



# South Petherton Parish Council Community Plan - 2023

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

In late 2022, South Petherton Parish Council asked a small Steering Group to prepare a Community Consultation Survey to update the Parish Council's knowledge of local needs.

The new community survey has been carried out with the support of Smart Communities Ltd (part of the Community Council for Somerset), and funding from Somerset County Council, Somerset Association of Local Councils and South Petherton Community Land Trust.

The survey took place between 28th November 2022 and 16th December 2022, and was available to respondents both through a paper version and an online one. All residents aged 16+ in the Parish of South Petherton were eligible to take part. The survey was advertised through noticeboards, local magazines, social media, and through a leaflet which was delivered to every household in the parish.

A total of **406** residents completed the survey, of which around **60** used paper versions, which has justified offering this method to those unable to access computers.



Supported by



# Findings

**We have now analysed the results and presented them at a public event on 15th March 2023. A summary of the main findings follows:**



## Demographics

The overall response rate was around 12.7% of the total adult population, which is considered a good response rate for a survey of this type. The responders are heavily weighted towards the older age groups with 71% of those responding being 56 or over. This does, of course, reflect the demographic for the community as recorded in the last census.



## Communications

We wanted to find out which methods of communication are used to find out about what activities and events are going on in South Petherton Parish, as well as how people keep up to date with Parish Council matters and anything around local business and commerce. Findings will now help us improve our methods of communication and ensure that we communicate with the whole community effectively.

- It is pleasing to see that the vast majority of residents appear moderately or well informed about what is going on in the parish with only 1 in 8 feeling poorly informed. The importance of local leaflets/magazines/community facebook group pages and 'friends/word of mouth' is clear in this understanding of how residents learn about what is going on in the parish. While many access local social media sites and welcomed their development, those who did not use the internet stressed the importance of posters in public places and community magazines.
- In respect of future improvements, the growing use of, and increasing demand for, social media as a medium for learning what is going on in the parish is clear, as is the wish for a bigger Local Information Centre, and improved use of parish notice boards.



## Children & Young People

Everyone wants to offer children and young people in the parish the best possible services.

- The survey revealed very good use of current facilities within the parish, especially the playground and the youth club
- In respect of further provision, a woodland adventure area was most sought, followed by a bike/skateboard park.
- In respect of barriers to engagement, cost was raised most, followed by lack of information and parents work patterns
- For the future this suggests some routes forward for the Youth Parish Council and the Skateboard Park Working Group, as well as for others involved in the provision of services





## Community Facilities and Community Hub/Centre

It is hoped to create a Community Hub in South Petherton, where the Library can have a permanent home, as well as the Parish Council offices. If larger premises such as the Coke Methodist complex of buildings are secured, the range of services on offer could be expanded significantly. We were interested in finding out what else might be ideally provided through such a facility.

- There is clear support for the venue to continue to be used for a wide range of activities. It should be noted that, whilst the active Methodist congregation in South Petherton is declining, the members wish to have the opportunity to continue to use the facility for worship, even if it does become a Community Hub.
- Should a Community Hub be realised, there would be a need for the spaces provided to be used flexibly to reflect changing community needs over a period of time, e.g. in 2022 there is clear community demand for warm space provision, a community post office (mentioned frequently under 'Other') and the creation of a food/clothing bank. Such needs might well change over years and decades and the Community Hub would seek to accommodate these demands.
- Other specific comments concerned lack of provision for those with special needs, support for carers, additional sports and fitness facilities, and an accessible local history archive.
- Some of those responding questioned the suitability of the Methodist complex for a community hub, preferring a new build.
- Amongst those who responded there is clear support for further development of the Food Share scheme.
- Funding will need to be secured from a variety of sources. Specific comments mentioned the desirability of attracting legacies, donations and business sponsorship, targeted local fund-raising and increasing the parish precept.



## Traffic, Travel & Transport

Cars are essential for many people in rural areas, but to address the challenges of congestion and climate change, we can look to improve the provision of public transport, and encourage walking and cycling, to reduce car journeys.

- Two thirds of those responding to the question about traffic concerns raised speed of traffic as a continuing issue despite the introduction of the 20mph zone covering much of the village.
- Amongst the many other issues raised were: cutting back of hedges obscuring signs and overgrowth on pavements; road safety for horse riders; lack of provision for cyclists; the poor state of pavements; the need for restrictions on large tractors and trailers; problems created when traffic is diverted onto narrow lanes; disregard of parking restrictions; lack of functioning EV chargepoints, inconsiderate parking by parents delivering and collecting children from school; the desirability of creating a one-way system.
- An overwhelming percentage of responders considered the provision of a bus service to Yeovil to be essential. (Since the completion of the survey, it is noted that the frequency of buses to and from the village has been reduced.)





## Cost of Living

The price of food and fuel and other goods and services have spiralled. We wanted to find out how the Cost of Living Crisis is impacting our community and what services and resources we could put in place to help.

- As anticipated, the majority of responders are feeling the effects of rising prices on day to day living. The relatively low number of those reporting concerns about mortgage costs reflects the age profile of responders. A desire for the Community hub to assist people struggling with the cost of living was clear.
- A range of other comments included suggestions around helping people with computer usage, developing cooking skills and providing support for small businesses. Education and early learning also received comment.



## Retired and Older People

Many people post-retirement are often very active in their community and provide a valuable resource for action. However, we must acknowledge the challenges Somerset's ageing population will present to health, social care and housing providers.

- It is pleasing to see that so many responders consider that a wide range of opportunities are open to them, as reflected in the number of clubs, organisations and societies listed in ta13 and the parish magazine.
- The majority of responders are satisfied with the current level of provision. Some specific comments were made about lack of public transport in the evenings, the possibility of the desired Hub providing a wider range of opportunities and the need to take into account challenges such as impaired hearing, mental health concerns and the needs of those who lived alone and did not have a social circle with whom to interact.



## Health & Wellbeing

Health & Wellbeing was another topic for consultation in this Community Review process.

- It is concerning that so many residents reported difficulty in accessing services to meet their health and well-being needs.
- Specific comments reinforced concerns, such as the difficulties experienced accessing dentistry services and making appointments at the Health Centre. This decline in the availability of services is deeply disturbing.





## Community Safety

Residents were asked about which aspects of Community Safety are important in the community?

- A disturbing number of issues were raised by the survey, especially in respect of traffic, roads, parking and safety.
- Specific comments reinforced concerns about speeding tractors, anti-social behaviour, dog fouling and lack of parking.
- A large number of specific comments were also included. They reinforced desires for more policing, increased traffic enforcement, safer pedestrian routes and better driver behaviour.



## Business

Business has changed over the last couple of years and how and where it takes place has been particularly affected by Covid. The survey asked about local opinion.

- A number of specific comments included concerns about the absence of post office and banking services, as well as a desire for a greater variety of retail businesses.
- A number of responses suggested the need to increase the availability of local workspaces.
- In respect of broadband services, and whilst fibre has been made available to many in the parish, this clearly remains an issue for many business users working from home. A number of specific comments reinforced concerns about broadband/mobile phone coverage in some parts of the parish,
- There is clearly strong support for more advice and assistance to be available for current and new businesses in the parish. There were some specific comments about rental levels.



## Other Issues and Concerns

A range of other issues were raised through the survey. A number of examples which had been raised a good number of times are as follows:

- The survey reveals good local support for the creation of a community owned renewable energy facility. The most popular form of energy scheme is of a solar type, with good support for harnessing wind power. Some specific comments expressed concerns about solar farms and heat networks, but were generally supportive of exploring possibilities further.
- Consistent with earlier responses, the speed of traffic continues to be the greatest area of concern.





## Other Issues and Concerns continued...



- Significant concern also raised around the cost of housing, bus services, overgrown footpaths, litter and dog mess.
- It is pleasing that more people are happy with the level of provision of arts/music/theatre/sporting and social activities than those who are unhappy. There are also a number of specific comments from respondents regarding the desire for more live music, more film screenings, more lunch clubs and a regular produce market.
- Wish to see Post Office services restored. Since the survey it has been announced that the local Newsagent will be providing post office services in the future.
- Lack of Banking facility. Following the closure of the Nat West Branch, a mobile service is provided for one hour every other Thursday afternoon. It seems unlikely that a bank branch will reopen, given the general programme of closures nationwide, although the reopening of the Post Office will offer some banking services in the parish. The Bath Building Society branch has also closed recently, again reflecting the changes in banking habits as online banking grows and cash use recedes.
- Lack of sufficient public parking This is a theme which has cropped up throughout the survey. Whilst difficult to resolve, it clearly needs to figure within future parish strategies.
- Lack of bus services to nearby towns other than Yeovil (Crewkerne/Martock/Ilminster/Taunton mentioned). This is again a recurring theme, and is another difficult one to resolve. The service to Yeovil has recently been reduced in frequency.
- Traffic Speed and need for enforcement/calming. Previous surveys have revealed this as an issue, and a 20mph scheme has been implemented in a large part of South Petherton for more than a year now.
- Specific concerns about safety at 'Knapp Hill' roundabout. This was raised by a number of responders. It suggests new and better signing might be needed, as well as consideration about speed calming on the approaches.
- Idea to make the roads in the centre of South Petherton one-way.
- Condition of roads, footpaths, drains, and surfaces.
- Pedestrian safety: Overgrown hedges, lack of crossings
- Concern about further expansion/development - infrastructure can't cope, and village 'feel threatened.
- Perception that the dominant focus on South Petherton village leads to outlying parts of parish being overlooked.
- Suggestions that the Hub should be in a 'new' village hall, rather than an older, costly to maintain, building.

## Conclusion & Way Forward

The wide range of issues, concerns and ideas raised in the survey now need to be prioritised and acted upon by various groups and agencies. Some are within the direct remit of the **South Petherton Parish Council** and can feed into their review of action planning for future years. Other issues fall to other statutory agencies, such as Somerset Council, and may be referred to those bodies by the Parish Council, for consideration and response, along with any parish recommendation for action.

**The Community Hub Project Group** needs to use the information gathered to further develop its plans, on behalf of the Parish Council, to acquire and develop a Hub facility. The findings may assist in the development of funding bids to statutory and charitable bodies. The incoming **Local Community Network** should be advised of the findings, as it develops its priorities for action in the parish. In particular, some of the issues around health and wellbeing which do not fall to the Parish Council may best be driven forward by this multi-agency body.

The **South Petherton Community Land Trust** should consider whether it can lead in response to relevant survey findings, such as the benefit of a local renewable energy facility.

A more detailed action plan, focusing on priority areas, is contained within the full version of the report, which is available online at [southpethertonparishcouncil.gov.uk](https://southpethertonparishcouncil.gov.uk) or [southpethertonlibrary.co.uk](https://southpethertonlibrary.co.uk) or to view at the **South Petherton Community Library**



# Glossary:

**Somerset Council:** Somerset Council is the unitary authority that will replace Somerset County Council and four district councils on 1 April 2023.

**Local Community Network (LCN):** LCNs encourage community engagement and development. They are about listening, sharing and local partnership working. They look to improve outcomes for residents. They provide the strong connection between Somerset Council, our residents, businesses, and partners. They are the voice of local communities. There will be 18 LCNs covering every corner of the new Somerset Council area.

**South Petherton Community Land Trust:** Local South Petherton families need a place to live. Our community-led committee has developed some affordable housing in the parish, and will look to do more in the future if demand exists. It can also look to develop some other community regeneration initiatives.

## Privacy Statement

Analysis was conducted by Smart Communities Ltd part of the Community Council for Somerset (CCS) Group. Data was captured for legitimate and contractual purposes. Information was collected and analysed in accordance with Smart Communities Ltd role as a Data Controller and Data Processor. Hard copies of consultation surveys are kept for the duration of the consultation period and destroyed after the final report is signed off by the commissioner of the survey.

The South Petherton Community Plan Steering Group entered any paper copies using standard proprietary online survey software. The survey was anonymous, and responders are not identified.

Digital copies are retained for 12 months and deleted after this period. Any personal data that is captured is anonymised with the report and held securely for the purposes of analysis.

# Community Review

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