

REPORT ON THE CHEVINGTON SURVEY AND PUBLIC MEETING

(OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2023)

Introduction

The survey was compiled by the All Saints Parochial Church Council (PCC) Communications Committee (The Committee) of Chevington (Clive Fairclough, Justin Rabett, Sophie Hunt and Jamie Robertson) after consultation with the PCC and the Chevington Parish Council (PC).

Its broad aim was to discover what issues were important to the village and how we could best use the resources of the PCC and the PC to improve community life in the village. The questions were of varying types – yes/no answers, top three preferences out of a list and “free text” comments. I have included an edited down version of the “free text” quotes within the survey answers.

The survey or questionnaire was conducted from 1 October 2023 to 15 October 2023 and then extended until the end of the month.

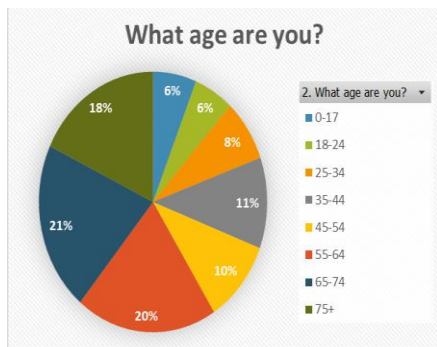
280 questionnaires were distributed, one to each household in the Chevington parish with the Benefice Magazine.

Nevertheless, with a village population of 590 (2021 Census) 201 surveys were filled out, representing 34% of the village. Although the survey said that it should be filled out by everyone in the household – and provided a QR code and website link to an online form – we were told by many villagers that they thought it was households rather than individuals who should fill out the survey. If each questionnaire filled out represented the views of several individuals within a household we believe the whole survey reflects well over half the population of the village

The committee felt that this was sufficient to draw conclusions about the mood and attitudes in the village. The survey was followed up with a lively public meeting on 3 November attended by around 80 parishioners. Minutes of this are below.

The Results

Age profile.

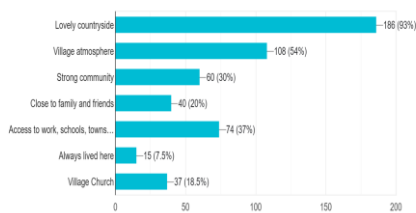


The age of parishioners is largely over 45. This ties in with the Census data from 2021 which puts the percentage of parishioners over 45 in Chevington at approximately 63%. *

*(https://citypopulation.de/en/uk/eastofengland/admin/west_suffolk/E04009297_chevington/)

What do you most like about living here?

4. What do you like most about living here? (Please select your top 3 priorities - top can use the 'other' box, too)
200 responses



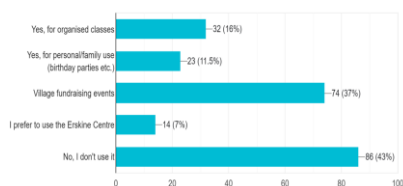
The answers here establish a theme that runs through the whole survey. There is an appreciation and enjoyment of the countryside, green spaces and community.

Among the comments posted in the “free text” box supplied with this question were:

- “Would like a more village atmosphere as provided by a local shop”
- “Just a lovely location, not too far from BSE A14 etc and beautiful quiet location”

Use of the Village Hall

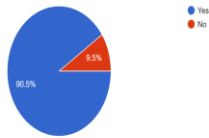
5. Do you use the village hall? (Please select all that apply)
200 responses



43% of the village do not use the hall. This is not because they have a better alternative in Chedburgh – only 7% take advantage of the Erskine Centre (1.5km distant). A sizeable minority use the hall for fundraising events.

Is the Village Hall worth keeping?

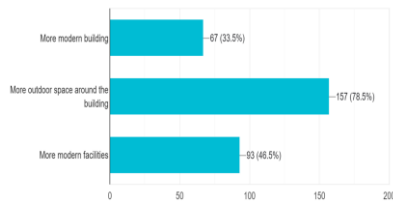
6. Is the village hall worth keeping
200 responses



This answer is very revealing in that it shows that while a large section of the village do not use the village hall over 90% want to keep it. It is, in short, an underused asset.

What would you like from the village hall?

7. What would you like from your village hall? (Please select all that apply)
200 responses



The overwhelming wish is that people want more space around the village hall and almost half want more modern facilities.

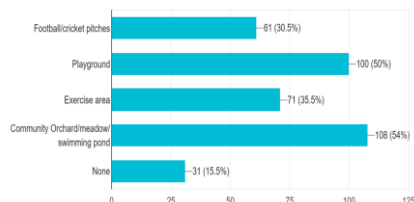
Among the comments posted in the "free text" box supplied with this question were:

- "More community events" (ten responses like this).
- "Compulsory purchase the land owned by the Church opposite the old rectory, sell the village hall, then room for a new hall and football/ cricket pitches, bar, parking, pool etc." (4 other responses like this).
- "Excellent internet connectivity, eco design with self-sufficiency in energy and decent insulation - an exemplar for sustainable buildings" (4 other responses like this).
- "The village hall entrance hall could look more welcoming. It looks very dated and functional, especially with the toilets directly in front of you!"
- "Stage for shows. Grounds for football and village events."
- "More parking."

What kind of outdoor space would you like for the community?

8. Would you like to see new outdoor spaces for the community? What sort of outdoor spaces would you use? (Please select your top 3 priorities)

200 responses



The answers here demonstrate the continuing theme of a wish for more outdoor communal space, specifically (54%) a community orchard, meadow/swimming pond, a playground (50%) and an exercise area (35.5%).

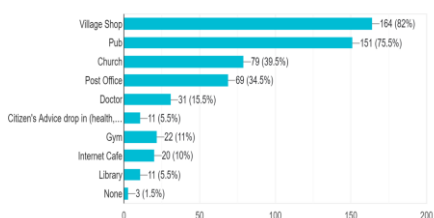
Among the comments posted in the “free text” box supplied with this question were:

- “Coordinated recycling and community projects growing and sharing of veg, plants, tools. Helping those in genuine need. Shop.”
- “Allotment space” (6 other responses like this).
- “A community team possibly with Chedburgh. Football team? Cricket team? Kids team?” (6 other responses like this)
- “Outdoor gym.” (2 other responses like this)
- “More nature reserves and footpath areas” (2 other responses like this)

What facilities would you like the village to have in future years?

9. What facilities would you like the village to have in future years? (Please tick your top 3 priorities)

200 responses



The other big demand – a village shop. The village meeting was significant here because one parishioner who had run the village shop in Chevington until the 1990s described how it had failed to survive and compete against the supermarkets. However, there was a feeling in the public meeting that a shop might have a better chance of survival if it was combined with other attractions and facilities.

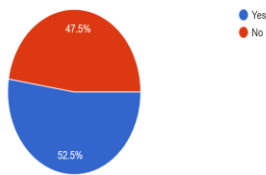
Among the comments posted in the “free text” box supplied with this question were:

- “Coffee shop.”
- “Perhaps a pub could be multipurpose with a small shop/post office facilities” (2 other responses like this).
- “Takeaway.”
- “Friendly welcoming (not just regular drinkers) modern pub - quality food, focused, comfortable outside eating.”
- “Pop-up monthly farmers market or weekly veg store?”
- “Pharmacy.”
- “Adding facilities to the village could attract development - we don't want to end up like Barrow” (a rapidly expanding village some four miles away).

- “Book exchange” (7 other responses like this).
- “Community growing plot, allotments” (1 other response like this)
- “Hobby groups e.g. fishing, cycling, gardening.”
- “Gym” (1 other response like this)
- “Playground.”

Would you be interested in investing in a community pub?

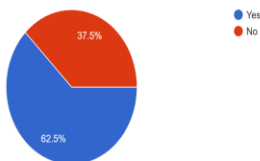
10. Did you know that both The Greyhound in Chevington and The Plough in Rede are currently on the market. A pub is a huge asset to a village. Would you answer, no-one will be asking you for money) 200 responses



This question proved to be redundant in that while the survey was being carried out the pub – the Greyhound – was sold to a private landlord. However, it does point to the fact that there are people – 100, maybe more – who might be willing to invest in a community venture.

Would you like a renewable energy project near the village if it provided the village with low cost energy or a financial return to local people?

11. Would you like a renewable energy project near the village if it provided the village with low cost energy or gave a financial return to local people who invested in it? Example: solar farm or wind turbines 200 responses



The answer here was 62.5% in favour, which is a large enough figure to warrant further exploration of the potential for community renewable energy schemes.

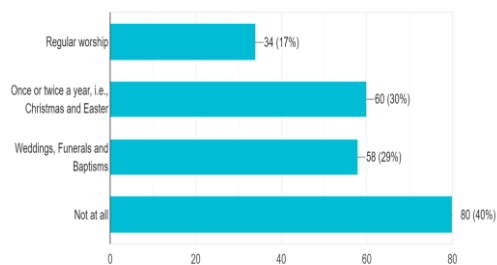
The questionnaire asked for ideas for other environment-friendly projects. Comments in the “free text” box supplied with this question were:

- “Allotments or community vineyard. Growing local food for the village/those in need” (6 other responses like this).
- “Large-tree planting in a massive designated area. Community woodland” (1 other response like this).
- “Village Garden.”
- “Wildlife project similar to Chedburgh” (1 other response like this).
- “Maybe summer sports? Rounders evenings etc.”
- “A little village shop.”

- “Health centre for Suffolk Heights benefice.”
- “Other sources of energy are needed. Solar farm preferable to wind turbines” (2 other responses like this).
- “Find financial support for heat pump installations or a community heat pump system.”
- “A small solar farm on agricultural land of low quality” (2 other responses like this).
- “Every house should have solar panels if possible” (1 other response like this).
- “Would it be better to explore options with homeowners to use existing roof space rather than new land?”
- “Wind turbines.”

Do you use the church and what do you use it for?

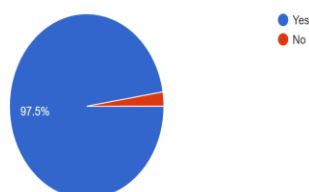
12. Do you use the village church? What do you use it for?
200 responses



The percentage of people using the church for regular worship is 17%, some three times the national average. However, the survey originated with the PCC and the congregation supported it enthusiastically. This implies that everyone who uses the church for worship filled out the questionnaire. If in theory all 590 parishioners filled out the form it is unlikely that the absolute number of those who use the church for worship (34) would rise and therefore their proportion would fall – probably to around the national average. That said the church is considered a valuable part of the village – as seen from the answers to the next question.

Do you want to keep the church as a public building?

13. Do you want to keep the church open as a public building?
200 responses



The response to this was overwhelmingly (97.5%) in favour. The situation is similar to that of the village hall. The church is an underused asset.

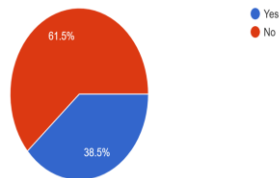
Among the comments posted in the “free text” box in reply to a question about what the church should be used for were:

- “Band practice area.”
- “Concerts” (10 other responses like this).
- “Silent disco! Non-religious social events, singing.”
- “Gigs. Jazz concerts, arts” (1 other response like this).
- “Events to mark Easter etc. involving children.”
- “Recitals, plays, fundraising events - make the church part of the villagers’ lives.”
- “Arts & Crafts, Exhibitions (34 other response like this).”
- “Choirs. (2 other response like this).”
- “Film shows, plays, plant fair.”

- “Meeting place for coffee, chat and making things to raise money for church. It is intimidating entering somewhere where you don't know anyone but if you have a purpose it is easier” (2 other responses like this).
- “Open door for quiet time/prayer.”
- “Food fayre.”
- “History talks.”
- “Christmas hymns.”
- “Local Gardeners/Producers Farmers Market”
- “Pop up café.”
- “Yard sales for church fundraising.”
- “Speakers on gardening, sports events.”
- “Village events should take place in the church. Heated building, parking, lavatories on site.”

Should there be more housing in the village?

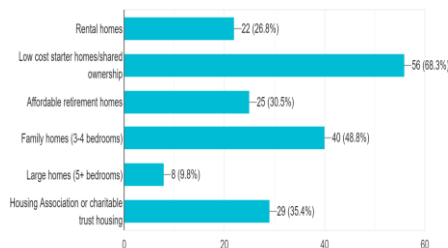
15. a) Should there be more housing in the village?
200 responses



The response to this significantly negative. The next three answers were only given by the 38% who were in favour of more housing.

What type of new housing should there be?

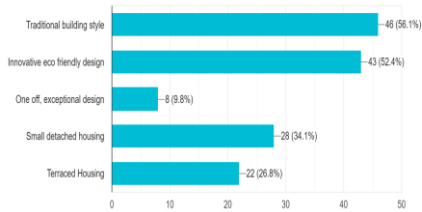
b) If your answer to a is Yes, what types of housing should there be?
62 responses



Of that 38% a majority (68%) wanted low cost starter homes or shared ownership. There was 48% support for 3-4 bedroom homes. There was very little support – just eight replies – who wanted large homes.

What style of new housing would you like to see?

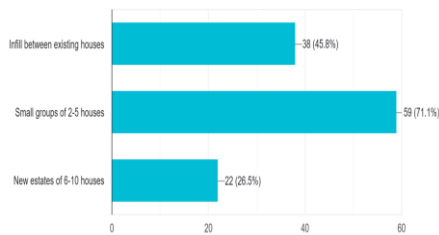
c) If your answer to a is Yes, what style of housing would you like to see?
82 responses



The majority wanted either traditional housing or eco friendly designs. (56% and 52% respectively)

What type of building density would you like to see

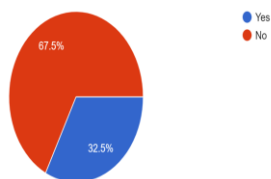
d) If your answer to a is Yes, what type of building density would you like to see?
83 responses



The answer was largely for small groups of 2-5 houses.

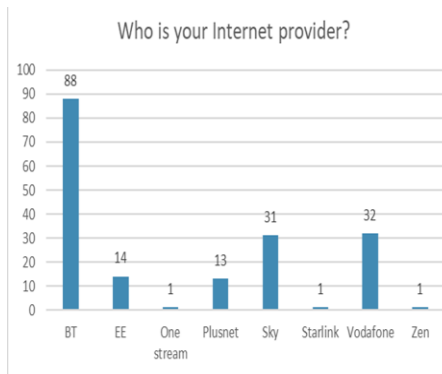
Do you work from home?

16. Do you work from home?
200 responses



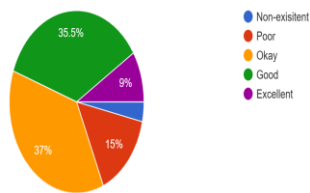
There is a sizeable proportion of the village that works from home (presumably since the pandemic). The significance of this is 1) the need for good internet and 2) the need for a community facilities to make the village more than just a collection of office and domestic spaces.

Who is your internet provider?



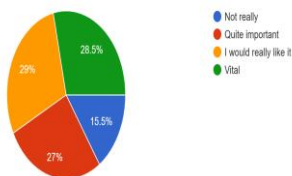
How good is your internet and how important is it for you to have better internet connection?

18. How good is your internet connection?
200 responses



These two questions along with their answers should be seen together. On its own the first graph could be seen as showing that over 80% of the respondents felt their internet was adequate, ie "Okay" or better. However, the second pie chart shows that 56% of respondents either would "really like" better connectivity or felt that it was "Vital". The two charts together seem to show that while much of the village is getting by, it is really important for the future to improve the internet quality.

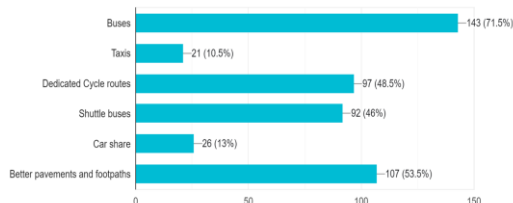
19. How important is it for you to have a better internet connection?
200 responses



What's the best way to improve local transport?

20. What would be the best way to improve transport to Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and nearby villages? (Please select your top 3 priorities)

200 responses



The biggest response here is for better buses, but there is also a need for better footpaths within the village and dedicated cycle routes.

Among the comments posted in the "free text" box supplied with this question were:

- "Pavements to the bus stops for primary age children" (5 other responses like this).
- "A path along New Road, it's unsafe and dangerous for walking and school bus, and New Road to be gritted in the winter to make it easier access out of the village" (3 other responses like this).
- "Not just footpaths, but bridleways! At the moment we have to drive with our horses to reach other bridleways."
- "More land open to go on walks."
- "Improved lighting near village hall and down to crossroads. Footpath from cross roads along Hargrave Road to Grange Mill" (2 other responses like this).
- "Dedicated off-road cycle routes, a strictly enforced speed limit (at most 30mph, ideally 20) on designated minor roads into Bury would make cycling feel safer."
- "Better and more environmentally friendly buses."
- "Absolutely wonderful cycle path exists between village and entrance to Ickworth but a scheme, possibly supported by Sustrans / local gov. / National Trust, to link the latter area safely via a cycle path to BSE seems a good idea to create the village into a cycle hub for both us village folk and attracting town cyclists too."
- "More minibuses - empty double decker buses thundering through village are horrid."
- "Better bus service out of working hours (Mon-Fri). There's almost no service at weekends / evenings" (2 other responses like this).

The Public Meeting.

A public meeting was held on 3 November 2023, attended by some 80 parishioners, including members of the PCC and the PC. The purpose of the meeting was to discover the mood of the village and gauge the level of enthusiasm for the various ideas put forward in the survey. There was a Power Point presentation by Jamie Robertson and Sophie Hunt of the findings as shown above and several notice boards showing the Free Text responses.

Introduction

The Rector, the Rev Clive Fairclough gave a background to the Survey saying that the Church sees itself not just as a church standing alone but a church plus the community. Much of what the church could do for the village lies in the fate of the Glebe Lands. These are in two parcels in the village, one triangular site in the middle of the village, another oblong, behind the Rectory. These passed some 50 years ago from the Rector to the Diocese. Earlier conversations – in January 2023 – with the Diocese surveyor established that a parish questionnaire was needed to see what the village wanted. Once the survey had been taken the Diocese would be prepared to talk about the use of the Glebe land. However, he warned that while the Bishop was anxious that the land should be used principally for the benefit of the community the Diocese also wants it to yield some commercial value.

Environment and Renewables

James O'Donnell said his children had asked more about why there had been no questions on the environment. Jamie said that many of the replies had shown how concerned villagers were about the environment.

In particular he pointed to the support in the survey for a renewable energy project although he said that the minority opposed to it must have their voices heard and their worries taken into account if such a project went ahead.

This may well include people living next to the 10 acre Glebe land field behind the Rectory which might well be suitable for a small solar farm.

Clive said that the Diocese was getting a very small income from the fields, possibly no more than £800 a year from each. He said that the other triangular Glebe land field was ideally situated as a central hub for the village.

There were some questions as to where the money would come from to finance this. Jamie said he did not know but believed that as other villages had managed to build similar facilities it must be possible for us to do it too. He pointed out that there were a number of ways in which the village could own or take a lease on the Glebe lands through a vehicle such as a non-profit Community Land Trust. It was suggested that the Village Hall land could be sold to finance a new building or village hub or that income from a solar farm could fund it.

The Rector also said there were organisations such as the Plunkett Foundation that would be prepared to help raise funds for building village assets.

A Village hub

Some (including Mike Chester, Chevington's West Suffolk councillor) said the Hawstead Village Hall with its surrounding green space, its use as a wedding and function venue, and community buzz was an example to follow.

Many wondered whether a village shop would be used. A café was thought to be more viable, and it was thought that in combination with other facilities it could be a success. Stetchworth's (a similar village to Chevington) community centre, post office and shop is well used and was cited as another example to follow.

On the issue of the playground, Jamie said that Grange Mill seemed an obvious place for one, but that if one wanted to combine it with other facilities, such as a village hall, sports ground or open space generally, it might not be the most suitable spot.

There were many comments about making this about what younger people want as most people in the room confessed to be in the older age bracket. It was thought we should have an eye 20 years into the future when most cars would be electric, more people would work from home which would make the need for facilities such as a shop more important. All the same it was emphasised that the village really valued the countryside and the environment and it was pointed out that lockdown had been relatively pleasant for people in Chevington if they had been physically able to get out into the countryside.

Existing Church and PC assets

Jamie outlined other assets held by the village. The church owns the graveyard; the Parish Council has the burial ground; the village hall is in trust to the village, run by the management committee. West Suffolk Council owns the land in middle of Grange Mill (which stipulates "No ball games" – but it was thought this might be amended) and also at Barnfield.

Clive pointed out that the church gets no funding from the diocese and has to fund all its own upkeep.

Sophie outlined the improvements being made to the church to make it more accessible as a public space – a new toilet and a servery being constructed this year. Jamie urged people who wanted to use the church as a venue for events such as concerts or exhibitions to apply to the PCC. A reception would be held to mark the opening of the servery this winter.

Mark Surety (Chair of the PC) said that the telephone box was being converted into a book share hub. It was also thought a seed share box could be included.

A large number of people in the room were aware of the Pantry – set up in the church to provide provisions for people in need in the village. It costs £50-60 a week to keep it going. It is funded by the church, aided by the Parish Council and supplemented by private anonymous donations.

Publicity

There was some debate about how events and functions should be publicised and it was generally thought that the Benefice magazine, Whatsapp, Facebook, village posters, Twitter and all forms of media should all be used. Many people were unaware that there was a village presence on any of these sites (the village Facebook site only has 25 followers).

Although there is a noticeboard outside the Village Hall it was thought another one at the crossroads by the Greyhound would be more effective. A show of hands suggested that the Benefice Magazine was still the most popular form of publicising events – but someone asked whether that would be true in 20 years.

It was pointed out that many people did not know the difference between the Parish Council and the Parochial Church Council. One person said the Parish Council sounded as though it was "very churchy".

Housing

There was not much enthusiasm for new housing in the village.

West Suffolk Council's Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) plan establishes where new building will be. Mike Chester said the village was a type B village and so could only build infill within the settlement boundary. It had been graded that way because of its lack of doctor, shops etc. Building

outside the boundary is tightly controlled. Glebe land would come under this kind of control but if there is community use that could be decisive in allowing some sort of controlled development.

Mark Surety asked if by adding new facilities, that might change the village from being Type B and open it up to more development. Frances Betts, Chevington Council Clerk said this was very unlikely.

Connectivity

On the internet BT is most used internet provider and it was agreed that the quality could be a lot better although many houses on the edge of the village received very good connectivity. It was thought the data from the survey could be used to press BT to get better internet to the village.

Jamie said that there might be a chance to use the church tower as a site for a mobile mast, and Clive, who knew of other parishes where this had been done said it could be erected unobtrusively. However, some people said that having a mast on a church was inappropriate.

Lighting and Footpaths

There were a number of complaints about the regularity of power cuts with the trees on Hargrave Road taking down cables. The Parish Council was asked to look into the state of the trees with respect to overhead cables. Jamie suggested people write to the PC to let them know there is a problem – can put pressure on UKPN and WSCC.

There were many comments on the state of lighting in the village. Many areas are too dark, and others have lights on all night shining into bed room windows. Frances Betts said this was a Suffolk County Council responsibility and that it was worth asking Karen Soons about it.

Cycling

Cycle routes – despite enthusiasm for this and the increasing use of electric bikes people saw local farmers and the National Trust as being obstructive. Jamie pointed out that the National Trust was more amenable to cyclists and might be persuaded to open routes there. Jamie suggested path through Ickworth Park – worth asking NT. [The National Trusts 2023 AGM notes read: “We have established a new Cyclists Welcome programme and appointed a project manager (part funded by Sport England) to implement this. We will use this programme to understand how cyclists’ access can be improved through new and better designed property entrance points.]

Next steps:

The meeting agreed (although no formal vote was taken) to a number of next steps:

The Rector said he would take the results of the survey to the Diocese to negotiate what use might be made of the Glebe lands for the benefit of the village community.

There would be follow up on the provision and use of lighting and pavements by PC. The PC would also debate the feasibility of a new noticeboard at the crossroads.

The PC would examine ways of talking to BT about connectivity of people in the village.

General Conclusions

The aim of the survey and the Public Meeting was to find ways in which we can use assets and resources, both human and physical, in the village to benefit the community and bring it closer together. The response to the survey and the comments written in the free text spaces overwhelmingly show there is a willingness to come up with ideas and activities – if people are given the chance and the facilities.

- **SPACE:** That chance can be given with access to space. Again and again the questionnaire responses and the issues raised in the meeting refer to a need for public space in which to do everything from operating pop-up cafes to walking, sport, allotment gardening, cycling, entertaining children or just gathering together as a community.
- **RENEWABLE ENERGY:** There is also substantial support for renewable energy if it can provide benefits for the local community in the form of financial reward or lower energy bills.
- **GLEBE LANDS:** The question of the two plots of glebe land (each approximately 10 acres or just over 4.0 hectares) was explained at the public meeting. They both show potential to host 1) a solar farm and 2) a village hub or multi-purpose facility.
- **WHAT WE HAVE ALREADY:** This can fulfil some but by no means all of these needs. The church is being adapted with a new toilet and a servery to be able to provide some of the facilities that that could support functions such as concerts, exhibitions, talks and other functions. The village hall is sound and in good condition but limited, or as one person put it: “[It] could be more welcoming. It looks very dated and functional, especially with the toilets directly in front of you!”
- **LAND ROUND THE HALL:** However, the parish has not recently explored the possibility of whether land to its rear or opposite the existing hall is in any sense available. There is also the possibility of selling the existing village hall and using the funds to build a new multi-purpose and flexible facility.
- **GRANGE MILL:** The land in Grange Mill, owned by West Suffolk Council is also underutilised, but the survey threw up no suggestions as to how it might be used, although the possibility of a playground there was mooted.
- **COMMUNICATIONS:** There seems to be a real need for better communications – a new noticeboard at the crossroads and better more co-ordinated use of social media.
- **CYCLING AND BUSES:** the village needs better connections to Bury. The PC to explore options.
- **INTERNET:** Connectivity is average but a majority want improvements – there are a sizeable number of home workers and it’s thought the numbers will increase. The PC to explore options.
- **FOOTPATHS AND LIGHTING:** these need improving and in some cases are dangerous.