

# **East Coker Neighbourhood Plan**

## **Evidence Base Report**

**Draft**

**26 May 2014**

## Introduction

The East Coker Neighbourhood Plan is being developed within the context of understanding the key issues of relevance to the Parish, or in other words, developing an 'evidence base'. The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG) has gone about this in a number of ways to ensure that we have as much relevant information on the key issues in the Parish as possible.

### *Locally derived and specific information*

1. A Parish-wide community survey distributed to each household in the Parish. A separate report sets out the findings and identifies a number of gaps in information or areas where further detail is required through further research and discussion with the community. A summary of the community survey headlines is included in this document.
2. Interviews, focus groups and correspondence on a range of key issues where the community survey has highlighted a need for further information, summaries of which are set out in this report.
3. A focused business survey applied through interviews and discussion with some of the key businesses in the Parish. This report sets out the key findings from that exercise.
4. Information relevant to the Parish taken from known locally specific studies, plans and other documents, set out in this report.
5. Relevant statistics available for the Parish from robust sources such as the 2011 census, some of which are set out in this report, with sources for further data clearly 'signposted'.
6. Various community consultation events, the results from which are documented in separate reports.

### *'Strategic' or wider than local information*

7. Wider than local information has principally been gathered through 'desktop' research into existing relevant plans, strategies, programmes and guidance. This is helpful in understanding and setting out the existing and future policy context and other key issues set out by various organisations. The information may refer to East Coker specifically but will

often be presented in wider geographic areas such as Yeovil, South Somerset, Somerset or a wider sub-region or region. This report sets out the findings from that exercise.

The report which follows summarises information gathered through the above tasks where indicated. It does that by focusing on 12 topic areas or themes which are:

- Business Activity and Employment;
- Education;
- Leisure and Services;
- Transport and Travel;
- Health and Social Needs;
- Housing;
- Children and Young People;
- Crime and Safety;
- Energy, Recycling and Waste;
- Parish matters;
- Natural Environment; and,
- Built Environment.

This report summarises only the key issues and results of research. More in depth coverage of the processes followed for each of the exercises above, setting out what we did, how we did it and what we asked, are documented in separate reports.

### ***Business Activity and Employment***

- We are a highly skilled and experienced community and many are retired from work.
- Less than 10% of working people work from home.
- Most working people travel out of the parish by car as the bus is generally unhelpful.
- Many of those who are employed in the parish travel in!
- Our 'major' employers have survived the recession and are satisfied with their existing conditions.
- Employers do not have significant training needs for their employees.
- Whilst a majority of people would like to see a greater number of local employment opportunities, the existing employers do not plan expansion.

- Residents do not like the appearance of the Halves Lane industrial site, however the occupants feel that the buildings suit their purpose.

#### Key Messages

- The existing parish businesses are generally satisfied with their accommodation, workforce and current performance and are unlikely to increase employee numbers.
- Even though parishioners would like an improvement in the appearance of the industrial estate, those responsible are unlikely to make changes.
- It is unlikely that there will be an increase in the number of jobs for parishioners.

### Education

#### General

- Playschool use remains restricted to a minority of families with young children.
- One in five young families have had difficulty in finding suitable child care.
- Most of the young children of the parish go to the local primary school which is almost at maximum capacity.
- There is no scope for the school to grow, and it could only increase capacity by becoming an Academy.
- 50% of pupils come from outside the catchment, so without them, the school would shrink to 4/5 classes.
- There are 4 secondary schools with East Coker being in the catchment of Westfield Academy.
- The area is served by 5 further education colleges.

#### Travel to school

- A third of primary school children travel to school by car, some use coach transport.
- Around half of the parish's primary school pupils walk to school.
- Most of those who walk to school felt their normal route was not safe because of dangerous parking and cars passing over the white line where pedestrians walk.
- People are reluctant to park at the village hall even though there is plenty of space, considering it too far to walk (approx 400 metres).
- Traffic issues have long been a concern, the Headteacher (HT) has, in the past, organised a public meeting involving interested parties; tried several initiatives including children walking from outside the immediate parking zone. They were unsupported so not sustained.
- HT investigated the creation of a footpath from the Village Hall to school, but the landowner was not agreeable to this access.
- Regular reminders re-parking are included in the school newsletters and mass texts sent to parents.
- Key Stage 1 children already finish school earlier than Key Stage 2, but further phasing of pick-up times would not help and would be unpopular.
- HT suggestions for potential changes were the possible use of double yellow lines (already discussed and rejected by the Parish Council); more frequent visits by Police Community

Support Officers or others in such authority (the Parish Council have requested this and are exploring further). *At time of writing (23 May 2014) the Police have written a strongly worded letter to all parents to be distributed today.)*

#### Key Messages

- The popular and successful primary school attracts half its children from outside the parish. They keep numbers on role high and there is no scope to expand further.
- There are adequate secondary and further education options within travelling distance of the parish.
- Traffic problems associated with school timings cause major disruption to village life. These ongoing problems could be helped with thoughtful parking, use of the Village Hall car park and greater visibility of Police to support enforcement.

#### Leisure and Services

- A large majority of local people is involved in some type of community affairs or local social activities, with the East Coker Preservation Society having a large local following.
- Allotments remain a minority interest.
- Many feel there should be more organised activities locally for young people (see Children and Young People section).
- The vast majority of local people feel the local shop is an important facility whose services could and should be extended. However the proprietors' feel that this is economically unviable because of the small support from local residents using the facilities.
- A majority of local residents would welcome a community-led tea room (since the survey, a privately run tea room has opened).

#### *Clubs and societies (as these are so important we have included detailed analysis in this section)*

- There are 37 well established clubs and societies meeting weekly or monthly at one of 12 venues within the parish. Membership varies from 7 to over 100.
- There is scope for more groups to explore interests not yet represented.
- The majority of groups operate on a formal, voluntary basis with a committee and positions of responsibility, but there are smaller, less formal groups organised by one person.
- Two groups operate as charitable trusts and have paid employees.
- Groups for a younger age range have all increased in size since formation, whilst those attracting a predominantly older age group have tended to decrease.
- It is a challenge to attract new members especially younger people and those prepared to take on more responsibilities.
- The majority of members are from the parish, however some come from much further afield, attracted by our community and facilities.
- We have a Village Hall with high class facilities (well-equipped kitchen, stage, bar, additional smaller room, car park), however some groups prefer to meet in public houses, cafés or private homes.
- The recently extended Pavilion works well, but improved changing facilities and parking would help even more.
- The Scouts plan to extend and improve their own dedicated building on the Recreational field.

### Key messages

- The parish is well served with facilities and amenities for leisure and recreation.
- There are many opportunities for leisure pursuits in the parish and these diverse clubs are well supported, however there needs to be more available for young people.
- The village shop provides helpful services, but its existence is threatened by underuse by local people.

### ***Transport and Travel***

- We seem to be a very car-dependent community.
- Local people feel that the restricted subsidised local bus service does not sufficiently meet local needs to provide an alternative mode of regular transport. However there is little potential to improve the public transport service due to limited Government funding for bus subsidy. New housing developments may enhance existing services, but this may add travel time to divert to longer routes.
- Charity provided transport is available at a cost.
- Resident parking is no longer regarded as a significant problem nor an issue by most.
- Walking and cycling routes and opportunities must be improved, but in the current climate of reduced public funding, this is unlikely to be a priority for action.
- Road and footpath maintenance could be better, but public funding is an issue and Parish Council precept may need to be used in this regard.
- Our community does care about the negative impact of the motor car on the environment.

### Key Messages

- Because of our rural setting, we are a car dependent community, but we care about the negative impact of cars on the environment.
- The existing local bus service may have more potential to meet specific needs (Demand Response Service may not be fully utilised), but is unlikely to be improved due to decreasing funding subsidy.
- Even in the time of government funding cuts, it is important to maintain and improve our roads and footpaths.

### ***Health and Social Needs***

- Generally the people of East Coker live healthy lives
- They live longer more prosperous lives than the national average
- They are generally happy with the health care provision on offer at present
- They appreciate they have to travel to receive health care.
- It is unlikely that any surgery (either 'main' or 'branch') would be supported within the Parish even with a significant building development.

From our focus group with older people, the following extra issues and perceptions were raised:

- Many feel lonely, especially in times of crisis.
- Many feel that the community is less good than people think, and may even be divided.
- 'Second home' owners are not perceived to be part of the community and 'new comers' are often not as neighbourly as their predecessors.
- Travel is difficult especially for some who have no access to a car.
- The bus is of limited use especially when accessing doctors' surgeries.
- They consider that a village taxi service would do well.
- Walking is difficult not only because of personal physical issues, but also traffic and poor conditions on our narrow country roads.
- They are concerned any future housing developments would add to the traffic problems.
- For those who do not have access to the internet, it would be helpful for shopping and keeping in touch.
- Living in a large family home is the norm because there is very little alternative accommodation in the parish.

#### Key messages

- Our Parishioners are healthier and live longer than average and are generally satisfied with the existing health care services, accepting that they need to travel to access them. There is little chance that parish-based services will develop.
- We have a lot of older people in the parish and some of them feel lonely and isolated, sometimes made worse by transport challenges.
- With age, some people find life more difficult especially access to shops and living in large accommodation more suited to their earlier lives.

#### **Housing**

- House prices are relatively high and prevent many people that would like to, from living in East Coker.
- Access to housing in the parish for young persons from the parish is very restricted.
- There is an identifiable preference to see more affordable homes being made available, however, SSDC identify a 1<sup>st</sup> choice need for only 8 homes across the Parish (not all considered a local need).
- Most local people would prefer to see new housing provided by way of small annual incremental development on suitable sites around the parish, certainly not large scale developments.
- In the 5 years to March 2013 there were 23 planning approvals for new build with only 12 completed or under construction.
- Housing that is suitable for the elderly is still in short supply and with an ever increasing older population, future housing may need to reflect this.
- The 2013 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment shows developer/landowner interest on land in East Coker for 2,683 dwellings.
- The number of unoccupied dwellings rose from 18 to 56 between 2001 and 2011.

### Key messages

- Housing costs in our popular parish are high, restricting access to younger people.
- The overwhelming desire of the parish is for small sympathetic developments rather than large overwhelming ones.
- Future developments need to take account of the specific and different needs of older and younger people.
- Whilst there is a preference for affordable housing, there is little existing evidence to support this.

### ***Children and Young People***

- Most young people seem to be happy generally with East Coker and what it has to offer with informal leisure activity not connected to organised adult events.
- Young people have very little knowledge of any youth organisations, parish clubs and support available relying on information passed via peers. A parish youth project will be launched in May 2014 to increase the leisure opportunities for young people.
- According to local youth agencies, East Coker is very much on the periphery of funding and support.
- As a parish we are seen to have an older population therefore having little need for support for our small younger population.
- The parish has mostly private not social housing therefore the support needs do not appear to have any priority with either housing associations or SSDC even though local children would like to see an expansion of the play areas within the parish to include different age groups making them “more exciting areas”.
- SSDC are looking to extend their support for young people of the parish during non-term time.
- A very high proportion of young people say they would like to live in the parish in the long-term.

### Key messages

- Most young people are generally satisfied with life in the parish and many would like to live here long term.
- There are several activities for children and young people, but there are gaps in provision (which may be helped by a youth group commencing 27 May 2014).
- Whilst we have many older people, we (including agencies outside the parish) need to beware of not overlooking the needs of the young.

### ***Crime and Safety***



- East Coker is a safe place to live with a total of 17 reported crimes from May 2013 – April 2014.
- Whilst the survey results suggested that Neighbourhood Watch may help reduce the incidents of crimes against property, these were relatively few (9 in the year).
- The NP survey results suggested that there was a problem of speeding traffic, but this was not borne out by a scientific survey by SCC Highways (2012).
- Respondents to the NP survey thought local policing service/coverage could be improved, however this is not realistic in relation to the staff responsible for the entire Coker Ward.
- The views of the Headteacher and parents on parking at the school can be found in our 'Education' section.

#### Key messages

- East Coker is a safe place to live, having low crime figures.
- Whilst speeding continues to be perceived as a problem, this was not supported by a scientific survey.
- Walkways within certain built-up areas especially near the school are dangerous and need further appropriate action.
- Constraints on police staffing mean that we need to be more active in getting support when needed, particularly concerning school parking issues.

#### ***Energy Recycling and Waste***

- Most East Coker residents participate fully in the recycling opportunities on offer.
- They consider recycling should be extended and this is an aspiration of SCC.
- There is a willingness to recycle much more if a service can be arranged or is on offer at a suitable site locally and again this is an aspiration of SCC to increase both site and kerbside recycling facilities, especially food waste.
- The reduced opening hours at the Yeovil tip were causing problems, including increased local fly tipping, however, from 1 April 2014, the tip is open 7 days a week, 8am – 4pm.
- Almost all garden waste is separated for composting through SCC's garden waste collection service.
- A large majority of parishioners recognise the value of using renewable energy, however there is concern about the potential negative impact of large renewable energy installations.
- Over a third of residents oppose wind turbines and solar farms being developed locally.

#### Key messages

- Most parishioners fully support and use the services offered by Somerset County Council, who are trying to extend what is available - especially disposal of food waste.
- The recent re-opening of Yeovil tip is welcome.

- Whilst recognising the value of renewable energy, there is a concern about local development of large scale facilities.

### ***Parish Matters***

- Most residents feel they remain well informed on local matters.
- Many would like to see a more regular local newsletter but there are constraints on the funding and distribution. It would be very helpful if more people agreed to receive it via e-mail.
- Most residents are satisfied that they can have their say in the way the parish is run and there are methods by which they can have their say and be informed of the decisions and work of the Parish Council.
- Broadband speeds are a frustration to many especially those running businesses from home. Wraxhill residents can already access Superfast Broadband, whilst those served by the West Coker exchange may have to wait until 2016.

### **Key messages**

- Most residents are satisfied with the work of the Parish Council and feel that they have a say.
- Most people feel well informed on local matters but would value more frequent newsletters. However this has many practical implications for funding and volunteer support making it unlikely to happen. If more people offered to receive it via e-mail this aspiration would become more achievable.
- Superfast Broadband is already available in part of the parish and frustratingly, the remainder may have to wait until 2016 to be able to have access.

### ***Natural Environment***

- Most residents are extremely happy with East Coker as it is.
- The greatest fear is being swallowed up by Yeovil and urbanisation with the consequent changes to life within the Parish.
- The ongoing fear of housing developments is exacerbated by current impending development applications (May 2014), including 144 dwellings (Nash/Helena Road), 17 dwellings (Long Furlong Lane), 750 dwellings (Keyford) – all of these whilst the modified SSDC Local Plan is still awaiting inspection (June 2014).
- Grade 1 agricultural land should remain in agricultural use, but some owners of such land.
- There remains a concern at the lack of a tree replacement programme, however the Parish Council have replaced trees in the Recreation Area and in the paddock. Whilst there is no formal 'tree replacement programme', they will monitor and respond to ongoing need.
- The parish ranger scheme is much appreciated and the Parish Council continue to fund and manage the scheme, in liaison with SSDC. Parishioners are encouraged to nominate and refer appropriate tasks to the coordinating councillor.

### Key messages

- Most residents are extremely happy with East Coker as it is and their greatest fear is large scale developments within the parish, changing the characteristics of life in the area.
- Grade 1 agricultural land is highly valued within the community and should be protected at all costs.
- The Parish Ranger scheme makes a valuable contribution to the upkeep of the parish and should be retained.

### ***Built Environment***

- East Coker parish comprises an attractive group of settlements in a fine rural setting; and should remain so.
- Any future extension to East and North Coker Conservation areas or development of additional conservation areas by SSDC are likely to receive widespread support.
- As part of the Neighbourhood Plan, a design statement should be created to address residents' issues raised in the survey.
- Concerns expressed about speeding and parking issues have been researched and can be found in the 'Transport and Travel' and 'Education' sections respectively.
- As a result of initiatives arising from the national flooding in winter 2013/4 the Parish Council will make efforts to access funding as possible to ameliorate local problems. It will also be necessary to include flood risk as part of the policies created in the Neighbourhood Plan.
- Having spoken to employers using the Halves Land industrial site, it is unlikely that there will be changes to the appearance of those buildings in the near future, even though residents would welcome improvements.
- Whilst road maintenance and drain clearance is the responsibility of Somerset County Council and SSDC, both have reduced budgets because of government austerity measures. East Coker Parish Council will continue to request their support and will also consider, where and when necessary, using funding from the Parish Precept.

### Key messages

- Our parish is beautiful and idyllic and any further development of conservation areas is likely to be well-supported.
- Many feel that the Halves Lane industrial site is less attractive than the rest of the area, however there is little chance that this will be enhanced.
- Flooding issues remain a concern, especially after winter 2013/14.

- Road maintenance and drain clearance need to be monitored and undertaken to preserve the well-being of the parish.