



Architect's draft entrance elevation of proposed Village Hall

There is a strongly expressed desire to cater for the social needs of people of all ages, and especially the young. The children's playing field at First Meadow has recently benefited from new play equipment provided by the Parish Council and Babergh.

#### **Aims and Objectives:**

¶ It is vital that existing social activities and facilities should be fostered by community participation, co-operation and support.

¶ The success and maintenance of the proposed Village Hall and Sports Pavilion similarly depend on the active participation of the community.

#### HOUSING



Estate housing at The Glebe

The village housing stock is mainly medium to large properties. Of these 89 have been built in the last ten years – 77 on estate developments. In the same period fewer than 10 were built to meet village needs and just 6 units of 'affordable' housing have been provided for young local families. In recent years the rentable stock has been depleted by the Right to Buy policy, and by the increasing number of properties bought as second homes and as holiday lets.

The combination of these factors has virtually precluded younger people from staying in the village or moving to it – 23 moved out in 1999 alone. Three-quarters gave lack of affordable housing, whether to rent or buy, as their first reason.

that seek to imitate existing building forms in individual estate houses do not produce an environment of equal quality to that of the historic core of the village. Variations in building form and size, the formation of attractive terraces and housing groups and the spaces they define need careful consideration, informed design and sensitive execution.

#### STREET SIGNS AND FURNITURE

It is important to keep street furniture and signs discreet and in character with the architecture of the village, in accord with the guidelines published by Babergh District Council and Lavenham Merchants Guild. Road signs and markings also need careful consideration so that they do not detract from the visual quality of the scene. Existing street lighting is adequate but thought should be given to the design of replacement. Telegraph and electricity poles in many of the streets are intrusive and their removal should be given priority.



Prentice Street

#### **Aims and Objectives:**

¶ Babergh District Council must ensure that alterations to existing buildings are undertaken sensitively with due regard to both the character and location of the property. Local and natural materials are preferred.

¶ Likewise, the District Council must insist that future housing developments take advantage of the best of what is new rather than just imitating

#### EMPLOYMENT

Lavenham, with a population of some 1800 has a thriving local economy comprising some 100 businesses ranging from sole traders to nationally recognized hotels and companies. The village is well served with shops and services catering for local needs and providing facilities for a large catchment area. The majority of overall trade is derived from the local area and county.

There are approximately 330 full time and 160 part-time jobs, the largest contingent being in hotels, public houses and restaurants. Some 30% of all employment is provided by three companies and 50% by six companies. Tourism generates about a half of all trade and supports hotels, B/Bs, holiday lets, galleries, antique shops and the like. The District Council recognizes Lavenham as part of a strong local tourism industry. In addition, although local businesses consider that the historic levels of tourism have been constant, increasing competition from elsewhere makes it necessary to promote the village.



The Swan Hotel and tourist shops

It is essential that the existing wide range of businesses in Lavenham be maintained so that the level of employment and self-sufficiency of the community can be sustained.

#### **Aims and Objectives:**

¶ To recognize that tourism, light industrial and local retailing businesses are vital to the local economy.

¶ To provide opportunities for the development of the local economy, by which employment can be sustained and new jobs created.

¶ To ask the Lavenham Merchants Guild and others to produce a marketing strategy for Lavenham.

¶ To ensure that any future commercial development in and around the village is carefully planned and designed and compatible with this Statement.

bricks at this time; many of the rows of Victorian cottages were built with these bricks, as was the school. Since each building changed in different periods and to a varying extent, Lavenham has inherited a collection of buildings, none of which are alike, and few are exactly as they were built. Any one structure may be of interest on its own, but it is the way in which it sits in relation with its neighbours which gives the village its particular character and quality. The curving street fronts and stepped roof lines produce a sense of enclosure which is domestic in scale and harmonious to the eye.

#### THE PRESENT

There has been a different sort of change in Lavenham over the last four decades. Many of the older properties were in need of renovation to maintain them in a habitable condition. For the first time since the 16th century the village entered a period of expansion, with local authority housing being built to answer the need for adequate accommodation for young families. At the same time a renaissance occurred of interest in and care for the older buildings. These buildings have thus enjoyed a new lease of life.

Dangers which threaten all existing buildings include overstated restoration, uninformed alteration or extension, inserting windows of unsuitable style and materials, installing roof lights in attic conversions, replacing front doors and, occasionally, using inappropriately coloured paints.

The local authority housing, particularly in Spring Street, demonstrates clearly that it is possible to construct new housing which sits comfortably in the landscape and reflects well the formula for the street scene and building form which is the essential character of Lavenham, without trying to imitate the earlier houses.



Spring Street

The effect is a very satisfactory extension to the village in the manner in which it has traditionally grown – responding to

the growing needs of the population in a building form that is relevant to current construction and design techniques. Later housing developments executed by the private sector have for the most part been designed and built to service a speculative need and have responded to an entirely different market.



Lower Road, 1990's

#### THE FUTURE

The historic buildings of Lavenham will undoubtedly continue to adapt to changing requirements. This change can take place in a manner which does not compromise the integrity of the buildings and preserves, or enhances the immediate environment.



Guildhall, 16th c; Information office c.1985; 16th c house renovated c.1990

It is more possible than ever to improve the amenities of old buildings, notably by thermal and sound insulation, timber treatment and damp proofing, using modern materials that have been devised to limit any invasion of the historic fabric. Alterations to timber frames, doors and windows, the rendering or painting of brick facades, inappropriate exposing of timber frames, are examples of alterations carried out in the past that should be avoided.

In any new development, whether infilling of vacant plots or abutting the village envelope, encouragement should be given to building with the latest techniques and materials of the time. This is Lavenham's true tradition. Designs

The Village Survey revealed wide concern over this perceived discrimination against young and local people. Opinion also appears almost unanimous that smaller, more affordable homes should be built in preference to larger dwellings; the Parish Council is currently exploring possibilities in discussion with the Rural Housing Trust. However, numbers will in any case be restricted by site availability and the local sewerage capacity.

#### **Aims and Objectives:**

¶ \*Lavenham Parish and Babergh District Councils are encouraged to produce, when resources allow, and in consultation with the residents of Lavenham, a long-term strategic plan for the future development of the village. The wealth of evidence, information and sentiment contained in the Village Survey, which has been made available to these Councils, gives a good starting point for such an exercise. This information should also prove a useful tool when considering planning matters of both a general and specific nature.

¶ At both the Outline and Detailed Planning Stages, residents, builders and developers must work together with the Parish and District Councils. Any new dwelling or extension must not only be a successful design within its own plot, but also in relationship with neighbouring properties and with the prevailing character and layout of that part of the village.

¶ The current proposals by Babergh District Council to meet the local and particular needs of its constituents, and the creation of sustainable residential environments should be applauded. For Lavenham these factors are particularly relevant and must be implemented.

¶ There is a clearly identified need for 2 and 3 bedroom housing provision for young families.



Cottages, Church Street

existing building forms. They should continue to consult as early as possible in the planning cycle with the Parish Council, especially where exceptions to policy are envisaged.

¶ Babergh District Council's *Design Guidance Note for New Housing in the Babergh District* and the Suffolk Preservation Society's *Patterns for Suffolk Buildings* indicate and illustrate styles, features and practices which are relevant to Lavenham. Both publications provide an objective and useful basis for establishing an agreed understanding of best practice which can be referred to in any future discussion of planning applications for Lavenham.

¶ Alterations to individual houses in terraces should be avoided when these lead to the fragmentation of the terrace facades.

¶ \*Babergh District Council is encouraged to pursue its objective of re-surveying the listed buildings in Lavenham.

¶ The Parish Council and other interested parties are encouraged to participate in the proposed District Council initiative to produce a Guidance Note on the criteria against which new development would be considered.

¶ Street furniture and signs should be kept discreet and in character with existing village architecture in line with the Suffolk Conservation Manual.

¶ \*Babergh District Council has identified the need to remove telegraph and electricity poles and the 'undergrounding' of cables. The District Council must give this a high priority and in liaison with the Parish Council agree an order of priority of the streets concerned.



Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Lavenham

is expanding its services to include banking facilities. There is an active Merchants Guild representing businesses in the village. The Medical Centre provides facilities at GP level and there is a Dental Practice.



The handsome Primary School, built in the village centre 100 years ago and still in excellent order, currently has 41 pupils, with some coming from outside the village. There is room for an expansion in numbers to ensure that the school continues to provide a shared experience for our young people. Nursery groups cater for under 5s, but for Middle and Upper Schools the children must travel away from the village.

Community and recreational activities have several focuses. The Guildhall (given to the National Trust in 1951 to be held for the village in perpetuity) houses a branch of the County libraries, a museum and tea rooms, and is available for meetings of the Parish Council, societies and other gatherings. The Parish Church and Salvation Army together with the Roman Catholic community provide the framework and impetus for much communal activity. Groups and societies include: Scouts, British Legion, Bird Club, Rambling Club, Cambridge Extra Mural Centre, Women's Institute, Gardening Club, Music Society, Theatre Club, Natural History Club, Tennis, Cricket and Football Clubs and many others. The Lavenham Sinfonia's concerts, held in the church, attract appreciative audiences from a wide area. The Community Council is the umbrella group for sport and recreational activities and organizes three popular annual events: the August Bank Holiday Carnival, the Christmas Street Fair and Hidden Gardens, in June.

The village is however short on public premises for its activities. The Church Rooms are acknowledged to be inadequate; the Guildhall's largest room holds only 65 people; the School is not always available or suitable. The Community Council has therefore developed plans for a new Sports Pavilion on the Recreation Ground (currently under construction with the participation of much voluntary labour and skills) and with the Parochial Church Council has put forward ambitious proposals for a new Village Hall on a central site. These will be the first new public buildings in Lavenham for many years.

## A LITTLE HISTORY

Lavenham's basic street pattern is a good example of early town planning and was determined by the requirements of the woollen-cloth industry, which achieved unparalleled prosperity in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. The de Vere family, Earls of Oxford and Lords of the Manor since the Conquest, shared in the creation of wealth by the commercial enterprise of such as Thomas Spring – the wealthiest commoner outside London. The imposing church of St Peter and St Paul, which stands on the site of an earlier more modest church, was built in grand demonstration of their piety and of the wealth of a community ranked in 1524 as the fourteenth richest in the Country.



Shilling Grange. Built 15th c., refaced 18thc., derelict early 20thc., restored 1930-

In the same period prosperous cloth merchants and producers proclaimed their standing in building oak-rich timber-framed houses and the corporate buildings associated with the four Religious Guilds which provided social benefit to their members. The Hall of the Guild of Corpus Christi, which has long outlived its original purpose, still dominates the Market Place.

But such prosperity contained the seeds of its own destruction. In barely a generation Lavenham's wealth had been destroyed by competition, penal taxation and by the migration of its merchant entrepreneurs to the condition of landed gentry. By the 1530s new building had practically ceased; some of the better houses were dismantled and carried off elsewhere; some were divided into tenements while others entered into a long process of decay.

Such local wealth as survived – or was introduced in the mid-18th century – was fashionably employed in grafting brick or stucco façades, classical doorways and sash windows onto timber-framed houses.

## IN CONCLUSION

Lavenham runs the real risk of following other famous villages in many parts of the country where shops no longer cater for local residents, and the fabric of society is eroded until the village is turned into another beautifully preserved museum. Indeed, Lavenham Parish Council believes that this process has already started with the closure of some light industry and the bank.

As work on the Village Design Statement proceeded, it became apparent that a number of initiatives had come from Central Government in this whole area of grass roots participation. These led to the Vital Villages Initiative and a Green Paper on proposals to introduce fundamental changes to the planning process. This process of change is unstoppable and its effects as yet unclear. What is clear is that the community must therefore be alert to ensure that urgent and effective steps are taken both to preserve the integrity of the village and its environs and to make housing and related amenities available for all the people of Lavenham.

It is hoped this Statement will play its part in meeting our shared goal of living in a varied and sustainable community.

Lavenham Village Design Statement Association  
July 2002



Lavenham landscape

## SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

### SETTLEMENT

The population of Lavenham is about 1800, living in some 880 households. About 45% have lived here for 16 or more years, but only one-sixth of the population is Lavenham born and bred. At least 45% have moved in during the last 15 years. Women outnumber men by a ratio considerably higher than the national average, particularly in the 65+ age bracket. More than 60% of the population is older than 45, and of these more than half are over 65. There are about ten times as many people over 60 as there are children under 10. People under 40 comprise less than a quarter of the population.

More than one-third of Lavenham residents are retired. About 45% are in work or self-employed, 80% of these locally; only about 5% work in London. Some 9% are in training or full-time education. Unemployment is gratifyingly low at 2%.



The High Street

The life of the village depends on many services and activities, including shops, which provide for day-to-day needs. We are lucky still to have a good variety though many have closed over the years and supermarkets in Sudbury and Bury St Edmunds pose a continuing threat to our shops. There is still the Post Office, which

## VILLAGE ACCESS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Lavenham is a compact village, with relatively easy access to the historic and commercial centre from all parts of the parish. Approach roads are mostly rural in character, though the suburban style of some recent housing situated on the outskirts will take time to mellow and mature.

Almost all the traffic flow through the village passes along the High Street and Church Street. This includes vehicles of all sizes travelling to and from the junction of the B1071 with the A134 Bury - Melford road. The A1141 to Hadleigh and Ipswich passes along the narrow Water Street which, with its restricted pavements and mediaeval houses, is quite unsuitable as a main traffic artery. The Lower Road, where not built up, is narrow and lacks a footpath yet is a principal route for children walking to the First Meadow playing field. Likewise, crossing the A1141 opposite First Meadow is dangerous to pedestrians and especially to children. The 30 mph limit in this whole area is too often flouted.

The builders of Lavenham from the 15th to the 20th century could not foresee the way that car ownership would transform the use of the streets: parking is an issue constantly under discussion. Even in the comparatively modern Meadow Close, provision for on and off street parking is inadequate.

The Church Street car park was designed to cater for tourist coaches, but *ad-hoc* drop-off points within the village centre can be a nuisance to other drivers, a danger to pedestrians and a cause of congestion.

A recent (2001) petition by residents to Babergh District Council called for parking to continue to be free of charge in Lavenham.

Bus services include an hourly service to Sudbury and Colchester in one direction and Bury in the other (calling outside the Hospital). There is no service from Sudbury after 17.03 and on Sundays there are almost no buses at all except, oddly, to Ely and to Ipswich – neither of which are served on weekdays.

An excellent hourly train service shuttles between Sudbury and Marks Tey for the London line from 06.14; the last connecting train from London leaves Liverpool Street at 20.47. A Sunday service operates in the summer. There are less frequent rail services from Bury to Ipswich and to Ely, Cambridge and Peterborough, with connections to Birmingham and the North.

Any reduction in these public transport services would be disastrous to the large number of non-car users. A very useful improvement would be the integration of bus and train timetables: at present they miss each other in Sudbury by a few minutes in both directions.

Travel without a car to the Council Offices in Hadleigh and Ipswich is arduous and time-consuming. Many respondents to the Village Survey supported the idea of a locally provided Community bus service.

### Aims and Objectives:

¶ Ensure that any road developments are in keeping with the village's rural character both in scale and design.

¶ Encourage the Suffolk Highways Authority and Police to consider introducing traffic restrictions on certain streets and ensuring speed limits are enforced.

¶ \*Babergh District Council should widen the remit of The Lavenham Car Parking and Traffic Management Working Party to include traffic movement and the needs of pedestrians and cyclists.

¶ \*It is essential that car parking in Lavenham remains free.

¶ The Lavenham Merchants Guild should agree drop-off points with tourist coach operators.

¶ The proposed community bus providing a feeder service to direct bus routes and/or 'Dial a ride' operation will meet many perceived needs and should be supported within the community.

¶ The Highways Authority is urged to act urgently to provide a pedestrian crossing at First Meadow.



'The Willows'. Georgian elegance over Tudor structure

Only after some 300 years did any significant new building begin, when Victorian cottages, small houses and almshouses were built to replace vanished or no longer habitable timber dwellings. These usually followed the medieval street patterns. They met the housing needs of people working in Lavenham's revived industry-based economy. With the coming of the railway, coconut matting manufacture, horsehair weaving, ropemaking, milling and sugar beet processing flourished and sustained a busy community of shops, pubs, services, schools and tradespeople.



Cottages, High Street

None of these industries survive. The prosperity was fragile and did not, despite the efforts of a few local and incoming individuals, embrace much active concern with the historic fabric of the village. In the first half of the 20th century many of the old buildings suffered further severe dereliction, a process only halted after the Second World War when Lavenham began to be seen by outsiders as a desirable place to live and as an attractive tourist destination. But as properties were renovated and new money brought into the village, house prices and rents rose beyond the means of many of the local people – especially the young. In recent years this condition has worsened.

**Today we need urgently to think hard and act decisively if our children and those who live here in the future are to inherit a vibrant, balanced and sustainable village community. It is hoped that this Statement will play its part in this process.**



Lavenham streetscape

## APPENDIX of AIMS and OBJECTIVES

### SETTLEMENT

- 1 It is vital that existing social activities and facilities should be fostered by community participation, co-operation and support.
- 2 The success and maintenance of the proposed Village Hall and Sports Pavilion similarly depend on the active participation of the community.

### HOUSING

- 1 \* Lavenham Parish and Babergh District Council are encouraged to produce, when resources allow, and in consultation with the residents of Lavenham, a long-term strategic plan for the future development of the village. The wealth of evidence, information and sentiment contained in the Village Survey, which has been made available to these Councils, gives a good starting point for such an exercise. This information should also prove a useful tool when considering planning matters of both a general and specific nature.
- 2 At both the Outline and Detailed Planning stages, residents, builders and developers must work together with the Parish and District Councils. Any new dwelling or extension must not only be a successful design within its own plot, but also in relationship with neighbouring properties and with the prevailing character and layout of that part of the village.
- 3 The current proposals by Babergh District Council to meet the local and particular needs of its residents, and the creation of sustainable residential environments should be applauded. For Lavenham these factors are particularly relevant and must be implemented.
- 4 There is an expressed need for 2 and 3 bedroom housing provision for young families.

### EMPLOYMENT

- 1 To recognize that tourism, light industrial and local retailing businesses are vital to the local economy.
- 2 To provide opportunities for the development of the local economy, by which employment can be sustained and new jobs created.
- 3 To ask The Lavenham Merchants Guild and others to produce a marketing strategy for Lavenham.
- 4 To see that any future commercial development in and around the village is carefully planned and designed, and compatible with this Statement.

### SHOPPING AND AMENITIES

- 1 To maintain the existing wide range of shops and amenities.

### COUNTRYSIDE

- 1 The permanent grasslands adjacent to the village should be preserved as an essential element of the views into and out of the village.
- 2 Existing hedges and woodland are also important to the views and every effort must be made to retain and improve their contribution to the landscape.
- 3 \*The District Council should be urged to join together the two Special Landscape Areas.
- 4 Historic features even when not officially classified, ought to be recorded and conserved.

## INTRODUCTION

*This Village Design Statement is the record, based on their own words, of how at the beginning of the new millennium the people of Lavenham view the environment in which they live and how they see themselves as a community. It gives expression to their concerns, hopes and perceived needs and sets out a vision for the future which, while preserving the fabric and values of a unique heritage, will ensure that Lavenham remains a vital and varied society in which people of all ages and conditions can live and enjoy fulfilled lives.*

In July 1998 a well attended and fully representative meeting of Lavenham residents overwhelmingly endorsed a proposal to prepare a Village Design Statement. A comprehensive questionnaire (the Village Survey) 'How do we live in Lavenham?' was circulated to every household: no less than 546 households, representing some 62% of residents, responded. The evidence was clear that people from all parts of the community share concern for the well-being of the village and welcomed the opportunity to express their views. Further community involvement was encouraged by workshops, exhibitions and public meetings, and by again delivering to every house in the village a synopsis of the facts, figures and views gathered from the questionnaire. Lavenham Merchants' Guild carried out a related survey of local businesses.

The present document presents a summary of what has been learned from the detailed and in-depth study undertaken over three years. It has been prepared with the approval of Lavenham Parish Council and, with the exception of those paragraphs of Aims and Objectives marked with an asterisk, has been adopted as formal Supplementary Planning Guidance by Babergh District Council. **This Village Design Statement is thus directly relevant to all planning applications, whether by individuals or by industrial and housing developers.** While the District Council has indicated that the document does not bind the Council other than in the determination of planning applications, the points not adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance are acknowledged by the Council.

More generally, but no less importantly, it embodies policies which are outlined in the Babergh Local Plan which will:

- ¶ retain and strengthen the sense of shared identity within the village;
- ¶ restrict expansion of the village beyond the present village envelope and maintain the population at about the present level;
- ¶ help correct the present age imbalance by providing more and better facilities for younger people and creating conditions favourable to young families;
- ¶ require new housing to include social and local needs dwellings and encourage economical letting of smaller properties.