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# **STEVINGTON PARISH PLAN 2007**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Letter from the Chairman of Stevington Parish Council

April 2007

To the Residents of Stevington

A great deal of work has gone into producing this Parish Plan which will give the Parish Council an idea of how residents would like to see their community develop in the future. It has generated a welcome interest in local affairs and heightened an awareness of how much or little we are in control of our own community.

Parish Plans are sponsored by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) through the agency of the Bedfordshire Rural Affairs Forum. The project has been guided by the Bedfordshire Rural Community Charity (BRCC). I should like to thank them as well as the Parish Plan Steering Group and Working Group members who have given up their time to produce this Plan; they have worked to a very tight schedule to produce the Plan before the Parish Council elections and their hard work is very much appreciated.

I should also like to thank those Villagers who have taken the time and trouble to think about how they would like to see our Village progress; they have given their views both at the Planning for Real day last September and by completing the various questionnaires the results of which have formed the basis of the Parish Plan. A majority of Villagers have contributed their thoughts in one way or another and everyone has had an opportunity to have their say.

The Parish Council will consider the Action Plan carefully over the next few years and will try to implement the proposals wherever practicable, having regard to the interests of the whole community and to the financial implications. In doing so we will work with the relevant external bodies to deliver on the actions recommended. I would expect the immediate outcome to be an implementation plan

which assesses the various suggestions for action and prioritises them. Moreover, circumstances change and I have noted that it is proposed to update the Plan regularly.

The Parish Plan provides us all with a framework within which to improve our Village and the Council hopes that the enthusiasm which has been shown throughout the preparation of the Plan will be carried forward in the implementation of these aspirations where practicable and financially possible.

Finally, I would like to thank Peter Hart who has led this project and has put in many hours of hard work to see it through to completion.

**Doreen Pendlington**  
**Chairman**  
**Stevington Parish Council**

## 1.2 Letter from the Chairman of the Steering Group

To the Chairman of Stevington Parish Council

April 2007

Dear Chairman

I have pleasure in submitting the Stevington Parish Plan 2007.

Over three dozen Villagers served on the Steering Group and the Working Groups or assisted the project in other ways. I should like to thank them and Barbara Davies, our Secretary, for all their hard work. There is much valuable expertise on hand in the Village and we have benefited from many hours of unpaid consultancy. Moreover, it was because everyone pulled together so effectively that we have met our original target of producing the Plan by April 2007, i.e. in a little under one year.

The Plan is the outcome of an in-depth investigation of the state of the community and its future. It has provided a unique opportunity to discover how the residents of Stevington see the future of their community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Two questionnaires and a Planning for Real exercise have provided us with over 6,000 individual pieces of information to guide the Steering Group in formulating the Plan. There are no easy answers to the problems which confront rural communities, even relatively affluent ones, but we believe the suggestions contained in the Plan, which naturally vary in their importance and likely impact, are positive and realistic.

I must thank the Parish Council and DEFRA for their financial support which they provided in equal measure and without which the Project would not have been viable. Moreover, we could not have managed nearly so well had we not had the support of the Bedfordshire Rural Community Charity at all stages and, in particular, the guidance of Zoe Ashby.

Finally, I thank my fellow Villagers for their forbearance in answering one questionnaire after another. We have tried very hard to elicit their views as accurately as possible on a range of complicated issues and at the end of the day the Plan is their plan.

Yours sincerely

**Peter Hart**  
**Steering Group Chairman**

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

### 2.1 The Physical Parish

- 2.1.1 The civil parish of Stevington lies on the southern side of the valley of the Great Ouse River, between the river and the A428 trunk road to the south, and extends to some 1676 acres. There is evidence of iron-age and Romano-British activity in the Village but the first mention of Stevington by name is in the Domesday Book of 1086, by which time Stevington was a long-established settlement. William the Conqueror granted the manor to Eustace II, Count of Boulogne, and it extended into the parishes of Bromham and Pavenham.
- 2.1.2 The layout of the Village is cruciform, typical of an Anglo-Saxon village and has the characteristic “ends”: Duck End, Park End, West End and Church End. Picts Hill was another Village end, lost to Turvey parish through boundary reorganisation in 1946. The “ends”, which were really small hamlets, facilitated the working of the open fields where every male villager, free or unfree, worked a strip, or strips, of land in mediaeval times.
- 2.1.3 The aspect of the Village altered radically in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century with the gradual replacement of cottages of wooden frame structure with buildings made from local limestone. There are several disused quarries in the Parish. This development was a symptom of the expansion of the wool trade locally and increasing prosperity through the grain trade. The Barringer Trust almshouses were built in this period.
- 2.1.4 The next change in the face of the Village was the Enclosure Award of 1806 which replaced the open fields with the existing field system. Most quickset (blackthorn) hedges in the Village date from that period. One consequence was the need for farmhouses to be provided in the areas between the “ends” and the centre of the Village and the need was

supplied by the Duke of Bedford who by then was the largest landowner in the Village. The great Tithe Barn, the old Manor House and the Hospice were demolished in the 1870s.

- 2.1.5 The modern development of the Village is represented by Court Lane, Burridge’s Close, Farley Way and Foxbrook.
- 2.1.6 The Village has 43 listed buildings. Only St Mary’s Church is Grade 1. The Cross and the Windmill are Grade 2\*; all other listed buildings are Grade 2. The centre of the Village is a designated conservation area and the whole of the Village lies within a designated Area of Great Landscape Value. It also boasts a number of important nature reserves.

Comment [S1]: is text correct here?

### 2.2 The Social Parish

- 2.2.1 The population of Stevington numbers about 640 living in about 280 dwellings. 18 per cent of the inhabitants are aged under 18 and 20 per cent are retirement pensioners. Of the working population, most work in Bedford, Milton Keynes and Northampton, though a number commute daily to London. Some 50 Villagers work from home. Apart from some half a dozen farms a number of other businesses such as Warmingtons (estate agents), EMC Ltd (graphics) and the Manse Nursery operate in the Village. Robert Shaftoe has his organ-building business in the old Primitive Methodist Chapel.
- 2.2.2 The Village has two churches, St Mary’s and the Baptist Chapel, two pubs and a community shop. The Social Centre Management Committee operates the Village Hall and Playing Field which is owned by the Parish Council. Stevington is well-known for having an active social life and supports a good variety of sporting and other clubs as well as organisations such as the Women’s Institute and the Historical Trust. The five Almshouses are operated by the Barringer Trust.

### 3.0 THE PARISH PLAN PROJECT

#### 3.1 The Decision to Plan

- 3.1.1 In September 2005 the Parish Council decided in principle to sponsor the production of a Parish Plan and committed itself to the project in January 2006 when the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) made a grant of one half of the cost of producing a Plan. The Parish Council generously contributed the other half. The total budget was £1250. DEFRA subsequently made a top-up grant of £320.
- 3.1.2 The Plan objectives were set out in a letter from the Chairman of the Parish Council to all households in April 2006 and at the same time a more detailed Fact Sheet was made available in the Church Room.

#### 3.2 The Organisation

- 3.2.1 The first step was to constitute a Steering Group to guide the project. The Parish Council decided that it would provide the Chairman and Vice Chairman (with the Parish Council Chairman attending *ex officio*) but that all other members would be drawn from the community at large. Twelve Villagers volunteered initially and the Group held its first meeting in June 2006 (see Appendix I). At that meeting a scheme of work was drawn up. It was decided that the Project would be carried out in two stages, a Village Survey (Part A) followed by an Action Plan (Part B). The Survey would highlight the issues to be investigated by specialist working parties in Part B and would thus provide the basis for the Action Plan. The final Parish Plan would draw on both sections and the aim was to produce it by April 2007.

#### 3.3 The Key Events in the Project

- 3.3.1 The first thing the Steering Group did was to appoint a small working party to devise, distribute and analyse a brief

Questionnaire (the Short Questionnaire) to all parishioners aged over 11. This was delivered personally (so far as was possible) to each parishioner and collected personally at the end of June and early July. Over 300 completed questionnaires were collected (nearly 60% of residents aged over 11) providing nearly 2,000 detailed pieces of information. The analysis is set out at Appendix III.

- 3.3.2 The next step was to hold a Planning for Real day in the Village Hall. Planning for Real is a proprietary tool for assessing Village opinion in a quite dramatic fashion. The Bedfordshire Rural Community Charity provided us with large scale maps (1:1250) of the Village which we enlarged to 1:625. We decided that the centre of the Village needed further enlargement which we did to a scale of 1:315. The maps were the mounted on polystyrene and coloured by assistants from the Manse Summer School. The Planning for Real kit consists of a wide variety of flags with printed messages divided into eight categories such as Housing, Planning, Environment etc and then subdivided into smaller categories. These flags are mounted on cocktail sticks which, on the day, parishioners could stick into the maps to flag up their likes, dislikes and suggestions. There were also blank flags on which participants could create their own messages.
- 3.3.4 20 per cent of Village residents came through the door on Saturday 30 September 2006. The results were analysed and provide a further 540 pieces of information to add to those obtained through the Questionnaire. The analysis is at Appendix IV.
- 3.3.5 While all this was going on each member of the Steering Group was writing a background paper on a subject relevant to Village activity (see Appendix II). These can be consulted on the Parish Council website [www.stevington.org.uk](http://www.stevington.org.uk) or in the Church Room. Background Paper authors were invited to think the unthinkable and it was a fundamental principle that the papers had to be totally impartial and factually based.

3.3.6 On the basis of all the information collected in the way described above the Village Survey was compiled and published in January 2007. (It is also available on the Parish Council website and in the Church Room). This formed the basis for the final information gathering exercise, the Village Survey.

3.3.7 A Village Questionnaire was sent to all households asking respondents to score the 46 issues which the Steering Group identified from the Short Questionnaire and Planning for Real. The outcome is too lengthy to include here but can be read on the Parish Council website or in the Church Room. This, along with all the other data and an important Youth Focus Group, guided the six Working Groups which were set up in January 2007 to draft the Action Plan.

## 4.0 THE ANALYSIS

### 4.1 The Problem

4.1.1 Communities need to be sustainable. The word “sustainability” is used in many different ways today but we adopted the ordinary, everyday meaning i.e. the factors which will enable Stevington as a community to survive, adapt and regenerate.

4.1.2 The Steering Group took a general view of the state of the community and the elements which enable it to function as a community. In so doing it sought to identify the factors which make a community i.e. the things which people living in the community do in common such as team sport, public worship, education, Village events (such as revues, fetes and dances), informal encounters in public places such as the Church Room, and participation in clubs and other organisations such as the WI, the Barringer’s Trust, the Historical Trust as well as general neighbourliness. The Parish Council is the institution

of local governance and the Parochial Church Council is the ecclesiastical equivalent.

4.1.3 This exercise was considered to be especially important in view of an apparent mismatch revealed in the responses to the Short Questionnaire. Respondents praised the active social life of the Village but considered that there was an increasing loss of Village identity. The Steering Group considers this is attributable to a lessening of social cohesion in the Village resulting from a serious institutional decline. This has been accentuated by the changing pattern of modern life whereby much sporting and cultural activity takes place outside the Village.

### *The Plus Side*

4.1.4 In considering the results of the Short Survey the Steering Group noted that the aspects of the Village which respondents liked most were the pleasant environment of the Parish and its social life. The Village is also well placed geographically as it is close enough to access centres like Bedford, Milton Keynes and Northampton without being affected adversely by their urban environment and problems. If people like their environment it affects their family and social life beneficially. Perhaps that is one reason why the Village’s social life is regarded as exceptional. It is founded on a number of active clubs and institutions, the pubs, the churches and the Social Centre, as well as a number of informal “friendship” circles.

4.1.5 The Village has a good mix between “old “ and “new “ Village which these days seem to interact more or less successfully; likewise church and chapel and the two pubs.

4.1.6 The Village has reacted positively to some institutional loss, the most significant example being the Community Shop, founded within a year of the demise of the last commercial retail shop in the Village. While many respondents to the Short Questionnaire wanted a new commercial retail shop,

this was balanced by praise for the service provided by the Community Shop, so much so that some respondents wanted more of it.

- 4.1.7 There is a very healthy element of neighbourliness operating in the Village and there are numerous informal support systems which help people in short-term and long-term difficulty, whether through bereavement or ill health or some other reason.

### ***The Down Side***

- 4.1.8 The Village is not self-sufficient and probably ceased to be so after the First World War. There is little employment opportunity in the Village; there are perhaps about 20 full time jobs (of which a minority are occupied by Villagers). There has been a decline in the services available in the Village. The smithy closed in the late 1950s and the bakery closed in about 1970. One of the two shops operating post-War closed in 1972; the other in 1993, though this has been balanced by the successful Community Shop venture. The School closed in 1984 and students are now bussed to school in other villages. The Primitive Methodist Chapel closed in 1954 and the congregations at the Baptist Chapel and St Mary's are smaller than they were a few decades ago. Currently the Post Office is under serious threat following a review of rural sub-post offices.
- 4.1.9 Of the Clubs and institutions, the Tennis and Drama Clubs failed to revive after the Second World War, though in the last few years a Stevington Amateur Dramatic Society (SADS) has been formed. The Flower Show was a casualty of the 1960s. A Gardening Club revived briefly but was short-lived. In the last 20 years we have lost the Mother and Toddlers Group, the Cubs and the Brownies. In the late 1960s the Scouts and Guides amalgamated with troops based in Oakley. The Playgroup ceased to function in the early 1990s.
- 4.1.10 On the sporting front the Cricket Club has been inactive for some years and non-Villagers predominate in the football

team. On the other hand the more recently founded Carpet Bowls Club flourishes and a second football team has been founded.

- 4.1.11 The Village Feast failed to survive the development of Burridge's Close on Burridge's Field and the Summer Fete, traditionally held at the Playing Field, has long been in abeyance.
- 4.1.12 In term of connections to the outside world, the bus service is poor (and non-existent on Sundays) and the rail connection at Oakley and Turvey was lost in the mid 1960s.

## **4.2 What the Village Wants**

The Village Questionnaire invited the Village to prioritise the issues raised in the Short Questionnaire and the Planning For Real exercise. It is no easy task to summarise the diversity of opinion expressed but the following attempts to do so.

### ***The Environment***

- 4.2.1 Many respondents wanted to maintain the natural beauty of the Parish by protecting trees and ancient hedges and to enhance it with tree planting and the creation of more nature reserves. There was some support for the creation of nature trails. At the same time great concern was expressed about factors which spoil the environment, particularly general litter, fly-tipping and the creation of unsightly scrap dumps on agricultural land. The prevalence of dog mess on pavements and on footpaths in particular was a source of great indignation and the barking of dogs left at home during the day was seen as a problem in the centre of the Village. Generally it was felt that the Village needed to be tidied up.

### ***Conservation, Planning and Housing***

4.2.2 There was general support for greater vigilance in regard to control within the Conservation Area balanced by a need to ensure that listed buildings are not sterilised by over-restrictive control so as to make them up to modern living requirements. On the planning side there was huge support for maintaining the existing planning policies relating to the Village and in particular the Village Envelope and the Area of Great Landscape Value designation. The response on housing issues was more diverse and difficult to interpret. There was support for development to accommodate the elderly seeking to downsize and generally for the concept that those with a Village connection should have priority for any new housing. There was little enthusiasm for development for single people and for letting. The suggestion is to conduct a survey of housing need.

### **Highway and Transport**

4.2.3 Respondents voted heavily for an improved bus service and the restoration of a regular route to Bromham. Speeding through the Village is seen as a great hazard and most respondents favoured the introduction of a further speed-activated sign. Another major issue is the scourge of large goods vehicles encouraged into the Village by Satnav systems despite warning signs as to the unsuitability of the narrow roads. The most controversial issue was on-street parking, particularly in Silver Street but also in Church Road. It seems that the residents of Silver Street voted solidly against any remedial action and the rest of the Village *en masse* for some solution. Less controversial was the general wish for the infilling of gaps in the pavement system and for a proper management of the footpath network to permit proper

passage to and fro. The idea of street lighting was generally deplored.

### **Youth and Education**

4.2.4 There was much support for the idea of the Parish Council and the Social Centre cooperating to create events for the youth of the Village. There was also significant support for the creation of a permanent youth centre. However, the idea of establishing a youth Parish Council found little favour.

### **Sport and Leisure**

4.2.5 The most popular suggestion in this area was that the Parish Council and the Social Centre should together consider what additional facilities might be provided at the Playing Field. The other two well-supported ideas were the provision of an all-weather surface at the Playing Field and public access to the river.

### **Community and Governance**

4.2.6 Three main issues emerged. The first was the need for the Parish Council, the Borough Council and the County Council to spend more on the Village. Rural parishes contribute more in council tax than they receive back in value of services. The second need was to provide some organisation to fill a perceived gap between the respective spheres of activity of the Parish Council and the Social Centre. The third was the need to involve Villagers in their 30s and 40s in the running of Village organisations to provide some positive succession.

## **5.0 THE ACTION PLAN**

The full set of issues which the Steering Group identified for action is set out below. These are the proposals of the Steering Group based on the recommendations of the Working Group

