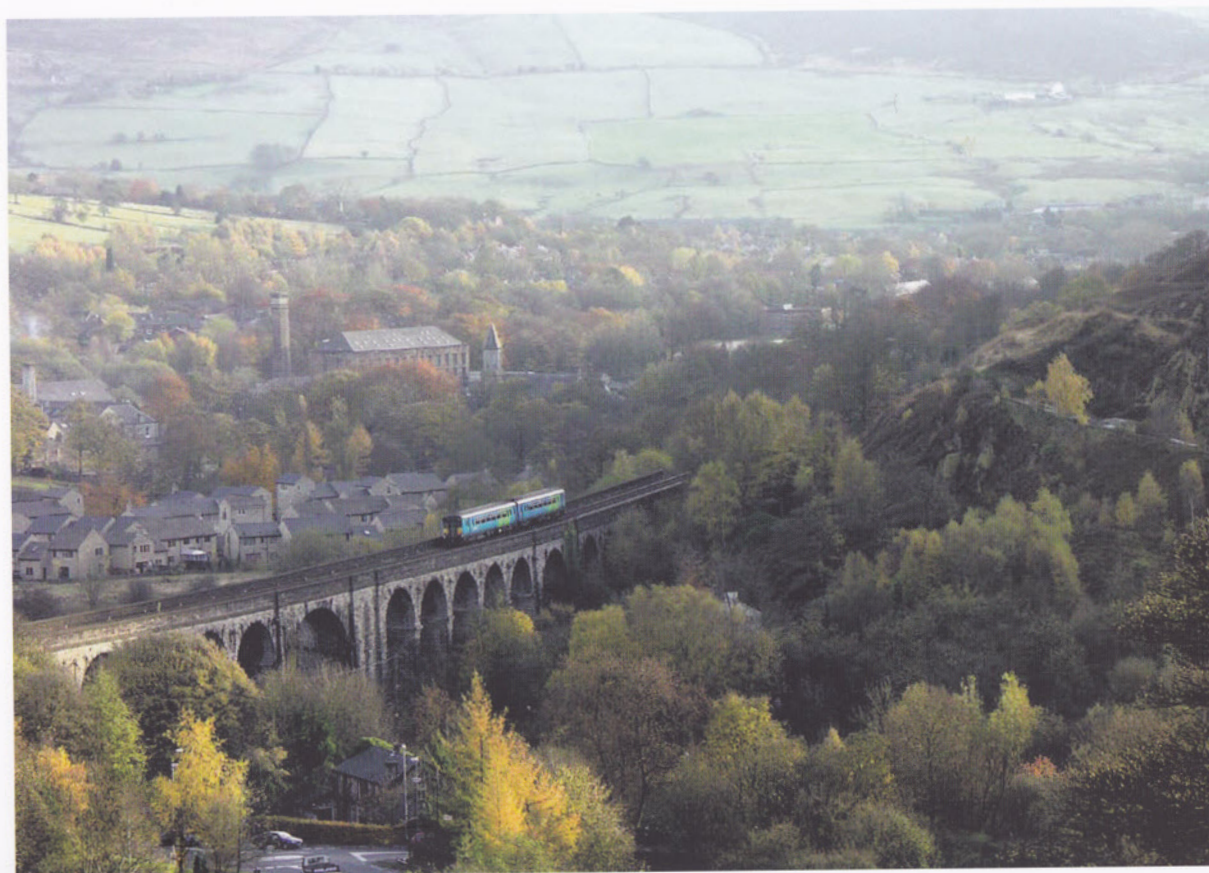
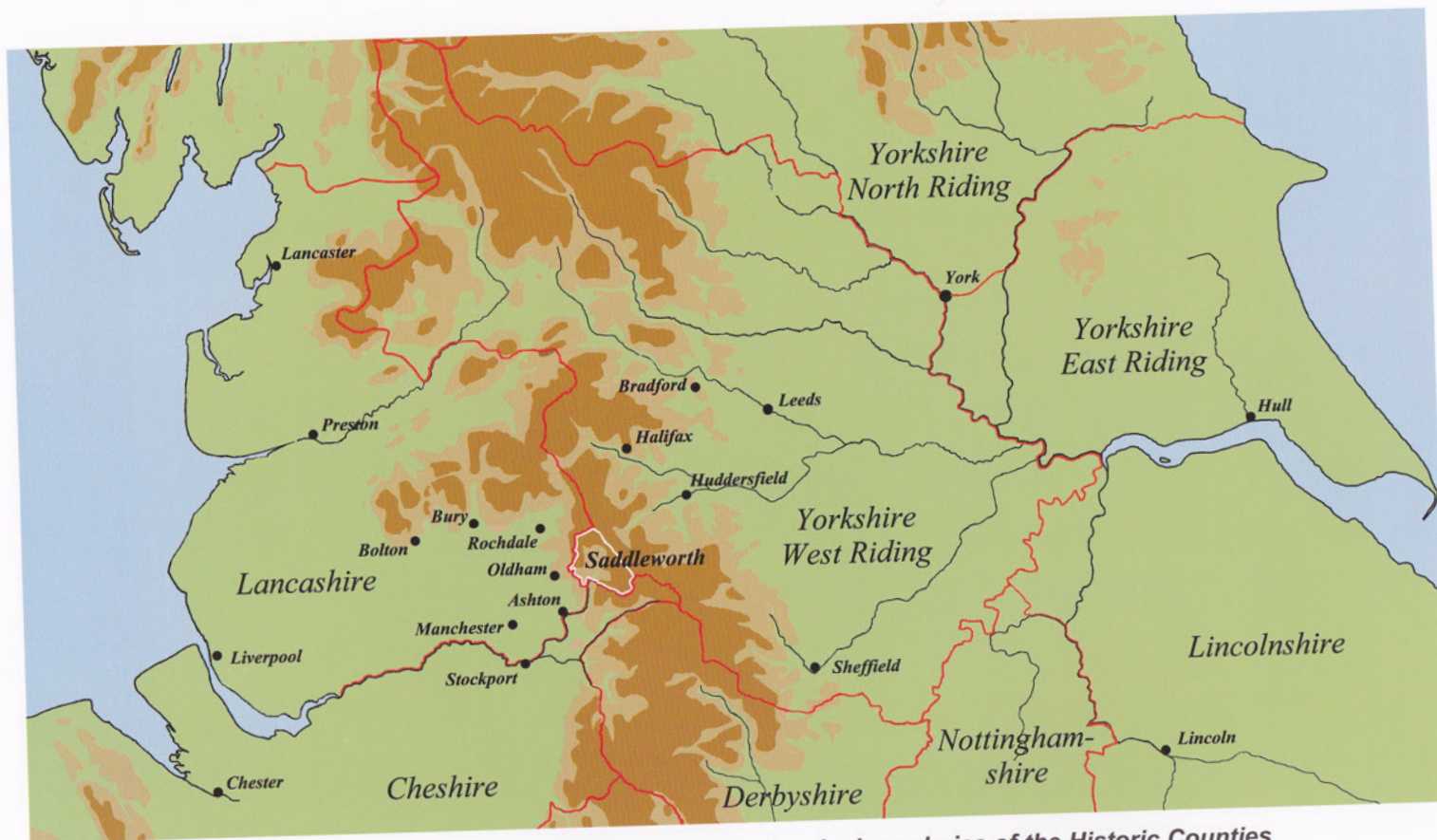


SADDLEWORTH PARISH PLAN





Saddleworth's location in the North West, showing the boundaries of the Historic Counties

FOREWORD

We have much pleasure in presenting this Parish Plan to the people of Saddleworth.

The Plan represents the culmination of many months work on policy development by the Parish Council, largely based on the results of a questionnaire issued to all Saddleworth households in 2008. The questionnaire, drafted by the Council and a number of representatives from local groups, addressed topics of local concern and issues affecting the quality of life in Saddleworth. There was a massive response with over 1200 questionnaires completed and returned and this has enabled us to produce a Plan truly representative of local opinion.

As well as providing a policy framework for the work of the Parish Council, the Plan highlights issues on which the Parish Council needs to focus its attention and actions. Many of the concerns raised lie outside our direct control and can only be tackled in partnership with other bodies, particularly Oldham Council. Similarly, many of the improvements sought can only be achieved if significant funding is made available; funding beyond the Parish Council's means. The plan provides a valuable evidence base for working with partners and seeking external help and support.

We live in a green rural area, rich in heritage, and one which we all wish to protect and improve for the well-being of young and old and for us all to enjoy. There is much to do. Not everything can be achieved at once, but we will endeavour to seek improvements on a yearly basis. We have a regular Newsletter where Councillors will keep everyone informed of the improvements achieved and what progress has been made with others.

Pat Lord
Chairman of Saddleworth Parish Council 2008-9

Alma McInnes
Chairman of Saddleworth Parish Council 2009-10



High Street, Delph

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1. INTRODUCTION

"Saddleworth is a beautiful place to live"



View from Ashway Rocks

The upper reaches of the River Tame, and its numerous tributaries define Saddleworth geographically. Its valleys contain the villages of Denshaw, Delph, Dobcross, Diggle, Uppermill and Greenfield and, in the more heavily populated western part of the parish, Scouthead, Austerlands, Friezland, Grasscroft, Lydgate, Grotton and Springhead.

A large proportion of the parish is heather moorland, a special landscape protected by two international designations.

Situated on the west side of the Pennines, but historically part of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Saddleworth has long looked in two directions: over the top, eastward to the towns of Huddersfield, Halifax and Leeds and westward to its Lancashire neighbours of Oldham, Ashton, Rochdale and Manchester.

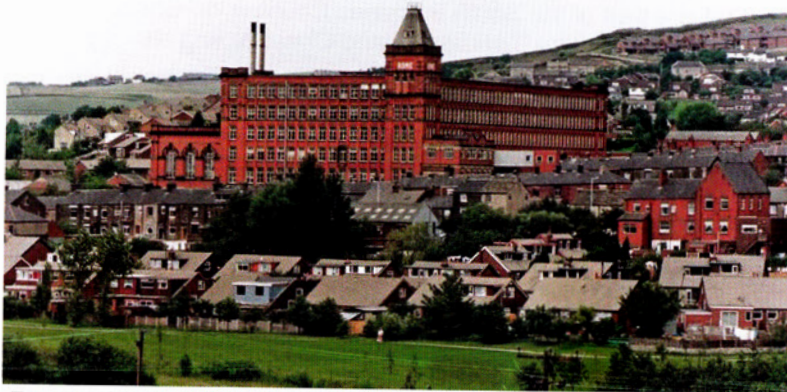
This dual identity is as true today as it was in the middle ages and the time of the Tudors and the Stuarts, when its absentee Lords of the Manor lived far away in Yorkshire and administration was from Pontefract and later Wakefield; yet ecclesiastically it was in the parish of Rochdale and Diocese of Chester. Today, it is administered by Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council, forms part of the sub-region of Greater Manchester, yet is partly in the Peak District National Park and is a part of the South Pennines Countryside Character Area. A true border territory, its ancient boundary unites the three historic counties of Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire and although in the North West Region it borders on the Yorkshire and Humber and East Midlands Regions.

Until the eighteenth century, Saddleworth was a lightly populated and fairly poor area where hillside farmers combined pastoral agriculture with small scale woollen cloth production. But in the next century, there was a rapid increase in population, matched by growing wealth and importance; Saddleworth broadcloth achieving international status. Saddleworth was at the forefront of the industrial revolution with hundreds of water powered textile mills springing up along the River Tame and the emergence of one of the most impressive turnpike road networks in the country. The construction of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal, with its astounding three mile long tunnel under the Pennines, was one of the major engineering feats of its day. The roads and canal provided access to both national and international markets as well as passing trade for the newly emerging villages in the valleys.

With the Victorian era came continued growth in industry but a decline in Saddleworth's importance in relation to its neighbours in Yorkshire and Lancashire. The water mills were turned into factories, mainly still engaged in woollen textile production but also cotton spinning in its western parts. The villages grew in



Higher Kinders



Rome Mill, Springhead (a cotton mill demolished 1992)

size and population as workers moved down from the hillside farms to live near shops and employment. Agriculture went into decline, a decline from which it has never recovered.

The twentieth century witnessed a transformation of Saddleworth from a community of industrial villages to a dormitory area for the major employment centres on both sides of the Pennines. The motorway network assisted this change. Local shops disappeared in most of the villages and with them a decline in the local economy. But house building mushroomed as Saddleworth was transformed from an industrial landscape to a leafy country district of attractive Pennine villages with a valued industrial heritage.

The present civil parish dates from the local government reorganisation of 1974, but its boundaries are essentially the same as those of its predecessor, the Saddleworth Urban District, and the medieval Township dating back to the Saxon period. With this long history there is understandably a strong sense of local identity.

Like other Pennine parishes, it is large, at 7,588 hectares, (29.3 sq miles), predominantly rural with a population approaching 25,000. Saddleworth shares little in common with the small village parishes of middle England.

The challenges facing Saddleworth today, primarily relate to the threat of over-development, attendant on rising land prices, the decline of a mixed local economy, the lack of affordable housing, and the expense of maintaining local services and infrastructure in a geographically large country district. But these are balanced by Saddleworth's strengths; its largely prosperous, healthy, and well-educated local population and its strong community spirit, manifest in the large number of voluntary societies and organisations and communal festivals such as the annual Whit Friday Brass Band Contest, the Rush Cart Weekend, the Saddleworth Beer Walk and the Saddleworth Festival of the Arts.

This Parish Plan maps out how the people of Saddleworth see the present challenges and pressures, their priorities for action but primarily how they wish to see the district evolve in the twenty first century.

2. ENVIRONMENT

"It is crucial to protect the character and beauty of Saddleworth".

Saddleworth is an attractive and interesting place to live and visit. In recent years its industrial past has been softened by tree planting and general environmental improvement. A stark landscape, scarred in parts by industry, has given way to a more rural aspect. The Pennine landscape with its open vistas, network of lanes and footpaths and wild moorland is distinctive and recognised as worthy of preservation, conservation and protection.

In Saddleworth the hallmarks of our landscape are a mixed heritage, much recording the work of our ancestors. The surrounding moorland is predominantly the result of nature: the land, the elevation and the climate. These uplands with their wide open expanse still have economic value as water catchment areas and sheep grazing pastures but are also highly valued for grouse shooting and other recreational purposes or simply for aesthetic reasons. They now enjoy the protection of two international designations: "Special Area of Conservation (SAC)" and "Special Protected Area (SPA)". These recognise the global significance of their rare habitats for plants and birdlife. A major programme of preservation is now underway by national bodies and landowners, to protect the moorland from excessive peat erosion. Recently the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has joined the National Trust and government agencies in planting heather and working with landowners to reduce over-grazing by sheep.

The Saddleworth hillsides, with their characteristic small enclosures bounded by a network of stone walls and small country

lanes, for many years have deteriorated with the decline in farming. Stone walls have fallen down and are generally in a poor state of repair. Heavy plant has also resulted in field drains being damaged causing poor drainage and flooding of minor roads. Barbed wire has replaced the traditional dry stone walling. Ancient earthworks such as sunken lanes and hedge ditches have been lost. Although there has been a steady loss of farming activity, there has been some use of land for leisure purposes with stables now a common feature across the district. Higher up on marginal land, most is neglected and returning to the wild. Lower down, a large part has been lost to building development.

In addition to housing development, the valleys in Saddleworth have been transformed since the 1960s with heavy tree planting. This has had a major effect on the appearance of the district. However, with increased tree planting there is a growing recognition that many of the views once enjoyed are now no longer visible and that some form of control and planning is required in relation to future planting. Also many of the trees planted in the 1980s and 90s have been unmanaged. 82% of respondents felt that trees in general throughout Saddleworth should be better managed and thinned out as required. Trees are highly valued; however and the majority of respondents wanted to see more tree preservation orders.



Saddleworth from Stanedge

Saddleworth buildings are traditionally built of local stone, and like the dry stone walls, weathered dark over the centuries. Most of the structures associated with the historic woollen mills have long since disappeared although the introduction of weirs and the re-routing of rivers and streams can still be seen. The major landscaping endeavours of our forefathers are evident throughout the district. From the wonderful achievement of the Huddersfield Canal, (rescued from oblivion by dedicated enthusiasts) to the magnificent railway viaduct, which dominates its setting and yet seems so much a natural part of our environment. Some of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century mills have now been given a new use as apartment blocks.

Our heritage legacy in Saddleworth is only partly protected by planning policies. A significant number (370), but still a small sample, of local buildings are listed for special historic or architectural interest. All the Saddleworth villages and some hamlets have been designated conservation areas. This designation provides some degree of protection against inappropriate development. Other buildings and many historic landscapes of Saddleworth however enjoy no protection with the result that their historic character has been eroded in many instances by insensitive development.



Uppermill - Ammon Wrigley Statue

*“extend and create new
Conservation Areas”.*



Saddleworth Church - Founded c.1200

Windfarms are a topical and very controversial issue. 34% of respondents agreed that windfarms should be allowed in the Saddleworth green belt, whereas 53% were against this, of which 37% were strongly against.

The immediate environmental concerns of many residents however

relate to poor management and maintenance of the environment. Litter and dog fouling are common complaints. Poor highway maintenance, blocked grids, dirty road signs, overhanging trees and badly maintained road verges create an overall impression of neglect. Compared with the wider environmental issues these problems are relatively easy to fix.

"Footpaths and hedgerows are badly managed"

"... trees have taken over our views".

"... Saddleworth is going wild and unkempt"

ENVIRONMENT ACTIONS

1. Work with Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (OMBC) to ensure that the existing programme of highway retaining wall improvements respects local building styles and techniques. Together with OMBC and Pennine Prospects, promote the government's Upland Stewardship Scheme to assist land owners to repair dry stone walls along country lanes and in the fields.
2. Support and strengthen OMBC's programme of management of overhanging trees and cleaning of street signs. Also encourage private landowners to adopt a planned approach to the management of overhanging trees on private land.
3. Investigate the appointment of lengthmen under local control who would maintain and have responsibility for roadside verges and ditches and cleaning and repairing of minor roads, e.g. one person having responsibility for a designated area.
4. Assist OMBC in producing a local list of buildings of historical and architectural importance to supplement the existing national list. Seek to broaden the coverage of Conservation Areas.
5. Investigate whether planning policies can be introduced to control tree planting throughout the district and encourage the wider adoption of Tree Preservation Orders for trees of particular merit.
6. Investigate whether Forestry Commission woodland management grants can be used to assist land owners in undertaking remedial work on overgrown trees including the removal of self seeded saplings.
7. Continue to tackle litter by working with community associations, volunteers and OMBC on targeted clean up campaigns.
8. Continue to oppose the introduction of windfarms in Saddleworth's Green Belt but investigate other less intrusive ways of generating green energy in accordance with Peak District National Park policies and the Association of Greater Manchester Councils (AGMA) Energy Study.

3. HOUSING, PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

“... development is ruining the local character of the villages”



Willow bank, Uppermill - residential conversion of a former Woollen Mill

Over the last four decades Saddleworth has undergone a transformation from a collection of villages, a large percentage of whose inhabitants worked locally, shopped locally, and spent much of their leisure time in Saddleworth, to a dormitory area for adjoining towns on both sides of the Pennines. This fact is borne out by the Survey, which indicated that of those in work, 80% were employed outside the Parish.

As part of this change, what was a semi-industrial landscape has been transformed into a leafy country district, desirable as a place to live and well positioned for commuters. The result has been a strong demand for more housing, a consequential rise in house prices, and an attendant increase in land prices with strong growth, particularly at the top end of the housing market. The net result has been a high level of housing development and a problem of affordability for many local residents. In the last five years Saddleworth and Lees has seen a growth of 597 new dwellings. Out of a planning target of 1445 across the borough, this represents 41% of all those planned and 48% of the actual net numbers achieved, taking clearances into account.

Although Saddleworth is 53% of the borough in area, the fact that much of this is green belt results in less than 10% of the land available across the borough for development being in Saddleworth. This large share of the new development on 10% of the available land has understandably led to the impression by residents that recent levels of housing development are excessive and that the character of the villages is under threat. In the survey 89% of respondents felt that some form of cap should be introduced on the amount of new housing permitted each year.

A particular phenomenon, of late, has been the residential development of gardens around large houses and the consequent loss of open green space. 92% of respondents felt that this was eroding the character of the villages and that stronger planning measures were required to limit this trend. Protecting the appearance and character of the villages was also rated very highly by respondents, 92% agreeing that this was important.

Government policies as well as land values have also led to a trend for high density development, much of this at the bottom end of the market in the form of flats. These are often criticised as being out of character with the Pennine village landscape. 72% of respondents felt that more terraced housing should be built rather than flats. Over supply of flats has in fact been demonstrated by the demand for flats having suffered significantly in relation to houses in the recent market downturn.

Affordable housing has become a major problem for local people. Many brought up in Saddleworth now find it difficult to buy or rent within the district. This is a particular problem for the young. In the Survey 64% felt that there should be more affordable housing available, that is housing where the purchase price or rent is controlled to maintain it below the market price. There was strong support (65%) for this to be a mix of rental and shared ownership.

“Keep the green belt sacrosanct”

“... affordable housing is by far the most urgent concern”



Walk Mill, Dobcross - new housing in sympathy with the local vernacular

Pressure on the green belt and employment land was also a concern with 95% stating that green belt protection was not strong enough. In fact green belt protection has, on the whole, worked well*, with the main pressures being house extensions and development, justified for business, tourism or family reasons. On the other hand many greenfield sites (sites not previously developed but outside the green belt) have been developed for housing in recent years as a result of planning policy and this has resulted in large areas of Saddleworth countryside being lost to suburban development. Prime examples of this can be found in Springhead, Diggle and Uppermill. Even the prospect of using some green belt land for a new Saddleworth School, was strongly opposed by respondents with 64% disagreeing with this course of action.

* N.B. "green belt" is open land outside the villages which is protected from development, "greenfield" land is undeveloped land, "brownfield" land is previously developed land.

*"There has been an
over provision of
apartments"*

HOUSING, PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS

9. Investigate whether OMBC can introduce a policy within the new Local Development Framework to impose an annual cap on the number of new dwellings built in Saddleworth. This would be based on a proportion of the total target for the borough.
10. Continue to resist building on greenfield sites and inappropriate development within the green belt.
11. Continue to resist any loss of Green Belt.
12. Work with OMBC to strengthen planning policies to protect gardens from housing development.
13. Investigate whether a policy can be adopted to encourage the building of terraced housing rather than flats in village and rural settings.
14. Work with OMBC to produce village design statements and other planning policies that recognise the character of the Saddleworth villages and provide better guidance on the form of new development.
15. Ensure that the Borough's housing policies provide an improved level of affordable housing in Saddleworth and recognise the desire of Saddleworth people to have prioritised access.

4. EMPLOYMENT

“... we don't want Saddleworth to become just a dormitory area”

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a range of industries developed in Saddleworth. Mirroring its neighbours across the border in Lancashire and within the West Riding, the textile industries of woollen cloth manufacture and cotton spinning predominated; however related industries such as textile machinery manufacture and other engineering industries also developed. With the industrial revolution textile mills became larger and associated industries such as engineering sprang up. Most of the mills produced woollen cloth but those in the west turned to cotton. At one time Rome Mill in Springhead had the largest number of spindles under one roof in Europe. The latter half of the twentieth century saw the demise of industry; now only two mills are still producing textiles in the form of specialised wool and cashmere cloth.

The make up of the population of Saddleworth in the twenty first century has changed significantly and with it the occupations. A large percentage of the population is retired and 33% of the respondents leave Saddleworth each day to work in nearby towns and cities. Only 8% live and work in Saddleworth and another 5% work from home.

As a result of the decline of traditional industries in Saddleworth over recent years there has been a steady release of employment sites for housing development, though recent studies have indicated a shortage of employment sites across Oldham Borough.



Riverside Business Park, Delph - the home of two successful high tech international businesses

It has been suggested that Saddleworth is not an attractive place for industry and distance from the motorway and rising land values have made industry unattractive. This view however appears to be based on traditional manufacturing and overlooks Saddleworth's suitability for new high-tech, software and service



Talking Point Conference Centre - formerly St Paul's Church, Scouthead

industries. Presently a number of small high-tech businesses operate from home and some significantly-sized international operations can be found on the business parks in Delph.

Farming in Saddleworth evolved during the nineteenth century from subsistence farming, with each householder providing for his or her own family's needs, to a more organised pastoral and dairy economy. In the last fifty years, like other local industries, farming has been in decline; reflecting the trend to more centralised production and distribution. Now only a few dairy farms exist, and sheep farming on the uplands is perhaps the only traditional farming activity left. Long-established farming families have had to diversify and find new uses for their land; in some cases once well managed land lies fallow.

Respondents to the questionnaire indicated a desire for a mix of employment types with equal weight being given to retail, manufacturing and high-tech. The need for more local trades scored highest with 85% in favour. An overwhelming 83% felt policies should help maintain and expand retail business. 81% felt existing employment sites should be protected from residential or other development.

EMPLOYMENT ACTIONS

16. Press for planning policies to protect existing employment zones and emphasise the opportunity for high-tech businesses.
17. Support actions to attract high-tech industries to Saddleworth.
18. Support actions to encourage the success and growth of local shops, professional and service industries.
19. Publicise and encourage tourism and related industries.
20. Support measures to help new business start-ups.
21. Support measures to find new uses for land and farming diversification.
22. Encourage services and facilities for an ageing population.
23. Support creation of jobs for young people, particularly those that will attract graduates, and those finishing full time education, back to their roots..

5. TOURISM

***“Saddleworth lends itself to visitors – it’s a beautiful area
– however there is too much traffic and insufficient parking ”.***



Whit Friday Walks

The local economy of Saddleworth is significantly boosted by tourist activity. Its natural assets of moorland and valleys provide attractions for visitors, walkers and climbers unmatched anywhere else in the Borough. Tourists are also attracted to its villages for their Pennine character. Uppermill is the hub and provides a range of visitor attractions; the independently run Saddleworth Museum, Gallery and Information Centre, other galleries, shops, cafes and pleasure trips on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. Tourist facilities in other villages are less developed but local pubs throughout the district provide good affordable food in pleasant surroundings.

Travel around the area by public transport is difficult and tourists mostly rely on their own transport, mainly cars. This places a considerable strain on parking resources. See Section 9 – Page 30.

There was strong support for a park and ride system linking the major attractions within the area. 57% supported a Park and Ride Tourism Bus servicing Greenfield Station and Dove Stone and 68% backed a route linking all Saddleworth villages and tourist locations.



Narrow boats on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal



“Longwood Thump” - The Rushcart Festival

Public toilet facilities are woefully inadequate and this presents a problem for both local people as well as visitors. There was strong support for the Parish Council taking an active role in providing improved facilities; even increasing the Parish Council Tax Precept if necessary. The way of providing the facilities will vary depending on the location. One option is the introduction of a Community Toilet scheme, where local businesses receive an annual payment to allow members of the public to use their toilets.

The overwhelming majority, 91% were in favour of the Parish Council supporting the Museum based Visitor Information Centre, a focal point for tourists and residents alike.

Saddleworth has a rich network of footpaths and bridleways; a legacy from an era before the industrial revolution when the area was one of scattered hillside settlements and hamlets interlinked with rights of way. There are 291 definitive footpaths and bridleways in the parish, in addition to large areas of open land where “right to roam” applies.

The Parish Council, together with a team of volunteers including the Ramblers Association, West Pennine Bridleway Association and Oldham Countryside Service, have undertaken to document all 150 miles (240 Km) of footpath and bridleway in Saddleworth, compiling a detailed record and a log of their condition, and working with the Local Authority Footpaths Officer to agree an action plan for their restoration and maintenance.

Walkers, horse riders and visitors to the area have long been frustrated by the lack of a single map of Saddleworth showing footpaths, bridleways and other tourist amenities; an earlier map in two sections, produced in 1979, has long been out of print. The Parish Council have embarked on a project to produce a new large scale map on a single sheet covering the whole of the parish.



Uppermill Museum and Visitor Information Centre

TOURISM ACTIONS

24. Work with partners to identify sources of funding to maintain the current Visitor Information Centre.
25. Approach Greater Manchester Integrated Transport Authority (GMITA) and others about the possibility of providing a Tourist bus on a trial basis.
26. Work with OMBC to investigate the feasibility of a Community Toilet Scheme.
27. Progress a survey of all the public rights of way in the area and work with OMBC to produce a plan for their renovation and maintenance.
28. Produce a large scale map of Saddleworth showing public footpaths, bridleways and tourist facilities for which grant funding is presently being sought.

6. LEISURE ACTIVITIES

"Churchill playing fields is a facility going to waste"

Respondents to the questionnaire felt that traditional indoor and outdoor sports/leisure activities enjoyed by the resident population were under resourced. Almost half were in favour of more indoor/outdoor facilities being provided; 63% wanted these provided centrally in Saddleworth. The main sports field venue, Churchill Playing Fields, is poorly drained and in a very poor condition, often resulting in the cancellation of events. Support for the suggestion that the Parish Council should contribute to the cost of effective drainage by increasing the precept by £10 per year for five years was significant at 44%, but not overwhelming. Many felt this should not be the role of the Parish Council. As this is an important part of the sporting facilities in Saddleworth though, action is clearly needed.

There is a shortage of other informal recreational areas in the villages with a marked need for open green spaces like Chapel Garden in Delph. The quality of many of these is low. The recent improvement plan for Diggle Tip by the Diggle 21st Action Group and the proposals for the renovation of Chapel Garden are good examples of communities working together to improve these.

Leisure pursuits not related to sporting activity occupy a broad spectrum in Saddleworth and the Voluntary Weekend sponsored by the Parish Council in 2008 allowed them to be presented to a large audience. Many groups showcased a large range of activities and used the event to good advantage to increase membership.

Many respondents to the questionnaire offered to help with community work and projects.

Availability of community meeting facilities vary, with most villages having at least one local venue for holding events. Denshaw Village Hall is a good example of recent community action to provide a much needed local facility. The Millgate Arts Centre in Delph and Springhead Community Centre are other examples where villagers have worked with OMBC to take over the running of Council buildings for community use.



Voluntary Action Showcase - a recent Parish Council event to promote local Clubs and Societies



The Pennine Way at Stanedge