

Looking to the future



Designed with and for the people of Meopham Parish
by the Parish Plan Steering Group

<http://www.meopham.org/>

Meopham Parish Council, The Windmill, Wrotham Road, Meopham

Meopham Parish Plan

Report October 2008

Chapter Contents

1. Introduction to the Parish Plan
2. Background to producing the Plan
 Role of the Parish Plan (Committee) Steering Group
3. Here we are (Meopham on the map)
4. Interface with Local Authorities:
 - a. Kent County Council;
 - b. Gravesham Borough Council.
 - c. Meopham Parish Council.
- 5 Providers of other Public Services:
 - a. Kent Police;
 - b. Kent Highways;
 - c. Public Transport;
 - d. Health Trusts.
6. Infrastructure of the Parish of Meopham
 - a. Services and facilities;
 - b. Housing;
 - c. Employment.

Issues and Concerns raised by Residents

as reflected in surveys and consultation exercises, with recommendations made in the following chapters, 9 to 12 :

- 7 Crime, Law and Order – Community Safety.
8. Highways, Traffic and Transport.
9. Protecting the Environment and Rights of Way.
10. Use of Amenities and facilities for young people.
11. Quality of Services.
12. Education and Child-care.

Annexes

- A. Executive Summary.
- B. Action Plan.
- C. Acknowledgements.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 The purpose of a Parish Plan is to provide the local residents with the opportunity to give their views in the planning of the future of their Community.

1.2 The Parish Plan had to have certain key factors, which were to:

be community owned;		be all inclusive;
comprise a consultation process;		prioritise and address issues;
enhance the value of its assets;	&	engender more community spirit.

1.3 In order to seek the views of everyone in the community, a questionnaire was distributed to every household in the Parish. The replies were analysed and reported, as shown in Chapters 7 to 12; throughout this progression, the information gathered was communicated back to the community.

1.4 It was to help the residents identify what they want and to work out how to deliver it that some key questions were raised. It was an opportunity to find out what matters to local residents by taking account of their opinions on a range of issues, for instance:

How can road safety be dealt with effectively?

What ways can public transport services be improved?

How the community can combat anti-social behaviour and crime?

Should there be better access to health care?

How can quality of services, social and leisure time be improved?

1.5 In order to obtain the best results to answer these kinds of questions, the providers of these services were consulted and asked to specify their future policies for the benefit of the community. The framework for communities to plan their own future was initially obtained from surveys and by consultation.

1.6 It was important to have the active participation of members of the community, who would set out a vision for what they regard as in their interests. It had not only to preserve what is valued but to develop new ideas for the well-being of the whole community. A Steering Group was formed to interpret these findings.

1.7 The guidance and financial support given by the Action with Communities in Rural Kent was of invaluable assistance in launching and proceeding with this exercise, in particular from Victoria Lawson, the Parish Plan adviser.

1.8 An interim report was presented to the Parish Council in time for the Annual Parish Meeting in May 2008. Following further consultation, this final report containing recommendations and action plan for the next four years was produced by the Steering Group. See the Action Plan at Annexe A.



Chapter 2 - Background to producing a Parish Plan

2.1 Meopham Parish Council first commissioned the preparation and publication of a Parish Plan and Village Design Statement in May 2003, following the Annual Parish Meeting. A committee was formed with the title "Parish Plan Committee" and first met in October 2003. The membership comprised three parish councillors and members of the community, under the chairmanship of Mr Michael Peart, a former Parish Councillor and a distinguished retired diplomat.

2.2 The discussions and consultation began on the Parish Plan with Gravesham Borough Council and one of its former senior Directors gave his services as a key consultant. However, it was then decided that the initial task should be to prepare a Village (Parish) Design Statement (VDS) before embarking on the full Parish Plan. The Parish Plan Committee was subject to some changes and amongst them, Michael Peart was replaced by Mrs Pat Luxford as chairman.

2.3 During the course of the next three years, the committee had investigated the physical character of the Parish. They completed their study and published their report in December 2006 when the document was handed over to the Parish Council and a copy was sent to Gravesham Borough Council. It is awaiting the outcome of negotiations with the District Council to obtain its acceptance as a supplementary planning guidance document. The final VDS report is under consideration for its sustainability and for an environmental assessment. The ultimate aim is for the guidance document to be included in Gravesham Borough Council's Local Development Framework (LDF) as part of their long term planning document.

2.4 The Parish Plan Committee was dissolved in August 2007. The Parish Council undertook to finalise outstanding matters and to prepare an action plan to be agreed with the Planning Officers at Gravesham Borough Council. The Members of the Parish Council decided to carry out a more detailed investigation into issues and concerns that were not covered by the Village Design Statement. This required the Parish Plan to be re-instated or for a Kent Health Check to be conducted. The latter was considered as an alternative because matched funding would be made available for a major project, such as providing a community centre or youth club. However, the amount of finance required was thought to be beyond that for this Parish.

2.5 The Parish Council thought it necessary to explore what local residents wanted over the next four years in the planning for the future. It was on this basis that the

need for a Parish Plan emerged. The process re-commenced in September 2007 and since then extensive consultation has been conducted. A Steering Group was established in January 2008 to report on the outcome for the future of the Parish. In the past 9 months they have met 6 times and assessed all the available information to produce the Plan with firm recommendations for implementation.

Role of Parish Plan (Committee) Steering Group

2.6 The Parish Council nominated members of the community to produce a Parish Plan and Village Design Statement for the long term planning development for the future of the Parish. The terms and their role were set out as follows.

2.7 In order to initiate the Village (Parish) Design Statement and for this Parish Plan, the Council produced their terms of reference. The Steering Group were asked to examine and produce recommendations for the future of the Parish, over the next four years, based upon:

- a. information and data gathered by way of a survey of residents;
- b. taking account of views and opinions by way of consultation; and through the advice offered by providers of services to the community.

2.8 The (PP) Steering Group comprised 12 members who were residents of which three were elected members of the Parish Council. The Group had the services of a co-ordinator and secretarial support provided by the Council. The Group had the support of the Action with Communities in Rural Kent on matters of procedure or protocol to ensure that the direction of the Plan was in accordance with DEFRA guidelines and any grants obtained met with specified conditions.

2.9 The Group reported to the Parish Council's Planning and Projects Committee and reports were presented at Committee meetings when requested. Any costs incurred were paid for by the Parish Council funds allocated from its budget.

2.10 The findings from their enquiries are contained in this Report. The Executive Summary at Annexe A and the proposed Action Plan, based on the Steering Group's recommendations, is set out at Annexe B. The acknowledgements to those who assisted in compiling this Report are listed at Annexe C.

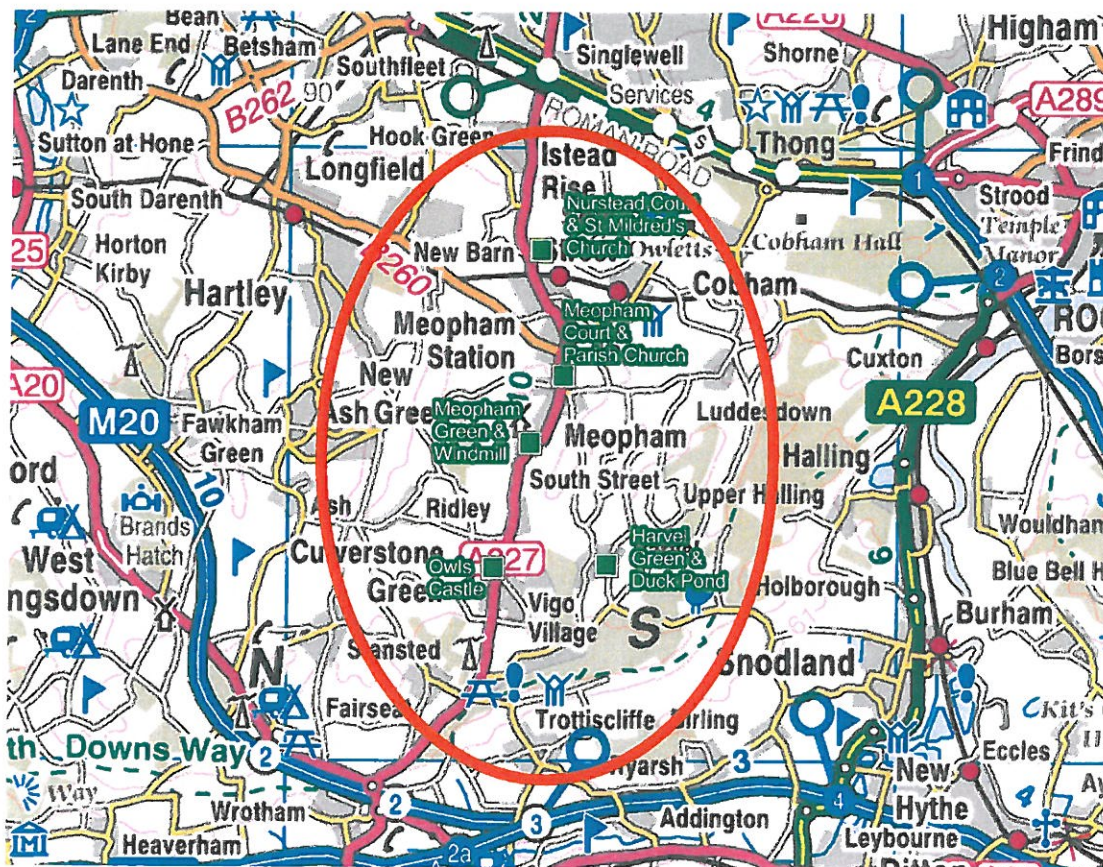
Chapter 3 - Here we are

Description of Meopham

3.1 The Parish of Meopham lies within the County of Kent and the District of Gravesham. It includes various smaller hamlets and straddles the A227 for nearly 7 miles, which runs between Gravesend and Tonbridge. It is close to four major motorways, M2, M20, M25 and M26 and stands on the main railway line to London Victoria, which also offers good communications to the Medway Towns and the North Kent coast.

3.2 Within easy reach are the Dartford Crossing, Ebbsfleet International Station and the Bluewater complex. The south of the Parish allows access to the North Downs and surrounding countryside of outstanding natural beauty and Trosley Country Park.

3.3 Meopham has a Norman Parish Church, an 18th century restored windmill; more than one village green, one has had cricket played there since 1770 and several restaurants and public houses with good fare; village shops, schools and a country park at Camer Park. Living in Meopham is highly desirable and a much sought after location.



Chapter 4 - Local Authority Interface and Responsibilities towards the Parish

4.1 There are three tiers of local authorities which have an impact on the Parish of Meopham. Their interface is set out below because from the replies to our questionnaires many households were not aware of how these operated in relation to the Community. The strategic planning for the County rests with KCC and its various functions range from Social and Youth Services to providing community wardens and country parks. Other responsibilities, which interface with the Parish, are given below. Amongst the major tasks carried out at Borough level is the collection of revenue, through Council Tax on behalf the County, Parish Councils, the Police and Fire & Rescue Services and for its own public services. It provides many direct services down to Parish level, which are indicated below.

Kent County Council (KCC) –

4.2 The County Council has the prime responsibility for the provision of education throughout the County. In this Parish, it funds the secondary (Sports College) and two primary schools, while acting too as the Admissions Authority to the primary schools for school entry. It also provides school transport and many material supplies to schools.

4.3 The Council operates the libraries and heritage projects too, such as the maintenance of the Windmill in Meopham. Other services include defining the rights of way; giving grants for new bus shelters; co-ordinating public transport and waste management.

Gravesham Borough Council –

4.4 The District Council is the second tier of local government and offers a range of services that have a more direct daily or weekly impact such as the collection of litter and household waste.

4.5 The Borough Council through its Planning department handles the majority of planning applications and the management of the local conservation areas, of which there are four in Meopham. Its other activities include the control of roadside parking and enforcement; maintaining grass verges, cutting grass on the village greens and recreation grounds; the protection of the Green Belt; and administering Camer Park and Culverstone Recreation Ground.

4.6 The Borough Council is vested with authority for licences and for the management of parliamentary and local council elections, including those to the Parish Council.

Meopham Parish Council –

4.7 The third tier of local authority management and services rests with the Parish Council which has elected members with no recognised political allegiances.

4.8 The Council works closely with the other levels of the local authority structure. It is more closely involved on immediate issues and has specific responsibilities for some services and amenities. For instance, the co-operation between both County and Borough Councils, together with the Parish Council brought about the parking improvements at Camer Parade.

4.9 Planning applications, which are normally processed by the District Council, are subject to consultation with the Parish Council, if they are within or close to the Parish boundaries.

4.10 The registered village greens and the recreation ground, which was covenanted by the Judson family, are directly maintained by the Parish Council. The Council obtained land, by purchase of a twelve acre site from KCC, part of which is made available for allotment gardens.

4.11 The upkeep, cleaning and maintenance of nine bus shelters, that were bought partly with KCC grants and from Parish funding, are borne by the Parish Council as are the initial cost of amenity street lighting and the management of trees in public areas.

4.12 Many village organisations, including two village halls and the community centre at Culverstone; the footpaths group and other groups receive funding. The Parish Council supports the Royal British Legion with meeting the cost of the Annual Remembrance Service and the upkeep of the War Memorial site.

Recommendations

The Steering Group recommend that:

PC. 1 there should be more publicity given by the Parish Council over its activities.



Chapter 5 - Providers of Public Services in the Parish

5.1 Meopham receives public services from the following sources:

- Kent Police;
- Kent Highways;
- South East Trains and Arriva (for public transport);
- Health Care Trusts.

Policing

5.2 North Kent Police have recently moved to new accommodation in Northfleet, with access closer to the Ebbsfleet International Station. The deployment of officers in rural areas includes a permanent beat officer, presently PC Helen Lamb and two PCSOs, who operate out of Meopham Police Station. They are supported by two Rural Community Wardens who are under the control of Kent County Council. These officers work closely together in the Meopham North and South Wards and regularly meet Parish Council representatives to report on their activities.

5.3 The Area Commander for North Kent Police acknowledged the requests for information about the presence of more police on the beat. His senior officers have responded by explaining their strategy for the Meopham Area and Inspector Paul Anderson and other officers have met with members of the Steering Group. The concerns expressed by residents of the Parish about crime, law and order and the Steering Group's recommendations are reflected in Chapter 7 of this report.

Highways

5.4 The safety and maintenance of the roads in Meopham is the responsibility of Kent Highways Services. They deal with the conditions on roads on a priority basis and liaise with the Parish Council on a frequent basis. A Parish Council representative attends Joint Transportation Board meetings, recent items discussed are noted below. The residents' views with the response of the Highways Manager and the Steering Group's recommendations are recorded in Chapter 8 of this report.

Note 1: KHS are committed to installing a zebra crossing on Longfield Road, in the vicinity of School Close, possibly in the financial year.

Note 2: KHS contractors are carrying out a feasibility study on constructing a footpath between Meopham and Istead Rise alongside A227 to allow pedestrians to walk in safety

Public transport

5.5 The provision of public transport in Meopham for trains and bus services are undertaken by South East Railways and Arriva respectively. Meopham Station operates a regular service to London and to the North Kent Coast through Chatham. Similarly, the bus runs hourly from Gravesend to Sevenoaks or Borough Green, half hourly at peak times. Arriva have advised that the present subsidised bus service will continue. The Area Manager for South East trains did not reply to requests for information about services from Meopham, once a faster service from Ebbsfleet to London operates for commuters. The views obtained in surveys on public transport and the Steering Group's recommendations are set out in Chapter 8 of this Report.

Health care

5.6 The health services for Meopham are provided by trusts which operate the two main hospitals at Darent Valley (DVH) and Maidstone; there is also a community hospital in Gravesend. A Parish Council nominee is invited to attend NHS Trust's quarterly briefings at DVH. The Medical Centre in Meopham is located alongside Meopham School and a private dental practice is situated on a small business park

just south of the Windmill. Comments from residents are contained in Chapter 11 together with advice on future local medical services from the Head of the Medical Centre.



Chapter 6 - Infrastructure of the Parish

6.1 The Parish of Meopham comprises three main settlements and several hamlets that are all represented by two District Councillors (Gravesham Borough Council) in Meopham North and South Wards, the South Ward also includes the Parish of Vigo. There are three Parish Wards each with four elected representatives on the Parish Council. There is one seat on the County Council representing Meopham Parish and other Gravesham parishes, which combine to elect one member between them.

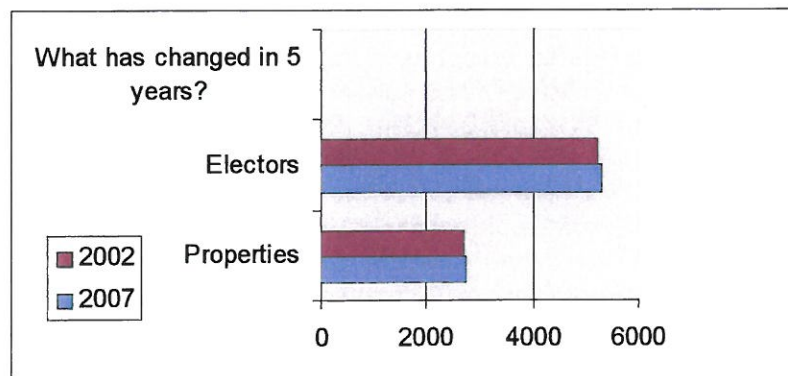
6.2 From south to north following the A227, the first settlement is Culverstone (Green) this extends mainly to the east of this trunk road and borders with the main rural village of Harvel. To the north of both these settlements, the most developed area is Meopham itself, covering two of the Parish Council wards and which contains the main infrastructure of the Parish.

6.3 To assess the infrastructure of the Parish, the first element is its population; then the number of residential followed by commercial properties; small business enterprises; educational, establishments, health establishments; restaurants, public houses, amenity centres; and transport facilities. The physical character of Meopham is described in detail in the Village Design Statement and this chapter will concentrate on the housing/business and employment sector.

6.4 Meopham's population shown by the last Census in 2001 was:
Males 3,166 Females 3,261 = 6,427

While the number of households recorded was shown as: 2,584.
That is 2.49 persons per household.

In the latest Electoral Register for the three Parish Wards recorded in December 2007, by comparison with 2002, the Roll showed only an increase of 65 more voters (1%) in 5 years. Similarly the number of residential properties in December 2007 rose only by 58 dwellings (2.25%) in the same period.



This is the most recent indication, in terms of overall population or residential properties that shows the Parish has increased very little in size over the past 5 years, although the changes in individual households were not analysed.

6. 5 The Medical Centre, located alongside Meopham School, is staffed by 4 doctors and ancillary personnel. The support staff include a practice manager, medical secretaries, receptionists and a medical dispenser. The practice which serves over 9,000 patients has practice nurses, health visitors and midwives attached. Comments from residents are included in the section on the Quality of Services, Chapter 11.

6.6 There are 98 registered enterprises and businesses, which pay the non domestic rate of tax. 83% of these are grouped in the Meopham North Ward.

6.7 Shops, restaurants, cafes and public houses are mainly located along Wrotham Road, apart from the Amazon and Tiger Public House, which is in the village of Harvel. The views expressed by residents are included in the Quality of Services, see Chapter 11.

6.8 Small light industrial units and factory premises are based in Culverstone, the Windmill Centre, Lomer Farm, on Camer Park Road and at Railway Sidings.

6.9 The Parish has 4 schools; two county primaries, a secondary and independent special school.

a. The two primary schools are:

(i) Culverstone Green CPS which has a roll of 150 pupils with 12 teaching staff supported by 6 teaching assistants and 8 support staff. It has 6 classes from Reception, years 1 to 6. The school stands on over 2 acres and has a swimming pool.

(ii) Meopham CPS is a much larger school with 413 pupils with 20 teachers. It has two reception classes and 12 classes from Years 1 to 6.

b. The Specialist Sports College is a secondary school. This is a co-educational foundation school with 778 students enrolled, which has 12 separate departments. The College takes children from Year 7 onwards. Out of an annual admission of 150 students, 20 places are reserved for pupils with a special aptitude for art, drama, music or PE. The campus covers 26 acres and accommodates the local Public Library, the main Medical Centre, the Leisure Centre (which provides PE facilities for the school) and a Day Nursery. All these facilities operating on this site give the college the characteristics of an extended school.

c. On Longfield Road, alongside Meopham CPS, is the Helen Allison Autistic School run by the National Autistic Society. The school caters for boys and girls with autism spectrum disorder and has 64 pupils of whom 12 are weekly boarders.

6.10 The number of staff employed at all schools in the Parish consists of 184 teachers and support staff. KCC confirmed that Meopham School employs 108 staff; the Meopham Primary School has 48; and Culverstone Primary School has 28. There are also pre-school, nursery and child-care places provided by 5 organised groups in the Parish.

6.11 The KCC education services are the largest single employer in the Parish. Comments given by residents are included separately in chapter 12 with recommendations on the future outlook for educational services in the Parish.

Housing

Parish profile

6.12 The information sought from the Council's questionnaire was to provide a profile on the people living in Meopham who were part of our society and to those who might require more support from our community. The Parish Council wished to

identify how residents fitted into the wider perspective with some indication of their housing and jobs. An exercise has already been conducted to examine the development, the structural and planning implications of housing in the area through the Village (Parish) Design Statement. This document was accepted, in principle, by Gravesham Borough Council in April 2007, but is still awaiting an environmental assessment.

6.13 From the earlier opinions and facts obtained on key issues, residents' aspirations are now clearer. For instance, the strength of feeling about protecting the Green Belt has implications for considering the position on providing more affordable housing in the Parish and traffic problems from speeding and heavy lorries implies changes are needed to the main road, the A227. The provision of more affordable housing to supplement 10 units already built to accommodate those with a Meopham connection, is being explored for any additional housing requirements to meet this need. Discussions are on-going between the Borough Council, the Parish Council and a Housing Association.

Residential properties and households

6.14 The make-up of households and what in many cases drew our present residents into this area has a bearing on future planning for our community. This information was collated to find what is coherent about our population and are resources being directed properly. Many respondents were older residents with a high proportion living alone in large detached houses: how long can this be sustained. The number of residential dwellings recorded for Council Tax (CT) purposes for this year, under their respective bands with the amount shown for each band, is as follows:

Band	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Total
£ up to	912	1064	1216	1368	1672	1976	2281	2737	
No.	185	99	158	514	948	574	254	22	2754
CT includes sums collected by GBC for KCC, Police, Fire & Rescue and MPC.									

Data obtained from Surveys

6.15 In the survey, from those residents who provided details of their families, **1140 individuals were recorded living in 498 dwellings**. These comprised 340 houses and 137 bungalows of which 300 were detached and the rest lived in either semi-detached or terraced residences and there were 8 flats; 10 mobile homes and 3 lived in sheltered accommodation. 200 dwellings had been altered with 73 recorded for accommodating larger families. **These residential units were 98% privately owned** with only 21 rented privately or from the Council and Housing Associations.

6.16 From the replies received to the questionnaire, only 12% have lived in Meopham all their lives. The information given provided a cross section of why families moved to the Parish as shown:

- *The majority have moved into the area from elsewhere. Their reasons ranged from 15% who were employed locally; 8% for their travel links to work; and 7% retired to live here.*
- *The largest segment, approaching half, gave their reason as "were attracted to the Parish", while just over one-fifth came with their families, had family connections or on marriage.*
- *Some householders responded that they moved here because of good schools.*

6.17 The scope for further housing development in Meopham is restricted by mainly the lack of available space for building within the "village envelope". The need for affordable housing and private sheltered accommodation for older residents is constrained by this land shortage within the villages. Furthermore, there is little or no chance for a "brownfield" site to be developed apart from a recent housing development in Harvel on the Calor Field site. The extent of development in the Culverstone Valley has also peaked and only a small number of plots are within current policy requirements for conversion to permanent dwellings.

The respondents to the first questionnaire were overwhelming opposed to providing affordable homes in the existing Green Belt, with 420 against such an incursion and only 85 supporting this proposition.

Employment

6.18 To try to bring together the disparate parts of our community, the surveys had tried to predicate the employment status of its residents. This has been an exercise not to intrude but to understand how its residents are able to relate to the employment opportunities available to them, particularly within the Parish.

6.19 There is only some light industry on small industrial units in Meopham; farming, small agricultural/riding stable enterprises and a veterinary practice; retail units and public houses/restaurants; the medical centre, the leisure centre, pre-schools and the library on the school campus; while the main employers are the four education establishments in Meopham and Culverstone. The vast majority of residents in employment largely work outside the Parish.



Information gathered from Surveys

6.20 From the questionnaire replies, 391 declared that they were in employment. In addition, 271 declared themselves as retired; 35 were disabled or not in permanent employment, with 24 of these stating they were full-time housewives/mothers and 3 were caring for adult dependents: 64 were in full time education.

6.21 Many who live in the Parish work outside the Borough and 76 drive daily by car elsewhere. The main surrounding towns to which they travelled were: Maidstone (13); Sevenoaks (15); Tonbridge & Tunbridge Wells (7); Bromley/Chislehurst (5); Bluewater (3). Others are employed farther afield, going to their places of work in Dover, Sandwich, Broadstairs and Sittingbourne to the east; while to the south and west - Croydon, Westerham, Godstone, Gatwick and Haslemere; while those crossing the river to work in Essex, include Thurrock, Romford, Basildon and Brentwood on a daily basis. With the number of commuters travelling to London by train, Meopham appears to be a satellite town for many of its local dwellers.

6.22 The main survey sought to differentiate between those who worked alone or who were self-employed compared to those who were employed by other organisations. This is shown below:

Self employed		Employed	
Work alone	77	Full time	176
Employ others	43	Part time	95

6.23 The prospect for increasing the number of jobs available in Meopham was generally not regarded as achievable. Some views expressed were that, apart from some light industry or part-time work for mothers with small children, there was no great demand for more employment locally.

Voluntary sector

6.24 The extent to which residents can take part in the community may have some impact on local voluntary organisations because only 20% were able to give any unpaid service to community projects. 18 households assisted Age Concern or The Lions Hospice; 12 acted as school governors or helped with the Scouts and Guides, The Windmill Trust; St John's Parish Church, St Paul's RC Church, South Street Baptist Church within Meopham and others gave their time to Rochester Cathedral. The voluntary sector provides unpaid help and services for those members of the community who are vulnerable from the very young to the elderly who would otherwise require more community care.

6.25 The need for more volunteers for some organisations was highlighted and more information is required from those groups, which provide a community service and need more voluntary assistance. Suggestions made in the surveys were that to encourage those interested in carrying out voluntary work, the public should be given more information and contacts. From holding fetes to coffee mornings would assist publicising and linking local organisers with members of the public willing to assist, especially when it comes to matching skills with groups that need expertise to support them and what they have to offer.

6.26 A sample of other voluntary organisations notified by residents who served national organisations, included:

The RNLI, SSAFA, Royal British Legion, Red Cross, Kent Association for the Blind and reading for the blind, MENCAP and Ellenor and Heart Foundation, Citizens' Advice Bureau volunteers; Rotary, National Trust and the British Horse Society.



CHAPTER 7 - CRIME, LAW AND ORDER – COMMUNITY SAFETY

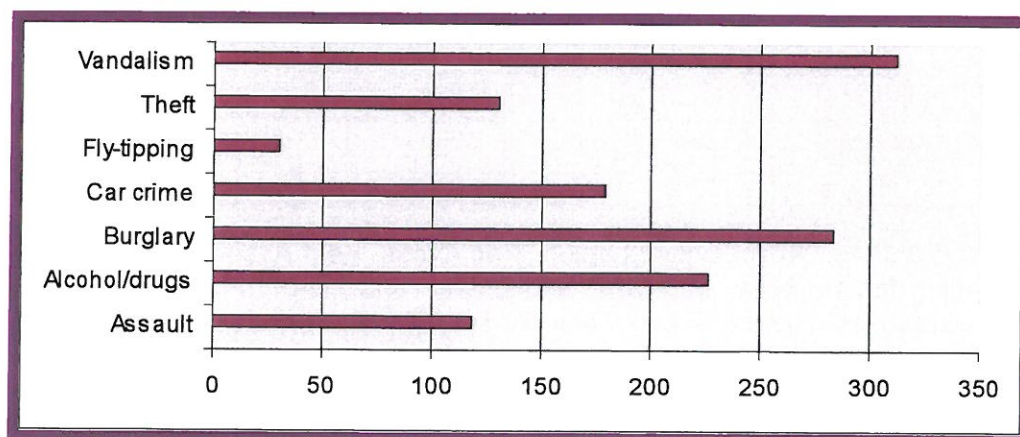
Surveys

7.1 When the replies to the questionnaire were analysed it was found that the main reaction was on **law and order issues**. These responses reflect only 20% of residents who returned their initial questionnaires, therefore the number of reported crimes etc may be much higher. It is also likely that crime and anti-social behaviour may not correspond to police statistics as many incidents appear to go unreported.

7.2 The Steering Group assessed whether there are solutions which might deal with the reality of criminal activities or was there merely a perception of crime and anti-social behaviour in Meopham; to what extent the Police respond and how the Community deal with these issues; whether more practical action can be taken, such as setting up more neighbourhood watch schemes or organising self defence classes. Some residents opposed more street lighting because they considered this was not a safety issue.

Community Safety

7.3 Although in 156 replies, these residents commented that they never felt unsafe in Meopham, 345 residents expressed doubts over community safety, with 45% expressing anxiety over their safety on dark evenings. Many residents gave instances of crime and anti-social behaviour that are blighting our community. Those concerned about crime and anti-social behaviour reflected their experiences and the reported occasions when local residents suffered from criminal or anti-social behaviour totalled 150. When asked what type of criminal activity occurred that caused the most concern, these are recorded below:



a. Vandalism and graffiti: Local residents reported 26 incidents directly involving damage to their homes.

b. Burglary and Theft: 34 burglaries were reported; some properties were burgled twice or more. 14 cases of theft were reported.

c. Assault, drunken behaviour and drug abuse: 20 incidents of verbal abuse and 6 of physical assault occurred to local residents. Not all were caused by youngsters but some by older people too. 9 cases of criminal damage resulted from drink or drug misuse.

d. Others: A case of a bogus EDF caller was reported; another encountered a door to door conman; quad bike riders and off-road bikes caused a serious nuisance to residents. From

the junior questionnaire, many schoolchildren were concerned about bullying and verbal abuse and most had contact with the Rural Community Warden.

7.4 When asked what other forms of criminal activity or anti-social behaviour were not covered by the list included in the questionnaire, the following were identified by a number of respondents:

- Two reported incidents of fly-tipping on private property and 10 gave instances fly-tipping in quiet country lanes, which required action to be taken. 2 highlighted criminal activities caused in one case by travellers.
- 3 stated speeding traffic and the use of mobile phones while driving; 2 reports of rowdyism and excessive noise.
- 4 noted the amount of litter dropping.

Reaction and quotes from residents about public safety

7.5 These are shown below in four categories:

Feel unsafe	32%	Unsafe in the dark	31%
Unsafe before 11pm	13%	Unsafe after 11pm	24%

7.6 Some of the reasons for these misgivings are explained by the reaction to unsafe areas:

- More street lighting needed, some prefer amenity lights throughout the village, others in areas such as from Meopham Green towards Culverstone but some residents were opposed to any more lights.
- "Youths from outside Meopham come here to cause trouble and to take drugs because of the lack of a police presence."
- "Recently received notice of police surgeries".
- "Judsons Recreation Ground should have lighting and CCTV to reduce vandalism".

Locations in Meopham that residents regard as unsafe for the public:

7.7 The following locations were identified:

- 12 at night-time outside Meopham Railway Station and the car park;
- 11 reported dark or unlit areas along Wrotham Road;
- 8 found Culverstone Community Centre car park and the recreation ground scary;
- 7 kept away from the Valley Area;
- 7 thought groups of teenagers intimidating;
- 5 near Public Houses;
- 5 at the rear of Camer Parade at night;
- 4 Alleyways leading to Ediva Road;
- 4 Judsons Recreation Ground; Camer Park.

7.8 The reaction to residents over the fear of crime were as follows:

"Abusive drunken behaviour and loitering after hours near pubs was threatening". "Only lived in Meopham for 7 months but yet to see a police officer". "The police officers and community wardens are never around when yobs cause trouble late at night". "The police are only present at meetings and never on patrol in Harvel".

Avoid dark areas	48%	Stay away from areas	30%
Don't go out alone	16%	Take precautions	6%

Presence of Law Enforcement

7.9 The significance of preventing crime and reducing anti-social behaviour were of paramount concern in replies to the Parish survey. One in five who responded had experienced some form of criminal action. Many felt there was a lack of law enforcement presence.

7.10 The presence of the police and other agencies was regarded as good or reasonable by 129 households, nevertheless 60% of the respondents reported that they were unaware of their presence in the area while less than 10% regarded their service as poor. Some residents commented favourably about the helpfulness of the rural community wardens but there was a general lack of response on this aspect and 109 respondents found they had no help from the police or these agencies. This too was reflected in the supplementary questionnaire compiled in June 2008.

7.11 On the positive side a resident gave self-defence classes for other people. Other comments made were:

"won't be intimidated"; "grit teeth and carry a torch"; "carry a hockey stick".

"People have the right to feel safe anywhere in the dark or on their own"

"Women feel more unsafe than men". "travel by car when possible at night".

Praise for the police and community warden – "Helen and Mandy were very helpful when youths graffitied property". In reply to the junior questionnaire most young people would contact the PCSO before their family over anti-social behaviour.

Advice from North Kent Police

7.12 Members of the North Kent Police Force have attended Parish Council meetings and their representatives responded to enquiries from the Steering Group's request for current and future coverage of law enforcement officers in Meopham. These police officers have requested that all incidents of law enforcement are reported to them so that they can properly assess the required responses. The Area Commander has deputed officers to explain the strategy for dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour. The PACT (Partnership and Communities Together) scheme has been widely circulated.

Organising more Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

7.13 One-third of residents stated that they belonged to neighbourhood watch schemes within the Parish. However of the remainder, over 70%, claimed that they would join such a scheme if it operated in their area but only 20 householders were prepared to start up a new group.

Recommendations

CS.1 that the Neighbourhood Police Team should mount more evening/ night patrols and to show a greater presence on the streets

CS.2 that "PACT" * scheme should be continued and further developed for the benefit of the whole community, including more support for neighbourhood watch schemes and that vandalism and anti-social behaviour should be targeted and reported by residents on every occasion.

* "Partners and Community Together"

CS.3. that more amenity lighting, preferably eco-friendly, should be installed only to make vulnerable areas safer.

CHAPTER 8 - HIGHWAYS (ROAD SAFETY) TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT

Surveys

8.1 Concerns expressed by the majority of residents were about *the case for a bypass; the need to improve the state of the roads; reducing the volume and speed of traffic; and improving the public transport service*. This was reflected in the initial survey, replies received on the web-site, in response to the junior questionnaire and subsequently in the supplementary survey.

Bypass – A227

8.2 A bypass to relieve pressure on the A227, connecting the A2 in the north with the A20 (M20) south of Vigo around Meopham and Culverstone would have to be routed through the Green Belt. The reaction from residents was:

<u>IN FAVOUR</u>	<u>AGAINST</u>
170	317

8.3 The Highway Management Unit for West Kent have stated that they have no plans to provide a relief road around Meopham. There is under consideration a case to downgrade the A227 to a “B” road, which may allow more restrictions to be applied. Those residents who favoured a bypass thought it was the only way for heavy goods vehicles to be diverted away from the built-up area in Meopham.

Speeding through Meopham

8.4 Two-thirds of respondents to the main survey thought that excessive speeding was a major hazard along the main Wrotham Road and indicated this in their replies. Young people who replied to the junior questionnaire were concerned about noisy and speeding vehicles. These views were emphasised by opinions sought in the supplementary questionnaire again for the need to install more traffic calming, particularly if the A227 is reclassified to a B road.

Note 3: KCC have delayed the downgrading of the A227 to B classification on financial grounds. Representations have been made not to postpone this urgently required measure in the interest of improved road safety through the Parish.

8.5 The response in the supplementary questionnaire again reflected the need to reduce speeding and to restrict heavy lorries. There was strong support for downgrading the main road, A227 to a B class road so that more traffic calming could be imposed. The replies to the junior questionnaire showed that young people found that cars and lorries travelled too fast. While in the supplementary survey, extra speed cameras were called for especially near schools, with 20 mph speed restrictions imposed in these areas and other blackspots. However, some residents were opposed to any measures and did not want additional speed bumps or more signs that would be ignored. It has been recorded that up to 80% of those drivers caught speeding lived locally.

PROPOSED ROAD SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS ALONG WROTHAM ROAD

8.6 Although some respondents to the survey expressed their disquiet about the extent of the current road safety measures and the plethora of signs and traffic

restrictions, others were concerned that the present traffic controls did not go far enough. Over 30% wanted more general traffic calming steps to be taken. The junction at Wrotham Road with Longfield Road was highlighted by many parents in the supplementary survey as requiring traffic lights or a controlled crossing as a matter of urgency. The same concerns were expressed over the dangers with the crossing near Culverstone School where parked cars were also seen as a major hazard at school times.

8.7 Several factors were observed by residents in the supplementary questionnaire replies that at present mitigate against effective action being taken. These were the current status of the A227 as a trunk road connecting the two main motorways in Kent and that satnav equipment directs traffic along this road. Traffic also detours when there are serious delays along the A2/M2 or A20/M20.

8.8 Such a need for safety measures were identified by residents, who listed some of the following blackspots:

Junctions with Longfield Road and Norwood Lane and along these roads.

Catholic Church to the Railway Stn.

Meopham School to Meopham Green

Meopham Green to Culverstone

Whitepost Lane, Culverstone and

Near the George Inn (The Street)

On the bends by the Windmill

Chapmans Hill to Primary School

Newlands Lane, Culverstone.



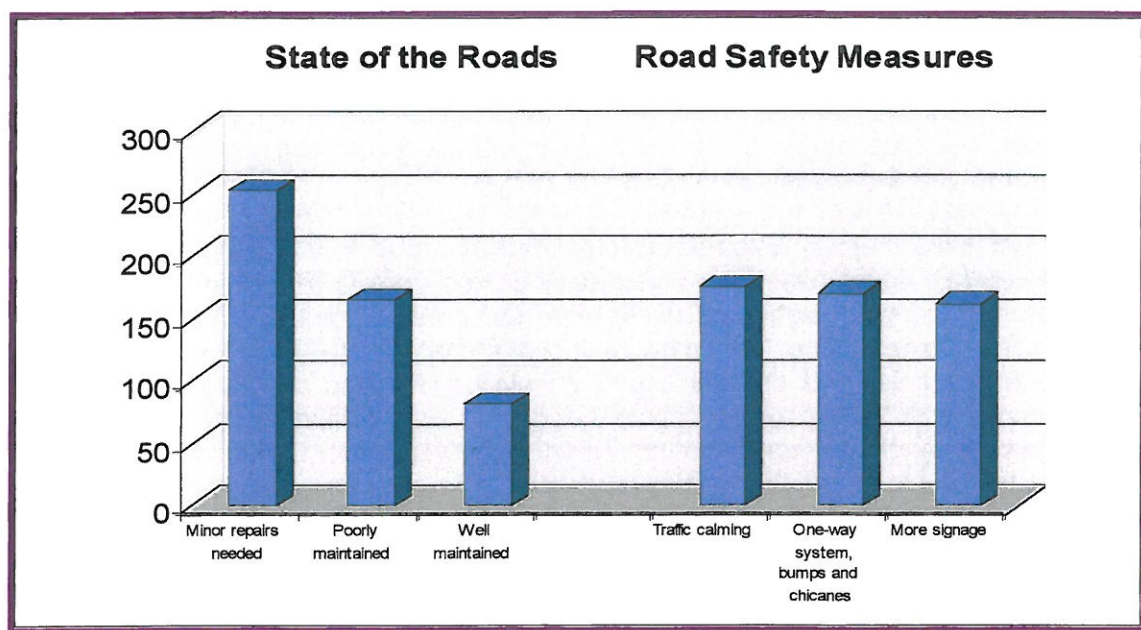
OPINIONS ON THE STATE OF THE ROADS THROUGHOUT THE PARISH

8.9 226 separate comments were made to this topic in the questionnaires indicating which roads or sections of roads were regarded as potentially dangerous or in poor condition.

8.10 Many residents accepted that most road maintenance was of a satisfactory standard or only minor repairs were required but a significant minority disagreed.

They considered that some roads were badly maintained, particularly those leading off the A227 and country routes to Harvel and Cobham, whose observations were :

***"Minor roads are badly looked after." "Side roads poorly maintained."
"Pavements in poor state, especially where there is no street lighting."***



8.11 From the supplementary survey, some specific examples were: that Cheyne Walk was the worst maintained road in the Parish and adverse comments about potholes in many side roads; with other comments made about Strand Close and Evenden Road in need of repair due to numerous potholes.

Kent Highways Unit response

8.12 The Highways Unit explained that they have a priority system with three levels for handling reports. Dealing with emergencies posing a threat to road users, are responded to in two hours; urgent repairs, which are not life threatening, are started within 3 days. All other repair work is bulked together to maximise resources and takes longer to carry out.

Recommendations:

Hi.1 that the downgrading of the A227 to be re-classified as "B" road should be actively pursued in order to apply more traffic measures, particularly on the application of weight restrictions on heavy lorries.

Hi.2 that measures should be taken to remove potential accident blackspots on the A227 and some minor roads, such as improved access to the Culverstone Valley Area via Heron Hill Lane and to relieve the volume of traffic using Whitepost Lane.

Hi.3 that traffic calming and/or roundabouts should be considered on the A227, particularly at Meopham School, to slow traffic down.

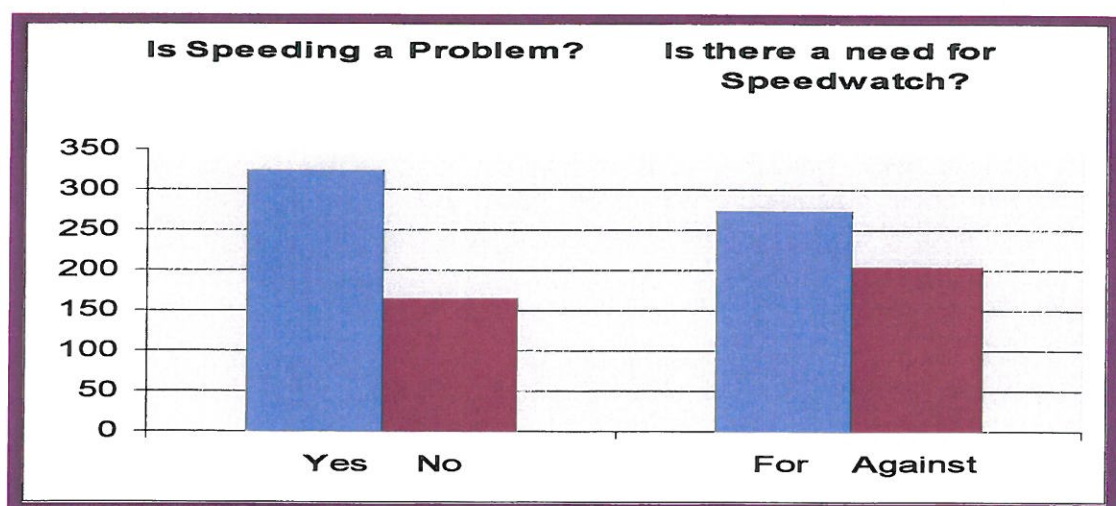
Hi. 4 that cycle paths and continuous pavements should be reviewed along the length of Wrotham Road (A227).

Traffic Management and Transport

There were 139 different comments on traffic management issues, including:

8.13 More speed cameras were needed; enforce existing speed limits; 20mph signs near the three schools on Wrotham Road; speed bumps in Whitepost Lane; traffic lights at Wrotham Road/Longfield Road junction; more measures to slow down traffic; reduce the number of heavy lorries and coaches; no overtaking while driving within speed limit areas; congestion caused by inconsiderate parents parking cars outside schools. The proposal to reduce the A227 to a B classified road was well received so that some of these measures could be taken.

8.14 While the majority favoured action to improve road safety, a significant minority regarded the present measures adequate or had gone too far. Views opposed to speed bumps, more signs and using more cameras, which did not solve the traffic and safety issues alone. Too many restrictions may lead to them being ignored and alternative opinion was that blackspots should be identified and targeted for special measures, with 20mph zones concentrated near schools and locations such as the dangerous junction of the Wrotham Road and The Street. Otherwise drivers were going to ignore speed restrictions that were not necessary in a blanket restrictive area.



Speedwatch Scheme

8.15 57% supported a speedwatch scheme to see if this had any impact on reducing speeding.

8.16 Various shades of opinion were reflected by those who regarded speeding as dangerous, especially along the A227 while those who did not or saw the need for a speedwatch scheme were divided even though the majority were in favour. When asked who would be prepared to man this operation in one of three locations, the reaction in each survey was largely negative.

PRIVATE TRANSPORT

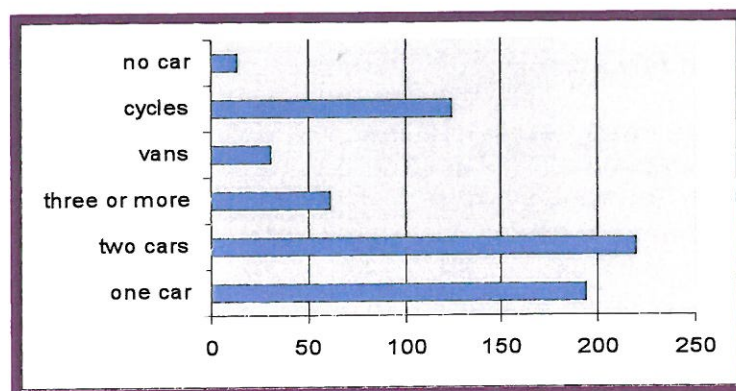
8.17 Meopham households have a high rate of vehicle ownership and make limited use of public transport. Many support action to reduce traffic as a way of protecting the environment but will only make more journeys on the local bus service if conditions improve.

8.18 The general observation was that private transport was indispensable because public transport offered a very poor alternative.

Vehicle ownership per household		Transport used by households	
One car	30%	Car	63%
Two or more cars	44%	Train	15%
Other vehicles	24%	Other forms of transport	12%
No car	2%	Bus	10%

8.19 299 residents (almost 60% of respondents) experienced difficulties either leaving or entering Meopham; just over a quarter on a regular basis. These occurred outside schools or as a result of road works, particularly at the Tollgate at the junction with the A2 or at Wrotham Hill near A20/M20 junctions.

No of vehicles notified by households



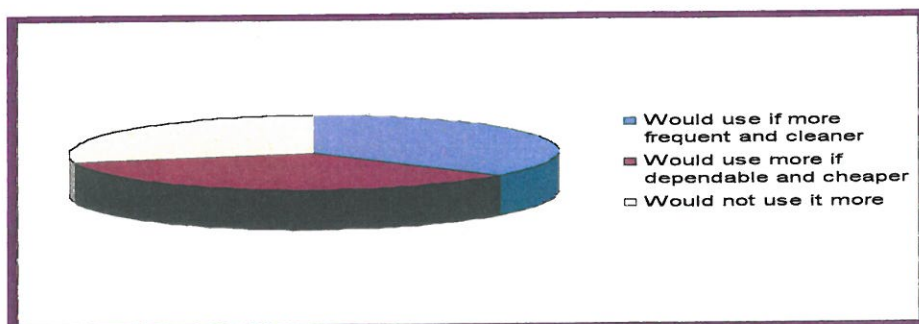
PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Train Service

8.20 The service between London and North Kent runs hourly each way (half-hourly to London at peak times) and is mostly used by commuters. Many households gave as a reason for not being satisfied with the service as the high cost of fares and the expensive car parking charges.

Public transport buses

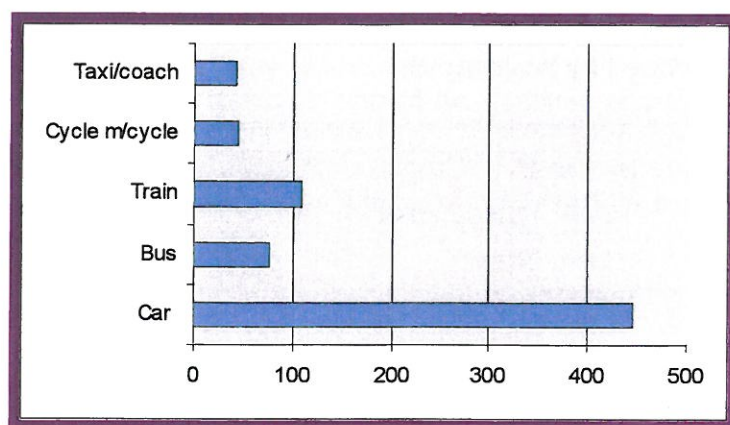
8.21 The bus service is operated by Arriva and is supported by a subsidy by Kent County Council. Over 40% of responses indicated that they would use the hourly bus service more, subject to the following requirements:



Use of private and public transport

8.22 Residents of Meopham, especially in rural areas such as Harvel, which has no public transport links, are dependent upon their own private transport. Many households have more than one car, while only a very small minority had no private vehicle. Meopham is served by the main line railway from London to Medway Towns (and beyond) and a bus service from Sevenoaks through Borough Green to Bluewater via Gravesend. Arriva, the main bus operator, has stressed that there is no current demand for more or varied routes to or from Meopham.

8.23 The regular mode of travel by members of households is recorded below with most families having become dependent upon private cars.



Recommendations:

TT.1 that road safety measures should be constantly reviewed in the immediate vicinity of all local schools and parents should be encouraged to take their children to and from school by means other than by private transport including walking bus routes.

TT.2 that the traffic wardens should patrol all locations throughout Meopham including Culverstone, so that "no parking" restrictions are observed on double yellow lines.

TT.3 that car parking charges should be reduced at Meopham Railway Station to decrease off-street parking in surrounding roads.

TT.4 that more frequent and punctual bus services should be available within Meopham Parish, with bus routes that fulfil all the community requirements, including co-ordination between train and bus services at Meopham Railway Station.

Chapter 9 - Maintaining the environment and rights of way

9.1 Half of the respondents to the questionnaire came to live in Culverstone, Harvel and Meopham because they were attracted to the area. Around Meopham and its other villages are areas of outstanding natural beauty and an extensive network of public rights of way footpaths, with easy access to the countryside. As shown by these surveys, high on local residents' list of priorities is protecting their environment. The Steering Group considered some of the best solutions and plan of action based on replies to these questionnaires.

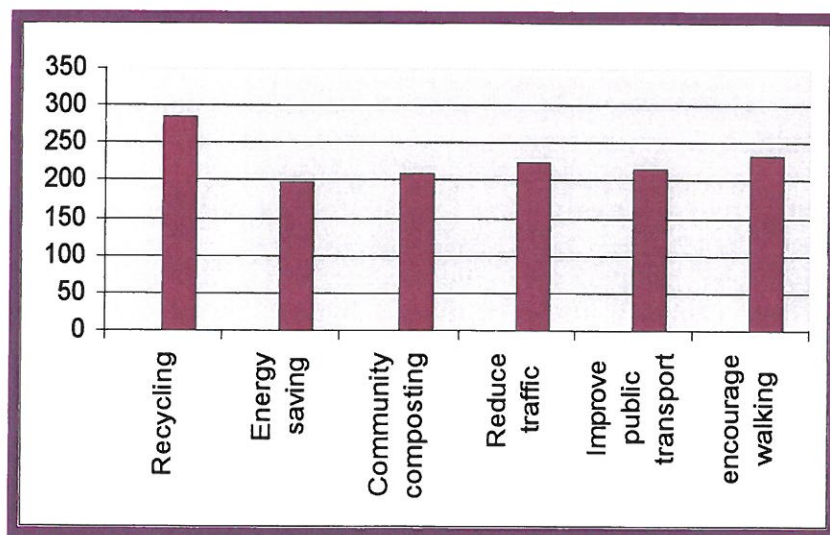
Surveys

9.2 55% of residents thought more recycling was required and this measure was supported by children of whom 5 out of 6 considered this as the best way of protecting the environment. The supplementary questionnaires gave similar responses and from all the replies, 132 different measures were suggested. These ranged from:

*improving flytipping clearance & pursuing culprits more vigorously;
keeping roadsides clearer of long grass and debris;
maintaining weekly collections of household waste; free collection of garden waste and glass; changing from plastic bags to wheelie bins; providing more recycling facilities in Meopham (eg behind the toilets on Pitfield Green), at Culverstone and Harvel, bulk collections each month at a public area.*

Supporting the Environment

9.3 The issues which residents regarded as important are reflected in the measures advocated to protect the environment, these drew their reactions, as shown below:



Views expressed by residents on environmental issues

9.4 Many residents' opinions, some of which are composite replies, were:

Extend waste water drainage to Harvel

Don't build more homes in the Parish in rear gardens;

Stop use of shingle on driveways that block surface water reaching drains;

More cycle paths needed; serious problem cycling from Nurstead to Istead Rise;

*Better recycling centre required nearer Meopham;
Encourage litter picking; residents should 'adopt' a street to keep litter free;
Local community groups should organise litter spring cleans;
Shop-owners and publicans should be responsible for clearing outside litter;
Discourage bonfires in the daytime;
More litter and dog bins needed near greens, the station and by schools;
Cut verges more often especially between Meopham Green and Culverstone;
Keep hedgerows trimmed back; Replace dead trees in old orchards;
Plant more trees and bulbs along verges; Encourage more floral displays;
Stop use of sewage on fields;
Encourage more children to walk to school; Reduce cars on school runs.*

Note – many verges are left long and planted with wild flower seeds as a policy and are cut once or twice a year.
GBC are conducting a survey to obtain residents' views on banning parking on pavements and grass verges.

Improvements to help the Environment

9.5 The extent to which local residents want to see improvements reached over 60%, from those who think that hedgerows need to be kept tidy and trees preserved. Half the respondents were concerned about the care of nearby woodlands and over 30% want more trees planted throughout the parish. 27% of those who took part in this survey wished to see footpaths better signposted or gave other reasons, such as reducing fly-tipping and clearing dog litter.

9.6 Many respondents to the Parish Council questionnaire referred to the need for better maintenance of hedgerows. Many school-children regarded energy saving and reducing traffic as important, while encouraging more walking, cycling and improving public transport as the alternative. About half the children were in favour of planting more trees and caring for the present woodlands. Curbs on building, particularly in the Green Belt and Culverstone Valley Area were reflected in the supplementary questionnaire responses as a way of preserving the present countryside around Meopham through the planning regulations.

The Green Belt

9.7 Preserving the countryside and the Green Belt had the highest rating and to which more than 9 out of 10 residents attached great significance. Two-thirds of younger people who replied regarded its protection as most important. When replying about routing a bypass through part of the Green Belt or building more affordable housing using Green Belt land, a large majority were opposed to such proposals.



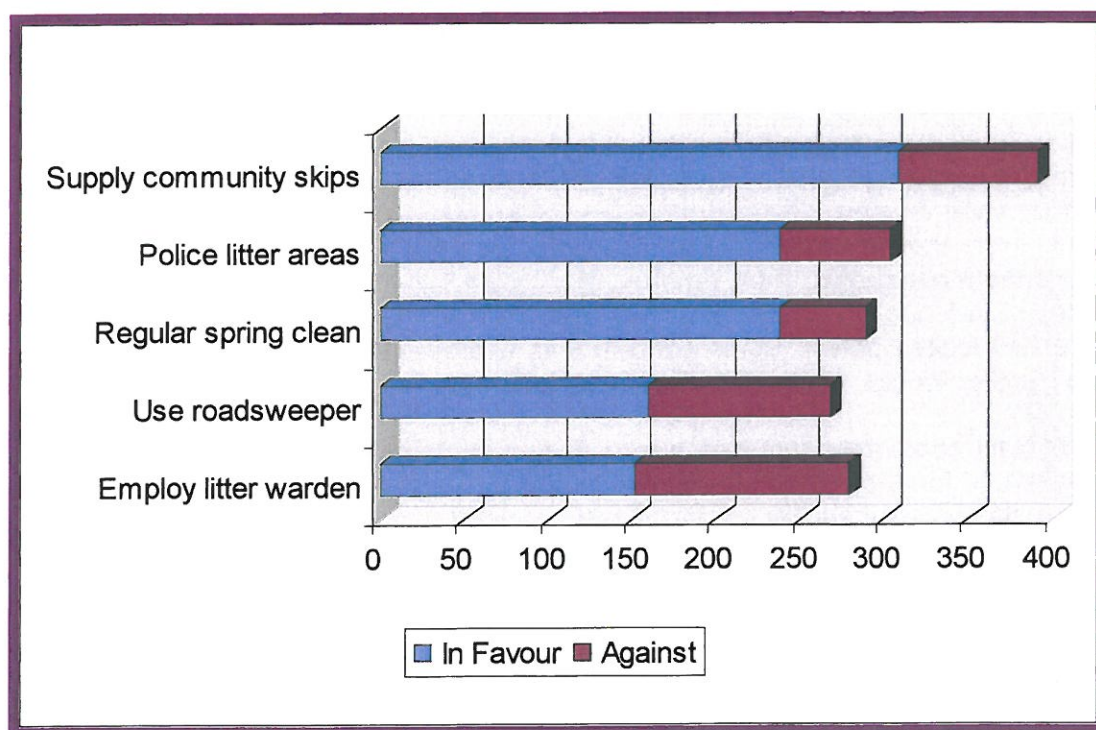
Waste management

9.8 The collection of waste is carried out by Gravesham Borough Council which currently maintains a weekly house to house service. Provision is made for household waste to be collected in black bags, collected separately from recyclable waste for which clear bags are issued periodically. Extra empty bags are also available from some retail outlets. Heavier items can be collected by contacting the Borough Council and any green waste will be collected with a prepaid voucher attached. The County Council also is responsible for maintaining a large tip at Pepperhill, Northfleet where waste materials can be deposited in skips. The proposed change notified with these arrangements were promulgated on the Parish web-site.

Note: the upgrading of the tip facility at Northfleet has now been completed. A trial is being conducted by GBC to collect glass with domestic waste fortnightly in part of Meopham.

9.9 How often should domestic waste be collected drew a very strong response in the surveys for the retention of the WEEKLY collection. Of those who commented most were in favour of the present GBC collection method by two bags but there was also a lobby which advocated "wheelie bins" to stop waste being scattered, especially by foxes or cats.

To keep Meopham cleaner and tidier the response was as follows:



9.10 Of the 512 residents who answered on this topic in the survey about what they valued most about living in Meopham, 91% regarded access to the countryside as their first choice. Nearly two thirds favoured its tranquillity while more than half recognised having a local identity with the villages and appreciated its openness. Amenities, sporting pursuits and other reasons accounted for 40% who liked living here.

9.11 The use of public open air facilities was enjoyed to varying degrees. The most frequented was Camer Park, attracting 87% of residents who responded. Meopham is the Parish with the most registered greens in Kent and 43% said that they took advantage of these open spaces. In the region of 20% use the recreation grounds regularly at Culverstone and Hook Green (Judsons).

Rights of Way

9.12 In Meopham and its surrounding area there are nearly 35 miles of rights of way footpaths. Major work in maintaining these arteries for fresh air and exercise is the responsibility of Kent County Council but most clearance tasks are left to volunteers.

9.13 Public rights of way come under the jurisdiction of Kent County Council but monitoring is conducted by the local District Footpath Group and footpath wardens. The Footpath Group also carry out much of the voluntary maintenance with some funding from the Parish Council. The Parish Council also help fund the path clearing equipment used by Footpath Group members. The footpaths are an integral part of the local environment and are enjoyed by an extensive number of local residents and visitors. The Meopham and District Footpath Group recently circulated a leaflet on how to raise issues related to the upkeep of footpaths.

9.14 From the households, which responded to the questionnaire, 335 had good knowledge of footpaths and 429 used them for walking. Nearly 100 also used the paths for horse-riding, cycling and a few for motorcycling or 4-wheel driving. A recurring theme which came through from the supplementary survey was that the footpath signs should be clearer. In the replies to the junior questionnaire half the children used the footpaths but found that the main hazards for them were barbed wire fences and overgrown vegetation.

9.15 From the responses to the questionnaires, 57% had used the footpaths and found them overgrown; 44% reported other obstructions such as crops on paths or muddy stretches of water; 18% reported high stiles obstacles along with barbed wire and locked gates.. Some concern was expressed about guard dogs patrolling too close to fences adjoining rights of way footpaths.

9.16 Main concerns expressed were: fly-tipping, footpaths overgrown, particularly adjacent to farm land with encroachment of crops across rights of way. Overgrown vegetation was a frequent complaint with Nurstead to Sole Street and off Longfield Hill being cited as poorly maintained locations. Litter and dog droppings were regularly noted. Some footpaths became impassable because of thick mud and surface stagnant water.

Recommendations

Ei. that the present Green Belt areas in the Meopham Parish should be preserved by resisting any development therein or over-development on existing properties.

Ei.2 that the weekly household waste collections should be retained but include green and glass collection with an objective for monthly community skips and more recycling facilities.

Ei. 3 that litter parties should be organised for cleaning areas and action against litter offenders should be enforced.

Chapter 10 - Use of Amenities and facilities for young people

10.1 In the replies to the questionnaires, about 60% of respondents commented on this topic which explored whether there was a demand for more facilities for the people in Meopham. The Steering Group were asked to assess what resources are needed.

10.2 The main public amenities in Meopham range from:

- A **permanent library** on the Meopham School campus provided by Kent County Council supported by a mobile service for outlying areas;
- A **Leisure Centre** under the auspices of Meopham Sports and Leisure Association and operated by SERCO, in which some public money was invested;
- Public meeting places include Meopham and Harvel **Village Halls** and Culverstone **Community Centre**, which are managed by separate Trusts, with some financial support from the Parish Council.

10.3 There are also independently managed amenities which include a Scout Hut at Hook Green, a Girl Guide Centre in The Street; Hope Hill and Kays Garden camp sites used by Scouts and Guides respectively from far and wide. Attached to the main Parish Church is St Johns Centre. The Meopham Welfare Committee provide a community bus service funded by donations and a Parish Council grant, with the vehicle garaged by the Council. The Meopham Country Club operates on the Village Hall site, alongside the Table Tennis Club and the Meopham Lawn Tennis Club, which is located at the rear of the Village Hall and has a membership of approximately 120 adults and 100 juniors.



10.4 The open air public facilities comprise:

Camer Park and **Culverstone Recreation Ground** are maintained by Gravesham Borough Council;

Meopham Parish Council is responsible for five major and eight minor registered village greens and **Judsons Recreation Ground**. The hallowed turf on **Meopham Green** is renowned for cricket played there for over 200 years.

Two local football teams use Judsons Recreation Ground, which was covenanted to the Community and is maintained by the Parish Council. In addition to the football pavilion, the site has the garage for the Community Bus and a play area fenced off for young children. The play area contains play equipment, purchased by the Parish Council over 10 years ago. Part of the pavilion on this site is used for a Youth Centre

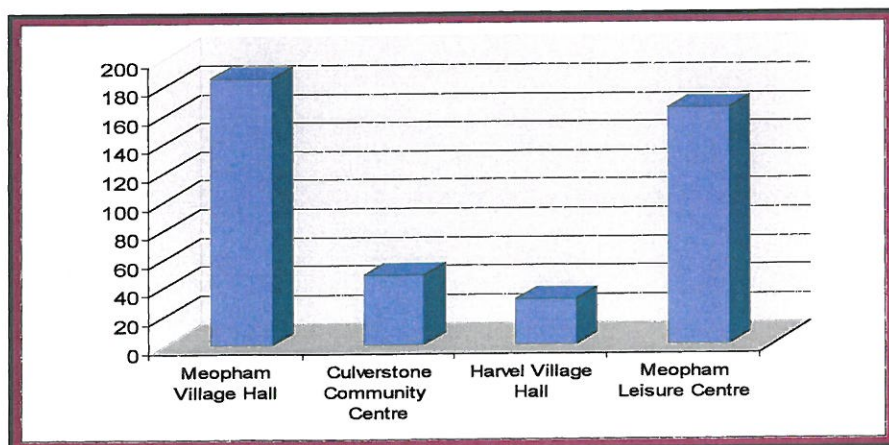
Southdown Shaw is a 12 acre site in the Green Belt, purchased by the Parish Council from Kent County Council nearly 10 years ago. This site accommodates about 130 allotment garden plots on approximately 4 acres at the north end of the area.

10.5 There were a whole host of suggestions for new or replacement facilities, which would benefit local residents and engender more community spirit. The most popular choices were an indoor swimming pool (35%); improved community halls (24%); and a purpose-built youth centre with sports facilities (24%). A small group of residents considered that there were already enough amenities and that further expenditure on extra facilities was not warranted. However, a broader spectrum of residents had other views, which are recorded later in this report.

Village Halls

10.6 One of the main areas that residents felt strongly about was that the village halls should be adapted to provide a wider range of facilities in order for them to be more usable and in turn used more by the Community. Some views expressed about Culverstone Community Centre were that it should be accessible for young people to use because it would stop them hanging around outside.

10.7 50% of those who responded attend one of these centres for events or functions. These centres may also be required should an emergency situation occur. The number of people using the village halls is shown below, together with attendance at the Leisure Centre:



The Leisure Centre

10.8 The result from the surveys indicates that the facilities at the Leisure Centre are used by 1 in 3 families in Meopham. Many commented that this facility would be greatly enhanced by the addition of an indoor swimming pool and squash courts. From the responses it was also made clear that these facilities should be made available for young people at lower cost. Some users commented that better lighting and pathways were needed as they thought it was unsafe when using the Centre in the dark.

Libraries

10.9 Over 300 families stated that they make use of the main library with 18% using it weekly and 47% on a monthly basis. The mobile library is used much less but is very well supported by and provides a vital service for the rural parts of the Parish. The latest provision includes access to the internet and is highly valued. The location on the Meopham School campus provides an "on the spot" support facility for the students of the school and other schools in the area.

The Windmill

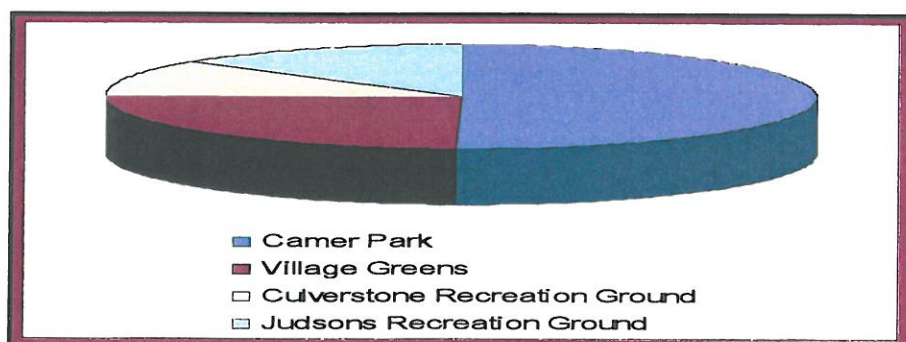
10.10 Meopham Windmill is the major landmark and is the recognised symbol for the Parish. It is maintained by a Trust with financial and technical support given by Kent County Council. As a "museum", it is open to the public on Sunday afternoons from Easter and throughout the Summer. There is a small charge made for visits by the public. It still remains, however, a low-key tourist attraction because of its relatively short opening hours. The Chairman of the Windmill Trust has responded that the reliance on volunteers governs the extent of providing a service to the public.

Outdoor pursuits and events

10.11 The problem of large amounts of dog fouling at Camer Park was highlighted along with some residents not using Judsons or Culverstone Recreation Ground due to the groups of youths congregating in these locations. Several comments reflected the need for children's play areas to be upgraded and expanded. The Parish Council are well aware of this but funds for this project have had to be diverted to pay for the high cost of vandalism, particularly at Judsons. However, these improvements are now being planned and any proposals from residents are to be encouraged.

Open Air Facilities

10.12 Meopham is the Parish with the most registered greens in Kent and they are well used by residents together with the two recreation grounds. Usage of these facilities are as shown in the pie chart below:



Proposals for better use of the Open Air Facilities

10.13 There were a number of ideas expressed in replies to the surveys, such as a yearly "Meopham" fete day to be held on one of the parks or greens; a "Make Merry" fete at Judsons; more fetes and jumble sales were variations on the same theme. There is already an annual May Day pageant organised by the Meopham Primary School support group and a Village Fete at Harvel.



10.14 Other residents gave opinions on:

- a bowling green (but not on the Green!)
- a bandstand on Meopham Green;
- a more regular farmers' market or farm shop;
- jogging and cycle tracks as part of an outdoor activity centre;
- sports ground for children;
- all-weather hockey and five-a-side football pitch;
- zoo/farm funded by plant sales, with duck pond and wild-life park;
- community orchard;
- An activity centre with a bike path, with jumps and ramps;
- A roof over the tables by the Camer Park kiosk;
- a dog free area in Camer Park.

Improving other facilities

- a public house in Culverstone would also be most welcome
- more sheltered accommodation for the elderly
- indoor café at Camer Park
- tea/coffee shop for young mums to meet
- a theatre/cinema
- reopen and staff the police station
- a slimming club
- a new council building for meetings
- replace all bus shelters with brick built ones

promote the village for tourism
full-time nursery at Culverstorie
re-open post office and shop at Harvel
advertise events more.

Other improvements

10.15 Better equipped playground at Judsons and Camer Park, provision of skate board park at Judsons and a decent play park, secure and locked at night were sought.



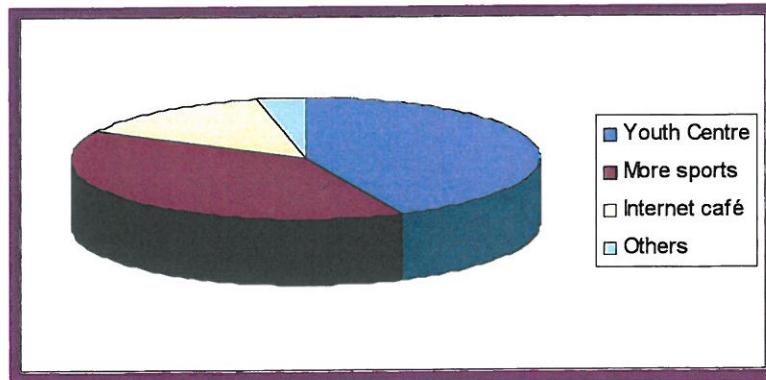
Recommendations:

Am.1 that enhancement should be made to the Library to make this a centre of excellence for the provision of literature, information and a communication centre for residents without their own access to IT.

Am.2 that sponsorship and grant funding are proactively sought for all amenities and that more community events should be organised, such as a Meopham Fete or a Meopham Fair.

Provision of Youth facilities

10.16 In the replies to the questionnaires, the topic which drew the fourth largest response was the need for more facilities for young people in Meopham. The Steering Group were asked to assess what solutions might deal with involving youths, in particular, in order to prevent anti-social behaviour within the Parish. To a large extent the Police and the Community Wardens have been engaged in these issues but there should be a commitment in the Community to give more support to their efforts. What practical action could be taken such as providing a dedicated youth centre, more sporting outlets or opening an Internet café were put to residents in the surveys in order to gauge their reactions. The analysis of the responses is set out below:



10.17 The Parish Council had accepted that more facilities were necessary when two of its Members initiated a youth department. This is based in the football pavilion at Judson's Recreation Ground but the available room is not adequate enough to meet the demand for all who would like to attend and this location was subjected to extensive malicious vandalism. Although the Parish Council saw the need for a dedicated youth centre, it has been identified now by the survey as a requirement. The strength of feeling amongst residents for such a project was clearly indicated and other facilities should be provided for the development of young people.

10.18 In addition, the need for more sports facilities and the possibility of introducing an Internet café were features that arose from replies to the questionnaire. These would need to come from private sources or support from trusts operating halls etc. Kent County Council have indicated that through their youth team students are encouraged to participate in a whole range of supportive activities. Youth provision and support is of significant importance to the Local Authority.

For a Youth Centre

10.19 A Youth Centre would need to be affordable for young people. Parents need to take more responsibility and use what is already available in the village. A more suitable venue needed for young people to congregate instead of hanging around the streets. Facilities need to include a coffee bar and specific provision for girls such as beauty courses. A covered hangout or drop in centre in Culverstone is needed for young people in order to combat the number of youths in groups in Culverstone with nothing to do. In reply to the junior questionnaire about half the children take part in activities such as dancing, judo and after school clubs in halls within the Parish. However, nearly one in three children never use these amenities. In order of preference, most children would like to have a swimming pool; youth/social club; sports/activity centre or an ice rink/ theatre.

For more sports and leisure outlets

10.20 The tone of most replies to the surveys indicated the following:

Cheap access to organised and coached activities such as tennis and golf needed.

Sports Centre at reduced cost should be provided for youngsters.

Meopham Leisure Centre is too crowded and should have discount for local residents' children.

The Leisure Centre should be available for organised activities in school holidays.

Low cost learning centre needed for music, arts and martial arts.

More funding for sport.

Involve young people with identifying their needs.

10.21 In response to the junior questionnaire, the choice of sporting activities were football, baseball, swimming, pony riding, trampolining and cycling. Leisure activities included fishing, dancing, singing, socialising, shopping and playing the guitar.

10.22 The Meopham Colts Football Club have made representations to the Steering Group for improvements and additional sports facilities for young people in Meopham. At present, it caters for boys from age 9 to 16 but wants to extend this to boys and girls from age 6 to 18. Over 25 adults give their time to running the Club with more than 150 children involved in football. The Club does not have its own ground but travels to training grounds and pitches in Gravesend. Many pitches, which the Club use elsewhere, have poor drainage and surfaces, long grass and are dog fouled. In order to achieve charter status with the Football Association, the Club needs better facilities so that it can develop and expand its membership. The Club want to create a quality playing surface in Meopham to provide for young players from the Parish.

10.23 The West Kent (Meopham) branch of the Pony Club is a very successful youth organisation catering for young people of all ages, which has been in existence for over 60 years. It is largely run by volunteers and has a membership of 160 with training facilities, amongst other locations at Ashmere Farm and Clements Reach, in Meopham, with stabling throughout the Parish. It is significant that horse-riding events of high standard are held at Nurstead Court and has given young people locally something to which they can aspire.

Other comments and ways of involvement

10.24 Not all the views were favourable and some were critical. However, most respondents were supportive towards giving young people opportunities for being involved in the Community. Some of the comments expressed were:

- Skateboard area at Culverstone being used by groups of lager drinkers.
- More discipline by parents and less pandering to the youth.
- More facilities should only be provided when young people learn to appreciate what they have already.
- Engage schools and any groups in promoting social and community cohesion.
- Commend work already done to provide youth facilities.
- Find voluntary work related to activities or a youth volunteering centre.

Existing organisations for Young People

10.25 The survey showed that 20 boys attended scouts etc while only 11 girls took part in guides etc. 10 children were reported as members in other organisations such as cadet forces. Scouts, Cubs, Guides and Brownies have their own huts, which other organisations can also use.

Recommendations:

YP.1 that for the development of young people, greater use of the existing facilities, such as schools, village halls and centres, should be considered, with the provision of a purpose built Youth Centre that is manned and open most evenings with youth involvement promoted in order to develop these facilities and activities.

YP.2 that sponsorship and support for sport should be obtained for young people in the Parish, with the provision of suitable facilities at various locations.

YP.3 that better play areas for younger children should be provided at Judson's Recreation Ground, Camer Park and Culverstone Recreation Ground.

Chapter 11 - Quality of Services

11.1 Over half of respondents commented in the surveys on the level of service that is available to residents in Meopham. The Steering Group were asked to propose ways that might improve the quality of life for local residents who depend upon these services and have made their recommendations from the survey responses.

Range of Services

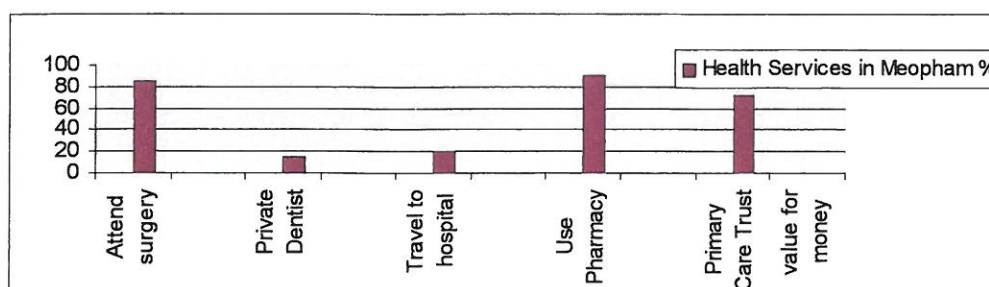
11.2 The range of services available to residents of Meopham had mixed reactions from the residents, as the replies to the surveys revealed. The prime services, which residents need on a day-to-day basis, such as health care, communications and availability of goods in local shops were the focus of the surveys. Some of the services from local shops may be provided outside Meopham at lower cost and at less convenience to residents. However, unless support for these continues in Meopham some existing businesses may not survive. Some of these businesses are under threat and most have an essential part to play in giving the Parish its vitality and in retaining its quality of life. How our families use these services may decide if they will continue or even encourage previous businesses to return.

11.3 Meopham has medical centre, three schools, two post offices, a library and shops in three locations. It is generally well served by telephone call boxes and post boxes. There is no bank or building society branch and only one petrol filling station.

Health

11.4 The provision of good health care lies with the Health Service Trusts and private practitioners. **The main surgery in the Meopham campus provides medical services for 85% of local residents with access to a doctor and support staff.** However, there is no NHS dental services in the Parish and the private practice was used by 15% of local residents who responded. Only a few households expressed the need for the service to be provided within the Parish. Residents were asked how many attended hospitals regularly, bearing in mind the nearest are at Darent Valley and Maidstone. Over 100 patients attended for treatment and over a quarter experienced difficulty travelling there. Taking the overall system of health provided by the Primary Care Trust, 73% were satisfied with value for money. Being able to collect prescriptions from the local pharmacies present no difficulty to 8 out of 9 households.

11.5 The Head of Meopham Medical Centre proposes to offer a wider range of extra services to patients; these would include phlebotomy and control of anti-coagulation. He is investigating practice based commissioning to improve patient care and save money to re-invest towards other patient services.



Note: The Medical Centre now holds surgeries at 7am for appointments to benefit of patients who can attend before going to work.

11.6 Some comments, extracted from the surveys, by those who did not find the present health service facilities meet their requirements, are set out below:

"The surgery does not cater for those at work and should be open later and on Saturdays".

"Would not be able to get to hospital if we were not able to drive there for treatment".

"Appointments should be made easier to obtain".

"A better mobile service is needed for foot-care for those who are immobile".

"Cannot use the surgery for my prescriptions because of idiotic rules".

"Because I live near Meopham Station, unable to obtain prescription while at the surgery".

11.7 Many of the commuters who replied to the supplementary questionnaire were concerned over these issues too and were in favour of evening and Saturday morning surgeries. There was also concern about Government announcements over threats to smaller GP surgeries by enlarging them into multi-practices, if this would affect the Meopham Surgery range of health practices.

Public Services

11.8 The public services are going through a transition because of changes in technology and this has placed under threat the Post Office, mail and telephone facilities used by residents. The two post offices at Meopham Station and Culverstone were used by 480 respondents for postal services; obtaining information, and a high percentage for Giro and bill paying. In addition, 130 residents paid their car tax, exchanged foreign currency and withdrew cash. Most users found the post office opening hours met their need but 6% did not and some reported that Wednesday afternoon closing was inconvenient. Many residents considered that the Post Offices have more potential for banking services and give out more general information.

11.9 The risk of closure for the Meopham Station Post Office was averted last year and The Royal Mail has since revised its delivery service. The collection service through post boxes, both in location and number drew a large response for suitability (18:1) and sufficiency (7:1) respectively. 50 residents wanted more post boxes. 39 respondents found the apertures of the post boxes too small for items, which required them to use the Post Office. The extensive use of mobile phones has had an impact on the use made of public telephones, fewer people responded to the same question with only 12% who thought that their locations were not suitable. Less than 20% found the number of phone boxes was insufficient but 30% did not agree that they were well maintained, with vandalism as one reason for their poor condition.

Retail shopping

11.10 Parking was regarded as a major problem by those using the local shops for their shopping. Nearly one in five shoppers found pavement obstructions a problem, particularly those who are disabled or mothers of young children requiring wheelchair/pushchair access. The inconvenience of opening hours, reading shop labelling print sizes and the height of shelving affected a small percentage of shoppers but these may deter some from using local shops. Residents who opted to go outside Meopham for their main shopping requirements who cited the main reason was a lack of choice.

11.11 In the supplementary survey, several respondents commented on the need to modernise or update the shopping parades in Meopham and to re-instate a shop in

Harvel. The young people who replied to the junior questionnaire did not use local shops but instead preferred to go to Bluewater or the local towns with family and friends. A wide range of options in all the surveys were expressed in favour of many more enterprises. These included:

A farm shop, fishmongers, delicatessen, drycleaners, haberdashery, shoe repairers, pet shop. On the other hand, some wanted more choice with extra shops and businesses, such as a chemist and café in Culverstone; reinstate a general store and post office in Harvel and similarly in Nurstead/Hook Green – a petrol station and general store/supermarket. Many residents of Meopham appear unaware of the range of services available now at Culverstone Costcutter. The Farmers' Market held monthly outside the Leisure Centre is popular and some residents asked that it should be held more frequently.



11.12 The main demands, put forward by those shopping locally, were for:

Bank/Building Society	61%	Cash machine (24 hr ATM) Vogue Travel have applied for permission to install ATM outside their premises.	45%
Specialist Butcher	21%	Dedicated Greengrocer	21%

11.13 Other comments made were that because of parking problems, we shop elsewhere. Access to the post office is very difficult with a pushchair. We need a store like a Tesco's Metro. There is no disabled parking. Baker has no bread by lunchtime for customers. Shop assistants need to be more polite to customers to encourage local trade. Too much inconsiderate parking and parking on pavements outside shops.

Recommendations:

QS.1 that local health facilities should be encouraged to offer more benefits to local residents with the Medical Centre by extending its opening hours and a more flexible appointment system.

QS.2 that better transport provisions should be organised to assist patients in need of transport to attend hospital for treatment.

QS.3 that the local Post Offices should be given more scope to improve their range of services such as a wider range of banking services.

QS.4 that existing shopping outlets should be supported to continue to provide a service for local residents but more updating and improvements are needed, with car parking arrangements being regularly monitored.

Chapter 12 - Education

12.1 The number of young people under age 21 recorded in the response to the questionnaire totalled 214 of which 205 were in either full-time education, child-care or training..

12.2 The families who replied specifically showed that the state primary sector accounted for 48 children and those at secondary school, 54. 23 students of all age groups attended independent schools. Below age of 5 years, 31 children took part in various forms of pre-school activities.

12.3 The reason given by some households for the families coming to live in Meopham was the attraction of good schools. The supplementary survey also conveyed the general approval of schools in Meopham, with the occasional criticism of the behaviour of children in the Secondary School. Most regarded the results and the teaching of their children to be of a good standard.

12.4 These figures appear to understate the actual numbers attending school and it is likely that many households with children did not submit a completed questionnaire. A separate junior questionnaire was compiled to try to bridge this gap and to find out what young people themselves think about the future direction of the parish. This covered both local schools and the main schools in Gravesend, in an effort to capture the views of as many Meopham children as possible.

12.5 From the information gathered in these surveys, those children either being brought to or collected from school by private car or vehicle sharing amounted to 44% while only 25% walked or cycled to school. The remaining 31% travelled by school bus or public transport. It is understood that less than 8% of the students now attending Meopham Sports College reside in the Parish. This can be expected to have a significant bearing on the volume of transport, resulting from outside the Parish, at starting and ending times of the school day

12.6 Concerns were expressed by respondents about the traffic problems, with the disruption caused at school times, with congestion, hazardous road conditions and the extent of parking near school entrances. The strength of feeling over roads blocked around Culverstone Primary School drew several major criticisms from local residents and other road users. There was also the anxiety of parents because of insufficient safeguards for children crossing the very busy A227 at these times. The strongest representations were near the junction of Wrotham Road and Longfield Road for which more safety measures were called for by residents.

12.7 In response to the junior questionnaire, 60% of the children were not born in Meopham. The majority came to live here because their families were attracted by the quality of the primary schools. Nearly 70% had other siblings, most of whom also attended school and less than one-third travelled to school by car. Most were conscious that this helped to protect the environment.

12.8 In reply to enquiries made with Kent County Council, the Area Education Officer confirmed the partial rebuild of the secondary school from 2010 and the intake has been reduced to 150 in line with the overall surplus in school places in the Borough. The principle focus will be on teaching and learning and the provision of a swimming pool will not be part of the funding for the re-development. The site on which the new building is to be constructed will help to alleviate some of the traffic flow problems and will help to ease congestion.

12.9 The primary schools are subject to annual review but there are no plans to reduce the present intakes. There is no intention by the Local Authority to close any primary schools in the Borough.

The response to the provision of child-care for the youngest children below school age was low.

12.10 Those householders who replied to the questionnaire stated that 9 attended baby/toddler groups as did those going to pre-school playgroup; 3 went to nursery. This was spread across 5 separate local groups in the area: Playpen; Chuckles; Kinder; NCT; Toddler Group and Culverstone CPS. 9 parents found the benefit to them was that it enabled them to work. 7 others gave their reason as social.

12.12 Cost was only an issue for 4 out 13, who would like these to be lower. Only one found more accessibility and the provision of a small charge for local transport to gain access to a child-care group as a factor.

12.13 The supplementary questionnaire brought fewer responses, most who commented were well satisfied with the present arrangements but one opinion proposed that the Library be used to help younger children develop.

12.14 Further exploratory work may be required to determine if the requirement for child-care is being adequately met.

Recommendations:

EC.1 that support for schools in Meopham should continue so as to maintain a high level of education and educational facilities so more local children are encouraged to attend the local schools.

EC.2 that contact with schools/nurseries should be maintained on their development and standards in the interests of those in their care.

Annexe A - Executive Summary

Meopham Parish Council commissioned an independent Steering Group to prepare a Parish Plan in January 2008, having initially conducted a comprehensive survey. The aim of the Parish Plan was to look at wider issues and to find out what the local community wanted for the future. It offers the opportunity to exercise more local control and to work out how to deliver improvements in their neighbourhoods with a major contribution from the residents themselves.

The Meopham Parish Plan Steering Group (MPPSG) members were tasked to produce a Parish Plan for the Parish Council with their findings. MPPSG has based its assessment on responses to a range of issues that have an impact on local residents and considered what solutions are possible from views expressed from questionnaires, surveys, web-site replies, meetings and recently at an open forum. The Open Forum took place in Meopham Village Hall on 20th September 2008 to make sure that all shades of opinion voiced by residents of the Parish, who would be affected, were not overlooked.

The main areas of enquiry for the Parish Plan, which were identified, ranged from the effect of having a major highway passing through the Parish, with traffic disruption and speeding; how people regard crime and anti-social behaviour with the response from the law enforcement officers; protection for the environment and the Green Belt; the need for youth and young people to develop and be suitably occupied; and to ensure the level of services and amenities meet residents' expectations.

MPPSG has been assisted and part funded by Action with Communities in Rural Kent, with guidance from their own adviser on how to conduct the consultation process; to produce recommendations and an action plan. The remaining funds, to support the preparation of the Plan, were provided by the Parish Council. MPPSG will put their recommendations to the Parish Council to seek their implementation.

When the final recommendations are agreed and converted into the Action Plan, this will provide the framework for the planning of Meopham, over the next 4 years. It will be based on a mandate from the residents and will be referred to by the Parish Council in their discussions on the future of Meopham with other local authorities and service providers.

The proposed Action Plan for the next 4 years, as outlined in Annexe B of this report. The Members of the Parish Council and service providers are requested to implement these proposals for the benefit the community in Meopham.

Annexe B - Action Plan

The Parish Plan Steering Group propose that the following action plan is adopted.

Parish Council

Item No.	Recommended Action	Action by	Timescale
PC.1	The Parish Council to give more publicity to its activities and decisions.	MPC	2009

Community Safety – Crime and anti-social behaviour

CS.1	Neighbourhood Police Team to mount more evening/night patrols and to show a greater presence on the streets.	NKP	2009
CS.2	"PACT" * scheme to continue and develop for the benefit of the whole community, with more support for neighbourhood watch schemes and to target vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Residents to report all incidents on every occasion.	NKP	2009
CS.3	Install amenity lighting only to make vulnerable areas safer.	MPC	2011

Highways

Hi.1	Downgrading of the A227 and re-classifying as "B" road to be actively pursued to apply weight restrictions to heavy lorries.	KCC, MPC	2010
Hi.2	Install traffic calming and/or roundabouts on the A227, particularly at Meopham School, to slow traffic down.	KHS	2010
Hi.3	Remove potential accident blackspots on the A227 and some minor roads and improve access to the Culverstone Valley Area via Heron Hill Lane.	KCC, KHS	2012
Hi.4	Provide cycle paths and continuous pavements along the length of Wrotham Road (A227).	KCC, KHS	2012

Traffic & Transport

TT.1	Review road safety measures constantly in the immediate vicinity of all local schools and encourage parents to take their children to and from school by means other than by private transport including walking bus routes.	KCC, MPC	2009
TT.2	Traffic wardens to patrol all locations throughout Meopham including Culverstone, so that "no parking" restrictions are observed on double yellow lines.	GBC,	2009
TT.3	Operate more frequent and punctual bus services within the Parish, with bus routes that fulfil all the community requirements and co-ordinate between train and bus services at Meopham Railway Station.	KCC, Ava, MPC	2009
TT.4	Cut car parking charges at Meopham Railway Station to reduce off-street parking in surrounding roads.	GBC, NR	2009

Actions to be taken by: Meopham Parish Council (MPC); Kent County Council (KCC); Gravesham Borough Council (GBC); North Kent Police (NKP); Kent Highway Services (KHS); Network Rail (NR); Arriva (Ava); Primary Care Trust (PCT) and Post Office Counters Ltd (POC).

Environmental issues

Ei.1	Preserve the present Green Belt areas in the Meopham Parish by resisting any development therein or over-development on existing properties.	GBC MPC	2009
Ei.2	Retain weekly household waste collections but include green and glass collection with monthly community skips and more recycling facilities.	GBC	2009
Ei.3	Organise litter parties for cleaning areas and action against litter offenders should be enforced.	GBC MPC	2009

Amenities

Am.1	Carry out enhancement to the Library to make this a centre of excellence to provide literature, information and a communication centre for residents.	KCC	2010
Am.2	Seek sponsorship and grant funding proactively for all amenities and organise more community events, such as a Meopham Fete or a Meopham Fair.	MPC	2009

Providing for young people

YP.1	Encourage development of young people, make greater use of the existing facilities, with the provision of a purpose built Youth Centre, manned and open most evenings and promote youth involvement to develop these facilities and activities.	KCC, MPC	2012
YP.2	Obtain sponsorship and support for sport for young people in the Parish, with the provision of suitable pitches at various locations.	KCC MPC	2010
YP.3	Provide better play areas for younger children at Judson's Recreation Ground, Camer Park and Culverstone Recreation Ground.	GBC MPC	2009

Quality of Services

QS.1	Encourage local health facilities to offer more benefits to local residents with the Medical Centre by extending its opening hours and a more flexible appointment system .	MPC	2009
QS.2	Provide better arrangements to assist patients in need of transport to attend hospital for treatment.	PCT, MPC	2009
QS.3	Give local Post Offices wider scope to improve their range of services such as a wider range of banking services.	POC	2009
QS.4	Support existing shopping outlets to provide a service for local residents but with improvements and monitoring of car parking arrangements regularly.	KCC, GBC, MPC	2010

Education and Child-care

EC.1	Maintain a high level of education and facilities in Meopham to encourage more local children to attend the local schools.	KCC	2010
EC.2	Maintain contact with schools/nurseries on their development and standards in the interests of those in their care.	KCC	2010

Annexe C - Acknowledgements

15.1 The following organisations have responded to requests for information:

Kent County Council:

Cllr. Michael Snelling, County Councillor for Meopham.
Ms Cath Anley, Head of Library & Archives Services.
Mr Simon Webb, Area Education Officer.

Gravesham Borough Council:

Mr Glyn Thomson, Chief Executive
Mr Kevin Burbridge, Director of Regeneration & Planning
Mr Tony Chadwick, Principal Planning Officer
Mr Stuart Alford, Manager, Waste & Horticulture.

Kent Police:

Superintendent Martyn Cochrane
Inspector Paul Anderson
PC Steve Ridley, Traffic Management
PC Helen Lamb, Community Beat Officer.

Kent Highways:

Mr David Aspinall, Head of Operations.

Arriva:

Mr Malcolm Spalding, Commercial Manager.

Meopham Medical Centre:

Dr Jonathan Mounty.

Meopham Welfare Committee:

Mr Colin Durham, Secretary (Organiser, Community Bus).

Meopham Village Hall Management Committee:

Mr David Arnold, Treasurer

Harvel Village Hall Management Committee:

Mrs June Burkitt, Chairman

Culverstone Community Association:

Miss Julie Roper, Secretary.

Meopham Windmill Trust:

Mr Ian Kerr, Chairman.

Action with Communities in Rural Kent:

Ms Victoria Lawson, Parish Plan Adviser.

Members of the Steering Group:

Mr Brian Boughton, Mrs Dawn Bramer, Cllr. Mrs Yvonne Carne-Ross Mrs Ceri Courtney, Cllr Bill Fisher (Chairman), Mr Michael Gillott, Cllr. Mrs Mandy Green, Mrs Sheila Howe, Cllr. Douglas Powell, Mrs Paula Robinson, Mr Simon Westmacott and Mr Michael Windsor. Mr David Gray also attended one meeting.

Website management: Cllr. Max Bramer.

Co-ordinators: Mr Peter Tennyson and Mrs Sarah Lawry-Johns.