

## **VDS Forum on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2007: Report-back from Table A**

### **What makes Preston Distinctive**

- The village was formerly two separate parishes of considerable antiquity, both with churches that are ancient and architecturally interesting.
- The hub of Preston is based on The Street with the hub being the small green at the junction of The Street and Mill Lane.
- Elmstone has a less defined centre and has a series of lanes bordering agricultural fields. To the casual traveller Elmstone might appear to consist of a scatter of houses on the way through to Sandwich. Several properties are quite large, often set back behind trees and widely separated by large gardens, orchards and fields.
- There are quite large gaps between properties compared with Wingham or Ash. Older buildings include timber-frame cottages, some older houses with “Georgianised” fronts and Victorian cottages. Significant in-filling has taken place since World War 2; these are easily identified by their style.
- Preston has been described as “Quiet without being quiet, and busy without being busy.”
- There are just enough village facilities to enable the residents to be independent of having to shop in other villages or towns. The remaining shops – the general store, the butcher and the farm shop are very much valued and the loss of the Post Office much regretted especially by older people.
- A distinctive feature of the parish is our position in a “no-man’s-land” on the boundaries of three distinct District Councils: Dover, Canterbury and Thanet. We consider this results in a certain isolation, but perhaps contributes to an attitude of insularity and independence.

### **Housing**

- There has been little new building in the parish since 1980: possibly 12 new properties have been built in the past 25 years.
- Many residents express a desire for affordable housing and there is a perceived need for cheaper housing with a lack of rented property in the public sector.
- Given the topography of the parish, cheaper housing could only be achieved by building small units, possibly as part of a development of mixed housing on a plot of sufficient size.
- Generally it was felt that residents would welcome some development of a modest and appropriate volume. But they would, for example, be opposed to the sale of a large tract of agricultural land for the development of a large estate.
- It was recognised that sustained development of housing could produce gains by bringing improved infrastructure facilities and utilities.

### **Roads, Safety & Streetscape**

- Residents are generally concerned about traffic speed through the village and through the narrow lanes.
- The group proposed a speed limit of 40mph on the approach roads to the village and speed inhibitors including pinch points or humps were discussed.
- A system designed to control traffic and maintain a steady slow speed through the village was needed.
- There was concern about lack of safety for those walking or cycling on the roads, especially children, particularly on their way to and from school. Parents were therefore reluctant to let them walk to school.
- Opinion regarding the development of pavements alongside the roads and lanes was sharply divided: resistance to “urbanisation” was balanced the need for a safe place to walk.
- On the subject of street lighting the majority on this table (men) opposes street lighting as destroying the rural quality: the minority (female) view was that some modest street lighting in Elmstone – there is currently none – would enhance the safety of pedestrians and young cyclists.

### **Employment and Farm Diversification**

- Our PPP survey has revealed that the considerable number of small businesses being run from homes and small offices and units in the parish.
- Trade workers in the building industry, service industry workers and other self-employed people work from home as do the local farmers who also employ some full-time and seasonal workers.
- The development of local business to enable residents to take up employment without having to travel should be encouraged.
- Farm diversification and possible conversion of farm buildings to other employment uses, which could engender additional income, was discussed.

### **Environment & Amenity Space**

- The local rural environment – wooded areas along the perimeter of fields, the large expanses of orchard encouraging bird and wildlife variety – is greatly valued and appreciated.
- The local footpaths and bridleways are valuable in themselves and as shortcuts. Their use and maintenance should be encouraged, especially in enabling children to get to school on foot.
- Maps of local footpaths erected in appropriate prominent locations would assist residents and visiting walkers in identifying and using them.
- The existing parish amenity space is well used by the football and cricket clubs, also providing an adjunct to the village school as its sports area. It is where the young people of the village congregate and is also used in the summer by the Pre-school playgroup.
- There is strong demand from the youth in the parish for tennis courts.

### **VDS FORUM on 5.10.2007: Report-back from Table B**

#### **What makes Preston Distinctive**

- Preston is a linear village accessed by narrow roads.
- Preston has developed slowly over time so there is a mixture of architectural styles and dates.
- Lack of pavements with houses lining the street make it distinctive but cause problems for pedestrians.
- Trees make Elmstone distinctive.
- The spaces between the houses in The Street make Preston distinctive but gradually the spaces have been filled.

#### **Housing**

- In recent times Preston has had very little new housing. It needs to expand to help keep the existing retail outlets in business.
- A small estate of not more than 20 dwellings would be appropriate if well landscaped, providing some public amenity space and perhaps a pond.
- It would be better to find new greenfield sites than to limit expansion to the village envelope.
- The group were very critical of the latest build opposite Mossy's Farmshop
- The group was worried about the problems arising from social housing projects.

#### **Roads, Safety, Streetscape**

- Both Elmstone and Preston suffer from the rat run effect on weekdays.
- Elmstone needs a speed limit and some in Preston would like to see the existing speed limit reduced.
- Lack of pavements means that excessive speed is a very real safety issue for pedestrians,
- Pinch points were discussed and a change of colour of the road with picket gates as at Shepherdswell.
- The lorry traffic as caused by Salvatori's is of grave concern. It appears to members of our group who live near that the business is expanding. It means more noise and movement of lorries at night. It was once a small depot for local fruit producers. It needs to be controlled.

#### **Local Employment & Farm Diversification.**

- A lot of people are now able to work from home but not everyone can get Broadband
- A site could be identified for light industrial use in small units with favourable start up schemes but noise and pollution is not wanted.
- Farm diversification was supported. Farmers could be allowed to create large fishing lakes or maybe mountain bike-ride track.

#### **Environment & Amenity Space**

- For existing footpaths to be more fully used they need to be maintained particularly when the path is lined on both sides by hedges . There is an example of a path in need of maintenance that connects Elmstone to Preston
- Elmstone people have no recreation ground and can only walk away from cars on footpaths. Some of these paths are covered in Dog poo. If bins were provided there might be less excuse.
- Hedges lining roads need more frequent trimming to make them safer for pedestrians and car drivers.
- Maps of footpaths and bridleways are needed in both Preston and Elmstone.

- Communal grass verges need to be trimmed more frequently for the sake of neatness and safety and it discourages people allowing their dogs to foul these areas.
- Polytunnels were disliked visually but it was recognised that they were necessary for farmers to be competitive. The ones near Nash need to address the problem of run-off, as the flooding is now worse.

## **VDS FORUM on 5.10.2007: Report-back from Table C**

### **What Makes Preston Distinctive**

- Both Preston and Elmstone are living communities: few houses are owned as weekend retreat homes.
- The parish has a good set of local retail units, two churches and a traditional English country pub.
- The villages are ideally situated in relation to the surrounding large towns: far enough away to be over-dependent while not too distant to reach when necessary.
- The housing in the villages is interesting with many different styles and designs that blend in well. It was agreed that in-filling of the spaces between houses was undesirable.
- The lack of street lighting outside the centre of the village was considered a good thing as it maintained the rural character of the area.
- Locally owned working farms were an important part of what makes Preston distinctive.
- Treescapes and the green triangles at road junctions are important.
- The history and slow evolution of the two villages has allowed them to retain the village character, while allowing them to function well in our modern environment.

### **Housing**

- There is a shortage of low cost housing, suitable for our young people to set up home in their own village.
- Shotfield Close was considered to be a good example of housing development for the area.
- New housing should show diversity but at the same time be sympathetic to the overall ambience of the village.
- Large-scale development must be avoided at all cost.

### **Roads, Safety & Streetscape**

- HGV transport remains a major problem along The Street
- 30mph flashing warning signs should be erected at both ends of the village, to remind responsible drivers to check their speed as they enter the village.
- It was reported that a web site exists citing our lanes as a suitable route for daredevil high-speed boy racers.
- It was suggested that some of the trees and hedges near bends should be kept short to avoid screening on-coming traffic

### **Employment and Farm Diversification**

- There is a lack of opportunity for young people to get started in a useful trade locally, with local apprenticeships no longer available.
- New businesses need to be encouraged providing they are able to blend in with the village profile.
- Areas of development land should be identified for both housing and business premises, making sure that they do not adversely impact on the current structure of the village.

### **Environment & Amenity Space**

- It was proposed that responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of hedges, trees and other areas of planting should be identified. The possible availability of grants to maintain green areas should be researched.
- Long term tree planting should be considered, as future generations should have the opportunity to enjoy large mature trees.
- Footpaths are in danger of becoming impassable due to fences having untrimmed hedging alongside: footpaths should be clearly defined and be of a suitable well compressed material so as to make them safe to use.
- It would be very useful to have a clearly defined map, prominently displayed in the village, showing footpaths and bridleways.
- One person raised the subject of climate change and the future possibility of malaria-carrying mosquitoes breeding in the marshes. .

## **VDS FORUM on 5.10.2007: Report-back from Table D**

### **What Makes Preston Distinctive**

- Preston and Elmstone were historically two parishes and each has its own distinctiveness
- Preston is predominately characterised by the linear character of The Street and its green triangles: those at the Longmete Road junction, at The Forstal and especially the largest triangle at the Mill Road junction are of great importance and should be preserved as important features.
- In both Preston and Elmstone the spaces between buildings and variations in what planners call “the building line” are further distinctive elements to be valued.
- The parish is characterised by a mix of historical and 20<sup>th</sup> century development with a wide diversity of building types, styles and scale.
- For its relatively small population it is truly distinctive in the number of shops it has retained and a recent regeneration of small businesses.
- Trees and surrounding orchards contribute to the character of the parish.
- The narrowness of the roads throughout the parish is also part of its distinctive character.

### **Housing**

- While there was considerable “in-fill” building of bungalows and chalet bungalows after World War 2, since 1980 there has only been one small social housing development and about 6 new houses.
- In consequence of planning restriction the tendency has been for houses to be successively extended, thus reducing the availability of smaller, less expensive houses.
- There is a good case for some measure of small scale mixed development to include a proportion of “affordable” houses (rental and shared equity) for local young people and young families.
- The village could also accommodate a limited number of larger new homes for families to continue to foster a mixed community and to sustain the village school and local retailers (not a Wimpey-style estate of “executive homes”).
- Good design quality and sustainability were essential for any new building. Good quality 21<sup>st</sup> century design was preferable to period pastiche.

### **Roads, Safety & Streetscape**

- Preston was a “rat-run”: To restrain the speed problem it was essential to retain the narrowness of the streets.
- We propose that the case for 20mph speed limit through both Preston and the residential lanes in Elmstone should continue to be promoted and also for a 40mph limit all along the narrow approach roads from Wingham and Stourmouth.
- Our table was equally divided as to the preference for pinch points or humps. Some of us urged that humps would damage the transport of harvested fruit. ( there was a notable absence of the farming community at the Forum)
- To promote child safety walking to school, a “walking bus was proposed. Also the establishment of a footpath from Longmete Road to the school and recreation ground.
- Our table, as a majority view, opposed more street lighting as creating light pollution and carbon footprint.

### **Employment and Farm Diversification**

- Opportunities for local people to find employment within the community should be fostered.
- The increased tendency for people to work from home, with home offices and internet connectivity was already reversing a late 20<sup>th</sup> century trend and reducing out-commuting’
- The government’s policy of reducing barriers to farm diversification were welcome – as long as alternative enterprises did not give rise to unacceptable noise or environmental pollution hazards.
- The farm shop movement was welcomed as creating local employment and challenging supermarket supremacy and globalisation.
- The revival of apple and soft fruit growing locally was a positive development since the 1990s. While the economic arguments for polytunnels were recognised - to produce Kentish rather than Spanish strawberries and tomatoes - there is nevertheless concern about their visual impact, their scale and the extended season.

### **Environment & Amenity Space**

- Tree planting should be encouraged and hedges maintained. Hedge trimming should be timed so as not to damage wildlife.
- Signage for footpaths needs to be sustained and renewed when damaged or felled.
- The Parish Council is trying to persuade local farmers and land owners to agree to extend the bridleways - currently limited and unconnected – to form a network which would take horse riders off the roads and into the countryside.
- The wish for tennis courts reported by the younger people in the village was noted.
- The night sky light pollution caused by the over virulent lights along the Thanet Way was objected to.

### **VDS FORUM on 5.10.2007: Report-back from Table E**

#### **What Makes Preston Distinctive**

- Unusually Preston's church is not in the centre of the village, while contrary to this Elmstone has its church at its centre as three roads converge at the church.
- Elmstone, which is more of a hamlet than a village, has a markedly different character from Preston, reflected both in its houses and the surrounding trees.

#### **Housing**

- It was considered there was room for more low cost housing and other developments to the village.
- This would support and maintain the few shops that we had left in the village and support the other businesses.
- Any development should be limited and should be compatible with the existing homes.
- We also considered that new housing should be environmentally friendly/sustainable.
- One comment was that new houses in Elmstone would need to be very different from those in Preston.

#### **Roads, Safety & Streetscape**

- Some considered that more streetlights were needed as a safety issue but others in the group were concerned that they were bad for the environment.
- As far as speed issues were concerned, could we not have fake cameras?
- The Salvatori HGV vehicles seem less of a problem than inconsiderately driven "Chelsea tractors" that push other drivers off the road.
- Additional white lines should be considered as well as a second flashing 30 mph warning sign to help slow down the traffic.
- Pinch points were not considered helpful but the parking of several tractors down the road would stop the traffic racing through.
- There was a need for designated cycle tracks.

#### **Employment and Farm Diversification**

- Many businesses (about 35) operate from the parish, providing local employment.
- Due to this there is a strong need better, faster broadband.
- Weekly or monthly farmer's markets might be encouraged, held in local farm buildings.
- It was noted that the Preston Steam Rally was getting bigger: this was not considered to create any issues with the village.
- Toll rides were proposed and off-road cycle tracks.

#### **Environment & Amenity Space**

- Light pollution was discussed.
- There was a strong consensus that the few existing bridleways which did not go anywhere should be linked up.
- It would be very useful to have village maps, one for Elmstone and one for Preston, with the footpaths listed and shown.
- There are more trees in Elmstone than in Preston, so additional tree planting in Preston was proposed.
- The "Baroness Bridleway" needs to be sorted as parts are very thin, too narrow to get a large horse down and barbed wire on the side is certainly dangerous, should the rider fall in contact with this.
- If the Village Hall is improved or rebuilt more capacity for car parking should be considered. It could then serve as a venue for weddings and other functions.