

LP307

The Impact of Policy
on a Community:
East Hanningfield



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June, 1996

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Cover illustration: Coulde Dennis, East Hanningfield.

East Hanningfield

An Introduction

East Hanningfield parish lies six miles to the South East of Chelmsford, the county town of Essex, and has an area of 1,019 hectares. The village of the same name sits to the East of the centre of the parish, is surrounded by fields and is where the majority of the population of the parish lives. Of the 438 dwellings in the parish only 42 are beyond a few minutes walk from the village centre. The total parish population is approximately 1,200 with 897 names on the Register of Electors.

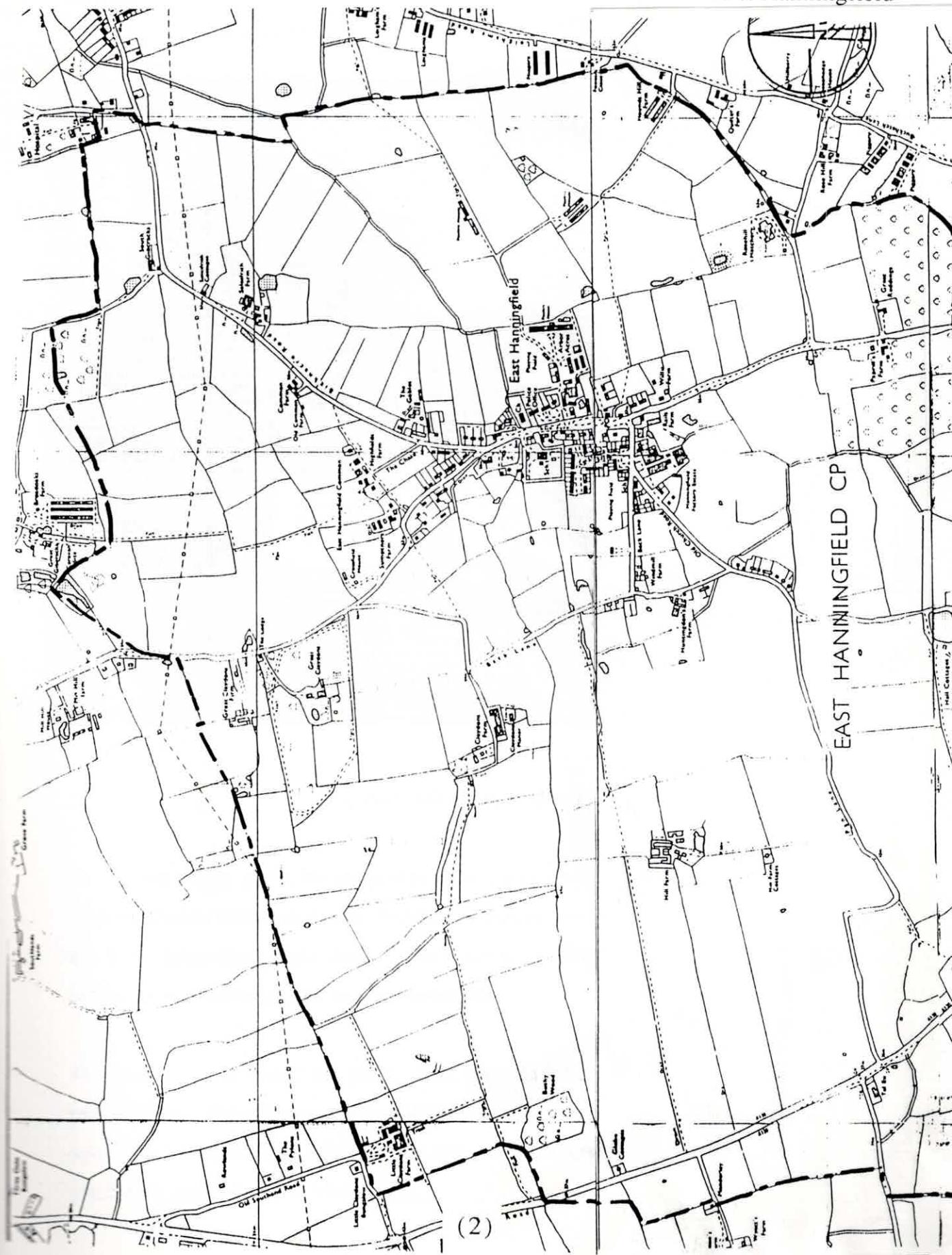
The western boundary of the parish is followed by the A130, a very busy single carriageway route linking Chelmsford and the A12, London to Great Yarmouth, with the A127, London to Southend, and the A13, London to Canvey. A small area of the parish lies to the West of the A130. Two busy cross country routes, Chelmsford to South Woodham Ferrers and the A127 to Danbury, meet and run through the centre of the village along the length of the village green. Traffic speed and density is a continuing source of annoyance to residents of the village.

Until February of this year, there was a village shop on the village green but it and the associated sub post office were closed. The Post Office is now in a portable building hired specially for the purpose by the Parish Council and situated beside the Village Hall. The only retail premises in the village, the closed shop and post office, are the property of the ex-shopkeeper who has refused to lease them (1), so the village is without a shop and without any prospect of having one in the foreseeable future.

Two miles away in Bicknacre is the nearest shop which, as it is predominantly a newsagent, sells only a few grocery items, and also a farm shop which is now officially a greengrocer. There is no bus to Bicknacre, and the road is not safe to walk.

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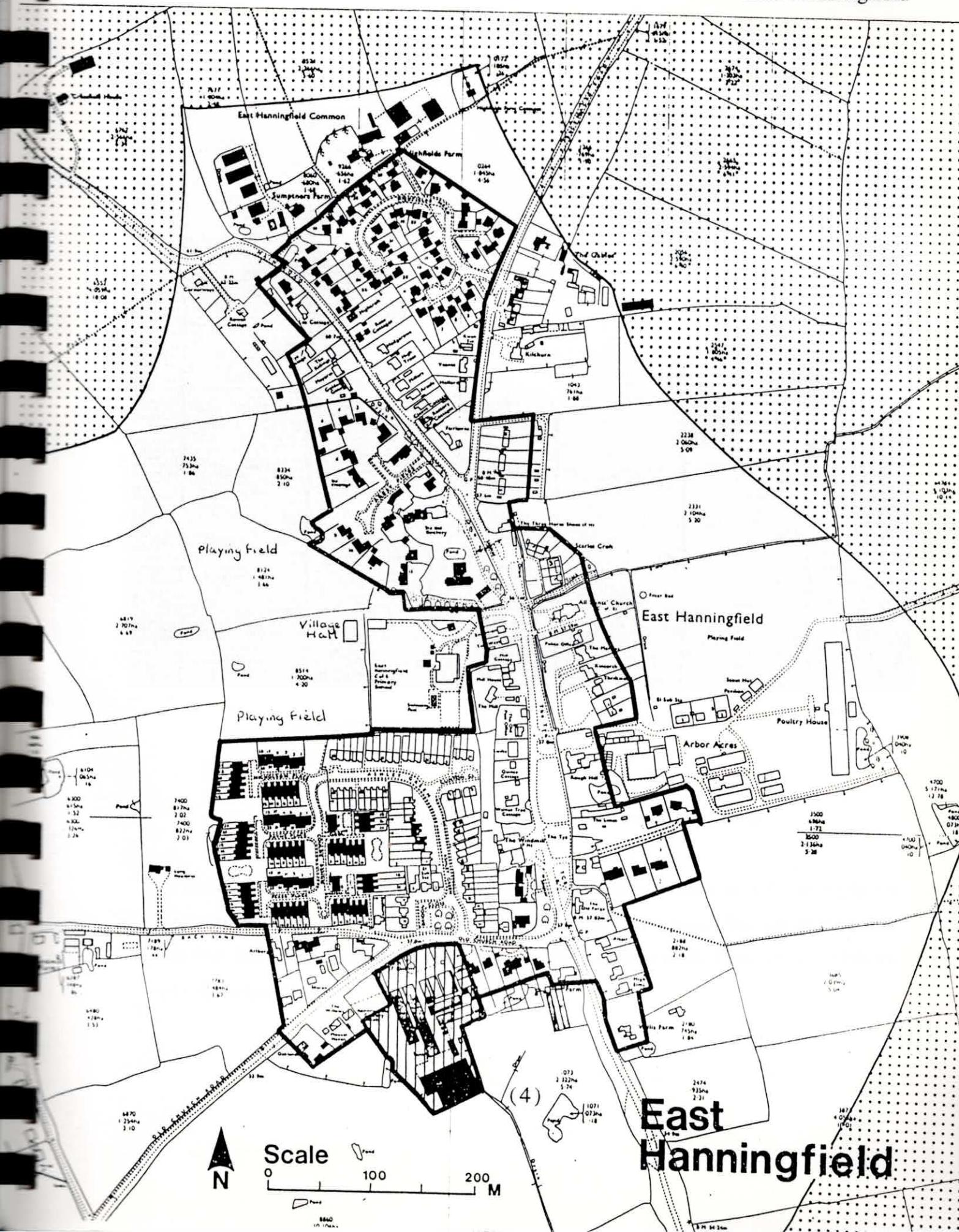




The Post Office Stores (now closed).

Also on the village green, but at opposite ends, are two public houses. In the last ten years the Justices' licence with regard to the Windmill Public House has been transferred four times and the Three Horseshoes eight times, so there has been no continuity of management. A third public house, the Plough and Sail, sits beside the A130 and belongs to a restaurant chain.

The church is also beside the green. East Hanningfield shares a rector with neighbouring parish Sandon. The other place of worship within the village is the Bethel Evangelical Church which has a resident lay pastor who with his wife takes services and meetings and organises a youth club and mother and toddler club.



To the West of the school are the Village Hall and playing fields which are managed by a committee of volunteers. The Hall opened in 1986 and provides a venue for the village playgroup, Badminton Club, Bowls Club, aerobics classes, Parish Council meetings and casual sports bookings. The Football Club uses the playing fields for its matches.

The Cricket Club pavilion and pitch are on private land North of the village and a Womens Institute hall is next door to the Bethel Church.

There are employment opportunities at the industrial estate at the southern edge of the village, at a small industrial estate at the old tileworks to the West of the A130 and at the chicken breeder's on the eastern edge of the village, but not necessarily for residents of the parish. Agriculture has only a minimal part to play as provider of work.

Locality? Rural Community?

East Hanningfield is a settlement where 1,200 people live, where some of them can spend their leisure time sometimes and where a few of them might work. For the necessities of life such as food and health care they have to go elsewhere. It is difficult to see how the concept of locality can apply. "Locality is the space within which the larger part of most citizens' daily working and consuming lives is lived" and "a base from which subjects can exercise their capacity for pro-activity by making effective individual and collective interventions within and beyond that base" (Cooke p12). The commuters who live in East Hanningfield travel in all directions. Discounting the odd one or two who work in Kent or Hertfordshire, an area covering where most of them work would have to include all of Essex and London. Similarly shopping takes place in several towns within a ten mile radius such as Maldon, Wickford, Chelmsford, South Woodham Ferrers with occasional trips further afield to London, Colchester, Thurrock and Southend. It is doubtful whether the people who travel daily to Colchester feel any affinity with the South of Essex and London and it is probable that those who work in London think they have nothing in common with Colchester, if they think about it at all. The residents of East Hanningfield are aware that they live in Chelmsford Borough and the county of Essex, but there is no reason to believe that they have any common sense of belonging to or acting politically in any other areas than the existing borough, county or parliamentary constituency.

The concept of locality can be said to apply to the county of Essex, but for many of its residents the focal point of their lives is outside the county in London. Perhaps then the simplest way to make the term locality fit the situation is to imagine London and its surrounds as one locality overlapping Essex which is another separate locality.

East Hanningfield is surrounded by fields, but that does not mean it is a rural community. To assess the relative rurality of a community social scientists have referred to a rural-urban continuum (Jones pp9-12, Frankenburg pp286-292). The continuum identifies the poles or

extremes of the urban and rural which can be found to apply in a varying extent to the community being studied. Some of the criteria for the rural will no longer apply to any communities in Britain, such as the concept that most inhabitants are engaged in agriculture (Frankenburg p287), but it is useful as a starting point for analysis.

Two of the key elements of the rural community or *Gemeinshaft*, as exemplified by Tönnies, are those of kinship, and "a furtherance of mutual good through familiarity and understanding" (Jones p13). There is kinship in East Hanningfield; there are families of which two or more related households have moved into the village in recent years and are able to offer mutual support within the family, and there are some old families where family ties are vague and communication minimal. Of the 438 households in the parish 269 have been resident five years and 179 ten years (2), and of the latter nine have moved within the village, so there is a core of families who can be said to be settled as opposed to presently resident. It is far more likely that familiarity and mutual understanding exists amongst the core families and the more recent arrivals who intend to stay and therefore have an interest in there being a community spirit, than amongst the migrants and *spiralists* or upwardly mobile (Frankenburg p261). This is illustrated by the membership of the Parish Council and Village Hall Management Committee; only one councillor has lived in the village for less than ten years but he has demonstrated his commitment to the community by also being active in the Village Hall management. All the major players and the majority of the committee members involved with the Village Hall have been resident for more than ten years.

A common complaint by organisers of events in the village is that, apart from the usual crowd, they are not supported by the villagers. This is in contrast to the experience Frankenburg related of Glynceirog (p239) whereby villagers felt obliged to attend and illustrates the *anomie* which is usually associated with urban life being present in East Hanningfield (Frankenburg p292). Following from this the question must arise as to whether the village of East Hanningfield is a community.

In the broadest sense of the word a community is a group of people with something in common (Willmott p2) and in the case of the residents of East Hanningfield the fact that they live in the same geographical area means that they can be recognised as a *territorial community* (Ibid), but community also infers a sense of common membership and a feeling of identity, of *attachment* (Ibid p4). "The people living in a particular area do not always feel a sense of attachment to each other or to the place, not necessarily share the same priorities as their neighbours; indeed in complex modern societies they seldom do either to any substantial extent" (Ibid), so East Hanningfield cannot be denied the title *community* when seen in the light of modern reality. The epithet *rural* is also applicable in a limited sense, when the village is considered in respect to its difference from nearby urban areas rather than by trying to find similarities with primitive villages in the past or other parts of the world. This is not to say that some of its residents do not suffer from the same rural isolation as the women in Glynceirog described by Frankenburg (p90). In some respects the women of Glyn who had little occasion or opportunity to leave were better off than the inhabitants of East Hanningfield, who are confined to the village without transport, because they had a variety of shops (Ibid p87).

So East Hanningfield is a rural community of place which has within it several communities of attachment or interest, one of which is the core of families of long term residency. Other interest groups include the Playgroup, the Parent Teacher Association, the Womens Institute and the two churches, and these are linked by their members' social interchanges in many ways creating a network. Such a network with its *redundancy*, or several different routes between one person and another, is another symptom of a rural community (Frankenburg p282). These groups are constantly calling for more members, so it is not the core families who are preventing the new comers from becoming part of the community of attachment, but the new comers themselves who choose not to become involved.

The Policy and its Implementation

At the end of the war, "The acute housing shortage was a major political issue... if not the major issue....In the 20 years after the war local authorities demolished or closed 670,000 dwellings, replacing them with 2.9 million new ones.... By 1978 almost half the housing stock in Britain was of post war vintage.... and the lion's share of the credit goes to local authorities who then managed a third of the nation's housing stock" (Newton p59). Poor quality housing is accepted as a cause of health problems and linked with educational under-achievement (Coxall and Robins p409), so the policy to provide good quality housing by the state was an intrinsic part of the state's attempt to care for its citizens from the cradle to the grave as was the creation of the National Health Service in 1948.

By 1975, in East Hanningfield parish there were 29 council houses out of a total of 242 dwellings and the population was 757 (3). In 1964, the then Chelmsford Rural District Council (CRDC) had been granted outline planning permission to build on a piece of land of 6.45 acres, adjoining the newly built private Ashley Green housing estate, and purchased it in 1965 (4). This field was then rented by the Parish Council (EHPC) as a recreation area.

Outline planning permission was allowed to lapse (4) and a new permission granted in 1972 for council houses to be built on the field (5), but it continued in use as a recreation ground. In 1974 the CRDC was reorganised as Chelmsford District Council (CDC). At the same time East Hanningfield, which had two families on the council housing waiting list, was moved into Housing Area 7 to join three other parishes with a combined population of 11,516 (6) and a housing waiting list of 139 families (7). The letter of complaint by EHPC to what was seen as manipulation rendered a reply from CDC saying that the housing areas were "strictly geographical"(4). The same year the East Hanningfield Community Centre Appeal Committee (EHCCAP) with EHPC asked to aquire the land, either by purchase or on a long term lease, "to provide a permanent sports field, childrens playground and ultimately a village hall" (8) and bringing to CDC's notice the lack of facilities in East Hanningfield which made

it unsuitable as a location for the proposed up to 80 council houses and that building on the only recreation area would exacerbate the problem.

The detailed planning application for the council estate made its appearance in early 1975. CDC had briefed an outside architect to design the estate and the result was a plan for 22 old persons' flats for two persons, 22 old persons' flats for three persons, 48 three bedroom houses for five persons and six four bedroom houses for 7 persons. The proposed total number of dwellings was 98 and population 392, the density being 61.5 per acre (Gowan).

Although, as might be expected, some East Hanningfield residents objected in principle to any council housing, the East Hanningfield Residents' Association (EHRA) and EHPC did not, and produced arguments for objection on the following grounds:

- the proposed density of 61.5 was not suitable for a village where the density was under 20 per acre;
- the council estate with another private estate being built at the time would increase the population by 80%;
- the external designs of the building would not fit in with the vernacular architecture (see following pages). Upstairs flats were to be accessed by open air stairs which would be dangerous for the elderly;
- the access through the existing housing estate was unsuitable as was the possible alternative off Back Lane.
- the plan should have included the facilities which were lacking in the village;
- the plan was creating a greater need for recreation facilities but removing the only facilities which existed and;
- non-compliance with the outline planning permission, which had stipulated houses, not flats, that each dwelling should have one garage and one parking space and other conditions, several of which were not met.

The CDC Planning Committee resolved on 22nd July, 1975 that "the plans be referred back to the Housing Committee for further consideration with the comment that the Planning Committee do not consider the external design and layout are suitable in East Hanningfield."

Sutherland Lyall later explained that the architect had been influenced by Palladio and that the angle of the roofs matched "the pitch of several of Palladio's paradigmatic buildings". He went on to say, "In the middle of the scheme Gowan put rows of two-storeyed houses back to back, then moved them apart dropping in open concrete staircases (for access to the first floor flats) then slid one half of this split gable wall several feet back. Gowan describes it as a 'split pediment'. But the additional twist of dislocating one half of what could originally have been a gable wall is an act of mannerism. So are the idiosyncratic circular windows and the 'slightly surreal' (as Gowan puts it) pattern of differently coloured brickwork which give a hint on the outside of the way the internal spaces are organised" (Lyall).

The Housing Committee re-submitted the plans to the Planning Committee and EHRA and EHPC re-submitted their objections. Planning permission was granted by the Planning Committee on the casting vote of the Chairman on 30th September, 1975. Several residents of East Hanningfield complained to the Local Commissioner that CDC had been guilty of maladministration because, at the Planning meeting, the architect, who had a pecuniary interest, had been allowed to speak in favour of his plans and against the arguments of the objectors for forty minutes when the submissions by EHRA and EHPC had been read aloud by officers (9), but this complaint was not acted upon.

During the months that the planning application had been causing such controversy EHPC had identified the field to the North of the estate site as a potential recreation ground and had been writing to CDC asking whether CDC would be prepared to contribute towards the cost of purchase, whether EHPC would obtain loan consent and whether, in the event of purchasing negotiations failing, CDC would exercise its powers of compulsory purchase (10). EHPC had attempted to purchase the field in 1965/66, but had refused to agree to the owner's price of £1,000 per acre. CDC would not commit itself to answering EHPC's questions.

In 1976, EHPC was aggrieved to learn that plans for council housing in the neighbouring parish of Rettendon were "in tune with the needs and atmosphere of the area" and asked for the East Hanningfield plans to be reconsidered (11). The reply from CDC quoted the Chairman of the Planning Committee; "The internal design of the houses appears to be far above average and the layout is pleasing. Whether one likes round or square windows is a matter of personal choice, as is the type of roof line - but neither of these reasons in themselves form a basis for refusing an otherwise good and much-needed development." (12). Willmott presents us with an apt summing-up; "Despite the noble aspirations of the post-war welfare state, in practice it often seemed bureaucratic and insensitive to people's needs" (p29). Building began that year and was completed in 1978.

After years of negotiation with the owners of the field, EHPC purchased it in 1979 with a Public Works Loan, and grant aid from CDC for improvement works. Another Public Works Loan paid for the construction of the Village Hall in 1985.

The Housing Act, 1980 introduced the 'right to buy' council houses policy and reduced Government subsidy so that there were less council houses built per year thereafter. The 'right to buy' policy was popular with the electorate (Hanson & Walles p80), but has been identified as an example of *micropolitics* whereby a policy is changed gradually when it would have been opposed if the process had been attempted in one action (Greenaway et al p64). Thus the Local Government Housing Act 1989, following the Housing Act 1988, "completed the framework whereby local authorities became 'enablers and regulators rather than providers of services'" (Wilson & Game quoting Nicholas Ridley). Of the 127 council properties in East Hanningfield on completion of the estate, 80 remain in local authority ownership.

The Outcome

Frankenburg says of village unity, "if they can find nothing else in common they may microcosmically imitate the nation or the wartime allies and become united only by their common enemies" (p273), and this would appear to have been the case in East Hanningfield. The common enemy was the District Council who by threatening the village with what was seen as an unsuitable development caused unity in the form of the EHRA which was created specifically to deal with the problem (3).

"It needs to be said that there are a few physical problems with the scheme. Apparently these are due, in part, to the inaccuracy or vagueness of official climate data. I would also say there are inherent problems in doing circular windows without some kind of a sill" (Lyall). The round windows proved a considerable annoyance to any residents with conventional ideas about interior design, and most of the 'portholes' are now covered on the inside by thick net curtains. The other 'physical' problem was more difficult to deal with; the houses were very damp and the aluminium window frames were constantly running with condensation. The cause was a design fault; the roofs were not impervious to rain and the window sills held instead of draining away water. Delays in dealing with the damp were caused by the then Borough Council's need to prove that the design was the cause and that the chosen remedies had been tried and tested on a few of the properties. Counsel had advised appointing a consultant, this had been done and the consultant and counsel then advised that a pilot scheme should be undertaken. This had been completed by November, 1980, and as the Chief Executive admitted had been a long and involved process, but was necessary in view of the vast sums of money which the Council was seeking to recover (13). The problems continued; in 1989/90 provision was made in the capital programme for £250,000 for anti-condensation works and the provision of a gas supply to the flats, the original under-floor central heating having been found to be unsatisfactory (CBC 88).

Once the damp had been dealt with, other problems came to the fore. The open staircases at the flats and the open corridors on the ground floors were found to be a security problem, being frequented by young people with nowhere to go as were the open-plan rear gardens; they were being treated like a public open space and the tenants were feeling intimidated. There was also a shortage of parking spaces. The stairs and corridors were enclosed and security systems installed. Extra parking spaces were created, but because they are not visible from the properties, residents are reluctant to use them.



The Flats, the later additions of the front porches, drainage features on the round windows and vents for gas heaters are all clearly visible (as is the parking problem).

The physical problems of the buildings and the layout of the estate probably encouraged the original residents of the village to feel that their objections to the estate were vindicated so they had no need to look for other problems, but other problems were identified.

"The people that were moved in were not village people and were not used to living in a small quiet community. Everytime there is any crime or vandalism in the village you can almost guarantee that it comes from that estate, which has been nicknamed 'Legoland' by people in neighbouring villages, because of the ugliness of the houses..." (14). Other comments along the same lines were made to the recent parish housing survey, and it has to be said that the council estate is the only area of the village where there have been acid attacks on cars, and on a person, a rape, a prostitute plying her trade and drugs and a child expelled from the local secondary school for supplying drugs. Vandalism is a continuing problem in the village and it is the general conception that the perpetrators live at the council estate; some of them do.

The local Borough councillor has admitted that in the past problem families, who have been out of council housing in other parts of the borough, have been placed in East Hanningfield where there is often a vacancy because it is not popular. Other families have taken the offered accommodation in the village because they had no choice, but they put there names on the transfer list in the hope of moving back to the town as soon as possible. People who do not want to be in the village and who are eager to leave are not going to settle in and become part of the community because they have no commitment and no interest.

The recent housing survey identified the need for 25 extra dwellings in the village. This need can be divided into two general groups: young people wanting to set up a home of their own, some of them married and/or with children; and families who have outgrown their accommodation. Mrs. A explained her situation, she moved into one of the flats almost ten years ago. She now has two children the elder of which is about to start secondary school but there is nowhere for her to do her homework. The family is at the top of the list for a house in the village, but the stock of council houses continues to get smaller because of 'right to buy' and no-one appears prepared to move out of the remaining houses. There is also the

probability that should a house become available a homeless family will be placed in it because of the general shortage of houses in the borough as a whole. Since 1979, 4,463 council houses have been sold and 8,160 remain in the borough (CBC 96).

Coxall and Robins ask, "Why are there not enough homes to house Britain's population?" (p409) and cite the slow down in house building and the decay of older housing stock as the reason (p410). In East Hanningfield it is possible to see other factors being involved. In the private sector, the cheaper three bedroom houses were built approximately 30 years ago. When they come up for sale it is usually childless couples or families with young children who move into them; they are the starter homes, but they are more expensive than the usual starter homes in the area. Developments since that time have produced increasingly larger 'executive' type houses, so there is nowhere for young people to start on the home ownership ladder unless they are particularly well paid. The council estate, built almost 20 years ago, has no room for expansion, and neither does the rest of the village. Apart from back garden development, which for financial reasons usually produces large houses, there is no more space within the defined settlement boundary for further building. So the prevalence of 'market forces' and local planning polices have prevented the village from growing naturally with its population, and Government polices have done the same for the local authority housing sector.

The local community, with the Parish Council and the Residents Association campaigning on its behalf, was unable to prevent the imposition of, what was foreseen as and, turned out to be the wrong development. Since that time the parish councillors have bemoaned the planning applications which arrive for consultation for their increasingly bigger executive type houses which bring new people into the village when there is a need for additional simpler housing for those already resident. It is this situation which has led the Parish Council to contact the Rural Housing Trust with a view to possibly creating some homes for the local people who need housing but do not want to move away. It was to determine whether there was a genuine need that the housing survey was undertaken.

So, whereas the community's involvement with the decision making process with regard to housing development has been a history of failure, with some minor successes, a new era is emerging whereby the community can have a proactive role, albeit only so far as the Borough Planning Committee will allow.

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