

## B. Our Parish

We have set out here information about Much Birch.

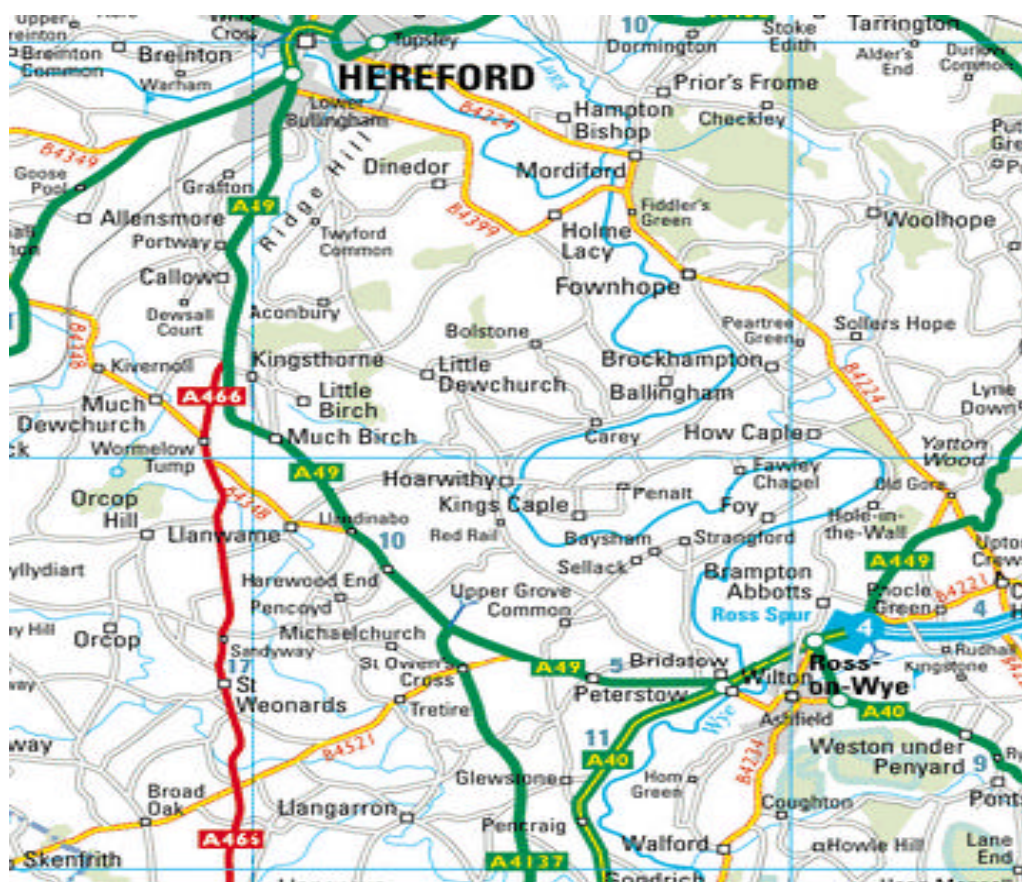
### Location

The Parish of Much Birch in Herefordshire is located midway between Hereford and Ross-on-Wye (see Map 1). It extends for about 1.5 miles along the A49, a busy trunk road running from the border with South Wales to North West England.

The parish of Much Birch comprises the settlements of Kingsthorpe, Much Birch and parts of Wormelow. The remainder of the village green is located next to the old school at the junction of Tump Lane, the A49 and Kingsthorpe Road. The horse chestnut trees growing there now replace two magnificent trees that were felled for road improvements.

There are magnificent views from the high ground of the parish looking out over Herefordshire and across to the Welsh mountains, the Forest of Dean and the Malvern Hills.

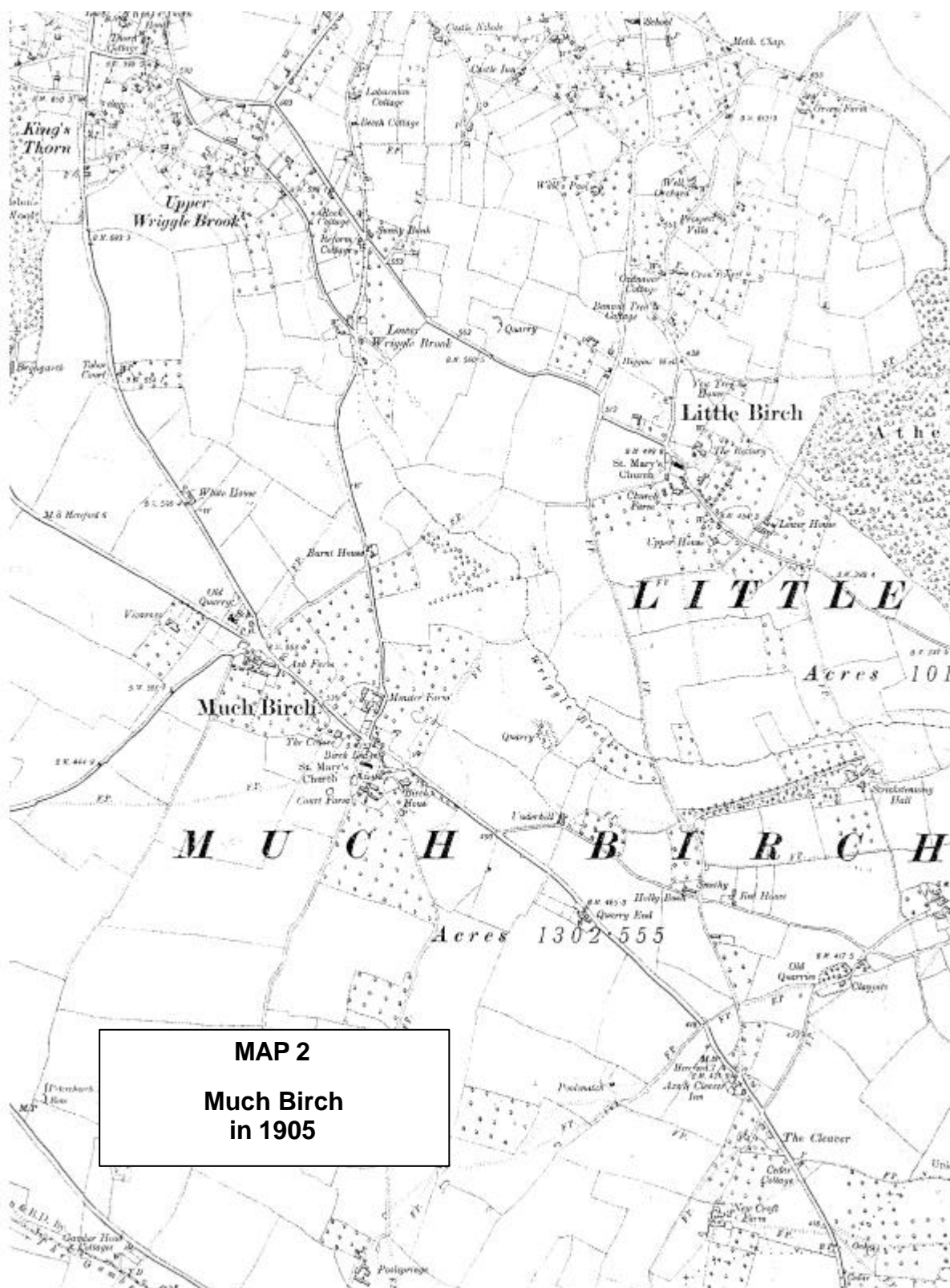
MAP 1



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## Much Birch from the air





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## **Population and Employment**

The parish had a population of 833 at the time of the 2001 population census and covers an area of 527 hectares. Its population density of 1.58 persons per hectare is roughly double the county average.

The age structure of the population is similar to the age structure of Herefordshire's population, although there is a smaller proportion of people in the 25 – 29 age group in Much Birch and a higher proportion of people in the 65 – 84 age group.

There are 353 households in the parish. 82% of households are owner occupiers, compared with 71% in Herefordshire. Only 10% of households did not have the use of a car or van compared with 18% in Herefordshire.

At the time of the census, only 1.7% of people aged 16 – 74 years were unemployed, compared with 2.7% in Herefordshire. 23.3% of the people in these age groups were retired, compared with 16.1% in Herefordshire.

Of the 358 people in the parish who were in employment in 2001, a large proportion worked in the professions and many ran small businesses from home. The proportion of people who work mainly at or from home was 23%, compared with 15% in Herefordshire.

People working from home have become more numerous in recent years and include people working in architecture, legal services and sales. There are at least 10 building contractors living and working from the parish.

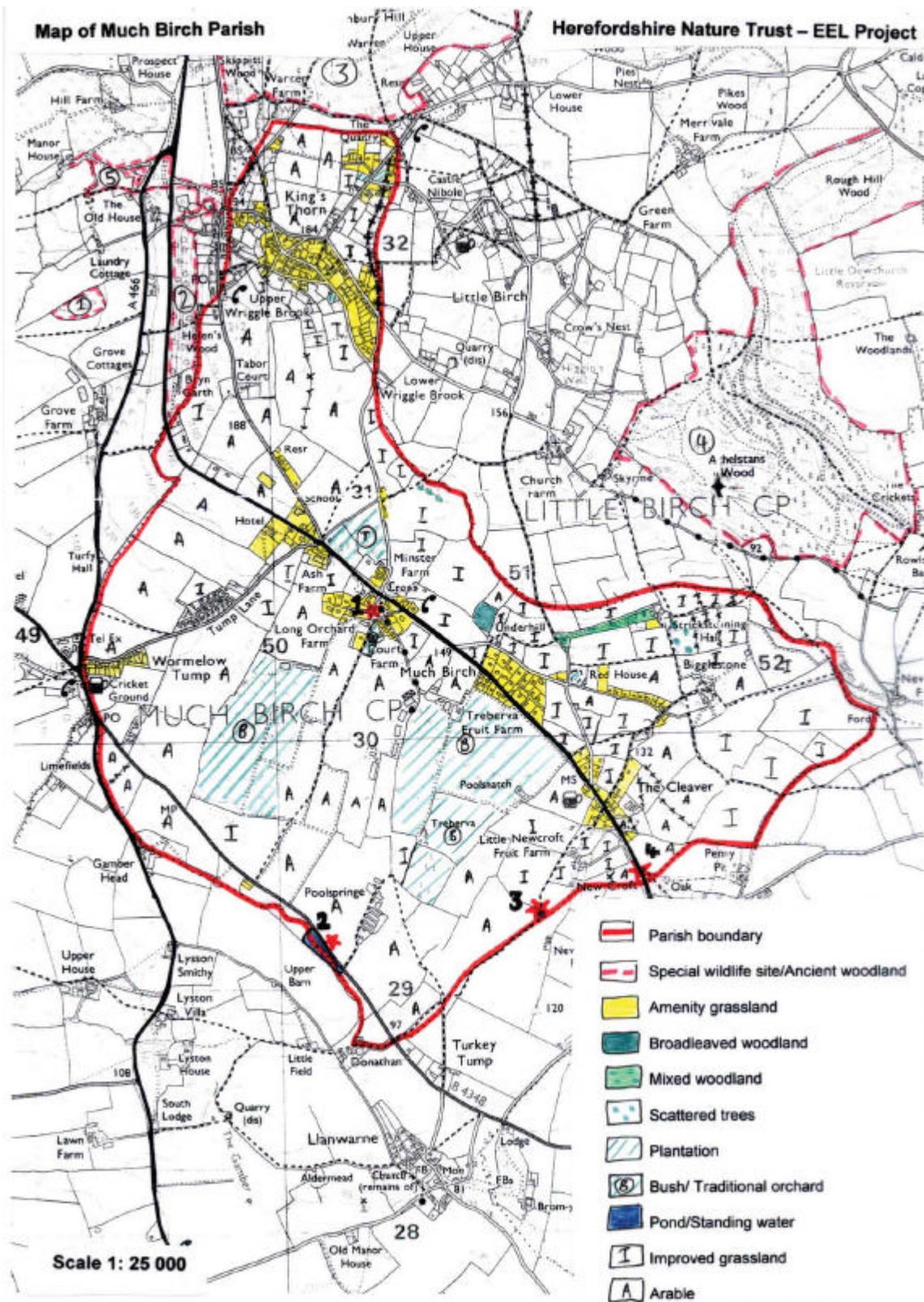
Tourists are catered for at the Pilgrim Hotel. Several houses offer bed and breakfast accommodation.

## **The Natural Landscape, Agriculture and Wildlife**

The parish consists of attractive hilly farmland with well hedged fields and a variety of semi-natural woodlands, plantations and traditionally managed orchards. A wooded ridge forms a backdrop to the parish to the east and provides extensive views across to the Forest of Dean and the Welsh Mountains as the land falls away to the west of the parish.

The farmland is used for arable crops and improved grassland pasture. The boundaries of the parish and the pattern of land uses are shown on Map 3 which has been produced for the Parish Plan by the Herefordshire Nature Trust.

The soils in the Parish are mainly fertile sandy loams (Grade 2), suitable for a wide variety of horticultural and agricultural crops. Horticultural crops include strawberries and raspberries grown under polythene tunnels, black currants, eating apples and vegetable crops, including PYO.



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Farms are mixed, with crops and livestock, mainly cereals, sugar beet, beef and sheep. Broiler chickens are major enterprises on three farms.

In the last 30 years economic forces have led to a reduction in grass land, beef cattle and sheep, and an increase in arable crops.

Within the parish there are as yet no designated Nature Reserves (NR), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Commons, Ancient Woodland (ANW) or Special Wildlife Sites (SWS). However, a Phase 1 Habitat Survey of the area, carried out in 2000 by the Herefordshire Nature Trust as part of the Herefordshire Millenium Map Project identified the following areas of potential value to wildlife:

1. Much Birch churchyard (SO 504 305)
2. Gamber Pond (SO 502 292)
3. Pond at New Croft Farm (SO 510 293)
4. Species rich roadside verge (SO 514 295)

See Map 3.

There are some existing sites of wildlife interest adjacent to the parish boundary or within a distance of 1km from it:

No.	Name of site	Category	Details
1	Manor Wood SO 492 318	ANW	Area of ancient semi-natural woodland.
2	Helens Wood SO 497 316	SWS	Oak dominated woodland with dormouse recorded.
3	Woodlands on Aconbury Hill SO 505 330	SWS, ANW	Ash dominated ancient woodland with species-rich ground flora, some conifer plantations.
4	Athelstan's and Rough Hill Woods and The Crickets SO 524 322	SWS, ANW	Oak dominated ancient woodland, some hazel coppice, some conifer plantations.
5	Kingsthorpe Common SO 495 321	Common	Land comprised of semi-improved neutral grassland and broadleaved woodland.

In addition, there is a fine example of a traditional English pond just outside the parish at Penny Pit farm.

## ***Housing***

Until the 1940's most of the housing in the parish consisted of farms, small holdings and cottages.

In the early 1950's the council houses and flats were built in Tump Lane. Bungalows and new houses were built, especially in the Wrigglebrook valley in the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's, and in the 1990's most of the new houses were of the "executive type". In Tump Lane homes have been built to provide low rent accommodation for local people.

## **Services**

### ***Public Transport***

Car ownership levels in the parish are high and most people rely on their own transport arrangements. There is an hourly bus service between Hereford, Ross-on-Wye and Gloucester along the A49 and via Kingsthorne. Buses also run between Hereford and Monmouth via Wormelow eight times a day and from Wormelow to Hereford on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. There are less frequent services connecting Much Birch to adjacent villages.

People gain access to the national bus network in Hereford. There is a service to London three times daily.

One taxi service operates from Kingsthorne. Local people also use the taxi services based in Hereford.

Local people access national rail services from Hereford. 20 trains run daily to Cardiff, 14 to Birmingham and 4 to both London and Bristol.

Community Transport schemes operate in Herefordshire for people who cannot access the public transport network or are unable to use conventional buses. The schemes covering Much Birch Parish are operated by Hereford Dial-a-Ride, Dore Community Transport, and Ross-on-Wye WRVS County Cars. The Ross Action Committee takes elderly people from the parish for recreational drives in its ambulance between March and December each year.

### ***Shopping and Post Office Services***

Shopping and post office services are provided at the village shop in Wormelow where a wide range of goods is available. In 2003 a second shop and post office at Kingsthorne ceased trading. At one time the parish had a cobbler, butcher, a bakery and a sweet shop.

### ***The Garage***

Wormelow Garage sells fuel and vehicles, as well as carrying out vehicle repairs and MOTs. There is also a car sales outlet on the A49 at Much Birch garage.

### ***The Hotel and Public Houses***

The two public houses – The Axe and Cleaver on the A49 at the southern end of the parish and The Tump Inn at Wormelow - together with the Pilgrim Hotel on the A49 at the northern end of the parish, provide drinking and dining facilities. The Axe and Cleaver was built in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The name refers to the Harewood foresters who used the pub and the butcher who first lived there. The Tump Inn was built in 1780. Its name relates to the “Tump”, the area where the court met.

Tourists are catered for at The Pilgrim Hotel and by several houses offering bed and breakfast accommodation.

### ***The Pilgrim Hotel***



### ***The Axe and Cleaver, circa 1900***





### ***The Church***

The village church, dedicated to St Mary and St Thomas a Becket is in the Wormelow Hundred Group of seven Parishes. The church is located at the centre of the parish in a prominent position on the A49, its tower visible from most parts of the parish. The recently restored church clock was installed in 1921 as a parish war memorial and is a fine time piece. The church forms part of a grouping of community buildings with the Much Birch Surgery and the Community Hall. The church is well attended, providing weekly services for an Anglican congregation and conducting weddings and funerals.

The Old Rectory was built in 1880 but was sold by the Diocese in the 1970's when the house needed extensive repairs and the proximity of the A49 after straightening was making the house unsafe for children. The Old Rectory is now the Pilgrim Hotel. The replacement rectory from the 1970's was built next to the Community Hall but is now leased out by the Diocese as the present Priest-in-Charge resides at The Rectory, Birch Lodge.



### ***Birch Methodist Church***

The Chapel which has services every Sunday morning is at the top of Barrack Hill in Aconbury/Little Birch Parishes.

### ***Poor Clare Monastery***

Services in the Chapel of Our Lady of the Angels are open to the public. The monastery is located on the Much Birch to Kingsthorpe Road and is the home of an active Order of Catholic Nuns.

### ***The School***

Much Birch School caters for 5 to 11 year olds. Currently there are 193 pupils, with a head teacher, 10 other members of staff, 7 ancillary staff and the administrator.

A specially designed log cabin, The Cabin Crew, opened in the school playground in September 2003. It is used for a Breakfast Club between 8.15 – 9.00am and an After School Club between 3.15 – 5.15pm. It also accommodates a nursery class for up to fourteen 4 year olds. In the holidays and half terms a Play Scheme is run for 4 to 8 year olds.

Children of secondary school age travel out of the parish to schools in Hereford, Ross-on-Wye and Monmouth. The Hereford Waldorf School is located in Much Dewchurch and a number of children from the parish attend.



### ***The Surgery***

The surgery, located opposite the church, serves an area within a 7 mile radius of Much Birch. It is a long-established rural dispersing and training practice with four General Practitioners, two Nurses, a team of Administration, Reception and Dispensing Staff, and a Practice Manager.

The Practice provides morning, afternoon and early evening surgery sessions each weekday, and an emergency surgery on Saturday mornings. The Practice also offers a wide range of clinics.



### ***Meeting Halls***

Much Birch Community Hall was completed in 1979 for the use of the whole community in the parish. It is owned by the Parochial Church Council of Much Birch who are also the trustees of the building. It is used for church meetings and activities, and by a variety of groups for a wide range of activities including Guides, Brownies, Yoga, Line Dancing, a Lift Programme, a Bridge Club, Women's Institute meetings and IT courses. One of the rooms is used for a resource centre where printing and copying facilities are available for use by community organisations and the church. The Community Hall can also be hired for private functions.



The Community Hall

Little Birch Village Hall was opened in 1951 as a World War 2 memorial. The hall was built on land donated by David Dyke of Castle Nibole and the cost of £2,000 was raised by the public subscription. Little Birch Parish Council are the trustees of the hall and in 1977 they refurbished the building to celebrate the Jubilee.

Kingsthorne Memorial Hall (previously known as Much Birch Little Hall) was built as a World War 1 memorial on land made available by Cecil Manning. The hall was originally used for all village communal activities, but after Little Birch Hall was built it was used only by the Scouts and the rifle club. There is an obsolete rifle range at the rear of the building.

### ***Library Services***

A Mobile Library visits the parish once a month, on the second Friday of the month. It stops at fifteen points in the parish.

### ***The Museum***

The Violette Szabo Museum was established by Miss Rosemary Rigby MBE to commemorate the life and work of Violette Szabo, the resistance hero. The museum is located in a building adjacent to “Cartref”, the house formerly owned by Violette Szabo’s aunt. Violette Szabo stayed at “Cartref” for respite visits during the war.



### ***Playground***

There is a children’s play area at Tump Lane with equipment for children aged between 1 – 14 years.

### ***Public Open Spaces***

Much Birch has the only Millenium Green in South Herefordshire – the 3.5 acre (1.4 hectares) field at Wormelow next to Cartref House and the Violette Szabo Museum. The Green was donated by Rosemary Rigby MBE and designated in 2000 as part of the Government scheme to create 250 Millenium Greens across the country. It is available as an “open breathing space” for the whole community. The chestnut tree in the centre of the field is protected by a Tree Preservation Order.

### ***Private Sports Fields***

The Wormelow Cricket Club has its field and pavilion in the centre of Wormelow next to the garage.



### ***South Herefordshire Hunt Kennels***

The South Herefordshire Hunt has had its kennels on the same site in Wormelow since it was formed in 1860 following the split of Herefordshire Hunt into the North Herefordshire and South Herefordshire Hunts.

The Hunt owned a large area of land in Wormelow and made available the sports field that is now used by the Wormelow Cricket Club.

The kennels are home to 34 couples of hounds and have been completely refurbished in the last two and a half years. The kennels hold a licence for receiving and processing farmers' fallen stock.

### ***Sources of Information***

There are parish notice boards on the village green at Much Birch, alongside the Community Hall and at Wormelow Stores.

The King's Thorn and The Birches Newsletter and the "Parishes of the Wormelow Hundred" magazine are produced monthly.

### ***Clubs and Activities in Much Birch***

#### ***For Adults:***

##### ***The Evergreen Club***

A club for the Senior Citizens who go on coach trips to places of interest monthly from April to October.

##### ***The Birches Forum***

Meets monthly in Little Birch Hall and has speakers on a wide variety of subjects of general and topical interest.

##### ***The Kingsthorpe and Little Birch Gardening Club***

The Club holds monthly meetings with speakers on gardening topics and runs an Annual Open Horticultural Show in September. Meetings are held at Little Birch Hall.

##### ***The Halfway Community Theatre***

A Musical and Drama group. The main activity in the last three years has been running a well supported concert several times a year in Much Birch Community Hall.

### *Much Birch Womens Institute*

There is a long standing and active W.I. Branch which meets on a monthly basis at Much Birch Community Hall.

### *The Wormelow Cricket Club*

The Club was formed in 1965. The excellent Club Pavilion built in 1988 was opened by Fred Truman. The club is in the First Division of the Flint Cook Marches League. Over 60 under 15's from all over South Herefordshire and the City turn out for practice each week in the Summer.

### *The Birches Bridge Club*

This active club meets twice a week in the Much Birch Community Hall.

### *LIFT run by Halo*

These exercise classes are run once a week in Much Birch Community Hall for patients referred by Doctors.

### *Country and Western Line Dancing Group*

Weekly sessions in Much Birch Community Hall

### *Yoga Group*

Meet once a week in Much Birch Community Hall

### *Pop In*

Fortnightly afternoon meetings and social gatherings for men and women of all ages living mainly in Much Birch and Much Dewchurch. Meetings are held in the Much Dewchurch Village Hall.

### *Much Birch Flower Club*

This club, founded in 1972 by the late Mrs Billy Pedley, MBE, has been extremely active for many years but closed in June 2004 due to a fall in membership and the high cost of speakers and flowers.

### ***For Children:***

#### *Mothers and Toddlers Group*

Meets twice a week in the Much Birch Community Hall for mothers with babies and children aged up to four years.

### *Much Birch Brownies and Guides*

Well supported Packs that each meet once a week in term time in the Much Birch Community Hall.

### *The Cubs*

The Pack meets at Little Birch Hall

### *The Scouts*

Meetings are held at the Kingsthorne Memorial Hall.

### *Activities in Much Birch Church*

Activities for young families include a regular Children's Workshop for the 5 – 11 year olds, PUFF which meets once a month in the Church for the under 5's and their parents, and a bi-monthly meeting for 11 – 16 year olds called The Banana Bunch. There is also an Ecumenical Bible Study Group in the parish which meets once a week.

## **Utilities**

### ***Roads, pavements and public rights of way***

The parish is divided by the main A49 trunk road where traffic speeds are high because only the national speed restrictions apply. The other significant roads through the parish are Tump Lane which has a 40 mph restriction and Kingsthorne Road which has a 40 mph restriction for about one third of its length. Elsewhere, most of the minor roads and narrow lanes which allow access around the parish have a 30mph limit.

There are several stretches of pavements in the parish: pavements run along one side of the A49 from Much Birch school to the former shop premises at Kingsthorne; from the A49 to the surgery car park; from the Tump Inn to Wormelow shop; and for about two thirds of the length of Tump Lane (although the middle stretch is missing). All the pavements are maintained by Herefordshire Council. Herefordshire Council pays an annual grant of £200 to the Parish Council for additional grass cutting and weeding.

The Public Rights of Way in the parish are shown in Map 4.

## MAP 4

### Public Rights of Way



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## ***Water***

The village water supply is provided by Welsh Water and comes from the River Wye. The mains water is good and the pipes have recently been replaced.

A borehole on a local farm supplies good quality water to 86 households in Little Birch and Kingsthorpe; some people in the parish use local wells.

## ***Electricity***

All properties in the parish are supplied from overhead lines, some of which are currently being improved. Power fluctuates regularly in some areas and each year there are a number of power cuts.

## ***Gas***

There is no gas supply to the parish.

## ***Drainage and Sewerage***

There are no plans to install mains drainage in the parish. Households have cess pits, septic tanks and bio-disc systems. Careful management of these systems is necessary to prevent pollution of water courses.

## ***Street Cleaning and Maintenance***

The Department of Transport is responsible for cleaning and maintenance along the A49. Herefordshire Council is responsible for maintaining and cleaning all other highways in the parish.

Other cleaning, maintenance and tidying is carried out by local residents on a voluntary basis.

## ***Refuse Collection and Recycling***

General household waste is collected by Herefordshire Council once a week.

There are no recycling bins in the parish and skips for public use are only available on an occasional basis.

## **Land Owned by the Parish Council and The Poor Acre**

The Parish Council owns two small areas of land. The first has been used for many years as part of the garden of Barrack View, a cottage near the bottom of Barrack Hill. The second is a small field (OS5129) of about two thirds of an acre at Rosebank near the top of Barrack Hill, which has been let for a number of years to the owner of Rosebank. The Parish Council is looking into the possibility of selling the land at Rosebank for residential development to finance the provision of low cost accommodation for local people on the land it owns at the rear of Barrack View.

In addition, the Parish Council appoints two Trustees, one of whom is the Rector, to administer the Joseph Cook Charity (The Much Birch Old Charities). The main asset of the charity is "The Poor Acre", a one acre field (OS322) on the north side of Holly Bush Lane.

The field has been rented for many years to Bigglestone Farm. The Charity income is to be given to "The Poor of the Parish". The land is on record as having been given to the Parish of Much Birch by an unknown benefactor in 1786.

## **Planning Policies affecting the Parish**

The planning policies affecting the parish are set out in the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan. The plan consists of Proposals Maps and a Written Statement.

The parish is not directly affected by any of the designations in the Proposals Maps. The villages of Much Dewchurch and Llanwarne just outside the parish are identified because Llanwarne contains a Conservation Area and Much Dewchurch is classified as a "Main Village" with a site allocated for housing. The Proposals Map also identifies Helen's Wood, just to the west of Kingsthorne, and Athlestans Wood in Little Birch Parish, as Special Wildlife Sites.

The Written Statement contains the policies that Herefordshire Council will use when determining planning applications in the parish and when giving people advice about development proposals or changes affecting the environment.

One of the most relevant policies for the parish is "H6: Housing in smaller settlements" because the plan defines both Much Birch and Kingsthorne as "smaller settlements". Within these settlements proposals for residential development on plots arising from the infilling of small gaps between existing dwellings will be permitted, subject to limits on the size of the dwelling, the plot and the infill gap. Development may be permitted on larger plots for affordable housing where a proven local need has been successfully demonstrated.

Elsewhere in the parish, outside these settlements, residential development is limited to accommodation which meets the needs of agriculture, forestry or farm diversification.

Other policies in the Written Statement relevant to the parish are essentially concerned with conserving and enhancing the rural and historic character of the area.