SOHAM COMMUNITY FACILITIES AUDIT

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April 2008

SOHAM COMMUNITY FACILITIES AUDIT REPORT

This report sets out the findings of a review of Community Facilities in the town of Soham, their availability and current usage, and an assessment of local needs not currently being met by existing community facilities, completed by independent researchers Celia Dickinson and Gill Robinson.

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SECTION 2: REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. A review of community facilities was undertaken by independent consultants to establish the level of service provision in Soham. The work was commissioned to inform Soham Town Council of baseline provision at the commencement of a process to identify any gaps in provision which may need to be addressed.

1.2. The audit of facilities and an assessment of current usage were commissioned by Soham Town Council in December 2007.

1.3. The brief also called for an investigation of need not currently being met by the existing provision

1.4. It was intended that this should inform decisions by the Council on future community facility provision and provide an evidence base for any funding applications which may be submitted.

1.5. For the purposes of this process, community facilities were defined as including meeting rooms in schools, libraries, clubs, sheltered housing, public leisure/sports centres, council offices, churches, voluntary organisations and similarly maintained public facilities

1.6. The review process was based on a list of local facilities provided by Soham Town Council for this study; two additional facilities were subsequently added by agreement. (See Appendix 1)

1.7. The process included:

- the completion of a profile of each facility that was found to be available to the community
- an assessment off what facilities they offered, how accessible they were and in what condition
- an assessment of the extent of usage of the facilities, and any barriers to usage that existed
- an assessment of local needs not currently being met by existing community facilities

1.8. All audit data refers to date of audit only unless otherwise stated

2. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

2.1 **Existing Provision**

2.1.1 We believe that overall Soham facilities provide an adequate level of service provision but that there are issues in terms of quality and some unmet need.

2.1.2 Many of the existing facilities were built some time ago and have become outdated. There is rising public expectation which is not being met. However there are promising prospects for improvement.

2.1.3 Our conclusions are based on the evidence obtained during the review and are outlined below:

a) Community facilities

The review identified at least fourteen buildings that were available to the community as well as seven commercial facilities. However there appeared to be shortages of certain types of facilities and the use of some is restricted to a targeted group of users and/or very limited.

b) Quality issues

Quality issues with many of the facilities that were included in this review mean that they are falling short of modern standards and public expectation. It is recommended that they are encouraged to rise to the challenge of improvement so that they meet more than the basic standard for community facilities; and to look at how they could more closely meet community need and how they could develop their relationship with users and the wider community. The use of the Hallmark (a quality standard for community buildings) or similar could be considered.

c) Large quality community facility

Many needs are being met through existing resources, or may be met in future through others that are planned. However there is a need for a modern or modernised facility that will accommodate a certain range of purposes. There was a gap in terms of a large space with bar facilities that could be used for large private celebrations, meetings and local events that meets public expectation. It is therefore recommended that the establishment of such a facility be considered. This needs to meet quality standards for community buildings in terms of its appearance and interaction with the community. Those that are available fall short in many respects.

It is recommended that the community be consulted on and involved in any plan to take this forward as the facility must reflect the needs and aspirations of the community. The options are new build or conversion of an existing building. It is recommended that a detailed options appraisal is carried out. In the event that the Pavilion is an option for this, a feasibility study should be carried out to establish whether extending the building would have any benefit, in order to maximise the range of purposes that it could serve. It is recommended that in any event, the Pavilion be remodelled and access road lighting be improved, to eliminate barriers to usage of the building.

d) Inclusivity and cost

The cost of hire is a determining factor in the use of many community buildings in Soham. Some people felt that there is a need for a single flagship multi purpose community centre, catering for all. It is not clear however, that any community centre/building that is established would be able to generate sufficient revenue income for its maintenance, without cost becoming a barrier for some sectors of the community.

e) Youth facilities

There was a consensus that there is a shortage of youth facilities and particular need for a venue for the youth café which is planned. This may meet the need for this additional facility, provided that a venue can be identified and funding found for capital and revenue costs.

f) Performing arts facilities

The need for a new performing arts space which meets the desired standard was highlighted by several groups. The outcome of developments at Soham Village College will almost certainly lead to improvements. The policy defining the future use of this new building is yet to be formed and the position should be re-assessed when it is available.

g) Information and advice needs

Lack of clear information was a recurring theme. Services and facilities in Soham would be enhanced by more relevant and clear information about what is available, better systems for obtaining and sharing information and by improved co-ordination. There is a role for a newsletter to enable everyone to get to know what is on offer and it is recommended that a newssheet with a wide circulation be made available if possible. This should list the facilities and provide information about 'What's On'. A central information point in the town could also benefit the community. Ideally this will include ICT to enable self service help. It is recommended that the 'One stop shop' that has been discussed, is established as soon as possible. Plans are in hand for a community notice board in a central position and this will be a useful addition.

Careful thought needs to be given to the best way to locate and meet the need for a comprehensive range of information and advice, with good signage. Facilities for services offering confidential advice are barely adequate. Developments within the Extended Schools programme will take shape over the coming months. The outcome of these developments will almost certainly lead to an increase in facilities and services available to the wider community (including family support and advice). The situation should be kept under review.

h) Looking to the future

The audit of facilities provides a snapshot of the existing provision in Soham. With the proposed development of more homes the community will inevitably change size and structure. Whether the facilities will be sufficient to cater for the needs of the new and existing communities will need to be kept under review.

3. PROFILE

3.1 The Town

3.1.1 Soham is a small market town of approximately 9,102 population (2001 Census), forecast to reach 9,900 in 2006; (Cambridge County Council Research Group) situated midway between Ely and Newmarket. Traditionally a farming area and a close-knit community, Soham has a range of buildings that are used by local groups and individuals to pursue a range of activities.

3.1.2 Soham has a large number of active community groups. In the Soham Town Health Check 2004, 24% of respondents were participating in a community activity.

3.1.3 Soham Town Council commissioned this review of community facilities in order to gather as much information as possible about the existing facilities and the aspirations of the Soham community. The purpose of the review is to help the Council formulate the best ways in which these groups can best be supported; to find out what options exist to align facilities available with the needs of a community that expects to grow as a result of new housing development; and to move towards a comprehensive plan for the town's future.

3.1.4 Changes in the make up of the Cambridgeshire population are anticipated in the coming years. In East Cambridgeshire the proportion of the population composed of people over 65 is forecast to rise steadily to 2021, when they are expected to make up about a quarter of the population.

3.1.5 Population change: Soham is predicted to have the following changes between 2006 and 2021:

- Increase in all ages total 1000 +
- Increase concentrated in older age groups

(Source: Cambridgeshire County Council Research Group 2005- based ward age forecasts)

3.1.6 Additional housing development is expected to lead to further population growth in Soham. The Town plan (2006) indicates that up to 518 new homes will be built in the next 14 years. Soham therefore faces significant growth pressures and the challenge of integrating the new and existing communities.

It is important that any plans for the development of community facilities should take into account the growth in the town and public expectations that will possibly continue to rise.

4 Audit of Community Facilities

Location	Contact	Facility offered	Managed by	Usage level	Condition
Walter Gidney Pavilion	David Giles, Soham Town Council 01353 723472	Two linked halls, kitchen	Soham Town Council	High	Fair/good
Soham Village College	Soham Village College office 01353 724100	Beechurst Hall Lodeside Hall Others if required	Soham Village College Governors	High	Reasonably good
The Lode Centre	Soham Village College office 01353 724100	Meeting room	Soham Village College Governors	Very high	Reasonably Good
St Andrews School	St Andrews School office 01353 720345	Hall, small hall, field	St Andrews School Governors	Medium	Good
Weatheralls School	Weatheralls School office 01353 720456	Hall	Weatheralls School Governors	Low	Good
Soham Comrades Club	Steward or secretary 01353 720393	Hall, lounge bar	Soham Comrades Club Trustees	Temporarily suspended	Fair
Soham Town Rangers FC	Malcolm Howe, Steward 01353 720732	Large hall, lounge	Soham Town Football Club Trustees	Medium/high	Fair/good
Viva Centre	Lisa Hunt, Manager 01353 722228	Meeting room	Viva Arts and Community Group Trustees	High	Good
Ross Peers Sports Centre	Ross Peers office 01353 722662	Halls 1 and 2 Meeting room Bar	Soham & District Sports Association Trustees	Low	Good
Soham Library	Carol Knappett Library Supervisor 01353	Meeting room	Cambridgeshire County Council	High	Very good
Methodist Church Hall	Rev Edwin Myers 01353	Hall and kitchen	Soham Methodist Church Council	High	Fair
St Andrews Church	Rev Tim Alban Jones 01353 720423	Aisle, nave, Lady Chapel, chancel	Church of England	Low	Good within constraints
Causeway Centre	Ms Dawn Young 01353 723555	Lounge, day room	Sanctuary Hereward Housing Association	Low	Very good
Keith Leonard House	Mrs Sylvia Chivers 01353 778181	Mill View Room	Sanctuary Hereward Housing Association	Medium	Very good
Commercial facilities					
The Cherry Tree	01353 720405	Bar and lounge	Landlord	Medium	Good
The Carpenters Arms	01353 722026	Bar/lounge, pool room	Landlord/owner	Low	Very good
The Red Lion	01353 720843	Bar and lounge	Landlord	None	Fair

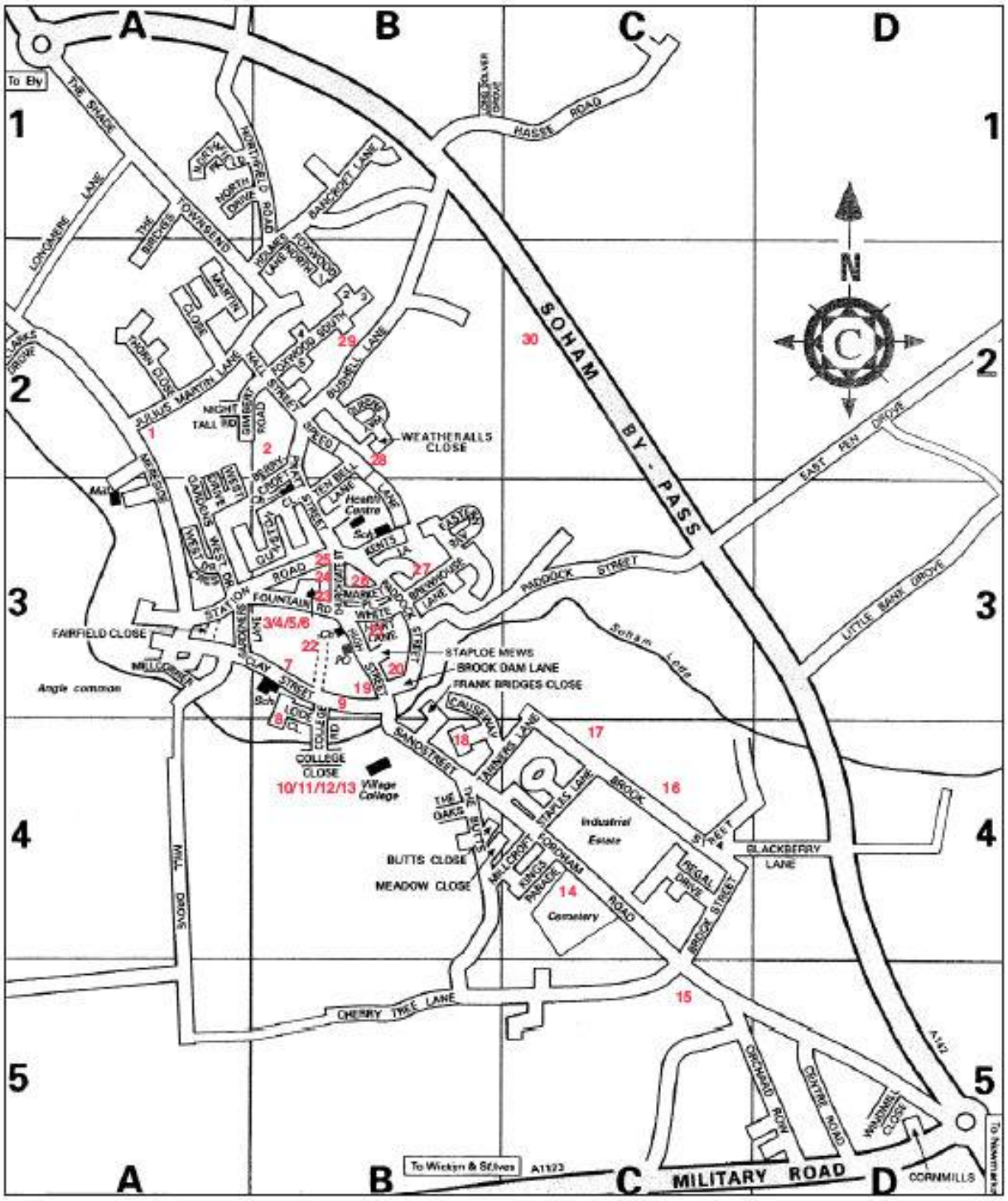
The Ship	01353 720319	Bar and lounge	Landlord	None	Good
The Fountain	01353	Bar and lounge	Landlord	Low	Good
The Brook House Hotel	01353 720324	Function room suite	Limited company	Low	Good
The Soham Lodge Motel	01353 725076	Currently closed	Limited company	Currently closed	Very good
Available on limited basis					
Salvation Army Hall	Envoy Morag Rogers: 01638 577386	Hall and kitchen	Salvation Army	Low	Poor
Cemetery North Chapel	Mr Timothy Clark: 01353 720269	Small chapel	Soham North Cemetery Charitable Trust	None	Good condition but with no power or heat
Care and Repair Office	Manager: Mrs Yvonne Thresh 01353 723777	Small office	Trustees (Friendly & Provident Society)	Low	Good
Staploe Medical Centre	Practice Manager: Mr Michael Wilde 01353 624123	Training room	Limited Company	None	Very good
Not available					
The Guide Hut	Bridget Clements	Not available	Guide Association	High	Very poor
The Scout Hut	Mr Colin Brook	Not available	Scout Association	High	Very poor
Baptist Church Hall	Mr Colin Stringer	Not available	Baptist Church Council	Church activity only	Unknown
St Andrews Church Hall	Rev Tim Alban Jones	Not available	Church of England	None	Unusable in present condition
St John Ambulance Hall	Mrs M Mumby-Croft	Not available	St John Ambulance	No permission to sub-let	Poor

This table indicates the buildings and facilities that were investigated and basic information regarding management responsibility, current usage levels and condition.

4.1 The audit identified 25 buildings in Soham with facilities that are currently available to the community. This included four school buildings; others were clubs and independently managed buildings, a library, Council owned building and a number of commercial facilities.

4.2 A detailed profile of each of the facilities with additional data is supplied in Section 3. See also Review and Analysis in Section 2.

Map of Soham



1. Soham Town Rangers Football Club
2. Methodist Church Hall
3. Walter Gidney Pavillion
4. St John Ambulance
5. Guide Hut
6. Scout Hut
7. Baptist Church
8. Keith Leonard House
9. Soham Library
10. Soham Village College
11. The Lode Centre
12. Ross Peers Sports Centre
13. St Andrews School
14. Cemetery North Chapel
15. The Cherry Tree
16. The Carpenters Arms
17. Brook House Hotel and Function Room
18. Causeway Centre
19. The Red Lion
20. The Ship
21. St Andrews Church Hall
22. St Andrews Church
23. The Fountain
24. Care and Repair
25. Viva Arts and Community Centre
26. The Comrades Club
27. Staploe Medical Centre
28. Wetheralls School
29. Salvation Army
30. Soham Lodge Hotel

5 SUMMARY OF AUDIT

5.1. The total number of facilities audited was thirty. Five facilities, of the thirty, were found not to be available to the community due to their condition, the need for them for other purposes, or because subletting was not permitted by the landlord.

5.2. Twenty five separate facilities in the audit were therefore identified as being available to the community. Of these:

- Seven were operating commercially and eighteen non-commercially.
- Four were available on a limited basis or for specialised use only.

5.3. The majority of facilities that were available had spare capacity. The amount of spare capacity was estimated by looking at what would be available for various groups as follows:

For small groups	30 people or less	Good*
For medium sized groups	31 – 70 people	Good*
For large groups	71 – 150 people	Limited*

*These estimates were based on the likelihood of finding a two -hour period of unallocated time in facilities suitable for these sized groups

5.4. Some detail is needed to form conclusions about the facilities and their performance and value as facilities for the community. This is because ideas have changed and expectations have risen, and facilities need to keep pace. Reference may also be made to the Review of facilities in Section 2 and to the full profiles in Section 3.

The New Forest Toolkit Guide Four sets out a pro forma for gathering information about community facilities. The questions are intended to aid taking stock of local community facilities. They can be also used as indicators for audit purposes and a high positive score would be an indication of a strong community facility that is meeting quality standards.

An overall assessment has been made using a range of key indicators. These indicators were chosen as they cover some basic characteristics and features of a good-to-ideal community facility, once they have complied fully with legal requirements. The provision of a room for hire was regarded as a minimum qualification as a community facility. To operate to a high quality standard, the facility should also perform well in additional ways.

Indicator	Purpose	Number of facilities scoring on this indicator
Space available for general community use	Promote community involvement	25 (100%)
Location, setting accessible to the community. Disability access	To enable access for all To enable access by disabled people	25 (100%) 12 good (48%) 7 improving this (28%) 1 poor (4%) 5 old building, cannot be adapted (20%)

Up to date, good condition, well maintained, fit for purpose	To encourage maximum usage and user satisfaction	17 (68%) 2 reasonably good (8%) 6 require modernisation (24%)
Welcoming and warm atmosphere	To encourage participation	17 (68%) 8 require improvement (32%)
Interaction with users - user feedback/communication mechanism/user representation management body	To ensure that the user's voice is heard, and to inform management and development decisions	2(8%)
Explicit and clear policies regarding hire. Rates and conditions of use clear and information available to prospective users Information displayed	To enable users from community to make suitable choices of venues	10 (40%) 1 (4%)
Usage monitored and development plans for future for community use	To enable constant development and improvement	8 (32%)

5.4.1Space for hire: Most community facilities in Soham are fulfilling the basic criteria. Clearly the basic requirements for a community facility can be reached easily by making a room available for hire, which complies with legislative requirements. However there is a qualitative difference between this standard and that of a developed, high quality facility. A community facility, it can be argued, is more than just 'room hire'. It is recommended that consideration be given to ensuring that facilities are available that meet more than the basic standard. This would clearly have to be resourced.

5.4.2. Access: The location of facilities across the town can be seen on the map on page 9. All were accessible to most users. The access to the Pavilion was a particular issue. Although access for disabled people was not achieved throughout, overall it was an improving picture.

5.4.3. Condition: The condition of each of the facilities is set out in the table on pages 7 and 8. This indicates that two were regarded as being in reasonably good condition, four in fair condition and four poor or unusable. Of the four facilities in only 'fair' condition, plans were being formulated to improve one facility, the Methodist Hall, specifically to make it more suitable for community use. For the three others, this was not a priority although recognised as broadly desirable. The Salvation Army is aware of the poor condition of its hall and plans to address this in due course.
Fitness for purpose: Most of the facilities that were available have a primary purpose other than general community use. The facilities each had their own strengths and weaknesses. They served different purposes for a variety of groups with different requirements, but did not co-ordinate their efforts. This resulted in some gaps. Gaps in provision are identified in the following section of this report.

5.4.4. Interaction with users/wider community: It is noteworthy that most facilities did not have a 'user focus'. This was evident in two ways:

a) Most did not make available clear information (in the form of a printed sheet, notice or website) about the cost and conditions of hire. There were notable

exceptions, mainly the larger organisations such as the Pavilion and the Soham Village College; and also the Viva Centre which had comprehensive information on its website. Word of mouth is the usual way that people found out which venues can be hired and on what conditions. Information that is available on the Soham Online website may not be sufficient on its own to provide a clear picture of what is available. A number of the facilities allowed community access but did not actively promote this, and these venues would need to be convinced of the benefit of doing so. Community facilities were therefore sometimes available but not obviously so and could be under used.

b) Most did not seek feedback from users in any structured way, did not communicate formally with users except regarding hire arrangements and users were represented on the management of only two of the facilities that were audited. Commercial facilities in the main were responsive to customer demand to a varying extent (repeat custom was noted and they made attempts to help when requested to provide an addition to their usual services).

Many community facilities work best with community involvement in running them (for example by representation on the management body) so that the time and talents of local people are tapped for the benefit of all. The management models of the majority of the facilities included in the audit did not easily allow this, which may explain the lack of user focus. However, it is good practice to have a mechanism for hearing the voice of the user and a key feature of a quality community facility.

The general theme of some responses in this review leads to the view that members of the Soham community would welcome the opportunity to shape any facility which is for general community benefit. Achieving community involvement in activities and decision making at the local level is an important issue. In Cambridgeshire only 16% of people feel that they can influence decisions in their local area. (Cambridgeshire County Council Quality of Life Survey 2003)

It is therefore recommended that every effort should be made to promote local community involvement in shaping and developing any community facilities where this is possible in the future, giving weight to local consensual decisions as expressed by community groups and partnerships to determine the design, plans for development and operation of community facilities. Such involvement is desirable for future community participation and inclusiveness.

5.4.5. Atmosphere: It is desirable, although not perhaps essential, for a facility that is for wide community use for all ages, to have a warm, welcoming, inclusive atmosphere in which people can feel comfortable. Some were unintentionally falling short of this, with several locations particularly identified as being austere, cold or 'lonely'. This acts as a barrier to usage.

5.4.6. Cost and value for money: This study indicated that use of community facilities in Soham is price sensitive. Feedback identified several facilities as expensive, but this was not limited to those which were charging most. Cost was a barrier to usage as many groups and individuals looking to hire the facilities were on a limited income.

Area	Estimated Median Household Income
Cambridgeshire	£30,000
East Cambridgeshire	£29,800
Soham North	£28,600
Soham South	£27,500

This table indicates the relative median levels of household income in Soham, compared to East Cambridgeshire and the County of Cambridgeshire. Source CACI 2006

The table shows that Estimated Median Household Income in Soham is below that for the District and the County. However, the detailed income profile for the area indicates that around 20% of the population of Soham North and Soham South have a household income of less than £15,000 per year. For these people the cost issue is likely to be an issue. Many of the households in this group are likely to be older/retired people living on a pension.

One Super Output Area (SOA) in Soham North (approximately 1500 people) comes within the top 25% of areas with Deprivation Affecting Children (Source: Government Indices of Deprivation 2004) and others within the top 50% in the County. Super Output Areas are a new statistical geography unit developed by the Office for National Statistics. Because SOAs are smaller than wards, they provide a more detailed local picture and have the potential to identify pockets of deprivation more accurately. There are 32,482 SOAs in England compared to 8414 wards.

Clearly Soham is not the most deprived in East Cambridgeshire but it is not an affluent area. A significant number of households are on very low incomes. It emerged from this study that cost is often a significant factor in the use of community facilities. Some of those that are on offer may be used without charge or in return for a donation but some of these were not heavily used usually because other barriers to usage were present.

6. IDENTIFYING GAPS

6.1 We assessed how far suitable facilities were available for certain purposes, to identify gaps in provision. These were:

- A confidential interview
- A meeting (up to12 people)
- A larger meeting (13 -70 people)
- A private party or function/charity event
- A performance for an audience of up to 150 people/over 150 people

6.2 A confidential interview

Confidential interviews need to be carried out in a setting that offers privacy, that is soundproof, does not expose the client, and that has a waiting area. A community centre would not usually offer a suitable venue, although this would depend on the particular circumstances. The facilities that are available in Soham for this purpose are limited.

Currently the community-based organisations that require such a facility are:

- The Cogwheel Trust

This organisation uses the Staploe Medical Centre by agreement with Dr Partha and partners. This works well.

Other organisations such as Cruse Bereavement Care can also arrange to use the medical centre if the problem is medical/health related (depression/anxiety etc) on an ad hoc basis. However in future there may be a demand for self-referral to community-based organisations and a confidential space to offer interviews may be needed that is independent of the medical centre.

- Ely Citizens' Advice

This organisation offers a general advice service at the office of Care and Repair for 3 hours a week. This is unsatisfactory because the Manager's office has to be used as a waiting area.

It is recommended that the situation be kept under review and considered with other information and advice needs when the Children's Centre plans are clarified. This new Centre is likely to offer support to vulnerable families and also possibly advice on certain issues such as debt and benefits. At this stage it is not clear whether these services will be available to other sectors in the community.

6.3 Small meetings (up to 12 people) and larger meetings (13-70) people

6.3.1. A number of community facilities in Soham are suitable for holding small and larger meetings. Assuming that the need comes from a community group operating on a not-for-profit basis, facilities of different types in a variety of locations would be available at rates indicated on the table below.

Facility	**Lower cost**	**Higher cost**	**Evening**
Walter Gidney Pavilion rooms	£23.50	£23.50	£36.00
Soham Village College Halls Classroom	£34.60 + insurance £14.40 + insurance	£52.00* + insurance £14.40 + insurance	£34.60 + insurance £21.60 + insurance
Lode Centre	£28.80 + insurance	£28.80 + insurance	£28.80 + insurance
St Andrews School Hall	£24	£47	£24/£47
Weatheralls School Hall			
Soham Comrades Club	At Steward's discretion	At Steward's discretion	£40-£70 for Hall At Steward's discretion for other rooms
Soham Town Rangers Football Club	At Manager's discretion	At Manager's discretion	£50 for Hall or at Manager's discretion
The Viva Centre	£10 - £20	£10 - £20	£14 - £24
Ross Peers	£26	£26	£26

Sports Centre			
Soham Library	£8	£8	£30
Methodist Church Hall	Donation requested	Donation requested	Donation requested
St Andrew's Church	Donation requested	Donation requested	Donation requested
The Causeway Centre	£15	£15	£15
Keith Leonard House	£11	£11	£11

This table indicates rates for a room in the week in the day and evening.
***This higher rate applies to Fridays**

Name of facility	**Does the facility have spare capacity? If so how much?**
The Walter Gidney Pavilion rooms	20%
Soham Village College	Limited
The Lode Centre	Very limited
St Andrews School	Yes
Weatheralls School	Yes
Soham Comrades Club	Temporarily suspended
Soham Town Rangers Football Club	Yes, but hire is at Manager's discretion
The Viva Centre	Day 50% Evenings 30%
Ross Peers meeting room	Day 75% Evening 75%
Soham Library	20%
Soham Methodist Church Hall	Limited and group would need approval
St Andrew's Church	Yes
The Causeway Centre	Limited
Keith Leonard House	No

This table indicates the position with regard to spare capacity in local community facilities.

6.3.2. It indicates that there is sufficient capacity locally so that a venue could be hired for a meeting with reasonable flexibility and notice. This offers the hirer some choice as to the type of room so that they can select the best venue.

6.4. A private party or function/charity event

6.4.1. The options for holding such an event in Soham at different locations are set out below.

Facility	**Does the facility have spare capacity?**
Walter Gidney Pavilion	Yes, limited
Soham Village College Halls	Yes but not available at certain times of the year and/or when required by school
Weatheralls School	Yes but has never been used for this purpose
St Andrews School Hall	Yes
Soham Comrades Club	Not currently available

Soham Town Rangers Football Club	Yes
Brook House Function Room	Yes. Future to be decided in 2009
Soham Lodge Motel	Not currently available
Viva Centre	Yes, for up to 50 people

6.4.2. The facilities above include publicly maintained, club, voluntary organisation and commercial premises. Currently people wanting to hold an event of this type in Soham have a choice of the above but there are significant barriers to use for all:

The Pavilion: The internal layout was given by respondents as the single most important reason that they would not hire the Pavilion for such a purpose. This reason was given by almost all respondents. Other significant factors include the dark access, austere atmosphere and institutional décor.

Soham Village College Halls: The lack of availability on the dates required was most frequently given as a barrier to usage. Other factors included the 'school atmosphere' and cost.

Weatheralls School: The school had no experience of hire for this purpose and as separate applications have to be made for use of the hall and the kitchen, this may act as a deterrent to use of the building for such an event.

St Andrew's School: The school hall had been used for a Harvest supper on one occasion; however its atmosphere perhaps makes it useful for this kind of event rather than a private celebration. Barriers to use include the fact that it is closed for much of the year, the school atmosphere and lack of suitable adult furniture.

Soham Comrades Club: This Club has the bar facilities which people wanted for this sort of event, and a car park. However the Club is currently unavailable to hire while licensing issues are resolved. Barriers to usage include: the run down general finish and reputation as a noisy venue in a part of the town that is the location for trouble attracting the attention of the Police. This meant that for some people it was completely ruled out.

Soham Town Rangers Football Club: The main barrier that exists is the personal dislike of the style and dated décor, the focus on football combined with the limited kitchen facilities. For many people this is the location that they choose because no better ones are available. However it has bar facilities.

Brook House Function Room: This offers a very large room and it is therefore less suitable for parties of up to 100 people. It needs a critical mass to fill the space. However it has a kitchen and bar facilities, and parking space for a large number of cars. The main barrier to use was the slightly dated décor.

Soham Lodge Motel: This is currently unavailable following a financial crisis. It has good facilities but cost was the main barrier combined with its location on the by-pass and out of town, requiring car access.

Viva Centre: This is available and offers good facilities on the first floor. It is suitable for up to 50 people, and possibly more.

6.4.3. We believe that there is a gap in provision and a need for a modern or modernised hall that offers a suitable location for up to about 180 people. People might justifiably expect to be able to hold a celebration in their home town on high

days and holidays for a reasonably large number of people. It could also meet the need for small theatrical performances, exhibitions, talks and events if the right elements are included. Ideally this will have a stage, bar (for people to use and if possible to supply their own drink) and kitchen, as none of the alternatives can adequately cater for this need. It should have a welcoming atmosphere and to be accessible to the community for medium sized events.

6.5. Theatrical performances for audiences of various sizes

6.5.1. In Soham much community and youth activity is focussed on drama. The options that exist currently for performing arts groups are shown on the table below:

Facility	**Suitable for?**
Soham Village College Beechurst Hall	Performances with audience of up to 200+ • Large stage • Backstage area large • Safe for young people
Soham Village College Lodeside Hall	Performances for audience of up to 200+ • Large stage • Backstage area average • Safe for young people
Weatheralls School Hall	Rehearsals
St Andrews School Hall	Rehearsals
Soham Town Rangers Football Club	Rehearsals • but restrictions in week due to noise
Soham Comrades Club	Performance with audience up to 120 • Suitable for small events *Not currently available*
Brook House Function Room	Large rehearsals (Potential as theatre seating 200+)
The Viva Centre	Small rehearsals
Pavilion	Rehearsals • Layout imposes serious drawbacks
St Andrews Church	Recitals with audience of 80-90 • No toilets • See development plans
Soham Lodge Motel	Performance in large function room • Seats 100 • Cost issues : Stage costs £100 • Catering and room hire add to cost • *Not currently available*

6.5.2. Soham Village College Halls offer a key resource to drama groups requiring large spaces for large audiences. However these can be difficult to access because the school curriculum is demanding and activity levels so high that the halls are often not available. In addition some of the specialist equipment in them is outdated leading to other operational problems for groups needing to use them.

6.5.3. Smaller groups are able to access some venues but there are cost issues in using the Soham Lodge Motel (currently closed). The low cost option is to use the Comrades Club which seats up to 120 people but is currently not available.

6.5.4. The College plans to build a new theatre and will form a policy for the use of all its facilities by the community following the appointment of a Business Manager in mid 2008. The situation should be kept under review and the options assessed once future plans been clarified and put on a business footing.

7. AN ASSESSMENT OF NEED NOT BEING MET

7.1 Quality community facilities

7.1.1. The quality of community facilities in Soham varies considerably. Whilst to provide space is a minimum requirement, the public expects that the facilities will go further and meet other criteria, such as condition, accessibility and clear booking information. It is also important to members of the local community in Soham that if possible, there is a facility on which they have 'first call'. The performance of facilities in different ways is analysed in the audit report and this highlights the variable quality. Over 70% of respondents indicated general dissatisfaction with aspects of certain facilities and a third of respondents to this study specifically made the point that some improvement in quality was needed by modernising or replacing the facilities. It is recommended that consideration be given to ensuring that facilities are available that meet more than the basic standard. This would clearly have to be resourced.

7.2. A facility for private function/party or charity event

7.2.1. Please see Section 6.4.above which sets out the rationale for this.

7.3. A facility for young people

7.3.1. A need has been identified for additional facilities for young people to enable them to meet, to develop social skills and have a focus for their leisure time.

7.3.2. Youth clubs and activities are currently provided by a variety of organisations, the main ones being:

a) Soham Action 4 Youth: (Registered Charity Number 1119761). Two youth clubs cater for approximately 70 young people, including junior and senior members. Youth workers estimate that 40 off these young people have issues with binge drinking/anti-social behaviour. Detached youth workers run one club a week for juniors and two for seniors per week. These activities are based at The Lode Centre and the Viva Centre. Both these buildings have some disadvantages for youth work. (see Review section of this report)

b) Viva Arts and Community Group
The group offers performing arts based activities and youth outreach programmes for about 70 young people, and works closely with Soham Village College. These activities are currently based at: The Viva Centre, Soham Village College and other hired locations.

c) Scouts and Guides: These groups meet in their own premises on the Recreation Ground, offer a range of activities.

7.3.3. It is thought likely that a new venue will provide somewhere to spend their leisure time for young people who may not be interested in sports (for which there are facilities at Ross Peers), Scouts/Guides or drama for which facilities already exist.

7.3.4. Work within Soham Village College is ongoing, to engage 'hard to reach' young people and the school recognises that a market town such as Soham may present problems for young people to leave in the evenings to find leisure activities, due to poor public transport. Young people may then hang around in town, possibly contributing to a fear of crime.

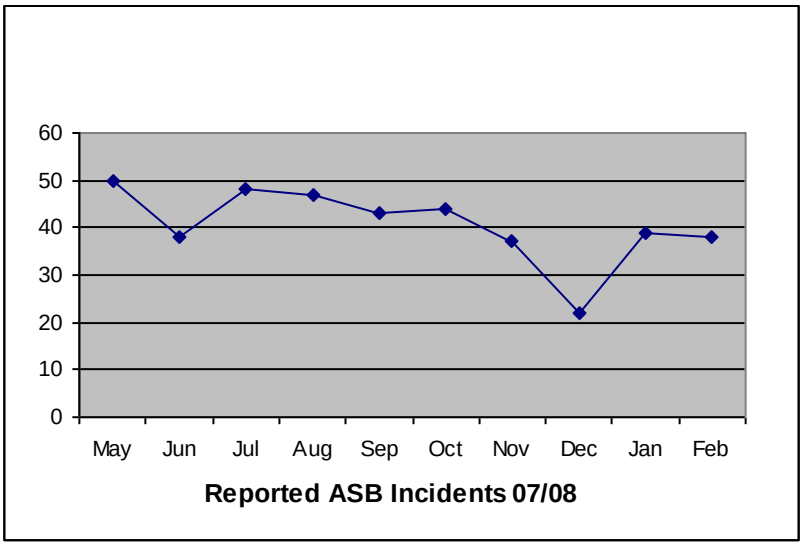
7.3.5 There is a need for an additional location offering a free and relaxed environment that would attract young people. A youth café idea is under consideration by staff of the Youth Office and Viva/Youth Council. Funding support is being sought to progress this project. An application to the Cambridgeshire Community Foundation was unsuccessful.

7.3.6. It is proposed to run the café on a trial basis for an initial period of time to establish whether it is feasible and whether there is uptake by young people.

7.3.7. A study of the need for additional facilities for young people was undertaken 2 years ago by Cambridgeshire County Council, among Years 7, 8 and 11 at Soham Village College. Of the135 responses, 51 indicated a wish for other places to meet and pursue activities locally. It is considered that any project will be more likely to succeed if young people are involved and have an appropriate level of influence over the development.

7.3.7. The survey work undertaken as part of this study indicated that the improved provision of facilities for young people is of the utmost importance to residents and community groups, with 27% rating this issue among the priorities. At the consultation, 62% of attendees rated this as 'essential'.

7.3.8 It has been highlighted by other surveys that whilst crime and anti-social behaviour levels in East Cambridgeshire are generally low compared to the national average, fear of crime among the public persists. The figures for anti-social behaviour over the last two years indicate that there are between 22 and 50 reported incidents per month in the Soham area, with seasonal fluctuations.



Reported incidents of antisocial behaviour in 2007-08
Source: Cambridgeshire Police 2008

7.3.9. Drug abuse is also present sometimes and prevention of escalation of this is a priority for the Police.

7.3.10. The areas of Soham that have issues relating to these drugs and antisocial behaviour according to the Police who were interviewed for this study, are mainly the small back roads off the High Street, Mereside and West Drive Gardens. The area around the centre of town, the Church, Market Lane and Fountain Lane are also regarded by the Police as 'hot-spots'.

7.3.11. CCTV has been installed in Soham in the town centre. It has also been installed at the rear of the Causeway Centre due to anti-social behaviour involving young people. Concern was expressed by residents as to whether this is effective as a deterrent and achieving a reduction in anti social behaviours, since it required additional staff to monitor the cameras.

7.3.12. The use of the new Children's Centre to meet the need for this youth facility was ruled out during this review. Several other venues also appeared to rule themselves out.

7.3.13. There is therefore an unmet need for a venue for this new venture.

7.4. Information and advice needs

7.4.1. Assistance with a range of information and advice is currently offered by Ely Citizens' Advice outreach service. This is available for 3 hours per week at the offices of Care and Repair on the High Street.

7.4.2. Care and Repair is an independent home improvement agency providing a service helping vulnerable people to organise home repairs, adaptations and improvements so that they can remain at home. The co-location of the two organisations is useful because it facilitates referral between them.

7.4.3. Feedback indicates that Care and Repair receives a number of enquiries (often on a drop-in basis) for information on a wide range of topics that it is unable to meet. Over a 2 month period records of these were kept for this review. Of 100 enquiries over this period, 22 were not relevant to Care and Repair's area of work. The conclusion was that their position on Churchgate Street in the town centre and shop front gave people the impression that it may be an information centre, and/or that the Citizens' Advice service was available there more frequently than is the case. It is unclear to visitors and possibly to residents where various types of information and advice can be obtained from what source and the public would value a central source of local information

7.4.4. In the last year the CAB has dealt with a total of 287 new clients, with 911 new enquiries. Debt, benefits and employment advice accounted for 63.7% of this.

7.4.5. Some enquiries were also addressed to the Town Council or dealt with via the Library.

7.4.6. Consultation in this study indicated that the better provision of information and advice is important to residents. At the consultation, 41% rated the improved/increased provision of confidential welfare benefits/debt and related advice as essential.

7.4.7. The needs of migrant workers were briefly assessed. The major employers, especially Shropshire's, employs 500-800 workers from overseas in the summer months. They reported that almost all these employees return to their country of

origin after a period of 3 - 6 months. A number of in-house services have been developed for them, to assist them during their stay. These are comprehensive and vary from language classes to advice and assistance with accommodation, transport and medical needs. However, employees should be able to obtain help from an objective source where they need advice on employment issues. Over the last year 13.5% of enquiries to Citizen's Advice from new clients who were living in Soham came from non-British people, the majority Polish or Portuguese.

7.4.8. In recent months a potentially significant boost has been given to the future provision of information and advice in the Soham area, by the plan to establish a Children's Centre on the site of the Weatheralls School with a smaller building on the St Andrew's School site. The Centre, which is due to open in autumn 2008, is likely to result in: a) additional support for vulnerable families, and b) debt and related advice and referral for parents and carers. However details of this are unclear as operational plans for the Centre are at an early stage of development

7.4.9. More confidential interview space may be needed to deal with private enquiries in the future. Only one client can be seen at once at Care and Repair due to shortage of space. At the moment an office in Care and Repair has to be vacated to be used as a waiting area to meet CAB standards of good practice.

7.4.10. A single point of contact possibly on the main street would help to meet local information needs and - a 'One Stop Shop'* – with local information and 'What's On'. This needs to be well signed. It is understood that this development is in hand and that an application for funding has been submitted, with the result expected in July 2008.

* The Fenland '@ your service' shop may provide a model for this kind of facility.

7.4.11. Consultation indicated a wish for a sign at the Police office at Budgen's. Notice Boards were also an issue in feedback. It is understood that the provision of these is in hand and this is expected to improve the distribution of information in the town. People wished to have access to notice boards to advertise meetings and events in the community, and for these to be regularly updated and changed.

7.4.12. Some people thought that a more comprehensive newsletter would be an effective way of communicating in the town, which has approximately 4,500 households. The Lodestar is useful but has a limited circulation (estimated at 900).

7.5. Other needs put forward in the study

7.5.1 The study also highlighted other issues of importance to at least a proportion of the population in Soham:

- Parking – the vast majority of respondents thought that parking near a community venue was important and parking in general in Soham was often raised as a worrying issue.
- Swimming pool: This was listed as a need by a small number of people. The District Council is currently looking at leisure provision in the north of the district, in the light of a recent report. A hierarchy of provision is seen as necessary as a critical mass is needed to support any major facility. An improved swimming pool in Ely is included in proposals which are under consideration, and it is thought that this is likely to be the best way of meeting the need for this facility in the area.

- Cinema: The nearest cinema is in Ely. Cinema facilities there are due to improve, after a temporary closure. The Maltings will be closed from 28th May until around October at which point it is planned to reinstate the cinema. Additional provision, possibly of a multiplex cinema is under consideration. Given its size and proximity to Ely, it is thought that this will also be able to meet the need of Soham residents.
- Improvements in public transport, particularly late buses to Ely and Newmarket
- A publicly available list of local venues with a stage

7.6. Evidence of additional need

7.6.1. A variety of statutory and voluntary organisations were interviewed to establish whether new services or an expansion in the existing services was likely to create a need for additional facilities. There was no evidence that this was likely to occur.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1. Following our research with a large number of groups, venue managers and individuals in Soham, we found a high degree of consistency in feedback showing how people want to live and the facilities that they wish to use. This, together with the audit and our observations, has provided a clear way forward and our conclusions are as follows:

8.2. We believe that overall Soham facilities provide an adequate level of service provision but that there are issues that require to be addressed in terms of quality.

8.3. Many of the existing facilities were built some time ago and have become outdated. They were not designed for modern community purposes. Public expectation is not being met.

8.4. The facilities vary and each has different strengths and weaknesses. A very limited number meet a high quality standard as a community facility. The following areas were identified for development:

- Condition (where necessary)
- Up to date with good atmosphere
- Fit for purpose
- Clarity of information for users
- Availability of information
- Interaction with users and wider community
- Well developed staff management practice
- Good hall management practice
- Improvements in customs and procedures

8.5. However plans are already in place to improve several of the buildings. We believe that many would have the potential to meet expectations with some investment to bring them up to date, provided that sympathetic renovation could retain the unique character of the older buildings

8.6. The review identified at least fourteen buildings and seven commercial facilities that were available to the community. Many needs are currently being met through existing resources. The facilities in Soham are catering for a wide range of groups.

8.7 However there appears to be a shortage of certain types of facilities, and the usage of others is restricted to a targeted group of users and/or very limited. In our view there is evidence of a need for a properly equipped, modern or modernised venue, perhaps with a bar, that would be suitable for private parties, community events and functions for up to 180 people.

8.8. Soham is not an affluent place and about 20% of households have an income of less than £15,000 per annum. The cost of hire is an important factor determining the usage of community buildings in Soham. Some people believe that there was case for a single flagship multi purpose community centre catering for all. It is not clear, however, that any community centre that is established would be able to generate sufficient revenue income for its maintenance, without cost becoming a barrier for some sectors of the community. It is important that any facility should be accessible to all sectors of the community.

8.9. There was a high level of support in the review for improvement to existing and available community buildings – this outweighed the support for a new community hall. Some people pointed out that taking the latter option (a new hall) could impose a heavy ongoing fundraising burden on the community. Over 70% thought that improvements were needed to existing facilities. About 16% of respondents said that they saw the need for a new hall while 38% specifically said that they believed that there were already sufficient facilities available.

8.10. Some facilities are available to the community for very restricted hours. Many facilities exist primarily to meet another purpose and the spare capacity is sold or offered to the community to generate income or goodwill. Not all facilities are interested in maximising the use of their buildings because of the burden that it places upon the host organisation in terms of administration and in diverting staff from their primary task. It is important to some people in the Soham community that they have a facility on which they can make ‘first call’.

8.11. While it appears that there is currently some spare capacity in existing provision, this is likely to have to be re-assessed as the population increases over the next few years.

8.12. While there is a need for a new performance space, no conclusion should be reached pending the outcome of the Soham Village College review of policies for community use.

8.13. The facilities for information and advice, a key service for disadvantaged groups, are currently barely adequate but about to receive a boost in the form of a new Children’s Centre. This is likely to benefit families but probably not other sectors of the community; detailed plans for this are not yet available.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1. It is recommended that consideration be given to encouraging local Soham facilities to meet more than the basic standard for community facilities – to rise to the challenge of improvement. This would clearly have to be resourced.

9.2. An option would be to ask Cambridgeshire ACRE (Action for Communities in Rural England) to offer advice and assistance to organisations that want to improve the standard of the community facility that they run. The outcome of this audit could

be used as a basis for discussion if required. The value of standards such as the Hallmark (a quality standard scheme for community buildings and village halls) should be explained. Sources of funding for improvements would need to be identified.

9.3. It is recommended that consideration is given to establishing a modern or modernised central facility with public appeal for moderately large events. This could meet the need for a venue for private parties and also for small theatrical performances, exhibitions, talks and events if the right elements are included. Ideally this will have a stage, bar (for people to use and if possible to supply their own drink) and kitchen, as none of the alternatives can adequately cater for this need. It should have a welcoming atmosphere and to be accessible to all in the community. In due course it should reach quality standards for a community building as identified in this report at more than simply a basic level and should be planned with a view to obtaining the Hallmark quality standard, or similar, as soon as possible.

9.4. It is recommended that the community is consulted on and involved in any plan to take this forward as this facility must reflect the needs and aspirations of the community. The options are new build or conversion of an existing building. It is recommended that a detailed options appraisal is carried out. In the event that the Pavilion is an option for this, a feasibility study should be carried out to establish whether extending the building would have any benefit, to maximise the range of purposes that it could serve.

9.6. It is recommended that, in any event, the Pavilion be remodelled and the access road lighting be improved, as a minimum, to eliminate barriers to usage of this building.

9.7. In the event that the Pavilion is remodelled it is recommended that the option to co-locate the Scout and Guide Huts with it is also considered and explored in terms of practicality and acceptability to these groups. If that forms an acceptable option, specific provision will need to be made for the permanent storage needs of these groups.

9.8. It is recommended that consideration be given to improving information services in Soham. In particular:

- Newsletter to improve communication and list facilities
- A database of facilities in Soham, along with a database of equipment available and a list of facilities with a stage is kept at a central point for easy access
- Locating a clear information point in the town, with facilities for confidential interviews.

9.9. It is recommended that the need for additional performance space be monitored pending the outcome of the review at Soham Village College.

9.10. These recommendations are consistent with the agenda to increase pride in the town of Soham. We believe that if taken forward they will raise morale, enhance community life and confidence in the town, and will have wide public support.

The researchers wish to thank the representatives of the many Soham organisations who kindly gave their time to participate in consultation and interviews in this study, and the members of the public who responded to requests for views and information. They also wish to express their appreciation to the Community Facilities Audit Steering Group, which included members of Soham Town Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridgeshire ACRE, for their support and expertise.