

Law and Order

Historical Context

One police constable, known as a Community Beat Manager (CBM), is currently responsible for community policing for Meldreth (population approximately 1800) and twelve other villages grouped under the Sawston Sector of Cambridgeshire Constabulary. The others are:

Melbourn, Bassingbourn, Abington Piggotts, Arrington, Littleington, Shingay cum Wendy, Steeple Morden, Tadlow, Whaddon, Guilden Morden, Croydon, Kneesworth

Whilst many villages are small, the area covered is approximately 28 square miles connected by minor roads. The largest village is neighbouring Melbourn, a designated Rural Centre in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan with a population of 4500. Our CBM has a beat with a total population of around 14200 residents, which is 46% of the population of South Cambridgeshire (6.).

There has been a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (NHW) in the village since the late 1980s and currently the village has 15 volunteer Street Co-ordinators, 12 of whom are registered with the police. Some parts of the village are thinly covered and more recruits are needed. Three new volunteers came forward resulting from the Parish Plan Open Day in February 2005.

The NHW occasionally receives generalised alerts from the police but communication remains a concern, especially when major incidents occur.

Cambridgeshire Constabulary run a public access website which posts selected reported crime incidents. Meldreth NHW has monitored the site for some years and reports an average of 3 -5 incidents per month in the village. These range from house burglary and theft of garden machinery to vandalism and petty nuisance crime.

Whilst we have had two major incidents in recent months concerned with the village shop, the general level of crime is in the lower quartile of the figures for the Sawston Sector and also for South Cambridgeshire. However, it is interesting to note from the recent South Cambridgeshire Crime & Disorder Audit published by the Cambridgeshire Crime Research Team in Autumn 2004 that more offenders live and commit more offences in South Cambridgeshire than the total for all the other Cambridgeshire districts including Cambridge itself!

Police schemes are available for members of NHW and others to visit the Hinchingsbrooke Headquarter Control Room and arrangements can be made to accompany police on patrol.

Main issues

Highlights of respondents' concerns were:

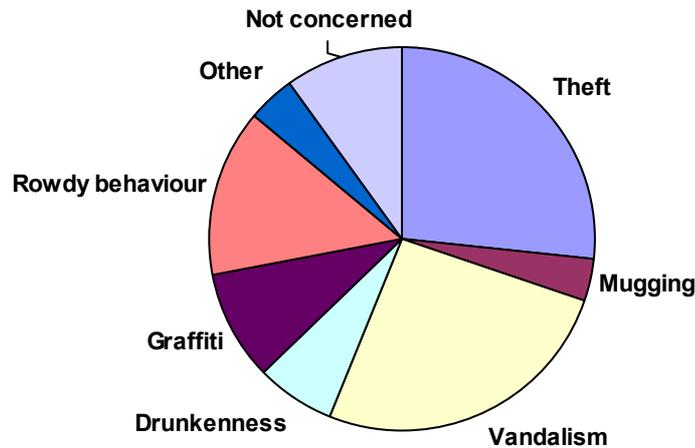
- low confidence in police response
- loutish behaviour by gangs of youths
- fear of crime still high in senior age groups
- low constabulary detection rates.

Asked to rate police coverage in the village, 2% rated it good, 17% reasonable and 20% had no opinion. 62% thought it poor.

Asked what crime concerned people most, respondents' replies are clearly shown by the chart below:

6. Source: SCDC website: Village Leaflets - February 2005.

Concern of Crime



Theft & vandalism concerned most at 52%. Rowdiness, graffiti & drunkenness, 28%, 18% & 13%, respectively, and 20% were not concerned.

When asked for areas in which villagers felt unsafe, the question prompted 91 additional comments. 82% did not feel unsafe or had no opinion. For those who commented, the main areas mentioned were Mettle Hill, the railway station area and the recreation ground. These latter two areas do sometimes attract groups of youths who might appear intimidating to elderly people.

Areas considered unsafe during darkness were:

- the footpath between the station and Melbourn - particularly the A10 underpass
- the footpath alongside the recreation ground (Whitecroft Rd to High Street)
- areas around the British Queen public house and the Village Hall.

Street lighting was raised as an issue by many respondents and areas poorly lit feature among the list above. However, addressing this issue will need to take into account a significant minority who dislike the glare of street lights and enjoy the sky at night.

Leisure

Facilities

Meldreth has the following sport and leisure facilities:

- recreation ground that has a sports pavilion, a football pitch, a skate board ramp, a basket ball hoop and a children’s play area. This recreation ground is centrally located near the village hall
- village hall with its own kitchen area and meeting room. The hall has a stage, lighting and can accommodate up to 150 people
- British Queen Public House – located centrally on the High Street
- two asphalt tennis courts
- Melwood – a wooded area adjacent to the River Mel that is managed and run by the Melwood Conservation Group
- croquet lawn in the grounds of the British Queen pub



- bowling green opposite the church
- sports club owned by Eternit
- horse riding provided at Scope's Meldreth Manor School
- various public footpaths, the most popular of which runs along the River Mel from Melwood to the church.

Leisure/sporting associations

Meldreth has the following sport and leisure associations:

- Art Club that meets regularly in the village hall
- Bowls Club that manages and maintains the village bowling greens
- Croquet Club that manages and maintains the village croquet pitch
- Tennis Club that uses the two village tennis courts
- Good Companions over 60s
- United Football Club that uses the recreation ground's football pitch
- Riders Group for horse riders
- Women's Institute
- Youth Club that meets at the Sports Pavilion.

There are other private organisations that provide further leisure and sporting activities within the village such as keep fit classes and ballroom dancing.

These associations believe that publicity and sharing of information about and between the organisations is weak. Meldreth Matters is a very effective local medium, but clearly needs to be supplemented. The associations are looking for more members and co-ordinators and this would be helped by improved publicity.

There is a strong consensus amongst these associations that:

- village notice boards need to be rationalised and improved
- greater use should be made of the Parish Council website, www.meldreth-pc.org.uk; most organisations are listed, but only nine provide information on what they do or whom to contact
- a coherent "Village Diary" would help avoid clashes of events and help draw in more participants
- a brochure of village organisations to supplement the website could be useful, particularly for new arrivals to the village.

In addition to better publicity, some organisations recognise the need to offer "taster" sessions and particularly to target younger people. Organisations could consider co-operating more by multi-activity days or by providing extra helpers for each other's outings.

Individual organisations have other specific issues as follows:

- Bowls Club would welcome better street-lighting and parking around the church
- Football Club needs help with fundraising and finding sponsors
- Riders Group has many problems caused by inconsiderate drivers and the lack of bridleways
- Tennis Club would welcome access to better changing facilities, less aggressive speed bumps in the access to the Village Hall car park, court lights and the repositioning of the skate board ramp (to avoid distracting noise and reduce the propensity for broken glass around and on the courts)
- Croquet and Tennis Clubs would welcome roadside signs indicating their location.

Views on Social Facilities

The questionnaire asked for views on Meldreth's social facilities for children, young people, adults 26-60 and those over 60. 855 people responded (87% of a total of 987 people) and the results of those who had definite opinions are as follows.

Facilities for	Good	Reasonable	Poor	Good and Reasonable
Children up to 16	46	164	286	42%
Young people 17-25	9	67	406	16%
Aged 26-60	43	251	223	57%
Over 60s	107	236	92	79%

The ratings of each age group for their own age group's facilities were virtually identical to how all age groups rated that age group's facilities.

There is a strong consensus of reasonable satisfaction about the facilities for the Over 60s and dissatisfaction about those for young people. There are very mixed views about facilities for children and 26- to 60-year-olds.

The household questionnaire also asked for the worst thing about Meldreth. 157 people expressed a desire for a good pub, whereas no-one expressed an opinion that the pub was good. The British Queen is criticised for being unwelcoming, dingy, dirty and rundown with 12 comments on the lack of food and many noting that they would welcome a pub to which they could take friends and that would be a focus for social interaction in the community. A further six comments that criticised the pub were made during the Parish Plan Open Day.

The business questionnaire highlighted general dissatisfaction with the British Queen by the business community. Generally, businesses do not use local pubs or restaurants to entertain, with only two businesses using the British Queen (20 go elsewhere). 30 responses commented on the British Queen – none of these comments was complimentary and all echo the Household Questionnaire findings. The British Queen is clearly not addressing many of the needs of Meldreth.

Usage of Recreational Facilities

The questionnaire asked the respondents how often they used the following recreational facilities:

- Melbourn Village College swimming pool (McSplash)
- Malton Lane golf course
- Tennis Club
- Horse/pony riding
- Football Club
- Youth Club
- Croquet Club.

867 responded (88% out of 987) whether and how often they used the various recreational facilities. Most people did not use the facilities and the count of those that did is as follows:

Facility	Weekly	Monthly	Occasionally	Total Users
Melbourn swimming pool	90	29	168	287
Golf course	26	22	76	124
Tennis club	17	11	72	100

Facility	Weekly	Monthly	Occasionally	Total Users
Horse/pony riding	11	1	18	30
Bowls club	15	1	13	29
Football club	19	2	8	29
Youth club	13	5	6	24
Croquet club	4	1	15	20

The Melbourn swimming pool is clearly an asset to Meldreth, as are local golf courses and the tennis club as they each provide recreation for over 100 people each. Other clubs attract many fewer participants and most are known to be seeking new members. In particular, the youth club is used by a very small minority of the village's young people.

Improving Existing Sports Facilities

The questionnaire asked how sports facilities in Meldreth could be improved. There were 280 suggestions or comments (28% out of 987 responses) of which the highlights were:

- 33 people would like to see fuller use of existing facilities (recreation ground, schools, village hall and Eternit)
- 27 people would like to see a new sports hall or leisure centre being built
- 25 people would like to see more facilities for the young, including encouraging participation via taster sessions and tennis lessons for the young (three people)
- 23 people would like to see more information about existing facilities and clubs to be made available, particularly for recent residents
- 20 people would like to see a gym or fitness centre being provided
- 20 people would like to see more facilities and clubs generally
- 19 people would like to see a better pavilion and changing facilities
- 13 people would like to see better lighting on the recreation ground including tennis court lights (six people)
- 10 people would like to see the creation of cycling track/cycle paths
- 9 people would like to see a swimming pool being built
- 6 people have identified that the children's playground needs to be improved with the swings being replaced
- 6 people would like to see an all-weather area for basketball, 5 a-side football and skate boards.

New activities that were identified were: girls football team, netball, Tumble Tots, badminton, cricket, ladies golf, jogging circuit, putting green, rugby posts, running track, junior tennis club, indoor tennis, table tennis, trampoline club, and daytime yoga. 11 respondents said facilities were OK as they are - in the context of the size of the village and access to Melbourn facilities.

There is a clear call for improving the current pavilion, either replacing it with something larger or going to a substantial sports hall/leisure centre. This is a strategic decision for the village that needs careful thought.

The facilities available in the school, village hall, Meldreth Manor School and Eternit should beneficially be worked in co-operation to provide opportunities for more sports activities. The village hall balance between sports and other activities should be examined to maximise its utilisation.

More advertising by clubs and their providing tasters and training (including for the young) should be arranged.

New Sports Clubs and Activities

The questionnaire asked which new sports clubs/activities respondents would attend in Meldreth if they were provided. 369 responded (37% out of 987) and the numbers for each are as follows:

Club/Activity	Number
Badminton	199
Billiards/snooker	131
Table tennis	78
Judo	31

Respondents were asked if there were any other sports they would attend, if they were provided. The following sports were identified:

Sport	Number
Gym/fitness centre	27
Yoga	15
Swimming	7

Many other indoor and outdoor sports, forms of dancing and indoor pastimes got a mention.

Badminton, billiards/snooker/pool and table tennis facilities should all attract reasonably strong participation if they were provided in the village. For other sports, better publicity of what is available in surrounding villages should be beneficial if it is not cost-effective to provide these in Meldreth.

Conclusions

- there is a clear need for a better pavilion or Leisure Centre on the recreation ground. This would help to provide better facilities for the football club, the youth club and the tennis club
- communications about what is available, where and when need to be improved. This could be done by completing the Parish website with organisation details, rationalising and improving the village notice boards, addressing communications to new villagers and the formation of a better village diary
- there should be a fuller use of the village facilities for a wider range of activities. For example, nearly 200 people would be interested in playing badminton if it were provided
- British Queen needs to be made a major village focal point. It needs to be enhanced to become a family-friendly establishment serving good, moderately priced food, with an improved garden and car park.

Environment

Footpaths and Byways

Historical Context

Meldreth is fortunate in having a network of footpaths which connect to the surrounding villages. There are however no byways within the parish although part of Harcamlow Way and the Icknield Way Path briefly border just south of Bury Lane Fruit Farm and cross under the railway line.

There is one Permitted Path from Malton Lane to 'Five Fools Meadow' in Barrington which runs north alongside the brook forming the parish boundary just west of Brimble Hill.

Although some paths are clearly not used frequently, most are passable and none has been obstructed by landowners, as has been sometimes been the case in some other areas. Indeed, many paths are cross-field and landowners have been generally very good at maintaining the required clearance through crop land.

A survey organised by the Ramblers Association was made for the Millennium year. Local people contributed for the parish paths and a bound document for all the county paths was presented to the county archives in 2000.

Before the Parish Plan project was started the Parish Council had already signed up to the Parish Paths Partnership (PPP) and general improvement work on surfaces and signage started in summer 2004 and is continuing.

Initially, a small number of Parish Councillors and others volunteered labour but, as a result of the Parish Plan project, 93 more people expressed interest in helping and subsequently successful meetings have meant that Path wardens have been appointed to monitor path conditions regularly.

Major work so far has been the surfacing with wood chippings of Path No 6 which runs along the River Mel and revetment work to shore up a short stretch of the path running very close to the river bank.

Path No 6 is by far our most popular and picturesque village path. Attractive at any time of year, it runs through field and wood, on the eastern bank of the River Mel from Topcliffes Mill across the railway continuing along the river to Station Road or Melbourn.

Further work is planned to upgrade stiles, gates and some surfaces.



What the Survey said about Parish Footpaths

- 56% of respondents knew path locations
- 35% sought signage improvements
- horse riders want bridle paths
- high interest in paths - 93 volunteering to maintain
- disabled access very limited by stile/gate design.

Further comments indicated interest in having a circular foot route around the village and there were roughly equal calls for better surfacing or leaving things as they are.

The Parish Paths Partnership is already well established in Meldreth and will be the principal partner in carrying through any action plans raised by the Parish Plan process.

Conservation and Environment



Historically Meldreth was an important fruit growing area and mainly surrounded by fruit orchards and market gardens. Strong evidence of this is shown on the 1887 map of the parish. In the 1970s fruit growing was already in decline, orchards were grubbed up and land converted to cereal crop.

So, like many south Cambridgeshire villages, Meldreth is no exception in being short on woodland and rich in surrounding agricultural land. What little woodland remaining in the parish is privately owned with no public access.

However, there is strong interest in conservation and environmental issues and the village has a conservation group dedicated to preserving the only woodland in public ownership as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

Owned by Cambridgeshire County Council and leased to the Parish Council, this 0.8 hectares of deciduous woodland (named Melwood) west of the railway and adjacent to Footpath No 6 and the River Mel is being actively managed by the Melwood Conservation Group both for the benefit of the village of Meldreth and local wildlife.

A Management Plan has been produced and it is hoped that LNR status can be achieved in 2006/7. The Group encourages members of the public to take interest in the site by organising one or two public events in the wood every year.

In keeping with the general views of villagers responding to the questionnaire, mention should be made of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which is immediately adjacent to the northern parish boundary, namely Shepreth L-Moor.

It is as much a resource for Meldreth as it is for the neighbouring parish and constitutes the only other public access land reserved for wildlife and residents in the vicinity.

The land consists of ancient grassland, ranging from dry to damp, a chalk stream, and hedge and scrub originally given in 1823 as livestock grazing for the cottagers of Shepreth.

It is managed by the Wildlife Trust, and Meldreth Parish Council has contributed to a recent appeal made to purchase further similar land the other side of the railway which runs at the eastern edge. Footpaths connect to Shepreth just outside Meldreth's parish boundary.

".....more natural spaces are necessary for the health of the community, but unfortunately most places contain facilities for the motor car to the exclusion of these very important "wild" spaces." - Comment from the questionnaire

Questions on the environment revealed the views below:

Countryside features	Important
Meadows, green fields	87%
Small Woods - Melwood	84%
Hedges	83%
Ditches & Watercourses	79%
Orchards	76%
Traditional Farm Buildings	72%

Ten percent of respondents felt these features were not special or had no opinion.

Environmental Improvements	Response
Look after woodlands	69%
Keep hedges short & tidy	56%
Preserve old orchards	50%
Plant more trees	50%
Single trees in special places	49%
Plant more hedges	35%
Allow hedges to grow naturally	24%
Specify others: *	23%

* Few people specified improvements other than seats & bins; which were suggested as examples.

A planned action will be required to find out where people think such street furniture should be placed and in what numbers. Additions of this nature represent ongoing costs in servicing and maintenance for the parish precept.

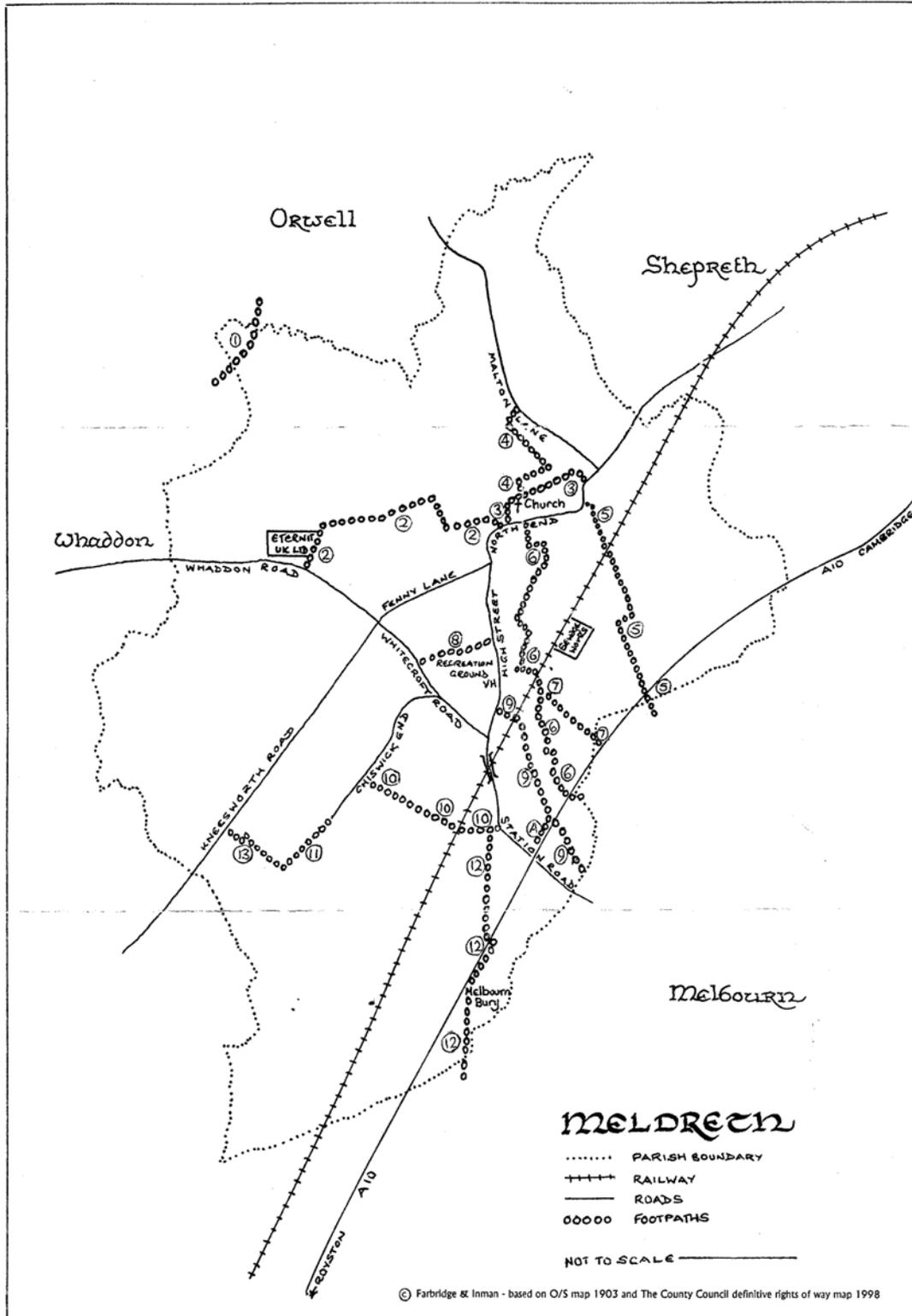
Wildlife protection	Response
Look after woods, fields, lakes & watercourses	75%
Campaign against litter & rubbish	73%
Manage meadows for wildlife & people	65%
Create local nature reserves	57%
Create grass borders around fields	41%
Create new ponds	37%
Discourage too many people using the countryside	8%



Melwood by Faith Mutti (Meldreth Primary School)

Village Footpaths Map

This map shows footpaths within the parish, with their numbers, and was drawn up for the Millennium celebrations.



A definitive map can be accessed from the Cambridgeshire County Council website:
<http://online2.camcnty.gov.uk/cam>