

**RYHALL & BELMESTHORPE PARISH COUNCIL**  
**2020 PARISH SURVEY**

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

**OVERVIEW**

The 2020 Parish Survey took the form of a brief, four sided consultation on four specific projects. It was circulated to all residents inside the November issue of the Village News, and residents were asked to return completed survey forms to the Parish Council mailbox in Ryhall by 30th November.

The number of returns totalled 134. This compares favourably with the surveys of 2017 and 2014, as the latter two were much larger and more comprehensive in nature and had multiple collection points across the two villages. There was also not the complicating factor of the Coronavirus.

Many of the 2020 returns were thoughtful, some even passionate. Although they constituted only a fraction of the number of homes in the two villages, there appears to be no reason why they should not be taken to be representative of the views of the wider community, and therefore a reasonable guide for the Parish Council in making decisions regarding the various projects.

The white bridge and Ryhall library projects both received strong support from the community. The white bridge may need a more detailed survey and the library must await the outcome of the forthcoming RCC review of leisure facilities across the county before work can begin. But there is no doubting the community's desire to see both of these important village assets receive the maintenance work they are due.

The footpath project is clearly a more complex issue, which requires further investigation and consultation. Although the numbers in favour heavily outweighed those against, opponents of the idea brought forward some pertinent and well-reasoned arguments to support their case. The future of this project may well be bound up with the proposed further developments along Belmesthorpe Lane, which have yet to gain official approval.

The Belmesthorpe gateways were well supported by residents of Belmesthorpe, who strongly maintain that there are serious speeding issues in the village and are welcoming of any measures which might offer relief. Ryhall residents were less supportive of a project that most saw as being of benefit only to Belmesthorpe residents. Perhaps locally sourced wooden gates would provide a cheaper, and therefore more palatable, alternative? At the very least, the speeding issue should be seriously investigated and solutions found, be they gateways or be they of a different nature.

73 respondents took the opportunity to make other suggestions at the end of the survey, whilst 61 made no comment. 4 thanked the Council for all their hard work: not surprisingly, all the remaining comments were complaints or requests for action. Of these, the greatest number by far were related to finance and road safety.

As regards finance, most comments concerned the high level of the current Council Tax, the perceived poor return from Rutland CC and a feeling that volunteers (whoever these might be?) could do the work required by most of the projects. Road safety concerns centred round speeding, especially along the A6121, parking and the need for double yellow lines in parts of the centre of Ryhall, and the improvement of some of our footpaths. In addition to the above, there was a list of individual complaints and suggestions relating to different aspects of the villages.

Although in the case of the first three projects the number who were content to see the costs borne by the precept outweighed the number who were not content, it must be said that there was a significant minority who expressed grave concerns about increasing what is already perceived to be a high level of Council Tax when compared with the services received by the community and also when compared with neighbouring authorities. These residents would wish the Parish Council to be at least circumspect when considering future precept increases, especially given the current financial and economic climate. Use of CIL monies rather than precept wherever possible would clearly be a welcome, and perhaps appropriate, way of relieving these concerns.

### **SPECIFIC PROJECTS**

#### **WHITE BRIDGE, RYHALL (Foundry Road)**

The need to repaint the white bridge is readily accepted by the community. The vast majority in both villages thought it important and did not feel the need to justify their opinion. The white bridge is felt to be an iconic village asset which should be properly maintained.

The strong majority were content for the cost stated to be added to the Parish precept, especially amongst Ryhall residents. However, a sizeable minority were not content, almost exclusively for financial reasons. A significant number felt the work could be done by volunteers, and others felt the cost should be borne by Rutland CC.

Unfortunately, it appears that the suggested indicative cost of £500 was not correct and is likely to be substantially higher. It is now clear that this is a major project, necessitating permission from the Environment Agency and Highways, and suggesting the need for an inspection and/or quote from a professional company able to advise on the best way to tackle the project.

A resident has offered a £500 donation towards the project, so it is possible that the final cost to the precept might not be too far away from the survey figure after all. If this is the case, there would seem to be little argument against approving the project and completing it at the earliest opportunity, subject to the above caveats.

#### **Recommendation:**

Obtain professional quotes and necessary permissions as soon as possible, with the aim of implementing the project at the earliest opportunity. To be financed from increase to precept and, if necessary, additional funds from current account surplus.

## **NEW VILLAGE GATEWAYS (Belmesthorpe)**

The numbers of residents voting in favour or against this project or expressing no preference were in all three cases almost identical. However, the responses from the two villages were very different, with significantly fewer voting in favour from Ryhall, whereas in Belmesthorpe those in favour massively outnumbered those against or expressing no preference.

The low scores in Ryhall are perhaps not surprising, given that this project clearly serves the interests of Belmesthorpe residents first and foremost. A typical response pattern from Ryhall residents was against, not important and no wish to foot the bill. It is arguable that a similar response would be given for any other project associated only with Belmesthorpe.

It is also clear that the low level of enthusiasm amongst Ryhall residents was influenced by negative feelings towards the existing Ryhall gateway, which is seen by some to be ineffective as a speeding deterrent. It is also felt by a few people to be unattractive and incongruous, although the aesthetic merit of gateways was an aspect which very few in the survey took into consideration, the vast majority of respondents' preferences apparently being influenced by views about the effectiveness, or otherwise, of gateways as speeding deterrents.

It is the issue of road safety which was responsible for the strongly positive feelings for gateways expressed by Belmesthorpe residents, who made very clear that, whatever speeds the official traffic monitors may have registered, they feel there does exist a significant and dangerous amount of speeding by vehicles passing through the village and along Belmesthorpe Lane, which needs to be addressed. Although not all residents were convinced about the effectiveness of gateways, a clear majority felt they were important and worth paying for, on the grounds that any measure which would ameliorate the situation was welcome.

The question of finance was more clear cut. A huge majority of Ryhall residents were not content for gateways to be financed by an increase in the Parish precept, and this view was shared even by some in Belmesthorpe, although a majority there were content to see the precept increased for this purpose. Most respondents did not choose to explain their preferences, but a few felt that it was not for the parish to finance these gateways, especially in the current economic climate. For most of those who expressed an opinion, the case for gateways was unproven and they did not therefore merit a financial outlay.

However, the issue of road safety remains, and there is a clear indication from this survey that a proven speeding deterrent would gain support from the community, even though some would regard its financing as a matter for a higher authority than the Parish Council. Belmesthorpe appears to have a particular problem, which is worthy of further attention.

## **Recommendation:**

Further investigate the problem of vehicle speeding through Belmesthorpe village and consult with appropriate external agencies as to a suitable solution. Reserve funding previously designated for gateways but not yet used for whatever solution is finally agreed.

## **NEW FOOTPATH (Belmesthorpe Lane)**

The creation of a new footpath along Belmesthorpe Lane was an issue which polarised opinion amongst respondents, with comparatively few not having a view either way. The great majority in both villages were in favour of the project, thought it important and were content for the Parish to make a financial contribution towards its cost, though only a minority felt this should be more than £10,000, and some felt it was for Rutland CC to provide the funding.

A significant minority were against the footpath, and these included a number of self-declared frequent walkers along Belmesthorpe Lane. A wide range of reasons for opposing the project was stated, the most frequent being that there was no need for a new footpath, given that one already exists across the fields, that there are other projects more deserving of short term funding, which is necessarily scarce at the moment, and that a new footpath would be detrimental to the natural environment of Belmesthorpe Lane, which has been shown by previous surveys to be so highly valued by the community, and perhaps even to Belmesthorpe itself.

By contrast, very few reasons were given by those who were in favour of the project, and some attached provisos, the most common being that it would be funded by RCC rather than by the Parish. The commonest reason which was stated was increased safety for pedestrians.

It was interesting to note that some respondents had views about the effect of a new footpath which were diametrically opposed, eg whether it would reduce or encourage speeding, and how many pedestrians currently actually use Belmesthorpe Lane. More important were the number of cautionary observations which were submitted and which merit consideration in the drawing up of any final plans, eg the width of the road, the preservation of a grass verge, the need to restrict usage of the path to pedestrians only, the need to have, or to avoid, lighting, whether enhanced traffic calming measures would be a cheaper but equally effective means of ensuring pedestrian safety along Belmesthorpe Lane, and, last but not least, whether the Lane actually affords enough space to create a new footpath and maintain satisfactory road width.

A number of respondents volunteered the suggestion that a footpath linking Belmesthorpe to the main A6121 road was a more pressing need, given that a footpath already exists from Shepherd's Walk to Ryhall, but the white bridge road offers only a rough grass verge, which is unsuitable for push chairs, as an alternative to a road which contains a dangerous blind bend and is Belmesthorpe's only direct access route to the footpath along the A6121 and the bus route which it offers.

In view of the above, it might be wise before making any final commitment to this project to hold a further public consultation when a final plan is determined with a clear view of how a new footpath along Belmesthorpe Lane would be built and financed, and with appropriate drawings and maps available for inspection. And perhaps consideration should be given to including in this consultation a similar plan for a new footpath to link Belmesthorpe with the A6121 via the white bridge road.

**Recommendations:**

Set up project involving appropriate external agencies and advice to assess the viability, the best way and the cost of ensuring safe pedestrian passage along the Belmesthorpe Lane between Belmesthorpe and Ryhall . Then to hold a further public consultation as to whether to proceed with the project.

Finance to be provided by CIL funds from any new developments subject to their approval, along Belmesthorpe Lane , and / or by external agencies

**RYHALL LIBRARY**

As with the white bridge, the vast majority in both villages thought it important to repaint the library building and maintain what is seen to be a valuable community asset.

Again, a strong majority were content for the cost of the work to be met by an increase in the Parish precept, although a significant minority were against this, feeling that the cost should be met by Rutland CC and that the Parish precept is high enough already. As with the white bridge, a sizeable group felt the work could be done by volunteers, though this is not feasible.

There would therefore seem to be little argument against the parish funding this project, unless Rutland CC agrees to paying for it. Certainly the job needs to be undertaken at the earliest opportunity, to prevent further deterioration.

**Recommendation:**

Redecorate the paintwork and varnish on the exterior of Ryhall Library at the earliest suitable opportunity, using professional decorators and subject to the permission of Rutland CC. Funding to be provided by an appropriate increase in the parish precept, unless RCC offers to pay for the work.

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Survey executed and analysed and report compiled by Adrian Gombault on behalf of Ryhall Parish Council.

Recommendations agreed by David Amies (Chairman), Adrian Gombault (Vice-Chairman) and Mrs Caroline Adams (Parish Clerk)

