



Great Chesterford

Village Plan

2015

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Great Chesterford

Great Chesterford is a village and civil parish in the Uttlesford district of Essex. It is situated about 3 miles north of Saffron Walden and 12 miles south of Cambridge, in the Cam Valley.

Archaeological evidence suggests that the land around the village has been inhabited for centuries. There was a substantial Late Iron Age settlement on the site of the current village, with a shrine located approximately a kilometre away to the north-east. A Roman fort was constructed at Great Chesterford in the first century AD, possibly as a consequence of the Boudiccan revolt in AD 60 or in recognition of the settlement's strategic position between the territories of the Catuvellauni, Trinovantes and Icenii tribes. In the fourth century it became one of only two walled towns in Essex, the other being Colchester. The name of the Romano-British town is unknown, but *Civitas Ikelorum* has been suggested based on a particular find.

There is evidence of a large settled Saxon population at Great Chesterford from the end of the Roman period, and it was during this time that the village acquired its name *Cestreforda* or "the ford by the camp". The Domesday Book records the village in 1086 as a settlement with a total of 47 households.

Following the Norman Conquest Great Chesterford became a royal manor, with its occupants holding right of copyhold. The village was reasonably prosperous during the medieval period, largely due to the cloth trade (cloth was cleaned or 'fulled' at the

water mill), and hosted a weekly market (which may have been held near the site of what is now the Crown and Thistle public house). By 1635 the village was being used as a staging post for the Newmarket Races, often used by Charles I. In 1801 Great Chesterford had a population of 600; by 1841 the population had grown to 917.

The modern-day village has its own railway station (opened to passengers in 1848) serving Cambridge and London Liverpool Street and is about half a mile from Junction 9 of the M11, which connects London with the north. There are two public houses and a hotel, and the village also provides employment with its own small industrial sector and various small businesses. There is a first-rate school, a pre-school and many clubs and societies. It remains a picturesque settlement, with 68 buildings listed as being of 'special architectural and historical interest'. According to the most recent census, Great Chesterford has 1494 residents in 599 households.

Drafting the Village Plan

A Village (or Parish) Plan is a document that helps to determine the future of a community, and how it can change for the better. It deals with quality of life issues, and reflects a collective view of what is important to people living in a village. It is a document that sets out a vision for the future of the parish and outlines how that can be achieved.

In early 2013 a group of volunteers formed an independent Steering Group with the objective of producing a Village Plan for Great Chesterford. After consultation with other villagers at the Annual Village Meeting a questionnaire was developed and circulated to obtain the views of the community on topics of mutual interest.

The questionnaire was distributed to all houses in the village in autumn 2013 and allowed for up to four residents in each household to answer the questions. In total 287 were completed, a return rate of 46.2%. Within the survey 493 different people answered some or all of the questions, equating to 43.8% of the village's population over the age of 17. Responses were received from all age groups, with those aged 18-29 least represented (4.5% of the total) and those aged 60-74 most represented (30.4%). Youths and businesses were asked to complete separate questionnaires.

Overall respondents seemed very content with their environment, and there was a consensus of opinion on most matters. Perhaps unsurprisingly, residents listed the surrounding countryside, transport links and the attractiveness of the village as the most important reasons for living in Great Chesterford, but quality of the environment for raising children, sense of community, and proximity to nearby relations were also popular reasons for living in the village.

This document summarises the data collected from the questionnaire, and proposes a number of actions for consideration by the village and its representative bodies.



Roads and Transport

Great Chesterford is sited on the main route between the university city of Cambridge and the thriving market town of Saffron Walden, close to the M11, and boasting a direct rail connection with London. The transport network is a major asset to the village.

Railway

The railway (located to the south west of the village) is frequently or occasionally used by 68% of respondents, and whilst it is considered to be generally satisfactory there were several suggestions for improving the station and its environment. Parking is limited, and there is poor lighting on Station Road (to the extent that some respondents do not as a consequence use the railway). Access for less mobile users to the northbound platform is difficult, and there were several comments about lack of facilities which might be considered integral features of other stations.

Buses

The bus service stops in the centre of the village on the route between Saffron Walden and Cambridge. Unlike the rail service, it is not at all well used, with 76.9% of respondents saying that they never or hardly ever use it. There were suggestions that the village needed a bus shelter(s) and a longer and more frequent service. The successful introduction of either would be contingent on a better-used service in future.

Roads

The core of the village falls between the busy B1383 (London Road, once the A11) and B184 (Walden Road), and contains three main internal thoroughfares: the High Street, which moving from east to west becomes South Street and then Church Street; School Lane, which continues north onto Jacksons Lane; and Carmen and Carmel Streets.

A number of road safety concerns were raised by respondents. Chief of these was that traffic needed to be slowed on the B184 (current speed limit 50mph), and there was support for reducing the speed limit on internal roads (currently 30mph). Many felt that junctions needed to be improved. However a number of respondents stated that they did not wish to see the village landscape cluttered with un-necessary signage, markings or equipment.

There was significant support for cycle ways on the main roads, and for a reasonable pavement to be made along Jacksons Lane up to the junction with Walden Road and similarly along High Street. The footpath along Walden Road between Jacksons Lane and High Street was also felt to be inadequate. Despite the major resurfacing work carried out in the summer of 2013, a large number of potholes remain un-repaired, whilst others continually appear.

Parking

Inconsiderate parking stimulated more comments than almost any other issue; in particular there is a major problem outside the school at drop off and pick up time, although the majority of those advocating restrictions do not have children at the school. Suggestions included parking restrictions, a one way system on School Lane, and a 'walking taxi' from a better drop-off point.



Environment, Recreation and Leisure

Although reflecting the bias in the survey towards the more elderly age group it is remarkable that some 62% of respondents have lived in the village for more than 10 years. People like the general attractiveness of the village, and the surrounding countryside. Younger people find it an excellent place to bring up children. The survey showed that in particular Horse River Green, the Recreation Ground Playground and the Community Centre were heavily used by villagers.

Open Spaces

There is strong support for providing an allotment area; and 71 respondents said they would definitely be interested in leasing a plot. It will be important to understand the reasons for the loss of the previous allotment before planning any new provision. Many people would like to see some community fruit trees planted in open spaces, as well as a more general tree and hedge planting initiative. Over 100 people are prepared to join a litter picking team and general volunteer group for ad-hoc projects as they occur. Dog fouling was a widely reported nuisance.

Village Events

The annual 'Steam Up' (held each October and featuring fair-rides, stalls, and an exhibition of steam engines) has wide support and approval and is attended by a huge majority (85.4%) of respondents. Some commented that the overall format is now due for an update; but almost half of respondents (46.7%, or over two thirds of people who expressed an opinion) felt that there was scope for a second event such as a Spring or Summer fair. Otherwise the great majority of people are aware of events and activities, and feel that these fulfil the recreational and leisure needs of the village.

Heritage

There was clear support (76.8% of respondents) for making more of the village's history and heritage, much of which was not obvious to visitors or indeed to residents themselves.

Street Lighting

There is no strong indication that the village wants street lighting to be re-introduced for the full night-time period. However there are certain specific areas where street lighting needs to be improved, particularly for the perceived safety of pedestrians. These include the path to the Rail Station, the path to the Recreation Ground, and near the Community Centre.

Footpaths and Cycle Paths

Most people know where the public footpaths are around the Village; and about 65% of those people use them without difficulty. However signage is said to be poor. There is a general enthusiasm for more and better cycle tracks, including off-road tracks to Saffron Walden and up to Hinxtton, with connections there to the Cambridge network. Most usage would be 'for fun', but for 55 people it would become part of their travel to school or work.



Services and Facilities

The village is generally considered well-served in terms of facilities. The most used at the time of the survey included the Post Office, the pubs, the GP surgeries, the village shop, and the Community Centre. Significant numbers of respondents also use the church and the hotel.

Village Shop

Since the survey was taken the Village Shop (and with it the Post Office) has closed. Respondents commented that the Shop had been inadequately stocked and priced for some time; for their part, the owners of the Shop did not feel that they could continue as a business without significantly more support from the village. At the time of writing the Shop is scheduled to re-open under new ownership. It is not clear if the Post Office will form part of its offering. There was some support for maintaining the Shop as a community initiative should a commercial provider be unable to make it a going concern.

Farmers Market

Almost three quarters of respondents – some 326 individuals - said that they would be interested in a weekly or monthly Farmers or Community Market. It may be worth waiting to see what the offer of the new shop will be before pursuing this idea further.

Green Skip

The green waste skip (which visits the village in alternate locations every weekend) remains popular, used at least monthly by almost half (47.4%) of respondents

Crime and Safety

A significant majority of respondents thought that Great Chesterford is a safe place to live. By far the single biggest concern (reported by 268 respondents) was cold calling, though vandalism, theft, and anti-social behaviour were also recorded as issues (c.95 each). Many felt that there was a need for better or more visible policing and a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, which has subsequently been re-established.

Education

Great Chesterford is fortunate to have a pre-school located at the Community Centre, and a primary school rated outstanding by Ofsted.

Pre-School

The pre-school offers sessions five mornings per week during term time. The survey showed that the pre-school is valued by the community, and the majority of respondents on the subject (80.1% of those who expressed an opinion) want to see it have its own permanent site. If this were possible, a considerable majority would like to see it increase the number of sessions that it offers (83.6% of the 244 respondents offering a view).

The Primary School

The primary school – Great Chesterford Church of England Primary Academy - is a valued part of the community; it has been described as the ‘heart of the village’ by many residents, and respondents reported good interaction between the school and the community. Just under one-fifth of respondents had children at the school, which currently serves 210 children from Great Chesterford and neighbouring villages (primarily Little Chesterford and Littlebury). Almost 100 respondents said that they would be willing to volunteer to assist the school in its various educational initiatives in and out of the school.

A majority of residents want the school to stay in the centre of the village (76.3% of those expressing an opinion). There was more support for a change of site in the next 15 years if the school expanded, though a significant minority of respondents felt that the existing site could simply be redeveloped to increase capacity.



Communication and Democracy

The village has an active parish council comprised of nine Councillors and a Clerk. It is responsible for the Recreation Ground, Horse River Green, Coronation Green, Hall Garden, Jubilee Garden (at Fag End) and the open spaces at Rookery Close and Pilgrim Close.

The Council is also responsible for a number of street lights in the village and will report faults and other highways problems i.e. potholes, to the relevant authority for action.

There are various points of communication with the village, including a village website (www.chesterfords.info) and email group, The Broadsheet, a village noticeboard, a Parish Council newsletter, and various public fora including an Annual Village Meeting.

The Parish Council

The Parish Council communicates with the villagers well, according to most people in the village. Most respondents find out about the work of the Parish Council from the Broadsheet. But some improvements have been requested by residents. It was felt that Parish Council newsletters should be printed on a more regular basis, and that minutes of meetings should be easier to access. It was suggested that photographs and contact details of all Parish Councillors might be published on the Chesterfords website.

The Broadsheet

Almost all of villagers (97.3%) read The Broadsheet always or sometimes and rate it good or very good (97.1%). It has been suggested that it could be expanded to include more articles and features, and that it should be made available online. The hard copy circulation could be supplemented with an email pointing to the electronic version on the website

Chesterfords Website and Email Group

Just over half of respondents to the survey said they used the Chesterfords website. Many felt that it needs to be updated on a more regular basis, and that it could be developed to host more detailed information about up-coming events, timetables, contact numbers, links to electronic versions of the Church News and The Broadsheet, and Google Group discussions either verbatim or in digest.

There was strong support (74.9% or 346 of respondents) for producing a welcome pack for people moving into the village.



Housing and Development

Housing was a contentious issue and the one that attracted the most full response overall. Over half of respondents (53.3%) felt that there should be no further construction in Great Chesterford beyond the 100 dwellings already allocated by the District Council in the current draft Local Plan. However a large minority (42%) would accept up to 100 additional dwellings.

Types of Dwellings

There was strong support for any future provision to be affordable and for local people. Views were mixed on the size of homes that should be made available, but the majority favoured small (1-2 bedroom) or family (3-4 bedroom) homes. There was significant interest in bungalows, retirement accommodation and warden-assisted accommodation.



Most agreed that any new development should be sympathetic to the village character, be environmentally friendly and make provision for off-street parking. There seemed to be significant interest in provision for residents to be able to downsize within the village.

Neighbourhood Plan

Just over 80% of those who expressed a view (315 respondents) said that they would support the development of a Neighbourhood Plan for Great Chesterford. However a further 137 respondents said that they did not know, which suggests that further work would need to be done to educate residents on what a Neighbourhood Plan is and how it could be used to influence future planning decisions.



Business Questionnaire

A total of 18 Great Chesterford businesses responded to the business survey. The majority of these were well established; 88.9% had been operating for 5 or more years, and two thirds had been based in the village for at least 10 years. One quarter of businesses were run from home. Between them they employ some 84 full time and 17 part time staff. Almost all (93.8%) said that they felt they benefitted from being located in the village, particularly given transport links.

One of the issues reported by businesses was lack of parking for staff and deliveries / visitors. Most of their staff live outside of the village (85.3%) and over two thirds travel to work by car. Perhaps connected, over a third of businesses said that their employees struggled to find local housing.

The majority of local businesses said that they were unaware of any local business services provided by the District Council. Almost three quarters reported that they found the current broadband provision limiting. The majority were interested in being included in a business directory on the Chesterfords website.



Youth Questionnaire

There were 108 responses from villagers aged 5 to 18, with just over two thirds being offered by 5 to 10 years olds. They all like living in the village at least 'a little', but most 'a lot' (84.3%). Respondents expressed interest in a wide range of activities: seeing friends was top of the list, but cycling and walking, and visiting the recreation ground, play areas and engaging in sport were all popular. Although almost a quarter felt that village facilities were fine, the majority suggested that they could all be improved.

There was strong interest in the introduction of new activities and sports (68.9%). This might perhaps be considered alongside the sentiment expressed in the main survey that a funded youth club should be available.

The two biggest issues for youth respondents were speeding cars (68 respondents) and dog mess (55 respondents) in the village – echoing points made by adults.

The majority of those responding use the train at least sometimes (89.2%), but again echoing the main survey 57.3% said that they never use the bus service.

Younger respondents seemed aware of footpaths and were keen on the provision of more cycle ways in the village.

Action Plan

Roads and Transport

1. Discuss with Greater Anglia (a) the possibility of more and/or better organised and marked parking spaces at the station, (b) better access to the northbound platform; (c) the installation of electronic information boards; (d) the introduction of toilets and coffee facilities.
2. Explore what can be done to improve lighting on Station Road (and on the path to the Recreation Ground and around the Community Centre).
3. Conduct further research into what can be done to encourage greater use of the bus service.
4. Raise with the Parish Council the question of reporting road repair issues.
5. Explore with Essex Highways what might be done to calm traffic on the main roads within the village envelope. It is noted that there is already a proposal to reduce the speed limit to 20mph on main internal roads within the village.
6. Investigate what improvements can be made to existing and planned cycleways, and identify stretches of road that would benefit from the creation of cycleways.
7. Engage with the school to explore possible solutions to the parking issue; these might include temporary one-way measures on School Lane; cycle schemes; car sharing schemes; alternative parking sites; or a walking taxi scheme.

Environment, Recreation and Leisure

8. Establish an Open Spaces Group to (a) consider the provision of allotments, (b) identify areas for potential planting of trees and hedgerows and (c) develop volunteering projects.
9. Establish a group to identify the areas of historical interest within the village, and devise a costed plan for improving their visibility and profile.
10. Request that the Parish Council explore potential for a second annual village event, in consultation with villagers, particularly those most affected by its location and operation.
11. A map of the existing footpaths to be drawn up and published on the Chesterfords website, also posted on notice boards, and made available in print for residents and tourists; improved signage and regular maintenance for footpaths.
12. More dog bins are called for; and the appointment of the dog warden is welcomed.

Services and Facilities

13. Establish a group to consider whether a farmers market would be viable, and to draft a proposal setting out location, suppliers etc.

Crime and Safety

14. Discuss with the Parish Council how it might actively support the new Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. Discuss with the Scheme leaders how they will communicate with the village.

Communications and Democracy

- 15 Suggest that the Parish Council produce its newsletters on a more frequent basis, and improves the visibility of its members and discussions on the Chesterfords website.
16. Establish a group to review the content and update of the Chesterfords website.
17. Develop a welcome pack for people moving into the village.

Education

18. Report the findings of the survey to the Chesterfords Pre School Management Committee.
19. Report the findings of the survey to the headmaster of the Great Chesterford Church of England Primary Academy, and note in particular the willingness of villagers to engage with the school on its projects.

Housing and Development

20. Establish a group to take forward proposals to create a Neighbourhood Plan for Great Chesterford. This should be done in close communication with the village, providing advice on technical issues and making clear the implications of moving forward.

Youth Questionnaire

21. Establish a group – to include representatives of the under-19 community – to explore how village facilities might be improved and what demand there was for additional structured activities.

Business Questionnaire

22. Explore further with businesses what their parking needs are and to what degree this is limiting their work.
23. Create a business directory on the Chesterfords website.
24. Discuss with the Parish Council what can be done to improve broadband provision in the village.



Statement from the Parish Council

The Parish Council, on behalf of the village as a whole, is deeply grateful for the enormous amount of work that has gone into this Village Plan. We would like to thank everyone involved, not least those of you who very kindly took the time to complete the survey.

What are we going to do with the findings? Rather a lot actually. I have listed below the progress on the various objectives and actions identified, so you can see the progress made to date. We will continue with implementation of the outstanding matters and review progress on a regular basis at Parish Council meetings. You will be able to see how we are doing from the Minutes. In addition we will have a specific item on the Annual Village Meeting agenda to discuss progress on the Village Plan.

As well as these important implementation issues, the Village Plan will be a very significant part of the evidence base for the forthcoming Neighbourhood Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan, which is a very significant project, has formal status under planning law and will be of profound importance in influencing the future size and nature of the village. Neighbourhood Plans are required to be evidence-led, and as such the Village Plan has given us a head start in this process.

Once again our profound thanks to the team who put this plan together for all their valuable hard work. I commend this plan to you, as both a summary of where we are and a blueprint for the future.

Roads and Transport

1. Discussions are in progress with Greater Anglia concerning potential improvements to the station and its facilities.
2. The Parish Council is exploring what can be done to improve lighting in areas identified as needing attention in the Village Plan.
3. Streamlined processes are now in place with Essex Highways and Uttlesford Highway Rangers to report road repair issues.
4. A 20mph speed limit within the village envelope has been agreed in order to calm traffic, with signs to be installed. Essex Police have agreed to effect greater monitoring and enforcement of traffic in the village and have just approved a new speed monitoring site in Jackson's Lane.
5. A new section of cyclepath will be obtained as part of S106 for the New World Timber site, and all developments in the village will in future be required to consider cycle access. Discussions are being held with the Genome campus about cyclepath provision.
6. Enhanced parking restrictions have been introduced on School Lane, and a new footpath within the school boundary will be put into use. Essex Police will undertake additional monitoring and enforcement action.

Environment, Recreation and Leisure

7. Allotments have been fenced and services laid to them. We are awaiting formal transfer of the land to the Parish Council. Additional open space provision is under consideration, at the moment the land will be put to grass but subject to consultation and fundraising we may look to provide extra sports pitches.
8. The Chesterford History Society will be invited to consider what can be done to better present the history and heritage of the village to visitors.
9. The Parish Council will explore potential for a second annual village event, in consultation with villagers, particularly those most affected by its location and operation.
10. Dog enforcement issues are being considered by the Parish Council.

Communications and Democracy

11. The Chesterfords website and associated village communications are being reviewed by a group led by the Parish Clerk.

Education

12. Findings of the survey have been reported to the Chesterfords Pre School Management Committee and to the headmaster of the Great Chesterford Church of England Primary Academy.

Housing and Development

13. At the January 2015 meeting of the Parish Council it was agreed to pursue the development of a Neighbourhood Plan. An interim steering group has been established to undertake consultation. This will be a whole village activity and we very much welcome both engagement with the process and offers of help with the tricky bits.

Business Questionnaire

14. Detailed and extensive discussions are underway between local residents regarding broadband provision in the village. It appears that certain suppliers provide a faster and more reliable service than others.

Neil Gregory, *Great Chesterford Parish Council*

Acknowledgements

The membership of the Great Chesterford Village Plan Steering Group consisted of Jon Beard, Colin Day, Henri Stevenson, and Julie Williams. None had experience in creating a document of this sort and they hope that the result is helpful as the village looks to the future.

The Steering Group would like to thank the team of people who delivered and collected questionnaires on cold, dark winter nights.

They would also like to thank Sarah Sapsford at the Rural Community Council for Essex for her support and guidance; Paul Rutter at Rutters UK for providing promotional banners; Warwick Network Limited for providing a detailed analysis of the questionnaires returned; Harts of Saffron Walden and Plumridges of Linton for providing printing services.

Thanks are also due to the Rural Community Council for Essex, the Essex Rural Fund (through Essex Community Foundation), and Great Chesterford Parish Council, who provided the funding which made this project possible.

Final thanks must go to those who took the time to respond to the questionnaire, and who read this report. It is your village, and your participation ensures that we all continue to enjoy it for years to come.

