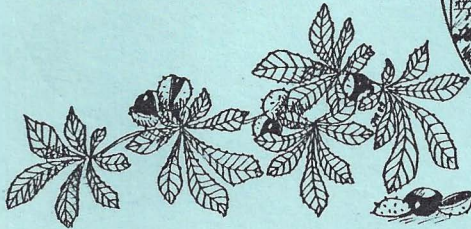
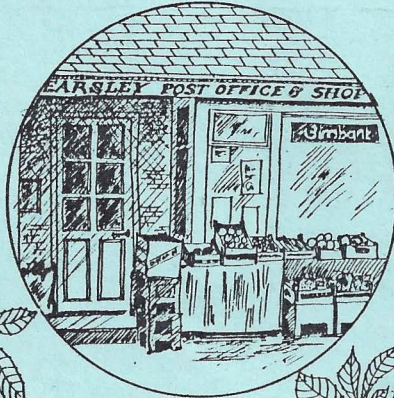
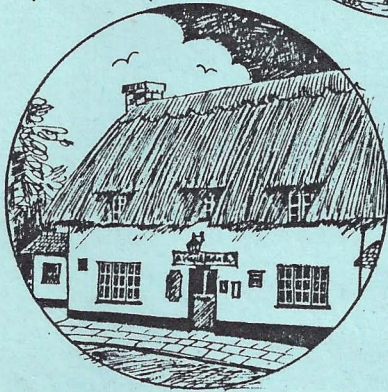


# CHEARSLEY



**VILLAGE APPRAISAL  
SUMMARY REPORT**



VILLAGE  
APPRAISAL

1986 - 1988

**SUMMARY REPORT**

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This document has been produced by the Appraisal Committee: Chairman - Peter Peters; Members Harry Ashworth, Ted Hooton, John Miles, Jenny Watkins, and Annie Willens. Special thanks are due to Ted for many hours spent in applying his professional analytical skills and authorship. The total time devoted to this project adds up to almost 1,000 of unpaid and voluntary working hours by all the above, and by various other people.

We wish to recognise the early efforts of Ray Stollery in getting the project started, and Don Wallis for his early chairmanship. We are indebted to Michael Head for his willingness to provide objective summaries from a detached viewpoint. We extend our thanks to the following: Bill Keech and Bill Slatter for their early participation; Laura Heybrook and John King for their advice on compilation of the Junior Questionnaire and general assistance.

Thanks are due to the villagers who participated in the pilot study, and to those who gave additional help in distribution of the Questionnaires.

The Committee has received welcome encouragement and advice from Anne Stobart and Sarah Jackson of the Buckinghamshire Council for Voluntary Services

## **CHEARSLEY VILLAGE APPRAISAL**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Appraisal is an attempt to make a statement about the village and its inhabitants, their views on its development, and their hopes for the future. It is also intended as a document to provide facts and figures for the Parish Council and others, so that future decisions can be based on known data and Quantified opinion, instead of estimates and suppositions.

The main feature of the Appraisal was a Questionnaire which was distributed to all inhabitants over the age of eight, asking their opinion on many things, from hobbies to housing policy, from transportation to trees.

An Appraisal committee started work in April 1986. However, later that year, a battle to save our School began, and took all the spare time of some key committee members for many months. Work on the Questionnaire resumed in the Spring of 1987, the forms being printed and distributed in the late Autumn. After collection, analysis of the Adult forms was finished by the early Spring of 1988, with the Juniors completed by the Autumn.

### **THE VILLAGE**

Chearsley is situated in the Vale of Aylesbury, with the older part of the village on the side of a hill below the Aylesbury-Cuddington-Long Crendon road. The parish is just over 940 acres in size and is mostly farmland of arable and pasture, with some water-meadows alongside the River Thames. Most now belongs to farmers in neighbouring villages, but Manor Farm of 233 acres is still an integral and important part of Chearsley.

The community has a Church, with an active congregation and, until losing the fight for its existence in the summer of 1988, had a "First" School with over 30 pupils. There is a Shop/Post Office, and "The Bell" public house. The Village Hall is used by a pre-school Playgroup, a newly started youth club, as well as by others.

Parts of the village lie within a Conservation Area and, in addition to the Church and Pub, twenty-three of the houses are listed buildings. Perhaps it cannot be described as a beautiful village, but it has character, enhanced by its old winding sunken lanes. In recent years estate agents have come to describe it as "a much sought after village" and this may have contributed to house prices reaching astronomical levels.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It seems that the village began about the year 800. A noted expert has described the shape of the village and its sunken lanes as "an unusual arrangement, and one not expected in deepest Buckinghamshire . . . and which has not been changed later". As time passed, dwellings developed around seven farms, and between two large "Greens": Lower Green by the river; and Upper Green, now considerably smaller and known as The Green.

The Church is very old, parts dating back to at least the time of the Normans. Apart from the Black Death in the 14th century, and local skirmishes in the Civil War (17th century), little would have disturbed the life here. Fourteen existing houses in the village were built around the time of the Civil War. The farms kept their basic identities until the late 18th century when the population had reached 200 souls. We did not have a resident Lord of the Manor, and this undoubtedly affected the character of the village and the attitude of its inhabitants.

Until early Victorian times, all the houses were below the top road, hardly visible to travellers, except for "The Bell" Inn. Then, a new Smithy appeared on the north side of The Green, followed by more houses, up to the turn of that century. In some ways that must have been the heyday of the village, being a self-sufficient community. There were some five Inns and beer-shops, and many trades: bootmakers, carpenters, baker, laundress, and so on. Many of the women and young girls made pillow lace, until that craft died out after the First World War.

Two world wars, and mechanization on the farms, accelerated the exodus from the land. The first council houses appeared in 1925, followed by others on a small estate. More came after World War II and, with a new Village Hall, a sizeable part of the village was established above the top road. From 1950 the village had grown very quickly and, with the exception of Manor Farm, all the farm Land gradually transferred to owners outside the village. Little shops died out, and the Smithy closed. The Baptist Chapel, and old barns were converted into houses. The era of the "executive home" had arrived. Families that had originally rented the old cottages moved out to the council houses and smaller bungalows, and watched their former homes transformed with modern interiors and extensions. By 1986, only two inhabitants were in farming as a full-time occupation, and Chearsley was firmly in the 20th century.

## SOME FACTS AND FIGURES

### POPULATION

1986 estimate:		
Senior Citizens	80	16%
Under 18 years	122	25%
Remainder	293	59%
Total =	495	
1988 Electoral Roll:	362	

## HOUSING

In 1986 there were 182 dwellings and it was estimated that 214 were in the "executive class". Between 1800 and 1955, the total number of dwellings doubled from 47 to 91. In the next thirty years up to 1986, the number of dwellings doubled again, giving an average building rate of 2.7 dwellings per year.

In 1976 the District Council defined the village Conservation Areas and published the Conservation Document. It was an early type of appraisal, and contained two key statements:

"Further infilling (of housing) will be severely restricted"; and: "The village will be confined to its present limits". By 1986, it appeared that those statements had had little effect: in the previous ten years, houses had been built where, previously, planning permission was denied. Also, due to decisions by the Department of the Environment, other houses appeared outside the village limits. Today, planning applications for new houses show no sign of slackening. By the year 2001, we might have about two hundred and twenty dwellings with a population of 600 people.

### SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

The Full Report, giving the complete analysis of the questionnaires, took up 62 closely-spaced pages of text. Clearly, such a document is too large for most people to digest, although it will be available to those who want it, and to organizations such as the Parish Council.

Therefore, it was decided that a Summary Report was required. The task of making a summary of the results was given to a volunteer: Michael Head of Long Crendon, an experienced market researcher. He was chosen because the committee members felt it was desirable that an impartial observer should write it. The following summary is based on Mr Head's work, which of course, used the data from the completed Questionnaires.

#### Response

Taking the "Adult" Questionnaires (all those aged 16 or over), **46%** of the villagers responded. This is quite a good response rate for this type of self-completion survey. Because the replies were completely anonymous, it is very difficult to judge if those who responded are a representative sample of the inhabitants. However, from a knowledge of the population estimates for Chearsley in 1986, it would appear that the lower and top age groups are not so well represented in the Questionnaire replies - particularly those below the age of 30. Those in the 40-49 age group appeared to respond the most.

For the Juniors (aged 8 up to 16), their response rate was **34%**, and it would appear that those in the 8-10 age group responded more than their elder compatriots.

In no way do these response rates invalidate the survey, but they mean that small differences of, say, one or two percent between numbers should not be considered as very significant. Also, it should be noted that where values are given in this report, eg: "one third", or "37%", those figures refer to the proportion of respondents.

#### Work/Employment

Two thirds of the men are in full-time employment - considerably more than the average for the country, and half of the women are in full-time or part-time work. The proportion of men travelling more than 10 miles to work is particularly high: nearly half of them. A third of those at work would like to work in Chearsley.

A clear majority were in favour of small craft workshops being introduced into the village, but they would not want to see light industry here.

One third have lived here for less than 5 years, which suggests a much higher turnover than the national average. Generally, the replies give an impression that a fairly high proportion use the village as a dormitory, in which they will stay for only a few years. However, the latter impression may be partly biased, due to proportionally fewer survey replies from longer-term residents.

## **The Village**

Key reasons given for choosing to live here were:

- small, attractive, quiet village environment
- type of housing available
- geographical location
- personal and family reasons.

There were twice as many favourable comments about the village as unfavorable, with the friendliness of most people being the outstanding attribute mentioned by adults and children alike. Main dislikes for the adults were the infilling by new houses, and the traffic - volume, noise and speed. For children, lack of facilities was the common complaint.

## **Environment**

There is a strong balance of opinion in favour of keeping the village as it is, and some thought the conservation area might be extended to include more of the village and some of the surrounding fields, because the views (both inward and outward) are important to many people. The sunken Lanes were also mentioned by many as being an attractive feature. The most frequently mentioned problems are: the overhead cables, litter, and the need for more salt bins in winter.

## **Housing**

This is a subject which generates strong feelings, with many divisions of opinion. The only clear majority on any issue was the need for a village policy on development - most people felt it could not be left to planners and developers alone.

Opinions were divided as to whether it is desirable, or practically possible to stop further building in the village. 43% would like to see the rate of building slowed down, 26% did not know, 20% thought it should stay about the same, and 11% wanted to see the building rate increased. The existing mix of housing seemed to be right, but with some emphasis on the need for new houses for young, first-time buyers.

On the issue of building inside and/or outside the prescribed village limits, opinions were split and inconclusive - there was no clear majority one way or the other.

## **Education**

Just over a half of the parents of school children felt that the transport provided was not satisfactory, mainly because of late buses. On the same issue, nearly half of the children who used the buses complained that they were not on time, and often got them to school late.

With respect to Adult Education, 16% already attend such classes, but 37% would like to see evening classes in the village. Of the latter group, a high

proportion expressed interests in a language and crafts, but for the remainder the range of subjects suggested very wide.

### **Amenities**

Very few adults are regular users of buses, although 40% use them occasionally. Some children rely on them for getting to and from school. Suggestions on improvements were mainly with respect to the timing of buses: connecting with BR at the new Haddenham Station, and better evening services - especially for the youngsters.

80% of the adults use a car (well above the national average), and this leads to many comments on car parking in the village. This is seen as a major problem - particularly in the area around the school. 89% of the children have bikes, mostly for fun, and a high proportion of them complain about fast and bad car drivers in the village.

Nearly everybody, of all ages, uses the village shop and post office, and most of the comments were very positive and complimentary.

Conversely, two thirds had no comment to make about the church or its activities. Of those who did comment, most were complimentary, and feel the church is an important part of the village.

### **Recreation and Entertainment**

Only a minority of the adults claimed to be involved in various social activities, though of these, the Womens' Institute and Thursday Club were most popular. Other specific items mentioned were the need for a playing field and some adults expressed dislike of the hunt meeting here, though neither of these attracted great numbers of comments. A majority of adults were not interested in seeing new social facilities, although most of the children were in favour of the Youth Club.

Opinions on the village hall were divided, with 62 favourable comments (many feeling it is adequate and the best we can afford), and 82 unfavourable comments: too small, poor condition, unattractive.

One third of women and half of the men use the Pub, but in many cases this is only occasional use. A number had suggestions for improvement.

### **Roads and Footpaths**

Sunken Lanes: most comments suggested there be a one-way system and weight limits to stop erosion, and restrictions on house building to avoid more damage by builders vehicles.

Speeding: 77% said speeding is a problem, especially at the top of the village. A 30mph limit, and a mini-roundabout at the junction of the roads, were the two most popular solutions.

Road surfaces: most believe that roads are well-kept, but the majority of comments requested better verge cutting and drain clearing.

Lights: there is a 2:1 opinion against having more lights in the village.

Footpaths: 90% say they use them, but opinion is split on whether they are properly maintained.

Roadman: There is a 3:1 opinion in favour of employing a part-time roadman.



## **Services**

Only a small minority use the phonebox, and 20% use the mobile library, and they are clearly important to those who do use them. Litter bins aroused much adverse opinion - not enough, too small, not emptied often enough.

The majority are satisfied with the main services, but all came in for some criticism - less for the rubbish collection, most for the phone service;

- Rubbish, 82% satisfied; but more bags of better quality required
- Water, 76% satisfied; but a few comments on the awful taste or cloudiness
- Electricity, 75% satisfied; but comments on too many breakdowns due to weather
- Telephone, 59% satisfied; but complaints of crackly lines and slow repairs.

One third were satisfied with the police service, and there were many adverse comments on the lack of police presence. 43% said they participated in a neighbourhood watch scheme, others saying it was not necessary.

Just over a half were satisfied that they get a good service from the parish council, although there was a varied list of comments on their work and effectiveness.

There is a 3:1 ratio in favour of the parish council increasing the village rate to support worthwhile village projects, but some caution was expressed that they should only consider those of general benefit to the village.

## **Health and Welfare**

Accepting that we have no medical services in the village, most people appeared to think that local services are satisfactory, and after the Doctor and Dentist, the district nurse and health visitor were the most used services. Transportation to and from local health services was the most common complaint. Some remember we used to have a weekly clinic here.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The answers to the questionnaires confirm that Chearsley is indeed a collection of individuals, many with very positive and varied opinions on all sorts of subjects. In particular, the following issues raise strong feelings: further building - how much, and where it should be (the latter issue not really resolved by the survey); the appearance of the village (overhead lines and keeping our sunken lanes); car parking and speeding. On six issues there are clear majorities of opinion:

- YES, a craft centre would be acceptable;
- YES, a village housing development policy would be welcome;
- NO to extra street lights;
- YES, provision of a part-time Roadman would be appreciated;
- MORE rubbish bins and salt containers;
- YES, the Parish Council could consider an increase in the village rate if a worthwhile project came up which would benefit all.

The Shop/Post Office is probably the most appreciated amenity (now that the school has gone), and the least appreciated service is the Police.

There are very many useful comments amongst the many minority opinions expressed in the Questionnaire, and it is to be hoped that local organizations (Parish and County Council, bus companies, etc) will pick up many of them from the "Full

Report" - such things as bus times, old peoples' bungalows with two bedrooms, comments on the school buses, getting to and from local clinics.

Chearsley seems to emerge from the survey as being mainly a younger middle-aged community with a relatively high turnover. The main requirement is for the village to be a small, attractive and Quiet place to live in, but not to be the sole centre of recreation. Amongst young and old there is a lot of agreement that it is a friendly village, and the most popular course of action would seem to be to keep it as pleasant, restful place to come home to, and to live in.

#### RECOMENDATIONS

1. A copy of the **Full** Appraisal Report should be kept by the Clerk to the Parish Council, so that it is always available at council meetings to provide reference information for councillors. Progress made in implementing the recommendations should be monitored, with an annual review and updating.
2. The Full Appraisal Report should be made available to all interested people: perhaps Parish Councillors could lend out their copies if asked. Other copies should be placed in the reference sections of all local libraries - long Crendon, Haddenham, Aylesbury and Thame. The Womens' Institute and Thursday Club should be offered a free copy each.
3. The Parish Council should extend a sympathetic ear to any practical suggestions or planning applications for a craft centre - should one ever be proposed for the village.
4. The Parish Council should explore with AVDC Planning Department possible ways to produce a Village Housing Policy Document which would reflect the views of the village (on issues where there is a clear majority), and which would be of value to all those concerned in planning matters. In other words, to see if a useful document can be made which would not simply be a cosmetic exercise. Attention should be given to trying to maintain a mix of housing (with some priority for young buyers), together with a slower rate of growth than experienced in recent years.
5. The village and BCC Education Department should be made aware of the fact that there may be enough interested people to begin evening classes here (on a language and crafts), that there is a site (the village hall), and potential instructors within the village. It is to be hoped that one or two interested and energetic villagers could follow this up.
6. The governors of Cuddington, Haddenham and Aylesbury schools should be made aware of the village concern over poor transportation of the pupils to those schools. Appropriate pressure should also be maintained on the BCC Education Department.
7. The Parish Council should explore ways to keep the pressure on the local bus company to provide a link with BR Haddenham, and a better bus service in the evenings for the young people of the village. This is an issue which the Womens' Institute might take up.

8. The Parish Council should invite the Womens' Institute, Thursday Club, or one or two villagers to explore the possibility of setting up a voluntary car service, as it appears there are enough users and potential providers to make a worthwhile service.
9. The Parish Council should keep a close eye on parking problems in the village, especially around the area of the school and the Pub. The police should be invited to make occasional spot checks on these two areas to ensure that parked cars do not present a danger, and that emergency vehicles have proper access.
10. With the results of Part 8 (Roads, etc) of the questionnaire in front of them, the Parish Council should debate (and possibly call a public meeting) to consider the questions of:
  - a) Sunken lanes, and the methods suggested for their preservation
  - b) Speeding, and methods of prevention (eg. speed limit, mini-roundabout)
11. The Parish Council should note the majority in favour of supporting true village projects (of benefit to all and funded from the village rate) and, in particular, make all efforts to employ a part-time "roadman".
12. Particular note should be taken of the majority opinions concerned with siting of salt bins, and provision of more, larger, and frequently serviced rubbish bins.
13. The attention of the Chief Constable should be drawn to the comments expressed by villagers in Part 9 (and other parts with respect to parking and speeding) of the questionnaire, and he should be asked to respond.

## ADVICE TO OTHER APPRAISAL COMMITTEES

As new appraisals are started in other villages, committees often look at previous efforts by others, and try to use their experience and formats. We have the following advice to others who follow us:

1. Keep your committee as small as possible, but with a broad cross-section of the inhabitants. You need some members who are capable of coping with lots of detail, objective analysis, and who have good, simple, writing abilities. Extensive knowledge of the village and inhabitants is obviously highly desirable on the part of some members, but be prepared for the fact that village knowledge and experience is often found amongst inhabitants who may dislike committees.
2. Decide on your basic Questionnaire format (Section Headings) early on, and make those Sections the basis for regular meetings. There is no need to keep minutes, provided that one person is responsible for the detailed creation of the Questionnaire, section by section, incorporating the members' ideas and suggestions as you go along. A computer word-processor is invaluable in the inevitable process of constant re-writing here.
3. Our final Questionnaire was too large (10 Sections, 10 pages, 72 Questions). Half the size would have been much better, with the majority of questions being multiple-choice only. Our "technique" of general questions, and inviting comments on nearly everyone, made for horrendous problems when it came to analysing the results! Our invitation for comments should have been rationed to one, or two at the most, for each section.
4. When formulating the Questionnaire there is a tendency to want to put in questions which would make it a census more than a sampling of village opinion, eg. number of cars in the household, number of children at school, etc. Avoid such things and, when formulating questions, apply the following criteria to each one: "Why should the village want to know this?" ... and ... "Will the village benefit from knowing the answers - i e., is there a good possibility that the answers may provide really useful information so that something can actually be done as a result?" .
5. We did a trial run of our Questionnaire before the main distribution. On balance, we feel it was an unnecessary exercise.
6. The committee was quite independent of the Parish Council, and that was a good idea. We had one councillor and an ex-councillor, but it was not a Parish Council sub-committee, and we came to value our independence.
7. As already mentioned, we found the word-processing capabilities of a computer/printer very useful indeed (in both the preparatory and analysis stages), but never found the need for a computer for data processing or analysis. However, with a larger village population and more multiple choice questions, computer data processing/analysis might prove useful.

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