

GULDEN MORDEN VILLAGE

A COMMUNITY APPRAISAL

FINAL REPORT

December 2003

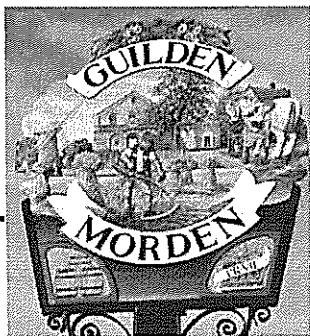
This is the Second - and Final - Report by the Guilden Morden Village Community Appraisal Working Group. Our Interim Report - 'Report Part One' - was published in April 2002 and contained a review of the Data gathered from the Appraisal Questionnaire circulated to all village households in June/July 2001. This Report builds on that earlier report and provides more in-depth appraisal and analysis of the Questionnaire findings, a commentary using further information and data gathered through consultation carried out by the Group since the Questionnaire was circulated, conclusions distilled from that enhanced data and Recommendations formulated by the Group as a basis for future action.

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Community Appraisal Working Group

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Introduction & Overview

Guilden Morden is a village coming to terms with change. Not for well over a hundred years has our community experienced change on such a scale – nor the speed at which it is taking place.

In many respects, we are a village in transition. In 1951, the population of the village was 550; by mid-1986 the figure had risen to 850 and was 900 by mid-1996. The Appraisal responses suggest that the village is now approaching 1000 residents. In little more than half a century, Guilden Morden has moved from being a quiet agricultural backwater, a community with strong local traditions and a clear social order, to one that acknowledges more distant roots, that looks beyond village boundaries for its employment, its leisure and its future and which faces rapidly growing economic and social pressures imposed from Regional and National level. Services and facilities to which we have become accustomed are under threat. Some have already been lost. Others are becoming overburdened by demand.

Guilden Morden is not alone as a community feeling threatened by the pace and scale of change. Many other towns and villages feel equally threatened – some more so than ourselves. This apprehension is fuelled by a recognition that we are too often inadequately represented in the decision-making that is taking place.

This Appraisal was first mooted in the Millennium Year by two village residents who had concluded, independently, that our village lacked a clear vision for the future. Increasingly, decisions affecting our community were being made either on the basis of doubtful evidence or by outsiders without adequate reference to the people most directly affected by those decisions. Management and direction of village affairs was becoming re-active, rather than pro-active. We were grappling with change, rather than successfully leading it.

Meeting the Challenge

In order to meet this challenge, it was important to forge a consensus – a common view as to where our community was going and, most importantly, where the members of that community wanted it to go in the future. The first step was to find out a lot more about what village people were thinking – and what views were on the future for our community. We needed to ask questions. Fortunately, at the behest of Central Government, a new initiative called *Village Appraisal* was being taken up by rural communities throughout Britain. In the context of a political will to see responsibility and decision-making devolved down the chain of governance, the aim was to encourage local communities to take a firmer grip on their own future.

At the Annual Parish Meeting in April 2000, the decision was taken to carry out an Appraisal in Guilden Morden. An ad hoc Steering Group was formed, by invitation, to

prepare for – and carry out – the task. Their work became very public with the distribution of a sizeable Questionnaire to every household in the Village – and to one or two outlying communities – inviting facts and opinions on a wide range of topics relevant to the future of our community. The response was almost unprecedented, with over 83% of households completing and returning the questionnaire. The sheer scale of this response led to its own problems of data handling and analysis, for which both manual and computer-based methods were used.

An interim Report on the Appraisal findings – “Report Part One” – was compiled and distributed to all households in the village at Easter 2002. It was well received.

The Appraisal Questionnaire and its resultant data were never, however, seen as the only components of the Appraisal process. In order to develop coherent and balanced recommendations, it was seen as necessary also to consult widely with individuals and agencies both within and outside the village. The aim has always been to forge conclusions and recommendations that might, with further discussion and development, become the ‘building blocks’ for a cohesive strategy for the future of the village.

This apparently simple aspiration proved far more complex and time-consuming than had been first anticipated. As the months rolled by, villagers could be forgiven for wondering what had happened to the Appraisal!

Democratic Representation

In order to ensure a properly democratic representation of village interests, the ad hoc Steering Group was replaced in July 2002 by an elected Working Group with a formal remit from the Parish Council to develop the Appraisal to a final Report, working in accordance with best practice for Village – re-named “Community” – Appraisals as promulgated by ACRE and the Countryside Agency. Accordingly, the Appraisal Group continued to consult widely – and to give villagers a second chance to air their views on key issues at a Consultative Workshop in March 2003 held in the Chapel Schoolroom.

After nearly eighteen months gestation, this document embodies our final Report.

The Appraisal Group recognises that time has passed since villagers were asked to complete the Appraisal Questionnaire. Life has moved on. Changes have already taken place, and other changes are in the pipeline. However, we do not believe that the data from that original questionnaire – augmented and enhanced by our extensive consultation and discussion in the interim – is in any way invalidated. The Questionnaire responses and their analysis still constitute the principal evidence base for the conclusions in this Re-

port. Where interim change has been significant – or new facts have come to light - we have attempted to reflect that in our narrative.

The Appraisal Group would be the first to recognise that the recommendations contained in this Report are unlikely to attract unqualified support from the whole village community. Life is never that simple. Indeed, were our Report to be received without comment, we would be disappointed. We have given it our "best shot", and we believe that our recommendations provide a positive and realistic basis on which our village can move forward into the 21st Century. We offer our conclusions both to our Parish Councillors and to our village community as a whole as a basis for further constructive debate and, hopefully, for action.

Working with our Parish Council

The Appraisal Group has, throughout the Appraisal, maintained a close working liaison with Guilden Morden Parish Council through two Group Members who were also Parish Councillors. The Group also held an in-depth discussion with Councillors at an early stage in the drafting of this Report. The Parish Council has also (as acknowledged elsewhere in this Report) assisted in the funding of the costs of the Appraisal.

We make no apologies for the fact that this Report contains few neatly-packaged solutions. It raises more questions than it answers. This is to be expected. After all, if the solutions were easy, they would have been implemented by others long before now and this Appraisal would have been unnecessary. Our objective as an Appraisal Group has always been to make a dispassionate and objective assessment, to reach reasoned conclusions and then to formulate recommendations as a basis for decision-making and action. A vision for the future of Guilden Morden, if you like – with the aim of enhancing the quality of village life for today's residents and to improve the sustainability of Guilden Morden as a community in the longer term. We believe that the process should not end with the publication of this Report. In fact, the final Section of our Report embodies our thoughts on the next steps.

We hope that, in compiling and publishing our two Reports, the people of Guilden Morden will feel that we have reasonably reflected their views and that we have done full justice to our village community and to its future.

**THE GULDEN MORDEN VILLAGE
COMMUNITY APPRAISAL GROUP**

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