

ARKESDEN

∞ Parish Plan ∞

2009-2014

ARKESDEN An Introduction

Arkesden lies in the north west corner of Essex, close to the Hertfordshire border and about five miles south west of the market town of Saffron Walden. Bishop's Stortford is nine miles to the south and the university city of Cambridge lies approximately twenty miles to the north.

History

There is evidence that there has been some sort of settlement in this location since the Bronze Age. Arkesden's current name is thought to be derived from the Anglo-Saxon meaning Arkel's Valley. Arkesden is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as 'Archedana' and consisted of seven manors – Wood Hall, Chardwell, Wyggpitts, Rockells (since 1821 in the parish of Elmdon), Coggeshalls, Minchens and Peverells.



In Norman times there was also a motte and bailey situated a few hundred yards northeast of the church. The ruins are no longer evident and the area is now arable farming land, but at certain times the circular outline can be detected in the crop from the air.



There has been a church in Arkesden since Saxon times and the site of the round tower is beneath the square Norman tower. The present Church of St Mary the Virgin dates from the 14th century but the oldest feature of the church is the font which dates back to the 12th century. Many alterations have been made since then, and the church you see today is the result of extensive Victorian restoration undertaken in 1855. There are some lavish marble sculptured monuments

which date back to the 17th century. At the south aisle there is an impressive Elizabethan memorial to Richard Cutte and his wife of Wood Hall surrounded by their kneeling children, four sons and two daughters, all named. The sons have been decapitated, it is thought by Oliver Cromwell's men who were encamped in Saffron Walden during the Civil War. The village has also played host to a Congregational Church where the Village Hall now stands and a Methodist Chapel in Hampit Road, built in the 1880s by Mrs Birch Wolfe following a row between her and the Reverend Herbert Matthew Fearn and converted to a private dwelling in the mid 1990s.

In common with other small villages, Arkesden has lost many of its facilities over the years. There was a school next to Church Green in what is now the front garden of Parsonage Farm but this was closed in 1949 and subsequently demolished. Among buildings that are still standing, many house names reflect their past – the Old Forge, the Old Post Office, the Old Maltings and the Old Vicarage, plus most of the converted dwellings at Wood Hall. A shop, Empire Stores, used to be housed at Empire Cottage, The Green Man used to be a pub, allegedly visited by Dick Turpin, and there was a beer house at The Ancient Shepherd.



Today



Arkesden retains many of its old dwellings, some of which date back to well before the 17th century, and there are more than thirty Grade II listed buildings, most of them thatched. No wonder Arkesden is considered one of the prettiest villages in Essex and this charm is enhanced by Wicken Water which meanders between weeping willows along the length of the village as it makes its way to the Cam. For most of the year the watercourse is dry but can become fast flowing after heavy rainfall.

The village no longer has any shops, the last one - the Post Office and local crafts shop - having closed in 2004. However, it does still possess an excellent pub, the Axe and Compasses. Its bar and restaurant

are very popular with locals but also regularly draw people from much further afield. Other facilities include a Village Hall - used for social functions such as parties, the annual village quiz and the famous Christmas Bash - and the Millennium Field and play area. The Church shares a vicar with the neighbouring parishes of Clavering, Langley and Wicken Bonhunt but still provides services every Sunday, although, in common with national trends, regular attendance has diminished. However, several volunteers help to keep the church in excellent condition. There is a keen group of bellringers who meet twice a week and the bells themselves underwent extensive refurbishment in 1999.

People

The parish now has a population of 370 people in 140 households, stretching from Severals Farm in the east to Clodmore Hill in the west and from Wood Hall in the south to the old pumping station on the Royston road in the north.

In previous centuries most Arkesden people earned their living on the land but now only a handful are directly involved in agriculture, although farming obviously still has a huge impact on the character of the village and its surroundings. Other traditional trades, including thatching, also remain. Nowadays, many villagers commute to London by train from nearby Audley End station, while others travel by car to work in various towns in the Home Counties and East Anglia. However, improvements in communications, especially internet broadband, also mean that many people work partly or wholly from home.



Over the last ten years or so there have been significant demographic changes with many young families moving into the village. Consequently, there is a good spread of people across all age groups, from children to people of working age to retirees. Although Arkesden no longer has a school, there are excellent state primary education facilities in Clavering and other nearby villages and for older children in Newport and Saffron Walden. Alternatively, Saffron Walden, Bishop's Stortford and Cambridge offer a choice of good private schools.

Most Arkesden residents, whether young or old, agree that Arkesden is a very friendly village and a delightful place to live. Its rural character and small size, peace and quiet and sense of community are the most highly valued aspects of village life and those which people are keen to preserve.

What is a Parish Plan?

A Parish Plan aims to set out a vision for the future of the parish and identifies the actions needed to achieve that vision. It is aimed specifically at rural parishes and the challenges they face in maintaining viable and vital communities and is part of the Government's Rural Strategy, published in July 2004. The planning process is coordinated by the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE), a registered charity established in 1929 to help those who live and work in the county's rural areas.

The purpose of the Parish Plan is to act as a catalyst, bringing together members of the community with common goals and aspirations and setting out how the village as a whole sees its community developing over the next few years.

The emphasis of this document is very much on community planning, covering social, environmental and economic issues, rather than on planning for housing and development. This latter issue is better covered in a Village Design Statement (VDS), the next stage in the community planning process and which, given sufficient interest, the Parish Council intends to address next. For more information on VDSs, please see the Housing and Development section.



Why do a Parish Plan?

There are three main reasons why a Parish Plan is worthwhile:

- Primarily, the Plan is for the community's own use, to identify the issues considered to be of most importance and hence to focus effort on the areas of most benefit to the community as a whole.
- It can also be a useful tool in securing external funding for projects as it demonstrates genuine and widespread community support for the project in question.
- Finally, it feeds into wider statutory community planning strategies at a district level and above, providing external organisations with more detail and ensuring that the community's voice is heard.

It is a way of ensuring that our village's future is the one that we want.

How it was done

It is essential that the Plan reflects the needs and desires of the whole community, both for the benefit of the community but also if it is to have legitimacy in the wider planning framework and in trying to secure funds. It needs to express the opinions of everyone who wishes to have an input and not just those who regularly sit on committees or attend public meetings. Although the planning process was initiated and supported by the Parish Council, the Parish Plan is very much an independent document created by the village as a whole.

- First, a questionnaire was distributed to every household in the parish. Responses were chased and the results collated and published in July 2006. A total of 89 households completed the questionnaire, a response rate of 69%. Responses were received from homes in every part of the village and from all types of households and appear to be representative of the village as a whole. Figures quoted throughout the Parish Plan refer to the questionnaire responses received.
- A Steering Group, including a representative from the Parish Council, was appointed in late summer 2007 to produce the Parish Plan. The Group analysed the results from the questionnaire, identifying the main issues and deciding how best the process might be taken forward.
- At the end of May 2008, an Open Day was held in the Village Hall to present the findings to date and invite further comment on these and on any new issues which had arisen since the questionnaire. The Steering Group were present to answer questions together with representatives from the RCCE and the Rural Housing Trust. Everyone was welcome and over 40 people attended.
- Feedback from the Open Day was incorporated into the earlier findings and an Action Plan was drafted under five main headings: Community, Environment, Traffic and Transport, Housing and Development and Recreation.
- A Consultation Draft of the Plan was launched at the Parish Council Annual General Meeting in April 2009. Copies were made available for everyone in the village to look at and were circulated to other interested parties, including Arkesden Parish Council, Uttlesford District Council, the Village Hall Committee, the Parochial Church Council, Arkesden WI and the Friends of Arkesden Church, for their comments.
- The final Parish Plan, incorporating comments from the consultation stage, was published in July 2009.



THE ACTION PLAN

Community



Arkesden retains a strong community spirit. There are four main focal points for its social, religious and other parish activities – the Axe and Compasses public house, the Village Hall, St Mary's Church and the Millennium Field. All of these are well used. 68% use the Village Hall and many would be keen to see its use increased, while 66% use the Church, with 35% using it for worship, albeit not on a regular basis. Ways of making more and better use of these facilities are currently being investigated.

However, Community is not just about social events and venues – it is also about communication, coordination and involvement.

- 99% read the Village Magazine; 42% use it as their main source of village information.
- 72% have access to broadband internet.
- Over half would be interested in a formal fuel syndicate to secure better prices; schemes are already up and running in the village and these could be expanded and formalised.
- 86% would make use of a village archive and 25% would be willing to help organise it; the Village Hall and the Church were thought to be the most suitable locations. This could tie in with both the proposed local history group and the website.



Arkesden online

The existing village website is essentially defunct, but given that most people in the village have access to broadband internet, it makes sense to establish a new, improved website. Ideally this would be run in conjunction with the Village Magazine and could provide:

- up to the minute information on social events
- details of new planning applications
- an easy to access resource for useful telephone numbers, bus and train timetables, refuse collection dates, links to other sites and so forth
- an archive of past articles from the Village Magazine and elsewhere, photos of the village ... plus, of course, the Parish Plan!
- potentially, booking systems for car sharing, oil syndicates, etc.
- pages dedicated to younger people in the village, who hopefully would be involved in developing and maintaining the whole website.

What are the issues?	What can we do about it?	When?	Who?
Maintain communication through Village Magazine	Ensure that the current success of the Village Magazine is encouraged and continued	Now	Magazine committee
Enhance communication via village website	Establish a new website to use as a resource and for more up to date information than the Magazine can provide	1 year	Website team to be formed; liaise with Magazine committee for contents
Syndicates for oil/ calor gas	Identify who would be interested and whether existing schemes could be expanded – approach current coordinator	6 months	Gas and oil champion
Arkesden history/ archive display	Collate suitable material and decide how best to display/store and where (displays removable for events). In the longer term, aim to establish a proper archive. Funding required	1 year	Village Hall Committee, PCC. Tie in to proposed local history group
Increased local use of Village Hall for activities	Promote and encourage use, e.g. publicise charges, how to book, etc.	6 months	Village Hall Committee
Use Church more for village events as well as/instead of Village Hall	Village Community Building Working Party has been set up. Findings were forwarded for further discussion through the Village Magazine and a meeting was held to discuss/debate these in early April 2009	1 year	Working Party with Village Hall Committee, PCC and Parish Council
Welcome pack for new residents	Compile draft pack - Village Magazines, map with house names, Parish Plan, etc. Identify 'host team' to welcome people and deliver pack by hand. Rely on word of mouth to be notified of new residents	6 months	Parish Council. Members of 'host team' to cover each part of the village
Village Sign	Investigate feasibility - location, design, cost, etc. Proposals submitted for approval of villagers and Parish Council. Possible design competition. Explore funding options	1-2 years	Parish Council plus local craftsmen/artists
More regular village events, e.g. fete, barn dance	Concerted effort to generate interest - involve various groups to coordinate and maximise efforts. Set realistic goals for first couple of events and identify who can give the necessary time. Need to establish a working party	2-3 years for next fete	PCC, Friends of Arkesden Church, Village Hall Committee, Parish Council, residents, pub, etc.
Explore possibility of rekindling mother and toddler group	Identify who would be interested in being main contact point for interested parties	6-12 months	Millennium Field Committee as a starting point

Environment

Arkesden is a beautiful village and its tranquil setting is the reason that many people come to live here in the first place. The village has, over the years, managed to evolve while at the same time maintaining its rural charm. We are also lucky enough to enjoy a wealth of flora and fauna on our doorstep.

Whilst people recognise the changing face of the surrounding landscape, a strong theme that emerged from the questionnaire and the Open Day was that of people wishing to keep the village as it is and, understandably, having a voice with regards to any potential development.



A major environmental challenge facing the village is the proposed expansion of Stansted Airport. 56% of villagers felt that aircraft noise had a medium or high impact on their lives and it is unclear whether proposed changes in flight paths will make the situation better or worse. The effect of an increase in the total number of flights resulting from a second runway is obvious, as is the impact on the wider environment.



At a more local level, wheelie bins have been introduced since the questionnaire was circulated and the response to them generally has been positive. However, concerns were expressed about them being left in or near the road after collection and that the brown (compostable waste) bins were too large for many households. This latter complaint is obviously a common one across the district and Uttlesford District Council has been trialling smaller 'caddies' elsewhere.

So far as other waste was concerned, there was considerable support for both green waste collections (57% said they would use such a scheme in the village) and a bottle bank. Finally, a need for some sort of litter picking was identified.

Glass collection/ bottle bank in the village	Find a suitable location for a bottle bank OR tie in to existing arrangements and resources	6 months	Parish Council/ pub/brewery
Garden waste collection	Aim to establish a regular local village collection during summer months. Need to establish who will collect the waste	6 months	Parish Council to liaise with UDC
Unightly wheelie bins left near the road after collection	Ask residents to place wheelie bins out of sight	6 months	Parish Council
Brown wheelie bins are too large for their purpose	Await results of UDC trial/ approach UDC about alternatives	6 months	Parish Council/ nominated spokesperson
Renewable energy and the carbon footprint	Explore viability/impact/ advantages of alternative energy sources – wind turbines, solar power, etc. Liaise with officer from UDC	3 years	Parish Council. Ideally would like to establish an environmental 'task force'
Mains gas supply in the village	Explore costs of installing gas and who would be interested	2 years	Parish Council
Unightly overhead wires (electricity and telephone) especially in the conservation area	Explore viability and cost of burying the wires with the electricity companies and BT	5 years	Parish Council
Stansted expansion/ flight paths and the impact on the village	Establish a dedicated group to keep up to date with the latest developments and feed this back to village via the Parish Council/meetings/village website	6 months	Parish Council plus interested individuals
Create nature area/ nature trail in the village. Also community garden for vegetables, etc.	Explore local land opportunities and identify level of interest	1 year	Interested individuals

The Arkesden Environmental Task Force

Issues of renewable energy and the carbon footprint are becoming increasingly important. 83% of villagers thought that the parish should look into renewable energy grants and 80% would be themselves be interested in renewable energy schemes. There is a wealth of information available – so much so that it can be hard work trawling through it all. A Task Force – possibly people already in the field – could:

- create a resource that people in the village can access detailing the options and grants available
- identify ways of making the village as a whole more carbon neutral

A similar task force could be established to look into Stansted expansion and flight paths.

Traffic and Transport

Arkesden's rural location and fairly poor public transport links, combined with a lack of schools or shops in the village, mean that the population is heavily dependent on the car for most day to day activities. 97% of households responding to the questionnaire own at least one car and 70% have use of two or more. A third of villagers use public transport, but the same figure would like to see more regular bus services to Saffron Walden and Audley End, suggesting that existing services are felt to be far from adequate.

Despite this reliance on the car, there was little enthusiasm shown for car sharing to and from the rail station or Saffron Walden and even less for organising such a scheme (22% and 9% respectively). However, feedback from the Open Day suggests that matters may have moved on recently and it is worth exploring the options.

Great concern has been expressed regarding the speed and volume of traffic through the village, with over three quarters of people feeling that traffic speed had a medium or high impact on their lives in the village.

Did you know ... ?
"Quicksie" is the ancient name for hawthorn.

The Parish Council has secured a 40mph speed limit past Quicksie Hill; a 30 mph limit was requested but was rejected by Essex County Council Highways Department on the basis of the existing points system being used for speed management. The Parish Council will keep campaigning for the further reduction.

So far as enforcing existing speed limits is concerned, methods of speed reduction such as speed bumps, flashing signs and speed cameras will require further consultation. There is far more support for flashing signs (43%) than for speed bumps (only 21%) and the former seem to have been installed successfully in the neighbouring villages of Wendens Ambo, Clavering and Wicken Bonhunt.

The general poor condition of the road surfaces in and around the village are a major concern to car users, cyclists and pedestrians.



What are the issues?	What can we do about it?	When?	Who?
Footpath from Quicksie Hill to Church/village (because of road safety issues)	Identify possible routes. Approach Essex CC Highways Department. Approach landowners/Church	6 months to explore, 2 years to implement, if feasible	Parish Council
Lack of bus services	Approach bus service operator for increased service. In the meantime, increase publicity of current bus times and also bus stops	6 months	Parish Council
Car sharing	Advertise in Village Magazine for interested parties for transport to station/Cambridge/London. Could use website for 'booking' once this is established	6 months	Parish Plan Steering Group
Quality of road surface, potholes, overgrown vegetation and erosion of roadside verges	Contact Essex CC Highways Department. Publicise contact details and emphasise that any individual can contact Highways themselves about a problem	6 months	Parish Council
Reduce traffic speed and improve road safety in the village	Explore options through Highways Department, e.g. solar powered flashing signs, community speed checks, etc.	12 months	Parish Council
Rationalise/reduce signage on the approach to the village	Check out with Highways Department what can be done	6 months	Parish Council
Control parking on Quicksie Hill and extend 30mph limit	Approach Highways Department and Police	6 months	Parish Council
Review existing traffic priority at Pump Green	Canvass village opinion before approaching Highways Department	6 months	Parish Council



Housing and Development

The issue of future housing development in Arkesden is a controversial one.

On the one hand there is a desire to maintain the village's unique character. The centre of the village is a conservation area and the village development envelope (outside of which there is a presumption against development) is drawn very tightly around the village core, excluding some parts of the main village, such as Hampit Road and Quicksie Hill, as well as the outlying houses.



On the other hand, there is the need to allow the village to develop and grow to maintain a viable and vital community. High house prices combined with a lack of social housing stock means that it is difficult for some local people to remain in the village. Any future housing development – in terms of scale, location, type and design – needs to strike a careful balance between these frequently opposing aims.



As mentioned before, the Parish Plan is limited in how it can affect the overall quantity and quality of future housing development – that task falls more to the proposed Village Design Statement, which is explained opposite. However, we can give the planners some insight into the views and opinions of residents in the hope that these will be taken on board both in individual planning applications and in future planning policy.

Overall, people are keen to see some future building in Arkesden, with only 30% wanting no new houses built at all. Among the remaining 70%, the preference is for infill and small groups of between three and ten houses, rather than larger developments. Most people would like to see family homes being built, together with some desire for homes for single people and retirement housing (10% and 8% respectively). However, the greatest support is for affordable housing, with almost half of residents who responded to the questionnaire saying that they would like to see this in the village, aimed particularly at local people and key workers.

Affordable Housing

As of June 2009, the village is in the process of trying to secure some affordable housing. A survey has been completed and has identified a need for several low cost dwellings for local people. The process now moves on to the next stage which is to identify suitable sites.

What are the issues?	What can we do about it?	When?	Who?
Need for affordable housing within village	Survey has been completed and has established a need. Suitable sites will need to be identified and secured	1 year	Parish Council, RCCE, Rural Housing Trust
Maintain village character through good planning and design; limited growth should be allowed	Following completion of Parish Plan, draw up Village Design Statement for reference and use in commenting on planning applications	2 years	VDS steering group with Parish Council approval
Desire for retirement housing	Identify possible sites and developers – will have to be in the private sector	1 year	Interested parties (individuals/ developers)

Village Design Statement

A Village Design Statement (VDS) is the next stage in the Parish Planning process.

- Like the Parish Plan, it is a document created by the community that reflects the views of the village as a whole.
- It identifies the physical qualities and characteristics of the village and its surroundings that are valued by local people and the aspects that they would like to preserve and protect.
- It details the existing character and main features of design in the village and guidelines for how this should be respected in any new development.
- It is an advisory document for planners, designers and developers, providing them with information on what is felt by the community to be 'acceptable' development.
- Whilst it must fit in with existing local plan policies, if it meets the requirements of the local authority it can be adopted as a supplementary planning document. Parish Councils and local people can then cite it when objecting to, or supporting, individual planning applications.

"In this way a VDS can be a positive influence on development, giving local people a recognised voice in the planning system rather than having to rely on protest to make their views heard." (Source: RCCE).



Did you know ...?

Arkesden is famous in some circles for having more than its fair share of puddingstones - sedimentary rocks that are basically pebbles naturally cemented together into larger stones. They can be seen outside the Axe and Compasses, in the stream bed under the bridge near the Church and in several gardens; the War Memorial (pictured) is made out of one huge puddingstone.

Recreation

There is a clear interest in the village in many varied recreational activities, from organised sports to book or garden clubs to simply walking. In addition to the obvious social aspect, making as many activities as possible available within the village has advantages in both reducing car journeys to other venues and increasing the use of (and potentially revenue from) existing facilities – primarily the Village Hall and the Millennium Field.



Over half of residents said they would support outdoor activities on a regular basis, especially tennis and cricket but also football. In terms of indoor activities, a third of villagers would be interested. The resurgence of Arkesden Cricket Club since 2007 is an obvious success story and, more recently, table tennis has started up again in the Village Hall and is attracting a regular following. Many villagers would be interested in tennis or swimming but a venue for these would need to be found.

The Millennium Field and the play equipment is a valued resource. Similarly, the footpaths around the village are very well used with 93% of residents who responded to the questionnaire saying that they walk in the parish and 88% feeling that the footpaths are well maintained.

On a less energetic note, many villagers are interested in activities such as book, local history or garden clubs or bridge. The provision of events for teenagers in the village would also be welcomed. The main issue in all these is organisation.

Getting things started

The challenge is getting people together so that activities can be organised without the burden falling too heavily on any one individual's shoulders. The intention is to publicise each activity (either individually or in one big mail shot) and ask everyone interested in joining in to sign up by a certain date. This should then give a clearer idea of exactly how many people are interested and whether 'critical mass' can be reached. With any luck a coordinator may even volunteer themselves, safe in the knowledge that there are others to help out! Additional funding may be available for some activities if we can demonstrate that there is sufficient interest.

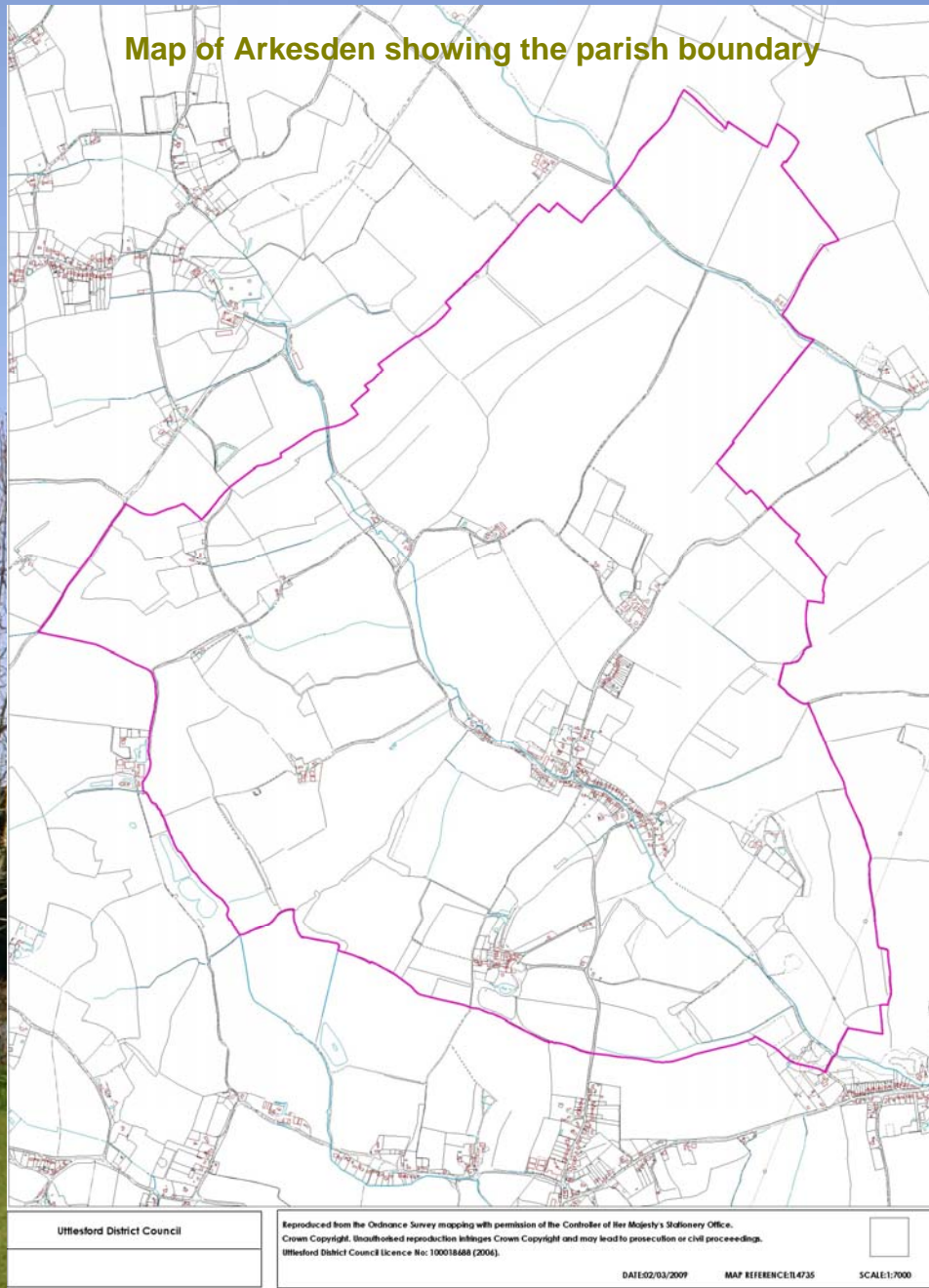
What are the issues?	What can we do about it?	When?	Who?
Support for indoor activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keep fit/pilates • table tennis • carpet bowls 	Identify who is willing to participate in each activity and secure a suitable venue. Post article in the Village Magazine to generate interest	6 months	Parish Plan Steering Group and interested parties, including existing groups such as the WI. Village Hall Committee for venue
Support for other social activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local history group • book club • gardening club • bridge club • youth events 	Identify who is willing to participate in each activity. Post article in the Village Magazine to generate interest	6 months	Parish Plan Steering Group and interested parties, including existing groups such as the WI
Cricket Club – people would like to build on current enthusiasm and success	Explore a range of options from increasing the number of fixtures as a 'nomad' team to, in the longer term, campaigning for own ground. Look at possibility of putting nets on Millennium Field. Approach West Essex Cricket Board for grants	6-12 months	Cricket Club, Millennium Field Committee
Use of swimming pool and/or tennis court in the village. Possibility of establishing a village tennis club	Liaise with villagers who have a pool/court and would be willing to allow access. Send letters/post article in the Village Magazine	6 months	Pool/court owners. Parish Council
Support/enhance current widespread use of the Millennium Field as a resource for the whole village	Publicise the fact that it is open to all villagers and not just those with children. Maintain current equipment and repair/replace when necessary. Explore possible other uses for the field, e.g. cricket nets	6 months	Millennium Field Committee

Did you know ...?

The highest point in Essex – a vertiginous 140 m (460 ft) above sea level – lies just 2 miles north west of Arkesden between Langley and Duddenhoe End, in the aptly named High Wood



Map of Arkesden showing the parish boundary



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