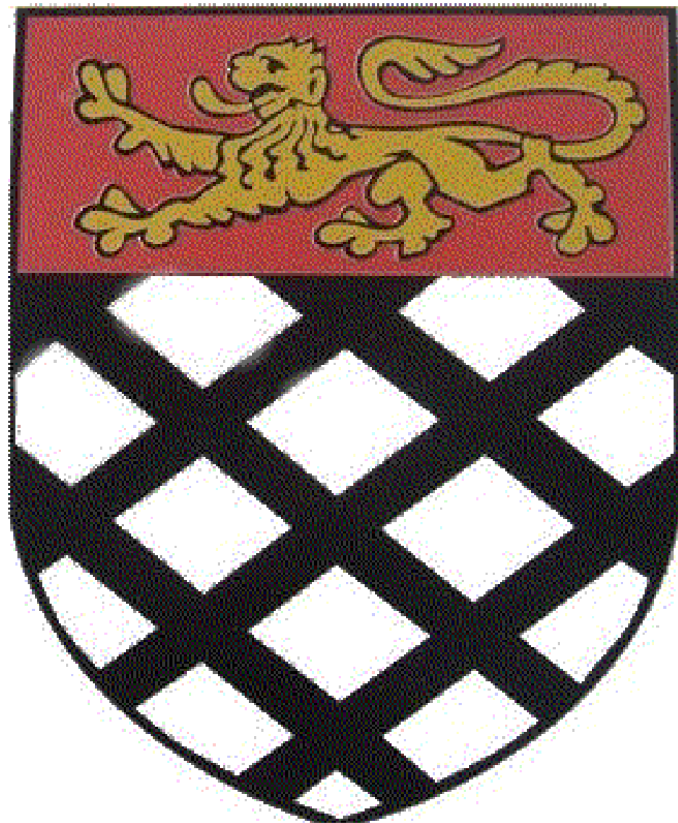


Meppershall Village Plan

2017-2027

Full report



13 March 2017

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Introduction by the Chairman of Meppershall Parish Council

The first Village Plan for Meppershall was written by a group of dedicated volunteers in 2008. This document proved to be a resource for villagers and planners to better understand residents' views about their community.

In 2014, the Parish Council resolved to update the Meppershall Village Plan, and set up The Village Plan Review Group to arrange for residents and stakeholders to have a say about various aspects of village life. A small group of volunteers came forward and the Village Forum was born.

This Group launched their project at a very busy stall at the 2015 Summer Fair; residents were encouraged to say what they liked about Meppershall and what they wanted to improve. This enabled the Forum group to devise nine questionnaires seeking the residents' views in detail.

The Group set up a dedicated website to publish their findings and the extensive data that were collected. They also publicised their work on Twitter and Facebook, and reported progress to the Parish Council at its monthly meetings, and to the community in articles in the Meppershall Messenger, together with the key findings of each study section.

The response from the residents was very encouraging; its breadth and passion showed what a vibrant and open community Meppershall is. There are many positive aspects of our village, which attract a wide range of families to live here: our open countryside and green spaces; excellent playgroup and lower school; a variety of organisations in which to become involved; a Post Office and shop, a bakery, a pub, a village hall and a social club. However, we must also recognise the downside, particularly speeding traffic, the ever-increasing traffic flow and parking problems, housing development pressure and other areas highlighted in this report.

The Parish Council will use the results of this Village Plan in fulfilling its duties to the community of Meppershall, as representative of its collective views and as facilitator of community action. This document will form a reference point for the Parish Council during its discussions, and will be used by the various Working Groups in informing recommendations for policy and specific responses. It may also influence Central Bedfordshire Council, and would inform a statutory Neighbourhood Plan.

We also hope that this Plan will generate a number of projects to address the issues raised, which will require resources yet to be identified. All village residents are encouraged to get involved by joining a Parish Council Working Group, or by initiating/joining community actions; either way will increase pride of ownership and ensure successful delivery. It is intended that this plan be reviewed and updated at five yearly intervals starting 2022.

Finally, I should like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication that this small team has invested in the project; we have indeed been fortunate in recruiting individuals with a dogged determination to devote many hours of unpaid work in completing this research.

Peter Chapman

Chairman, Meppershall Parish Council

The community's vision for Meppershall

Below is the summary representation of what the residents of Meppershall want the village to become, as revealed by the surveys' results.

Communication and engagement

- Organisations and individuals make the most of existing and new media, to communicate and receive regular information and important updates to and from the community.
- Residents continue to feel free to participate in community discussions and actions, with a greater sense of engagement with local government (Parish Council and Central Beds Council).

Countryside and outdoors spaces

- The countryside and community outdoor spaces are preserved and respected.
- They are enjoyable and accessible by all.
- They are clear of dog mess and fly tipping.
- They are clearly mapped and signposted.

Amenities, services and business

- The village offers services and employment opportunities that strengthen its sense of community.
- Amenities such as the church, the village shop, the bakery and the Post Office are preserved.
- The village offers a varied range of hospitality, including a pub, a village hall and a tea room.

Housing development

- Housing development recognises the national requirements, while being considerate, proportionate and appropriate to clearly-defined local needs.
- Developments are limited to small numbers of houses on various sites, with good open spaces, and construction styles in keeping with the rest of the village.

Traffic flow

- Traffic flow is improved thanks to better parking provision.
- Speeding is controlled.
- Highways and pavements are well-maintained.
-

Acknowledgements

The Village Plan Review group members were:

Richard Bulley
Neil Chambers
Albane Lester
Paul Smith
Roger Smith
Julie Stock

Members of the group would like to acknowledge the help given by many people in the production of this plan, particularly those residents who gave their time in completing the nine surveys that form the backbone to this report.

Special thanks must be extended to Ansell Stores, the Social Club, the Church, the Sugar Loaf and Roger's Bakery for holding the boxes for residents to return their completed questionnaires.

Marc Neilson helped with the design of Questionnaire 8 aimed at the younger residents, as part of his Duke of Edinburgh Bronze award; the team wishes him good luck with that.

We also acknowledge with thanks the dedicated efforts of the Meppershall Messenger team in printing and delivering the monthly surveys with such efficiency.

Finally, we would like to recognise and thank the individuals and organisations who have already made positive changes in response to the findings of the surveys reported in our progress reports.

Purpose

A Village Plan consultation is an opportunity for everyone in the community to have a say about the future of Meppershall.

The output is a strategic document:

- Highlighting the strengths of the village, and mapping out the services and facilities already available in the community
- Identifying aspirations for the village, causes for concern amongst the residents and opportunities for improvement
- And defining a vision of what Meppershall should look like over the next decade.

The Village Plan is an important document because:

- It is representative of the views of the community as a whole and its findings are supported by a full audit trail
- It looks forward to the next five to 10 years, giving residents, the Parish Council, Central Beds Council and other stakeholders clear guidance about mid- and long-term community priorities
- It addresses all issues relevant to life in Meppershall and provides holistic findings, not just views on individual matters in isolation
- Its conclusions are scalable: they apply to changes of any size, from the creation of a new club by individuals, to the provision of new services by a business or a council.

Therefore a Village Plan is the most complete guideline document available, providing anyone wishing to make local changes a solid set of information to ascertain whether their proposal accords with the community's vision for Meppershall.

Yet these findings are only worthwhile if they are acted upon. Everyone should be encouraged to take action: addressing any aspect raised in these surveys, at any scale, will improve village life for all, as actions stemming from the previous Village Plan demonstrate.

At a higher level, this Village Plan should inform a Neighbourhood Plan, a legal document against which any major changes in the village must be assessed. Neighbourhood Planning processes are led by Parish Councils and require the involvement of the entire community, from definition of the vision to agreement by referendum.

The vision for the future of Meppershall as revealed by the surveys in 2016 is shown on page three and page 28 of this report, and the views of respondents about the current state of the village are shown from page eight onwards.

Methodology

The Village Plan Review Group, commonly known in the community as the Meppershall Village Forum, was set up in 2014 by the Parish Council to ascertain the views of residents and stakeholders regarding various aspects of village life.

The Group, made up of parish councillors and lay members of the community, began by inviting members of the 2008 Village Plan Group to explain the methods they had used and the lessons learned.

The Forum was launched at the Village Fair in May 2015; residents were encouraged to say what things they liked about Meppershall and what they wanted to improve. Their responses, written on over 300 hundred "Post-it" notes, were sorted into several distinct themes which the Group consolidated into nine topic areas for further, more focused research.

The Group decided that the process would benefit from a subject-specific approach, with nine surveys being distributed between November 2015 and July 2016, allowing both team and respondents to focus on one subject at a time, and keeping the questionnaires to a manageable size for preparation, reply and analysis purposes.

In order to make the surveys and their results as accessible as possible, the Group made use of both paper and online formats.

The Parish Council funded a hard copy of each questionnaire, which was distributed to each household with the Meppershall Messenger. Villagers could return the completed forms to boxes in the Church, Ansell Stores, Roger's Bakery, the Sugar Loaf and the Meppershall Social Club.

In addition, the Parish Council provided funding for Survey Monkey, a survey tool allowing residents to complete each survey online, via links available on the village website (www.meppershall.org), and dedicated website (www.meppershallvillageforum.wordpress.com), Twitter account (@mepvilforum) and Facebook group (Meppershall Village Forum).

Each survey began with the same three questions: age, gender and how long the respondent had lived in the village. The responses to these questions ensured the mix of respondents was consistent throughout all the surveys. Anonymity was assured, and the wording of each question carefully chosen so that no answer would be so specific as to identify the respondent.

As soon as each survey was closed, the paper replies were input manually into the Survey Monkey account, and the compiled data was analysed using the powerful tools available on this software.

The consultation was open to every resident of Meppershall over the age of 10, about 1500 people. With one exception, the average number of respondents was 90. With a confidence level of 90%, our margin of error is 9%, so we believe the data is representative and accurate.

The exception relates to Questionnaire 8, the Youth Survey, which was open to all 13-18 year-olds, about 150 people. The number of respondents was 12, down to seven for the most complete surveys. With a confidence level of 90%, our margin of error is 31%, so the data is still valid, but less reliable.

In the last questionnaire, 90% of respondents thought that the survey process had been good or very good.

The key findings from each questionnaire were reported at Parish Council meetings throughout 2016, and published in the Meppershall Messenger, on the website and via the social media feeds.

Once all the questionnaires were completed the group undertook a consolidated analysis of the data as a whole, in order to extract its essence and to frame it in the community context.

On the one hand, the findings were articulated under the two fundamental aspects of community - the people and the place, and a number of paradoxes were identified, that will require further research and resolution. On the other hand, the image that residents have for the ideal Meppershall of the future was summarised in a community vision.

In order to gain a complete understanding of the community, it is essential to understand the make-up of the population. The 2011 Census Parish Profile provides key information about the demographics of the parish.

Compared to national statistics, the following points define our village's specific identity:

- Age and gender trends are broadly in line with the national average, with a marginal bias towards children, the elderly and women
- The vast majority of the population is of British origin and of white ethnicity
- The percentage of people following a religion are in line with the national average, with the Christian component above the national average
- The population is in better health than the national average
- The proportion of married couples, with or without dependent children, is significantly above the national average
- Meppershall is an affluent village, with housing ownership and type, economic activity, qualifications, amenities, and socio-economic classification all significantly above the national average.

The top findings of this consultation are presented in this report in two ways.

Pages 8 – 19 present the top findings by topical survey, as they were published to the Parish Council, in The Messenger and online.

Pages 20 – 25 present the top findings in the community context under two headings: The People and The Place. The left hand column of each table shows the reference number of the finding, relating it back to the relevant survey (e.g. Q1.2 refers to Questionnaire 1, Top Finding 2).

The full responses for each separate questionnaire are not included in this written report but are available online at:

www.meppershallvillageforum.wordpress.com/

The paradoxes identified in the data collected are discussed on page 26.

The overall conclusions drawn from the consolidated data is summarised in the Community's Vision for Meppershall on page 3 and page 28.

Top Findings by Topical Survey

Survey 1: Communication

This questionnaire concentrated on how community organisations communicate with the villagers and included 27 questions covering the communication content and methods that the community uses and prefers.

Top Findings

1. What People Want to See

80% of respondents would like to receive information on all of the following:

- Updates on village schemes and projects
- Community events
- Public notices
- Police reports
- Parish Council meetings agenda, calling notices and minutes.

2. What is Good/Bad Communication

Good communication is defined as repeated information (both over time and in various forms):

- Multiple sources of information/advertising used in parallel, with special focus on the use of The Messenger, web-based formats and posters
- Regular and/or early information.

Poor communication is defined in terms of not visible, detailed, early or regular enough.

3. The Messenger is key to communication in the village.

4. The village website and the Meppershall Facebook noticeboard page are important but require development.

5. Villagers would like to receive an email newsletter.

Survey 2: Community and Engagement

21 questions exploring what community means, how far its members feel engaged with it and how they wish to be consulted.

Top Findings

1. The meaning of community
 - a small group in close geographical proximity
 - a sense of care and support, safety and belonging
 - people doing things together, for each other and for the common good.
2. An engaged community
 - 4 out of 5 respondents said that they were involved at a level that works for them, with a further 17% wishing to be more involved
 - 80% of respondents got involved, at least as users and beneficiaries of community activities
 - Also, with 43% of respondents contributing by volunteering, Meppershall was in line with national statistics (Community life survey, Institute for Volunteering Research, 2014-15).
3. Some difficulties in having your say
 - 2 out of 3 respondents did not communicate anything to the community in the past 12 months. Those who did, used the methods identified in Questionnaire 1 (e.g. The Messenger, social media...), plus the Parish Council
 - 1 out of 3 respondents did not participate in any group discussion and 3 out of 10 did not give their opinion on any community matters over the past 12 months
 - Of those who did express their views in the past year, 9 out of 10 felt they could do so freely but only half felt that their views were taken into account.
4. Preferred consultation methods

The preferred consultation methods, from most liked to least liked were:

 - Public information meeting followed by the opportunity to share your views anonymously
 - Community forums, i.e. public meeting with public discussion
 - Anonymous surveys
 - Small working groups, workshops, or focus group
 - Posting your views on a website, blog or social media, as a named contributor.
5. A desire for much greater involvement with local and unitary government
 - Respondents wanted to be involved with the Parish Council and with Central Beds Council 2 to 4 times more than they currently are.

Survey 3: Social and Recreation

27 questions covering the social and recreational amenities and activities within the village.

Top Findings

1. Some social amenities important to village life

The vast majority of respondents said that the following amenities have a positive effect on village life in general, not just in Meppershall:

- Community open spaces (97%)
- Community hall (95%)
- Pub (95%)
- Outdoor play areas (91%) and outdoor sports facilities (79%)
- Social club (85%)
- Place of worship (83%)
- Coffee shop / tea room (79%).

2. A desire for varied and attractive forms of hospitality

- The patronage of the existing licensed premises in Meppershall is low to moderate (27% to 56%), with The Airman being mostly used for food, the Social Club for quizzes and The Sugar Loaf for casual drinking and meetings
- All three would benefit from the same improvements: a better overall décor, and an atmosphere appealing to a wider patronage. Respondents also wish for good quality food to be served both at The Airman and at The Sugar Loaf
- In addition, 83% of respondents said that they would patronise a tea room / coffee shop if one were created in the village
- These findings follow the national trend towards more versatile hospitality.

3. The existence of the Village Hall is appreciated, but there are many suggestions for improvement

- The usage of the Village Hall is low to moderate, with the Meppershall Players, the Parish Council meetings and private hire cited as the top three uses
- Detailed findings have been provided to the Village Hall committee
- It is worth noting that responses show great confusion in the distinction between the Village Hall, the Social Club and some other group or club activities.

4. St Mary's Church is extremely important, but it needs to be warmer

- Respondents mostly attend St. Mary's Church for baptisms, weddings and funerals, as well as for Christmas services, and regardless of any faith aspect, 98% consider St. Mary's as an important historical building
- Half of respondents said that their faith or belief system was important to their sense of social connection
- Better heating is cited as a key area for improvement.

5. The outdoors communal facilities are widely used

- Foster's Fields and Old Road Meadow Nature Reserve (with their respective facilities) are widely used, as are the benches available throughout the village. A variety of additional recreational equipment would be of interest to respondents.

6. Recreational activities

- 94% of respondents have attended a Meppershall Summer Fair, while the Winter Fair and Fireworks, St. Mary's events and performances by the Meppershall Players are also popular
- Respondents also attend a variety of clubs / groups, and there is a desire for more exercise classes, and the resurgence of the WI Meppershall branch.

Survey 4: Countryside and Environment

Meppershall is categorised by local government as a large village and the importance of the surrounding countryside and environment was explored through 32 questions.

Top Findings

1. The countryside is an integral part of villagers' lives
 - More than 95% of respondents feel that living in the countryside is beneficial or essential to their lifestyle, and 78% of respondents actually spend more than half their time in rural areas
 - The views are especially valued, as well as the peaceful environment and the local paths
 - The building of new houses, traffic issues and dog fouling are common concerns, perceived as having detrimental effects to the local countryside.
2. A mostly clean environment, except for dog fouling
 - 3 out of 4 respondents feel that the environment is free from environmental pollutions but fly-tipping is a concern
 - In addition, 88% of respondents are satisfied with the weekly rubbish collection and the various recycling facilities are widely used
 - By contrast, 73% of respondents feel that dog fouling is a major issue, which they think could be alleviated through education and the enforcement of fixed penalties.
3. The history and heritage of the village are important
 - 88% of respondents would visit local listed buildings if they held open days
 - The buildings seen as forming our local heritage fall into three main groups:
 - Agricultural history: local farms, greenhouses and associated market gardening buildings, workmen's cottages
 - Village life history: this includes the places of worship (St Mary's Church, Primitive Methodist Chapel and St Thomas Chapel) together with historical services buildings (school, old police station)
 - Architectural history: thatched houses, water tower.
4. The footpaths are well used, but would benefit from some improvements
 - More than 95% of respondents know where the public footpaths and bridleways are, and a similar proportion of villagers use them, at least occasionally
 - Although a majority of the respondents is satisfied with the condition and signage of the paths, several improvements would be welcome, such as better footpath maps on public displays, clearer distinction between path types, better path surfaces and maintenance.

Survey 5: Highways and Transport

31 questions were asked in this survey, reviewing local transport provision, highways quality and traffic matters.

Top Findings

1. Methods of transport: a car village

- Meppershall is almost entirely a car/van/motorbike village, with 95% of respondents indicating these as their regular modes of transport
- Currently, about 20% of respondents use buses, but most respondents feel that the provision of more buses, especially a bus service to Arlesey station, would be the most beneficial improvement to public transport. This echoes the finding that train services from nearby stations are well used and mostly satisfactory.

2. Parking is the major issue (90%)

- The biggest traffic concern in the village is parking (90% of respondents), with its associated congestions, pinch points and blind bends
- Multiple critical zones were highlighted throughout the village, especially the shop area of the High Street, and Fildyke Road
- The most popular remedy suggested by respondents was double yellow lines (36%).

3. Speeding also a major concern (75%)

- The speed limit in the village (30mph) is considered adequate by 73%, while the limit on the surrounding roads (60 mph) receives mixed views (55% adequate, 45% too fast)
- Speeding is a concern for 75%, with specific problem areas. Speed cameras and associated fines are seen as the most effective method to tackle the issue (75%), while the recent measures are seen as mostly ineffective by 77% of respondents.

4. Other highways matters are acceptable but several improvements would be welcome.

- Respondents are strongly satisfied with street lighting and signage (94% and 93% respectively), although some improvement would be welcome, such as better signposting to Old Road Meadow nature reserve
- 92% of respondents are satisfied with the gritting carried out by Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC). 76% know where the grit salt bins are, yet 71% never make use of them
- The condition of the pavements received mixed reviews (55% mostly satisfied), and a third of respondents would like to see additional pavements, notably on Fildyke Road
- 52% of respondents are dissatisfied with road surfaces and potholes are the problem most commonly reported to CBC (32%).

5. Information to and from Central Bedfordshire Council

- Communication between villagers and local authorities on highways issues is poor. The reporting methods to inform CBC of highways issues are hardly used (13%) and 10% of respondents didn't know they could do so. Likewise, more than half didn't know www.roadworks.org existed and less than 10% of villagers are using it.

Survey 6: Housing

26 questions were asked exploring the housing needs in the village and the ways to address national requirements at local level.

Top Findings

1. A desire for housing development in keeping with the village

Most respondents understand the national need for more housing and believe that Meppershall should play its part with:

- Considerate development: respondents strongly indicate the desire to maintain the village feel and to protect the surrounding countryside
- Proportionate development: generally, an average of 6 to 10 new houses per year is perceived as acceptable, and respondents feel strongly that Meppershall is doing much more than its fair share
- Appropriate development: respondents want new housing to respond to local needs. For example, many voice concerns about the lack of affordable housing for young adults and first-time buyers.

Most respondents also agree with the national principle of 'presuming in favour of sustainable development', but express strong concerns about how sustainability is analysed and defined.

2. A current housing stock mostly fit for purpose

- 88% of respondents say that their dwelling meets their current needs, and 71% think that it will continue to do so over the next ten years
- 29% of respondents would like to move away from the village in the next ten years.

3. A clear set of building guidelines for the village

Respondents ranked the housing needs of the village over the next 10 years as follows (each table ranked from most needed at the top to least needed at the bottom)

Type
Semi-detached houses
Terraced houses
Detached houses
Flats

Ownership
Properties for sale (full ownership)
Properties for sale (shared ownership)
Properties for rent (housing association)
Properties for rent (private landlords)

Size
2-bedroom /3-bedroom properties
4-bedroom properties
1-bedroom properties
5-bedroom properties

Build
2-storey properties
1-storey properties
3-storey properties

In addition, 70% of respondents would prefer to see multiple new sites, each with few houses, rather than few new sites, each with many houses.

4. Impact of new housing on the village, the environment and the community

- 88% of respondents thought it important that new houses built in Meppershall blend in with their surroundings. In addition to the points above, respondents indicated a desire for a village style defined by spacious planning (be it green spaces, plot size or off-road parking) and a variety of building materials and styles. There is a common aversion to suburban-style estate builds
- 70% of respondents thought it important that new houses built in Meppershall be environmentally friendly. The use of renewable energies, highly efficient insulation and water management technologies were at the forefront of the desired green methods
- New residents are seen as good for community activities, local business and council tax, but bad for services, especially highways and transport, medical facilities and utilities.

5. A moderate engagement with the planning process

- 40 to 50% of respondents have been involved in the planning process over the past year, be it with Central Beds, the Parish Council or prospective developers.
- A similar proportion (42%) would be interested in helping create a Neighbourhood Plan for Meppershall.

Survey 7: Services, Employment and Business

This survey concentrated on the economic aspects of Meppershall through 25 questions aimed at all villagers plus five extra questions specifically aimed at those who run a business in the village.

Top Findings

1. A great range of local services

- 94% of respondents use Ansell's Village Stores and 91% use Roger's Bakery (broadly half of them often and half of them regularly). However, all respondents wish for greater variety, local produce and better value.
- Other than superstore home deliveries (used by 45%), mobile food services available locally are rarely used.

2. A very strong health and social care provision

- Local healthcare and social services were considered satisfactory by 88% of respondents and there was little demand for these services at home
- 62% of respondents do not know where the defibrillators are and/or how to use them, suggesting the need for regular training for interested residents.

3. Respondents were overwhelmingly satisfied with all the local services over the past 12 months

- The fire brigade, GP surgeries, Post Office, hospitals and libraries all received more than a 90% satisfaction rate. The least satisfactory service was the Police, with 62%.

4. A vibrant, active community – not a dorm village

- 40% of respondents work from Meppershall and the surrounding villages, and a further 35% would like to do so, if it were made possible by the right job offers becoming available
- 78% of respondents would like to see more jobs available in Meppershall and 2/3 of respondents would support the construction of offices or light industrial units to provide new employment opportunities
- 47% of respondents work in Hertfordshire.

5. Local Businesses

- Local businesses would benefit most from advertising their products and services through all local media (80%), business networking events (73%), and business fairs to promote their business to local customers (67%)
- Generally, the local infrastructures are fit for their needs, with broadband internet least adequate (70% satisfactory)
- 75% of business respondents do not foresee recruiting staff over the next 5 years.

Survey 8: Youth Survey

A survey of 29 questions specifically aimed at 13-18-year-old residents.

Top Findings

- The park is popular as a meeting place for teens
- All respondents attended activities in the village in the past 12 months (71% attended 1 to 3 activities), and generally respondents are satisfied with what is on offer
- There is no major demand for a youth club (71% would not attend)
- 1 in 4 respondents have a part-time job
- All respondents have someone to talk to about the future
- 50% of respondents prefer to receive communication about Meppershall in paper form.

Survey 9: Village Governance

This survey concentrated its 31 questions on the tiers of local government affecting Meppershall.

Top Findings

1. The role of the Parish Council is understood in theory, but not seen in practice

Respondents understand the role of the Parish Council as being about:

- the local community
- representing the views/interests of the community
- overseeing local matters.

However, there is great confusion about how this occurs in practice, with 72% of respondents unable to give examples of something the Parish Council had done well, and 62% unable to give examples of something done poorly.

2. What the Parish Council is doing well or poorly

- When contacting the Parish Council with a concern or query, 58% of respondents had their concern addressed or were helped to the right agency but 36% felt that their concern was ignored
- 67% of respondents thought that the Parish Council was ineffective in representing the interests of the villagers in dealings with the next tier of local government (that is Central Beds Council)
- The views of the respondents were very varied. For example, an equal number of respondents give the handling of the Village Hall development as an example of something done well and something done poorly (20% each).

3. Communication could be improved

- 89% of respondents read the Parish Council report in the Messenger and 92% are mostly satisfied with the content
- However, there is a desire for more detailed information, in particular about finances, outcomes of meetings, feedback from consultations, and planning matters
- Currently, the absence of detailed feedback is leading to confusion and frustration about how the Parish Council responds to the views of the community.

4. A community disconnected from its Parish Council

- 46% of respondents never attend Parish Council meetings, and a further 18% of respondents didn't know that they could, and 63% can name only 1-3 Parish Councillors
- Yet 59% of respondents say that they are involved with the Parish Council at a level that works for them and a further 26% do not want to be involved with the Parish Council at all
- In addition, 85% of respondents said they would not be prepared to become a parish councillor, while 54% would not consider helping on Parish Council working groups as laypeople either.

5. Top priorities for next 12 months

Echoing the findings of previous surveys, respondents feel that the Parish Council should focus its efforts (and when applicable its funding) on:

- Restricting further housing development
- Improving the state of the footpaths and the general cleanliness of the countryside
- Improving highways conditions (especially road surfaces)
- Addressing speeding and parking issues.

6. Overall, the feedback to the consultation process was very positive.

90% of respondents thought that the survey process had been good or very good.

Top Findings in the Community Context

This table relates our key findings to the specific survey and question identified in the left hand column.

THE PEOPLE - Communication, Engagement, Community

Q1.1	<p>What People Want to See</p> <p>80% of respondents would like to receive information on all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updates on village schemes and projects. - Community events. - Public notices. - Police reports. - Parish Council meetings agenda, calling notices and minutes.
Q1.2	<p>What is Good/Bad Communication</p> <p>Good communication is defined as repeated information (both over time and in various forms):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multiple sources of information/advertising used in parallel, with special focus on the use of the Messenger, web-based formats and posters. - Regular and/or early information. <p>Poor communication is defined in terms of not visible, detailed, early or regular enough.</p>
Q1.3	The Messenger is key to communication in the village.
Q1.4	The village website www.meppershall.org and the Meppershall Facebook noticeboard are important but require development
Q1.5	Villagers would like to receive an email newsletter
Q2.1	<p>The meaning of community</p> <p>Community was defined in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a small group in close geographical proximity - a sense of care and support, safety and belonging - people doing things together, for each other and for the common good.
Q2.2	<p>An engaged community</p> <p>4 out of 5 respondents said that they were involved at a level that works for them, with a further 17% wishing to be more involved.</p> <p>80% of respondents got involved, at least as users and beneficiaries of community activities.</p> <p>Also, with 43% of respondents contributing by volunteering, Meppershall was in line with national statistics</p>
Q2.3	<p>Some difficulties in having your say</p> <p>2 out of 3 respondents did not communicate anything to the community in the past 12 months. Those who did used the methods identified in Questionnaire 1 (e.g. The Messenger, social media...), plus the Parish Council.</p> <p>1 out of 3 respondents did not participate in any group discussion and 3 out of 10 did not give their opinion on any community matters over the past 12 months.</p> <p>Of those who did express their views in the past year, 9 out of 10 felt they could do so freely but only half felt that their views were taken into account.</p>

Q2.4	<p>Preferred consultation methods</p> <p>The preferred consultation methods, from most liked to least liked were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public information meeting followed by the opportunity to share your views anonymously - Community forums, i.e. public meeting with public discussion - Anonymous surveys - Small working groups, workshops, or focus group - Posting your views on a website, blog or social media, as a named contributor.
Q2.5	<p>A desire for much greater involvement with local and unitary government</p> <p>Respondents wanted to be involved with the Parish Council and with Central Beds Council 2 to 4 times more than they currently are.</p>
Q3.6	<p>Recreational activities</p> <p>94% of respondents have attended a Meppershall Summer Fair, while the Winter Fair and Fireworks, St. Mary's events and performances by the Meppershall Players are also popular. Respondents also attend a variety of clubs / groups, and there is a desire for more exercise classes, and the resurgence of the WI Meppershall branch.</p>
Q6.5	<p>A moderate engagement with the planning process</p> <p>40 to 50% of respondents have been involved in the planning process over the past year, be it with Central Beds, the Parish Council or prospective developers.</p> <p>A similar proportion (42%) would be interested in helping create a Neighbourhood Plan for Meppershall.</p>
Q8.2	<p>All teen respondents attended activities in the village in the past 12 months (71% attended 1 to 3 activities), and generally respondents are satisfied with what is on offer.</p>
Q8.3	<p>There is no major demand for a youth club (71% of teen respondents would not attend).</p>
Q8.5	<p>All teen respondents have someone to talk to about the future.</p>
Q8.6	<p>50% of teen respondents prefer to receive communication about Meppershall in paper form.</p>
Q9.1	<p>The role of the Parish Council is understood in theory, but not seen in practice</p> <p>Respondents understand the role of the Parish Council as being about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the local community - representing the views/interests of the community - overseeing local matters. <p>However, there is great confusion about how this occurs in practice, with 72% of respondents unable to give examples of something the Parish Council had done well, and 62% unable to give examples of something done poorly.</p>
Q9.2	<p>What the Parish Council is doing well or poorly</p> <p>When contacting the Parish Council with a concern or query, 58% of respondents had their concern addressed or were helped to the right agency but 36% felt that their concern was ignored. 67% of respondents thought that the Parish Council was ineffective in representing the interests of villagers in dealings with the next tier of local government (that is Central Beds Council). The views of respondents were very varied. For example, an equal number of respondents give the handling of the Village Hall development as an example of something done both well and poorly (20% each).</p>
Q9.3	<p>Communication could be improved</p> <p>89% of respondents read the Parish Council report in the Messenger and 92% are mostly satisfied with the content.</p> <p>However, there is a desire for more detailed information, in particular about finances, outcomes of meetings, feedback from consultations, and planning matters.</p> <p>Currently, the absence of detailed feedback is leading to confusion and frustration about how the Parish Council responds to the views of the community.</p>

Q9.4	<p>A community disconnected from its Parish Council 46% of respondents never attend Parish Council meetings, and a further 18% of respondents didn't know that they could, and 63% can only name 1-3 Parish Councillors. Yet 59% of respondents say that they are involved with the Parish Council at a level that works for them and a further 26% do not want to be involved with the Parish Council at all. In addition, 85% of respondents said they would not be prepared to become a parish councillor, while 54% would not consider helping on Parish Council working groups as laypeople either.</p>
Q9.5	<p>Top Parish Council priorities for the next 12 months Echoing the findings of previous surveys, respondents feel that the Parish Council should focus its efforts (and when applicable its funding) on: - restricting further housing development - improving the state of the footpaths and the general cleanliness of the countryside - improving the condition of the highways (especially road surfaces) - addressing speeding and parking issues.</p>
Q9.6	<p>A very positive feedback to the Village Plan 2015-2025 consultation process overall. 90% of respondents thought that the survey process had been good or very good.</p>

THE PLACE - Infrastructures, Amenities, Environment

Q3.1	<p>Some social amenities important to village life The vast majority of respondents said that the following amenities have a positive effect on village life in general, not just in Meppershall: - Community open spaces (97%) - Community hall (95%) - Pub (95%) - Outdoor play areas (91%) and outdoor sports facilities (79%) - Social club (85%) - Place of worship (83%) - Coffee shop / tea room (79%)</p>
Q3.2	<p>A desire for varied and attractive forms of hospitality The patronage of the existing licensed premises in Meppershall is low to moderate (27 to 56%), with The Airman being mostly used for food, the Social Club for quizzes and The Sugar Loaf for casual drinking and meetings. All three would benefit from the same improvements: a better overall décor, and an atmosphere appealing to a wider patronage. Respondents also wish for good quality food to be served both at The Airman and at The Sugar Loaf. In addition, 83% of respondents said that they would patronise a tea room / coffee shop if one were created in the village. These findings follow the national trend towards more versatile hospitality.</p>
Q3.3	<p>The existence of the Village Hall is appreciated, but there are many suggestions for improvement The usage of the Village Hall is low to moderate, with the Meppershall Players, the Parish Council meetings and private hire cited as the top three uses. Detailed findings will be provided to the Village Hall committee. It is worth noting that responses show great confusion between the Village Hall, the Social Club and some other group or club activities.</p>

Q3.4	<p>St Mary’s Church is important, but it needs to be warmer Respondents mostly attend St. Mary’s Church for baptisms, weddings and funerals, as well as for Christmas services, and regardless of any faith aspect, 98% consider St. Mary’s as an important historical building. Half of respondents said that their faith or belief system was important to their sense of social connection. Better heating is cited as a key area for improvement.</p>
Q3.5	<p>The outdoors communal facilities are widely used Foster’s Fields and Old Road Meadow Nature Reserve (with their respective facilities) are widely used, as are the benches available throughout the village. A variety of additional recreational equipment would be of interest to respondents.</p>
Q4.1	<p>The countryside is an integral part of villagers’ lives More than 95% of respondents feel that living in the countryside is beneficial or essential to their lifestyle, and 78% of respondents actually spend more than half their time in rural areas. The views are especially valued, as well as the peaceful environment and the local paths. The building of new houses, traffic issues and dog fouling are common concerns, perceived as having a detrimental effect on the local countryside.</p>
Q4.2	<p>A mostly clean environment, except for dog fouling 3 out of 4 respondents feel that the environment is free from environmental pollutions but fly-tipping is a concern. In addition, 88% of respondents are satisfied with the weekly rubbish collection and the various recycling facilities are widely used. By contrast, 73% of respondents feel that dog fouling is a major issue, which they think could be alleviated through education and the enforcement of fixed penalties.</p>
Q4.3	<p>The history and heritage of the village are important 88% of respondents would visit local listed buildings if they held open days. The buildings seen as forming our local heritage fall into three main groups: - Agricultural history: local farms, greenhouses and associated market gardening buildings, workmen’s cottages; - Village life history: this includes the places of worship (St Mary’s Church, Primitive Methodist Chapel and St Thomas Chapel) together with historical services buildings (school, old police station); - Architectural history: thatched houses, water tower.</p>
Q4.4	<p>The footpaths are well used, but would benefit from some improvements More than 95% of respondents know where the public footpaths and bridleways are, and a similar proportion of villagers use them, at least occasionally. Although a majority of the respondents is satisfied with the condition and signage of the paths, several improvements would be welcome, such as better footpath maps on public display, clearer distinction between path types, better path surfaces and maintenance.</p>
Q5.1	<p>Methods of transport: a car village Meppershall is almost entirely a car/van/motorbike village, with 95% of respondents indicating these as their regular modes of transport. Currently, about 20% of respondents use buses, but most respondents feel that the provision of more buses, especially a bus service to Arlesey station, would be the most beneficial improvement to public transport. This echoes the finding that train services from nearby stations are well used and reported as mostly satisfactory.</p>

Q5.2	<p>Parking is a major issue (90%) The biggest traffic concern in the village is parking (90% of respondents), with its associated congestions, pinch points and blind bends. Multiple critical zones were highlighted throughout the village, especially the shop area of the High Street, and Fildyke Road. The most popular remedy suggested by respondents was double yellow lines (36%).</p>
Q5.3	<p>Speeding also a major concern (75%) Speed limit in the village (30mph) is considered adequate by 73%, while the limit on the surrounding roads (60 mph) receives mixed views (55% adequate, 45% too fast). Speeding is a concern for 75%, with specific problem areas. Speed cameras and associated fines are seen as the most effective method to tackle the issue (75%), while the recent measures are seen as mostly ineffective by 77% of respondents.</p>
Q5.4	<p>Other highways matters are acceptable but several improvements would be welcome. Respondents are strongly satisfied with street lighting and signage (94% and 93% respectively), although some improvement would be welcome, such as better signposting to Old Road Meadow nature reserve. 92% of respondents are satisfied with the gritting carried out by Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC). 76% know where the grit salt bins are, yet 71% never make use of them. The condition of the pavements received mixed reviews (55% mostly satisfied), and a third of respondents would like to see additional pavements, notably on Fildyke Road. 52% of respondents are dissatisfied with road surfaces and potholes are the problem most commonly reported to CBC (32%).</p>
Q5.5	<p>Highways information to and from Central Bedfordshire Council Communication between villagers and local authorities on highways issues is poor. The reporting methods to inform CBC of highways issues are hardly used (13%) and 10% of respondents didn't know they could do so. Likewise, more than half didn't know www.roadworks.org existed and less than 10% of villagers are using it.</p>
Q6.1	<p>A desire for housing development in keeping with the village Most respondents understand the national need for more housing and believe that Meppershall should play its part with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Considerate development: respondents strongly indicate the desire to maintain the village feel and to protect the surrounding countryside. - Proportionate development: generally, an average of 6 to 10 new houses per year is perceived as acceptable, and respondents feel strongly that Meppershall is doing much more than its fair share. - Appropriate development: respondents want new housing to respond to local needs. For example, many voice concerns about the lack of affordable housing for young adults and first-time buyers. <p>Most respondents also agree with the national principle of 'presuming in favour of sustainable development', but express strong concerns about how sustainability is analysed and defined.</p>
Q6.2	<p>A current housing stock mostly fit for purpose 88% of respondents say that their dwelling meets their current needs, and 71% think that it will continue to do so over the next ten years. 29% of respondents would like to move away from the village in the next ten years.</p>
Q6.3	<p>A clear set of building guidelines for the village See page 15 of this report for detail. In addition, 70% of respondents would prefer to see many sites, each with few houses, rather than few sites, each with many houses.</p>

Q6.4	<p>Impact of new housing on the village, the environment and the community</p> <p>88% of respondents thought it important that new houses built in Meppershall blend in with their surroundings. In addition to the points above, respondents indicated a desire for a village style defined by spacious planning (be it green spaces, plot size or off-road parking) and a variety of building materials and styles. There is a common aversion to suburban-style estate builds.</p> <p>70% of respondents thought it important that new houses built in Meppershall be environmentally friendly. The use of renewable energies, highly efficient insulation and water management technologies were at the forefront of the desired green methods. New residents are seen as good for community activities, local business and council tax, but bad for services, especially highways and transport, medical facilities and utilities.</p>
Q7.1	<p>A great range of local services</p> <p>94% of respondents use Ansell's Village Stores and 91% use Roger's Bakery (broadly half of them often and half of them regularly). However, all respondents wish for greater variety, local produce and better value.</p> <p>Other than superstore home deliveries (used by 45%), mobile food services available locally are rarely used.</p>
Q7.2	<p>A very strong health and social care provision</p> <p>Local healthcare and social services were considered satisfactory by 88% of respondents and there was little demand for these services at home.</p> <p>62% of respondents do not know where the defibrillators are and/or how to use them, suggesting the need for regular training for interested residents.</p>
Q7.3	<p>Respondents were overwhelmingly satisfied with all the local services over the past 12 months</p> <p>The fire brigade, GP surgeries, Post Office, hospitals and libraries all received more than a 90% satisfaction rate. The least satisfactory service was the Police, with 62%.</p>
Q7.4	<p>A vibrant, active community – not a dorm village</p> <p>40% of respondents work from Meppershall and the surrounding villages, and a further 35% would like to do so, if it were made possible by the right job offers becoming available.</p> <p>78% of respondents would like to see more jobs available in Meppershall and 2/3 of respondents would support the construction of offices or light industrial units to provide new employment opportunities.</p> <p>47% of respondents work in Hertfordshire.</p>
Q7.5	<p>Local Businesses</p> <p>Local businesses would benefit most from advertising their products and services through all local media (80%), business networking events (73%), and business fairs to promote their business to local customers (67%).</p> <p>Generally, the local infrastructures are fit for their needs, with broadband internet least adequate (70% satisfactory).</p> <p>75% of business respondents do not foresee recruiting staff over the next 5 years.</p>
Q8.1	The park is popular as a meeting place for teens.
Q8.4	1 in 4 teen respondents have a part-time job.

Paradoxes

As is to be expected from a varied community, respondents' views across related issues are not always consistent, and the consultation highlighted the following paradoxes.

Firstly, the consultation repeatedly shows contradictions between a desire to see change, a reluctance to be active in bringing it about or to fund it. For example:

- Many respondents wish for improvement, yet only 17% wish to be involved more than they currently are (Top finding Q2.2)
- To improve recreational aspects, only 37% of respondents (on average) are willing to contribute time, resources or funding to make change happen (Survey 3 question 25)
- Similarly, respondents state that they want to be much more involved in the working of local democracy (Top finding Q2.5), yet very few make use of the existing means of providing their views to the Parish Councils and Central Beds Council; 89% do not wish to become Parish Councillors; 54% do not wish to assist the Parish Council as lay members (Top finding Q9.4); and 52% are not willing to pay more Council Tax to make their top priorities happen in Meppershall (Survey 9 question 27).

Desire to see change
vs Reluctance to be active in bringing it about
v Unwillingness to fund it

Whilst Meppershall may be typical of many communities in this respect, greater community engagement from all stakeholders will be necessary if the village is to continue to improve.

Secondly, although there is a consensus to see Meppershall remaining a village:

- The level of amenities and activities respondents wish for varies widely (see detailed responses to Survey 3: Social and Recreation and Survey 7: Services, Employment and Business)
- Views about the village density are contradictory: 59% of respondents wish to maintain the current housing density (Survey 6 question 15), which must increase the overall size of the village, but is at odds with the desire to preserve the surrounding countryside (Top finding Q4.1).

Meppershall remaining a village
vs Amenities needed vs Housing density
vs Preserving the surrounding countryside

Addressing these paradoxes will require further review with residents and other stakeholders, such as businesses, councils and service providers.

The community's vision for Meppershall

Below is the summary representation of what the residents of Meppershall want the village to become, as revealed by the surveys' results.

Communication and engagement

- Organisations and individuals make the most of existing and new media, to communicate and receive regular information and important updates to and from the community.
- Residents continue to feel free to participate in community discussions and actions, with a greater sense of engagement with local government (Parish Council and Central Beds Council).

Countryside and outdoors spaces

- The countryside and community outdoor spaces are preserved and respected.
- They are enjoyable and accessible by all.
- They are clear of dog mess and fly tipping.
- They are clearly mapped and signposted.

Amenities, services and business

- The village offers services and employment opportunities that strengthen its sense of community.
- Amenities such as the church, the village shop, the bakery and the Post Office are preserved.
- The village offers a varied range of hospitality, including a pub, a village hall and a tea room.

Housing development

- Housing development recognises the national requirements, while being considerate, proportionate and appropriate to clearly-defined local needs.
- Developments are limited to small numbers of houses on various sites, with good open spaces, and construction styles in keeping with the rest of the village.

Traffic flow

- Traffic flow is improved thanks to better parking provision.
- Speeding is controlled.
- Highways and pavements are well-maintained.