

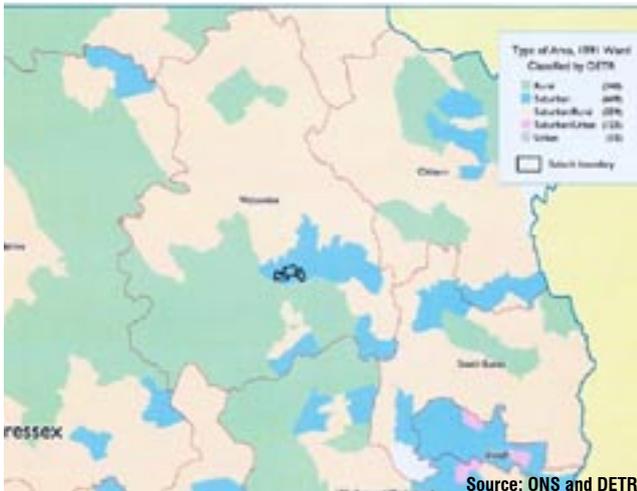
# CRESSEX, HIGH WYCOMBE

This case study provides a profile of the suburb, and assesses its current state of health. It considers the need for improvement and potential for renewal, before raising some policy issues. It is based on a visit, a workshop with representatives of local interests, and data from a range of sources including the 2001 Census, Local Knowledge, CACI, and FPD Savills.

Cressex in Wycombe presents the issue of how to manage intensification pressures such as the redevelopment of inter-war houses with large gardens into higher density flats, semis and terraces in a road which once had considerable character

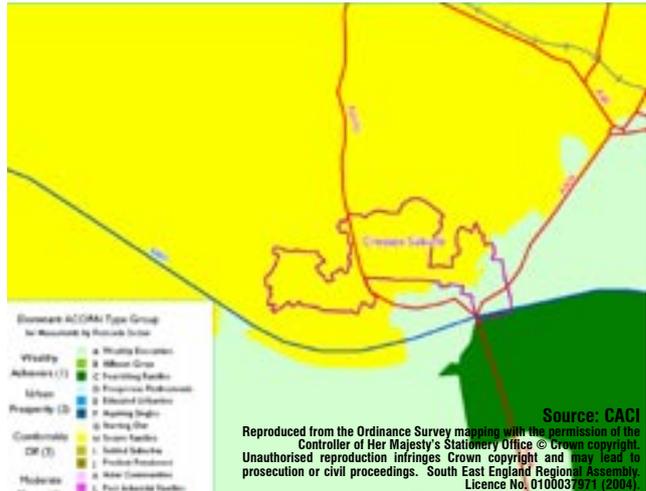


### What type of suburb is Cressex?



Defined by ONS as suburban

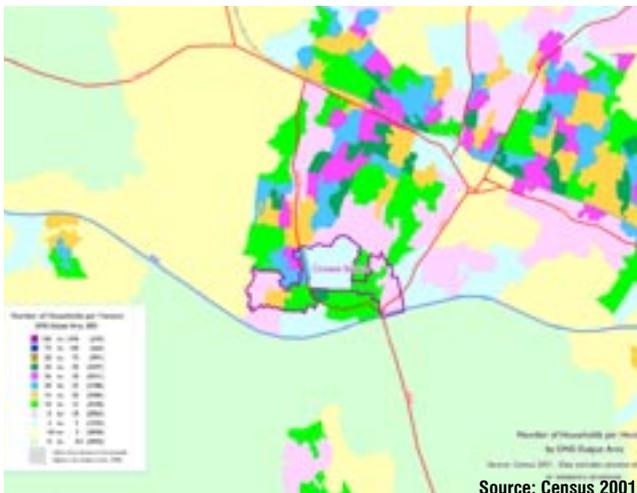
Source: ONS and DETR



Source: CACI  
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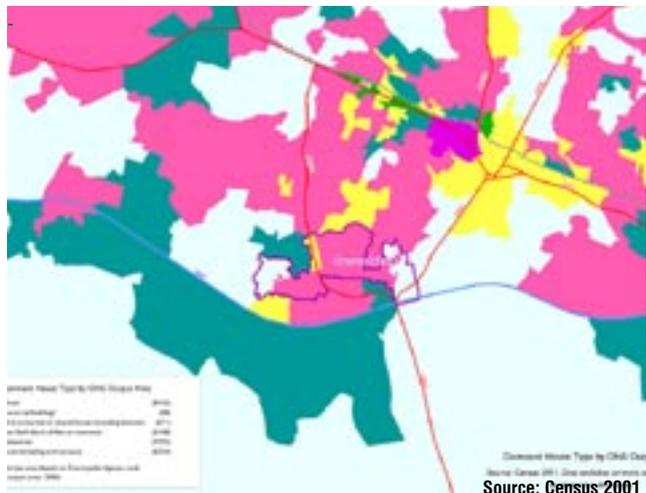
Dominant Acorn Type Group (with transport links shown)

- Secure Families
- Flourishing Families
- Wealthy Executives



Density: number of households per hectare (ONS)  
 • to the west, east and north the density range is 3 - 10  
 • the south is slightly higher at 10 - 15

Source: Census 2001



Dominant House Type (ONS)

- In commercial building
- Terraced
- Detached
- Purpose built block of flats or tenement

Source: Census 2001

## Physical features

**a. Location** Cressex lies close to Junction 4 of the M40 just 30 miles west of London in an area with strong pressures for growth. Cressex Road is on a bus route, with a new ten minute Cressex Express service linking up to the town centre, which is 5 minutes away by car. It adjoins one of the largest modern business parks in Buckinghamshire and out of town shopping, with leisure facilities.

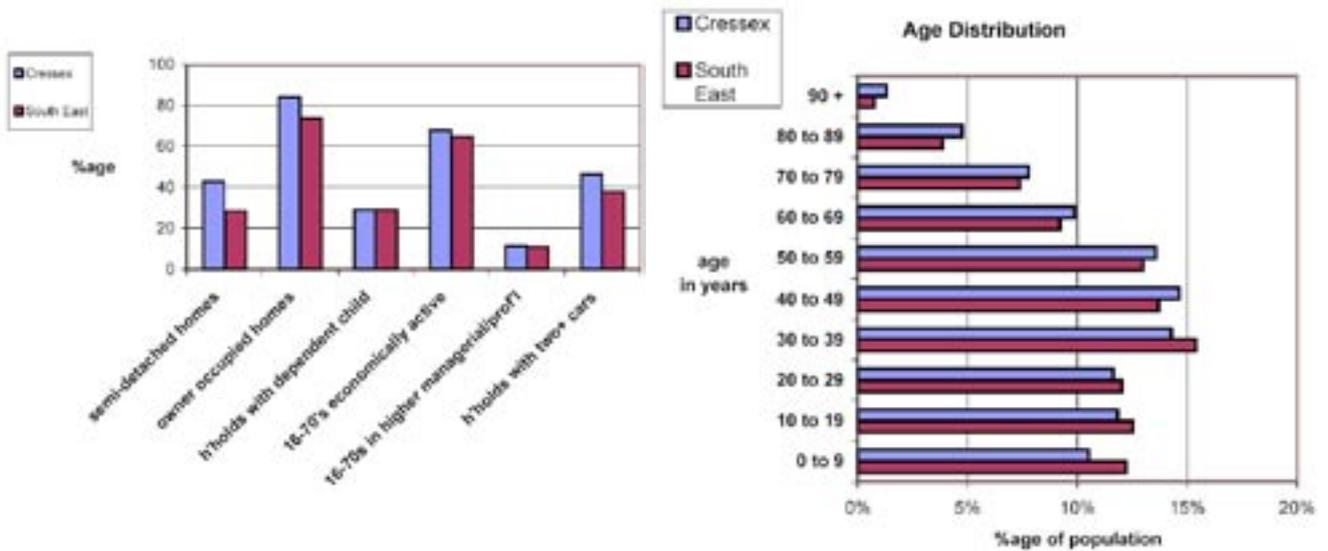
**b. Age** Most of Cressex Road was built in the 1930's and after the last war. However it forms part of a much larger suburb which has been developed since then, and there is scope for further extension. The M40 was built in the 1960's.

**c. Layout** The area is a classic suburb with densities averaging 14 to the hectare, and the population density for the Cressex suburb is high at three times the figure for the South East as a whole. Cressex Road itself has about 2,300 residents in 900 homes.

In Cressex as a whole 43% of the houses are semi detached, 36% detached and 11% purpose built flats.

Cressex Road, the study area, is a straight wide road, bordered by houses which are set back from the road and have large, long gardens. Most are semi-detached, but there is a good sprinkling of detached houses and bungalows. On either side

of Cressex Road, there are areas with higher density houses built since the war. There are distinct differences between the Eastern and Western ends of the road, with a small parade of shops roughly in the centre. There is also a difference between the North side, which borders on to the industrial estate, and the South side, which borders on to other housing. Most of the applications for redevelopment so far have been on the Western part and South side of the road, possibly reflecting the higher property values there, and the longer back gardens with their potential for redevelopment.



## Neighbourhood features

**a. Role** With schools close by Cressex Road primarily provides a good place to bring up a family. In addition there are extensive retail and employment opportunities nearby, with the business park providing some space for start-ups, and very modern accommodation for many growing companies. Johnson and Johnson's headquarters are also nearby. 23% to 35% of people in Cressex work within two Kilometres of home compared with 20% for England and Wales as a whole, and 45% work within five kilometres.

**b. Image and identity** Cressex was seen as a good post war suburb, and is now viewed as a place in a state of transition, but one that is affordable when compared with Wycombe as a whole.

**c. Demographics** In terms of most indicators Cressex is very similar to the South East as a whole, though with nearly half the households owning two or more cars and a higher proportion of owner occupi-

ers. However the suburb is changing in many ways, one of which is in terms of ethnic make up for example 86% of the population identified themselves as white and 8% as of Asian origin, (similar to Wycombe District as a whole). It is a slightly older area with 26% of the population pensioners compared with 21% for the District, and there has been a notable increase in the numbers aged over 85.

**d. Housing demand** 84% of dwellings are owner occupied, with 6% privately rented and 9% social housing.

- The population in the Western part of Cressex (Booker and Cressex Ward) has fallen by around a fifth over the last decade, while in the Eastern part it has grown by a fifth, possibly because Abbey ward is a large urban ward and there has been relatively more house building through intensification and conversions. Booker and Cressex Ward, on the other hand, has seen comparatively less house

building and this, together with changes in household characteristics, could have resulted in a decrease in population. These population changes are however only estimates as the wards were different in 1991.

- House prices for semi-detached houses have risen faster than the national average, with the area closest to the town, which mirrored the national average, pulling away in the last four years, and currently is around £170k compared to £150k according to figures from Upmystreet.com.

**e. Social infrastructure**

- The area is well off for shopping facilities, with the choice of town centre, out of town retail and local shops (the Turnpike).
- To the South of Cressex Road are several schools, and additionally a special school run by the County.
- A community centre is nearby.

## Health of the suburb: priorities and opportunities for improvement

The first part of the workshop comprised a scoring/ranking exercise using a ten category scorecard (5 physical and 5 social characteristics). Participants were asked to score questions within each of the ten categories, and the results used to stimulate discussion and reach consensus on priorities. While officers were able to make a judgment on physical capital, the group examining social capital did not feel able to score. They did however believe that this part of the score card would be valuable to use with residents (with some reservation about the relevance of some of the question), and much time was spent debating the wording of the questions.

A further ranking exercise enabled the priority categories below to be identified, together with some ideas for improvement.

**Choice** The most important factor in maintaining the area’s longer term sustainability was retaining a choice, and the problems of affording a house in the area could become worse as more people move in to take advantage of Buckinghamshire’s excellent schools when the qualification for entry to Grammar Schools changes. There is a need for family housing in the area and the balance could be threatened if there was large scale intensification.

**Character** Cressex Road is losing its character as front gardens are increasingly turned over to car parking (and there are few front gates). The road is dominated by through traffic, and does not look very well cared for. There is also loss of character through redevelopment

### NEIGHBOURHOOD SCORE CARD - CRESSEX

- \* 1. Poor
- 2. Adequate
- 3. Good
- \*\* 1 to 5 where  
1 = least important and  
5 = very important

A. Physical capital	Score*	Rank**
<b>1. Choice</b>		
• can the area accommodate the stages in a family's life cycle?	2	5
• does it offer a mix of house types and affordability?	2	
<b>2. Connectivity</b>		
• can you reach services and jobs without too much stress?	3	3
• are there basic shops and quality open space within easy walking or cycling distance?	1	
<b>3. Conservation</b>		
• are natural resources being saved e.g. energy, water, materials (waste)?	1	2
• is bio-diversity being encouraged e.g. trees, wildlife?	1	
<b>4. Character</b>		
• does the area look attractive and cared for?	2	4
• has new development enhanced the area?	2	
<b>5. Commerce</b>		
• are there other uses in the area, such as employment or leisure?	3	1
• are there places to set-up a business?	2	
<b>B. Social capital</b>		
<b>1. Community</b>		
• do people feel a sense of pride?		
• does the area readily accept newcomers?		
<b>2. Civic life</b>		
• are there enough places to meet others e.g. pubs, clubs, open spaces?		
• are the shops and services welcoming?		
<b>3. Crime</b>		
• do residents feel safe when they go out?		
• do residents feel their property is safe?		
<b>4. Climate for enterprise</b>		
• is it a good place to start a business?		
• is there sufficient purchasing power to support local businesses?		
<b>5. Capacity (and quality) of services</b>		
• can you get to see a doctor without a long wait?		
• can you get into an acceptable secondary school without a long journey?		

Group felt unable to score or rank the social capital questions but made the following comments:

- useful to use with a residential group
- too simplistic for the task
- school question could relate to reputation and within walking distance
- is the school helping or hindering the suburb
- crime question might relate to antisocial behaviour, and do people care for their property/does the LA care for its property
- sense of pride might be better under civic life, and include attendance at meetings

replacing original large detached dwellings with smaller units and smaller gardens. However the suburb still retains character as an area of family housing.

#### Possible improvements:

**a. Building design** The proposals being submitted for development, including extensions, often by local firms, are thought (by Planning Officers) to be of a generally low standard. As permission for intensification is uncertain, developers invest little

in design and produce proposals that are designed for profit rather than attractiveness.

**Connectivity** Walking or cycling is not very pleasant, with little open space and heavy traffic. It is easy to use a car in Cressex Road. As the road is very long it is not as well connected as it might be, and the areas behind it are cut off and relatively impermeable.



Urban Design Principles

- developing corner plot adjacent to local centre
- increasing the mix of uses with retail, communal facilities and workshops, with housing above
- maximising density whilst preserving the character of the neighbourhood
- providing a pedestrian circuit through a variety of street environments.

## Room for renewal and redevelopment

In addition to the above improvements there is the following potential for the area to become more sustainable through renewal and development.

At present there are three applications for redeveloping existing housing, including one that will lead to the loss of two of the most attractive looking houses on the road. Though the redevelopment of houses is very controversial, e.g. with concern about ecology and habitat loss, there are a number of opportunities, which may minimise any adverse impact on the community.

- **Strengthening the local centre** Re-developing the doctor's surgery, with its hardstanding behind, into a primary health centre, and providing space for a group of practices, with housing above would:
  - reinforce the attractions of the local centre
  - provide affordable housing in a highly accessible location
  - create some architectural quality
  - open up the rear of adjoining sites
 (While informal discussion with the PCT revealed that there are insufficient facilities in the area, there are no commitments to providing more facilities or resources to secure new facilities.)



Illustrative only

### Possible improvements:

- a. **The new link road** between the industrial estate and John Hall Way should take some traffic away from Cressex Road, thus freeing up some road space, and enabling improvements to be made.
- b. **Greening frontages** There is a real need to reverse the gradual loss of identity through tree planting along the road, which could be combined with traffic calming measures through 'build outs'.
- c. **Living streets** A concerted effort could be made to encourage cycling and walking by narrowing and possibly curving the carriageway in places, providing cycle lanes (which is particularly important in

creating Safer Routes to School), and possibly providing car parking on some of the verges, which could be echelon style to fit more in, and help cut traffic speed.

**Community** There are concerns, like everywhere else, about gangs of young people hanging around, anti social behaviour, and low levels of community engagement.

### Possible improvements:

- Research has shown the need for
- a. **A small local park** with places to sit and for children to play
  - b. **Clearer definition between public and private open space**



speculation, intensification could be concentrated around the ends of roads, thus preserving the character of the road, and allowing new streets to be built with lanes or footpaths that improved permeability.

- **Using institutional land** Another way of securing large development sites in order to avoid piecemeal development would be to use institutional land. Buckinghamshire County Council own several sites: Orchard House, a Childrens Home, is now part offices for Social Services and Vinio House, a special educational needs school, has just been granted permission for change of use to a children's respite unit. There is often potential to relocate schools, and enable a much better designed scheme to be provided with a range of housing on it, as well as the opportunity to address open space deficiencies. According to Wycombe DC, the advantages in relocating facilities to suitable sites is sometimes overlooked.

## Recommendation for policy

At present the planning system is not resolving the conflicts, and quality may be lost in the concern to boost housing numbers. Redevelopment can produce 12 homes in place of 2, but developers

need 3-6 plots to make backland development work, and are reluctant to include affordable housing. It is impractical to build on the back gardens alone, and it may be better for housing to come forward, with parking behind. Councillors want to retain the character of the area, and are concerned by the speculation that is starting to take place. Also a number of houses are being left empty and allowed to decay.

A study is underway locally to identify wider issues, and consideration is being given to the need for and type of advice for Cressex. This may take the form of a Supplementary Planning Document. Meanwhile applications are going to appeal, and there is a fear that 'the flood-gates may open'. A number of possible solutions were identified by this study:

- **Area Action Plans** The new Development Framework will require Councils to produce plans for areas, such as Cressex Road, that are in a transition or offer development opportunities. The ODPM is also encouraging local authorities to produce strategies for smaller centres, such as the Turnpike. This could provide the clear framework that both house owners and developers need to reduce uncertainty, and hence produce better schemes.

- **Character Area Appraisals** Even a single road developed largely in a single era can contain many different elements. While it would be wrong to seek to conserve Cressex Road through Listed Buildings or Conservation Area status, it does deserve to be treated as somewhere distinctive, where a pride of place should be encouraged. Now that most people are aware of the value of looking after old buildings, the battlefield is shifting to 'Character Areas', and character appraisals would be useful in identifying what makes a place special, and what is missing. These could provide an excellent way of engaging local people, possibly starting with the schools. Character Area Appraisals could identify the areas where intensification was appropriate, as well as marking features that should be conserved and enhanced. Along with the use of Neighbourhood Profiles and 'action planning events' they could lead on to the issue of Supplementary Planning Documents in Local Development Frameworks.

- **Development briefs and masterplans** There is a case for having masterplans for the wider area of Cressex, especially to ensure that full advantage is taken of the planned new road. In addition where



there are opportunities for intensification and/or mixed use development, briefs for specific sites would help to secure better quality schemes and ensure that the outcome reflects the need.

- **Design Guides** Though Design Guides and awards have a role to play, the general feeling was that something more specific was required, and that the Council needed to take the lead. Design Guides could be undertaken in association with professionals working for developers or groups of private owners. It is possible that small schemes might be discouraged in favour of proposals that not only provide more than 15 units but also provide some community benefits

- **Community Charge** Some of the opposition to development would be reduced if developers made a proper contribution to improving the general environment. This could be facilitated by using a system of 'charges', rather than the current Section 106 agreements, to contribute towards transport improvements, based on the number of bedrooms.

Alternatively a better system might be a charge related to the value of the development, to be paid before the houses are occupied. Within Wycombe contributions are already sought via the S106 process for implementing the Local Transport Strategy currently applicable to Marlow

and High Wycombe (which therefore includes Cressex), and where new development is proposed that generates new demands for travel.

Contributions are proportionate to the level of demand associated with the development and its parking provision, and are sought where development would result in more than 20 additional vehicular movements per day (equating to about an additional 2 or 3 dwellings). The contributions fund is ring fenced, and can only be spent on the local transport strategy. More info at <http://www.wycombe.gov.uk/planning>

- **Partnership or Trust** As there is often reluctance to pay money over to local authorities who may use it for other purposes, the process of charging could be improved through the use of a local trust, that could collect contributions and use them to support improvements identified and favoured by the local community. At the same time the local authority needs a 'seed capital' fund to cover the costs of preparing design guides. This could be replenished out of a Community Investment Fund or Programme.

- **Living Streets** As there is so little experience in the UK in making streets pedestrian friendly (outside town centres where very different conditions occur) new guidance and models are needed. The former Pedestrians Association is

promoting new ideas under the name Living Streets, which may well describe what is required.

- **Community Engagement** This is an area where experience could usefully be shared between authorities on what works, and the costs and benefits. Nothing can happen without support, and techniques such as surveys and action planning events are needed to help build consensus. In Cressex there is a fear that those wishing to realise the value of their housing asset may be selling off 'cheaply' to developers, as well as causing problems for their neighbours who do not want redevelopment. If it were agreed that intensification was desirable for an area, and both the community and developers were aware of this, there could be a move towards developing a set of plans and principles where there was some agreement on where this should take place. The principles would consider size of back garden, location and proximity to public transport. Where necessary compensation would be paid, but the aim would be to seek as much agreement as possible, thus avoiding creeping development and provide a fair deal for all.

## Summary findings from FPD Savills' Market\* report on Cressex

### Residential

- One of the most popular residential areas in High Wycombe due to its proximity to the motorway network and good schools.
- With relatively lower values than in Wycombe district, it is popular with young families in particular, and with first time buyers and those wanting to buy to let (flats).
- Flats and detached houses have seen the highest increases in value due to their relative scarcity, compared with semi detached housing for which there is continuing demand, and which dominates the suburb.
- Demand is considered to be outstripping supply and there is no latent unfilled demand for specific types of property not currently found in the area.
- Typified mainly by 'comfortably off – secure families (ACORN classification) with some wealthy executives, most properties – 85% – are owner-occupied.
- In the last two years there have been five applications for residential intensification in the study area. One (pending) is to develop six flats on 193-5 Cressex High Road. Lack of supply of semis is likely to push up prices.
- High Wycombe, with its town centre improvements, is becoming increasingly popular as a place to live and future demand could lead to greater development activity if suitable land can be found.

### Retail and Leisure, Office and Industrial

- Cressex is not a prime business area/location.
- There is limited retail provision in Cressex – a few local neighbourhood units, and an ASDA in Booker.
- Given the relative affluence of residents there should be a healthy and attractive retail sector.
- While no retail is proposed for Cressex there are two mixed use developments in the town centre – Town Centre Redevelopment (formerly Project Phoenix) which will accommodate the need for large high street retail units and Lily's Walk (former gas works).
- Cressex has the potential to support some further small scale retail development dedicated to neighbourhood services, or even a more up market/specialist offering due to the relatively high affluence of Cressex residents.
- There is a multi-screen cinema and leisure centre on the suburb's periphery.
- There are plans to develop a leisure unit on a mixed use scheme in Oxford/Bellfield roads, and it is envisaged that the Town Centre Redevelopment scheme will have a significant proportion of leisure space.
- The Cressex Industrial/Business Estate is dominated by manufacturing/industrial uses rather than offices, making it an unattractive environment for service businesses looking for dedicated office space. The ageing stock does little to attract prospective occupiers.
- There is no significant demand for any type of office space in Cressex itself.
- In the borough as a whole there may be obsolete 60's and 70's business stock that could be converted to residential development.
- Local market perception is that office demand in the long term will be good due to High Wycombe's good road links and relatively vibrant economy.

### Future action

- There may be good future demand for various property types in Cressex based on the fact that there is an established business park in the area, and that the location is good in terms of proximity to the motorway. Development could take the form of a mixed use scheme situated close to or even incorporating Cressex Business Park.

\* The full market report can be found at [www.southeast-ra.gov.uk](http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk)