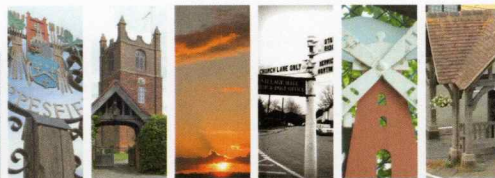


The Parish of



Toppesfield & Gainsford End



Village Plan for 2012 – 2027



The Parish of Toppesfield & Gainsford End

Village Plan 2012 - 2027



Chairman's Introduction

Welcome to the Toppesfield Village Plan.

The Village Plan came about in January 2009 because the then newly appointed team of councillors wanted to change the way things had been done in the past.

We recognised we had something very special in Toppesfield and Gainsford End with a spirit and strength of community that is very rare in today's busy society. We wanted to build on this to ensure this Community spirit not only remains but strengthens and grows with the Village.



To achieve this we needed some goals and a blueprint for the future. This had to come from you, the Community, as a considered reflection on how we wanted our Village to grow.

This fitted well with the Borough and County policies for planning the future of our rural communities. So the Village Plan was conceived and after our initial launch a team of volunteers came forward to construct the Plan.

The time from the launch to this first stage of the Plan has flown by and the team has worked diligently and collaboratively to achieve this. They have also done a great job in communicating their progress across all the different community groups and stakeholders,

This has been very much a team and community activity and I would like to record my warm thanks to all the volunteers who have given their time and energy to making it all happen.

Peter Moore - Chairman: Toppesfield Parish Council

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VANTAGE

Village Action Network for Toppesfield And Gainsford End

VANTAGE was set up as a non-structured, loosely formal, but very open group, through which interested residents could contribute ideas and guidance to the Village Plan development process.

Almost two thirds of residents took part throughout the review period, which meant that many and varied views were openly considered.

An informally constituted steering group of volunteers, led by a neutral and independent chairman, met regularly to guide the process. The meeting minutes, the results and analysis of the questionnaires, and other relevant presentation notes are all available for open view under the Village Plan tab on the Toppesfield Parish Council web site at www.toppesfieldparishcouncil.org.uk.

VANTAGE was registered with the Rural Communities Council Essex (RCCE) and joined their Community Led Planning Network.

RCCE is an independent charity, funded by Essex County Council and voluntary donations, to help people and communities throughout rural Essex plan for a sustainable future.

VANTAGE also signed an agreement with Toppesfield Parish Council setting out the roles and responsibilities of each party. It included a formal arrangement for accessing and controlling the finances raised for the project.

Introduction

What is the Village Plan for?

- To create a shared vision of what the Toppesfield and Gainsford End villages should – or should not – be like.
- To create the opportunity for everyone to input and influence the future of the villages.
- To build strengthen and develop the community spirit amongst the inhabitants of the villages.

Toppesfield and Gainsford End's inhabitants have a track record for developing and supporting community activities. The Village Plan aims to harness this enthusiasm for village life, by identifying how this community spirit could be developed and gain ideas what the future shape of the village should be.

The village plan aims to benefit all the villagers of Toppesfield and Gainsford End by creating a shared vision and process for delivering the vision, based on what the inhabitants might need, want or aspire to in the future.

Village life is a wonderful thing, something to be appreciated and preserved. Its quality is very much dependent on the efforts of those that live there. That's as true for the Parish of Toppesfield and Gainsford End as it is for anywhere else.

It's also true that the more effort that is put in to create a sense of community, the greater the gain for the village as a whole.

The villages' facilities are very important and their continued use is essential if Toppesfield and Gainsford End are to maintain their sense of community. The residents of both villages have generally been concerned and active in meeting the needs of the Community as they arise.

Solutions have evolved under the leadership of individuals from the Community.

Background

An opportunity has arisen from a Government initiative to assess and document current and possible future needs of the Community and to lay down broad plans for such needs to be funded and hence met efficiently.

The Village Plan for Toppesfield and Gainsford End was developed by a group of independent villagers, operating under the name of "Village Action Network for Toppesfield and Gainsford End" – abbreviated to VANTAGE.

The Village Plan exercise was mandated by the Parish Council to ascertain from parishioners the areas where it is felt improvements could be made to our community and, based on their views, to formulate a set of implementation plans.

The recommendations set out in this Plan are based on the extensive responses provided by parishioners to the detailed questionnaires completed in 2011. (see appendix 1 for process).

Funding for the project was provided by Essex County Council via the Rural Community Council for Essex (RCCE).



Aims and Goals

This Village Plan seeks to address the issues, now and in the future, that will affect everyone in the community.

The Village Plan is not intended to be 'set in stone', nor detail every move and project planned for the village. However it is intended to be a route-plan providing direction for a group of people to use and develop the thinking further.

Through this process the aim is to deliver a framework that helps bring about the developments, resources, funding and action required to make the plan a reality.

It is envisaged that the plan will be delivered by interested parties made up from the villagers and other interested parties who regularly use the amenities and facilities within the Parish boundaries.

Progress will be co-ordinated by the Parish Council and reported by various bodies at the Annual Parish Meeting.

Summary of Villagers' Views

Through a series of workshops and consultations, the residents of the Parish developed ideas of the sort of place in which they would like to live.

These ideas were turned into Vision Statements that were put to the community in the questionnaires and were generally accepted across the board.

These statements formed the basis of the in-depth survey of the opinions of people in the questionnaires, some of which is summarised in the appendices of this document.

In the following text, the full name of the "Parish of Toppesfield and Gainsford End" is often abbreviated to "Toppesfield", unless specific items relating to the central area (Toppesfield village), or indeed the outer areas including the hamlet of Gainsford End, are being discussed.

Vision Statements



- The Parish of Toppesfield & Gainsford End aspires to be a peaceful, safe, open, inclusive and united community living in an attractive, green, rural environment.
- There will be a sustainable, prosperous, progressive, balanced population, using comprehensive facilities open to all.
- There will be good connections with the outside world, but there will also be a trend towards self-sufficiency with resourceful residents caring and sharing, and having fun whilst living within a thriving community spirit.
- Our Village will be self-supporting, self-maintaining and self-sustaining as much as possible, whilst preserving our rural heritage.
- There will be comprehensive facilities for recreation and leisure open to all, for all to enjoy in pursuit of healthy and fun social activities and community life.
- There will be an environment in the Parish of Toppesfield and Gainsford End that will enable and support local businesses and business people in a long term and sustainable manner which will maximise employment opportunities.
- We will enjoy easy access to shared information within our community, and efficient, effective and affordable communication and transport links with the wider world.

Detailed Villagers' views

Information and views are broken down into eight distinct areas:

1. You and Your Family

- 345 people surveyed (61% of the total population)
- 154 homes responded from a total of 202 homes invited to comment (76%)
- Trend for population to be ageing
- Correlation between the the number of responses from young families and published census statistics is poor
- Half of adults are working with one third retired (survey inconsistency – maybe working parents have less time to respond to surveys).
- Main means of transport – car
- The population is declining in number with fewer dwellings.
- Whilst there is a spread of ages, it is apparent that the over 50's are becoming the most significant proportion of the population. Over 30% are retired
- With poor public transport provision, people are dependent on their cars for travelling from the Parish and, indeed, across the Parish to the central area (i.e. the amenities in Toppesfield village).



2. Ecology and Environment

- Green and pleasant area but needs attention
- Roads and paths not well maintained in bad weather
- Scope for communal purchasing of fuel and local energy generation
- Local generation of energy desirable, but wind farms undesirable
- Energy savings schemes would be appreciated
- Being able to recycle locally is well supported
- Local food production to be encouraged
- Generally peaceful but with some disturbance
- Disturbances listed include low flying aircraft, motorbike noise, domestic animals, fast cars and speeding, along with badgers, neighbours, alarms, music, guns, etc.
- Dog fouling and litter – some problems but not too bad
- No street lighting needed

There was little difference in the responses between Toppesfield and Gainsford End.

3. Social and Community

- Good community spirit
- Housing – there seems to be a reasonable spread of housing types with low interest in creating new housing developments
- Feelings of safety and security
- School, Church, Village Hall, Shop, and Pub are important to the community, but awareness of the facilities provided is surprisingly low, indicating communication issues
- Car parking in central area is restricted – school parents particularly concerned
- Provision for pre-school children important
- Amenities should be sustainable

It is generally accepted that there is a good community spirit in the Village. The feeling was felt more strongly in Toppesfield village than in Gainsford End. There is a bit of a feeling of remoteness in Gainsford End.

There is a low rate of crime in the area. The Neighbourhood Watch Scheme in Toppesfield was appreciated and there is some scope for extending it more widely.

There is a difference between the central and outer areas in the perceived need for a greater proportion of small affordable properties.

It is perceived that we need to make efforts now to encourage young families to live and be active in the life of the village, so that in 15 years' time we are still a thriving community, not a retirement village.

4. Leisure and Recreation



- Playing fields are under utilised
- Children's play equipment is inadequate
- Team changing facilities are poor
- Allotments (under impressive development programme)
- Public footpaths' network appreciated but in need of attention
- Car parking facilities need some attention in central Toppesfield
- Extensive range of clubs, organisations and events available

Village recreation facilities include the Village Hall, Playing Fields in Toppesfield and Gainsford End, The Green Man public house, and the Allotments area.

It does appear that many residents are not aware of the breadth of activities which are covered by the various clubs and societies.

By far the most significant areas for attention appear to be the playing fields and the recreational equipment sited there. The children's play equipment is thought to be inadequate and unsafe, and there is no equipment suitable for youth and adult fitness.

Whilst it is generally thought that the playing fields are important to the community, there is a widespread feeling that the facilities, both for sport and the children's play areas are not well maintained and not adequate for the needs of the village.

They are seen NOT to be used to their full potential.

Many think that more activities for the young should be provided. It was said that a shortage of helpers at the Youth Club was a problem in the past; a comment was also made that young people may prefer to be outside.

The Village Hall is seen as important, but the facilities are neither well known, nor perceived as fit for purpose by those using them. The Hall is perceived as not being used to its full potential with funding an issue.

This may be due to the lack of advertising of events, or lack of support from the villagers, or just insufficient groups prepared to use the Hall, or maybe a mixture of all three.

Perhaps the Parish Web site should be developed to include comprehensive coverage of the activities of the clubs and organisations and up-dated programmes.

The following clubs, organisations and events are important to Toppesfield and Gainsford End residents:

Women's Institute
"Little Chestnuts" Pre-school
"Little Hedgehogs" Parents and Toddlers Group
Golf Society
Wine Clubs
Art Club
Doctors' Car Service
Church Choir
Church Bell Ringers
Walking for Well Being
Red Barrows
Darts Team
Pool Team
Quiz Nights
Village Show
Church Fete
W.I. Harvest Supper
Church Auction
Christmas Carol Service
Beer Festival
Golden Jubilee / Royal Wedding/Diamond Jubilee/etc.



The residents feel the Church is important, but some people are not fully aware of the facilities it offers, nor if it is inclusive.

As with the pre-school, the Primary School is viewed as being very important. When asked if it meets the needs of the community, some 14% think it does not, but the majority either have no opinion or did not answer.

Written comments seem to query whether it is necessary for the school to provide facilities for the community as a whole.

Nearly all residents think that a pub is important to the community; although, currently, the Pub facilities are not seen as adequate for the purposes of the village.

In general residents think it welcomes families. Food in the pub is however seen as a weakness and people would like to see an improvement.

There is an extensive network of footpaths and this appears to be popular. Whilst the footpaths are clearly marked on maps, there seems to be some concern that they are not well maintained, not kept clear and not always well signposted.

There would appear to be a demand for maps and guides to footpaths and walks.

5. Transport and Communication

- Broadband is inadequate
- The web site is not visited often, particularly by younger residents
- The Parish Newsletter is widely read and is seen as the main communication vehicle for the Village
- Public transport is poor to non-existent
- Car sharing schemes or car clubs would be possible
- The speed limit through the village and hamlet should be applied and enforced – 30 mph or 20 mph around central area amenities.

6. Economy and Employment

- Local businesses need supporting for sustainability
- Part-time work is desirable
- Young peoples' work experience opportunities would be appreciated
- There was not much support for a Business self-help group
- In general, people are keen for business and employment opportunities to exist in the Parish. There is less support for the idea of encouraging tourism. Residents would use local business services if they had the information, through a directory of local businesses, about what is available.

7. Youth

The main areas of interest were:

- Playground and sports equipment
- Youth representation on Parish Council
- In general, young people appear to be satisfied with Toppesfield as a place to live. They claim to know what is going on and regularly read the notice boards in the village. They do not appear to visit the T & GE Face book page but do read the T & GE Newsletter regularly. Whilst they think that it is important to have a village web site none of the respondents actually visit the current Parish web site. This may be because the content is irrelevant to them.
- They feel in general that the Children's play areas are disappointing and would like better play equipment in the playing fields. In addition, they would like to see the playing fields used for sports other than football. For example, a basketball/netball hoop would be appreciated. They would enjoy a nature reserve in the village but appear unaware of the existing one.
- They do not feel isolated from facilities, and use public transport to and from the village (including taxis). Some young people do feel ignored in the village, and would like to see a Youth Council or Representative to advise the Parish Council on young persons' matters.

8. Local Councils

The roles of Braintree District Council and Toppesfield Parish Council appear to be understood. The Parish Council is responsible for the services it provides. Its primary income is raised through the annual Council Tax precept.

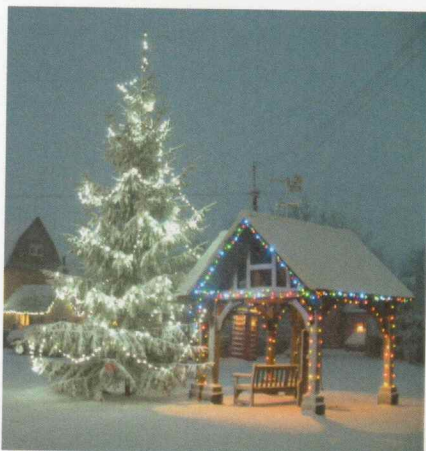
It establishes policies for action and decides how money will be raised and spent on behalf of the Community. It is responsible for spending public money lawfully and achieving the best value for money.

The Parish Council as a body decides whether to work in partnership with other organisations and it often serves (through representatives) on other bodies.

Individual Councillors cannot make a decision on behalf of the Council – decisions have to be based on a majority vote with the Council operating as a Corporate Body.

Photography Competition - Results

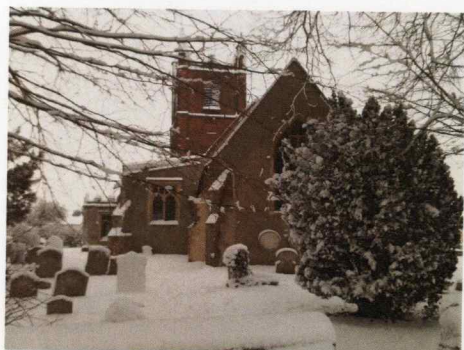
Winner: Shaun Sheldrake



Second Place: Molly Stevenson



Third Place: Carolyn McConnell



Shaun Sheldrake

Highly Commended

Molly Stevenson



Carolyn McConnell

Projects for Implementation 2012 – 2015

1. You and Your Family

Whilst there are concerns on the sustainability of a balanced community, there are no specific actions proposed for the first phase of this village plan. However, aspects of other parts of the plan relates to the maintenance of a healthy society in Toppesfield.

In the medium to longer term, the Parish Council might consider a plan for retaining and sustaining local amenities for the benefit of residents. The centre of Toppesfield houses the main amenities in one cohesive area around the Village Hall.

Recommendations:

- Creating a Parish Centre incorporating a pub, community centre, school, church on land owned by the Community
- Extending the utility of this Parish centre to the wider population of the Parish in the outlying areas. The planning and location of a car park would be important to achieve this.

2. Ecology and Environment

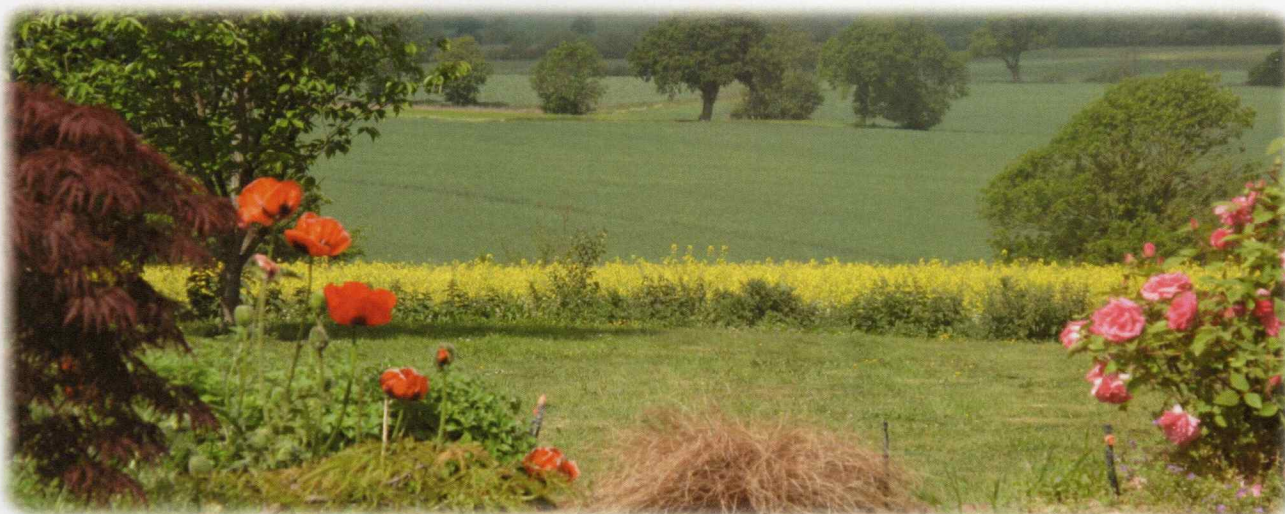
Energy

Recommendations:

- Review long term opportunities for local energy generation and energy savings for community buildings together with possible funding opportunities for any necessary spend
- Short term: collect and disseminate information on how to reduce energy usage, how to find the most suitable energy suppliers, and awareness of the various assistance and energy saving schemes available
- Carry out energy audits of residents' homes and propose solutions, along with awareness of grants, etc. available for such projects

Process

- Lead by the Parish Council, establish a Ecology & Environment sub-committee
- Disseminate relevant information through a series of presentations on a monthly basis in the first year.
- Establish a team of 'auditors' to carry out energy audits



Collective Purchasing

Recommendations

- Extend existing collective purchasing scheme for heating oil to include other forms of fuel (electricity, logs, biomass, etc.); insurance; food, etc.

Local Food

Recommendations

- Consider a project to identify existing sources of food and drink within the Parish and within a specific radius of the Parish. Publish a directory of producers, outlets and related services
- Arrange monthly Farmers' markets to bring food and drink to the Parish
- Develop proposals to supply local 'manufacturers' with raw materials grown or sourced locally (e.g. apples for the local cider maker).



Process

- Identify and assess any major opportunities to further extend the production of local food and drink for viability
- Agree project leadership and administration - form action group drawn from the Community shop, local landowners, local producers (e.g. Allotment Society, suppliers to the Community shop, etc.), and interested local residents (e.g. Women's Institute).

Maintenance of roads, verges, hedgerows, green areas

- Road maintenance remains the responsibility of Essex County Council and any need for road repair should be reported to the Highways Department via the Parish Council.

Recommendations:

- Parish Council to develop a cohesive policy for spending money provided by Braintree DC for the up-keep of grass lands, verges and hedgerows.
- Integrate the efforts of Local landowners to have responsibility for some maintenance with other actions in this area.

3. Social and Community

In the wide area of Social and Community, whilst many issues are listed, the key concern seems to be that the existing amenities should be sustainable.

The School, Church, Village Hall, Shop, and Pub are seen as important to the community, but awareness of the facilities provided is surprisingly low.

Recommendations

- Review car parking provision in central Toppesfield to enhance use of central amenities
- Take steps to secure the future of all public amenities



4. Leisure and Recreation

Playing Fields and Recreational Equipment & Resources (See Appendix 3 for Additional points)

Recommendations

- Introduce equipment suitable for teenage, youth and adult fitness.
- Improve the maintenance of the playing fields and the bordering hedgerows.
- Review the children's play area and equipment ensuring they meet modern expectations and standards.
- Review sports field/area investigation options for extended or flexible use (e.g. in addition to football a basketball/netball option).
- Investigate opportunities for indoor recreation (e.g. badminton, carpet bowls, chess) possibly in the Village Hall and School Hall.
- Repair and update the pavilion in the central Toppesfield recreation ground providing an on-site changing facility (potentially with showers).

Process

- Establish a team to manage and develop the Recreation Resources i.e. "The Leisure and Recreation Group" (LARG) responsible for managing the resources for leisure and recreation in the Parish.
- Agree areas of responsibility: the playing fields, and associated equipment, along with maintenance of the grass land, fences and hedgerows.
- Nominate a team leader, administrator, treasurer (fund raiser), operations manager, and volunteers working closely with the Parish Council .
- Funding to be raised from the PC, local community, local authority, or national sports/health grants.
- Using voluntary, or where budget allows, commissioning services from local businesses and the farming community, to undertake any work not undertaken by volunteers or Youth groups.
- Prepare a plan for improvement and management of the recreational facilities identifying maintenance requirements, land usage and equipment usage .
- Agree (after further community consultation) the requirement and format for playground furniture.
- Source and agree funding and implement plan.

Footpaths Network

It was clear from the questionnaires regarding the Village Plan that there is considerable interest in the public paths in the parish, and that many people do use them but are not clear where the rights of way are.

The Parish paths include footpaths, bridle ways, and byways.

In addition to these there are permissive paths with permission to use but only on a temporary basis.

This permission can be withdrawn at any time.

Recommendations:

- Join the Parish Paths Partnership (P3) which is a partnership between Essex County Council Highways and the parish to cover all types of paths.
- Prepare document stating the rights and responsibilities of users of the different.
- Agree plan for paths and outlining future developments, activities, maintenance and resourcing.

- In conjunction with P3, survey all the paths and note any things that need attention.
- Source funding, produce and publish maps of walks around the parish based on the Ordnance Survey maps, with guidance.
- Organize Parish walks on a regular basis with particular interests.

Process

- With P3, create working parties with local landowners to agree and execute a maintenance and repair regime.
- Form the Toppesfield Parish Pathfinders, with different people taking responsibility for different parts of the plan such as preparing the maps, doing the surveys, leading walks, organizing working parties and liaising with P3.

5. Communications and Transport

80% of respondents to the Village Plan Questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed with that part of the Vision Statement concerning Communications and Transport.

This suggests significant support for the planned process of improvement, for which it is helpful initially to examine the current position.

Toppesfield Broadband / Internet Connections.

The village, like many rural locations, does not have particularly good broadband connections or access to alternative Internet solutions.

For many villagers the attainable speed is pitifully low. Poor connections affect many aspects of modern life – they limit use of the Internet for social and domestic reasons, access to help and entertainment.

Poor connections also have a serious negative impact on economic activity and property prices.

Recommendations

- Plan to have better Broadband links installed considering the following options:
 - obtain enough commitment from the area that BT will bring fibre to the village (1,000+ users)
 - finding suppliers of alternative technologies
 - enable village to become its own telecommunications supplier
- Consider and measure commitment for villagers to carry out the actual home installations
- Consider options and identify the process of working with alternative supplier
 - Creating a single village billing point responsible for collecting individual subscriptions
- Confirm benefits and issues e.g.
 - Cost saving & improved services
 - Complexity and long term commitment
- Lobbying for 4G mast as alternative to Fibre

Process

- Establish what funding/grants are available and what criteria are necessary to meet these
- Create a web based survey for the village, documenting -
 - current Broadband speeds and supplier

- occupiers feelings/need about accessing enhanced broadband
- willingness to pay for installation and/or increased monthly fee
- any other data necessary to achieve funding grants (see above)
- Establish the occupiers' total Broadband needs – by bandwidth and activities, Video on demand remote controlling the office network, or intensive web browsing.
- Identify if there are villagers/businesses willing to pay an increased cost/subscription in return for enhanced features but also to provide an accelerator fund to enable the project.
- Create a critical mass of people willing to subscribe in order to critically drive costs down and attract supplier
- Research and confirm what grant money is available
- **Proposed actions:** Next Steps: Once the survey is complete and the results analysed
 - Assemble the economic argument
 - Present a business case to potential suppliers
 - Achieve an enhanced Broadband capability.



Transport and Traffic

For the current status of Transport and Traffic as identified in the Questionnaire, please refer to Appendix 5

A Transport Group has been formed and has identified the following eight opportunities and has undertaken preliminary research on each:

- Speed Limits
- Car Clubs
- Minibus acquisition
- Community Transport
- Car Sharing
- Taxi discounts
- Bicycles for hire
- Bus service improvement

Of the eight opportunities explored in detail, three have been disregarded at this stage: Taxi Discounts, Bicycles for hire and extensive Bus Service improvements.

Bus services are the single area of transport which for economic reasons may be the most difficult to enhance unless critical mass can be achieved in conjunction with neighbouring communities e.g. Sible Hedingham.

Efforts focused on shared or community transport are judged to provide greater returns for residents. As transport costs rise inexorably, the effects of rural isolation will become ever more damaging.

Future developments will be those over which our residents have control; in planning, in decision making and in day to day operation.

The following five areas have been prioritised by the Transport Group as appropriate for action within the Village Plan:

Speed Limits

- The 30 mph limit submission has been:
 - accepted by Essex County Council
 - to be implemented after the signage procurement process in 2012.
- Resident team to be formed to:
 - monitor and assist enforcement of adherence to the 30 mph limit
 - advise on the need for and viability of a 20 mph limit near the Shop and School in Church Lane



Car Clubs

Points for consideration: Other Car Clubs indicate that a single clean car can replace up to 12 (not so clean) privately owned vehicles. The net saving of Car Club usage versus car ownership is typically £3,500 p.a. for each small family car.

Recommendations

- Formation of a Car Club to develop affordable access to new and efficient vehicles on a shared cost basis
- Investigate current business models to determine best practice
- Research and monitor manufacturers' promotional offers and funding opportunities
- Prepare recommendations and plan for progress

Community Transport

Recommendations:

- Raise awareness of the three Community Transport Schemes within the villages through:
 - The Village Newsletter
 - Posters (Shop, Pub, Notice Boards)
 - The Village Web site
 - The P.C. Web site
 - Face book
- Recruit locally based volunteer drivers, using the above communication tools.

Minibus Acquisition

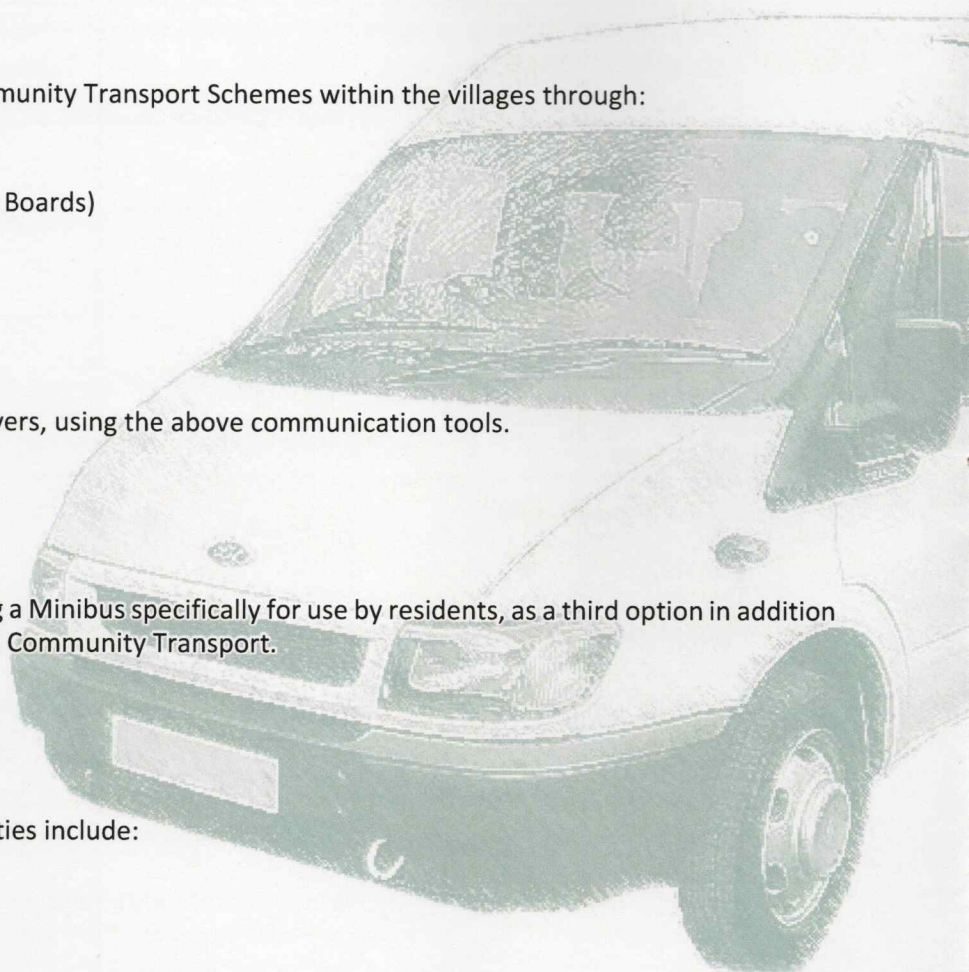
Recommendation:

- investigate the viability of acquiring a Minibus specifically for use by residents, as a third option in addition to those provided by Car Clubs and Community Transport.

Car Sharing

Recommendations:

- Examples of Car Sharing opportunities include:
 - Commuting
 - Social Journeys
 - Airport Runs
- Use Village Web site as medium for initiating and sustaining contact between Sharers.



6. Economy and Employment

Business Directory

The priority is to place the directory where it is the first place people go to find local tradesmen and services not the last. A project called "somewhere.local.co.uk" is in the early stages of development, so in this case the web site would be called. **toppesfield.local.co.uk**

Recommendations

- Plan to develop a business directory to promote local business and services to local people and keep local money local
- Consider the following
 - Printed directory
 - Word of mouth
 - Web site

Process

- Consider where existing activities (Parish Council website, Parish magazine, What's On and Bits & Bobs) already provide the relevant information for free
- Review Village & Parish Website and Facebook: based on price, resourcing or suitability
- Consider an on line business directory
- Publicise the existence of the Business directory appropriately

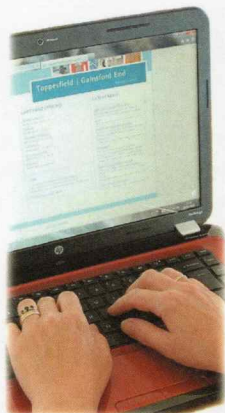
Community Website

The concept is to develop a community website that offers broad and varied content covering all aspects of village life to make it a worthy bookmark, and a site that people would want to actively visit and use.

This could be the vehicle that would hopefully attract visitors and allow the effective placement of a business directory advertising local trades and services. It might also address other communication issues.

The site could include a broad range of content including but not limited to:

- Post office and shop opening times etc.
- Local doctors surgery information
- Local bus service details
- Parish Council links
- Local news and issues
- Info on various community groups i.e. art club, allotments, WI, etc.
- School and pre-school info/links
- Online version of Parish Magazine
- Village diary
- Specialist pages for local groups and clubs that can be updated and maintained by a group or club member.
- Local business directory
- Buy and sell pages
- Community forms to discuss local topics and issues



This domain is already in place as well as various others including greatyeldhamlocal.co.uk, hedinghamlocal.co.uk. Part of the concept is to have geographic groups of community sites so commercial adverts can be placed on one or more sites.

It has to be noted that Toppesfield Parish Council has an existing website but that considerable revision is needed to make it more user-friendly. There is scope for common development of these sites within the project framework.

The project could be a commercial one with revenue coming from paid adverts and commercial entries to the village diary.

This would incentivise the development and maintenance of an up-to-date information source.

7. Parish Council

Parish Youth Council

When the village questionnaire was undertaken in 2011, a distinct survey was produced for young people living in the parish. The analysis of the results showed that, broadly speaking, young people are happy living in the village and felt part of the community.

However, there are some aspects with which they are less satisfied and there was interest expressed in establishing some form of youth council as a way of having their views and opinions heard.

In response to the question 'Would you be interested in participating in a Youth Council?' more than 80% of those expressing an opinion responded affirmatively.

Consequently, it has been decided that the Village Plan will include, as one of its objectives, support for the creation of a Youth Council.

Recommendations

- Establish a formal forum for young people between the ages of 10 and 17

Process

- The Youth Council would comprise an agreed number of members voted into office every 2 years.
- Identify and discuss issues of interest and relevance to young people
- Present recommendations to the Parish Council every 3 months or when appropriate.

St Margaret's Primary School has had its own successful school council for several years so there is already a cadre of young people with experience of working with such a model.



Youth Councils are becoming more common throughout the UK and there are examples in Essex. Help in setting them up is available from the National Association of Local Councils ('NALC').

Of course this is something that young people themselves must play an active part in developing and whilst it will be the case that practical guidance and advice will be available to them, they must provide the greater part of the input into the design of the council and what it discusses.

During the lifetime of the Plan, further detailed work will be undertaken to determine the best way in which this can be taken forward.

Summary and Conclusions

The residents of Toppesfield are generally community-minded and resourceful when it comes to meeting the needs of their families, their neighbours and friends.

In the past, when needs have arisen, a solution has evolved and it may be appropriate not to 'force' any particular project as identified in this plan.

At the least, the whole village plan process has raised awareness, and some actions have already been initiated. Of note, progress has been made in the areas of broadband provision, local food, transport, playground equipment, and footpaths.

At the most, this document provides a work plan for the future. There are projects that would be desirable to be completed in the first three years of the review period, and a subsequent review might be held towards the end of the first 3 year period (2014).

In that review, as well as examining those projects scheduled for completion within the first three years, those projects identified for longer term attention might be prioritised for action over the following 3-5 year period.

There is a clear mandate for the Parish Council to ensure the sustainability of the amenities and businesses in the village.

The Parish Council will operate by encouraging groups of committed residents to take on the various roles necessary to implement the village plan, and to receive progress reports from these groups at the Annual Parish Meeting.



SUMMARY ACTION PLAN TABLES

1. You and Your Family

Whilst recognising there are issues relating to the residents and their families, there are no immediate areas for serious attention other than those covered in the sections below.

2. Ecology and Environment

Energy

What Action?	Who Leading?	Who Else Involved	How Funded?	When?
Form Energy Group	Parish Council	Residents	PC from precept	By September 2012
Establish programme of information and energy auditing for local residents	Energy Group	Carbon Trust, Energy Saving Council, Braintree District Council, Suppliers of energy-saving equipment	Participants	Programme for one year Oct 2012 – Oct 2013
Identify funding opportunities	Energy Group	Carbon Trust, Energy Saving Council, Braintree District Council	Group	April 2013
Study energy use in public buildings	Energy Group	Church/School/Village Hall/Pub	Voluntary	by December 2013

Collective Purchasing

What Action?	Who Leading?	Who Else Involved	How Funded?	When?
Grow and consolidate Bulk Fuel Purchasing scheme group	Parish Council	Residents	Self-funding	August 2012 and then on-going
Study other fuel purchasing schemes	Collective purchasing group	Parish Council, Energy suppliers	Self-funding	On-going
Explore collective purchasing of insurances (House, life, car, etc.)	Collective purchasing group	Residents/Parish Council/Braintree District Council	Self-financing	Schemes in place by end 2017

Local Food

What Action?	Who Leading?	Who Else Involved	How Funded?	When?
Identify and catalogue local food and drink suppliers	Community Shop Committee	Local landowners, Allotments Society, Women's Institute, Residents	Community Shop	Initiate in August 2012 and then on-going
Organise Farmers' Market	Community Shop Committee	Local Farmers' Market group, Parish Council, Village Hall Committee	Self-funding	On-going
Co-ordinate distribution of local food surpluses to appropriate outlets	Community Shop Committee	Residents/Parish Council/local producers	Self-financing	Schemes in place by end 2017

Maintenance of roads, verges, hedgerows, green areas

What Action?	Who Leading?	Who Else Involved	How Funded?	When?
Develop road maintenance programme	Parish Council	ECC Highways, Braintree DC	ECC, BDC	Initiate in August 2012 and then on-going
Develop and implement clear policy for maintenance of grass areas, verges and hedgerows.	Parish Council	Local landowners, contractors	PC from precept	Initiate in August 2012 and then on-going

3. Social and Community

Car parking and village assets

What Action?	Who Leading?	Who Else Involved	How Funded?	When?
Review car parking needs in and around central Toppesfield	Parish Council	Local residents, ECC Highways, Braintree DC	ECC, BDC	Initiate in August 2012 and then on-going
Review opportunities to secure the ownership of central amenities to secure their futures	Parish Council	Local residents and landowners	Public subscription, grants	Initiate in August 2012 and then on-going

4. Leisure and Recreation

Playing fields and Playground Equipment

What Action?	Who Leading?	Who Else Involved	How Funded?	When?
Maintain and bring to a safe level the existing playground equipment	Parish Council	Leisure And Recreation Group (LARG) and local businesses	PC from precept	By September 2012
Establish LARG and assess funding requirements	Parish Council	Residents/Parish Council	Parish Precept	By July 2012
Survey needs of relevant age groups	LARG	Residents/School/ local businesses/Sports Clubs/Neighbouring Parish Councils	Voluntary	by December 2012
Develop and implement a maintenance programme for lands and equipment	LARG		PC from precept /LARG funds	August 2012 and then on-going
Make proposals for long term work plan	LARG	LARG/PC	Voluntary	On-going

Footpaths

What Action?	Who Leading?	Who Else Involved	How Funded?	When?
Form Group (Toppesfield Parish Pathfinders - TPP)	Parish Council	ECC Highways	ECC and PC from precept	By September 2012
Join ECC Parish Paths Partnership – P3	TPP	Residents/Parish Council	Parish Precept	By October 2012
Itemise rights and responsibilities of landowners and users	TPP	PC/Landowners	Voluntary	By December 2012
Survey, develop and implement a maintenance programme for all footpaths/bridleways/byways	TPP/P3	Landowners	TPP and P3	March 2013 and then on-going
Mapping – maps and verbal descriptions	TPP	P3	Voluntary/ PC from precept	On-going

5. Transport and Communication

Communication - Broadband

What Action?	Who Leading?	Who Else Involved	How Funded?	When?
Conduct property-level survey	Communications group (Toppesfield Broadband Group – TBG)	Experienced residents	PC from precept	Oct-12
Establish public and business needs	TBG	All residents		Dec-12
Assemble economic argument	TBG/Parish Council	Residents		Jan-13
Establish funding/grants	TBG/Parish Council	Funding sources		Mar-13
Contact potential suppliers	TBG/Parish Council	Suppliers		Apr-13

Transport

What Action?	Who Leading?	Who Else Involved	How Funded?	When?
Explore Public transport network with other neighbouring villages	Parish Council	Transport group/ Neighbouring Parish Councils/ Hedingham Bus Company, etc.	Local bus companies	Establish network of public transport by December 2015
Car sharing schemes possible	Transport Group	Residents	Individuals using 'service'	On-going
Car Club	Transport Group	Residents	Residents/Braintree DC / Essex County Council	Apr-14
Community Transport	Transport Group	Residents	Braintree DC.	On-going
Minibus acquisition	Transport Group	Residents	Residents/Braintree DC / Essex County Council	Apr-15

Traffic and Speed Limits

What Action?	Who Leading?	Who Else Involved	How Funded?	When?
Speed limit through village applied – 30 mph to be enforced.	PC/Transport Group	Police / Residents' speed limit enforcement group	Braintree DC / Police	Summer 2012
Survey need for 20 mph speed limit in Church Lane	Transport Group	Residents		Jul-13



6. Economy and Employment

What Action?	Who Leading?	Who Else Involved	How Funded?	When?
Establish Business self-help group	Parish Council	Businesses in Community	Proceeds from breakfast meetings	ASAP
Develop a directory of local businesses (or website) for distribution around community	Toppesfieldlocal.com / Parish Council	Private business/Business Club	Commercial venture - Generated from Business Community	By December 2013
Part-time work desirable – survey employment needs in community	Parish Council	Business Club /Parish Clerk	Business Club/Parish Precept	By January 2013
Young peoples' work experience opportunities - survey employment opportunities	Parish Council	Business Club /Parish Clerk/Local secondary schools serving community	Business Club/Local secondary schools	By January 2013
Minibus acquisition	Transport Group	Residents	Residents/Braintree DC / Essex County Council	April 2015

7. Parish Youth Council

What Action?	Who Leading?	Who Else Involved	How Funded?	When?
Engage in debate regarding formation of Youth Council	Parish Council	Young people (11 – 17 years old) in Parish		By October 2012
Terms of Reference	Parish Council	Parish Council / representatives of Youth		By November 2012
Organise election	Parish Council	Parish Council / representatives of Youth	PC from precept	By December 2012
Joint meeting Youth Council and Parish Council	Transport Group	Youth Council / Parish Council		March 2013

Appendices

Appendix One: THE VILLAGE PLAN - Process

Over a period of two years, the group distributed three questionnaires and held a number of village meetings to consult the residents of the Parish on how they would wish their village life to be, and if and what they would like developed over a period of 15 years into the future.

The first questionnaire had just three questions:

- "What do you like about living in the village?"
- "What don't you like about living in the village?"
- "What would you change?"

From the responses to this first questionnaire (30% of households), the second and third questionnaires were developed to explore, in detail, opinions on the wide range of topics identified.

The response to the second questionnaire was 76% of households representing some 61% of the population.

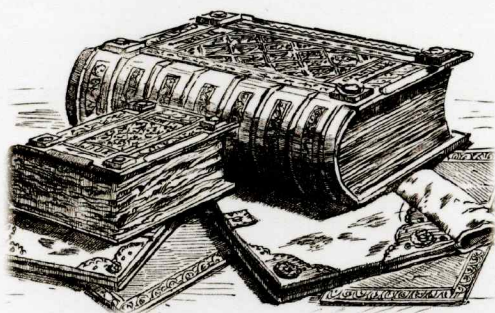
The third questionnaire, the Youth Survey, was targeted to young people in the village and 28 returns were received.

Throughout the period, a nucleus of residents met regularly to monitor the progress of the project and to commission the questionnaires and studies from which this Village Plan has been derived.

Appendix Two: Description of the Village - Historical and Geographical

Introductory history of the village

Throughout its history our village has changed as the world around it has changed. Developments in ownership of land, technology, communication, industry and education have all made their mark.



Although today in some ways things seem not to change a great deal, daily life and the physical appearance of the village is dramatically different compared even to a generation ago.

A village has existed here since Anglo-Saxon times. You might suppose that it is called Toppesfield because it sits on some of the highest ground in this part of the country, but it is believed that it was originally named after a man called Topa, or Toppa, who cleared the ancient Essex forest and became our first farmer.

By the time of the Domesday Book at the beginning of the 11th century the main landowner was called Goti. After the Norman Conquest ownership passed to men with more French sounding names and over the next three centuries estates were formed with names familiar to us today:

- Berwick Hall named after Albrey de Wic;
- Scotneys after Walter de Scotney; Gaynesfords after the Gaynsford family;
- Husees after Roger Huse; Cust Hall after the Cust family;
- Camoys after Sir Ralph de Camoys;
- Flowers Hall after the Flowers family;
- Bradfield after John Bradfield; Olivers after John Oliver.

None of the original buildings from this period have survived.

The houses which bear the names of some of these old estates would have taken their present shape in the 16th and 17th centuries, with additions until the present day.

The oldest building in the village is the church, the main part of which was built in the 14th century.

Life in these early centuries was difficult for villagers. Most were agricultural workers tied to the lords of the manors. Wages were low and in periods of famine, which occurred often, the workers suffered at the expense of their employers. In 1381, after the imposition of a poll tax to pay for the war against France, the Peasants' Revolt began in Essex.

This and the shortage of labour caused by the Black Death, which reduced the population by a quarter, led to many of the feudal ties being abolished, but day to day existence remained precarious.

Most people continued to work on the land, although by the 16th century there was a thriving textile industry in North Essex and South Suffolk. It is probable that many women in Toppesfield engaged in spinning wool in their homes.

In the 17th century the village would have suffered the effects of the Plague, when the population of some places in Essex fell by as much as one third. It was the time of migration to America. Samuel Symons of Olivers migrated in 1637, becoming a founding father of Topsfield and Deputy Governor of Massachusetts. In 1689 villagers would have noticed a big change in the appearance of the village when the church tower collapsed, to be replaced in 1699 by the great brick tower we know today.

In the 18th century life continued to be precarious for most villagers. Agriculture and generally the face of the countryside was revolutionised by the Enclosures. The weaving industry declined, but in its place straw plaiting became a common occupation for women. The first allotments were recorded in Toppesfield and also the first record of a school.

The 19th century saw some of the greatest changes in a short period ever seen before in Toppesfield's history. Things began badly.

The Corn Laws were passed in 1815; the price of grain rose sharply and, while landowners benefitted, many were reduced to poverty. The technology of farming changed dramatically after the invention of the steam-driven traction engine, which improved productivity but reduced the need for manual labour.

Toppesfield's access to the wider world improved greatly; roads were metalled, the bicycle was invented and in 1861 the railway arrived in Great Yeldham. Villagers could now come and go much more easily to find work and by the turn of the century many went to work at Rippers in Sible Hedingham or Whitlocks in Great Yeldham, or left the village to find work in the expanding cities.



The population rose from about 700 at the beginning of the century to over 1000 by mid-century, but gradually fell back by 1901 to 650 and soon after to the level of 500 we know today, though with more children. The school in Church lane was built in 1856 and after compulsory education was introduced had 140 pupils by the end of the century.

In the 20th century the physical appearance of Toppesfield and Gainsford End changed with the removal of older buildings and the building of council houses in Park Lane and Gainsford End in 1929, Church Lane in 1934, and in the Causeway in 1948. At the centre of the village the chapel had been built in 1881,

The Green Man was rebuilt in 1905 after the old pub was destroyed by fire, the Village Hall was built in 1961 and Dordell Court made its appearance in 1976.

Also in 1966, the Blacksmith's pond was filled in and the bungalows in Camoise Close were built.

Modern amenities finally arrived – electricity in 1949, mains water in 1954 and main sewerage in 1965. The telephone was a late arrival. The railway never made it to Toppesfield; the line through Great Yeldham was closed in 1965.



The first bus services came to Toppesfield in the early 1930s but have never provided more than an occasional service.



The farming revolution continued with ever larger petrol-driven machinery and the consolidation of farms, until now very few villagers work on the land.

As the 21st century begins we look back on a village quite different in many ways to that of previous centuries, but with enduring strands that tie us back to our roots – family names, house names, the pattern of roads, the church, the pub, the school.

The challenge for the future is to embrace the changes happening at an even faster pace in the world around us, while holding on to all that has made this village an enduring community for over a thousand years.

Geography and Demography

The Parish of Toppesfield and Gainsford End occupies approximately 5.8 square miles (1,500 hectares) and is located 12 miles north of Braintree, 9 miles south of Haverhill, 8 miles NW of Halstead, 22 miles SE of Cambridge and 44 miles NE of London.

It is part of the Braintree Parliamentary constituency and is in the Upper Colne Ward of Braintree District Council.

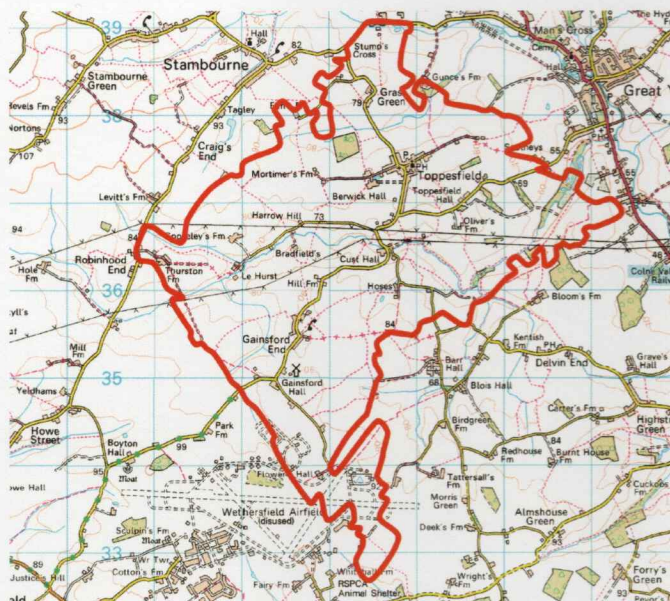
It consists of two main areas of population (the village of Toppesfield and the hamlet of Gainsford End) with individual outlying properties spread across the length and breadth of the Parish.

The neighbouring villages include Sible Hedingham (3 miles), designated in the Braintree District Council Development Plan as a "Key Services Village".

Great Yeldham (2 miles); Stambourne (2 miles), Ridgewell (5 miles), Finchingfield (5 miles); Cornish Hall End (6 miles) –

(all distances measured from the centre of Toppesfield).

N.B. It is to be noted that when the term "village" is used this generally means the whole Parish of Toppesfield & Gainsford End as shown on the map to the right, unless specific mention is made of parts of the Parish such as "Central Toppesfield", "Gainsford End", or "Outer reaches".



The population of the village is distributed as follows:

Population by Gender of Toppesfield & Gainsford End Parish

Date	Apr-01	Nov-07
Males	259	256
Females	274	279
Totals	533	535

Number of Households

Date	2001	2011
Households	212	202

Breakdown of Age Ranges (2007)

Age Range	Numbers	% of Total
0 - 10	49	9.2%
11 - 20	77	14.4%
21 - 30	43	8.0%
31 - 40	56	10.5%
41 - 50	103	19.3%
51 - 60	88	16.4%
61 - 70	72	13.5%
71 - 80	30	5.6%
80+	17	3.2%

Appendix Three: Assets and Amenities

The Church of St. Margaret of Antioch.



The nave and chancel of Church of Saint Margaret of Antioch date back to the 14th Century and the tower was built in 1699. Sited at the centre of the community, on Church Lane, the building is adjacent to local residences, the village school, the Village Hall, and the recreation field.

It has a graveyard that is owned by the Church Commissioners with an additional area donated by the Benson family to the Parish. There is capacity in the graveyard for at least 100 further graves.

Managed by the Parochial Church Council, the church wants to be accessible and welcoming to old and young, not just as a building but also as a fellowship of sharing and caring.

During the week, the building is kept locked, after a case of vandalism, but the PCC would like the church to be open more during the week for people to drop in for a quiet moment. Some four years ago, funds were raised to renew the bells and bell loft, and there is a peel of eight bells regularly rung.

A kitchen facility and toilet have recently been installed, and when funds become available, the pews will be replaced with chairs. The church can then be used for more village events, as well as worship. The PCC hope that church members will be more available to provide pastoral support to those in the community who need help.

Toppesfield church is in a group of churches under the guidance of the recently appointed vicar, Reverend Barbara Hume.

Two church wardens are appointed to oversee the premises. Funds are generated from the community, through collections and fundraising events such as the Annual Church Fete, Cheese and Wine Party, and the Village Auction. A small income is generated from community land rents, historically determined under trusts.

St Margaret's Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School

St. Margaret's school is situated in the village of Toppesfield, a small rural community, close to the Parish Church and Village Recreation Ground and away from the main road. The school was founded by the Church in 1865 to provide an education according to the principles and practices of the Church of England.

Like other Church schools, St. Margaret's has a governing body, which is responsible for the school, and on which the Church, the Local Authorities, parents and staff are represented.



The School is legally owned by the Trustees and is a Church foundation controlled by Essex County Council, which has financial responsibility for its maintenance.

Within the school grounds there is a large playing field, a main playground and an outdoor play area for Foundation Stage pupils, a woodland area and a nature area. Although the school buildings are of Victorian origin, they have been extended and modernised over the years. There are a number of well-resourced areas including a library and a recently upgraded ICT suite. There is also a range of workspaces to accommodate classes, groups and individual learning activities.

In the last ten years, a new, purpose built school hall was added which is used for P.E., assemblies, drama and music activities, productions and school lunchtimes.

There are currently three classes: Class 1: Foundation, Year 1 and Year 2; Class 2: Years 3 and 4; Class 3: Years 5 and 6.



With a strong, energetic, and enthusiastic team in place, the school has gone from strength to strength, particularly in the last two years. The most recent Ofsted report concluded that St. Margaret was **'a good school'** with **'many outstanding features'**.

Only last year St. Margaret's achieved a remarkable feat by **topping** the nationwide SAT's league tables. As the school reputation has grown in stature, so too have the pupil numbers, from forty one back in 2009, increasing to the current level of seventy pupils largely driven by an increase of children from outside the catchment area.

St. Margaret's consider their links with the local community of the upper most importance with active participation from the children in village events such as the Church Fete and Village Show, and joining in with celebrations such as the Christmas 'Lighting up ceremony' at the village pump.

With strong links with the church the children attend regular services including Christmas, Easter, Carol, Harvest thanks giving and an end of year leaving service.

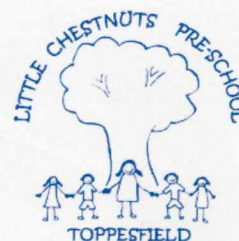
St. Margaret's aim is to provide a happy, secure, stimulating climate, which is purposefully organised to encourage respect for others and the environment, where everybody is equally valued and everyone's achievements are celebrated.

We aim to be aware of our children as individuals, to give them the opportunity and support to identify, develop and use their potential to become active and responsible citizens of the future.

Pre-school Group "Little Chestnuts"

The group, a Registered Charity, meets daily in the Village Hall from 9.00 am to 1.00 pm. Up to 31 children currently enjoy the facility, but fewer than 50% come from the Parish.

In the medium term, the group hopes to have its own, purpose-built unit, where it can totally control the equipment, toys, books, displays etc. without having to clear them away for others to use the Village Hall.



The Village Hall

The Village Hall freehold is held by the Parish Council (the Holding Trustee) and valued in its asset register.

It is administered by a group of 'management trustees' who have a 99 year lease on the building from 2002. Management is exercised through a committee that has representatives of user groups included.

The Toppesfield Village Hall Committee aims to provide a place for community focus and strives to continually improve its facilities and resources for the benefit of local individuals and groups.

Its purpose is to support existing regular users and to encourage more groups, clubs, private hirers, etc. to use the hall.

This will in turn increase revenue to help with the continual maintenance of the property and surrounding grounds.



It is in regular use by a pre-school group on a daily basis, a Mother and Toddler's Group on a once a week basis, The Art Club on a weekly basis, the Women's Institute on a monthly basis, and, annually, several village events are held within the Hall.

Outside there is a small, paved car park and a grass field, fenced off and used by the pre-school group, and occasionally for other village events.

The Community Shop

In 2001, when the village shop and post office suddenly closed, it was a disaster. The nearest shops are some miles away and there is a dearth of public transport.

An action group, initiated by the then-Parish Council, quickly established an interim shop in a Portacabin, and set about fact-finding and awareness-raising.

A Public Meeting was called and villagers voted overwhelmingly to establish a Community Shop, to be built at the front of the village hall.

It would be run by a not-for-profit Provident Society. Sixteen months later a neat, bright, village-owned shop with an up-to-date Post Office cabin was built on land secured by a 99 year lease. It was opened in October 2002.



Toppesfield Stores and Post Office is now the well-established "pop-in" place for shopping, news, post, directions, pensions, leaving messages, meeting friends, paying bills, asking advice and lots more.

Toppesfield Community Village Shop Association Ltd. is registered (number 29302R) pursuant to the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts 1965-1978, and the Shares are issued in compliance with and subject to the provisions of the Society's registered rules.



Many villagers are shareholders and may vote at the AGM but no dividends are paid. The shop is run entirely by volunteers on a not-for-profit basis. Any surplus funds remaining after contingency sums are deducted are used to support other village groups by way of grants, thus strengthening and enriching village life wherever possible.

The shop is managed by a committee which is elected by shareholders each year at the AGM. All committee members are also active shop volunteers and are unpaid. The Post Office is run separately.

The shop is open from 8-1 and 2-5:30 Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 8-1 on Wednesday and 9:00-12:30 on Saturdays. The Post Office is open Monday to Friday mornings from 9 until 1, and offers a huge range of products and services (not just stamps!!). In total there are fewer than 30 volunteers who keep the shop open 6 days per week.

Financially, the shop takes approximately £1000 per week, and, although it would not be a commercially viable proposition, does make an annual surplus, part of which is retained as a reserve and part of which is made available to any organisation or individual to help fund something that will benefit the community.

In a typical month (November 2010), the Post Office was used on 472 occasions, on 145 occasions visitors used both the shop and Post Office, 619 customers shopped in the mornings and 122 visits were made in afternoons. 168 of the visits were made on a Saturday morning. Summing the shop visits, 886 transactions took place averaging £4.50 (excludes Post Office takings).

The shop premises are small with almost no storage area, and there have been times when additional space would have been useful. However, an outside storage unit has been added which has helped alleviate the congestion. A more substantial and permanent outside storage unit would be ideal.

Should there ever be any structural changes to the Village Hall, the Shop Committee would like to be consulted to ascertain if there would be any benefit from the shop undergoing any concurrent changes.



The Green Man Public House



Owned by Admiral Taverns, and rented to a tenant, the Village Pub is situated on a gross site area of 14,485 square feet.

Being the last pub left in the village, it is important to retain it in some form because of its central location at the hub of the village.

The current landlord makes extensive efforts to provide the community with all the support that a 'village pub' ought to give to the residents.

However, there are some concerns over the future of the pub.

Residents from the outer parts of the Parish have to drive to the pub, and insufficient car parking, along with the drink/drive laws, could be considered an issue for them. Within a similar driving distance, there are competitive pubs outside the Parish.

Common Land

One piece of common land is registered with the Land Registry. This is a narrow strip of land alongside Church Lane beyond the church.

Parish, Church, and Charity Land

There are several pockets of land around the Parish registered under charitable trusts which were established in the 18th century and controlled by trustees nominated by the Parish Council and the Church of St Margaret (2 from each).

The church vicar is an ex officio member of the board of trustees. The John and William Edwards's charity with approximately 12 acres within Toppesfield Parish, annuity land on Olivers Farm, and the Durnford Trust currently raise around £800 per annum. Its purpose is for the benefit of the eleemosynary (those dependent on alms) and ecclesiastical parts of the community and is distributed by the trustees.

This is split 50:50 between the 'poor of the village' and the church. The rent on Parish land is reviewed annually by the trustees. From annuity land in Stambourne, the Robert Edwards Educational Trust donates approximately £10 per annum to the local school children, rewarding attendance, effort or ability.

The land on which the school is built was originally owned by the church but is now owned by Essex County Council.

Church Field was donated to the Parish by the Benson family and this area appears to cover the Toppesfield playing field, the school grounds and school playing field. Part of this land was formerly the village and school allotments.

The Gainsford End playing field is believed to be on a 99 year lease from the Lee family of Cust Hall. Dordell Court, off Church Lane, was built on former Glebe land and land from Church Farm.



The Central Toppesfield Recreation Grounds

The Toppesfield playing field (approximately 2 acres) was donated to and is owned by the Parish and maintained by the Parish Council. Some of the maintenance work is contracted to Braintree District Council.

There is a reasonable access route via a lockable gate, adjacent to the Church and School. A permanent football pitch is marked out, occupying the greater part of the field. A small changing room and storage facility, for use by the football club, was constructed by local resident volunteers in the 1970s with money raised by public contributions.

This facility is now in poor repair and needs attention. The football club, sponsored by the local pub, has recently disbanded, and the future of a football activity is in doubt. A small playground of old, poorly maintained

play equipment is also sited alongside the football pitch. This does appear to be used by younger residents with their parents, although there is criticism of the quality and safety of the equipment.

The Parish Council has recently worked on improvements to the equipment to bring it up to acceptable standard. The first football pitch in Toppesfield was situated on Park Field adjacent to The Causeway, now a cultivated field.

The Gainsford End Recreation Ground

There is a small playing field (approximately 1 acre) in Gainsford End to the rear of the public telephone box. It is on a 99 year lease (started in 1952) to the Parish Council and is maintained by Braintree District Council.

There is a limited access drive, with a locked post preventing unauthorised vehicular access. There is no convenient car parking facility in the neighbourhood. There is a small set of children's swings, in poor condition. It does not appear that the playing field is used to any extent.

Public Footpaths, Byways, and Bridleways

There is an extensive network of public footpaths around the village. Whilst used by many individual villagers, there is very limited organised use by walking groups.

Marking of footpaths is not complete, although Braintree District Council does conduct regular maintenance projects to keep the footpaths open. Maintenance and marking of footpaths by the landowners is patchy.

Public Bridleways are well marked and used by the many horse riders in the Parish. A number of Public Byways, or green lanes, cross the Parish. These are maintained by the Essex County Council Highways department, but not all are totally passable on sound surfaces.

They are used by off-roading, 4-wheel-drive vehicles on recreational outings and by off-roading two-wheel motorbikes and 4-wheel quad bikes.

Ordnance Survey maps show the footpaths, bridleways, and green lanes, but there is a demand for detailed maps with instructions to facilitate use further.



B&B /Accommodation

There is one B&B in the Parish at Oliver's Farm, with further accommodation/hotel facilities in nearby Great Yeldham.

Allotments



Sited to the east of The Causeway in Toppesfield village, approximately 30 allotment plots are available free of charge to the residents of the village.

The current site is part of a field belonging to Toppesfield Hall Farm and therefore not owned by the Parish Council.

Access to the allotment area is via a narrow, public footpath, making it difficult for large equipment to be brought onto the plot.

Until very recently, there was no piped water supply to the allotments but this has now been rectified.

A strong and active Allotments Society has recently been formed and is engaged in development of the area including a small nature reserve.



Trees

There are a number of trees with preservation orders sited within the village of Toppesfield. The tree belt on The Causeway also has a tree preservation order in place.

A fairly large programme of tree planting, consisting of some 200 trees, was carried out by the Parish Council in the mid-1970s.

This programme was locally known as "Plant a tree in '73" and "Plant some more in '74" and increased the number of trees in the Parish.

But a number have disappeared or are in poor states of health.

Many of these newly planted trees died in the dry summer of 1976 and were removed during a period nick-named "Pull up sticks in '76"!



There is some concern over the state of the existing 'green' assets of the village and maybe some attention might be given to this in the future.

Nature Reserve

A small nature reserve has recently been established adjacent to the allotments to the east of The Causeway. There is interest in further securing a refuge for wildlife in the area.

Tennis Courts

There are no public tennis courts in the Parish, but interest from younger residents for their provision.

Public Car Park

There is a small public car park situated in Park Lane. It is owned by the Parish but is not signposted, not well known, nor well used.

Small business units

There are small business units offered for rent at Gainsford Hall farm in the south of the Parish.

Petrol Station

The nearest petrol stations are situated in Sible Hedingham, some 3 miles away.

Health provision

No facilities exist in the Parish relating to doctor/dentist/optician/chiroprapist/chemists or pharmacy.

The nearest doctors' surgeries are in Great Yeldham, Finchingfield, Sible Hedingham, or Castle Hedingham, some 3-5 miles away.

A car service to transport people to doctor or hospital appointment is in place, but not extensively used.

Village Agent

Toppesfield shares a Village Agent with a number of other local villages.



The purpose of the Essex Village Agent scheme is to help needy villagers to utilise local social groups, leisure and learning opportunities, welfare benefits, fire and home safety, health and fitness, how to travel, services and carers' support, and volunteering.

The knowledge of the services provided by the local village agent is not extensive within the community and there is clearly opportunity for wider use with more information circulated.

Public transport

Public transport is severely limited, with only one bus service per week from the Parish to Haverhill and one to Braintree. These are middle-of-the-day services that attract bus-pass users. Transport is seen as an issue for sustainability of the village.

Appendix Four - Points for Consideration: Leisure And Recreation Group (LARG)

Design and Sourcing

Suitable playground equipment would be desirable, and fairly distributed, across the whole age range, including for adults and older residents whose health and fitness maintenance is becoming increasingly important.

Swings, slides, climbing frames, seesaws, roundabouts, etc. suitable for the under-5s, and, separately, for the 5 – 12 age range might be desirable.

Climbing frames, adventure equipment, physically demanding training equipment, and training circuit equipment might be made available for the youth and young adult age ranges.

Consulting with, and involving young people, would give closer ties to the full constituency of the Parish and ownership of the recreational resources.

Breakdown of Age Ranges (2007)		
Age Range	Numbers	% of Total
0 - 10	49	9.2%
11 - 20	77	14.4%
21 - 30	43	8.0%
31 - 40	56	10.5%
41 - 50	103	19.3%
51 - 60	88	16.4%
61 - 70	72	13.5%
71 - 80	30	5.6%
80+	17	3.2%

Older residents could have more physical exercising equipment (e.g. rustic press-up and pull-up bars, stepping stone exercisers, log walks and balancing equipment, etc.).

By involving representatives of each age-range in the planning process, equipment that is actually going to be used can be designed and sourced as appropriate. The school and local keep-fit businesses should also be consulted.

Equipment Location

Siting the equipment must be carefully planned and agreed. The management group should first ensure ownership of the existing playing fields. Public money must not be spent in installing equipment on land under questionable ownership.

Users of the playing fields must have suitable parking facilities. This includes around the central Toppesfield playing field and the Gainsford End recreation ground. Ownership of adjacent land needs to be identified, and secured for car parking use as appropriate.

The potential use of playground equipment by the pre-school and primary school might dictate the type of equipment to be installed on the central Toppesfield site. Rustic circuit and training equipment might be sited at Gainsford End.

Installation

Installing new equipment can usually be carried out by equipment providers. This is a costly option but might prove more cost-effective where insurance premiums are concerned.

Alternatively, the work can be done by local volunteers or local suitable businesses. The management group needs to determine the way forward.

Additional facilities for Recreation

The surveys suggested interest in other resources for recreational use. Young people would like to see a paved area for activities such as basketball and/or netball.

The existing facility for storage of football equipment and changing space provision is in a poor state of repair.

With no organised football team currently using the grounds, and therefore no need for such a resource, does the village need such a building?

However, the management team may wish to undertake a review.

Funding

Such equipment, and a suitable, safe surface on which to install it, has to be provided from scratch, and there are not sufficient existing funds available within the PC budget.

Funding sources need to be identified and approached only when full and fully-costed plans are available. Funds can come from a number of sources, and can include “public subscription” from local individuals or business organisations.

Where match funding is required, this can be “in-kind” as where full labour and preparation and value of the land used can be considered as contributing.

It is likely that elements of the equipment will be sourced and installed over the whole time period, and not all at the outset.

A steady, planned approach to continuing improvement is desirable.

On-Going Maintenance

There is no on-going budget specifically available to the recreational facilities. The management team will have to assess the costs and provide for their funding.

Some can be sourced from the existing Parish Council infrastructure maintenance budget by negotiation once the actual need is determined.

By involving local people in the management and up-keep of the grounds and equipment there will be ownership, and hence, better stewardship through ownership.



Appendix Five: Response from Questionnaire re: Transport & Traffic

Current status

82% of residents are dependent upon private motor vehicles as their primary form of transport. Only 9% of respondents regularly use public transport.

Buses

There are two bus routes serving Toppesfield, both operated by Hedingham Omnibuses: Route 10 to Braintree once a week on Wednesday, and Route 8 to Haverhill once a week on Friday.

Taxis

The nearest taxi services are at Great Yeldham and Sible Hedingham. There are taxi drivers resident in Toppesfield.

Doctors' and Hospitals' Appointments Transport Service

A transport service for patients from the village to attend doctors' or hospitals' appointments is operated by a group of villagers with a shared mobile phone contact point using their own vehicle.

Community Transport

Three services are operated by Braintree DC and are available to those within the district who meet any one of a number of criteria, the most relevant being rural isolation.

- The Social Car Scheme is an organised form of lift-giving by volunteers driving their own cars.
- Dial-a-Ride provides the same services using a specially equipped minibus.
- The Minibus Scheme provides fully accessible minibuses for hire.

It is clear that there is a very low level of awareness (and consequently a very low level of usage) of all the Community Transport services.

Speed Limits

Whilst there is currently no speed limit within the combined parishes, other than the national 60mph limit, Braintree Highways department has recently agreed a 30 mph limit in Toppesfield village and the installation of signage is awaited.

75% of respondents are concerned by the issue of speeding traffic and are in favour of a 30mph limit.

Nearly 60% support the introduction of a 20mph limit in Church Lane.

Whilst there is no speed limit through Gainsford End hamlet, there was no immediate concern expressed.

Acknowledgements

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- To a core of some 25 residents, constituted as **VANTAGE**, the

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VANTAGE hands over the Village Plan to the Parish Council with sincerity, on behalf of the residents of the Parish, for implementation.

This plan hopefully fulfils the brief to provide a blueprint for the future to strengthen and grow the Community of the Parish of Toppesfield and Gainsford End.



VANTAGE



Toppesfield & Gainsford End

... Taking our history into the future ...

