

Wickham Bishops

VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT 2010

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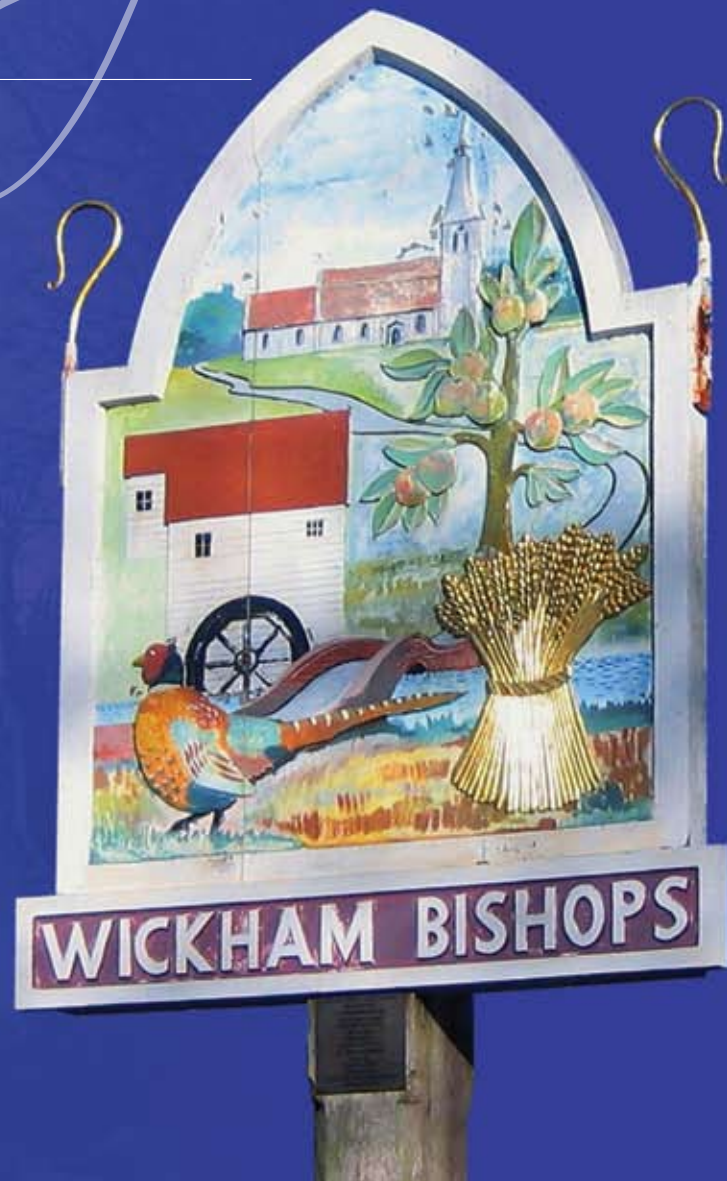




Fig 1A Blackwater Bridge



Fig 1B Wickham Place

1. Geology, Location & Landscape

Geology

The bedrock of Maldon District is London Clay; a silty clay deposit laid down in a warm sea some 55 million years ago, and is up to 150m deep. The geology of our area is complex, being dominated by subsequent deposits from the glaciers and rivers that have criss-crossed the region over the past 0.5 million years of the Palaeolithic period. These deposits may be found in our gardens and comprise: brickearths, glaciofluvial sands and gravels, head deposits, and alluvium. The last ice sheet stopped some tens of miles south of here - c.11,000 years ago - the start of the Mesolithic Age, before retreating back up north.

Location and Landscape

The western boundary of Wickham Bishops Parish roughly follows the Blackwater River (Map 1 Wickham Bishops Parish Boundary). East of the river the land rises quite steeply to a height of 77m, where the main part of the village is situated. The total area of the parish is approximately 762 hectares.

There are two roads passing through the parish from Witham, which is 2.5 miles NW of the village, to Maldon which is 3 miles to the SE. First is the B1018 which, as Station Road, crosses the Blackwater at a narrow, arched bridge (*Fig 1A*) at Wickham Place (*Fig 1B*), site of the old Mill and the old railway route. It continues on to Maldon via Langford, through open farm land with wonderful views and big skies to the west. Station Road leaves the B1018 and winds up the hill towards St Bartholomew's Church, a landmark for miles around and, as Church Road, links up with the second road through the village at Snows Corner cross-roads.

NB direct quotes from the questionnaire are in larger blue font throughout the document.

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The second road is the main approach road from Witham. It is picturesque, passing over another narrow bridge across the Blackwater at Blue Mills (*Fig 1C*). The present white boarded mill dates from the 18thC but the original mill was mentioned in the Domesday Book. The road then climbs Blue Mills Hill (*Fig 1D*) through a pleasant stretch of native woodland with trees meeting overhead, as Witham Road as far as Snows Corner. The road then continues, as The Street, through the village and, as Maypole Road, on towards Maldon.

North of Snows Corner, Tiptree Road links up with Kelvedon Road at the War Memorial. Here the parishes of Little Braxted and Great Totham join Wickham Bishops seamlessly; in fact some properties are half in one parish and half in another. This part of Kelvedon Road forms the eastern border of the parish and runs south to the junction with Great Totham Road. At this point there are more glorious views, this time to the south over the Blackwater Estuary.

Settlement

Although, at first sight, the village looks to be a mixture of dates and styles, there are particular areas which have their own identity. The original medieval village lay in the valley of the Blackwater River on the south west side of the parish, close to the 11thC St Peters Church and the Old Manor House, now Wickham Hall. Several old properties, many of them Grade II listed, e.g. Wickham Place, are still flourishing, forming a very attractive, tranquil area.

The same ambiance continues up Station Road with large houses, well looked after, on extensive plots, hidden from the road by high banks and old hedges and trees on one side and farmland on the other. Near the top of the hill, half hidden by trees is Hill Place. The first house on this site was built in the 1330s by Simon-on-the-Hill who died in the Black Death in 1349. The present house is half Tudor and half Victorian. At the top of the hill stands St Bartholomew's Church and the



Fig 1C Blue Mills



Fig 1D Blue Mills Hill



Fig 1E Old Rectory



Fig 1F Old V.R. Letter Box



Fig 1G Snows Corner



Fig 1H Village Hall

Old Rectory on a site first recorded in 1198 (*Fig 1E*). The present house dates to the 17thC and was Victorianised in 1840 with an original Victorian post box set into the wall (*Fig 1F*). This completes the old part of the village shown within the blue dashed line on the settlement map. (Map 2)

The Street is the main road through the village with the distinctive design of Arthur Mackmurdo's building (1905) at Snows Corner (*Fig 1G*). This was built as the first Post Office in the village (now a hairdressing salon).

Diagonally opposite is the imposing new Village Hall, (*Fig 1H*) opened in 2006 (see page 22). Between the two old public houses, The Mitre, (*Fig 1I*) and The Chequers, c.1743 (*Fig 1J*) were once shops and services but these are long gone and have been replaced by three small housing developments in the 1990s and a small, undistinguished retail area.

To the east of The Street is a separate, less densely populated area in a rural setting, featuring some attractive 16thC to 18thC properties, e.g. the 1531 former workhouse in Handleys Lane (*Fig 1K*), the War Memorial (*Fig 1L*), some 1930s semi-detached houses and a small 1970s cul-de-sac (Beech Green).

The major development came in the 1960s/70s with the introduction of mains sewerage in 1963. This took place on the western side of The Street (see the orange dashed ring on the Map 2a, expanded on Map 2b, Later Development). The planning was well considered. Several new cul-de-sacs were built. The roads are wide and the houses are well set back with decent sized plots featuring an open plan front garden giving a pleasant, spacious feel. The house designs are varied in each road and different in each area, avoiding the appearance of a large housing estate. As a result of this expansion, the population of 911 in the village in 1961 had risen to 1,934 in 1981. In 1991 it was 2,055 and has remained around this figure.

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In recent years, a tendency has been creeping in to replace smaller, older properties with large rather overpowering houses (see *Figures 4F and 4G*), particularly noticeable in the areas built in the 60s/70s. In the 2000s a development of large, three story houses with minimal gardens, has been built around the new Village Hall and some very large properties have been built outside the building envelope, giving a different dimension to the village.



Fig 1I The Mitre



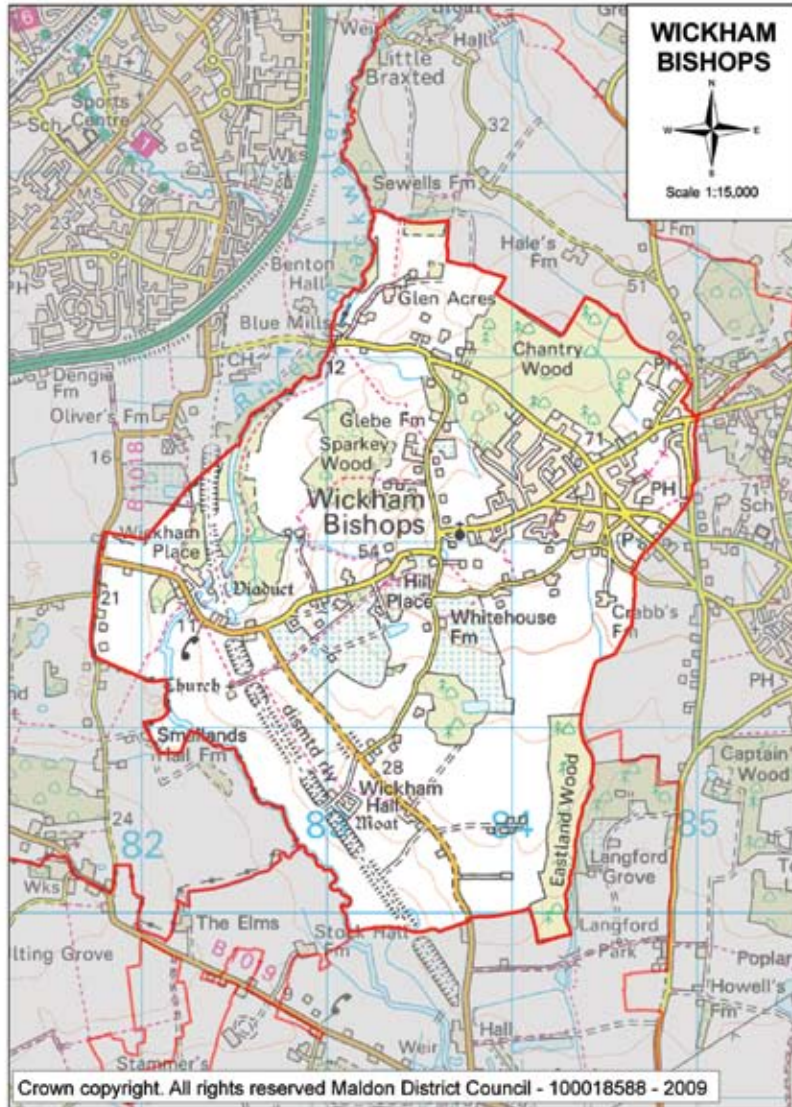
Fig 1J The Chequers



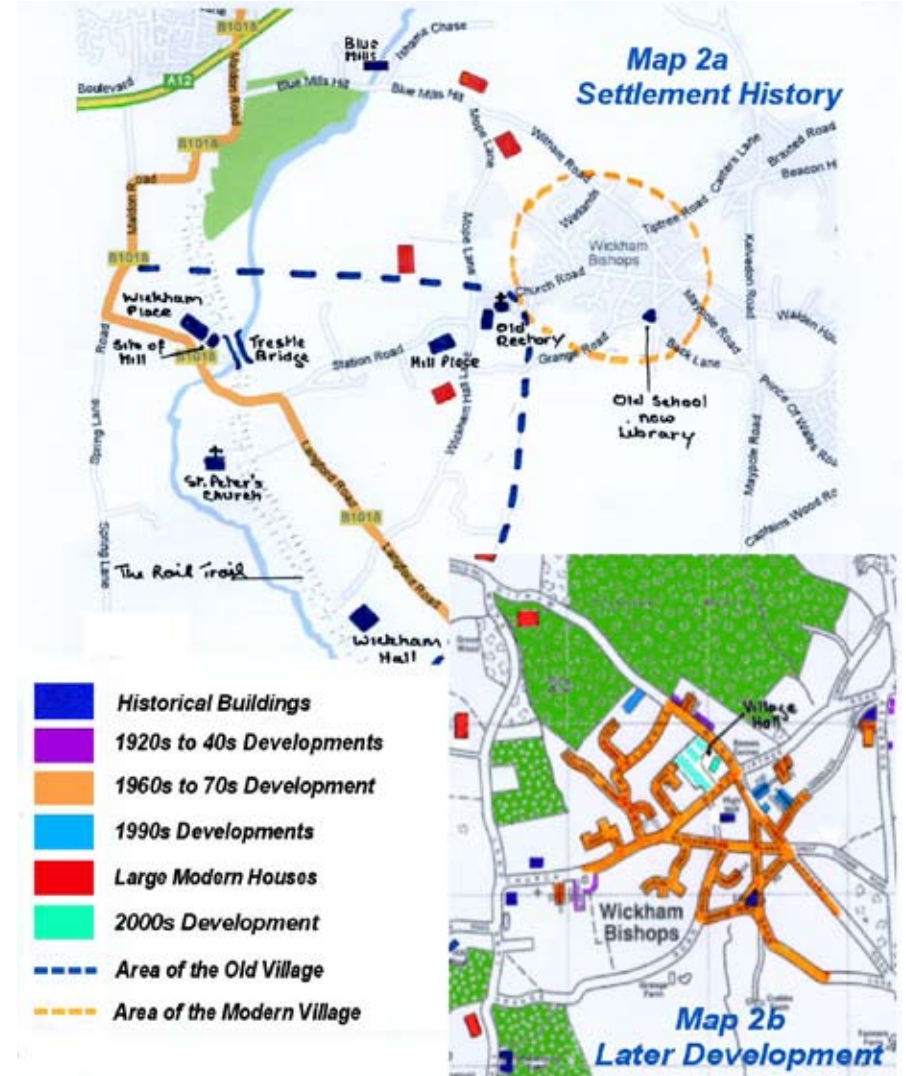
Fig 1K Former Workhouse



Fig 1L War Memorial



Map 1 – Parish Boundary



Maps by A. Walkden

2. History

Responses to Questionnaire

The overwhelming majority of the respondents to our questionnaire felt that knowledge of our history is important and we certainly have plenty of it. Almost all respondents consider that discovery and preservation of historic features should be supported.

Pre-History

The last ice age ended some 11,000 years ago and is defined as the start of the Mesolithic Age. Indirect signs of Mesolithic hunter-gatherer presence have been found in the region, such as flint tools; but we have to wait until the Neolithic Age, some 6,000 years ago, for direct evidence of habitation and the gradual emergence of farming. By the Bronze Age, 2,000BC, farming is widespread and many artefacts, such as arrow heads, a dagger and Beaker pottery, have been excavated in Maldon District. Metalworking had also come to Essex. By the end of the Bronze Age (c.750BC) a fully agricultural economy had been established.

Iron Age sites are numerous in the district but there seems to have been a move to more defended settlements with many roundhouses. There is also evidence of strong links and trading with the Roman Empire at the start of the first millennium and the end of the Iron Age.



Fig 2A Wickham Bishops Mill



Fig 2B Wickham Hall



Fig 2C St Bartholomew's Church



Fig 2D The Library



Fig 2E St Peter's Church

History

In the late Iron Age our region was home to the Trinovantes, a Celtic Tribe. Their king, with two other tribes, was Cunobelinus (Shakespeare's Cymbeline). In 9AD he issued coins from his new capital Colchester. Indeed, an Iron Age pot, now in Colchester Museum, was found in Mope Wood during WWI. Colchester was the focus of Roman Emperor Claudius' invasion in 43 AD and, after the conquest, became Camulodunum, the capital of Roman Britain. Our region was bounded by an important Roman road, roughly the A12, linking Londinium to Camulodunum and became the most civilised in the province.

There is little evidence about our village from Saxon times until around the Norman Conquest. The first mention of our village comes from William the Conqueror's Domesday Book of 1086 as one of 24 manors belonging to the Bishop of London: "Wicham which Bishop William held in Edward the Confessor's time, is held by the Bishop in demesne as a manor.... Then, as now, one mill". This would have been Wickham Bishops Mill, which was of Saxon or even Roman origin. (Fig 2A). From the Middle Ages onwards, the manor was owned and regularly visited by the Bishops of London, who stayed at Wickham Hall (Fig 2B) (1514). Rebuilt in 1710, most of the original moat, surrounding 3 acres, is still there.

During the Middle Ages our manor was regularly visited by the Bishop of London, probably staying where Wickham Hall is now. The original parish church, St Peter's, dates from the late 11thC. It was poorly constructed and over the years was continually repaired, so in 1850 our present St. Bartholomew's Church was built (Fig 2C) as also was the Village School, now The Library (Fig 2D). ***"Consider reducing the Library car park to increase the green space and make a village green environment."*** The old church fell into disuse and ruin; but has recently been restored and is now used as a stained-glass artist's studio (Fig 2E). Over the centuries the Bishop of London passed control of the area to tenant farmers. In the 18thC the parish of Bishops Wickham was responsible for the upkeep of the Braintree to Maldon turnpike road. As recently as 1905, children were employed picking stones from the fields to maintain the local roads.

A railway branch line was opened in 1848 between Braintree and Maldon, built by the Maldon, Witham & Braintree Railway Company. Wickham Bishops Station was located near the junction of Langford Road and Station Road. The railway operated for over a century, transporting passengers, farm produce and cargo to and from the port of Maldon.

By the mid 20thC, however, the Witham to Maldon section was losing money and was eventually closed to passengers by Dr Beeching in 1964 and to freight two years later. Surviving relics of the railway are the unique Timber Trestle Railway Viaduct that crosses the River Blackwater near the old station which, after restoration, is now a Scheduled Monument (*Fig 2F*) and the Blackwater Rail Trail, leading from the station, along the old rail route to Langford (*Fig 2G*).

The first public building in the village was the Church Room, built around 1912. By 1995 it had become too small and was demolished. The land was redeveloped as the site for Church Cottages. The new Church Hall Extension is now the focus for many church and village events. The War Memorial (*Fig 1L*), commemorating the 17 fallen in WW1, was built in 1919 using a donation from the family of one of the dead. It was updated after WW2 to include 3 more fallen.

Our first Village Hall, surrounded by playing fields, was built by volunteer labour and opened in 1929. During WW2 it was hired by The Marconi Company. Two anti-aircraft guns were mounted in the playing fields with a searchlight in a pit down Blue Mills Hill. A land-mine fell behind Poney's Shop during the blitz. Later a returning damaged US B52 bomber crashed near the village, spreading ordnance over the area and in 1944-5 a V1 Doodlebug fell in Wickham Hall Lane.

The Beacon Hill Sports Association (BHSA) was formed in 1945 to administer the Village Hall and its grounds for the residents of Wickham Bishops, Great Totham plus Great and Little Braxted. Our new Village Hall was opened in 2006, offering spacious accommodation incorporating the Social Club, Nursery School, Drama Group, and Jazz Clubs and many more local societies and associations.

Bibliography:

- 1 Sir Mordant Currie, Bart: "Wickham Bishops, a Social History of the Parish" 1966
2. The Wickham Bishops Branch of the Workers Education Association.
"Wickham Bishops Survey of an Essex Village" 1951
3. The Millennium Survey Group "Wickham Bishops Survey of an Essex Village" 2000



Fig 2F Timber Trestle Viaduct



Fig 2G The Blackwater Rail Trail



Fig 3A Sparkey Wood



Fig 3B Benton Hall Footpath

3. Rural Wickham Bishops

Wickham Bishops Parish consists principally of arable farmland, open fields, six large areas of woodland, and a small and diminishing acreage of fruit orchards. The rural part of the parish is very large in area compared with the tightly bounded major settlement in the NE corner, where habitation merges with the adjoining parishes of Little Braxted and Great Totham.

The western area of the parish, which is dominated by the Blackwater River valley, is extensively farmed (there is only one working farm in the village), and the track bed of the disused railway line between Witham and Maldon extends virtually the whole length of the parish, adjacent to, and crossing, the river at Wickham Place. There are extensive views of the Blackwater valley and beyond, from the elevated position of the B1018.

Footpaths

There are 20 well marked and maintained footpaths, permissive routes and bridleways in the parish with a total length of approx 12 kilometres, which provide excellent recreational opportunities crossing fields and woodlands. These help to maintain the rural character of the village, with their many mature trees and hedgerows. A number of paths afford beautiful views across the Blackwater valley to the west and its estuary to the south.

In recent years, some footpaths have been upgraded, and clearly marked with new fencing, hedging or tree planting, such as the one from Hill Place to the Langford Road. This passes through some of the few remaining orchards in the village. There is a section along the track bed of the old railway line between Witham and Maldon, between St Peter's Church and Reigate Barn, which is much loved by dog walkers and horse riders. (Fig 2G)

Only one footpath passes through a wood – Sparkey Wood (Fig 3A) – renowned for its spectacular bluebell carpet in the spring.

Another long and well maintained footpath leads from Wickham Place to Blue Mills, and for most of its length, follows the bank of the river Blackwater, which forms the parish boundary. This footpath also adjoins the 17th, 18th and 12th fairways of Benton Hall Golf Club, of which all but two of the other holes are situated within the parish. The path affords excellent views of the village's hill top situation. (Fig 3B)

Another path diverges at Blue Mills up the hill between the 5th and 6th holes to emerge in Mope Lane, via Thistle Hall.

There are two important footpaths connecting the Kelvedon Road settlement with the main part of the village. One starts at the War Memorial crossroads and finishes in Handleys Lane. This path ***“should be retained, as it is a good example of a footpath/bridleway and is well used by the people of the village”*** (Fig 3C). The second path passes through the new sports field area (Rainbow Path).

The network of public footpaths and bridleways links local areas and those of neighbouring villages, and is frequently used by residents and others. Adequate signage exists both from the highway and en route through the countryside. The Parish Council has published a booklet with a selection of walks in and around the parish.

Trees/Woodlands/Orchards

With the exception of the footpaths through Sparkey Wood, all the other major woods in the parish are private, with no public access. They are Grove Wood, Mope Wood and Chantry Wood at the north end of the parish, forming a natural barrier between the village and Witham. Eastland Wood and Likely Wood adjoin farmland to the south of the parish.

There is an overwhelming wish amongst parishioners for greater access to the woods, fields and open spaces which geographically dominate the parish. Some interest has also been expressed in the formation of conservation areas to protect the remaining rural aspect of the village and its surrounding area. Also it is important to encourage the retention and management of historic or visually important hedgerows in the parish.

Many of the former orchards have been grubbed up in recent times. However, there has been an encouraging amount of replanting of native species in these fields, most notably around Fontenay on the land between Wickham Hall Lane and Station Road, where public access has been retained. (Fig 3D)

“This area of outstanding beauty has seen too much development during the past 40 years.”



Fig 3C Handleys Lane



Fig 3D Fontenay – Wickham Hall Footpath



Fig 3E Playing Field Area



Fig 3F Church Green

“The surrounding agricultural land provides important local character, as do the green rural spaces which are visually important as well as providing recreational opportunities.”

Open Spaces

The residential area of the village is fairly densely developed as a result of infill expansion in the 1960/70's, thereby affording relatively few open areas in the centre of population. However, an extensive playing field area was acquired just after the year 2000, on the NE edge of the parish, and this allows public access for community sporting events on what is, nevertheless, privately owned land. (Fig 3E)

There is no obvious heart to the centre of Wickham Bishops, due to the busy thoroughfare between Witham and Maldon. The development of the new Village Hall, however, which began in 2004, does provide some open space nearer the middle of the village, sufficient to hold open air events. It is surrounded by public footpaths, a car park, landscaped hedging and a refurbished children's play area.

At the western end of the village lies Church Green (Fig 3F), surrounded on two sides by well spaced former council houses, and this forms a pleasant open space in a quieter area, with access to a public footpath. Smaller open spaces can be found at the Library triangle, Box Iron Corner and the Parish Church and adjoining cemetery.

To complement the main thoroughfares, are a number of interconnecting roads and lanes in the village, most of which are single track and without footways. Some of these extend well into the surrounding countryside (e.g. Mope Lane, Grange Road and Wickham Hall Lane), and add greatly to the rural feel of the parish.

The unofficial centre of the village is the small retail area adjoining the Mitre Public house and Beacon Hill garage, the main parking area for the village is at this point. This is a hard and relatively unattractive centre where five roads meet, and has not been sympathetically developed over the years, despite the location of several attractive older buildings (Cobb Cottage, The Mitre and Middle Watch, opposite the shops).

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Fig 3G Thistle Hall



Fig 3H New Witham Road Mansion

Generally, open spaces fall into three broadly similar groupings in residential areas. Post WW2 housing estates tend to be open plan and well spaced with attractive front gardens. This trend has extended to recent infill developments.

Secondly, older character properties are mostly well screened behind established hedges and long drives, and thirdly, in recent years, the village has been ringed with several large country houses, mostly built on the periphery and on the site of smaller older houses (Figs 3G & 3H). The majority afford extensive views of the surrounding countryside, from the village's elevated position.

The questionnaire results showed overwhelming support for open spaces, greens and verges retaining their rural character. Also, urbanisation of the village, such as the addition of further street furniture, or the placing of barriers on the grass verges, should be avoided. The open agricultural land around the village, which in some areas extends between dwellings, is an important feature (Fig 3I). Most of the existing hedgerows are old field boundaries, and together with mature trees, are significant assets to the parish which contribute greatly to the rural character. Most residents consider all trees to be important, particularly broad leaved native species.

“I like the rural nature and extensive areas of farmland in the village.”

This statement found overwhelming support from residents.



Fig 3I Agricultural Land



Fig 3J Benton Hall Golf Course



Fig 3K The natural 'barrier'



Guidelines

1. *All existing footpaths should be preserved and maintained.*
2. *Consider size restriction signs for narrow and single carriageway roads, to prevent erosion of verges by HGV's.*
3. *Essex County Council should continue to repair and maintain the wooden trestle railway bridge and accompanying information signs.*
4. *All ancient woodland should be protected and enhanced.*
5. *There is village support for a conservation area, the most popular site being Chantry Wood, which is in private ownership.*
6. *More trees should be planted in public spaces.*
7. *Visually significant trees, hedgerows and wooded areas in public spaces should be cared for, conserved and, in due course, suitably replaced if required.*
8. *The removal of hedgerows should be resisted.*
9. *New planting should use native species.*
10. *The rural nature of the parish and its extensive farmland areas are universally liked and should not be developed.*
11. *There is overwhelming support from the parish for retention of the open spaces, which are deemed to be visually and recreationally important.*
12. *There is strong support for more open spaces for community use.*
13. *Provision of more seats in existing open areas is needed.*

Surrounding Area

The highest point in Wickham Bishops is just over 77 metres above sea level, near the War Memorial. The village's elevated situation near the summit of a ridge on one side of the River Blackwater, and roughly equidistant between Maldon and Witham, means that it has become a very popular residential community.

The village is in close proximity to the highest point of the ridge (over 83m) on Beacon Hill. This is reached from the minor road to Great Braxted from Beacon Hill crossroads, where there are extensive views across farmland in adjoining Great Totham parish, to the Blackwater Estuary, the Dengie peninsula, and beyond. On the western side of the ridge, there are also big vistas across the Blackwater valley to the Little Baddow ridge, Maldon and Chelmsford, nearly 10 miles distant.

Access to the village from Witham is either via Blue Mills (*Fig 1C*), a single carriageway bridge over the river, or via Wickham Place (*Fig 1B*) and another narrow bridge over the Blackwater. There is a restricted 25 mph speed limit over the bridge and the nearby railway bridge. In each case, vehicle traffic is required to slow down significantly before entering the parish, thereby adding to the residential desirability.

In recent years, an area between these two locations on both sides of the River Blackwater, has been created into an 18 hole golf course, the majority of which lies in the parish. An attractive public footpath follows the parish boundary at this point between the river and the course (*Fig 3J*). The Golf Course also forms a natural barrier, together with Benton Hall farm, between the parish and Witham, and this feature remains desirable to the residents (*Fig 3K*).

Essentially, the surrounding area is largely agricultural, save for the close proximity of residential areas of Little Braxted and Great Totham (Beacon Hill) adjoining the north east corner of the village. Working mixed farms such as Little Mountains, which provides meat, vegetable and fruit produce to the communities, add to the rural feel of the area.

Where there are natural breaks between communities, such as the rural link between Wickham Bishops and Great Totham in Walden House Road, there is strong support that these should remain, so that the village retains its geographical identity.

“The village does not need too much expansion. Care should be taken to avoid joining us to nearby villages, as this would change the area into a boring suburb, with no character of its own, and spoil the community spirit”.

4. Housing Design & Development

The village can be split into two separate areas of habitation, (Maps 2a and 2b). The lower part of Wickham Bishops is based along Station Road and Langford Road, outside the village envelope and comprising predominantly older properties built in the 1900's and earlier, including a number of listed buildings. Examples include Wickham Place (*Fig 1B*) and Wickham Hall (*Fig 2B*) that date back to the early 18th century (although the sites may have been occupied much earlier). This part of the village was originally built around the old railway station now converted into a house, the mill, now gone, and the original church. The main part of the village is further up the hill. Here a mixture of older properties and newer ones is seen. Some properties can be dated back to the 1700's. Newer developments, like the one adjacent to the new village hall have been completed only recently. There are approximately 800 properties in the village in total.

There are a number of listed buildings in the village and some buildings, though not listed, should be preserved because of their historical importance. For example the 'black houses' (*Fig 4A*) off Kelvedon Road, which are an early exercise in social housing originally called the Motor Houses because they were built for staff accommodation and garaging to support Ruffins, and Snow's Corner (*Fig 1G*), both of which were designed by A.H. Macmurdo who himself lived on the village boundary.

Buildings such as the current library (*Fig 2D*) are reflective of the past of Wickham Bishops too. This was the old school and dates back to Victorian times. Hill Place and Abbots may originally date back to the 14th century, others such as High Hall (*Fig 4B*) and Ballards were built in Victorian times. Near St Bartholomew's Church is Church Green (*Fig 3F*) surrounded by former council houses and nearby is a row of small recently built terraced houses (*Fig 4C*).

Most people did not favour the splitting of properties into two households, which could potentially also increase the number of vehicles; and wanted planners to avoid too many houses on redeveloped plots.

Some developments within the village have open plan frontages, such as Leigh Drive, Roots Lane and Byron Drive and respondents felt it was important that these be retained. (*Fig 4D*)



Fig 4A Black Houses



Fig 4B High Hall



Fig 4C Church Road cottages



Fig 4D Leigh Drive

There was general opposition to the building of garages in front of houses. New builds should have adequate space to the side of the property for garages. (Fig 4E)



Fig 4E



With regard to the style of house, most were not happy with the recent trend towards building houses with three storeys. The majority felt that the skyline views should be protected with restrictions on building height (Fig 4F).



Fig 4F



“Three storey houses on small plots are seriously detracting from village culture”

There was overwhelming support for the view that the exterior of buildings and any alterations and extensions should be in keeping with surrounding properties in terms of height, character and materials used (Fig 4G, 4H and 4I).



Fig 4G



With regard to general housing development, the majority felt that it should be restricted to Brownfield sites.

There was no significant support for sheltered housing or for homes for rent. However, the need was expressed for affordable starter homes, and there was considerable support for affordable housing built on the edge of the village specifically earmarked for local people. The majority preferred the provision of low density affordable housing to that of large properties on the edge of the village. Although the lack of provision of local services and the poor transport links were noted as a problem:

“Affordable/starter homes should be within easy reach of a town” (i.e. not in the village)



Fig 4H



Fig 4I





Guidelines

14. *New houses should have adequate off road parking. Garages should not be in the front garden and should be constructed of building materials sympathetic to the house and surrounding houses.*
15. *New developments and extensions should avoid increasing the density of the housing in the area, thus being sympathetic to the village scene.*
16. *Open plan frontages should be retained as should original hedging where this already exists.*
17. *Established plots should not be sub-divided if the consequent housing density is greater than in the surrounding area or if the impact of extra garaging, cars, off-street parking or boundary changes is not sympathetic to the surrounding area.*
18. *New developments/extensions to respect neighbours in terms of size, scale, siting and appearance including building materials.*
19. *Development to be restricted to Brownfield sites.*

The desire for more family homes in the village was combined with an expressed need also for smaller homes (e.g. bungalows):

“Smaller homes should be encouraged in order that people can downsize without leaving the village.”

The provision of larger houses also has some support:

“New large houses add great charm to the village. Where there is sufficient land, it is good to see these wonderful houses being built.”

However the need to retain the rural nature of the village is important and is reflective of the local character;

“We moved to the village because of what it is, otherwise we may as well live in Maldon/Witham.”

“Do not extend village envelope.”

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1. James Bettley and Nikolaus Pevsner “The Buildings of England: Essex” 2007.

5. Boundary Treatments

There are a variety of walls, fences and hedges used as boundaries to properties in the village. The older properties tend to have established hedges of native plants such as hawthorn, privet, cotoneaster and laurel. Sometimes the hedges are combined with brick walls and picket fences (Fig 5A).

Abbotts, pictured (Fig 5B), was voted most liked wall/fence/hedge in the VDSA Photo Fun Day Exhibitions.

Properties built during the 1960/70s, for example Byron Drive and Roots Lane, were built with open plan frontages and most have remained that way. Some residents have added flowerbeds or low-level brick walls to indicate the garden boundary but not enclose the front gardens completely (Fig 5C).

In the questionnaire, almost every respondent agreed that street/field hedge boundaries are an important part of the character of Wickham Bishops. The majority agreed that walls and hedges should be limited in height and that areas with open plan frontages should be retained but where hedges are on the front of boundaries, they should not be removed.

“Hedge boundaries are an important part of the character of Wickham Bishops as are clean verges and ditches, which encourage wildlife and flowers.”

We asked what boundaries the residents preferred for the village and the vast majority of those who expressed a preference chose either trees and hedges or wooden/iron fences rather than brick walls.

Drives, parking and garages

There are a variety of materials used for driveways including tarmac, concrete, gravel, block paving and sometimes a combination of these. In the questionnaire, nine out of ten respondents agreed that boundary gates and driveways should be in keeping with the rural nature/aspect of the village. The Old Rectory driveway (Fig 5D), was voted second “most liked” wall/fence/hedge in the VDSA Photo Fun Day Exhibitions.



Fig 5A Blacksmiths Lane



Fig 5B Abbotts



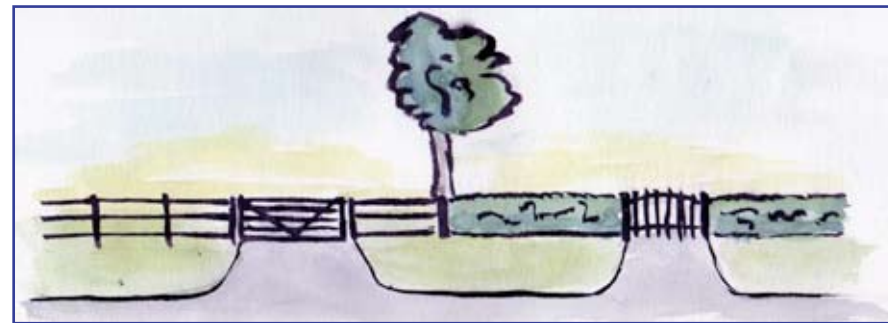
Fig 5C Byron Drive



Fig 5D Old Rectory driveway



The sketch below shows the “most liked” fences and hedges.



Driveways and gates like those sketched below were voted “least liked”.



Guidelines

20. Hedges on front boundaries should not be removed but should be limited in height.
21. Conifers such as Leylandii should be discouraged as they are fast growing and are not suitable for boundaries unless they are controlled.
22. Where new walls are built, their size, materials and design should be sympathetic to the surrounding area.
- 23 Large areas of uniform hard-standing in front of houses should be avoided where possible or interspersed with planting.
24. The choice of materials for driveways should be influenced by the local environment.
25. Driveways should use materials which minimise problems of surface water run-off.
26. New housing developments should provide sufficient off road parking and/or garages.

6. Recreation, Social & Business

Recreation/Social

In 2005, a new Village Hall was built to replace the old one, built in 1928, as the maintenance costs were more than the income. The new building was funded by selling off land used as the sports field in the centre of the village for development, and moving the Sports Field to the Great Totham Road. The new village hall was finished in October 2005 and gained a Design Award from the Maldon District Council in 2006.

The Village Hall is run by the Beacon Hill Sports Association which is a registered charity, and has an elected committee with representatives from all the clubs involved with the hall.

The newly situated sports field is considerably larger than the old one, incorporating two full size football pitches and a mini pitch for the youngsters; new changing rooms have also been built (*Fig 6A*). A cricket field with pavilion is also incorporated in this area, along with four tennis courts (*Fig 6B*) with a small pavilion and parking.

In the 1950's, there was a grass tennis court within the old village hall grounds. Unfortunately this became overgrown and although everyone wanted to play, not everyone wanted to look after it! So in the 1970's fund raising began to build a hard tennis court. The funds were mainly raised by selling £25 shares to prospective members, and once enough money was raised, one court was built. The shares were then gradually paid back from membership fees. Since then the Tennis Club has thrived and now has four courts, with 221 adult members and 110 juniors.

In 2008, the Beacon Hill Rovers – our football club with ten teams – was named Charter Standard Club of the Year for their achievements in coaching, and the cricket club is working towards charter standard. The Tennis Club is a member of the Halstead League for adults, and the Halstead and Chelmsford League for Juniors. At present, the Tennis Club is working towards their Clubmark Accreditation which is the Standard Charter set by the LTA.

There are over thirty clubs and associations in the village, being run from the Sports Field, the Village Hall, the Church and the Scouts Hut and Lodge (*Fig 6C*) at “Prances”. Miss Edith Prance who lived in the little cottage and owned the grounds in front of it, gave it all to the District Scouts in 1956. She died in 1957; it then became known as “Prances”. Over the years many different scout troops have visited “Prances” and camped there, including scouts from overseas.



Fig 6A Sports Pavilion



Fig 6B Tennis Courts



Fig 6C New Scout Hut



Fig 6D Playground



Fig 6E Wooldridge Place



Fig 6F Finches

The original scout hut was rebuilt in 1956 when Wickham Bishops Scouts and Great Totham (St. Peter's) Scouts became one and formed the 1st Beacon Hill Scouts and it is still used by them today.

A new Scout Pavilion was built in 1998, and is called the "Peter Church Lodge" after Peter Church, the District Commissioner from 1947 to 1967, and later President. He was a solicitor who worked in Witham, and lived in Braxted. This lodge is mainly used as the Maldon and East Essex Headquarters and any visiting Scouts (Fig 6C). It took 20 years to raise the money to build, through fund raising Scout activities, grants and personal donations.

Over the years Wickham Bishops has gained a rich diversity of clubs, societies and associations, offering something for young, old and everyone in between. All these clubs and societies help to keep a strong community connection. The population in the village has developed to just over 2000. The main increase took place in the late 1960's and early 1970's, when developments were built at Holt Drive, Byron Drive, Leigh Drive and Heathgate, and more housing was built in Roots Lane, Grange Road, Blacksmith's Lane and Church Road, with cul-de-sacs at Birch Rise, Beech Green, Church Close and Buckleys Close. More recently, in 2005, Wooldridge Place (Fig 6E) was built on the old Sports Field.

In the 1970's "Finches" (Fig 6F) was built, a cul-de-sac of retirement bungalows. This scheme was initiated by the Parish Council.

In August 2009, the first Community Picnic was held on the Sports Field – a low cost event, giving maximum community spirit where villagers met, and had great fun with their families, playing ball games and enjoying their picnic. It is hoped that this will be held on alternative years to the Open Gardens Day, which is run by the Church.

Apart from all the Clubs in the village, which provide social activities, the Village Hall is the venue for the Drama Club Productions (Pantomime, Spring Play and Summer Review), Jazz Evenings and Dances, with the occasional Quiz Evening. It is even available for wedding receptions and other community events.

Of the 300 respondents to the questionnaire at least two thirds have lived in the village for at least ten years and around half have lived in Wickham Bishops for over twenty years. This long association with the village speaks volumes for the sense of community and satisfaction that residents feel living in Wickham Bishops.

Schools

Wickham Bishops is in the catchment area for the Great Totham Primary School which was built in 1971. This larger school replaced the small village school in Wickham Bishops, and is available for primary school children in the Wickham Bishops, Great Totham, Great and Little Braxted area. The small Great Totham School also closed. The old village school in Wickham Bishops is now the Library (Fig 2D).

The Nursery School is run in the Committee Room situated at the rear of the Village Hall, and the newly built playground (Fig 6D) is very convenient for them at playtime.

Children of secondary school age travel by bus to Maldon, Witham, Chelmsford, Tiptree, Southend and Colchester.

St Bartholomew's Church

This Victorian Gothic church, commissioned in 1850 by Sarah Leigh in memory of her father Reverend Thomas Leigh, is a thriving part of the village community. Its spire can be seen above the trees as you enter the village from Witham and Hatfield Peverel. As a grade 2 listed building, the sympathetic addition of an award winning hall in 1994 has enabled it to become an important outreach centre in the community, through such groups as 'Edward Bear', for the very young children, Women's Christian Fellowship, and drop-in coffee sessions. It is fully equipped to EC standards and can be hired for social events as well as activities such as carpet bowls, keep fit, and drama and dance classes. An important part of the Church's outreach is the Parish Magazine, which is delivered free to every household, and contains church and village news, local advertising, and reports from the Parish Council, Police and local organisations.

Business

The main village shop/bakers closed in 1989 when Tesco opened in Witham, and the butchers closed in 1991; but today, we still have a small convenience store/post office, two public houses, a hairdresser, an estate agents, sign shop, beauty salon and health food shop. From the VDS survey some people expressed a desire to have a café, butchers and bakers. On the outskirts of the village Wickham Hall Farm is the sole remaining working farm of 120 hectares.

Some of the numerous clubs, societies and activities are listed below:

Badminton Club, Beacon Hill Social Club
Beavers, Blackwater Fine Arts Society
Bridge Club, Brownies
Church Choir, Cricket Club
Cubs, Drama Club Workshop
Drama Club, Edward Bear Club
Flower Club, Football Club
Guides, Jazz Club
Neighbourhood Watch
Nursery School, Over 60's
Rainbows
Rangers (14 years +)
Royal British Legion (Men)
Royal British Legion (Women)
Scouts, Short Tennis
Sunday School
Swifts (Church Youth Club)
Tennis Club
Toddler Group, Venture Scouts
Wickham Bishops Art Group
Women's Christian Fellowship
Wickham Bishops Lunch Club
Wine Circle
Women's Institute



THE STREET, WICKHAM BISHOPS



*The Viaduct in use May 31st, 1958
Reproduced by permission of Colin Hogg, courtesy MIKE ESAU*

7. Methodology

The Wickham Bishops Village Design Statement Association was formally inaugurated in February 2008, a constitution adopted, officers elected and a committee created. With initial help and encouragement from Stella Meesters, a Field Officer from RCCE, the WBVDSA established a rough timetable of events that would help meet the overall objective of crafting a community-led Village Design Statement. This statement could influence the Planning Department at Maldon District Council about future developments within the village and delivery of the finished document was targeted for end 2009.

The pre-requisites for creation of a worthwhile and influential VDS were considered to be the following:

- early identification of the key issues about which the residents have strong opinions
- provision of at least one opportunity to test those initial findings and gather feedback
- confirming with the Planning Department at MDC that we were working in a way that would deliver a document of value to them
- final development and delivery of a questionnaire that every household in the village would have the opportunity to complete
- analysis of responses to the questionnaire to inform the writing of the VDS

The following events were organized in order to deliver the pre-requisites above.

- A Photo Fun Day, during which 8 teams walked pre-determined routes in the village, covering all the main population centres, areas of character and outlying countryside. Each team had two disposable cameras (50 photos in all) and were encouraged to photograph the buildings, open spaces, landscapes or features that they liked or didn't like. Over lunchtime the photos were developed and each team set up an exhibition of their photos. They were asked to add notes to explain their choices. These notes were attached to the photos for later analysis and discussion.
- Two exhibitions of a large subset of these photos were displayed at public events within the Village Hall and Church Hall. Questionnaires about these photos, (likes and dislikes, as well as freeform responses) were distributed and around 80 were completed.
- Questionnaires from other villages which had successfully completed their VDS were adapted, using the feedback from the exhibitions to create a questionnaire tailored to our village's needs. Every household had a questionnaire delivered by hand by the local Parish Councillor. In the few weeks prior to distribution a poster campaign, backed up by adverts in the Parish Magazine alerted the village to the timing of the questionnaire's distribution. Cash prizes were offered to incentivise completion and maximize responses. Completed questionnaires could be returned to collection points in the Library, GP surgery and local shop.
- Around 300 responses out of a possible 790 were received. This 38% response rate was considered a representative sample.

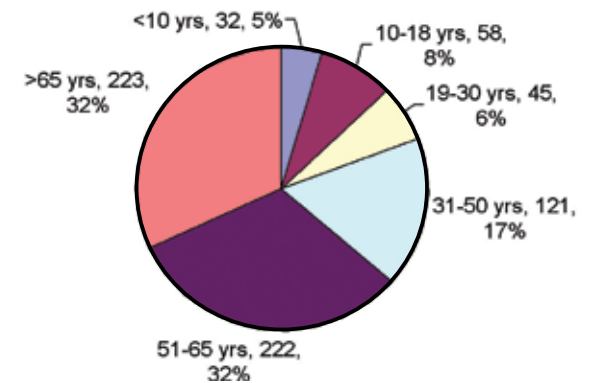


8. Response to Questionnaire

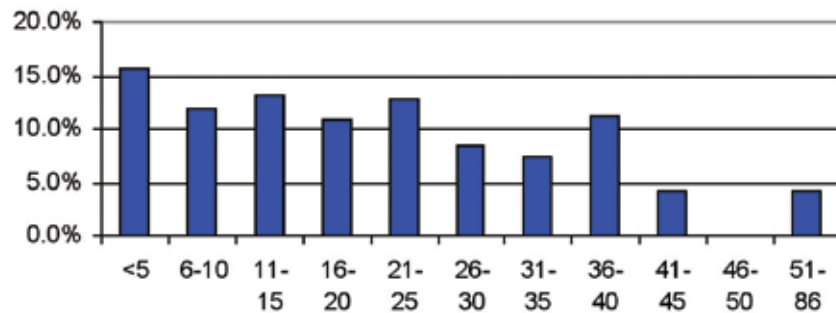
Distribution of Respondents

Any questionnaire of this type contains inherent sample bias but the respondents did represent a range of household types, in terms of their length of residence in the village, the number of people in each household and the ages of people in each household. Although the majority of respondents have lived in the village for over 10 years around 15% are relative newcomers (less than 5 years). Almost two thirds of the residents in the respondents' households are over 50 years old but one fifth are less than 30 years old, reflecting a mix of families and couples. Indeed, while 70% of respondents live in two person or one person households, 30% of respondents live in households of three to six people.

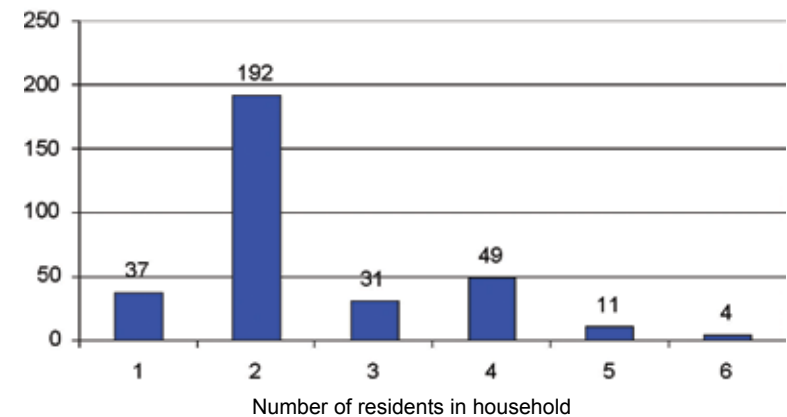
Age Distribution of Residents represented by Household members of Questionnaire Respondents



Distribution of Respondents by Years of Residence in Wickham Bishops

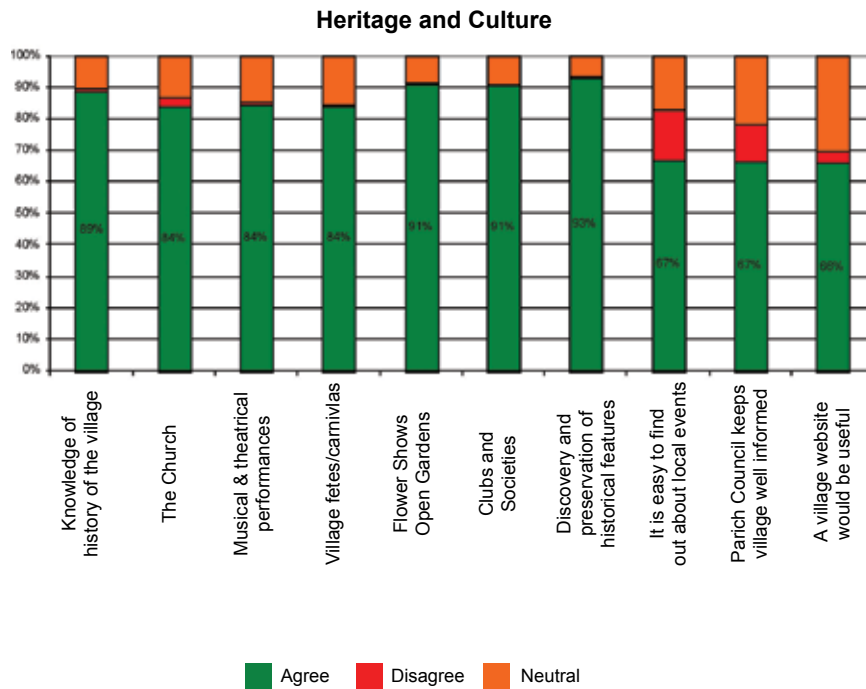


Distribution of Size of Household



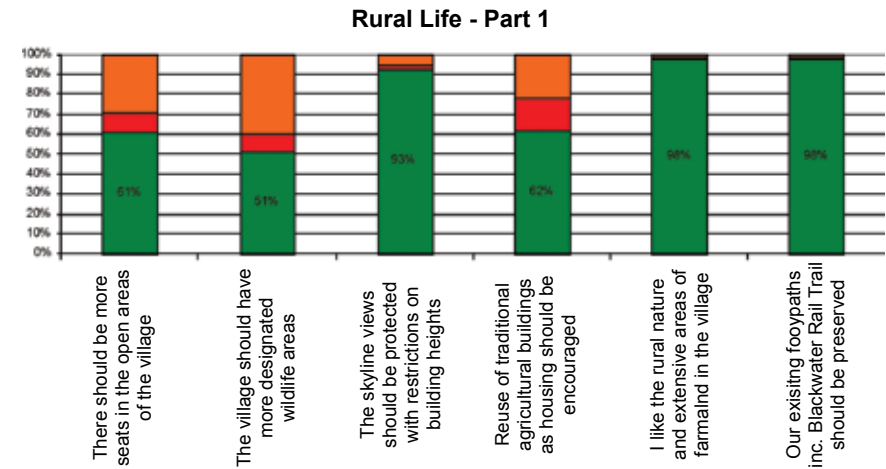
Heritage and Culture

There was overwhelming support from respondents for preserving those characteristics and events which define our local heritage and culture.

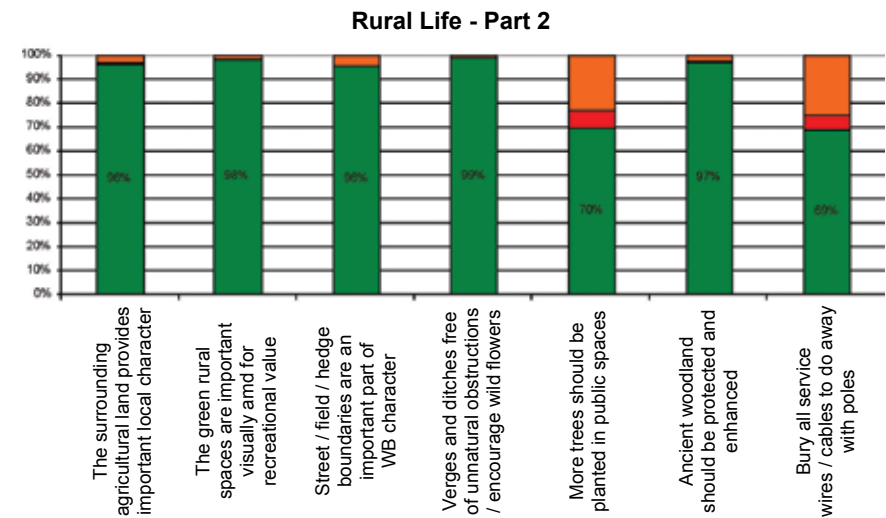


Rural Life

The rural character of the village, as reflected in its open spaces, extensive footpaths and attractive views, was very much favoured.



The green spaces, the agricultural surroundings and the hedge boundaries to streets and fields are considered to be of important visual and recreational value.

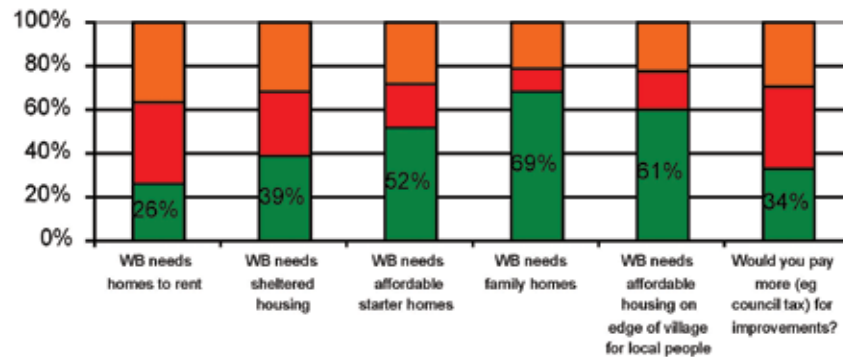




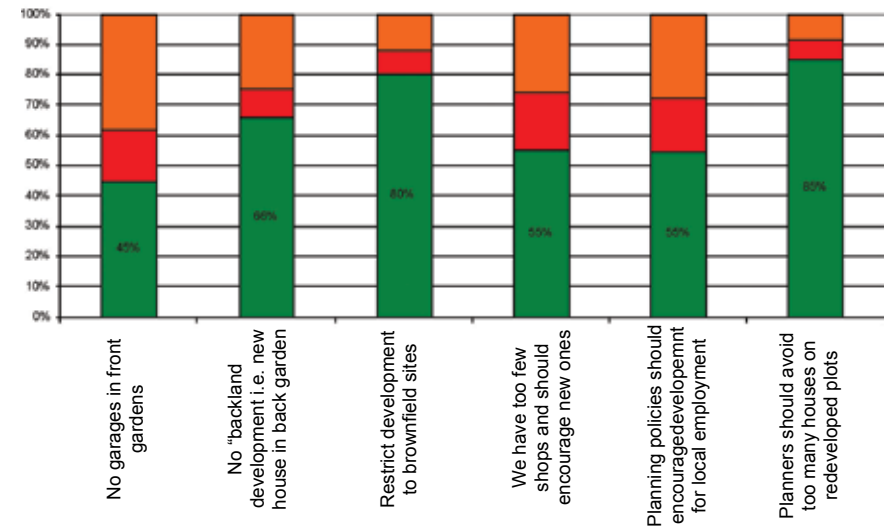
Housing and Development

In terms of the types of housing and development that respondents preferred there was a strong view expressed that the village needs more family homes, as well as more affordable starter homes, perhaps on the edge of the village (where there is space) for local people. There was not much support expressed for the need for rented accommodation or sheltered housing.

Housing and Development - Part 1



Housing and Development - Part 2



However, there was strong support for the development of "brown field" sites wherever possible and that such redevelopment should avoid overdevelopment, with too many houses crammed in. A dislike for development of new houses in back gardens was also expressed. This is consistent with the strongly expressed views that the open and rural feel of the village should be maintained.

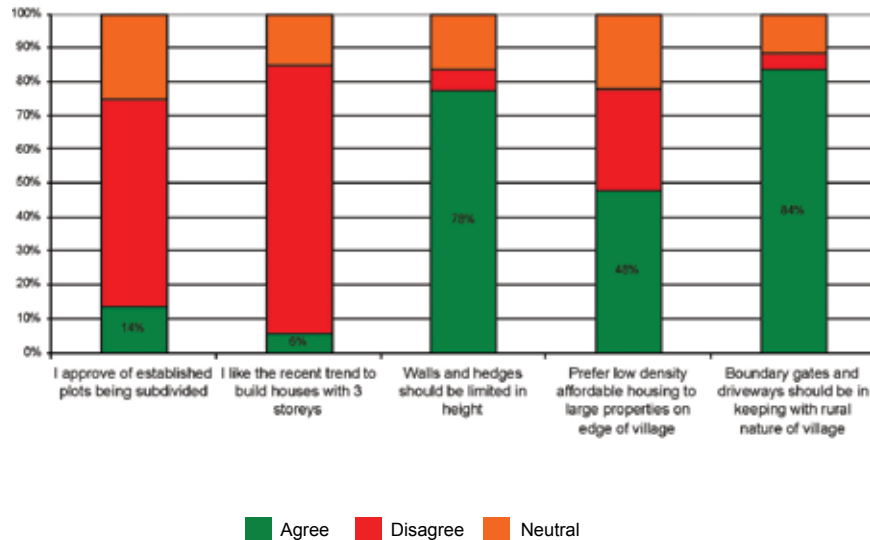
Agree Disagree Neutral

Buildings and Boundaries

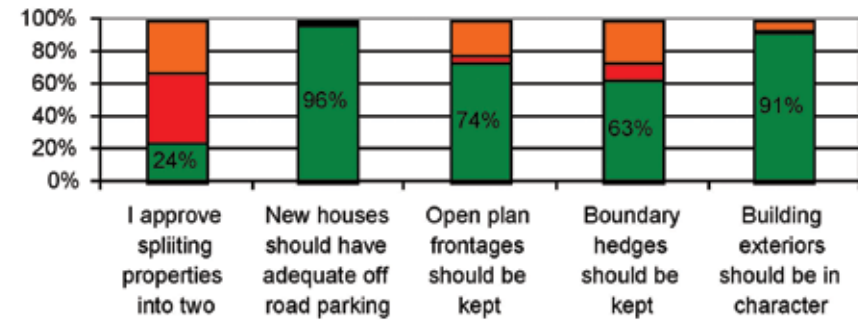
The strong support for an open feel to the village and the preservation of the rural character extends to the buildings and boundaries to buildings. There is widespread disapproval of subdividing plots and the trend towards three storey houses, which spoil the skyline. Walls and hedges should also be restricted in height, and gates and driveways should also be in keeping with the rural nature of the village.

Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of respondents would prefer new houses to have off-street parking, that open plan frontages and boundary-hedges should be retained and the exterior of buildings and extensions should be in character with their surroundings.

Buildings and Boundaries - Part 1



Buildings and Boundaries - Part 2





9. Acknowledgements

The development and production of the Wickham Bishops Village Design Statement is the result of a magnificent effort by a great many people who care deeply about the future of our village.

We must thank more than 300 people, including the local Brownies and their leaders, who variously attended meetings, the Photo Fun Day, our exhibitions and filled in the questionnaire.

We also recognize the wisdom and guidance given by Stella Meesters of the Rural Community Council of Essex, when we were unsure of our direction at the start of the project.

Thanks are due to the Maldon District Council Planning Department for their help in shaping the content of our VDS. We will always remember the description of Wickham Bishops as “Arcadian” and the exhortation to keep our recommendations at a high level, rather than too much technical detail – welcome advice.

We are grateful to the Parish Councillors for their delivery of the questionnaires by hand and providing many with an opportunity to discuss the VDS face to face. Funds to support this project were received from Wickham Bishops Parish Council and the Community Planning Fund (managed by Rural Community Council of Essex on behalf of the Essex Rural Partnership and Defra). We thank them both.

We are appreciative also of St Bartholomew’s Church PCC for allowing us to advertise in the Parish Magazine and to present our case at various public events in the Church and Church Hall. We also thank the Beacon Hill Sports Association for the use of committee rooms for meetings and for the opportunity to present our exhibition at several high profile events in the Village Hall.

A special mention must go to Kevin Topple of KAT Graphics for his time and expertise in designing and formatting the published VDS.

Finally, special thanks to the VDSA Committee who for nearly two years has devoted an enormous amount of time, effort and enthusiasm to the development, management and production of the finished document. They are Stewart Adkins, Jill Gooding, Mike Gwinn, Jane Hall, Janet James, Mandy Mickelsen, Barrie Stead, Tony and Joan Walkden and Peter and Lin Ward. For more details see www.wickhambishops.info