**Oakley Neighbourhood Development Plan Businesses Study – 2016**

**Background & method**

Where its residents work and the types of employment available within it are two key characteristics of a village. These factors are core to its economic sustainability and are a major driver of its infrastructure requirements, both of which must be reflected in the Neighbourhood Development Plan. The nature of modern business is dynamic so a simple study was undertaken to assess the current state of employers based in the village.

A similar review was undertaken several years ago to prepare the local business directory for the Parish Council and this served as the starting point for the current study. It generated an initial list of businesses which was then updated based on business directories, both paper and web-based, with all entries cross-checked where practical to confirm the business was still operating in the village. The list is not exhaustive and it is possible that some directory entries are out of date. There are also several self-employed traders in the village, for example providing gardening and cleaning services, who do not appear in business directories and are therefore not included in the list. However, the list is sufficient to give a reasonable indication of the range and scope of businesses and employers in the village.

**Overview**

Oakley was a farming village for centuries but this changed significantly with the development of the large residential areas which now occupy a large part of the village. Whilst farming, especially arable, is still very important to the nature of the parish, Oakley has evolved to become the home of a diverse range of businesses which provide employment for a significant proportion, 22%, of its population.

Local businesses, especially the shop and post office, are used by the majority of residents at least once a week and 36% of residents use them every day. They form a key element of the village community. Having a range of day-to-day services and facilities accessible within the parish makes it a stronger, more sustainable community without losing its rural character.

The largest single employer in the parish is Lincroft School which also serves several surrounding parishes. Along with Oakley Lower School it provides a prime focus for the community but also is the source of significant traffic issues.

The parish is home to an unusual range of commercial operations with over 120 businesses with bases in it which is a very large number for a village with just over 1000 homes. It has three small light industrial parks in Highfield Parc, Station Road and Willow Vale In addition, there are more than a hundred micro businesses (those with less than 10 employees) ranging from unskilled local services to highly skilled professional operations working with international clients.

The industrial parks mainly house larger businesses which serve a broad area. They require access for large goods vehicles which can create issues because of the narrow roads in the village. This is a particular problem for the Station Road and Willow Vale sites which are on busy residential roads. The Willow Vale site is also next to an environmentally sensitive area which requires special protection.

The large majority of micro businesses either provide their services locally or, when necessary, travel to see contacts. Their impact on the local traffic volume is relatively small. However, good transport links to Bedford, Milton Keynes, London and major airports are a major factor in enabling small rural-based businesses to interact with customers and suppliers.

Micro businesses both provide and feed off support services. Not only do they bring income and provide employment but also often make use of local services where practical, thereby providing an additional boost to the village economy. They are a key element of a thriving rural community without adding to traffic congestion.

As many of the businesses in the parish are enabled by telecommunications, it places particular demands on the support infrastructure. The recent provision of high speed broadband has been a significant step forward. Improved mobile phone coverage, in terms of both capacity and resilience, is important for businesses to maintain close contact with customers and suppliers.

Businesses with very few employees also require local support in terms of social contact, especially to discuss shared problems and issues. The availability of a pub, social club, coffee shop and other meeting places is important in maintaining the welfare of home workers. However, micro businesses are often vulnerable and the provision of local business support needs to be considered.

**Policy drivers**

The breadth and volume of employers in the parish change its nature and form its commercial heart. The relatively large number of people employed in the village are often significant users of other local businesses thereby encouraging its economic sustainability. It is a highly entrepreneurial community which needs to be supported by a very strong telecommunications infrastructure and, potentially, business support. However, it is important to control the scale of organisations in the village in order to maintain the right balance of the community and to ensure their growth does not impinge on the defining characteristics of the parish.

The limited road infrastructure in the village is an important characteristic in defining the nature of the village which in turn imposes constraints on the size of employment organisations. The main constraint on new organisations with employees and the expansion of current organisations within the parish is their potential impact on traffic congestion and parking. For that reason, no new organisations or expansions to existing organisations requiring additional parking should be permitted if they require access in or through the current Settlement Policy Area or are likely to increase the volume of traffic within it.

Particular care needs to be taken with the industrial parks which are on residential roads. The road infrastructure is barely adequate to support an increase in the number of dwellings and so the commercial sites should not be allowed to expand. Any larger businesses must be sited close to the junctions with the A6 to minimise their impact on traffic in the heart of the village.

Because the parish includes environmentally sensitive areas, any commercial or industrial operations near these must be carefully controlled to minimise their impact on the environment.

Tony Kellett

November 2016

**Table 1 – Businesses based in Oakley**

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| **Business trading name** |  |
| 1 TO 1 FITNESS | John Kaye |
| A&S Controls | Katz Klawz |
| Acoustic Guitar Lessons | KB Finishing |
| Adam Aylott Electrical Contractors | La Jolie Ronde Languages for Children |
| Addison Ousebank | La Maison |
| Aerowalkers | Lee Holden Photography |
| Aetna  | Lincroft Middle School |
| AJ Saunders & Son - College Farm | Literacy and Numeracy Tutor |
| AKS Tuning | M Gibbons Financial Services |
| Allen Steam Turbines | MBH Facilities |
| Almond Garage Doors | MCm Decorators |
| Amanzi Information Services | Melissa Willars - energy performance certificates |
| Andy Peckham Electrical | Metro Signs |
| Anmat Motor Services Engineering | Morgan Scaffolding |
| Architectural Design Building Surveying | Mr Shah Opticians |
| Ashley Builders Ltd | MV Smyth Plumbing & Heating |
| Assured Quality Paving | Nightingale Fire Protection |
| Aura Belle Sweet Cart | NLW Plumbing & Heating Engineer |
| B A Shearn podiatrist | OakenShield Kitchens & Bathrooms Ltd |
| Baker Business Energy Consultant | Oakham Decorators |
| Barton Petroleum | Oakley Angels |
| Bays Media | Oakley Building Services |
| Bedford Arms Public House | Oakley Dog Walking & Pet Sitting Services |
| Bedford Window Cleaning | Oakley Drylining - plastering & screeding |
| Bedfordia Farms | Oakley IT |
| Beds County Windows | Oakley Lower School |
| Blue Bear systems Research | Oakley Post Office |
| Bodycast Studio | Oakley School of Motoring |
| Bookkeeping and Payroll Services | Oakley Upholstery and Interiors |
| Carpet Line of Bedford | Old Road Securities |
| Centre Stage Academy of Dance | Optimis consulting |
| Credit Risk Insurance Services | P M G Carpentry |
| Cuesim - flight simulation equipment | Pat Driver Training |
| Custom Tek | Power Academy of Dance |
| D Hearn Plumbing & Heating | Pro Heat |
| Deborah Cook Accounting Services | Probuild Paving Contractors |
| Diamond Security | Qualitative Training Services |
| Distinction - driving school | Remarkable Marquees |
| DJR Tennis | Rotaworth |
| Dog Walking and Pet Day Care Services | Salon at 84 (The) |
| DSA Painters & Decorators | SCP Electrical Services |
| EMC Design | Select Floors & Carpet Cleaning |
| Oakley Fremantle Trust (The) | Shrewd PR |
| Gillian Trustam - psychotherapy | Sian Edwards Productions |
| GJW Group - industrial cleaning | Slimming World |
| Graham Lawrence Plastering | Steven Drakulic plastering |
| Hallmark Cars | Stitchin Time |
| Hazel Kaye | Totus Cleaning Services |
| Helen Jayne - entertainment pianist  | Tudor Rose Coffee Shop |
| Helen Sheath Piano Teacher | Tudor Rose Patchwork |
| Henry Saunders Agricultural Services | V E Parrott |
| Hi Line Abseiling | VC Property |
| Holistic Care & Beauty for Women | Vintage Chic- second hand furniture |
| I M Plumbing | W3CO web design |
| Ian Messenger Photographic | Wenham Flooring |
| Icon Partnership (The) | West End Wendies Theatre Schools |
| Ideal Building & Carpentry | Whites Engineering |
| ISCA Management Services | Whites Lawn Mowers & Garden Machinery |
| JAP Sound | Woodworth Architectural Services |
| JC Paintwork | Z&M Roofing |
| JC Whilton |   |

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