

DRAFT BLAXHALL PARISH PLAN

Prepared by Blaxhall villagers with the support of **Suffolk ACRE** and



For review and comment by Blaxhall Villagers and the Parish Council

VOTE NOW - Do you support the Action proposals ?

VOLUNTEER - Do you wish to volunteer to progress a particular action item in company with other volunteers?

PLEASE DETACH AND FILL IN THE FINAL PAGE

BLAXHALL - A vibrant Rural Community in Suffolk

Blaxhall is a secluded Suffolk village rurally located approximately 9 miles Northeast of Woodbridge and 6 miles West of the coastal town of Aldeburgh along the Alde River. Blaxhall's population of some 230 people has lost its shops and post office but retained a public house (locally famous for generations of Suffolk folk music), a C of E Church (which has worked to interact with other local denominations), a small village hall and a recently modernised and expanded Youth Hostel. Blaxhall also has an international Language School, an international motorcycle scramble circuit and is within 1 mile of the internationally renowned Snape Maltings concert hall. The only routes into Blaxhall are along single-track roads (part of the National Cycle Network) or by foot (or horse) across the SSSI designated Blaxhall Heath and Tunstall Forest (including along the Suffolk Coastal Path). The 123 homes in Blaxhall are widely dispersed around two main residential groupings, Mill Common and Stone Common, situated about 1 miles apart. Blaxhall community includes farming, an agricultural contracting business plus many current day, non-agricultural, skills and professions and has a lively, communicative spirit.

What is the Blaxhall Parish Plan?

A local consensus, in a single document, on how the quality of life in Blaxhall might be maintained or improved in the future. The result of opportunities everyone in Blaxhall had to express their views on social, economic, environmental and any other aspects of life in the Parish.

How will the Parish Plan be used?

Parish, District and County Councils will use it as guidance on local views.

Government and other agencies (such as the Lottery Fund) which provide funds for Parish projects may require applicants to provide this Parish Plan as evidence of local support for such projects.

Strong local support for the Parish Plan makes it stronger guidance.

What are the benefits of a Parish Plan?

It provides a snapshot of local views on Blaxhall's amenities, services and housing.

It provides a clear statement on What, Why, How and When in response to the local consensus for specific improvement projects.

It will support Blaxhall's funding application for the Village Hall refurbishment there is strong local support (as evidenced in a village hall survey) for improving the facilities in the Village Hall whilst maintaining the character of the existing building.

It has provided Blaxhall the immediate benefit of a Countryside Agency grant (in excess of £3500) to purchase a photocopier, computer, display boards and other equipment needed to prepare a Parish Plan (this equipment will be donated to the Parish Council upon completion of the Parish Plan).

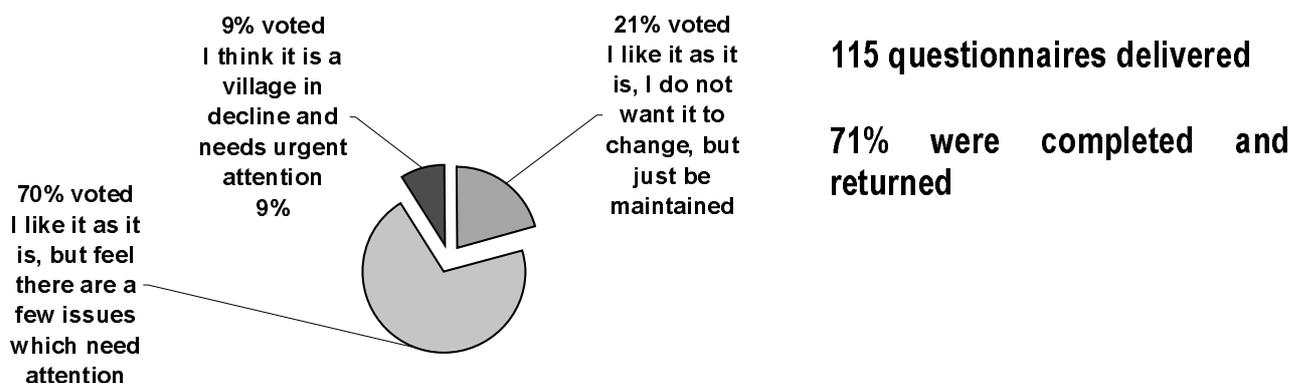
How was the Parish Plan Achieved?

Members of the Parish Council invited all Blaxhall residents to a meeting on 29th January to discuss the potential for a Blaxhall Parish Plan. Annette Gray, the Rural Services Officer from Suffolk ACRE, gave a presentation on the scope and benefits of the Parish Plan concept. There was more than 75% support, by a show of hands, for going ahead with a broad review of social, economic and environmental conditions within Blaxhall Parish leading to adoption of a Parish Plan.

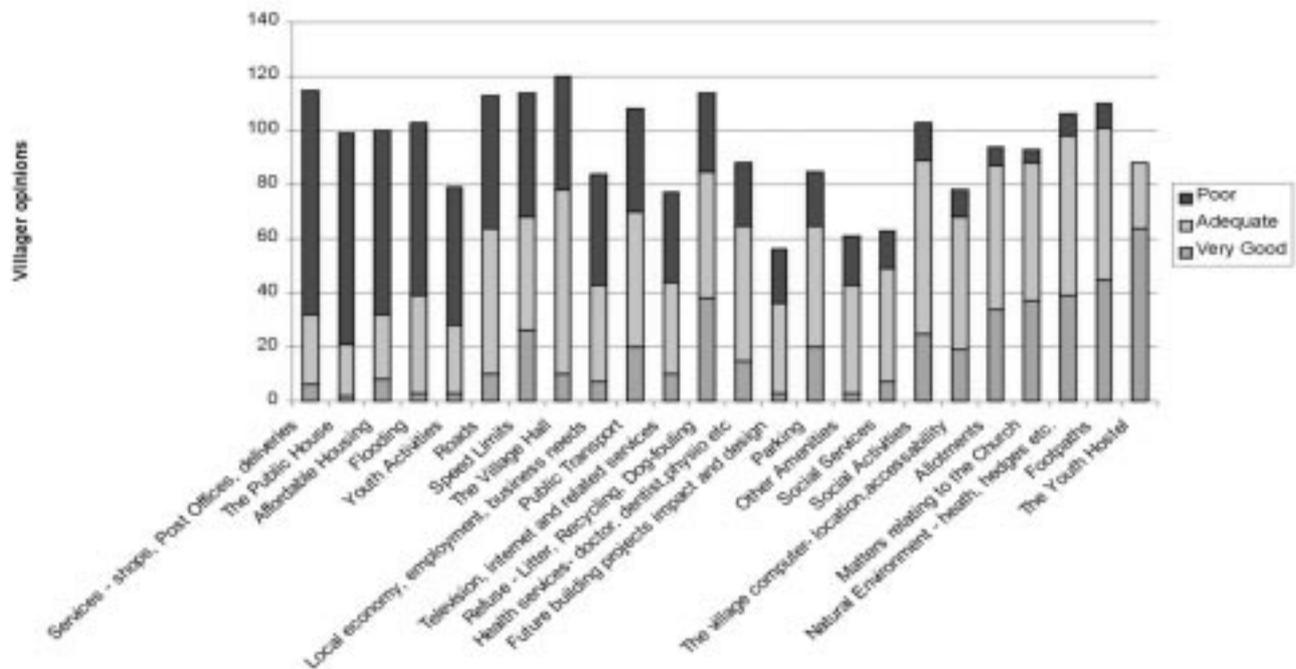
A Steering Group, comprising one Parish councillor (Steve Smedley) and 6 other residents (Jonathan Cutting, Maggie Grenham, Jackie Oliver, Bob Mackenzie, Tony Salisbury and Joy Shaw), was set up at the meeting and assisted by the Parish Clerk, Joyce Iszard. The Steering Group adopted the objectives of **(i) To work with all Blaxhall villagers to identify views on potential improvements in village amenities and environment; and (ii) To attempt to obtain consensus on these views, and identify improvement projects, in the form of a Parish Plan by November 2003.** A variety of opportunities were provided to the villagers including a door to door survey in May 2003, and an exhibition on the Parish Plan in August 2003.

The results of the survey, together with views expressed in the January 2003 village meeting, the 2002 village hall survey and **[supported by X% approval of a draft of this document and action plan]** was the foundation for a local consensus to focus attention on those areas requiring immediate action.

May 2003 Pilot Survey for Parish Plan



Results of the Spring 2003 Blaxhall Parish Survey



" Blaxhall is a very happy and friendly village with a great many organised activities going on. Many people love it as it is so please do not try to change it except in a few ways as long as you keep the old-fashioned rural feeling that is still here "

" Very happy with Blaxhall "

" Blaxhall is a lovely village with just a few problems that local residents can probably solve. High contentment factor amongst local residents. Good community spirit - need more social/meeting opportunities"

" Care must be taken to maintain Blaxhall's unique peace and charm "

The Good

Blaxhall villagers saw certain aspects as good or very good: -

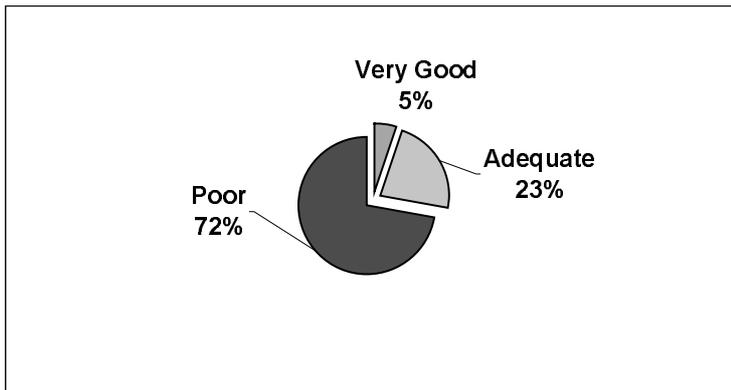
Youth Hostel	100% very good or adequate	" Youth Hostel could have shop for basics, ie., milk, bread, cigarettes, papers? Probably not feasible. "
Footpaths	92%	" Footpaths - lack of reinstatement after crop planting. Missing signs. "
Environment	93%	" Keep the busibodies off the heath let people enjoy it. "
The Church	95%	" The church is very much alive but we need to try to get more children and young people. "
Allotments	92%	" Stone Common needs sorting. "

[The above items need action pointing to how they may be preserved and further improved. This action would be recorded in the adopted policy for each issue.]

The Poor

Villagers felt some aspects of Blaxhall were poor and required action: -

Missing Services – shops, Post Office, deliveries



" Shop needed "

" A village shop is a must. It would be excellent as a general store and meeting place. "

"A question of economics"

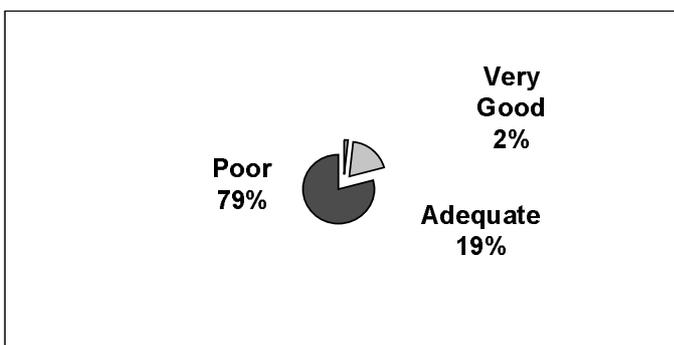
Blaxhall lost its Post Office in the late 90's. The nearest PO and a general store are some 1.5 miles away in Snape.

ACTION

[A volunteer group of villagers] is to survey Blaxhall and surrounding areas to determine if the strongly expressed need for a shop would be met in practice by volunteers to staff the shop and customers to create an ongoing commercially viable enterprise.

[A volunteer group of villagers] is to investigate local Internet delivery services and how best these could be accessed by locals (or by others on behalf of locals without computer familiarity)

The Village's sole pub needs a boost



" This is a private business so policy is up to the landlord (but if he would be more inclusive, it might be jollier for the village)."

" It's a pity the pub is not more welcoming "

" Pub should encourage local people, a la carte & also good value food. People would eat out regularly if prices reasonable, etc. "

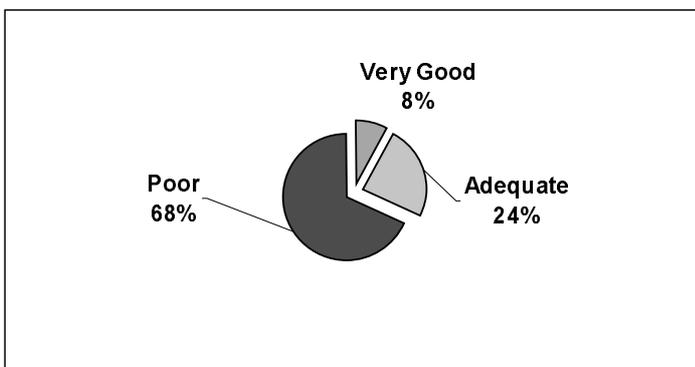
Blaxhall's pub has hosted generations of local folk music. More recently the pub's management has restricted opening hours. Also planning applications have been lodged which contained an attempt to impose a change of use from a public house to tourist accommodation for a significant portion of the current social area within the pub. The voting response and comments from Blaxhall villagers, collected as part of the Parish Plan process, are in the hands of the Suffolk Coastal District planners for their use in consideration of these applications. Blaxhall villagers' consensus, given at an extraordinary meeting of the Parish Council, was to oppose these changes. The Parish Council together with many villagers has formally objected to the change of use.

ACTION

The owners of the Pub should be encouraged by [a representative group of villagers] to welcome locals.

As this is the sole pub in the village, the views of the local authorities should be investigated by [the Parish Council] to ensure there could be no future change of use and that the pub physically remains adequate as a large social gathering point.

Affordable Housing is a concern



"Attention needed to ensure local families can stay in Blaxhall"

" 2nd home owners should pay full Council Tax or more "

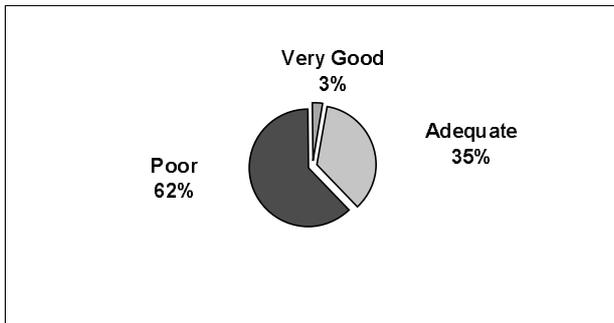
Blaxhall has some 123 houses of which [13%?] is "affordable" housing and [20%?] is holiday Lettings and weekend homes.

It should be noted that there was no local take-up of the new affordable housing in Jubilee Close. The views collected from villagers on Affordable Housing need further investigation to determine if they represent a real need or are just an expression of general concern.

ACTION

[The Parish Council is to consult with local housing associations to obtain guidance on methods to determine the true demand for further affordable housing in Blaxhall including potentially raising funds for a Housing Needs Survey.]

Remedy needed for Flooding of roads and property



" All roads need clearing after flooding "

" If any amount of rain all roads out or in, Blaxhall are flooded (not good) "

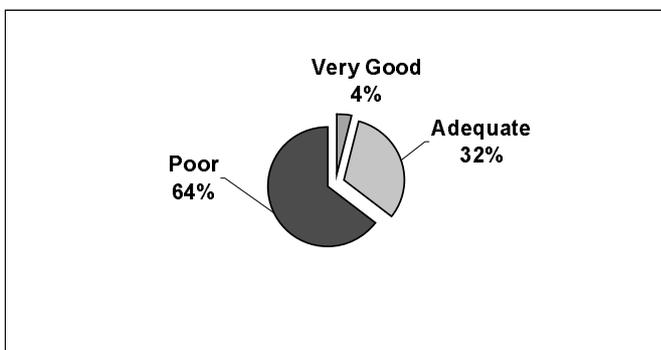
" Need urgent attention "

Many of the roads into and within Blaxhall suffer from flooding following heavy rainfall creating access difficulties particularly for pedestrians and cyclists. Flash flooding also caused damage within a number of Blaxhall houses this year.

ACTION

[The Parish Council] is to consult with local authorities and farmers to obtain a consensus on the causes of the flooding and proposals for remedial action.

Youth Activities need action



" Suggest a meeting for children (no parents) to discuss their needs"

" The best thing for young people is organised sport "

[Further action is required to encourage views from the younger section of Blaxhall's community on the adequacy of youth facilities in Blaxhall and, if found lacking, what would be their preferred options to remedy the situation].

[Statistics on Blaxhall's Youth].

ACTION

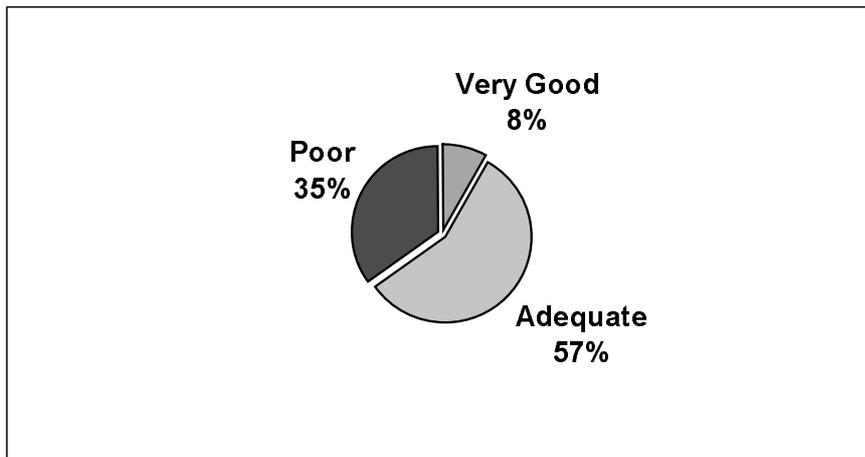
[A volunteer group of Blaxhall's young people] is to find out the views and preferences of Blaxhall's younger people on the situation and to investigate and progress improvements].

IMPROVEMENT NEEDED

Other Issues seen by Blaxhall villagers as needing improvement : -

Blaxhall Village Hall

Around 1911, the then Rector of Blaxhall, Reverend Ernest Bates, gave a piece of land of an area of "around nineteen poles" (approximately 575 square yards) between Church Road and Station Road for the erection of a Parish Room to be used for "purposes beneficial to the inhabitants of the Parish of Blaxhall". A Parish Room was duly erected, in the form of a timber-clad building with tiled roof. This unique character is one which local people are still keen to preserve.



" Toilets and kitchen are embarrassing "

" Loos and kitchen upgrade "

A questionnaire was distributed throughout the village in order to gain a snapshot of local opinion about the current state of Blaxhall Village Hall, its

current uses, its potential future uses, and attitudes to potential funding options.

The questionnaire was prepared by the Village Hall Management Committee in April 2002 and circulated over the following summer to 105 households in the village. Responses were received from 65 households (62%).

A village wide survey was undertaken in late 2002 requesting views on the potential future use of the Village Hall. The results of this survey support future projects to expand and renovate the village hall to enable additional activities.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents claimed to use the Village Hall. By far the main use for the hall appears to be as a venue for social gatherings. Art, line dancing and carpet bowls are popular activities, and the hire of the hall for private functions is also significant. There are also many other diverse, low-key uses.

Two out of five people are deterred from using the village hall in its current state, with the condition of the kitchen, toilets and floor being specifically mentioned by a number of respondents.

After improvements, it is clear that the village hall would retain its importance as a meeting place for the village and as a venue for a wide range of village events. Art, dancing and carpet bowls would still be significant activities. There is, however, a very diverse range of other activities for which the village hall could be used in the future, and for which there may be local support. The most popular future activities identified by the respondents were craft/hobby workshops and evening classes, while meetings, sales and dances will continue to be important for the local

community. An IT facility could be installed in the Hall bringing together the Village's existing computing equipment into one secure and accessible location.

Surprisingly, activities specifically aimed at children (youth club, toddler group, mother and toddler group) did not attract much support.

There appears to be a lot of local interest in the activities of keep fit, yoga and tai chi. Currently, it would appear that the condition of the hall floor prevents these activities from taking place now. Providing suitable flooring for these activities would appear to be a priority.

ACTION – The Village Hall Management Committee to continue its work to raise funds for improvements (existence of a Parish Plan will help with fund raising).

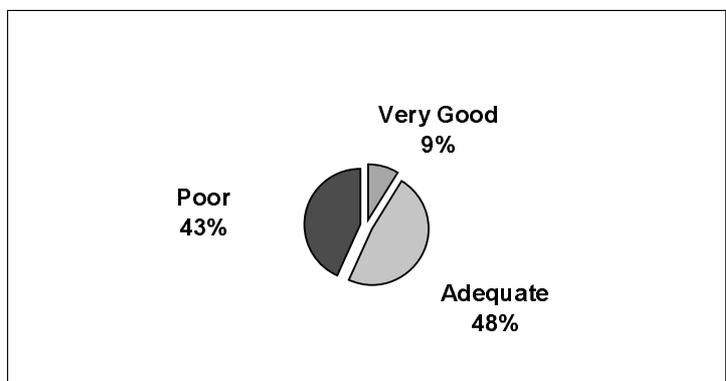
ROADS

" All roads need clearing after flooding "

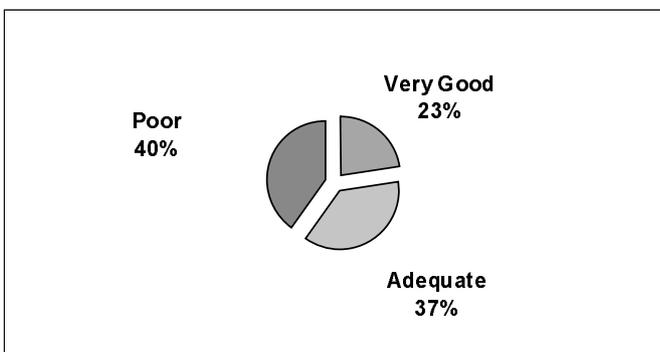
" Lorries and tractors are taking too many banks down, instead of pulling into drive way and waiting for passing vehicle. "

ACTION

Parish Council to continue its work in lobbying relevant organisations to take remedial action.



SPEED LIMITS



" Not enforced "

" Enforcement + extension of speed limits before further accidents "

ACTION

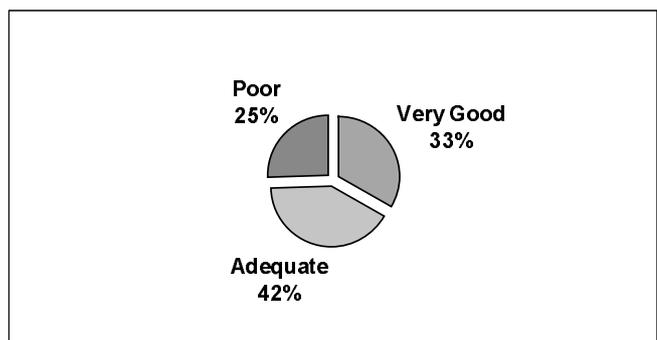
[Parish Council and volunteers group] to obtain views on what improvements are practical and achievable

LITTER AND DOG FOULING

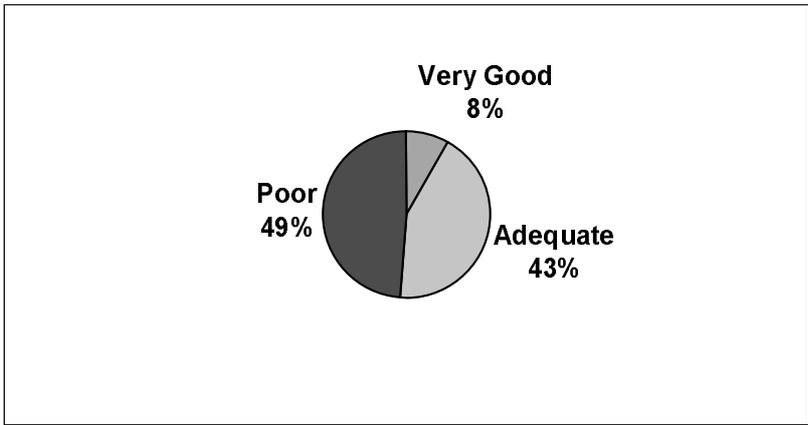
" Litter, Dog fouling - DREADFUL!! The amount of rubbish left around is distressing & the dog fouling is appalling. "

ACTION - More social responsibility.

Also more people take the example of those who pick up after the irresponsible drop-it.



Local Economy, Employment, Business Needs



" How can we encourage businesses "

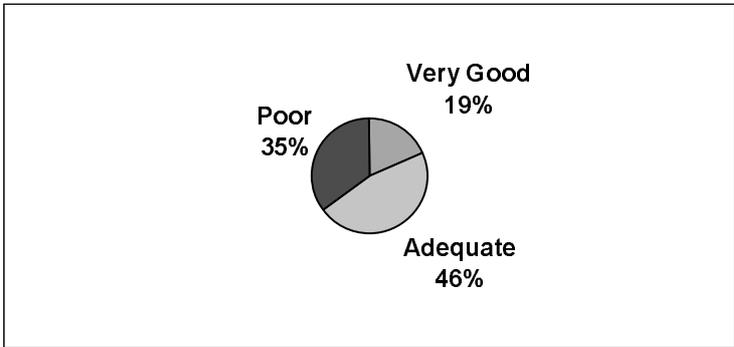
" Farm buildings as business units? "

ACTION - [Volunteer group] to work with local businesses to obtain views on what improvements are practical and achievable

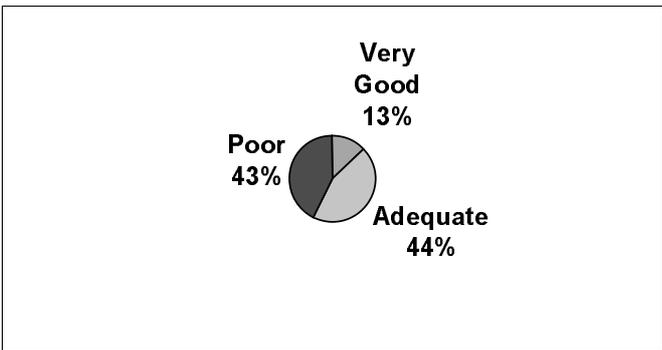
PUBLIC TRANSPORT

" Transport has declined (public) "

ACTION – Parish Council to repair bus shelter and to continue its work in lobbying relevant organisations to take remedial action (special thanks to Maureen Adie)



TV, INTERNET



" No channel 5 access "

" TV, etc., broadband connection needs attention "

At present the only route to Channel Five in the village is via Sky satellite –you will need to pay

for installing the Sky equipment which provides a link to 8 BBC digital channels and Channel 5 (Telephone 08700 100 123 or contact www.bbc.co.uk/digital).

ACTION – [Volunteer group] to lobbying relevant organisations to take remedial action.

ADEQUATE ISSUES

The following Issues were seen by Blaxhall Villagers as not requiring remedial action: -

Health Services	74% very good or adequate
Building Design	64%
Parking	77%
Other Amenities	71%
Social Services	78%
Social Activities	86%
Access to Village Computer	87%

ACTION - *The Parish Plan results would require regular new surveys by [the volunteer Steering Group] to ensure the current level of adequacy is being maintained.*