

# The Budget for the Long Melford Parish Plan

25th September 2005

## 1 Introduction

This paper is an updated version of notes discussed through three revisions of the budget by members of the Steering Group for the Long Melford Parish Plan. It represents our best estimates of the resources we believe will be required to carry out the investigation and planning process to the appropriate standard.

The budget, of course, depends upon many other decisions about how the project should be carried out. Some of those decisions can only be made now, in time for the funding submission by guessing the outcome of some of the early tasks. (For example, the size and therefore the cost of the residents' questionnaire will depend on the findings of the initial consultations and needs analysis.) The Steering Group have therefore consulted Suffolk ACRE and members of several other parishes who have now completed their plans. This has been very helpful, and we are modestly confident that we shall be able to accomplish the tasks we have set ourselves within the budget we have calculated.

Nevertheless, the budget is a fairly rigid instrument, and we must anticipate that printer's quotations (valid only for 30 days) will change somewhat over the better part of a year. Stationery costs will likewise vary, and there will be at least a few tasks that we have failed to anticipate, even though they appear essential in a few months' time. We have no provision for such contingencies.

## 2 The Village

Long Melford is a rather large village both in population (around 3900) and in geographical extent (6Km East to West and 8Km North to South). It is an interesting example of ancient 'strip development' with a main street that has been over a mile long since the days of the Roman occupation. It now boasts what is believed to be the longest village street in England.

Besides the traditional agricultural base, the parish has been continuously engaged in industry on a significant scale for the past six hundred years. Weaving of woollen cloth, horsehair and coconut matting were the staples until the twentieth century, but a foundry and a gas works were also established in the nineteenth century. Nowadays the commercial component of the village consists of a caravan factory, around eighty retail businesses (shops, restaurants, public houses and hotels) and a good handful of offices in service industries such as insurance broking, software and printing.

Although very close to the town of Sudbury (roughly 4 Km between centres), Long Melford has always been separate, and greatly values its independence. It is a shopping centre in its own right, attracting customers from all over East Anglia to a collection of specialist shops for women's fashions, eastern carpets, house furnishings (both antique and modern) and some outstanding food shops and restaurants.

Although the village has been successful in maintaining a mixed economy up until now, it is not at all certain that that success will continue. Shopping habits are changing rapidly. The Tesco supermarket 3Km away from the village centre is about to double in size. Throughout the last year there have been at least three vacant shops in the main street. Nor is Long Melford immune to social problems. There is a shortage of affordable housing for first-time buyers, and almost no facilities for teenagers. Careful planning and vigorous action will be needed to prevent the village from decaying to a shadow of its present self.

### 3 Project Structure

#### A Communities

Long Melford is what it is as a result of the activities and needs of many interlinked communities; residents, employees, business owners, visitors, young people and so on. A major part of the plan is to find out about what these communities feel about Long Melford and its future. Each distinct community will need to be approached in a suitable way, and the ways are likely to differ from each one to the others.

Common to all communities, though, is the need for a two-stage process. In the first stage we have to identify the concerns and issues that matter to a representative selection of that community. In the second stage we have to get as accurate a measure as we can of the spread of opinion and the strength of feeling on each of the main issues uncovered in the first stage.

#### A1 Residents

This is by far the largest of the well-defined communities we have to deal with. There are 1683 homes in the civil parish that are rated for Council Tax. The details of the process for this community are being worked out in Working Group 3, but the main elements of what we want to do are already fairly clear.

- There will be a questionnaire addressed to each household to accomplish stage 2, (measurement)
- To achieve a good response, and to act as a human communication channel, we aim to recruit up to 100 'Street Representatives' who will each be responsible for delivering and collecting the questionnaires for up to 20 houses.  

Recruiting and training the Street Reps. is a significant task. We have had a good many informal contacts from suitable people over the last few weeks, and plan to do the recruiting systematically when funding has been secured.
- Before the questionnaires can be designed and printed, Stage 1 is required to uncover the concerns and issues that matter. The approach here is likely to involve a 'drop-in' meeting lasting most of one day, with a 'Carousel' structure to collect ideas in different categories (economic/social/environment/etc.).  

The drop-in (Carousel) meeting needs careful preparation, and several people from the Steering Group to invigilate it. Some advice from Suffolk ACRE will also be called for, though local opinion seems to be that it had best be organised and run by the Steering Group members themselves.
- Another useful option in Stage 1 is likely to be an open 'Walkabout' led by a few of the Steering Group. This might be particularly valuable in listing the assets that need to be conserved, many of which we so easily take for granted. No special budgetary requirements here.
- In preparation for the Carousel meeting (and the walkabout, when it is decided on), there will be leaflets distributed with the 'Mercury' newspaper to all houses and business premises, and also at least one article in 'What's On In Melford'.
- There may be a need for a first-stage questionnaire, too, though if so, it will be handled as a leaflet and distributed with the weekly paper.
- The Street Reps will be used as a pilot community for testing the main residents' questionnaire

Following the main questionnaire, the results need to be collected and collated

- We shall need suitable database software. The most likely candidate is 'V A for Windows' from the University of Gloucestershire.

- The data-entry team (15-20 strong) must be recruited, equipped with the software and trained. There's lots of goodwill and ability to work with, but some care will be needed in managing this task.
- The questionnaires must be collected, registered, distributed for data entry, collected again, and a sample of them checked for accuracy.

It is not yet clear whether sub-communities (such as pensioners, residents distant from the village centre or those disabled) will be contacted through a separate questionnaire, or through special questions on the main one. We shall rely on the Street Representatives to help in ensuring coverage in Stage 1, to compensate for any problems these people have in attending a drop-in meeting in the centre of the village. The budget does provide for an additional 'Pensioners' Questionnaire'

Besides the sub-communities outlined above, Long Melford has at least twenty four clubs, societies, playgroups and other community organisations. They will be explicitly invited to the drop-in meetings and walkabout in Stage 1, and we expect them to make a significant contribution to defining the issues and refining the investigations of Stage 2.

### **A2 Businesses**

There are 155 business rated premises in Long Melford. They include shops, restaurants, public houses and hotels in the retail sector, but also a range of offices for service industries (insurance, software, consultancy etc. ) and several industrial units in printing and manufacturing. Most of these businesses have employees who travel to the village to work, and the retail sector depends on customers travelling to the village to purchase goods and services.

The details of the approach to this community are still to be worked out, but some features are already evident.

- A questionnaire will be used to address most of the retail businesses for stage 2. (It is likely to be quite different from the questionnaire for residents, of course.) There is a choice to be made over whether issues of concern to owners and managers should be separated from those of concern to employees, and put in a separate document (probably 'Yes'). Since the numbers are modest, it only makes a small difference to the budget.
- The first stage of the study, identifying the concerns and issues, will be handled at a general meeting of the Long Melford Business Association, which has a good representation of the owners and managers of the retail segment of the village. (We already have an invitation to one of the meetings.)
- Some other owners and managers (e.g. of the office and industrial sectors) will be interviewed individually for the first stage.
- Leaflets distributed at the workplace may be the best way of consulting the employees in Stage 1 about concerns and issues. Collecting boxes or a site representative will be needed to gather the responses.
- At both stages of the study there is the option to use computer-based communications for at least a proportion of the business and employee community. The most likely scheme is to distribute questionnaires as a .pdf *form* on CDs. These can be filled in on any PC and the results collated automatically afterwards.

### **A3 Landowners and Farmers**

This small but important community must be expected to have a distinct set of concerns that differs considerably from those of the central part of the village. Individual interviews appear to be the only sensible way to gather this information. The first of these, with the largest landowner is currently being arranged.

#### **A4 Young People**

Our project is fortunate in that two members of the Steering Group are former school teachers recently retired. The current intention is to use contacts with schools to pick up the concerns and issues that matter to that upcoming generation.

- The first stage will involve meetings in schools (one primary, two middle schools and one upper) to explain the concept of the village plan and show why it matters to young people as well as old.
- Distilling out the issues that matter to this community will be done using volunteers from among the young people themselves. They will effectively design the 'Second Stage Questionnaire'.
- It is very probable that the Young People's Questionnaire will be mechanised, either using .pdf forms on CD, or with touch-screen technology such as 'Infonnaire'.

#### **A5 Surrounding Parishes**

As a relatively well-equipped village, Long Melford provides services to residents in as many as eight surrounding parishes; Acton, Alpheton, Chilton, Glemsford, Shimpling, Stanstead and (in Essex) Borley and Foxearth/Liston. The two other parishes (Lavenham and Sudbury) that adjoin Long Melford can generally look after themselves!

Residents from these parishes come to Melford for services from

- The Post Office
- The Pharmacy
- The Doctors' Surgery
- The Dentist
- Newsagents
- Hairdressers
- Food shops (e.g. two butchers and the Co-op Foodstore)
- Several restaurants

What is more, the clientele from this wider community is an essential part of the 'Customer Base' of all those businesses, and a significant contributor to the rest of the retail sector in Long Melford.

This wider community is hard to reach, and it will not be practical to use questionnaires or carousel meetings to contact them. Instead we expect to write to the parish councils, and ask for their help in identifying concerns and gauging the depth of feeling about the issues affecting Long Melford. This is likely to involve a number of face-to-face meetings with parish councillors and others from those adjacent parishes.

#### **A6 Visitors and Tourists**

This 'community', although vital to the village is extremely diffuse and difficult to contact. Nevertheless, it is to be expected that some, at least, of the issues affecting the other communities will also matter to regular visitors and to once-in-a-lifetime tourists.

In practical terms, only a 'Second stage' inquiry can be followed here, in which the issues are pre-defined and only an opinion on them is sought from the visitor. The mechanism is likely to be a one-page questionnaire made available at spots such as the Church, the various public houses, hotels and B&B establishments round about. (A collecting box will be needed at each one.)

Since these visitors' questionnaires will only be picked up by those potentially interested in filling them in, we hope to get a fair proportion of them back. Exact numbers do not matter, as we shall print 2000 copies, and enter the data from as many as are returned (a relatively streamlined job for a 1-page questionnaire).

Another recent suggestion from the Steering Group is to use a web-based questionnaire in connection with the project's own web site. There are obvious problems over the credentials

of those responding and possibly with multiple voting too, but it would give access to a very different interest group from paper questionnaires. This idea will be explored further in conjunction with one of the larger web-site design offices in the village.

### **B Council Departments and Other Agencies**

There are a good handful of departments at both the District and County Council level whose plans and policies we wish to influence. They include, among others :

Babergh D C; Planning Department and others

Suffolk C C; Highways Department

Suffolk C C; Education Department

South West Suffolk Primary Care Trust

West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership

Each one has plans of their own, and a planning cycle as part of the process keeping the plans up to date. We need to examine the current plans from each of these departments insofar as they affect Long Melford. We also need to understand their planning cycles, processes and constraints. Only then can we hope to produce a report for Long Melford that will be acceptable to those whose plans we must influence.

Personal contacts are likely to be the best and only way to proceed. Luckily we have some few existing contacts to build upon. The budget cost is of volunteer labour in time and car mileage contributed in kind for the number of meetings required.

### **C Functioning of the Steering Group**

The Steering Group itself, while driving the plan along, will be consuming resources which have to be recognised in the budget.

The two main items are personal time committed to the plan, and space occupied for meetings. The time is volunteered, and through the generosity of the Trustees, we are allowed to use the Board Room in the Holy Trinity Hospital without charge.

There is a third item in the form of stationery and other consumables used in the administration of the Steering Group itself, and in document design and trialling for questionnaires, reports, budgets etc.

In addition, at least three members of the Steering Group will attend workshops at Suffolk ACRE, and those have to be paid for.

### **D Final Report and Action Plan**

When all the questions have been answered, and the results analysed, there will be a lot of careful work to be done in drawing conclusions and preparing the final report. The current aim is to make that document fully worthy of the scale of the study by using professional advice in its final design and typography. For budget purposes we have assumed a 32-page A4 document in full colour. Since the essential numbers are small, the quotation from a specialised digital printer looks attractive. The price of roughly £2.70 per copy is low enough that we may be able to sell a substantial number more (perhaps at £3 per copy to cover costs and administration) to residents and members of the other village communities. We also anticipate making the report available as a PDF document on CD.

A summary of the report will also be produced (budgeted as A5, 12 pages, full colour) and distributed free to all residents and businesses in the village. It is the unanimous opinion of the Steering Group that this level of feedback to the Long Melford communities needs to be guaranteed from the beginning as part of the bargain for their enthusiastic participation. We hope to obtain sponsorship for half the cost of designing this summary as a contribution in kind.

The first edition of the Action Plan will be a much smaller document, with no special need for glamour. It will be printed in black and white.

### **E Publicity and Communications**

Long Melford has a village web site; <<http://www.longmelford.co.uk>>. As a result, it has already been possible to set up a dedicated web site for the village plan project, with its own domain

name; <<http://www.melforward.org.uk>>. This is intended mainly as a way of informing the web-literate segment of the village what is going on with the plan. It may also be possible, however, to use it to collect opinions from visitors and others from outside the village boundary who are nevertheless concerned about Long Melford's future. This option has not yet been fully explored. To work, it will depend on sponsorship from one or other of the web-site design companies with offices in the village.

The main channel of routine communication between the Steering Group and the rest of the village (e.g. about dates and events) will be leaflets (distributed with the weekly paper to all households and businesses) and posters on noticeboards and in windows in the main street. We also expect to use the team of Street Representatives as a flexible two-way 'Chat' channel to keep in touch with opinion and suggestions where leaflets and posters may not always reach.

#### **4 Notes on the Budget Spreadsheet**

The arrangement is in two sections, dealing respectively with expenses (the money we need to spend) and funding (where we get it from).

The expenses are arranged in much the same order as in the notes above, though within each 'community' the lines are arranged chronologically, so that, for example, the residents' carousel meeting comes higher up than printing the questionnaires.

We have taken seriously the injunction to obtain at least two quotations on paper for any items over £100. Where two or more quotations are attached, there is an asterisk (\*) in column 3. For items slightly less than £100, we have usually attached a single quotation, marked with a plus sign (+) in the same column.

Stationery items are based on catalogues of reputable office suppliers.

The funding calculations follow the rules set out by DEFRA as interpreted by Suffolk ACRE. The most important rules are :

- Hard cash spent on buying goods and services is kept distinct from contributions in kind (separate columns on the spreadsheet).
- The 'Total Cost' of the project is calculated to be 100% of the 'Cash' component plus some fraction of the 'In Kind' component, to make not more than 125% of the cash amount altogether.
- The Parish Council must make a contribution of at least 5% of this 'Total Cost' (Long Melford PC are actually contributing nearly 10%.)
- Provided that the true total of the 'In Kind' component is big enough, 20% of the 'Total Cost' is met from that source. (In our case the 'In Kind' amount is enormously bigger than needed to meet this criterion.)
- Additional contributions from the Suffolk CC Location Budget (£100 agreed), the Business Association (£100 now agreed) and Fund Raising Events (two planned, and £500 hoped for in total) are then subtracted from the remainder.
- We hope for a contribution from Babergh DC (the distribution is also controlled by Suffolk ACRE), but have no certain information about its availability.
- The residual amount is submitted as a grant request to DEFRA through Suffolk ACRE. On the present figures that is £2839, representing 56.2% of the nominal 'Total Cost' of £5048.

If this amount is granted, the DEFRA/Babergh contribution will then be approximately 73p per head of the village population.

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