



The AMERSHAM COMMUNITY VISION

***“The Voice of the Community
Shaping Amersham’s Future”***

AMERSHAM MARKET TOWN HEALTHCHECK

STEERING COMMITTEE

JANUARY 2008

AMERSHAM

The market town of Amersham is situated in the south east corner of the Chiltern Hills, astride road and rail routes from London to Aylesbury and beyond in Buckinghamshire. It is made up of two main settlements, Old Amersham and Amersham-on-the-Hill, formerly Amersham Common, each with distinctive characteristics, plus ancillary settlements of Chesham Bois and Little Chalfont. Old Amersham is placed in the valley of the River Misbourne, around a core of 16th and 17th Century houses along a wide main street, previously a coaching highway.

Much of that part of the town is defined as a Conservation Area, and is a popular tourist attraction, complete with a thriving museum. Amersham-on-the-Hill is, as its name suggests, sited on the hill above the Misbourne valley. It blossomed as a residential centre in the late 1800's/early 1900's when the railway from London was routed along the ridge, and subsequently expanded dramatically as London Underground pushed their Metropolitan Line extension through to Amersham.

The two parts of Amersham are linked by Station Road and Rectory Hill, separated by Parsonage Wood and by Ruckles Field, a large open expanse on the hillside. Beyond much of the town boundary the land is designated Green Belt and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In the main, Amersham limits are defined by woodland and farmed fields within the Green Belt.

Natural environmental landmarks are mostly woodlands, as befits its location in the Chiltern Hills. Woodland areas include Parsonage Wood, Hervines Wood, Chesham Bois Common, Stanley Hill Wood and Willow Wood. A very significant landmark is Ruckles Field, mentioned previously, a farmed and well maintained field on the hillside between Amersham Old Town and Amersham on the Hill. It is a magnificent sight at all stages of the year from Gore Hill – on the A355 approach to Amersham from the south.

The Amersham Parish 2001 Census Population Fact Sheet updated to mid year 2007 available online at www.chiltern.gov.uk, estimated a population of 17,719, only 2.4% inactive economically, with a total of 7,493 houses. Car ownership totalled 10,414.

The Health Profile 2007 for Chiltern, which is available online at <http://www.communityhealthprofiles.info/index.php> indicates the wards covered by the Market Town Health Check (Amersham Town and Amersham on the Hill) as being in the least deprived 25% in the country. Health is strongly correlated to educational achievement and wealth. The combined Life Expectancy is significantly higher (83.6 years old) against a national average of 77.8 years old.

Buckinghamshire as a whole has high GCSE achievement, significantly higher than the national average. The secondary schools in the area are Doctor Challoner's Grammar School (boys), Doctor Challoner's High School (Girls) and The Amersham School (mixed). All are highly rated by Ofsted and perform well when compared to other secondary schools nationally.

TOWN CENTRE REVITALISATION

In the late 1990s Chiltern District Council encouraged the establishment of Revitalisation Groups for the larger settlements with the obvious objective of consulting and consolidating local opinion on aspects of the community which by improvement or new introduction could enhance and revitalise towns and town centres.

Membership of these Groups comprised local community organisations, local council elected representatives and individuals interested in contributing to the improvement of their community. The Groups are independent of the District Council but receive a small amount of annual funding.

It was early understood that funding for improvements would be required and that local Councils would not be able to provide this in any great measure. To achieve funding from external agencies and sources, a documented, formal appraisal of all facets of the community would be required, drawing together the collective views of all those who live, work and play in the area.

During the spring of 2004 the three settlement area of Old Amersham, Amersham on the Hill and Little Chalfont joined together to work on an appraisal process. This took the form of community consultation on Saturday mornings in May and June in all three areas and resulted in a document entitled "Amersham Community Vision". This identified a number of commonly identified key themes and shared priorities.

The joint activity ceased late in 2004 as Little Chalfont had ambition to become an independent Parish, leaving Old Amersham and Amersham on the Hill to continue the consultation activity in a Market Town Health Check. Amersham is classified as a Market Town.

THE KEY THEMES AND SHARED PRIORITIES

- A sense of community
- Accessibility to green open spaces
- Choice of shops
- Linking of education, training and employment
- A solid community infrastructure
- Integrated public transport
- A town of character
- Regeneration of shopping areas
- A sound local economy
- A vibrant social mix
- Best access to services
- Effective communication between all who live, work and play in the Amersham area

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY ASPECTS

Objective: To assess the amenities and community facilities currently available and required for future improvement

- **The population is expected to decline by 10% over the next 15 years. There is a tendency for a higher percentage of older people, lower of young people and more elderly living alone. The population will include a higher proportion of professional and managerial skills level, and a lower percentage of skilled and semi-skilled workforces.**
- **The housing stock is of predominantly medium/larger dwellings (4-6 rooms), currently with 80% owner occupation, 13% social housing and 7% rented. There is a significant need for affordable housing and for smaller units for instance to serve elderly people downsizing.**
- **On primary health care it is felt that weekday needs are met satisfactorily but out of hours and weekend care is limited. There are concerns regarding the remoteness of major services, especially with maternity and A&E relocated to Stoke Mandeville. The cost of attendance and visiting by public transport is extremely significant. Dental care is met by an adequate number of practitioners, but there is a lack of NHS service.**
- **Fire and Ambulance services are effective and respected. Police presence and response is considered patchy – improvement in this area is vital.**
- **More effective communication is required to explain the different levels and services provided by Local Government – and preferably a more integrated public face developed.**
- **There is a need for more youth facilities, play facilities, green and open spaces. In particular, some local facilities including Raans Field, Community Centre and Chiltern Pools are valued and must be supported.**
- **On the Arts front, there is a vibrant culture and heritage life led by enthusiastic individuals and societies. The lack of a sizeable, modern hall is an issue in this scene.**
- **Legal services locally are generally adequate and the CAB provides good support to the community – funding of the CAB is of particular concern.**

ENVIRONMENT ASPECTS

Objective: To assess the quality of the environment and existing facilities and improvements needed to enhance where we live, work, rest and play.

- Town centres – there is particular concern regarding the lack of improvement in Amersham on the Hill town centre. Excess traffic and parking, limitation in variety of retail outlets and generally shabby appearance must be addressed to enhance community spirit and pride in the centre.
- To a lesser extent, this applies to the Old Town, although that is also constrained by its designation as a conservation area. The Old Town's most significant problems are excessive motor traffic and lack of parking facilities.
- Despite the access to Green Belt beyond the town boundaries, there is still a limitation on the availability of open space within the town. King George V field, Hervines Park and Barn Meadow are vital spaces well maintained by the Town Council but there is a need to preserve and protect any other space.
- Woodland is accessible to the public, contains good specimens of trees and wild life, and is well maintained within the current limitations of equipment and staffing. Investment in maintenance equipment would further improve the situation.
- Smaller spaces could be improved with some landscaping – entry into the Britain in Bloom will encourage this. Cemeteries are of good quality and allotments are in the main, heavily used.
- Litter problems are minimal on main roads, but more problematic on other routes. Railway station, supermarkets and fast food site create a big litter problem. Spasmodic outbreaks of graffiti on walls and road signs are also a problem.
- Recycling is improving enormously, with many more residents becoming environmentally aware and actively participating in new initiatives. Nonetheless, there is need for the local authority to be flexible in its methods – particularly in Amersham Old Town.
- Tourism – there is no overarching strategy on this, and limited information. There appears to be need for more hotel accommodation – which could spawn other services such as conference facilities etc. Town signage is adequate, but shabby, and better attention is required to other street furniture and to building facades.

ECONOMIC ASPECTS

Objective: To assess the strength of the local economic framework and indicate areas for improvement.

- **Amersham enjoys a strong job market with low unemployment. 67% of working age population living within the town work elsewhere – and a similar proportion of those working within Amersham do not live here. The job market does not rely on any single major organisation.**
- **A large proportion of the employment within the town is not remunerated sufficiently for those employees to live within the town. The cost of property drives younger people away.**
- **Business support services are limited; greater communication with local government is needed. A greater understanding of the process of collection and subsequent allocation of business council tax by small businesses would also be of value.**
- **There is a good level of education and training available locally, but not taken up by small businesses due to cost, and reluctance to release staff.**
- **Retail outlet variety has improved over the last 5 years, with low levels of empty premises and an influx of national brands, but there are still gaps in provision. Larger premises are scarce – but there is expansion/redevelopment space suitable for further industrial/commercial use.**
- **Tourism is still underplayed despite the attractiveness of the area to visitors and a significant drive in this field would be welcome.**

TRANSPORT ASPECTS

Objective: To improve access to local amenities, local communities and larger towns – and reduce congestion

- **Amersham on the Hill town centre suffers from excess traffic and some indiscriminate parking. Development of a one-way system would improve safety and comfort for pedestrians, enhance the town centre, and create more controlled short term parking.**
- **Parking limitations are a very significant problem in the Old Town and to a lesser extent in Amersham on the Hill. There is a short and medium term need for additional parking facilities in both parts of the town which will require significant investment. Other moves are also important – encouragement of commuters to use alternative travel, car sharing etc.**
- **Generally there is a need for more responsive public transport to enhance current rural and town bus services; and to provide service where no conventional service is financially sustainable, and accessibility to essential services/locations is difficult.**

A taxi/bus service to feed the railway station would be of value, as would a service connecting Little Chalfont, Amersham Old Town and Amersham on the Hill.

- **A prime focus for transport improvement is for congestion management on the A416 from Station Road, Amersham to Berkhamsted Road, Chesham.**
- **Emphasise the importance of School Travel Plans/Workplace Travel Plans and installation of Cycle Stands – all to reduce traffic congestion, air pollution and increase safety of pedestrians especially children**
- **Ensure that train services are maintained – especially the link Little Chalfont/Chesham – to increase the use of public transport and reduce road traffic congestion**

ACTION PLAN

A list of Actions, developed from the above findings of the Groups, and tested on the public, is the next step to fulfil the Vision.

The action list is a living document, which reflects changes in the market town as they occur, and continues to represent the main interests of people living in the market town.

The current action plan is based upon the community feedback on the interim vision summary report and the findings of the subgroups for Social and Community, Environment, Economics and Transport.

Review Process

Amersham Action Group and Old Amersham Community Revitalisation Group have both considered the draft at their spring 2007 meetings from which feedback was incorporated.

Similarly, members of Revitalisation Groups consulted with their own organisations during summer 2007 and their feedback included.

Finally the Action Plan was tested at an Open Day in Sep 2007 visited by approximately 200 local residents who indicated their levels of support and identified priorities.

Next Steps

The final draft once accepted by the Revitalisation Groups will then be sent to stakeholders for their review and acceptance as appropriate.

Also, community groups, where they are specifically interested, will be asked to consider taking the lead role in a project. We also need to identify a MTHC link person for such projects.

It is important to consider key priorities in each subgroup that can be delivered by March 2009 and longer term projects that the community should aspire to, so that we can maintain the momentum of the work so far undertaken.



AMERSHAM MARKET TOWN HEALTH CHECK

ACTION PLAN – January 2008



1 SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY					
No.	Project	Description	Priority	Target Timescale	Proposed Sponsoring Revitalisation Group
1.1	Play Ground	Seek sponsorship and confirm site to install a Children's Play Ground in Fieldway/Piggots Orchard	Medium	2008 - 2009	OACRG
1.2	Raans Field	Lobby Councils and encourage public support to retain maximum possible area of Raans Field for public open space, children's play and youth facilities	Very High	2008 - 2009	AAG
1.3	Restaurant/pub in Amersham on the Hill	Encourage the establishment of a family friendly restaurant/pub in Amersham on the Hill within a coherent plan for Amersham on the Hill development (Amersham Vision)	Medium	Ongoing	AAG
1.4	Youth Club Old Amersham	Develop youth club, sports pavilion and community centre in Old Amersham (Barn Meadow). Clarify need and work up partnerships. Agree designs, cost and permissions Seek funding and build	High	2008 – 2010/11	OACRG
1.5	Youth facilities at King George V Rd field	Improvements to existing and development of youth facilities	High	2008	AAG

No.	Project	Description	Priority	Target Timescale	Proposed Sponsoring Revitalisation Group
1.6	Social facilities for Youth - Amersham on the Hill	Conduct a comprehensive study of leisure facilities existing and required/desired – and investigate all possible sources of funding for essential/desirable facilities.	Medium	2008	AAG
1.7	Chiltern Pools	Secure future of Chiltern pools via ongoing contractual maintenance. Support and encourage work of CDC	Very High	2008/2009	AAG
1.8	Sports hall	Develop community access to school sports hall at Amersham School as part of Bucks CC Extended Service to Schools. Also consider possible use of other schools facilities	Medium	2008/2009	AAG
1.9	Multi-use games area (MUGA) Old Town	Seek funding and partnership to develop MUGA facilities for youth recreation in Amersham Old Town.	Low	2008/10	OACRG
1.10	Promote healthy active lifestyles.	Develop joint promotion of leisure services and improve access to services by involvement of County, District and Town Councils to assist with transport coordination, publicising access to facilities and provision of financial incentives where appropriate	Low	2008	AAG & OACRG
1.11	Healthy Living Centre	Seek to develop “Healthy Living Centre” to act as a one-stop-shop for health services in Amersham on the Hill. Review pressure on Amersham on Hill Health Centre - partly due to parking limitation. Needs focus on improvement of parking	Low	2008/9	AAG

No.	Project	Description	Priority	Target Timescale	Proposed Sponsoring Revitalisation Group
1.12	Promote and increase out of hours health service	Promote and increase capacity of "Harmony" service	Very High	2008	AAG & OACRG
1.13	Bucks PCT - engagement with community	After demise of Community Health Council, need for other contact PCT/Community. Suggest once Bucks PCT restructure completed invite Bucks PCT to attend AAG and OACRG meetings	Low	Ongoing	AAG & OACRG
1.14	Upgrade Amersham Community Centre	Consider options for increased facilities or redevelopment of Community Centre Amersham on the Hill . The review must be considered in as wide a forum as possible, to develop a plan which will provide the facilities the town needs.	High	2008/10	AAG
1.15	Increase affordable housing in Amersham	See Project 2.10	Medium	Ongoing	AAG & OACRG
1.16	Council Services	Develop integrated council services in Amersham. A number of groups are against splitting services between Old Town and Amersham on the Hill.	Low	2010	AAG & OACRG
1.17	Integration of Library into Chiltern District Council Offices	Chiltern District Council/Bucks CC project. Need to ensure that if current building is freed up this remains part of a coherent plan for any Community Centre and Youth Club redevelopment for Amersham on the Hill	Low	Ongoing	AAG

No.	Project	Description	Priority	Target Timescale	Proposed Sponsoring Revitalisation Group
2.1	Environmental/Sustainable Projects	Promote funding for environmental / sustainable projects i.e. Landfill Tax Credits.	Low	Ongoing	AAG and OACRG
2.2	Planning Gain	Seek “planning gain” for community infrastructure from new dwellings and business development. such as roundabouts, street lighting etc as part of the planning approval process	Low	Ongoing	AAG and OACRG
2.3	Percentage for Art	% of development into community. there is possibility to assign part of planning gain to purchase of Art for public viewing eg murals etc	Low	Ongoing	AAG and OACRG
2.4	Visitor Signage/Orientation	Need to progress recent survey regarding refurbishment/replacement of finger posts; then review town identity signage; sites particularly relevant to visitor interest Need to consider other signs including identity of town at entry roads, directions to Car Parks etc	Low	2008/09	AAG and OACRG
2.5	Design sustainability into new dwellings	Support the design of recycling facilities, energy conservation, water conservation into new house designs. Should be incorporated into Local Development Framework by CDC	Medium	2010	AAG and OACRG
2.6	Commission Streetscape design for Amersham on Hill	Support a study to review and propose revision/upgrade of street furniture, parking, lighting. A subset is study for St Michael’s Church forecourt. Must incorporate traffic management considerations from para 4.2 of traffic subsection - which calls for a one way system for motor traffic, management of deliveries for retail etc outlets etc	Medium	2008/ 2009	AAG

No.	Project	Description	Priority	Target Timescale	Proposed Sponsoring Revitalisation Group
2.7	Commission Streetscape design for Amersham Old Town	A study to review and propose revision/upgrade of street furniture, parking, lighting, Similar consideration as above applies- also the Conservation Area limitations will apply, and reduce the options <i>Note: OACRG may revise priority</i>	Low	2008	OACRG
2.8	Christmas lights	Commission technical review and develop plan for Christmas lights in Amersham Old Town and Amersham on the Hill. Present arrangements do not accord with H&S requirements, and are managed on an ad hoc basis. Should be a specific study, but undertaken under the umbrella of streetscape designs. A common approach on lights will be more economical for both parts of the Town	Medium	2008/2009	AAG and OACRG
2.9	Footpath Improvement	Improve footpath between London Road buildings and River Misbourne by surfacing with tarmac where necessary	Medium	2008	OACRG
2.10	Increase affordable housing in Amersham	Promote projects that include affordable housing Seek/promote mixed use sites such as retail and affordable housing Support the development of practical policies in new Local Development Framework See Project 1.16	Medium	Ongoing	AAG and OACRG

No.	Project	Description	Priority	Target Timescale	Proposed Sponsoring Revitalisation Group
2.11	Anti –social behaviour	<p>Promote reporting mechanism for anti social behaviour and support of probation officers Work with Police to enforce ASB orders.</p> <p>Liaise with the Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG) recently established by Thames Valley Police</p> <p>Action should be focussed on more visible presence of Police, improved use of CCTV, faster advice to retailers of incidents.</p>	High	2008/09	AAG and OACRG
2.12	Graffiti	<p>Support ATC effort and equipment to remove graffiti on public areas. Support police to enforce ASB orders.</p> <p>Also ATC can only deal with public space; private land and buildings are the responsibility of the owner. Support from NAG?</p>	Medium	2008	AAG and OACRG
2.13	Recycling	<p>Seek to increase collections from central collection points or increase number of central collection points</p>	Medium	2008	AAG and OACRG
2.14	Refuse Collection	<p>Review success or otherwise of current refuse collection system</p> <p>Public concerns expressed regarding size of wheelie bins, frequency of collection, storage of bins in some smaller properties especially in Old Town and Amersham on the Hill town centre flats</p>	Medium	2008	AAG and OACRG

No.	Project	Description	Priority	Target Timescale	Proposed Sponsoring Revitalisation Group
2.15	Litter	<p>Review litter collection mechanisms – look to integration of different Councils' responsibilities Possible "Hit squad" for problem areas</p> <p>Develop community litter picks</p> <p>Requires positive effort from three levels of local government to get act together</p> <p>Possibility of motorised sweeper to clean streets more often? Be very aware that "pavement" area is frequently partly the shop/office responsibility!</p> <p>Consider also containment of litter in the Streetscape Design projects above.</p>	High	2008/9	AAG and OACRG
2.16	Parsonage Wood Hervines Wood Stanley Hill Wood	<p>Enhance support for management of woodland. Further investment in equipment would further improve management, and qualify for Woodland Trust/Forestry Commission funding. Support required for ATC to consider this approach.</p>	Low	2008	AAG and OACRG
2.17	Hervines Wood Play Area	<p>Promote the development of a woodland and adventure play area in Hervines Wood. Need initially to clarify location and project then obtain design and costs.</p>	Low	2008/10	AAG
2.18	Join up grounds maintenance contracts	<p>Build on existing agreement and review for new contract 2008/09</p>	Low	2008	AAG and OACRG
2.19	Britain in Bloom	<p>Support Amersham Town Council's entry into Britain in Bloom</p>	Medium	2008	AAG and OACRG

No.	Project	Description	Priority	Target Timescale	Proposed Sponsoring Revitalisation Group
3.1	Economic Development	Support for Economic Development Officer for Chiltern and South Bucks area. Amersham is a potential retail hotspot. Relatively low business rates and retail rent compared to London, but 6 out of top 10 wealthiest post codes in country.	Low	2008/9	AAG and OACRG
3.2	Promote Business Green Assessment	Audit of green issues for business and link this into Environment area of action plan	Low	Ongoing	AAG and OACRG
3.3	Develop an action plan for business training in Amersham	Need training facilities to be accessible. i.e. in Amersham and relatively low cost	Low	2008	AAG and OACRG
3.4	Town Centre Redevelopment Amersham on the Hill	Integration of studies – Streetscape and Traffic with close involvement of developers/property owners aimed at long term improvement in facilities	Very High	2008/10	AAG
3.5	Promotion and Marketing of Town Centres		Low	Ongoing	AAG and OACRG
3.6	Markets – Amersham on the Hill	Review location and quality of weekly market Consider occasional Farmers Market Needs review with charter holder to upgrade stalls, control sprawl, encourage some uniformity in presentation etc. The aim is to increase footfall in town centre – benefits all retail outlets. If Traffic Study proposes Sycamore Road as one way –necessary to relocate the weekly market possibly to Woodside Road Car park.	Very High	2008	AAG

No.	Project	Description	Priority	Target Timescale	Proposed Sponsoring Revitalisation Group
3.7	Amersham Visitor Strategy	<p>Expand Amersham Visitor Strategy into a Chiltern Visitor Strategy (maximise the windfall opportunities of London 2012) Ensure that strategy encompasses other aspects such as local transport, availability of hotel beds etc.</p> <p>Need to pose question who visits Amersham (eg friends & family, tourists, business connections)</p> <p>Visitor Information Centre required?</p>	Medium	2008 2008/09	AAG and OACRG
3.8	Signage on historic buildings; link to promoting walks	<p>Review historic buildings signage and the option of signs for heritage trail. Signs on buildings within Conservation Area are not appropriate, but signage to publicise Heritage Trail walk, associated with enhancement of Amersham Museum leaflet "A Walk Around Amersham", should be pursued. Link with work on Project 2.4</p>	Medium	2008	AAG and OACRG
3.9	Development of large scale event / functional facility in Amersham	<p>Perform an initial review of need and potential economic benefit and viability.</p> <p>Subsequent action will depend on whether facility can/should be incorporated within changes to Community Centre, Amersham on the Hill</p>	Medium	2008 2008 onwards	AAG

No.	Project	Description	Priority	Target Timescale	Proposed Sponsoring Revitalisation Group
4.1	Promote circular bus route for area	Include Little Chalfont, Amersham on the Hill, Old Amersham and Chesham Bois <i>Note: priority to be reviewed</i>	Low	2008/09	AAG and OACRG
4.2	Promote one –way traffic system in Amersham on Hill	Sycamore Road / Hill Avenue North – South being considered in BCC Transport Plan. Must incorporate aspects such as revision of Market location, deliveries to retail outlets, availability of parking	Medium	2008	AAG
4.3	Traffic management for Old Town to be reviewed	Consider range of traffic management options for residents of Old Town, including residents parking permits. This is a high priority project – a subgroup of Old Amersham Community Revitalisation Group has been discussing with County and District Council officers for the past 2 years!	High	2008/09	OACRG
4.4	School travel plans for all schools in Amersham	Develop a sustainable travel plan for each school in the area. Needs attention to the availability and state of footpaths and pavements to enable more access by foot. Particular note re access to St Mary's School.	Medium	Ongoing	AAG and OACRG
4.5	Feed School Travel Plans into CATS review		Low	2008	AAG and OACRG
4.6	Cycling	Develop a Safe Cycling Plan for the area. Identify cycle ways; provision of cycle racks at key points i.e. stations etc	High	2008	AAG and OACRG

No.	Project	Description	Priority	Target Timescale	Proposed Sponsoring Revitalisation Group
4.7	Extend multi storey car park Amersham Station	<p>Review options for extending Multi storey to relieve car parking in Amersham on the Hill. Could be achieved by adding at least one deck over existing open area of car park – Hemel Hempstead a good model</p> <p>Note difficulty of parking at Health Centre – consider possibility of free, short term parking at the multi-storey car park.</p>	Medium	2008	AAG
4.8	Extend Woodside Road Car Park	Encourage Chiltern District Council to continue process of expanding Car Park by purchase of part of back gardens Rickmansworth Road. Significant increase in Car Park area should assist commercial interests – and possibly provide alternative site for weekly market	Low	2008/9	AAG
4.9	Promote local walks	Part of Visitors Strategy deliberations. Needs coordination of Chiltern District Council and Amersham Town Council efforts. Develop links on websites	Medium	2008	AAG and OACRG