

Mere Parish Plan 2005



INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2001, with the mandate of the Parish Council, a nucleus committee was formed to prepare a Parish Plan for Mere.¹

A Parish Plan should cover everything of relevance to the people who live in the parish, including social, economic and environmental issues and will form an action plan to address the needs of the entire community and everyone should have an opportunity to participate in its preparation. The Plan is based on information provided through survey, research and consultation and should contain a clear statement of action. It should also help contribute to and form a close relationship with the Salisbury District Local Plan (Development Framework) and the Mere & District Community Plan, by allowing the community to articulate their needs and priorities and to ensure that the activities of the local councils and bodies who provide local services are better coordinated and responsive to the needs of the community. The Parish Council was successful in receiving a grant from the Countryside Agency to help cover the costs in developing and producing the Mere Parish Plan.

Various consultation methods were used to provide the information contained within the plan. In September 2002, a workshop session was held involving representatives from various organisations and businesses in Mere. In May 2003, public consultation was given at the May Fayre and this culminated, at the end of 2003 and beginning of 2004, with a short questionnaire that was distributed as far as possible to every household in Mere: 565 questionnaires were returned, resulting in an overall response rate of 47%.² The completed questionnaires were subsequently analysed and the data has been incorporated into the body of this document. The Parish Council accepted the Draft Parish Plan which was also submitted to 'potential partners' for final consultation before printing. The full document will be sent to key organisations and every 'potential partner' and will be available to the general public in various formats and venues (public library, CD Rom, hard copy). Furthermore, it is intended that a summary of this document will be distributed to every household in Mere. The final phase is to produce an 'Action Plan' where aspirations will be turned into strategy and actions will be prioritised with lead partners identified to ensure that someone is responsible for making things happen; this will be periodically and actively monitored by the Parish Council who will be responsible for overseeing its implementation. It has also become apparent, during the production and consultation process of the Parish Plan, that other documents will need to be produced to substantiate some of the actions e.g. Housing Needs Register, Employment Needs Register & Village Design Statement.



Picture: View at the western entrance to Mere, in Spring.

¹ Details of the Committee and other contributors can be found in Appendix 1.

² A sample of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix 2.

MERE'S HISTORY

Mere is a small town nestling under the western edge of Salisbury Plain near the conjunction of Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset. It owes its existence to an immense geological fault running east/west through the town; the main road runs along the line of the fault. To the north is the chalk of Salisbury Plain, and it is there that the first pre-historic settlements took place, and where, ever since then, cereal farming has been possible. South of the fault is the clay pastureland of Blackmore Vale. At the junction of the two, bountiful water rises, making the site ideal for settlement, though this seems to have been only sporadic until Norman times, when the Church was well established. Many of its houses are built of local stone, Chloritic Marl from Dead Maid Quarry.



Picture: Aerial view of Mere taken from a glider flying over Mere Down.

The town has always been well served by road, the Ridgeway on top of Mere Down being the first from London to Exeter in Roman times through to the present day A303. With the advent of the railway, the station at nearby Gillingham allowed similar London to Exeter travel, allowing London to be reached in 2 hours.

Historically Mere and its surrounding district is exceedingly rich with important settlements. In Neolithic times they were to be found on White Sheet Down. It was also close to the raising of the Wessex Standard by King Alfred in his defeat of the Vikings at nearby Bratton. In the 18th Century the Hoare family made the famous gardens at Stourhead. Today much of the land is still in the province of the Duke of Cornwall.³



Picture: The world famous Stourhead Gardens just up the road from Mere.

GEOGRAPHY

The Parish of Mere is situated in the extreme south-west corner of the County of Wiltshire, 105 miles from London and 23 miles west of the city of Salisbury. The parish boundary also forms the Dorset County boundary and the Somerset County boundary is only 4 miles away. Nestling beneath the South Wiltshire Downs, large parts of the surroundings are designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The three nearest large shopping

centres, Salisbury (Wiltshire), Bath (Bath & N.E. Somerset) & Yeovil (Somerset), are all about 20 to 25 miles away. Mere provides an important tourist facility, being within easy reach of Stonehenge, Stourhead, Longleat and only an hour's drive from the beautiful Dorset beaches at Bournemouth, Poole and Weymouth. There are also a number of sites in and around Mere that provide a wealth of historical and archaeological interest.

³ A more detailed history of Mere can be found in Appendix 3.

POPULATION

The population of Mere has grown, between the two censuses of 1991 and 2001 from 2250 to 2633 (an increase of 17%), and the number of dwellings from 1045 in 1991 to 1234 in 2001 (an increase of 18%). Today there are 1299 rateable dwellings in Mere and a further 60 being developed at the time of printing. Overall this represents a housing increase of over 24% since 1991. Unfortunately, since the 2001 census figures are now outdated, it is difficult to determine precise population figures for the present time. The number of residents on the electoral register in 1991, however, was 1879 and the number of residents on the electoral register for 2004 stands at 2198, showing an increase, again, of 17%.⁴

The trends suggested by the Countryside Agency (State of the Countryside – 2004) would suggest that the countryside is changing quite dramatically:

“There is now a recognisable immigration from the towns as people retire, downsize or as people acquire second homes. Many of these people are responsible for a boom in small businesses and employment with more new firms starting up in rural areas than cities.”

Mere’s experience has been that the influx of older generations has helped to sustain existing businesses.

It would seem that children record better educational results in rural areas, seen most markedly in the tests at Key Stage 2. This may encourage young families to migrate to rural areas such as Mere. However, this, in itself, could present a problem to young local families who find themselves competing for properties and services.

The official structure of the population from censuses and other records, by age, work place and background is not readily available. To provide some up-to-date information, a crude

sample was taken from the Parish Plan questionnaire.

The population analysis from this reveals that 565 households (47%) returned the questionnaires, representing 1260 residents in the following age brackets:

Aged 0 – 17	= 215 (17%)
Aged 18 – 40	= 247 (20%)
Aged 41 – 65	= 442 (35%)
Aged over 65	= 356 (28%)

This information has been taken to be a representative sample that can be further validated when official 2001 censuses data becomes available.

The responses to the survey demonstrate that Mere has an economically active and capable population, predominantly (63%) in the later half of their lives. Although difficult to predict demographic trends, if the current inhabitants remain in Mere, in 10-15 years time, the population distribution could have shifted towards the older age categories who may well have greater or more specific needs for certain services or facilities. What changes will be required in housing, services, transport and infrastructure? Alternatively, what can be done to maintain an even population distribution across the age ranges?

There is one word which crops up time and time again, particularly within the interactions of local government and planning. It has been used widely within this Parish Plan and throughout our consultation process – ‘sustainable’. It is interesting to research the definitions:

Defined in *Our Common Future*, the Report of the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development (the ‘Brundtland Report’), **sustainable development** is defined as ‘development that meets the needs of the

⁴ Information taken from census records, electoral registers and other Parish Council records.

present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* defines **sustainable development** as a ‘concept that stresses the balance between the interests of economic growth and environmental protection.’

We live in an ever changing world and whilst we may not understand the meaning of the word ‘sustainable’ as an absolute, the intention of the Parish Plan is to develop a vision of how residents may live their lives in the future and how policies might be evolved to assist and enable these aspirations; and our interpretation of the word ‘sustainable’ is one in which

embraces not only changes that do not damage the character of our rural town but which will conserve its culture and enhance the quality of life of its inhabitants.

As emphasised in the Conclusion to this Parish Plan, to achieve ‘sustainability’ will require a sense of balance which, in turn, will probably also require an element of compromise. For example, it would be unrealistic to aspire to a brilliant public transport system on the one hand, but on the other hand seek all facilities, services, employment opportunities and recreation facilities to be provided locally - as the two may not be equally ‘sustainable’.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

1. **A more sustainable community over the next 10 to 15 years that meets the needs of its inhabitants and is compatible with its population distribution.**

VISION	ACTION	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIME
A more sustainable community over the next 10 to 15 years that meets the needs of its inhabitants and is compatible with its population distribution.	Attitude study for the over 40's on their retirement intentions	Various partnerships and agencies	Medium

COMMUNITY VITALITY

Mere has a great sense of community and has many facilities that even larger towns and villages would envy, with its own Library and Information Centre, Museum, Doctors' Surgery, Dentist, Post Office, Chemist, Red Cross, Police and Fire Station. The town is well provided for with public meeting places in the Grove Buildings and the Lecture Hall.



Picture: [The Grove Buildings.](#)

A wide variety of interests are catered for, and it is thanks to the dedication of its town's people that they can enjoy sports such as Bowls, Tennis, Football, Cricket, Snooker, and keep fit with Diet & Fitness, Slimming, Line Dancing or walking with the Footpath Group. It is possible to learn something new with the Historical Society, WEA (Workers Education Association) classes or the Art Group; be entertained or do the entertaining with Mere Drama or join Shreen Harmony, Handbells or Tower Bells.

There are various churches of all Christian denominations in Mere which support many connected activities including the Parish Church Fete and the United Services organised by the Churches Together in Mere. All are well supported by the whole community. There are also various Charities to be supported both countrywide and local, such as The Mere &

District Linkscheme with its annual Literary Festival, Cancer Research with its May Fayre plus Brainwave with its bargains. There are also representatives and activities in support of the Lions, Oxfam, Christian Aid, Cafod, Forest Charities, RNLI, Poppy Appeal, RSPCA and NSPCC. Mere continues to hold an annual carnival in the autumn, together with a week of fund raising activities for local causes, and the Carnival Club parade in the wider local carnival circuits.



Picture: A carnival entry by the Mere Play Group.

The older generation are catered for with social events and meeting places, the Rosemary Goddard Day Centre and wardened accommodation provided at Lynch Close and Bishops Close, and residential accommodation for the elderly in Fives Court and Bramley House. These provisions enable Mere residents to remain in the local community in their old age and still participate in town life. The capacity of this provision will need to be kept under review in the next 5 to 10 years in order to meet the potential demand from the current population distribution..



Picture: Members of the recently disbanded White Tudor Club enjoy a party in the Grove Buildings.

Whilst there are some good provisions for the younger generations who, at their various age groups, can join The Youth Club, Barn Buddies, Scouts, Cubs, Beavers, Guides, Brownies and Rainbows, there still remains the concern that there is insufficient for these generations to do to occupy their time. This is in line with national trends. For the very young there is Preschool (playgroup) and Toddlers.

Many of these activities are provided and managed on a voluntary basis and there is a need for new volunteers in existing and new areas. There are a number of possible explanations for the lack of willingness on the part of potential volunteers who may be unable to make regular long-term commitments and unwilling to cope with the ever-present and ever-increasing red tape, beurocracy and regulations.

Whilst the abovementioned community activities are some of the most visible there are still a wealth of other clubs and activities that take place, although the survey showed that there is a significant proportion of the population (38%) that do not participate.

This is only part of the things to do in Mere. For some a friendly greeting in the street or shops will suffice, but you have to live in Mere to find out what a welcoming place it is.



Picture:
The Barn Buddies, who meet in a converted barn at Barrow Street, receive an award.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

1. A more sustainable community with continuing vitality that reflects and provides for the current and future population of Mere.

VISION	ACTION	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIME
A more sustainable community with continuing vitality that reflects and provides for the current and future population of Mere	Communication	Everyone	Ongoing



Picture: The First Mere Brownies, a youthful part of the community, take care of a flowerbed in the centre of Mere.

ENVIRONMENT

Landscape

The visual landscape has always been an essential part of the local environment, dominated as it is by Castle Hill and from there, the vista of the Blackmore Vale with the backdrop of Mere Downs and the western extent of Salisbury Plain. At the centre of the town is the Square, with its Clock Tower and open space around it from which the principal routes radiate. Bounded by an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (White Sheet Hill and Mere Downs to the north), an Environmentally Sensitive Area and containing a Conversation Area within the town that borders the River Shreen, Mere is a working town, serving the outlying districts with jobs, shops, medical care, transport and education as well as being a centre for tourists and visitors.

In modern times this has brought difficulties in the management of these conflicting interests. There is increasing pressure to provide modern facilities for new technologies, particularly telecommunications equipment, and no doubt there will be future pressure for renewable sources of energy in the area. Up until now, we have managed to elude this clutter of modern technology and encourage it to be placed in discreet and unobtrusive locations. However, there is increasing pressure from central government to impose and facilitate such provisions and care must be taken to ensure that this does not jeopardise the quality of life, as exemplified in our outstanding natural landscapes, for Mere's residents.

Whilst not always in the immediate location much of the overall attraction of Mere is in the wider areas around Mere; Salisbury Plain, Cranborne Chase, the Blackmore Vale, north Dorset and south-east Somerset. All exhibit unspoilt landscape and contribute to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in their own rights.

Mere has won the Best Kept Large Village Competition several times in recent years and in 2000 won the regional finals of the Village of the Year competition. This is an accolade to



Picture: The River Shreen at Waterside

all those who make Mere “a pleasant place to live”. Although the parish portion of the Council Tax has become one of the highest in the Salisbury District area, it is average (16th) when compared to the 35 larger towns and parishes in the whole of Wiltshire. The parish precept does not raise too many serious objections, mainly due to the fact that people recognise that Mere has a high proportion of open spaces and responsibilities which are maintained or administered to a relatively high standard.

Since the advent of the Mere “bypass” in the mid-seventies, the physical appearance of many of the houses have enjoyed being brightened up and the physical appearance of the main street-scene has changed dramatically. Whilst balancing the needs of residents, businesses, shop and office-workers, essential users of the towns facilities, emergency vehicles as well as those passing through, we will need to control any encroachment of unsuitable advertising, inappropriate and unnecessary traffic signs, and of course on street parking and traffic pollution.

There are no significant community recycling facilities within a reasonable distance of Mere although sites are available at Castle Cary (Somerset), Shaftesbury (Dorset), Warminster and Salisbury (Wiltshire). The use of 'out of county' facilities is not guaranteed and Mere residents have been known to be sent away. There are mini-recycling bins in the Salisbury Street Car Park and there is a kerbside paper/cardboard collection every two weeks. However, 39% of questionnaire respondents felt that more needed to be done about recycling and many of those wanted an

increase in kerbside recycling and a separate collection for garden rubbish.

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Picture: One of Mere's best-kept secrets – the waterfall at Edgebridge.



Picture: Rest a while on a bench after the climb to the top of Castle Hill and enjoy the panoramic views.

VISION

1. Maintain Mere's accolade of being "a good place to live".
2. To enhance the environment by better management of modern facilities.
3. To seek improved recycling facilities and explore new recycling initiatives.

VISION	ACTION	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIME
Maintain Mere's accolade of being "a good place to live"	Encourage community involvement and interaction	Parish Council, District Council, County Council & Community (by participating in consultation and local government activities)	Medium to Long
To enhance the environment by better management of modern facilities	To prioritise and plan a works programme to reduce visual impact	Parish Council, District Council and County Council + Chamber of Trade	Medium to Long
To seek improved recycling facilities and explore new recycling initiatives.	1. Liaise with relevant agencies and investigate options e.g. community composting, free garden compost bins, increased kerbside collection. 2. Publicise locally available composting & composting initiatives.	District Council, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, South Wiltshire Agenda 21, Parish Council.	Medium to Long

Open Spaces

The Parish Council manages the general open spaces within the town which includes Castle Hill, Long Hill, Kingsmere and Jubilee Gardens.



Picture: Jubilee Gardens that lead to Castle Hill.

Castle Hill - owned by the Duchy of Cornwall and leased to the Parish Council, is a sensitive site as part of it is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The Parish Council has plans to create a nature/heritage trail on Castle Hill and has opened discussions with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, English Heritage and the Duchy of

Cornwall to assess views and gather information for this project.

Long Hill – accessible from Castle Hill & Kingsmere is woodland and chalk grassland area, important for wildlife, that receives little maintenance other than grazing by a local farmer's cattle, which helps to control unwanted scrub growth.

Kingsmere – the land above Kingsmere, owned by the Parish Council, is an open space that is popular with dog walkers. The Parish Council have planted an area of nut trees and an area of berry trees to encourage wildlife and there has been a line of beech trees planted to which are considered to be aesthetically important but which will inevitably suffer eventual deterioration. Ease of maintenance for this site is necessary as it is steeply sloping and any elaborate planting schemes would require costly upkeep.

Jubilee Gardens – owned by the Parish Council is a more formal small area of garden.

The one remaining recreational open space area defined in the Salisbury District Local Plan is that piece of land in Angel Lane which is owned by the Church and used by Stourbridge House School as a recreational field for pupils. It is also used periodically for community events.

81% of questionnaire respondents said that the open spaces were adequate

7% said that they were not, with specific comments relating to too much dog mess.

One person said that less upkeep was needed.

12% expressed no opinion.

Preserving our open spaces

The issue of dog-fouling is one of high concern raised in the Parish Plan questionnaire and survey, particularly on footpaths and public open spaces. There are heavy fines and penalties for those who do not clean up after their dogs. However, it is very difficult to prosecute those responsible as witness and photographic evidence is usually required. The District Council does not, nor is it required to provide or empty doggy bins in the way that they do litter bins. If the Parish Council were to provide doggy bins, they would also have to find someone that could empty them on a very regular basis. Dog waste (if wrapped) can be disposed of in a normal litter-bin. Dog owners need to be educated to act responsibly when they take their dogs out for walks in that they should use a 'poop scoop bag' to clear up after their dogs, take the offending item home or put it in a nearby litter bin.

Green Spaces

Mere has lost several green spaces to development over recent years. The green and open spaces which contribute to the character of Mere are important. The need for new development within the development boundary should be balanced with the need to protect these open spaces. The preservation of remaining green spaces within the development area should be supported where possible. Important open spaces could be identified as part of a Village Design Statement exercise as this would enable efforts for their protection to be more robust.

Footpaths & Rights of Way

Mere has a vast network of public footpaths and rights of way, the responsibility for most of which falls upon Wiltshire County Council. Wiltshire County Council has recently introduced a 'hierarchy policy' for their footpaths, whereby the most significant and vital footpaths will receive a higher level of inspection and maintenance than the less significant and less well-used footpaths. Mere has a Footpath Group, the volunteer members of which have carried out sterling work to help maintain and keep open the vast network of footpaths. However, increasing maturity of members has resulted in a decrease in their footpath maintenance programme in recent years. The significance of the Burton Path has been brought to the attention of relevant authorities in recent months. This vital footpath provides an essential link for residents of Burton to gain access into Mere and has suffered a lack of maintenance in recent years, resulting in width narrowing and poor surface. The footpath across the Meads has also received special mention in the recent surveys with many residents stressing that this footpath provides important links between the centre of Mere and the residents living in the southern area of Mere.



Picture: Rustic style sign indicates the way to Burton, via the footpath.



Picture: One of Mere's favourite footpaths through The Meads.

79% of questionnaire respondents said that the footpaths in Mere were adequate
 11% said that they were not, the largest complaint relating to dog fouling and others to lack of maintenance (overgrown, broken stiles etc)
 10% expressed no opinion.



Picture: The rear slopes of Castle Hill that were cleared of scrub to improve visibility and access.



Picture: Another of Mere's green spaces – the town cemetery

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

1. **Produce Nature/Heritage trail for Castle Hill.**
2. **Ensure that the management of open spaces is both ecologically and environmentally sustainable and they are maintained to allow maximum public and disabled access (where possible).**
3. **Ensure that footpaths are maintained and inspected on a basis appropriate to their use.**
4. **Encourage younger community involvement in maintenance of footpaths.**
5. **Reduce dog fouling on footpaths and open spaces.**
6. **Retain important open spaces within development boundary**

VISION	ACTION	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIME
Produce Nature/Heritage trail for Castle Hill.	Continue negotiations with organisations to achieve Nature/Heritage trail. Explore avenues for funding.	Parish Council, English Heritage, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Duchy of Cornwall.	Short, Medium & Long
Ensure that the management of open spaces is both ecologically and environmentally sustainable and they are maintained to allow maximum public and disabled access (where possible)	Maintain close links with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, English Heritage. Encourage upgrading, widening and improved maintenance of some footpaths to allow disabled access	Parish Council, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, English Heritage, Wiltshire County Council	Medium to Long
Ensure that footpaths are maintained and inspected on a basis appropriate to their use.	Ensure that consultation is offered on hierarchy identification of footpaths for WCC's Rights of Way Plan. Monitor inspection and maintenance programme accordingly.	Parish Council, County Council & Landowners	Short to Medium
Encourage younger community involvement in the maintenance of footpaths		Youth Groups, Footpath Group, Parish Council & County Council	Short to Medium
Reduce dog fouling on footpaths and open spaces.	Educate dog owners. Provide dog-waste bags.	Parish Council and District Council	Medium to Long
Retain important open spaces within development boundary	Important open spaces to be identified in Village Design Statement	Parish Council	Short to Medium

ACCESS TO SERVICES

As the principal community at the extremities of the south-west Wiltshire area Mere provides a focus for the surrounding parishes and offers a broad range of services to the inhabitants. Additional services, particularly in Health and Education are provided through Salisbury District and Wiltshire County as well as through its adjacent Counties, Dorset and Somerset. These longstanding cross border arrangements need to be sustained.

Infrastructure

Although the town has increased in population over recent years there has been little improvement in the overall provisions of local infrastructure. It may well be that the provisions of the 1970s and 1980s allowed for sufficient expansion, however, now that the current approved housing developments are completed it is essential that a thorough assessment of the current infrastructure capacity is made before any future substantial development is considered. There is already sufficient proof that the infrastructure is stretched with sewage blockages and overflows from new developments. Notwithstanding the preference for land drainage attenuation the fact that such provisions are required has to be an acknowledgment that natural drainage provisions are unable to cope. If climate change is to be accepted from recent weather and seasonal conditions, past provisions for the '100 year storm' are outdated and insufficient. Whilst we are assured that a complete infrastructure study is undertaken by all relevant agencies before new housing and employment allocations for Mere are made within the Salisbury District's Local Development Framework, it remains a concern that local evidence may conflict with their findings. For example, low river flows, blocked sewage systems and drains, and local flooding. We should strive to secure the necessary network of all utilities to include health, education and roads, to adequately cover the town and to ensure that the sewage system, surface water run-off and the river system have the ability to cope environmentally.

Roads (Covered in more detail in Section 11 – Transport)

Adequate maintenance and repair – national problem of declining condition.

Cleaning and repair

Utilities (Covered in more detail in Section 6 – Environment)

View on renewable resources.

Refuse, recycling and cleansing

Mere is well served with a weekly refuse collection and a two-weekly paper and cardboard collection by SDC and there are limited facilities in the Central Car Park for recycling domestic paper, glass, plastic and cans. An attempt to provide periodic facilities for the disposal of larger items of domestic waste was immediately subject to abuse and therefore suspended. If increased recycling facilities are to be provided in the next 10 to 15 years a suitable site must be identified and provided. Mere aspires to a clean and litter-free environment and to this end the Parish Council subsidises the grant from Salisbury District Council to employ a street cleaner. The District Council provides weekly service to clean the main town centre areas.

Police- Fire –Ambulance

Mere is fortunate that it has local facilities for police and fire but there remains concern about the levels of service. Whilst better coverage can always be asked for, the reality is that with current and projected funding levels a reasonable argument for continued presence should always be made.

Recent cut backs in the central provision of ambulances in the Salisbury District Health Authority means that the provision of service to the rural areas, including Mere, has declined. The case for re-instatement of adequate provisions should be continually argued.

Health

Doctor – There is one GP medical surgery in Mere, situated in the Salisbury Street Car Park. The three partners have a patient list of about 4000 covering not only the residents of Mere,

but also the surrounding area and, indeed, some from Gillingham. However, because of the recent large increase in the population of Mere no more patients from Gillingham are being accepted.



Picture: The Salisbury Street car park, site of the doctors' surgery.

The current view is that having just increased the number of full-time partners from one to two, the practice should be able to provide a satisfactory service to its existing patients and any it may acquire as a result of the proposed development at Clements Lane and small-scale infilling. Any additional major developments would stretch their capabilities beyond capacity and they would expect such new residents to look towards Gillingham, with its new surgery at Peacemarsh, for their medical services.

There is no room on the present site for the Surgery building to be enlarged; nor has any alternative site been identified, to which the present Surgery might transfer, assuming that the partnership was prepared to contemplate such a move.

A major problem the Surgery does have, in providing as good a service as it would like, is the lack of public transport to Salisbury Hospital. This is exacerbated by the inability of hospital staff to appreciate the difficulties that someone living in a rural area, without their own transport, particularly if they are elderly and/or frail, have in getting to the hospital for what may be no more than a fairly routine test or check-up. It is not unknown for the Surgery, in the absence of a Linkscheme driver, to requisition a full '999' paramedic ambulance to take a person to hospital – thus depriving the area of emergency cover.

Dentist - Mere has an NHS dental surgery. However, their patient list is full and this could be the reason why the recent survey showed that 70% of respondent were not using a Mere dentist compared with 80% who use the doctor's surgery.

Chemist - In line with current national trends it will be increasingly important that the local chemist is maintained to permit local access to medicines and prescription provision.

Local shops

Mere has a number of shops providing the essential basic everyday necessities. However, the viability of these businesses is under increasing threat from the increase in supermarkets and out of town facilities in nearby towns of Gillingham, Wincanton and Shaftesbury. It is also of concern that traffic congestion and lack of short-term town centre parking are in danger of threatening the viability of these shops as the shopkeepers rely on 'quick visit' as well as more regular customers. It will be vital, over the next decade, to ensure that these facilities are sustained, in particular the Post Office and local bank branch which provide vital services for the elderly (pensions) and local businesses.



Picture: One of the two supermarkets in the centre of Mere.

Youth facilities

The Youth Club is the main provision for young teenagers and is accommodated in the Recreation Ground. Wiltshire County Council is responsible for its budgetary control and for appointing the Youth Development Worker. Mere Youth Club has become renowned for the Summer Leisure Credit Scheme – this is a project held in the summer whereby young people are encouraged to work within the community in order to earn credits to participate in leisure activities. The youths working on the scheme are supervised by adults and have carried out a wide-range of jobs such as gardening, clearing footpaths, ponds & rivers, painting gates and benches etc. The success of this scheme has encouraged youth clubs in many other areas of the country to follow suit.



Picture: The Youth Club

Old Peoples homes /sheltered accommodation

The overall provision for the elderly, whether as an increasing number of singles in their own residences, or in homes provided through either public or private organisations, should be reviewed in the light of the increasing age distributions of the population. Similarly, whilst there has been an emphasis in provision of sports facilities and recreation of the young generations, serious consideration should now be made on provisions for the over 60's.

Pubs /Restaurants

Having declined over the past centuries the remaining public houses and inns should be sustained. Similarly restaurants, cafes and

takeaways should be encouraged subject to market forces and continued support from the local population.

Library, Museum and Information Centre

Mere is fortunate to have a useful library and Information Centre. The building also houses the local award winning Museum and periodic visits of the Registrar. The Information Centre acts as the outstation for local government (Salisbury District Council) and offers an initial point of entry to other government departments via Internet provision. The Information Centre also functions in a local capacity in support of local community events offering ticket sales etc. and information on public transport.



Picture: Opening of an exhibition of old toys at the museum which is housed in the library.

Linkscheme

The Mere and District Linkscheme is a local charity providing transport and caring assistance in a very broad capacity. It is of concern that, as central and district government resources are increasingly stretched by the changing national demographics and costs of providing services, there will be a tendency for District and County to draw back to major centres of provision thereby excluding and disadvantaging the rural areas. This gap in provision should not by necessity be filled by local charity, and district and national government should be lobbied by the rural community for fair provision in return for fair contribution in terms of precept and taxation.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

1. As many services as possible should be provided at local levels.
2. Improved public transport possibilities to Salisbury Hospital
3. Continue support and encouragement for Youth Club & its Leisure Credit Scheme
4. Continuing provision of appropriate accommodation and services for elderly.
5. Improve emergency service cover
6. Secure adequate infrastructure of utilities and services

VISION	ACTION	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIME
As many services as possible should be provided at local levels.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Forecasting on population and need. 2. Participation at Salisbury District Local Plan level. 3. Ensure that new development does not result in valued facilities becoming unviable. 	County Council, District Council and Parish Council	Short, Medium & Long.
Improved public transport facilities to Salisbury Hospital	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seek to improve public transport (bus) links to Salisbury Hospital. 2. Maintain capacity for of Mere & District Linkscheme drivers 3. Improve awareness of hospital staff. 	County Council, District Council, Parish Council, NHS Trust & Community Transport Project Officer	Short, Medium & Long.
Continue support and encouragement for Youth Club and its Leisure Credit Scheme	Liaise with youth club & management committee	County Council, Youth Club & Parish Council	Short, Medium & Long
Continuing provision of appropriate accommodation and services for elderly	Periodic review in line with changing demographics	County Council, District Council & Parish Council	Medium & Long
Improve emergency service cover	Endeavour to influence case for adequate provision	Police, Fire, Ambulance Trust, NHS Trust, County Council & Parish Council	Medium & Long
Secure adequate infrastructure of utilities and services	Request consultation & input on infrastructure studies undertaken within Salisbury District's Local Development Framework.	District Council, Parish Council & utility/service providers	Short, Medium & Long

HOUSING & DEVELOPMENT

Housing Development Allocations

Central Government dictates how many houses should be built by issuing regional and strategic planning guidance and national policies. The latest planning system provides regional guidance through Regional Spatial Strategies and local policies through Local Development Frameworks. The South West Regional Spatial Strategy is responsible for setting a housing requirement for each district whilst the Local Development Framework is responsible for allocating sites to accommodate that level of housing.

In 1991 Mere Parish Council adopted a proactive (rather than reactive) approach to the consultation exercises for the Salisbury District Local Plan, which at that time was required to provide an additional 5,200 dwellings within the district up to 2001. After having conducted a community survey, a number of suggested sites were put forward as development potential, in the event of Mere being required to allocate housing provision. Thus, 5 of these sites were earmarked for development within the Salisbury District Local Plan that was adopted in March 1996, providing for an estimated 130-140 new dwellings and the housing policy boundary was realigned to allow for infilling, small-scale development or redevelopment. Employment land adjacent to Quarry Fields Industrial Estate was also allocated. By the time the Replacement Salisbury District Local Plan consultation exercise was underway, in 1998, some of these developments were complete but two housing allocations, along with the employment allocation had not been taken up and were therefore carried forward. In line with local consultation, no new housing allocations sites were allocated despite an objection having been lodged by Wimpey Homes who own the old Fairground Field on the Gillingham Road corner.

Salisbury District Council will shortly be conducting the consultation exercise for their new Local Plan (to be called a Development Framework) and it is therefore vital, if residents feel strongly about new housing

development, that they should participate in the consultation exercises.



Picture: One of the newest housing developments in Mere with a mixture of building styles and building materials. The houses were built on land previously owned by the Duchy of Cornwall and are styled on similar lines to those in the village of Poundbury.

In 1992, the Parish Council also carried out a Housing Needs Survey, identifying the housing requirements of residents. At the time, the overwhelming needs were for rental accommodation and this survey provided valuable information for the Housing Association Development at Jack Paul Close where the Parish Council, with help from the Duchy of Cornwall, were successful in obtaining a priority for local needs. (Houses were allocated to families from Mere or with a 'Mere' connection in the first instance and, if no take up, allocations were made to the outlying villages – Zeals, Stourton, Kilmington, West Knoyle, East Knoyle, - before allocating from outside the local area). Indeed, this small development (and the Shared Equity Houses at Kingsmere) fulfilled the needs identified in the Mere Housing Needs Survey at that time. Since then, the Housing Needs Register has been updated and includes a small need for Shared Equity or affordable private purchase homes for local families.



Picture: Mere's newest housing under construction, a mixed development including affordable housing.

The Parish Plan questionnaire analysis revealed some interesting data on the topic of housing with 59% of responses saying that Mere did not need any more housing, 32% saying that Mere did need more housing and 9% expressed no opinion.

The majority of those that felt Mere needed more housing clarified this by stating that it should be directed towards young people and young families from Mere or with a Mere connection and that it should be directed towards people on low incomes.

It is important to clarify that there is often confusion over the wording and terminology used in housing requirements. For instance, 'affordable housing', 'low-cost housing' & 'housing need' to many local authorities is taken to mean social housing to rent or shared equity. However, the general public may well perceive this to mean less-expensive private housing that they can afford to purchase with a mortgage. It is therefore important that this distinction should be encompassed within the Housing Needs Register. The housing requirements of older people could also be encompassed within a general Housing Needs Register in order to review and understand their requirements (e.g. sheltered housing).

The Employment Allocation adjacent to Quarry Fields Industrial Estate has still not been taken up. There is much thought that Mere should only be allocated more housing if it can provide the employment. However, there is relatively little unemployment in Mere and the Parish Council have suggested that an 'Employment Needs Survey' should be carried out to demonstrate which types of employment would encourage residents to work in their

own town and thereby alleviate the need for long commuting distances and creating a more sustainable environment. It is therefore important to ensure that the existing infrastructure in Mere, which includes health, education, road, water and sewerage facilities, can support further development growth.

Planning applications are determined by the policies that are adopted in the Salisbury District Local Plan. Central Government influences local authorities' planning policies through the issue of Planning Policy Guidance (PPG's); these PPG's are currently being replaced by Planning Policy Statements (PPS's). The present guidance regarding housing is PPG3 and this advises that the density of new housing development should generally not fall below 30 dwellings per hectare.

Whilst the Planning Authority (Salisbury District Council) may have every intention of considering the existing character of Mere and providing policies that suggest that development should be sympathetic to that character, in reality, the central government guidelines dictate that the character of rural towns such as Mere are in danger of being lost due to the application of these PPG's and the density requirement. It is vital that the character of Mere is not lost through inappropriate development. Through good design and consultation, it is possible to ensure that new development is sympathetic to the character of Mere. A Village Design Statement (VDS) could be produced by Mere which would identify local character and set out design guidance to help guide new development. This would provide a way for local residents to describe the qualities that they value in Mere and its surroundings. Setting out clear and simple guidance for the design of all development in a 'village', based on its character, a VDS can help effect how any new building fits into the town. Salisbury District Council prepare broad design briefs for most new developments which are allocated within the local development framework and it is intended that the policies contained within Salisbury District's Local Development Framework also work to protect the character of the district.

The District Council currently has no policy on the number of off-street car parking spaces that should be provided with new dwellings. This

is because central government is trying to reduce the number of cars owned per household and thinks that it will encourage residents to use public transport and bicycles more if they do not have sufficient off-street car parking spaces. All these central government guidelines may be practical in urban cities but, in reality, do little to promote sustainable communities in rural areas such as Mere.

Planning Enforcement

Much of the credibility in the current planning rules comes from the fact that planning decisions can be and are enforced. The preservation of the town's Conservation Area and adjacent Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty rely on effective enforcement of the

rules when needed. It is the vision of this Parish Plan that the environment which makes Mere a preferred place to live is preserved and that planning regulations are enforced when necessary.

Design & Architecture

It is important, in order to conserve the character of Mere, not only in the Conservation Areas, that good design and architecture is put into practice and any future developments, whether small-scale infill or larger scale, should reflect the character of the neighbourhood in which they are to be located. Particular attention should be paid to conserve the historic and listed buildings that form part of Mere's heritage.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- 1. Ensure the new Salisbury District's Local Development Framework aspires to meet the needs and demands of the community in relation to residential development allocations and housing policy boundary.**
- 2. Any demand for future housing allocation is balanced with employment opportunities, and other infrastructure (health, road, education, drainage etc.)**
- 3. Encourage developers to encompass the visions of Mere Parish Plan and Mere Design Statement**
- 4. Any new housing should accommodate needs of Mere people**
- 5. Ensure that new housing is sympathetic to character of the area, the natural environment and the social & economic viability of the town.**
- 6. Deter developers and owners from breaching planning controls.**

VISION	ACTION	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIME
Ensure the new Salisbury Development Framework aspires to meet the needs and demands of the community in relation to residential development & housing policy boundary	Maintain a proactive rather than reactive approach to consultation for Salisbury Development Framework in relation to residential development and housing policy boundary. Encourage public participation in consultation.	Parish Council & District Council + general public	Short to Medium
Any demand for future housing allocation is balanced with employment opportunities, and other infrastructure (health, road, education, drainage etc.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain close links with health authority, highways authority, education authority, Wessex water etc. Encourage their participation in consultation for Development Framework. 2. Use planning gain to improve local facilities. 	<p>District Council & relevant authorities</p> <p>Parish Council and District Council</p>	Short, Medium & Long
Encourage developers to encompass the visions of Mere Parish Plan and Mere Design Statement	Parish Council to liaise with developers and vice versa.	District Council, Parish Council & Developers	Short, Medium & Long
Any new housing should accommodate the needs of Mere people	Publicise and maintain a Local Housing Needs Register so that demand can be demonstrated and needs addressed.	Parish Council & District Council	Medium to Long
Ensure that new housing is sympathetic to character of area, the natural environment and the social & economic viability of the town	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use Parish Plan to help inform the production of a Village Design Statement and Salisbury District's Local Development Framework. Both documents to act as useful guide to all relevant authorities. 2. Produce Mere's Design Statement to identify local character and set out design guidance and request subsequent adoption as supplementary planning guidance. 	Parish Council, District Council, County Council and other relevant authorities + potential developers	Short, Medium & Long
Encourage developers to avoid breaching planning controls.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enforcement of Planning decisions. 2. Inform developers & owners of planning regulations. 3. Seek enforcement of breaches in planning controls. 	Parish Council, District Council	Short, Medium & Long

EDUCATION

Pre –school, Primary, Secondary

The provision of education for the children of Mere is, on the whole, good and is not something about which the residents of Mere have expressed a great concern, other than a great number, particularly parents, opposing the recent change from the three tier system to the two tier system of education. However, the provision of adult education is seen to be poor and this is something which the residents would like to see addressed for the future.

Education in Mere and the South West Salisbury District Area is provided by Wiltshire County Council. Given Mere's unique geographical relationship to the rest of the Salisbury District and Wiltshire County, provision of secondary education has been through longstanding arrangements with our adjacent county, Dorset. This dependency for secondary education has increased with the demise of the Three Tier education system. The current two-tier system transfers local school children from Mere Primary School at age 11 on to Gillingham School.



Picture: Official opening of Mere Primary School

As there is no secondary education provision in this area of South-West Wiltshire, all Mere children requiring state secondary education go to Gillingham School. Gillingham itself continues to expand with new housing estates and developments, thereby creating an increasing number of children within the Gillingham School catchment area. Should the current secondary education arrangements with Dorset become unviable for any reason there would be considerable disruption to education unless Wiltshire Local Education Authority establishes a new policy for

secondary education in the area of South-West Wiltshire.

Mere remains a good area for education in both primary and independent school provision and the state secondary school provision at Gillingham currently has an excellent reputation, encouraging families to move within its catchment area and attracting parental preference from a far wider area. The effect that this has on the social activities of pupils is such that friends and acquaintances can be made in a wide geographical area and in a rural area such as this where public transport is not liberal, parents are faced with the consequence of making frequent travel journeys, often 25 miles or more, to accommodate their children's social needs.

Mere also has a long-established Playgroup/Preschool with strong links to and liaison with the Primary School. Children may attend here from the age of two up to five mornings a week before going into the school in September after their fourth birthday. Negotiations are taking place for the Preschool to move into larger premises attached to the Primary School building and expand to offer nursery and all-day facilities.



Picture: Mere Play School Nativity Play.

Within easy reach of Mere, as well as slightly further afield, there is an excellent choice of independent schools at both nursery/preparatory level and senior level, offering adequate choice of boarding or day school. Furthermore, there is, in Mere, a small independent and well attended Nursery and Pre-preparatory School taking children from Mere and the surrounding area, as well as a

further small Nursery/Playgroup in the centre of the town.

Adult Education

This is an area of concern to the residents of Mere who would like to take advantage of further education of all types without having to travel long distances. There have for many



Picture: Senior and Junior members of the Karate Club

years been classes in Karate for both adults and children. Some adult courses have been provided in Mere, particularly in ICT through the visiting Learning for Life and Dorset Adult Education, but these have been one-offs rather

than regular provision. Various organisations, including the WEA (Workers Education Association), offer courses in music and the arts from time to time which are popular, and there are also classes on offer at times from individual teachers or clubs covering line dancing and other forms of dancing, upholstery, drawing and painting, yoga, etc. The four District Councils of Wiltshire have just begun to run a scheme to provide groups of any age and type with projects to be run by a professional arts worker at a nominal cost which is then subsidised by the local district council. No experience is needed to take part. As this has only just come into operation, in September 2004, there is as yet no information on the uptake in this area.

There are a wide range of adult education courses available at Gillingham, Shaftesbury, Wincanton, Salisbury, Yeovil & Trowbridge.

The development of suitable adult education provision in Mere remains an objective to enhance the opportunities for this age group.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

1. **Expansion of Mere Preschool to enable nursery and all-day facilities.**
2. **Ensure the long-term provision of secondary education at Gillingham School for Mere Primary School pupils.**
3. **Improve opportunities for regular adult education.**

VISION	ACTION	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIME
Expansion of Mere Preschool to enable nursery and all-day facilities	Support existing providers to develop increased capacity	Parish Council, Preschool organisers and Wiltshire County Council	Short to Medium
Ensure long-term provision of secondary education at Gillingham School for Mere Primary School pupils	Maintain close liaison and links with schools and education authorities	Wiltshire County Council, Dorset County Council, Mere School & Gillingham School (governors & heads)	Medium to Long
Improve opportunities for regular adult education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish precise adult education requirements in Mere. Conduct Educational needs survey 2. Explore providers and venues for the provision of adult education. 	Wiltshire County Council	Medium to Long

WORK, BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Mere has a long history of contemporary local industry that has developed and been superseded as the generations and industry trends have progressed. Equally there has been a long tradition of international trading which continues to this day. However, in the context of a current global economy the current industrial enterprises of any significance face stiff competition from the immediate continent and from low wage economies throughout the world.



Picture: Staff at the Hill Brush Company, Mere's longest established manufacturing business.



Picture: Still making brushes in Mere after more than seventy years.

In the current survey, whilst the resident population is one comprising retired people, 40% of those that answered the occupation questions said that they were retired. However, when comparing this to the responses given for the age questions, only 28% were over 65. The current working population is made up of a professional and managerial component, either working from

home or as part of the commuting population, and local workers. However, as a result of local housing prices there are many people who work in Mere who commute into larger towns as they cannot afford to live and work in the immediate location. Whilst there are considerable number of workers coming into Mere and workers going outside Mere, the required skills base within the town cannot be matched by simply encouraging those within the town to find local employment. Equally, employment opportunities within the town are restricted in depth and numbers and hence real opportunity, especially for the younger generation, lies outside the town.

However, the local plan holds designated employment areas and an area of green field development for industrial use. Despite continued marketing at a Rural Development level, no uptake has been forthcoming for the site over a number of years and significant development opportunities along the A303 in either direction will militate against this particular development area. The town has two designated industrial areas, the Quarry Industrial Estate, situated near the western entrance to the town and conveniently situated for access to the road network. However, the individual commercial sites have not always been fully occupied but as they are now over thirty years old may need substantial re-investment and refurbishment to provide for modern business requirements. The other site, Woodlands Road, which has seen both significant investment in one enterprise and decline in the second major international business, has limited access other than through the town centre and is surrounded by an increasing number of residential properties. In the longer term it is essential that the local plans preserve the current proportion of industrial and employment land to afford future generations the opportunity for industrial development and exploitation. Any windfall brown field industrial and employment sites should be maintained rather than increase the pressure on the local infrastructure and imbalance of employment opportunities at the expense of a short-term

residential increase. The latter either increasing the potential for an influx of retired people together with increased private transport, or overloading local infrastructures whether material in terms of drainage, parking or medical facilities. The current policies with Salisbury District's Local Plan supports the need to preserve the current proportion of industrial and employment land where these remain viable. However, the short-term viability of an employment allocation may not necessarily reflect the long-term needs of the future generations.



Picture: The Hamilton Litestat Group who have been manufacturing electrical switches and fittings in Mere for over twenty years

A Mere and District Chamber of Trade supports the commercial elements of the community. The fortunes of this organisation have fluctuated over the recent decade but its continued presence and strong representation of the town's economic requirements is necessary to support all local representations at the District Council level. This commercial representation as an independent voice will also be required should more devolved administration of the regions occur within the construct of the wider European Community.

The prosperity of the local community is reflected in the number and nature of enterprises visible on the high street. Over the years, the number of retail outlets has declined and currently sits at a minimum level of self-sufficiency. The local survey results show that local residents would like more local shops and greater variety; however, it must be matched by local commitment to support these shops that need to be viable commercial businesses and not a social convenience. On-street, local and central parking are a current issue, which will only increase in significance as more cars

support the local population, particularly in peripheral developments and, if retail and tourism opportunities flourish, visitors and tourists are attracted to stay. It is vital that increased central car parking is made available should suitable sites become available. The District Council must do this as an investment in local infrastructure rather than just adding to the housing allocation as has been seen with recent potential opportunities.

The economic fortunes of Mere have been significantly affected by the development of the A303 over recent decades. Further development in upgrading to dual carriageway will further affect the town. Rather than react to a potential loss of passing traffic and trade after the event, an impact study of the improved road scheme should be undertaken.

Although there is considerable talk of the needs of rural communities and the support of local business within the ICT environment, Mere remains a backward area. Broadband has only recently become available.



Picture: Candle making in Mere where a large proportion of the country's church candles are made.



Picture: At the heart of the community – Waltons of Mere – the newsagents and post office.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

1. **Balanced employment opportunities for local residents**
2. **Prosperous central shopping centre and local enterprises**
3. **Increased central parking**
4. **Sustained employment land capacity**

VISION	ACTION	PARTNERS	TIME
Balanced employment opportunities for local residents	1. Conduct Employment Needs Survey to establish what type of employment is needed and encourage those employers to come to Mere. This will help with marketing strategy for undeveloped employment sites.	Mere Parish Council, Salisbury District Council, owners of allocated employment land.	Short to Medium
	2. Resist proposals for residential development of brownfield sites and change of use applications (from commercial to residential). [Unless alternative employment sites provided elsewhere within the town offering equivalent employment provision].	Mere Parish Council & Salisbury District Council. Local employers & landowners.	Short, Medium & Long
Prosperous central shopping centre and local enterprises	1. Support for Mere & District Chamber of Trade: encourage membership for continued strong representation at local and district level.	Traders, Chamber of Trade, Mere Parish Council & Salisbury District Council.	Medium to Long
	2. Resist application for change of use (commercial to residential) and resist applications that may affect long-term viability of commercial premises.	Mere Parish Council & Salisbury District Council	Short, Medium & Long
	3. Impact study on effects that proposals to upgrade the A303 may have on passing trade in Mere.	Mere Parish Council, Highways Agency, Salisbury District Council	Medium to Long
Increased central parking	Investigate possible sites to create additional central car parking, particularly short-term.	Mere Parish Council & Salisbury District Council	Short, Medium & Long
Sustained employment land capacity	Adopt a proactive approach to Strategic Development Plans.	Mere Parish Council & Salisbury District Council	Medium to Long

TRANSPORT

Highways

Throughout its history from the thirteenth century, when Richard Earl of Cornwall built the Castle, to the present day, Mere has been a favoured stopping place on the journey from London to the West Country. Indeed, at one time it boasted at least a dozen inns; now it has only three – The Old Ship, The George and The Butt of Sherry – with the Walnut Tree under re-development.

However, until the last century all transportation was by horse-drawn coach or on horseback. A consequence of this is that though the town lies on the main road to the West Country, its layout and central buildings are not suitable for today's society where the internal combustion engine holds sway. The town was by-passed in 1978 but despite this remains a popular stopping off point. The A303 is once again likely to be upgraded to dual-carriageway. At present Mere is at the end of a long stretch of single carriageway so to turn off just as the dual-carriageway section begins is easy. Undoubtedly this upgrade will further affect Mere as journeys become less disrupted by the road conditions and other roadside facilities compete for custom.

Today's volume of traffic is not compatible with the main road (White Road, Salisbury Street, Castle Street) through Mere. As with most small towns, shops and houses are built with frontages opening straight on to the street, and many do not have any off-street parking facilities. Furthermore, the street is not wide enough to allow for the parking of residents' cars or of commercial delivery vehicles, and at the same time allow even two cars, never mind two commercial vehicles to pass each other. The result is that there are occasional traffic jams with maybe one or more vehicles having to reverse to allow other drivers to get through.



Picture: On street parking in the centre of Mere on a typical weekday morning.

One recent effect of this congestion is that the town has lost its National Express daily coach service to Bournemouth in the south, and to Bath, Bristol and other places further north. There are rumours circulating that other bus service providers may be considering whether they can continue to pick up in the centre of Mere, such is the adverse effect of the local road congestion on their timekeeping.

One way to alleviate the situation would be to persuade motorists from London who want to go to Gillingham or to south of Mere, to use the A303 exit on the western side of Mere. Also, heavy vehicles travelling from Warminster to Gillingham should be encouraged to use the A350/A303 rather than come through the Deverills and Mere. Likewise, motorists travelling from Gillingham to Warminster, Andover and London could be directed to use the western access on to the A303, rather than turning right opposite the Quarry Industrial Estate and driving through Mere town centre to get to the eastern access on to the A303. To this end discussions should be held with the appropriate highways agencies/authorities to improve the signage on the appropriate roads.

Results from the Parish Plan questionnaire revealed that 38% of households own 2 or more cars. As Mere continues to expand, those living outside the immediate centre of the town will need to use their cars to do local shopping, etc. This will exacerbate the traffic congestion in Castle Street and Salisbury Street to which reference has been made above. There needs to be, therefore, urgent consideration as to how best to deal with this problem. Without some measures being taken to alleviate the situation, people may decide that getting into Mere is too difficult and will drive instead to Gillingham or Wincanton to do their shopping – with a consequent adverse effect on the trading viability of existing shops in the centre of the town.

The state of the pavements, both for those disabled and those with small children requires some further thought. Both the unevenness and the need to cross from one side of the road to the other have not been resolved.

Summary

In common with other small towns on major trunk routes, in commuter areas or with increasing development and population, the increasing levels of car ownership and consequential travel patterns are a major issue. The local survey indicates high car ownership and this can be expected to increase in future years. This trend is contrary to government and local planning expectations which will further exacerbate the problem. In Mere we are well aware of the problems with current traffic management issues and are engaged with District, County and Highways authorities as a matter of course. This liaison and problem resolution should be continued and agreeable traffic management solutions implemented as and when funding becomes available.

Car Parking

Alongside the above study there needs to be a review of off-street parking in the central area. The two car parks in Salisbury Street and Castle Street are well patronised at present (the former also serves as a parking area for surgery patients, and overnight is used by commercial vehicles). However, with projections for car usage on the increase, parking within the town will only become worse and if possible further central parking should be provided.

Whilst it is popular with District Councils to put parking fees on car parks, invariably the result is under-utilised car parks and further congestion where parking is free. The provision of free car parking in Mere should be sustained to alleviate potentially greater difficulties elsewhere. Any future potential to utilise land near to the town centre for additional free car parking should be investigated. To benefit economic viability of town centre shops & businesses all on-street town centre car parking should remain short-term and any all-day parking, especially by town centre employees, should be discouraged. In rural areas such as Mere, the private car is an essential transport mode for many people and for this reason it is important that sufficient car parking spaces are provided with new dwellings. The use of bicycles (where it is safe to do so) and public transport (where available) could also be encouraged in order to reduce reliance on the car and increase the sustainability of Mere.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Rail

Mere is not on a railway line but is only 4½ miles from Gillingham station with services eastbound to Salisbury, Andover, Basingstoke and London (Waterloo); and westbound to Sherborne, Yeovil and Exeter. Warminster (10 miles) provides services to London (Paddington), Bath and Bristol with connections to Birmingham and further afield. Unfortunately, bus services to Warminster station are non-existent, whilst those to and from Gillingham station are not convenient for London departures or arrivals. If one travels to the railhead by car, there is no guarantee that one will be able to park in the station car park. Consequently, Mere residents use rail services less than they might otherwise. Discussions should be held with the bus companies to ascertain whether it would be possible to provide better connecting services. Such service should be extended into the evenings so that Mere residents can take advantage of the evening facilities and entertainments offered by, for example, Salisbury.

Buses

One of the most disturbing results of the recent survey was the fact that the majority of residents who have a car stated that they do not

use public transport services, nor would they. There was no recognition that a time may come when circumstances dictate that they can no longer drive, or for some reason they cease to have ready use of private transport. What then? What, if by their non-use now of public transport, those services are not available when they could do with them? If asked, they say that there is always the Linkscheme; or the neighbours are very good.



Picture: Literary Festival Award Winners and organisers 2004. The Event is held annually to help fund the Mere and District Linkscheme that provides transport and assistance for the housebound.

One reason for this lack of use is poor communication of the services that are available. Discussions need to be held with the local bus companies and Wiltshire County Council on how best to better publicise the services that are available, and thus increase patronage. For example, to get to Salisbury Hospital is particularly complicated as it involves several bus changes and information would need to be obtained in order to plan the journey in advance; it is therefore easier to ask the Linkscheme, if available, for transportation.



Picture: The Wigglybus at the bus stop in the centre of the town.

Wigglybus

A Wigglybus, a locally controlled flexible routing and booking bus service has been provided to Mere and District, funded from Wiltshire County Council. This is on a three-year trial after which time the initial grant funding ceases. Whilst initial indications of the service are favourable, this needs to be sustained to prove that there is a need for such a service. The future funding of the Wigglybus should be addressed within time to secure its future as, bearing in mind the current travel charges are subsidised, it may lose its appeal should travel charges need to be raised in order to keep it self-sufficient.

The Mere and District Linkscheme

This is a local initiative and charity that provides transport and caring assistance within the local area. It is supported by local volunteers and sustained by donations and fund-raising events.

7% of respondents (compared with the 28% over 65) stated that they have used the Mere & District Linkscheme at some time. This is a voluntary service so the level of service it can provide is limited by the number of available drivers. Looking ahead, the demands upon the service will increase as a result of the cut backs in the availability of hospital cars imposed by Salisbury Hospital. Therefore, it is important to maintain the recruitment of volunteer drivers.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

1. Implementation of effective traffic management solutions
2. Additional central car parking
3. Improve pavements –especially for disabled.
4. Better public transport, with integration between bus and rail
5. Improved access to public transport information
6. Sustain Wigglybus
7. Sustain the Linkscheme through assured funding

VISION	ACTION	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIME
Implementation of effective traffic management solutions	1. Investigate possible measures to promote better traffic management – especially in Salisbury Street & Castle Street. 2. Improve signage on and around A303 to discourage commercial traffic unnecessarily travelling through Mere.	Parish, County & District Councils + Public transport providers Parish Council, County Council & Highways Agency.	Short to Medium
Additional central car parking	Investigate possible sites for additional central car parking	Parish Council & District Council	Medium to Long
Improve pavements – especially for the disabled	Carry out disability assessment to consider in line with future programmed works.	County Council	Medium to Long
Better public transport, with integration between bus and rail.	Seek timetable alterations to obtain better integration of bus and rail services	Parish Council, County Council and public transport providers	Short to Medium
Improved access to public transport information	Redesign timetables to make them easier to understand; and improve access to such information	Parish Council, County Council, Public transport providers and Information Centre	Short
Sustain Wigglybus	1. Determine and secure future funding sources 2. Develop routes & services	Parish Council, County Council	Short
Sustain the Linkscheme through assured funding	Determine and secure future funding sources & recruitment of volunteer drivers.	Linkscheme Committee, Local Authorities & Community	Short to Medium

RECREATION, SPORTS & LEISURE

Children's Play Areas



Picture: The play area at the approach to Castle Hill.

The Parish Council has a policy to support the provision of children's play areas within any future sizeable housing developments and to support their subsequent upkeep. In addition to the play areas established in recent housing developments there are two dedicated children's play areas: one off Castle Hill Lane and one within the Recreation Ground. The children's play area in Castle Hill Lane has been deliberately equipped to accommodate the needs of smaller children, whilst the play area within the Recreation Ground has been equipped with the needs of a wider age range of children. Both play areas receive an annual safety inspection by RoSPA to ensure that the equipment meets the required safety standards. The Recreation Ground site has been refurbished since the questionnaires were completed:

50.5% of questionnaire responses said that the play areas were adequate

22.1% said that they were not – with specific comments for more equipment and more play areas for new developments.

27.4% expressed no opinion.



Picture: Newly refurbished play area at the Recreation Ground.

Sport facilities

At present the only site available for general sports provision is the Recreation Ground, north-east of the town centre, accessible from White Road/Queens Road. There is limited car parking provision within the site. The site is administered by the Mere Peace Memorial Sports & Recreation Ground Charity, the Trustees of which are the Mere Parish Council. The site currently houses the Mere Youth Club Building, the old Rutter Pavilion, two newly-refurbished tennis courts, a cricket pitch and cricket storage building, a multi-games kicking wall and a fenced children's play area. There are residential buildings to the north-west of the ground, agricultural to the east and school/education land to the south. The Parish Council is currently negotiating with Wiltshire County Council to lease the old Duchy Manor School grounds in order to provide improved sporting facilities for the community and as this is adjacent to the Recreation Ground (albeit divided by a public footpath), it would seem sensible to combine any future facilities for the two sites.

There is an active cricket club, tennis club, youth football club and outdoor bowling club in Mere. Cricket, football and tennis require improved changing facilities and with this in mind, the Parish Council are also negotiating



Picture: The newly refurbished tennis courts in the Recreation ground.



Picture: The Rutter Pavilion

with Wiltshire County Council to lease and convert the old Duchy Manor School changing rooms and make them available for sports use. It is also hoped that these improved facilities will encourage other sporting groups to come forward and make use of the grounds. Mere Outdoor Bowling Club, currently based in North Road, has asked for support in relocating to the School Grounds so that they can have a full size green, enabling them to enter league and cup matches.

19% of questionnaire respondents stated that the sports facilities in Mere were adequate
 50% said that they were not with 5 specified comments that the tennis courts were in need of repair – now completed.
 31% expressed no opinion.

Swimming

A large number of residents have indicated that they would like an indoor swimming pool. Realistically, it is doubtful that this proposal would be considered financially viable as indoor swimming pools are notoriously expensive to maintain. The nearest swimming facilities are in Tisbury (outdoor) and Gillingham (indoor); although at the time of

production, the exact long-term future of the Gillingham swimming pool is unknown. Steps could be taken, however, to negotiate with transport providers for better transport links to Tisbury or Gillingham for swimming.

There is a small children's outdoor swimming pool within the grounds of the school and the future of this facility is uncertain. The Parish Council has agreed to encompass this facility in its new lease with Wiltshire County Council but have agreed to 'mothball' the pool for the present time. Unfortunately, health and safety requirements are such that children's swimming needs to be supervised by suitably qualified adults and therein lies the problem. If a team of parents/supervisors were willing to come forward to enable this facility to be used then it may be possible to consider a scheme for children's swimming.



Picture: The outdoor swimming pool at Mere School in the days when it was still in use.

Skate Park

During the Mere May Fayre in 2003 the committee organised a Wish Tree Consultation exercise during which time the suggestion of a Skate Park received the highest number of endorsements, mostly from teenage boys within the town. The provision of a skate park is a topic that has been explored by the Parish Council and indeed, planning permission has been granted for a skate park within the Recreation Ground. However, the capital outlay for a well-designed scheme is high and this, coupled with the high costs incurred in meeting current health and safety regulations, risk assessment and public liability insurance premiums is a cause for concern.

Summary

We have a vision of enhanced sporting facilities based upon the use of the Recreation Ground and old Middle School playing fields. The current facilities will be enhanced by use

of improved changing facilities in the old Middle School buildings and through the development of a new sports pavilion, additional pitches and specialist facilities (i.e. bowling green). It is not intended to provide specific swimming facilities in the near future but to facilitate increased access to existing facilities in the area through improved transport arrangements.

Halls for Hire

The Lecture Hall, owned by the Lecture Hall Trust, is a well-used building in the centre of Mere that provides a variety of facilities. Unfortunately, it has restrictions as to its use and will not permit the consumption or sale of alcohol.

Grove Buildings – owned by the Church, again well used.

67.4% of questionnaire respondents said that the halls for hire were adequate

17.5% said that they were not and that they needed upgrading and modernising.

15.1% expressed no opinion

In reality, at peak times it is often difficult to find a hall available for booking.

A small number of residents have said that Mere needed a new community hall. There are many that would like to see the School Hall being used outside school hours for community purposes and it would seem feasible that it could be used for organised groups for purposes such as badminton, yoga, keep fit. However, the decision and responsibility for this rests with the governors of the school. With two halls available for public hire and a possible third, it would seem unfeasible, from a financial point of view, that Mere could sustain a new purpose-built large community hall.



Picture: It's great fun at the play park in the Recreation Ground

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- 1 Provide safe but challenging and rewarding play facilities for younger children and older children.
- 2 Increase range of sporting facilities in Recreation Ground and School Field that meet demands of the community.
- 3 Facilitate access to Gillingham and/or Tisbury Swimming Pools
- 4 Sustain the availability and usage of halls and public buildings for the widest range of groups and organisations.
- 5 Use of Mere School facilities for community use

VISION	ACTION	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIME
Provide safe but challenging and rewarding play facilities for younger children and older children.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Liaison with schools to ensure that equipment meets needs of users. 2. Ensure regular safety inspections of equipment and sites. 3. Play Areas for young children to be provided on-site in larger-scale developments. 	Parish Council, RoSPA, District Council	Short, Medium & Long
Increase range of sporting facilities in Recreation Ground and School Field that meet demands of the community.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue negotiations with WCC for lease of school grounds. 2. Continue liaison and close links with existing sports groups to meet demands. 3. Welcome approaches for new sports interests (i.e. hockey, basketball, rugby etc). 4. Use Policy R2 (developers contributions) for the creation of sports facilities and explore other avenues of funding/match funding. 	Parish Council, District Council, Sports Groups and Sporting Associations	Short, Medium & Long
Facilitate access to Gillingham and/or Tisbury Swimming Pools.	Establish level of need and encourage public transport providers or Mere & District Wigglybus to provide necessary transport for swimming.	Parish Council, Public Transport Providers, Wiltshire County Council	Medium to Long
Sustain the availability, usage and affordability of halls and public buildings for the widest range of groups and organisations.	Maintain close links with other public building providers to assist with reaction to demands.	Parish Council, School governors, Lecture Hall Trust, Grove Building Management Committee.	Medium to Long
Use of Mere School facilities for community use	Direct school governors to promote use of school facilities for community use.	Parish Council & School governors.	Short to Medium

COMMUNICATIONS

Mere Matters

Mere Matters and So Does West Knoyle is the local community magazine started in the mid 1980s by the then Vicar, Rev'd Ben Elliott. It is free, and the print run is 1200 copies, the intention being that there should be sufficient copies for each household in Mere and West Knoyle to have a copy. It is published ten times a year. Distribution is done by using a combination of delivery with newspapers, and copies being made available in the Tourist Information Centre and major shops and other outlets in the town. It seems to be generally appreciated, and would be missed if either a lack of finance or of personnel forced it to cease publication.

The magazine is financed by a grant from the Parish Council and donations from other sponsors/organisations, from advertisers and from a small percentage of its readers.



Picture: The news publications available in Mere.

The magazine is put together by an editor with one assistant who is responsible solely for the advertising content. There also is a treasurer who deals mainly with payments out, as all income is sent to the editor. The problem is that these three persons, who all give their services voluntarily, have no back-up. Thus, if the editor falls ill, or for some other reason is unavailable to produce the magazine, there is no magazine. Likewise, advertising revenue would be adversely affected if the advertising editor was not available.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that because of the magazine's history, the editorial team operate in a vacuum. The magazine is not 'owned' by anyone, there is no organisational structure behind it. Indeed it is an interesting question as to who is responsible for appointing a new editor when the present one retires. Therefore, as a matter of some urgency, there should be a review of the organisational structure and objectives appertaining to the community magazine.

Parish Council News and other mainstream reportage

The Parish Council may use the local magazine *Mere Matters* to include a short report on the main monthly Council meeting held on the first Monday of the month and other official notices as appropriate. However, this magazine is not published until the last weekend of the month so some of the information may be out of date by the time it is read.

The Salisbury Journal used to include a full report of the Parish Council meetings about ten days after the meeting, but has not done so for over the last two years (apparently, it will only report on a meeting if the Parish Council itself submits a report). Very occasionally there may be a report on a highly contentious issue. Thus, if residents wish to find out details of Parish Council proceedings, etc., they either have to attend the meeting itself or wait until a confirmed set of the minutes are available at the Library – which may be some weeks after the meeting to which the minutes relate.

There is a notice board outside the Lecture Hall (where the Parish Council meets) for official notices, etc. However, because of its situation and the narrow pavement, it is not ideally situated. Consideration should be given to finding a new more centrally sited position, i.e. in The Square.

Mere is at a disadvantage when it comes to other mainstream reportage as a result of its position on the border between three counties.

It is part of Salisbury District Council and thus details of planning applications are published in the *Salisbury Journal*. However, other more general items relating to Mere may appear in the *Western Gazette*, the *Blackmore Vale Magazine*, *Warminster Journal* or the *Somerset Standard*.

What's On in Mere?

An analysis of the replies on the questionnaire shows that 52% rely primarily on *Mere Matters* for finding out what goes on in Mere, 17% rely on posters (including those at Post Office, shops, library and Information Centre), and the rest use other means such as “there is a lady who lives on the estate who knows everything that is happening”. The main newspaper source is the *Blackmore Vale Magazine* (BVM), which like *Mere Matters* is free.

Fly Posting

A common method of advertising events is by fly-posting on telegraph poles, etc. Although fly-posting is illegal, there is no doubt that this method is effective, but it is unsightly, especially when posters are not taken down immediately after the event to which they refer (or are badly taken down).

Welcome Pack

At one time new residents to Mere were supplied with a ‘Welcome Pack’ containing

information about shops, organisations and societies, etc. It is recommended that, if it no longer exists, it be resuscitated, revised and brought up to date and issued to all households, perhaps on an annual basis. A major reason for poor communication is that people do not know where to look for information; and this applies just as much to those who are charged with information as those seeking it.

Websites

Mere has at least two websites – www.mere.org and www.merewilts.org.uk. (as well as others that could facilitate a free web presence for Mere: www.southwilts.com and www.ukvillages.com) The former was set up in the year 2000 by a then parish councillor under the auspices of the Mere Chamber of Trade with the intention that it should be a source of information about Mere in general. However, for one reason and another it never really got established, and now no longer serves its original purpose. Merewilts.org.uk was set up about two years ago by the organiser of the Mere and District Linkscheme Literary Festival, and it is used exclusively for that purpose. The question is whether Mere really needs its own website, what its purpose and objectives would be, who would access it, and very importantly, who will maintain it?

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- 1. More immediate notification of Parish Council activities**
- 2. Better coverage of Mere & District in local newspapers**
- 3. Improved local magazine structure**
- 4. A sustainable local Magazine to reflect the community need**
- 5. Improved information about Mere and its facilities/events to residents**
- 6. Establishment of all embracing local website**

VISION	ACTION	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIME
More immediate notification of Parish Council activities	Determine what information needs to be publicised and the best medium for achieving those aims.	Parish Council, local magazine & newspapers	Short to Medium
Better coverage of Mere & District in local newspapers	Establish policy of local newspapers regarding coverage of Mere & District: and how Mere can obtain good coverage	Parish Council & local newspapers	Medium to Long
Improved local magazine structure	Determine need for local magazine, its organisational and financial structure, and content policy	Parish Council & existing Mere Matters editor	Short to Medium
A sustainable local Magazine to reflect the community need			
Improved information about Mere and its facilities/events to residents	Determine whether information about Mere should be supplied to all residents, both existing and new: and if so, content and distribution method.	Parish Council & other invited parties	Short to Medium
Establishment of all embracing local website	Establish present position of existing websites, personnel to administer any new/additional site	Parish Council & existing website operators	Short to Medium

CRIME & DISORDER

The results of the Parish Plan questionnaire covering crime need to be viewed in the light of the overall position of policing in the local area. Crime figures for the three counties affecting our local area show that Wiltshire has consistently low crime rates for which the Salisbury Policing district is the lowest figure in the county. As shown nationally, the public perception of actual crime and the fear of crime show considerably different results; the latter outweighing reality. However, it is recognised that the reduction of the 'fear of crime' is an important local policing objective as it does affect the quality of life of the community.

Mere has an established Neighbourhood Watch Scheme and a Community Safety Partnership scheme with the adjacent villages. The presence of the local police force has been endorsed by the establishment of a new Police

Office in conjunction with the Mere Fire Station.

Local policing is based out of Tisbury and Mere and the small force of 9 officers, 2 special constables and 2 enquiry officers cover a large rural area of 120 square miles. Additionally this small force has to cover traffic incidents on the busy A303 in support of Salisbury Traffic Department. The Community Safety Partnership have been active in trying to increase the manpower at Tisbury and Mere in order to increase the level of police patrols, particularly at night. However, it is unlikely that there will be any increase in such manpower in the foreseeable future.

Much of Mere's 'crime' is imported and instigated by non-residents on an opportunistic basis. Petty vandalism and anti-social behaviour by the younger generations erupt

sporadically and remain of concern to the largest percentage of respondents – 74%. The second largest category of concern to residents was that of young people being involved in crime, either as victims or offenders (65%) and of crime resulting from drug and alcohol misuse (65%). At present Mere has no ‘persistent young offenders’ and police consider the overall level of youth crime is low.

Solutions to crime and fear of crime lie as much outside the remit of policing as just providing additional visible police presence. 49% of respondents would like to see CCTV in Mere and half of those wanted CCTV coverage

to concentrate on the Town Centre area (31% did not want CCTV and 20% expressed no opinion). Interestingly, the question to whether or not there should be an Alcohol Exclusion Zone in Mere received a balanced response (38% said that they wanted an Alcohol Exclusion Zone with the majority suggesting it should be applied to the Town Centre; 37.5 saying that they would not want an Alcohol Exclusion Zone and 24.5% expressed no opinion). Much of the recorded crime in Mere, according to the police, is preventable and efforts should be concentrated in reducing opportunities for criminals with emphasis placed on crime prevention.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

1. **Encourage social responsibility and reduce vandalism and anti-social behaviour.**
2. **Provision of better recreational and activities for the younger generation (balanced with demographics).**
3. **Raise awareness of preventable crime**

VISION	ACTION	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIME
Encourage social responsibility and reduce vandalism and anti-social behaviour.	Support Community Safety Partnership. Work with police & community to identify & address specific concerns. Liaise with anti-social behaviour officer of WCC.	Police, Community Safety Partnership, Wiltshire County Council & Parish Council.	Medium to Long
Provision of better recreational and activities for the younger generation (balanced with demographics).	Encourage proactive Youth Club management structure. Encourage sports groups to adopt a youth policy and provide training/coaching.	Wiltshire County Council, Sports Groups, Parish Council & Youth Club.	Medium to Long
Raise awareness of preventable crime	Raise awareness of crime prevention schemes such as ‘Phone a Friend’, ‘Bobby Van Trust’.	Police, Community Safety Partnership and community.	Short, Medium & Long.



Picture: The Bobby Van visits Mere and meets the area's member of parliament, Dr Andrew Murrison.

CONCLUSION

When carrying out the consultation exercise for this Parish Plan the committee members asked residents what they liked about Mere. The responses given were that Mere was a lovely, friendly place to live with a large-village atmosphere and a strong community feeling ('not only do you know your immediate neighbours but you also know everyone living in your street'). Residents also commented about the beautiful surrounding countryside, the rural nature of Mere and the importance of its open spaces and network of footpaths. Most residents felt that they were able to access basic facilities and one resident commented, when asked about clubs and organisations 'there is so much going on that there are not enough evenings in the week!'

It occurred to members of the Parish Plan committee that some of the responses to the questionnaire were slightly contradictory to this reaction. Surely, if Mere were to offer such facilities as 'large supermarkets', 'cinemas', 'indoor swimming pools' etc. then the whole nature of the large-village atmosphere would be in jeopardy because Mere would need to see a large increase in development in order to sustain such facilities.

The conclusion is that a sense of balance needs to be achieved. The relevant authorities and organisations should strive to meet the needs of the community and to improve the quality of life of its residents whilst **conserving** the fundamental qualities of Mere – the large-village atmosphere, the strong community feeling, the beautiful surrounding countryside and the rural nature with open spaces and network of footpaths.

It will require a strong local voice at District and County level from all Mere representatives, whether as County or District Councillors or as members of appropriate central committees operating within the local area, to ensure that Mere and the rural areas have access to and retain suitable local services, facilities, lifestyle and quality of life that is their right.

If this Parish Plan is to carry any weight it will need to be adopted by the Parish Council who will also need confirmation of commitment from the District Council and County Council (as well as other relevant agencies) to its visions and action plans.

Appendix I

This Parish Plan would not have been produced had it not been for the determination and hard work of 7 Parish Plan Committee Members: (in alphabetical order) George Jeans, Michael Lake, Fran Maidment, Margaret Thompson, Michael Welch, Mary White, John Wilson & Lindsey Wood.

Acknowledgements:

Mr. Michael Tighe – for writing the detailed history of Mere (Appendix III)

Mere Parish Council - whose members helped distribute and collect the questionnaires for the Parish Plan survey.

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Liz Fricker - photographs

Liz Fricker - printing

Funded by:



with assistance from Mere Parish Council

Appendix II

Mere Parish Plan

Door-to-door questionnaire:

1. How many people live in your household:

Aged 1-17	Aged 18-40	Aged 40-65	Over 65

2. Number in household in paid employment:

- a) in Mere []
- b) outside Mere []
- c) If b) please state how far is travelled and whether you travel by car or public transport

3. Nature of employment: *(please tick box)*

- a) Professional/Managerial []
- b) IT/Computers []
- c) Nursing/health care []
- d) Secretarial/office []
- e) Factory/manual []
- f) Agricultural/land management []
- g) Retail []
- h) Unemployed []
- i) Retired []
- j) Other []

4. Would you work in Mere if suitable employment opportunities were offered:

5. What facilities in Mere do you use on a regular basis: *(please tick box)*

- a) Bank/Post Office []
- b) Pubs/Restaurants []
- c) Doctors surgery []
- d) Dentist []
- e) Chemist []
- f) Shops []
- g) Others []

6. Do you feel that the public facilities in Mere are adequate:

- a) Halls for hire (e.g. Grove Building/Lecture Hall) Yes/No
- b) Play Areas Yes/No
- c) Recreation Ground Yes/No
- d) Sports facilities Yes/No
- e) Youth Club Yes/No
- f) Open Spaces (Castle Hill, Long Hill, Kingsmere) Yes/No
- g) Footpaths Yes/No

7. Are there any other shops or facilities that you would like to see in Mere
8. How many cars belong to people living in your household? []
Parked on:
a) Street []
b) Garage []
c) Car Park []
9. Do you use public transport in Mere: (please tick box)
a. Never []
b. Occasionally []
c. Regularly []
10. Are there any public transport services that you would like: (times, venues etc)
11. Do you use Mere & District Linkscheme Yes/No
12. Are you concerned about:
a) Car crime Yes/No
b) Vandalism and anti-social behaviour Yes/No
c) Crime resulting from drug and alcohol misuse Yes/No
d) Domestic violence Yes/No
e) Young people involved in crime either as victims or offenders Yes/No
f) Would you like to see CCTV in Mere (if so where) Yes/No
g) Would you like to see an Alcohol Exclusion Zone in Mere (if so where) Yes/No
13. Do you feel that enough is being done about:
a) recycling Yes/No
b) environmental management of open spaces in Mere Yes/No
14. Do you think Mere needs more housing development Yes/No
If yes, should housing be directed towards:
a) young people Yes/No
b) elderly Yes/No
c) families Yes/No
d) people on low incomes Yes/No
15. How do you find out what is going on in Mere
16. Do you belong to or regularly attend any clubs/organisations in Mere (if so, please state which).
17. Do you have any specific hobbies/interests or further education requirements that are not catered for in Mere
18. If you have any other burning issues that you would like to raise, please complete a Parish Plan questionnaire and hand it to the Information Office in Mere Library.
- Thank you for your help.

Appendix III

A history of Mere

At Domesday there were sizeable manors at Zeals and Charnage, but little recorded at Mere itself until 1243 when the Manor of Mere was granted to the Earls, later Dukes, of Cornwall – restricted to the first born son of the reigning monarch – a system which has remained to the present day. It must be noted that it was the Manor, not the parish which was granted, and Duchy land only accounts for about half of Mere. Even so, it had the effect of depriving the area of a squirearchy, and in modern terms Mere had a corporate absentee landlord; this undoubtedly had an effect on the social development of the town. In the late nineteenth century the Duchy began a process, completed in the early twentieth century, of disposing of its large holdings of residential and commercial property, concentrating on farming. Politically, Mere never had any great importance; until the formation of the Parish Council in 1890 local government was vested in the vestry. The town never had the privileges of self-government of a borough.

Almost at once the first Earl built a Castle overlooking the town – a status symbol and administrative centre rather than a garrison. Both its construction and the activity it generated brought prosperity to Mere, and had a profound effect on the pattern in which the town would develop. The centre of the town was the market square, with houses and cottages nearby laid out in a fairly regular pattern on rectangular plots, but further out development over the centuries was sporadic, and irregular, as in the Water Street and Mill Lane areas. By the end of the fourteenth century the Castle was derelict, and provided a useful source of building stone for the residents. The Duchy however, continued as the major landlord of what was by then a thriving agricultural community; the town's prosperity rested on the growing wool trade, with cloth being produced from the wool of the large flocks of sheep on the Downs. This prosperity resulted in the continued improvements to the parish church, culminating in the major rebuilding of the late fifteenth century. The whole parish was actively farmed by small tenant farmers throughout the centuries; at first this was all on the mediaeval open field system, which continued over 3,100 acres, nearly half the then parish, till the Enclosure Act of 1807. The farms had land spread in small plots over different parts, and as a result, many of the farm buildings were then situated in the town itself until after Enclosure, when consolidated holdings needed more convenient buildings.

Later, the woollen trade became concentrated on North Wiltshire, and its place here was taken by the weaving of linen, at first from locally grown flax, and later from imported fibre. Like the wool trade, this was a cottage industry involving the whole family in production, and it continued as a main economic activity until 1830, by which time it was overtaken by the industrial mills of Scotland and Ulster. Till then Mere was the principal producer of bed-ticking in the country, and even had a merchant dealing with Germany and Portugal.

It was then that Charles Jupe, of a local family of farmers and linen manufacturers, established his silk throwing works at Lords Mill, Hinks Mill and the Grange, which operated until the trade was killed by French competition in the 1890s. After this there was no manufacturing industry in Mere until the establishment of the Hill Brush Company in the 1920s.

Until the 1760s Mere's links with the outside world were tenuous, with the main coaching road going over Mere Down, effectively by-passing the town; the opening of the Wincanton Turnpike from Willoughby Hedge through to the West brought an influx of trade, with several inns going upmarket to serve the coach trade. A bare century later the opening of the railway through Gillingham killed such trade overnight until the arrival of motor traffic. Mere had had a market through the years, but it was never as important as those of Shaftesbury and Hindon, and fell away in the 1700's; an attempted revival around 1800 was short lived. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw a steady growth in retail trade, partly in a multiplicity of small shops but particularly in the establishment of Waltons, which became a department store with branches serving the surrounding area and offering everything from the cradle to the grave. By the mid twentieth century growing mobility, and changes in the

patterns of retail trade, led to the end both of Waltons and also of many of the smaller shops, leaving the present nucleus.

Despite the textile industries, the main economic activity of the parish continued to be farming, and prosperity was at the mercy of the fluctuations in agriculture; from the mid-seventeenth century English farming, particularly in Wessex, suffered continual setbacks. By the 1830's agricultural wages in Wiltshire and Dorset were the lowest in the country, and unemployment high; this was compounded by the fact that while the linen industry was mainly a male employer, 90% of the silk workers were young girls. As a result a steady migration commenced – not merely overseas, but very largely to London and other areas of the UK. A surprising number of Mere families moved to the steel working areas of South Wales.

As a result of this poverty many of the cottages were rather mean small buildings in the soft local stone with thatched roofs and by the 1880's many were unoccupied and falling down; changing demographic patterns in the twentieth century resulted in virtually all the remainder being renovated, amalgamated and altered so that the three room cottage which had housed a family with several children is now home (sometimes second home) to a much smaller unit with far higher expendable income. One of the great attractions of Mere is the pleasant appearance of the small stone houses, and there is a distinct absence of the 'gentry' Georgian houses of communities which had enjoyed greater prosperity. There must be some significance that the only two houses in the centre which visibly display past wealth, Dewes House and the Ship, both date from around 1671, when a disastrous fire caused enough damage in the town to justify a nationwide appeal for aid.