

ASHTON HAYES & HORTON-CUM-PEEL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (2016-2036)

PART 2 – Evidence Base

REGULATION 17
REFERENDUM VERSION
FEBRUARY 2017



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1 PREFACE

The full Ashton Hayes and Horton-cum-Peel Neighbourhood Plan (NP) comprises three parts, each of which is available as a separate but related document as follows.

1.1 PART 1 - Key Policies

Introduces the NP, the approach to the work and the consultation undertaken. Based on the consultation and evidence considered, it sets out policies proposed in each of five areas:

- built & natural environment
- housing
- facilities, amenities & social welfare
- business & employment
- transport & infrastructure.

It then provides an overview of the strategic fit between these policies and the Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan.

The consultation process and associated work identified a number of problems, desired improvements and policies that fall outside the mandate of this NP. These have been captured in a Community Action Programme (CAP) section in Part 3. They will be pursued by the Parish Council approved CAP process.

1.2 PART 2 – Evidence Base

This document is Part 2 - Evidence Base and is available on the Ashton Hayes website www.ashtonhayespc.co.uk. For each of the policy areas in Part 1, Part 2 provides the **remit** laying out the key research focus, its **scope** and subsequently the **evidence** found. This evidence and the draft policies were tested at various stages on the residents of the area, adjusted based on feedback and the resulting community views obtained. Key conclusions that underpin the policies in Part 1 are provided based on the information gleaned.

1.3 PART 3 – Attachments

The attachments are available on the Ashton Hayes website and include

A - Habitat Report Summary

B - Local Green Spaces Detailed Maps

- C – Open Spaces in Neighbourhood Area
- D – Ashton Hayes Character Statement
- E - Items Proposed To Be Transferred To CAP
- F - Consultation Statement
- G- Basic Condition Statement
- H – Not Used
- I– Tree Preservation Orders in Ashton Hayes and Horton-cum-Peel
- J - Heritage Assets in Ashton Hayes and Horton-cum-Peel

Other documents, studies, surveys and plans are referred to in the three parts. A list of sources and how to access other detailed papers is given at the end of Part 1. Surveys, studies and research conducted on behalf of the Parish Council or the NP team are available on the Ashton Hayes website while information produced by external third parties is available directly from them.

Throughout these documents references to Ashton Hayes should be read as meaning Ashton Hayes and Horton-cum-Peel.

2 BUILT & NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

REMIT

To establish policies which will ensure the environment in which we live is maintained and sustainably improved, such that it can be passed on at the end of the plan period, in a healthier and richer form for the benefit of residents and the local flora/ fauna.

Early resident input helped shape this work which has resulted in policies in this section concerning the wider environment. Given the varied character of the area, specific work was carried out to:

- produce an overview Ecological Assessment and Management Plan (Nov. 2013) which identifies existing habitats, their broad nature and condition
- establish the air quality and the water quality (aquifer water and water in local streams) status for the area
- build on the community's commitment to become carbon neutral
- identify potential actions from the above work that in general help achieve and support the policies below. These will be dealt with separately by inclusion in the Parish Council Community Action Programme (CAP) at Appendix E.

2.1 Local character

2.1.1 Scope

This section evaluates the local character of the area in terms of the

- village layout
- external design of the buildings and their valued characteristics
- nature of the surrounding landscape and how the village and buildings fit in.

2.1.2 Evidence

2.1.2.1 Landscape visual character

The local landscape is essentially a flat agricultural plain where the prevailing field pattern and condition of the hedgerows gives rise to some subtle variations in landscape character. Where fields are smaller, hedges higher and hedgerow trees are more abundant, the sense of enclosure is much stronger than elsewhere in the area. However at 6.5% the woodland cover is low (10% is national target), being

restricted to small copses, game coverts and groups of trees associated with ponds and lines of drainage.

In such areas long distance views are blocked or filtered, creating a perception of a smaller scale and much more verdant landscape. Where the fields are larger, with low trimmed hedgerows and fewer trees, the landscape character appears to be more open and larger scale. At such locations the views are much more extensive and panoramic and often extend as far as the high ground of the surrounding areas. A number of particularly valued views are identified in Attachment D – Built character & rural perspective. These generally being in and around Ashton Hayes village. To the west these extend to the Clwydian Hills and to the east the Mid-Cheshire Sandstone Ridge. In addition good general views can be had from the roads from Brines Brow looking towards Delamere Forest and from Longley Lane West over the NP area and the Cheshire Plain. Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan Part 1 Strategic Policy ENV 2 concerns itself with the landscape and its preservation and thus the inclusion of these views provides a link to wider planning laws/guidance. Views themselves are not normally a planning issue, but their amenity value is if any development has the potential to adversely affect them.

In summary much of the area has a very rural feel with small, winding roads and lanes connecting isolated farms and hamlets. This contrasts with the significant local impact of the busy A54 road that forms a boundary to the south east of the area.

2.1.2.2 Village layout

The village straddles a B road used as a main route connecting Kelsall - Tarvin to Helsby - Frodsham and has the following characteristics - see attachment D.

- It is unobtrusive and has a sense of compactness.
- The village sits across the main route through the village but since most dwellings are tucked down side roads or in cul-de-sacs they are not visible to through traffic or to people walking within the village.

2.1.2.3 Village buildings

Within the village Conservation Area, traditional materials and designs typical of a small Cheshire village have been used, including slate roofs, rendering, dark weathered brickwork and some sandstone features such as walls.

2.1.2.4 Rural buildings

The rural area outside of the village contains:

- brick built farmhouses and farm buildings along with older sandstone buildings and halls. Many of the farm buildings have over time been converted to dwellings, generally in a sympathetic manner
- over the years a number of more suburban buildings have been erected differing in style from the existing traditional farmhouses.

2.1.2.5 Cheshire West and Chester Borough Landscape Strategy

Cheshire West and Chester (CWaC) produced early in 2016 the document 'A Landscape Strategy for Cheshire West and Chester Borough Part 1 (Mar. 2016). Also produced was a Part 2 which contains details about the landscape types of the whole CWaC area. These documents together replaced the previous assessment of 2008.

The Neighbourhood Plan area can be found within Part 2 of the above at:

- CWaC Landscape Strategy Part2-LCT9 Cheshire Plain West (Mar.2016); section 9a Dunham to Tarvin Plain
- CWaC Landscape Strategy Part2-LCT3 Sandstone Fringe (Mar.2016); section 3a Helsby to Tarporley,

2.1.2.5.1 LCT9 Cheshire Plain West (Mar.2016) section 9a Dunham to Tarvin Plain, includes the majority of the NP area. It identifies the forces for landscape change.

Past change

- Agricultural intensification with enlargement of fields and loss of hedgerow boundaries (oak trees left 'in-field') with loss of historic field pattern.
- Under management and deterioration of some small farm woodlands.
- A shift from pasture grazing with increasing areas being cultivated for arable cropping, silage or feed crops including cereals and maize.
- Loss of historic parkland to recreational use (such as golf courses) or farmland.
- Loss of unimproved grassland.
- Loss of ridge and furrow.
- Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession and overshadowing from trees.

- Prominent transport and energy transfer infrastructure.
- Erosion of local distinctiveness in larger settlements.
- Increased visual intrusion and loss of tranquillity from industrial and transport infrastructure to the north, including the M56.

Potential future change / key issues

- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks.
- Pressure for solar PV farms.
- Pressure for residential/employment development, for example at Tarvin and Ashton Hayes.
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space.
- Degradation of vernacular building style through alteration.
- Pressure for built development around settlements and associated with the main M56 corridor at Junction 14 that passes through the landscape.

2.1.2.5.2 *LCT3 Sandstone Fringe (Mar.2016) section 3a Helsby to Tarporley* includes the east of the area up to and north of Brines Brow. It identifies the forces for landscape change.

Past change

- Limited boundary management and some evidence of decline and degradation in hedgerow boundaries as well as over-mature hedgerow trees.
- Sandstone walls, often forming part of hedgerow boundaries or alongside roads, are also in a declining state of repair.
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in the number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings.
- Growth of potatoes and maize in traditionally pastoral areas resulting in soil erosion as a result of exposure of bare soil.
- Farm diversification and an increase in paddocks/horse grazing with accompanying ranch style fencing, decline in sward structure and introduction of ancillary buildings, clutter and hardstanding.

- Loss of orchards – in the past nearly all farms would have had an orchard.
- Decline in thatched buildings.

Potential future change / key issues

- Pressure for residential development, particularly on the edges of the larger villages such as Kelsall and Tarporley, but also Utkinton and Mouldsworth.
- Pressure for holiday chalets.
- Likelihood of conversion of farm buildings for residential, business or industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space.
- Erosion of built environment character and increased suburbanisation through development and standardisation/upgrading of main roads, including signage and screen planting.
- Pressure for communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines, given the elevated topography and wind speeds.
- Visitor pressure with small scale recreation-related development along the Sandstone Trail and other walks, with the possible erosion of the soft sandstone, fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity.
- The area's location in The Mersey Forest indicates that there is likely to be additional tree planting in this area. The Forest Plan is aiming for a woodland cover of 20-30% in this area.

**2.1.2.6 CWaC Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 9a:
Cheshire Plain West**

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **restore** the historic field pattern of hawthorn hedgerows and hedgerow oak trees and **enhance** the grassland and small woodland network, and to limit the influence of urban and industrial development to the north on the rural character of the plain.

Landscape management guidelines

- Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
- Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerows.

- Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost utilising appropriate species of hawthorn and oak standards.
- Conserve the remaining hedgerow trees and seek opportunities to encourage a new generation of hedgerow trees to increase their presence in the landscape.
- Manage existing small woodlands and coverts to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
- Consider opportunities to plant simple, small pockets of trees and small blocks of woodland in field corners to ensure the continuation of these declining characteristic features.
- Conserve the small to medium scale pattern of fields, particularly early field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape, particularly around settlements.
- Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
- Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
- Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
- Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved grassland that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
- Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
- Conserve the remaining areas of ridge and furrow by restricting use of fields to pasture.
- Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that ‘suburbanise’ the landscape such as kerbs and large-scale signage.
- Conserve distant views to the Welsh hills and take account of views from the *Sandstone Fringe* and *Sandstone Ridge* when planning for change.

Built development guidelines

- Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of villages, hamlets, halls and farmsteads and isolated cottages, retaining the main villages as the main focus for development.
- Conserve the local vernacular built form –simple red-brown brick buildings with steeply pitching welsh slate roofs.
- Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
- Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not ‘suburbanise’ the landscape.
- Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows rather than close-board fencing.
- Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
- Conserve rural views towards the *Sandstone Ridge* in the east.
- Maintain the rural setting to villages and farmsteads which are features of the landscape.
- Ensure the design of elements associated with new development such as boundary treatments and surfacing recognise, respond to and reflect the traditional vernacular of existing landscape elements that help to define the landscape character, in order to prevent encroaching sub-urbanisation.
- Ensure that the siting of Solar PV farms is not visually prominent from higher ground.

**2.1.2.7 CWaC Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 3a:
Sandstone Fringe**

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the pastoral character, strong field pattern and views to and from the *Sandstone Ridge* and the *Cheshire Plain West*.

Landscape management guidelines

- Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
- Conserve ancient field patterns, particularly those dating to the medieval period or earlier which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
- Seek to repair sandstone walls where they bound fields or align roads, to conserve these as a feature of the landscape.
- Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
- Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
- Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
- Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved or semi-improved acid grassland on the sandy soils that are of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
- Conserve field ponds, brooks and streams that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
- Consider further opportunities for recreational use of the landscape as long as this does not result in 'suburbanisation' of the countryside.
- Seek opportunities to extend woodland cover where it doesn't impact upon other ecologically valuable habitats – small scattered broadleaved woodland blocks, copses and riparian woodland are the most appropriate forms of woodland in this area.
- Seek opportunities to restore and create orchards at the farm scale – in the past nearly all farms would have had an orchard.
- Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
- Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes.

Built development guidelines

- Respect dominant historic settlement patterns where they remain.
- Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of hamlets and farmsteads away from the main urban areas.
- Avoid locating buildings in prominent locations.
- Conserve the local vernacular built style - red brick/sandstone or white washed farmsteads and buildings, thatch, and sandstone walls. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
- Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
- Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
- Maintain the rural setting to villages.
- Minimise impacts of the leisure industry.

2.1.2.8 Conservation & Protection

Within the NP area statutory protection is already in place for

- mature or important trees, or groups of trees. See map in PART 3 – Attachment I Tree Preservation Orders in Ashton Hayes and Horton-cum-Peel
- listed buildings. See PART 3 – Attachment J Heritage Assets in Ashton Hayes and Horton-cum-Peel. Also a significant part of the older part of the Ashton Hayes village already has conservation area status, put in place to protect and conserve this particularly valued area of the village.

2.1.3 Community views

- The rural nature of the parish is valued by the vast majority of residents. When asked about the importance of such aspects as public and permissive footpaths, open green spaces, hedgerows, woodland areas, farmland and tree preservation areas, an overwhelming majority of those expressing an opinion considered they were important.

- Based on the above, a policy was drafted and put to the community in the externally led Policy Proposals Survey (October 2014).
 - 97% of respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the objective and proposals.
 - There was no disagreement to the objective or proposals.

2.1.4 Supporting documents

- National Planning Policy Framework
- Rural Conservation Character Assessment (1995)
- Parish Plan survey results (2009)
- Initial NP survey (2012)
- Policy proposal survey (Oct. 2014)
- Cheshire West and Chester District Local Plan (Part 1) (2015) - policies ENV2, 6
- Landscape Strategy for Cheshire West and Chester Borough Part 1 (Mar. 2016)
- CWaC Landscape Strategy Part 2-LCT9 Cheshire Plain West (Mar.2016)
- CWaC Landscape Strategy Part 2-LCT3 Sandstone Fringe (Mar.2016)
- Attachment D, including section on valued rural views and vistas

2.1.5 Conclusions

The Ashton NP area has a mature, cared for, diverse character that has evolved over time. The village of Ashton Hayes sits unobtrusively in the surrounding landscape and possesses a number of characteristics that are highly valued by residents. It is this sense of place and character that is to be maintained and enhanced whenever new developments provide the opportunity.

2.2 Green environment

2.2.1 Scope

This section covers all land use within the area, be it developed, agricultural or woodland and the habitats of importance that they contain. Also covered are key aspects of the landscape.

2.2.2 Evidence

2.2.2.1 Ecological Assessment and Management Plan findings

RSK Ltd was engaged to produce an overview Ecological Assessment and Management Plan in order to:

- assess the current ecological value of the area, autumn 2012
- assess existing management practices
- make suggestions for habitat creation and management of existing habitats
- highlight the type of detailed protected species surveys required for future planning applications.

RSK was supported by a member of the Neighbourhood Planning Group, to arrange access to private land and to input local information. The plan area is some 715 ha and comprises large expanses of agricultural farmland with little ecological value. There are however many habitats of importance as listed in Attachment A. In summary these comprise:

- several areas of woodland including five recorded on the National Inventory of Woodland including some of the few designated areas of Ancient Woodland in the Cheshire 'West Lowland Plain'
- hedgerows that are generally managed to a greater height than is typical in Cheshire, enhancing their benefit to wildlife
- two main wildlife corridors of importance close to the village. Shay Lane was also identified as having potential to be enhanced to become a wildlife corridor
- approximately 40 ponds, seven of which were assessed as 'Good to Excellent' in terms of invertebrates and amphibians. These are close to the village boundaries and detailed surveys would be required if development were considered nearby. Many of the remaining ponds represent valuable wildlife habitats for many species including fish and wildfowl
- three waterways, of which Ashton Brook is of note for water voles and Gongar Brook for badgers.

Most local farmers are managing their land according to Government Stewardship schemes thus enhancing provisions for wildlife. 14 species of birds on the national list of at risk species can be found in the area.

2.2.2.2 Ecological Assessment feedback

The draft ecology report was reviewed with three of the largest farmers in the area and pond feedback was provided to nine parties responsible for nearly all the ponds surveyed. Their input and comments were included by RSK.

2.2.2.3 Open spaces

The Ecological Assessment and Management Plan findings in PART 3 - Appendix A identified the significant habitats of importance to wildlife. In addition to this the NP environment team surveyed the area to identify other local green spaces which are of significant value to the community and /or which contribute to the local character of the area. These were then put to the community for consideration and comment in the Policy Proposals Questionnaire (Oct. 2014) under the three categories of:

- sites of value as open space
- sites of value for nature conservation
- sites of recreational value.

Attachment C identifies the local open and local green spaces along with the understood ownership of each in December 2015. This excludes the sites referred to in Appendix A unless explicitly mentioned elsewhere in Attachment C.

The sites of recreational value include the community owned recreation field which is a valued community open space of some 4.5 acres used for recreation purposes. It has been developed as a public recreation ground comprising a play area, sports pitches, nature area, paths, amenity items plus a purpose built sports/amenity pavilion. The facility is managed and operated by the Ashton Hayes Sports and Recreation Association (AHSRA) which is both a limited company and a registered charity. The recreation field is also registered with the Fields in Trust charity for its protection.

Although the open character of the recreation field is valued, it has been suggested that there is potential to enhance its community benefit by potential complementary developments such as all-weather play surfaces, discreet lighting, and possible enhancement of the pavilion.

2.2.3 Community views

In the Initial NP Survey (2012) of a sample of village residents, conducted on behalf of the neighbourhood planning team by the University of Chester in July 2012, respondents identified the following environmental issues

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| • Maintaining & improving green space | 86% of respondents |
| • Maintaining the Green Belt | 67% |
| • Maintaining & encouraging wildlife | 40% |
| • Supporting good access to footpaths & roads | 20% |

Based on the above, a policy was drafted and put to the community in the externally led Policy Proposals Survey of October 2014.

- 94% of respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the objective and proposals.
- There was no disagreement to the objective. The list of identified green spaces was however adjusted from comments received, to explicitly include the Brines Brow picnic area and woodland. Also it was requested that the former cricket club ground be excluded on the basis that it had ceased to operate. However it has since been reinstated as requested in responses to the Regulation 14 consultation. Seven people made the point that the policy needed to support possible extensions of the recreation area facilities. The policy was amended accordingly.

The Green Environment policy did originally include the Recreation Field, however it was subsequently removed at the request of AHSRA, as it is protected in perpetuity from non-recreational development by means of a) a 2011 Trust Deed signed by AHSRA, the Parish Council and Fields in Trust (formerly the National Playing Fields Association) and b) by the Charitable Purpose of AHSRA. Green Belt restrictions also apply.

Regulation 14 Consultation in January 2016 resulted in:

- reinstatement of the cricket field as a site of recreational value as a new cricket pavilion was being proposed
- removal of Shay Lane as a Site of Nature Conservation Value as a number of adjacent landowners were concerned as to its impact on their farming activities. However further steps were proposed to the Parish Council under the CAP to investigate improving its amenity value
- clarification to the protections covering the recreation field.

2.2.4 Supporting documents

- National Planning Policy Framework
- National Inventory of Woodland & Trees - England
- Cheshire Roadside Habitat Action Plans Target
- Parish Plan 2009

- Initial NP survey (2012)
- Footpath survey and map (Jun 2013)
- Ecological Assessment and Management Plan (Nov 2013)
- ACRE Rural Community Profile for Ashton Hayes Parish (2013)
- Policy proposal survey (Oct 2014)
- Cheshire West and Chester District Local Plan (Part 1) 2015 - policies ENV 2,3,4
- Landscape Strategy for Cheshire West and Chester Borough Part 1 (Mar. 2016)
- CWaC Landscape Strategy Part 2-LCT9 Cheshire Plain West (Mar.2016)
- CWaC Landscape Strategy Part 2-LCT3 Sandstone Fringe (Mar.2016)

The ecology and footpath reports were made available at a community consultation event in December 2013 and also on the Ashton Hayes Parish Council website in December 2013.

2.2.5 Conclusions

Ashton Hayes sits within Green Belt and its rural nature is highly valued by its residents. In the previous Parish Plan the value of open footpaths, green and open spaces, hedgerows and woodland areas was rated by the community as either very or extremely important. A large majority of Parish Plan respondents pointed to the need to maintain these in future. The Parish Plan has previously identified that footpaths are the most frequently used amenity within the area.

An overview Ecological Assessment and Management Plan study of the whole plan area was undertaken to inform and assist development of the Neighbourhood Plan policies. As these policies do not identify specific sites for development this level of survey is considered sufficient at this time. Detailed environmental surveys will be required whenever proposals for development or changes in land use are proposed. The overview Ecological Assessment and Management Plan study identified key habitats that need to be protected for the sustainability of the wildlife in the area. The policy therefore aims to protect these valued aspects and enhance them where opportunities arise.

2.3 Carbon Reduction

2.3.1 Scope

Ashton Hayes has sought since 2005 (see the Mandate Minute from the PC (Nov.2005)) to be in the forefront of promoting a more carbon neutral lifestyle. Its Ashton Hayes Going Carbon Neutral Project (see website) has strong community support and has acted as a pathfinder for other communities in the UK and overseas.

This initiative has to date primarily focused on:

- raising awareness of the possibility of community carbon reduction through organised events, surveys and feedback, focusing on domestic emissions and the trends in usage as people make adjustments through lifestyle changes
- supporting behaviour changes that lead to reduced emissions
- supporting household energy generation initiatives within the community and encouraging improvements in insulation
- promoting the use of renewable energy by installing solar photovoltaic (PV) cells on the purpose-built low energy sports pavilion and on the village school.

2.3.2 Evidence

2.3.2.1 Government targets

The Climate Change Act (2008) commits the UK to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050 from 1990 levels. Government projections suggest that emissions from electricity generation could be between 75% and 84% lower than 2009 figures by 2027 (HM Government 2011, *The Carbon Plan: Delivering our low carbon future*). Our policies are aimed at achieving our goal earlier. These government carbon reduction targets already assume further take up of domestic renewable energy generation facilities, but still fall 20% short of carbon neutrality.

2.3.2.2 Ashton Hayes experience

Between 2006 and 2015 carbon emissions from domestic energy consumption in the village were reduced by 33% ignoring flight offsets and 45% including flight offsets. In a presentation at the event celebrating the 10 year anniversary of the project, the phrase 'in the region of 40%' as a result of the Going Carbon Neutral Project' was quoted to summarise that achievement. See the carbon footprint surveys (2006-2015) on the village Going Carbon Neutral Project website. These reveal an ongoing strong aspiration to carbon neutrality.

In 2010 DECC selected Ashton Hayes for a £410,000 award under its Low Carbon Community Challenge, one of only 22 communities across the UK. This was as recognition for its strong aspiration for a lower carbon lifestyle and its pioneering approach to democratic behavioural changes that result in increased awareness of energy issues and a reduction in carbon footprint.

Village community peak electricity generation capacity early 2014 was approximately 45 kW from solar PV, which although useful, supplies only approximately 2% of the community's annual consumption of 1,900MWh.

Ashton Hayes is therefore still a long way away from achieving its target to become carbon neutral in respect of electricity. As yet no substantive community facility to help achieve this has been agreed by the community.

It is difficult to estimate how much extra generation capacity would be necessary for Ashton Hayes to become truly carbon neutral with respect to electricity. However, 400kWp of solar PV capacity, would supply approximately 20% of the community's domestic energy consumption and would significantly close the gap between government targets and the village's ambition.

Such a capability purely based on 2014 proven solar PV technology, would require up to 3 acres of land space, spread across several suitable sites to preserve green space 'openness'. Ideally a mix of technologies (e.g. solar PV, anaerobic digestion, combined heat and power) should be considered both to reduce the potential land requirement and to increase the diversity and security of supply. Locating such facilities requires consideration of other policies, particularly those concerning wildlife, noise, air and visual impact.

2.3.3 Community views

- The Ashton Hayes Parish Council agreed in the Mandate Minute of Nov.2005 to support the newly proposed Going Carbon Neutral project. The project was launched in January 2006, when 400 residents attended a public meeting and expressed their support. The Going Carbon Neutral Project has a constitution that has been agreed with and is monitored by the Parish Council
- A Master's thesis by Ged Edwards c. 2007 confirmed overwhelming support for carbon neutrality objectives. A public vote in 2010 showed a 98% support for moving towards renewable energy.

- In 2011 Ashton Hayes Community Energy (AHCE) was incorporated as a community interest company (C.I.C), to take the project forward through ownership and management of community renewable generation assets and promotion of further developments. AHCE reports to the Parish Council and has Parish Council representation on its Board of Directors. Progress on this initiative has been communicated to the community regularly.
- In the Village Consultation Survey (Nov. 2013), the community was asked whether it still supported the carbon neutral objectives. Also raised were proposals that new developments should be constructed to higher energy efficiency standards than current regulations and that new developments should include generation capacity either inbuilt or via community facilities. 74% of the respondents agreed.
- Based on the above, a policy was drafted and put to the community in the externally led Policy Proposals Survey (Oct. 2014).
- 76% of respondents 'strongly agreed' / 'agreed' with the objective and 9% of individuals did not agree with the objective.
- 17% disagreed with the originally proposed wording in the survey of the proposal regarding that up to 3 acres of land be potentially used for renewable energy generation. Also comments received suggest that further information is required by some as to the specific proposals for renewable energy and potential land use. The proposal has consequently been recast to address the comments as far as possible and to incorporate guidance from CWaC.

2.3.4 Supporting documents

- National Planning Policy Framework
- Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) planning practice guidelines for renewable and low carbon energy
- Mandate minute from the PC November 2005
- Climate Change Act (2008)
- Parish Plan survey results (2009)
- Ashton Hayes carbon footprint surveys (2006-2010)
- The Carbon Plan: Delivering our Low Carbon Future, HM Government (2011)
- Ashton Hayes PV Report (Mar. 2013) by SP Energy Networks
- Policy proposals survey (Oct. 2014)
- Cheshire West and Chester District Local Plan (Part1) (2015): policies ENV 6,7

2.3.5 Conclusions

Government carbon reduction targets fall short of carbon neutrality by 20%. For Ashton Hayes to achieve its aspiration additional renewable energy generation capacity would be required in the locality. Government projections assume continuing improvement in building energy efficiency and the installation of residential, community and commercial renewable energy generation capacity. Delivery of this will vary across the country e.g. non-government communal renewable generation facilities for large proportions of society may not be easy to achieve in cities, or where local communities do not share Ashton Hayes' strong desire for carbon neutrality. Consequently community facilities installed in the village will take us closer to carbon neutrality than the country at large.

2.4 Pollution and Sustainability

2.4.1 Scope

Residents of Ashton Hayes, like those in many other communities, share concerns about pollution of the environment. As the exact status of the local environment was unknown the following aspects were considered:

- air quality
- river water and groundwater quality
- noise
- visual annoyances
- community lighting
- waste.

2.4.2 Evidence

2.4.2.1 Air pollution

Information was sought regarding the quality of the air in the area. Data from the nearest measuring points, which are outside the plan area, were used to assess the position. One of the main sources of air pollution arises from road traffic. However, pollution levels drop to background levels beyond 20 metres from the road. An analysis of the air quality in the plan area is given in the Air Quality Assessment report (Aug.2013), for Ashton Hayes and the surrounding countryside, which was made available at the public consultation event in December 2013.

2.4.2.2 Drinking water/ river water and groundwater quality

Ashton Hayes drinking water is sourced from the United Utilities (UU) network, typically from Lake Vyrnwy in Wales. However there is an important aquifer under much of the area which is accessed at times to produce drinking water via boreholes situated in Mouldsworth and in the south of Ashton Hayes. This latter borehole sits within its water protection zone where UU expect:

"any planning applications to consider the vulnerability of the land and to propose suitable mitigation measures which will be employed to reduce the risk of pollution of groundwater"

The water in two of the brooks in the plan area is analysed periodically. An analysis of the river and the groundwater in the area, together with details of the water protection zones in the plan area, is given in the Water Quality Assessment (Jun.2013) report, which was made available at the public consultation event in December 2013.

2.4.2.3 Noise

Concerns regarding noise levels have been raised by residents in earlier surveys. Although these mainly concern noise from the village pub and from aircraft, the main source of noise pollution is from traffic particularly that on the A54, plus the B5393.

2.4.2.4 Waste

The ACRE Rural Community Profile for Ashton Hayes (2013) report shows that 41% of household waste in the Cheshire West area is recycled or composted compared to 35% for England overall. The residual waste per head is still 560kg per person. Historically, however, the level of recycling in Ashton Hayes is greater than in other parts of Chester.

2.4.3 Community views

In the Initial NP Survey, a sample of village residents was interviewed by the University of Chester in July 2012. This identified the following pollution issues as being important to the respondents:

- pollution and waste issues 43% of respondents
- maintaining quiet lanes low pollution 33%
- maintaining carbon awareness 27%

- support of local services 46%

Based on the above, a policy was drafted and put to the community in the externally led Policy Proposals Survey (Oct. 2014). 89% of respondents 'strongly agreed' / 'agreed' with the objective and one person out of 136 'strongly Disagreed' that developments must not expose people to increased pollution.

2.4.4 Supporting documents

- Initial NP Survey (2012)
- Water Quality Assessment (Jun. 2013)
- Air Quality Assessment (Aug. 2013)
- ACRE Rural Community Profile for Ashton Hayes (2013)
- Policy Proposals Survey (Oct. 2014)
- Cheshire West and Chester District Local Plan (Part 1) (2015): policies ENV 6

The air and water reports were made available at a community consultation event in December 2013 and also on the Ashton Hayes Parish Council website in December 2013.

2.4.5 Conclusions

Investigations have identified that pollution and waste issues in the plan area are generally in line with or better than those in Cheshire West and Chester overall. However two specific points have been identified.

- First, that additional measures may be needed to prevent groundwater pollution if development is considered on land within the protection zone of the village water borehole.
- Second, a more general problem of noise pollution, particularly from the A54.

3 HOUSING

REMIT

To establish policies which address the housing needs of the community within the context of the character of the plan area but also within wider planning policy, by exploring the challenges and issues specific to the plan area and carrying out in depth and detailed consultation and engagement with the community and key stakeholders.

3.1 Scope

Housing is vital to the community and a core aspect of the Neighbourhood Plan. In arriving at appropriate and suitable policies a number of diverse and significant factors were explored and considered.

- The existing housing stock – 408 houses (ACRE Rural Community Profile for Ashton Hayes (2013)) exist in the plan area with the majority located in the village of Ashton Hayes and the remainder being spread in small pockets or single units throughout the rest of the plan area. Key house type data for 'Gowy North 3L1 area' was extracted from the House Type by Region Census 2011 (Jan. 2013). Whilst the Gowy North 3L1 area is larger than the plan area, the data does give a feel for the level of key house types which are:
 - large bungalows (three bedrooms or more - 23% of housing stock)
 - large detached houses (four bedrooms or more -19%)
 - medium semi-detached houses (three bedroom - 16%).
- Demographics of the plan area and the wider region – Census data from the ACRE Rural Community Profile for Ashton Hayes (2013), shows that the plan area has a higher proportion of people aged 65 years or over (28.7%) than the average for Cheshire West & Chester (18.5%) and the population aged 20-39 is significantly lower than the other adult age ranges in the plan area. The number of households in Cheshire West & Chester is set to grow from 141,000 in 2013 to 156,000 in 2033.
- The property market - following a rapid increase in house prices in the UK overall and in the plan area in the late 1990's through to 2008, the market has seen minor fluctuations with growth over the period since 2008 being considered static. In the plan area the capital values of houses are considered high in the context of

the region and are higher than average for Cheshire. The rental market is also considered to be strong, with the average rent being above the Cheshire average.

- Planning policy - the plan area is governed by Cheshire West & Chester's Local Plan along with wider and national planning policy. The plan area is washed over Green Belt, which highly restricts any new residential development. Generally new development is restricted to dwellings associated with agriculture or forestry, conversion of existing buildings, limited infill or small scale exception sites, predominantly for affordable houses.
- Ashton Hayes Going Carbon Neutral – the existing Going Carbon Neutral project is relevant to the energy use and efficiency of existing buildings (including dwellings) within the plan area and the implications for any new residential development that may occur.

3.2 Evidence base

It was necessary to understand the individual and the collective needs of the community. It was also necessary to identify what residential development would be appropriate within the existing planning policy context to meet any identified need and/or be supported by the community. The process also needed to consider what requirement may exist for the plan to guide or dictate the quality and location of new development in respect of the impact upon the character and environment of the plan area and implications for the Going Carbon Neutral project.

The following work was carried out to assess and understand the issues and inform any new policies.

- Examination of the evidence base and intentions of the Parish Plan survey results (2009).
- Analysis of 2011 census data for the area from the ACRE Rural Community Profile for Ashton Hayes (2013).
- Assessment of the findings of the Initial NP Survey conducted on a random sample of the community to establish initial comments and issues.
- Issue of a questionnaire to all households in the plan area to collate all comments and issues.
- The findings of previous CWaC surveys, such as Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) were considered.

- An assessment of the character of the area was carried out to inform any proposed policies in relation to design and location. See attachment D
- The Ashton Hayes Housing Needs Survey (2013) was carried out in the plan area and those expressing interest in new affordable housing were interviewed to understand and quantify specific needs in more detail.
- Work was undertaken to refine the assumption, in particular what potential demand might exist from those who did not respond to the above survey.
- The Ashton Hayes & Horton-cum-Peel Housing Needs Survey Part 2 (Oct. 2014) was carried out by Cheshire Community Action (CCA) to detail further the need and pick up any further expressions of interest not brought forward in the first survey.
- A number of formal and informal public consultations were conducted, at dedicated Neighbourhood Plan events, as part of other community events and via community newsletters and the Ashton Hayes Parish Council website.
- Views and comments were sought on findings of questionnaires, issues previously raised and draft policies.

3.2.1 Local housing need

A key issue identified through initial consultation was quantification of the local housing need that may exist in the plan area. The need was analysed through the following reports and surveys.

3.2.1.1 Cheshire West and Chester Council Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

The SHMA was conducted in 2013 and was based on “Spatial Zones” that were larger than the Ashton Hayes council ward: Ashton Hayes is in the Tarvin and Kelsall Spatial Zone. The data could not be reliably apportioned to sub areas such as the plan area. The NP team’s ‘Analysis of Tarvin Kelsall SHMA Spatial Zone Housing (May 2014)’ concluded that

- within a year of the SHMA’s publication, 92 affordable housing units had been approved against the total aggregated ‘**annual requirement**’ of 120 for the whole five year period

- within the same period, 92 affordable housing units had been approved against the aggregated '**recommendation**' of 60 for the whole five year period
- if the planning applications under consideration at the time of this analysis were to be subsequently approved, the SHMA Kelsall/Tarvin Spatial Zone figures for the SHMA '**requirements**' (120) and '**recommended**' (60) provision would be exceeded within just over one year of the five year period

The parish of Ashton Hayes accounts for approximately 12.3% (by number of households) of the Spatial Zone which on a simple extrapolation and pro rata figure equates to 3.0 units per annum.

It is understood the model was based on a sample survey in which about one third of households were contacted with a questionnaire. Of these 19.6% responded, representing therefore about 7% of West Cheshire households.

It was concluded that as this survey was of a large scale, in order to establish an accurate need for the plan area, further surveys should be commissioned.

3.2.1.2 Stage 1 - Ashton Hayes Survey of Potential Housing Need

This study was conducted in November/December 2013 by members of the NP team. The study made contact with 254 households i.e. 62% of the 408 households in the plan area.

In the survey 46 households expressed an initial general interest in housing. It provided evidence of a potential interest in new housing of 11 affordable units and an additional 11 open market units for the elderly over the plan period, with the affordable units focused in years 1-5 (8 units) and the elderly accommodation units focused in years 5-10 (6-7 units).

This survey advanced the work undertaken in the SHMA as it obtained data specific to the plan area and related to real people with immediate or anticipated needs.

The main source of uncertainty in this survey related to the adjustment factors, which are necessarily subjective. These were

- the probability adjustment factor, which is selected by the respondent with the guidance of the interviewer, is purely subjective and captures their assessment at a moment in time. Any major family change – a serious illness, a marriage, a promotion - could change the need dramatically. This is an inherent uncertainty.

- The sampling correction factor is a property of the study. In the case of affordable housing, this is small (1.2) and any error here is unlikely to make a big impact on the overall need assessment. With the elderly accommodation, the factor is 1.74, a figure with higher uncertainty. If the correction seems high, then it should be noted that in an ageing population, any over-provision is likely not to last for long.

The concept of co-housing was raised and discussed with interviewees and was well-received by those elderly interviewees consulted. Co-housing provides a choice in how independently an elderly individual can live – eating, relaxing, socialising are choices that can be made day by day. It should be noted that most co-housing projects are not designed for the elderly, but rather for younger or more age-balanced communities.

This survey established the potential demand but identified further work needed to:

- convert potential demand into real need in terms of firm interest and potential eligibility
- refine the assumption regarding the proportion of likely interest in those households whose views could not be ascertained. See further survey below.

The evidence gathered indicated a relatively small current demand for housing for the elderly, but significant interest for the future. The people who have indicated interest already own properties and therefore may well prefer to downsize to appropriate local market housing tailored to their needs. They also are unlikely to satisfy the criteria for affordable housing as they already own a house, which is why no further investigation was conducted. Typically the interest expressed was for single storey, smaller and more easily managed accommodation. The respondents also expressed an interest in housing that would be flexible in response to their needs and would have some element of communal facilities included.

3.2.1.3 Stage 2 - Follow Up Work

The original survey above indicated that 154 households had not responded. This left a potential unknown demand of uncertain scale.

A number of reasons for the non-response / lack of contact with the remaining 154 households were identified including no interest in housing, a reluctance to express a requirement, being away at the time of the original survey or the property being vacant.

In order to refine this position, follow up investigations were undertaken in October 2014. The follow up was planned to reduce this uncertainty as it was considered unsafe to simply scale up the estimate of needs from the responses received. Researchers conducted face to face interviews with a random sample of 50 of those we had been unable to contact during the initial 2013 survey. The outcomes were that:

- 50 (32.5%) households were contacted of those from which no response had previously been forthcoming
- 3 (1.9%) stated a potential need and were then included with the respondents of the original survey in the CCA Housing needs survey below.

3.2.1.4 Stage 3 – Ashton Hayes & Horton-cum-Peel Housing Needs Survey Part 2 – (Oct. 2014)

This survey was commissioned from Cheshire Community Action (CCA). CCA is a local charity that conducted the above survey independently, in order to give as fair and clear a picture as possible of the current and future affordable housing needs in the plan area. The purpose of the survey was to focus on housing needs for those households that had expressed an interest in the earlier studies. The report presents the full analysis of the data from the survey.

- 49 hardcopy surveys were posted to Ashton Hayes and Horton cum Peel residents.
- Residents were given two weeks to respond with a single freepost return envelope.
- All hardcopy responses were numbered to ensure no duplication of results.
- The exact questions from the hardcopy postal survey were uploaded to an e-survey and a link was sent out so residents could fill the survey out using the internet.
- All IP addresses were also logged to prevent one household filling out multiple surveys with the same results. Contact details of Cheshire Community Action were also given so households could request more forms if there was more than one person in the household in housing need.
- The Neighbourhood Plan team helped promote the survey and organised postage of the hardcopy survey forms to all 46 households that expressed a potential housing requirement in the first housing survey conducted.

This survey achieved a response rate of 14.3%. It should be noted that not all questions were responded to by each applicant. However the survey data identified the following housing need:

- 1 single adult home, 2 adult couple homes, 1 single older person home and 2 older couple homes
- the majority (5) need private ownership with 3 rented and 1 shared ownership
- 3 houses, 3 bungalows and 1 flat
- 1 respondent needs a 1 bedroom home, 4 respondents need a 2 bedroom home and 2 respondents need a 3 bedroom home
- 3 need a home in the next 1-3 years and 4 need a home in the next 3-5 years

CWaC Local Plan Part1 Strategic Policy - SOC 2 requires that 'development schemes must be supported by an up to date housing needs survey'. Schemes can request planning permission for developments adjacent to the village if they can demonstrate that 'special circumstances exist'. This essentially means affordable housing, however SOC 2 also states that 'Schemes will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the properties will remain affordable in perpetuity'.

3.3 Community views

The consultation response to the Policy Proposals Survey (Oct. 2014) established a number of views and preferences.

- Local Housing needs
 - 88.7% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that rural exception sites should meet the needs of the plan area.
 - 72.2% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that new housing should meet the proper evidenced need of the plan area.
 - 81.6% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that market housing for local needs of the elderly should be supported.
 - 86.2% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that new housing schemes should be led by the community.
- Location of housing development:
 - 93.2% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that new developments should be located to respect character.

- 91.1% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that rural exception sites should respect valued characteristics.
- 82.5% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that rural exception sites to be selected on basis of least impact.
- 89.9% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that housing for the elderly should be located close to village centre.
- Design of new housing development:
 - 86.5% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that new development must contribute to character and carbon neutral aspirations. A further 11% were neutral on this.
 - 92.7% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that new development must meet specified design standards.
 - 67.2% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed contemporary designs will be allowed as an exception. 15% were neutral on this and 15% disagreed with this aspect

Regulation 14 Consultation identified several concerns regarding car parking and the traffic implications of new developments. As at May 2016 we are advised that CWaC does not have parking standards for the NP area - they assess parking requirements on a case by case basis. It is understood that where guidance does exist in other areas, standards may be applied quite flexibly by the local highway authority. CWaC has commissioned a Borough wide parking strategy which is looking at a range of parking related issues, including establishing parking standards for new developments. Although this will take some time to produce it should provide a borough-wide set of parking standards and hence a clearer and more robust approach.□

3.4 Supporting documents

- National Planning Policy Framework
- Ashton Hayes Going Carbon Neutral Project
- Attachment D - Ashton Hayes Character Statement
- Rural Conservation Character Assessments (1995)
- Essex Design Guide for Residential and Mixed Use Areas (2005)
- Parish Plan survey results (2009)

- Localism Act (2011)
- Initial NP Survey (2012)
- Ashton Hayes Housing Needs Survey (2013)
- ACRE Rural Community Profile for Ashton Hayes (2013)
- CWaC Strategic Housing Market Assessment (Jul.2013)
- Analysis of Tarvin Kelsall Affordable Housing Need & Approvals (May 2014)
- Ashton Hayes & Horton-cum-Peel Housing Needs Survey Part 2 (Oct. 2014)
- Policy Proposal Survey Report (Oct. 2014)
- Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan (Part 1) (2015): policy SOC2
- A Landscape Strategy for Cheshire West and Chester Borough Part1 (Mar. 2016)
- CWaC Landscape Strategy Part2-LCT9 Cheshire Plain West (Mar.2016)
- CWaC Landscape Strategy Part2-LCT3 Sandstone Fringe (Mar.2016)

3.5 Conclusions

The progressive surveys and consultations identified a limited need for affordable housing and housing for the elderly. This demand is supported by the residents as being a justified exception under the wider national and CWaC planning guidance. However the key points that are made by the residents are that:

- new housing should be developed in line with Ashton Hayes NP area need
- new developments should be led by the community
- new developments must be located in a manner that preserves, protects and enhances where practical the valued character of the area
- design of new housing should be sympathetic to the surroundings in which it is to be built and also should progress the communities aspiration to become carbon neutral.

These criteria are considered as essential in order that Rural Exception Site housing contributes to the community's wish to build a sustainable and more balanced community, looking after the wellbeing of residents by keeping families together and allowing residents to remain in the community where they enjoy living.

Since the surveys were completed a planning consent has been granted by appeal on the 2/1/2015. This permits the construction of 15 affordable 2/3 bedroom houses on land off Ashton Lane and adjacent to the Methodist Chapel. Assuming these are delivered as approved, it is anticipated that this will largely meet the likely plan area

requirements for the foreseeable future. It is recommended that further surveys are undertaken to assess evolving requirements through the plan period to support any future schemes.

4 COMMUNITY FACILITIES, AMENITIES AND SOCIAL WELFARE

REMIT

To establish policies that strongly support the maintenance and further development of a healthy, welcoming and inclusive community which responds in a caring way to all, especially the vulnerable and those in a minority and also provides the facilities necessary to achieve this vision.

Early resident input has helped shape this work and has led to the policy proposed.

Specific work has been carried out to:

- clarify community concerns and priorities
- identify potential changes and improvements
- propose an approach which aims to both safeguard and enable development of facilities to support the community.

4.1 Scope

Ashton Hayes has benefited over time from a varied range of facilities, amenities and services. An early snap-shot of these is provided in the Facilities Summary of Usage (Nov. 2012) review and was followed up in the Meeting Place & Venue Review Report (Nov. 2013), together with a comment on the issues where they exist.

Community facilities, amenities and services include at one extreme, facilities owned and controlled by the community (e.g. the Parish Rooms) to, at the other extreme, a business of key community value (e.g. the Golden Lion pub). Broadly these can be categorised as:

- legacy facilities including the church, pub, school, village hall and parish rooms
- community enterprises and initiatives including the recreation field, community shop, community café, community energy company and the community resilience plan
- community volunteer services and activities including Time Bank, Snow Angels and assisted shopping
- recreational groups including WI, Scouts, gardening club.

4.2 Evidence base

4.2.1 Community experience

Ashton Hayes has over recent years established a range of effective and highly valued local services and facilities, which provide a local response mainly on a local voluntary basis. Some of these have been detailed in the section above.

The annual reports of some of the above named community amenities and services are available on the Ashton Hayes website.

Local people take a pride in the success of these ventures as they do in the many other local initiatives that also exist and the degree of community engagement and willingness to be involved in the wider community has grown as a result.

4.2.2 Restrictions on community experience

Whilst the village and surrounding area offers much to its residents in terms of locally based activities there are significant restrictions in that:

- facilities which are suitable for youth activity are limited as evidenced by the findings of the Facilities Survey (Adults) (Mar 2014)
- the existing Scout Hut is aged and not fit for purpose and a replacement venue is required
- there is no available local facility licensed for activities involving groups larger than 100. This means that the village theatre group productions which occur 2-3 times annually, are put on in Tarvin. The Community Choir performs its larger productions twice a year in Kelsall.

However, on a positive note, the recreation field with its play equipment and football field is commented on as good by many local residents (see comments from Policy Proposals Survey (Oct. 2014).

4.2.3 Protecting existing facilities

Four of the previously enjoyed and well established community facilities are no longer available. The loss of these facilities over the last two years has reduced opportunities for people to meet and socialise.

- The closure of the Golden Lion pub in January 2013 is considered to be a highly significant issue by the community.
 - Prior to its closure in early 2013, 47% of the respondents to the Initial NP survey in 2012, rated it as one of the most important concerns regarding local facilities and amenities.
 - Its loss is an ongoing disappointment to the community who have consistently raised it as a concern in all subsequent surveys and at successive Parish Council meetings.
- The closure of the WI Hall in 2014 came about as the hall was not economically viable due to its current state and was not considered safe.
- The Guild Room was sold together with the Vicarage in 2012/2013 which impacted on facilities for the Sunday School and other church activities.
- The Methodist Chapel closed in August 2013 with an impact on what was a small local congregation. It was not generally used for other purposes.

The Parish Council in conjunction with CWaC has invoked the provisions of The Localism Act (2011). This act provides the opportunity for communities to take certain actions through the act which strengthen and enable them to safeguard assets considered as important. This includes the identification and registration of an asset[s] of community value and the community right to bid and/or to build. The Ashton Hayes and Horton Cum Peel area listed both the Golden Lion Pub and site and the WI Hall and site, as Assets of Community Value. This listing lasts for 5 years.

4.2.4 Locally provided services

The use of locally provided services involving local people is preferred as it increases sustainability and fosters community cohesion.

In response to the Policy Proposals Survey (Oct. 2014), 46% (as per the environment pollution policy community views) of the community support opportunities for increasing the provision of local services as a means of reducing wider pollution levels and creating opportunities for local employment.

4.2.5 Establish new or enhanced community facilities

The community has recognised that as its aspiration to move towards a more community-focused and sustainable style of living increases, then this places pressure on the buildings and land, which are required to support this aspiration.

This aspiration is hindered by the lack of available appropriate facilities and capacity.

- Some existing facilities are not fit for purpose and/or do not meet necessary standards for public meeting places and would be difficult and/or not cost effective to bring up to standard. In particular the:
 - WI Hall which did not satisfy insurance safety concerns
 - Parish Rooms which are of very limited size and which have outdated facilities with poor access
 - The Pavilion which although the facilities are good is very small
- Some facilities and local services could be improved for the benefit of local people and it makes sense to pursue this.
 - The church is at an advanced stage with its planning (St. John's Church Brochure) to develop a welcoming building which will reach out to the wider community. Improvements will provide a toilet, kitchen facilities and space for large and small activities, something the Parish Council fully supports.
 - The Pavilion could be extended to make the most of the facilities available. However this is constrained by the existing planning approval, parking etc.
 - If the Golden Lion could be acquired by the community then consideration would be given to extend its facilities to both support a range of social activities and extend the hours of use in the day to amongst other things support child and youth activities. See the Facilities Survey (Adult) (Mar. 2014) and the Facilities Survey (Young People) (Feb. 2014).

There is a recognition on the part of the Parish Council that it may, in future, be in the interests of the village for one or more of its existing facilities and services to be replaced by another whether that be on the same site or another that offers more potential.

4.2.6 Ashton Hayes School

The head teacher of the school and chair of the Parish Council raised concerns in the report on Ashton Hayes School (Oct.2015). The report identifies the difficulties being faced by the school. It is anticipated that these difficulties will become more acute as numbers increase further. The report makes it clear that the school will

require additional teaching space in the very near future. This requirement will have knock-on effects on the community and as such the Parish Council has added the issue to their Community Action Programme (CAP) under the Problems section. See appendix E for further details.

4.3 Community views

The degree and nature of community involvement in the parish is valued by the vast majority of residents as evidenced by the various surveys and studies.

When asked about the importance of such aspects as local services, support, social and recreational facilities, the overwhelming majority of those expressing an opinion considered they were important.

The Facilities Survey (Adult) (Mar. 2014) concluded that there was positive support for a youth venue from 50% of the limited adult response

Based on the above, the policy was drafted and put to the community in the externally led Policy Proposals Survey (Oct. 2014).

- 84% of respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the policy objective, provisions and proposals.
- 72% agreed that it would be acceptable for limited undeveloped land to be used for new community facilities under Community Right to Build Orders.
- 13% disagreed, questioning whether such facilities were needed and/or the use of undeveloped land for such purposes should be allowed. The policy has, as a result, been amended to include safeguards to help ensure the overall need is justified and also to mitigate the impacts.

4.4 Supporting documents

- National Planning Policy framework
- Parish Plan survey (2009)
- Localism Act(2011)
- Initial NP Survey (2012)
- Facilities Summary of Usage (Nov.2012)
- Facilities Meeting Place & Venue Review Report (Nov. 2013)
- Facilities Survey (Young People) (Feb. 2014).
- Facilities Survey (Adult) (Mar. 2014)
- Policy Proposals Survey (Oct 2014)
- Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan (Part 1) (2015): Policies SOC5 and SOC6

- Ashton Hayes School (Oct. 2015)

4.5 Conclusions

Ashton Hayes has a track record of successful community initiatives and engagement. The Ashton Hayes Neighbourhood Plan area has a mature, caring community which wishes to effectively utilize the valued facilities it has, safeguard those under threat, where appropriate, and develop new and enhanced facilities for the future as justified. This will aid the community in becoming more sustainable. As of October 2014 the facilities available have been depleted and this has hindered the community and its desires. The requirement is to restore some facilities, enhance others and also to introduce new capacity where justified. The policy seeks to support these issues.

5 BUSINESS & EMPLOYMENT

REMIT

To establish policies which address the concerns of the community regarding business and employment.

Early resident input has helped shape this work and has led to the policies proposed

Specific work was carried out to:

- clarify community views and priorities
- establish the nature of existing provision, consider the extent of adequacy and acceptability and address issues arising from consultation with the community
- identify likely future requirements and their nature
- identify potential and policies to support the above future requirements.

5.1 Scope

Ashton Hayes and Horton cum Peel is a rural parish, which in recent history has become largely residential and home to a high percentage of professional and retired people. The parish is set in mixed farmland and has two significant employers - Ashton House Nursery and Farrall's Transport.

5.2 Evidence Base

Most working residents commute to other larger centres of employment such as Liverpool and Chester. Commuting distances are often long as a high proportion of residents (54%) work in professional and managerial positions (2001 Census information from the ACRE Rural Community Profile for Ashton Hayes (2013)). A Home Working Survey (May 2013) was completed and this, along with personal interviews held with the tenants and owners of offices in the converted barns at Lane End Farm, indicate that an increasing number of residents are able to work from home, or would like to do so.

Offices at Lane End Farm have been continually occupied for twenty years and any vacancies are quickly filled. Occupiers have chosen the offices due to the convenient location close to their homes in local villages such as Tarvin, Kelsall and Tattenhall. The economic recovery and advances in technology would suggest that there may be an increase in the number of people wanting to work from home, or requiring local small offices and workspaces.

Future business development can be difficult to predict. During the consultation period for this plan, redundant glasshouses on the edge of the village that had been unused for some years were taken over by The Natural Vegmen, who supply the Ashton Hayes Community Shop and other local outlets. It has been encouraging to see a new agriculture based business in Ashton Hayes and other initiatives offering employment or economic activity would be welcomed in the plan area, but cannot be planned for.

The above is consistent with Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan (Part 1) (2015); policy Strat 9

5.3 Community views

The results of the Initial NP Survey undertaken in 2012 by the University of Chester showed that

- 80% of the 25 respondents believe that there should be business and employment development in Ashton Hayes
- 62% of the 16 who responded to this specific question said this should complement the nature of the village
- 44% of the 25 who responded said that any new business should be small or light industry to suit the village, and 32% said this should also provide jobs for locals.

A formal Home Working Survey (May 2013) questionnaire was sent direct to all that were known by the group to work from home. This was promoted in 'Around Ashton (Apr. 2013)' with a request for residents to complete it online. The questionnaire was also promoted at Picnic in the Park 2013, where stand visitors were able to complete the survey. Nine completed questionnaires were received. The predominant view (see Home Working Survey (May 2013)) was that existing provisions were adequate. To clarify the above and to establish demand a separate specific questionnaire was issued. Based on the findings policies were drafted and put to the community in the externally led Policy Proposals Survey (Oct. 2014).

- 88% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that AH should support existing and new businesses that create local employment and have a sustainability ethos.
- 90% of residents strongly agreed or agreed with support for home or garden offices.

- 54% strongly agreed or agreed with conversion of redundant farm buildings for office rather than residential purposes. However 19% disagreed with this position and the wording has been adjusted to reflect the range of views.

5.4 Supporting documents

- National Planning Policy Framework
- Going Carbon Neutral surveys 2006-8 (data on vehicle use)
- Parish Plan Survey Results (2009)
- Localism Act (2011)
- Initial NP Survey (2012)
- Home Working Survey (May 2013), along with personal interviews with tenants and previous owners of offices at Lane End Farm.
- ACRE Rural Community Profile for Ashton Hayes (2013)
- Policy Proposal Survey (Oct. 2014)
- Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan (Part 1) (2015); policy STRAT 9

5.5 Conclusions

Despite the views expressed in earlier surveys, as of October 2014 there is no significant demand for new employment opportunities or premises within the area. However it is considered likely that changes in working practices and technology advancements will encourage more working from home potentially requiring extensions to home facilities and/or creation of small office environments.

6 TRANSPORT & INFRASTRUCTURE

REMIT

To establish policies which address the concerns of the community regarding the public transport infrastructure and pedestrian safety.

Early resident input has helped shape this work and has led to the policies proposed.

Specific work was carried out to:

- clarify community concerns and priorities
- establish the nature of existing provision, consider the extent of adequacy and acceptability and address issues arising from consultation with the community
- identify potential changes and improvements.

6.1 Scope

Ashton Hayes and Horton-cum-Peel is a rural parish in which there are no major roads.

- The A54 Chester to Winsford road forms the southern boundary.
- Access to the community is primarily via the B5393 from the A54 to the south and the A56 to the north. The B5393 is a significant commuter route from the communities to the south to the M56 and M53 via Frodsham and Helsby.
- There are further points of access to the A54 and A56 via minor unclassified roads.
- The safety of road and footpath usage is a significant concern to residents.
- The scope includes an assessment of public utilities.

6.2 Evidence base

6.2.1 Public transport

Public transport is available but is considered inadequate by residents particularly for regular commuting for employment or further / higher education even in Chester or Northwich.

- Buses run to Chester and Northwich along the A54 at approx. 30 minute intervals between 6.30am and 6.30 pm. The A54 bus stop is approx. 0.75 mile and 15 minute walk from the centre of Ashton Hayes along the narrow B5393 road. At peak times buses to and from Chester are subject to the severe congestion on the A54/ A51 recently recognised (BBC news March 2015) as one of the busiest roads in the North West.

- Mouldsworth station, is approx. 1 mile and 20 minute walk from the centre of Ashton along the B5393 which subject to 30 and 50 mph speed limits.
- A limited pre booked shuttle bus service to Chester is available on 2 days per week and is highly valued by users.
- Trains run hourly from Mouldsworth Station to Chester (12 minutes) and Manchester (90 minutes) between 7.00am and 11.00pm. The service to and from Manchester is slow and not really viable for regular commuting beyond Altrincham where a tram service to Manchester is available. A quicker train service to Manchester is available from Frodsham approx. 5 miles away. Recent residential development of the former Mouldsworth station yard has significantly reduced the parking provision. The Parish Plan 2009 indicated that potentially up to 50% of residents would like to be able to travel via bus to Frodsham, Tarvin etc.
- Both the existing bus and rail services are unsuitable for wheel chair users for whom a very limited pre booked Dial-a –ride service is available.
- During school terms buses are used to convey school children to / from Helsby High School and to 6th form college at Hartford.

6.2.2 Safety concerns

- The B5393 is the main route through the area. It is subject to 30 mph speed limits in the village and 50mph outside. The pavements alongside are both narrow and unlit outside of the village. This is a cause of great concern to the residents as speed limits are not always observed and are not regularly monitored or enforced.
- The bus stops on the A54 are close to the junction with the B5393 and afford no protection from the weather or traffic. At this point the speed limit on the A54 is 60 mph and there is no central refuge for pedestrians.
- The paved footpath to Mouldsworth station was extended in 2011 since when the usage of the train service has increased. However most of the footpath is unlit and a short section through woodland is both unsurfaced and unlit.
- In some locations the width of roadside pavements is further reduced by overgrown hedges and /or the surface slopes towards the road making pedestrian use difficult / dangerous.

6.3.3 Private car usage

- For most people living in the parish the car has become the principal mode of transport even for the shortest journeys. Car ownership and usage within the parish is higher than the CWaC average which in turn is higher than the national average.

- Voluntary Sector. There are a number of local and CWaC initiatives for volunteers to assist residents with visits to hospital, clinics, etc. and for shopping. Whilst the service is much appreciated it is no real substitute for adequate public transport.

6.3.4 Highways

Although fit for the original purpose the road network suffers from lack of ongoing maintenance and is under pressure from:

- increasing amounts of through traffic and local traffic as evidenced by the experience of residents and developments such as the nursery
- increasing amount of on street parking (often using narrow pavements) and at school/ shop
- inappropriate use of large agricultural vehicles and equipment (particularly on residential estate roads).

As a result of these and the frequent failure of drivers to observe the speed limits, various road junctions and the S bend by the Golden Lion are becoming difficult to negotiate and considered by residents to be dangerous.

The increased traffic on the A54 and B5393 has made the junction (particularly turning right towards Chester, difficult, dangerous and time consuming.

NB Public footpaths and bridleways are dealt with under Environment

6.3.5 Utilities

The utility companies will not provide details of capacity but it is assumed that there is generally adequate capacity for the limited development likely to be allowed in a green belt village, or that any capacity shortcomings can be reasonably dealt with as necessary.

- Water. All dwellings, public and commercial buildings are connected to mains water, the local network for which has been significantly improved in recent years.
- Drainage. Almost all the built up central area is connected to mains drainage and then to a pumping station at the end of Peel Hall Lane. A few older buildings and outlying buildings do not have mains drainage and rely on septic tanks, cesspits or private treatment plants. It is a requirement of United Utilities that any additional surface water is dealt with on site or to an adequate water course and not connected to public sewers.
- Electricity. All dwellings, public and commercial buildings are connected to mains electricity mostly by overhead power lines. Power cuts are less frequent and of shorter duration than in the past. With regard to electricity Scottish Power has advised that the supply to Church Lane

is close to capacity (See the Ashton Hayes PV Report (Mar.2013) produced by Scottish Power Energy Networks).

- Gas. Mains gas is available to the built up central area of the parish (extending from the former Methodist Chapel to the Church and from Peel Crescent to Willow Hayes). Most are now connected with the remainder and outlying buildings using solid fuel, oil, electricity or propane for heating.
- Telephone / broadband. The parish is served by the telephone sub exchange in Tarvin. The telephone service is adequate The broadband service was very slow but a fibre optic broadband service of up to 18Mps is now available in the centre of the village .Some outlying areas will not benefit until much later.
- Mobile phones. Signal strength varies by provider but generally is considered by residents as not good.

6.3.6 Funding

CWaC have advised that the issue of crossing the A54 and provision of secure cycle storage at the rail station may be something that could be dealt with through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) / S106, but there would need to be evidence of demand for this. The neighbourhood portion of CIL (25% of CIL revenue generated within Ashton Hayes Parish) could potentially be spent on the identified transport issues as there is a broader definition of what this neighbourhood portion can be spent on. The secure cycle storage at the junction of the A54 / B5393 may not be realistic or deliverable. [CWaC].

6.3.7 CWaC Policy alignment

The proposed policies are consistent with the Cheshire West and Chester District Local Plan Spatial Strategies 10 and Social Strategy 5

6.4 Community views

The Parish Plan Survey (2009) highlighted that

- 84% of households did not feel that Ashton Lane (B5393)/A54 was a safe junction
- up to 50% of people would like to be able to travel via bus to Frodsham etc.

The results of the Initial NP Survey undertaken in 2012 by the University of Chester showed that:

- 73% of the 30 respondents were concerned with the lack of public transport and that they considered it key to progressing with the carbon neutral goal. Also 90% would like to see a regular bus service through the village
- 30% were concerned with the quality of roads and access
- 91% wanted traffic calming measures in the area due to speeding of traffic
- 9 people wanted there to be a regular bus service so they do not 'feel trapped' in the village

Based on the above, policies were drafted and put to the community in the externally led Policy Proposals Survey (Oct. 2014). This reported that:

- 84% strongly agreed or agreed that we should aim to reduce reliance on private cars
- 89% strongly agreed or agreed that developments should contribute to access improvements
- 91% strongly agreed or agreed that we should aim to improve the safety of residents and road users by managing the traffic
- 91% strongly agreed or agreed that there is a need to improve public safety and comfort of pedestrians crossing the A54.

6.5 Supporting documents

- National Planning Policy Framework
- Parish Plan survey results (2009)
- Initial NP Survey (2012)
- Ashton Hayes PV Report (Mar.2013)
- Policy Proposal Survey (Oct. 2014)
- Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan (Part 1) (2015); policies STRAT 10 and SOC 5

6.6 Conclusions

The quality of public transport and the safety of road and footpath users are the main concerns of residents and this has been the case for several years. As a result Policy T1 in PART 1 was produced to deal with the NP aspects and the other concerns raised have been transferred to the CAP for consideration/action.