

1 Parish Profile

1.1 Introduction

This Parish Profile provides a picture of the parish and the village. The information in the profile comes from contacts with organisations, clubs and businesses, and from the 2001 Census and the 2006 Electoral Roll.

Swavesey has a cohesive community with a strong identity, but it is changing under the influence of external factors. To ensure a good future, Swavesey's better features must be identified and consolidated.

1.2 Swavesey and its context

Swavesey village lies along a peninsula projecting into the fenland from higher land to the west. The parish is bounded to the south-west by the A14, which provides links to the east and west, and to the M11 and A1 trunk roads. (Refer to Map 1 on the back cover.) To the north the River Great Ouse forms the boundary. To the east lie the villages of Over and Longstanton, and to the west Fen Drayton and Fenstanton. The Greenwich Meridian runs through Swavesey. Cambridge, with two universities and science-based industry, is the major local influence and, as the county town, is a centre of administration and business.

1.3 Swavesey and its past

There is evidence of prehistoric human activity around Swavesey, along the Great Ouse and the fen edge, which supported farming, grazing, fowling and fishing and provided means of transport.

Roman exploitation of Britain stimulated agriculture and trade here, but the collapse of Roman administration left East Anglia open to Anglo-Saxon migration. Swavesey, a distinctively Anglo-Saxon name, is interpreted as 'Swaef's landing-place' or 'Swabian landing-place'. There is evidence for an Anglo-Saxon minster serving adjacent parishes in the tenth century.

After the Norman Conquest, the Domesday Book indicates a population of between 200 and 300 people. By 1278 Swavesey's population had grown to an estimated 1060 people, more than at the start of the twentieth century.

The de la Zouche family promoted trade with a market and fair in 1244, probably transporting grain from a dock rivalling Cambridge's. The castle may be a Conquest foundation, but thirteenth-century disturbances led to its repair and the building of defensive ditches (including Wallman's Lane and Turnbridge) to enclose the valuable trading area. The part of the village in Middle Watch became deserted. St Andrew's probably combines the parish church with a priory church, but the priory never flourished.

In the seventeenth century the area was Puritan and Parliamentary. Dissenters were strongly represented here after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, and since then Unitarians, Baptists and Methodists have contributed to a tradition of Nonconformism surviving today.

In 1840, the enclosure of the village fields promoted a burst of Victorian building still visible along several streets. The coming of the railway in 1847 speeded up transport but took trade from the dock on Market Street, which was finally filled in the 1960s. Fire in 1913 made several families homeless, and severe flooding occurred in 1947.

