

Chesham Community Vision your town - your future



VISION STATEMENT - Chesham in 2015

An active and vibrant working market town with an integrated but varied community where people support one another and can live, work, shop, visit and enjoy themselves in an environment that is constantly cared for and enhanced. A town that...

- provides sustainable employment opportunities, housing and business facilities that respect the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in which it is situated.
- encourages young and old from all areas to work together to achieve continual improvement to the facilities and future prospects of the town.
- promotes a thriving town centre which provides leisure and shopping facilities to meet the needs and wishes of residents and visitors.
- has a fully linked transport and communication system providing good services for people to travel within the town and regular connections to London and surrounding towns and villages..

BACKGROUND

The Chesham Community Vision was launched in early 2004. Over 400 residents from Chesham and surrounding communities plus representatives of more than 40 local businesses, groups and organisations responded to an initial consultation event. Over 3,000 individual responses have been captured as part of this new community-wide appraisal, completed by a broad spectrum of the community including the very young, young people, older persons, minority group representatives plus local retailers and businesses. A good example of the innovative consultation techniques deployed during the project was the 'Lights, Camera, Gab DVD initiative. What has emerged are a range of key trends and issues, challenges and aspirations, that those who live, work, play or visit the town and local area express when they consider the future of this community.

In late 2004 four Action Groups, Environment, Economy, Community & Transport, were created with a remit to build on the evidence from the consultation work and prepare a fresh action plan reflecting the views of the widest possible audience and forming a springboard for projects to be delivered by local community groups. This Vision document summarises the outcome of their work and offers an initial action plan which will guide project teams as they seek solutions to the challenges facing Chesham over the next 10 years.

HISTORY & HERITAGE

The people of Chesham have a tradition of being independent minded - politically, in religion and in trade. In the 1700s the commercial planting of beechwoods gave impetus to the first industrialisation of this rural town. Leathercraft followed. This together with a brewery gave the town its cachet of 4 B's - Boots, Brushes, Beer and Baptists. The arrival of the Metropolitan Railway in 1889 further boosted the economy. In the 1960s an influx of workers from Pakistan and Bangladesh began the change of the population into today's multicultural diversity.

As we move into the 21st century our traditional small industries have declined and the change is towards service industries. However, Chesham survives as a market town in a valued Chiltern landscape and still serves a wide rural area.

KEY VALUES

The key values, challenges and aspirations expressed by the community in and around the town are;

- A town of character
- A strong sense of community
- A vibrant social mix
- An integrated community
- A solid community infrastructure
- Easy accessibility to green open spaces
- Regeneration of the High Street
- Better choice of shops
- Ensure a sound local economy
- Linking of education, training and employment
- Best access to services
- An integrated public transport system
- Improved communication with all who live, work, visit and play in Chesham



Chesham retains a very strong community identity. The responses to our appraisal from all sectors of the community reflected this and also a clear appreciation of the blend of rural and urban. This unique mix e.g. distinctive town centre, green spaces, variety of small retail units, street market and surviving social fabric was recognised by all who we have consulted, i.e. living, working or visiting the town. Many valued and wished to retain the geographical distinctiveness of Chesham and surrounding communities within the Chilterns. These factors clearly play a major part in the importance of the town to a wide hinterland.

PARTNERS

This Vision reflects a strong local partnership, the process facilitated by Bucks Community Action and supported by Chesham Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Chesham Community Association, Chesham Society, Chesham Environment Group, Chiltern Racial Equality Council, The Children's Fund, Chesham Town Council, Chiltern District Council and Buckinghamshire County Council

ENVIRONMENT

Chesham has many attractive landscape features, notably, the River Chess, Lowndes Park and the surrounding woodlands, and an historic built environment that includes the church and old town. These need to be enhanced, protected and publicised. As well as larger schemes to achieve this, such as *Impress the Chess*, Chesham In Bloom and the Lowndes Park project, there are numerous local groups working on environmental projects. An Environment Forum will be set up to identify these groups, co-ordinate their work and to publicise their activities. Furthermore, access to the surrounding countryside needs improving for walkers and cyclists, both local and visiting, so that Chesham can be seen as a tourist centre and a gateway to the Chilterns. The town itself needs to have more to offer to visitors and the utilisation of the Yards off the High Street is one way of achieving this. Chesham has an interesting heritage of trades and professions. Publicity of this by means of the Museum and various publications will further add to the attractiveness of the town to the visitor.



ECONOMY

Chesham is a work/life town with the majority of residents working within five miles of home and it is this heritage that determines its character. It is not just a dormitory for anywhere else and its High Street is not a clone of a hundred other High Streets throughout the country. Maintaining these elements is essential to maintaining the character of Chesham.

The High Street in Chesham has suffered like those in many other market towns but with the fourth largest population in the County and with its hinterland of the historical Greater Chesham it has strengths to build upon. The need is to upgrade the High Street in terms of environmental and social attractiveness, to extend the range of shops, particularly local and specialist shops, to exploit the street market and to develop other facilities such as restaurants that will attract visitors. There is a need for consistent promotion of the High Street, recognising the convenience, variety, accessibility and expertise that local ownership and control provide.

Although Chesham has a substantial resident population, a really dynamic High Street needs to attract visitors from outside. There are many attractive features to Chesham, but no major attraction to bring people in. The need is to develop a strategy that will build on these lower key attractions to increase the numbers of visitors to the Town and to encourage those visitors to make use of the other facilities available.

It is characteristic of Chesham that people work and live in the town. To maintain this situation, which is highly beneficial in social and environmental terms, there is a need to retain commercial premises in the Town and also to ensure that the people in Chesham have the appropriate education and skills to meet the needs of 21st century employment.

The economic vision can be captured in these five themes:

- Chesham has always been a working town and the key to maintaining its character is to maintain its economy.
- An essential element in its economy is a vibrant High Street, with an emphasis on local and specialist shops offering service, expertise, convenience and on-the-spot accountability.
- A successful High Street requires a good variety of shops and services in an attractive environment, with consistent promotion of what the Town can offer to increase the flow of visitors.
- It is also important to continue to provide employment within Chesham, to benefit from the major social and environmental benefits that this brings.
- This will require the availability of a suitably skilled and educated workforce and access to suitable commercial premises.

COMMUNITY

The population of Chesham includes people of all ages and differing ethnic backgrounds. For geographical reasons, many communities are physically separated and the hinterland is even more distant. The community vision has identified four key themes that can address the challenges to this dimension of future Chesham.

- To meet the needs of all groups and communities and to seek integrated facilities that encourage an interaction of all ages and origins across the town and hinterland.
- To understand better the needs of communities in different parts of the town and hinterland, in similar terms. A commitment to community cohesion that can have as an outcome the celebration of similarities and differences across the community. Examples can include projects to celebrate Black and Asian History and support to similar festivals in the future.
- To define better the needs of young people, the elderly and other identifiable groups in terms of facilities, services and learning provision. A community hub in the former Pond Park ward has been identified as a major need.
- To develop an independent town community forum with an ability to draw down its own funding for community wide initiatives.

TRANSPORT

The transport vision seeks to improve access for all to local amenities, local communities and the nearby larger towns. Transport is restricted by the topography of the area, with traffic being funnelled along the A416 through Chesham. Congestion along this road is a major issue that needs to be addressed. Much appreciated is Chesham station and its direct access to London. It is important to improve access from the estates of the town and surrounding villages to Chesham town centre and the Railway Station. This can be achieved through improved transport facilities including frequent reliable core bus services, demand responsive buses, taxi-buses, cycling and walking.

Other issues include

- The difficulty in accessing health provision and other services within the Chesham area and beyond.
- The lack of a regular bus service to and from the nearby large towns
- The lack of evening and Sunday transport in general and the lack of information on transport
- The lack of a resident, shoppers and visitor parking strategy for the town and environs.

ACTION PLAN

This first action plan captures the challenges identified during the appraisal and proposed solutions. The steering Group will review and refresh this element of the Vision as projects progress.

Short Term Projects	Medium - Longer Term Projects
ENVIRONMENT	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce a Rights of Way Development Plan • Audit surviving industrial heritage (mills etc.) • Create a local Environment Forum • Support and enhance the <i>Impress the Chess</i>, Lowndes Park and Chesham In Bloom initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rights Of Way network improvements (for walkers, riders, cyclists, etc.) • Joint / linked projects • Seek to develop historic yards
ECONOMY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a Training and Skills Forum (schools, colleges, employers) • Develop a Visitor Strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revitalise the town centre • Establish an Enterprise Hub • Attract sustainable new businesses
COMMUNITY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a community-wide Youth Forum • Waterside youth projects • Access and Mobility survey (COPAG - Chesham Older Persons Action Group) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated youth projects • Community Cohesion initiatives • Pond Park community Hub • Access projects
TRANSPORT	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a taxi bus service to feed railway station with through ticketing options. • Develop a road freight management strategy. • Parking and access strategy. • Promote school & workplace travel planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to local services, communities, amenities and towns • Introduce demand responsive local bus services to meet local needs and connections to national networks.

WHAT NEXT!

Project groups will now develop the solutions proposed in our initial action plan. Why not join them? For further details contact :

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or our website: www.cheshamchamber.org/communityvision

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