

## SOCIAL & PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

### 3.1 Statistical profile of the parish

The Parish Plans Group has progressively published evidence of emerging material and conclusions to promote reasoned debate. A full comparison of National Census data for 1981 and 1991 was undertaken using Office of National Statistics (ONS) data<sup>1</sup> in order to assess changing trends and patterns and establish an objective parish profile. The 2001 data for Aston was not published by ONS prior to this Plan.

Unwilling to plan using 12 year old data (parish details of the 2001 census would not be released until April 2004), the Steering Group drafted, consulted on and issued an Aston Parish Census and Opinion Survey in January 2003, which achieved a 67% return rate. A copy of the survey form is provided in Annex 23.

The ONS material runs to 91 tables of data, covering many aspects of social and economic activity in the Civic Parish. A full copy of the analysis is included in the reference papers. An extract of the key indicators is provided in Annex 5. The following data helped shape opinion on key issues such as housing and population trends

#### 3.1.1 Population data

The nominal population increased by 8% to 917 between 1981 and 1991. The 2003 sample suggests that this has subsequently fallen.

The proportion over pension age remained broadly stable (12.7%) between the two census years, but has increased significantly since. In 1991, 10% of the population was over 64. Today that percentage has increased to 17%.

Between 1981 and 1991, the number of 0 to 4 year olds fell 39% to 4.6% of the population. Similarly the number of 5 to 16 year olds fell by 15% to 15.7%.

Those aged 16 to 20 remained broadly stable at 6.1% of the population.

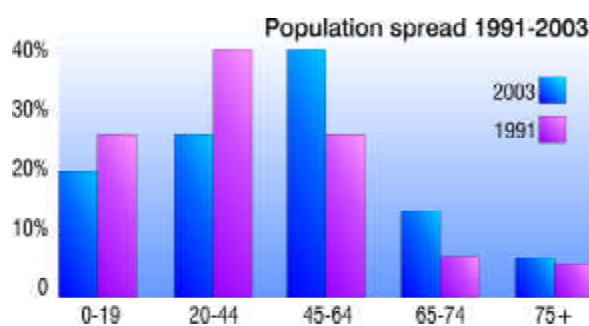


Fig 3

Aston's 2003 sample census suggests the number of under 20 year olds has fallen to less than 1 in 5 of the population, compared with 1 in 4 in 1991.

The 2003 Parish Census found that those moving into Aston in the last five years provided 26% of the sample population and 38% of children and young adults under 20.

Those moving into Aston in the last five years had an impact on the parish profile. Figure 3 shows that they are considerably younger, more economically active and have a significantly higher percentage of children living at home. That said, the average age of the population is getting significantly older

#### 3.1.2 Household data

The 2003 Parish Census found that some 25% of residents have lived in Aston for over 25 years, many since birth. About the same percentage moved into Aston within the last 5 years.

Household numbers increased by 14.8% to 318 between 1981 and 1991. There are presently some 335 households, suggesting an increase since 1991 of 5.3%.

Residents per hectare increased by 19% to 1.3 reflecting the loss of former Aston lands. The 1991 figure remains

significantly lower than both the Hertfordshire and the national average of 6 and 2.4 respectively. Comparable 1991 figures for Benington are 0.8, Walkern 1 and Watton 1.4.

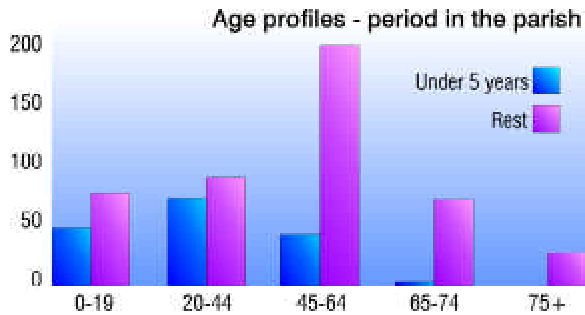


Fig 4

Owner occupation rose in 1991 by 22% to 78% of all households, considerably higher than both the Hertfordshire and national averages.

The numbers of economically active residents has fallen. The Parish Survey suggests that 41% of Aston residents are economically active. The comparable figure in 1991 was 53%.

Households generally increased the number of habitable rooms per household over the period whilst, in contrast, household sizes reduced considerably - a trend which is likely to continue.

### 3.1.3 Other key data results and resume

The earlier census material, updated by the 2003 Parish census suggests:

Aston has an aging population. Residents live in larger, mainly owner occupied houses with fewer persons per dwelling than in 1981. Car ownership increased significantly over the period. In 1991 owner occupation levels and car ownership was considerably higher than the Hertfordshire or national average.

In 1991, 52% of families had children living at home. Today numbers are likely to be considerably less.

Numbers of children (0 - 15) by 1991 increased from 129

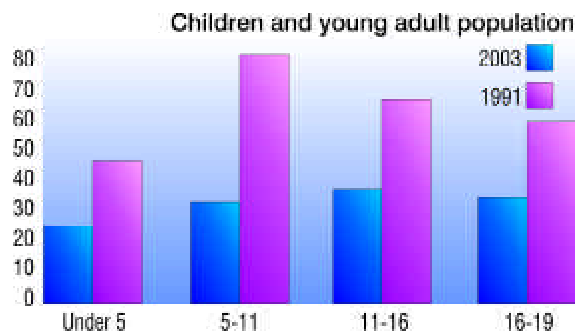


Fig 5

to 187 (45%). Children in this age group accounted for 20% of all residents in 1991 (15% in 1981). Today the figure is likely to be around 110 or some 13% of Aston's projected population<sup>2</sup>.

The age group relevant to planning primary education in the parish i.e, 0 to 11, rose 54% to 134 prospective pupils in 1991. Today the equivalent figure is likely to be in the order of 70 or 8% of the projected population. In July 1991 the majority of pupils at St Mary's CE Primary School lived in the parish. Today, just 25% do so<sup>3</sup>.

### Action: A 1

*The statistical profile of the parish will be updated to reflect the 2001 Census material.*

## 3.2 Aston's built heritage



Aston Village 1953

Aston or Estone as it is referred to in the Domesday Book formed part of the lands belonging to Odo, Bishop of Bayeaux. Until the time of the 2nd World War, it retained a quiet existence, in harmony with its agricultural base and rural heritage.

Aston House was part of a 17th century estate and the house appears to have dated from that period. During the 2nd World War, the War Office requisitioned the house and its park. The House and adjacent lands became Station 6 (WD) Special Operations Executive (SOE).

Subsequently, in 1946, Aston House became the Operational Headquarters of the newly formed Stevenage Development Corporation which relocated to Daneshill House, Stevenage Boroughs' current offices in 1961, and Aston House was demolished.

### 3.2.1 Astonbury Manor

One of the largest and oldest buildings in the immediate area is Astonbury Manor, a Grade 1 listed building now divided into luxury apartments. It has a long history, but records indicate that during the reign of Edward the Confessor (1024-1066) the land was held by three vassals of Stigend, Archbishop of Canterbury. No doubt a house stood on the land and history recounts that the manor of



Astonbury Manor

'Estone' was presented to King Henry 1st in dower to his second wife, eighteen year old Adelicia, upon their marriage in 1121. In 1135 it was bestowed on the Abbot and Monks of Reading Abbey and remained under monastic control

for three hundred years until the Dissolution. The Manor passed to Sir Philip Boteler, Sheriff of Hertford who, in 1540, started to build himself a large house using the site of a ruined building. The house was completed by his grandson, Sir Robert Boteler.

### 3.2.2 Bragbury House and Grounds

Built in the 16th century, Bragbury House lies to the south of Astonbury Manor House on the A602. More recently it was the club house for British Aerospace's (BAE) Sports & Social Club. In the Summer of 2003, GO-East endorsed a departure from Green Belt Policies, to allow Stevenage Borough Council to grant planning permission for the house to be converted into apartments, with some 15 new dwellings being built within the footprint of the former sports and leisure buildings. BAE interests will market the adjacent sports fields abutting Astonbury Wood, as a potential new sports club, for a two year period. Although outside the parish boundary, progress on this will be actively monitored to ensure any subsequent use protects the visual benefit of the grounds, particularly as viewed from Astonbury.

#### Action AD 2

*The Parish Council will monitor developments affecting Bragbury House and grounds to ensure that none impact local Policy PD 1, or cause ecological or physical damage to the ancient Astonbury Wood, situated within the parish, or detrimentally affect residents of Astonbury Manor.*

The Parish of Aston has a number of listed buildings which date back hundreds of years, the earliest being the church of Aston St Mary. The nave and chancel date back to 1230. Additions were made to the church in the 14th and 15th centuries and, after falling into disrepair, it was restored in 1850. In 1921 a Lych Gate was built as an entrance to the church grounds.

In the grounds of the church a War Memorial was erected in 1919. Recently restored as part of Aston's millennium celebrations it displays many local family names.



St Mary's Church

Although the church has the longest recorded history, there are twenty seven properties in the village dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries, and eleven other listed properties within the current parish boundary. These are scheduled in Annex 7.



Service of Remembrance at the War Memorial

### 3.3 Character & distinctive features

#### 3.3.1 The Parish of Aston comprises three areas, each with its own character.

**Aston Village** is situated on top of the Beane Valley ridge line and has developed historically around the Church of St. Mary's. It has many older properties and now embraces a number of small new developments. It is more developed than any other part of the parish with a higher density of buildings. The village is home to the local school, village hall, cricket, bowls, football and tennis clubs and two public houses.

**Aston End** comprises a number of active farms and small clusters of houses and cottages, many of which are listed. These are separated by many small fields in a very rural area. A butcher's shop is located at Brookfield Farm and a public house is located adjacent to Holders Lane.

**Hooks Cross**, situated on the busy A602 which dominates the character of this area, is a series of active farms and

small clusters of houses and cottages in a rural setting. The A602 forms a key east-west route carrying heavy traffic flows from the A1M at Stevenage to the A10. A bypass has long been advocated by the Parish Council. Proposals to ameliorate noise and traffic hazards for Hooks Cross residents, and those further east at Tonwell are contained within the DTLR's 2002 Long Term Capital Programme.

Whilst each of these areas is quite distinctive in character there are a number of strong unifying features which are common to the entire parish which must be maintained:

- The network of ancient narrow lanes with high hedgerows.**
- The number of small woodland areas and many fine mature trees.**
- The wide variety of traditional buildings of all ages and architectural styles, including many which are listed.**
- The strong rural character of the area.**

### 3.3.2 Aston Village

#### Broadwater Lane

Like all roads into Aston, Broadwater Lane, the busiest in the parish, is a narrow, sunken lane with high hedges on both sides. As it rises up the hill from Gresley Way, towards the village centre, it passes two small cul-de-sac developments.

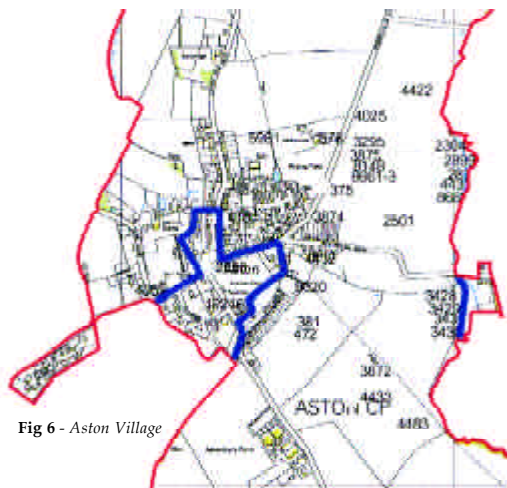


Fig 6 - Aston Village

The first of these is Long Ridge, which has ten large, two storey houses of differing designs featuring many common elements and materials which produce a cohesive development. There is a variety of pitched roofs, high quality facing brickwork and stained timber cladding. The informal layout includes open front gardens with a variety of hedge screens and ornamental trees. Belts of trees adjoining the golf course boundary enhance the landscaping.

Continuing along Broadwater lane through a canopy of many mature trees, the next group of buildings are in Dene Lane. Now a cul-de-sac, it serves a number of distinctive older properties which have been subdivided into separate dwellings. These include Aston Dene, set in fine mature gardens, and The Lodge which has also been extended sympathetically to provide an attractive residence. The Old Rectory has also been subdivided into Gregor House, The Braids and The Stables, to provide high quality homes whilst retaining their original character. Dene Lane provides access to the Lawn Tennis Club, private stables and footpath access to Gresley Way. The properties in Dene Lane are within the conservation area but not listed.

Directly opposite the church is Yeomans Drive, which was once the site of Aston House. The house was demolished in the 1960's after it had been vacated by the Stevenage Development Corporation.

Fortunately the high, red brick garden walls and many of the magnificent specimen trees were retained as a feature of the development when the modern houses were built, and the original coach house (refurbished and renamed The Clock House) still stands.

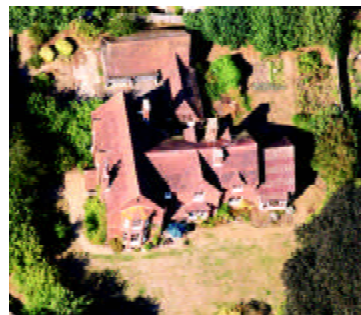


The Clock House

The whole development on this private road falls within the conservation area.

#### Aston End Road

This road narrows to a lane which links the centre of the village to Aston End to the north of the parish and embraces a wide variety of residential development, including many distinctive and characteristic older villas and cottages interspersed with modern houses. Off Aston End Road are three small cul-de-sacs including Arundel Close which has 5 large, modern, two storey houses in a variety of individual designs, St Mary's Close with 8 high quality,



Astonbury Manor

Tudor style houses in an attractive, mature landscape setting and Garden Field close with 10 smaller private detached houses with garages, arranged around a pleasant landscaped court.

# SOCIAL & PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

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Bareleigh House

The northern end of Aston End Road is typical of all roads into the village, having high hedges either side of a narrow lane. Whilst the southern end is fairly intensively developed with properties on each side, the narrowness of the lane and absence of footpaths together with the

many well kept gardens and mature trees, give the road a country lane character. Part of the road, including St. Mary's Close and Aston Cottage (c. 1836), fall within the conservation area.

None of the older properties are listed although many have considerable architectural merit, especially a group of larger houses on the northern edge of the village. These include Bareleigh, Shephall House and the Stables, all of which are built in local soft red facing brick with timber window sashes and gabled roofs with red clay tiling.

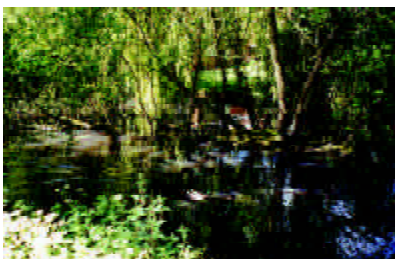
## School Lane

School Lane is a cul-de-sac which lies to the east of Aston End Road serving Brookfield and Wrights Orchard housing developments and provides westerly access to the Village Field and the Bowls Club.



Junction of School Lane and Aston End Rd

The lane has some excellent historical cottages on its northern side including the 17th century Glebe Cottage and 16th century Pond Cottage by Whitney Pond. Both are listed but are not within the conservation area.



Whitney Pond

The form and layout of the stepped terraced houses opposite is out of character with the area.

Lack of garaging and off-street parking together with the problem of providing reasonable access to the school, create traffic problems which the Travel Plan will look to address. The area is well served by inter-connecting footpaths that provide safe access to the school, village hall, Benington Road & New Park Lane.

St Mary's School is accessed from School Lane. It is located in a pleasant 'backland' position providing a mod-

ern building with excellent views over open countryside. Presently some 75% of its pupils travel from the Stevenage - part of the joint diocese.

## Brookfield

An earlier local authority built development, now of mixed tenure, Brookfield is a small, modern residential development of traditional construction providing two storey terrace housing and flats with open garden frontage and garages in compounds. There are also a few bungalows with high hedges to their gardens sited opposite Aston Bowls Club.

## Wrights Orchard

Wrights Orchard is accessed from Brookfield and is a 1970's private development of 28 two storey detached and semi-detached houses linked by single storey garages. The development has pitched gabled roofs and red facing brick elevations, pleasant open fronted gardens and landscaped areas, which are now maturing.

## Benington Road

Benington Road forms one of the three roadside boundaries to Centre Field, which is the most important public open space within Aston. It provides a village green setting to the village.



Beehive Cottage

The road runs from Aston End Road east

to the neighbouring village, and parish, of Benington. It contains many important historical and listed properties from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.



The Rose & Crown

These include the Rose and Crown public house, which lies to the north-east of Centre Field, Beehive Cottage, the old forge, Solomon's Pightle, and the old Post Office amongst others.

Collectively, together with attractive old character buildings such as the Pig and Whistle public house (late 17th century), they provide a core of historic development within the conservation area.

These properties suffer excessive noise and air pollution levels from the high volume of HGV's required to manoeuvre a 4m crossroad complex in order to travel to Benington and further east.



HGV negotiating Queens Square

## Action AF 6

*The parish will continue to press the County Council to find ways of diverting HGV traffic from Queens Square and similar inappropriate locations.*

Further along Benington Road on the extreme eastern edge of the parish, are a diverse number of modern houses in a variety of architectural styles.

## Holbrook

Holbrook Farm has been redeveloped to provide attractive and high quality barn conversions in a rural setting. Holbrook Farm has a visually attractive manège within its grounds, along the pleasant Beane valley walk.

## New Park Lane

New Park Lane runs north from Benington Road at its junction with Stringers Lane. It has a mixture of small, Victorian terraced cottages (1850) and modern, stepped terrace houses. This lane provides vehicular access to the village hall and Village Field, both of which are important local facilities offering splendid views over the Beane Valley, and continues as a back lane to Aston End

## Stringers Lane

Stringers Lane is a narrow sunken lane with high embankments on either side. It is bounded by a hedgerow, in part, on the eastern side and paddock fencing to the west, which is also forms the southern boundary of Centre Field.

Aston Park Farmhouse, at the junction with Benington Road, is a listed 16th century property, tastefully restored. Its listed barns, stables and granary, have been converted into residential units, resulting in a very attractive development. Neighbouring barns have also been sensitively converted into small business units.



Stringers Lane from Centre Field

To the south, a traditional earlier local authority development now largely owner occupied, comprises two storey semi-detached houses with single storey links between. They are located on a raised embankment on the eastern side of the lane.

The houses have smooth white rendered elevations and red plain clay tiled roofs with gabled ends and small, well kept front gardens.

There is a small compound of garages, which is inadequate in meeting the needs of the residents resulting in high levels of on-street parking in the narrow lane, thus causing problems for public transport and other road users. The problem was specifically identified in the Travel Survey and measures are being proposed to alleviate the situation, as part of proposed works to create a one way system around Centre Field.



Stringers Lane from Centre Field

The houses form a physical boundary to the village core and have wonderful uninterrupted views at the rear, to the south-east over the Beane Valley and over Centre Field at the front.

Park Farm House, situated at the junction with Aston Lane, is a large traditional house which has been extensively altered and extended to provide an attractive, substantial home on a large plot. It has many fine trees and mature hedgerows abutting Centre Field.

## Aston Lane

This lane forms part of the public transport route into and out of Aston village. It runs south from the village opposite the War Memorial to Bragbury End and the A602. Within the village core it has two modern houses which were developed as part of the Yeomans Drive Scheme. Opposite these houses is the western boundary of Centre Field with vehicular access to the field.

As the lane leaves the village to the South it forms the western parish boundary abutting Stevenage Golf Course. It is another example of our sunken lanes, with high hedges to both sides.

A private lane lined with many magnificent trees to the east of Aston Lane provides the principal access to Astonbury Farmhouse and the Grade 1 listed Astonbury Manor.

Astonbury Manor is the most important domestic building, architecturally and historically, within the parish. It dates from 1540 and is on the site of much earlier houses. The building has been sensitively converted into apartments and a small complex of new two storey mews houses have been built in the area which used to be the manor's kitchen garden. The whole scheme sits within beautifully landscaped grounds containing many specimen trees and is adjacent to the 28 hectare Astonbury Wood.

## Astonbury Lane

This lane provides access to Astonbury Farm from the village. It continues to Walkern Road and the A602 via Frogmore Hill, through narrow lanes with high hedges.

The parish has supported a change in use of the farm buildings and yard areas. Whilst the farm lands continue to produce cereal, the farm is now better known as a small business centre, housing 12 office and light industrial concerns. Some 125 personnel are employed on the site, of whom 6 are presently Aston residents. Whilst the activities of the Business Centre are generally accepted, there is concern about the increase in traffic crossing the village, particularly HGV's associated with tarmac and groundwork contracting businesses housed at the farm. Measures to alleviate these local concerns will be promoted and are likely to be endorsed by the site owner.

### Action AF 7

*The Parish Council, in conjunction with the Highway Authority, will seek to examine ways of mitigating HGV flows emanating from the Astonbury Farm site impacting on inappropriate highways in the parish.*

### 3.3.3 Aston End

Aston End lies to the north of Aston and is surrounded on three sides by open farmland, reserve sites for a primary school and allotment facilities to the west (in Stevenage), and on the fourth side by the Green Belt boundary east of Gresley Way abutting the Stevenage and East Hertfordshire District Council boundary. The reserve sites are owned by English Partnerships.



Fig 7 - Aston End

At the last Enquiry in Public (EIP) in 1997, it was proposed that Aston End should take some 340 new dwellings, part of an overall package to build 4,500 new homes in Aston, as an alternative to developing West of Stevenage.

With most of the proposed development land in Aston End then optioned to developers, the prospect of a pincher movement that would ultimately impact Aston Village

through to Hooks Cross, seemed very real. The Inquiry Inspector ruled in favour of the concerted energies of Aston, neighbouring parishes and over 3,000 Stevenage residents objecting to this development. Subsequently, development options have not been renewed.

In 2002, at the Stevenage Local Plan Inquiry, English Partnerships proposed that their reserve school and allotment sites adjacent



Horses at White Farm, Aston End

to Edmunds Drive, be developed for further housing. This was opposed by Stevenage Borough Council. In March 2003, the Council further confirmed to APPG in writing, that it considered any large scale housing development to the East of the Borough to be unsustainable in principle.

Regrettably, contrary to general policies on coalescence the Inspector determined, under new Government Guidelines, that the reserved allotment site should be developed for key worker housing.

100 years ago Aston End had 3 public houses and a larger population than Aston. That is no longer the case. Aston End has small clusters of buildings scattered around the area separated by a network of small fields with high hedges between them. This, together with the narrow lanes, gives it a strong rural flavour forming a wildlife and green corridor separating urban and country habitats. The hamlet of Aston End is scattered around a loop formed by Long Lane and Tatlers Lane.

The hamlet, a tranquil haven for walkers, wildlife enthusiasts and horse-riders during daylight hours, provides a gateway to Aston and the Beane Valley. At night, when the sky is bright, the north ridge of the Beane Valley above Lords Farm, plays host to Stevenage astronomers, keen to escape the town's light pollution to get a clearer view of the world beyond.

There are several working farms, which under farm diversification policies provide other facilities to significantly wider catchments. Issues around increased traffic movements associated with these businesses, that need to use Lanterns Lane and Long Lane for access, are a concern.

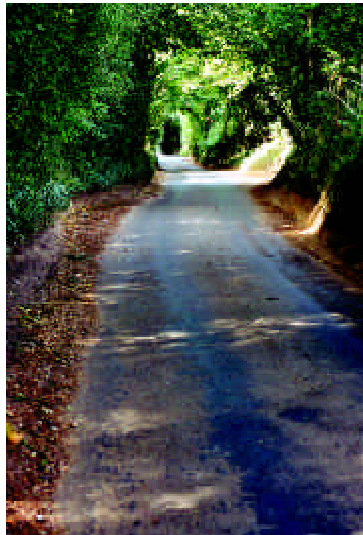
Business interests include a butcher's shop<sup>4</sup>, an equestrian outlet, stabling for some 60 horses primarily at Lords Farm, a furniture upholstery unit and a small vehicle workshop. There is also the Crown public house which caters for children and families in this rural setting. Each draws

significant custom from outside the parish. The traffic generated creates further pressure on, and damage to, local lanes, verges and hedgerows.

Further potential rural business activities are planned: Planning permission was granted in the late 1990's for a small horticultural nursery adjacent to Fox Cottage. Despite local objection approval was granted, but subject to stringent traffic control measures. The business has not commenced at this time.

Whilst these small and medium sized enterprises (SME's) generally enjoy the support of residents, their location, just 1km from the arterial Gresley Way route in Stevenage, together with in-bound school traffic and a significant rise in through traffic movements, has contributed to progressive deterioration of Lanterns Lane, Long Lane and Aston End Road.

Lanterns Lane now carries upwards of 1,000 vehicles each day. Prior to the opening of Gresley Way it carried its probable design load of just 20-30.



*An eroded Lanterns Lane, today*

The damage done to this ancient sunken drovers lane from unacceptably high traffic loadings is evident from this picture taken in September 2002.

It should be compared with the indicative photograph of Lanterns Lane prior to the opening of Gresley Way, shown in Section 2.6.6 Whilst other Lanes in the parish do not display such stark change in condition, they display continuing deterioration, due to high traffic loading. The issue is covered in greater depth in Section 8 - Travel, Traffic and Highways.

Architecturally there is a wide spectrum of periods and styles but the majority are of traditional construction with red facing brickwork or rendering and pitched gabled roofs with red clay tiles and dormer windows. Buildings are spaced well apart and many have attractive gardens bounded by mature, indigenous hedges and trees.



*Poplar Farmhouse*

Many buildings in Tatlers Lane are listed and include Tatlers Cottage, with its

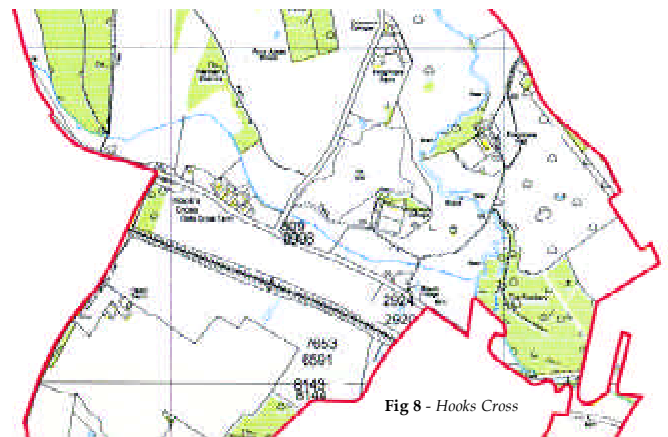
pargetted render and Yew Cottage, which are 18th and 16th century houses. Listed buildings in Long Lane include the 16th century White Farmhouse, Asmores, built as two houses in the 18th century, Lords Farm Farmhouse which is a late medieval open hall house, Poplars Farm dating from the 18th century, which is now an equestrian centre and Fox Cottage which was once a 16th century public house. Other premises of interest are 23 Tatlers Lane which was formally the site of the Live and Let Live Public House and Sunnyside Cottage, formally two Poor Law properties run by the Church Authorities, prior to their freehold sale in 1836.

### 3.3.4 Hooks Cross

Hooks Cross, known as Oaks Cross prior to the development of Stevenage New Town, is the least developed of the three areas within the parish. Some cereal and arable farming continues to the south of the A602, whilst land to the north, save that at Frogmore Estate, is increasingly being used for equine pursuits. Hooks Cross has an undulating topography and number of small woods.

The area is bisected by the A602 (Hertford Road) and the Stevenage to Hertford railway line which runs parallel to it from east to west. Along the Hertford Road, the largest group of buildings comprise a mixture of small cottages, modern houses, some bungalows and Oaks Cross Farm.

These buildings suffer considerably from severe noise, pollution and dangers of living on the A602 with its high traffic volumes. The parish supports a bypass for Hooks Cross.



**Fig 8 - Hooks Cross**

Oaks Cross Farm has a listed 16th century farm house with an 18th century barn sited directly on the A602 and is now home to one of the largest equestrian centres for many miles around. A British Horse Society registered establishment, it has 25 stabled ponies for riding tuition providing 160 training session each week. In addition, it has another 35 stables for private hire which the owners are looking to increase to 55.

It employs 16 part-time personnel of whom 20% live in the parish. Considerable investment has converted much of



Oaks Cross Farmhouse

the 74 hectares of previous arable and cereal farmland. There are now 20 post and rail paddocks ranging from 0.2 hectares to about 1.7 hectares which are used in rotation, and a 6.5km on-site riding circuit as well as a floodlight manege. The owners wish to build an indoor riding school within the grounds to the north of the A602, adjacent to the river access 'road'. In addition to its equestrian services the buildings house a pine furniture retail outlet.

To the south of the A602 is Raffin Green Lane, which forms the southern parish boundary. It links Hooks Cross to Datchworth. This narrow lane is bounded by high hedges or woodland and gives access to Staples



Manege at Oaks Cross Farm

Farm, a 16th century listed building with later barns, a well house and a granary, which are also listed.

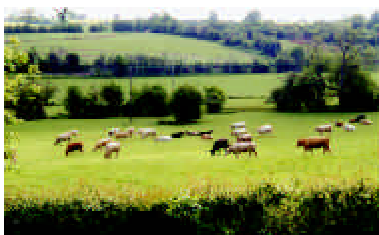
To the north of the A602 lies the Frogmore Estate which has many fine mature trees and woodland areas and the last significant remaining herd of cattle in Aston. It forms the southern end of the Beane valley and the parish boundary.



Frogmore Hall

Frogmore Hill is a narrow winding lane which runs north from Oaks Cross Farm to Aston through open farmland. There are a number of isolated farms and cottages scattered along the lane including Frogmore Farmhouse,

a listed 16th century building with 18th century entrance gates, Frogmore Cottages built in the 17th century and Waterbridge, a fine house set in extensive grounds, dating back to the 15th century.



The last remaining sizable herd of cattle in Aston, at Frogmore Estate



Frogmore Cottages

### 3.4 Areas of specific importance

There are four types of land with specific importance and identities in the parish:

- Open Spaces within the developed envelope.
- The 'Green Corridor' separating Aston from Stevenage.
- The lands of current and former estates.
- The Beane Valley.

#### 3.4.1 Open Spaces

##### Village Field (public access)



Village Field from the Village Hall

Situated on New Park Lane on the Eastern edge of the village of Aston, this field belongs to the Aston Village Society. It contains the Village Hall, football pitch and an enclosed

children's playground and is the hub of many village activities including Aston Fun Day.

##### Centre Field (public access)

Situated in the centre of the village and bounded by Benington Road, Aston Lane and Stringers Lane, this field belongs to a Trust (of which the Parish Councillors are the trustees). It is used for exercise and recreation and is home to the Cricket Club and its pavilion.

##### St Mary's School playing field (private)

Situated behind School Lane, it is used by the schoolchildren for games.

##### Bowling Green (private)

Situated off School Lane, it is the home of the Aston Bowls Club and houses their pavilion.



Aston Village Hall

### 3.4.2 The Green Corridor

The separate identities of Aston Village and Aston End from Stevenage are critically dependent on the strip of undeveloped land starting at Stevenage Golf Course at the southern end and the land to the east of Gresley Way, extending about 4km from the junction of Gresley Way and Broadwater Lane to the junction of Gresley Way and Walkern Road at the corner of Box Wood. Most of this land is in Aston Parish although some small areas, Elm Green, around Skeggs Lane, Niggets Hill and Millfield are now in Stevenage Borough. The residents of the parish are totally opposed to any development in this corridor as was demonstrated by the PACE Poll in 1997.

### 3.4.3 Estate Lands

In earlier centuries, Aston Parish contained four distinct estates. Two of these (Astonbury Manor and Frogmore) were written up in the South Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment October 2001 (see Annex 24).

#### Aston House

Although the house has been demolished, the parkland remains in the form of the Stevenage Golf Course and Club House - now part of Stevenage Borough. The footprint of the house now forms Yeoman's Drive, housing 16 detached houses.

#### Astonbury

The house, now developed into apartments, retains some of its land but the bulk is now separately owned as Astonbury Farm and Astonbury Wood.

#### Aston Dene

This house was formerly the original rectory and was owned and occupied during the late 18th and early 19th century by the Oddie Family, two members of which succeeded as rectors of St Mary's Church.

During that time it is believed that the estate extended to approximately 29 hectares. The property was purchased by Colonel Thompson during the 1940's who subsequently acquired adjoining land which increased the size of the estate to approximately 91 hectares.

During the 1950's, 83 hectares were subject to compulsory purchase by the Stevenage Corporation to form part of the Poplars development, for a sum equating to approximately £253 per hectare at today's prices!

Since 1984 the house and adjoining cottage have been converted into four separate residences.

#### Frogmore

Frogmore Hall is a Grade II listed Victorian gothic country house of Frogmore Hall. Set in 129 hectares of largely pasture land, the hall was re-located from the valley bottom and rebuilt in 1863. Home to the late Mr G B Hudson MP, it was the headquarters of Jarvis plc between 1997 and 2004.

The estate has many fine mature trees and woodland areas and the last significant remaining herd of cattle in Aston. It forms the southern end of the Beane valley and the parish boundary.

### 3.4.4 The Beane Valley

The exceptional beauty and importance of the Beane Valley is widely recognised and referred to elsewhere in this plan. It is the subject of a chapter in the South Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment (see Annex 24).

Summary of policies proposed by the Parish Plans Group for consultation, with a view to some or all being formally adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) within the statutory planning framework, that are relevant to this Section:

#### Plan Policy H

##### The built environment Section 3.3 (all)

- 1 *No new development, other than proposals for rural exceptions affordable housing schemes, will be supported outside the built up area of Aston Village. All development should be sensitively designed, respecting the character and landscape of Aston Village. Section 3.3 (SPG14)*
- 2 *The character and appearance of the Aston Conservation Area should be preserved and, where appropriate, enhanced - in accordance with Policy BE18 of the East Herts Adopted Local Plan (December 1999). (SPG15).*
- 3 *Development adversely affecting Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Aston Parish will not be supported - in accordance with Policy BE15 of the East Herts Adopted Local Plan (December 1999). (SPG16)*
- 4 *Development involving Listed Buildings should have special regard to the desirability of preserving the character of such buildings and their settings. (SPG17)*
- 5 *The open character of the parish should be preserved and significant open spaces or gaps important to the form and or/setting of the parish be maintained. (SPG18)*
- 6 *Important views into and out of Aston Village should be protected. (SPG7)*
- 7 *The scale, design and materials of any redevelopment or new development (including extensions) should be appropriate to the locality and not detract from the character of the surrounding area. (SPG19)*

- 8 *All developments should adopt principles of good design and take account of the characteristics of existing development in the immediate surrounding area. (SPG20)*
- 9 *New development should be appropriate to the setting of Aston Village and pay careful attention to detail. Standard designs will be discouraged. Durable materials should be used. (SPG21)*
- 10 *A visual separation between individual properties should be maintained, where appropriate (SPG22)*
- 11 *The displacement of vehicles to the surrounding area could be prejudicial to amenity and highway safety. New development should therefore assimilate car parking where appropriate (SPG23)*
- 12 *New development should respect the local use of warm red brick and plain tile. Where possible, extensions should be built in materials closely resembling those of the original building. (SPG24)*
- 13 *Any new commercial or agricultural building should be carefully sited and designed to reduce its apparent mass and minimise visual intrusion upon the wider landscape. (SPG25)*
- 14 *Development that adversely affects sites of archaeological importance will not be supported - in accordance with Policy BE15 of the East Herts Adopted Local Plan (December 1999). (SPG26)*
- 15 *Cables should be placed underground wherever possible, especially within the Conservation Area.*
- 16 *Care should be taken to use boundary treatments that are appropriate to the location (SPG27)*
- 17 *The settlement patterns of the village and hamlets are the key to the distinctive nature of the various parts of the parish. New developments, as well as alterations and extensions to existing buildings, should harmonise with the overall appearance of their surroundings and respect existing patterns and densities of land use. Section 3.3.1.(SPG28)*
- 18 *Buildings should as far as possible be constructed for maximum energy efficiency, using low-impact technologies and reclaimed, recyclable or biodegradable materials wherever possible.(SPG29)*
- 19 *Ribbon development must not be allowed, and the distinct boundaries of each hamlet and settlement must be preserved. Section 3.3.1.(SPG30)*

1 OPCS References CEN 81 WCP 21 & CEN 91 WCP 21 and supporting tables  
 2 Derived from 2003 sample data suggesting 86 recorded children on a 2/3rds sample  
 3 Figures supplied by Aston St Mary's School (March 2003)  
 4 This is the last remaining food retail outlet in the parish. The Aston Post Office closed in June 1999