

Steppingley Parish Plan Update 2016



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1. Letter from Steppingley Parish Council

Steppingley is an ancient settlement, enjoying note in the Domesday Book, which has developed in modern times into a thriving and contemporary alternative to urban life. It successfully sustains widely diverse wild life and it benefits from dark skies, where the Milky Way and comet showers can still be observed.

Steppingley does not merely afford an excellent environment for its residents, its many rural recreational facilities are much utilised by people from further afield and, in particular, residents from the nearby towns of Flitwick and Ampthill. The extensive network of footpaths and bridleways, and an ancient byway, enable free access for all, including those on foot, mountain bikes and horses.

As such, Steppingley's Parish Council jealously guards the social value that the Parish's assets command.

H. Jackson
Chairman
Steppingley Parish Council



2. Introduction

In 2005 Steppingley Parish Council and Village Association consulted the parish to produce a Parish Plan. This document gave an overview of the parish, its history and the views of the residents. An action plan was added which was used by the Parish Council and Village Association over the following ten years.

In late 2014 we carried out a new consultation throughout the Parish, with 35 responses collected. This document captures the outcomes from that consultation, as an update to the 2006 Parish Plan.

Acknowledgements

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- Central Bedfordshire Council
- Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity
- Marcus Webb for photos
- The residents of Steppingley for their input

Progress made since 2005

A key output of the 2005 Parish Plan was an action plan that has been used as a guide to decision making and objectives for both Steppingley Parish Council and Steppingley Village Association. A full update with new actions from this update of the Plan can be found in Appendix 1. The key areas of focus were:

- **Development** – the Parish Council has actively opposed development which has a negative impact on the rural aspect and identity of the Parish and which could lead to merging of settlements.
- **Highways** – on-going work with Central Beds Council to maintain the condition of the highways; review of plans for new roundabout at the cross roads reduced the proposed street lights from 25 to 12; improved signage through village at narrow bend (with on-going discussions to improve this further).
- **Footpaths & Bridleways** – addition of a new Bridleway connecting Peakes End to Flitwick Woods creating a new, circular route.
- **Community facilities** – purchase of the Recreation Ground on behalf of the Parish; improvements to Village Hall; replacement of Pavilion with new building; Parish website development.

3. Development

Since 2006 the Parish has continued work to enhance the rural character and identity of the area. Despite this Center Parcs have opened a new resort, leading to some urbanisation on the northern edge of the Parish. A housing development is under construction on Froghall Road (Flitwick side), which means that Flitwick will be developed up to its boundary with Steppingley. The Parish Council continues actively pursuing visual enhancement of the Parish in line with its rural character.

All residents want Steppingley to remain a separate community from the surrounding towns and villages, with many people adding comments to reinforce this view.

There are many old buildings in the village, with considerable character and uniqueness that is strongly valued, some are of historical importance.

The majority of residents (88%) would be prepared to accept limited (up to about 8 properties), or want no development in the Parish. Any development should be in a sympathetic, unobtrusive style, in keeping with the character of the village. Possible areas for development suggested were at various small, infill areas within the village envelope.

It was noted that there is limited Affordable Housing for rent or purchase due to the low supply and high demand to live in the parish. Questionnaire respondents noted that this is a regional and national problem and that there are options available in nearby Flitwick and Ampthill.

Very few residents would support applications for wind turbines, especially within the conservation area. A small majority would support applications for unobtrusive solar panels.



4. Services

In general people are happy with the services provided. The majority of respondents are happy with the Health Services, although concern was expressed about future availability following the housing development at Froghall Road. Waste disposal and recycling was also considered good or excellent with a pocket of concern around collections in Church End. Some people wanted to see a glass recycling point, but many felt that it would be too noisy and that provision in local towns was sufficient.

There are many small businesses or self-employed/home workers in Steppingley and the key facility wished for was better mobile & broadband services. Maximum broadband speeds within the village are typically around 6 Mbps, which is poor compared with both average UK broadband speeds of around 29 Mbps and average UK rural broadband speeds of 13.7 Mbps¹. Cable broadband is not available within the village, and the rollout of Fibre Broadband is currently scheduled for Phase 4 of the BDUK2 superfast broadband rollout programme, which should provide speeds of at least 24 Mbps by September 2018².

Only three respondents were concerned about the level of crime in the Parish, due to burglaries and 83% would support a Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

94% of respondents do not want to see street lighting in the Parish, with many commenting on its urbanising effect and negative impact on wildlife. This should be considered in any development applications.

Less than half of residents support provision of an additional burial ground in the Parish, however since the questionnaire was issued the Parish Council have concluded that this is not feasible (see minutes through 2014 & 2015).

¹ Ofcom UK fixed-line broadband performance report, November 2015 - <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/other/telecoms-research/broadband-speeds/UK-home-broadband-performance-Nov-15>

² Central Superfast Central Bedfordshire BDUK 2 Broadband Phasing Map - <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/business/broadband/project.aspx>

5. Highways

Anecdotally the volume of traffic through the village has increased over the last ten years and this is a cause for concern, in particular around the narrow & sharp bend at Peakes End. While CBC have added signage to warn oncoming vehicles of the narrow road it is felt (strongly) that more is needed, with almost half of respondents having had an accident in the last 2 years.

78% of respondents support a 20mph zone through the centre of the village. Many residents suggested the removal of the paving on the inside of the bend as it is believed to serve no purpose.

Pedestrians would like a safe way of moving around the village by an inter-connecting footpath. A footpath / cycleway to Flitwick was also suggested by many respondents.

Following the completion of the new Bridleway connecting BW6 to BW9, creating a circular route half of respondents wanted to see more circular routes connecting the existing Footpath & Bridleway network.



6. Social & Community Facilities

The Parish is fortunate to have many excellent facilities and they are very well used, see table in Appendix 2. In particular the Footpaths & Bridleways, Village Hall, French Horn, Drovers Arms and Recreation Ground were regularly used by the majority of respondents. The only facility not used at all was the Public Telephone Box which is a regulatory provision by BT as part of their charter, but remains out of keeping with the surrounding streetscape.

The Steppingley Village Association is very active in both the organisation of social events and the maintenance of community facilities. 91% of respondents felt part of the community and most thought that the events were sufficient.

Following the purchase of the Recreation Ground by the Parish Council on behalf of the residents, the old Pavilion has been replaced with a new, fit for purpose building. Apart from being much more in keeping with the character of the Parish it has been well used in its first year. This was an enormous project for a small group of volunteers who should be congratulated.

Dog fouling has been an issue on the Recreation Ground and there is much debate about how to enforce owners cleaning up. The Parish Council provide waste bags and additional signage, but it may be necessary to ban dogs off lead. The cost of fencing off the play equipment is being investigated, but this adds to the on-going cost of mowing as the Cricket Club would be unable to mow a fenced off area and the cost would need to be met by the Parish Council through the Precept.

The Village Hall was improved in 2005 and a grant has been obtained for further improvements to the damp and insulation, completed late 2015. This has significantly improved the heat retention, both cutting bills and providing a much more pleasant environment.

Generally respondents are happy with the facilities available, though a wish list of Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) and swimming pool were suggested. The current play equipment is in need of additional maintenance due to its age.

St Lawrence Church is poorly attended and its viability is under assessment. 70% of respondents felt that the Parish needs to maintain an open church and many suggestions were made to improve and increase usage. These included making it warmer, family services, Sunday School, better information on services and times, weddings linking with French Horn, use for music recitals, craft fairs and community events.



