

Housing

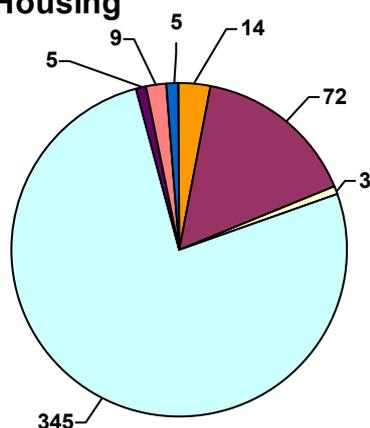
Future housing need for the people of Meldreth

This was an important part of the Household Questionnaire. Responses from the questionnaires covered 72% of the occupied homes in Meldreth at the time of the survey and 1137 people living in 453 households replied. The average age of people in the responding households was 42 years; 27% were 60 or over and 21% were 17 or under.

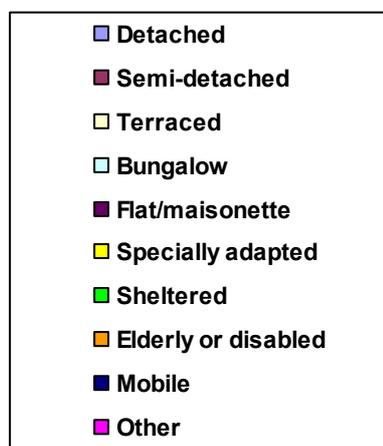
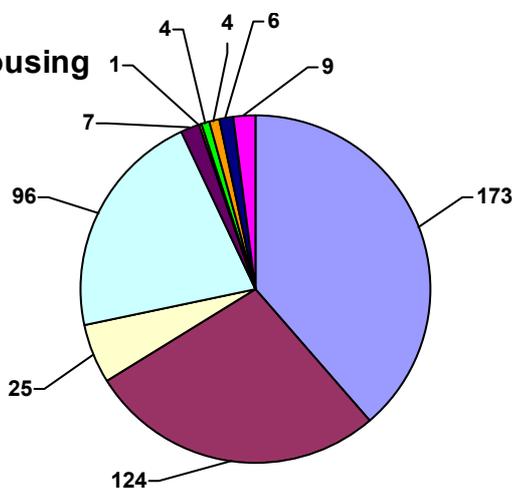
76% of dwellings were owner occupied and 16% were rented from the local authority.

The two charts below show the numbers of dwellings of each category and type.

Categories of Housing



Types of Housing



51 people said they were in need of alternative accommodation – this is 11% of those who filled out questionnaires. The number of single occupants of homes who needed alternative accommodation was 8 (out of 96 single occupants) and the number of single parent families in need of alternative accommodation was 2 (out of 10 single parent families).

(A single parent family is defined as a household having at least one child aged 0-17 years and only one adult aged 18-64 years.)

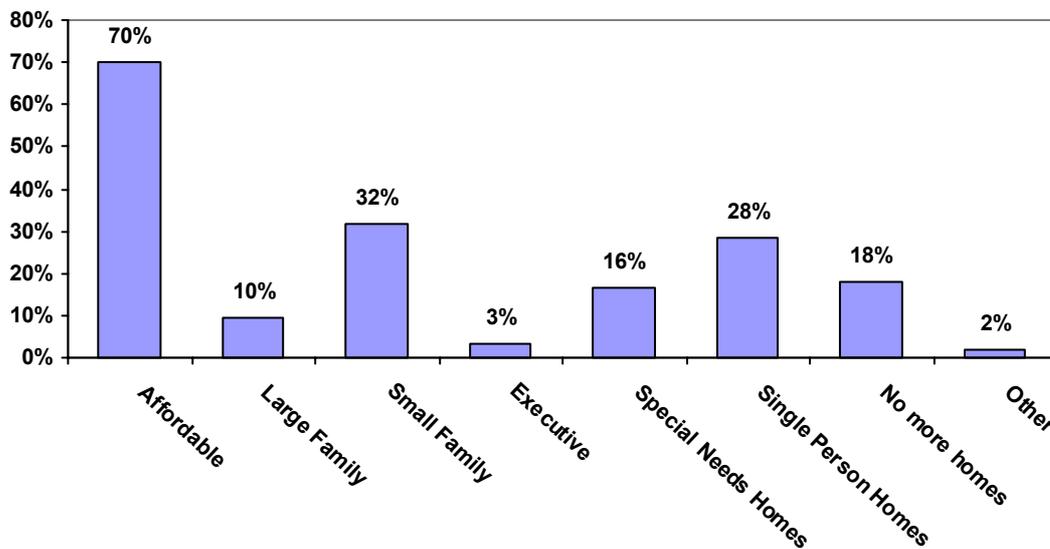
20% of those seeking alternative accommodation are single occupancy or single parent homes.

The reasons that villagers need alternative accommodation were given as family reasons (22% of those needing it), 12% wanting a larger home, 8% wanting a smaller home & 34% for undisclosed reasons. Employment reasons do not seem to be an issue.

The difficulties to be overcome to allow people to move to alternative accommodation are cost issues (given by 72% of respondents), lack of suitable accommodation to buy (46%) and lack of local authority/housing association homes (52%). Employment again does not seem to be an issue.

Types of Homes Required

In response to the question "What kind of accommodation do you think Meldreth needs?" the biggest support was for more affordable (low cost or social) housing.



65 single occupants of homes believe Meldreth needs more affordable accommodation (68% of 96 single occupants); 80% of single parent families believe Meldreth needs affordable accommodation (out of 10 single parent families). Support for more affordable homes is strongest from people aged 25-44 and 45-59 and from single parent families.

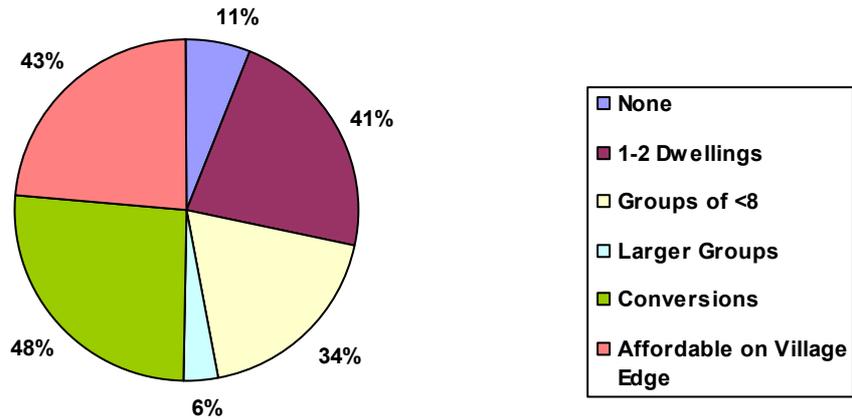
In total 70% of those responding thought Meldreth needed more affordable homes. The biggest group of housing style required was small family homes (32%). Only 18% said no further homes were needed. Other suggestions were: part-ownership, sheltered 2-story retirement flats & rented flats/bed-sits.

Acceptable Housing Developments

The questionnaire also asked "What type(s) of housing development would be acceptable in Meldreth?" People were allowed to choose more than one option and there were 1545 suggestions from the 839 people who answered the question.



Acceptable Housing Developments



43% of those answering the question thought low cost housing should be on the edge of Meldreth. 75% supported Meldreth's current status as a "group village" which allows small (8 & fewer homes) and infill developments. Both of these suggestions are in line with the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (see section on "Planning Issues").

48% thought redundant buildings should be converted to housing. Other suggestions were well-mixed developments of low-cost and market housing.

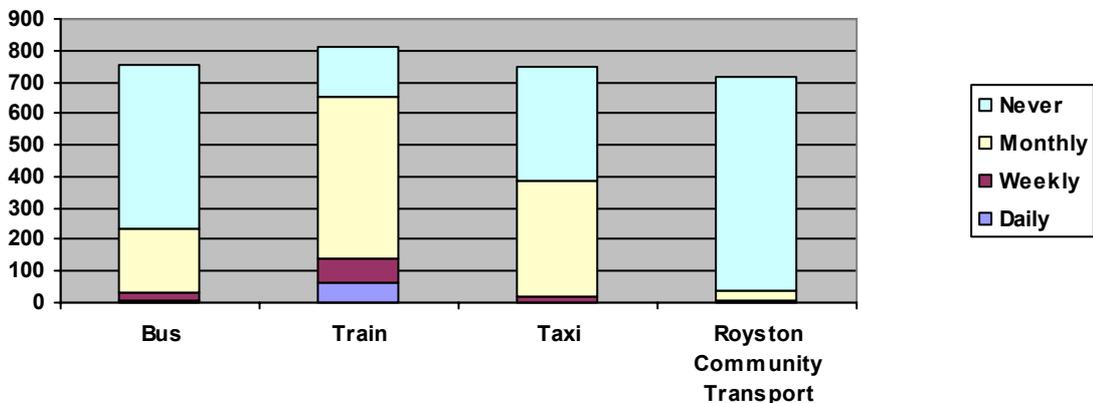
399 respondents (40%) did not answer the question. Of those that responded 299 (51%) said there should be more housing in the Kneesworth Road/Mettle Hill area (including West Way) and 105 (18%) cited the Whitecroft Road/Whaddon Road area. 17 suggested the areas of North End towards Shepreth.

However the majority of these areas suggested are outside, but not immediately adjacent to, the village framework and therefore the land is not available for housing under current planning rules.

Transport

The chart summarises the use made by villagers of the transport services available in Meldreth. The numbers correspond to the number of people that gave answers on the questionnaire.

Use of Transport Services



Railway

Historical Context

Modern transport arrived in Meldreth as early as 1851 when the London-Shepreth Railway was constructed. This was later extended to link Cambridge with the capital. With the village on the line of the railway, it soon profited by being able to send fruit from its extensive orchards direct to the London markets. This traffic lasted for over 100 years, declining in the 1960s as orchards were grubbed up in favour of cereal crops.

The Atlas Stone Company in Whaddon, now the Eternit Company, put in a branch line in the early 1900s to carry product from the factory to the main railway at Meldreth Station; this has long since disappeared and such heavy goods traffic moves by ever larger HGVs.

During World War II the station area was extended with a branch line so that war casualties could be off loaded and sent by road to nearby Wimpole Hall, which was then in requisition as a war hospital.

Meldreth is fortunate amongst South Cambridgeshire villages in that it survived the rail cuts of the Beeching Report in the 1960s and has retained a regular service to Cambridge and London.

Overview

Meldreth is served throughout the week by an average of 28 stopping trains per day during the working week and around 20 during the weekends (1.). The station has a staffed ticket office during weekday mornings and tickets can be purchased from a ticket machine at other times.

In addition, there is free car parking space for nearly 50 vehicles on the west side of the line and there are 4 recently installed bicycle lockups which are regularly used. The station is accessed from the village either by road or a short tarmac footpath and a similar longer path across agricultural land from Melbourn.

A recent campaign conducted by the local Rail Passenger Committee and Meldreth Parish Council led to the reinstatement in May 2004 of the late evening train from Cambridge stopping at the station. This train had earlier been withdrawn, largely through regular vandalism and the anti-social behaviour of passengers returning from entertainment venues in Cambridge; not unreasonably, the threat of withdrawal remains in the event of any re-occurrence.

Network Rail's much heralded Thameslink 2000 project is planned to link Meldreth along with other local stations to enable direct travel through the metropolis to the south and to cross-Channel connections. However, the construction start is subject to public inquiry reports and decision by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and looks unlikely to occur until 2007, with a finish time around 2011/12 (2.). It is expected that any station access improvements might be associated with the Thameslink project.

WAGN's short-term franchise runs until 2006. Then, in theory, the Great Northern route and the existing Thameslink 2000 route would be connected. We need to try to ensure that Meldreth does not come off badly in any timetabling changes and indeed emerges with a more secure future.

Summary of Issues

Respondents and local businesses were 92% positive about the rail facility which Meldreth is privileged to enjoy. There was favourable mention of our current 'Station Master', who is clearly recognised to practise customer service above and beyond the often 'normal' standards of our times.

1. WAGN Train Times - 12 December 2004 until further notice.

2. Details ex Network Rail's Thameslinkinfopack, www.networkrail.co.uk - Jan 05

"Railway line very good. Cheap way of going to centre of Cambridge and London."

"Great having a railway station with trains that run quite late" - Comments from our Village Model - 2004"

However, there were some strong views on current problems facing would-be travellers:

- access for disabled
- the footbridge
- bicycles on trains
- cost concerns
- frequency of services.

Of the 858 respondents, 25% were concerned with access for disabled to the south-bound platform. Meldreth does have an above average number of wheelchair users - around 100, including 55 young people at the SCOPE Manor School.

The station footbridge is difficult for the disabled, elderly and people with bikes and pushchairs as the steps are quite steep and bicycles and pushchairs have to be wheeled rather than carried, so these travellers have difficulties crossing to the south-bound platform to Royston and London. Suggestions that passengers could use Shepreth or Royston stations are seen as insensitive and unhelpful.

20% of our respondents worried about peak-time bicycle carriage; gangways crowded with bicycles are a problem for many foot passengers at busy times of the day, although people felt bikes should be encouraged on trains (3.). There was one call for cycle lock-ups on both sides of Meldreth Station, again possibly prompted by the difficulty in carrying bikes up and down the steps of the footbridge.

The results of our questionnaire were taken before the January 2005 announcement of further fare increases but, even so, 35% had cost concerns.

Meldreth is among the few South Cambridgeshire villages with a train service. 137 (17%) respondents use it daily or weekly, mostly for commuting to work or school. An additional 513 use it for shopping, social and leisure purposes. Some thought both these figures could be improved if there was better access to both platforms, particularly the south-bound one.

The issue of 8-car stopping trains, requiring a longer platform, brought contrary views, with a balance towards the current situation remaining unchanged.

Bus Services

Historical Context

Bus usage has decreased steadily in rural areas since World War II, as demographic shifts and work patterns have dictated. Motoring has become cheaper and generally more affordable.

Overview

The result of decreased usage has been that rural bus services for Meldreth and surrounding villages have been reduced over the last 2 years.

A village campaign started in November 2003 when Stagecoach reduced their Cambridge – Royston service through Meldreth and adjoining villages from 8 buses per day (Monday to Saturday) to just one bus each way per day.

Villagers are left with the early bus to Cambridge (Service 27) leaving the Stocks at 7:43 am and the returning school service leaving Cambridge at 4:20 pm and arriving back at 5:11 pm.

3. WAGN Train Times Dec 2004 - " - bicycles are carried where they can be safely accommodated free of charge.....not carried between Ely & Royston on trains calling at Cambridge except the 0715 & 0045 services departing from Kings Cross.

The more frequent service (No 27), - hourly during the day - both to Royston & Cambridge, would require Meldreth residents to sprint 1½ miles or so from the centre of the village to the nearest bus stop in the nearby villages of Melbourn or Shepreth.

In February 2004 a petition and a bus-user survey by Meldreth Parish Council were presented to Cambridgeshire County Council and negotiations with statutory authorities and service providers continue. The campaign aim is to reinstate a limited service, without which the elderly, people without cars and young students are particularly disadvantaged.

In contrast to the railway, bus services have been gradually eroded over several years, making it difficult to travel to the two nearby centres of Cambridge and Royston without a car. The railway option suggested by Stagecoach is really not viable for many, because of town centre distances from stations and a long walk for those living at the western or northern edges of the village.

Whilst the very active joint village bus campaign, which includes Barrington and Shepreth, continues to fight for a service to key points at key times, solutions towards this service reduction may lie in a number of other initiatives working together.

In the Cambridge & South Cambridgeshire Area Transport Plan - Consultation Draft, published in February 2005, a possible medium term plan over 2004/5/6 is for improved frequency of service on the Royston-Cambridge corridor. Our action plan will need to address whether this can mean improvements for services to and from the village.

Should the government's Regional Spatial Strategy for Eastern England ever come to fruition, there would have to be a radical re-think of the seriously diminished public transport services.

The table below is a summary of the situation taken from the Stagecoach and Cambridgeshire County Council websites in February 2005.

<u>Meldreth Outbound</u>			
From Stocks	To Cambridge	To Royston	Service No
07:43	08:40		27
08:15		08:30	128
10:50		11:05	128
<u>Meldreth Inbound:</u>			
From Cambridge	From Royston	To Stocks	Service No
16:20		17:11	27
	12:35	12:50	128
	15:50	16:05	128

Our responses indicated that, of the 453 households returning questionnaires, the use of cars or vans was extremely high for all purposes.

A high proportion of households had access to and use of more than one car (1.63 cars per household compared to the national average of 1.04 (4.) for all essential and leisure journeys.

With 84% of respondents using cars as their major means of transport and even 4% using bicycles, only 2% say they used the bus.

However, data from disadvantaged groups were much more difficult to obtain so we consider these figures to be very unrepresentative of the need by disadvantaged groups for improved services to both Royston & Cambridge.



4. By 1989/91 cars per household were recorded at 1.04 per household. - National Travel Survey

Key Issues

- bus frequency to Royston & Cambridge
- review of stop points
- routing impediments - e.g. Shepreth bridge weight limit.

Asked if able to share cars, 60% felt unable and, of the remainder, 32% shared for social purposes, with only around 6% sharing for school runs.

Forty percent of the 872 respondents wanted better routes, frequency and timetables, 20% had concerns about cost and disabled access and 11% were concerned with bus stop location. However it was clear that 60% of our respondents never used a bus.

Prior to the Parish Plan project, there has been regular contact with Stagecoach and the County Council by the Parish Council and representatives from other villages and this will be continued as a high priority under our Plan.

Social Car Services

A Self Help Group was founded 28 years ago. Initially a Luncheon Club, it expanded with a Social Car Scheme. In 2003 the Social Car Scheme for Meldreth and Melbourn was absorbed into Royston and District Community Transport (RDCT).

It provides a valuable service for a small but significant group of mainly elderly residents without their own transport who find difficulty using other services for essential medical and shopping journeys.

Users call the service 24 hours before need (but the earlier the better) and pay a modest fee to the driver. Demand generally exceeds supply.

"Thirty per cent of people in the countryside do not have access to a car during the day.

Source: Cabinet Office"

The availability of volunteers and funding are the current limitations on the scheme. Our action plan will explore ways of expansion

We asked respondents if they would be prepared to participate in a car scheme as volunteer drivers and were encouraged to see 43 people registering interest. They will be urged to volunteer for RDCT or provide occasional help to others where this can be arranged.

Funding remains a challenge. Although the scheme delivers service to north Hertfordshire and south Cambridgeshire residents on roughly a 60/40 percent basis, funding from Hertfordshire local government and other sources is more than twice that from Cambridgeshire sources (5.).

For most respondents (62%), car sharing appeared inapplicable or impracticable; of the remainder, some 46% said they shared for social purposes or shopping purposes and only 6% said they shared for school runs or work.

Local authorities are supporting initiatives to change commuting habits and have launched a website, <http://www.tfw.org.uk/> which gives details of schemes for car sharing, encouraging the use of cycles for commuting and some grants for local schemes.

Issues for the Action Plan

- rail services - southbound platform access
- bus service improvements
- extended social car services.

5. Source: Royston and District Community Transport