

The Natural Environment



The natural environment, as opposed to the built environment, embraces air and water quality, noise pollution, light pollution, disposal of litter and recycling, the use and maintenance of footpaths and woodlands, and the conservation of open spaces, their flora and fauna.

Air Quality

Air quality is considered good in Cambridgeshire; air pollution can be checked by phoning 0800 556677. There are two industrial chimneys visible from the village: one is at the cement works in Barrington, the other at the whiting works at Steeple Morden/Odsey. There is little smoke pollution in Guiden Morden as very few houses use coal fires, wood burning is rarely the main source of heating and the practice of straw burning on arable fields was banned in the 1980s.

Although the Appraisal contained no questions aimed specifically at air quality, asked whether bonfires adversely affect Guiden Morden, only 8% of households responded in the affirmative. The Parish Council issued a statement regarding bonfires in GAMUT for June 2002. This was basically a request to villagers to be considerate of their neighbours if they have absolutely no other way of disposing of *dry* garden waste (please do not burn green/damp material) or other *dry non-toxic material*. Garden waste, along with other organic waste, can now be disposed of in the Green Wheelie Bins or at the household recycling tips at Royston or Thriplow.

Water Quality

Mains water is provided by the Cambridge Water Company. The pumping station at Wendy pumps water extracted from the chalk aquifer. Rainfall for the village is approximately 21 inches per annum.

Anglian Water is the sewerage service provider and there is a sewage treatment works off the Potton Road to the north of the village which also serves Steeple Morden. During 2002/3 there were complaints to the Parish Council of untreated sewage from this plant escaping into nearby watercourses and this issue was taken up vigorously with Anglian Water. Of 297 households responding to the Appraisal, 277 (93%) considered the water supply to the village to be very good, good or reasonable,

while only 14 households felt it to be poor or very poor. Again, of 297 households responding, 263 (88%) felt the standard of sewerage service to be very good, good or reasonable while 14 households found it to be poor or very poor.

Noise Pollution

One man's noise is another's blissful peace; in other words, this is a very subjective topic. Asked whether Guiden Morden is adversely affected by Noise, only 13% of households answered in the affirmative.

This bears out the discussion in Section One, where there are 120 mentions of "peace, quiet or tranquillity" being a major advantage of living in Guiden Morden. Put another way, Peacefulness is rated the second most important environmental feature of Guiden Morden, after its Countryside & Views. There were 475 individual votes for Peacefulness, though many of the younger generation might use its tranquillity as evidence of the village being "dead".



A chestnut tree in Pound Green, believed to be 320 years old

Traffic noise is dealt with in Section Seven.

It is possible that one consequence of the projected extensions to Stansted will be more aircraft noise over Guiden Morden. There were, however, only 8 households that specifically mentioned aircraft when asked in what ways Guiden Morden is adversely affected by this problem.

On a positive note, the renovation of the bells of St. Mary's Church is one of the triumphs of voluntary fund-raising in the Village.

Light Pollution

Living in relatively flat Cambridgeshire allows inhabitants to view big open skies and to see the night sky with its myriad of stars. From this point of view it is useful to ask the question "Have we got too many street lights and security lights in the Village?" as these make the viewing of the night sky very difficult and upset the nocturnal habits of wild creatures. Obviously, this has to be balanced against pedestrians' safety when walking ill-defined paths in the dark.

However, there is no reason for the village to be illuminated to the same standard as suburban Stevenage. Floodlit streets are not in keeping with the character of a rural village. Of 297 households responding, 221 (74%) felt street lighting in the village to be very good, good or reasonable, while 63 (21%) households felt it to be poor or very poor. Unfortunately the Appraisal question did not clarify in what way the street lighting was to be judged. And so we do not know whether, of the 21% who felt it was poor, that was

because there is too much lighting, too little, lighting in the wrong places, or street lights of poor or inappropriate design.

Disposal & Recycling of Litter

20% of households responding to this Appraisal question agreed that litter in the village is problematic. Out walking, one can see crisp bags and drinks cartons blown under hedges. There is a particularly bad problem at the parking area beside the Village Hall, several evenings a week, where broken glass is frequently to be found the morning after an event. Bottles and cans are also strewn across the recreation ground. These are items not sold by the Pub itself, so the blame cannot be levelled at drinkers there. The broken glass is of concern because the Playgroup meets in the Village Hall on weekday mornings and the children sometimes go outside the Hall. The Local Authority provision for street cleaning is not adequate where such off-road litter is concerned.

Dog mess was considered a problem by twice as many households as found litter a problem. There was one mention of dog mess on the Craft but, other than that, we have to guess where the mess is worst. Dog mess should not be a problem because we rarely, if ever, see dogs without owners. So, if all owners were to carry plastic bags and use the bins, now green rather than red, the problem will go away, in the same way as litter will go away if we take it home in our pockets.

Recycling

There is a bottle and paper bank in the Three Tuns PH car park. The village receives money from the paper and glass recycled, a portion of which goes to the charity "Wheels for Martin's Friends".

The St. Mary's Church Floodlighting committee collects aluminium cans. Tins and cans made of other metals can be recycled using the fortnightly Kerbside Recycling collection of paper, glass containers, cans and textiles.

Asked in the Appraisal what additional facilities for recycling they would like to see in Guildden Morden, 99 households made positive suggestions, 88 of those being for more recycling. This was, of course, before the introduction of the new wheelie bins. Half of those 88 agreed that the idea of a village compost point (suggested in the questionnaire) was a good one. The disposal of garden waste and smaller tree loppings is now covered by the newly-introduced wheelie bin service but not everyone is a convert to composting; certainly, without a powerful shredder, tree branches cannot be composted. While they can be taken to the Household Recycling tips at Royston or Thriplow, if the gardener has no car, or if the branches are too big for the car, they probably have to be burnt – but does everyone have a space suitable for a large bonfire in their garden? In the opinion of the Appraisal Group, the recent introduction of kerbside collection of organic garden material should provide a useful facility for most households, but does not necessarily obviate the need for a village compost facility, which could offer low-cost (or even free) soil conditioning material for local residents.

32 households wished to recycle clothing. Since the questionnaire was circulated, the Kerbside Recycling Scheme allows clothing and other textiles to be collected fortnightly.

Only 12 households requested plastics recycling. Cambridgeshire Local Authorities continue to investigate options for plastics recycling but state that the process involves excessive cost both to the local Councils and to the environment. The basic economics involved are: £250 per tonne to collect, clean, sort and bale each tonne of waste plastics; the average value of 1 tonne of recycled plastic is £110; thus it could cost the council £140 to recycle each tonne of plastic while income from plastics varies between £40 and £150 per tonne.

However, the Appraisal Group is pleased to note the introduction of recycling facilities for plastic drinks bottles at the Recycling Centre in the car park at Tesco's Royston store.



Church Lane bridleway

Maintenance of Footpaths and Hedges

The Parish Council works in partnership with the County Council to manage and maintain the paths in the village. The PC, supported by many residents, keeps a watch on the paths' condition and, each year, the PC bids for funding for improvement/maintenance of the paths. The responsibility for keeping clear footpaths over private land ultimately rests with the landowner, so the PC has to get agreement from them to carry out works.

Of 592 individuals who responded to the question, only 65 people said that they never use local footpaths, while 527 (89%) said they used them either frequently or occasionally. However, it is possible that there was ambiguity between the words pavement and footpath and this latter figure may therefore be inflated. When asked specifically if overgrown footpaths adversely affect Guildden Morden, almost 30% of responding households said 'Yes'.

The Parish Council manages all the hedging around the Craft, cemetery and recreation ground, and some, with permission of landowners, adjacent to parish footpaths. Cutting is always done at times that do not interfere with nesting birds. The Appraisal questionnaire elicited only 4 suggestions that hedge maintenance in the vil-

lage could be improved, while 2 people suggested the re-instatement of hedgerows which have been grubbed up.

Roadside verges are owned and maintained by the County Council. If any changes are requested, such as tree, bulb or flower planting, as suggested in answers to several Appraisal questions, it has to seek the Parish Council's views and permission and vice versa. It is the County Council that decides which verges to mow and when. There were a very few references in Appraisal responses to untidy grass verges. It is worth mentioning here that Councils everywhere are introducing more environmentally-friendly grass-cutting regimes. This is to prevent precious wild flowers from being cut down in their prime, before their seeds have ripened and fallen. Indeed, certain verges, such as on the road from Bygrave to Baldock, are now protected because of the indigenous flora.

There were several disgruntled comments about cars parking on verges, lorries and farm machinery churning up verges, and pavements being blocked by cars putting two wheels on the path/verge.

Conservation of Open Spaces

There is very little woodland around Guilden Morden, Cambridgeshire being the county with the fewest trees in the UK. A few years ago, Guilden Morden residents, together with residents of Steeple Morden, raised money towards the purchase and planting of 'Tween Towns Wood', near Morden Hall, managed in perpetuity by The Woodland Trust. Residents also helped with the tree planting, although the questionnaire showed that 68% of respondents never use the woods. It is possible that this is because the wood is not yet mature. But it is interesting to note that 23 households suggested the planting of even more trees to make the village itself, or the surrounding countryside, more attractive.

A recommendation regarding tree planting is brought annually to the Parish Council by the Tree Warden. This is considered, bearing in mind the future maintenance costs. Each year the County Council offers the Parish Council free hedging and trees. This offer is usually taken up to further enhance the village.

The Craft, an area of land to the north of the Church, is owned by the Church and is tenanted and managed by the Parish Council. The area is managed as meadowland and part is laid out as allotments which the Parish is obliged to provide to residents as required. This land is under Countryside Stewardship and this provides funds which are administered through the Townlands Charity. The result is a pleasant open area in the centre of the village which is not only actively managed but is also afforded protection against development in the current Local Plan (see Section 11).

The Appraisal unfortunately omitted to ask a question about Allotments. For information, there are currently 12 plots of varying size on the Craft, and there is usually a small waiting list for vacant plots. In the event of a vacancy when there is no name on the list, then a notice is placed in GAMUT.

Two further amenity areas lie outside the village, to the south of the Parish. Comprising the Ruddery Pit, which is managed to preserve the local plants and

wildlife, and The Vineyard, an area of some 3.5 acres off the Ashwell Road, these two areas are also maintained by the Parish Council under the Countryside Stewardship scheme.

The open space whose use is potentially controversial is Town Farm Meadow, currently enjoying Government 'Set-Aside' payments and left "wild" by the owner, who has sought to sell it for residential development. A significant group of Appraisal respondents wished it to be purchased for the village and turned into a village green. Others wished to keep it as it is; i.e. a wild green space. There is another school of thought that feels a happy medium would be more appropriate; i.e. keep it as a meadow, with large trees and mown grass paths. The question of where the village would get the money both for purchase and for subsequent maintenance of the site is, as yet, unanswered. Fundraising is one option, but there is a finite number of causes that the residents can support at any one time.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The village is quiet and peaceful. Residents, apart from some of the youngsters, do not want to lose that aspect of village life. Unfortunately, we live in a world where noise is on the increase. The large number of house extensions and home improvements that are being carried out at present is a case in point. Future development will only add to the problem.

Residents are happy with the quality of the water and air; smoke from bonfires is another matter.

There is a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the street lighting in Guilden Morden, but without more probing it is impossible to know what residents really want in terms of further illumination. There is a danger that the village will become floodlit at night, particularly if any more inappropriate security lights are employed.

At the time of the Appraisal questionnaire, a fair number of people asked for more recycling points in the village. It would be interesting to re-visit the whole question of recycling now that the kerbside recycling scheme has been implemented. A village composting facility could still be investigated to supplement the kerbside arrangements, as an effective means of providing a local source of compost for villagers.

Residents are satisfied with the hedge trimming around the village, but feel that footpaths could be cleared more frequently. Verges, too, come in for criticism but more from the point of view of cars parking on them than from the grass-cutting angle.

Residents want more trees and hedges in and around the village. They would like to see the approaches to the village enhanced with spring bulbs and wild flowers.

Town Farm Meadow is a controversial site, which will need sensitive handling in any future development plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- We suggest that the Parish Council instigates a 'Village Footpath Clearance' day, along the lines of the Parish Clean-up days. Also that the number of Parish Clean-up days each year is increased.
- We suggest that local schools carry out anti-litter campaigns.
- We believe that villagers should be further encouraged to take responsibility for cleaning up after themselves and their dogs. In support of this, the existing powers of prosecution for litter and dog mess offences should be more actively used.
- We recommend that the Parish Council (or interested others) publishes a set of leaflets showing local footpaths, together with suggested walks to be taken using those footpaths, and also showing places/things of interest en route.
- We suggest that the school might collaborate with the Parish Council in planting days each autumn. One approach to the village could be chosen each year. Bulbs and/or wild flowers could be donated by parents and other interested residents.
- We recommend that the Parish Council encourages full use of the current fortnightly kerbside recycling scheme and that collection dates for recyclables are published in every edition of GAMUT. The recycling arrangements should also be fully described in any Welcome Pack for new residents.
- We suggest that residents who are already recycling converts should be encouraged to begin a strategy of reduction (e.g. reduction in purchases, reduction in packaging, etc.) and re-use (e.g. of plastic containers in the fridge rather than plastic film, take-away containers for freezing, etc.). Over time, reduction and reuse should have a far greater impact than recycling on the village's waste problem. These strategies also use no energy, whereas recycling always uses energy for cleaning, sorting, processing, transport, etc.
- We suggest that residents with suitable plots should be encouraged to try composting garden waste that does not have to be burned. Those with shredders can chip and shred tree branches and compost the result, or use it as mulch.
- We recommend that a suitable site for a village compost point is identified and that the County Council is asked for help to manage the project under the Master Composter Scheme. Funding may be obtainable via Landfill Tax credits.
- While bonfires cannot be eliminated completely, residents should be encouraged to minimise nuisance to neighbours.