

## PARISH PLAN QUESTIONNAIRE

The Parish Plan questionnaire was circulated to over 2,700 households at the end of September 2007 with a view to drawing up a development plan for the next 5 to 10 years. The aim being to complete a first stage consultation exercise to obtain the views of parishioners in order to draw up a strategy for their future benefit.

Over 530 members of households have returned their verdict that has given the Parish Council comments on the future for our community. This represents almost 20% of the parishioners and is an acceptable sample on the opinions of those who live in this diverse Parish and with a cross section, which was spread across most age groups. Parishioners expressed views on a range of issues affecting their lives in Meopham, Culverstone and Harvel. The three Wards, comprising Hook Green and Nurstead (850 properties); Camer and Meopham Green (940); and Culverstone and Harvel (950), residents were broadly similar in their responses.

How did the public respond to what they know about their Council's present decision making process? Only 20% were **Fully** aware; half who replied were **Quite** aware; but those **Not aware** accounted for 30%. The overwhelming majority of respondents, 80% considered that more publicity was required on the Parish Council's activities. ***Less than 45% know who their Parish Councillor is – fewer still, 25%, stated that they know their Borough or County Councillors.***

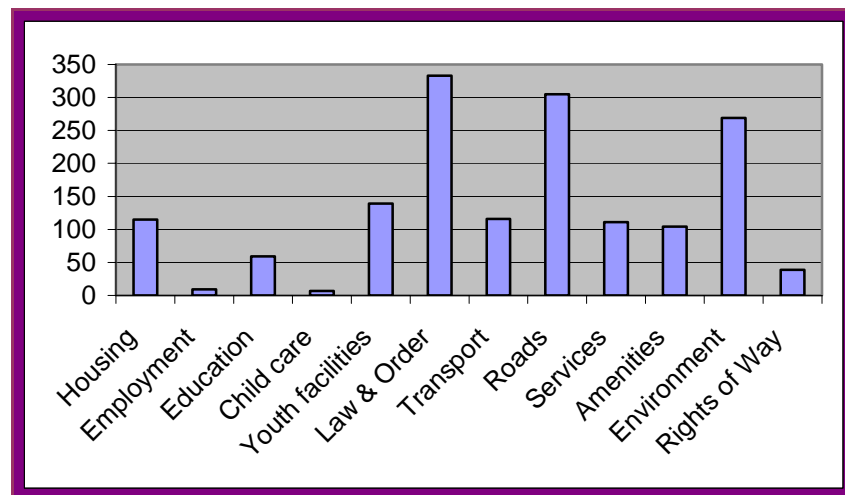
If the Parish Council is to seek to implement changes that will fulfil what are parishioners' aspirations, the question of funding has to be examined. 56% of respondents considered that fund raising, private sponsorship and council tax through the Precept should be combined to meet these costs; only 30% regarded the latter as acceptable as the sole source. Very few expected, less than 20 households each, for the other alternatives on their own.

The comments, made in the questionnaire replies on the funding, were that Council Tax was already too high and that improvements should be made without increasing it. This was summed up by "Already pay £190 a month for very little out of our money" or "Improvements should be paid for within the existing budget – we pay enough". Some regarded improvements in efficiency or more efficient spending as the means to meet such costs. However, these criticisms were relatively few but there does need to be more information given out to allay these adverse statements.

"Providing more up-to-date information" was a theme of several suggestions. A monthly report is published in the Meopham Review, which was commented upon by several respondents. Minutes of Parish Council meetings are also promulgated on the Parish web-site but some thought that these should be more current and be made available with less delay. Publicity from the Borough Council was regarded as better than that given by the Parish Council.

The way in which the parishioners responded to the questionnaire was summarised in an information sheet (No. 1), which is being circulated via the free press. A more detailed analysis is provided in the following pages. A further consultation exercise is being organised at Meopham Village Hall on Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2008, at 2pm.

In order to gain the views of parishioners, 12 topics were included in the questionnaire seeking comments and obtaining information. Tabulated below, based upon the three most important, are the issues that affect the lives of our Community.



As can be observed the three key issues were Law and Order; Roads (Highways and Traffic); and the Environment.

All the subjects covered above will be dealt with separately on this website.

Under Law and Order, the key aspects were:

**Vandalism and burglary cause most anxiety but so too was the lack of police presence.**

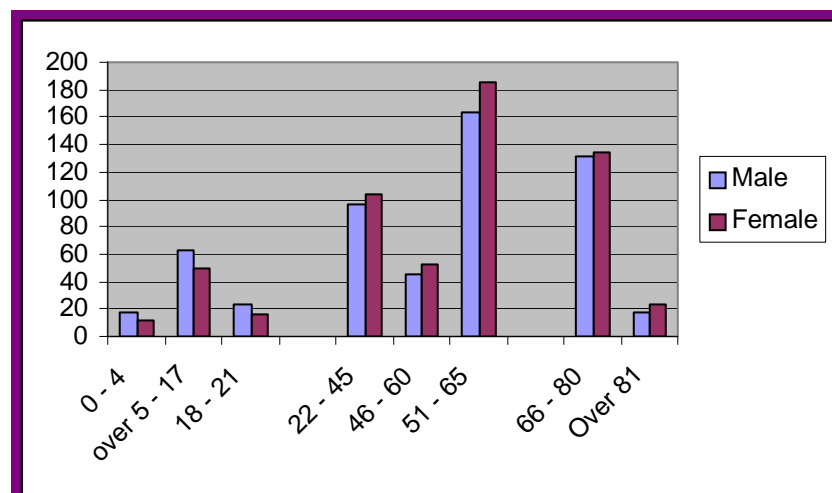
Highways and Traffic

**Road safety throughout Wrotham Road identified as the most significant hazard.**

The Environment

**Over 94% consider that the Green Belt is either very important or important.**

So that we can consider how representative was our sample from the replies we received, the response from each household has been broken down into age groups and gender, as shown below:



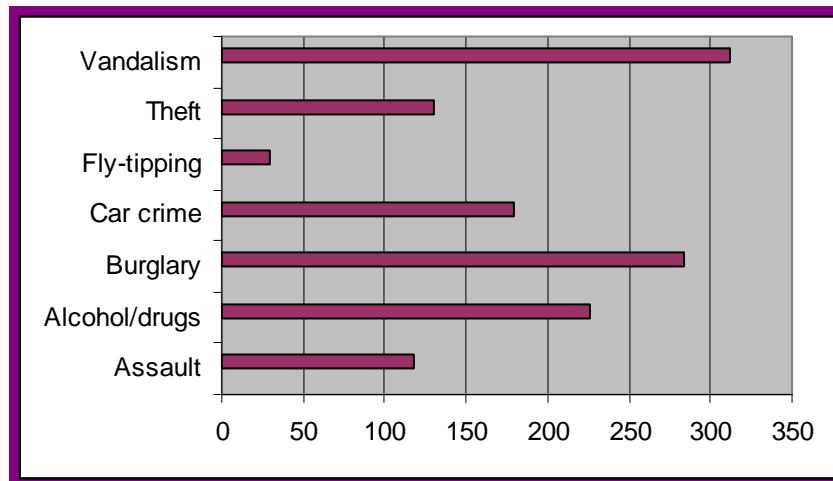
The younger age groups are under-represented and a separate exercise is being conducted to assess the requirements that school children and other teenagers may regard as relevant to them.

## Concerns about Law and Order

The issue that drew the largest response was law and order. Many residents gave instances of crime and anti-social behaviour that are blighting our community.

One-third of parishioners stated that they belonged to neighbourhood watch schemes within the Parish. However of the remainder, over 70%, claimed that they would join such a scheme if it operated in their area but only 20 householders were prepared to start up a new group.

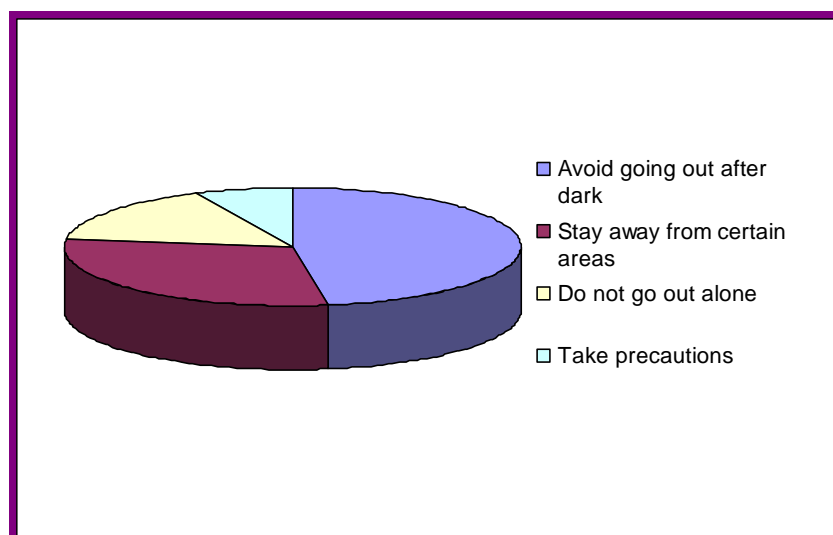
Those concerned about crime and anti-social behaviour reflected their experiences as well as perceptions as illustrated below.

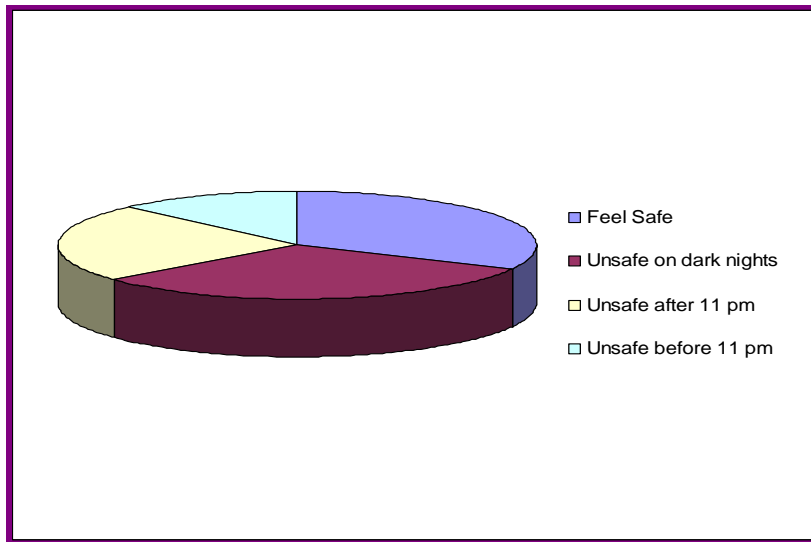


In addition, the reported occasions totalled 150 when local residents suffered from criminal or anti-social behaviour. Instances of burglaries, car crime and vehicle damage were cited; in addition abuse and verbal assault occurred frequently often associated with drunken behaviour and vandalism by young people. More details are given below, as shown by this survey's responses.

Although in 156 replies, these parishioners commented that they never felt unsafe in Meopham, 345 residents expressed doubts, with 45% expressing anxiety over their safety on dark evenings. Places that caused such fears were:

Near the railway station; in the Valley Area; when gangs of youths gather around the station, near the shops or by Culverstone Community Centre and on Judsons Recreation Ground.





The presence of the police and other agencies was regarded good or reasonable by 129 households, nevertheless 60% of the respondents reported that they were unaware of their presence in the area while less than 10% regarded their service as poor. Some parishioners made favourable comments about the helpfulness of the rural community wardens but there was a general lack of response on this aspect and 109 respondents found they had no help from the police or these agencies.

## **Level of crime and anti-social behaviour in Meopham**

Bearing in mind that this reflects only 20% of residents who responded to the questionnaire the number of crimes etc may be much higher. This level of crime and anti-social behaviour may not correspond to police statistics as many incidents may go unreported.

**Number of occurrences reported in this survey of crime and anti-social behaviour inflicted on Meopham residents are shown as follows:**

***Vandalism and graffiti:*** Local residents reported 26 incidents, which had directly involved them or resulted in damage including fences being kicked in and walls being damaged. Excessive noise from young people and frightening behaviour occurred.

***Burglaries:*** 34 criminal actions were reported and in two cases, properties were subject to burglary twice and another on 4 occasions.

***Theft:*** 14 cases of theft were reported.

***Drunken behaviour and drug abuse:*** Criminal damage occurred on occasions when drunken behaviour or excessive drug abuse led to 9 incidents that were reported in this survey. A suggestion made was for a police crackdown, especially in pubs known for drug trafficking.

***Assault:*** 20 incidents of verbal abuse and 6 of physical assault occurred to local residents. Not all abuse was from youngsters but older people too.

***Fly-tipping:*** Two reported incidents of fly-tipping on private property. Others reported fly-tipping in country lanes, which required action to be taken.

***Others:*** A case of a bogus EDF caller was reported. Off-road bikes caused a serious nuisance to residents.

When asked what other forms of criminal activities or anti-social behaviour were not covered by the list included in the questionnaire, the following were identified by a number of respondents:

10 gave instances fly-tipping in quiet country lanes;  
4 noted the amount of litter dropping;  
3 stated speeding traffic and the use of mobile phones while driving;  
2 highlighted criminal activities caused in one case by travellers;  
2 reported rowdyism and excessive noise; and  
other individuals had –  
encountered a door to door conman;  
been caused serious nuisance due to quad bike riders;  
and finally reported drug trafficking.

## **Locations in Meopham that parishioners regard as unsafe for the public**

The number of responses on areas in Meopham which seem unsafe to local residents were:

12 at night-time outside Meopham Railway Station and the car park;  
11 reported dark or unlit areas along Wrotham Road;  
8 found Culverstone Community Centre car park and the recreation ground scary;  
7 kept away from the Valley Area; 7 thought groups of teenagers intimidating;  
5 near Public Houses; 5 at the rear of Camer Parade at night;  
4 Alleyways leading to Ediva Road;  
2 Judsons Recreation Ground; 2 Camer Park.

Some of the reasons for these misgivings are explained by the reaction to unsafe areas.

## **Reaction and quotes from residents about public safety**

More street lighting needed, some prefer amenity lights throughout the village, others in areas such as from Meopham Green towards Culverstone but one resident was opposed to any more lights.

“Youths from outside Meopham come here to cause trouble and to take drugs because of the lack of a police presence.”

Noise, abusive drunken behaviour and loitering after hours near pubs was threatening.

Other views were that “the police officers and community wardens are never around when jobs cause trouble late at night”.

“The police are only present at meetings and never on patrol.”

“Never see a police officer in Harvel”.

“Only lived in Meopham for 7 months but yet to see a police officer”.

“Recently received notice of police surgeries”.

Judsons Recreation Ground should have lighting and CCTV to reduce vandalism.

On the positive side a resident gave self-defence classes for other people.

Other comments made were, “won’t be intimidated”; “grit teeth and carry a torch”; “carry a hockey stick”.

“People have the right to feel safe anywhere even in the dark or on their own”

“Women feel more unsafe than men”. “travel by car when possible at night”.

Praise for the police and community warden – “Helen and Mandy were very helpful when youths graffitied property”.

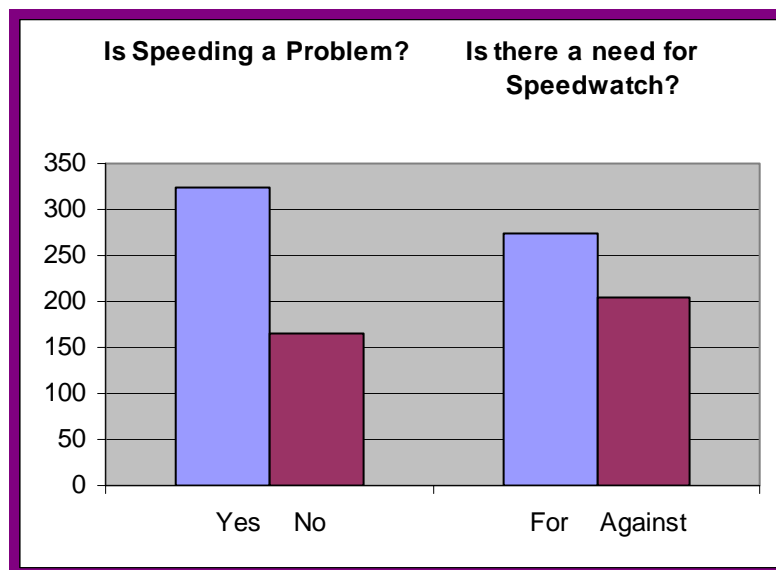
The views of the Police have not been sought on this subjective analysis but they will be asked to comment in due course. They may also wish to comment separately.

## HIGHWAYS, TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT PROBLEMS

After Law and Order, the next most serious problem for the majority parishioners were ***the roads, speeding traffic and the public transport service***. However, the responses were mixed on these issues and the reactions were varied but with clear majorities in support of more action to improve these conditions on the highways.

***Two-thirds of respondents considered that excessive speeding was a major hazard along the main highway, Wrotham Road and indicated this in their replies. 57% supported a speedwatch scheme to see if this had any impact on reducing speeding. 89 people were prepared to man this operation in at least three locations.***

Various shades of opinion were reflected by those who regarded speeding as dangerous, especially along the A227 and those who did not or saw the need for a speedwatch scheme was divided.



Road safety concerns were identified mainly along Wrotham Road (later Gravesend Road to the south of Newlands Lane) - A227 but also some feeder roads, including Whitepost Lane, Culverstone; Longfield Road at Camer; and Norwood Lane at Hook Green. 192 separate comments were made to this topic in the questionnaires indicating roads or sections of roads, which were regarded as potentially dangerous.

The concerns about traffic congestion and dangerous sections of the highways in Meopham were identified by parishioners who listed them, as follows:

### Blackspots

Outside schools start and finish times.

Junctions with Longfield Road and Norwood Lane and along these roads.

Meopham School to Meopham Green

Meopham Green to Culverstone

Near the George Inn

On the bends by the Windmill

Chapmans Hill to Primary School

Catholic Church to the Railway Stn.

Whitepost Lane, Culverstone and

Newlands Lane, Culverstone.

## **Bypass – A227**

Over a considerable period of time some parishioners have campaigned for a bypass around the Parish to relieve pressure on the A227, connecting the A2 in the north with the A20 (M20) south of Vigo; a stretch of 7 miles through the Parish from Nurstead to Culverstone. The need for such a bypass around Meopham and Culverstone, which by its definition would need to be routed through the Green Belt, brought the following the reaction from residents who responded with:

**IN FAVOUR**  
**170**

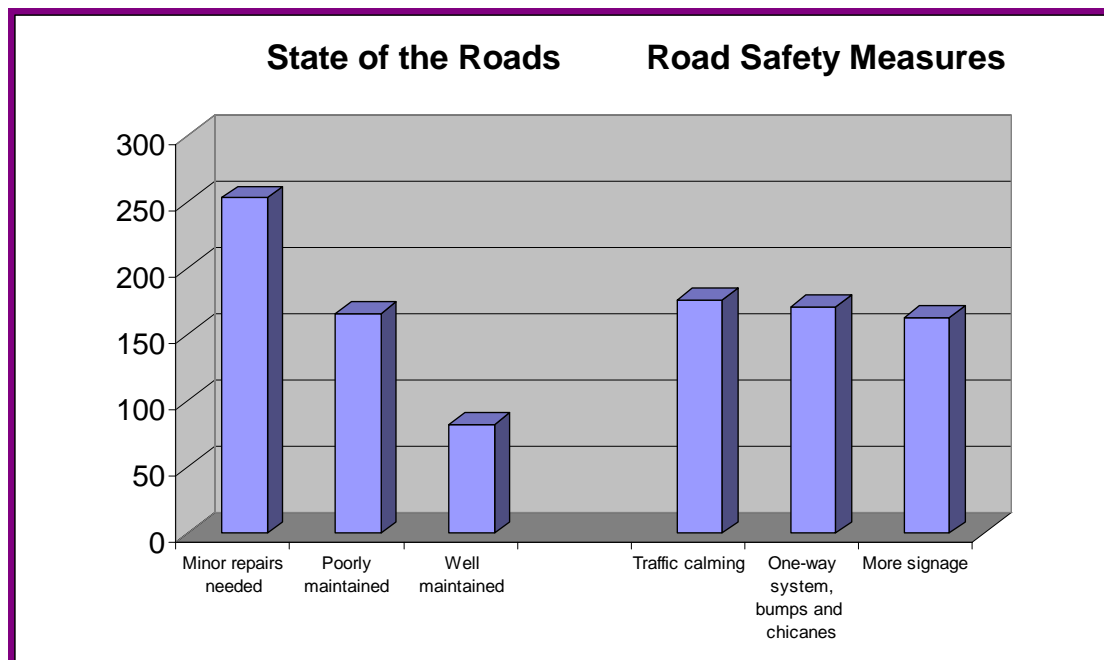
**AGAINST**  
**317**

### **Action suggested for improvements**

**Take measures to ban heavy lorries or apply weight restrictions; traffic lights needed at junction of Wrotham Road and Longfield Road; More safety (average speed) cameras needed; zebra or controlled crossings, flashing signs required and no parking outside schools. Classify A227 as “B” road, apply more traffic restrictions and install average speed cameras.**

### **Road safety measures**

Although some respondents to the survey expressed their disquiet about the extent of the current road safety measures and the plethora of signs and traffic restrictions, others were concerned that the present traffic controls did not go far enough. Just over 30% wanted more general traffic calming steps to be taken and the table below sets out in graphic form the way in which more specific measures should be applied from their response to the questionnaire.



## State of roads

The majority of residents accepted that most road maintenance was of a satisfactory standard. However, a significant majority considered that they were badly maintained. These observations were on the state of side roads, particularly those leading off the main A227 and country roads leading to Harvel and Cobham.

Comments made on the state of the highways were as follows:

“Woodhill in a very poor condition.”

“Minor roads are badly looked after.”

“Road repairs needed in Cheyne Walk.”

“Side roads poorly maintained.”

“Pavements in poor state, especially where there is no street lighting.”

“Loose chippings from rumble strips thrown up by passing lorry and broke my front windscreen near Bartellas for which I received no compensation.”

## Views expressed on speeding and traffic controls were:

**There 96 different comments on traffic management issues, many are set out below:**

More speed cameras needed;  
enforce existing speed limits;  
speed bumps in Whitepost Lane;  
traffic lights or controlled crossing at Longfield Road junction;  
any measures to slow down or to reduce traffic needed;  
drivers don't heed speed limits;  
overtaken while driving within speed limit;  
congestion at Culverstone School by inconsiderate parents parking cars.

### Opposed to more measures

*Educate drivers, all restrictive measures have little effect; drivers ignore flashing signs; less speed limit signs; no more speed limit restrictions; too many signs already; the more signs there are, the more they are ignored; speed bumps cause damage to vehicles and slow down the emergency services on call.*

### Support for more restrictions

*Outside schools – speed humps near entrances; 20mph signs approaching schools; carry out speed checks near schools; restrict parking at leaving times; no parking outside or in nearby roads; stop unlawful parking near schools; better parking provision at schools; proper crossing outside primary school; school traffic blocks road in mornings; all school approaches should have lollipop staff; mini-roundabout at secondary school.*

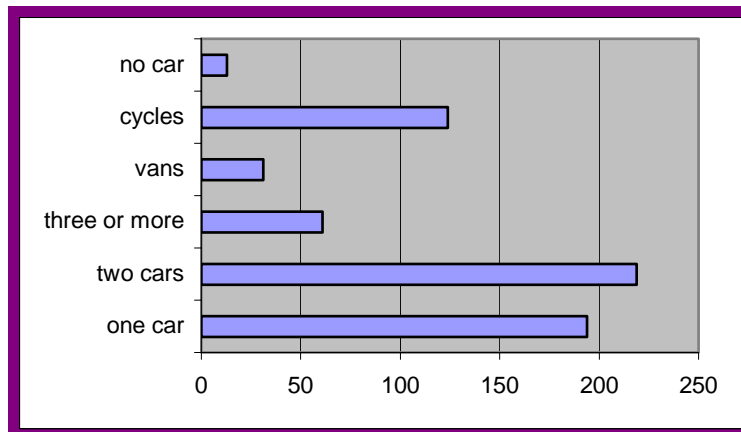
*Shopping areas – chicane and controlled crossing at Nevil Parade; pedestrian crossing or traffic lights for these shops: Camer Parade should have mini-roundabout at Longfield Road end; visibility leaving this Parade is hazardous; poor lighting at the rear at night discourages restaurant users parking behind the Parade; traffic lights at Longfield Road/ Wrotham Road junction; traffic calming near Costcutter store; more control necessary over cars parked on pavements.*

*Other locations – speed bumps near Meopham Green; crossing needed near station; size and volume of vehicles increasing; ban heavy lorries and juggernauts coming through Meopham; lorries don't slow down when approaching Culverstone ; HGVs use Melliker Lane which is too narrow; Melliker Lane should be one-way; Wrotham Road should have centre double white lines at Hook Green to discourage overtaking.*

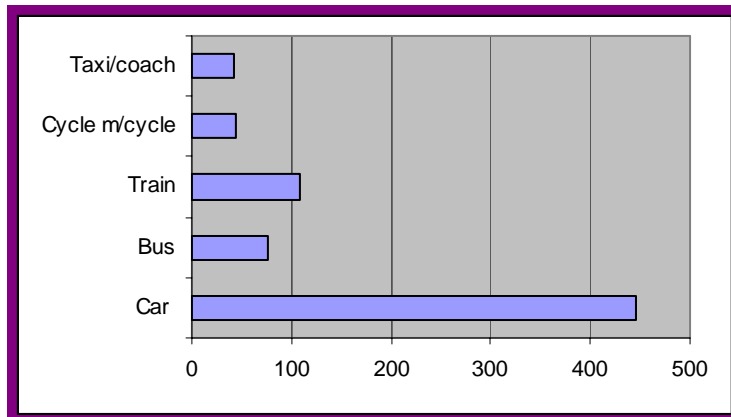
### ***Use of private and public transport***

Residents of Meopham, especially in rural areas such as Harvel, which has no public transport links, are dependent upon their own private transport. Many households have more than one car, while only 2% had no private vehicle. Meopham is served by the main line railway from London to Medway Towns (and beyond) and a bus service from Sevenoaks through Borough Green to Bluewater via Gravesend.

#### No of vehicles notified by households

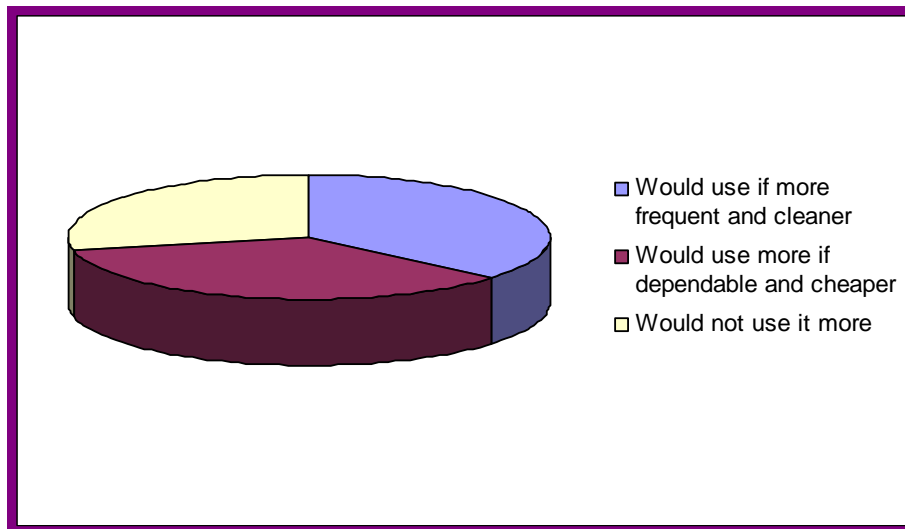


The regular mode of travel by members of households is recorded below with most families having become dependent upon private cars.



## Public transport buses

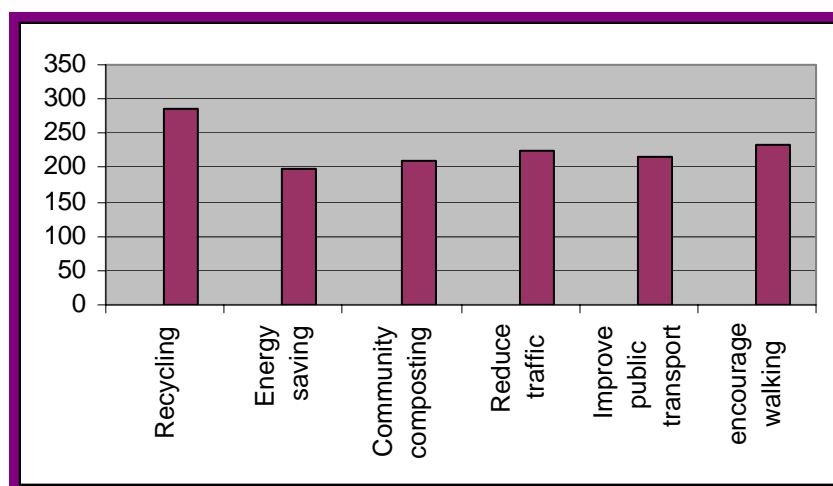
Over 40% of responses indicated that they would use the bus service more, subject to the following requirements:



***299 residents experienced difficulties either leaving or entering Meopham. Just over a quarter on a regular basis. These occurred outside schools or as a result of road works, particularly at the Tollgate at the junction with the A2 or at Wrotham Hill.***

## Maintaining the environment and rights of way

Half of the respondents to the questionnaire came to live in Culverstone, Harvel and Meopham because they were attracted to the area. Around Meopham and its other villages are areas of outstanding natural beauty and an extensive network of public rights of way footpaths, with easy access to the countryside. As shown by this survey, high on local residents' list of priorities is protecting their environment. **Therefore, preserving the countryside and the Green Belt had the highest rating, which to more than 9 out of 10 parishioners, they attached great significance.** This is reflected in the measures advocated to protect the environment, which drew their reactions, as shown below:



### Views expressed by residents, some of which are composite replies, were:

*Extend waste water drainage to Harvel*  
*Don't build more homes in the Parish;*  
*Stop use of shingle on driveways that block surface water reaching drains;*  
*More cycle paths needed; serious problem cycling from Nurstead to Istead Rise;*  
*Better recycling centre required nearer Meopham;*  
*Encourage litter picking; residents should 'adopt' a street to keep litter free;*  
*Local community groups should organise litter spring cleans;*  
*Shop-owners and publicans should be responsible for clearing outside litter;*  
*Discourage bonfires in the daytime;*  
*More litter and dog bins needed near greens, the station and by schools;*  
*Cut verges more often especially between Meopham Green and Culverstone;*  
*Keep hedgerows trimmed back; Replace dead trees in old orchards;*  
*Plant more trees and bulbs along verges; Encourage more floral displays;*  
*Stop use of sewage on fields;*  
*Encourage more children to walk to school; Reduce cars on school runs.*

### Improvements

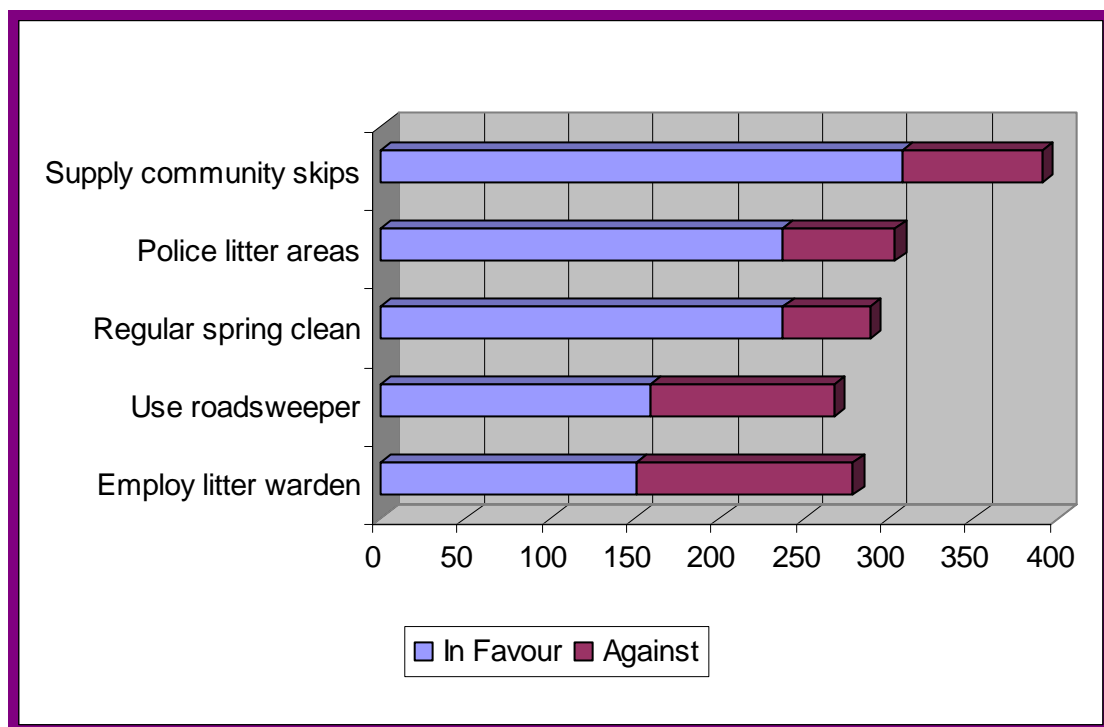
The extent to which local residents want to see improvements reached over 60%, from those who think that hedgerows need to be kept tidy and trees preserved. Half the respondents were concerned about the care of nearby woodlands and over 30% want more trees planted throughout the parish. Those who wish to see footpaths better signposted or gave other reasons, such as reducing fly-tipping and clearing dog litter, came from 27% of those who took part in this survey.

## Waste management

The collection of waste is carried out by Gravesham Borough Council which currently maintains a weekly house to house service. Provision is made for household waste to be collected in black bags, collected separately from recyclable waste for which clear bags are issued periodically. Extra empty bags are also available from some retail outlets. Heavier items can be collected by contacting the Borough Council and any green waste will be collected with a prepaid voucher attached. The County Council also is responsible for maintaining a large tip at Pepperhill, Northfleet where waste materials can be deposited in skips. There has been no proposed change notified with these arrangements. 55% of residents thought more recycling was required of whom 132 suggested different measures. These ranged from:

***improving flytipping clearance & pursuing culprits more vigorously;***  
***free collection of garden waste and glass;***  
***keep roadsides clearer of long grass and debris;***  
***maintain weekly collections;***  
***change to wheelie bins;***  
***provide more recycling facilities in Meopham,***  
***(eg behind the toilets on Pitfield Green).***

To keep Meopham cleaner and tidier the response was as follows:



What 512 residents answered on this topic in the survey was that they valued most about living in Meopham, 91% regarded access to the countryside as their first choice. Nearly two thirds favoured its tranquillity while more than half recognised having a local identity with the villages and appreciated its openness. Amenities, sporting pursuits and other reasons accounted for 40% who liked living here.

The use of public open air facilities was enjoyed to varying degrees. The most frequented was Camer Park, attracting 87% of parishioners who responded. Meopham is the Parish with the most registered greens in Kent and 43% said that

they took advantage of these open spaces. In the region of 20% use the recreation grounds regularly at Culverstone and Hook Green (Judsons).

## **Rights of Way**

Public rights of way come under the jurisdiction of Kent County Council but monitoring is conducted by the local District Footpath Group and footpath wardens. They also carry out voluntary maintenance with some funds provide by the Parish Council which too purchases and pays for maintenance of the path clearing equipment used by Footpath Group members. The footpaths are an integral part of the local environment and are enjoyed by an extensive number of local residents and visitors.

From the households, which responded to the questionnaire, 335 had good knowledge of footpaths and 429 used them for walking. Nearly 100 also used the paths for horse-riding or cycling and a few for motorcycling or 4-wheel driving.

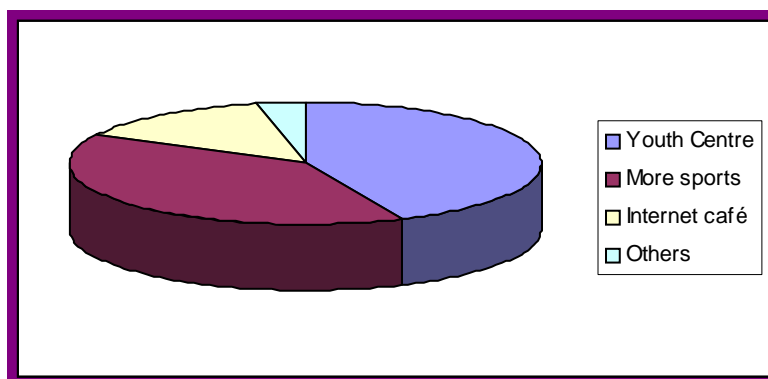
57% of those who use footpaths found them overgrown and 44% reported other obstructions from crops on paths or muddy stretches of water. 18% found high stiles obstacles along with barbed wire and locked gates to a lesser extent. Some concern was expressed about guard dogs patrolling too close to fences adjoining rights of way footpaths.

Main concerns were that fly-tipping was a constant problem; landowners who allowed footpaths to be overgrown, particularly adjacent to farm land with crops growing across the right of way. Overgrown vegetation was a frequent complaint and Nurstead to Sole Street and off Longfield Hill were cited as poorly maintained locations. Litter and dog droppings were regularly noted. Some footpaths became impassable because of thick mud and surface stagnant water.

## Provision of Youth facilities

The topic which drew the fourth largest response was the facilities for young people in Meopham. The Parish Council had accepted that facilities were fairly limited in spite of the action of two of its Members to initiate a youth department based in the football pavilion at Judson's Recreation Ground. The available room is not adequate to meet the demand and this location has been subjected to extensive malicious vandalism. Although the need for a dedicated youth centre has been identified, the survey sought to gauge the strength of feeling amongst parishioners for such a project and for any other facilities that should be provided for young people.

The analysis of the responses is set out below:



The views expressed by residents, were as follows:

*A Youth Centre would need to be affordable for young people. Parents need to take more responsibility and use what is already available in the village. A more suitable venue needed for young people to congregate instead of hanging around the streets. Facilities need to include a coffee bar and for girls to be given beauty courses. A covered hangout or drop in centre in Culverstone is needed for young people. Increase noticed in the number of youths in groups in Culverstone with nothing to do.*

*Cheap access to organised and coached activities such as tennis and golf needed. Sports Centre at reduced cost should be provided for youngsters. Meopham Leisure Centre is too crowded and should have discount for local residents' children. The Leisure Ccentre should be available to book children;s parties and in school holidays. Low cost learning centre needed for music, arts and martial arts. Encourage more funding for sport. Involve young people with identifying their needs.*

*Find voluntary work related activities or a youth volunteering centre. Skateboard area at Culverstone being used by groups of lager drinkers. More discipline by parents and less pandering to the youth. More facilities should only be provided when young people learn to appreciate what they have already. Engage schools and any groups in promoting social and community cohesion. Commend work already done to provide youth facilities.*

*Hall for guides and brownies which others could use. Better equipped playground at Judsons should be provided. Improve children's playground soon. Provide skate board park at Judsons. A decent play park should be secure and locked at night.*

The survey showed that 20 boys attended scouts etc while only 11 girls took part in guides etc. 10 children were reported as in other organisations such as cadet forces.

## Quality of Services

The range of services to residents of Meopham has received mixed reactions from the public, as the replies to our questionnaire revealed. The prime services of health care, communications and availability of local shops was the focus of the enquiry for which parishioners need on a day to day basis. However, these maybe provided outside Meopham but with less convenience, unless support for them is realised. Some of these services are under threat and most have an essential part to play in giving the Parish its vitality and to retain its quality of life. How our families make use of these services, in many cases may decide if they will continue to operate and perhaps to encourage those businesses in the past that were here to make a comeback.

The need for good health care lies with the Health Service Trusts and private practitioners. **The main surgery in the Meopham campus provides medical services for 85% of local residents with access to a doctor and support staff.** However, there is no NHS dentist and the private practice was used by 15% of local residents who responded, the dental services in the NHS were only available outside the Parish. Nevertheless, only a few households gave this as a prime need for the service to be provided within the Parish. Parishioners were asked how many attended hospital regularly, bearing in mind, the nearest are at Darenth Valley and Maidstone. Over 100 patients attended for treatment and over a quarter experienced difficulty travelling there. Taking the overall system of health provided by the Primary Care Trust, 73% were satisfied with value for money. Being able to collect prescriptions from the local pharmacies was found to present no difficulty to 8 out of 9 households. Reasons given by those who did not find the present health service facilities meet their requirements, are set out below:

*“Would not be able to get to hospital if we were not able to drive there for treatment”.*  
*“Cannot use the surgery for my prescriptions because of idiotic rules”.* *“Because I live near Meopham Station, unable to obtain prescription while at the surgery”.* *“The surgery does not cater for those at work and should be open later and on Saturdays”.*

The public services are going through a transition because of changes in technology and this has placed under threat the Post Office, mail and telephone facilities available to the parishioners. The two post offices at Meopham Station and Culverstone were used for postal services by 480 respondents, while obtaining information, Giro and bill paying attracted a large number users. In addition, 130 parishioners paid their car tax, exchanged foreign currency and withdrew cash. Most users found the post office opening hours met their need but 6% did not and some reported that Wednesday afternoon closing was inconvenient.

The risk of closure for the Meopham Station Post Office has recently been lifted. The Royal Mail service has since been revised with later deliveries. The collection service through post boxes, both in location and number drew a large response for suitability (18:1) and sufficiency (7:1) respectively. 50 parishioners wanted more post boxes. 39 respondents found the apertures of the post boxes too small for items which required them to use the Post Office. The extensive use of mobile phones has had an impact on the use made of public telephones, fewer people responded to the same question. The response was that only 12% thought that their locations were not suitable while less than 20% found number of phone boxes was insufficient but 30% did not agree that they were well maintained, with vandalism as one reason for their poor condition.

Shopping in Meopham was seen as having the biggest problem with parking for over half of those using the local shops. Nearly one in five shoppers found pavement obstructions were inconvenient and particularly those who are disabled needing

wheelchair access or mothers of young children requiring pushchair access. The inconvenience of opening hours, reading print sizes and the height of shelving affected a small percentage of shoppers but may deter some from using local shops.

A wide range of options were expressed in favour of many more enterprises these included:

Farm shop, fishmongers, delicatessen, drycleaners, haberdashery, shoe repairers, pet shop amongst those not available. On the other hand, some wanted more choice with extra shops and businesses, these were, a chemist and café in Culverstone; reinstate a general store and post office in Harvel and similarly in Nurstead/Hook Green – a petrol station and general store/supermarket. The biggest demand, put forward by those shopping locally, was for:

***Other comments made were that because of parking problems, we shop elsewhere. Access to the post office is very difficult with a pushchair. We need a store like a Tesco's Metro. There is no disabled parking. Baker has no bread by lunchtime for customers. Shop assistants need to be more polite to customers to encourage local trade. Too much inconsiderate parking and parking on pavements outside shops.***

Bank/Building Society	61
Specialist Butcher	21

Cash machine (24 hour ATM)	45
Dedicated Greengrocer	21

## Amenities

Amenities in Meopham range from a permanent library on the Meopham School campus provided by Kent County Council supported by a mobile service for outlying areas to other public facilities. There is a Leisure Centre under the auspices of Meopham Sports and Leisure Association and operated by SERCO. Public meeting places include Meopham and Harvel Village Halls and Culverstone Community Centre, which are managed by separate Trusts, with some financial support from the Parish Council.

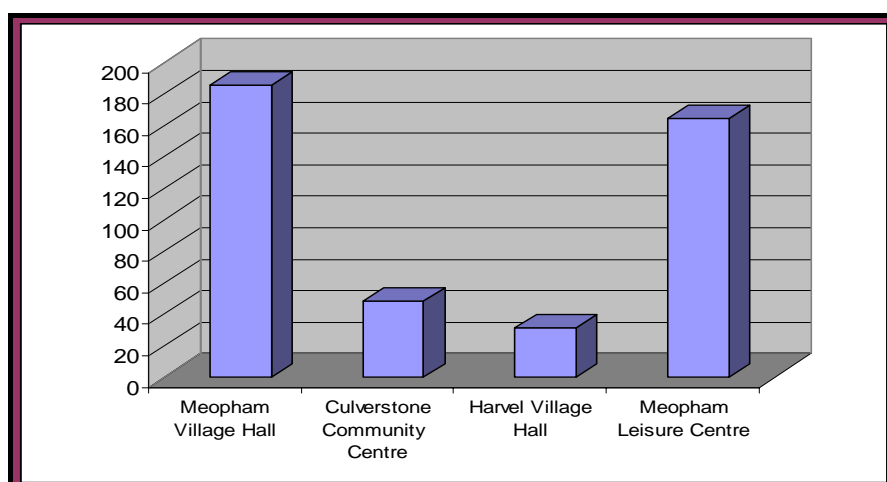
There are also independently, a Scout Hut at Hook Green, a Girl Guide Centre in The Street and attached to the main Parish Church is St Johns Centre. The Meopham Welfare Committee operate a community bus service supported by a grant from this Council. The Parish also hosts Hope Hill and Kays Garden used by Scouts and Guides respectively from the Borough and beyond.

Open Air facilities comprise Camer Park and Culverstone Recreation Ground maintained by Gravesham Borough Council; Meopham Parish Council is responsible for major five major and eight minor registered village greens and Judsons Recreation Ground. Meopham Green is renowned for cricket played there for over 200 years and two local football teams use Judsons. Southdown Shaw purchased by the Parish Council nearly 10 years ago accommodates nearly 130 allotment garden plots.

There were a whole host of suggestions for a new or replacement facility, which would benefit local residents and engender more community spirit. The most popular choice for residents (35%) who were in favour of an indoor swimming pool. Improved community halls and a purpose-built youth centre with sports facilities were supported by 24% of respondents to this section of the survey. A small group of residents commented that there were already enough amenities and that further expenditure on more facilities was not warranted. However, a broader spectrum of parishioners had other views, which are recorded later in this report.

## Village Halls

One of the main areas that residents felt strongly about was that the village halls should be made bigger and/or have a wider range of facilities in order for them to be more usable and in turn used. 50% of those who responded attend one of these centres for events or functions. These centres may also be required should an emergency situation occur. The number of people using the village halls is shown below, together with attendance at the Leisure Centre:



## Libraries

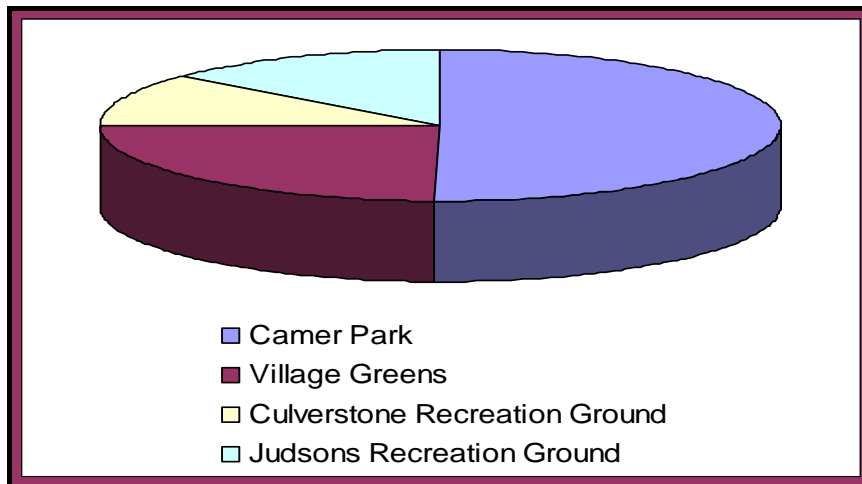
Over 300 families stated that they make use of the main library every month with 18% using it weekly and 47% on a monthly basis. The mobile library is used much less but is very well supported by and a vital service for the rural parts of the Parish. The latest provision including access to the internet is highly valued. The location on the school campus provides an “on the spot” support facility for the students.

## The Leisure Centre

The facilities at the Leisure Centre are used by 1 in 3 families in Meopham. Many commented that along with a swimming pool, they would like to see squash courts at the Centre. Better lighting and pathways were needed some felt whilst using the Centre in the dark.

## Open Air Facilities

Meopham is the Parish with the most registered greens in Kent and they are well used by residents plus the two recreation grounds, as shown below:



## Outdoor pursuits and events

The problem of large amounts of dog mess at Camer Park was highlighted along with some residents preferring not to use Judsons or Culverstone Recreation Ground due to the groups of youths hanging around. Several comments reflect that there is a need for children’s play areas to be upgraded and expanded. The Parish Council are well aware of this but funds for this project have had to be diverted to pay for the high cost of vandalism, particularly at Judsons. However, these improvements are being planned and some proposals from residents are encouraged.

There were a number ideas expressed that a yearly “Meopham” fete day should be held on one of the parks or greens. A “Make Merry” fete at Judsons: More fetes and jumble sales were variations on the same theme. There is already an annual May Day pageant organised by the Meopham Primary School support group. Other views gave opinions on:

- a bowling green (but not on the Green!)
- a bandstand on Meopham Green;
- a more regular farmers’ market or farm shop;
- jogging and cycle tracks as part of an outdoor activity centre;
- community orchard;

- An activity centre with a bike path;
- A roof over the tables by the Camer Park kiosk;
- a dog free area in Camer Park.

### **Improving facilities**

- a pub in Culverstone would also be most welcome
- more sheltered accommodation for the elderly
- indoor café at Camer Park
- tea/coffee shop for young mums to meet
- a theatre/cinema
- reopen and staff the police station
- a slimming club
- a new council building for meetings
- replace all bus shelters with brick built ones
- promote the village
- full-time nursery at Culverstone
- re-open post office and shop at Harvel
- advertise events more.

## Housing

The information asked for in the Council's survey was to provide a profile on the people living in Meopham who were part of our society and to those who required more support from our community. The Parish Council wished to identify how parishioners fitted into the wider perspective. An exercise has already been conducted to examine the development, the structural and planning implications of housing in the area through the Village (Parish) Design Statement. This document has been accepted by Gravesham Borough Council, subject to an environmental assessment being completed.

Already from the earlier views, opinions and facts obtained on key issues, some of their aspirations are clearer. For instance, the strength of feeling about protecting the Green Belt has implications for considering the position on providing affordable housing and should the main road, A227 be by-passed which would encroach into the countryside.

The make-up of households and what in many cases drew our present residents into this area has a bearing on future planning for our community. This information has been collated to consider what is coherent about our population and are resources being directed in the right way. In other words, each household comprises 2.3 per household and is this sustainable in the medium or long-term? Many respondents were older residents and of these a high proportion were living alone in large detached properties.

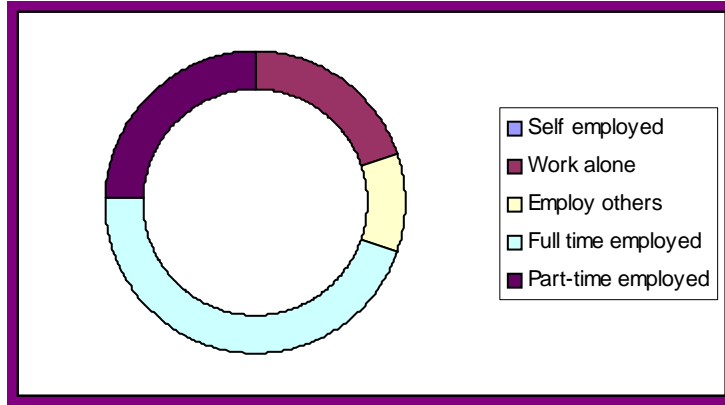
***From the replies received to the questionnaire, only 12% have lived in Meopham all their lives. Therefore, the vast remainder have moved into the area from elsewhere. The reasons given ranged from 15% who were employed locally; 8% for their travel links to work; and 7% retired to live here. The largest majority, approaching half, gave their reason as "were attracted to the Parish", while just over one-fifth came with their families, had family connections or on marriage. Two householders responded that they moved here because of good schools.***

In the survey, from those that provided details of their families, **1140 individuals were recorded living in 498 dwellings**. These comprised 340 houses and 137 bungalows of which 300 were detached and the rest lived in either semi-detached or terraced residences of which 8 were flats; 10 mobile homes and 3 lived in sheltered accommodation. 200 dwellings had been altered with 73 recorded for accommodating larger families. **These residential units were 98% privately owned** with only 21 rented privately or from the Council and Housing Associations.

The scope for further housing development in Meopham is mainly restricted by the lack of available space within the "village envelope". The need for affordable housing and private sheltered accommodation for older residents is constrained by this land shortage within the villages. Furthermore, there is little or no chance for a "brownfield" site to be developed outside of Harvel. The extent of development in the Culverstone Valley has also peaked and only a small number plots are within current policy requirements for conversion to permanent dwellings. The overwhelming view of the parishioners was opposition to providing affordable homes in the existing Green Belt, with 420 against such an incursion and only 85 supporting this proposition.

## Jobs

To try to bring together the disparate parts of our community, the Parish Council has tried to predicate the employment status of its residents. This has been an exercise not to intrude but to understand how its residents are able to relate to the employment opportunities available to them. The survey sought to differentiate between those who worked alone or who were self-employed compared to those who were employed by other organisations. This is shown below:



This amounts to 391 in employment. In addition, 271 declared themselves as retired; 35 were disabled or not in permanent employment, with 24 of these stating they were full-time housewives/mothers and 3 were caring for adult dependents: 64 were in full time education.

Many who lived in the Parish worked outside the Borough and 76 working elsewhere travelled daily by car. The main surrounding towns to which they travelled were: Maidstone (13); Sevenoaks (15); Tonbridge & Tunbridge Wells (7); Bromley/Chislehurst (5); Bluewater (3). Others travelling farther afield, going to their places of work in Dover, Sandwich, Broadstairs and Sittingbourne to the east; while to the south and west - Croydon, Westerham, Godstone, Gatwick and Haslemere; while those crossing the river to work in Essex, included Thurrock, Romford, Basildon and Brentwood on a daily basis.

With the number of commuters travelling to London by train, Meopham is a satellite town for many of its local dwellers. The extent to which they can take part in the community may have some impact on local voluntary organisations because only 20% were able to give any unpaid service to community projects. 18 households assisted Age Concern or The Lions Hospice; 12 acted as school governors or with the Scouts and Guides, The Windmill Trust; St John's Parish Church, St Paul's RC Church, South Street Baptist Church within Meopham and others gave their time to Rochester Cathedral.

A sample of more for which local residents gave their services outside Meopham, varying from:

The RNLI, SSAFA, The Ellenor, The Royal British Legion, The Red Cross, Kent Association for the Blind and reading for the blind, MENCAP in Greenwich, Disabled Club, Swanley; Heart Foundation volunteers;

Bexley and Greenwich Hospice; Citizens' Advice Bureau, Gravesham Voluntary Bureau, 1-2-1 child befriending, Rotary, National Trust, British Horse Society and the Dockyard Historical Society.

## **Education and Child-care provision**

The number of young people under age 21 recorded in the response to the questionnaire totalled 214 against those shown to be in either full-time education, child-care or training, which in the survey, reached 205. ***The state primary sector accounted for 48 children and those at secondary school, 54. 23 students of all age groups attended independent schools. Below age of 5 years, 31 children took part in all forms of pre-school activities.***

The reason given by two households for the families coming to live in Meopham was the attraction of good schools.

These figures appear to understate the actual numbers attending school and it is likely that many households with children did not answer the questionnaire. A separate junior questionnaire is being compiled to try to bridge this gap and to find out what young people themselves think about the future direction of the parish.

One of the concerns expressed about the traffic problems was the disruption caused at school starting and finishing times, with congestion, hazardous road conditions and the extent of parking near school entrances being claimed respondents. The strength of feeling over roads blocked around Culverstone Primary School drew several major criticisms from local residents and other road users. There was also the anxiety of parents because of insufficient safeguards for children crossing the very busy A227 at these times. The strongest representations were near the junction of Wrotham Road and Longfield Road for which more safety measures were called for by parishioners.

From the information gathered in this survey, those children either being brought to or collected from school by private car or vehicle sharing amounted to 44% while only 25% walked to school or cycled, the remaining 31% travelled by school bus or public transport. It is understood that less than 8% students now attend Meopham Sports College, who reside in the Parish. This can be expected to have a significant bearing on the volume of transport, from elsewhere outside the Parish, which is used to bring them to school.

### **The response to the provision of child-care for the youngest children was low.**

Those householders who replied to the questionnaire stated that 9 attended baby/toddler groups as did those going to pre-school playgroup; 3 went to nursery. This was spread 5 separate local groups in the area: Playpen; Chuckles; Kinder; NCT; Toddler Group and Culverstone CPS. 9 parents found the benefit to them was in 9 cases it enabled them to work. 7 others gave their reason as social. Cost was only an issue for 4 out 13, who would like these to be lower and only one found more accessibility as a factor as did the provision of a small charge for local transport to gain access to a child-care group.

Further exploratory work may be required to determine if the requirement for child-care is being adequately met.

