ASHAMPSTEAD

PARISH PLAN
The Ashampstead Parish Plan gives local people the opportunity to engage with their fellow residents, community groups, service providers and others to set out a vision for how they would like their village to develop over the next 5-10 years.

It examines all aspects of local life and uses consultation with the community to provide the foundations for an action plan, which prioritizes local issues, identifies key partners for delivery and sets target dates for the completion of projects.

There are certain projects that will require a large input from outside agencies. There are some projects and ideas that require assistance, co-operation and organization through the Parish Council and there will be some projects that we will be able to create with the help of local parish participation.

There are many benefits to completing a Parish Plan, these include:

- West Berkshire Council uses Parish Plans to help determine how local services are delivered. Parish Plans can create a real sense of community spirit and can reinvigorate local democracy
- A Parish Plan provides clear evidence of community needs and priorities
- A Parish Plan action plan provides the community with a defined list of community priorities
- The completion of a Plan enables access to the Parish Plan Grant Fund and other funding streams which may otherwise be denied to us
- Parish Plans can highlight innovative projects which need help from other agencies
- Parish Planning encourages partnership working
- Parish Plans strengthen the Parish Council’s relationship with the community
- Parish Plans are also used as a tool to complement and help deliver local planning policies (although they cannot override adopted planning policy)

The Parish Council fully supports the Parish Plan and will make every effort to assist in achieving the objectives of the plan.
Ashampstead is a small rural community set in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with about 400 inhabitants. Its peace and tranquillity are its principle attributes and the main reason that residents choose to live here. Over the years it has lost its shop, village school, public house and post office. These losses have been countered by a very strong sense of community spirit and entrepreneurial substitution, good examples of which are the improvised “Ashampstead Arms” held once a month in the village hall and the letting of the village hall to a Montessori School. However, much of this depends on the dedication of a small band of volunteers.

The village demographics are changing. There are still a few families who are associated with working the land but these are being outnumbered by incoming young families. In time there will be a significant number of young people in the community who will need activity opportunities within the village. With this in mind, Ashampstead Recreational Trust (ART), which is responsible for the village hall and recreation ground, Flowers Piece, asked whether there might be a demand for a tennis court. Some people supported the idea but opposition by residents around Flowers Piece to any change was much stronger than support. In order to find out the general community wishes, ART proposed that a Parish Plan should be produced.

The Parish Council first considered a parish/community plan in 2004 and produced a draft which was circulated but was not acceptable to West Berkshire District Council as, in drafting it, no one apart from the Parish Council had been consulted. In 2007, the Parish Council supported ART’s proposal and encouraged a group of residents to see if there was a desire in Ashampstead to have a plan. A community meeting was held in May 2007 and the advantages of having a plan were explained in great detail by our local district councillor, the leader of Yattendon's parish plan.
steering group and Sarah Ward from Community Action West Berkshire. It was apparent that some residents could still not see what advantages a plan had. It was therefore agreed that the whole community would be canvassed to see if there was support for a plan. Despite a disappointing response, 34 questionnaires were returned, all except one were positive and a Steering Group of volunteers was set up in September 2007. Focus/working groups were set up under the chairmanship of a member of the Steering Group covering the environment, the village hall, traffic and highways, Flowers Piece, planning and development, community services particularly for the elderly, activities for young people and crime. Open House events were held in June 2008 during which residents could see what the working groups were recommending. They were able to vote for or against any proposal they felt strongly about and to add any comments of their own if they wished. Seventy four residents attended from every corner of the community and representing all age groups. The responses were very positive indeed and it was quite clear that there was a considerable support for the proposals in the plan. The Steering Group agreed that they would not go to the lengths of circulating another questionnaire and therefore unlike many parish plans, this plan does not include numerous pie charts and tables.
The lack of surface water inhibited permanent settlement in the earliest times but people used the surface flints to make blades on Ashampstead Common during the Middle Stone Age (about 5,000BC) and a couple of thousand years later in the New Stone Age someone lost a polished stone axe near Slade Gate. No settlements of the Roman or Saxon periods have been found.

As the population grew after the 9th century, small woodland settlements expanded and cleared land to farm. Stubbles means newly cleared land. Ashampstead was part of Basildon Parish. The larger population justified a church to save a five mile walk to the parish church at Lower Basildon and one was built in the 12th century. It remained a dependency of Basildon until 1847.

Ashampstead manor is not mentioned as such in Domesday Book (1086). However, an unlocated manor called Ashdon is listed. Ashdon means the hill where ash trees grow and this would describe the parish very well.

It is very probable that part of the Norman army marched up Bottom Road on their way from Winchester to Wallingford after the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

The population continued to grow. It is difficult to estimate numbers, but in 1086 there were probably around two hundred people in the parish. Even today the population is only about 400.

The majority of people lived by working the land. Most of the arable was in large Open Fields in which husbandmen (not farmers) held a number of scattered long narrow strips. In theory this gave a fairer share of the good and poor land. These started to be enclosed at an early date and was completed by the 17th century.

Deer parks were created on Ashampstead Common before 1240.
and in Beche Park Wood in 1336. Many of our best bluebell coppices were enclosed in the same centuries. Some trees growing on their boundary banks may be 800 years old.

The population continued to expand but the agricultural technology did not. Farmers were forced to plough marginal land and steep slopes. This resulted in the creation of terraces cut into hillsides.

In 1300 the climate took a turn for the worse and people began to starve. In the winter of 1348-9 the Black Death entered Britain having devastated mainland Europe. It was a virus against which people had no defence and they died in thousands. The manor records of Basildon contain the entry 'this year no rents have been paid. All the tenants are dead'. The marginal land was abandoned and became woodland thus fossilising the terraces. They may still be seen in Long Croft Shaw and in other woods.

A thriving pottery industry existed on the western edge of Ashampstead Common between the 11th and 13th centuries. Its products have been found as far a field as Oxford and in Reading, Newbury and Wallingford.

Methodism gained a strong hold in the area in the 19th century. There were many more chapels than churches. Ashampstead Parish had chapels at Ashampstead Green (1840), Quick's Green (1872) and Burnt Hill (1864). Only Burnt Hill survives as a chapel.

The Methodist movement led to demands for education. Between 1875 and 1877 money was raised by subscription, often from very poor people, and a school was built in Ashampstead village on land donated by the Hopkins Estate of Tidmarsh. It served the community until it was closed in December 1971. It later became the village hall.
During World War I the parish lost eight men killed and many more injured. During World War II the parish lost two men. A Homeguard platoon was formed and carried out patrols and exercises with other villages. In the build up to D Day on 6 June 1944 Ashampstead and Burnt Hill Commons were used as staging posts between the training areas and the channel ports.

After World War I the Local Authority built houses for rent on the eastern edge of Ashampstead village and at Stubbles. These were a great improvement on the old farm tied cottages. A second phase was built after World War II.

In 1971 the Rights of Common that had supported parishioners for a thousand years were given up in exchange for a written Commons Agreement with Yattendon Estate guaranteeing every parishioner of Ashampstead Parish unhindered access to both Ashampstead and Burnt Hill Commons.

The wheel continues to turn. More and more residents are running successful businesses from their homes in the parish. The redundant farm buildings at Childs Court Farm are now home to several new businesses including a steel fabricator - surely the equivalent of the old village blacksmith.
ENVIRONMENT

Ashampstead parish lies in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Although very few parishioners work on the land or in the woods of the parish, the environment plays a large part in parishioners’ reasons for choosing the parish as a place to live and bring up their families.

Access. The parish has 47 Public Rights of Way and one Permitted Path. This richness allows walks to be designed which take in different terrains from open fields with wide horizons to the enclosed intimacy of woodland. The importance of maintaining and improving this network was made plain to the working group.

Tranquillity in terms of both lack of noise and lack of light pollution came high on parishioners’ approval list. Desire for tranquillity around our homes is common across the whole of the AONB and measures to retain and improve it form an important part of our Community Plan and the AONB Management Plan.

Fly tipping. We will seek to provide re-cycling facilities beyond the current kerb-side collections thus removing part of the source of the problem. We will encourage the reporting of fly-tipping and will work closely with other bodies to identify and prosecute the culprits.

Local food production - gardening and allotments. We will support the production and use of local sources of food. Provision of allotment gardens will be considered and a corps of experienced gardeners will be recruited to offer advice and guidance to novices seeking to grow their own food.

Studying a locality leads to a greater awareness and sense of belonging. We will encourage and support local studies.

The Commons. The parish is blessed with eighty-one hectares (nearly 200 acres) of open mixed woodland seamed with a dense...
network of footpaths and bridleways, covered with trees of many species and ages and with a ground flora to gladden the eye and lift the spirits.

Rights of Common were given up in 1971 in exchange for a legal contract between Yattendon Estate and its successors and Ashampstead Parish Council. This agreement is registered with the Land Registry and requires the Commons to be maintained as open woodland. It is a prime duty on the Parish Council to monitor and enforce the provisions of this agreement.

The parish shares in the management of the Commons via the Commons Committee consisting of representatives of Yattendon Estate, Ashampstead Parish Council and residents on the Commons. A Management Plan for the Commons was instituted in 1997. This cooperation has resulted in publications such as 'The Commons of Ashampstead Parish' & 'Veteran Trees for the Future'.

The Way Forward
Our Community Plan will be monitored and amended as circumstances change. However, we consider it essential to start by implementing the following policies in addition to those outlined above and detailed in the Action Plans.

- We will liaise closely with the farming and forestry community in the midst of which we live.
- We will seek to discuss and resolve issues which affect both communities.
- We will seek to improve our path network by negotiating Permitted Paths to by-pass dangerous roads and to link existing paths.
- We will seek to make contact with environmental groups in surrounding parishes and with bodies such as the North Wessex Downs AONB; the Berks, Bucks & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust; The Pang Valley Project FWAG; The Friends of the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Valleys; The Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers.

ENVIRONMENT continued
Ashampstead parish lies on the dip slope of the Berkshire Downs. Its northern boundary lies a mile or so south of the crest of the Downs along which runs the Ridgeway. To the east lies the edge of the Thames Valley. The southern and eastern boundaries are less well defined.

The underlying geology is chalk, but the surface is covered by a variety of soils from calcareous soils, where the chalk is close to the surface, to heavy clay and clays and to acid sands and gravels. The highest point at 151 metres lies in the north east near Black Wood, and the lowest at 70 metres on the southern boundary at Slade Gate. There is no surface water other than man-made ponds. The valleys are dry, carved out by melt water during the ice ages. This lack of water has had a major influence on the history of the parish.

The vegetation is a mixture of large arable fields, small paddocks, ancient woods and coppices and commercial forestry plantations. Christmas trees are an important crop. Along the southern boundary run Ashampstead Common and Burnt Hill Common. These form a continuous belt of species rich woodland up to half a mile wide.

Settlement is dispersed over the parish. Ashampstead Village is the largest settlement and provides a focus, but there are small settlements at Ashampstead Green, Quick's Green, Hartridge, Stubbles, Ashampstead Common and at Burnt Hill.
The architecture of the older buildings reflects local resources. There are a few half-timbered houses with thatched roofs, but most of the older houses are built with red bricks and tiles made with the local iron-rich clays and sands.

From the 1930s onwards groups of houses were built by the local District Council on the edge of Ashampstead village and at Stubbles. These were of standard utilitarian design.

More recent houses reflect the wide variety of designs available, but, in general, are built with materials which sit well in the landscape.

The whole of this beautiful and fascinating parish lies in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. AONBs fulfil a similar role to National Parks. The designation requires them to ‘.... conserve and enhance natural beauty and ..... take account of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities ...’. These duties are delivered mainly via West Berkshire Council, but there are important roles for voluntary organisations and individual parishioners.
TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAYS

The traffic and highways working group looked mainly at issues in the heart of the village. The working group was minded of two important factors. Firstly, the Parish Council is already working on many proposals and long standing problems of the highways and traffic in the community and their work is fully endorsed in this plan. Secondly, the rural character of the village should not be changed. Urbanisation by excessive signage, road markings and traffic calming measures should be balanced off against the effect on the village scene.

Traffic speeding through the village was seen as a major problem with the additional risk to children's safety being a worry particularly at the start and end of the school day. There are several ways in which we think this problem could be addressed such as extending the 30 mph zone and renewing existing signage which is now illegible. We support the initiative to link Yattendon, Hampstead Norreys and Compton by cycle path and would like to see Ashampstead also in this link.

We are not impressed by the standard of repairs carried out to the roads in the village. Patches don't last any time and the workmanship appears bad. Every action point was thoroughly endorsed by the community during the open house events.
A working group of five met to discuss and take soundings in the parish on what services a small village can expect in practice. There are desirable services and activities that we would like to happen, which cannot be provided either because in a small parish they cannot be economic, or because there are not enough people willing to organise them.

The “Tea and Chat” Club runs excellent monthly meetings with some outings; and organises Christmas parcels to single senior citizens. Setting up a gardening group was considered but there is insufficient interest. However, senior citizens would welcome more events being organised.

There are no problems with health and well-being/care in the home/support for the disabled and vulnerable. The GP surgeries and hospitals offer a good service including transport for those unable to get there and back themselves. There is a good record of neighbourliness to those in need.

Transport however is unsatisfactory: the problem is that there are too few users to make a proper service commercially viable. There
is a daily bus into Newbury and discussions are being held about combining with Aldworth, which has a similar problem.

The library service is satisfactory.

Communications are on the whole good. The village magazine is good: parish council and ART meetings and minutes are reported. The notice boards are satisfactory. Telephone landlines are satisfactory. Reception for mobiles varies over the parish but all the parish is covered by at least one operator. Broadband cover, or lack of it, is unacceptable: some areas can get it and some can't, without any logical pattern. This is a problem, which needs to be resolved. It is thought it would be good to have a parish website, using the Greenham Common Trust server, controlled by a parishioner. It could hold the parish welcome pack and a diary of village events, as well as village history, etc.

Interests of home-workers and small businesses were considered. Known home-workers and self-employed have been emailed to see if they would like to form a village business group. Only 4 replied positively, which is not enough to form a quorum.
The building known generally as the Village Hall was erected in the late eighteen seventies as a consequence of the general demand for education by the Methodist movement. Between 1875 and 1877 money was raised by subscription, often from very poor people, and a school was built in Ashampstead village on land donated by the Hopkins Estate of Tidmarsh. It served the community for almost a hundred years until it was closed in December 1971 because of a shortage of pupils. It then had to be purchased from the Church Commissioners at the full market price even though the Church had only contributed £5 to its original construction. At the time this issue caused great bitterness in the parish.

To this day the building still displays all the signs of its heritage with a tarmac playground outside and what was once a large, lofty classroom, now the main hall, and a separate smaller room adjoining on the inside. Even the old school bell still hangs above the roof! Later additions include a "lean to" storeroom at the back, improved toilet facilities and a kitchen with fittings and a cooker that remain as a tribute to the 1950’s!

Strictly speaking the hall should be called the Jubilee Hall as it
was re-named in 1977 as a way to permanently commemorate the Queen's Silver Jubilee.

Now that the village has lost its pub and shop the number of gathering places is limited to the recreation ground, where good weather is a condition for a satisfactory meeting, the church or the hall. Under these circumstances, the building now plays host to events like the annual Christmas party, the monthly Ashampstead Arms pub and public meetings such as the open house events used to involve the parish in building the community plan. In addition to this it has, during the day, reverted to its original purpose and currently provides a home for the children attending the Montessori school.

Although the hall plays an active part in the life of the village it has the potential to play a far more pivotal role. However in order to achieve this potential it needs modernising, constant maintenance and general tender, loving care to bring it fully into the 21st century making it something we can be proud of and a worthy feature within the community. Only then can we build a broader spectrum of events and activities to enhance the life of the people who use this facility.
THE FLOWERS PIECE RECREATION GROUND & THE PAVILION

The Flowers Piece Recreation ground was gifted to the village for use by the inhabitants of the Parish of Ashampstead and the immediate neighbourhood thereof without distinction of political, religious or other opinions, including use for forms of recreation and leisure time occupations with the object of improving the conditions of life for the said inhabitants.

The current facilities include a playground, the pavilion, a volleyball net, football pitch and general open space. Flowers Piece is currently used for village functions such as the Summer Party, walking, picnics, football, annual bonfire and fireworks, as well as kite flying and other leisure activities that the parishioners enjoy.

The management of the recreation ground and the pavilion is carried out by both ART and the Parish Council. At present, the PC arranges and pays for the grass cutting and ART are responsible for the maintenance of the playground, pavilion and looking after the trees etc.

Due to varying reasons there have been several meetings held over the past two years about the use of Flowers Piece. As such comment has been taken from the results of these previous meetings and indeed tied into this plan. It is noted that the meeting held in September 2006 was attended by more than 40 residents, with similar numbers attending the meeting in 2007 and then again completing a questionnaire. There were several themes running through the three sets of data, and indeed these themes are included in this report. However, the general consensus from these meetings was that Flowers Piece should remain the same and that there should be no excessive development, if any at all. As such the main objective to be included in the Parish Plan should be to protect the natural environment, avoid any building on Flowers Piece, and to ensure that it is maintained to be enjoyed or available to be enjoyed by the inhabitants of the Parish of Ashampstead.

The Pavilion is a major part of Flowers Piece. However, it has fallen into disrepair over recent years, and is now almost beyond use. There are two options available:
Replace it with something similar, with power but not water, which could again be used for storage and a changing room for football teams. Knock it down and build an open shelter with perhaps a barbecue site and seats, which could be used as a meeting place for young people.

Any action taken in this respect will of course be subject to full consultation with the residents of the parish.

The playground situated on Flowers Piece is well used and has in the past had safety concerns due to the slippery rubber matting around the swings, slide etc. This problem was resolved in October 2008. No further work is needed beyond normal maintenance; however this element is extremely important and should be monitored carefully.

An open meeting to discuss the future of Flowers Piece resulted in the positive conclusion that the majority of the residents living in the parish want no change. Ideas for developing the recreation ground are as follows:

- Do nothing - although this is not quite as easy as it would appear as there is a vast amount of maintenance required in order to keep Flowers Piece as it is.
- Planting trees - to replace the chestnuts which have bleeding canker caused by dry summers but which may survive as a result of the wet summer we have just had.

The action plan which follows will show that the removal of the dead and dying trees is a priority and indeed as is the removal of the stumps. The main action to be considered firstly is to research potential funding for any of the proposals.

Any further development of Flowers Piece must include a full consultation with the parish as a whole.
There are approximately 75 children under the age of 18 in the parish. The Montessori pre-school held in the village hall offers an opportunity for some of the under 5s to get together, but, as there is no parish school, the children attend a number of different state and independent schools. In addition, there are currently very few organised activities for young people in the parish, and as a result the children do not all know each other or get together socially as much as they might if there was a youth club.

Previous one-off activity days such as the kayaking event in 2007 proved popular and we had a lot of good ideas from children, teenagers and parents of youngsters who attended the open days or fed back information to us in other ways.

There was interest in setting up organised groups and clubs of various groups of young people, in particular a youth club, restarting a toddler group, having a Sunday school and running more activities similar to the kayaking event. It was felt that there should be more sporting facilities in the parish but it was clear that more work needs to be done investigating these whilst involving all members of the parish in any decisions.

Other areas that were popular were using the village hall for sports, dance classes, film nights etc., providing transport for young people to sporting or other social activities in surrounding villages and towns and spending more time researching young peoples ideas via discussion groups or a youth questionnaire.

It is clear that parents and the young people themselves are keen to do more together but these activities do not run themselves and the biggest challenge for us as a community will be to find volunteers from the parish to organise these events.

It was significant that no one volunteered to be a member of the working group on this subject and therefore no group discussions took place. These findings are therefore based on a very small sample of the community whose views were sought individually.
Planning and Development tends to generate two levels of emotion within a parish, one being apathy until someone wants to paint their house bright pink then complete rage as to how this could possibly be allowed to happen and destroy a beautiful environment. The difficulty is seen as to how can we have a say at informing and influencing planning at the local level - The information set out has great potential to add to the local development plan, and has an important role in influencing formal planning processes. The information can be of benefit in two main ways:

- Guiding and influencing local development proposals;
- Contributing to the review of broader planning policy within development plans.

This is why it is very important that within a parish there is a clear view as to what the parish wants with regards to new buildings, existing buildings, extensions, businesses etc and also why it is important to ensure we also liaise with other parishes and influential bodies (Yattendon Estate, The North Wessex Downs AONB) to ensure views are aligned. It is therefore important the parish has a clear view on what it sees as the needs moving forward.
The following evidence was gathered:-
- police coverage is poor;
- fear of/or have experienced theft/burglary;
- a greater police presence would be very effective

It is clear that a majority of people, even in this rural parish, fear crime. Recorded crime in Ashampstead is very low. Even allowing for unreported crime, Ashampstead is not assessed to be a problem area for Thames Valley Police and West Berkshire Council. However, both organisations recognise the fact parishioners fear crime.

The Community Safety Officer is responsible for dealing with anti-social behaviour. Any issues regarding anti-social behaviour are sent to the Community Safety Officer by the Parish Council's Police Liaison Councillor. This is done on a secure online system.

During a meeting with the Parish Council's Police Liaison Councillor, the Chief Inspector of Thames Valley Police reiterated there is no possibility of the return of a permanent police presence in the area. Instead, police presence is dictated on where problems are perceived to be occurring or will occur. In the meantime, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) will drive around the area and provide a visible presence within the parish.

The Parish is connected to the Police Community Messaging system whereby details of crimes and criminals are emailed to the Parish Council's Police Liaison Councillor so he can forward them on to parishioners. This system, working alongside Neighbourhood Watch, will only be successful if it gets the full support of parishioners.

All crimes should be reported to the police, and a reference number obtained so the police have accurate records of crime in Ashampstead. In non-emergency cases the number 0845 505505 should be used.

Regular liaison between the Parish Council and the Pangbourne Neighbourhood Action Group takes place. These meetings give the Parish Council's Police Liaison Councillor the opportunity to air the Parish's concerns directly to the police and other relevant authorities.
The Parish Plan Steering Committee would like to thank everyone who took part in the working groups, who attended the open events, added comments and offered opinions. In particular we are grateful to the following:

Sarah Ward from Community Council for Berkshire for much help and advice
Teresa Newson from Greenham Common Trust who designed the final plan
The Greenaway Collection of Local Photographs, Ian Hall, Garry Stewart, Mary Calvert and Keith Whiteman who provided photographs
North Wessex Downs AONB for funding the production of the plan
ASHAMPSTEAD PARISH PLAN

One free copy of this plan delivered to every household in the Parish.

supported by

Greenham Common TRUST

West Berkshire Council