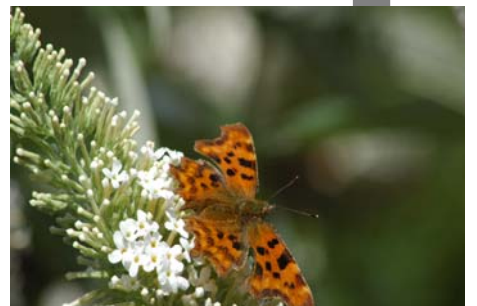


Steppingley Parish Plan

January 2006



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1 Letter from Steppingley Parish Council

Steppingley Parish Council
Steppingley
Bedford
January 2006

Dear Steppingley Resident

This Parish Plan is the result of an extensive consultation exercise and a great deal of hard work from many individuals. You all were invited to contribute to the development of this Plan by completing a questionnaire in 2005 and many of you did so. Now, for the first time, Steppingley has a clear unified strategy to improve the village and the quality of village life. Of course many of you have contributed to the various improvements which have already taken place. The provision of play equipment for the children on the Recreation ground is but one example. This would not have occurred without the support and hard work of members of the Steppingley Village Association. Steppingley is fortunate in having a Village Association which is active and thriving and the Parish Council looks forward to working with the Association and indeed with all residents to fulfil the promise that the Parish Plan offers for the development of the Village.

Your Parish Councillors have accepted the responsibility for driving this Plan forward and monitoring progress. They will work both with Steppingley residents and external bodies to achieve its aims. It will be a regular item on the Agenda for meetings of the Parish Council. I am confident that with your help we can make sure that Steppingley continues to be a thriving village of which we are all proud to be residents.

John Eilbeck
Chairman, Steppingley Parish Council



2 Introduction

Steppingley Parish recognised the importance of producing a Parish Plan to allow the community to be involved in the future direction of the parish and guide decisions affecting it. The document is a result of consultation with the community and a questionnaire designed by a parish plan steering group and completed by villagers. All statistics and views in this document are as a result of the responses obtained from the questionnaire and feedback from the village. See Appendix 1 for full details of the questionnaire results.

The action plan aims to be a live document, owned by the Parish Council, with help from specific task groups.

2.1 Acknowledgements

Thanks to the following people and organisations for their support and contribution to the Steppingley Parish Plan:

- The Greensand Trust and the Discovering the Flit Valley Project for help with the environment section
- Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) for help and guidance throughout the project
- The Countryside Agency for funding
- The residents of Steppingley for their input

3 History

Steppingley village stands on high ground in the centre of a small parish of about 562ha on the Greensand Ridge. People have lived here for several thousand years, flint tools over 8000 years on have been found in the southwest of the parish. Stepigelai (Steppingley Manor) is mentioned in the Domesday Book.

Probably the most famous resident of the village was one of the early rectors, John Schorne, who took up office in 1273 (it has been said that the French Horn pub was named after him). He became well known as a healer and was credited with having imprisoned the devil, or demon of pain, in an old boot. He moved to North Marston church in 1283 and when he died North Marston became a place of pilgrimage. Small models of Schorne holding a boot with the devil's head poking out were sold as pilgrim tokens and this is believed to have been the inspiration for the Jack-in-the-Box, so popular in Victorian times. John Schorne's remains lie in St George's Chapel, Windsor.

In the late medieval period the poor quality agricultural land was emparked for hunting and timber production. Beckerings Park lay in the northwest of the parish and Steppingley Park occupied most of the south of the parish. Routes running through the parish were redirected around the parks, restricting further growth of the village.

In the sixteenth century, Beckerings became one of the local deer parks providing entertainment for King Henry VIII. Timber from the park and other parts of Steppingley became the most important element in the village economy at this time and much of it was used to build ships for the navy.

Two hundred year's later, Steppingley was one of a group of parishes in the area with a high proportion of pasture land producing dairy products for the growing London market, which brought a measure of prosperity to the village and an increase in population. Steppingley Kiln (where Kiln Farm stands today) was producing bricks for the local gentry and provided the materials for the Earl of Ossory's Amptill Great House in 1762-64.

In 1839 the 7th Duke of Bedford purchased almost all of the parish that he didn't already own and began a programme of improvements. Hedges were removed to make larger fields, the Church, farm buildings and cottages were rebuilt. A few older buildings survive, but most of Steppingley was created between 1840 and 1872.

Today the village retains much of this character and the conservation status helps to preserve this.

4 Social and Community Facilities

4.1 Democracy

The Parish is represented by the Parish Council (PC) which meets seven times a year and has seven elected councillors. The meetings are open to all village residents. There is also an active Village Association (SVA) which works with the PC, the Cricket Club and the Church to organise social events and manage the village hall and the recreation ground.

4.2 Information

A news letter is issued to the Parish on a regular basis, organised by the SVA, it includes information on social events, comments from the PC and the Cricket Club. A notice board is situated in the bus shelter in the centre of the village which is used by about 60% of the village. There is a village website and the PC is looking to link into this for more use in the future. Village meetings are held for common issues to be discussed as required.

4.3 People

The village comprises people of all ages, 20% are under 18 and there are four Bungalows owned by a housing association restricted for use of the elderly. The remaining adults cover all ages.

The majority of housing is within the village centre, with several other houses scattered around the rest of the parish. Care is taken that newsletters are distributed to all houses.



4.4 Leisure

The Steppingley village social calendar is run by the Steppingley Village Association (SVA), which is a voluntary organisation with a registered charitable status. Its membership is open to all local residents. As well as organising regular social events, the SVA manages the village hall – its maintenance and hire, and the maintenance of the children's playground situated on the village green. The social events are held all year round and usually include a village social, 'beat the bounds' walk, bingo, whist drive, sports day, comedy cabaret, carol singing, cricket matches and hedgerow repairing.

4.5 The Recreation Ground / Village Green

The village green is located along Rectory Road, next to the village hall. It was created in 1947 and is used by the local residents for gentle recreation and outdoor events such as the Sports Day and Village fete. It is also the home of Steppingley Cricket Club and at present there are moves to raise money to build a club house and a pavilion on the site. In 2004, substantial sums of money raised as a joint venture between the Steppingley Mums and Tots group and the SVA provided for a much welcomed children's playground.



4.6 The Village Hall

Built in 1851 as a school and situated at the heart of the village, this building was taken over as the village hall in 1963. It has been the centre of the village social scene ever since. Its high ceiling, a wooden floor and an open fire place provide a warm and friendly atmosphere for many of the local events as well as for private parties and functions. The hall is also used for evening classes such as Tai Chi and Pilates. The clock was installed to mark the millennium and its maintenance is funded by the PC.

4.7 Public Facilities

There are two public houses in the village, the French Horn has a restaurant and bar and seems to be well used by the village. The Drovers Arms, now the Saffron Plaza Indian restaurant is also a bar and is used as such by some villagers.

The village hall is maintained by the SVA and used for a number of social events, meetings and group hire. The questionnaire highlighted a number of improvements that could be made to the hall facilities and these are listed in the action plan.



The church (C of E) has very low attendance and struggles financially to raise the funds necessary to maintain and repair the building and grounds. One suggestion is to use the church more for concerts or art exhibitions.

The allotments are located just past the last house of Church End Road, on the right hand side. The allotments are still in use and are flourishing, providing home grown fruit and vegetables for the villagers. Indeed more villagers are taking up the option of keeping one. The feedback from the recent Village Survey showed that the allotment keepers would like to have a water point to tend the gardens.

4.8 Footpaths and Bridleways

Surrounded by farmland and woodland, Steppingley offers a number of interesting and picturesque footpaths and bridleways for ramblers and horse riders. A small part of the Greensand Ridge Walk is also sited through the North West corner of the parish.

5 Development

The main concern for Steppingley, highlighted through responses to the questionnaire, is how to maintain its identity, rural character and open aspects. It is threatened by developments such as the proposed Center Parcs holiday resort, a Flitwick by-pass and future encroachment of housing from Flitwick. A key action for the Parish Plan is to oppose development that would impact negatively on the parish and seek to protect the surrounding Green Belt from development.

5.1 Building

Many buildings were identified as important through the parish plan questionnaire, the full list is included in Appendix 1, this includes: French Horn, Village Hall, School House, Duke of Bedford Cottages, Thatched houses, Park Farm.

60% of the village wanted no further development and the remaining 40% wanted only limited development in a sympathetic style to maintain the character of the village. These wishes should be considered by the Parish Council & Mid Beds District Council when reviewing planning applications.



5.2 Housing

There is a wide range of housing in Steppingley from Housing Association bungalows for the over 50's, small 2 bedroom terraced cottages to large family detached homes. There is a wide range of prices for this housing, though in general prices are higher than, for example, Flitwick due to the location and character of the parish.

5.3 Roads

Over 70% of the villagers are affected by the noise from the M1 and the planned widening is seen as a matter of concern.

The proposed route of a Flitwick by-pass would be an unwelcome intrusion into an area of great landscape beauty, increasing the noise and light pollution in the village, with a potentially significant negative impact on the residents. It could also lead to more in-fill housing and business development that would threaten a merger of Steppingley with Flitwick. Consultation must actively include Steppingley Parish if this project is progressed.



The main road through Steppingley is narrow and has two sharp bends. Concerns have been raised about increased traffic, particularly heavy goods vehicles, along this road due to developments in the local area. In particular, the proposed Center Parcs resort could lead to a significant increase of traffic taking the most direct route from the M1, through Steppingley.

6 Services

6.1 Emergency Services

No issues were identified with Emergency Services apart from finding houses with slightly eccentric numbering systems!

6.2 Schools

Steppingley is in the catchment area for Eversholt Lower School, Parkfields Middle School and Harlington Upper School. One third of the households who responded to the questionnaire had children of school age or lower living with them. Everyone that provided an opinion thought that schools in the area were excellent or good at all levels, although it was suggested that Harlington School's reputation has fallen more recently. Half intended to use private schools.

There are currently no pre-school care options available since the toddlers group based in the Village Hall ended recently.

6.3 Crime and Safety

16% of the village are worried about the level of crime in the village, mainly through burglaries. A concern for the future is the impact of large commercial developments. 77% would be in favour of participating in a Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

6.4 Health & Personal Care

While the majority of the village were happy with the health services provided (87%), concern was expressed about access to these facilities – use of a car is essential due to the lack of public transport as above. Evening appointments at doctor's surgeries would be used if available. One resident used services for the elderly – a mobile warden and care line.

6.5 Lighting

93% of respondents did not want street lighting to be introduced into the village and comments were strongly expressed on this subject. The main concerns were about urbanisation of the village, loss of village charm and light pollution.

6.6 Public Telephone & Toilets

There is a public telephone in the centre of the village which is rarely used by villagers. There are no public toilet facilities.

6.7 Transport

There is very little public transport in the village; suggestions were made to provide a bus to Milton Keynes or Bedford on a weekly basis and a shuttle bus to Flitwick. There are currently 3 bus providers, but it is very difficult to find out the times even when calling the providers directly and the County Council information line doesn't have any times (it was suggested that I ask the driver for a return time). The Flittabus does provide a service to Flitwick, but it is from Steppingley hospital not the village.



The roads in Steppingley are in need of some repair which is monitored by the PC. The pavements along Rectory Road and the bend at the bottom of Peakes End need upgrading.

The speed of traffic through the village has raised concerns over safety and traffic calming measures should be investigated such as width & weight restrictions, further reduction in speed limits.

A safe footpath or cycle path to Flitwick would increase access to transport links and retail facilities without the need for a car.

6.8 Refuse Collection and Recycling

While the majority were satisfied with the waste collection service to the village, many raised concerns about the fortnightly collection recently introduced. There is concern that this is not frequent enough, especially in summer. The bins left on the junction at Church End were also a concern for residents in that street.

Everyone who responded to the questionnaire was committed to recycling and most people requested more facilities, for example, extending the range of plastics, adding corrugated card and glass collection. Noise and appearance concerns were raised with the option of having a bottle bank installed in the village.

6.9 Utilities

Mains drainage and electricity are available throughout the village, but no domestic gas supply, although a high pressure pipeline runs through the village.

7 Economic

7.1 Employment

About 30% of the village are not in paid employment, none are unemployed seeking work. 52% work locally (including Bedford & Milton Keynes), 17% commuting to either London or elsewhere.

There are several farms in the parish and concerns have been raised about people and dogs straying from footpaths.

An idea was raised to hold local enterprise evenings in the village hall to promote local businesses, e.g. farm shops, trades people.

7.2 Food and Retail

There are farm shops in the parish used by many. The main viable supermarket is Tesco in Flitwick, accessed by car only; a Waitrose supermarket has been approved for Ampthill which would increase choice to the residents of Steppingley. Some use internet shopping, for example, organic vegetable boxes. There is a scheme to improve food access in rural Bedfordshire which the parish could investigate further.

For other items shops in Milton Keynes are used by many. The range of shops in Ampthill is limited. Both Ampthill and Flitwick provide Post Offices and banks.

7.3 New Technology

There is no cable provision to the parish; broadband internet access is through BT lines. Other facilities are available in Ampthill or Flitwick.

8 Land and Environment

See Appendix 2 for full report on the environment in the Parish.

8.1 Key Characteristics

- Greensand Ridge; sloping down to a valley to the N and East.
- Elevation ranges from 73 to 108 m.
- Area of approximately 526 ha with strong landscape character and natural environment
- Some ancient hedgerows and protected trees within the village boundary
- Expansive tracts under arable cultivation but with some variation of land use i.e. plantations, game reserves and small pockets of pasture that bring local variation.
- High ecological value – the area supports several important sites for nature conservation including woodland, meadows and ponds. Sites with County Wildlife Status include: Rod Wood, Steppingley Copse and part of Steppingley Hospital grounds, Flitwick Wood and Millbrook Warren.
- Strong wooded context with some areas of deciduous woodland (a large proportion of which is ancient), mixed woodland and coniferous plantations e.g., Flitwick Plantation. That provides an important ecological and visual resource.
- The contrast of arable land and densely wooded areas creates contrasting perspectives from open and exposed to enclosed and sheltered.
- Variable fields and roadside boundaries – ranging from mature shelterbelts through dense intact mixed hedges to discontinuous, short flailed boundaries.
- Primary transport routes including the M1 and Midland Mainline railway cross north-south through the ridge at the west and east edges of the Parish and reduce tranquillity although some of the central areas have a more remote character.
- Settlement comprises of a small contained village, hospital and isolated farmhouses. Generally the village has a consistent character in terms of material and style (red bricks, slate or clay tiles).
- Population 230
- Public Access; a good rights of way network connecting to adjacent areas.

8.2 Threats to Landscape and Environment

- Falling within Milton Keynes and South Midlands Growth Area as outlined in the Sub-Regional Strategy (although most development is anticipated outside the parish in the areas immediately surrounding Bedford, Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Luton)
- Transport expansion and improvement of primary transport routes decreasing rural character and sense of tranquillity (e.g. M1 widening, proposed Flitwick to Westoning bypass & Luton Airport expansion).
- Settlement expansion, including encroachment from neighbouring settlements (e.g. Flitwick and Ampthill).
- Proposed commercial development in Warren Wood by Center Parcs, loss of green belt, restricted access to footpaths through more remote areas, traffic congestion and general pollution (noise, light etc).
- Occasional noise nuisance from “raves” held in local woods.

8.3 Proposals

These threats are of concern to the residents of Steppingley who value their village character and community highly. It is felt that all of the above points would have a severe negative impact on this rural community and action should be taken to minimise impact.

The natural environment is under threat from many factors, particularly the increased pressure from traffic on our roads and from major commercial developments.

Steppingley village would like to enhance the environment and provide the opportunity for Steppingley



villagers to enjoy it by increasing the area of amenity woodland and by developing areas where other types of vegetation can be restored.

We propose enhancing the recreational value of the landscape by creating open access opportunities to woodland areas either through the purchase of land or by the negotiation of access rights.

In order to achieve these objectives we propose planting a band of woodland and heathland connecting Flitwick Wood in the east to Warren Wood in the north. This could link with existing woodland recently planted at Beechcroft and would have significant wildlife benefits with the additional advantage of providing a barrier between Steppingley, Fordfield Road and Flitwick.

The rights of way need to be enhanced and developed to link existing parts of the network. (e.g. Flitwick Wood to Flitwick Plantation; The reservoir to Moor Plantation) and by creating circular routes. The amenity value would be further enhanced if footpaths could be established between the reservoir and the byroad and between Park Farm Road and the track near the pumping station. This is an ambitious plan that will need the cooperation of the current landowners. See Appendix 2, page 20 for map of area.

9 Action Plan

The Action Plan has been developed following analysis of the questionnaire results and further feedback from members of the Parish Plan group and the Parish Council. An evening was arranged in the village hall, prior to printing the final document to give the entire Parish an opportunity to comment on the plan, especially the actions.

The Parish Council will own the overall implementation of the Action Plan, working with groups such as the SVA, local authorities and organisations such as the Greensand Trust and BRCC.

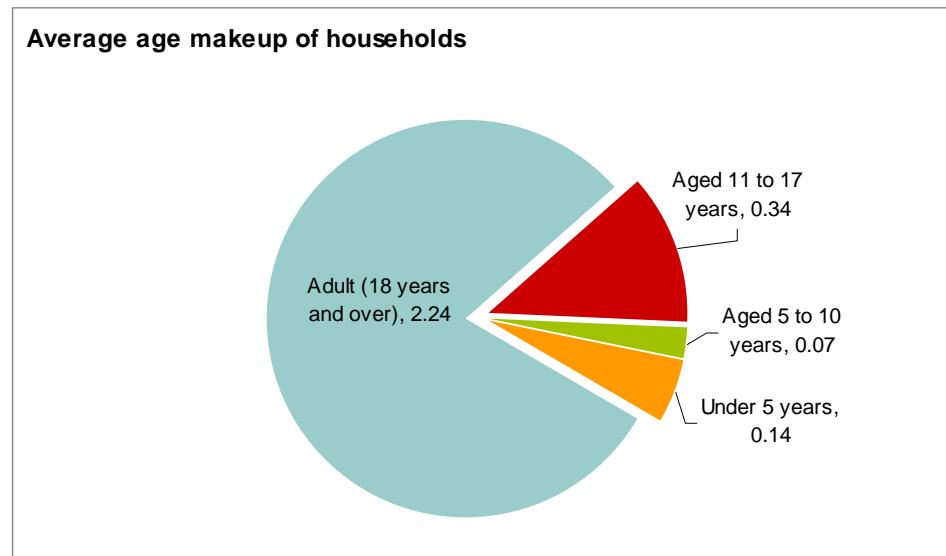
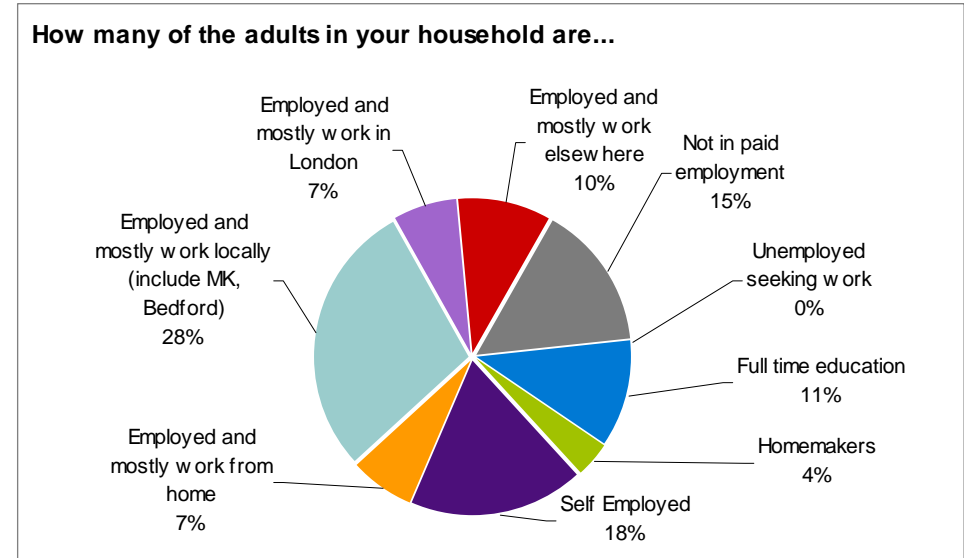
All members of the Parish are invited to be involved in actions from this plan, through joining a task group or owning an area they are interested in.

	Action	Priority	Timescale	Who	How it will be tackled
1	Ensure that Steppingley is fully part of any consultation on developments impacting the parish. Protect & maintain the rural aspect of the parish from settlement merger and loss of identity	High	Ongoing	PC	Parish Councillor holding the Planning portfolio to raise with PC
2	Develop a community web site to share village information and links to documents (eg Parish accounts)	High	1 yr	PC IT help	Identify site designer Agree design required Implement
3	Work with Bedfordshire Highways to improve road and pavement repair, conserving the character of secondary roads and limiting urbanising influences (eg signage, street lighting, kerbing & widening)	High	Ongoing	PC Bedfordshire Highways	Parish Councillor holding 'Highways' portfolio to act as liaison between PC and Bedfordshire Highways
4	Discuss improvements to Steppingley cross-roads with Bedfordshire Highways and County Council	High	3 yrs	PC Bedfordshire Highways	Develop action plan, including use of section 106 planning gains if relevant
5	Investigate traffic calming measures that could work for Steppingley, conserving the character of the parish (e.g. speed bumps with lighting in keeping with village character; width restrictions with signage at cross roads)	High	3 yrs	PC Bedfordshire Highways	
6	Reduce quantity of signage 'clutter' in village, especially on corner of Church End.	Medium	1 yr	PC	Identify who owns current signs Arrange removal
7	Investigate the possibility of an improved footpath or cycleway to Flitwick	Low		PC	
8	Investigate feasibility of regular bus services to Bedford, Milton Keynes & Flitwick through Steppingley, including the Flittabus stopping in the village centre	Low		PC	Consult villagers to determine requirements before contacting providers
9	Set up Neighbourhood Watch scheme in the village	Medium	2 yr	PC Police	Identify local owner for Parish Work with local Police to set up scheme
10	Set up scheme of volunteers to give lifts to Doctors surgeries for those without a car or for other emergencies		6 mth	PC BRCC	Set up Village Care Scheme through BRCC
11	Hold local enterprise evening to advertise local businesses – develop into village services directory?	Low			
12	Review waste collection to avoid bins being left on Church End junction	Low		PC MBDC	

	Action	Priority	Timescale	Who	How it will be tackled
13	Arrange training for hedgerow maintenance & repair with Greensand Trust Volunteers	Medium	Ongoing	PC Greensand Trust	Work with Greensand Trust volunteers to increase skills in Parish
14	Develop a plan to plant a band of woodland and heathland from Flitwick Wood to Millbrook Warren, creating additional footpaths and rights of way to enhance the recreational value of the landscape. See Appendix 2 for details.	Low		PC	Set up a working group and work with local land owners
15	Purchase of the Recreation ground (village green) by the village	High	3 yrs	PC Grant body	Investigate cost Apply for grant & agree sale
16	Carry out improvements to the village hall: new chairs & tables, re-wiring, deal with the damp in the walls, fix the crack above the kitchen window, improve the outside space	High	3 yrs	SVA	Investigate potential help from villagers with necessary skills
17	Re-build cricket pavilion to modern standards	Medium	5 yrs	CC Grant bodies PC support	Design building and determine costs Apply for grant Build
18	Increase public rights of way to give more circular walks	Medium	5 yrs	PC	Identify potential groups, work with local land owners to develop
19	Set up monitoring of hedgerows, trees and bird populations around the parish to ensure important sites are maintained	Medium	Ongoing		
20	Increase leisure facilities in the village, including boules pitch and tennis court	Medium	3 yrs	SVA	
21	Install water point for allotments	Low		PC Anglian Water	
22	Investigate feasibility of using the Church for concerts, art exhibitions & weddings to raise funds	Low			
23	Remove telephone box as very little use, uses electricity unnecessarily and has been used as a toilet.	Low		PC BT	Talk to BT about usage levels and assess possibility of removal
24	Enhance area of electricity sub station as detailed in Conservation Area review.	Low		PC Electricity supplier	Talk to Electricity supplier about improvements to area

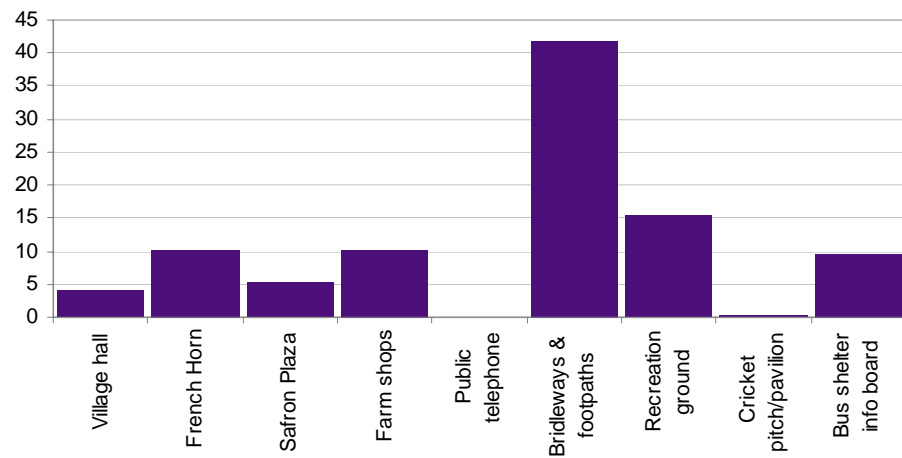
Appendix 1 – Village Survey Results

Section 1 – Your Household



Section 2 – Social & Community

Average number of times in the last 6 months that people have used...



50% of responses thought that the Village Hall needed some improvement, many were very positive. Key suggested improvements were:

- Equipment (e.g. chairs & tables)
- Infrastructure (e.g. heating, lighting, electrics)
- Make the front entrance more inviting
- Provide open access to French Horn and the Rec
- Clear rubbish from the side area of the hall
- Upgrade the outside patio area

96% of responses thought that activities and events run by the Steppingley Village Association were sufficient. Ideas for improvement were:

- Theatre group, film shows, chess club, jazz & dance nights
- 1 big annual event, e.g. a barn dance or ball
- Outdoor events, e.g. nature walks, sports day
- Wider variety of sport, something other than cricket
- More / cheaper events, including youth events

Most respondents preferred to be made aware of things happening in the village through the newsletter. Other preferences included information via:

- eMail
- Steppingley Village Association Website
- Posters in the Bus Shelter
- Mailshot

Ideas suggested to improve communication within the village included:

- Posters in the French Horn or Safron
- Village meetings
- A notice board in Peakes End
- Areas of concern listed on the Steppingley Village Association website, e.g. M1 widening, planning applications

46% of respondents felt very much part of the community in Steppingley, whilst 17% did not really.

Most comments on this subject indicated that those who did not feel part of the community knew that they could attend or become more involved in village activities and events if they wished.

There were many positive comments about the Steppingley Village Association and Parish Council

Suggestions were made to include sections on the Steppingley Village

Section 3 – Economic

3 responses were received from people running or owning a local business. Suggestions were:

- To keep people & dogs from straying off footpaths
- To have a bigger post box that takes A3 envelopes
- For a more reliable electricity supply
- For provision of Cable TV/phone/data service
- To have a local business evening in the Village Hall to encourage use of local farm shops, tradesmen, riding schools etc.

Section 4 – Leisure

Most people wanted to see more non-pavement footpaths and circular walks. Non-road cycle paths, including a non-road cycle route to Flitwick were also popular with respondents. A request was made for more bridleways, especially circular paths over the A507

85% of responses thought the signs in the village were adequate. A few thought they could be clearer. One household was concerned that the paths were not clear after ploughing.

96% of responses thought the playground facility available in the Rec added to the community. Many people added that it was excellent, a great achievement by small group. One household felt that a tennis court would have a wider appeal, i.e. to adults as well as children.

Respondents were asked if they would like to see the village have a tennis court, boules pitch or new cricket pavilion. The cricket pavilion was the most popular option with 76% of residents who completed questionnaires, followed by a tennis court (59%) and boules pitch (47%).

Other ideas suggested included:

- Outdoor exercise equipment / all weather playing surface
- Youth club
- Indoor bowls pavilion
- Communal garden
- More public access land & woodland

It was highlighted that open space is a facility in itself. One household pointed out that Flitwick Leisure Centre provided a wide range of services which fulfilled a wide range of leisure needs. It was also suggested that a small village such as Steppingley should keep a realistic perspective of what could be achieved.

Section 5 – Environment

A number of buildings were seen to be important within the parish. These included:

- The French Horn
- Village Hall
- Church
- The Rec & Cricket Pavilion
- Pump House
- Park Farm
- Mill
- Steppingley Hospital
- Farms within the Parish

Mention was also made of houses in Church End (e.g. School House), in Peakes End (e.g. The Croft, Ratcatchers) and in Rectory Road (e.g. Old Rectory / Hinton House) , as well as thatched houses within the parish, Duke of Bedford cottages and other pre-1900 and listed buildings

48% of respondents wanted more Dog Waste bins around the village, including on the edge of the Rec, by the kissing gate, on Church End, and on paths leaving the village. Many felt that owners should be responsible for picking up dog waste, and that this should be enforced if necessary. Suggested measures could include:

- Banning dogs (especially from the play area which could be fenced off) – one household thought that this would not be preferable as the Rec is a valuable area
- Fining owners
- Providing extra signage
- Providing a leaflet on hazards
- Wardens or local policing, with prosecutions

It was mentioned that bins need emptying more often

62% would like to see more Green Space and/or Conservation Areas, 88% would like to see more community woodland. Suggestions included:

- Old ponds
- Rectory Road near The Barns
- Allotments (could be used for a Boules pitch)
- Bluebell wood
- Land from Revelstoke to the reservoir (wood, trees, marsh)
- Between Pumping Station & Flitwick woods
- Along Peakes End up to Park Farm
- Church grounds

One household suggested that we have enough such areas & are lucky for such a small village.

94% of responses felt that we should encourage more biodiversity in the village, this included:

- Hedge & woodland management to help movement & diversity
- Plant grass verges with wild flowers and create meadowland
- Co-operate with local landowners
- Maintain & extend field hedges & woods
- Open up old ponds
- Not ploughing right up to hedges
- Installing nesting boxes, and encouraging wildflowers
- Purchase land to create multi-habitat reserves, link areas of woodland, creating a woodland burial site
- Put signs up to educate walkers

Residents were aware of the following particular species of wildlife:

- Tawny Owls, Swifts, Buzzards, Greater Spotted Woodpeckers, Pine Martins
- Hares, Muntjac & other deer, Bats and Rabbits (although the latter were not necessarily welcome)
- Frogs, Toads and Great Crested Newts

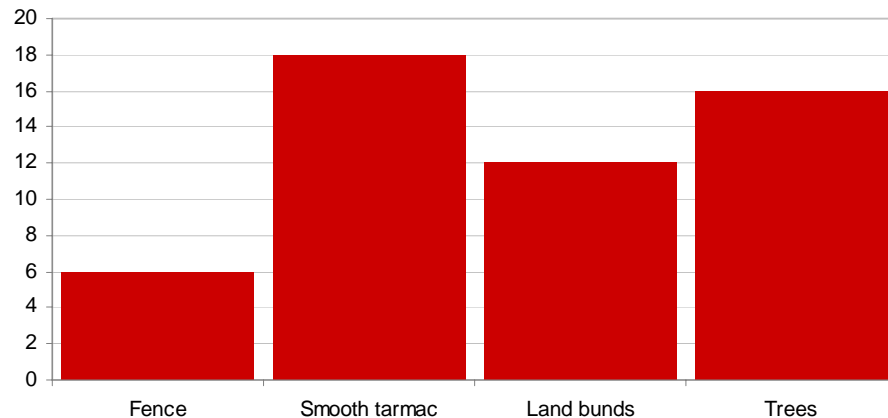
It was noted that there used to be lots of House Martins.

100% of respondents want to remain separate from Flitwick, many felt this very strongly. Comments included reference to the identity of the village (not many rural villages remain), its charm, character & uniqueness, and its community spirit.

It was suggested that Steppingley retains links with other villages, e.g. Eversholt & Ridgmont, and retains decision making within the village, rather than being absorbed into other areas.

72% of respondents would like to take part in a Best Kept Village Competition (although some only if everyone is involved)

What is your preferred solution to noise from M1?



73% of residents are affected by noise from the M1. This varied from low background to invasive noise which depended on season and wind direction. There were some concerns with the M1 widening plans and lack of thought for this issue.

76% of responses wanted a weight restriction through the village. A limit of 7.5 Tonnes was suggested, although delivery vehicles may require exemption. One household felt it would be ignored anyway, and another household felt that speed of vehicles through the village was more of an issue.

76% of responses wanted a roundabout at Steppingley cross-roads, and many felt this was a priority. Extension of the current 30mph limit to include the cross-roads was suggested. One household felt that development of the cross-roads could lead to more urbanisation.

Other improvements suggested included:

- Widening and cleaning the footpath alongside the Rec and the corner by Peakes End (there was concern that the path here is not safe)
- Creating safe circular footpaths linking Green Lane with the reservoir, linking the Pumping Station, Flitwick Bridleways & Park Farm, and linking the village centre to farm shops
- Improving road and footpath maintenance (a phone number to call to report problems would be useful)
- Granite sets
- Kerb footpaths
- Something to slow traffic down (e.g. a 20mph limit around the 2 main bends in the village centre, or speed bumps)
- Reduction of on-road parking, especially on Rectory Rd
- Reducing the amount of standing water near Steppingley Hospital

Section 6 – Services

Schools

- A third of responses had children living with them of school age or lower.
- Half intend to use private schools
- Everyone thought the schools were excellent or good at all levels
- The only "poor" response was about pre-school with the comment that there was no option

Health

- 1 respondent received services for the elderly (mobile warden & careline)
- 89% were happy with the health services available, one respondent clarified that this was while they were able to drive
- A Chemist is available in the Ampthill surgery
- It was suggested that it would be beneficial to be able to book advance appointments, with own doctor and in evenings.

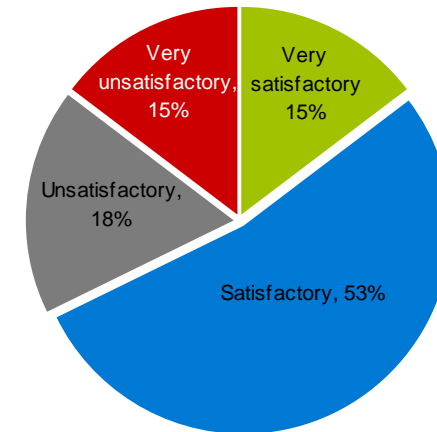
Crime

14% were worried about the level of crime in the village, particularly burglaries. Intimidation from illegal hare coursers and vandals from other areas was also mentioned.

77% would participate in a Neighbourhood Watch scheme. A presentation from a local crime prevention officer was suggested as being useful.

There are concerns on the potential impact from any future local commercial developments.

Opinion of current waste disposal & recycling



Fortnightly waste collection was a concern due to unpleasant smells, particularly in summer, as were the bins left on the junction on Church End

A suggestion was made to open the Ampthill Tidy Tip for longer hours

Recycling

Everyone is either committed or very committed to recycling. Many wanted more plastic recycling (bags, yoghurt pots), corrugated card. Glass recycling was requested by almost everyone, either through collection or a bottle bank – concern was raised over noise and mess that a bottle bank may lead to. There was a perception from one household that villagers pay more for the service and get less than they used to.

Street Lighting

6% would like street lighting

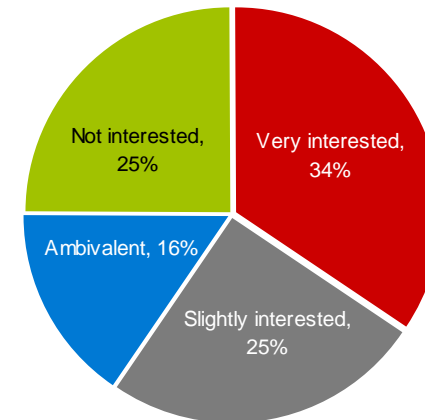
Many respondents expressed a strong view against street lighting to protect the charm/character of the village and avoid urbanisation

Requests were suggested for lighting in the bus shelter and at Steppingley cross-roads

Development

47% of respondents considered limited development within the parish to be acceptable, with 53% preferring no development at all.

Many respondents were concerned that any development must be sympathetic to the style and character of the village, with some preferring extension/in-fill development, or affordable housing for young local people.

To what extent are you interested in being connected to gas?**Section 7 – Other Comments**

Respondents noted that they would like to see the following within the village:

- A shop or Post Office
- Welcome pack when new residents move in
- More use made of the church for concerts, art exhibitions etc
- New burial ground required
- Shuttle bus to Flitwick and a weekly bus to Milton Keynes/Bedford
- Free or subsidised transport for elderly
- Welfare for elderly, e.g. shopmobility or team that checks on community
- Village representation about M1 widening noise issues
- Village discussion/representation about major development proposals

The following points were also made:

- The Parish Plan should influence development planning to avoid haphazard growth like other rural villages
- People live in Steppingley because it's rural, development not wanted
- Concern about Steppingley cross-roads, Flitwick by-pass route, and impact of commercial developments
- Can the Parish Council buy land that comes up for sale in the parish?
- Steppingley Conservation area is ignored by some, and not enforced
- Parish Council & Steppingley Village Association work is appreciated, for benefit of village
- People & dogs are a problem off footpaths

Appendix 2 – Further Environmental Detail

Key Characteristics

- Greensand Ridge; sloping down to a valley to the N and East.
- Elevation ranges from 73 to 108 m.
- Area of approximately 526 ha with strong landscape character and natural environment
- Expansive tracts under arable cultivation but with some variation of land use i.e. plantations, game reserves and small pockets of pasture that bring local variation.
- High ecological value – the area supports several important sites for nature conservation including woodland, meadows and ponds. Sites with County Wildlife Status include: Rod Wood, Steppingley Copse and part of Steppingley Hospital grounds, Flitwick Wood and Warren Wood.
- Strong wooded context with some areas of deciduous woodland (a large proportion of which is ancient), mixed woodland and coniferous plantations e.g., Flitwick Plantation. That provides an important ecological and visual resource.
- The contrast of arable land and densely wooded areas creates contrasting perspectives from open and exposed to enclosed and sheltered.
- Variable fields and roadside boundaries – ranging from mature shelterbelts through dense intact mixed hedges to discontinuous, short flailed boundaries.
- Primary transport routes including the M1 and Midland Mainline railway cross north-south through the ridge at the west and east edges of the Parish and reduce tranquillity although some of the central areas have a more remote character.
- Settlement comprises of a small contained village, hospital and isolated farmhouses. Generally the village has a consistent character in terms of material and style (red bricks, slate or clay tiles).
- Population 230
- Public Access; a good rights of way network connecting to adjacent areas.

Natural Environment

Introduction

Steppingley village is set in the middle of a rural parish with a predominantly agricultural and woodland land use (Plate 1, Figure 1). The village is mostly above 110 m above sea level and enjoys views to the north across the Wash Brook, a tributary of the River Flit, to Ampthill and Warren Wood. The parish is bounded to the west by the M1, to the South by Flitwick plantation and farmland, to the east by Flitwick and to the North by Warren Wood.

The agricultural land is mostly sandy soil arising from the Greensand Ridge, growing a range of arable crops and novel crops such as daffodils. The soil is heavier further south. There is livestock kept at Beckerings Park Farm and also numerous paddocks for horses. These are mostly “improved grassland” with Italian Ryegrass that has little conservation value but an older pasture exists by the Steppingley Crossroads and in an area of unimproved neutral grassland in an orchard at Steppingley Hospital (Figure 2) This County Wildlife site (CWS) contains species of particular note: pepper saxifrage, adder's-tongue fern and green-winged orchid.



Plate 1: Aerial view of Steppingley village

The field and roadside boundaries are variable ranging from mature shelter belts, through dense intact mixed hedges to discontinuous, short flailed boundaries. The recreation ground has mature holly hedges. Some of the field boundaries are being augmented in places by replanting under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Cover crops such as maize and brassicas are also grown to provide refuge for pheasant and partridge and the Beckerings Park is extensively shot over in season.

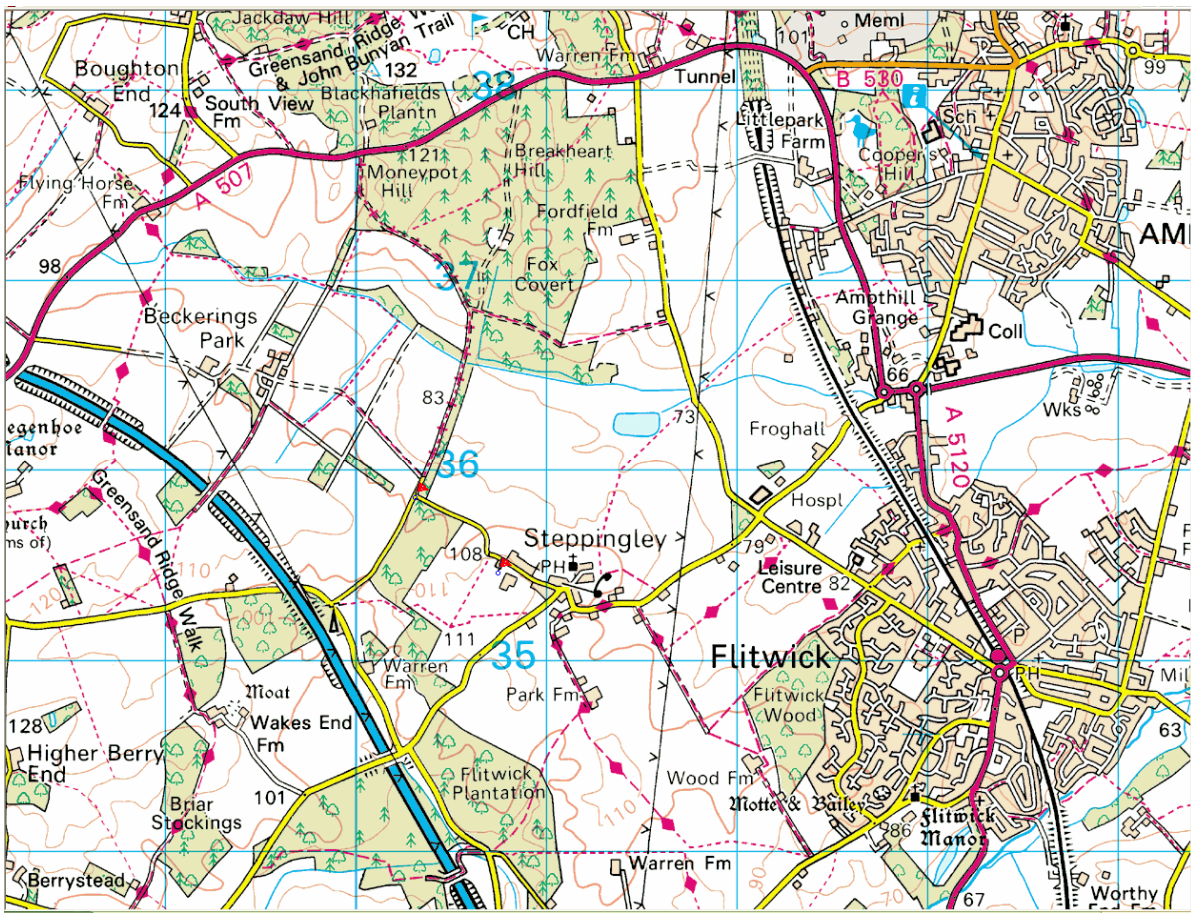


Figure 1. Steppingley Parish showing existing rights of way: Source Memory-Map OS 2004

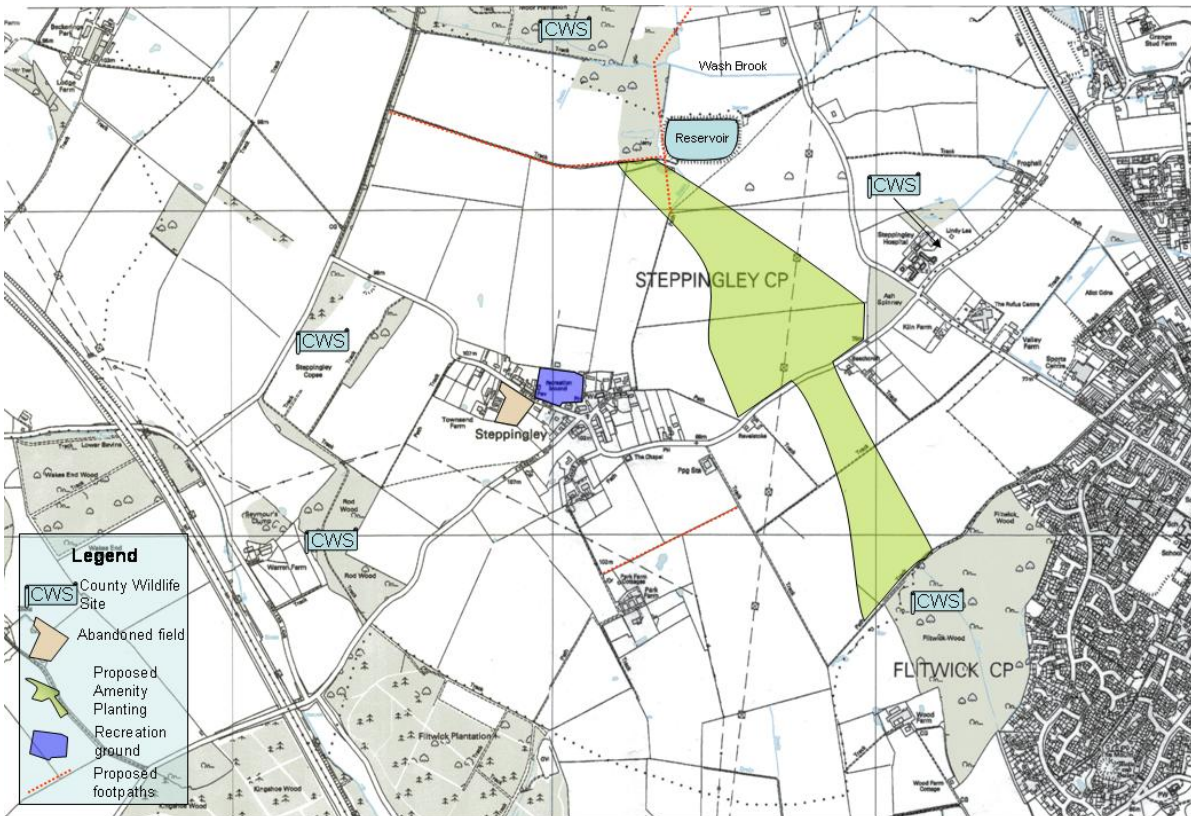


Figure 2. Map of Steppingley parish showing the location of features of particular environmental value and proposed woodland and footpaths. Produced by Bedfordshire County Council OS Licence no. 076465 (LA). Based upon Ordnance Survey mapping with permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution of civil proceedings.

The parish has about 60 ha of woodland within its boundaries (Plate 3). This includes several sites areas of deciduous woodland, mixed woodland and plantations; these provide an important ecological and visual resource. Steppingley Copse, Rod Wood and Flitwick Wood are the most picturesque and are the ancient woodlands, with bluebells and other indicators of ancient woodland (Plate 5, Figure 2) all three sites have County Wildlife Status. Also important is Ash Spinney, the small copse in the old clay pit at Steppingley Crossroads and Moor Plantation on the Wash brook flood plain which are priority areas of wet woodland, the latter has County Wildlife Status as part of the Millbrook Warren CWS. Flitwick Plantation and parts of Steppingley Copse are commercial coniferous plantings, which are felled on a predetermined rotation. These woodlands together with established shelter belts (e.g. linking Steppingley Copse and Moor Plantation) provide an important wildlife corridor running north – south. They also form an important sound barrier between the village and the motorway.

These woodlands are private and are accessible to villagers along the rights of way passing through the woods. Individual trees are important within the village, most notably the Sequoia in the grounds of Hinton Hose and the magnificent oak tree at the western end of Rectory Road. There are also several large oaks on Eversholt road. Even the abandoned field between Constantia and the Barns supports the biodiversity as the nettles are excellent host plants for butterflies (Figure 2; Plate 10).

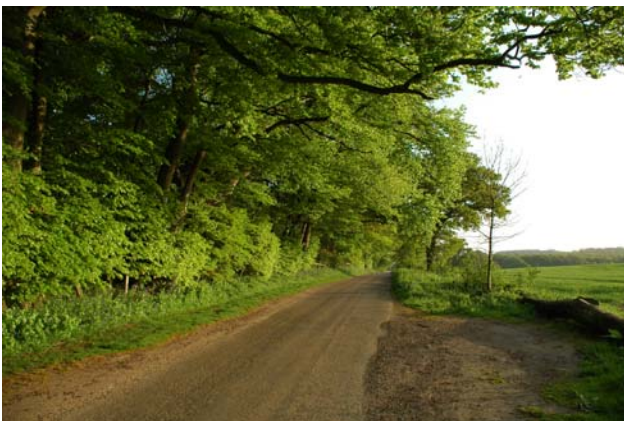


Plate 2. Looking south with Steppingley Copse on the left: May 2005 Plate 3. Steppingley Copse: Beech woods with bluebells: May 2005

Other important features for biodiversity in the parish are the ponds and the Wash Brook running along the northern boundary. Ponds include King's and Queen's ponds on Eversholt Road as well as those in gardens in Rectory Road and Peaks End. These provide breeding grounds for frogs and newts and for moorhens.

The largest area of water is the irrigation reservoir in the valley to the north of the parish (Plate 7). This is used by a fishing club and is not open to villagers to visit.



Plate 4. A carpet of Bluebells in Steppingley Copse: May 2005

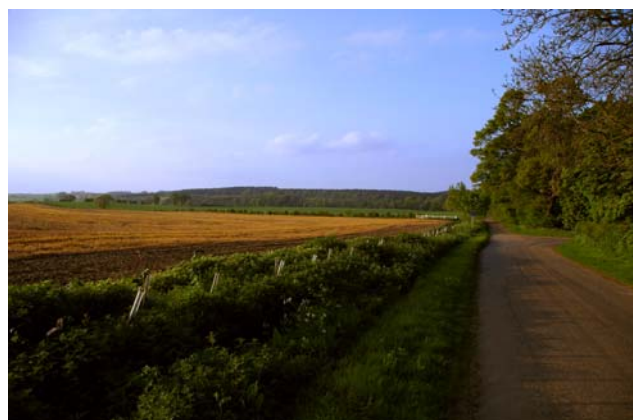


Plate 5. Looking north across Beckerings Park Farm towards Warren Wood: May 2005. Note the replacement hedge planted along the road.



Plate 6. The view north towards the reservoir and Ampthill: September 2005



Plate 7. The view from the reservoir north towards Steppingley: December 2000



Plate 2. The view east towards Flitwick from Church End over the proposed site amenity planting: August 2005



Plate 9. Steppingley Recreation Ground and play equipment

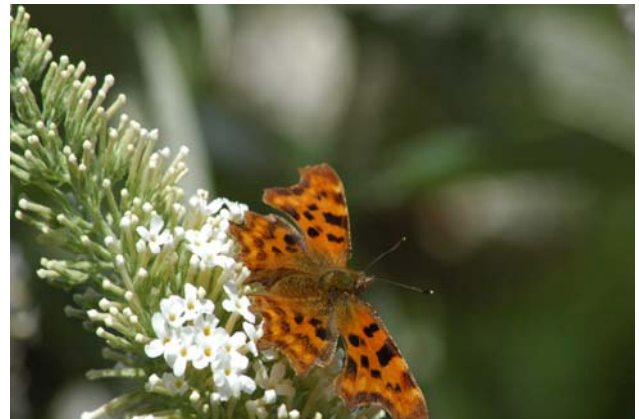


Plate 10. A Comma butterfly on *Buddleia* in Steppingley

Threats to Landscape and Environment

- Falling within Milton Keynes and South Midlands Growth Area as outlined in the Sub-Regional Strategy (although most development is anticipated outside the parish in the areas immediately surrounding Bedford, Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Luton)
- Transport expansion and improvement of primary transport routes decreasing rural character and sense of tranquillity (e.g. M1 widening, proposed Flitwick to Westoning bypass & Luton Airport expansion).
- Settlement expansion, including encroachment from neighbouring settlements (e.g. Flitwick and Ampthill).
- Proposed commercial development in Warren Wood by Center Parcs, loss of green belt, restricted access to footpaths through more remote areas, traffic congestion and general pollution (noise, light etc).

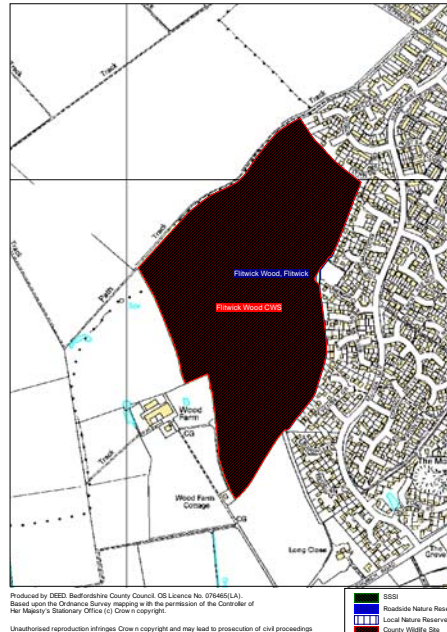
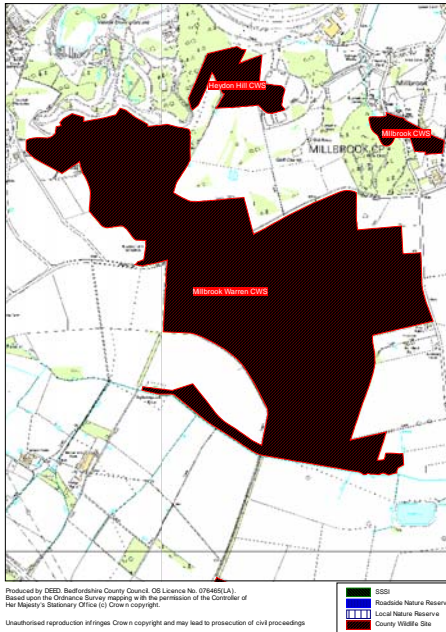
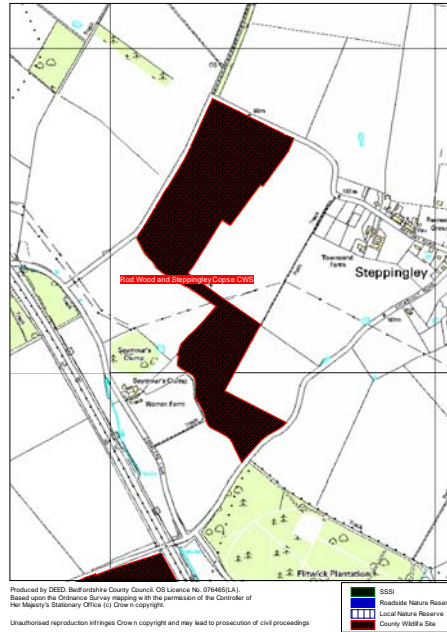
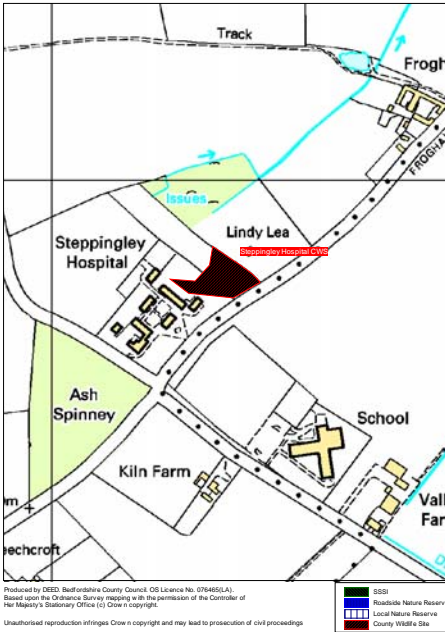


Figure 3. Detailed maps of County Wildlife Sites within and adjoining Steppingley Parish.

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Proposals

The natural environment is under threat from many factors, particularly the increased pressure from traffic on our roads and from developments such as the proposed Center Parcs holiday resort.

Steppingley village would like to enhance the environment and provide the opportunity for Steppingley villagers to enjoy it by increasing the area of amenity woodland and by developing areas where other types of vegetation can be restored.

We propose enhancing the recreational value of the landscape by creating open access opportunities to woodland areas either through the purchase of land or by the negotiation of access rights.

In order to achieve these objectives we propose planting a band of woodland and heathland connecting Flitwick Wood in the east to Warren Wood in the north. This could link with existing woodland recently planted at Beechcroft and would have significant wildlife benefits with the additional advantage of providing a barrier between Steppingley, Fordfield Road and Flitwick.

The rights of way need to be enhanced and developed to link existing parts of the network. (e.g. Flitwick Wood to Flitwick Plantation; The reservoir to Moor Plantation) and by creating circular routes. The amenity

value would be further enhanced if footpaths could be established between the reservoir and the byroad and between Park Farm Road and the track near the pumping station. This is an ambitious plan that will need the cooperation of the current landowners.

Opportunities and Strategy

- The overall strategy is to conserve and enhance the landscape and natural environment by building upon the positive features that make a strong contribution to landscape character.
- Promote the extension and connection of existing areas of woodland, particularly through the creation of additional broad leaved woods and heathland.
- Enhance the recreational value of the landscape by creating open access opportunities (purchase or negotiation) and developing rights of way to include circular routes.
- Ensure existing ancient woodland is sensitively managed.
- Support sustainable arable production to keep fields in active use and conserve areas of pasture.
- Survey hedgerows and trees and identify most important areas.
- Enhance the conditions of hedgerows boundaries and where necessary reinstate sections to strengthen landscape character.
- Conserve the open panoramic views from the village.
- Monitor bird populations especially swift, swallow and house martin and ensure breeding sites are maintained
- Continue to manage churchyard in a sympathetic way to maintain wildlife value for both plants and invertebrates.
- Limit the expansion of existing and development of new transport corridors to prevent fragmentation of the landscape and visual and noise pollution.
- Conserve the character of secondary roads and limit urbanising influences (e.g. signage, street lighting, kerbing and widening)
- Ensure that traffic management measures are sympathetic to those areas with a strong rural character
- Monitor development of neighbouring villages to prevent settlement merger and loss of identity.
- Preserve the identity of the village and respect the unified architectural character of villages e.g. red brick, clay tiles and timber frames.
- Oppose developments that might impact upon the rural, tranquil character on the village

References

Bedfordshire Landscape Character Assessment, Priority Area Study, Draft Report. Prepared for Bedfordshire Design Forum by Land Use Consultants, March 2004

CWS info: from the Wildlife Sites Manual, Bedfordshire. Produced by the Bedfordshire and Luton Wildlife Working Group.

Acknowledgements

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