



The Youth View

The Appraisal Group was anxious to obtain the perspective of younger people on village life in Guildden Morden, and to this end six questions were targeted specifically at those in the 11-18 age group. We were pleased that these questions attracted some 71 individual responses.

Positives

Questions Y1 and Y2 attempted to define those aspects of the village that young people most like and dislike. There were some surprising results. On the positive side, 12 respondents specifically referred to the attractive countryside setting – notably the open spaces in which to play – and almost the same number referred to peace and quiet (not entirely expected from the younger generation!) – but with the slant that they welcomed the relative absence of people and the lack of “hassle” associated with a more Suburban living style. Other attractions proved to be the Recreation Ground, the School, the relatively safe environment and the friendly community atmosphere. Looking at the responses in an opposite way, 7 respondents specifically said that, in their view, there was nothing attractive about the village at all and 14 actually failed to respond to question Y1, implying that they could find nothing positive to say about village life. In terms of organisations designed to reach the younger population, three mentioned the pubs, while two mentioned the Church and just one referred to the Youth Club.

Negatives

It was in the disadvantages that the most interesting responses were found. The lack of a village shop/post office was far-and-away the greatest downside with 24 specific references, some of which mentioned the fact that it is necessary to travel some distance to reach any shops that appeal to younger people. There was also much interrelation between negative issues. For example, 18 respondents bemoaned the fact that there is little or nothing for younger people to do in the village, while four others regretted that there is no meeting point or facilities for teenagers and four more referred to the lack of sports facilities and clubs; one made the illuminating comment that “football and cricket is all – nothing for us girls” – another said that “playing in the road is no fun at all”.

Some young people saw village living as “isolated” and others felt distanced from their friends (mainly in Cambridge) – the other side of the same coin were those respondents who referred to the lack of public transport, the need to depend upon parents to ‘escape’ from the village and their inability to get out and about on their own. Other interesting mentions were the lack of Channel 5 TV reception, that the Youth Club meets only once a month and the lack of available paper rounds as a way of earning pocket money (“the same people always get them”).

These findings were reinforced by responses to subsequent questions. 55 (77%) of those youngsters who

What do young people see as the advantages of living in Guildden Morden?

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|----|
| Countryside/nice setting | - | 12 |
| Quiet and peaceful | - | 11 |
| Recreation Ground | - | 10 |
| Friendly community atmosphere | - | 7 |
| School | - | 6 |
| Safe environment | - | 5 |
| Nothing at all | - | 7 |

And the disadvantages?

| | | |
|--|---|----|
| No shop or post office | - | 24 |
| Nothing to do | - | 18 |
| Lack of transport | - | 17 |
| Isolation | - | 8 |
| No meeting point or facilities for teenagers | - | 4 |

Is there enough for young people to do in the locality?

No - 55 Yes - 12 Don't know - 4

Are there problems in travelling out of the village (and getting back) in the evenings or at weekends?

No - 23 Yes - 47 Don't know - 1

Are the views of young people adequately taken into account in decisions effecting the village?

No - 41 Yes - 3 Don't know - 27

What new facility for young people would you most like to see in the village?

| | | |
|--|---|----|
| Shop/PO/food outlet | - | 21 |
| More sports facilities and clubs | - | 13 |
| Tennis court | - | 10 |
| Basketball | - | 6 |
| Skateboard/roller blade park | - | 5 |
| Aerobics | - | 1 |
| Swimming pool | - | 1 |
| Multi-functional sports area | - | 1 |
| More regular/better resourced Youth Club | - | 7 |
| Better public transport | - | 4 |
| Evening buses | - | 1 |
| Bus link to station | - | 3 |
| Improved children's play area in Rec | - | 3 |

How would you go about improving the representation of young people in local affairs?

- See Section on Local Governance

responded to Question Y3 said that there is not enough for young people to do in the locality, while, in response to Y4, 47 (66%) said that they have problems travelling out and back from the village in the evenings and at weekends. (The Appraisal Group suspects that this latter figure would be much larger if those who responded 'No' to travel problems did not have parents willing to act as unpaid taxi drivers!) Interestingly, the issue of lack of facilities for teenagers is fully recognised among adults, 138 of whom responded 'No' when asked if the village provides young people with sufficient opportunities for social contacts and leisure activities (compared with only 15 who answered 'Yes' to the same question). Yet nothing has been done about this longstanding issue, apart from a Youth Club once a month, a youth football team and a Scout Troop. Small wonder, then, that young people are generally negative about country living.

Facilities for Young People

Invited to suggest what facilities might be provided for teenagers, the response was again somewhat unexpected. Top of the Pops, with 21 mentions, was a desire for a village shop, post office or food outlet – perhaps (as suggested by one respondent) in the new Village Hall and complete, as sought by another respondent, with a photocopier. More 'active' sports clubs/facilities for teenagers was also predictably high on the wish list, even higher if one adds those who specifically referred to facilities for a particular sport. Among the specific facilities sought, it is interesting that a Tennis Court proved most popular, with a facility for Basketball a fairly close second.

Away from sports, a more regular (at least weekly) and better-resourced Youth Club – "like Ashwell" – was clearly attractive to many, and one respondent imaginatively suggested a Youth Café based in the new Village Hall. Independent discussion with the organisers of the existing Village Youth Club has highlighted the constraints imposed on running such a club by the limited facilities of the Village Hall and by the reluctance of parents to support and participate in its organisation and operation. Too many parents apparently see the Club as a convenient "drop off point" for their teenage children, providing them once a month with a welcome few hours of peace and quiet at home!

The issue of transport raised its head here also, with 'better public transport', a 'bus link to the station' and 'evening buses' all being prominent concerns of younger residents.

Decision-making

Finally, young village people were invited to comment on the extent they felt their views were taken into account when decisions are made relating to the village and its future. Overwhelmingly, the response was negative, indicating clearly a cause for disillusion and disaffection. How this lack of representation might be improved is discussed in the Section on Local Government.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In overview, the Appraisal Group concludes that teenagers are the least well served sector of our village community. Local decision-making rarely takes their views into account and seldom considers their needs. Those whom they see as the primary decision-makers within the village are perceived as 'old' and out-of-touch with the needs and aspirations of the younger generation. "They should actually do what young people want, rather than just pretend to provide for them." Younger people believe that they have no effective means of expressing their views and, in consequence, feel isolated, ignored and, most of all, bored.

How many Parents, attracted by rosy perceptions of rural living, rightly consider schooling provision – particularly for their younger children – when choosing to move to Guilden Morden, yet fail to think of the downsides of village life when those same children attain their teenage years? For those aged 11 and below, leisure and friendship aspirations can invariably be well accommodated locally. There exists a good range of clubs and activities for those below ten years of age. Once a teenager in Secondary or Higher education away from the village, however, there is little that the village can offer beyond the street corner or the pub – neither, we suggest, an adequate or appropriate social provision for the generation of Tomorrow. And compare this with the extensive provision, in terms of clubs and activities, for older people and the elderly of the village. In the words of one respondent, there is simply "not enough emphasis (in the village) on young people." And another commented, "I feel that village children are treated as if we are all the same", emphasising the need for variety in what is provided. Not everyone wants to play football.

Finally, it is clear that nothing is likely to be done to improve the situation for young people in terms of facilities within the village without the direct and sustained involvement of parents in organising and supporting what is being provided. This applies particularly to the development of a re-invigorated Youth Club or Internet Café capable of attracting young people on a regular basis as an alternative to the Pub and the street corner. As this Report goes to press, we are heartened to note an initiative by local youngsters to raise money in village by sponsorship in order to pay for a skateboard "half-pipe" in the Recreation Ground. We wish this initiative success.

The Appraisal Group would comment that they do not believe these issues are unique to Guilden Morden. We are sure that other local villages show similar inadequacy, to a greater or lesser extent, and there is clearly here also a strong case for joint collaboration with those other communities to provide new or enhanced facilities of quality that, by virtue of their wider potential market than simply one village, are more likely to prove viable and sustainable in the longer term.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to redress the balance more favourably towards young people within the village, the Appraisal Group recommends –

- that a Youth Council should be established as a sub-committee of the Parish Council and/or that teenage residents should set up their own Youth Forum, perhaps in conjunction with young people in Steeple Morden and Abington Piggots.
- that provision for young people – and teenagers in particular – should be a priority in the design of any new or refurbished Village Hall, including adequate provision for a regular Youth Club or, preferably, a Café for young people.
- that, with the support of parents, any Youth Club or Café for young people should be available at least twice weekly and, preferably, daily during the winter months – in order to discourage the use of street corners and pubs as primary social gathering points.
- that evening and weekend bus services are available to and from both Cambridge and Letchworth/Stevenage – as the main centres providing leisure and entertainment facilities for young people.
- that active consideration should be given to establishing new village-based clubs and societies in activity areas of likely interest/appeal to teenagers (not purely sport-based) and that existing clubs review their membership and activity base with a view to extending their appeal to the younger resident. The needs and interests of female teenagers should particularly be considered.
- that the young people of the village be further consulted, encouraged and supported to set up their own clubs
- that the village Sports Forum focus on the provision of sports facilities actually sought by younger people, notably the provision of courts for Tennis and Basketball.
- that Guilden Morden work closely with Steeple Morden in establishing new or enhanced facilities for those in their teenage years.