attempt to work towards a community building for Siston Hill. The Localism Act may also strengthen the use of the Compact in certain situations, although more evidence of this is probably needed. However, the Council's Localism Action Plan does state that, "*Localism presents the opportunity to build on South Gloucestershire's Compact and identify and support ways to build the capacity of the [Voluntary] Sector to take on new challenges and opportunities.*" Perhaps that statement can be tested in seeking to support the residents of Siston Hill.

Having said all this, it is not the role of a community Parish Plan to raise unrealistic expectations or to suggest that community projects like a new village hall are easy to achieve. Unless a new community building is constructed at the same time as a housing development through the application of Section 106 funds, then it can take many frustrating decades to build sufficient momentum to find, fund, construct and run a community building as an afterthought of the original housing scheme. But the idea has to start somewhere and a Parish Plan is the right place to raise it as a potential future aim. So, where does the conversation begin that will start a journey towards a community building for Siston Hill, however far off that goal may be? Probably it has to start with the local district councillor who knows the community better than anyone else, together with relevant Council officers, partners and stakeholders (including the social housing provider and estate management company) and of course local residents themselves. But such a process will also need support from all the communities that make up Siston Parish.

#### **4. Traffic congestion and road safety**

Traffic congestion, road safety and parking problems may be the most pressing community concern raised in the household survey, but as has already been noted these issues are beyond the decision-making reach of a community Parish Plan, or indeed, a Parish Council, since road schemes are planned and decided at district, regional and national levels. However, some indirect actions can be taken.

Firstly, communities need to engage with Siston Parish Council and with their district ward Councillor who can voice local concerns in response to planning proposals that impact on roads and neighbourhoods. Local democracy gives communities a voice, so if residents do not engage with it then their voice will not get heard.

Secondly, local campaigns and petitions can sometimes be effective, especially where they touch on issues that are so local that they may have been overlooked by decision-making

authorities. But even road safety issues on a national scale can be led by community campaigns. For example, it should be respectfully remembered that the campaign to ban the use of hand-held mobile phones whilst driving was initiated by the mother of an 11-year-old child who tragically died after being knocked down in Pucklechurch in 1996, just three miles north of Siston.

Active citizenship like this is an essential part of democracy. One of the espoused aims of the South Gloucestershire Council Plan (2016-2020) is *“To have strong, resilient, cohesive communities,”* but unlike its other aims it does not propose a measure for what it calls *“community resilience.”* However, the measure is simple: it is a community’s capacity for active citizenship, whether in terms of groups and projects, or in terms of people willing to volunteer for local causes, or in terms of people who care enough about a local issue to make complaints or organise campaigns and petitions, or even in terms of the level of voter turn-out at election time. At the time of writing this Parish Plan there are at least two current community campaigns in Siston aimed at opposing proposed increases in traffic flow through the area. Obviously community campaigns do not always win, but the alternative of doing nothing just gives carte blanche to decision-makers who would probably much prefer it if we did not speak out.

Thirdly, in the long term, all efforts to improve the status and recognition of the ancient Commons may influence planning authorities to take more account of the environmental impact of future traffic flow projections on their ecological importance, instead of regarding Siston as a convenient funnel for more and more traffic travelling to and from Bristol.

## **5. The involvement of young people in the Parish Plan**

With the closure of the Grange School at the time of collating this Parish Plan, the proposal to involve young people has not been progressed. But the Friends of Siston Commons have expressed the view that if an appropriate and safe way can be found to include young people in projects related to the Commons and their heritage, then this would be a good way of involving them. Therefore it has been agreed to contact both the new Digitech Studio School and the Warmley scouts and guides to discuss a suitable project for their inclusion.

## **SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY ACTIONS IDENTIFIED IN THE SISTON PARISH PLAN**

### **1. The Commons**

The protection, conservation and maintenance of the ancient Commons of Siston, Goose Green, Webbs Heath and Bridgegate are at the centre of the Parish Plan, just as the Commons themselves are at the centre of Siston Parish.

The Friends of Siston Commons, which the Parish Plan predicts will become the most significant local community group in the next five years, will work in partnership with South Gloucestershire Council to implement the recommendations of the Farming and Wildlife

Advisory Group's (2016) condition survey into the ninety habitat compartments of the Commons as a blueprint for future maintenance schedules. To achieve this the FOSC will urge the Council to review its land-management designation of the Commons as well as the cost-calculation of their maintenance. The FOSC will continue to work as conservation volunteers as well as collecting evidence of habitat biodiversity and decline; and will promote wider public awareness of the special ecological nature of the Commons through its website and through public meetings, walks and events. The group will grow its membership as quickly as it can.

## **2. Heritage**

Whilst it is hoped that those projects already involved in progressing the recommendations of the Warmley Brassworks Conservation Management Plan (2007) will make further progress, especially the Kingswood Heritage Museum's plans following its national accreditation, the Parish Plan identifies that, following the success of the volunteer-led restoration of the Warmley signal box, another community-led heritage project in which local people can participate directly is needed to maintain local interest in the parish's history.

To this end a proposal has been made for a community heritage project to survey, preserve and where possible restore sections of the Dramway currently in imminent danger of decline because of erosion, subsidence and encroachment by scrub; and also to try to get the remaining sections of the Dramway listed as a Scheduled Monument as a way of protecting it against future encroachment or damage. In the absence of an existing project group, it is proposed that such a group would request to become a sub-group of the Friends of Siston Common.

The Parish Plan also calls on residents with an interest in community arts to explore ways of celebrating Siston's heritage of Commons, coal and rail in art.

## **3. Community buildings**

The Parish Plan supports the decision by the trustees of the Warmley Memorial Hall to rebrand the venue as the 'Warmley Community Centre.' The Hall's trustees have also explored possible options for the Hall's relocation, rebuilding or refurbishment. The most likely option will be an incremental modernisation of the current building on the current site. To this end, if the trustees choose to modernise the Warmley Community Centre, the Parish Plan supports the establishment of a public fundraising campaign to support this goal, particularly since the loss of the Warmley Clocktower's carpark has implications for its long term future as a community building.

The new estate of Siston Hill is the largest isolated conurbation in South Gloucestershire without any community amenity whatsoever. The community needs a village hall or similar meeting place. Whilst this cannot be achieved within the timescale of the Parish Plan, the Plan recommends that first steps are taken now to explore how this may be achieved.

#### **4. Road safety and traffic congestion**

The Parish Plan notes that problems caused by traffic congestion and parking are beyond the decision-making reach of community action, except indirectly. It therefore supports increased community engagement in local politics and 'active citizenship' to challenge any new schemes that will increase traffic flow through the parish.

#### **5. Young People**

The closure of the Grange School while the Parish Plan was being collated delayed this element of the Plan. Now that the new Digitech Studio School has opened on the same site, efforts will be made to involve students in those aspects of the Plan that concern the Common and/or local heritage.

#### **What happens next?**

The Siston Community Parish Plan will be open to consultation, comment and amendment for a period before being adopted by Siston Parish Council on behalf of Siston's communities. Then, whilst it may be hosted on Siston Parish Council's website, it will 'belong' to any community group or voluntary project in Siston who wishes to pursue the priorities identified in the plan. As has already been said, the timescale for the Parish Plan is five years. That represents a realistic estimate of the time needed to achieve most of the goals set out in the Plan. Other goals may take much longer, so the five year timescale may be seen as a way of measuring progress towards longer term objectives. The Plan will be a 'rolling document' that can be added to as issues emerge, goals are reached or changed, or as new groups and projects develop. It is therefore suggested that representative of projects identified in the Parish Plan come together once a year to share information about their progress and suggest updates or changes to the Plan. After five years the Plan can be reviewed and a new Plan collated if needed.

Good luck to all the community groups, projects and volunteers who will deliver the Siston Parish Plan!