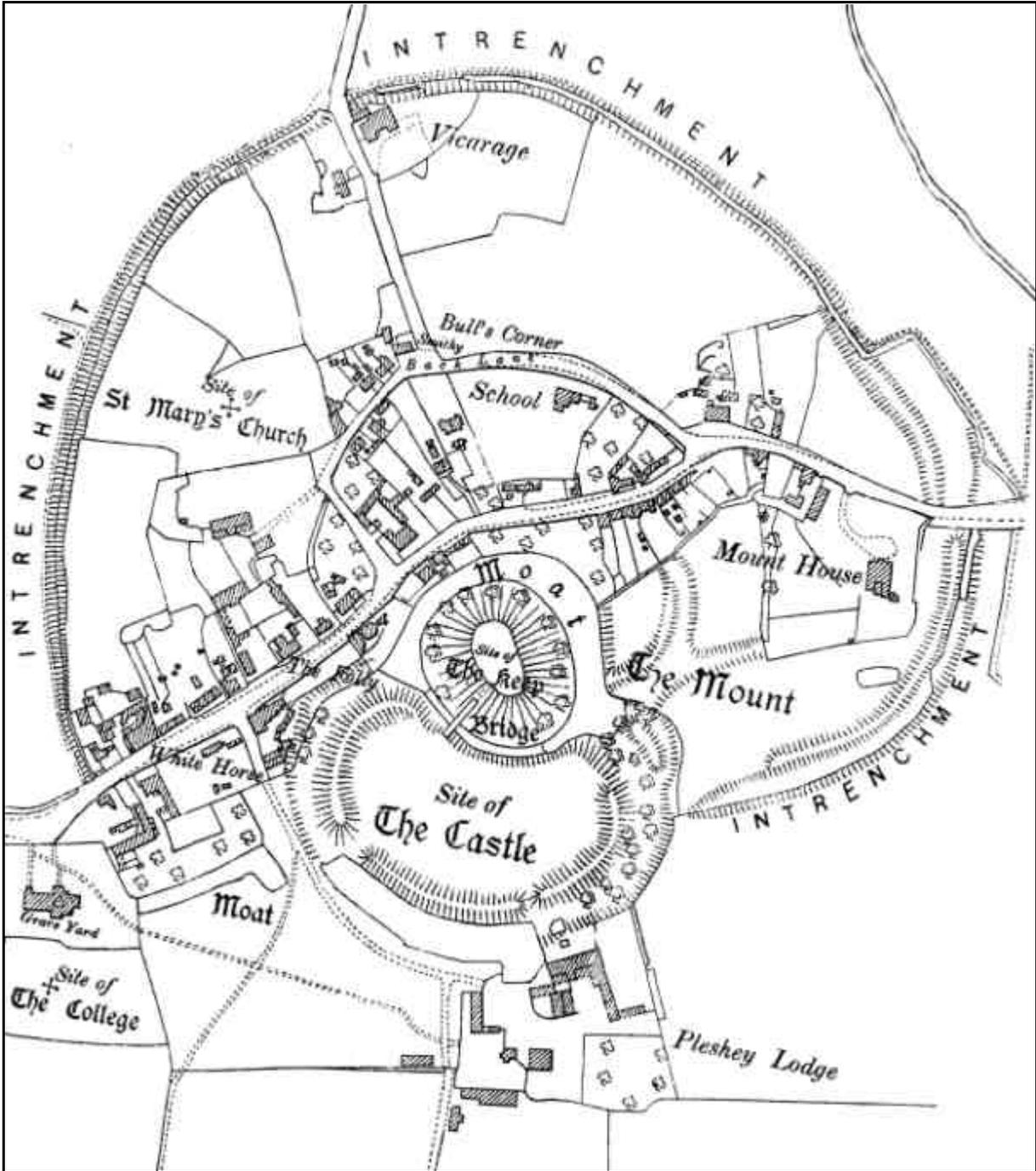


Pleshey Village Design Statement



Pleshey c 1900

The Street, Pleshey – c. 1980



Rose Cottage



The Folly



Butlers



Mount Stores



Garden Cottages



The Gardens



Mount Villas



Leather Bottle

Pleshey Village Design Statement

Introduction

A Village Design Statement (VDS) is a community-led assessment of a Village's character, and an identification of its qualities. These may be common bonds with the surrounding area and landscape, or may be things that set it apart, and make it special to its residents. For a village to be an active community rather than simply a dormitory or a museum piece, it is necessary to accept a certain amount of change. However, it is the nature of such change, particularly where it may involve new housing development, which can often destroy the very things that make a village special. A VDS aims to identify what sort of change may or may not be acceptable within the context of a specific location.

This VDS relates to the whole parish of Pleshey, rather than simply the village itself, although clearly the village forms the major part of the parish, and the VDS reflects this. The VDS aims to provide guidance and recommendations to property owners and prospective developers on future changes in the parish, advising how these changes should respect the setting and contribute to the environment of the village and parish. The VDS also offers guidance to Council officers and Members in the determination of planning applications.

Pleshey Village Design Statement was produced by the villagers themselves, and resulted from a process of assessment, discussion and consultation. This commenced in June 2000, and continued until 2001. A major element of the process was the drafting of a questionnaire, derived from the activities of a "workshop" day to which all parishioners were invited. A copy of the questionnaire was then distributed to all households within the parish, and people were invited to respond to a range of questions within different categories. These categories are summarised within this VDS, with the consensus responses of the parishioners indicated by bullet points.

If adopted by Chelmsford Borough Council, this VDS will be used as Supplementary Planning Guidance in conjunction with the Chelmsford Borough Local Plan, as well as serving as a consultation document for the Parish Council, and a wider spectrum of interested parties who may from time to time need to assess aspects of the village.

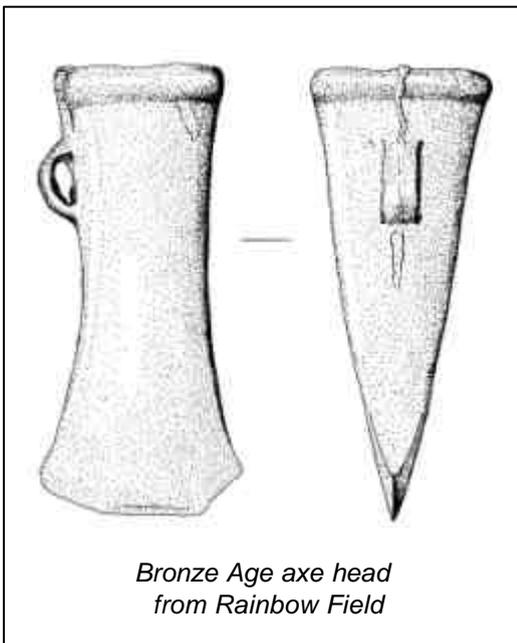


Pleshey Village

History of the Settlement

Pleshey is located in central Essex, some 10 kilometres NNW of the County Town of Chelmsford. The geology of the area comprises chalky boulder clay overlying glacial sands and gravels on London clay. Archaeological fieldwork has identified traces of human activity dating from the Early Stone Age to the present day. A number of finds of Late Bronze Age metalwork have been made in the parish, and by the Late Iron Age most of the area had been cleared of primary woodland and was being intensively farmed. A number of Romano-British occupation sites have been identified, two being of "villa" type with partial masonry construction.

No evidence of early Anglo-Saxon activity has so far been found, but metalwork finds of later Saxon date indicate a continued agrarian occupation in the area, although not specifically within the area of the present village. Pleshey as a nucleated settlement only evolved after the Norman Conquest, but it is this phase that marks it out as a place of special historical significance, not just to Essex, but at a national level as well.



The earthworks that encompass and dominate the modern village of Pleshey are the remains of a Norman castle constructed after the Conquest, and restructured in the 12th century. A motte and bailey castle was raised, surrounded by a circular entrenchment within which a new town was laid out. Back Lane, formerly called Brette or Bred Street, probably marks an original outer bailey. From the 13th to 15th centuries, Pleshey was an important royal estate, forming the dowries of a succession of Queens of England, and also boasting two deer parks. Pleshey's heyday was perhaps during the tenure of Thomas of Woodstock, who in true knightly fashion delighted in the pageantry of the Tournament as well as the ritual of the Church. In 1394, Thomas had the Parish Church (located off Back Lane) dismantled, and rebuilt in its present location as part of a College of Canons. This thrived until the Dissolution, when along with the castle it was plundered for its stone and became ruinous.

During the following centuries the village declined in population, becoming just another small agricultural community. A few buildings with medieval origins still remain, although most visible today date from the 17th to 20th centuries, and display a variety of vernacular styles appropriate to their respective periods. The church was finally rebuilt in 1725, and again rebuilt in 1868. The unique character of Pleshey has always drawn visitors, including eminent early historians such as Leland and Morant, and later ones such as Sir Mortimer Wheeler. It also drew spiritual visitors, and in 1909 a community of nuns established the House of Prayer, which today is the Chelmsford Diocese House of Retreat, the tranquillity of the village being one of its special attractions. Pleshey was also home to the Darby Digger, an innovative agricultural cultivator developed in the late 19th century at Lodge Farm.

The remarkable survival of the medieval earthworks, and the historical background of the village, have led to it being recognised as a place of particular importance. As a result much of the inner village envelope is designated a conservation area, and large parts of the village are scheduled as ancient monument. The village today still retains something of its former agricultural character, but is now increasingly home to a more diverse population comprising both retired people and workers, the latter mostly commuting to local towns or to London for employment.

Further detailed information regarding history, archaeology and previous fieldwork in the village is available in the Essex Heritage Conservation Record and in the Historic Town Assessment Report (Medlycott 1999) for Pleshey, both of which are held at County Hall.

From Past to Future – Planning Ahead

From the later Middle Ages until a century ago, Pleshey, in common with most villages in Essex, was primarily an agricultural community. Generations were born, grew up and passed on without moving from the parish, and were frequently accommodated in overcrowded and basic properties. Today, however, a very small percentage of the population of Pleshey earn their living from agriculture, and most who are in employment commute to towns or cities. Few people are now likely to live their entire lives in the village, while few children on reaching maturity remain in the village itself, although some may return in later life. There is therefore little locally driven demand for new housing from within the existing village population. Even then, there are several former tied properties currently occupied by relatives of ex-farm workers, which will eventually join the commercial housing pool.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, a number of substantial properties were built in Pleshey. However, by virtue of the small population and lack of outside development pressures, such large new constructions have remained limited. And with the passage of time, they have become part of the accepted village fabric.

Issues

The situation today is very different:

- There is significant pressure for new housing arising from both population increases, but more significantly from changes in demographics. This need has been formally endorsed by successive central governments.
- In last few decades, modern planning criteria and legislation have evolved, recognising the vulnerability of the environment when subjected to unregulated development.
- Within the last 30 years, Pleshey has lost its village shop, and then the post office.
- The traditional role of the village pubs is under threat.

In addition:

- Newcomers have moved into the village, putting external pressure on housing stock.
- House prices generally have risen beyond the reach of first time buyers.
- Owners seek to extend their properties, further pushing market values beyond first-time buyers.

The village of Pleshey is now designated as a Historic Town, and as a Conservation Area, with most of the open areas within the village further scheduled as Ancient Monument. In addition, the Chelmsford Borough Local Plan (1997) identifies a Historic Core. The Local Plan sets out specific policies that apply to the Conservation Area, the Historic Core, and the scheduled Ancient Monument areas.

All these are factors in the future evolution of the village, and parish, of Pleshey.

This Village Design Statement sets out those elements which make Pleshey the village that it is, and which the village wishes to retain. Future evolution must be considered within this context.

Recommendations are highlighted throughout the VDS, and numbered.

Recommendations

1. The evolution of Pleshey should respect the historic context of the village and parish.

The Village – Principal Areas and Open Spaces

A single principal road (The Street) runs through the village east-west, and a semi-circular road (Back Lane) leads to a third road running north out of the village. These roads comprise the only through-routes and access.

The settlement is dominated by the earthworks of the castle, and the perimeter ditch serves to delineate the village in a very clear way. These features combine both visual and historical interest, but so far have escaped commercial development. Pleshey Castle (see “A” on map overleaf) has always attracted discerning visitors – one of its most salient features is its uncluttered tranquillity, which sets it apart from so many other monuments that have been exploited for tourism with car parks, kiosks and themed displays. The village itself is also very attractive in its own distinctive way, and draws regular numbers, particularly in the summer. Walkers using the Essex Way pass through throughout the year. The current level of visitors does not adversely impact on village life, or the attractions of the village.



Pleshey Mount (Ref “A”)



Cricket pitch and Church

Within the village enclosure, a number of areas have their own distinctive character. The west end commands a particularly pleasing aspect, with the Church, the House of Retreat and the White Horse Inn clustering around a point that provides a sweeping view of The Street. (See “B” on map.)



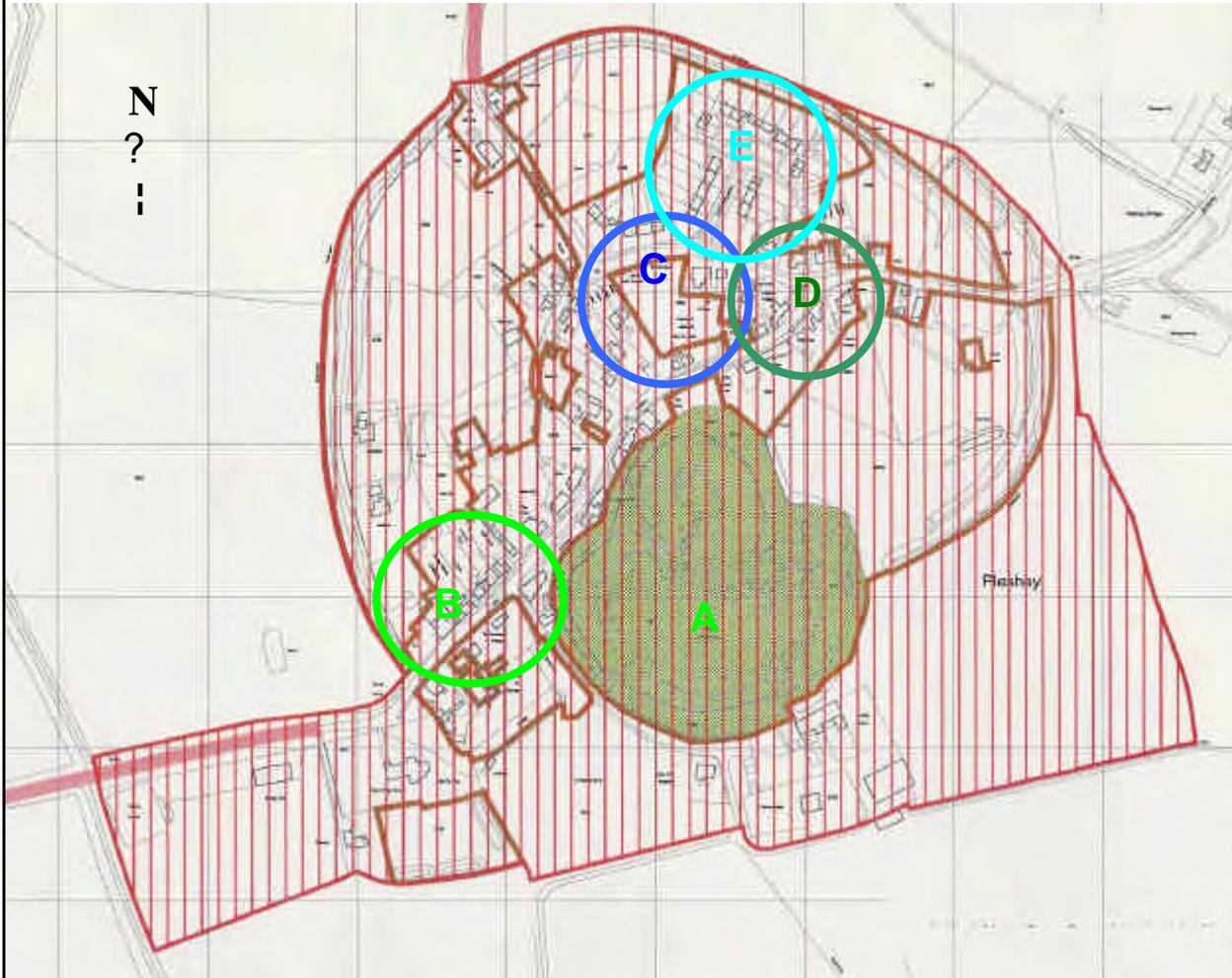
The Street from Church



Middle of the Street (Ref “C”)

Towards the middle of The Street several dwellings are set back from the road and possibly delineate the site of the medieval market place. (See “C” on map.)

Pleshey Village



Scale: 1:5000 (approx)

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Key (based on Chelmsford Borough Local Plan):

-  Conservation Area
-  Grade 2 Protected Lane
-  Ancient Monument
-  Sites of nature conservation or other scientific value

Village Areas:

-  A – Pleshey Mount (motte and bailey)
-  B – West end – White Horse and retreat house
-  C – Central area and Garden Field
-  D – East end – Leather Bottle
-  E – Woolmers Mead

The east end of The Street is flanked by several long former tenements, now amalgamated into larger dwellings, and again provides a distinctive aspect of Pleshey when viewed westwards. (See "D" on map.)



East end of the Street (Ref "D")

Back Lane has a different character, with its access to a former farmyard containing two converted barns, several smaller cottages, and the Forge. Also located in Back lane is the former village School, now a dwelling. A small post-WW2 housing development (Woolmers Mead) is located off Back Lane. (See "E" on map.)

The village enclosure contains a number of pasture fields, together with sizeable gardens for many houses. There are also many trees. This ensures that the village has an overall green impression.

Midway down The Street there is an open area designated as a viewing area for the castle motte.

Allotments are located in the central part of the village, with the church, churchyard, and village hall playing field and tennis courts at the western end.

There is also a cricket pitch and a children's play area within the compass of the village.

Taken together, these spaces contribute significantly to the character of Pleshey, and the views both within the village, and into and out of it.



The Garden Field in the village centre is a valued open space

Recommendations

5. Given the constraints of access and parking, the present level of visitors to the village is already sufficient. Any increase would be detrimental to the everyday life of the residents. However, within these limitations, better access to the castle might be considered for existing numbers.
6. Additional public facilities such as refreshment establishments or toilets would be considered inappropriate.
7. All the above open spaces, the village hall field, the cricket pitch, the viewing area, the children's play area and the allotments are considered to be of great importance to the village, and must not be compromised.

Highways and Infrastructure

Some of Back Lane and most of Vicarage Road have soft verges of grass. By contrast, Woolmers Mead and most of The Street are paved, bordered by strips of grass or front gardens.

Street to property boundaries are a mixture of low walls with distinctive capping, high walls and hedges. Wooden fence panels are frequently employed for rear garden boundaries.

A number of water pumps (disused) are to be found around the village.

All electrical and telephone services utilise overhead cabling.



A red brick wall flanks one side of The Street

There are a number of items of street furniture which contribute to the character of the village. These include the phone box, post box, benches, and pub signs.

Recommendations

8. The village should maintain the existing mixture of grass verges and pavements.
9. The diversity of the walls and hedges is important, and this should be maintained.
10. Speed enforcement does not warrant any visually intrusive measures such as speed humps, chicanes or width restrictions.
11. The concealment underground of existing overhead cabling should be encouraged at every opportunity.
12. The introduction of mains gas, should it ever be an option, would be seen as a favourable development.
13. Visually intrusive mobile phone masts and satellite dishes should not be permitted.



High Hedges in Back Lane



Ornamental ironwork on the churchyard wall

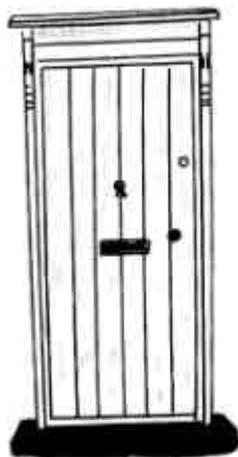


Miscellaneous elements of the village

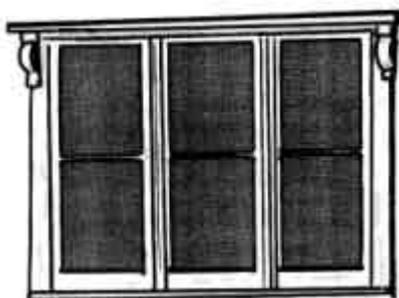
Local Housing

Overall, the buildings within Pleshey are very diverse in age, style and construction. Roofs are thatch, tile or slate whilst exteriors are brick, render or weatherboard. Houses and cottages dating from the 15th and 16th century are to be found down The Street. These are all of timber frame construction. Roofing of these houses is either tile or thatch. There are also timber frame houses of later construction, through to the 19th century, together with brick-built 19th and 20th Century properties. These later houses have tile or slate roofs. Two barns within the village have also been converted to dwellings.

Together with the basic building materials, the style and appearance of an area is set by the combination of windows and doors, and pargetting of rendered buildings.



Vernacular door



Vernacular window



Pargetting

The variety of buildings means that no one style predominates in the village, though all the older houses follow a vernacular style. Despite this variety, there is considerable harmony between the different elements of the village. In fact, the diversity contributes significantly to the character of the village, and is to be welcomed and protected. However, what may be visually acceptable in one part of the village would not be acceptable in another.

The majority of the housing in Pleshey comprises family units of 3 – 5 bedrooms. Many tenements have been converted into single houses, although a few 1 – 2 bedroom dwellings remain. There may be a case for new small-scale single dwellings in the parish to provide a better balance in the housing stock; there are locations in the hamlets in the wider parish that could be considered appropriate.

As previously mentioned, the whole of the village of Pleshey is designated as a Conservation Area. Within this, there are 26 buildings which are individually Listed; some of these fall into two sets of Group Listed buildings. In addition, there are a further nine Listed buildings in the parish.

Recommendations

14. Notwithstanding other relevant planning policy constraints, there may be a case for new small-scale single dwellings in the wider parish. However, any new housing development within the village is likely to be unacceptable, although extensions to existing properties and the conversion of redundant buildings into dwellings could be acceptable.
15. Where extensions or alterations are allowed, they should be in a style and use materials appropriate to the vernacular of their immediate surrounding. The aim should be to blend in as much as possible with the existing building and its immediate neighbours, and to maintain harmony within the variety of the village.
16. The parking of cars within the village is an ever-growing problem, and house owners should be encouraged to make provision for off-street parking where possible.



Brick and render, tile, thatch and slate – a typical range covering several centuries



From multiple occupancy to a single dwelling



Extended in matching thatch and render



Pleshey Barn conversion



A sizeable extension, but matched to vernacular style

Social and Community

The village benefits from two pubs, which provide different facilities. These are considered important to the village, in terms of both the employment and the facilities they provide. They are dependent on visitors to the village. While an increase in tourism could provide additional income opportunities, there is a danger that this could negatively impact those aspects of the village that currently attract visitors.

The village hall provides excellent modern facilities for the village.



The White Horse Inn c. 1870 and in 2000. Often unchanged for centuries, village pubs are an essential part of local commerce – without them many villages lose their focus

Recommendations

17. The two pubs should if possible be retained as public houses. They provide different facilities, and their continued viability should be encouraged. Any change of use should be resisted.

Employment - Local Industry and Commerce

The main industry in Pleshey and the surrounding area is agriculture, although modern mechanisation means that it now provides few employment opportunities. At present, farming within the parish is almost solely arable, with little diversification.

In addition to agriculture, there is also a surprising amount of light industry to be found in and around the village, mostly located in converted farm buildings.

The Retreat House is another source of local employment. It benefits from the peaceful nature of the village.



Pleshey Forge – a familiar local landmark



Wrought iron work from Forge

Recommendations

18. Agricultural buildings are felt to be the only acceptable locations for industrial use in this rural area.
19. The present level of such industrial activity is considered to be about right. In particular, intrusive activity, whether through noise, smells, traffic or visually, should be resisted.
20. There is no objection to greater opportunities for people to work at home, provided this does not create significant additional traffic.
21. As previously noted, the present level of visitors to the village is already sufficient. Any increase would be detrimental to the everyday life of the residents.

Conclusion

Pleshey, with its motte and bailey and the ditch forming the village enclosure, is a unique village of outstanding historical and visual importance, which argues for a special status in future planning considerations. It has a particular character derived both from these earthworks, and the buildings that have developed and accumulated over time. Its uncluttered tranquillity should be viewed as a resource, not an opportunity for exploitation, and this must not be compromised for short-term commercial gain.

Over the last 100 years, Pleshey has been affected by dramatic changes in agriculture, and transport. It is to be expected that further societal changes will impact the village, not just over the next 100 years, but even the next ten years. Radical new innovations cannot be ruled out, but would only be acceptable as part of a progressive evolution which does not change the character of the village.

Changes that might affect Pleshey in the coming years include:

- Cereal growing land might be used instead for sustainable energy crops.
- Broad band access networks may offer more and more people the chance to work from home.
- More environmentally friendly power sources might become an option.
- Changes in usage policies by the owner of Pleshey Castle.

While some of these changes are very unlikely to affect the character of the village, others (e.g. wind turbine for local power) might well do so. New technology that offers the chance of a real alternative to rural stagnation should be viewed on its merits, and not be dismissed out of hand.

However, the tranquillity and quiet of Pleshey should be maintained, as an alternative and antidote to the increasing pace of life in the urban environment.

The challenge for Pleshey is to accommodate change, but to do this without changing its character. By identifying those elements which are a vital part of that character, this VDS is aimed at helping to maintain it.

Recommendations

22. The evolution of Pleshey should respect the tranquillity and quiet of the village and parish.

The recommendations set out in this VDS represent the clear views and concerns of the people of the Pleshey as evidenced from the responses to the questionnaire carried out for the VDS.

The Steering Group therefore urge the Parish Council, Borough Council and County Council to take note of and adopt the recommendations set out in this VDS.

VDS Steering Group

John Oates (Chairman), Jeremy Baldwin, Ian Bruce, Mike and Judy Cuddeford, Chris Curle, †Tony Hellier, Dave Herbert, Kate Holland, Ian Jarrett, Paul Jee, Alison Jeffs, Mike McNeill, Sue Morris, Robin North

PLESHEY VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT PREPARATION AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

2000

- 14th June Presentation on VDS by Terry Bailey of Chelmsford Planning Department to a very well attended Annual Parish Assembly. Volunteers for VDS Steering Committee requested.
- 28th June Parish Council asks John Oates to chair the VDS Steering Committee of all 12 volunteers.
- 27th July 1st Steering Group meeting - outline of process agreed to support the production of a VDS as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the 1997 Chelmsford Borough Plan.
- 31st August 2nd Steering Group - organisation for Workshop set – Facilitators agreed.
- 20th September Facilitators meeting - Workshop details and Facilitators' roles.
- 19th October 3rd Steering Group - Workshop details agreed.
- 18th November VDS Workshop Day - 27 attendees including Jan Cole (RCCE). Two further volunteers joined Steering Group.
- 29th November 4th Steering Group - Workshop reviewed, outline and timing of Questionnaire agreed.
- 6th December Open Meeting in Village Hall to discuss Workshop findings.
- 13th December Questionnaire drafted by 4 Members of the Steering Group.

2001

- 10th January 5th Steering Group - Questionnaire with 62 questions agreed. Open evening planned.
- January - February Questionnaire distributed to all 228 adults in 116 households. One month allowed for return to a choice of 3 collection points. Posters were placed around the village and distributed to each household to encourage returns and attendance at the open meeting on 31st January 2001.
- 31st January Village Hall open meeting attended by 44 villagers - Results of Workshop, explanation of Questionnaire, its importance and how it would feed into the VDS.
- 18th February Deadline for returns. 122 (47%) Questionnaires were returned.
- 22nd March 6th Steering Group. Compilation and analysis of responses presented.
- 29th March VDS drafting subcommittee – first draft presented and amendments agreed in principal.
- 24th April 1st formal draft issued to Steering Group members
- 3rd May 7th Steering Group – draft to be sent to CBC amended and agreed.
- 20th June Results of Questionnaire presented to Annual Village Meeting.
- 9th July 8th Steering Group – comments on draft by Derek Stebbing and Terry Bailey of CBC Planning Department.

2002

- 10th January 9th Steering Group – agreed revisions to draft VDS
Revision of draft VDS
- May Revised draft VDS sent to CBC.
- 1st November Meeting with Derek Stebbing of CBC Planning Department. Comments on Draft.
- 18th November 10th Steering Group – review of CBC comments, and agree changes to draft VDS
- 27th November Presentation to Pleshey Parish Council

2003

- 8th January Pleshey Parish Council – opportunity for further comments
- 3rd March Meeting with Derek Stebbing and Jamie Cole of CBC Planning Department
- 31st March 11th Meeting of Steering Group
- July Revised draft VDS sent to CBC
- September Further comments received from CBC
- 22nd October 12th Meeting of Steering Group

General

Background articles, a list of Steering Group members, progress and announcements of the Workshop Day and open meetings appeared in the October, November, December, 2000 and the March and June, 2001 editions of the parish magazine.

Notices of open meetings and the Workshop were displayed on the Village Notice Board.

This Village Design Statement was produced under the guidance of the Pleshey VDS Steering Group, who are most grateful to the people of Pleshey for their support.

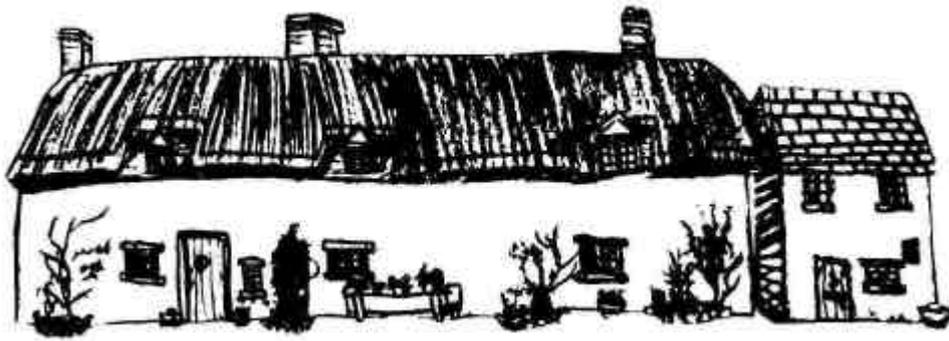
The early photograph of The Folly Barn is reproduced with kind permission of the Knight family. All the present-day photographs of the village that appear in this publication were taken by members of the Steering Group. Most are the actual ones used for the “workshop” day and in the later discussions.

The Steering Group is grateful to all those who provided postcards and photos that appear in this VDS.

The plan of Pleshey from Chelmsford Borough Draft Local Plan is reproduced with the permission of Chelmsford Borough Council.

Sketches inside the cover by kind permission of Susan Kenning.

The Street, Pleshey – c. 1980



Moat Cottage

Little Moat Cottage



New Woods



Mount Cottage

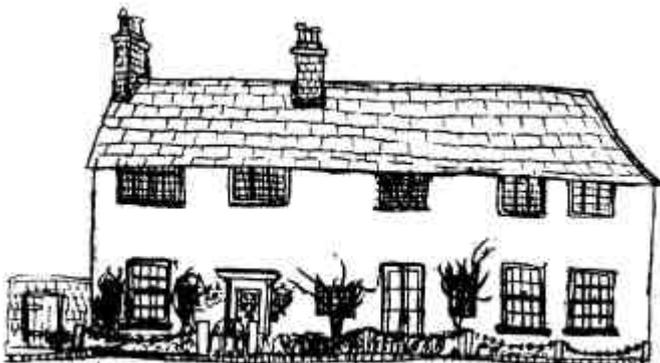


Mount Pleasant



Crompton Fold

Mount Bridge



Old Post House



Parsonage Cottage