

MERIDEN

Parish Design Statement 2011



IN REMEMBRANCE
OF THOSE
CYCLISTS
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES
IN WORLD WAR II
1939 - 1945



Meriden Parish Council
the centre of england

Putting the heart into the Centre of England

Foreword

The Meriden Parish Plan, adopted and published in 2009, set out the priorities for our Parish, based on survey evidence and widespread community engagement. This Parish Design Statement is supplementary to the Parish Plan and is written, in particular, to inform planners and developers what has been agreed by the local community in order to supplement and guide local planning decisions. We apologise for the planning jargon used in places, but we need to use the language that planners and developers understand!

The Government is in the process of changing planning legislation and proposing to introduce new National Planning Policy Guidelines. These changes are controversial, but are likely to give even greater weight to the views of local communities expressed through village and parish plans and design statements such as this. This Design Statement will form supplementary planning guidance for future developments in the Parish.

Thank you to all parish residents who have responded to consultation on this Statement. Thanks to the volunteers in the Parish Plan Action Group who have put this together and to the Solihull Borough Council officers who have given guidance.

Best wishes



**Chair, Meriden Parish Council
December 2011**



Chair, Meriden Parish Plan Action Group

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Meriden Parish Design Statement

What it is and what it's for

A Parish Design Statement forms part of a Parish Plan. It is produced by local people in partnership with their Parish Council to identify the characteristics and qualities they value in their village and surroundings and the issues and concerns about enhancing their local environment. A parish design statement informs planners and developers about what has been agreed by the local community in order to supplement and guide local planning policy decisions.

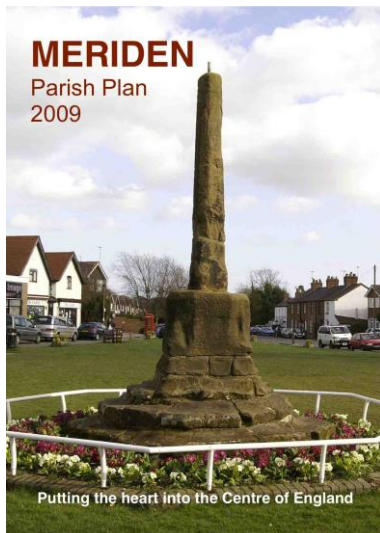
A Parish Design Statement seeks to ensure that any future changes, large or small, are based on an understanding of the parish's past and present. The aim is to draw attention to the valued characteristics of buildings and environmental features throughout Meriden Parish and village so that unsympathetic development can be avoided and to identify where improvements can be made to the public realm to enhance the environment and liveability of the village.

The scope and context of Meriden's Parish Design Statement

This covers the whole of the Parish of Meriden, with a particular emphasis on the village. It should be read in conjunction with the Meriden Parish Plan, approved and published by the Parish Council in 2009 and the Survey and Parish Appraisal Report, published in 2008. (www.meridenparishcouncil.org.uk/pdfs/meridenParishPlan.pdf)

This draft statement has been produced in partnership with Meriden Parish Council by a team under the auspices of the Meriden Parish Plan Action Group – a large group of volunteers who helped in various ways to engage the population of Meriden in the development of the Parish Plan. It has been largely informed by the Household Survey 2008, other consultation during the production of the Parish Plan and by specific consultation (during April 2011) in the form of a newsletter delivered to every property in the Parish giving an outline of the issues and inviting responses on proposed general guidance, input on concerns in specific areas of the Parish and on points that may have been missed. A further consultative newsletter was distributed in November 2011 to confirm support for some key matters of guidance.

The Solihull Unitary Development Plan will run out in 2011 and the Borough Council is required to replace this with a new style plan called the Local Development Framework. This will be made up of a series of documents, the main one being the 'Core Strategy'. This is an opportune time for Meriden to make its views clear through this Parish Design Statement and press for the adoption of the final version of this document as Supplementary Planning Guidance.



Meriden Parish
Appraisal & Plan



Household
Survey 2008

The Results



And the key
issues for
the draft
Parish Plan

For more information and to comment on the Survey or if you would like to help prepare the Parish Plan, see contact details on the inside back page.

Putting the heart
into the centre of England

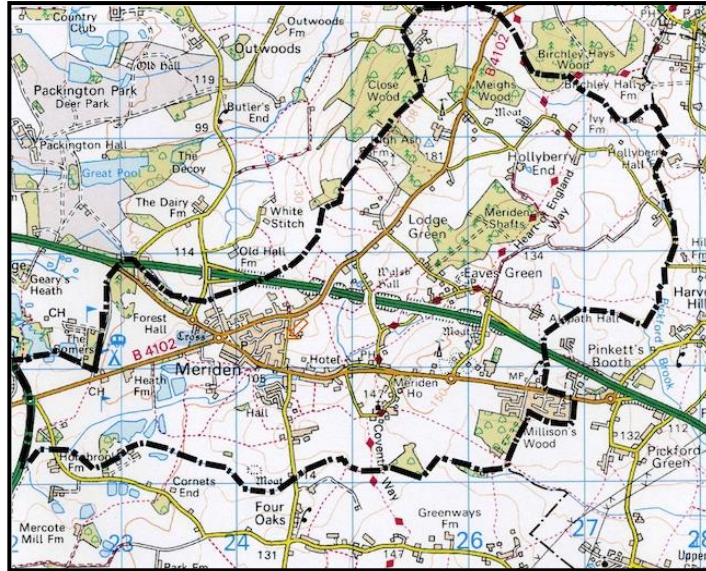


Meriden's location and history

Meriden is at the centre of England and this fact has been marked for centuries by an ancient cross on the village green. It lies in the rural 'gap' between Coventry and the Birmingham conurbation. The "Meriden Gap" is the name given locally to the precious Green Belt of attractive countryside and villages that lie at the heart of the most economically successful area of the West Midlands.

The Parish covers approximately 11.5 square kilometres and forms the North East corner of Solihull Metropolitan Borough, bordering Coventry to the east and North Warwickshire to the north.

The main settlements are Meriden Village itself where approximately two thirds of the population of the Parish live, Millison's Wood and Eaves Green. Millison's Wood, a mile to the east of Meriden Village is partially built on the site of the former Triumph Motorcycle factory.



The Parish is crossed by the A45 Birmingham to Coventry road and is within 10 minutes drive of the M6, M42 and M6 Toll motorways, Birmingham International Airport and rail station. It is extremely well connected and highly accessible. At the same time, its hilly and wooded countryside attracts walkers to many well looked after footpaths, including the Heart of England Way and the Coventry Way.

Ancient records often refer to Meriden as a small but pleasant village with a scattering of inns. The original hill top village of Alspath, where the church of St. Laurence is situated, was superseded by a later settlement, Meriden, which grew up in the valley on flatter ground on either side of the important medieval road linking London to Chester and Holyhead.

In places, Meriden still retains signs of its ancient landscape with deep narrow winding lanes and embanked hedges marking old boundaries. Ancient woodlands, such as Millison's Wood survive.

The London to Holyhead Road was of strategic and economic importance. Meriden was a day's coach drive from London and a favourite overnight stop. In 1723, one of the first sections of road to be made into a turnpike ran through Coventry to the bottom of Meriden Hill.

Maintenance of the turnpike was poor and in 1810, the great road-building engineer Thomas Telford began work on a major renovation of the whole route to Holyhead that included lowering Meriden Hill, thus bypassing the Queen's Head Pub and the "Old Road". This remained the main Coventry to Birmingham Road until 1958 when the village was bypassed by the A45 dual carriageway.

The development of the village and the surrounding settlements

The 'centre' of the village today is off-centre, at the intersection of the Birmingham/Main and Fillongley Roads by the village green, which is a Conservation Area. It is along these two roads that the historical development of the village can be traced.

Facing the Green on the corner of Fillongley Road are thatched cottages, while 'Corner House' and 'The Laurels' are later 19th century buildings. Eastwards from the Green along Main Road is a run of older cottages and a cluster of listed buildings from Strawberry Bank to Waterfall Cottages, with the Bull's Head pub and Meriden Hall in its own grounds to the south of Main Road. And further to the east, beyond the duck pond four distinctive stone cottages lie intermingled with post-war development before reaching the 'Old Road', its cottages and the Queen's Head.

Westwards from the centre is Forest Hall and the remarkable original pavilion, workshop and archery grounds dating from the late 18th century, all listed as of national importance.

The 'old' village (Alspath) on Meriden Hill was designated a Conservation Area in 1977, with its cluster of listed buildings including the Church of St. Laurence, which is of exceptional value.

Growth in the 20th century was extensive. Between the wars, ribbon development took place along the Fillongley Road and to a limited extent along Main Road / Birmingham Road and Leys Lane. At the same time the Millison's Wood development was constructed a mile or so to the east of the centre and there was some development at Eaves Green.

During the Second World War, 'temporary' evacuation centres were established at Eaves Green and in the grounds of Meriden Hall. After the war, these became more permanent 'mobile' home parks which are attractively laid out and well liked by residents.

In the decades following the war the pattern of development was shaped by the roads, with council and private housing developments built on the land enclosed by the Fillongley Road, Main Road and Leys Lane. Frontage development also consolidated housing on the Fillongley Road, Maxstoke Lane, Main / Birmingham Road and Berkswell Road.

In the last decades of the 20th century there were two significant housing developments. The first was on Strawberry Fields, to the south of Main Road near the centre and the second was at Millison's Wood on the site of the former Triumph motorcycle factory. Elsewhere there were some smaller infill developments.



Development pressures – present and future

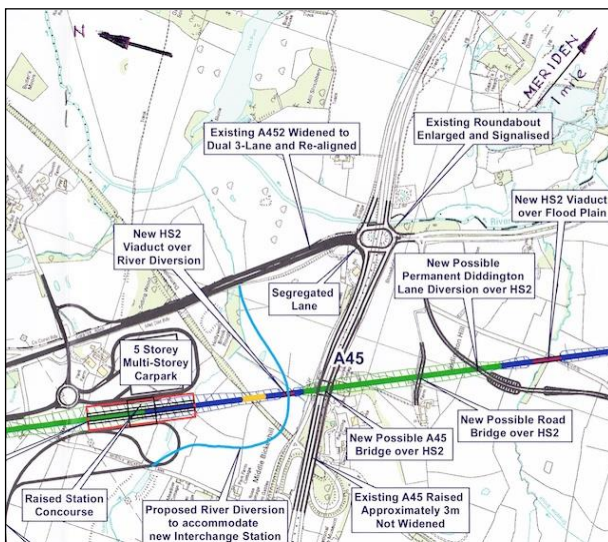


A substantial housing development of 88 homes is under construction by David Wilson Homes on the former playing fields at **Maxstoke Lane**, following the completion of replacement play and sports facilities at the centre of the village, south of the Green, in August 2011. This new housing will increase the population of the Parish by approximately 10% and of Meriden village by 15%.

The application for outline planning permission for a further 50 houses on the **Leys Lane** allotments and adjoining field illustrates the development pressures on Meriden and the surrounding area. The Household Survey demonstrated the overwhelming opposition of residents to further large-scale housing developments of this type in the Meriden Gap.

The application for retrospective planning permission for a **gypsy caravan site** on Green Belt land at Eaves Green was turned down – a decision that was upheld on appeal. In vigorously opposing this inappropriate development, Meriden residents reasserted their commitment to the preservation of the Green Belt in the Meriden Gap. In the Household Survey 98.5% of residents said that the preservation of the Green Belt is important or very important.

Two major proposed developments near Meriden – the runway extension and expansion of **Birmingham International Airport** and (if it is approved and built) **High Speed 2** – will put more development pressures on the Parish.



The proposed alignment for the HS2 line passes just to the west of the parish boundary. The new station to the north west of the Stonebridge roundabout, however, is bound to increase further the volume of traffic on local roads within the Parish and the pressure for further housing development in the area.

This plan shows the proposed HS2 interchange station with its 5 storey multi-storey car park just to the north-west of the Stonebridge roundabout. This part of Solihull, including Meriden Parish, needs a set of strong planning policies to protect the Meriden Gap and its villages. These policies must fully take account of these development pressures.

Guidance:

- *In the event the Government decides to proceed with HS2, the funding of measures to mitigate the impact on Meriden of traffic generated by the new HS2 station must be part of any planning conditions to be met by HS2 developers and be acknowledged in the hybrid Bill that may be put before Parliament in 2013.*
- *Planning authorities need to be especially vigilant in maintaining the Green Belt in the face of quite exceptional development pressures in the next decades.*

Population, Housing and Sustainability

Both the Household Survey of 2008 and consultation on this Parish Design Statement have shown that residents are divided on the issue of whether or not there should be any further housing provision in the parish following the completion of the Maxstoke Lane development. In the Household Survey, just over 50% agreed with the statement that: *'Any new housing development must maintain the village / rural character of Meriden Parish and the social infrastructure and services must be improved'*, while 45% felt that there should be no more housing developments in the village. **There is a general consensus that there should be no more large scale housing developments in the parish.**

In 2010, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council conducted a review of future housing land requirements in the Borough. This concluded that the Leys Lane site, taken out of the Green Belt and designated for 'future housing needs' in the 2006 UDP, was no longer needed. Development of this site would destroy the character of the lane, erode the Green Belt and further degrade the village / rural character of the village and Parish. Large-scale housing developments on green field sites in the Parish would be strongly resisted and the Leys Lane land should be formally returned to the Green Belt, establishing a defensible eastern Green Belt boundary to the village.

However the population is changing and the survey also showed a large and growing need for housing for young local people and for housing specially designed for the growing elderly population of the parish. As a result of this research that was reflected in the Parish Plan, a proportion of properties in the Maxstoke Lane development are specifically designated for local people. For a balanced and sustainable community in the long term and to ensure the continued viability of Meriden Primary School, the local surgery and local shops we need to allow for modest further growth in housing provision and at the same time create robust defensible Green Belt boundaries around the village.

The Action Group has examined the possible options for future small-scale housing development and has concluded that there is only one possible site for a future housing development that is potentially acceptable.

The site of the former garage on the north side of Birmingham Road, Meriden, already has planning permission for housing. The adjacent land currently used for caravan parking and part of the adjoining field could form an attractive small housing development near the centre of the village, local shops and transport. It's accessibility and proximity to shops and other facilities would make it an ideal location for more older persons' accommodation in the village, shown to be needed in the Parish Appraisal.



With appropriate landscaping, a development here would provide the opportunity to greatly improve the appearance of the western gateway to the village. The April 2011 consultation showed opinion divided on whether this be given further consideration, with more support than opposition to the proposal. Hence at this stage in the development of the Parish Design Statement, the proposal is kept in play.

Guidance:

- *There should be no more large scale housing development in the Parish.*
- *Development of the Leys Lane site should be strongly resisted and it should be formally returned to the Green Belt.*
- *To improve the appearance of the western gateway to the village and to provide more housing for older local people near the village centre a small attractive housing development should be considered on the north side of Birmingham Road*

Commercial, industrial and extraction developments

While predominantly rural and agricultural in character, Meriden Parish has a significant commercial sector. Meriden village has a particularly vigorous hotel, b&b and restaurant sector and some other commercial enterprises, most notably the Headquarters of Pertemps and of Cogent Elliot. At Millison's Wood the Meriden Business Park is a significant employment hub and, although it is just beyond the border of the Parish, it forms part of the Millison's Wood character area. While they generate traffic and, in the case of Meriden Business Park, some parking problems along Birmingham Road, these developments are not generally a cause of concern.



Of much greater concern in terms of pollution and disturbance is the sand and gravel extraction and landfill industry to the west of the village. Prevailing southwest winds blow dust towards the village and the industry generates a large number of heavy goods vehicle movements through the parish, particularly along the Fillongley Road. Further expansion of the industry is planned, with other areas of the wider site being opened up for extraction and subsequent landfill, mainly with coal waste from Daw Mill mine.

Action should be taken to mitigate the impact on the Parish of the extraction and landfill industry. Better dust suppression methods should be employed on the site and these should be more effectively monitored. The industry should make developer contributions to fund measures aimed at reducing the impact of traffic on the Parish and in particular on the village centre around The Green. Future permissions should be dependent upon agreement to these contributions.



Guidance:

- *Local employment opportunities should be encouraged. To this end, existing employment land should generally be preserved and its use for non-polluting employment purposes encouraged, though there may be instances where its conversion to housing is desirable and justified.*
- *Dust pollution from the extraction and landfill industry needs to be tackled more effectively and current pollution control requirements enforced.*
- *Developer contributions should be required from the extraction and landfill industry to fund measures to reduce the impact of traffic on the Parish. Future permissions should be dependent upon agreement to these contributions.*

Landscape setting and important views



Meriden lies in a rural setting at the heart of the “Meriden Gap” – the narrowest part of the West Midlands Green Belt between Solihull and Coventry. This photo, taken from Meriden Hill, shows the NEC and Airport in the middle distance, and Birmingham city centre on the horizon.

Meriden Hill marks the watershed between the rivers Severn and Trent. Rain falling on Millison’s Wood, though to the east, drains into the Severn, while in the Village and most of the rest of the Parish it drains to the Trent. From the top, at Kinwalsey Lane at around 180m above sea level, to River Blythe valley at around 90m, the general fall of the land is north east to south west.

The surrounding countryside is a mix of high quality farm land, some extensive and very attractive woodland and sand and gravel extraction to the west.

Away from the main roads, the agricultural landscape is largely unchanged from Victorian times with a particularly distinctive feature being the lanes with high banks and ancient hedgerows. Within the village both Church Lane and Leys Lane still have these same characteristics, which must be retained. Millison’s Wood, Meriden Shafts and the extensive woodlands at the top end of Fillongley Road are all parts of the former Forest of Arden and form an essential characteristic of the parish and the wider landscape and a haven for all types of wildlife.



The hills within the village are an attractive feature. Church Lane offer views over the rest of the village and extensive views to the west over Birmingham and as far as the Lickey Hills. Meriden Parish is well served by footpaths and bridleways and is at the centre of two important walking trails – the Heart of England Way and the Coventry Way. These offer very attractive views of the village as well as further afield. The views from roads within the village are more restricted by development and by trees, but of particular note are the views on the approach from the east over Meriden Hill and the views from the Fillongley Road on descending from Shaft Lane towards Lodge Green Lane and Walsh Lane.



The large sand and gravel quarries to the west of the village are being backfilled and restored to farmland when exhausted. In this ‘hidden’ landscape, large lakes have been formed between extraction and backfilling that are developing naturally into havens for birds and other wildlife. The triangular area between Hampton Lane, Birmingham Road and Somers Road is currently nearing the completion of extraction and consideration should be given to creating a wildlife reserve in partnership with British Coal, Tarmac, the Packington Estate and the RSPB.

Within the village the urban landscape is very mixed. The duck pond is particularly valued, especially by Meriden's children. The Green is also valued highly by residents, as is the conservation area around St. Laurence Church. Other features, such as the avenue of magnificent trees at the lower end of Fillongley Road and the stretch of Main Road between the Bulls Head and Waterfall Cottages, with its willow tree have also been identified as of particular character and merit. Leys Lane, Church Lane and Old Road have a real 'village' feel and exemplify what residents said in the Household Survey 2008 – *'what most people like about living in Meriden is the feeling of it being a real village in a countryside environment, yet near employment centres and transport links'*.

The value of Meriden's landscape is recognised in published landscape character assessments, notably Natural England's National Character Area 97: Arden and Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Arden. The latter (adopted by Solihull MBC), divides Arden into seven distinct landscape types. Meriden lies within 'Ancient Arden'. For Ancient Arden the strategy is summarised as *'conserve and restore the ancient irregular landscape pattern'*; and the countryside around Meriden has been identified as an 'enhancement zone'.

Solihull MBC's Countryside Strategy (adopted and published in October 2010) reinforces the case to protect and enhance the landscape of the Meriden Gap.

Commentary:

- Parish residents are passionately concerned to preserve the Green Belt, to reinforce the defensible green belt boundary around the Meriden village and Millison's Wood and to ensure that only very tightly regulated, appropriate development occurs elsewhere in the Parish.
- Residents of Meriden and from the surrounding conurbations value highly the quality of the landscape and the footpaths, bridleways and lanes of the Parish. Meriden is of national importance to cyclists with the National Cyclists Memorial and is a popular centre and destination.
- The urban landscape could be considerably improved in places by sensitive treatment of the public realm and reducing the impact of traffic, the narrowing of main roads and selective tree planting and landscaping. (See the later section on the public realm).

Guidance:

- *Public footpaths, bridleways and lanes form important parts of the Parish's character and amenity. They should be preserved and maintained and the lanes should be protected against any alterations that might spoil their peaceful nature and endanger their surrounding flora.*
- *To this end, Solihull Borough Council should designate the narrow rural lanes in the Parish as 'Quiet Lanes' under The Quiet Lanes and Home Zones (England) Regulations 2006 (Department of Transport Circular 02/2006). These should include Church Lane, Walsh Lane, Eaves Green Lane, Lodge Green Lane, Harvest Hill Lane, Becks Lane, Shaft Lane and Kinwalsey Lane.*
- *Mature hedges should be preserved and the creation of new hedgerows to delineate boundaries with typical indigenous species should be encouraged.*
- *Wildlife habitats and biodiversity should be protected and enhanced in accordance with the strategies set out in Solihull MBC's Nature Conservation Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plan.*
- *Consideration should be given to creating a permanent wetland site on the current sand/gravel pit to the west of the village between Hampton Lane and Birmingham Road.*
- *Careful consideration should be given to the impact of any new development on the views from public rights of way, particularly with regard to height, size, design, colour, boundary and landscaping.*
- *Farm development which increases commercial or recreational activity should be encouraged provided there is no significant increase in any kind of pollution (including noise, traffic and light pollution), and the impact on the environment is kept to a minimum.*

The Built Environment

A village study of Meriden by Solihull Borough Council in 1986 (*see ref. below) concluded that 'environmentally the village had its strong points', but 'older buildings of character have been lost in redevelopment schemes' and 'new developments have not added to its character and, with the exception of Meriden Hill, the village has a somewhat disappointing suburban appearance.' There was 'little rural character remaining apart from the Berkswell Road approach and parts of Leys Lane, where a sense of enclosure is engendered by high banks'. It is very important that these attractive features, identified back in 1986 by Solihull Borough Council, are now conserved.

While Meriden residents do not accept this 'disappointing suburban' description as entirely accurate today, we do accept the opinions expressed by the author of the report on some of the lamentable planning decisions to allow the demolition of fine older buildings and the 'suburban' type development allowed. The most significant losses were the 'old' Bulls Head, Darlaston Hall, opposite the duck pond (replaced by '60s' three storey blocks of flats) and the pair of 17th century timber framed buildings that used to face The Green on the south side, replaced by a row of detached houses.

The challenge today is to take measures that, over time, will mitigate some of the mistakes of the past and gradually improve the character of the built environment in the village. This takes time, however the 1986 report concluded that investment in landscaping and in particular the narrowing of the carriageway of Main Road to make it 'more in scale with its village setting' would have 'a more immediate effect in improving the appearance of the village'. No actions were taken after the 1986 report to implement the road narrowing proposal, but this is a key recommendation of this Statement (see the Public Realm section).

General Guidance:

There is a mix of styles in most areas of the village. The following guidance supplements Solihull MBC's general house extension guidance (House Extension Guidelines SMBC 2010) and provides some principles for improving the visual appearance of Meriden village and Millison's Wood over time.

- *Any future developments should be congruous, harmonise with their environs and be in keeping with the character of neighbouring properties.*
- *Future developments more than two storeys high should not generally be acceptable.*
- *Back-land and garden/site overdevelopment should not generally be allowed.*
- *Brickwork should generally be repaired rather than rendered or painted, particularly when the property is terraced or semi-detached.*
- *Any development which requires the removal of trees or hedgerows should require replacement appropriate to the particular location.*
- *Property boundaries adjoining public roads, lanes and spaces should complement the general character of the area in terms of materials and should avoid runs of contrasting styles and height. Encourage a preference for hedges, particularly in certain roads.*
- *The construction and use of outside lighting on commercial, domestic and public premises and land should be tightly regulated to control light pollution and avoid causing intrusion and offence to neighbours.*

* Meriden Village Study, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, November 1986



The Public Realm

Its value and the current context

Spaces and public places in the village are as important as its buildings. They contribute immensely to how we feel about the place and our sense of wellbeing.

The Household Survey 2008 showed that the public spaces in the parish were highly valued by the community. In particular, the Green, with its ancient cross and cyclists' memorial provides a heart to Meriden that makes it distinctive from other places. In the survey of younger children's perceptions and views, the Duck Pond was very popular and valued. In the wider rural areas of the Parish, the lanes, bridleways and footpaths are highly valued by cyclists, riders and walkers.

Changes underway in 2011

The new Meriden Sports Park, open in August 2011 is a great asset to many sections of the community, particularly young people. However, Sports Park, together with the housing development on the former playing field site in Maxstoke Lane, are changing the pattern of movement in the village and increase greatly the conflict between pedestrians and vehicles in the centre of the village.

Roads, vehicles and pedestrians - key principles

Roads are public spaces and contribute to our impressions of a place. In Meriden, for historic reasons in the development of the village, the needs of the highway have dominated. We have wide roads designed to speed traffic on its way. This must end and a better balance achieved between vehicles and pedestrians. The public space of the highway needs to be shared more equitably. Within the village, pedestrians need to take priority in the movement hierarchy, particularly around the Green and the school.

The 1986 Meriden Village Study by Solihull MBC made proposals to 'selectively narrow parts of Main Road, particularly between The Green and Berkswell Road' and 'create more car parking spaces close to The Green'. These proposals were never implemented, but we believe they have considerable merit; and combined with 21st century thinking on shared space and good traffic management design (*as in Manual for Streets – DfT, 2007 and subsequent Local Transport Notes*) they have the potential to considerably improve the quality of public space and road safety within the core of the village.

The Parish Plan (p13) calls for a comprehensive approach to traffic and parking and to managing the relationship between pedestrians and road vehicles and that this should be in accordance with the following general guidance:

General Guidance

- *Within the village pedestrians should be considered first and the street's function as "place" should be equal to its "movement" function.*
- *To this end, the gateways to the village should be marked by a distinct change in road design.*
- *And within the village there should be narrower main roads, more parking bays and more pedestrian crossing points – to naturally slow traffic down and to preserve and enhance the environment of the village.*
- *And street "clutter" should be minimised and necessary street furniture and lighting should be unobtrusive, consistent and of high quality.*

In addition the following should also be considered as general guidance, having near unanimous support in the consultation:

- *Grass verges and embankments should be preserved and inappropriate parking and overrunning by vehicles actively discouraged.*



Village Gateways

Entrances to the village on Main Road from the east, Fillongley Road from the north-east, Birmingham Road from the west and Hampton Lane from the south-west are already marked by signs (*Meriden the Centre of England*) and attractive wooden planters with flowers. Similar signs (and planters) mark the entrances to Millison's Wood on the Birmingham Road. The southern entrance from Berkswell Road is marked by a plain 'Meriden' sign and could be improved to match the other gateway signs.

The current 30 mph speed restriction coincides with the east, north east, west and south-west gateways to the village. On the Berkswell Road the speed restriction currently begins at the junction with Main Road and should be extended up the hill to the edge of the village at Berryfields Farm along with a 'Meriden the Centre of England' sign. This is likely to change following formal consultation by Solihull MBC in 2011.

Signage alone is not enough to mark village gateways. A distinct change in road design is needed as drivers enter the village. For example, a change of road surface, a change or the absence of road markings and were appropriate, the narrowing of the road. We believe that distinct changes in driver perceptions of the road at the gateways are needed to induce slower speeds and more appropriate driver behaviour within the village.

Guidance:

- *A distinct change in road design is needed at the gateways to the village and to Millison's Wood*

Considering pedestrians first



The average speed of traffic on Main Road by the Duck Pond is 38 mph. (Community Speed-watch 2010). The Fillongley Road average is similar, though moderated a little by the recent addition of a flashing 30mph sign.

The current road markings encourage drivers to think they are on 'main' roads that happen to have properties alongside, rather than in a village. They encourage driver confidence that they have priority over pedestrians in practically all circumstances – except at the (new) zebra crossing or at the school crossing patrol.



To rebalance the 'rights' to the road-space within the village between pedestrians and drivers and make it much easier for pedestrians to cross roads, we propose the following guidance for planners, traffic engineers and designers:



Guidance:

- *Main Road should be selectively narrowed between the Green and Church Lane, Fillongley Road should have occasional narrower sections and Birmingham Road should be narrower between Hampton Grange and the roundabout.*
- *Similar measures should be taken on Birmingham Road, Millison's Wood, including the section outside but adjacent to the Parish boundary.*
- *Road markings should be drastically simplified and in some sections of road, eliminated entirely.*
- *In The Green area, a comprehensive scheme should be developed to improve pedestrian facilities, the public space environment, car parking and access to the shops by delivery vehicles.*
- *There should be a 20 mph zone covering all roads around the Green, including Main Road and Fillongley Road (to beyond the school) and Leys Lane.*



Removing 'clutter' and improving the visual environment

The proposals outlined above would create the opportunity to greatly enhance the visual attractiveness of the centre of the village. Rationalising road markings would minimise the visual intrusion they present, particularly at some of the most interesting and attractive streetscapes (for example at the Bulls Head, Waterfall Cottages and the Duck Pond).

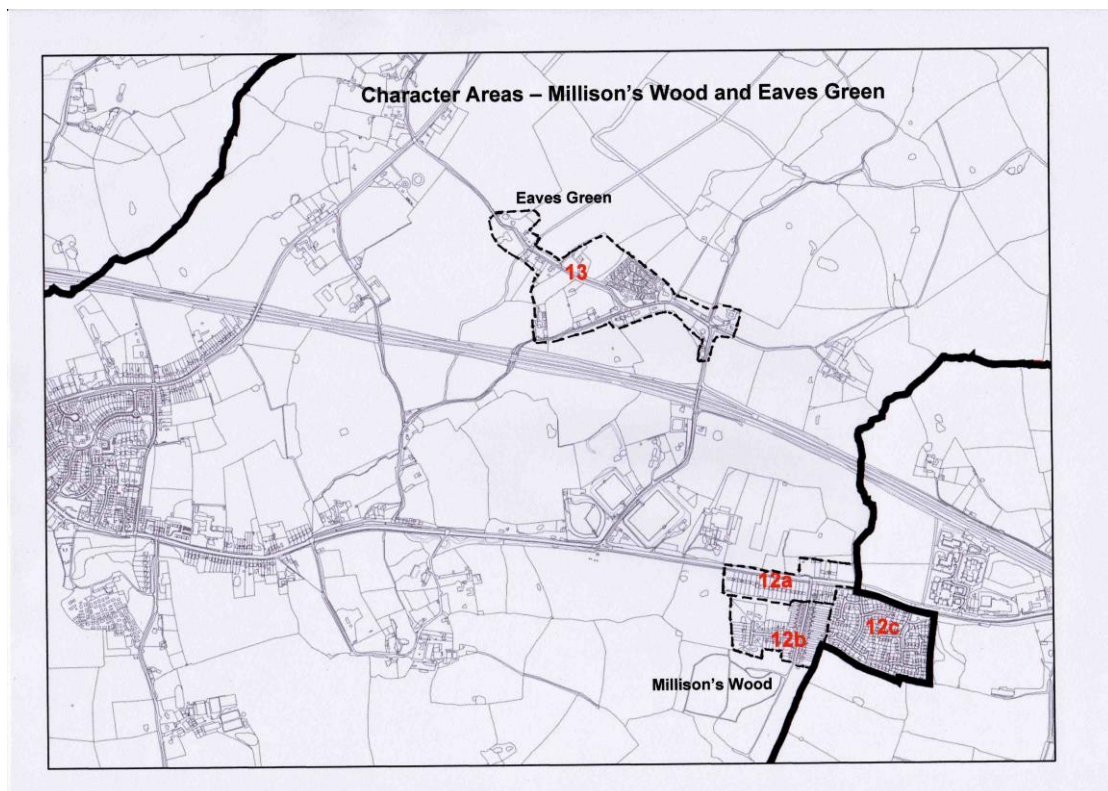
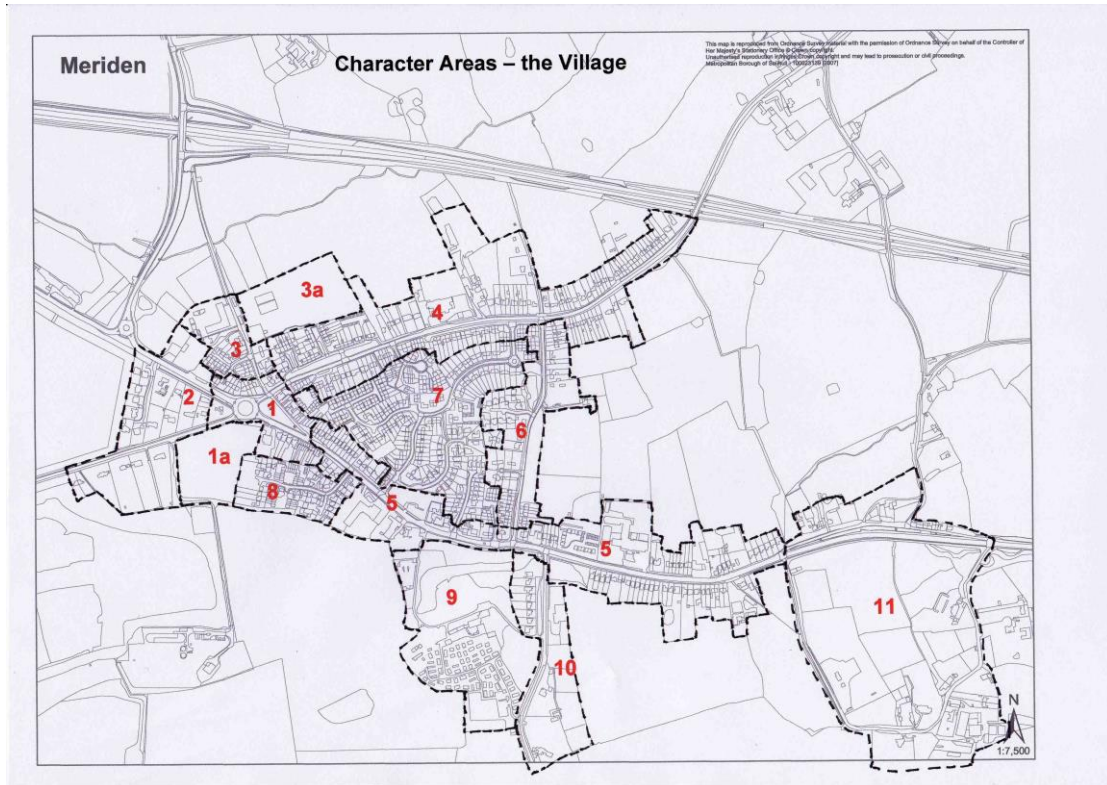
Many road signs in the village are far too large and should be reduced in size; some should be removed entirely. Selective narrowing of roads provides the opportunity for improved landscaping and the provision of safer and less intrusive car parking

Guidance:

- *Traffic engineers and designers should note and take full benefit from the flexibility within the regulations (for example the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 – SI 2002 No.3113, TSO and later amendments).*

The character areas of the village and parish

The Parish has 14 distinct 'character areas'. A description of each of these, together with a note on the concerns of residents about planning, development and public realm issues specific to each of these character areas follows. The character areas are delineated on the map and described below, with concerns expressed by residents and guidance particular to those areas where appropriate. They have been delineated on the basis of the visual environment – what you can see when travelling along a road or walking an area – and how residents identify their locality within the Parish.





1. The Green and its immediate environs.

This is the centre of the village surrounding the village green. The conservation area covers The Green itself, the buildings housing a convenience store, library and tea shop at the corner of Fillongley Road and the thatched cottages on the corner of Maxstoke Lane. The wider area includes:



- The other shops on the north eastern side of the green, with a variety of mainly pitched roof styles
- Two terraces of 1880s cottages on the south side.
- Four detached houses and a telephone exchange also on the south side of the green
- A semidetached pair of distinctive cottages at the junction of Hampton Lane and Birmingham Road
- Two small terraces of 1960s houses and Ye Old Pound House on the Birmingham Road and northern side of the roundabout.



Meriden's new sports and play facilities, opened in August 2011 are on the south west side of The Green (area 1a on the map).

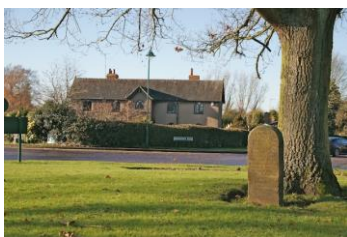
Concerns:

- To reduce the impact of traffic on this area, particularly after the opening of the new Sports Park and create a more pedestrian friendly environment
- To improve car parking, including the provision of disabled bays. This is a priority for the benefit of the whole parish. See front cover photo.
- Light pollution from commercial premises.



Guidance

- *Excessively bright illuminated shop signs should not be permitted.*
- *Every effort should be made to encourage shop frontages and signs to have an integrated and consistent 'village' style.*
- *Substantial changes should be made to address the conflict between vehicles and pedestrians in this area, to improve safety, to improve the environment and to improve parking (see the Public Realm section)*
- *Visually this area forms a single entity and the planning regime should reflect this. Hence it is recommended that the Conservation Area be extended to cover all of the environs of the Green subject to an appraisal in accordance with English Heritage guidance.*



2. Birmingham Road, Hampton Grange and Hampton Lane

This area contains mainly large detached houses in substantial grounds, facing Hampton Lane, the south side of Birmingham Road and in Hampton Grange, a gated cul-de-sac off the Birmingham Road. It is in the Green Belt.

The land to the north side of Birmingham Road contains a caravan storage park and the site of a former garage. As this road forms one of the main 'gateways' to the village, its appearance is particularly important, yet at present the north side is very scrappy and unattractive. There is existing planning approval for housing on the former garage site and serious consideration should be given to designating the adjacent land for housing purposes with a small attractive development and landscaping. This would be complemented by narrowing of the road, landscaping of the public space and better management of the wildlife habitat (see the Public Realm Guidance p14).

Concerns:

- To improve the appearance of the north side of Birmingham Road and slow down traffic on both Birmingham Road and Hampton Lane.
- To improve the control of parking and protect grass verges.

Guidance:

- *A well-designed and attractive development should be allowed on the north side of Birmingham Road to improve the appearance of this gateway to the village.*
- *Birmingham Road should be narrowed to make it more in scale with its village setting, with better parking provision and protection to verges etc*





3. Maxstoke Lane / Maxstoke Close

This currently forms a cul de sac area of the village, very close to the Green. It will be impacted substantially by the new housing development on the former playing field site (3a). In particular there are well-founded concerns about the volume of traffic in Maxstoke Lane and the difficulty of exiting the area onto Fillongley Road.



It is a characterful area with a variety of housing styles and ages with a real village feel. It includes a mixed tenure older persons' development (The Firs).

Concerns:

- The pressure that this area will be under after completion of the housing development and during its construction.
- The traffic and safety problems at the junction of Maxstoke Lane and Fillongley Road.
- The condition of the pavement, pavement parking and the safety of pedestrians, particularly the elderly, in Maxstoke Lane.



Guidance:

- *Any future developments in this area need to sensitively respect and enhance its village character.*
- *The pressure on Maxstoke Lane from the new housing development must not lead to its 'suburbanisation'. It must retain its rural / village feel.*
- *The footpath link directly to the Birmingham Road should be reinstated.*



4. Fillongley Road

On the north side between the Green and the edge of the village, properties are generally set well back from the road, with substantial gardens. In addition to mainly interwar housing there are some commercial uses, the village school and an attractive small (1950s) council development of terraced and semi-detached houses in Archery and Kittermaster Roads set behind a magnificent avenue of cedars lining the Fillongley Road.



On the south side there is a mixture of styles, including detached and semi-detached houses set well back from the road and later developments by the council and by private developers, including attractive provision specifically for older people. Of particular note in terms of public space is the greensward that separates the Fillongley Road from a service road opposite the school. This and the other verges along the road offer opportunities for improving further the attractiveness of the environment along the road.



Concerns:

- The straight and fast nature of the Fillongley Road.
- Pavement and grass verge parking.
- School parking issues



Guidance:

- *Back-land and garden over development should not generally be allowed.*
- *Consideration needs to be given by residents and the Borough and Parish Councils about how to improve the visual attractiveness of the many grass verges and green spaces that flank the Fillongley Road, together with measures to alleviate parking problems, slow down traffic and introduce a 20mph limit outside the school.*





5. Main Road

From the Green through to Church Lane, Main Road is flanked by a mixture of residential properties, hotels and restaurants and some commercial properties and, on the south side between the garage and the duck pond, the wooded grounds of Meriden Hall.

The stretch between the Bull's Head and Leys Lane is particularly attractive and characterful with Waterfall Cottages and other distinguished houses of different architectural styles spanning 400 years together with some interesting trees. Looking from the duck pond up Main Road towards the Bulls Head, the onlooker sees a very harmonious and pleasing picture.



The principal problem needing to be addressed is the Main Road itself – to make it more in scale with its village setting and to reduce or eliminate its intrusive road markings and signs. Consultation confirmed substantial support for narrowing Main Road with a few expressing some scepticism.



Concerns:

- The width of the Main Road that makes safe crossing difficult and the road markings that encourage speed.
- Inappropriately high, intensive or incongruous new development proposals
- Light pollution from social and commercial premises.



Guidance:

- *Any future developments must harmonise and be in keeping with the character of each section of Main Road.*
- *Back-land and garden/site overdevelopment should not generally be allowed.*
- *Main Road should be narrowed within the village between the Green and Church Lane to make it more in scale with its village setting, to slow traffic down and facilitate safer crossing throughout its length by pedestrians.*



6. Leys Lane

Leys Lane rises steeply from Main Road to Ley Mere – a natural pond on the crest of the hill. It is characterised throughout most of its length by hedges and embankments on both sides and by high banks at the steepest section near Main Road. The footpath is separated from the road by a hedge for much of its length and this, together with the allotments and countryside to the east, gives Leys Lane a real 'village in the country' feel.

It is flanked by a wide variety of housing styles, including former council housing, a modern estate of 'executive' homes and some distinguished older houses.

Concerns:

- The threat of development on the parish allotments and other agricultural land to the east of the lane – formally in the Green Belt.
- The speed and volume of 'rat run' traffic in the lane at peak times.
- The inappropriately severe cutting back of certain hedges by council contractors.
- The constant erosion of the embankments by inappropriate parking and other vehicles, including Council / Enterprise refuse collection vehicles.

Guidance

- *The Leys Lane site designated as for 'future housing needs' in the 2006 UDP should be formally returned to the Green Belt.*
- *Hedges and embankments should be preserved and enhanced.*
- *Property boundaries adjoining the Lane should be consistent with the general character of the Lane – hedges and/or wicker fences (see illustration).*
- *Back-land and garden overdevelopment should not generally be allowed.*
- *Consideration needs to be given by residents, the Parish and Borough Councils to how to discourage the use of Leys Lane as a 'rat run' and how best to deal with the conflicting needs for car parking and access.*





7. The central triangle of the village

This is the area within the triangle formed by Main Road, Fillongley Road and Leys Lane. It is suburban in character and comprises a mixture of private and council housing development, much of the latter now being privately owned. The housing is low rise semi-detached, a few small terraces, detached houses and bungalows and a small development of flats. In the centre there is a small hall with community facilities.



The visual attractiveness of some parts of the area could benefit from improved landscaping that takes into account the need for better car parking facilities in some roads. Another problem affecting certain roads in the area is their use by large lorries servicing the rear of the shops.



Concerns:

- The use of some of the roads for deliveries to the rear of the shops by inappropriately large vehicles and at inappropriate times.
- Pavement and grass verge parking.
- Discouraging anti-social behaviour needs to be considered in urban design



Guidance:

- *Back-land and garden overdevelopment should not generally be allowed.*
- *In each road, residents and the Borough and Parish Councils should consider what measures might be taken to improve the public realm.*
- *Any measures taken in this area to improve its attractiveness should take into account residents' concerns about anti-social behaviour.*



8. Strawberry Fields

To the south side of Main Road very close to the Green, this area of popular modern housing was built by a single developer in the 1990s. Whilst nicely situated, it is suburban in character and of a single consistent 'estate' style.

Concerns: No concerns specific to the area were raised by residents.



9. Meriden Hall and Park

The hall and its lake and grounds form a very attractive and secluded area. The hall is a grade II* listed building and the grounds, though privately owned are opened to the community for special events and occasions. Meriden Park mobile home park is behind the hall to the south, attractively laid out though hidden from view, except from rural footpaths.

The area is in the Green Belt, with appropriate restrictions on development applying.

Concerns:

- That the Hall and park should retain its attractive rural environment.
- The clearance of much of the small wood between Meriden Hall and Berkswell Road and the creation of a lighted track to a gate on a blind corner of the road.

Guidance:

- *Inappropriate developments and developments not conforming to the conditions set out, should be challenged by the planning authorities.*





10. Berkswell Road

Berkswell Road is the most rural ‘gateway’ to the village. On the east side, just behind the duck pond, is the Heart of England Club, one of the centres of village life, and a few properties set in large plots. On the west side there is a small service road with detached houses backing onto Meriden Hall and park.



The area is in the Green Belt, with appropriate restrictions on development applying.

Concerns:

- Light pollution from Heart of England Club car park.
- The changes within the grounds of Meriden Hall (see Area 9 above).



Guidance:

- *Inappropriate developments and developments not conforming to the conditions set out, should be challenged by the planning authorities.*



11. The Meriden Hill Conservation Area and Old Road

These two areas form the eastern edge of the village and are both in the Green Belt. The hamlet on Meriden Hill, though small, contains a charming and unique cluster of buildings in an unspoilt and attractive setting grouped around the Church. The Old Road, bypassed by Thomas Telford in 1821, contains a number of attractive buildings, including the Queen’s Head pub, a favourite stopping point for walkers on the Heart of England Way.



Concerns:

- To preserve and enhance the attractiveness of this area.
- To identify future burial grounds for the church.



Guidance

- *The unique qualities of this area must be preserved, including the trees and hedgerows*
- *Any proposed alterations to the buildings must be in keeping and harmonise with the character of the area.*
- *Inappropriate new building should not be allowed in the conservation area and continue to be tightly controlled in accordance with Green Belt policies along the Old Road.*



12. Millison's Wood

A mile to the east of the village centre over Meriden Hill, this area of housing was developed adjacent to the former Triumph motorcycle factory and then, following its closure, on the factory site. There are three distinct sub-areas (see map):

- (a) A ribbon of substantial pre-war detached houses facing the Birmingham Road, well set back.
- (b) Albert Road and Grace Road, with a pre-war estate of mainly semi-detached properties attractively set within a woodland setting.
- (c) A more modern estate of mainly detached properties in a suburban setting.

All Millison's Wood housing is in the Green Belt and backs onto one of the most attractive bluebell woods in the region (see below).

Concerns:

- Many residents would like a local general store.
- There is also a demand for a children's play area, but no suitable land can be identified.
- There is widespread concern over the speed of traffic on Birmingham Road.
- Pavement parking.
- The lack of clearance and cleaning of the footpath between Millison's Wood and Meriden village.
- Flooding of the pavement between James Dawson Drive and Bonneville Close.

Guidance:

- *Sympathetic consideration should be given to any proposal to provide a shop / general store.*
- *Back-land and garden overdevelopment should not generally be allowed and all other restrictions on development in the Green Belt applied.*
- *Millison's Wood itself must continue to be preserved and managed as a public asset with public access.*
- *Press Coventry City Council to reduce the speed limit on their section of Birmingham Road from 50 to 40mph.*





13. Eaves Green

This is a small hamlet with its centre at the junction between Eaves Green Lane, Lodge Green Lane and Showell Lane. It is very rural in character, with narrow lanes, the Heart of England Way footpath and the extensive woodland of Meriden Shafts to the north. Eaves Green Park contains 50 single storey 'mobile' homes exclusively for older people and is very similar in character to Meriden Hall Park. The whole area is in the Green Belt.

Planning permission has been refused for inappropriate development of agricultural land between Eaves Green Lane and the A45 and this refusal has the full support of the community.

Concerns:

- The inappropriate development that has taken place without planning permission in the Green Belt.
- Vegetation overgrowing the footpaths on Showell Lane

Guidance:

- *Restrictions on development in the Green Belt must be rigorously applied.*
- *The characteristic nature of the area's ancient narrow lanes must be preserved.*

14. Other rural areas of the Parish

Concerns:

- Speed of traffic in rural lanes (Fillongley Road has 50mph limit, while lanes are derestricted).

Guidance

- *The rural lanes should be designated 'quiet lanes' with appropriate (low) speed limits.*



Final consultations on the Parish Design Statement

At its meeting in September 2011, the Parish Council approved a draft of this Design Statement, subject to further consultation to ensure it had the backing of residents on three key, controversial questions. A consultation newsletter was distributed to all households in the Parish with facility to respond by email or by returning the questionnaire to collection point, within a three week period. The results were as follows:

Do you support the Parish Council in resisting more large-scale housing developments in the Parish?

Yes: 98%
No: 2%

Do you support in principle a development of older people's housing in this location?
(* The old garage and caravan parking site on the north side of Birmingham Road, Meriden)*

Yes: 93%
No: 7%

Do you support in principle the development of self-enforcing measures to slow traffic down?

Yes: 81%
No: 19%

The Parish Council is confident it has the backing of residents on these as well as the other proposals and guidance in this Statement.

Summary and conclusions

Meriden is proud of its heritage. It has much that is valued in its landscape and buildings that must be preserved and enhanced. In particular, Meriden Parish is proud that it forms the 'Gap' between two large conurbations – and it is intensely concerned that planning policies and decisions preserve and enhance the open and green countryside that is so valued by citizens of the urban areas that surround us as well as by Meriden's residents.

Good planning policies and decisions in the future – aided by this Parish Design Statement – will mitigate some of the mistakes of the past. Limited small-scale sustainable housing development within the village to meet identified local housing need is acceptable in principle, subject to detailed location and design. The process of improving the overall design and visual quality of the village will be slow, and we recognise this as a fact. However, this statement is intended to ensure that the direction of travel is consistent and to act as a spur to increase the pace of improvement.

The statement puts considerable emphasis on the importance of improving the public realm – in particular lessening the impact of traffic on the parish. It recognises the relationship between investment in the improvement of public space and the willingness of property owners and residents as a whole to invest time, effort and their own money in improving the built environment and landscape.

Residents are working with the Parish Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to develop a comprehensive approach to roads, vehicles, pedestrians and parking. We recognise that, in a period of cuts in public sector spending, implementation would be need to be incremental. But we are convinced that some considerable progress can be made at small cost.

