

Survey finds villages lack facilities

BUCKS ranks below average in a national survey of parishes lacking key services such as a village shop or post office.

The study, carried out by the Rural Development Commission (RDC), revealed that 46 per cent of parishes in the county in 1997 lacked a shop of any kind, 71 per cent didn't have a general store, and 46 per cent had no post office.

The researchers also pointed out that parishes often embrace more than one village.

Bucks is benefiting from the new Village Shop Development Scheme, which is providing £500,000 for shops in 26 local areas to help pay for improvements such as a new freezer or a new roof. It cannot be used to pay wages for extra staff.

The maximum grant is £5,000,

but first there has to be a cash advance by the district council which is matched by the RDC and then matched by the shop owner.

Out of more than 9,000 English rural parishes surveyed, 82 per cent had no food-only shops and 75 per cent had no daily bus service.

Miles Middleton, chairman of the RDC, commented: "What is worrying is the continuing reduction in bus services. This means that rural residents are more dependent on private transport and are particularly vulnerable to measures designed to reduce car use."

Anne Grindley, the RDC's South East Regional Manager, said the figures concealed marked levels of deprivation in many villages.

She added: "Particularly hard

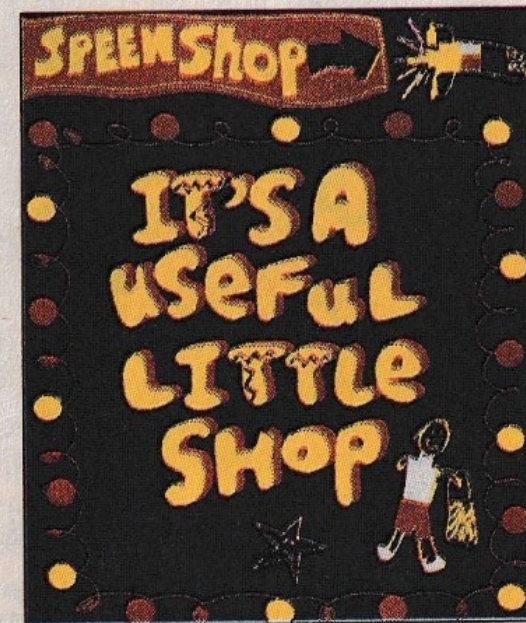
hit are those looking for work or having to travel to work when they do not have their own transport."

But there is good news for residents in one South Bucks village. Speen is getting its shop back ten years after the last one closed.

The brick and flint shop has been built with lottery funds on the site of the former village store, in a joint venture between Wycombe District Council and the Wycombe-based Buckinghamshire Housing Association.

The association bought the site for £120,000 and battled for five years to convince people that a village shop was still viable in an age when the majority of families in affluent areas buy groceries from out-of-town supermarkets.

The shop is now ready for fitting out, a sign has been



Sign: The Speen store

designed by pupils at the village school, and a grand opening is planned for next month.