

Meppershall Village Plan 2017-2027

Summary report

Introduction by the Chairman of Meppershall Parish Council

The first Village Plan for Meppershall was written in 2008 and was a resource for villagers and planners to better understand residents' views about their community. In 2014, the Parish Council set up The Village Plan Review Group (the Forum) to prepare another plan covering the next ten years.

The project was launched at the 2015 Summer Fair, and enabled the Forum group to devise nine separate questionnaires, each seeking the respondent's views on a separate topic area. They were circulated on a monthly basis, both on line and in hard copy with the Meppershall Messenger. 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 Group have summarised the findings from the nine surveys in a detailed Village Plan document, which is available from the Parish Council on request, or by downloading from the Meppershall village web site. The Forum also maintains its own website, where the detailed findings and also the survey responses themselves are available for download to provide more detailed information if required.

This short document provides a summary of that report. However, residents are encouraged to read the Village Plan in full to see the depth of information available.

The Parish Council is now using this Village Plan as a guide to fulfilling its duties to the community of Meppershall, as representative of its collective views, and as facilitator of community action. The Plan will form a reference point for our discussions, and will be used by the various Working Groups in informing recommendations for policy and specific responses. The full Village Plan is being circulated to Central Bedfordshire Council and all the organisations mentioned in the report.

The Parish Council will incorporate these findings in its next major task, drafting a statutory Neighbourhood Plan, which when finalised will be placed before the residents for their agreement. Once agreed, it would then have legal force in the planning process.

Peter Chapman

Purpose

The purpose of a Village Plan is:

- To give everyone in the community an opportunity to have a say about the future of Meppershall
- To highlight the strengths of the village, and map out the services and facilities already available in the community
- To identify aspirations for the village, causes for concern amongst the residents and opportunities for improvement
- To define a vision of what Meppershall should look like over the next decade

The Village Plan is an important document because:

- Everyone in the community had an opportunity to help define the future of Meppershall
- It is therefore representative of the views of the community as a whole
- 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 the 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.

Process

The process followed was:

- Step 1 – Identify topics to consult on
- Step 2 – Gather data on each topic and perform initial analysis
- Step 3 – Analyse and reflect on the data as a whole
- Step 4 - Compile findings in a strategic document - the Village Plan

The 9 topics were:

- Communication
- Community and Engagement
- Social and Recreation
- Countryside and Environment
- Highways and Transport
- Housing
- Services, Employment and Business
- Youth Survey
- Village Governance

The top findings were presented by topic, as well as under the two key aspects of community:

- The People: Communication, Engagement, Community
- The Place: Infrastructures, Amenities, Environment

The Community's Vision for Meppershall

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.

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 but a reluctance to be active in bringing it about or in funding 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
- Views about the village density are contradictory: many wish to maintain the current housing density which must increase the overall size of the village, but is at odds with the desire to preserve the surrounding countryside

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