

Castle Acre. Neighbourhood Plan.

Summary of Comments made by attendees on May 2nd 2017.

### **Community**

Castle Acre is a good place to live but not perfect.

There is good spirit, a sense of community.

There is a diverse age range with a variety of personalities offering a mix of skills; of particular note is the artistic and music community. The church is viewed as strong community facility.

Whilst some embrace newcomers to the village and what they contribute, others feel that the village has a developing imbalance of newcomers against established residents perhaps due to the lack of affordable housing for locals and or the restricted job opportunities. There is also a feeling that 'new blood' is needed in the village to avoid a sedentary decline.

It is felt that there could be more clubs and activities organised within the village; in terms of youngsters this could help offset anti-social behaviour.

### **Environment**

River and countryside walks, dark skies and local wildlife delight the residents as does the individuality and historic heritage of the village. Castle Acre is generally viewed as picturesque and unspoilt although perhaps threatened by the style of potential new development.

People enjoy clean air, quietness and the natural habitats within and around the village.

The Castle Acre Conservation Area is protecting the historic village but infill and fringe development is of concern to some. Traffic is seen as a threat to nature habitats such as the SSSI at the river crossing. Oversized vehicles can and do damage buildings and verges. An increase in traffic could present an increased Health and Safety risk whilst also increasing pollution. Littering presents a problem in some areas whilst dog fouling is a major anti-social concern.

Trees and hedges need to be protected and public areas regularly maintained.

The character of the village is seen as a real strength and development must be managed to avoid its erosion. Careful consideration to traffic and parking management needs to be given to help preserve the sense of village.

Farming in the locality is viewed as a double edged sword. It contributes greatly to the rural feel of Castle Acre, providing green views away from the village and helping to contain sprawling development, whilst also providing employment and wealth to the area.

In the broadest terms the community is keen to ensure good ongoing management of the historical and natural assets of Castle Acre and to uphold the principles of conservation, especially in the village centre.

### **Leisure and Tourism**

Countryside, village greens, the church, the river, historical sites, the playing field are listed as big attractors to Castle Acre. Additionally the artistic and musical events at the much appreciated village hall are enjoyed by residents, their guests and visitors too. The locality provides a great dog walking amenity which is enjoyed by many but is unfortunately spoilt by some owners who do not clean up appropriately after their pets.

Tourism is seen by some as a real asset to the village and should be encouraged and built upon. However poor/limited parking provision, toilet facilities and signposting mean that the arrival of visitors can cause problems within the village. Tourism could become a greater job creator within the village if the facility was expanded. English Heritage could be encouraged to be more proactive in the village and help more with the provision of tourist facilities.

The demise of hospitality venues, pubs, tearooms, etc is seen as a potential threat and some residents are keen to see a revival of this kind of amenity for residents and tourists alike.

Whilst many villagers enjoy the status of tourist destination there are some who feel that a large number of visitors are an inconvenience.

The leisure facilities the village does have are well used, managed and greatly enjoyed, however there is strong opinion that more are needed and that the younger populations needs are not met. Tennis courts and a swimming pool feature on the wish list.

More could also be done for the older demography and skills based workshops would be appreciated.

It is the view of some that inappropriate development could damage the essence of the village, it's sense of community could be further diminished by an influx of second home owners, empty properties and the inability of locals to afford the newer houses.

### **Businesses.**

The local shop/post office is praised by many in the village for its wonderful service. The tearoom is also much liked for the food and atmosphere although many feel that a 7 day per week provision is needed in the village to meet local and tourist demand. The pub is liked by a number of residents but there is concern that it could find itself under threat.

Poor internet provision in the village is a problem for encouraging businesses and work from home within the village.

A greater diversity of businesses would be welcomed.

Investment in and the support of local business is necessary to build the commercial base within the village, some are in favour of capping/reducing rates and feel that the Parish Council could do more to promote and support local enterprises.

### **Infrastructure**

This issue generates much comment of a diverse nature. On the one hand there is good current provision in terms of Recycling, rubbish collection, a local shop, a tearoom, a playground, the school. On the other hand some villagers express the need for a medical facility, more shops with greater variety, school places, pubs, public toilets, tearooms whilst street lighting is deemed intrusive by some who would prefer some being turned off and or low level pavement lighting.

Some feel that there is a need for more footpaths

Post office services are key within the village and must be preserved at all cost.

The current broadband provision is either mediocre or very poor as are mobile signals. Parking provision is inadequate especially close to amenities, the bus service is inadequate for needs especially those of the elderly,

Supply of water according to some is poor in terms of pressure and quality (over chlorination) is poor although there has been some improvement in pressure recently.

Some would like a natural gas service whilst others would see the fitting of a supply and the subsequent road works as a major inconvenience.

There is general consensus that sewage services are inadequate, with the need to promote the connection of all homes, especially new developments to a mains system. Septic tanks are viewed as a potential threat to the ecology of the area and as a "smelly" solution.

Surface water and drainage is causing problems especially in heavy downpours, the system seems to be at capacity.

Waste and dog poo bins need to be increased in number especially in key locations, e.g. near the Castle and by the river.

The electricity supply via overhead cables provides an intrusion to the appearance of the village and is not compatible with conservation and burying cables would be more appropriate.

Road structure and systems would not cope with increased traffic, there is already damage to surfaces, verges and the Bailey Gate especially by oversized and farm traffic. Increased parking needs would also pose a threat.

New technologies need to be promoted - not something the Borough Council seem keen on. Wind power, solar energy, etc are again not wholly compatible with the conservation ethos and a compromise may be necessary.

New businesses require the provision of appropriate premises.

All utilities need reviewing for capacity when considering new build.

### **Traffic**

On the positive side there is generally little traffic and road noise although there is the potential for this to change and the situation needs both monitoring and controlling, Speed through the village and on the outlying roads is a concern and speed limit alteration and traffic calming have been suggested. Another worry is the frequent use of the roads and the Bailey Gate by oversized

vehicles, some larger vehicles are also destroy the verges. Our roads are narrow and prone to congestion once obstructed and exceeding speed limits is potentially far more dangerous due to visibility issues.

Castle Acre is used as a 'rat-run' which is to be deterred or stopped especially for larger vehicles. Many think that the bus service could be improved with more direct links to neighbouring towns e.g. Fakenham on a Thursday. A Sunday service might be appreciated by some. Bus information needs to be more accessible and coherent.

Improving parking facility for all seems to be very high on the public agenda, along with better signage encouraging the use of existing parking sites. Parking becomes an inconvenience for residents on Stocks Green and Bailey Street especially during the summer and holiday periods. The ford needs to be sorted out, frequent abuse of the river and SSSI is a treat to wildlife. Innovative ideas like the consideration of a one-way system may help some of the traffic management issues and the creation of a dedicated cycle route to Swaffham are on the minds of some residents.

## **Housing/Development**

New development is an area where a range of views were expressed. Some prefer buildings that reflect the 'Norfolk' style with the use of traditional materials whilst others would like to see more innovative design and a shift from a generic "mock historic" look which is becoming a design feature of some new estates. Eco features, such as water harvesting, solar panels, modern heating systems, etc, must in the opinion of some be considered in all new build.

It appears that there is great support for the Conservation Area and the impact it has on preserving the character of the village, some would like to see it extended. Concerns have been expressed however about infill/backyard development in and close to the Conservation Area. Some of this seems to go ahead with little real consideration of neighbouring properties and their owners/inhabitants. Infill development which is often ad-hoc must be rigorously controlled and fit with the village plan as a whole.

There is a view that the older houses look nice whilst newer properties are in keeping... not an opinion shared by all. Suggestion has been made about a preoccupation with design character and not enough emphasis on build quality and amenity.

The "lack of affordable housing for locals" call rings loud, and the increased number of executive and larger style homes is not catering for the local market/need and irritates many. There is a fear that the average age of the population is increasing and that new build must encourage both families and the young to either remain in Castle Acre or to move to the village. If this can be achieved it is also essential that the school is properly protected from overcrowding, especially with pressure to admit from outside the village.

Because many young locals cannot afford the smaller properties they are being purchased as rental businesses which sometimes prices them above the affordable local market value or they are languishing largely empty as 2nd/holiday homes. There is concern that parts of the village could stagnate and that housing stock should be used to live in and not left empty. Running alongside these views is the feeling that new blood is also necessary in the village.

There is a poor supply of mid range, two or three bedroomed houses and single storey accommodation, so new development needs to address this as well as the properties being more eco friendly and robustly designed.

The village needs to be as involved as possible with ongoing development, trying to guarantee that needs are met and desirable locations for development are selected. The need for social housing, shared ownership, access for local youngsters to the housing market, etc must be addressed.

Housing stock needs to cater for and select a diverse range of ages and to embody where possible 21st century living. The move to working from home premises is a developing trend and ought to be embodied in the thinking.

New build must not put pressure on providing good utilities and developers profits via executive homes need to be contained.

Parking should always be provided within new build premises to avoid putting more pressure on street parking provision.