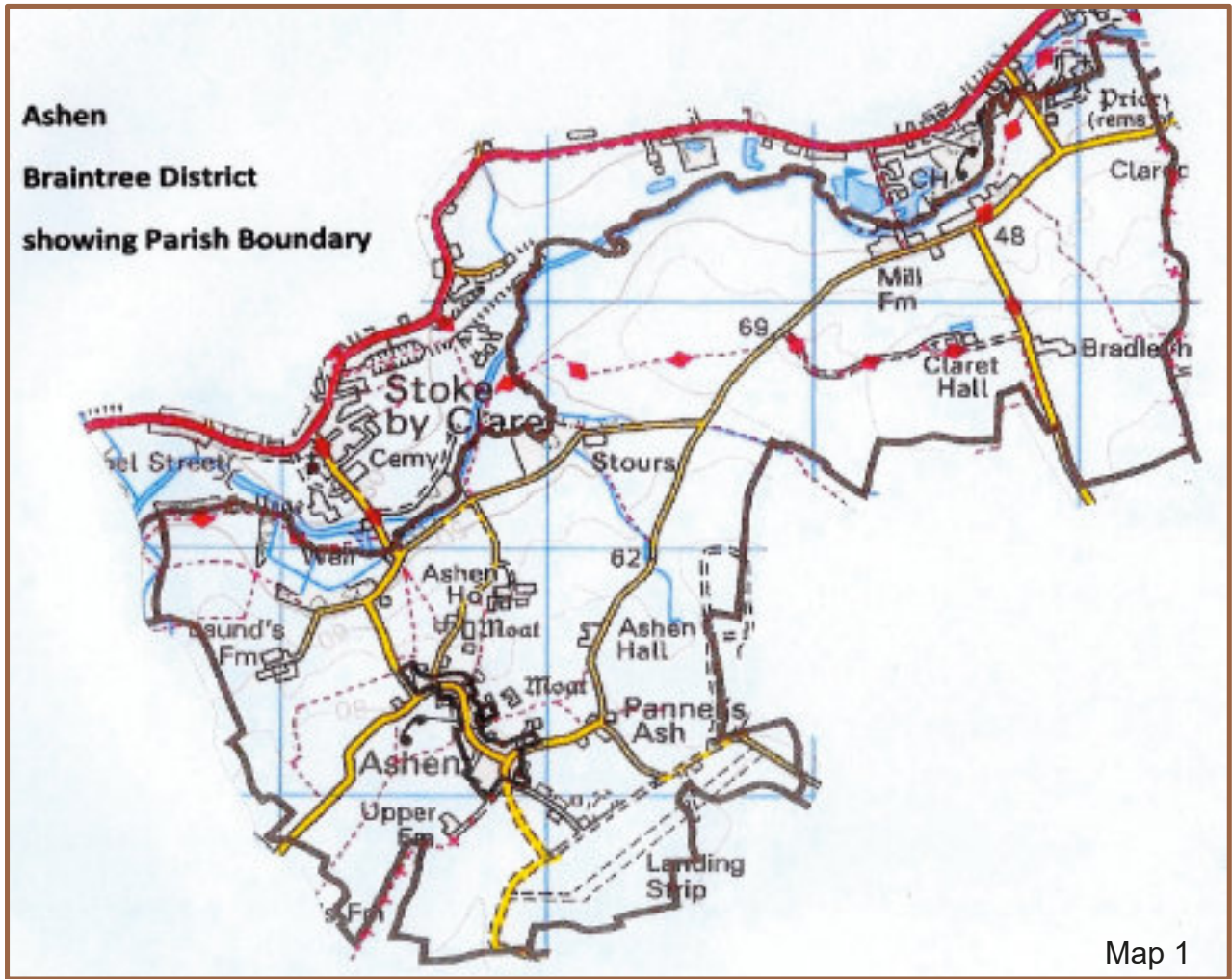


An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, a small village with several buildings and a church spire is visible, surrounded by trees. The middle ground consists of rolling hills and fields in various shades of green and brown. The background shows a vast, flat landscape under a blue sky with light clouds. The text is overlaid on the upper half of the image.

Ashen
Parish Plan
and
Village
Design Statement
2020

CONTENTS

Introduction	4-6
Ashen Parish Plan	
Community,safety and crime prevention	7
Public transport, road and traffic.....	7-9
Footpaths, bridleways and byways	9-10
Amenities, activities and facilities	11-15
Future challenges and community-owned schemes	15-16
Ashen Village Design Statement	
Background	17-19
Form of the settlement as a whole	19
Characteristics of the buildings and spaces	19-23
Opportunities and constraints.....	23-24
Appendix A	
Trees and hedges.....	24
Appendix B	
Listed buildings.....	25
Appendix C	
The VDS survey: options and responses	25-28
Appendix D	
Guidance on building improvements	28
Appendix E	
Guidance on buildings in conservation area	28
Appendix F	
Guidance for owners of listed buildings.....	30
Acknowledgements	Back cover




Map 1

Extract from a map of Essex published "as the Act directs September 1st 1787".



Ashen Parish Plan and Village Design Statement

Introduction and Role of Parish Council in General.

he Parish Council has responsibility to identify the priorities in the Ashen Parish Plan (the APP) and Village Design Statement (the VDS). It will work in partnership with Essex County Council, Braintree District Council and relevant authorities such as the police, and other organisations as appropriate to achieve the chosen priorities. The Parish Council will be responsible for taking forward the policies and proposals in the APP and VDS. It will monitor progress and review it annually. The APP and VDS are active documents intended to provide a framework and guidance for the future of our village. As such, they will be subject to updating and review including further consultation with village residents as appropriate.

The APP and VDS are together in this single document for convenience and economy.



1. What is a Parish Plan?

A Parish Plan is a document that sets out a vision for the future of the parish and identifies actions to achieve that vision. (See Map 1) It is a local, action-based plan which addresses a range of problems and opportunities affecting a rural community. It may also be material in the statutory planning process. The APP has sought to identify features and local characteristics valued by people who live in the village, to identify local problems and opportunities and to set out needs, aspirations and priorities which residents have identified. It includes actions to achieve identified objectives.

1.1 What is a Parish Plan for?

A Parish Plan can help to shape a future that the community wants to see.

- ◇ It identifies areas of concern within the community and highlights what needs to be improved or conserved
- ◇ It can help bring groups and

individuals in the community together to work towards a common goal

- ◇ It can equip the community with the information they need to improve quality of life in the parish
- ◇ It can enable future projects to be planned with the knowledge that they have community support
- ◇ It can improve success in funding applications by providing evidence of community involvement in local projects

1.2 What is a VDS?

A VDS is a document that describes the distinctive characteristics of the locality, and provides design guidance to assist future development and improve the physical qualities of the area.

A VDS describes the character of a particular village or town against which planning applications may be assessed. It is not so much about whether development should take place but provides guidance as to how development should be undertaken so as to respect the local character.

The VDS:

- ◇ is developed, researched, written, and edited by local people
- ◇ seeks to be representative of the views of the village as a whole and has involved a wide section of the village community in its production
- ◇ describes the visual character of the village and demonstrates how local character and distinctiveness can be protected and enhanced in new development
- ◇ is applicable to all forms and scale of development and is about managing change in the village, not preventing it
- ◇ The VDS is intended to help to identify and protect visually important buildings and their settings and other community assets to promote the use of appropriate designs and building materials

1.3 How Ashen Produced its APP and VDS

A Parish Plan is based on information provided through survey, research, consultation and community participation. Following the Rural Community Council for Essex (RCCE) guidelines, the Parish Plan Group (PPG) had an open-to-all approach, using a questionnaire distributed to all households and well-advertised consultations and exhibition held in the village hall. Steps taken included:

- a) A community workshop attended by forty residents was held in the village hall on 1st March 2014, facilitated by Jan Cole, Community Engagement Officer for Braintree District. This set out the purpose of the plan and the processes involved.
- b) Over twenty volunteers met on 27th March 2014 to form the Parish Plan Group. (For a list of those involved who gave their time and support, see

back cover - Acknowledgements). For the sake of economy, given the small size of our community, it was decided to produce a VDS in tandem with the APP as a single document.

- c) A steering group was formed as a sub-committee of the PPG and undertook the drafting of the survey questions and printing of the questionnaire and co-ordinated the distribution in 2015 of the questionnaires to all households in the village and their collection. 142 questionnaires were distributed and 60% of recipients responded with completed forms.
- d) The survey included responses from 11 young persons (under 18). 100% of the responses said that they like living in Ashen. Seven think that they would like to live in Ashen when they grow up.
- e) The steering group was responsible for the budget and finances of the project and for liaison with the Parish Council. They commissioned the processing of the information through the questionnaire using Warwick Network Ltd, and oversaw the work of the publication group (see below).
- f) A publication sub-committee was established, meeting frequently to analyse the findings of the questionnaire and present them for consultation and responsible for the writing and presentation of the final draft, including visual material. They met numerous times, setting up computer shared files to coordinate their work. They organised and staffed two key events to involve residents and give opportunities for feedback and determining priorities for action arising from the survey results: an initial consultation event on two consecutive dates (19th and 20th May 2017) in the village hall and an

exhibition in the village hall (27th June 2017). In particular, the results of the original survey were exhibited seeking comments on the results and any additional views by way of update to the original survey. In the event there was nothing in the responses at the exhibition which departed from the results of the original survey.

the draft presented to them for the purpose of consultation in the village and with other stakeholders.

- i) Following consultation on the 6th January 2020 the Parish Council decided on the final form of the APP and VDS.

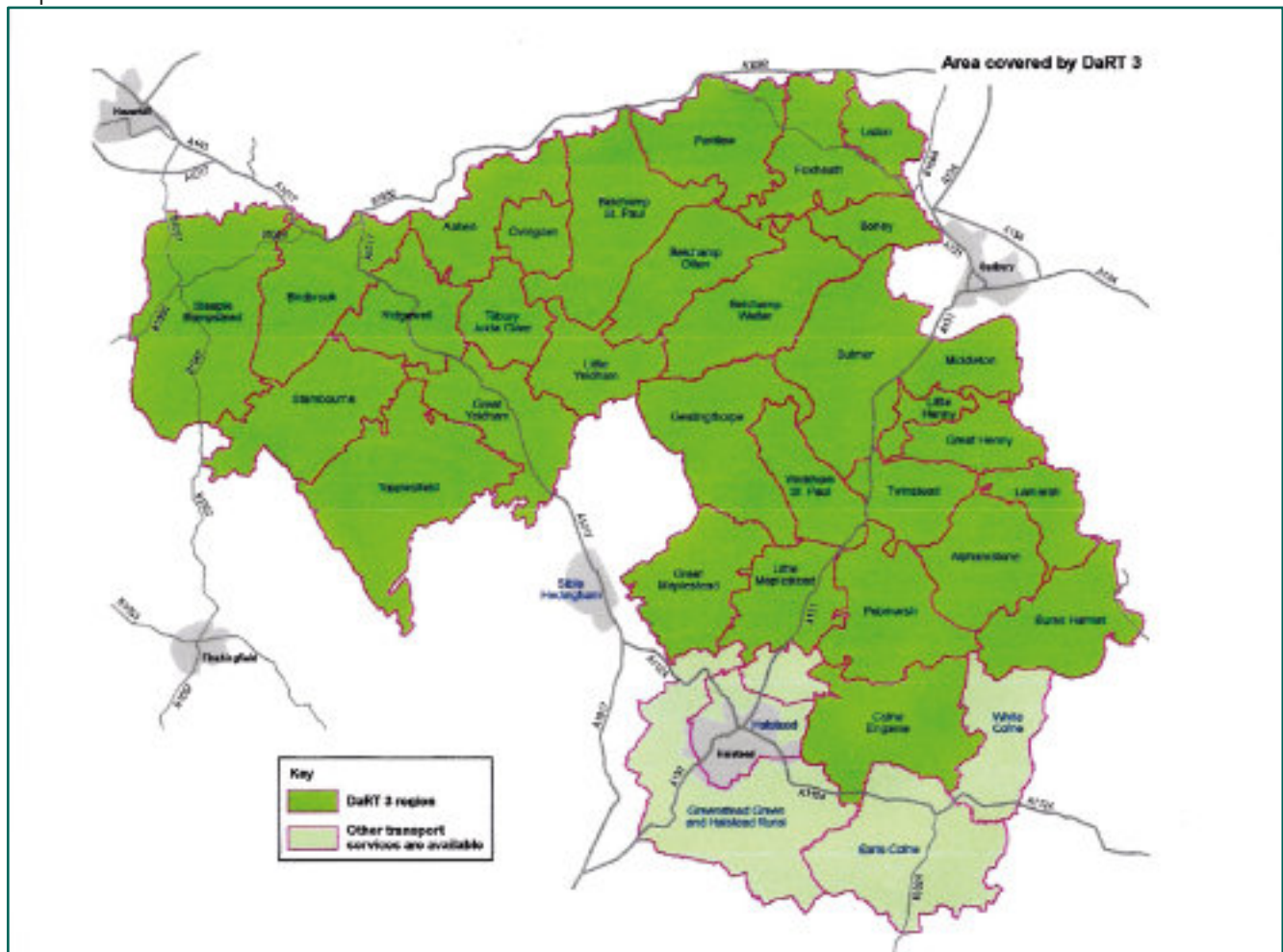
A note on funding:

- g) The publication sub-committee prepared the draft APP and VDS based on the results of the survey and the consultation events and the exhibitions along with other relevant material and presented it to the Parish Council in September 2019.
- h) On 28th September 2019 the Parish Council met and finalised changes to

The RCCE gave a grant of £1500 to the Parish Council to generate the project. The Parish Council set aside £500 as a reserve if required. At a later date, Braintree District Council gave a grant of £750 for the continuation of the work. The plan is expected to be completed and published within budget.



Map 2: DART Bus Service



Ashen Parish Plan



Ashen is a small community. The last census in 2011 showed we had 137 households giving the numbers of residents as 323. With several new additional houses there are now about about 152 households.

Community, Safety & Crime Prevention

Our village, though small and with modest facilities, regularly comes together for various events such as coffee mornings, fund-raising events, exhibitions, concerts and the village fete and shared activities include the pond and orchard maintenance and the village oil buying syndicate. There are undoubtedly many acts of neighbourliness happening throughout the village, probably another contributory factor to why the survey shows Ashen enjoys a sense of community above the national average, something to be celebrated.

There are schemes already available through Braintree District Council that cover

76.81% feel that Ashen enjoys a sense of community, an above average figure: nationally 69% feel "they belong to their neighbourhood" and 70% think "most people in their neighbourhood can be trusted". (Office of National Statistics)

81.34% would welcome organised community support.

personal health and ageing, well-being, safety and transport. West Suffolk and Addenbrookes Hospitals both offer transport for those meeting their

criteria for qualification. Braintree Community Transport Social Car and Dial-a-Ride Scheme is available for people with mobility difficulties.

See website for community transport or Tel: 01376 557883.

Ashen has an active Neighbourhood Watch Scheme with 34 households participating. To

join and help reduce the chance of crime in the village, contact the co-ordinator Alan Rigg, 1 Ashen Close or email him on alanrigg46@hotmail.com

Actions on community, safety and crime prevention:

- 1 Ensure these schemes are known and disseminated, including as appropriate on the website or in welcome packs
- 2 Liaise with the local police team on crime prevention, and the fire service on safety in the home.
- 3 Support community activities in the village

Public Transport, Roads and Traffic

Ashen has a shelter and bus stop outside the village hall but, like many rural communities in recent times, it has very limited access to public bus services. A school bus takes pupils in the village to and from Ridgewell primary school and there are school bus services to other schools in the area. Since the survey was undertaken, regular bus services to Sudbury and Haverhill have been withdrawn when private contractors could no longer justify the service. However, there is now a DART service (Demand and Responsive Transport) funded by Essex County Council operated by Arrow Taxis on advanced booking system, for which bus passes are eligible.

Passengers can travel to and from anywhere

within the parishes shown on the map, between these parishes, and also direct to Sudbury, Halstead and Haverhill town centres, Sudbury train station and health facilities in Clare and Sible Hedingham and Community Hospitals in Sudbury and Halstead. (See Map 2, page 6)

66.6% thought bus services to Ashen inadequate and more would welcome a more frequent service (71.65%)

Most people want better signage for speed limits (66.90%), the playing field (80.28%) and for wildlife awareness (89.28%).

Many want "Thank you for driving carefully through Ashen" signs (70.02%).

80.00% support that HGVs should be restricted and 78.15% that there should be vehicle weight limits.

More than half (60.81%) feel that highway maintenance needs improving and 51.02% that drainage is adequate.

86.18% consider that existing lanes could not support a traffic increase.

8 out of 11 young people (under 18) said that they would not use weekend public transport to Sudbury/Haverhill.

Cleaner roads are wanted (77.40%) and the possibility of snow clearance by farmers should be explored (89.58%).

A regular and frequent bus service between Haverhill and Sudbury goes via Stoke by Clare and Clare and returns by the same route. *Timetables are available online at bustimes.org*

The centre of the village has a speed limit of 30 mph. There was support for better signage for this, as well as for the playing field and for wildlife awareness.

Roads in the parish carry large agricultural vehicles at certain times of year, (often depositing straw or mud as they go). While

this causes real concerns, this is an agricultural area and there is a weight limit on Stoke Bridge which limits the opportunities for access to the farms and other rural enterprises in the vicinity for both drivers and pedestrians. Large vehicles delivering to or collecting from local farms or other premises can damage verges and road surface and be detrimental to the village environment. This is compounded by inconsiderate parking narrowing the space available for passing vehicles. Many of the roads and lanes within the parish are single lane, making their use by large vehicles potentially hazardous to other users. However, any traffic restrictions would have to have regard to the legitimate requirements for access within the parish and in any event are the responsibility of the highway authority. In the past approaches by the Parish Council for a weight restriction have been rejected.

Highway maintenance in the parish is an issue with room for improvement, particularly road drainage, cleaning and snow clearance. This is again the responsibility of the highway authority. The Parish Council regularly seeks work to be carried out by the highway authority where the roads have fallen into disrepair. For that purpose it has appointed a highways officer who is identified on the notice board.

There is volunteer group clearance of vegetation around the Waiver which improves visibility on the bend of The Street. The Parish Council pays an individual for four hours a month to clear litter from the roads and verges, for which it is paid by Braintree District Council (BDC).

Signage on the highway is the responsibility of the highway authority. In the past it has objected to a sign to the village hall at the back of the footway.

Useful Contact Details

To find out about provision of transport for pupils and students in primary, secondary

and post-16 education see essex.gov.uk/Education-Schools/Travel-School/Documents/Education_Transport_Policy.pdf

For DART bus service, contact Tel: 01621 874411 or email: bookings@essexandsuffolkdart.co.uk

Fly-tipping: if the waste constitutes a lorry load or more or contains hazardous waste of any kind or if you see illegal tipping in progress, contact the Environment Agency via the National Incident Control Centre on 0800 807060. If you want to report fly-tipping to the council, there is a form at braintree.gov.uk/info/200203/keeping_the_district_clean/181/report_fly-tipping or phone 01376 552525

Actions on Public Transport, Roads and Traffic:

- 1 Continue to seek the maintenance of the highways through the highway authority
- 2 Consider additional signage for the playing field, speed limits and other management measures and pursue that with the highway authority if appropriate.
- 3 Continue to give publicity for the DART and other public transport facilities.

Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways

Many people enjoy the walks that Ashen offers.

The 60 miles-long Stour Valley Path passes through the edge of the parish on its way from Newmarket to the coast at Harwich.

The byway known as Green Lane from Upper Farm Road to Tilbury Juxta Clare has recently been levelled and cindered making it available for light vehicles.

Footpaths are designated for walkers only. Bridleways are for walkers, horse riders and

pedal cyclists only, but Ashen currently has none. Byways are officially open for all traffic but are often not the same standard as normal roads.

Permissive bridleways had been available, but these permissive paths have been withdrawn as result of their exclusion from the relevant stewardship scheme since the survey was completed. These closures have considerably reduced opportunities for off-road walking and riding.

A large-scale map of official footpaths across and within the parish is available in the village hall. (See Map 3) These are each experienced as a complete route by walkers but, as the map shows, are in fact recorded

86.62% felt existing bridleways are sufficient and 91.09%, footpaths. However, since the survey the permissive bridleways which served the village have been closed so that there are no bridleways in the area.

Continuing maintenance of bridleways was important to many people (84.14%).

75.89% considered that the maintenance of stiles was adequate for most people.

53.90% supported increasing the number of footpaths and 44.99% bridleways, although again this view was expressed before the closures.

officially as over 20 separate numbered paths. For complaints or suggestions to the BDC, these numbers can be used to pinpoint particular areas.

The condition of footpaths and byways is monitored by the parish footpaths officer. The responsibility for the maintenance of the footpaths is for the highway authority including powers to seek that footpath owners keep footpaths over their land in acceptable condition.

Further details of footpaths and public rights of way in the parish can be found on the Essex Highways website:

www.essexhighways.org/getting-around/public-rights-of-way/prow-interactive-map.aspx

The Ramblers Association also publishes information about footpaths and rights of way. See their website: www.ramblers.org.uk

Useful Information:

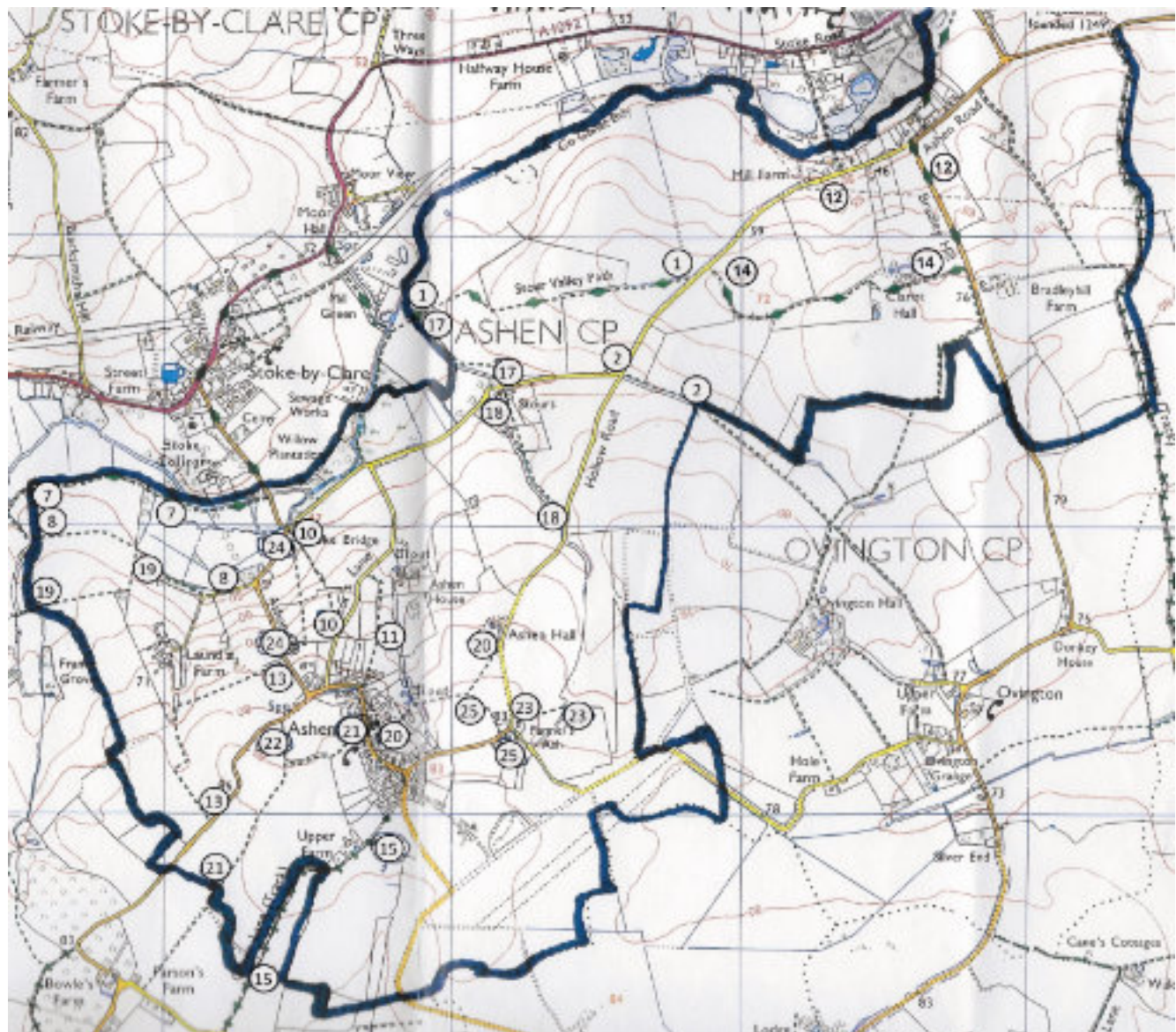
The parish footpaths officer is responsible for monitoring footpaths and receiving any comments from walkers on conditions, (e.g. if they are overgrown) and passing them to BDC/CC to attend to these. The current footpath officer is Velda Ovenden

Actions on Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways

- 1 Consider putting a footpath map on Ashen village website.
- 2 Support the provision of additional bridleways and/or footpaths as appropriate



Map 3 : Footpaths across and within Ashen Parish



Amenities, Activities and Facilities

The Village Hall is well-appointed and situated in the middle of the village. It has good parking and is available to hire for private events, at special rates for Ashen residents. (There is no charge for funeral wakes for residents.) Activities in the Hall include regular art classes, carpet bowls, a regular walking club, coffee mornings and a St George's Day dinner. A glass recycling facility and a defibrillator are sited at the Hall. The notice board at the front has sections for Village Hall and Parish Council notices with a central panel open to anyone to post notices.

Ashen has two working post boxes and a newly restored working Grade II telephone kiosk.

The Parish Council had proposed providing a notice board in Lower Ashen. As part of this exercise all households were canvassed to see if anyone would provide land to set up the notice board without anyone agreeing to do so. The highway authority would only agree to a notice board on the south side of the road but required the provision of a full scale paved area and crossing point which would have made the proposal very expensive, which did not seem to the council a proper use of its public funds. On this basis the Parish Council did not proceed further with the proposal but would be willing to consider any initiative from residents in that part of the village.

The village playing field, recently improved, is well equipped. It has an enclosed area with a variety of apparatus for small



Children's play area in the playing field



Orchard volunteer workers after a hard days toil



The Ashen Equestrian Centre

The village hall "Pop-up Pub" social evening





St Augustine's church at the centre of the village is a fine Grade I Listed church, which holds regular services shared across the Two Rivers benefice, in the diocese of Chelmsford (Ashen, Birdbrook, Helions Bumpstead, Ridgewell, Steeple Bumpstead, Sturmer). It also hosts exhibitions and concerts, various Christmas festivities, and 'messy church' sessions for children. A popular summer fete is held in the grounds, with a barbecue, arts and crafts for sale, a teddy bears' parachute jump from the tower, a treasure hunt and much else. Two Rivers circulates a magazine across its six parishes and a Parish News magazine, shared with Ridgewell, is delivered to every house in the parish as well as a welcome pack for new residents. The churchyard preserves an area for wildlife. The management plan for this is in the church porch noticeboard.

97.22% thought that the Parish Church and Churchyard were a very valuable asset.

The village hall is another much appreciated facility with almost everyone happy to use it (97.16%). There is a call for more activities to take place in it (76.51%) but despite that 54.96% do not wish to be more involved in village activities.

At the time of the survey 59.52% were against extending the village hall. The young (under 18) were evenly divided over setting up a youth club but 60.15% of the adult respondees were in support.

89.32% would like to see a village magazine.

78.94% supported the provision of a noticeboard in Lower Ashen. Almost everybody (97.99%) wanted to see the post boxes retained.

90.23% are happy with the recreation ground and its facilities, and 98.50% think the children's play area is a very good amenity. Some people thought more adult exercise machines would be welcome. These are now in place.

74.59% were interested in having the support of a Good Neighbour's Scheme.

residents. The airfield, known as Ridgewell Airfield, housed RAF and USAAF bombers during WW2. There is a memorial on the Ovington road to lives lost in a 1943 bomb loading accident. A Stars and Stripes was presented to the people of Ashen by veterans of the 381st Bomber Group on the occasion of their return visit to Ashen in 1993 and is on display in the church. To find out



more about this important aspect of our village history, you can visit the Ridgewell Air Field Commemorative Museum. It is open (free entry) every 2nd Sunday of the month from April to September. Oaker Hill, Ridgewell Road, Great Yeldham, Halstead. CO9 4RG. See their website rafcamuseum.co.uk for more information.

children, and zip wire, climbing ropes and football nets for older children and others. The area includes the village orchard. Annual maintenance for the orchard is done by volunteers from the villager, as is maintenance of the village ponds. All but one of the young respondees (under 18) said that they use the recreation ground.

The Essex Gliding Club is situated on the old airfield. It offers discounts for Ashen

There is also an equestrian centre and a rifle range at Pannells Ash.

Many residents said that they would like there to be a village magazine and there is now an Ashen Parish News which is circulated to all households in the village and contains village events. Communication within the village is also via the notice board or flyers and the village website and Facebook page.



Ashen Parish Plan

The village website address is:

<https://e-voice.org.uk/ashenparishcouncil>

The website lists village events and information on the Parish Council. To post information you can get access through the Parish Council. By a simple application, residents can also join the village Facebook page and share posts and photographs of village interest.

The village is now on high-speed broadband, from early 2019. This may have answered the numerous individual complaints expressed in the survey about the previously poor service.

The printed calendar for regular collection of household, garden, recyclables and food waste is delivered by the council annually to all households. For extra copies contact Braintree District Council or download from:

Braintree.gov.uk/downloads/1280/route_1_collection_2018-19

Individual comments in the survey indicate that bonfires and fireworks cause concern.



There are a number of thatched properties in Ashen, an extra reason for residents to take appropriate precautions when lighting bonfires or holding firework parties. There are official guidelines for this, worth noting. You cannot buy 'adult' fireworks if you're under 18, and it's against the law for anyone to set off fireworks between 11pm and 7am,

except on Bonfire Night, when the cut off is midnight and New Year's Eve, Diwali and Chinese New Year, when the cut off is 1am. DEFRA advises that fireworks must not be set off near livestock or close to buildings that house livestock, or near to horses in fields and that anyone planning a firework display in rural areas should warn neighbouring farmers.

There are no laws against having a bonfire, but there are laws against nuisance caused. You cannot get rid of household waste if it will cause pollution or harm people's health. This includes burning it. You could be fined if you light a fire and allow the smoke to drift across the road and become a danger to traffic. Braintree District Council can issue an 'abatement notice' if a neighbour's bonfire is persistently creating a nuisance. There is a fine of up to £5,000 if the notice is not complied with.

Library Service

The Mobile Library currently visits every 3 weeks on a Thursday from 4.15 to 4.45 outside the church. There is no service during the Christmas period. For up-to-date information of the mobile library visits to Ashen see libraries.essex.gov.uk/mobile-library-service/ashen/

Nearby Amenities and Facilities

As Ashen is situated $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from Stoke by Clare village there is easy access to its



village store and post office, bowling club, tennis club, local public house, children's play area and village hall activities or events.

The village of Ridgewell is 1 mile by road and also has a local public house, an Indian take-away and an active village hall and children's play area.

The nearest town is Clare, some 2.5 miles away which has shopping, cafes, post office, mobile bank, surgeries, pharmacy, optician, library and physiotherapist as well as a country park with bowls club and children's play area, restaurants, pubs, golf course and numerous other activities available.

For more extensive shopping:

Haverhill is approximately 6.5 miles away,

Long Melford approximately 10 miles,

Halstead approximately 10 miles,

Sudbury approximately 11 miles,

Braintree approximately 14.5 miles,

Bury St Edmunds approximately 19.5 miles

Cambridge approximately 25 miles.

For all those interested in the environment, wildlife, local nature reserves and associated activities, the Essex Wildlife Trust is one of 47 wildlife trusts which cover the United Kingdom. The EWT was founded in 1959, and it describes itself as Essex's leading conservation charity, which aims to protect wildlife for the future and the people of the county. As of January 2017, it has over 34,000 members and runs 87 nature



reserves, 2 nature parks and 11 visitor centres. Ashen is also close to the areas covered by Suffolk Wildlife Trust, our neighbouring county's "nature charity – the only organisation dedicated wholly to safeguarding Suffolk's wildlife and countryside." It was founded in 1961, and as of March 2017, it has 13,200 members, and it manages 3,120 hectares of land in 60 nature reserves, most of which are open to the public.

Action on Amenities, Activities and Facilities:

- 1 Continue to support the provision of amenities and facilities for the village.
- 2 Continue to support provision for nature conservation and ecological enhancement, where appropriate having regard to other considerations.

Future Challenges and Community Owned Schemes

Good Neighbours Schemes are local voluntary groups which offer a service in their community for those in need of help and support, such as the elderly, disabled, single parents and young mothers and those temporarily in need through illness or isolation. These schemes already run in nearby villages. They do not replace professional care agencies but may help compensate for loss of rural services. They can work on a more personal and informal level, providing for example, transport for appointments errands, befriending, reading to the blind or partially sighted, helping people just discharged from hospital or household tasks. Such schemes can provide many positive outcomes for recipients and volunteers alike and play a key role in village life, improving the neighbourly spirit and the viability and resilience of rural communities. The RCCE provides an information pack on how to go about establishing such a scheme.

There are several examples of individual

domestic renewable energy generation already up and running in Ashen, but the UK government continues to reduce incentives for such systems. Community renewable energy generation schemes in the UK and abroad are a different approach, providing a co-ordinated response at local level to fuel poverty, rising energy prices and, of course, climate change. These schemes use solar power for water heating or generating electricity, wind power, hydro, biomass or ground or air source pumps, often selling surplus energy back into the national grid and best preceded by communities first taking steps to make energy savings.

If you want to contribute to a community care scheme, you could help to start or volunteer under a Good Neighbours Scheme.

Farm share schemes and also garden share schemes are not uncommon in the UK and elsewhere but there is little call in Ashen to explore their potential. Former village allotments on land behind the village Hall were closed down through lack of use.

The Energy Saving Trust, see: www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/renewable-energy.

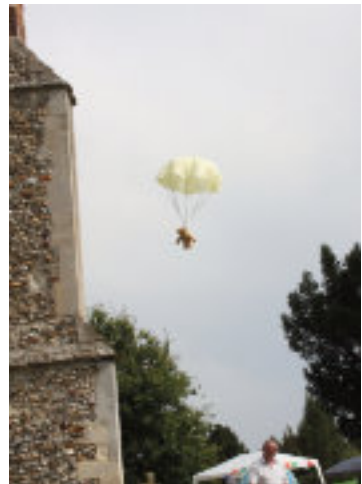
For community energy generation see: www.gov.uk/guidance/community-energy

Actions on Future Challenges and Community Owned Schemes:

- 1 Consider setting up a Good Neighbours Scheme



PHOTOS: top to bottom L to R
Social gathering at village fete.
Jubilee oak tree planting
Summer teddy bear jump:
Setting off - the flight - the landing.



Ashen Village Design Statement

Background: The village in its countryside or landscape setting

Ashen is on the south side of the Stour Valley. Many properties enjoy some beautiful countryside views as a result. The OS grid reference for the village taken from the church is TL745424 Latitude 52.0527 deg.N Longitude 0.5441 deg. E.



The village sits within an area of attractive countryside, where features important to the local landscape such as trees, copses, woodlands and ponds are encouraged to be conserved and protected. (See Appendix A)

For the most part, Ashen is surrounded by arable agricultural land though some houses in the village have paddocks and grazing land used for horses and other livestock.



The village is reached by small roads and lanes and is generally peaceful. The single-track Doctor's Lane (probably named after Dr John Piper who lived at Ashen House farm in the early 18th century) is designated as having Protected Lane Status by Braintree District Council. This refers to a wide range of values associated with historic lanes, including biodiversity, archaeology, views and issues of erosion

and highway improvements. Hollow Road, also single track in parts, is of antiquity.

Ashen was a predominantly agricultural community for most of its recorded history,

As long ago as 1881, Ashen church was described as "crowning the ridge of the border land between the two shires".... " This pleasant countryside is but little known, but would well repay a visit".

Despite changes since then, Ashen still retains some of the "enchantment" and the "unhurried pace" of " a hidden part of England" described in a 1960s account of a journey on a Jennings bus based in Ashen.

These qualities persist so that today many residents say how much they value the countryside views, the peace and quiet, the lack of noise and light pollution and friendly people.

"On the whole, a very peaceful and pleasant place to live: long may it remain that way!"

"On the whole, a very peaceful and pleasant place to live: long may it remain that way!"

with people working in or close to their homes. The 1881 census shows that over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the men in the village were agricultural labourers, a figure that declined over the 20th century, due to mechanisation and other changes, during which time arable rather than livestock farming came to predominate. Many women in the village then worked at straw plaiting, a common

cottage industry in wheat growing areas. There are place names in the village that survive to indicate the importance of grain to local economy and employment in the presence of mills, such as water mills formerly at Mill Farm and field names recalling windmills such as Mill Post field, also evidenced on old maps and other documents. Employment has diversified further in recent times and the majority of residents now work in jobs outside the village, although a number work from home.

Ashen lies within a cultural landscape of antiquity and we have a rich architectural heritage in our village. Ashen's modest scale, its peaceful setting and historic features give the village a quiet charm and character all of its own. It has two pretty road crossings over the Stour into Suffolk, to Stoke-by-Clare and Clare. There are a number of listed buildings and the central part of the village is in a conservation area.

In pre-history, during the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages, there is no evidence of a permanent settlement. However, a variety of recorded traces and finds, such as trackways, a barrow, pits, ditches and tools in the north east of the parish by the river Stour indicate that the Ashen we know today occupies an area known and used by pre-historic people. An example of a fine flint arrowhead found near the river is now in the Ancient House Museum, Clare. In later times, a substantial Roman villa was built nearby in Ridgewell, amongst numerous other Roman buildings and finds in other villages surrounding Ashen. Although there are no remains of a Roman settlement in Ashen itself, a brooch found in the village near the river indicates Romans passed through and may have been familiar with the place.

By 1086, when the Domesday Book survey

Ashen's modest scale, its peaceful setting and historic features give the village a quiet charm and character all of its own.

Notable People

Among notable people who have had involvement with Ashen, but not necessarily lived here, are:

Matthew Parker

Rector of Ashen in 1552, later Archbishop of Canterbury.

Samuel Fairclough

Preacher and later influential rector at Keddington, Suffolk.

John Elwes

The British miser who held the estates of Stoke College and Claret Hall.

Samuel Pepys

His cousin Richard lived in Ashen, circa 1660.

Edith Cavell

Her cousin Edward lived adjacent to the church.

Royal Link

King Edward III's third son Lionel lived in Claret Hall Ashen.



documented Ashen (then called Asce), it was an established working community in the Hidingfort or Hinckford Hundred, near Claret

Hall Manor with an estimated population of forty-five people. A watermill is recorded and livestock and arable land.

The life and development of Ashen after 1086 can be plotted on historic maps and in its older buildings.

The agricultural land surrounding the village is largely arable and shaped by the gentle valley slopes of the meandering river Stour that marks part of both the parish and the



a conservation area, excluding the 20th and 21st century development to the south and north-west. The part of the village nearest to Clare, which consists of about 30 dwellings, is known as Lower Ashen.

“Historic maps make clear its modesty, which is reflected in the disposition of several historic buildings, which are now listed, along the short street which runs north-south. Of these St. Augustine’s Church is most notable, a largely flint rubble church built between the 13th and 16th centuries

with a 19th century chancel. To the east of the church is the Old Rectory, an early 19th century brick house. Thatches, on the western side of the Street is a 15th and 16th century timber-framed and plastered house. Street Farmhouse is a particularly fine 16th century house, which despite later alteration retains many rare original features. Although the historic buildings are interspersed with modern houses, the historic character of the village centre and its historic relationship with the surrounding landscape are both well-preserved. The village is designated as a conservation area - excluding the extensive 20th century development to the south - and a number of the historic buildings are listed, among them the church at grade I and Street Farm at grade II.”* (Extract from Historic England letter dated 22nd January 2016)

county boundaries. The former Second World War air base occupied 500 acres and leaves considerable traces still in the landscape of the parish. Known as Ridgewell Airfield, the RAF then USAAF heavy bomber base had three intersecting runways, aircraft bays and hangars and on completion there was accommodation for nearly 3000 personnel. Though the buildings are mostly long gone, its presence can still be seen in orientation of the surrounding roads and the area used by the Essex Gliding Club. (For more information visit the museum in Ridgewell.)

The form of the settlement as a whole

Ashen has grown slowly over time. A 1770 map shows a cluster of 12 dwellings around the church. By 1880 the same area had 28 dwellings, and by now there are over eighty dwellings there. It is telling that despite a growth in dwellings, the population has not greatly increased; in 1801 it was 217, in 1831 a high of 373, then down to 168 in 1931 during the economic depression. In 2001 it stood at 315, and in 2011 323.

The form of the village has been recognised by Historic England as a good example of a mediaeval linear settlement plan with no backland development in the historic centre. The north end of the village is designated as

The characteristics of the buildings and spaces within the village

The village is characterised by a mix of building styles, materials and historical periods. The 20th and 21st century development in the central south and north west portions of the village consists of detached houses, semi-detached houses and bungalows. Building materials include brick sometimes with render, timber frame, and slate. Braintree District Council lists 10% of Ashen’s stock as social rented



accommodation. The village hall was constructed in prefabricated wooden sections in the 1950s. The village has eight thatched properties which add their own special character to the scene. Several new homes have been built since the survey was undertaken. Latterly single and two storey contemporary houses have utilised timber



cladding and sustainable building methods including Ashen's first factory-built new house with energy A rating in Lower Ashen.



Lower Ashen occupies the north side of Ashen Road closer to the river crossing into Clare. It has a mix of housing types including Edwardian semi-detached, the old Mill Farm, a converted wood-clad barn, historic Claret Hall, Ashen's only manor, and contemporary styles. Some of the properties back onto the river. Ashen takes pride in its generally well-kept front gardens which enhance the appearance of the village.

Of the more historic buildings, Ashen has a total of 20 listed buildings, (including the telephone box) over 14% of its current housing stock. (See *Appendix B*)

The most prominent building in the village is the parish church dedicated to St Augustine of Canterbury and of 12th century origins. Nestled in its pretty churchyard it is a highly regarded asset, a view the survey strongly emphasised. It is the only listed Grade I building in the parish. It represents a unique central point of our village accessible to everyone, most visibly in the exterior and interior of the building itself, its interior monuments and the surrounding church yard. The church also embodies much of our village story in its registers over the centuries of baptisms surviving from 1560; marriages and burials from



1558 and other ecclesiastical records (now housed for safe keeping in Essex County Record Office, Chelmsford). Its square embattled tower c.1400 has a distinctive early 16th century red brick stair turret.

The tower is home to a rare trio of probably untouched pre-Reformation inscribed bells bearing their original makers' names. The 1st

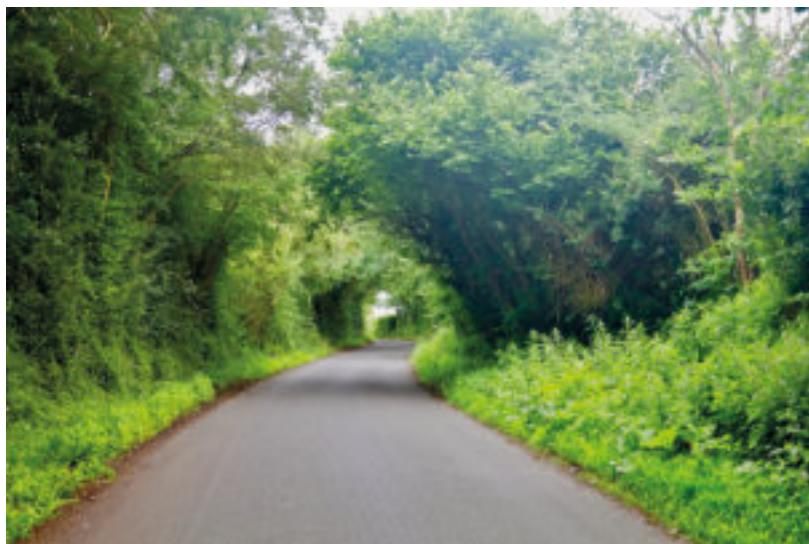


(treble) and 2nd were made by Thomas de Lenne, c. 1333; 1st inscribed 'Alicia, Ave Maria Gra. Plena Dns. Tecum'; 2nd inscribed 'Thomas, Ihc, Nazaren Rex Judeorum'; the 3rd (tenor) bell made by Henry Jordan, late 15th-century, inscribed, 'Sit Nomen Domini Benedictum.' These were commonly rung in the past for all church services and festivals, for weddings, funerals and other events.

Over the harvest fields in the past a morning and evening gleaning bell would have rung out, a local Ashen ringing tradition that lasted until the end of the 19th century.

The church is entered through its delightful and rather quirky c.1600 timber-framed porch and an original and historically important strap-hinged 13th century wooden boarded door. The main body of the church or nave is early 13th century and the chancel, vestry and organ chamber were largely rebuilt in 1857. The church also contains numerous memorials and fittings ancient and modern.





Mill Green and on to Stoke by Clare.

A significant portion of Ashen is designated as a Conservation area. (See Map 4) This is defined as ‘an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’, designated as such by the local authority in 1989. In practice this informs planning decisions and defines what owners can do with

Some of the names of the older buildings in the village, now all family homes, and their changes of use, are reminders of the versatility of old buildings as well as the social losses and economic changes the village saw over the 20th century. The Old Post Office was also a general store and closed in 1942. Bishops Hall, formerly a residence, became the Red Cow pub in the 19th century and closed as such in 1989.

their properties.

The village building ‘envelope’ (see Map 4) is an area of land outside of which new building is not normally permitted and so defines the limits of development for the village.

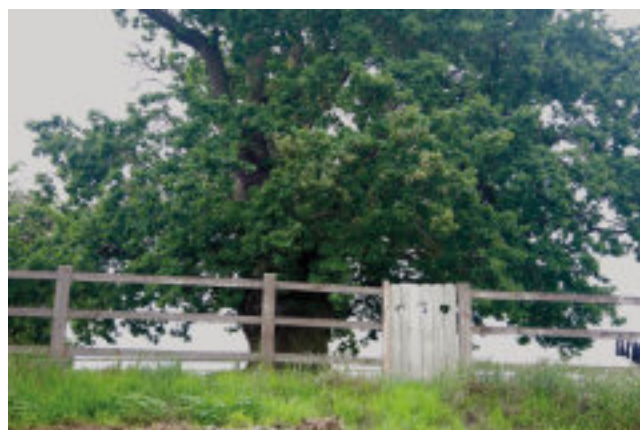
Unlike many villages in the area, Ashen has no village green or common land. The village sign sits on a small plot owned by the Parish Council. The sign was made and donated by the late Michael Williams of Bishop Hall. Neighbouring verges are owned by the County Council. The village playing field with its orchard is spacious and has amenities for all ages. It is owned and maintained by the village through the Parish Council after its donation in the 1970s. The orchard fruit is available free to all residents and contains varieties of historic interest. (See map on page 30)



The Old Rectory ceased its original function in 1967. The Old School House was a teacher’s house and school room; it served the children of the village from 1876 to 1923 when it closed

and then it accommodated Jennings bus service until 1984.

The attractive range of buildings on rising land near the river on the Lower Stoke Road includes two large Listed Grade II barns now converted to residential use and the original farm house known as Stours, also Listed Grade II. The surrounding riverine landscape has a distinctive appeal and ecology and includes cultivated willow, ponds, marsh land, deciduous woodland and the pleasant riverside path leading to the river sluice at



Street lighting is confined to one light, situated outside the village hall and is owned, maintained and run by the Parish



Council. The village hall has a tarmac parking area in front and behind and gives access to recycling bins for glass.

Situated to the north of the village on the bend of The Street is a village pond called the Waiver, said to be a Suffolk word meaning swampy or a swamp. Further down The Street on the west side was a second pond of similar size to the Waiver but now reduced in scale. The PC, BDC and the County Council (ECC) take no responsibility for upkeep or liability. Maintenance of both ponds is undertaken on a purely voluntary basis. The Waiver is home to breeding moorhens and mallard ducks.

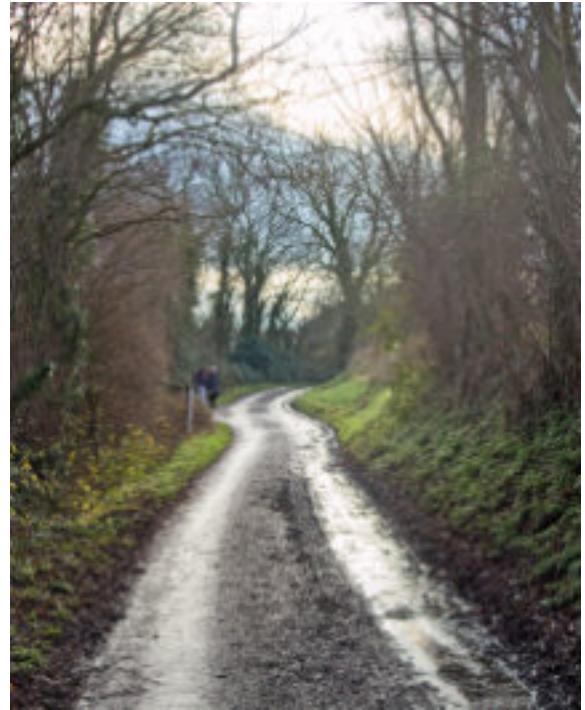
Opportunities and Constraints

Opportunities

Opportunities for development in Ashen are limited by the building 'envelope' and the conservation area. However, the survey (Appendix E) indicates a clear willingness for alterations to existing buildings within the



building 'envelope' and subject to planning regulations, provided such changes are sympathetic to the size and materials of the existing building forms. (See Appendix D) The survey also shows that residents would



generally support the establishment of a pub or a village shop. There was considerable support too for the enhancement of existing footpaths and the natural environment, including the restoration of hedgerows. Improvements to roads and infrastructure would also be welcomed. These views are in keeping with the overall wish expressed by residents to preserve the countryside and the peace and quiet of the village. The residents' views on these issues are shown below in the eight sets of options presented in the survey with responses given in percentages. (See Appendix C)

Constraints

Preservation of listed buildings and the conservation area inevitably constrain development. Access to Ashen is by narrow often single-track roads and there is a continuing lack of regular public transport. Given the emphasis placed by the BDC, the county and the government on sustainable development this also limits the opportunities for significant development.

Legal constraints are in place for those buildings that are listed and these protect important elements of Ashen's built environment and general appearance.

'Listing marks and celebrates a building's

special architectural and historic interest, and also brings it under the consideration of the planning system, so that it can be protected for future generations. The older a building is, the more likely it is to be listed.' How are listed buildings graded?

- ◇ Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest, only 2.5% of listed buildings are Grade I nationally
- ◇ Grade II* buildings are particularly important buildings of more than special interest; 5.8% of listed buildings are Grade II* nationally
- ◇ Grade II buildings are of special interest; 91.7% of all listed buildings nationally are in this class and it is the most likely grade of listing for a home-owner.

(See Appendix F for information on what listing means for a property and when owners may wish to make changes.)

Appendix A

Trees and hedges

The Tree Warden Scheme is a national initiative to enable people to play an active role in conserving and enhancing their local trees and woods. The scheme was founded and is co-ordinated by The Tree Council.

Tree Wardens are volunteers, appointed by parish councils or other community organisations, who gather information about their local trees, get involved in local tree matters and encourage local practical projects related to the trees and woods.

Hedges and their restoration were a priority



for over 99% of the residents. Hedges form a significant part of the appearance of Ashen.

The RSPB has useful advice on how we look after our own garden hedges for wildlife:

“We recommend not cutting hedges and trees between March and August as this is the main breeding season for nesting birds, although some birds may nest outside this period.”

“It is an offence under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built, or to intentionally kill, injure or take chicks or adults, or intentionally take or destroy any eggs.”

“It is an intentional act, for example, if you or your neighbour know there is an active nest in the hedge and still cut the hedge, damaging or destroying the nest or contents in the process.”

“If someone is cutting a hedge during this period, speak to them and politely mention the risk to birds’ nests, and the laws protecting nests. If they proceed, and you know there is an active nest at risk, contact the police on 101, and ask for a reference number.”

“If you are unsure what to do, contact RSPB Wildlife Enquiries on: 01767 693690.”

Read more at: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/plants-for-wildlife/garden-hedges/hedge-law.>”



Appendix B

Listed Buildings in Ashen

66 and 67 Ridgewell Road, Grade II

April Cottage, The Street, Grade II

Ashen Hall, Hollow Road, Grade II

Ashen House, Doctor's Lane Grade II

Barn Approx. 30 Metres South East of Stours Farmhouse, Grade II

Barn Approx. 30 metres East North East of The Stours Farmhouse, Grade II

Cottage immediately South of High House, The Street, Grade II

Hall Cottage, Hollow Road, Grade II

High House, The Street, Grade II

K6 telephone Kiosk, The Street, Grade II

Long Entry Cottage, The Street, Grade II (now Longways Cottage)

Mill Farmhouse, Grade II

Parish Church of St Augustine of Canterbury, Grade I

Rose Cottage, The Street, Grade II

Stours Farmhouse, Grade II

Street Farmhouse, The Street, Grade II*

Thatches, The Street, Grade II

The Old Rectory, The Street, Grade II

The Red Cow Public House, The Street, Grade II (now Bishops Hall)

Upper Farm Cottage, Upper Farm Road, Grade II



Appendix C

The Village Design Statement survey: options presented and responses returned.

As indicated above, the survey was carried out in 2015 with a 60% response rate. The responses were analysed and the results presented at the exhibitions held in 2017. This invited further comments on the survey and otherwise. In the event no responses were received which were inconsistent with the results of the survey, so that this tended to confirm the results of the survey. The analysis which follows is accordingly based on the survey. About 56% of the residents who responded to the survey were over 60 years of age and 44% were of working age. One third of the returns were from residents who had lived in the village for over twenty years. Of working residents, about 3/4s left the village to work (87.6% use a car) and 14%, worked from home.

Q.1 Existing buildings.

The survey shows very substantial support for blending the style of building alterations in with the village character (90.98%), using sympathetic materials for extensions (93.79%), modern replacement materials to retain design/character of originals (93.66%), style of extension to be sympathetic to building's existing style (93.79%) and roof heights to be in keeping



with adjacent buildings (93.75%). Equally a large majority thinks there are building styles worth preserving (92.24%). A smaller majority think it is acceptable to combine smaller houses into single larger ones (63.77%) but not acceptable for an extension to significantly change the size/character of a house (64.03%).

Conclusion: the majority wish to retain the way the village looks at present and any alterations to be made in sympathy with the existing development.

Q.2 New buildings

The survey shows substantial agreement on the value of preserving the distinctive form of the village (88%), on how the 'whole' character of Ashen derives from its present size and form (82.27%) and near total agreement that local heritage (such as the church and ancient lanes) should be preserved (97.98%). Today Ashen's heritage includes a concentration of listed properties large and small - 17 Grade II, 1 Grade II* (Street Farmhouse) and 1 Grade I (Parish Church of St Augustine of Canterbury) and even the telephone kiosk is Grade II.

In keeping with these views, there is also a majority against extending the village building envelope to facilitate development (69.93%), and against building in gardens/back land or rear gardens (72.74%/70.71%). Most people say the village infrastructure is inadequate for further houses (72.86%). If there is any future development, most people also believe the infrastructure would require improvements to it (84.17%) and any new buildings should resemble or mirror existing ones but without interference to them or their views (85.29%).

Conclusion: the majority value the local heritage. Any future development should be matched by improvements to the infrastructure and complement existing buildings. Individual comments indicate that

better sewerage and electricity supply are a priority. (Ashen had an average of 8 outages annually between 2014 and 2018, the largest single reason given being overhead network faults).

Q.3. What sort of new housing would residents like/not like to see?

The greatest support is for affordable housing for local people (72.39%), small family homes with 1-2 bedrooms (67.45%), bungalows (62.88%) and family homes with 3-4 bedrooms (54.69%). Those for additional housing in general (53.78%) just outnumbered those against additional housing (46.22%).

Flats are the least supported building type in the survey (92% against), followed by large executive homes (75% against) and sheltered housing (71.77% against). A smaller majority do not think there is any need for low-cost rented accommodation (62.9%) or a self-build scheme (61.21%). More information on self-build was requested.

Conclusion: there is majority support for some future development with affordable small-scale housing for local people a majority view.

Q.4 Support for development over the next twenty years.

Opinion was divided for the village having zero new dwellings (56.66% for, 45.35% against) and also for 1-5 dwellings (56.94% for, 43.06% against) and for 6-10 dwellings (54.54% for, 45.46% against). For 11 – 15 dwellings, there was less support (40.79% for, 59.21% against) and or for having over 15 new dwellings (35.06%for, 64.94% against).

Conclusion: there is support for a limited number of new dwellings to be built in the village. Since the survey was conducted, five new homes have been built. There has also

been consultation as part of the Local Plan including a call for sites in 2016. As part of that consultation the Parish Council held a public meeting and invited written representations. In its consultation response in the light of those representations the Parish Council concluded that:

“Over the plan period there is likely to be a local need in the village for those with particular ties to the village and its community to be housed. The Council believes that there is a case for identifying a site where affordable housing to meet the needs of the village could be provided. Whether that is by adjusting the village envelope or by simply identifying a site with a specific notation as potentially suitable for release to meet those needs, it is essential in our view that any residential development should be specifically committed to meeting those local needs, at least so far as the affordable element is concerned.”

Q.5 Other types of development

The survey shows that residents did not support commercial development. The only type of development in the village that had majority support would be a shop ((80.45% in support). Other developments not supported – small business park (97.63% against), a commercial office site (95.24% against), light industrial units (92.86% against) and home/work units (73.51% against). Many individual comments included the wish for a pub or pop-up pub.

Conclusion: the idea of a shop and pub in Ashen would seem to be popular.

Q.6 Further considerations in new building.

The survey shows that the majority wanted any new development to have off-street parking provided (95.24%) and to be built to the highest environmental standards (94.93%) with innovative design and modern materials encouraged if in keeping with overall character of the village

(92.86%). A smaller majority think any new development should be small scale as an ‘exception site’ just outside the village envelope (58.65%)

Conclusion: the majority want to limit on-street parking, uphold the highest environmental standards and preserve the character of the village.

Q.7 Environmental matters.

Updating the village sewerage system would be supported by a majority (93.94%). Keeping verges and ditches free from obstruction is also a high priority (99.31%) and managing them to allow drainage but also to support wildlife (100%). A smaller majority do not want more street lights in the village (57.35%) but many people do not find existing residential light pollution intrusive (75.37%). Aircraft noise was not intrusive for a majority (69.66%). A majority think that the village envelope/boundary should be maintained in order to protect the rural environment (84.61%). Almost all respondents think that native trees should be preserved (97.26%).

Conclusion: the improvement of the sewerage system is supported by a majority. A significant majority want well-kept verges that also support wildlife, native trees to be preserved and an unchanged village envelope to protect the rural environment. In keeping with the wish to maintain the rural environment, a majority did not want more street lights. Residential light pollution and aircraft noise were not regarded as intrusive by the majority of participants.

Q.8 Surrounding countryside.

The survey shows substantial agreement on the preservation of the countryside around the village, including support for preserving lanes, walks, views and woodland (100%) and almost as much support for encouraging the restoration of hedgerows (99.33%). There was also a majority in

favour of retaining cultivated farmland around the village as part of its character (96.50%). The preservation of open countryside around Ashen, 'e.g. no turbines/pylons' was supported by a majority (84.03%).

Conclusion: residents are appreciative of their rural surroundings and seek to preserve them.

Appendix D

Guidance on building improvements

Not all improvements require planning permission. This can be easily checked on the website www.planningportal.co.uk, which provides advice on every aspect of building improvements. Given the strong degree of consensus expressed by Ashen residents for retaining the visual character of the village, it is important for any improvements to consider features such as windows, roofing, doors, paint colour, boundaries, drives and gates and other distinctive elements that contribute to your building and its place in the village overall



appearance. Braintree District Council has abundant information on planning permission and numerous supplementary planning guides on best practice for new and old houses including ancient landscapes and sustainability

Appendix E

Guidance on buildings in conservation area.

Residents living within Ashen's conservation area (see Map 4) should be aware that more stringent rules apply to making changes to buildings. The effects of designation as a Conservation Area include the following:

- ◇ Applications for development in such areas are advertised in the local press and on site.
- ◇ Permitted development i.e. development, usually of a minor nature, for which planning permission is not required, is more restricted.
- ◇ Councils seek to ensure that new development preserves the character or appearance of the area.
- ◇ With the exception of minor structures, planning permission is required prior to the demolition of an unlisted building.
- ◇ The installation of a satellite dish on the chimney stack or on the roof slope or elevation fronting the road needs consent.

Trees in Conservation Areas are also protected. An application should be made to the Braintree District Council's Landscape Services department for the cutting down, uprooting, topping or lopping of a tree having a diameter greater than 75mm (or the cutting down or uprooting of a tree having a diameter greater than 100mm in order to improve the growth of other trees) measured at a point 1.5 metres above ground level.



Ashen Views



Appendix F

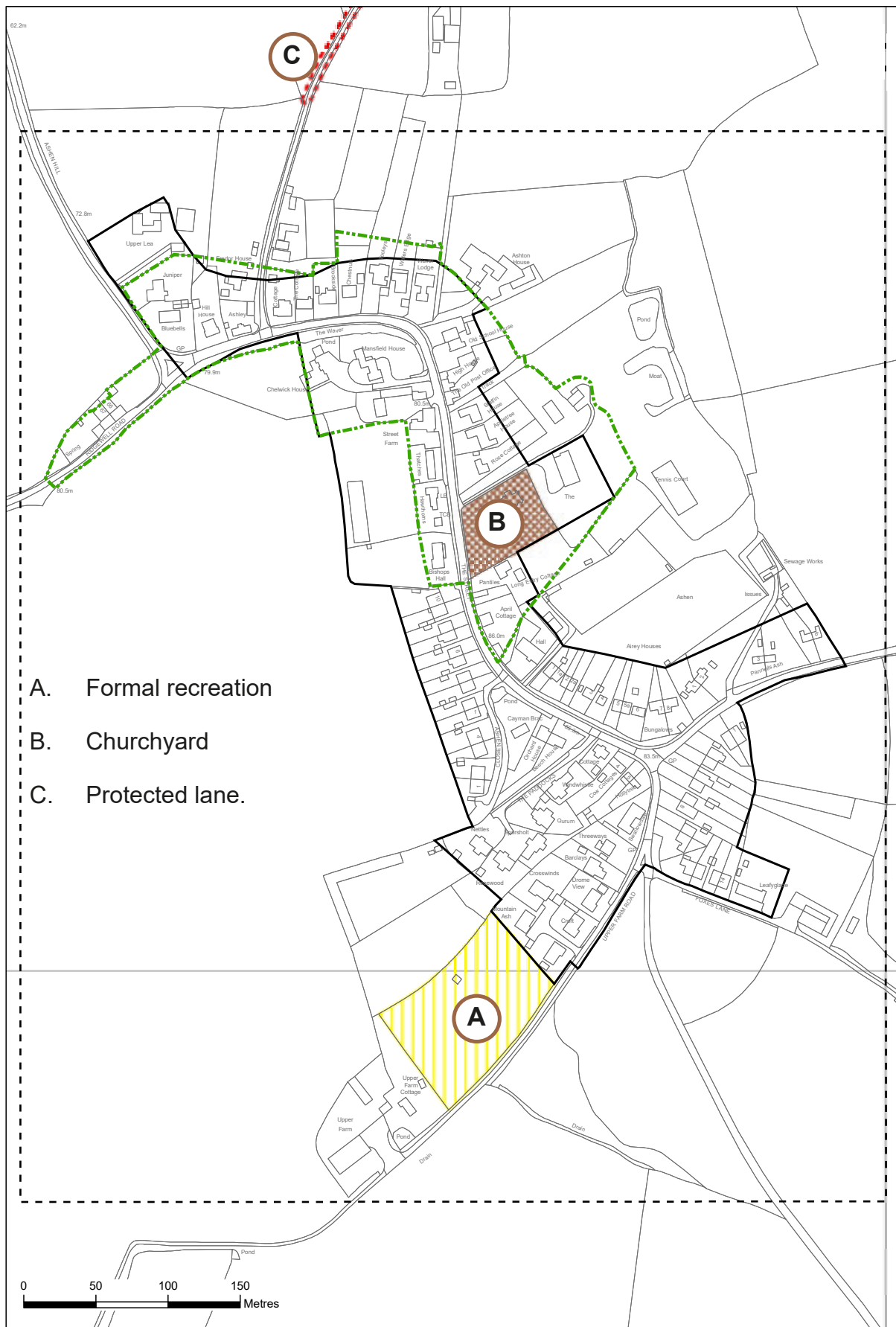
Guidance for owners of listed buildings

Owners of listed buildings have a responsibility to keep the building wind and watertight, structurally sound and in a reasonable state of repair. Advice should always be sought from Braintree District Council when considering any change. Owning or carrying out work on a listed building places a greater responsibility of care to ensure that the integrity of the building is not adversely impacted on. Controls apply to both internal and external alterations to the existing fabric of the building as well as extensions and alterations to certain outbuildings, such works are likely to require Listed Building Consent. For advice and readily available information on maintaining and caring for old buildings, listed or not, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) is a very helpful specialist organisation. www.spab.org.uk See also Historic England www.historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning

ASHEN RECREATION GROUND MILLENNUM TREE PLANTING



Ashen Village Conservation Area (broken green line)
and Village Envelope (solid black line)



Ashen - Pre Submission Plan

Map 4

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This document can also be consulted on the Ashen Parish Council website:

<https://e-voice.org.uk/ashenparishcouncil>