

Village Design Statement



For the Parish of Middleton

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What the Design Statement covers

It is an advisory document produced by the community, not by the planning authority. It will not stop change from happening, but it can affect how any change fits into the village. It describes the distinctive character of a settlement and its surrounding countryside, and shows how character can be identified at four levels:

- The village's history
- The landscape setting
- The shape of the settlement
- The nature of the buildings themselves then sets down our guidance for the future based on local character assessments.



2 Background

Background

Middleton is, in planning terms, a hamlet, i.e. a settlement with no defined village envelope or development boundary within which development would normally be permitted. The absence of this boundary means that all proposed development is subject to the constraints of Open Countryside policies as set out both at District, Regional & National Level.

There are many policies in the existing local plan which specifically relate to “rural” areas such as Middleton. Those specifically commented on by residents in the preparation of this document are as set out below. The guidelines developed in this statement mainly refer to or supplement these policies.



| | |
|--|--|
| RLP 06 - Affordable Housing in Rural Areas | RLP 15 - Replacement of Dwellings in the Countryside |
| RLP 16 - Hamlets and Small Groups of Dwellings | RLP 40 - Minor Industrial & Commercial Developments in the Countryside |
| RLP 78 - Countryside | RLP 79 - Special Landscape Areas |
| RLP 80 - Landscape Features and Habitats | RLP 81 - Trees, woodlands, grasslands & hedgerows |
| RLP87 – Protected Lanes | RLP90 - Layout and Design of Development |

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act of 2004 changes the way in which Town & Country planning operates, seeking to speed up the process and ensure greater community involvement.

Our District Council (Braintree) takes community statements seriously, both in preparation of their Local Development Framework (a new long-term plan) and in making individual planning decisions.

The purpose of this document is to clearly express to decision makers the views and desires of our community, explaining what is special, unique and distinctive about the character of Middleton. By promoting this document to the District Council for approval, it acts as a material consideration; for use in the deliberations of both planning officers, and committees.

Wide involvement has been important so that the finished document represents the views of our village as a whole. All residents have been invited to express their views. All answers have contributed to the Village Design Statement.



History

Middleton appears in legend, with tales of fighting white and red dragons (recorded in a 1449 chronicle, held at Canterbury Cathedral). This may be related to the battle fought between Boudicca's Iceni and the Roman 9th Legion.

Recorded history begins with Domesday 1086 when Milde "i" tuna (translates as Middle Farm) was divided amongst 13 freemen holding land from Robert Fitzgilbert, and Gilbert the priest.

The 12th century (1160) (Grade 1 listed) Church of All Saints has a chancel, which is, unusually, longer than the Nave. The living was endowed to St Gregory's College (in Sudbury) in 1374. Five successive Raymond's were rectors covering 160 years from 1769. The second Raymond (rector 1823 - 1889) built a new rectory, restored the church and landscaped a large area of the parish into parkland with avenues and terraces. This beautification included an arch in which stones salvaged from the 1841 restoration of Lavenham Church were used. In 1861, the "new road" was established. This leaves a legacy of a beautiful church, magnificent trees, and the remnants of open parkland.

The village school, funded by the Raymond's, opened in 1875. The school building remains with its bell in-situ. The school closed during World War 1 due to the fall in the number of pupils. In the 1950s, the church was restored, the wooden spire being replaced with a box tower. At this time the living was joined with Henny. The Rectory (Grade 2 listed) was sold into private ownership in the 1960s.

Middleton was a hamlet of cottages whose inhabitants principally worked on the land until the brick works at nearby Allen's Hill offered alternative employment during the 19th century.

Location & Settlement

Middleton is fortunately placed in an elevated position on the western fringe of the Stour Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, approximately 2 miles southwest of the market town of Sudbury. The parish lies at the northern edge of Essex and its eastern boundary is shared with the county boundary of Suffolk.

The valley sides afford many of those expansive views, which are characteristics of paintings by Constable and Gainsborough (both from this area). The gentle slopes are open in character, dominated by medium to large arable fields. A notable feature is the strong lines of mature trees, often marking former hedgerows. Although woodland is a relatively small component of the landscape, many mature and specimen trees are found within the parish.

The visitor will notice the small, winding and often sunken lanes, and the fact that Middleton does not lie on a through route. This, and its pocket size nature, imposes a slow pace of life, making an oasis of peace and quiet.

The settlement can be divided into general types of development comprising the core, which contains the great majority of properties; a small number of outlying properties, mostly on the Lower Road, and an area of commercial use (Middleton Hall Farm). Comprising fewer than 50 properties, the compact core is laid out as a rough square with the church on the northern edge. Other properties are more widely scattered although a sub-nucleus of note exists in the convoluted Southern section of the boundary with the neighbouring parish of Henny. (See map pages 8 & 9)

Most working age residents now work locally or from home. Although the majority of the current population moved to Middleton from elsewhere, there is nevertheless a strong community spirit, witnessed by the support for the group working on this document.

4 The Older Village

The Older Village

This core area contains principally pre-Victorian buildings, which are those with most historic significance, comprising an important part of the village's heart. The area is roughly square, with residential properties on three sides. The Church & "Queens Beeches" form the northern flank, while properties on the western side follow the original access to the village.

Overall design is heavily influenced by the remnants of a 19th century "parkland" surrounding the church and "rectory". The old road came from Henny, past Old School House and "Bellropes Paddock" en-route to the church, and beyond. This was downgraded, by the rector Oliver Raymond in 1861, who also removed the road from opposite the "Lake" to a crossroads at what is now the Box Iron Green junction.

At the same time a new road was created, reconnecting the village with Sudbury, and parts of the old road system were reassigned as paths, or bridleways.

This parkland legacy also accounts for the number of magnificent trees, extending into the area known as the "Terrace" which was formerly part of this grand design.

Features:

- 12th Century Church (Grade 1 listed)
- Ceremonial Arch, original parkland feature
- Queens Beeches, former rectory now a (Grade II listed) Georgian style home.
- Thatched Cottage the only remaining thatched roof (Grade II listed)
- Original (18th C) greenhouses still in use at Wayside.
- Original design pargeter work.
- Old School House and its former school building
- Several of the villages old wells
- Some flint construction (three properties)



Concerns expressed:

Retention of buildings and features that illustrate local history of Middleton. That existing legacy should establish a reference point for any future building. Continued use of the church as a surrogate "village hall", acting as an anchor for community activities and development. Affordable accommodation is needed to retain elder residents as viable contributors to the community, and release existing property for family occupation.



Guidelines

Principal issue: **Remaining historic features are of great value to many residents.**

- The core's features are in need of protection; three buildings are currently "listed", and hence protected.
- Other important features should be preserved: Please see the table on page 14.
- Community resources are vital; use should be maximised, and reduction or removal resisted.
- The provision of 2-3 units for occupation by elder residents should be considered (through a housing association who could impose such a use condition) to make it easier for them to remain in the community. These would be within the policy for Affordable Housing in Rural Areas (RLP 6). Any development should be purely for local need.
- At the time of preparing this VDS the evidence of local need was for sheltered housing / accommodation for the elderly and for provision of facilities at the church to enable it to be used as a community meeting place.

Middle Aged Middleton

Comprising a group of homes built in 1850s – 1890's, of local (Allens) red brick, plus Brakemoor Cottage: 1903, (originally two Middleton Hall Farm tied cottages), and a pair of 1930's semi-detached red brick homes (built by Pilgrims of Bures). Properties grouped in this document as "middle aged" are located around the main centre.

There are no pavements or grass verges outside any of these properties, and they are surrounded by woodland and open fields. Barnadiston Lane, part of the ancient route to Middleton, cuts through this area, and effectively links the historic core to the Stour Valley Way, and open countryside.

Features:

- Red and local "white" brick construction, often under slate roofs.
- Decorative finials and Tudor style decorative tiles (Fungs cottage).
- Effectively single track road-ways.
- A lay-by / passing place & the remnants of Middleton Common.



Concerns expressed:

Poor provision for car parking, relative to the needs now experienced. Pedestrian & horse hazards meeting traffic on narrow roads. Parking that reduces passing options and pedestrian refuge from traffic. Use of private drives by passing & turning cars. Retention of "peace & quiet" currently a prime feature of life in Middleton.

Guidelines

Principal issue: **Building density with traffic issues on single carriageway.**

- The opportunity to create off-road parking should be included in any & all redevelopments.
- The density of development is at the maximum for existing services. No proposals should be allowed that exacerbate existing issues.
- Prevention of noise and other nuisance is important, both during any works, and in controlling the use of properties.

6 Outer Middleton

Outer Middleton

Along the Stour Valley (AONB), from valley floor up to the western skyline, development is very widely dispersed within an open landscape. Homes are principally detached, on large plots with a screening hedge or fence facing the road.

Though of mixed age, younger buildings replace existing structures, so overall the character has remained stable for generations. A small sub-nucleus of development sits around the parishes' convoluted boundary with Henny Street.

Features:

- Most properties are unique; the main unifying characteristics being rendered or brick finish, under pitched clay tiled or slate roofs.
- Flint and lime mortar walling (Stone House) & feature bargeboards.
- Use of locally manufactured Suffolk White bricks.



Concerns expressed:

There is no recreational access to the riverside. Retention of attractive architectural features on all existing houses, and use of such features to visually link properties, and harmonise the built landscape. Trees, particularly natives, are a strong influence on the landscape; they are valued and should be added to, not lost.

Guidelines

Principal issue: **The open and natural character must continue and support the continued value of the adjacent AONB.**

- Development must be restrained even more strictly than in the rest of the Parish, in line with the existing "Hamlets and Small Groups of Dwellings" in the countryside" policies.
- The new LDF must contain clauses to suppress development in sparsely populated rural areas, to retain their character.
- Middleton should remain a hamlet, and not be designated with a development envelope.
- Design features from existing properties should be used as a reference and guide for refurbishment of adjacent buildings.

Any exception to this guidance could set a precedent, and should be robustly resisted by parishioners, our Parish Council, and the designated planning authorities.



The Younger Village

At the entrance to the settlement, are some of its younger properties. These retain characteristic open views, from Cornard, to Ballingdon Hill. There are areas of scrubland, farmed & uncultivated fields (in various ownership), adding to the open feel of the area. Here too are 4 semi-detached houses originally constructed by the local authority.

The Younger Village has a wide variety of building styles, and therefore no unifying architectural theme. They do, however, define the age in which we live. Most are infill, having been built in gardens of older properties, or to replace older buildings.

Individually designed detached bungalows and houses occur in small blocks (2-4) of a similar age. Some with obvious extensions, others were built on the old church meadow, an echo of local history.

Properties are all set back from the road, un-overlooked and again bordered by individual fencing/hedges. There is provision for off-road parking.

Features:

- Local Authority constructed housing.
- Ex Farm workers' housing.
- Architectural features e.g. bay window.
- Mature trees throughout this area.

Guidelines

Principal issue: **Managing alterations and extensions.**

- New building within existing large gardens should be resisted, as this diminishes the parishes open character.
- All alterations or extensions that are permitted should be of a style and appearance in keeping with existing buildings, and promote local character.
- The design and use of materials must be sympathetic to neighbouring properties.



8 Middleton Parish Map

Characteristics

Commercial Use Development

Village Core (Older Buildings)

Victorian Development

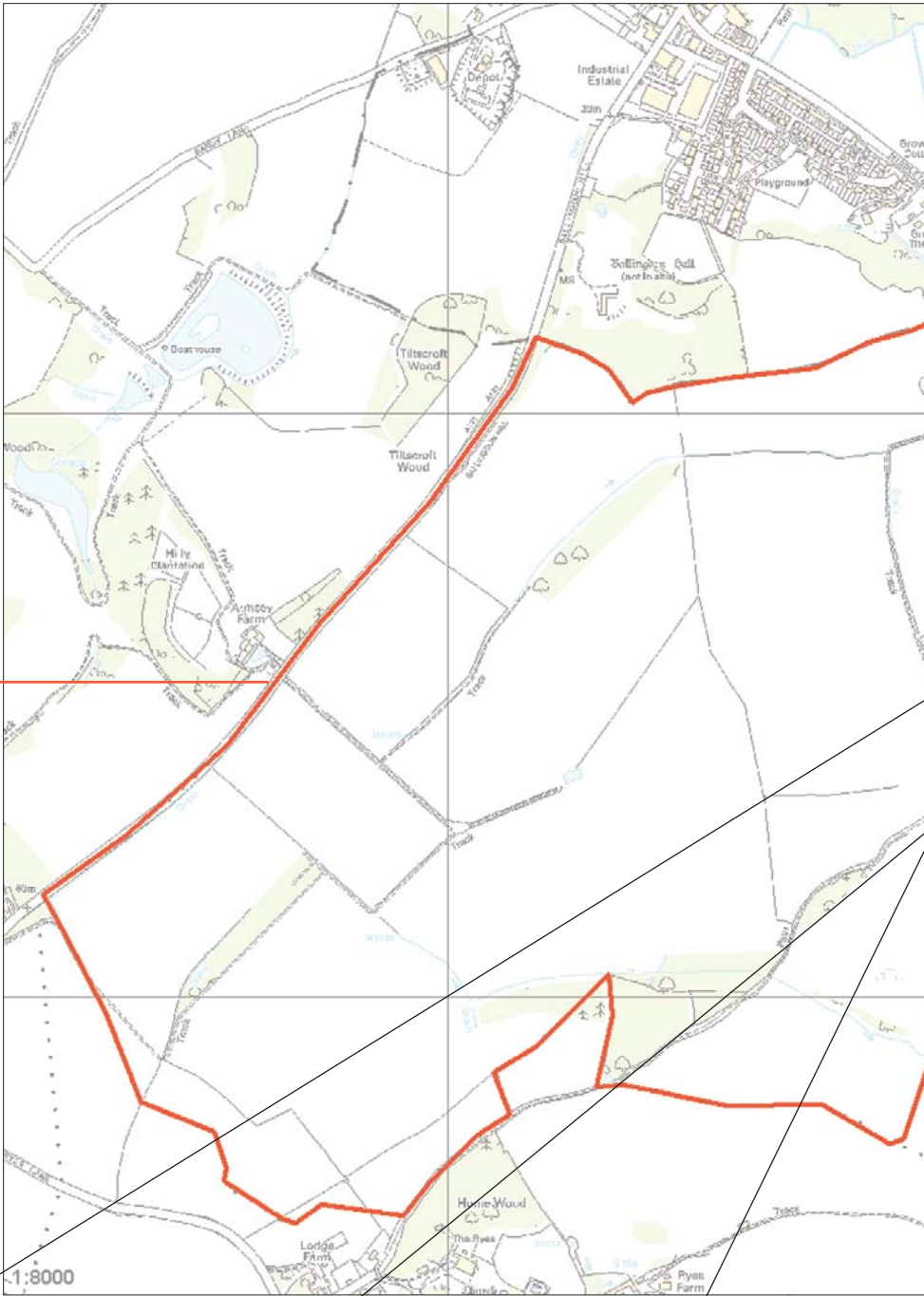
Younger Parts
of Village Development

Parish boundary:
note small built up area

Notes:

Lack of a through route keeps traffic at a minimum, and adds to the tranquil character.

No community facilities apart from the continuing use of the Church as a "village hall."



Sunken "Tunnel" Lanes with various uses.

Road

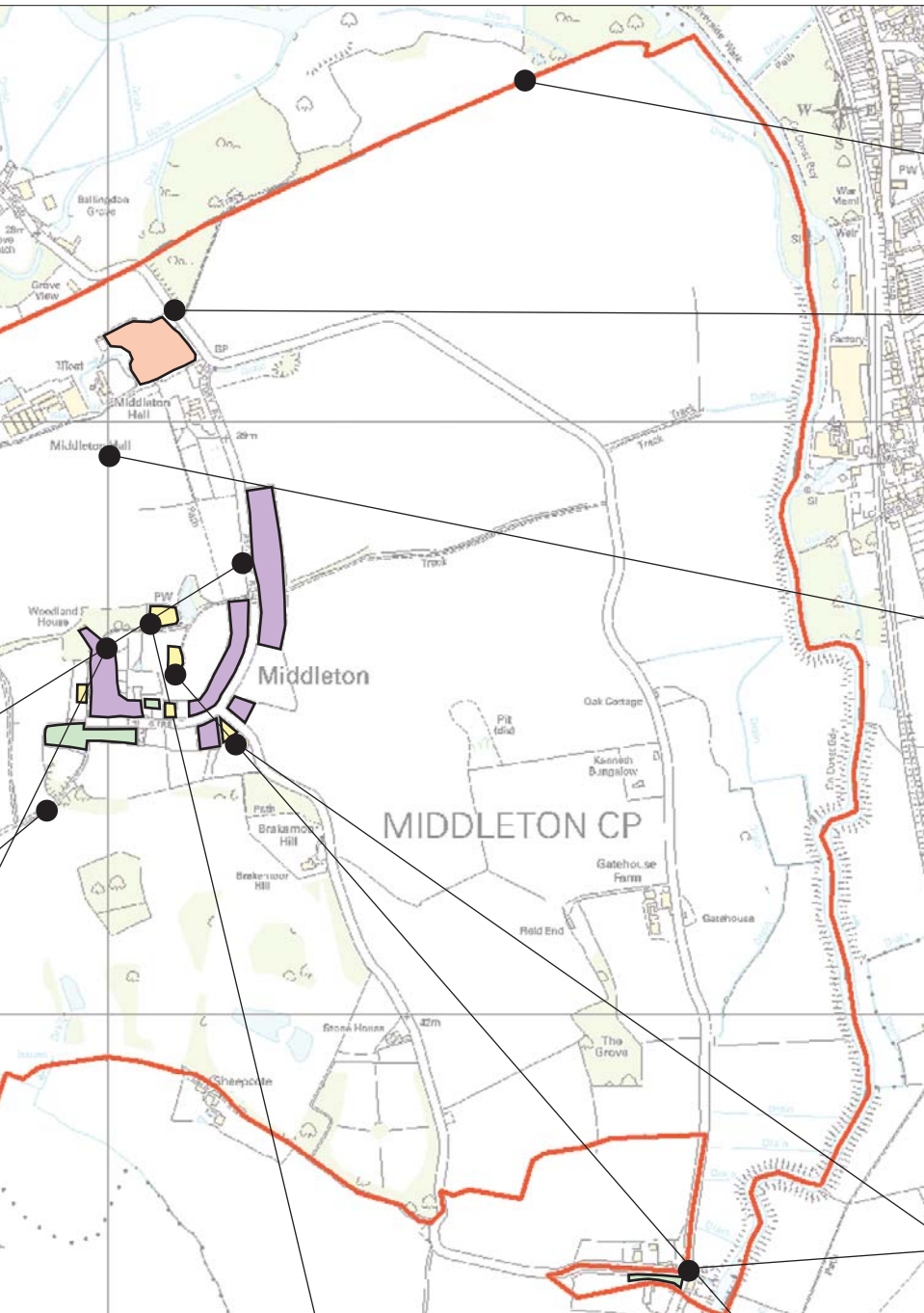


Bridleway



Footpath





Features

County Boundary

To Sudbury (Suffolk) Market Town, and main economic influence on Middleton

Arable landscape is significant in the Parish; contributing to the very rural setting

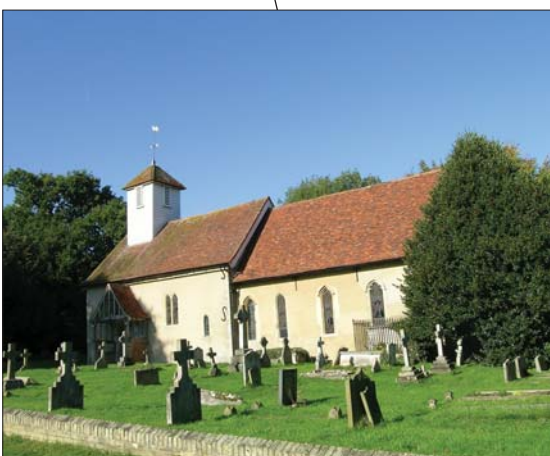
Commemorative Arch as it was



Development Sub Nucleus; partly in Henny as well as Middleton

Listed Buildings

Church



Queens Beeches



Thatched Cottage



10 Roads, Lanes, Byways & Paths

Roads, Lanes, Byways & Paths

Local roads are narrow country lanes of less than "B" class. What is now called "Lower Road" runs along the valley floor, through Lamarsh, to Bures. Road access to Middleton is from this road immediately adjacent to the entrance to Middleton Hall Farm. A smaller, very narrow, lane also connects Middleton at Box Iron Green to the Lower Road just before the Henny Swan public house. This latter lane (see map) is a "Protected Lane" as defined in the Braintree District Council Local Plan, and covered by policy RLP87:

Features:

- The "sunken" lane and "tree tunnel" aspects.
- The parish enjoys an excellent network of footpaths, a bridleway and a byway.
- Several public footpaths and a byway are accessible from the village.
- The Stour Valley long-distance path.
- The "no through road" design helps keep the village tranquil.



Concerns expressed:

"Protected Lane" status has not prevented the use of "back lane" by heavy Lorries. Other lanes don't have this status, as they are needed for regular access. Unnecessary traffic movements particularly "lost" large vehicles. "Motorised misuse" - by speeding motorcyclists and 4 x 4 drivers - of the Byway known as Barnadiston Lane.

Guidelines

Principal issue: **The character-giving lanes need use restrictions applied.**

- Protected Lane controls are valued by Middleton residents and must be retained.
- A suitable weight restriction should be applied to the existing Protected Lane.
- Protected Lane status should be applied to all other roads within the parish.
- Existing lanes should not be widened as this would compromise the character of the area.
- Roads designated "unsuitable for HGVs" should have that condition firmly enforced.
- Measures to prevent dangerous or anti-social use of the byway known as Barnadiston Lane should be pursued.
- The existing footpath network would be enhanced by creation of a route to and alongside the river.

Infrastructure and Services

Apart from its narrow roadways and lanes, and telecommunications, mains water, and electricity, Middleton has very little in the way of public infrastructure. The community finds itself beyond the reach of gas, sewerage and surface water disposal systems. Domestic sewage and wastewater disposal is by means of septic tanks and soakaways.

Water supplies came from wells and hand pumps until 1956/7; remnants of several of these remain. Drainage was historically through a system of ponds. These are still of importance as springs and surface run-off need to be managed. There is little support for gas being connected to the village, even less for the installation of street lighting or mains drainage.

Overhead cables provide electricity and telephone services. In recent years the electricity cables were replaced by heavier weight versions, which have reduced the incidence of power cuts, and temporary “blips” especially in windy conditions. Whilst this improvement in reliability is welcomed, the result is unsightly.

There is a traditional red telephone and post box on Rectory Road. The telephone box is regularly used despite the fact that many people have mobile phones these days. Any proposals to remove these facilities would be resisted.

Villagers are economically reliant on Sudbury and elsewhere as there is no shop, pub or post office in the parish. The limited (Thursdays only) bus service to Sudbury is a lifeline for some residents and any proposals to cancel it would be received with great dismay.

As part of the consultation: the question asked was “if public transport to Sudbury was available at the weekends, would you use it?” 60% of those who responded said they would so there would appear to be scope for such a service.

The weekly mobile library service is also greatly valued by many residents, and is unfortunately now about to be reduced to fortnightly.

The lack of a village hall is not seen as an issue while the church is available for secular use. In fact there was majority support (2:1) for making a financial contribution to continue such use.

Concerns expressed:

Limited public transport provision (and threat of reduction). Reliance on transport for services of most sorts (to Sudbury in particular). Reduction in services to rural areas, particularly refuse management, re-cycling provision, and library services. Retaining the positive effect of not being on a main road, or through route.

Guidelines

Principal issue: **Any proposal for development must be mindful of infrastructure constraints.**

- Any new development proposal must include proper provision for waste and surface water disposal without overloading the existing natural soakaway drainage system.
- Utility companies should be encouraged to underground their services.
- Provision of a weekend bus service to Sudbury should be considered.
- Existing bus and library services are greatly valued and must be retained or even extended.
- Existing telephone and post boxes must be retained.
- Extra services such as mains gas, drainage and street-lighting are not considered important.
- Any development (appropriate in style etc.) to enhance the Church’s use for community activity would be supported.

12 The Local Landscape & Environment

The Local Landscape & Environment

Approximately 2 miles to the south west of Sudbury, Middleton lies on the Essex side of the valley of the river Stour. Its elevated position just below the valley crest, affords far-reaching views in almost all directions. Mature trees feature on the ridge skyline, principally oaks and hedge elms that also delineate older field boundaries

One of the features of the parish, which is greatly valued by its residents, is the local landscape. Many of the pictures used in this document show selection of local views, all “on the doorstep”.

The village is completely surrounded by an arable landscape, although the valley bottom features some stands of poplar, and willow. A large Holm Oak is a feature in the terrace; as is a Black Poplar in the field behind old school house.

Hedgerows form many boundaries, and significantly enhance the area.

Ponds and ditches form part of an old, yet still functioning, drainage system for roof and road water.



Concerns expressed:

Retaining trees both generally, and older established ones and native species in particular. Some specific examples should be under an “order”. Retaining the “feel” given by the approach through sunken tree lined lanes. Continuing maintenance of ponds and ditches, as visual amenity, wildlife habitats, and for drainage.



Guidelines

Principal issue: **Wildlife, nature and open green space are a defining component of the quality of life here**

- Existing trees are a significant and valued feature of the parish. They should be protected as far as good sense and safety allow. Mature native trees in particular should have the equivalence of listed status.
- Good hedgerow management is required to keep this asset for the future.
- Hedging should be encouraged as property boundaries.
- Existing green / open spaces must be maintained; they connect all parts of the village with the surrounding countryside, an important characteristic.
- Ditches should be well maintained to encourage wildlife and minimise road drainage problems.

Commercial Area

The only area of commercial development within the parish is at Middleton Hall Farm. In addition to arable farming, turkey processing takes place in purpose-built buildings. Also a number of other businesses occupy previously redundant farm buildings. Older units are brick-built. The newer ones are metal framed, with a breezeblock fill. There are various cladding finishes.

The original farmhouse (Middleton Hall) stands within the farmyard, as do two other residential properties. One converted and extended from two Victorian farm cottages, the other is a recent addition.

While villagers appreciate current pressures on agriculturally led businesses and the drive from government, to diversify these businesses, the new end use of farm buildings remains a concern.

Features:

- Fine & notable ornate chimneys (Middleton Hall).
- There is a weighbridge near the entrance to the complex.
- Commercial uses identified are all low tech / trade based businesses.



Concerns expressed:

Access to the complex for often heavy vehicles is from the minor road: "Allens Hill". Traffic hazards on double bends by boundary wall from large articulated vehicles. This access route mixes long, heavy vehicles with local traffic, bicycles, horses and pedestrians. There are no pavements / footpaths on this stretch of road. No / poor signage, occasionally means these vehicles drive into the village. Some new industrial uses of the farm complex have given rise to concern.

Guidelines

Principal issue: **environmental and visual impact, of industries located here.**

- Better signage for the farm and co-located companies should be provided.
- Conversion of farm buildings should be better controlled. New planning applications, or changes of use, should be restricted to Use Class B1 = offices, research and development, light industry and appropriate use in residential areas.
- Uses with higher value, & lower environmental impact are preferred.

14 Specific Structures

Specific Structures
Properties cited by residents for high level of protection.

General Guidelines
Principal issue: **Many buildings are thought to be worth preserving:**
Buildings that should have protection, based on the 2006 survey of residents (not including those already “listed” (see map).

| Property - Structure | No. Of citations by residents | Reason / features for “protection” | Suggested action |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Old School (& House) | 22 | Integral to village character & flint construction | Encourage proposals that retain or improve the character and appearance |
| Prince of Wales Arch | 17 | Historic reference to Church & Lavenham | Encourage proposals that retain or improve the character and appearance |
| Middleton Hall | 4 | Style & Chimney’s in particular | Encourage proposals that retain or improve the character and appearance |
| Wayside | 3 | Integral to village character & flint construction | Encourage proposals that retain or improve the character and appearance |
| Rectory Farm | 3 | Age & Flint Construction | Encourage proposals that retain or improve the character and appearance |



The desire of Middleton residents set in a wider context

Overall this quote seems to summarise parishioner's views of Middleton.

"The rewards of tranquillity" *Campaign to Protect Rural England.*

Tranquillity is important to everyone – for our hearts, minds and bodies. We all need to "get away from it all" every now and then. Tranquil areas provide a means of doing this. Being largely natural, and free from intrusive man-made noise and structures, tranquil areas allow us to escape the noise and stress of cities, towns and suburbs, to be inspired, and to get refreshed. For many, the chance to experience tranquillity is what makes the countryside different from urban areas – making tranquillity critical for the economy of rural areas.

It has become harder to experience tranquillity over the past few decades – and may get harder still. Tranquillity is threatened by the steadily increasing urbanised area, the development of the road network, the growth in road and air traffic and the expansion of energy infrastructure. Road traffic is set to increase by 30% between 2000 & 2015, air traffic is forecast to rise 4-5% a year and the government want to boost annual house building rates by 25% (most in the South & East).

And part of their last paragraph, can be an overarching planning guideline for our parish:

There are only a few substantial tranquil areas left in England.

We want to maintain a contrast between Middleton and the other side of the Stour.

General Guidelines

We must all work together to not just protect the areas that are most tranquil, but to enhance those of "medium" tranquillity, often near built-up areas and greatly valued and needed.



16 Outline of the Process

Outline of the process involved in producing this VDS document.

| Time Line | Stages of the Project | Consultation(s) |
|----------------|--|--|
| June 2005 | Initiation | Village Meeting |
| September 2005 | Group formed & initial funding (PC) | |
| | | Meeting with BDC Planners |
| December 2005 | Research, and initial audit of the village | |
| March 2006 | Re-complied audit into first stage report taking on board comments from residents | Village Meeting |
| June 2006 | Questionnaire developed & circulated | Response from 75% of the voting age population; & 72% below 18's |
| September 2006 | Numerical analysis (Warwick software) | |
| | Analysis of text responses (in group) | |
| December 2006 | De-personalised versions of comments exhibited, along with pictures etc Linked to general community Christmas event | Exhibition 2: covering outcomes from survey, and gain "new ideas". 80 attendees. (although fewer comments) |
| April 2007 | Various drafts of the document made and consulted on within the group | Further consultation with BDC planners, to finalise draft |
| June 2007 | 1st draft for publication prepared | |
| July 2007 | | Feedback from BDC planning |
| | Acceptance process: | |
| August 2007 | Proposed recommendations exhibited for feedback | Village meeting & social event. 40 plus participants. No recommendation was voted out |
| December 2007 | Proposed publication draft | To BDC for official consideration |
| During 2008 | Review and discuss comments of planning officers | In the village and with the District planning office |
| March 2009 | Accepted by officers at Braintree District Council | |
| To be advised | Acceptance as planning guidance | By full Council |
| June 2009 | Printing & distribution to the village and Councillors for the Parish & District | |

Footnote:

This process was initiated from the village meeting in 2005, and consultation continued throughout preparation of the document, Any amendments in the future should ensure a similar level of consultation, representation and preferably be initiated at a full village meeting.

Acknowledgements

The Working Group:

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