Identity & Community Cohesion Evidence Paper [EICC]

Part 1: Introduction

What is Identity and Community Cohesion?

Identity

For many of us, the place we live in is an important part of our identity. Surveys usually suggest that local identities are shared across communities that might otherwise be divided by ethnicity or faith.

Usually, we can't know and will probably never even meet most of those who also identify with 'our place'. Our ties are not just shaped by geography but by shared symbols (sports teams, for example), shared histories and landscapes and buildings, amongst others. The idea of an 'imagined community' – a sense of fellowship with others we think share those same stories – underpins these identities.

Community Cohesion

Community cohesion lies at the heart of what makes a safe and strong community. It must be delivered locally through creating strong community networks, based on principles of trust and respect for local diversity, and nurturing a sense of belonging and confidence in local people. Effectively delivering community cohesion also tackles the fractures in society which may lead to conflict and ensures that the gains which changing communities bring are a source of strength to local areas. Community cohesion is, therefore, critical to the quality of life of local people and, as community leaders, local authorities have an essential role to play in facilitating this. Through working with local partners, through influencing local services and through making things happen, local authorities can embed community cohesion principles throughout local life and bring about real change to the lives of the people living in their areas. Building cohesive communities brings huge benefits by creating a society in which people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds can live and work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. Cohesive communities are communities that are better able to tackle common problems, to provide mutual support and to work together for a positive future. A cohesive community is one where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;
- the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued;
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and
- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

1. What the Consultation Survey results shows.

The report shows a Parish that currently has four separate neighbourhoods with several more coming in the future, but which has little community identity and cohesion. The parish has mixed housing, a wide range of age demographics and limited community facilities. It highlights that much work needs to be done to develop a real identity and community cohesion.
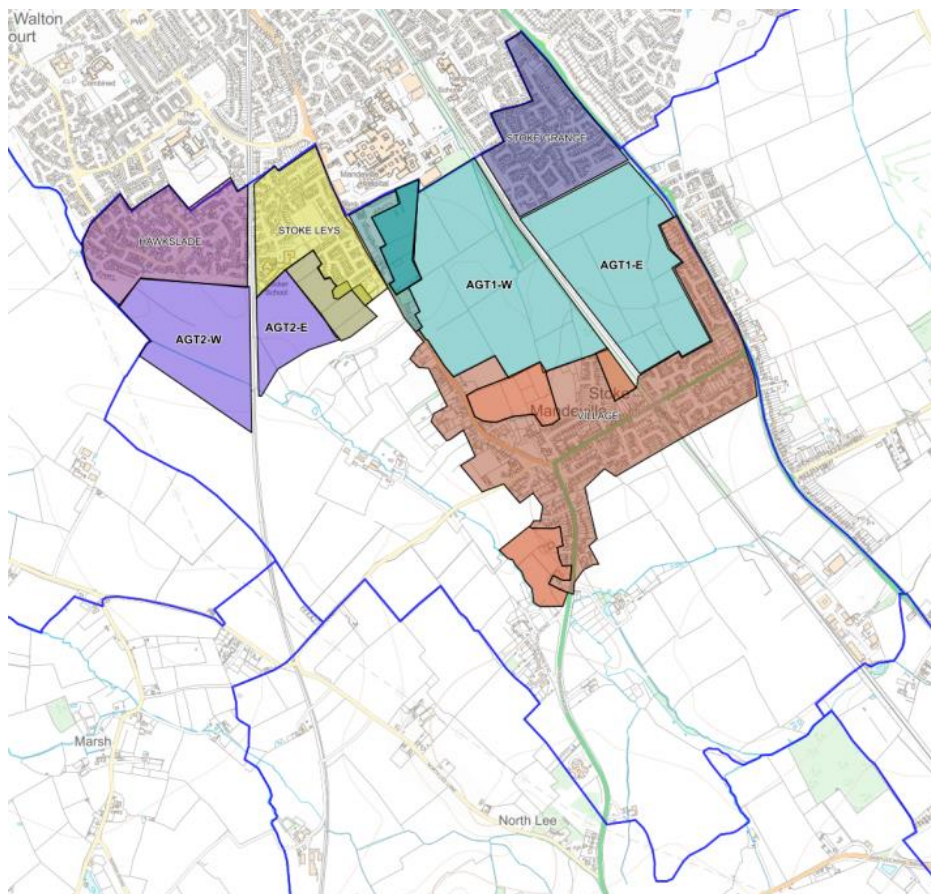
2. What it concludes.

It is clear that work needs to be done to develop the identity and community cohesion across the four existing neighbourhoods and future developments. The Neighbourhood Plan is an

ideal starting point to lay out the principles that could bring about this change. Connecting the neighbourhoods, communicating to them and promoting the vision for the garden parish are key to the success of the plan. Future developments need to be considered holistically with the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services that the community needs. Policies are needed to promote and support healthy lifestyles and to encourage inclusive social interaction.

Part 2: Facts

Historical background & development.

Stoke Mandeville Parish consists largely of post-war suburban housing, mostly built in the last 40 years. It is concentrated into 4 neighbourhoods, the 'Village', Stoke Leys, Stoke Grange and Hawkslade. Currently the Parish is Village centric and as a result, other neighbourhoods in the Parish feel as much connected to Aylesbury as Stoke Mandeville.

Current Situation.

Housing in Stoke Mandeville Parish is mostly detached or semi-detached dwellings with 5.9% of housing in Stoke Mandeville is social housing. This is significantly less than the 17% average for England. From the 2011 census the age profile of residents in the Parish was predominately (67%) of working age, with adults between 30 and 60 making up nearly half (47%) of the Parish population. Children (21%) significantly outnumbered older people of pension age (11%).

In 2011, there were only 3 communal establishments in the Parish, being 2 care homes and 1 social housing hostel. There are now 4 care homes in the Parish and 1 hostel. This growth in care homes is a trend seen in other nearby Parishes and in Aylesbury, and across Bucks as a whole, and the Parish is not exceptional in the number of communal establishments it has.

The Parish consists of four distinct neighbourhoods and strategic development will soon add a fifth and sixth neighbourhood. The Parish has recently seen continuous and massive growth in housing numbers, but no proportionate development of community or leisure facilities and the Parish and its neighbourhoods lack cohesion or a strong sense of identity. The remaining open agricultural land within the Parish is rapidly being taken for development, radically altering the nature of the Parish. For more information about the neighbourhood development within the Parish, please see the Neighbourhood Development Evidence Paper.

Opinion

In 2019 a questionnaire was sent out to all residents and face to face open days were held around the Parish. Views were sought on various aspects of the Parish and the question pertinent to this evidence paper is shown below:

Question: To what extent do you agree that the future Stoke Mandeville Garden Parish should have a clearer structure and identity?

	%
Strongly Agree	65
Agree	26
Neither Agree/Disagree	6
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	2
N=	181

91% 'Strongly Agreed or Agreed' that the 'future Stoke Mandeville Garden Parish should have a clearer structure and identity'.

Comments supporting these figures include:
- All the green spaces are being built on, so a clear structure is required.
- As an historic place with a world-famous spinal injuries unit and hospital named after it, it is important that the Parish retains its character and identity and remains an aspirational place to live and work.
- As noted previously, the lack of cohesive planning of recent new developments has been shocking. A clear structure to the Parish would allow for a central point of the village, building a focal point to prompt community spirit and involvement and the services/infrastructure required.
- At moment doesn't really have much identity?
- If we have no structure and identity, we will be ruthlessly exploited by developers.

Part 3: Analysis and Conclusions

Analysis of the Current Situation.

The Parish has four separate neighbourhoods that do not have a strong sense of cohesion or identity to the Parish as a whole. In the past, development has taken place across the neighbourhoods without a master plan and without a clear vision of developing and strengthening the cohesion and identity of the Parish, in fact the growth was opportunistic and led by developers. The result is four neighbourhoods that are not connected physically or in community leaving the residents having different identities across them.

Objectives.

A key objective of any community should be to develop community cohesion and identity and Stoke Mandeville Parish should be no different. Stoke Mandeville needs to become a strong, healthy and vibrant community with places that are safe, inclusive and promote social interaction.

Conclusions.

It is clear that work needs to be done to develop the community identity and cohesion across the four existing neighbourhoods and future developments. The Neighbourhood Plan is an ideal starting point to lay out the principles that could bring about this change. Connecting the neighbourhoods, communicating to them, and promoting the vision for the Garden Parish are key to the success of the plan. Future developments need to be considered holistically with the social, recreational, and cultural facilities and services that the community needs. Policies are needed to promote and support healthy lifestyles and to encourage inclusive social interaction.