

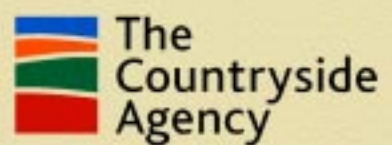


ASTON

HERTFORDSHIRE



PARISH PLAN
2004





Aston Village

Photo courtesy of Stevenage Borough Council

Foreword

Agreement for the preparation of a Village Design Statement (VDS) was reached at the Annual Parish Meeting in April 2001. In October 2001, a special Parish Meeting agreed to supersede the VDS with a more robust and comprehensive Parish Plan that will help inform the Community Planning process through the medium of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

The Aston Parish Plan is a product of active community engagement and draws on over 50 years of relevant history to document our heritage and values, to inform our future. It has taken three years to research the material required to prepare this document and engaged the active participation of a quarter of Aston's residents in its creation.

Change is inevitable and unpredictable. Aston will, by means of this plan, pro-actively exercise a significant degree of control over its future, rather than acting reactively and inconsistently to situations as they occur. Based on the findings of the Parish Plan Group, the policies contained in this document will help shape Aston's future.

The Aston Parish Plan will:

Advise statutory bodies, developers and residents alike that Aston has unique qualities and characteristics that require special consideration.

Create local planning guidance, noted by East Herts Council, advising Planning Authorities, Planning Appeal Inspectors and potential developers of what is, and what is not, acceptable to the people of Aston.

Help with the management of change, the planning of facilities and services and provide a perspective for the shaping of the future of the Parish.

Analysis of the fabric of the Parish and research into Aston's history, architecture, facilities, geology, hydrology, topography, ecology and community, has resulted in the creation of a fascinating historical document, containing an astonishing wealth of fascinating facts, figures, anecdotes, pictures, diagrams and maps vividly illustrating Aston's character and unique identity.

*Allan McNab
Chairman*

*Stephen Sypula
Convenor*

Aston Parish Plan Group

*David Stimpson
Chairman*

Aston Parish Council

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1.1 Introduction to the Plan

Aston's Parish Plan, the first produced in East Hertfordshire, is one of few in the Country.

It covers a wide range of subject areas that are important to the residents of Aston, ranging from building design statements to key issues affecting its relationship with Stevenage, from ecological and archaeological considerations to housing, business and highways matters. Most importantly the plan looks to protect stated Parish values and seeks to support the culture and ethos of a vital English village.

The plan and its policies are founded on research, evidence and public soundings. Little evidence of developments affecting Aston's boundaries, its economic and social profile, or residents' feelings about the Parish were readily documented. Much primary research was therefore required to map, and agree with a number of statutory bodies and residents, the many changes that have affected Aston since the early 1950's. The Parish Council will undertake future updates on a regular basis.

This plan comes into effect on 1st January 2005

1.2 Location and Area

The entire Parish is within the Metropolitan Green belt and is designated in the East Hertfordshire Local Plan (1999) as a Landscape Conservation Area.

Aston Parish lies on the extreme western boundary of the administrative authority of East Herts Council and on the eastern boundary of Stevenage Borough Council. It is bounded by the civil Parishes of Walkern (NE), Benington (E), Watton (SE) and Datchworth (S).

The Parish covers 712 hectares running broadly SSE to NNW in direction. It straddles the strategic ridgeline between the valleys of the Aston Brook and the River Beane. Overlooking Stevenage to the west and the Beane Valley to the east, the ridgeline is a significant planning watershed. It is endorsed as a natural boundary by planning authorities and other interests.

Its area is now 75% of that which existed prior to the advent of Stevenage New Town. At its extreme it is 7km long with a maximum width of 1.4km, narrowing to 600 metres from Stringers Lane to south of Holbrook Farm at the River Beane. Figure 1 identifies the existing boundaries in red and the earlier Parish boundaries in blue.

1.3 How this Plan was produced

This Parish Plan evolved as understanding of Parish needs and values were clarified and evidenced.

The Annual Parish Meeting in April 2001 sanctioned investigation into a Village Design Statement (VDS). Twenty-two residents volunteered to help map out a potential programme and scope the project. At the inaugural meeting on 21 July 2001, the group agreed a constitution and a Steering Group of six residents.

During the summer of 2001 it became clear that a VDS had some limitations. A new scheme, then being advocated by the Countryside Agency under its Vital Villages Programme, entitled Parish & Town Plans, appeared more comprehensive and relevant.

The Steering Group mapped the content and rationale for an Aston Parish Plan which, after consultation, was approved by the Parish. Following endorsement by the Parish Council and the Aston Village Society, a formal grant application was made to the Countryside Agency. This was approved in March 2002.

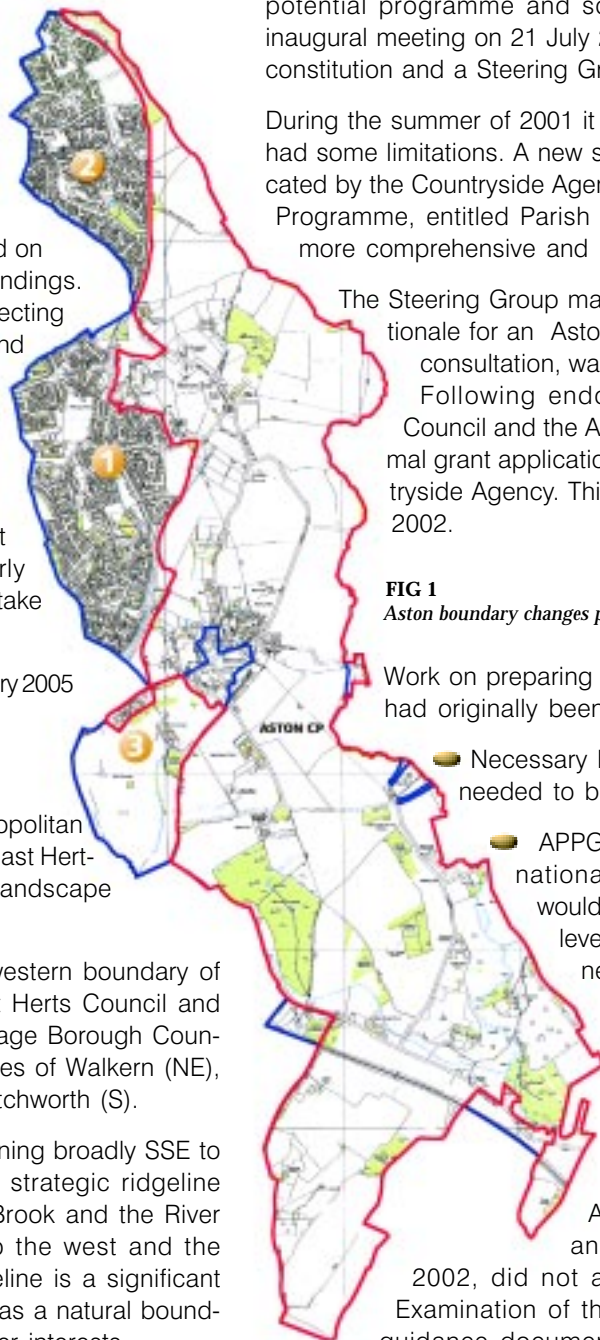
FIG 1
Aston boundary changes post 1948

Work on preparing the plan took longer than had originally been anticipated because:

- Necessary background information needed to be thoroughly researched.
- APPG was concerned that the national census data for 2001 would not be available at Parish level until 2004, prompting the need to undertake a local census to compare Aston's present situation with that of 1991 and 1981.
- Parish Plan Guidance from the Countryside Agency, which had been anticipated by September 2002, did not arrive until March 2003.

Examination of the Countryside Agency's guidance documents confirmed the belief that, if APPG was to fully deliver growing Parish expectations, a more broadly based plan embracing character, Parish values, design statements and concerns was required.

And so this plan came into being.



1.4 Engaging those that wanted to be part of the process

The APPG has sought actively to engage as many as wished to contribute to the process. It has:

- Reported to, and sought guidance from three Parish Meetings, two Special Parish Meetings, and two AGM's of the Aston Village Society.
- Made active use of the Parish Magazine to keep Parishioners abreast of developments.
- Created a dedicated Parish email-net to reach over 50% of all households.
- Undertaken four complete household leaflet drops covering a range of subject areas.
- Developed the www.astonparish.net website to address civic needs (recognised by the Countryside Agency as being an example of good practice).
- Undertaken two Parish surveys. The first looked to update the 1991 National Census intelligence and provide an assessment of public issues and concerns. The Second, conducted in conjunction with Hertfordshire Highways, to assess residents' views on traffic, travel, general highway and road safety matters.
- Organised a two day traffic census to measure traffic volumes using Aston's lanes.
- Established the Aston Travel Plan Forum, involving Hertfordshire Highways, Aston St Mary's School, Aston Pre-School Group, Hertfordshire Constabulary, and the County Council's Passenger Transport Unit to assess and progress concerns and potential solutions to Aston's traffic and travel concerns.
- Promoted a Housing Workshop, part sponsored and supported by East Herts Council.

Consultation mechanisms have encouraged nearly a quarter of all households to be involved in the process.

1.5 The purpose of the plan

The plan guides the acceptability of the form and substance of potential 'development', whether this is of a residential or commercial nature. It does this by defining locally acceptable standards, values and other significant matters. Compliance with this plan or code will, in general, guide Parish acceptance of any such proposals.

Guidance and a rationale are provided in the plan document so that developers and designers are aware of residents' expectations in terms of new or altered buildings, whether residential or commercial in nature.

The plan is also designed to provide an initial bridge between the Parish and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in helping to shape the LSP's evolving Community Plan, as recommended by the Countryside Agency¹.

1.6 Who will benefit from the Aston Parish Plan?

Everyone should benefit from this Parish Plan. For the first time Aston has a statement of what is, and is not, considered acceptable to those that live and work in the Parish.

For those that may be considering extensions or larger scale development, of either a residential or commercial nature, the plan, in broad terms will guide the nature and form of the application.

1.7 Structure of and access to the plan document and supporting papers

The Aston Parish Plan framework comprises three main components. This document forms the substance of the plan. It provides the key rationale for the Parish Plan policies.

Annexes containing summary policies, maps, supplemental research papers and other evidence support the Plan. The third component provides data and graphics of the Aston Traffic Survey conducted in the Spring of 2003. Copies of all documents are available from Roy Falder, the Parish Clerk, for a nominal charge, or may be inspected free of charge by appointment with the Clerk by phoning 01438 352505. The plan and its supporting Annexes may be obtained in PDF format from www.astonparish.net

Actions required to support the Parish Plan policies are shown in green within the body of the text: All action statements are summarised in Annex 10. An action matrix is provided at the end of this document. Aston Parish Council, which is responsible for the implementation of this plan, will determine priorities and appropriate completion dates for all actions.

Parish Plan policies, summarised in Annex 9, are provided at the end of each relevant section in blue.

A monochrome copy of the agreed plan has been provided to all households and business premises in the Parish. A full colour version may be purchased.

If you are new to the area or have a planning interest in Aston and wish to purchase a copy of the 2004 Aston Parish Plan, please contact the Clerk to the Parish Council, Roy Falder on 01438 352505 or email Stephen Sypula on parishplans@communityinitiatives.org.uk

Action: A1

The Parish Council will consider, review and publish a statement of prioritised actions and dates necessary to implement the views of the Parish as expressed during the Parish Plan formal consultation process 2004.

¹ Planning for Vital Communities - Good Practice in linking Parish plans, market town plans and community plans. Ref CA 173, June 2004

1.8 Protecting Aston's boundaries

Aston has lost significant and valued tracts of land to Stevenage's earlier expansion. Not surprisingly, protecting Aston from further urban encroachment and coalescence remains the Parish's (and that of many Stevenage residents), strategic priority.

Following the publication of the Stevenage Master Plan in 1954 a series of consultations and plan revisions to expand Stevenage to house between 60,000 and 140,000 people were produced. In 1978 the final proposal for expansion into the Poplars and Chells areas gained Government approval. This defined a new eastern boundary of the town roughly following the line of what is now Gresley Way up to Pin Green in the north. The development proposals were vigorously resisted by a campaigning group in Aston known as the Campaign Against Stevenage Expansion (CASE).

CASE, then supported by the local MP Shirley Williams, is not to be confused with the new CASE established in 1997, referred to locally as CASEW, set up to fight expansion West of Stevenage.

The fight against Poplars was lost and 2,845 new homes² were built to house a population of 7,000. A supermarket, community centre, surgery, pharmacy, public house and a residential and nursing home were included in the development.

In the 1980's Stevenage Borough Council sought and gained approval to transfer further Aston lands, known as Chells Manor³, to meet its growing housing need ... then projected at 102,000. The boundary change, approved by Parliament in December 1986 (SI 1986 - 2278) saw a further 70 hectares transfer from the Parish. 6,000 people now live in 2,726 new homes that have been built, along with a community centre, surgery, public house, and three small retail outlets - all on earlier Aston Parish land.

As a result of the combined boundary revisions, 187 hectares to the east of Aston, now forming the Poplars, Chells and Chells Manor areas of Stevenage⁴, was lost to the Parish. An earlier boundary revision saw some 52 hectares of Aston Park transfer to Stevenage, becoming what is now Stevenage Golf Centre⁵. At the same time the Parish also saw its heartland comprising what is now St Mary's Close, Yeomans Drive and about 33% of Park Farm (Centre Field) transfer to Stevenage. Fortunately these lands together with Long Ridge, reverted back to Aston in 1984⁴. In total, 250 hectares, comprising some 25% of Aston's former boundary, has been transferred to Stevenage. This provided new homes for 13,000 people, and increased the town's population by 20%.

Action: AA 1

The Parish Council will promote a boundary adjustment between Stevenage Borough Council and East Herts Council to regain lands known variously as Oslocks or Elm Green, in exchange for land to the SE of Box Wood west of Gresley Way.

Lands to the south of the Parish have not been exempt from change. Successive boundary changes between Aston Parish, Stevenage Borough Council and Datchworth Parish⁷ have further denuded Aston's boundaries by 12 hectares. The revised boundaries have left the area known as Hooks Cross sitting between 3 Parishes and two administrative district authority areas. Some residents in Hooks Cross have suggested that they be transferred to Datchworth, with which they have greater affinity.

Action: AA 2

Given the irregular nature of the boundaries in the Hooks Cross area, which straddles three Parishes and two administrative authorities and, given views expressed in the Parish Survey, the Parish Council will canvass residents' views in the area to determine of which Parish they would most prefer to be a part.

To summarise: In contrast to its earlier peaceful and uneventful past, the Parish has more recently been buffeted by successive boundary and development proposals. Astonishingly, rather than weaken the spirit of the Parish, external pressures have resulted in developing a vital and strong community of interests unified in protecting Aston's individual existence and resisting further coalescence with Stevenage.

Policy A Boundaries

1 *The 'green corridor' between Stevenage and Aston/Aston End will be defended. Proposals that would result in the coalescence of Stevenage with Aston/Aston End will be resisted. (Section 1.8)*

For the purpose of this policy this 'green corridor' is defined as all that land bounded on the west by Gresley Way from the junction with Broadwater Lane to the junction with the Walkern Road, apart from about 460m where the boundary skirts the Edmunds Drive development.

2 *The Parish Council will periodically review its boundaries to ensure that they are relevant to those that live within the evolving community of interests that has association with Aston. (Section 1.8)*

² Marked 1 on the nominal definitive map (Page 1)

³ Marked 2 on the nominal definitive map (Page 1)

⁴ East Hertfordshire and Stevenage (Areas) Order 1984 (S.I. 60/1984)

⁵ Marked 3 on the nominal definitive map (Page 1)

2.1 Parish opinion of Aston and the surrounding countryside

Views and opinions of residents were assessed as part of the Parish Census and Opinion Survey 2003. Over 67% of respondents ranked rural views and open spaces 2nd and 4th as their most liked and valued benefit of living in Aston.

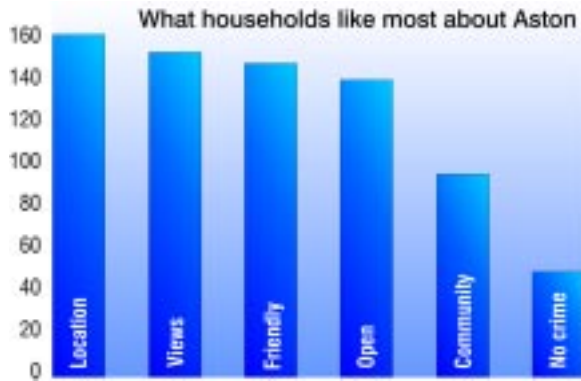


Fig 2¹

Rural location, views from and of the Parish were identified as 'likes' by 75% and 71% respectively. The strength of feeling on this issue was clearly demonstrated in 1997,

when the Green Belt between Aston and Gresley Way was threatened at the last Structure Plan EIP (See Section 4.2).

Aston is not visible from the roads that surround it due to its topography and the dense hedges and mature trees that surround it.

Photographs taken from outside the village, looking towards it, illustrate how little can be seen of Aston's built environment.



Looking west towards Aston Farm

Looking south towards Aston over Redwings from Gresley Way



Looking east towards Aston from Sainsburys

¹ Taken from the Aston Parish Census & Opinion Survey January 2003.



Looking over the Beane Valley from the Village Hall

Action: AD 4

Monitor all proposals so that Stevenage remains only peripherally visible from Aston.

2.2.1 Statutory protection - Metropolitan Green Belt

The entire Parish is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt.

One of the stated purposes of including land within the Metropolitan Green Belt is to prevent coalescence of town and country. Close proximity of Stevenage requires strict compliance with the District Council's policies on the Green Belt to avoid 'engulfing' the Parish, as happened to Aston's diocese's sister village of Shephall.

Stevenage Golf Course, whilst located outside the eastern boundary of the Parish, is also within the Metropolitan Green Belt and therefore currently acts as a buffer to further development.

East Herts Council's adopted and proposed Local Plan policies relating to the Green Belt are reproduced in full in Annexes 11 and 12.

2.2.2 Landscape Policy

The Adopted East Hertfordshire Local Plan (December 1999) identifies Landscape Conservation Areas where special consideration is given to the landscape implications of proposed developments. Particular regard is given to the setting, siting, design and external appearance of such development as is permitted.

The whole of Aston Parish falls within a Landscape Conservation Area. The relevant Local Plan policies can be found in Annexes 11 and 12.

East Herts Council has also recently completed a landscape character assessment of the District.

Aston Parish falls into four Character Areas: Character Area 38 (Aston Estate Farmland) and Character Area 39 (Middle Beane Valley) with small parts in Area 40



Character Area 38

(Bramfield – Datchworth Sloping Farmland) and Area 70 (Woodhall Park and Watton-at-Stone Slopes). A copy of the two major assessments can be found at Annex 24. The assessments identify key characteristics and provide guidelines and a strategy for managing change.

The Hertfordshire Structure Plan Landscape Character Supplementary Planning Guidance Consultation Draft October 2001 also provides useful direction on using landscape character information.



Character Area 39

2.2.3 Aston Village Conservation Area

The concept of Conservation Areas was introduced in 1967 in order to be able to conserve whole groups of buildings and their settings in addition to the listing of individual buildings.

Much of the village of Aston is designated a Conservation Area although a number of the most historic buildings are outside it. East Herts Council started producing character assessments for each of the 42 Conservation Areas in its area in 1992, but this process has not yet reached Aston. A map of the existing Conservation Area is attached (Map 4). This also shows a suggested extension of the Conservation Area being proposed by the Parish Plans Group.

Action: AA3

The Parish Council will seek the support of the District Council to extend the Aston Conservation Area in accordance with the proposed new boundaries shown in Map 5.

2.2.4 Listed Buildings

Listed Buildings form a nationally important and irreplaceable resource in representing the best of the country's historic and architectural heritage. When a building is listed, it is recognised as of special architectural or historical interest or both, and its details become part

of a public record. Most significantly, the building is immediately protected by law, and any changes to it must first receive listed building consent.

Listed Buildings are graded to show their relative importance:

- Grade I buildings are those of exceptional interest
- Grade II* are particularly important buildings of more than special interest
- Grade II are of special interest, warranting every effort to preserve them.

Protecting the setting of a listed building can be as important as retaining the historic fabric and interest of the building itself. The setting is often an essential part of the building's character, especially if the gardens, ancillary buildings or hard landscaping have been laid out to complement its design or function. Development proposals that affect the setting of a listed building must therefore be carefully designed through the massing, materials and location to preserve or enhance the architectural or historic interest of the building.

There are a number of Listed Buildings in Aston and throughout the Parish – these are shown on the map attached at Annex 7.

2.3 Contemporary Land Use

Aston has a record of adopting a progressive balanced and informed view to land use.

Lands, once part of this rural community, have given way to strategic and local retail outlets and the development of 5,570 new homes in Stevenage, housing 13,000 people. Land use in the Parish has not stood still elsewhere - nowhere is this more evident than with regard to earlier farmed land.

Until the mid 1970's Aston was essentially an agricultural community. Even as late as 1991, 10% of Aston's residents still had agricultural interests. The advent of milk quotas, cheap imported alternatives and aggressive wholesale pricing policies changed the face of British farming. Aston's farmers, like those elsewhere sought other outlets to make a living.

In its heyday most of the Parish area was either under the plough for animal feed stuffs and cereal production, or used for grazing.

Within many Parishioners' living memory Aston farmed 600 head of dairy/beef cattle, 500 pigs and upwards of 20,000 turkeys and chicken. Animal husbandry and related products were therefore very much in evidence and pervaded the landscape.

Local milk production and distribution was well established during this period. Lords Farm at Aston End had 120 milking cows, heifers and calves. It produced enough milk to deliver to Stevenage, Shephall, Datchworth, Knebworth and Woolmer Green - five miles from the farm. That ceased in the late 1960's as the farm turned its hand to farming swine, largely for pork production. It achieved a quality standard that won the East of England's 'Best Carcase' Award. In the mid 1960's, neighbouring White Farm was awarded the UK Model Farm Award for its innovative farming techniques. In those days Aston End enjoyed a reputation for agricultural excellence nationally.

With the change of focus at Lords Farm, Astonbury Farm took over the mantle of milk supply to the area. As an experimental animal feed farm, then owned by Rank Hovis McDougall, it had 450 head of dairy cattle including 150 milking cows.

Poplar Farm, like many, also saw a significant shift in emphasis during this period. Whilst still continuing its cereal production, the loss of the bulk of its acreage



The old turkey farm, Tatlers Lane

through compulsory purchase by the New Towns Commission to form Poplars, now in Stevenage, required the owners to seek alternative revenue sources. From the 1960's until the early 1990's Poplar Farm complex moved into egg production and at its height had 4,000 reared birds and

10,000 hens producing 3 million eggs a year.

The 1978 plan of the Stevenage Development Corporation saw 117 hectares, largely cereal, taken out of production at Poplar Farm. Expansion of Stevenage at Chells Manor saw a further loss of 70 hectares.

The Parish has subsequently supported diversification of farming lands, where appropriate.

- A turkey farm in Aston End converted to build 3 detached bungalows. Another converted to light industrial use.
- Existing farm buildings developed to house a rural business park supporting 12 business interests, employing 125 personnel.
- Existing farm buildings converted for horse riding, tuition, equestrian retail and stabling for 120 horses at Aston End, Holbrooks Farm and Hooks Cross.
- Barn conversions for residential purposes have been supported at Holbrook Farm, Aston Park

Farm, Astonbury, Astonbury Farm, and within the Grounds of Aston Dene (Oddies Barn).

- Barn conversions adjacent to Centre Field at Park Farm, in the centre of Aston, have also been supported for craft and light industrial use as have barns at Astonbury Farm to the south of Aston, for business use.

Conversely, whilst opposed at the time, a smallholding developed opposite Shackle Dell, Aston End Road, known as Brookfield Farm was put to intensive agricultural use. The site has been developed and now accommodates a private household and a rural butcher's retail outlet. Whilst Brookfield Farm generates increased traffic movement and is somewhat over zealous with its signage, both of which are of concern, its current status is generally endorsed.



Three bungalows on the Turkey Farm plot

Action: AC 1

The Parish Council will work with statutory agencies to ensure that business signage accords with Parish Plan Policy PCI(c)

The Parish Council has not steered away from making other difficult recommendations in the broader community interest. For example, it supported new family homes on agricultural land and development within the Village Conservation Area to enable the Parish to acquire Centre Field.

In the mid 1960's Aston Village saw the first of a number of developments that would change the feel of Aston.

Until then the land to the north of Benington Road to New Park Lane, and east of Aston End Road to what is now known as School Lane was largely waste land, save for the old School House on Aston End Road and allotments in the Garden Field area.

During the period, 18 houses were constructed between Aston Cottage and School Lane, and on the allotment lands now known as Garden Field.

In the mid 1970's the remaining quadrant of land to the east of Aston End Road was developed to house some 55 mixed tenure homes. Now known as Brookfield and Wright's Orchard, the mixed development provided much needed smaller accommodation for many younger indigenous residents. Since enlarged to meet extended family needs, the development is very much part of an integrated village community.

Also in the mid 1970's development of a further seven detached houses extended the then northern fringe of the Village envelope within the Metropolitan Green Belt, now known as Arundel Close.

Collectively, these eighty homes increased the number of properties in the Village core by nearly 60%. Not surprisingly, that affected the indigenous culture that was then Aston. It also led to a significant downward shift in the average age within the Parish as a whole, a new Primary School that thrived with local pupils, and a new vitality that saw the local funding of its Village Hall, the launch of the Village Society, the winning in two successive years of the Hertfordshire Best Kept Village competition, and a range of clubs and facilities not seen in Aston previously.



St Mary's Close

In order to support households with growing family sizes to remain in the Village, the Parish Council did not generally oppose house extensions. During the period 1985 to December 2002 some 90 extension applications

were submitted to East Herts Council, equivalent to 30% of the number of households in 1981. As a result of this earlier policy the number of smaller, less expensive houses in the Parish has declined as a percentage of the available housing stock². Despite trying to address this in recent years, such extensions continue to be approved.

Most significantly, in 1986 the Parish Council agreed to housing development on land within the Village Conservation Area. Eight luxury, detached homes in St Mary's Close were endorsed in exchange for the transfer of land at Park Farm on a 999 year lease, the purpose of which was to form a village owned, perpetual green field, now known as Centre Field.



Centre Field, towards St Mary's Close from the pavilion

2.4 The Beane Valley - An important nature and hydrological resource

Situated on chalk, the Parish is fortunate in having a strong network of underground springs which feed various ponds, brooks and rivers (see Section 2.6.3) which occasionally rise to the surface, as with the Aston End Brook. The springs may be more obvious during spells of prolonged wet weather when large ponds appear in unlikely places, causing flooding. There are a number of water meadows and flood plains both in the Parish and in adjacent fields, which collect the considerable volume of water that winter rains produce, providing a safe but controlled environment. Nevertheless, some areas have been prone to flooding in wet winters causing distress to residents.

The water resources of Aston Parish are of great importance to nearby Stevenage, which draws 85% of its water supply from Aston from pumping stations at Stoney Ford and Whitehall in the Beane valley.

Three valleys Water have a licence to pump up to five million gallons a day from the aquifers in the river Beane Valley. As a consequence, even in times of drought, water is still abstracted lowering the water table until the river ceases to flow. When first measured by the Environment Agency in 1998, the water table had been pumped significantly below its natural level. This problem is being addressed by the Environment Agency (see Annex 22) and a report was due in Autumn 2003.

In December 2003 the Parish Council was advised that measures to reduce extraction from the Beane Valley had to be put on hold pending studies into the water needs of the Stansted expansion and the proposed M11 development, further down the water system in the Stort Valley. The interaction between all the small Hertfordshire rivers, Ash, Beane, Mimram, Rib and Ver is also to be studied, as is the potential for additional water sources lower down the Beane Valley. Therefore, we are unlikely to see action to restore the Beane for some years.

Action: AD 5

The Parish Council will support the River Beane Restoration Association in pressing the authorities to ensure that the River Beane is restored to its natural flow i.e. perennial flow downstream of Walkern.

2.5 Aston values its ancient past which has shaped its settlement pattern

The Parish of Aston has a richness and interest that owes much to its topography, geological make-up as well as archaeological evidence of earlier settlements.

² See also Table 22 of the 1991 Census for evidence

2.5.1 Form and topography

For the purpose of this plan the Parish of Aston comprises three locations: Hooks Cross, Aston Village and Aston End. Each is embraced within both the Metropolitan Green Belt and viewed as a single Landscape Conservation Area for formal planning purposes. Aston End is both historically and culturally linked to Aston, as recognised by Aston Parish Council (APC) Policy P4.

Despite the loss of 25% of its western area to Stevenage over time, Aston retains a tranquil and rural perspective.

Adjacent Towns

The town closest to the Parish is Stevenage with a population of around 76,000 which seeks to grow to 125,000 by 2021. Although only a short distance from the village, due to geographical layout, only glimpses of the peripheral part of the town are visible. Stevenage, however, provides key amenities that the Parish lacks.

Hooks Cross is served by Watton at Stone, a larger village with small shops, pubs, farms, railway station and a local school. The Watton at Stone by-pass has taken the through-traffic around the edge of the village, but traffic is still channelled through Hooks Cross which carries an average of 18,500 vehicles each day. A by-pass for Hooks Cross has been included in highway plans for many years and now forms part of the Government's accelerated Capital Programme.

2.5.2 Geology

The Eastern part of the Parish forms the western half of the River Beane valley. This consists of well drained calcareous loams over chalky drift on the valley slopes - with chalk visible on the plateau to the west (Aston End and Aston) with slowly permeable calcareous clay soils over chalky till.

To the south of the Parish the land is undulating parkland dominated by the Astonbury and Frogmore estates with slowly permeable calcareous clay soils over chalky till with a small gravel plateau and chalk quite close to the surface (Ref: Landscape Character Assessment Area 38, Herts CC Landscape Character Assessment, Evaluation and Guidelines for Southern Hertfordshire, October 2001 - see Annex 24).

2.5.3 Archaeology

There are a number of sites of archaeological interest in the Parish showing that the River Beane Valley has been occupied since paleolithic man 150,000 years ago. The main sites and finds listed by the County Council are shown on Map 2 (page 51). Notes on the most significant ones are set out as follows:

- **Early Paleolithic** - Acheulean hand axe
- **Neolithic** - Hand axes and other flints and about 20 crop-marked ring ditches
- **Bronze Age** - crop-marked ring ditches, other evidence of occupation, pottery and bronze implements
- **Iron Age** - evidence of occupancy, gold coins, cremation burial site which yielded a rare engraved bronze mirror (British Museum)
- **Roman** - extensive findings of pottery, tiles and coins and the site of a Roman villa where a small bath house has been excavated, a dodecahedron and a bronze cockerel (both in The British Museum)
- **Saxon** - evidence of a Saxon or Danish camp.
- **Medieval** - double bladed axe.
- **Post-medieval** - two planned farms, early Tudor sword, site of former smockmill.

Apart from the three objects noted as being in the British Museum, others are exhibited at Hertford, St Albans, Stevenage and Abel Smith museums.

2.6 The Parish places great importance on protecting its natural features and habitats

A feature of the Parish, which distinguishes it from the adjacent town of Stevenage, is the narrow lanes, ancient hedgerows, the abundance of trees and copses and a wealth of other natural habitats providing cover for many endangered species.

2.6.1 Woodland and Nature Reserves

The Parish contains eight sites designated by Hertfordshire County Council as County Wildlife Sites. They are home to an extensive range of endangered and protected species of plants and animals. (See Map 3, page 52)

The largest site is Astonbury Wood which was planted to serve Astonbury Manor House. The woodland remains today as an area noted for its bluebells. Running through the wood are reminders of an earlier history with a section of a drovers' trail, used to drive sheep and cattle to market in Hertford. The Woodland boundary has remained unchanged for well over 150 years.



Bluebells in Astonbury Wood

Currently owned by Herts County Council it is managed by Hertfordshire Outdoors and the Astonbury Wood Management Committee. It is an educational nature reserve with its own field centre for teaching.

Thousands of schoolchildren and adults pass through its gates each year. Access to the wood is by permit only.

The remainder, in decreasing order of size, are :-

Frogmore Pit

To the south of Astonbury, near to Frogmore House, is an old quarry, no longer worked for gravel. Hidden from the road, this is also a delightful nature reserve with many trees, wild flowers and a lake which forms during the wet months. It houses much wildlife and is managed by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife TruSt

New Wood

Ancient woodland in the north of the Parish.

The Rookery

In the south-east of the Parish - formerly a 19th c. plantation, excavated for gravel, back-filled and replanted in 1989.

Stocking Grove Wood and Hopground Spring

Ancient woodland with ponds at the southern edge of the Parish.

Frogmore Hall and Grounds

Old park and grassland - important for protected species.

Astonbury

Land, buildings and ponds - important for protected species.

2.6.2 Hedgerows and trees

There are numerous hedgerows in the Parish - both marking field boundaries and lining most of the lanes through the Parish. Since 1997, with some exceptions, hedgerows over 20 metres long have been under statutory protection³. There are also regulations giving further protection to hedgerows in the Conservation Area.

Trees

The trees on the west side of Aston are particularly fine; great oaks, beeches, sycamores, ash and poplar. There are also many fine trees in the village itself; some in the Conservation Area already have Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) although trees over 7.5cm diameter at 1.5m in height are automatically protected in the Conservation Area.



New woodland planting, Chells Farm

In the past, there were several large houses with extensive grounds whose owners were keen tree planters, and although these buildings have now been divided into more manageable units, the magnificent and now mature trees remain.

Aston House

Now demolished, still has a great many large specimens in its former grounds and park (now Stevenage Golf Club and Yeomans Drive).

Aston Dene

The Dene and its successor as the rectory, Gregor House, both now split into several properties, retain beautiful, mature oak, beech, sycamore and poplar. There is an immense old oak behind Aston Dene Lodge and several magnificent Scots Pines at Gregor House.

Park Farm House

On the corner of Aston Lane and Stringers Lane, Park Farm House has some very large oaks along its boundary.

Mill House

The site of an old windmill, has some huge old ash trees visible from the Beane Valley.

Bareleigh

Now split into separate dwellings, has some huge mature limes, beeches, a walnut and a very large London Plane - with a pair of resident tawny owls.

St Mary's Church

The churchyard also has some significant old trees.

General

Tree planting is actively encouraged. Programmes have been undertaken on Village Field and in the churchyard. Residents were earlier encouraged to plant trees, provided through the Parish Council, in their grounds where they can be seen by passers by. In the last few years new plantations were established at Chells Farm and in the grounds of Aston Dene.

Action: AD 1

The Parish Council will apply to EHC for TPO's on the finest trees outside the Conservation Area

The golf course, formerly the parkland of Aston House, provides a verdant, open aspect between the village and Stevenage but the geographical layout keeps it hidden. Many mature trees, a small wood and a pond stocked with fish add to the beauty of the landscape.

Action: AD 3

The Parish Council will check with Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) whether relevant trees on the golf course are protected by TPOs. If not seek to encourage SBC to apply TPO's accordingly.

³ Hedgerow Regulations 1997 S.I. 1160

2.6.3 Rivers and water courses

Rivers

The river Beane flanks Aston's eastern boundary. A tributary of the Lea and hence the Thames, it rises from the chalk beyond Walkern and flows through the Beane Valley, a beautiful, natural area created from prolonged erosion by earlier glacial waters. It was once a much larger river with boating and fishing activities. There are records of fishing rights being leased and boating parties held at Frogmore Hall, a large estate on the edge of the Parish, where brown trout were common in the clean chalk water.



River Beane at Whitehall

Brooks

The two main brooks are Stevenage Brook, which enters the Parish close to Astonbury Wood and Aston End Brook which forms part of the western boundary of the Parish and joins Stevenage Brook at the golf course. The joint brook then flows into the river Beane at The Rookery. Both are culverted in parts, maintaining a good flow most of the time, often carrying more water than the river itself as they do not suffer from excessive extraction.

Ponds and their sources

Ponds may exist due to natural drainage or seepage where they lie below ground water table level, or may be man-made features dependent upon natural impermeable deposits or an artificial lining to retain water. A few local ponds have an inflow and outflow, acting to some extent as a balancing mechanism in the drainage system. The inflow may be from a ditch, stream drainage pipe or gutter, or from a local spring. There are pollution problems with ponds receiving run-off from road surfaces where oil film can affect the quality of water, as with the one located at the junction of Tatlers Lane and Short Lane.

Ponds have been used over the centuries for a multitude of different purposes and have played a fundamental role in rural life. Early maps of Hertfordshire indicated a pond in vir-



Pond at Astonbury

tually every field for stock watering and some farms had as many as twelve or thirteen ponds. The majority of ponds in the Parish are thought to be artificial. During the last century, however, the importance of ponds has declined because of changed agricultural practices and, with no further economic or functional use, ponds of all types have fallen into disuse and either become victims of neglect, pollution and general misuse or have simply disappeared under building development.



Pond at Oaks Cross Farm

Improved drainage techniques have resulted in culverts, deepening ditches and streams contributing to the loss of ponds. Within Hertfordshire, thousands of hectares of land, previously too wet for use as anything but rough pasture, have been drained and reseeded for intensive grazing, or ploughed and cultivated for arable crops.

The drainage of catchment areas, lowering of water tables and deepening and straightening of watercourses has had a devastating effect upon the ponds in the area. This has important implications for wildlife, especially aquatic invertebrates, amphibians and birds.

There remain at least seventeen ponds in the Parish, many of which have a long history associated with their agricultural use. It is critical to wildlife that these are preserved and properly managed.

The main surviving ponds in the Parish are:

Oxypiss Pond, situated behind Oddie's Barn, was a typical farmyard duck pond. It has recently been renovated and is now privately owned.

The pond in Little Orchard acts as a useful drain for excess water from Aston End Road and drains into Oxypiss Pond.

Due to the division of land, Whitney Pond at the end of School Lane has three separate owners. It was allegedly named after Major Whitney, a local highwayman who, it is said, watered his horse here. It sits on a clay cap and retains a good level of water throughout the year. Occasional maintenance ensures the viability of this feature which is on the edge of the recreational field. The local school uses the pond for educational purposes.

At the junction of Short Lane and Tatlers Lane is a small pond on the corner of Rustic Farm field which has recently been created by a landowner in order to enjoy a spring which rises at this point. During winter months this corner is prone to flooding and severe and prolonged icing of Tatlers Lane.

An old stock pond, recently enlarged and improved, is located at Oaks Cross Farm.

The pond by the drive to Astonbury Farm House is part of a natural drainage system that subsequently flows into the ponds on the adjacent golf course.

Action AD 6

Encourage landowners to improve the management of ponds and watercourses, and encourage environmental improvement groups to actively support this.

2.6.4 Environment Agency Policies and Recommendations

Buffer Zones

Watercourses, ponds and ecological sites should be protected from the negative impacts of new development through the inclusion of buffer zones in such developments. The parish will seek that a minimum of an 8 metre buffer zone from main rivers and a 5 metre buffer zone from any other watercourse or water body is provided as part of development proposals.

Buffer zones to watercourses are required for the following purposes:

- 1 to allow the watercourse to undergo natural processes of erosion and deposition, and associated changes in alignment and bank profile, without the need for artificial bank protection works and the associated destruction of natural bank habitat;
- 2 to provide for the terrestrial life stages of aquatic insects, for nesting of water-related bird species, and for bank dwelling small mammals;
- 3 to provide a "wildlife corridor" bringing more general benefits by linking a number of habitats and affording species a wider and therefore more robust and sustainable range of linked habitats;
- 4 to allow for the maintenance of a zone of natural character with vegetation that gives rise to a range of conditions of light and shade in the watercourse itself. This mix of conditions encourages proliferation of a wide range of aquatic species, including fish;
- 5 to allow, where appropriate, for the regrading of banks to a lower and safer profile, in areas where there is public access;
- 6 to prevent overshadowing of watercourses by buildings; and
- 7 to reduce the risk of accidental pollution from run-off.

Flood Risk

Development proposed in areas of land liable to flood, as shown on maps held by the Environment Agency, requires the submission of a Flood Risk Assessment.

The development may be at direct risk of flooding and may increase the risk of flooding elsewhere.

Culverting

The Environment Agency considers it beneficial for watercourses to remain open wherever possible for both flood defence and environmental purposes. Culverting can exacerbate the risk of flooding and increase the maintenance requirements for a watercourse. It also destroys wildlife habitats, damages the natural amenity and interrupts the continuity of the linear habitat of a watercourse. The Agency is, in general, opposed to the culverting of watercourses because of the adverse ecological, flood defence and other effects that are likely to arise. Wherever practical, the Agency will seek to have culverted watercourses restored to open channels.

Surface Water Drainage

With regards to surface water drainage schemes for new developments, the Environment Agency would advise that flow balancing be incorporated into the proposals. Consideration should also be given to Best Management Practice when considering surface water drainage.

The Environment Agency would advise that there are alternatives to conventional storage for the control of surface water run-off. These techniques not only cater for flood peak attenuation, but may also improve water quality and enhance the environment. Such systems include permeable pavements, grassed swales, infiltration trenches, ponds and wetlands. The developer would be advised to discuss with the Agency how these techniques might be applied at this site.

In order to manage the disposal of surface water in a more sustainable manner, taking into account flood risk and other environmental factors, the Environment Agency will recommend that restrictions are imposed on the discharge of surface water from any development site. The Agency suggests that a surface water drainage scheme should meet the following criteria:

- The surface water discharge from a site should be controlled to that of greenfield runoff rates (in the order of 2 - 5 l/sec/ha)
- A development site should be able to accommodate the 1 in 100 critical storm event without the flow balancing system being bypassed.

2.6.5 Flora and fauna

The whole Parish is an important reservoir of wildlife, supporting thriving populations of large mammals - fallow and muntjac deer, badgers (several active setts), foxes, hares etc. The many small ponds support amphibians - frogs, toads and newts - and a huge variety of birds which nest in the trees, hedges and gardens of the Parish. During the preparation of this plan a total of 80 species of birds was recorded.

Although no comprehensive surveys have been carried out on the ponds in the Parish, many are recorded by the Hertfordshire Biological Centre as being critically important to protected and endangered species such as water vole, smooth newt, great crested newt, common frog, grass snake and toads. The ponds support a good range of marginal and emergent plants and many species of dragon and damsel flies.

The importance of seasonal ponds which dry out occasionally, of which that in Little Orchard is a good example, should not be underestimated. They are often overlooked, or assumed to be 'lost'. In fact they support a vital range of specialised pond species and it is important that they are retained, and not deepened. The seasonal drying out of the pond gets rid of fish which are a major predator and allows other species to thrive. A surprisingly high number of temporary ponds support very rare species, particularly where they occur in semi-natural landscapes.

The areas where protected species have been identified are shown on a map contained in the appendices which augment this document.

2.6.6 Old highway lanes and verges

Lanterns Lane is typical of the old lanes that permeate Aston. It is a sunken lane formed from a river bed that still feeds Aston End Brook. The lane has been surfaced only comparatively recently. Like other sunken lanes, it was probably used by drovers to drive their sheep to market while carrying hurdles on their backs. At night they would use the hurdles to close off the lane, so penning their sheep in while they frequented the local hostelry. There are other sunken lanes in the village, indicating a long history of use.

Some of the hedges along the old roads and surrounding some of the old fields are likely to have been planted before the Roman invasion.

Action AF 5

Encourage preservation of the characteristic soft edges to lanes and sunken lanes.

2.6.7 Protecting and developing the footpath network

Volunteers in the Parish have adopted the major footpaths and report problems to the Parish Council, which works in partnership with the County Council's Parish Paths Partnership - 'P3', to maintain and improve the path network. This seeks to keep rights of way and countryside access open to the many visitors that look to Aston for recreational, health and leisure walking. (see Section 6.3.3)

The Parish Plan endorses and supports the District Council's existing policy. It particularly welcomes the proposed additional policy wording shown in *italics* as this is consistent with the objectives of the Aston Travel Plan and the increasing use of the horse for young adults, and general recreational purposes:

"The District Council will support the County Council, other District Councils, organisations and groups in the preservation, improvement, rationalisation, management and maintenance of the public rights of way network, *for recreational purposes and where appropriate, promoting the use of more sustainable methods of transport such as walking, cycling and horse riding.*"



Lanterns Lane north of Gresley Way

Policies D

Landscape & Environmental considerations

- 1 *The rural aspect of Aston, both from outside the village and looking out from within it shall be preserved. No development which destroys the "invisibility" from outside or the rural outlook from within will be endorsed. Section 2.1.*
- 2 *Development that adversely affects the sustainability of historic ponds, watercourses and other wildlife habitats will be resisted. An 8 metre buffer zone from main rivers and a 5 metre buffer zone from any other watercourse or water body will generally be required on the watercourses within the Parish in order to safeguard this precious resource. Section 2.6.3*
- 3 *Soft edges to lanes and sunken lanes which are a particular feature of Aston should be conserved, wherever possible. Section 2.6.5*
- 4 *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. Section 2.1*
- 5 *Where new development on land contains culverted sections of watercourse, opportunities will be sought for this culverting to be removed and the river channel reinstated into a natural form. Section 2.6.4.*

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) data¹ 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.

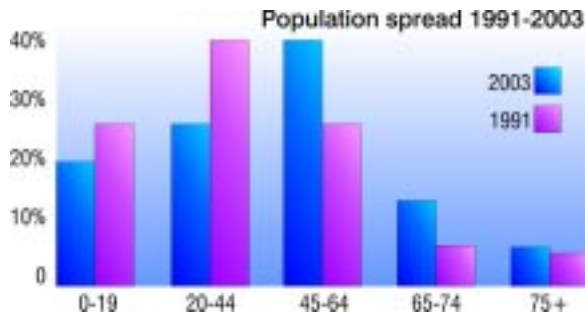


Fig 3

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%.

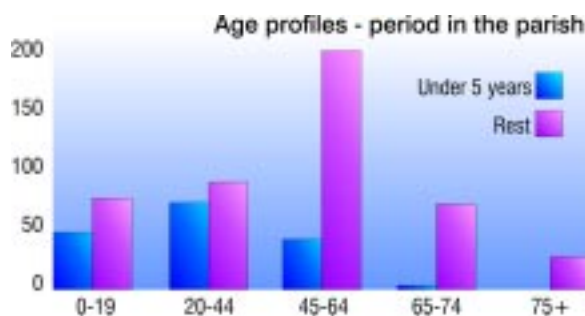


Fig 4

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.

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

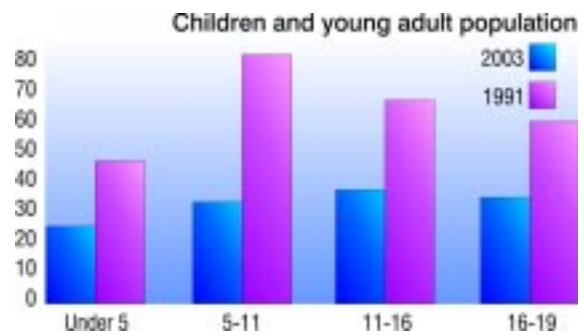


Fig 5

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

¹ OPCS References CEN81, WCP21 and CEN91, WCP21 and supporting tables

- The number 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 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 population².
- 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 so³.

Action: A 2

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



Aston village 1953

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)

3.2 Aston's built heritage

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 House

One of the largest and oldest buildings in the immediate area is Astonbury Manor House, 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



Astonbury Manor House

vassals of Stigend, Archbishop of Canterbury. No doubt a house stood on the land and history recounts that the manor of 'Estone' was presented to Henry 1st in dower to his second wife, eighteen year old Adelia, 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 clubhouse 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 they do not 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.



St Mary's Church

The Parish of Aston has a number of listed buildings which date back hundreds of years, the earliest being St Mary's Parish Church. 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.

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 and 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 Department for Transport'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, with the exception of lands overlooking or forming part of the Beane Valley, which should remain as open and natural as possible.
- 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 that 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.

SOCIAL & PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

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.



Junction of School Lane and Aston End Rd

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



The Rose & Crown

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.

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.

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, 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.



Beehive Cottage

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 Council will press the Highways Authority 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 manege 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 partly bounded by a hedgerow on the eastern side and paddock fencing to the west, which also forms the southern boundary of Centre Field.



Stringers Lane from Centre Field

in a very attractive development. Neighbouring barns have also been sensitively converted into small business units.



Stringers Lane from Centre Field

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.

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 House.

Astonbury Manor House 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.

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 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 Herts 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 to Edmunds Drive, be developed for further housing. Stevenage Borough Council opposed this and the Local Plan Inspector confirmed their case that the allotment site was not needed for housing purposes. In May 2003, the Borough Council further confirmed to APPG in writing, that it considered large scale housing development to the East of the Borough to be unsustainable in principle.

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.



Horses at White Farm, Aston End

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 shop⁴, 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.

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



An eroded Lanterns Lane, today

⁴ The only food retail outlet in the Parish. Aston Post Office closed in June 1999

It should be compared with the indicative photograph of Lanterns Lane prior to the opening of Gresley Way, shown in Section 2.6.5. 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.

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, Poplar 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.



Poplar Farmhouse

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 a 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.

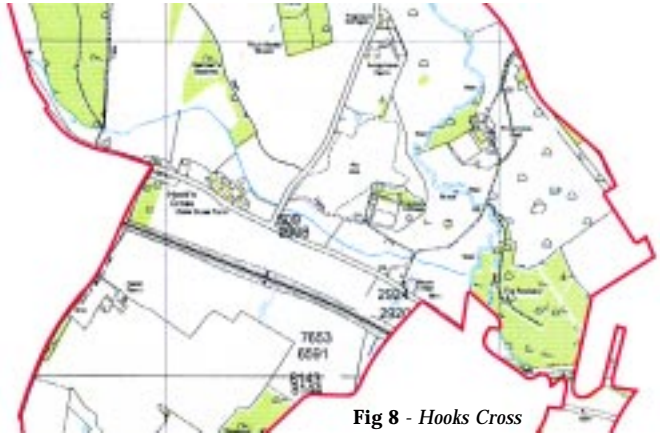


Fig 8 - Hooks Cross

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 sessions each week. In addition, it has another 35 stables for private hire which the owners are looking to increase to 55.



Oaks Cross Farmhouse

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

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



Manege at Oaks Cross Farm

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 Cottages

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

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)

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 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 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



Village Field from the 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 19th and early 20th 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 during the 1940's by Colonel Thompson 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. 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.



Frogmore Hall

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. Further information on the Middle Beane Valley can be found in the South Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment (see Annex 24).

Action: AD 7

The Parish Council will work with the Beane Valley Restoration Society, the Environment Agency, Hertfordshire County Council, land interests, and others, to produce a guide to protecting and sustaining the natural features of the Beane Valley, in Aston, and beyond.

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*
- 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).*
- 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).*
- 4 *Development involving Listed Buildings should have special regard to the desirability of preserving the character of such buildings and their settings.*
- 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.*
- 6 *Important views into and out of Aston Village should be protected.*
- 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.*
- 8 *All developments should adopt principles of good design and take account of the characteristics of existing development in the immediate surrounding area.*
- 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.*
- 10 *A visual separation between individual properties should be maintained, where appropriate*
- 11 *The displacement of vehicles to the surrounding area could be prejudicial to amenity and highway safety. New development should therefore incorporate car parking where appropriate*
- 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.*
- 13 *Any new agricultural building should be carefully sited and designed to reduce its apparent mass and minimise visual intrusion upon the wider landscape.*
- 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).*

- 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*
- 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.*
- 18 Buildings should as far as possible be constructed for optimum energy efficiency, using low-impact technologies and reclaimed, recyclable or biodegradable materials wherever possible.*
- 19 Ribbon development must not be allowed, and the distinct boundaries of each hamlet and settlement must be preserved. Section 3.3.1.*

4.1 The national, regional and local housing debate

This section first seeks to evidence the strength of concern against further large scale housing development. It then examines issues of local need.

For historical reasons it is important to differentiate scale and impact when discussing new housing proposals in Aston. In the introduction (see Section 1.8) it is clear that avoidance of further large scale strategic housing development within the Parish is of paramount importance to residents.

Aston has contributed more to the national housing target than most Parishes locally. The relatively recent loss of earlier Aston lands provided some 5,570¹ houses enabling Stevenage's population to grow by 20%. The lack of suitable infrastructure accompanying that growth has led the Borough Council to publicly acknowledge that further housing development to the east of Stevenage is not sustainable, at present. This must be seen in context.

On February 2nd 2004, the Government announced that Stevenage is to be included in the London-Stansted-Cambridge Growth Area. This could see its population grow by a further 56% to 125,000 by 2021. Locally, East Herts Council is particularly affected by the Stansted-M11 growth zones and is required to meet its share of national and regional new housing.

This plan seeks to inform planning authorities that further large scale housing development in Aston would destroy its thriving community of interests.

The 2003 Census and Opinion Survey suggests that Aston accepts that some limited infill may benefit the Parish. The form and location has yet to be agreed.

4.2 Local views on new strategic housing in the Parish

In April 1997, the new CASE (Campaign against Stevenage Expansion [West]) proposed to the County Structure Plan Enquiry in Public (EIP) that some 4,810 homes be built in Aston in areas earlier defined as numbers 5, 6 and 7 in the original New Towns Commission proposals, rather than build to the west of the Town. These areas wholly embrace Aston End, Aston and Hooks Cross/Brabury End to the Beane ridge line. An Aston based organisation called PACE (Protecting Aston's Community Existence) was rapidly constituted under the auspices of the Aston Village Society.

Within 10 days of the General Election being announced for 1st May 1997, 120 residents volunteered to staff 7 shadow Polling Stations over the 15 hour period.

The shadow polling stations straddled three Stevenage Wards and four East Hertfordshire Parishes. Over 5,000 voters² registered in support of the proposition: 'I/we strongly object to any further housing development to the East or South of Stevenage and request that your Council [Hertfordshire County Council, Stevenage Borough Council, East Herts Council] oppose any suggested reduction of the Green Belt in this area'.

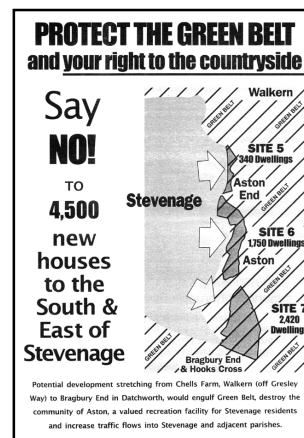


PACE volunteers at Walkern Polling Station 1997

The PACE poll was highly significant. Not only did it inform the outcome of the EIP, but with over 90% of the voting electorate choosing to support the proposition, the weight of evidence suggested that if any prospective candidate in the respective areas supports large-scale development east of Stevenage, it would be unlikely that they would be elected or re-elected to office. Whilst the outcome was expected from the rural Parishes in East Hertfordshire, the strength of

opinion from within Stevenage itself was particularly encouraging and has material long-term impact.

PACE remains active and takes a particular interest in strategic planning policies and proposals. It, along with the Parish Plans Steering Group, submitted comments on the County's Structure Plan Consultation 2002.



The Parish endorsed the earlier PACE Poll when it responded to the Parish Survey in 2003. The survey indicated that 149 households or 70% of respondents rank Stevenage encroachment and consequent large scale development of Aston to be their highest concern (see Figure 9)

Major concerns of Parishioners (2003)

This determined attitude reflects, in part, the substantial earlier losses of land to Stevenage and recognises the importance of maintaining the green corridor between town and country that distinguishes the differing

1 Local research and estimates formally endorsed by Stevenage Borough Council officials 2003
2 Put in perspective, the number of voters supporting on just one day was over 10 times that opposing development to the West of Stevenage in 1997, over five times the population of Aston Parish and over 50% of those that protested against the extension of Stansted Airport on at the House of Commons on 16 October 2002

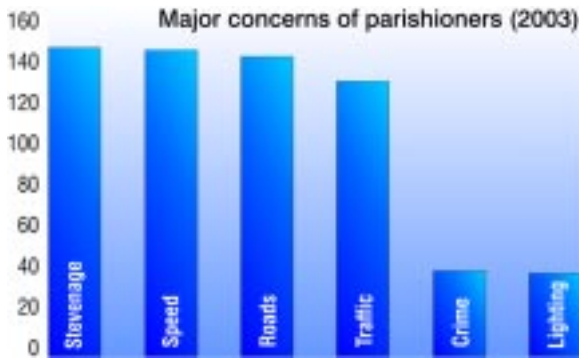


Fig 9 - Major concerns of parishioners

environments. A distinction that is equally fiercely supported by Stevenage residents on the western boundary of Aston, as was demonstrated in 1997.

4.3 Responding to changing local needs

The Parish Survey, conducted as part of the Parish Plan process, identified a significant shift of opinion with regard to new local housing needs. When responding to the survey nearly two-thirds of residents suggested that in principle they recognised the need for some limited in-fill housing development. That was contrary to the view expressed at an earlier Annual Parish Meeting which vigorously opposed the District Council's draft 'Village

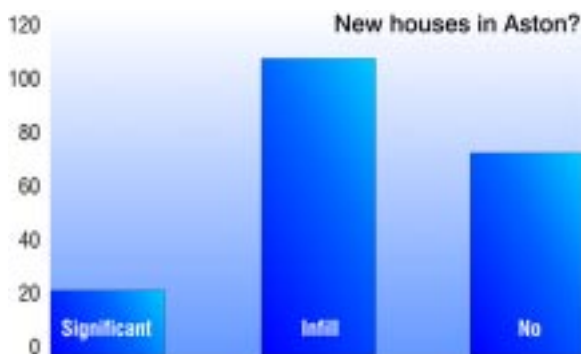


Fig 10 - Housing needs survey

categorisation' policy, embodied in its Local Plan Second Review Proposals. The Survey results were subsequently confirmed at the following Parish Meeting. Details of the survey are provided in Figure 10.

Housing needs perceptions

Significant increase	21	11%
Some limited infill	106	53%
No new housing	72	36%
Total	199	100%

General response

Homes for the more elderly
Smaller homes for younger families

4.3.1 Progressing the local needs debate

In order to facilitate further debate, a housing workshop was organised in September 2003. Following a full leaflet drop, promotion in the Parish magazine and website, some 50 people, representing approximately 15% of all households attended the workshop organised by EHC.

The workshop was considered helpful, enabling residents and other interests to better understand both the planning framework and how the Parish could help shape policies that would result in meeting local housing need.

The Parish Council has subsequently asked East Herts Council to organise a Parish Housing Needs Survey to progress matters.

4.4 Local housing policies

At present there is no specific Parish Council policy regarding new housing development. Instead the Parish Council is guided by the District Council's Policy RA2 (Metropolitan Green Belt). Policy RA2 (II) states "Within the Metropolitan Green Belt, except in very special circumstances permission will not be given for the construction of new buildings or for changes of use for purposes other than" ... [in defined instances – fully reproduced in Annex 11].

The 2003 Parish survey, the following Annual Parish Meeting and the Housing Workshop each indicated support for some limited in-fill.

Action AB 1

In principle, but subject to an appropriate Housing Needs Survey being undertaken, the Parish will review its earlier opposition to Local Plan Proposed Policy OSV2.

4.5. Affordable housing and local housing needs

By way of background a resume of 1991 census data may be found in Section 3.1.2.

In the mid 1990's the Parish Council undertook a housing needs survey. Whilst the young adult population was considerably higher than today, the level of indigenous demand for smaller starter homes was then very modest and could be met.

The 2003 Parish Survey identified a renewed perception of need. This in part recognises that the Parish as a whole is ageing and is in need of some regeneration by creating new starter homes. At the other end of the age spectrum there is a growing perceived demand for smaller, possibly supported homes, to allow the more elderly, particularly owner-occupying residents with large properties, to trade down and remain in the Parish. Should the latter be considered acceptable by the Par-

ish at large, it might liberate larger homes for growing Aston families to progress to, rather than reluctantly leave the Parish because of the shortage of suitable private sector accommodation.

Those who attended the Aston Housing Workshop, were mindful of the need to consider the need for social, mixed tenure as well as private housing as part of any agreed scheme. Should a demand be identified and agreement reached on suitable locations, the Parish would wish to ensure that the allocation, selection or sale process gives priority to those associated with the Parish. Where low cost housing is provided, it is suggested that those with an equity interest should receive only an agreed portion of any equity gain to enable the property to be similarly handed on to other people associated with the Parish. Schemes of this nature, depend on acquiring land with no alternative development value at a margin above agricultural land use value.

Action: AB 2

The Parish Council will support East Herts Council in conducting a whole Parish Housing Needs Survey

4.6 Conversion of houses to multiple occupation

The Parish has supported conversion of its larger houses into smaller homes. Five principal houses in the Parish have been converted to provide quality accommodation for some 26 new households. Collectively these represent nearly 8% of Aston's housing stock.

The five principal houses are:

Bareleigh

Converted to create the new Bareleigh, Shephall House and The Stables

Aston Dene

Converted to comprise the new Aston Dene, Dene House, Dene Barn, Deneside and The Coach House

The Rectory

Converted to create Gregor House, The Braids and The Stables

Astonbury Manor

Converted into 12 luxury apartments

Holbrook Farm House

Now comprising Holbrook Farm, Holbrook Barn and The Threshing Barn

Frogmore Hall is the last substantial property in Aston with potential for conversion to multiple occupation.

Policy B

Housing

- 1 Any new development shall have due regard to the requirements of the local community and the need to ensure that adequate affordable housing is provided Section 4.5.*
- 2 New build housing proposals shall be endorsed by the Parish Council only where such proposals are wholly consistent with a housing strategy. That strategy shall look to meet the holistic and community needs of the Parish. Speculative building proposals, outside the scope of the Parish Housing Strategy will not be supported by the Parish Council. Section 4.5*
- 3 The Parish strategy shall, in particular, look to address the needs of associated younger persons, the more elderly wishing to relocate but remain in the Parish, and to assist those associated with existing residents having an acknowledged disability or impairment. Section 4.5*
- 4 Where appropriately located, the conversion of dwellings or other appropriate buildings into two or more self-contained residential units will be supported. Section 4.6*

5.1 The Changing Pattern of Employment

The numbers of economically active residents fell by 2.4% between 1981 and 1991. This relatively marginal shift masks a significant change in full and part-time employment patterns. Full time employment fell 7.5% whilst part-time employment grew 28%.

The Parish Survey of 2003, suggests that 41% of Aston residents are economically active, compared to 53% identified in the 1991 Census.

In 1991 the profile of employment of Aston residents was:

Professional	32%
Managerial/Technical	23%
Skilled non-manual	15%
Skilled manual	9%
Partly skilled	23%

These figures could be updated and compared with the 2001 Census data, when released. It is known, however, that the number of those working in agriculture has fallen dramatically since 1991, when 9.5% of residents were employed on the land. The current profile is likely to show a significant change over the 1991 figures.

5.2 Rural diversification

Under proposals contained within the East Herts emerging Local Plan Review there is support for adaptation and reuse of existing buildings within the countryside for business, leisure, tourism, recreation and other employment generating uses. Nevertheless, the District Council also places importance on safeguarding the character and appearance of the countryside and ensuring the openness of the Green Belt is maintained.

Any proposals for the adaptation and reuse of agricultural and other non-domestic rural buildings for employment purposes will be considered in accordance with the District Council's Proposed Policies GBC10 and 11 (see Annex 12).

Action AC 2

The Parish Council will request East Herts Council to investigate fully the traffic implications of any new, or proposed change to business use of all planning applications, at both outline and detailed planning stage.

5.3 Doing business in Aston

Elsewhere, comment has been made about the community spirit, our enjoyment of Aston's rural aspects, and the Parish leisure dimension. Aston also does good business.

Aston hosts a number of business interests, scheduled in Annex 13. A number operate on world or European stages, whilst others serve the domestic UK and local markets. Jarvis plc, the engineering and public sector support group, with its HQ at Frogmore Hall, was by far the most financially significant. Others, such as WERX based at Astonbury Business Centre, is a world leading graphic design company specialising in decals and accessories for the moto-cross industry.

Products and services provided from Aston include:

Office based services:

- Engineering and public sector support services
- International media communication
- Vehicle graphics
- Sign writing and graphics
- Precision medical instrumentation for life sciences
- Exhibition display
- HQ of the Herts & Beds Medical Committee

Home based working:

- Petrochemical consultancy
- Web-site design and management
- Magical entertainment and puppetry
- Plumbing
- Voice, musical instrument and dance tuition
- Interior design
- Graphic design

Light industrial:

- Car restoration
- Vehicle servicing
- Construction and management of overhead power lines in Ireland, UK and near Europe
- Air conditioning and mechanical services
- Furniture upholstery
- Fencing materials
- Joinery
- Steelwork

Heavier industrial:

- Groundwork and tarmac services

Retail

- Butcher and general provisions
- Equestrian supplies
- Pine furniture supplies

Twelve of the site-based companies operate from the Astonbury Business Centre, at Astonbury Farm. Others operate out of converted barns located at Park Farm, Stringers Lane and elsewhere around the Parish.

5.3.1 Business communication channels

Aston is served by the Shephall Telephone Exchange, located in Aston End Road. The Parish Survey identified a business and residential need for high speed broadband access. A local campaign was launched which resulted in the BT 'Trigger point' being reached in November 2003 and Aston was broadband enabled on 18 February 2004.

5.4 Travel to work

The 1991 census identified that modes of travel to work have changed markedly since 1981. Those using trains more than doubled to 17% of the working population. Those using a car rose nearly 50%. Those using a motor bike, or cycling to work fell to zero from 16% in 1981. Around 10% worked at home.

Both the 2003 Parish Survey and the Hertfordshire Highways Travel Survey of October 2003 suggest further changes in mode of travel. More people are using their car to get to work, fewer people are using the train or other forms of public transport, walking to work (probably reflecting the loss of agricultural jobs) fell significantly but cycling had grown in popularity. The number of residents working from home is likely to have increased.

Policies C:

Business development (Section 5)

PC 1a Proposals for employment, business or other non-residential uses will be expected to:

- 1 contribute positively to the economic and social well-being of the community and:*
- 2 have minimal impact on traffic flows through the Parish.*

PC 1b Applications for hazardous or heavy industrial uses will not be supported, unless such pursuits are consistent with regional or other strategic policy directions.

Where appropriate, facilities should be located adjacent to primary arterial routes, and shall ensure that traffic generated follows approved Heavy Goods or similar approved routes

PC 1c The display of signs associated with business activity shall be sympathetic with the rural nature of the Parish.

6.1 A vital community of interests

New housing and the influx of 'new' people in the 1960's and 1970's brought a vitality that changed Aston. Whilst some established families might have regretted this at the time, others benefited. The younger families that moved into the southern end of Aston End Road, Garden Field, Brookfield, Wrights Orchard and Arundel Close made their mark.

In 1967 The Village Society was born. In 1971 it purchased 2.25 hectares of 'Land at Brookfield Lane', (now New Park Lane) to serve as a Village Field. A football pitch, cricket square and children's play area were developed.

Because the village lacked a central physical focus, a small band of fund-raisers sought to raise sufficient monies to build Aston Village Hall on Village Field. The hall, opened by Shirley Williams MP in 1978, is one of a few in the County that is not owned and run by a Parish Council. The existence of the hall prompted the formation of Aston Theatre Group and the Badminton Club to add to the existing Cricket, Bowls and Tennis clubs - formed in the early 1900's.



Junior Fun Run heralds another Funday

Since September 1983, the Village Hall has also been home to the Aston Play Group - now Pre-School. At the time it offered non-statutory opportunities for children to mix, learn and develop social skills, as well as providing a respite for their mums. In 1983 it accommodated a hand-

ful of places, all taken by Aston children. Today under strict regulation and Ofsted inspection, it provides child care educational facilities for some 44 children, 75% of whom live in Stevenage.

In 1990 the same community spirit saw the introduction of As-

ton Fun Day; an annual event designed to raise funds for key village concerns and reward each participating village club with £100.

Over a 13 year period this annual event, with its Amateur Athletics Association endorsed 'Aston 5 Miler' fun run and its renowned Village Scarecrow Competition, has raised over £100,000 (at current values), for good causes. This equates to over £300 for each household.

In 2000, the Village Society ran a competition to design a Parish sign to mark the millennium. Five excellent entries were judged and voted on by the whole Parish.

Aston's Millennium sign, was designed by the late Margaret Moreham of Fox Cottage, Aston End and depicts the various professions of the Parish, its clubs and of course the open and tranquil views of Aston.



Typically, 25 households build a scarecrow on Aston Funday

The sign is sited on the corner of Centre Field, opposite the War Memorial. If village gateways, proposed by Hertfordshire Highways, are adopted by the Parish the sign is likely to feature on each gateway into Aston.



The Aston Parish Plans Group adopted the sign as their logo, as it depicts a community of interests working together in common cause.

The Aston Village Millennium sign

6.2 Protection of existing physical facilities

In common with many other rural villages, Aston has suffered from a decline in local facilities.

6.2.1 The Post Office and General Store

Aston's Post Office and remaining General Store, closed on 24 June 1999, when its postmistress of 33 years retired. The loss of this facility is greatly missed. Not only did it provide pensions for the elderly, newspapers and produce for all, it was most importantly a friendly meeting place for all to catch up with news and happenings in the Village. The impact on our community well-being and spirit is most noticeable. It is hardly surprising that the village shop ceased to be viable as there is a Sainsbury's supermarket located just ½ mile from the village.

In conjunction with the Countryside Agency, the Village Hall Committee facilitated the part-time opening of a Post Office facility in the Village Hall.



Aston General Stores closes its doors for the last time

6.2.2 The Village Hall

The Village Hall, located on New Park Lane and overlooking the Beane Valley, is presently largely funded from its own revenues but with fierce competition for civil weddings functions elsewhere, its self financing viability is in some doubt. The Hall is home to the Pre-School Group, Theatre Group, Badminton Club and a thriving Karate Club amongst others.

Actions AG 1

The Parish Council will liaise with the Village Hall Committee in order to secure external funding to upgrade the hall.

6.2.3 Local public houses

Aston once had six 'public' or 'ale' houses, today it has three. The old, listed Rose & Crown and Pig & Whistle are located on Benington Road, Aston, whilst the Crown is at Aston End.

Located close to Stevenage, all three provide ready access to a country pub atmosphere. The Crown markets itself as a family pub and draws significant business from Stevenage residents, particularly on Sundays with its lunchtime carvery.



The Pig & Whistle

6.2.4 Brookfield Farm butcher shop

Brookfield Farm is located on Aston End Road, at Aston End. It sells largely home reared produce and, since the closure of Walkern Butchers in 2001, it draws custom from well beyond the Parish. As the only retail outlet in the Parish it now stocks a wider range of foods than butchery.



The Crown, Aston End

6.2.5 Aston St Mary's C of E Primary School

Aston St Mary's school, situated in School Lane, lies in the heart of the Village. It currently has 114 pupils on its books. The School and its grounds are highly valued.

10 years ago, the school was populated largely by local children whilst today 75% of its pupils are from Stevenage.

The School has few senior pupils, as many parents elect to transfer their children to the Edwinstree Middle School

in Buntingford to access wider secondary school opportunities. Clearly this has resource implications for the school and the loss of some of the older children also has an unsettling impact on the remaining Year 6 pupils.

Unless steps are taken to increase the number of local pupils able to attend and remain at the school, and unless more parents consider local secondary options, the school's long term future must be viewed with some concern. Fortunately, Stevenage secondary schools are obtaining 'specialist' status which may encourage future parents to select one of these in preference to bussing 9-11 years olds across the County, with the inevitable consequence of an extended school day.

With 70%¹ of pupils being driven to school, the resulting traffic flows and parking problems in and around School Lane are of concern. Discussions are in hand with Hertfordshire Highways, Sainsbury's and the Community Development Agency to explore community transport, and other opportunities that may benefit both the school, nearby residents and the wider community.

6.2.6. St Mary's Parish Church

St Mary's Parish Church is situated on the corner of Dene Lane and Broadwater Lane. A church has stood on this site since the time of the Domesday Book. Parts of the present building date back to the thirteenth century. Major repair work has recently been completed on the roof and the fifteenth century tower. The ecclesiastical parish now forms part of the united benefice of Shephall and Aston, staffed by a Rector, Curate and Reader.

Through its regular worship, week by week and at the great festivals, and its provision of baptism, wedding and funeral services for the community, St Mary's aims to witness to a spiritual dimension of life and to traditional Christian convictions.

St Mary's is involved in the community both as a church and through its individual members. This involvement includes the organisation of the annual collection for Christian Aid and the provision of a bookstall at the Aston Fete. The Living Room Project in Stevenage, helping people with addictions, was founded by a member of the congregation: its initiation was supported by the church and individual members continue to be involved as volunteers.

Aston Open Gardens is organised in association with the church and run concurrently with an art exhibition in the church building. The church has been the venue of some very successful musical concerts. Two home groups based in the village provide opportunities to explore and reflect on spiritual issues, in an atmosphere of mutual support. The clergy are heavily involved in Aston

¹ Source: Hertfordshire Highways School Travel Plan Survey October 2003

St Mary's School both by acting as governors and providing assistance with assemblies. Family services and festival times involve children from the community.



The Bell Tower door

The church in turn benefits from invaluable support provided in many different ways by the wider village community. For example, through a range of events, various village groups, most notably the Friends of St Mary's, help raise funds to support the structure and fabric of the church, as an integral part of the Aston scene.

Aston Bell Ringers

Aston has a renowned campanology group. A team of some 18 bell ringers practise on Thursday evenings. They ring for church services and other occasions. Currently ranging in age from 11 to retirement, Aston's bell and hand-bell ringers are indeed a sound of Aston. The hand-bell ringers perform not just in Aston over the Christmas period but throughout the county ...and beyond.

6.3 Outdoor amenities

Aston is increasingly a leisure resource for a wide catchment, offering fresh air, some wonderful open countryside, magnificent views and friendly hostellers.

6.3.1 The village fields

Aston is fortunate to have two public fields. Village Field, adjacent to the Village Hall in New Park Lane, hosted Aston Fun Day in July each year. It has an enclosed children's play equipment area and space for a football pitch. There are no changing facilities.



Cricket on Village Field

Centre Field, bounded on three sides by Aston Lane, Stringers Lane, and Benington Road, was acquired for the Parish in 1986 on a 999 year lease and is maintained by the Trustees (Aston Parish Councillors). It is home to Aston Cricket Club and provides car parking for FunDay and overflow car parking for Church functions.

In 2002 a group of Parishioners sought to gain Parish endorsement to approach the Countryside Agency with a view to seeking grants to enhance Centre Field under

their 'Doorstep Green' initiative. Parish endorsement was given and a series of proposals exhibited in the Summer of 2003.



Cricket on Centre Field

Subject to raising some £20,000 in matched funding (£50,000 has already been secured from the Countryside Agency), a

range of initiatives designed to soften the feel of Centre Field and make it more accessible will be implemented. These include providing safer walkways across the Village, the design of which will be built into the Travel Plan proposals being developed by Hertfordshire Highways.

Both fields are highly valued by Parishioners for their open space and the magnificent views of the Beane Valley and beyond.

6.3.2 The equine dimension

Facilities for horses and riding for leisure are now a feature of Aston life. A recent count suggests that there are some 180 horses in the Parish - probably more than at any time in Aston's history.

Largely stabled at Aston End or Hook Cross, about 10% are owned by local residents. The majority of riders live in Stevenage, but some travel up to 20 miles to use these facilities as Aston provides much off-road safe riding for the young and less experienced rider. The viability of much of the farmland in the Parish is now based on its use for horses.



Grazing, Holme Farm Pasture

Oaks Cross Farm has 5km of off-road rides within its boundary whilst Aston End based riders have access to the extensive Stevenage bridleway system, linked by Tatlers Lane, or across Lords Farm fields to use the many permissive routes granted by local land owners.



Astride Tatlers Lane

The Aston Travel Plan Survey (October 2003) found that Bridleways 4 and 21 linking Holders Lane (Aston End) and Chells Manor are the most popularly used bridleways for those riding in the Parish.

Horse riding, however, does not sit comfortably with the increasing volume of traffic using Aston's Lanes as a rat-run through Aston End.

Action AF 8

The Parish Council will seek to find safe and effective solutions that give priority to horses, on agreed routes. (PF 2)

6.3.3 Walking for pleasure

Aston is a member of the Parish Paths Partnership. With 14.1kms of formal public footpaths and bridleways, many of which cross open countryside, Aston provides an important health and leisure resource for adjacent Stevenage, as well as for Aston residents.

In recognition of this the Aston Village Society researched, produced, published and sold 500 copies of 'Aston in Your Pocket', a compendium of many of the most popular walks, with maps, commentaries and historical notes.

The Countryside Management Service on behalf of Stevenage Borough Council also publishes details of public walks under their banner of 'Town & Country Walks from Stevenage.' Walk 2 transports walkers from Sainsbury's along a 7.5km circular route through Astonbury Wood, past Astonbury, along the River Beane to Aston. Walk 3 guides walkers through Aston End over the Beane valley to Walkern Hall, turning south through Benington Lordship and west through the Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) of High Wood before returning, over the River Beane, to Lords Farm and the Crown public house.

Aston also provides about a quarter of the 22.5km length of the Beane Valley walk. The walk starts at its source in Walkern, passes through Aston, Watton at Stone, Stapleford and Waterford to Hertford. In the words of the published guide "The Beane Valley is an oasis of tranquil English countryside ...The valley offers walkers of all abilities the opportunity to explore a landscape that surprises many by its beauty ...

through historic landscapes that have not changed a great deal for many centuries"²

Whilst the majority of walks are off-road, access to Stevenage's Walk 3 is along Lantern's Lane and Long Lane to the Crown public house, from the Chells Park car park. The mix of pedestrians and vehicles using this busy narrow sunken lane gives rise to road safety concerns.



Action: AF 9

The Parish Council will seek to find safe and effective solutions that give priority to pedestrians on agreed routes. (PF 2)

To celebrate its lanes and views, Aston holds an annual New Years Day walk and run. Covering 4.8km, it is not untypical to see 150 residents and guests striding out and later returning to enjoy their free mulled wine back at the Rose & Crown. On 1st January 2000 an estimated 250 residents and friends joined this annual ritual and each was awarded a commemorative medal.



Start of the Parish Walk & Run, 1st January 2000



6.4 Securing Aston's historical archive

Aston is fortunate to have an unofficial custodian of many of the Parish's historical records and memorabilia who, over many decades, has collected substantial quantities of material having significant local historical interest. Inevitably, his home is overburdened and is not readily available for public viewing. In time, a permanent home, accessible by the public, will need to be found for this valuable archive.

Action AG 2

The Parish Council will consider the long term future of Aston's historical archive and cultural memorabilia. (PG1)

Policies G

Parish facilities

- 1 *Favourable consideration will be given to supporting the provision of suitable additional or replacement community facilities in locations accessible by modes of transport other than the car. Section 6.1. Proposals that would result with loss of a community facility will be discouraged, other than in exceptional circumstances.*
- 2 *The Parish Council recognises that horse riding, stabling, and associated interests are commercially and socially important to Aston. The Council will seek to maintain a fair balance of interest between equine and residential users of facilities, and will ensure that due regard is given to the interests of horse riders from a road safety point of view. Section 6.3.2.*

² The Beane Valley Walk, published by the Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service

7.1 Parish crime profile

Like most communities in England, Aston is concerned about crime or fear of crime. The Parish Survey provided an opportunity for residents to comment on the issue.

The results suggest that most households consider the Parish a safe place to live.



Crime statistics, covering the 26 months to February 2003 are provided in Annex 6. These tend to support the view that Aston has a low crime rate compared to many areas. Using Police definitions, the data provided in Annex 6 suggests that 1 crime was recorded in 2002. In addition the number of

recorded incidents has progressively dropped since 2001 as follows:

2001	15 incidents
2002	13 incidents
2003	3 incidents to February 2003

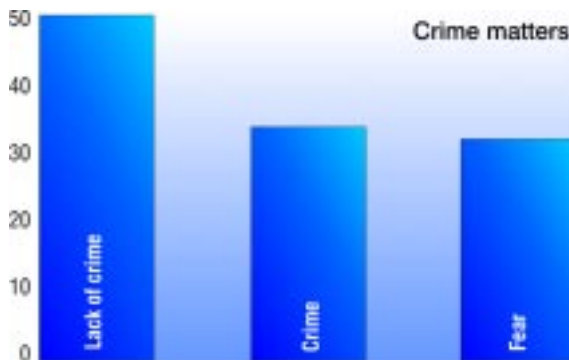


Fig 11

That suggests that 32 crimes and incidents were recorded over 26 months, equating to one every 3½ weeks throughout the whole Parish. Examination of the detail suggests that most incidents are traffic related.

7.2 Actions taken to address perceptions of crime

Six intermediate actions have taken place during the development of this plan and a further long term strategy is advocated following the plan's adoption.

An Aston email-net which advises one in two households of relevant Neighbourhood Watch notifications, has been established and is one of the first email data protected arrangements in the country.

The Parish web site www.astonparish.net contains a policing section with a direct email feedback form to the Constabulary.

Following local residents' suggestions to form a volunteer Neighbourhood Warden scheme, an alternative campaign to promote the Special Constabulary was initiated by our local 'bobby', in conjunction with the County Commandant.

Hertfordshire Constabulary implemented a special weekend police patrol in May 2003. The patrol saw a police presence in areas identified by the Parish Survey as being subject to anti-social behaviour, mainly by youths from over the border, after pub closing hours. Feedback suggests this action has generally been successful in tackling both cause and effect.

Discussions have been held with the Police Authority with a view to agreeing a framework that better meets the Parish's policing needs.

Representatives of the Parish attended East Hertfordshire's District Council's Community Voice meeting to discuss anti-social behaviour issues with the Constabulary. In addition the Parish Chairman and Clerk attended a County meeting on community policing in general.

It is recognised that the Constabulary is primarily required to implement community policing strategies to reflect Home Office policy directions and the Audit Commission's guidance in terms of value for money. The Group also recognises that the Police Authority, after taking account of the National Policing Plan, is required to work with each of the 10 Districts/Boroughs in Hertfordshire as part of their statutory Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships programme, to produce a local Community Strategy with District-wide priorities and targets. It recognises reluctantly therefore that it is not economically feasible also to have a formal Parish based policing plan, at this time.

Nevertheless the Police Authority seeks to work closely with individual Parish Councils to help reduce crime and the fear of crime. The Parish Council is invited, as a matter of course, to comment on The Police Authority's draft plans and targets for the coming year.

Action: AE 1

The Parish Council will provide feedback to the Hertfordshire Police Authority on its proposed annual policing targets, to reflect the Council's assessment of Parish priorities.

The Parish Council's current policy states that it would prefer to be policed from Stevenage rather than Hertford. APPG recognises the logic but also recognises that rural Parishes such as Aston, have more in common with Benington and Datchworth than with urban crime issues affecting Stevenage. Since the Parish Council's policy was agreed Aston is now part of the Hertfordshire's Eastern Police Division serviced from Stevenage. Calls to emergency services are responded to by the nearest police mobile unit, irrespective of where the incident occurred.

Action: AE 2

Parish residents and other interests will be consulted on whether the Parish is best policed from Stevenage or Hertford Stations, as part of the Parish Plan consultation process.

Action: AE 3

The Parish Council will encourage Hertfordshire Constabulary to provide a written monthly Parish Crime and Incident Report. The Report should identify success rates.

7.3 Planning & crime

The Parish Plan supports both the existing and proposed District Council Policies in 'planning out' crime both for new and existing developments, as reproduced in Annex 12. Such measures as may be proposed should be examined to ensure they are measured, and reflect the character and landscape of their location and impact on surrounding areas.

Policy E

Community safety

- 1 *New development proposals will be expected to incorporate crime prevention measures through their design, layout and landscaping. Section 7.3*
- 2 *The Parish Council request Hertfordshire Constabulary (Eastern Division) to provide updates on the volume and types of crime, traffic accidents and other incidents occurring within the Parish. Section 7.1*
- 3 *The Parish Council will continue to work closely with Hertfordshire Constabulary to promote prompt feedback on incidents and other crime related matters. Section 7.2*

8.1 Highway hierarchy and road network

Aston has 15 km² of public highway and 0.88km of private roads. For the purpose of this plan the following terminology has been adopted to describe the highway hierarchy, or network in Aston Parish:

- **Arterial routes:** Carry traffic along national 'A' class roads
- **Primary routes:** Carry traffic to, through or out of the Parish boundary
- **Secondary routes:** Comprise a small number of narrow lanes branching from a primary route. Each either serve outlying rural residences, or an alternative, low volume primary route.
- **Residential roads:** With the exception of Brookfield and Wrights Orchard, which are served by School Lane, all other residential roads are served directly by a primary route.
- **Footpaths, rights of way and bridleways**

For convenience, each road has been given a local reference number.

8.1.1 Arterial routes

The A602 passes through the Parish of Aston for 1.25km at Hooks Cross. At this point it typically carries upwards of 1,400 vehicles per hour² during peak periods in an east-west direction between the A1(M) and the A10.

The Parish Council has promoted a suitable by-pass for many years on behalf of the residents of Hooks Cross. Whilst the Council is pleased to note that this has been accelerated in DfT's 2002 advanced Capital Programme, it does have some reservations, particularly about its alignment.

Action AF 10

The Parish Council shall monitor progress and encourage the highway authority to proceed with a Hooks Cross by-pass at the earliest opportunity.

There are relatively few Parish residents in Hooks Cross. They do, however, have differing views as to whether a by-pass will offer long term sustainable benefits.

APPG is aware that in the very long term, the A602 is under consideration to become a candidate for part of a potential outer M25 route connecting Stansted to Luton Airports³. Should this prospect gain Government endorsement, Aston Parish will have strong views on its routing.

8.1.2 Primary routes

Aston Village lies at the centre of four locally defined primary travel routes broadly having a north-south and east-west bearing.

To the north lies Aston End Road, leading to Long Lane and Lanterns Lane with its junction of Gresley Way (north). Aston Lane runs south from opposite the War Memorial, past the southerly boundary at Astonbury Manor to the A602 at Bragbury End.

The east-west route runs from the Benington crossroads on the Walkern/Watton-at-Stone Road, past the far-easterly Parish boundary point at Holbrook Farm, through the village to the War Memorial, where shortly afterwards it becomes Broadwater Lane, at which point there is a 7.5 tonne weight restriction. Broadwater Lane passes the westerly Parish boundary at Long Ridge, prior to joining Gresley Way South, by way of a mini-roundabout.

The combined road length of these primary routes between the Parish 'gateways' is 4.5km. Of this, just 300m, or 6%, has pedestrian pavements - between Aston Cottage and School Lane on Aston End Road.

Containing only minor roads, there are no formal HGV routes in the Parish, other than along the A602 - despite contrary opinion. The approved passenger transport route both enters and exits the village at the A602/Aston Lane junction, following Aston Lane, Benington Road, Stringers Lane and back along Aston Lane. Indiscriminate weight restrictions apply to certain roads and lanes. These are being reviewed as part of the Aston Travel Plan review.

Each of these primary routes is hazardous. Few offer comfortable two-way traffic flow for cars. HGV's and buses demand that facing traffic give way at junctions, and more recently unofficial passing places have been created through vehicular erosion of ancient banks and hedgerows. This is most evident along the HGV route of Aston Lane and the single carriageway of Lanterns Lane. Proposals to develop formal passing places are being examined.

Each route has multiple blind bends and junctions. Minimal low level footway lighting exists along Aston End Road from Aston Cottage to Arundel Close and along Benington Road from the War Memorial. Few of these roads are sufficiently wide to allow centre-line road marking.

In addition, the A602 presents a major conflict between a key arterial route and local access.

¹ Road lengths provided by Hertfordshire Highways maintenance unit at Hertford

² Hertfordshire Highways Traffic survey October 2003

³ Transport 2000 Ltd, Report released 6 June 2003

For the purposes of this plan, these primary routes are referenced as follows:

- 1 Aston Lane
- 2 Aston End Road
(From Benington Road to Brookfield Farm)
- 3 Benington Road
- 4 Broadwater Lane
- 5 Stringers Lane
- 6 Long Lane
(From 'Back Lane' junction to Lanterns Lane)
- 7 Lanterns Lane

They have a combined length of 4.55km.

8.1.3 Secondary routes

Six secondary routes are identified for the purpose of this plan:

- 8 Astonbury Lane leading to Frogmore Hill.
Astonbury Lane, principally services the Business Centre at Aston Bury Farm, but continues to Frogmore Hill and out to the A602 east of Hooks Cross, or provides a more southerly access towards Watton-at-Stone.
- 9 Holders Lane, Aston End
- 10 Long Lane, at its junction with Lanterns Lane, Aston End
- 11 New Park Lane (formerly Brookfield Lane) skirts the village to Aston End, and provides a secondary north-easterly feeder route to the Walkern Road.
- 12 Raffin Green Lane, Hooks Cross, leads to Datchworth village.
- 13 Short Lane, leading to Tatlers Lane, Aston End

The secondary routes and the lanes they serve have a combined road length of 7.71km with no highway pavement. A traffic census, in the spring of 2003, identified significant numbers of HGV's using these inappropriate routes for cross-Parish purposes. Raffin Green Lane was not surveyed.

The lanes served are referenced as follows:

- 14 Frogmore Hill, Hooks Cross
- 15 Tatlers Lane, Aston End

8.1.4 Residential roads

These include residences outside the core of the Village:

- 16 Arundel Close
- 17 Aston Bury (private road)
- 18 Dene Lane
- 19 Long Ridge
- 20 St Mary's Close
- 21 Yeomans Drive (private road)

These comprise 570 metres of public highway and 840 metres of private road. Long Ridge and Arundel Close have highway footpaths and low level street lighting.

The core of the Village comprises a near quadrant bounded by Aston End Road to the west, School Lane to the north, Village Field (and hall) to the east, and Benington Road to and including New Park Lane to the Village Hall. With a total road length of 800 metres, it comprises:

- 22 Aston End Road,
from Aston Cottage to School Lane
- 23 Brookfield
- 24 Garden Field
- 25 School Lane
- 26 Wright's Orchard

With limited road length, they enjoy similar highway characteristics. These residences, comprise a large proportion of the village core and have paved highway and other metalled paths that offer safer off-road access to Aston St Mary's School, Village Field and Hall, the two public houses in the Village and the principal bus stop at the Rose and Crown.

Mostly built in the mid 1960's and 1970's, the village core offers an example of a relatively sustainable internal highway network. Whilst many villagers would comment adversely on the low level of off-street parking in School Lane in particular, and how this narrows access to the two adjoining roads, there have been no recorded pedestrian accidents in this location.

8.1.5 Footpaths, rights of way and bridleways

Aston is a member of the Hertfordshire County Council's Parish Paths Partnership (PPP). Despite the lack of roadside pavements, Aston has a wealth of rural routes. These take locals and visitors along an enjoyable rural ramble, over some of the county's most picturesque countryside.

Aston has 19 rural footpaths covering a distance of 11.5km and 4 bridleways covering 2.6kms⁴. In addition, it enjoys further permissive routes to explore elsewhere, together with a number of informal 'cross-border' field paths towards Sainsbury's, in adjacent Poplars.

8.1.6 Public Transport

Whilst close to Stevenage with its frequent bus services Aston, like most Parishes has a limited rural service. The Parish is served by the Arriva 390 service which runs 5 times during the week linking Aston with Stevenage at two hourly intervals. There is a single bus service on a Saturday - none on a Sunday. A single bus service oper-

⁴ Rural routes source:
Peter Garrett, Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service

ates between Aston and Hertford during the week. The last bus from Aston to Stevenage is at 3pm. The last bus arrives in Aston from Stevenage at 5pm. There is no evening service.

8.1.7 Relevant 1991 Census travel data

The 1991 Census identifies households with 1, 2 or more than 3 cars per household. Car ownership increased from 369 in 1981 to 520 in 1991, an increase of 41% over the period. With some 330 houses, average car ownership in 1991 was over 1½ cars per household.

Those without a car fell over the same period to 13.5%. This compares with averages of 22% for Hertfordshire and 33% nationally. The proportion of households with two or more cars rose to three times the national average. This is a key issue for Aston's roads and lanes, with fewer garages than households, on average.

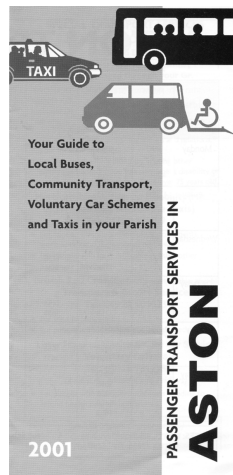
Travel to work modes have also changed significantly since 1981. Those using a train doubled to 17% of the working population. Those using a car rose from 50% to 67%. Those using a motor bike or walking to work fell to almost zero from 16%, in 1981.

8.2 Travel studies

In conjunction with the relevant agencies, Aston has undertaken two formal travel needs surveys in the last five years. The most recent led to far reaching engineering proposals being put to the Parish by Hertfordshire Highways in the winter of 2003/4. The proposals, designed to inhibit and reduce the speed of traffic flowing through the Parish, were extensively publicised.

8.2.1 Aston Travel Survey 1998

Aston is a member of the Watton, Aston & Benington (WAB) Rural Transport Action Group (RTAG). In late 1998, each Parish conducted a Travel Needs survey for their area. In Aston, the survey preceded the closure of the remaining village shop and Post Office in June 1999. With Christmas approaching the timing of the survey was not ideal, nevertheless, it achieved a 25% response rate. The outcomes were sufficiently instructive to warrant inclusion in the Government's Rural White Paper⁵, as an example of good practice.



The results of the survey, conducted 4 years prior to the Parish Census and Opinion Survey in 2003, and the Hertfordshire Highways Travel Survey in October 2003 are instructive.

A synopsis of the results is provided in Annex 14. In essence, the survey suggested:

- A good many of the respondents had difficulty accessing a wide range of facilities in Stevenage and elsewhere.
- Some 50% of respondents shop in Stevenage, the majority using Sainsbury's at Poplars.
- 30% of respondents had difficulty accessing the Banks, Building Societies and the main Post Office.
- Just 21% of residents work in Stevenage.
- Up to 45% of those asked said they would use community transport if the service was reliable and more frequent.
- 87% said their biggest transport concerns were traffic speed and increasing volumes.
- About 40 non-vehicle users graded the condition of pavements and access as poor. Some 20 respondents suggested they were adequate, on a scale of good, adequate or poor.
- Car ownership in the Parish is high. Just 3% of the sampled households do not have access to a car. 50% have two cars and 16% have three or more.

8.2.2 Aston Parish Census and Opinion Survey 2003 - travel related issues

The 2003 Aston Parish Census and Opinion Survey included questions relating to travel and traffic considerations. The Survey achieved a 67% response rate (the Highways Authority was impressed) and the findings were not dissimilar to those evidenced in 1998.

It found that up to 67% of all respondents were concerned about traffic volumes, road condition and traffic speed. These concerns ranked 2nd, 3rd, and 4th on the Parish's list of concerns. The highest concern was Stevenage encroachment.

The survey suggested that 68% of working residents travel to work by car, those travelling by train had diminished to 10% of the working population but more may be working from home for part or all of their working week.

With regard to travel journeys, 41% use Broadwater Lane as their primary route out/back to the Village. 25% use Lanterns Lane and 25% use Aston Lane as their main route.

⁵ Our Countryside: the future
- A fair deal for rural England Cm 4909 (Nov 2000)

8.3 School travel

Aston's population structure has changed dramatically over the last decade or so and now the percentage of children and young adults in its population is the lowest for 40 years.

The 1998 Travel Survey suggests Aston pupils travel to school in three ways - the same is true today. Some walk, but others are ferried by car to Aston St Mary's JMI School. A number of both middle and secondary school pupils catch the early morning bus to St Edwinstree School and Freeman College in Buntingford whilst others catch the scheduled bus to Stevenage. The primary bus stop is at the Rose and Crown public house on Benington Road.

Significant reduction in 0 to 11 years olds has had a marked impact on catchments for both the Pre-School Group and St Mary's JMI. Both now take 75% of their pupils from outside the Parish. In the main, pupils to the former come from all locations, but those entering St Mary's generally travel from the Stevenage side of the Parish.

Action AF3

The Aston Parish Travel Forum will work with the Governors and Head of Aston St Mary's C.E. Primary School, to ensure that any School Travel Plan is consistent with the wider Parish Travel Plan.

In July 2003, as part of their Safer Routes to School programme, Aston St Mary's parents survey identified that:

- A third of pupils live under ½ mile from the school, another third live between ½ and 1½ miles away.
- 30% of pupils are walked to school with an adult. 70% travel by car.
- 63% of drivers combine the school trip with other journeys.
- Only 7% currently car share.

It is estimated that 300-350 vehicle journeys are made by parents from outside the Parish each school day. The bulk of these directly affect Broadwater and Lanterns Lanes. All impact Aston End Road and School Lane junction.

Actions AF4

The Parish Council will support the development and implementation of Safer Routes to School within a School Travel Plan, as part of the 2003/4 Aston Travel Plan process.

8.4. Review of traffic, road loadings and condition

The 1998 survey indicated strong concerns about traffic speed (79%) and increased HGV movements (55%).

The 2003 Parish Survey supported these earlier findings and expressed concerns about the deteriorating road condition, caused largely by increased traffic flow.



Exit from Astonbury Manor

The then leader of APPG's Travel Group, together with the convenor, met with the Chairman of the Highways Partnership and a representative of the Community Development Agency (CDA) to discuss highway matters in general in 2002. It was suggested that Hertfordshire

County Council would take action if the Parish provided hard evidence of its highway related concerns.



HGV negotiating Queens Square

A travel survey, organised in the spring of 2003, sought to evidence the volume of traffic using the roads and lanes in Aston, and validate the traffic loadings at the main gateways to Aston, the War Memorial and Stringers Lane junctions.

The headline report with some graphical analysis is provided in Annex 17. The results of the count, undertaken over a 12 hour weekday period and two Sundays, was reported to the April 2003 Annual Parish Meeting and then published on the Parish web site.

8.5 Aston's informal Survey results (2003)

Since Gresley Way opened up the east of Stevenage, traffic flows and perceived speeds through Aston have increased. In consequence, the condition of the lanes has deteriorated. The public cost of damage to the lanes, as well as the number of road traffic accidents, particularly at the Lanterns Lane/Gresley Way junction, gives rise to concern.

APPG therefore organised a traffic count to evidence traffic volumes for future use. In the midwinter of 2003, over 60 residents, representing 1 in 5 households gave some of their time to count traffic flows.

- Over 5,000 vehicles criss-cross 4.3km of our lanes or primary [country] routes over a 12 hour day time period, representing 420 each hour, or 100 vehicles every hour per kilometre of road.

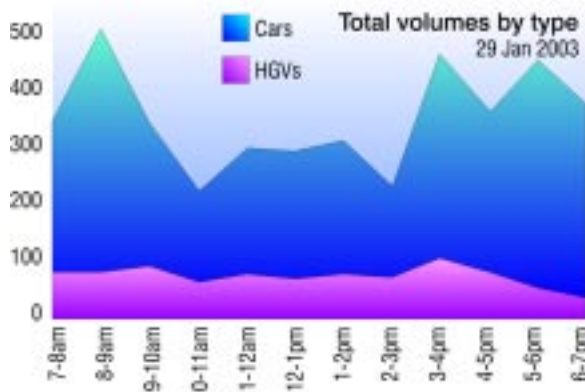


Fig 12

- The majority affect the Memorial staggered crossroad in the centre of the village: 260 vehicle movements per hour were recorded over a sample peak period at this junction.

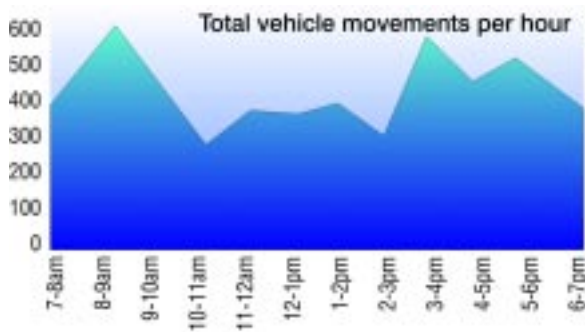


Fig 13

- 40% of Aston's traffic movement is along Broadwater Lane. It is believed that most of the 2,000 vehicle movements each day use Aston as a rat run between the A602 at Stevenage and the A602 at, or beyond Watton at Stone.
- Lanterns Lane has the next highest volume carrying about 1,000 vehicles a day. Before Gresley Way was opened it carried 2-4 vehicles an hour. Most use Aston End Road either to avoid the A602 roundabout in the morning rush hour, travel to Aston St Mary's School or cut across the village. It is relevant to point out that the junction of Lanterns Lane and Gresley Way accounts for nearly 50% of injury recorded traffic accidents, according to Hertfordshire Constabulary statistics (see Annex 16).

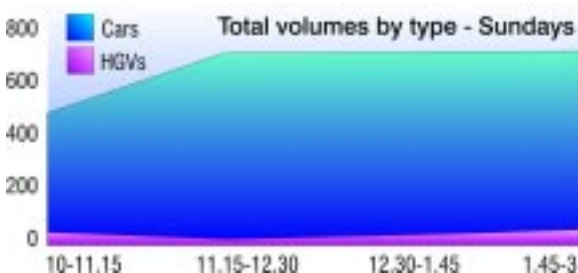


Fig 14

- Stringers Lane and Aston Lane past Astonbury carry the most commercial traffic - about 26% of its traffic flow. This is the approved passenger transport route and carries many of the HGV's emanating from and to the Aston Farm (business) complex. Aston Lane also carries HGV's east to Benington and elsewhere due to the earlier lower weight restriction at Watton Bridge, which has recently been revised to 44 tonnes, following an upgrade of the bridge structure.
- Benington Road, particularly at Holbrook, appears to suffer higher speed problems, as well as higher Sunday volumes when events take place further east of Aston. This is particularly noticeable during the Benington Lordship Snowdrop season.

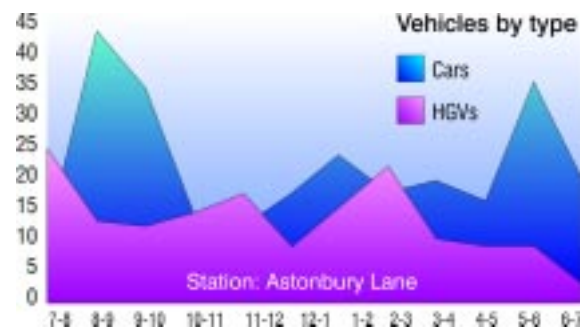


Fig 15

- The volume of Sunday traffic is, surprisingly, higher. On a same hours basis (10am to 3pm), traffic flows increased by 62% peaking at 700 vehicles per hour, suggesting that leisure access to and through Aston needs to be better understood.

8.6 Hertfordshire Highways Travel Plan Survey, October 2003

As part of the Aston/Hertfordshire Highways Travel Plan review, a further and more extensive traffic and travel survey was conducted. It sought to corroborate the concerns expressed in the Parish Census and Opinion Survey, and validate the spring 2003 traffic count. This new survey obtained a 50% response rate, the highest achieved by the County Council of any Parish.

The Survey initiative was supported by the installation of formal traffic speed and volume measuring equipment in ten locations for 24 hours per day over a 7 day period.

In volume terms, the formal measurement suggested that traffic flows were generally in line with those measured by Parish volunteers in the spring of 2003. This more extensive survey did, however, identify that Hooks Cross on the A602 carries upwards of 1,500 vehicles an hour compared to some 420 per hour using the Parish lanes.

The traffic speed analysis was new and suggested that most traffic in the village centre generally travels within the speed limit, whereas those on the outskirts of the village travel faster.

8.6.1 Broad summary of the survey findings

Movement in the Parish

The majority of residents who completed questionnaires said that they visited the butcher's shop, village hall, recreational ground and the church in Aston. Comments were made about the speed of vehicles travelling through the Parish, particularly the centre of Aston village, the lack of pavements and safe crossing points in Aston village.

Public transport

Only a small percentage of people use the bus services on a regular basis for either work or leisure purposes, although many said that if there were a more frequent

service in both the morning and evening, they would be more likely to use buses. Residents would also like direct services to Knebworth and Lister Hospital. A significantly higher number of respondents use train services than buses, the majority for travel to London from Stevenage railway station, for both work and leisure purposes.

Rights of way

The 'rights of way' network is very well used throughout the Parish, with most people walking circular routes on several different paths. Over two thirds of those who responded said they use local footpaths on a regular



The figures in the table show the number of vehicles per day in each direction and the 85th percentile speed (i.e. 85% of traffic travels at or below this speed) at the 7 locations in the village centre shown on the following map.

Site No.	NORTH		SOUTH		EAST		WEST	
	Speed	Volume	Speed	Volume	Speed	Volume	Speed	Volume
1					33.7	1027	32.6	1028
2					29.6	1004	30.7	1103
3	26.0	176	28.8	229				
4					27.9	486	28.1	587
5	25.6	158	25.3	140				
6								
7	30.1	460	30.1	481				

Fig 16 - Traffic Speed and Volume Survey, September 2003

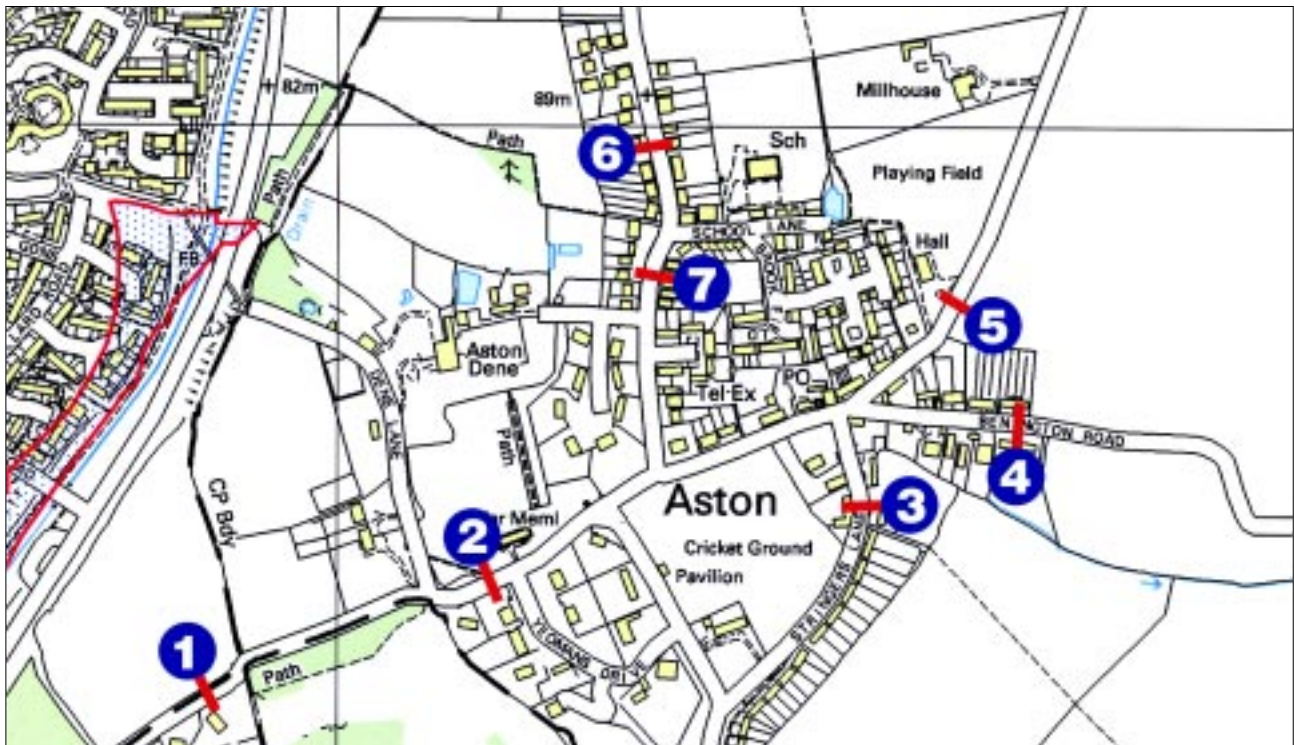


Fig 17 - Traffic survey locations in the Village

basis, and almost a fifth regularly use bridleways. Other than the condition of some footpaths, no problems with the rights of way network were identified through the questionnaire or the Forum Group.

Main Problems identified by Aston residents

- **Traffic speed** - throughout the Parish, but especially in Aston End Road, Benington Road and Broadwater Lane (166 respondents).
- **Rat running** - particularly through Broadwater Lane, Benington Road, Aston End Road, Long Lane and Lanterns Lane (114 respondents).
- **Condition of the highway** - throughout the entire Parish particularly in Broadwater Lane and Aston Lane (114 respondents).
- **The size and number of vehicles** travelling through the Parish, predominantly through Broadwater Lane (107 respondents).
- **Parking issues** outside the church, in Stringers Lane and School Lane (77 respondents).
- **Maintenance of trees and hedgerows** - throughout the Parish (55 respondents).
- **School travel throughout the Parish** - School Lane in particular (28 respondents).
- **Lack of street lighting** - throughout the entire Parish (27 respondents).
- **Lack of facilities for cyclists within the Parish** - no cycle racks, etc (27 respondents).
- **Poor signage** - throughout the Parish (21 respondents).
- **Lack of safe pedestrian crossing points** in the Parish (19 respondents).
- **Condition of some of the rights of way footpaths** - poorly maintained (19 respondents).
- **Vehicle congestion** outside the school, in School Lane, and Broadwater Lane outside the church (50 respondents).
- Hertfordshire Highway's published findings were provided to all interests in January 2004.

8.7 Outcomes to date of survey activity

As a result of the respective surveys a number of positive actions have been put in place.

The 1998 Travel Plan survey resulted in:

A voluntary car scheme being established for Aston. This is now organised by Stevenage Council for Voluntary Services. It is not known how many residents use the scheme.

Dial-A-Ride was introduced and serves some residents on a regular basis.

Local transport timetables showing all modes of transport (including buses, trains, taxis, community and voluntary transport) are distributed annually to every household.

A seminar on Safe Routes to School was organised by WAB, the County Council's Passenger Transport and Road Safety Units, and the Countryside Agency. It was held at Aston St Mary's JMI, in June 2000. Whilst there was interest in developing a Safe Route to School initiative as part of a wider School Travel Plan, neither was pursued at that time. The initiative is being rekindled as part of the 2003 Aston Travel Plan programme.

The 2003 Parish Census and Opinion Survey:

Promoted a traffic count and survey of the six gateways into Aston. This survey engaged 1 in 5 Aston households over 3 days of counting in February/March 2003.

As a result of both the Parish Census and Traffic surveys, each of the statutory agencies was invited to attend a site meeting to examine Aston's traffic and travel concerns. This took place in February 2003. The following Agencies were invited:

- Hertfordshire County Council
– *Passenger Transport Coordination*
- Hertfordshire County Council
– *Hertfordshire Highways*
- East Herts Council
– *Planning*
- Stevenage Borough Council
– *Transport and Highways Policy*
- Community Development Agency
– *Countryside Agency*
- Hertfordshire Constabulary
– *Traffic Management – Apologised*
- Aston Parish Council

Agency representatives were provided with 'guided tour' notes (Annex 18), a background briefing paper (Annex 19) and a schedule of possible highway modifications for consideration (Annex 20).

The site meeting culminated in two positive steps forward:

Aston was invited to submit an urgent application to be considered as a candidate for the County's emerging Parish Travel Plan initiative. Under this new initiative, if Aston were to be adopted, County, in conjunction with a representative group of residents and other interests, would examine, in depth, possible engineering options in 2003/4. Subject to agreement with the Parish and budget, approval works could commence in 2004/5.

The Community Development Agency, working in partnership with County's Passenger Transport Coordination Team, will examine opportunities to introduce a community 'hopper' bus, to meet many of the needs identified in both the 1998 and 2003 Parish travel surveys. In anticipation of this Sainsbury plc have been approached as a potential sponsor and an encouraging initial response has been received.

Application for Parish Travel Plan status was duly made, and the application was approved in April 2003. In May 2003, Aston Parish Council formally endorsed the scheme of arrangement with County. In July, residents were invited to sit on the Aston Travel Plan Forum Group and work with Hertfordshire Highways and seven residents volunteered to join the group.

Hertfordshire Highways Travel Plan outcomes

The results of both local traffic surveys has assisted Hertfordshire Highways propose a series of engineering solutions to the Parish. These were supported by the results of traffic measurement studies conducted in September 2003. After discussion with the Forum Group the proposals were published in the Parish Magazine and circulated to each household and business interest in January 2004.

Their promotion was further supported by a dedicated email address for comments to be made to both the Travel Forum and the engineers. The civic web site carried the full proposals, provided a frequently asked questions page to address some technical points, and carried Parishioners' comments to enable those with web access to monitor the progress of debate on the proposals.

A considerable number of comments were received which helped the engineering design team develop more detailed proposals for a Parish Exhibition in May 2004.

The Travel Plan Exhibition was well attended. All proposals were endorsed by a substantial (over 70%) majority of attendees. Draft Traffic Orders were advertised in July 2004. Subject to the outcome of this final round of consultation, works to effect the agreed proposals will be undertaken in 2004/5. A formal review will take place within 12 months of completion of the works.

8.8 Proposed highway engineering solutions for Aston (December 2003)

The measures proposed in December 2003 and subsequently refined, seek to address three key Parish concerns.

- 1 Inhibiting unnecessary traffic movements
- 2 Reducing traffic speeds where appropriate
- 3 Tackling key parking issues in the village

A full resume of the initial proposals is provided in Annex 21. These were further refined, extended and presented as part of the draft Travel Plan Strategy to the Parish Council for endorsement and approval to progress to the next stages of design, public exhibition and consultation. Following approval by the Joint County/District Member Panel in October 2004, the engineering work should commence in the current financial year. Details of the final designs are posted on www.astonparish.net

Actions: AF

- 1 APPG will continue to support Parish representation on the Aston Travel Plan Forum Group until completion of the consultation phase.
- 2 In conjunction with Sainsbury's plc, the Hertfordshire Rural Transport Partnership, and the Community Development Agency for Herts the Parish will look to pilot a community 'hopper' bus service both to support school travel and to encourage a move away from reliance on the car for local shopping, in accordance with Policy PF 3.

Policies F

Traffic and travel considerations

- 1 Partnerships between the Parish Council, residents, agencies and other interests that act to minimise the volume of traffic using Aston's Lanes, will be supported where they are consistent with improving the local environment. Section 8.6.1
- 2 New development proposals will be expected to take account of the needs of pedestrians, horse-riders and other non-motorised traffic users. Section 8.6.1
- 3 The Parish Council will pursue policies that seek to reduce reliance on the car. Section 8.6.1.

Appendix 1 - Summary of Aston's local plan policies

Aston's Parish Plan Policies, have been compiled with reference to East Herts adopted and proposed Local Plan Policies. Landscape and environmental policies acknowledge advice received from Hertfordshire County Council and the Environment Agency, respectively. Other policies, such as those on policing and traffic management have been compiled and agreed after extensive discussion with the appropriate Authorities.

The policies were exposed to wide consultation in the summer of 2004. This embraced Parish interests, Government, other Agencies and interested parties. In all over 90 different organisations were formally consulted. We thank everyone for their contributions.

The Plan and its local policies were duly noted by East Herts Council at its meeting on 7 December 2004. The Plan comes into effect on 1 January 2005.

APPG Policy	Section	Aston Parish Policy
Boundary considerations		
PA1	1.8	The 'green corridor' between Stevenage and Aston/Aston End will be defended. Proposals that would result in the coalescence of Stevenage with Aston/Aston End will be resisted.
PA2	1.8	The Parish Council will periodically review its boundaries to ensure that they are relevant to those that live within the evolving community of interests that has association with Aston.
Housing matters		
PB1	4.5	Any new development shall have due regard to the requirements of the local community and the need to ensure that adequate affordable housing is provided.
PB2	4.5	New build housing proposals shall be endorsed by the Parish Council only where such proposals are wholly consistent with a housing strategy. That strategy shall look to meet the holistic and community needs of the Parish: Speculative building proposals, outside the scope of the Parish Housing Strategy will not be supported by the Parish Council.
PB3	4.5	The Parish strategy shall, in particular, look to address the needs of associated younger persons, the more elderly wishing to re-locate but remain in the Parish, and to assist those associated with existing residents having an acknowledged disability or impairment.
PB4	4.6	Where appropriately located, the conversion of dwellings or other appropriate buildings into two or more self-contained residential units will be supported.
Business development		
PC1a	5.0	Proposals for employment, business or other non-residential uses will be expected to: 1 contribute positively to the economic and social well-being of the community; and 2 have minimal impact on traffic flows through the Parish.
PC1b	5.0	Applications for hazardous or heavy industrial uses will not be supported, unless such pursuits are consistent with regional or other strategic policy directions. Where appropriate facilities should be located adjacent to primary arterial routes, and shall ensure that traffic generated follows approved Heavy Goods or similar approved routes.
PC1c	5.0	The display of signs associated with business activity shall be sympathetic with the rural nature of the Parish.
Landscape & environment		
PD1	2.1	The rural aspect of Aston, both from outside the village and looking out from within it shall be preserved. No development which destroys the "invisibility" from outside or the rural outlook from within will be endorsed.
PD2	2.6.3	Development that adversely affects the sustainability of historic ponds, watercourses and other wildlife habitats will be resisted. <i>An 8 metre buffer zone from main rivers and a 5 metre buffer zone from any other watercourse or water body will generally be required on the watercourses within the Parish in order to safeguard this precious resource.</i>
PD3	2.6.5	Soft edges to lanes and sunken lanes, which are a particular feature of Aston should be conserved wherever possible.
PD4	2.1 & 3.3	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.
PD5	2.6.4	Where new development on land contains culverted sections of watercourse, opportunities will be sought for this culverting to be removed and the river channel reinstated into a natural form.

Appendix 1 - Summary of Aston's local plan policies

APPG Policy	Section	Aston Parish Policy
Community safety		
PE1	7.3	New development proposals will be expected to incorporate crime prevention measures through their design, layout and landscaping.
PE2	7.1	The Parish Council requests Hertfordshire Constabulary (Eastern Division) to provide updates on the volume and types of crime, traffic accidents and other incidents occurring within the Parish.
PE3	7.2	The Parish Council will continue to work closely with Hertfordshire Constabulary to promote prompt feedback on incidents and other crime related matters.
Travel, traffic & highways		
PF1	8.6.1	Partnerships, between the Parish Council, residents, agencies and other interests that act to minimise the volume of traffic using Aston's Lanes, will be supported where they are consistent with improving the local environment.
PF2	8.6.1	New development proposals will be expected to take account of the needs of pedestrians, horse-riders and other non-motorised traffic users.
PF3	8.6.1	The Parish Council will pursue policies that seek to reduce reliance on the car.
Parish facilities		
PG1	6.1	Favourable consideration will be given to supporting the provision of suitable additional or replacement community facilities in appropriate locations accessible by modes of transport other than the car. Proposals that would result in the loss of a community facility will be discouraged, other than in exceptional circumstances.
PG2	6.3.2	The Parish Council recognises that horse riding, stabling, and associated interests are commercially and socially important to Aston. The Council will seek to maintain a fair balance of interest between equine and residential users of facilities, and will ensure that due regard is given to the interests of horse riders from a road safety point of view.
The built environment		
PH1	3.3	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
PH2	3.3	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 Plan (December 1999).
PH3	3.3	Development adversely affecting Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Aston Parish will not be supported in accordance with Policy BE15 of the East Herts Adopted Plan (December 1999).
PH4	3.3	Development involving Listed Buildings should have special regard to the desirability of preserving the character of such buildings and their settings
PH5	2.1 & 3.3	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.
PH6	3.3	Important views into and out of Aston Village should be protected.
PH7	3.3	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.
PH8	3.3	All developments should adopt principles of good design and take account of the characteristics of existing development in the immediate surrounding area.
PH9	3.3	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.
PH10	3.3	A visual separation between individual properties should be maintained where appropriate
PH11	3.3	The displacement of vehicles to the surrounding area could be prejudicial to amenity and highway safety. New development should therefore incorporate car parking where appropriate.
PH12	3.3	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.
PH13	3.3	Any new agricultural building should be carefully sited and designed to reduce its apparent mass and minimise visual intrusion upon the wider landscape.

Appendix 1 - Summary of Aston's local plan policies

APPG Policy	Section	Aston Parish Policy
The built environment		
PH14	3.3	Development that adversely affects sites of archaeological importance will not be supported in accordance with Policy BE15 of the East Herts Adopted Plan (December 1999).
PH15	3.3	Cables should be placed underground wherever possible, especially within the Conservation Area.
PH16	3.3	Care should be taken to use boundary treatments that are appropriate to the location.
PH17	3.3.1	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.
PH18	3.3.1	Ribbon development must not be allowed, and the distinct boundaries of each hamlet and settlement must be preserved.

Appendix 2 - Aston Parish Plan - Schedule of annexes

This Parish Plan document is supported by a comprehensive range of papers. These either provide historic and / technical evidence, or, summarise relevant actions / policies for convenience.

A complete copy of the annexes [or relevant annex] is down loadable from the Parish website www.astonparish.net. Alternatively these may be inspected free of charge, by appointment with the Clerk of the Parish Council, or purchased from the Clerk @ £5.

1	Parish Meeting flyer 10 October 2001	1
2	News release – Character Statement gets go ahead	3
3	News release – Progress & next steps	4
4	News release – APPG gets grant go-ahead	5
5	Statistical profile of Aston Parish	6
6	Aston's crime statistics	7
7	Listed buildings in Aston Parish	8
8	Parish Council Policies - Summary 2003/4	9
9	Parish Plan policies 2004	13
10	Parish Plan Action Summary	17
11	E.H.D.C. Local Plan 1986-1991 (December 1999) (Current Policies)	20
12	EHDC Local Plan Second Review Deposit Version (December 2000) (proposals)	29
13	Business interests in Aston	44
14	Outcomes from the Aston Travel Survey 1998	46
15	Characteristics of local lanes, roads & streets	48
16	Road traffic accidents in Aston involving personal injury	51
17	Aston Traffic Survey 2003 – Headline report	52
18	Statutory Agency Tour of Aston with supporting notes	57
19	Aston Traffic Plan - Background notes for Site Visit February 2003	59
20	Informal traffic options for discussion	62
21	Proposed traffic engineering solutions (December 2003)	63
22	River Beane extraction – Update (December 2003)	67
23	Aston Parish Census & Survey Form 2003	68
24	South Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment (October 2001)	72
25	Aston Travel Plan Exhibition of proposals (May 2004)	78
26	Aston Housing Seminar – Public invitation September 2003	80
27	Aston Housing Conference September 2003 Report via APNews	81
28	Report to APN on Travel Plan Survey response (October 2003)	83
29	Travel Exhibition (May 2004) leaflet and results are available on the web*	
30	Policy Matrix – linking all Policies to the Plan	

Appendix 3 - Aston Parish Plan, action statement

This action statement summarises the 30 or so actions included within the Plan document. Whilst these are reproduced in their entirety in Annex 10, it seeks to ensure that through the Parish Council process, all residents are aware of what is to be achieved and by when. It thus provides a public record to demonstrate public accountability and attainment by our local parish representatives.

Ref	Resume	Who	Resources	When	Priority
Cross cutting					
A1	Agree prioritisation and timing for the completion of the Parish Action Plan	APC			
A2	The statistical profile of the Parish will be updated to reflect the 2001 census data	APC			
Boundaries					
AA1	Promotion of boundary adjustments with Stevenage Borough Council	APC			
AA2	Canvass opinion of Hooks Cross residents to determine parish allegiance	APC			
AA3	Seek support from EHDC to extend the Aston Conservation Area	APC			
Housing					
AB1	Review earlier opposition to EHDC proposed policy OSV2, regarding Village categorisation	APC			
AB2	Arrange to conduct a whole Parish housing needs survey	APC			
Business development					
AC1	Ensure that business signage accords with Policy PC1(c)	APC			
AC2	Request EHDC to fully investigate traffic implications of all business planning proposals	APC/ EHC			
Landscape & environment					
AD1	Extension of Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) within the Parish	APC			
AD2	Monitoring of activities at Bragbury House & grounds affecting Astonbury Manor	APC			
AD3	Check out TPO status of Trees on the Stevenage Golf Course	APC			
AD4	Keeping Aston only peripherally visible from outside the Parish	APC		On-going	
AD5	Support to the River Beane Restoration Association	APC		On-going	
AD6	Encourage landowners to improve the management of ponds and water courses	APC		On-going	
AD7	Production of a guide to protect the Beane Valley.	APC			
Community safety					
AE1	Actively respond to Hertfordshire Police Authority's consultation on policing targets to reflect a parish wide view	APC		Annually	
AE2	Formally consult will all residents and business interests , consider, and advise the Hertfordshire Police Authority on whether residents prefer to be Policed by Stevenage or rural East Hertfordshire (Hertford) Police Stations	APC			
AE3	Encourage Hertfordshire Police Authority to issue a monthly 'crime and incident report'	APC		On-going	
Travel, traffic & highways					
AF1	Executive support to the Aston Travel Plan Forum Group, during its currency	APC		On-going	
AF2	Explore prospects of a regular 'hopper bus' to reduce dependency on the use of the car	APC			
AF3	Ensure that the School Travel Plan is wholly aligned to the Travel & Parish Plan principles	APC		On-going	
AF4	Promotion of 'Safer routes to School'	APC		On-going	
AF5	Preservation of soft edges to lanes and sunken lanes	APC		On-going	
AF6	Exploration of diverting HGV Traffic from Queens Square etc	APC		On-going	
AF7	Mitigation of HGV traffic flows on the Parish more generally	APC		On-going	
AF8	Support priority for horses on appropriate routes	APC		On-going	
AF9	Actively support traffic measures that give priority to pedestrians	APC		On-going	
AF10	Continue support for a Hooks Cross bypass, in principle	APC		On-going	
Parish facilities					
AG1	Liaise with & support the Village Hall Committee to secure funding to upgrade the Village Hall	APC			
AG2	Secure a long term home for Aston's historical archive and historical memorabilia	APC			

Appendix 4- policies and actions matrix

Plan heading	Section	EHC policy description	EHC current	EHC proposed	APC	APPG	Plan subject	Related actions
Boundary considerations	1.8				P1, P4, P6	PA1	Protection of boundary and Green corridor	AA1
Boundary considerations	1.8				P5	PA2	Periodic review of logical boundaries	AA2
Parish Opinion of Aston	2.1					PD4	Open character to be preserved	
Parish Opinion of Aston	2.1					PD1	Invisibility from outside looking to Aston	AD5
Contemporary Land use	2.3	Adaptation & re-use of Rural Buildings	RA6A	GBC10				
Contemporary Land use	2.3	Riding Stables & associated development		GBC12				
Contemporary Land use	2.3	New housing for equestrian workers	BE6	GBC13				
Contemporary Land use	2.3	Extension of dwellings in the Green Belt		ENV11				
Contemporary Land use	2.3	Extension of curtilage into the Countryside		ENV12				
Contemporary Land use	2.3	Adaptation & re-use of Rural Buildings	RA6B	GBC11		PC1(c)	Signage to be minimal consistent with rural area	AC1
Hydrology	2.4	Water Environment		ENV25	E4			AD6
Hydrology	2.4	Groundwater protection		SD16				
Aston's built heritage	3.2	Extension of dwellings in the Green Belt	BE6	ENV11				
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH6	Important views	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH1	Local Designs standards	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH2	Conservation area	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH4	Listed buildings	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH5	Open character of the Village	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH7	Scale of development	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH8	New dwellings	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH9	New development	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH10	Visual separation	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH11	Car parking requirement	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH12	Appropriate materials	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH13	Commercial & agricultural buildings	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH16	Boundary features	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH17	Conformity with surroundings	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH18	Energy efficiency	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH19	Ribbon development	
Character & distinctive features	3.3					PH15	Cables to be placed underground	
New strategic housing – local view	4.2	Metropolitan Green Belt	RA2	GBC3				
Affordable housing & local needs	4.2							
Housing & the Community	4.3	New Housing Development	H4	HSG5	P2	PB1	Development of local housing strategy	
Housing & the Community	4.3	Rural Area Housing Needs	H6	HSG9				
Housing & the Community	4.3	Affordable Housing thresholds		HSG8				
Housing & the Community	4.3	Replacement dwellings & infill housing development		HSG12				
Responding to changing local need	4.3	Category 2 Villages		OSV2	P6			
New strategic housing – local view	4.4	Extension of dwellings in the Green Belt	BE6	ENV11				
Housing & the Community	4.4	Replacement dwellings in the Green Belt		HSG13				
Housing & the Community	4.4	Replacement dwellings ...key criteria		HSG14				
Affordable housing & local needs	4.4				H1	PB2	Guidance on housing need	AB1

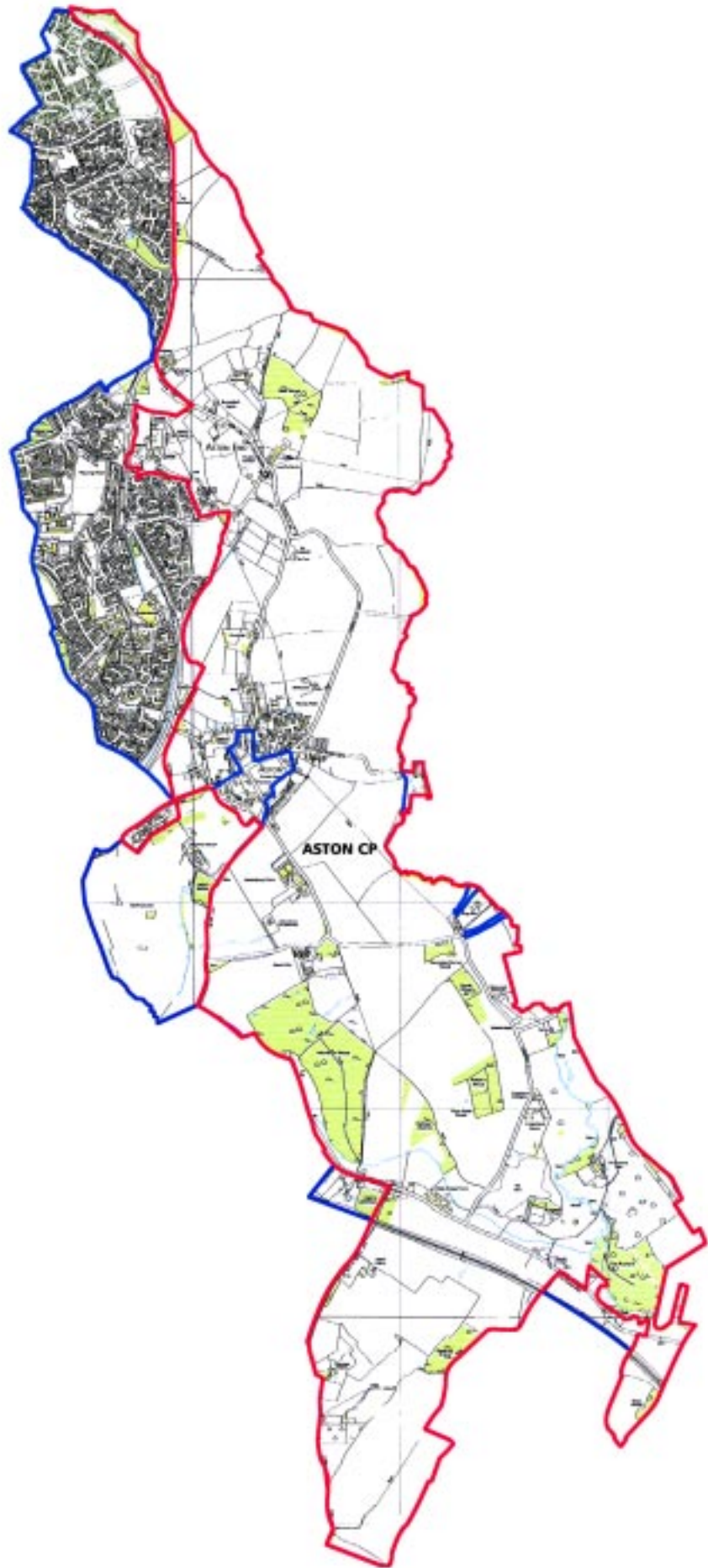
Appendix 3 - policies and actions matrix

Plan heading	Section	EHC policy description	EHC current	EHC proposed	APC	APPG	Plan subject	Related actions
Affordable housing & local needs	4.4	Affordable Housing	H5	HSG7		PB3	Defining local needs	AB2
Housing & the Community	4.5							
Multiple occupation homes	4.5							
Business & the Community	5	Adaptation & re-use of Rural Buildings		GBC11		PB4	To be favourably considered	
Business & the Community	5	Rural Employment	EMP5	EDE4		PC1a-c	Conditions for non-residential use	
Business & the Community	5	Loss of existing rural employment sites		EDE6		PC1a-c	Conditions for non-residential use	
Business & the Community	5	Homeworking		EDE8		PC1a-c	Conditions for non-residential use	
Rural diversification	5.2							AC2
Community facilities	6.2	Retention of community facilities		LRC13	A3			
Community facilities	6.2			LRC14				
Community facilities	6.2	Village Shops, community & leisure facilities		OSV9	A6			
Community facilities	6.3	Countryside recreation		LRC5				
Leisure Facilities	6.4	Provision of community facilities		LRC14				
Providing new Facilities	7.1							
Crime & disorder	7.1							AG2
Crime & disorder	7.3	Planning Out Crime - New Development	BE26	ENV6	L1	PE2	Provision of crime statistics	AE3
Crime & disorder	7.3	Planning Out Crime - Existing Development	BE27	ENV7		PE1	Local design criteria	AE1, E2
Crime & disorder	7.3	Pedestrian environments		TR18				
Movement	8							
School Travel	8.3							
Movement	8.4	Developments generating Traffic on rural roads	M11	TR21	T4, T5, T8			AF3, F4
Traffic, Road loadings / condition	8.4							
Aston's informal survey results	8.5							
Proposed highway solutions	8.8							
Metropolitan Green Belt	2.2.1	The Rural Area	RA1	GBC1				
Metropolitan Green Belt	2.2.1	Metropolitan Green Belt - Appropriate Development	RA2	GBC3	P2			
Metropolitan Green Belt	2.2.1	Metropolitan Green Belt	RA2	GBC3	P6			
Landscape Conservation Area	2.2.2	Landscape Conservation Areas	RA11	GBC16				
Landscape Conservation Area	2.2.2	The Rural Area	RA1	GBC1				
Aston Village Conservation Area	2.2.2	Conservation Areas		BH4	P7			
Aston Village Conservation Area	2.2.3	Conservation Area	BE18		P7			
Aston Village Conservation Area	2.2.3	Review of Conservation Area	BE19	BH5	P7	PA3	Review of Conservation Area boundary	AD4
The River Beane	2.2.3				E4			AD6
Bragbury House & grounds	2.3.3							AD2
Aston Village	2.4.1							AF6, F7
Character & distinctive features	2.5.3	Areas of Archaeological Significance	BE15,	BH1-3		PH3	Ancient monuments	
Character & distinctive features	2.5.3	Areas of Archaeological Significance	BE15,	BH1-3		PH14	Archaeological protection	
Character & distinctive features	2.5.3	Areas of Archaeological Significance	BE15,	BH1-3				
Archaeology	2.5.3	Local Nature Reserves or Wildlife Trusts	RA13 C	ENV21				
Woodland & Nature Reserves	2.6.1	Nature Conservation Management	RA13 D	ENV22				
Woodland & Nature Reserves	2.6.1	Nature Conservation Management	RA13 D	ENV22				
Rivers & water courses	2.6.1	Local Nature Reserves or Wildlife Trusts	RA13 C	ENV21				

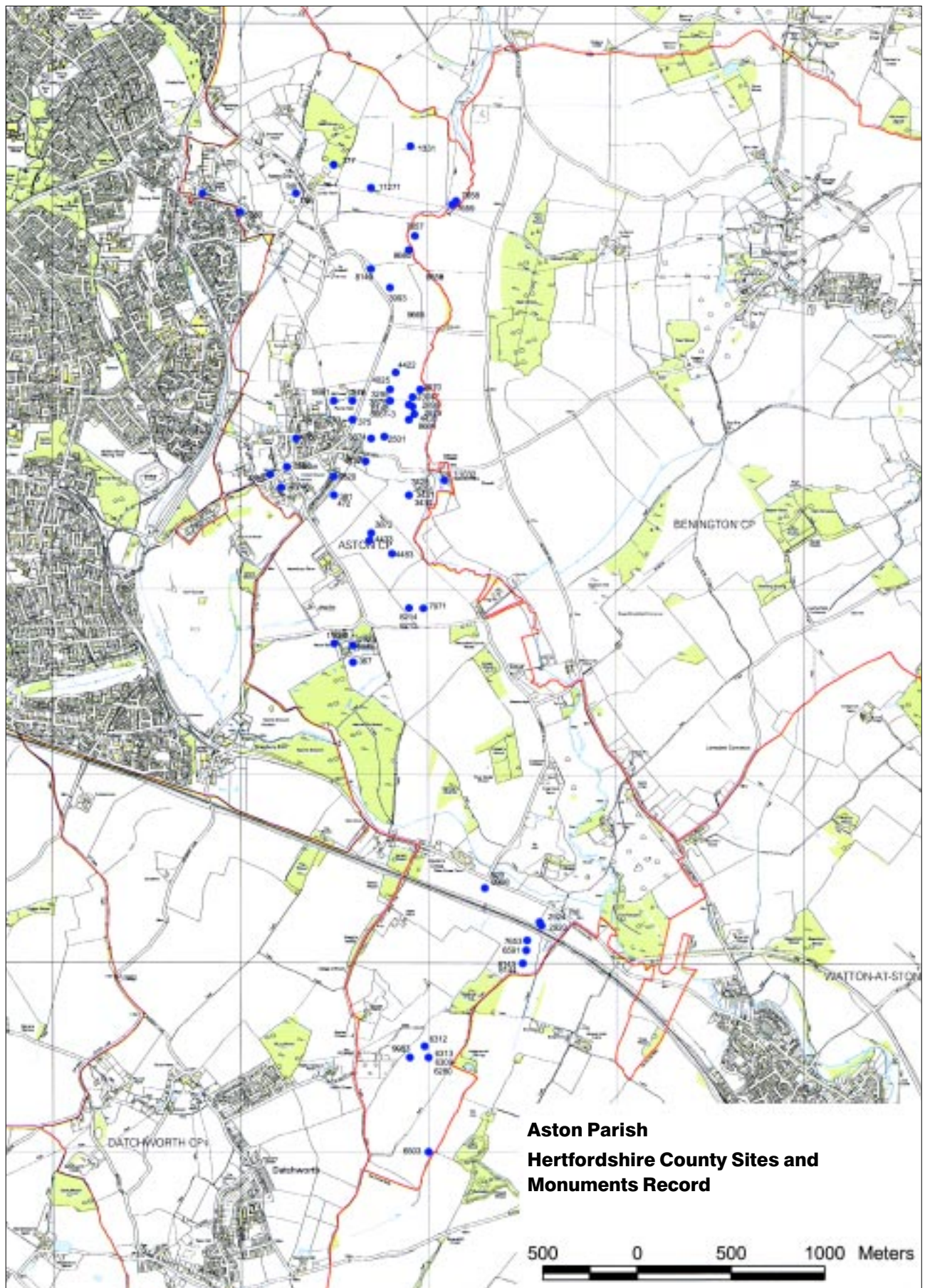
Appendix 3 - policies and actions matrix

Plan heading	Section	EHC policy description	EHC current	EHC proposed	APC	APPG	Plan subject	Related actions
Hedgerows & trees	2.6.2	Lanes & Hedgerows	RA8	ENV18	E2			
Hedgerows & trees	2.6.2	Tree Preservation	RA9	ENV16				AD1
Hedgerows & trees	2.6.2	Tree Planting	RA10	ENV17				AD3
Hedgerows & trees	2.6.2	Nature Conservation Management	RA13	ENV22				
Hedgerows & trees	2.6.2	Tree Planting	D	ENV17				
Rivers & water courses	2.6.3	Water Environment	RA10	ENV25				
Flora & fauna	2.6.3	Promotion of nature conservation		ENV24				
Rivers & water courses	2.6.4	Protected species	RA14	ENV23				
Roads, Lanes & verges	2.6.5	Lanes & Hedgerows	RA13E	ENV18		PD2	Development affecting ponds etc.	AF6
Old highway lanes & verges	2.6.6	Tree Preservation	RA8	ENV16		PD3	Soft edges to lanes to be retained	AF5
Protecting the footpath network	2.6.6	Public Rights of Way	RA9	LRC11	E3			
Protecting the footpath network	2.6.7	Countryside recreation	L2	LRC5				
Census material	3.1.3							
Character & distinctive features	3.3.1	Extension of curtilage into the Countryside		ENV12				1.1
National, Regional /Local housing	4.1	Extension of dwellings in the Green Belt		ENV11				
Housing & the Community	4.3	Extension of curtilage into the Countryside	BE6	ENV12				
The Village Hall	6.2.2				A1			
Aston St Mary's School	6.2.5				A4	PG2	Regarded as a key parish resource	AG1
Community facilities	6.3.1	Sports & Recreation		LRC1				
The Equine dimension	6.3.2	Cycling - Dual use and equestrian use	L1	TR11	P3			
Housing & the Community	6.3.2	New housing for equestrian workers		GBC13		PG1	Facilities - Minimising need for car usage	
Community facilities	6.3.2	Cycling - Dual use and equestrian use		TR11	A3			
The Equine dimension	6.3.2	Riding Stables & associated development		GBC12				
The Equine dimension	6.3.2	Protection of equestrian routes		TR15		PG3	Commercial & social importance to Aston	AF8
Community facilities	6.3.3	Public Rights of Way		LRC11				
Walking for pleasure	6.3.3	Countryside recreation	L2	LRC5	E5			AF9
Community facilities	7.1.1							
Arterial routes	8.1.1							
Primary routes	8.1.2							
Movement	8.1.5	Cycling - Dual use and equestrian use		TR11	T3	PE3	Electronic comms with the Constabulary	
Movement	8.1.5	Protection of equestrian routes		TR15	T6, T9, T10	PF4	Hooks Cross Bypass	
Footpaths, right of way, bridleways	8.1.5.	Public Rights of Way		LRC11				
Movement	8.1.6	Towns & Villages - Traffic	L2	TR20	T1, T7			
Public transport	8.1.6		M6					
Summary of survey findings	8.6.1					PF2	Policies favouring non-motorised travel	
Summary of survey findings	8.6.1					PF3	Minimalise reliance on the car for local use	

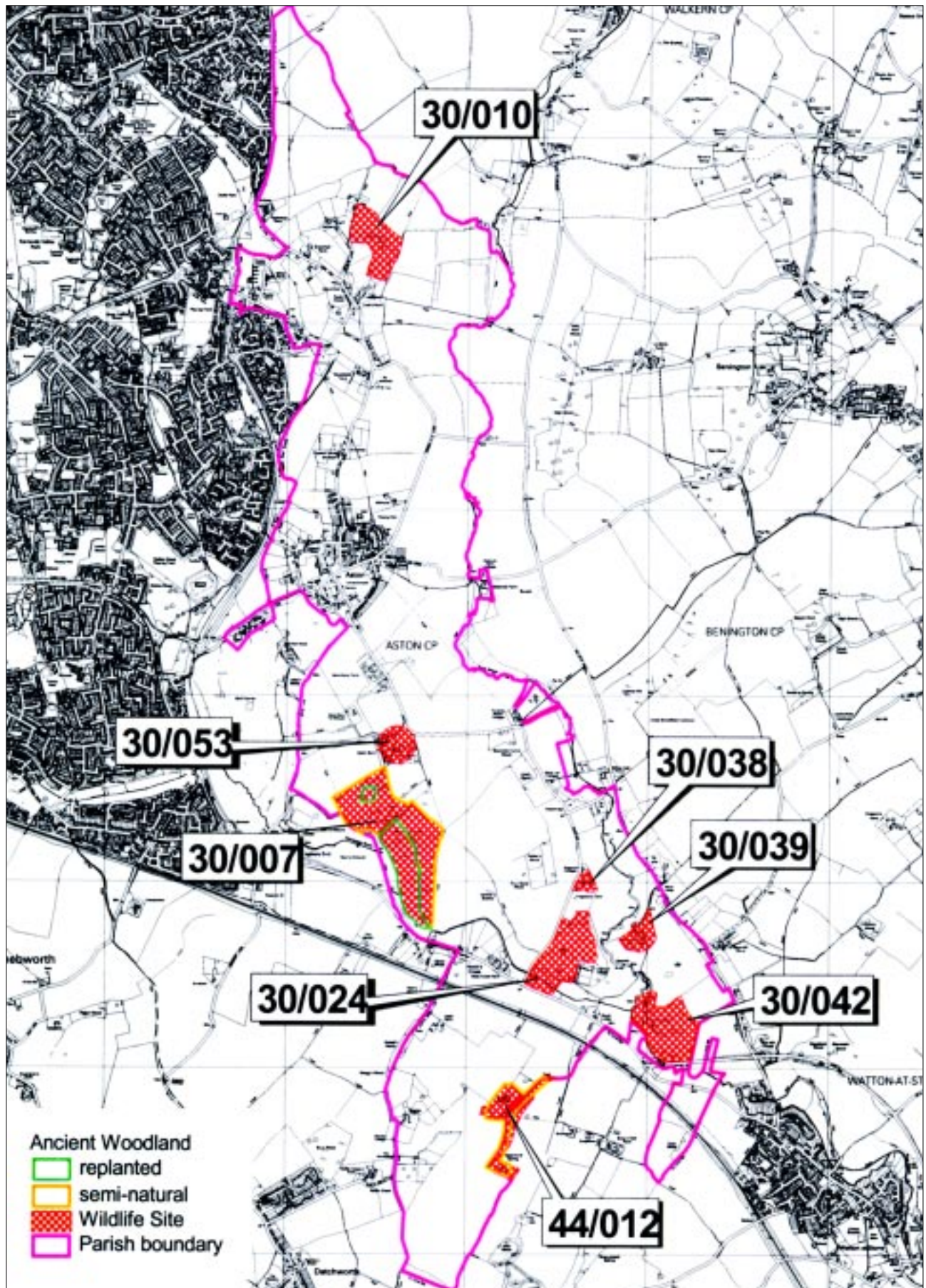
Map 1 - Definitive map of Aston Parish



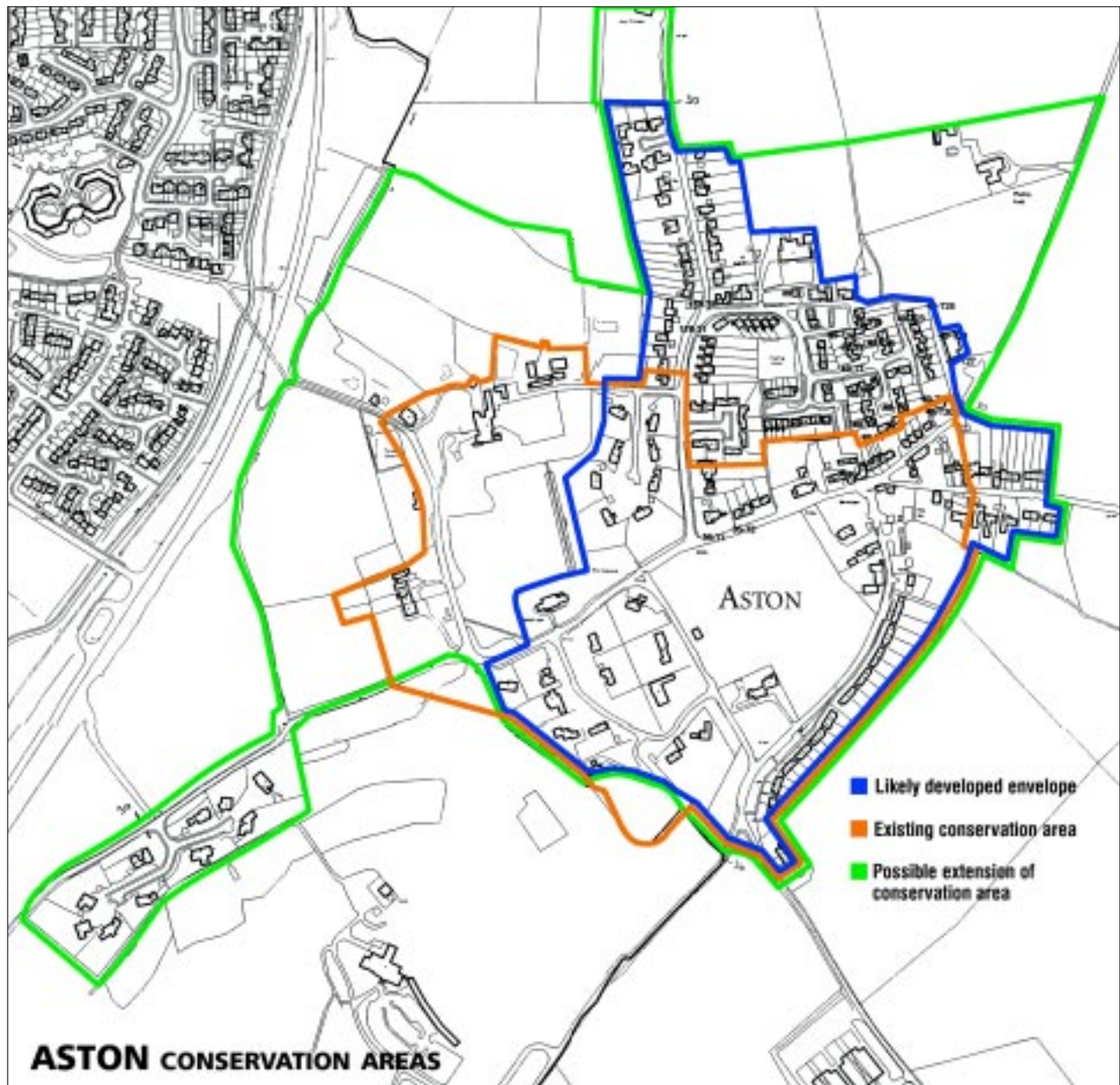
Map 2 - Aston Parish County sites and monument record data



Map 3 - Aston Parish, wildlife sites of interest



Map 4 - Aston Village Conservation Area



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Steering Group Members:

*Allan McNab
Stephen Sypula
Sue Anthony
Gordon Ewan
Simon Poole
Peter Greasby*

*Editors: Stephen Sypula, Allan McNab
Design: Max Holba, max@designersco.co.uk
Printed by: Streets Printers, Baldock*

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