

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	1
Acknowledgements.....	2
Introduction.....	3
History and Overview of Stewkley Parish.....	5
Map of Stewkley.....	7
Action Plan Overview.....	8
Action Plan.....	10
Appendix 1: Summary of survey responses.....	26
Appendix 2: Summary of youth survey responses.....	33
Appendix 3: Extract from Stewkley Conservation Area Booklet.....	35



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Front cover photos courtesy of Barbara Ginn (War Memorial) and Arthur Lyttle

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Introduction

Welcome to the first issue of the Stewkley Parish Plan, an ongoing work in progress that will help shape the future of the village, outlying rural homes, farms and other businesses that form the parish of Stewkley. The effectiveness of the Plan will be monitored and revised as objectives are met or missed, and desires and concerns change. The first review is scheduled for 2012.

Parish plans stem from the Government's Rural White Paper (2000) that sought to encourage rural communities to have a greater say in their future, by finding out their views on planning, social and environmental issues.

Parish plans also support applications for project-funding by providing vital supporting evidence of need. If you think that statistics from the Plan survey would assist with a grant application, please contact the Stewkley Parish Plan Steering Committee (page 2).

The Steering Committee of nine Stewkley residents worked closely with, but as an independent voice from, Stewkley Parish Council (PC). The Steering Committee's function is not to dictate to, or take over the duties of, other bodies (e.g. the Village Hall Committee) but to help them identify and prioritise needs and ambitions, ideas and conflicting requirements. A seemingly isolated or parochial issue can sometimes be more easily managed when considered in different or wider contexts. These issues can then be taken forward as appropriate by existing, or new, groups and partnerships.



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The bedrock of Stewkley's Plan was the consultation process that included discussions with representatives of village groups, clubs and businesses, and with as many residents as possible at popular village events to identify recurrent and interesting issues. From these, two surveys were developed – one for adults / anyone, and one specifically for younger residents (up to 18 years old). These were delivered to all Stewkley homes. The aim of the surveys was to determine the level of support / opposition for the issues already identified, to seek possible solutions, and to extract additional views that might have been missed so far. Advice was periodically sought and funding obtained from Community Impact Bucks (formerly Buckinghamshire Community Action), the county's Rural Community Council. Stewkley Parish Council and the Grapevine also helped to fund the Plan.

The surveys were delivered and collected with the help of the Stewkley Royal British Legion and the PC. About 60% of households responded; in addition about 150 youth surveys were completed. The responses were fed into a computer programme and analysed. A summary of the survey responses is available in Appendices 1 and 2. From the survey responses, an action plan was constructed with a view to being realistic and manageable. Some action points are included that were not identified by villagers, but which the Steering Committee felt should not be ignored or forgotten, e.g. the formulation of a Community Resilience Plan.

Despite a string of problems that delayed the Parish Plan's publication, ranging from software malfunction, committee illnesses and conflicting commitments, the Steering Committee kept faith. To keep the momentum going, some key findings of the survey were published in the Grapevine (the village newsletter) and conveyed to the PC. One such finding acted as a catalyst for the formation of a longed-for youth club well before the Plan was published! Now that it is published, we do hope that the Plan and subsequent revisions will successfully help to shape our future.

As mentioned earlier, Stewkley's Parish Plan is a perpetual work-in-progress, produced for Stewkley residents from information supplied by Stewkley residents. If you feel your views are not accurately or fully represented, or if you have an idea that you would like to be considered now or included in the next issue, please contact any member of the Steering Committee (page 2).

History and Overview of Stewkley Parish

Stewkley is a 4000-acre parish composed of an active village surrounded by working farms in the Vale of Aylesbury in the county of Buckinghamshire. Stewkley lies about 500 feet above sea level along a ridge, from where water runs to the north east into the River Ouzel and to the west into the River Thame. The village is approximately five miles (by road) west of Leighton Buzzard, five miles east of Winslow, nine miles north east of Aylesbury and 11 miles south of Milton Keynes. The High Street (North and South) is two miles long, reputedly one of the longest village high streets in England, with little significant depth of development either side. This linear design reflects the selling of land to settlers by various manors. It contrasts with Wing, for example, an older village on the edge of Danelaw and built for defence.

Stewkley was mentioned in the Domesday Book as 'Steuclai,' which means stump clearing. Our oldest building is the Grade-1 listed St Michael and All Angels' Church, which is said to date from about 1150 and is one of only three churches in England with its internal Norman layout unaltered. In addition to the church, there are about 25 listed buildings spread throughout the length of the village and incorporated in the Conservation Area. The Conservation Area booklet suggests measures to improve and maintain the historic areas of the village. Many of these have not been attended to and the Steering Committee recommends that these issues are revisited (see Action Plan 2d and Appendix 3).

In past centuries most of the population was employed locally on the land, but in the twenty-first century the majority of the working population has to leave the village to find work. The advent of broadband has, however, allowed some villagers to work from home.

In the 1960s and 70s, villagers put up a strong fight against the nearby siting of London's proposed third airport that would have wiped Stewkley from the map. Once the threat was over newcomers began to settle, and the number of dwellings rapidly increased with much infilling along the High Street. Most of it was unpopular with longer-standing residents who preferred picnic areas to cul-de-sacs, and meadows to patios. In 2010 Stewkley now has a population of approximately 1900 residents in 680 homes, with 1500 adults on the electoral roll. There is some affordable housing in the village, including 18 fairly new homes at Griffin Field off High Street South.

The Web site of the Office of National Statistics (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>) reveals some interesting facts about Stewkley parish. Of most note is that 95% of the parish is classed as 'green space' and we are one of the least deprived communities in England in terms of income, health, employment, education, crime, and living environment; but we face above-average 'barriers' to housing and services. These statistics are consistent with the responses to the Parish Plan survey.

Stewkley currently boasts an Anglican church (St Michael and All Angels) plus a Methodist chapel; a combined school for approximately 200 children aged four to eleven; a mobile library service; visiting recreational facilities for youngsters, including skate boarding and the i-Van (computer facilities); a newly renovated village hall; a recreation ground (the Rec) and pavilion, with extensive grass playing fields for soccer and cricket, play equipment for children, and a hard court for basket ball etc; a tennis club; a six-acre wildlife reserve that includes rare ancient hay meadows; a nursing home; a visiting GP service; a telephone exchange; two pubs; a café / delicatessen; a newspaper delivery service; a hairdressers'; and a business park with several light industrial units. Further, a glance at the Grapevine reveals a significant number of other small and home-based Stewkley businesses. The Spar shop closed in 2006 and the library-cum-post-office-cum-GP service was closed, controversially, shortly afterwards. Bus services cater (sparsely) for shoppers but ignore the needs of students, the local workforce and commuters. In line with neighbouring villages, Stewkley is now served by a Police Community Service Officer who attends to a variety of duties including traffic control, crime prevention and community liaison.

In addition, there are many societies and groups catering for most age ranges. In 2009, Stewkley showcased its local facilities as an aid to community cohesion during its Stewkley Weekend event. This village spirit contributed to Stewkley winning the Sword of Honour in the Best Kept Village Competition, and the Calor Gas Village of the Year Competition, both in 2009.



Map of Stewkley village, circa 2000 © Crown copyright, Aylesbury Vale District Council, LA 077046 2001. Contours are shown in metres at vertical intervals. Reproduced from the Stewkley Conservation Area booklet, © Aylesbury Vale District Council 2001

Action Plan Overview

There is no doubt that a village lifestyle, (i.e. rural surroundings, friendly people, safe environment) is key to Stewkley residents' lives. Anything that threatens this – e.g. encroachment from development around Milton Keynes, increased road traffic, general urbanisation (through street signs for example) – is unwanted. The concern regarding loss / lack of village amenities – e.g. a post office – is exacerbated by a lack of public transport to reach alternatives. Regarding the young persons' survey, Stewkley appears to cater very successfully for 5-11 year olds. The use of the mobile library is disappointing, although these children do have access to the School library. Older children and young adults would like a shop, more teenage-specific activities and better transport. It is hoped that the recent formation of the Stewkley Youth Club will satisfy some of these requests and act as a catalyst for others.

In some ways, the survey findings were initially disappointing because they were known already and there appeared to be nothing new to fire the imagination or inspire innovative solutions. Many 'obvious' solutions have been known for years, including the need for a more extensive bus service but obstacles, such as financial constraints at local to County level and beyond, have so far proved insurmountable. However, the survey indicates where energies should be or continue to be focused, particularly traffic, public transport, and youth amenities. Just because solutions are difficult or elusive does not mean that the village should not continue to press for improvements.

Not surprisingly, some suggestions from the survey conflict with each other: for example, the desire for less traffic means there are fewer potential customers for a village shop; the School was identified as a key village amenity and, for this to be viable in the future, more homes for young families are required but many current residents do not want more development. Parking was identified by many as a nuisance, yet this helps to slow traffic speed. Traffic calming measures were popular in principle, but previous experience has demonstrated that residents want the measures sited in different areas.

Other issues have been identified where further thought and discussion are required prior to more definitive actions being decided upon, e.g. 2g (climate change), 4c (village communications), 4d (community buildings), 5a (support for the School). The Steering Committee has included these in the Plan in their 'raw state' for those with specific interests and expertise to take forward.

This Parish Plan is therefore about managing expectations as well as fulfilling wishes. On a positive note, progress has already been made on some objectives, and ways forward identified on others. In addition, one inspired solution from the Recreation Ground Committee was the possibility of a first-floor being added to the pavilion to accommodate a youth club, library, museum or any other number of uses. At the moment, the Youth Club is happy meeting in the building as it is, but it is an idea that Stewkley should keep in mind for the future.

The Action Plan is divided into five sections:

1. Traffic and Transport
2. Housing and Environment
3. Economy
4. Social and Community
5. Youth Issues – this section duplicates some action points from previous sections, but the Steering Committee felt all issues raised in the young persons' survey should be kept together for more meaningful consideration.

The shaded boxes highlight the findings and objectives from the consultation process and list some of the possible solutions as suggested by villagers or by the Steering Committee. Some possible conflicts and limitations are then listed: others may well be identified in due course. Some action points and conflicts are repeated throughout the action plan, which are cross-referenced as appropriate.

None of the proposed objectives or actions has been assigned to any individual or group to take forward, so as not to interfere with existing workloads and priorities. Individuals or groups who wish to pursue any aspect of the Plan are therefore free to do so, but it would be helpful if intentions and progress reports could be communicated to the rest of the village either through any member of the Steering Committee (page 2), the PC (01296 720846 or spc@stewkley.org) or by submitting an article to the Grapevine (grapevine@stewkley.org).

As mentioned earlier, there was a delay between carrying out the survey and publishing this Plan. However, the Steering Committee did manage to communicate some of the findings from the survey to the relevant authorities during this delay, and any subsequent actions are noted in the action plan.

Action Plan

1. Traffic and transport

1a) Reduce the volume of traffic through Stewkley

- Challenge development that would increase local traffic (see 2a, 2b)
- Introduce HGV restrictions (see 2g)
- Improve bus services (see 1d, 2g)
- Introduce car sharing (see 2g)
- Improve walking / cycling opportunities (see 1e)

1b) Reduce traffic speed

- Introduce measures suggested in the survey (see Appendix 1)
- Target problem 'groups' (e.g. taxis¹, school runs)
- Target problem areas² (e.g. near the School, village entrances)

Possible limitations and conflicts (for 1a and 1b):

- Controls / signs urbanise the area (see 2d)
- Difficulty agreeing where controls should be sited
- Parking is a traffic solution and a safety problem (see 1c)
- Measures can be difficult to 'police'
- Many traffic-calming solutions are expensive (e.g. speed indicator devices)
- The School Travel Plan Committee has been working on many of these issues for some time but has encountered difficulties including funding, planning issues, safety, and possible solutions that potentially create problems elsewhere.



Photo: Stewkley Grapevine

¹ The PC wrote to some taxi firms in 2009 about their speeding vehicles, with copies to Bucks CC, police, and AVDC as the taxi-licensing authority. The response was supportive.

² The PC is considering (August 2010) forming a sub-committee to examine traffic issues holistically for the whole parish rather than on a piece-meal basis.

1c) Control on-road parking²

- Discuss with police zero tolerance of illegal / dangerous parking e.g. near the War Memorial
- Minimise related damage e.g. protect grass verges (see 2d)
- Organisers to advise police of particularly busy events e.g. weddings
- Introduce measures suggested in the survey (see Appendix 1)

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Restrictive design of the village – homes were here before cars
- Parking is a traffic solution AND a safety problem (see 1b)
- People expect to park outside their homes
- Parking in a particular place is sometimes unavoidable
- Street signs urbanise the village (see 2d)

1d) Improve bus services

- Seek small improvements e.g. Leighton Buzzard bus to stop at railway station and Tesco as well as town centre
- On-demand transport schemes for specific groups³ (e.g. youth [see 5c] and elderly) and/or for specific events (e.g. Winslow Farmers' Market)
- Shuttle bus to Wing for shops, services and additional buses
- Share services with other villages
- Improve publicity for alternative schemes, e.g. Wheels to Work

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- There is just a small demand for each location / time
- Requests for services do not always convert into usage
- Financial constraints

³ There is now a team of Stewkley volunteer drivers to help villagers get to doctors' or hospital appointments.

1e) Increase walking and cycling opportunities

- New routes around / through village to avoid main roads
- Introduce cycle lanes
- New routes to other villages / cycle route to Leighton Buzzard
- Dedicated areas for younger cyclists / cyclists-in-training
- BMX facility⁴ for older children

Possible limitations and conflicts

- Cycling can be unpleasant / dangerous at peak times
- Long / thin village increases difficulties for cycle lanes / footpaths
- New rights of way are expensive to develop and maintain (including signs and gates / stiles)
- Landowners' permission is required for new / upgraded routes
- Bikes are prohibited in the Rec but this is difficult to enforce



Photo: Arthur Lytle

⁴ The PC is renting an area of land off Soulbury Road with the intention of constructing a BMX track. It has had initial discussions with AVDC re planning issues, including a small shelter for the youngsters to meet in. This land could also be used for circuit training. Providing teens with an alternative meeting place may reduce use of bikes in the Rec, and loitering at bus stops (see 4a).

2. Housing and Environment

2a) Limit development in Stewkley

2b) Protect Stewkley from impacts of local/regional development

- Respond to planning applications and consultations
- Form / foster alliances e.g. NBPPC, CPRE⁵
- Seek mitigation e.g. developer contributions towards community projects
- Produce a Village Design Statement⁶

Possible limitations and conflicts (for 2a and 2b):

- Parish councils have limited decision-making powers re planning and development (pending clarification by the new coalition government)
- Consultation documents are difficult and time-consuming
- It is difficult to enforce breaches of planning law and special measures for the Conservation Area
- Village Design Statements are time-consuming to prepare and, at best, inform rather than direct planning decisions
- Limiting development conflicts with the need for more affordable housing (see 2c)



The Spinney, Stewkley Wildlife Reserve. Photo: Mike Draycott

⁵ NBPPC – North Bucks Parishes Planning Consortium
CPRE – Campaign for the Protection of Rural England.

⁶ A Village Design Statement provides a clear statement of the character of a particular village against which planning applications may be assessed: it is about how (not whether) development should be undertaken so as to respect local identity.

2c) Stewkley homes should be more affordable for local people

- Build more affordable homes for rent and shared ownership⁷
- Secure library building from Bucks County Council that includes a first-floor flat
- Encourage the building of smaller homes on new / infill plots
- Seek changes to local planning laws to limit extensions to smaller properties in the Conservation Area
- Produce a Village Design Statement (See 2b)

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Need for affordable homes conflicts with desire to limit local development (see 2a)
- Shared-ownership homes in Griffin Field are not genuinely affordable for Stewkley people (anecdotal evidence)
- Planning law / policy and markets favour building larger homes
- Affordable homes' shortage affects enrolment at St Michael's School (see 4d)
- Homes are extended because this can be more affordable than buying a larger one, but this reduces stock of smaller homes for on-sale
- Bucks County Council would prefer to / is trying to sell the library building to a private buyer, but matters are protracted



Great tits nesting at the Stewkley Wildlife Reserve. Photo: Mike Draycott

⁷ The Parish Plan survey and representations from the school led to Community Impact Bucks formally establishing a need for seven more affordable homes.

2d) Improve attractiveness of the parish

- Pursue various schemes identified in the survey (see Appendix 1) and the Conservation Area booklet (see Appendix 3)⁸
- Act on any shortcomings identified by judges in Best Kept Village Competition
- Village Design Statement (see 2b)
- Prevent/remove driveway shingle from pavements
- Stop smell from chicken farm
- Prevent inconsiderate bonfires

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Some think Stewkley is all right as it is
- Budgetary constraints
- Time-consuming
- Maintenance can be as difficult as setting up
- Threat of vandalism
- Conflict with other objectives, e.g. traffic calming (See 1a-1c)

2e) Prevent / remove litter, dog mess, graffiti, fly-tipping

- Discuss with AVDC, CPRE, police possible solutions to littering and fly-tipping
- Working parties to clear up litter
- (Mobile?) CCTV at persistent problem areas (see 4a)
- Install more bins for litter and dog mess e.g. at bus shelters
- Remove litter bin and parking bay on Bletchley Road
- Apply anti-graffiti paint at bus shelters

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Many perpetrators are not village residents but people passing through
- Actual act of littering etc. is rarely witnessed
- Enforcement of preventative measures is difficult
- Can be difficult and dangerous to remove litter e.g. in hedgerows.

⁸ The PC investigated (2009) permanent planters at village entrances but cost was prohibitive. The PC has discussed improved signage at entrance to Rec, e.g. memorial to Colin Buchanan (re Third London Airport campaign).

2f) Increase and improve recycling opportunities⁹

- Promote compost bins, and help to install where necessary
- Provide lids for recycling baskets, or other wind-proof measures
- Provide larger / more baskets
- Provide local facilities to recycle clothing, cardboard, etc.
- Improve communication re recycling possibilities and facilities

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Requires investment by AVDC (and maybe PC)
- Limited space in village for more receptacles
- Difficult to store more recycling baskets at home
- Pavements / kerb sides already cluttered

2g) Seek local solutions to counter 'Climate Change'

- Ideas from the survey (see Appendix 1)
- Reduce traffic / CO2 emissions through the village (see 1a)

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Overall there was little apparent knowledge of or concern for climate change identified in the survey
- The science behind climate change is not yet conclusive
- Recent cool summers and cold winters appear to contradict claims of global warming
- Solutions are believed to be costly, ineffective and compromise quality of life

⁹ Stewkley residents can use the 'Tidy Tip' at Heath and Reach.



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3. Economy

3a) Increase local employment opportunities

- Liaise with Manor Park
- Liaise with Business Link and Chamber of Commerce
- Grapevine and / or Web site 'message board' to match employers and job / intern seekers
- Generally support local businesses
- Career counselling for young and unemployed
- Improve internet access and broadband speeds
- Improve public transport to employment and education centres (see 1d)

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Currently a difficult economic climate
- Limited locations for new businesses in Stewkley

3b) Stewkley 'needs' a general store and post office (see 5g)

- Raise awareness of goods available at Harvey's

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Need to decide if this is an economic or a social need
- Economic forces have not attracted a general store to Stewkley
- If a social need, then difficulty in finding / retaining project leaders and volunteers for a community shop
- Insufficient passing traffic (see 1a and 1c)
- Could cause more traffic problems (see 1a)
- Survey responses and anecdotal reports suggest insufficient demand for any one type of goods (see Appendix 1)
- General trend is for village shops to close because they struggle to compete with supermarkets
- A post office has security issues
- Rural Post Office Services is closing branches, not opening them
- Lack of suitable premises and / or possibly planning constraints
- Internet shopping further stifles local demand

4. Social and Community

4a) Marginal improvements in 'safety' issues could be made

- Liaise closely with Police¹⁰
- Promote Neighbourhood Watch schemes, Neighbourhood Action Groups, and effective home/business/vehicle security measures
- Promote Crime Watch UK
- Reassess street lighting, including at bus stops / shelters
- Provide more facilities for youths to limit gathering at bus stops etc. (see 1e and 5)
- CCTV at Recreation Ground or a mobile unit (see 2e)
- Prepare a Community Resilience Plan¹¹

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Insufficient details provided in survey for significant patterns of complaint to be identified
- Limited Police resources
- Crime and anti-social behaviour is less in Stewkley than in other communities, despite recent increases
- Developing a Community Resilience Plan involves significant work



Photo: Arthur Lyttle

¹⁰ The PC met with the community police inspector in June 2010 to discuss increases in burglary from dwellings, outbuildings and vehicles in the first quarter of 2010, and reports of threatening behaviour

¹¹ Community Resilience Plans help local communities to withstand and recover quickly from any large-scale emergency, with a coordinated approach that complements that of front-line agencies such as Police and Fire.

4b) Improve facilities / access to facilities for those who are older or with special needs

- Improve / promote transport options (see 1d)
- Provide more social facilities for older / special-needs residents
- Lower kerbs at junctions to help road-crossing
- Liaise with other villages
- Retain / expand GP service at the Pavilion
- Liaise with GP re other healthcare facilities that might be provided locally

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Funding constraints
- Small (but growing) need means many schemes are not cost-effective for Stewkley alone

4c) Improve communications within the village¹², especially for newcomers (and youth: see 5c)

- Produce and deliver a welcome pack to all newcomers
- Secure a drop-in centre (see 4d)
- Introduce a "Did You Know" section for the Grapevine to highlight and clarify misconceptions revealed in survey responses, e.g. Harvey's do sell sweets and some groceries

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Conflicting comments in survey responses include, 'Many newcomers do not involve themselves in village life' and 'The village is full of cliques, especially the older families.' Other comments highlight how friendly and welcoming the village is! This cannot be 'actioned' but is included here to raise the awareness of these conflicting perceptions.

¹² The Grapevine has recently introduced a more extensive diary facility to try and guard against events clashing, and the village Web site is improving all the time.

4d) Maximise use of community buildings (including the School)¹³

- Improve promotion of buildings / events, including those outside the village
- Provide a suitable multi-purpose building / room that could meet a variety of smaller-scale demands
- Should sale of old library building fail again, secure it for return to community use as a multi-function unit (see 4d and 5e)
- Improve mobile library service provision in terms of location and dates / times (even if only for the short term)

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Despite a wealth of community buildings in Stewkley compared with many other villages, there remains an unmet demand for various facilities and activities, including those previously provided by the former library building on High Street North (currently being sold by Bucks County Council to a private buyer). However, the stated demand for any one facility is not overwhelming (see Appendix 1)
- Provision of a more dedicated drop-in centre with tea / coffee could compete with local small businesses
- A possible first-floor addition to the pavilion has been suggested (see 5e) and is, apparently, structurally possible, but would be expensive; in addition there may be planning issues, and a project manager is required
- St Michael's School is an integral part of the community, yet pupil-numbers have declined in recent years owing to a re-organisation of school allocations in this part of Buckinghamshire, and fewer young children living in Stewkley owing to insufficient numbers of smaller / affordable homes (see 2c).¹⁴

¹³ School Governors have formed a sub-committee for marketing the school.

¹⁴ The School has met with the PC to discuss more affordable housing, which is now being pursued with Community Impact Bucks (see 2c).

5. Youth Issues

5a) The School and pre-school groups cater for a large number of village children so should also be actively supported by the wider community¹⁵

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- School numbers and viability are subject to demographic forces and County funding that are beyond the control of the village

5b) There should be minimal waiting lists to join organisations, e.g. Brownies, Tennis Club

- Organisations to review constitutions and volunteer arrangements to increase membership¹⁶
- Children / parents to investigate membership of organisations in other villages (see 5c)
- Investigate additional activities through Bucks CC Youth and Community Service
- Improve advertising for skateboarding, roller-skating, i-Van

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Difficulty attracting sufficient adult volunteers, not helped by stultifying Government regulations (e.g. CRB checks)
- Lack of public transport or safe cycling to other villages (see 1d and 1e)

¹⁵ A member of the PC currently sits on the Board of Governors as a community (private) member, not as a PC representative.

¹⁶ Stewkley Soccer Club has recently prepared a development plan to increase youth membership for succession-planning and involvement with other villages.

5c) Improve communication within Stewkley and between other villages¹⁵ regarding youth activities and facilities, including a transport rota system between villages and to other youth-activity centres (see 1d and 4c)

- Discuss with Community Impact Bucks possible solutions
- Consider sharing a youth leader with other villages to coordinate an approach

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Cutbacks in public funding will limit finance for any initiatives

5d) Support and develop the Stewkley Youth Club (formed February 2010)

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Cutbacks in public funding will limit finance for any initiatives
- Relies on adult volunteers: is well supported at the moment but this cannot be taken for granted in future
- May out-grow current home at the Rec (see 5e)



Stewkley Youth Club – winners best float Stewkley Parade 2010
Photo: Clare Munday

5e) Improve facilities at the Rec

- Extend the Rec pavilion (see 4d)
- Increase use of the Wildlife Area
- Provide a picnic area
- Improve toilet facilities
- Introduce more adventurous ‘play equipment’ e.g. a climbing wall (see 5f)

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Cutbacks in public funding will limit finance for any initiatives
- Problem attracting volunteers, especially project leaders
- New activities may conflict with current ones
- Possible planning issues

5f) Provide cycle paths and tracks around the village (see 1e)

- e.g. the proposed BMX track off Soulbury Road
- Introduce cycling facilities at the Rec
- Provide a dedicated learning area¹⁷
- Liaise with BCC / Sustrans re improving advertising for road cycleways / other advice
- See specific proposals from youth survey (Appendix 2)

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- New dedicated cycleways are expensive to develop
- Cycling over Rec ground conflicts with other activities
- PC wary of recommending specific locations, such as cul-de-sacs, for safety reasons

¹⁷ There is cycle training at the school

5g) Satisfy youth demand for a 'shop' selling sweets and magazines (see 3b)

- Improve marketing of current outlets
- Possible project for the School or Youth Club to take forward

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- Desire for sweets conflicts with healthy-eating strategies
- See 3b

5h) Improve library facilities (see 4d)

- Review current usage with Bucks CC and change location / time of mobile service if appropriate
- Provide a suitable multi-purpose building / room that could meet a variety of smaller-scale demands (see 4d and 5e)

Possible limitations and conflicts:

- See 4d



Stewkley under-10s soccer team. Undefeated in 2009/2010 season
Photo: Clare Munday

Appendix 1: Summary of survey responses

Shop / Post Office – Questions 1 - 3

While approximately 60% of those who responded¹⁸ said they would use a shop or post office weekly, and 10% at least monthly, 25% said they would not use one at all. More significantly, there was insufficient demand for any one type or group of goods to indicate that a small commercial village shop could be viable. The most popular request was for groceries; in addition, all the following were requested by very few people: anything; bakery; cash point; CDs / DVDs / videos; dairy products; dry cleaning; everything; flowers; forgotten items; fresh fruit / veg; general household goods; haberdashery; household cleaning materials; library; local / free-range / organic produce; loo rolls; lottery tickets; meat / butchers; off-licence; pensions; per Harvey's; pet supplies; petrol; pharmaceuticals; pocket-money toys; soft drinks; stamps; stationery / cards; sweets; tights; tinned food; tobacco products; toiletries; top-ups, e.g. gas, electricity; vegan / vegetarian / health food.

Road Safety and Parking – Questions 4 - 8

The survey was undertaken about six months after the opening of the Stoke Hammond bypass, during the period of adjustment before its full (positive) effects could be felt. In this context, 29% considered the roads to be too busy at all times, 60% too busy at peak times and 8% considered them to be acceptable at all times.

Regarding traffic control systems, 59% preferred flashing speed indicators¹⁹ on the High Street; 47% wanted speed cameras (permanent or occasional); 32% would like a 20mph speed limit within the village and reduced limits on approach roads. Traffic calming bumps along the High Street were considered useful by 19%; whereas 13% wanted raised kerbs to prevent vehicles mounting the pavement, and 12% suggested additional chicanes.

Other suggestions to improve road safety included: a zebra crossing (55% in favour of having one near the School), 30% wanted wider pavements and 11% pedestrian islands; plus, painting double white lines at the dip in the Wing Road, and HGV restrictions.

¹⁸ Percentages do not always total 100% because, for example, not all respondents answered all questions, and some questions allowed more than one answer per person.

¹⁹ The PC periodically reviews the cost and effectiveness of speed indicators to ensure Stewkley would receive value for money.

Linked to road safety was the issue of parking. Forty-four per cent of those who responded said they encountered problems with parked cars when driving, compared with 29% as pedestrians and 10% as cyclists. Note that 28% of respondents said they did not consider parked cars to be a problem. Thirty-one per cent thought yellow lines would help control the parking; 5% favoured parking permits and 5% wanted to ban parking on verges. Restricting parking around the War Memorial was cited as a key safety issue. Other suggestions included banning parking at certain times of day at 'dangerous' parts of the village and limiting parking for residents only. Shingle from driveways getting on to footpaths was also cited as an irritant.

Bus Service – Questions 9 - 11

The most popular destination that respondents requested was Milton Keynes at 38%, with Leighton Buzzard at 36%. Aylesbury came next at 20% and Wing was fourth at 19%. However, 37% said they would not use public transport. (As respondents could tick as many destinations as they considered relevant, in theory having a maximum of four 'votes,' the proportion who said they would not use public transport is significant). Work, shopping, medical visits, leisure, visiting friends and relations, education, and children's independence were all cited as purposes for travel by bus. The days and times that people would like buses were many and varied; suffice it to say that aggregating all responses would mean the provision of a frequent, all-day (including late-night), seven-day service to all destinations!

Walking / Cycling – Questions 12 – 17

Sixty-one per cent of respondents wanted public footpaths and rights of way to other villages, most of whom wanted them for cycles as well. Wing was the most popular destination (35%); other destinations attracted 15% of respondents, including Soulbury, Swanbourne, Mursley and Leighton Buzzard.

Should a hard pathway be provided at the Rec between Soulbury Rd and Ivy Lane, 56% said they would use it for walking, 31% for cycling, 21% for pushchairs, 8% for wheelchairs / disability users, and 22% would not use it.

Forty-four per cent of respondents said the village needed a dedicated cycleway for young children. Of these, 5% nominated the Rec, 3% suggested various other locations, and 92% made no recommendations.

Housing – Questions 18 - 19

Regarding house building or other development, 47% wanted none whatsoever, 22% would accept development within the village, 7% felt that development should be on the edge of the village, and 3% considered it should be allowed in the open countryside. One respondent said any new builds should be replacement buildings only.

Eight per cent of respondents expressed an interest in renting affordable housing and 9% in a shared purchase scheme²⁰. Seventy per cent indicated no interest.

Safety – Questions 20 - 21

Sixty-four per cent said there had been no instances when they did not feel safe, 16% reported 'instances' of feeling unsafe and 7% were not sure. Of those who felt insecure, the concerns were chiefly about 'walking at night', 'pedestrian safety- vehicles driving on to footpaths,' and 'young people congregating in bus shelters.'

Making Stewkley More Attractive – Question 22

Improving village entrances gained most support at 49%. The Rec entrance was second with 38%, and a pictorial village sign third at 35%. The village pump in High Street South was supported by 22% of respondents and the War Memorial by 11%; many people considered that it was currently well cared for. The telephone exchange came last with 5%. Provision of a village history board was also suggested.

Stewkley's Problems – Question 23

The problem considered most critical was dog mess in the Rec and on village footpaths, with a 32% response rate. Litter was identified by 27% of respondents, mainly in the hedgerows on roads leading into the village. Twelve per cent cited graffiti in the Rec and bus shelters. Fly-tipping was perceived as a problem in the rural hinterlands of the parish by 9% of respondents. 50% of those completing the survey did not respond to this question.

²⁰ A dedicated housing needs survey by Community Impact Bucks in July 2010 confirmed a need for seven new affordable homes. Investigations for a suitable site have commenced.

Recycling – Question 24

Additional facilities for recycling cardboard, silver foil and garden waste was popular, with 70% of respondents requesting this. Permission to use the Tidy Tip at Heath and Reach had 47% support²¹. Seven per cent would like help with the installation of compost bins. A number of other specific suggestions were made, e.g. recycling facilities for clothes and shoes, Yellow Pages²², and lids for baskets.

Global Warming – Question 25

Only 10% of respondents suggested ways to counter global warming in Stewkley. Others suggested that global warming was a myth or there was nothing we could do about it when (for example) China was such a large carbon emitter. Positive suggestions included: ban junk mail; car sharing; circulate Grapevine by email; clean up dog mess; close the chicken farm; communal energy supply for Stewkley / Stewkley to be self-sufficient in energy; energy efficient commercial / community buildings; energy efficient new homes; fewer cars / ban 4 x 4s; greener planning decisions (e.g. windows for listed properties); low energy light bulbs; more recycling; more walking / cycling; personal carbon footprint; re-route HGVs; slower traffic; solar power; switch off lights (household, commercial, street); tree and hedge maintenance; tree planting / saving; wind farms / turbines.

Community Buildings and Facilities – Questions 26 - 32

The mobile library is used by respondents every week (3%) every fortnight (3%), every month (3%) or now and again (12%) compared with 66% who say they never use it. If the van were moved to the School playground, 10% of respondents said they would make more use of it. Other venues / times would appear to have no effect on usage.

When asked what other library / information services would be used if provided, 32% chose a permanent library facility, 21% were in favour of a bookshop, 14% art club / classes, 11% computer / internet access, 11% local museum / natural history centre, and a drop-in centre 5%. (Non-response was 45%.)

²¹ Following a court case we are now permitted to use this or indeed any other district's domestic facility for disposal of household waste.

²² These can now be recycled with other paper.

Residents were also asked what additional activities they would like to see at the Village Hall. The response rate was only 10%, and ideas included adult dances / dance classes and adult education, and other adult recreational activities.

Regarding St Michael's School, 48% of respondents considered that the village as a whole did not take appropriate advantage of the School's facilities, while 18% said it did. To improve the situation, 12% suggested better marketing of what the School has to offer the wider community by way of facilities, while 3% suggested community classes, such as computing.

Health Care Facilities – Questions 33 – 35

Forty-two per cent indicated that they needed the weekly GP surgery at the Rec. Forty-one per cent said they did not. Sixty-five per cent said it was easy to attend other health care facilities, compared with 19% who said it wasn't.

Special Members of the Community – Questions 36 – 40

(answered by villagers who were 60+)

Village facilities / services were rated as 'poor' for older residents by 14% of respondents, 12% rated them 'adequate' and 2% rated them 'good.' For those with physical disabilities / challenges, 1% found that local facilities were of 'average ease of use'.

Employment – Question 41

Forty-nine per cent of respondents thought the PC should seek local employment opportunities, while 20% did not.

Village Communications – Questions 42 - 44

Responses to these questions were contradictory. Some comparative newcomers thought the longer-term residents were 'cliquey,' but some established households thought newcomers could make a greater effort to get involved in village life. Of the 16% who responded to question 42, half thought a welcome pack would help make newcomers feel more welcome, and half favoured a directory²³. Other suggestions were: children helped break the ice, community Christmas party; everyone should be friendly; home visits (e.g. by the PC); improve Web site; library / drop-in centre; make it easy to walk

²³ A Village Directory has been produced by the Friends of St Michael's School and distributed village-wide each May / June for a number of years.

about; more / improved notice boards; Neighbourhood Watch; something at Harvey's / pubs / churches, e.g. open nights; welcome in the Grapevine;

Most respondents (79%) considered communications in general within the village could not be improved, many remarking on the excellent Grapevine. Of the 21% who did think there was room for improvement, ideas included: annual meeting²⁴; better communication for teens; better communications with PC, AVDC, Bucks CC, including their services such as bus timetables, waste collection / recycling info; better What's-On diary in the Grapevine; community events; explain Conservation Area and restrictions; inter-village diary / joint village meetings; library / drop-in centre; new / better notice boards; prevent events clashing / space events more evenly.

The Next 25 Years – Question 45

Surprisingly, only 21% responded. The most oft cited concern was the encroachment of Milton Keynes, Aylesbury or Leighton Buzzard, excessive housing development in general and village coalescence. Another popular concern was road-related, from increased traffic and reduction in public transport to parking and more road building. Other concerns included: activities for young people; affordable housing; aircraft noise; global warming / environmental issues; closure of local facilities (especially for the elderly); compensation culture; crime issues; demographic change / over-population; employment opportunities; farming concerns; green agenda domination (anti, not pro); inflation (food / fuel); lack of facilities for elderly; light pollution; losing community spirit; less local food / allotment space poor council services; removal of power from local communities; waste management issues.

Like Most and Least About Stewkley – Questions 46 and 47

These questions were designed to capture any issue the Steering Committee might have missed in the previous questions. Those who responded appeared to like Stewkley most for it being a friendly, safe village, and an attractive, tranquil, rural environment with good community spirit. The number of activities available was commented on very positively, including sports, Rec, pubs and Harvey's. Other positive comments about living in Stewkley included: able to walk / cycle; accessibility to work, stations, shops, towns; church / chapel; Conservation Area; family environment; fundraising;

²⁴ An Annual Parish Meeting is held each April but is poorly attended.

grammar school catchment area; Grapevine; (occasionally) little traffic; mixed socio-economic area; School; sense of belonging.

On the other hand the lack of amenities such as a shop, post office, library and public transport were cited as what they liked least about Stewkley, along with speeding traffic and inconsiderate parking. Other dislikes included: busy-bodies; chicken farm smell; cliquiness; close to Bletchley / Lakes Estate; congestion from School; Conservation Area restrictions; dog bin near bench; dog nuisance; dormitory village; flight paths; few wooded areas; grammar schools; HGV rat-running; increased crime (including vandalism) / feel unsafe; lack of chip shop²⁵; long thin village; moaning minnies; no active support for minorities; no community cohesion; over-development (housing, roads, incinerators etc); PC politics; pollution / light pollution; poor quality of pubs (noise, mess, long hours); School; youth congregation / youth boredom / nothing for teens to do / job culture.

Anything Else? – Question 48

Only 6% of respondents answered this question and cited: access for horse riders; ban dogs from Rec; elderly concerns; energy efficient housing (new and existing); family cohesion; footpath issues; greater use of pavilion; improve public transport; increased policing; maintain village character; no clay pigeon shooting on Sundays; no fads and fashions; protect against over-development / bypass; public meeting place / library; restore village pond; sensible housing in fields; shared office facilities for home workers; shop; stop environmental destruction / decline; traffic issues; tree planting; village hall in Rec; garden / verge upkeep; whole-village activities / open meetings; youth activities / consideration for youths / skate park.

²⁵ There is a visiting fish and chip van.

Appendix 2: Summary of youth survey responses

Aged 5 and younger

Fourteen girls and 16 boys responded, half of whom did or would attend St Michael's School, and 75% the village pre-school groups. Ninety per cent enjoyed living in the area because of the Rec (63%), School (17%), pre-school groups (13%), village life and friends (23%), and countryside (23%). Only 20% of this age group used the mobile library every one or two weeks, whereas 77% used the Rec play area for the young which, nevertheless, was described as 'too muddy in winter.' Suggestions to improve the Rec included a footpath to the area, a fence to exclude dogs from the play area, and improved toilets. Suggestions to improve other areas of the village included a bike track, a shop, a wildlife pond²⁶, and a litter patrol.

Ages 6-11

Twenty-five girls and 36 boys responded, about 90% of whom did attend or are attending St Michael's School, and 70% did attend the village pre-school groups. About 90% liked living in the area because of the Rec (20% girls, 61% boys), School (24% / 16%), lots to do (20% / 8%), friendly and kind people (60% / 33%), and countryside / peaceful (32% / 20%). Reasons for not liking Stewkley included busy roads (14%) and no youth club (10%). 80% did not respond to this question. Seventeen per cent used the mobile library every one or two weeks. The sporting groups, Brownies, Beavers, Cubs and ballet, were all well supported. The Rec play area for young children and the area for older children were used about equally, 50% of girls and 58% of boys. There were requests for more things for older children such as adventure play equipment and comments that the zip line didn't work well.²⁷ A quarter of boys and no girls enjoyed the skateboarding sessions provided periodically by AVDC, but publicity was criticised. Twenty per cent of girls used the ball court and 39% of boys. Suggestions for improvements to Stewkley included more shops / a sweet shop (10%), library (5%), youth club (5%), cycle track (5%) and more bridle paths (3%).

Ages 12-16

Twenty girls and 34 boys responded, of whom 80% had attended St Michael's School and 44% the village pre-school groups. Seventy two per cent said they enjoyed living in the area because of their friends, the environment, the Rec

and sports, and being close to Milton Keynes. Reasons for not enjoying living in the area (20%) included nothing to do / wanting more facilities such as a youth club, cycle track and shop. Eighty-one per cent had never used the mobile library. The most popular activities included Beavers, Scouts, Brownies and football, followed by tennis, cricket and the band. Choir, ballet and church orchestra were also mentioned. Sixteen per cent used the adventure equipment at the Rec. Those who did not use it said that there wasn't enough equipment, what there was did not work and it wasn't interesting or exciting enough. Thirty-three per cent attended AVDC's skateboarding, basketball and roller-skating at the Rec. But 25% did not know about the sessions, were not interested (19%) or did not have the time to attend. Thirty-five per cent used the hard surfaces often; those who did not said they had no time, were not interested, were too heavily used, or too full of boys! Things that would improve Stewkley include a shop / post office, more buses, a coffee shop and cycle track for teenagers, and more access to tennis courts.

Ages 17 and 18

Only five boys and four girls responded. Over half had attended St Michael's School and three the village pre-school groups. Six liked living in Stewkley because it was quiet, safe and friendly and because of the Rec. Reasons for not liking Stewkley included no transport to get anywhere else, no shop and little to do in Stewkley. Six had never used the mobile library; the rest use it every now and again. Sports, Brownies, Beavers and the Players had been or were still being attended. The adventure equipment was not really used and three respondents used the hard surface area. Things that would improve Stewkley for this age group included a shop, an evening café / diner, more public transport and more things for older teenagers.

²⁶ There is a pond in the wildlife reserve.

²⁷ The zip line has since been repaired

Appendix 3: Extract from Stewkley Conservation Area²⁸ Booklet²⁹

Enhancement Opportunities (reproduced in full)

1. **Overhead wires and cables:** Prevalent throughout the Conservation Area, contributing to a sense of clutter and a reduction of traditional setting, they are a dominant feature that detracts from the visual quality of the street.
2. **Chapel Square:** The Square would benefit from the removal of overhead wires. Other improvements would be to diminish vehicular dominance in favour of pedestrian space, the grass island could be enlarged, a major tree planted and the entrance to the Square visually closed down through surface treatments.
3. **Signage and Street Lighting:** Throughout the Conservation Area, these would benefit from redesign or darker colouring of columns to reflect traditional appearance and allow improved visual integration in this historic context.
4. **Parking:** Vehicles on verges are eroding the grass surface; discreet but substantial low wooden bollards would help deter this practice.
5. **Boundaries:** These are an important ingredient in Stewkley's townscape character; remnants of frontage enclosure railings and walls survive however much has been lost or survive in poor condition. These need to be reinstated wherever possible.
6. **Telephone Exchange:** (to the south of 15 High Street North). This building is visually intrusive in the street scene. The entrance would benefit from landscape improvement / tree planting.
7. **Village Hall:** Although tree planting has taken place in the grounds of the Hall, its elevated and prominent position suggest further improvement to the car park and boundaries. The retaining wall and railings have a detrimental impact on the character of the village; an improvement would be their replacement with an appropriate wall and railings that respect the character of the village. The rear boundary of the village hall along Ivy

Lane is also unsightly; a suitable railing backed by a hedge would upgrade its appearance.

8. **Verge:** (in front of 89 to 91 High Street South opposite Maltings Close). Although trees exist, they are smaller, short lived species. Inter-planting with larger growing species, typical of the type of trees found in the village, would enable suitable trees to become established and eventually replace the others.
9. **Traffic Levels and Speeds:** Traffic flows affect the overall character of an area, Stewkley suffers from heavy traffic and measures need to be taken to re-route heavy goods vehicles and to slow other vehicles. Any physical measures to slow speeding should utilise appropriate natural materials and be sensitive to the character of the Conservation Area.
10. **White Lines:** Markings in the centre of the road are strongly directional and emphasise speed; they detract from rural character and should only be used when absolutely essential for highway safety within the Conservation Area.
11. **Surfaces:** There is little visual difference between footways and roads, both are surfaced in bituminous macadam. The traditional appearance of the village would be enhanced if footpath surfaces were laid in buff coloured bound gravel.
12. **Junction of Dunton Road and High Street South:** There is scope for environmental improvements to the east of the junction, this would entail rationalisation of clutter, street signs, street furniture and a telegraph pole and then tree planting to promote enclosure. The northwest corner of the junction is visually weak, lacking boundary definition to conceal parking and garaging although the southern side of the junction is well contained by a hedge and railings.

²⁸ The Stewkley Conservation Area includes the older buildings along or near the High Street and endeavours to protect historic views over the farm land behind

²⁹ © Aylesbury Vale District Council 2001