



The Axbridge Parish Plan 2006

Full Report





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Executive Summary

The Executive Summary highlights the key findings and recommendations of the Axbridge Parish Plan.

The Process

The Axbridge Parish Plan started in Spring 2004 where a public meeting was arranged and the Steering Group was set up.

A questionnaire was formulated and circulated around all households in 2005. 800 households were given questionnaires and 240 were completed and returned (this is about the average reply rate for parish plans).

This report highlights the main issues and recommendations arising from the questionnaire and other public consultations.



"Increase the awareness that it is possible as individuals to make a difference in all sorts of ways..."

Getting Around

Traffic, Roads and Pavements

Overall eight out of ten respondents said that speeding traffic was one of the issues of greatest concern. Repeatedly throughout the questionnaire, traffic and pedestrian access were expressed as significant concerns and needing attention. Four in ten (nearly 100 households) said that more traffic calming measures should be introduced. However, there was extensive and often contradictory variation in the range of measures suggested.

Recommendation

An independent traffic study is to be commissioned to analyse and then present a range of traffic management, car parking and pedestrian access options for all parts of Axbridge. This should be undertaken as a thorough process of consultation with the whole community and other significant parties.



Executive Summary

Parking

Parking is seen as a significant or major problem in Axbridge by seven in ten of questionnaire respondents. People particularly feel that parking in the Square and in West Street/High Street are problem areas. Nearly half of respondents said that they want the parking fee in the public car parks to be reduced for Axbridge residents.

Recommendation

A review of parking fees in the public car parks is to be undertaken as part of a wider review of other parking and traffic issues. This should include looking at the impact of reducing the cost of the annual parking fee on both the wider environment of the town and the income to be derived from the car parks.



Public Transport

Half of the respondents said that they wanted more local destinations that they could travel to by bus. Bristol was the most frequently requested destination.

Recommendation

The Town Council is to approach Somerset County Council to review options for extending bus transport provisions to the Cheddar Valley area - in particular to Bristol.



"Buses have a problem with cars parked in unauthorised places"

Executive Summary

Environment

When it comes to respondents' views on enhancing the environment of Axbridge, four in ten wanted better pavements and better recycling of waste, and over three in ten wanted better litter campaigns, cycle ways, and gardening for wildlife.

Recommendations

Review ways that dog and horse owners can be encouraged to take responsibility for clearing up when their animals foul pavements and roads.

Explore the possibility of having an anti-litter/recycling campaign in Axbridge.



Community Safety

In addition to speeding traffic, anti-social behaviour was seen as a significant community safety concern by seven in ten respondents.

Recommendation

Avon and Somerset Police is to actively work with the Town Council and the Axbridge Action Group to develop measures for enforcing good parking practice, safe driving and community safety.



Executive Summary

Community Life

Over nine out of ten respondents said that the Square is the key feature that gives Axbridge its character. Enhancing and keeping it as the centre of Axbridge and building upon this seems to be important to the community.

Recommendation

Look at ways that The Square can be used more widely and enhanced as a feature of Axbridge.

104 respondents said that they felt they did not have enough information about social activities happening in Axbridge.

Recommendation

Audit the existing methods of communication in order to propose clearer methods of informing people about local events. Research what other villages/towns do.

Throughout the questionnaire people said that there is a lack of suitable facilities for sports, learning and leisure activities.

Recommendation

Undertake a Feasibility Study of the use of community buildings and spaces in Axbridge.



Lifelong Learning

48 respondents said that they did not take part in learning activities because the range of courses available did not appeal or that they ran at the wrong time of the day. 104 respondents said that they wanted fitness training. Many people suggested a need for a lunch club for older people plus avenues for advice on healthy living and nutrition.

Recommendations

Contact Somerset County Council to negotiate language, IT and fitness courses to be run in Axbridge.

Identify Axbridge talents, skills and activities and develop an information directory.



"The majority of education facilities listed are aimed at children, who tend to be well provided for. More opportunities for adults would improve things. More social activities for all age groups."

Executive Summary

Housing

Half of the respondents said that the choice of housing in Axbridge does not meet the needs of local people.

Recommendations

Before further proposals are considered the following data should be requested from Sedgemoor District Council :

- The number of social rented homes in Axbridge (e.g. council & housing association)
- The numbers of households on Sedgemoor's housing register requesting Axbridge as their first choice for re-housing (including the number of those considered to be in priority need e.g. homeless)
- The number of social housing lettings made in Axbridge each year, for the last 3 years

Following this work arrange for a Housing Needs Survey



"Starting prices for houses are too high"

Community Well Being

One in ten respondents said that they are reliant upon existing shops for the bulk of their shopping. Some people said that they find it difficult to access local services or facilities. Nearly eight in ten said that they used the monthly Farmers' Market, and eight out of ten respondents said that they want more shops and services in Axbridge. Seven in ten said they wanted more fresh produce and nearly nine in ten said that they wanted to buy more locally produced goods. 106 respondents said that they would like to see a fresh food co-op set up.

Recommendations

Survey Axbridge residents to explore what type of shops they would like to see in the town and share the findings with local businesses.

Contact local food suppliers to discuss ways of improving the provision of locally produced food within the shops

Increase the frequency of the Farmers' Market

Set up a food co-op.

There was only limited data from the questionnaire regarding the needs of older and disabled people in Axbridge. This is despite national data which indicates that 10% of the local population will have long term health conditions or disabilities.

Recommendation

Undertake a specific survey to identify the needs of older people and people with long term health conditions or disabilities in Axbridge.

Executive Summary

Economic Success

Over three in ten respondents (52 people) who said that they were in employment indicated that they worked in Axbridge. This suggests a higher rate of local employment than some may assume to be the case.

Recommendation

Set up an 'Axbridge Chamber of Commerce' to help local business and to help to encourage tourism in Axbridge.



Youth

The Axbridge Youth Survey indicated a range of aspirations and concerns that young people have. These are not dissimilar to the overall thrust of issues indicated by the general population.

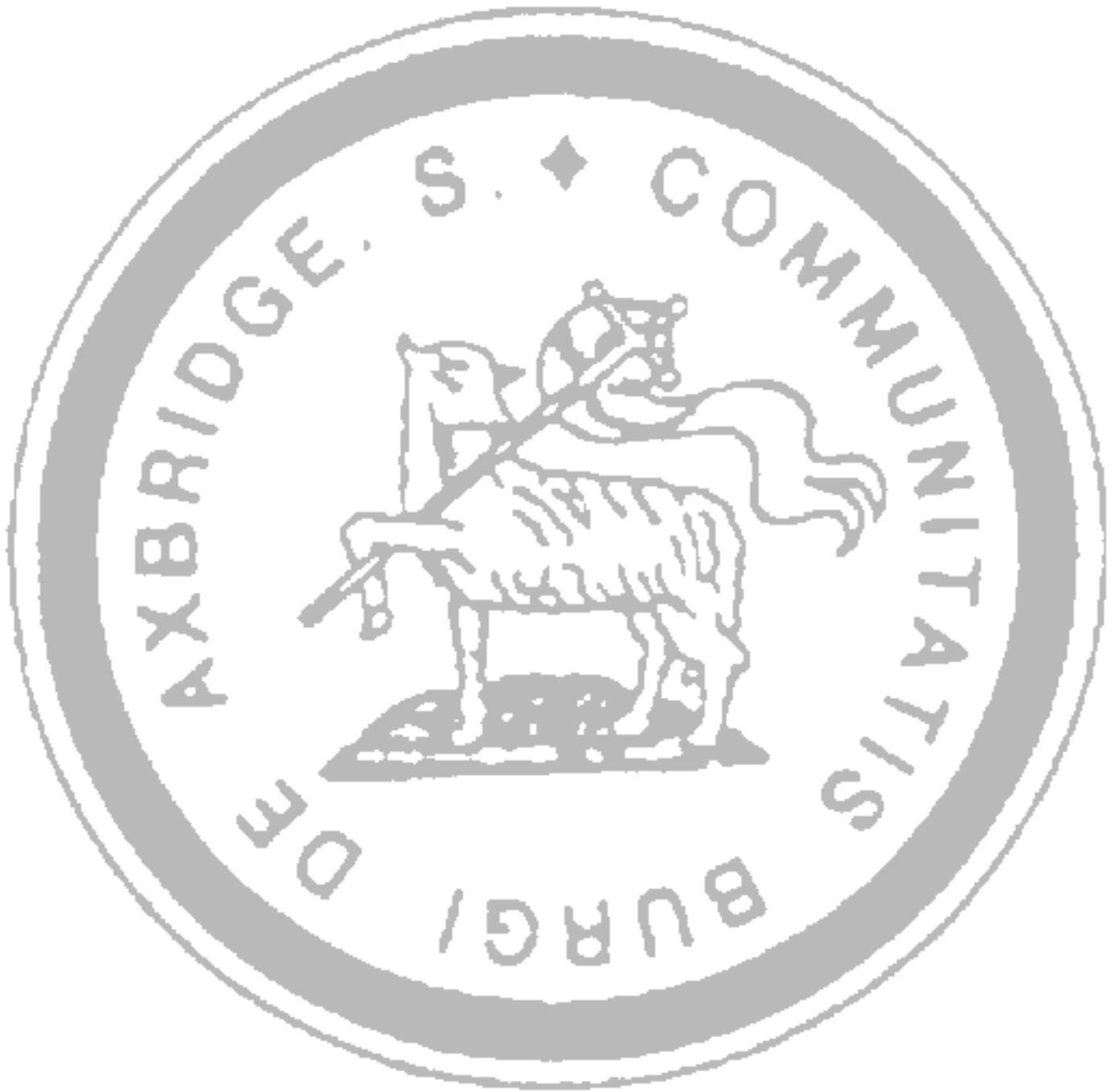
Recommendations

The Town Council is to respond to the findings of the CRIS Project with young people in Axbridge.

The all-weather court is to be reinstated at the youth club.



The Axbridge Parish Plan 2006



Full Report



The Process

The Rural White Paper provided communities with a fantastic opportunity to find out what local people wanted for their area and put forward suggestions as to how it could be improved, in the form of a Parish Plan. The success of the project lies in its local implementation, allowing the people who know their area best to drive the changes that will most benefit their communities. The following report outlines the findings and recommendations of the people of Axbridge.

An initial meeting was held in Spring 2004 to invite members of the community to take part in the Parish Plan Steering Group. As a result of this meeting a group was formed, made up of local volunteers and Town Council members. The core team consisted of twelve members; two Town Councillors and ten other volunteers. (See the back of the report for a list of the Steering Group Members)



The team met on a regular basis to formulate a questionnaire to ask the community a wide range of questions such as how people feel about Axbridge, what they want to see developed or changed, or if they are happy with the way things are. There was support and guidance from Sedgemoor District Council and the Community Council for Somerset. (See the Axbridge Town Council website for a copy of the questionnaire)

The questionnaire phase took a long time. The Steering Group was anxious that the questionnaire was not hurriedly put together so the group could gather relevant information that would reflect the needs and wants of the community. Volunteers then helped in the distribution of the questionnaire to every household in Axbridge, and assistance was offered to anyone who needed help or support in completing the form.



The Somerset Rural Youth Project was commissioned to include the local young people of Axbridge, to gather their views about living and being young in the town. We also consulted pupils at Axbridge First School and got them to tell us about their views.

We received back 240 completed questionnaires out of 800 households and the Steering Group commissioned the Community Council for Somerset to analyse the data. This produced a summary report that showed what people felt about Axbridge and what was wanted. The results were then re-presented to the community via two feedback sessions on Saturday 4th June 2005. A young people's feedback session was held on Monday 12th September 2005 with the help of the Somerset Rural Youth Project.



At the feedback sessions people were invited to put comments on flip chart pages under each heading in the questionnaire. This was done to ensure that as many people as possible felt they had had their say, as they might previously have forgotten to complete the questionnaire, been away, or forgotten to add a comment. These comments were added to the final write up of the questionnaire.

"...the hard working people of Axbridge will ensure that it goes forward each year with enthusiasm and imagination and new ideas for the future."

The Somerset Rural Youth Project - partly due to the youth questionnaire carried out on behalf of the Steering Group - brought in the CRIS (Crime Reduction in Somerset) Project to Axbridge in October 2005. The project has been working with the young people of Axbridge and has enabled them to present their ideas to the Town Council.

The Steering Group then spent most of the summer months teasing out the main themes embedded in the thousands of comments put forward in the questionnaire. The initial findings of the questionnaire were fed back to the Town Council on Monday 21st November 2005 and the process of writing up the findings of the Parish Plan then commenced.

In January 2006 the draft plan was presented to the Town Council for approval. On the 4th February 2006 at the Farmers' Market two presentations were made to the people of Axbridge in the Town Hall. The community responded well to the draft plan and were invited to pass on any comments or concerns about the plan. The Steering Group was delighted that the draft plan had been well received.



During April and May 2006 the final draft of the plan was prepared for publication in July. The Steering Group was keen to produce a document of which Axbridge could be proud. The other piece of work that had to be developed at this time (with the approval of the Town Council) was The Action Plan. The Action Plan is an important part of the Parish Plan, as this will ensure that the wishes of the community can be taken forward, or at least be considered as future projects. (See the Axbridge Town Council website for details of The Action Plan).

Finally, as Chair of the Parish Plan Steering Group for Axbridge, I would like to thank all those people who filled in the questionnaire. The plan would not have been possible without you. The group is grateful to local people who kindly volunteered their services to deliver the questionnaire to the residents of Axbridge, the local businesses who acted as collection points for the questionnaires, and the Lamb Inn and Compton House which both hosted meetings.



The Steering Group is appreciative of the support from Andrew Freeman and Val Granger from The Community Council for Somerset, Julie Cooper from Sedgemoor District Council, Axbridge Town Council and Lyndia Hind of the Somerset Rural Youth Project. Thanks also to Aqueous Publishing for producing the final report and for helping with the information leaflet.

Finally, I would like to thank all the Steering Group members who helped to steer the Parish Plan to the final document. The Parish Plan has involved a great deal of time and effort from all the team and I think we can be proud of the final document produced.

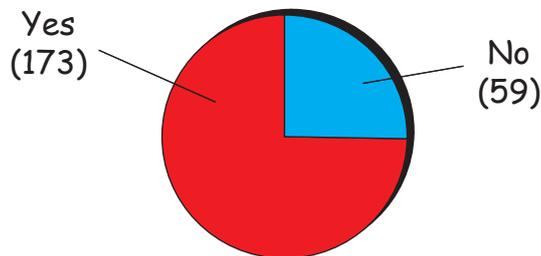
The Next Step

The Town Council is supporting The Parish Plan and has set up a sub-committee to respond to the recommendations. In order to make things happen we need the support of as many people as possible. Even though The Parish Plan is now finished, the members of The Steering Group along with many other people in Axbridge are working together to make things that have come out of it actually happen. If you would like to help please visit www.axbridge-tc.gov.uk to find out more and keep an eye on Oyez and the Council noticeboard.

Maggie Stanley
Chair
Axbridge Parish Plan Steering Group
June 2006

Getting Around

Are you concerned about your safety from traffic as a pedestrian?



Traffic, Roads and Pavements

Overall six out of every ten respondents (173 households) directly said that they were concerned about their safety from traffic as a pedestrian. Four in ten (nearly 100 households) said that more traffic calming measures should be introduced and there was an extensive range of suggestions for specific measures to help here. Some respondents (15) suggested a one-way system for different streets, and over two in ten said that there needs to be wider pavements and better pedestrian access. Repeatedly throughout all parts of the questionnaire points regarding speeding traffic and the need for better pavements and pedestrian access were expressed as concerns and as needing attention.

Some specific areas singled out included :

- Reducing the speed of traffic on the bypass (particularly below Hillside and at the Cheddar access road to the Town) and a safer crossing place at Hillside (said 20 respondents)
- Creating clearer visibility and controls for traffic on the Townsend Junction slip road (said 8 respondents)
- Restrict HGVs more actively (said 4 respondents)
- Create better pedestrian access from Axbridge to Cross (said 4 respondents)
- People in particular want more pedestrian access and reduced traffic speeds in and around The Square



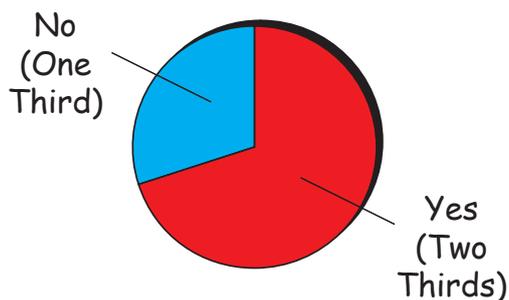
Recommendations

- An independent Traffic study is to be commissioned to analyse and then present a range of traffic management, car parking and pedestrian access options for all parts of Axbridge. This should be undertaken as a thorough process of consultation with the whole community and other significant parties.. To achieve this aim it should :
 - Seek out and acquire advice and support from relevant senior officers and councillors from Somerset County Council (SCC)
 - Seek out providers for the study and acquire cost estimates. The town then chooses a preferred provider and identifies funding
 - Consult on the options presented by the study with final recommendations to be made to the Town Council
- The Town Council to approach Somerset County Council to review options for achieving a way forward for addressing concerns regarding the bypass, Townsend junction, HGVs and pedestrian access to Cross as indicated above.

Parking

Parking is seen as a significant or major problem in Axbridge by seven in ten questionnaire respondents. Throughout other sections of the questionnaire - not specifically asking about parking - people frequently made statements about concerns regarding parking.

Do you see parking in Axbridge as a significant or major problem?



"Double parking in The Square is a real problem."

People particularly see parking in the Square and in West Street/High Street as the biggest problem areas, with four in ten respondents (over 100 households) indicating this. Nearly five in ten said that they want the parking fee in the public car parks to be reduced for Axbridge residents. People indicated this as being the most effective way of using available space given the narrow medieval streets.

55 respondents said that parking restrictions should be enforced more effectively, in particular for parking in The Square.



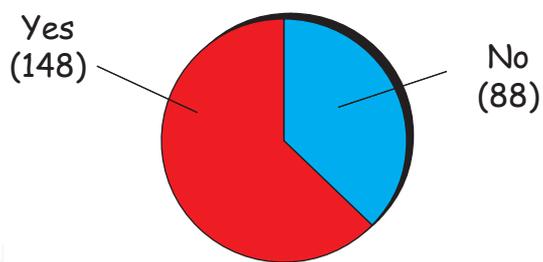
Recommendations

- Request Sedgemoor DC works with The Town to undertake a review of parking fees in the public car parks as part of a wider review of other issues raised below. This should include looking at the impact of reducing the cost of the annual parking fee on both the wider environment of the Town and on the income to be derived from the car parks.
- The Town Council and Town Trust to review parking options in The Square and methods for enforcing parking restrictions. One option is to review if Sedgemoor DC could become involved in administering parking in The Square.
- SCC and SDC are to be asked to review options for increasing on-road and off-road parking throughout Axbridge. This should run in parallel to the Study as presented for Traffic Management. This is to include a review of changing some areas of double yellow lines into parking spaces, turning some grass verges into parking spaces and identifying other open spaces that could be made available for parking cars. Options will then be considered before final recommendations are presented to the Town Council. This could be done as part of The Independent Traffic Study.
- To engage Avon and Somerset Police to work with the Town Council and the Axbridge Action Group to regularly report on measures for enforcing good parking practice.

Public Transport

Six in ten respondents said that the provision of public transport was important to them, although less than half said they use buses. Half of respondents said that they wanted more local destinations that they could travel to by bus; Bristol was the most frequently stated destination (nearly 100 respondents).

Is the provision of public transport important to you?



Many people suggested a speedy bus service going along the A38 with a bus stop near Cross as an option to be considered.



Recommendations

- The Town Council to approach Somerset County Council to review options for extending bus transport provisions - in particular to Bristol as suggested above. Suggest working with Cheddar to review the needs of the Cheddar Valley as a whole.

Environment

Spoiling Our Environment

184 people said that dog fouling was a problem and 112 were concerned about litter. Two in ten felt that noise pollution, smoking related litter, chewing gum, split rubbish bags and weeds on the road were a cause for concern, and some people suggested there should be a ban on public smoking. Particular concern was expressed about dog and horse fouling on the Furlong and the route to the local school.

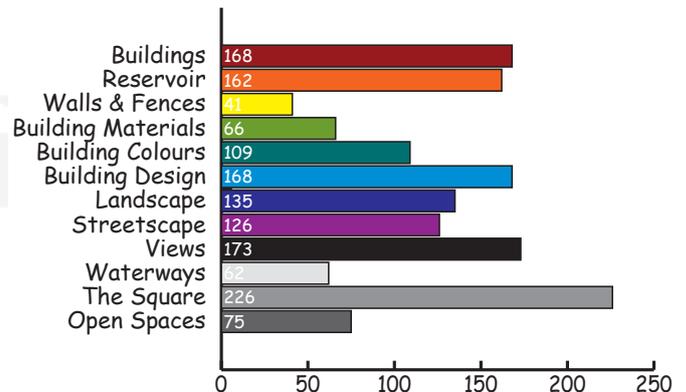


Key Features of Axbridge

People were also asked to choose five key features of Axbridge that they most valued. The Square was considered the most prominent; winning nearly all the respondents' votes. Other important features included the buildings, landscapes and the reservoir. The Square features prominently in other parts of the questionnaire and appears to be important to the community of Axbridge, both as an historical feature and as the centre of the community.

There were comments about enhancing The Square by having more flowers and prettier tubs, and also more traffic control with less parking. Valuing and building on the centre as the heart of the community with a wider range of activities is considered important.

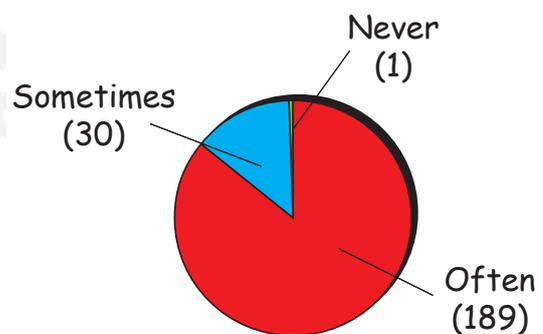
What do you think are the key features of Axbridge that give it character?



In the supplementary questions half of the respondents wanted better pedestrian safety and speed control, and some people suggested a pedestrian town centre with no parking. Parking, speeding and traffic control are issues that have come up as responses to other parts of the questionnaire.

Recycling and Litter Management

Do you use household recycling?



The recycling of waste appears to be important to the residents of Axbridge. Most questionnaire respondents said that they use the household recycling facilities. Some people in the supplementary questions said that they wanted to see better recycling and litter management in Axbridge.

Recommendations

- Look at ways that dog and horse owners can be encouraged to take responsibility for clearing up when their animals foul pavements and roads.
- Explore the possibility of having an anti-litter/recycling campaign in Axbridge.

Community Safety

The main concern voiced by respondents with regard to community safety was speeding traffic (by eight in ten people). Anti-social behaviour was another concern for seven in ten respondents and one in ten felt that drug/alcohol abuse was a serious problem.



Residents generally feel safe in Axbridge, although slight concern was expressed about being out in public places on their own at night. Additional comments made highlighted the following places where people feel somewhat unsafe :

- The Square (particularly when groups of young people are present)
- Car parks (due to poor lighting)
- Footpaths (due to poor lighting)
- The Square, High St & West St (due to speeding traffic)

"...the pavements are too narrow (and) big cars push past you at speed. With kids this is frightening"

Recommendations

- Request that Sedgemoor District Council increases street lighting in car parks and on public footpaths.
- Implement the proposals in the *Getting Around* section regarding the provision of traffic calming and traffic management generally to reduce speeding traffic.
- Encourage the Town Trust, the Town Council and other organisations such as the Youth Service to properly control and steward events held in the town centre (e.g. Blackberry Fair, functions in Town Hall, Youth Club, etc).
- Engage Avon and Somerset Police to work with the Town Council and The Axbridge Action Group to develop measures for enforcing good parking practice, safe driving and community safety.

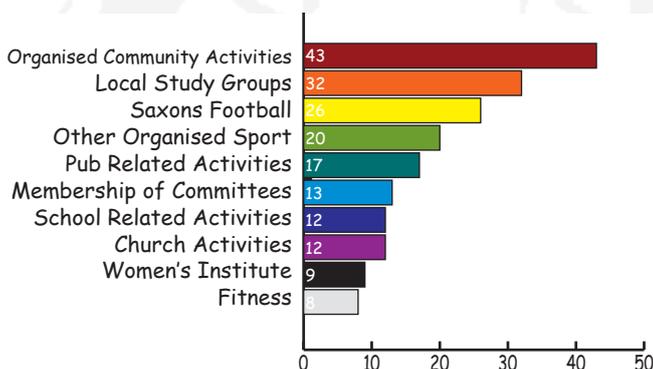
Community Life

What Are You Doing In Axbridge?

This section reports on the current participation in leisure, social and sporting activities and ideas for improving their provision.

The questionnaire indicated that people take part in social, leisure or sport activities, either as an individual or as part of a group in Axbridge. The majority said that they did engage in activities in Axbridge.

Popular activities in Axbridge

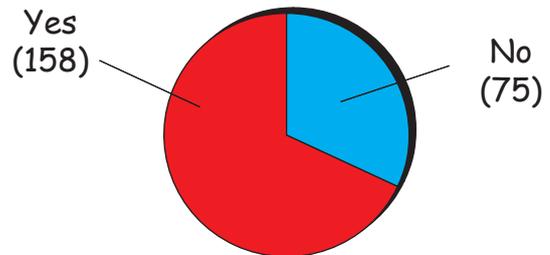


Respondents also mentioned Town Council duties, Charity fundraising, British Legion, Somerset Arts Week, OAP Events and Houlgate Twinning. Communally organised activities for the Town based in The Square, Town Hall and Furlong are the most popular as they are seen to enhance the quality of life and feeling of belonging to the community. Individual interests such as local societies and groups play an important part in town life as does Saxons Football and locally organised sports.

"[I take part in] Saxons football, assist sports and progressive supper, town hall parties, blood donor..."

What Are You Doing Elsewhere?

Do you travel outside of Axbridge to take part in any social, leisure or sports activity?



It was clear from the responses of 233 respondents that a majority of residents travelled outside of Axbridge to take part in social, sporting or leisure activities. These responses included :

- Sporting activities (115) with swimming being the most popular, followed by football and general fitness
- Cinema, theatre and music (40)
- Clubs (20); such as Bridge, Writing, Reading, Diet, Gardening, Caravanning and Archaeological
- Pub related activities (18) including snooker, skittles, darts, quizzes and socialising
- Eating out (8)
- Further education (6)
- Church related activities and voluntary work were also mentioned.

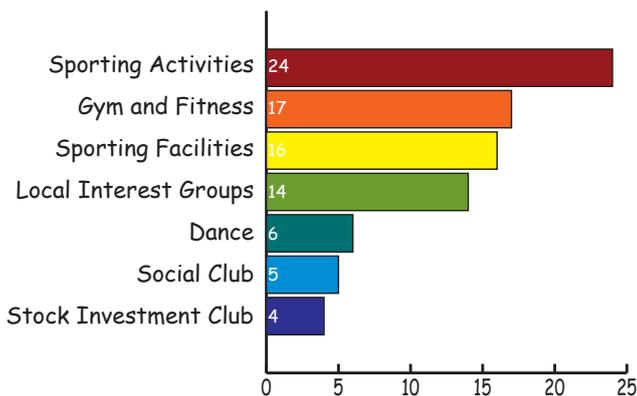




What Else Would You Like To Be Doing In Axbridge?

The following answers represent the most popular activities that people would like to take part in but they feel are not currently available in Axbridge :

What else would you like to be doing in Axbridge?



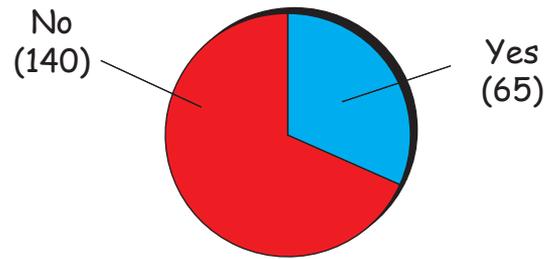
"My children said camel racing. Sorry, they thought you might need a laugh by now..."

What's Stopping You?

65 respondents stated that they felt unable to partake in the activities they wanted to in Axbridge. Perhaps the majority either feel happy to travel outside the town for their leisure pursuits or their personal circumstances prevent them from taking part.

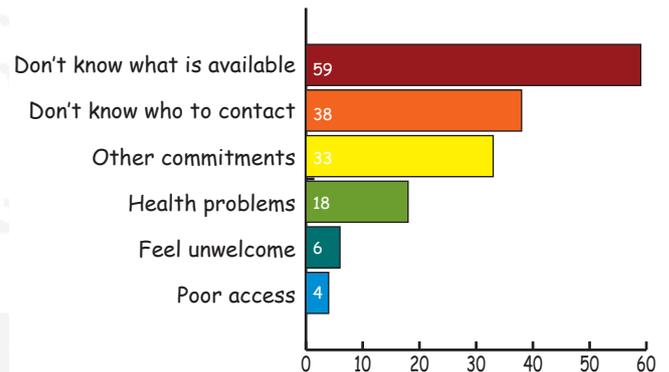
"[I] would partake in music ventures if a group existed; more advertising locally is needed"

Would you like to take part in more social, leisure or sports activities in Axbridge but feel unable to do so?



If Axbridge residents feel their participation in community activities is restricted, it is important to recognise the reasons behind such restrictions.

In what way do you feel your participation in Axbridge activities is restricted?



Respondents specifically emphasised the lack of facilities for swimming, sports activities and fitness facilities as factors which restricted their participation in community activities. Childcare, available time and funds in addition to specific points such as a lack of bridle paths for horse riding were also mentioned.



Information

We wanted to know how you normally find out about local events. Currently people rely upon the following avenues :

- Word of mouth
- Town Square Notice Board
- Newspaper/magazine
- Flyer/poster/leaflet/website
- Local shops
- Post Office
- Church Magazine

Other methods included TV, Internet, and Radio.



If residents feel restricted to participate in events due to a lack of or poor information then channels need to be formalised or clarified to ensure that the right information reaches the right audience at the right time.

"I would like to see Axbridge keep its character - it is unique and beautiful. the hard working people of Axbridge will ensure that it goes forward each year with enthusiasm and imagination and new ideas for the future."

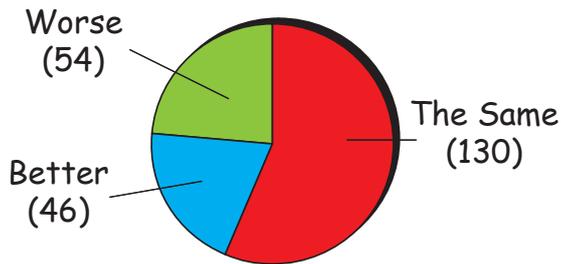
There was a mixed response to the proposition that better information would be useful to residents. Most people (170) said that additional information would not be of use to them, with 104 saying it would be.

Ideas suggested to improve the quality of information were :

- Notice board (physical and on website) to communicate events, what's on and contact names such as Guide listing contacts
- Up-to-date newsletter
- Posters in shop windows
- A magazine like the Cheddar Diary
- People said they particularly wanted more information on fitness activities, sports clubs, theatre trips or day outings, educational activities and activities for older people, plus children's activities.
- Mention was also made that Hillside receives no notification of events except for church activities



Taking everything into consideration, do you think the quality of life in Axbridge has got better or worse over the period you have lived here?



Quality Of Life In Axbridge?

Of those who said that the quality of life had worsened in Axbridge, the reasons given in priority order were :

- Fewer shops and amenities such as a bank and baker yet more dwellings - it lacks the vitality it once had
- More anti-social behaviour; rudeness and rowdiness in the Square - more crime and more litter
- Speeding and parking issues (those caused by illegal parking in the High Street and school runs)
- As the town has grown the community spirit has shrunk - less friendly with more outsiders
- Pollution and noise from the chicken farm, bypass and an increase in quarry traffic
- A lack of facilities for teenagers and youngsters, and elderly people are excluded
- Inappropriate building in open spaces; too much building generally
- Local shops are expensive

Of those who feel that the quality of life has improved the reasons given were :

- A great place to live with great community spirit
- Fantastic Farmers' Market
- Period properties sympathetically restored
- The Square - a focal point but it could be cleaner and improved
- Better children and help groups for mothers
- Lots of local talent
- More clubs and social activities than before



"Community spirit is a key feature that gives Axbridge its character - engendered by the square as its focal point"

Recommendations

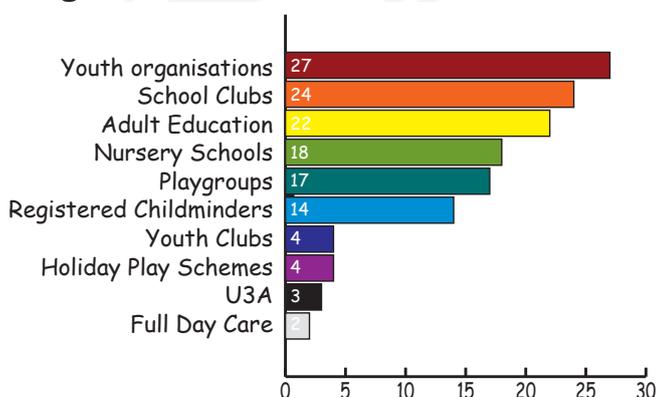
- Research the potential for a Community Centre and additional sporting facilities such as tennis courts.
- Audit the existing methods of communication in order to propose clearer methods of informing people about local events. Research what other villages/towns do.
- Look at ways that The Square can be used more widely and enhanced as a feature of Axbridge.
- Undertake a Feasibility Study of the use of community buildings and spaces in Axbridge. This to include an examination of how the Public Houses can be supported and helped to continue to assist community life in Axbridge by supporting clubs and activities and the possibility of an internet café.

Lifelong Learning

What Are You Doing?

This section reports on current participation in educational/lifelong learning and learning needs, in addition to the arrangements and opportunities for delivering them. 175 people answered the questions in this section, which also links to responses made in 'Community Life' regarding respondents' participation in - and requirements for - sporting and other activities.

What facilities are you currently using?



Respondents also mentioned Adult Education in Cheddar (most respondents seem to visit Cheddar/Kings of Wessex for further education needs) and computer classes and yoga in the Town Hall. While there appears to be healthy participation in activities for the very young and youth sectors (such as the Saxons Football), comments from the whole survey identify important reasons for improving and extending facilities for pre-teens and teenagers plus elderly people.



What's Stopping You?

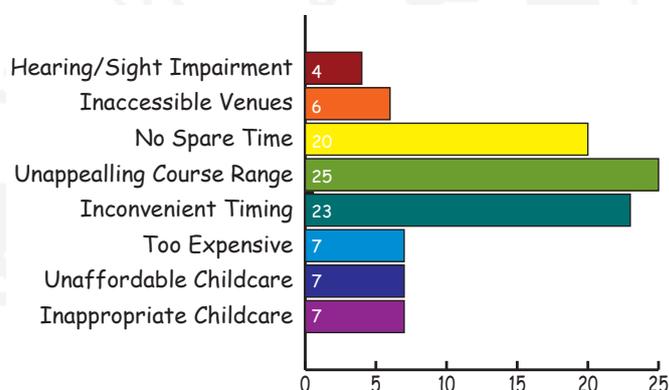
Only one in four respondents feel that they are prevented from taking part in courses.

The top three reasons for this are :

- Range of courses don't appeal (25)
- Courses run at the wrong time of day (23)
- No spare time (20)

Lack of appropriate or affordable childcare, inaccessible venues, courses being too expensive and accommodating for those with learning difficulties and hearing/visual impairments, and better advertising of courses are also identified as important reasons for not taking part.

What prevents you from taking part in courses?



What Are The Priorities?

The priorities for lifelong learning emerged as follows. Firstly, provision of a wider choice of educational subjects and interests is vital. Respondents' comments show that they are keen to have improved access to a variety of education/evening classes, as many residents currently travel further afield for these activities. Over half of the respondents identified the need for more sporting activities and facilities such as fitness classes for the young and old alike.

People also suggested more local interest groups such as conservation, dance, film, music, performing arts, painting, and cookery. More educational talks on topics such as green and global issues and a Stock Investment Club were listed as two good ideas for adult learning and to stimulate community life generally.



Better access to learning and activities is required. Examples of this are usable ramps for better access for disabled people, improved parking arrangements, better timing of classes, classes timed to accommodate full time workers and pricing of classes to suit the needs of residents.

Respondents requested improved facilities and venues for group learning and sports; for instance meeting rooms and places to learn such as an internet café. An increase in sporting facilities was also mentioned as important for improving learning, personal well-being and community life. More use of the museum as an educational centre was suggested.

"If there was a more user friendly hall that was light with good acoustics and facilities I'm sure many more educational courses could take place and would be supported."



Respondents want improved choice of sports and fitness activities. 158 respondents said they travel outside Axbridge - mainly to places such as Cheddar and Burnham - for their sporting interests (winter football, swimming, tennis, badminton, etc).

Respondents said that they travel outside the town to clubs such as bridge, writing and reading groups, gardening, and archaeological groups. Insufficient or poor advertising for Axbridge activities may be a contributing factor here.



People also said they wanted better information and advertising about what is available and suggested more use of the Town Notice Board and the Axbridge website, in addition to newsletters, door to door flyers and window posters as effective tools to market and advertise courses, theatre and social outings.

A lack of classes/activities for elderly people was also highlighted. Ideas here included a Community Social Club for elderly people and a local conservation group.



Finally, a wider range of activities for children and young adults is needed. A purpose built playgroup, extended access to the youth club with illuminated pathway, breakfast club at Axbridge First School, internet café and improved sporting facilities and clubs for teenagers are just some of the proposals put forward. More facilities for the young will stimulate youth involvement and provide necessary outlets for their energy and creativity. Respondents feel that this in turn will enhance the environment as more young people will be engaged in productive activity rather than just 'hanging around'.



"[We need] more information on what is available. [There is an] opportunity to tell providers what courses are required."

Recommendations

- Conduct a feasibility study into the use of community buildings and spaces in Axbridge.
- The all-weather court should be reinstated at the youth club or space found for a new one.
- Identify Axbridge's talents, skills and activities through the web or local media, resulting in a showcase for organisations and local skills/talents.
- Directory for Axbridge covering what is on offer.
- Contact Somerset County Council Adult Learning and Leisure to negotiate language, IT and fitness courses to be run in Axbridge.

Housing

Housing is clearly an issue of huge importance to the residents of Axbridge, with this section attracting the opinions of nearly nine in ten of respondents.

Nearly two in ten of these responses reflected the opinion that the choice of available housing in Axbridge does not meet their needs. Half, however, feel that the choice of available housing does not meet the needs of local people generally.



"Axbridge needs more affordable housing for rent and shared ownership for local people."

If these results were typical of the population of Axbridge it could mean that approximately 130 households may feel the choice of available housing does not meet their needs and that roughly 400 households do not feel that the choice of available housing in Axbridge meets the needs of people generally.

The majority of additional comments made related to affordability (one in ten), lack of housing for first time buyers (one in twenty) and lack of social housing (one in twenty).



"I have older teenage children - should they wish to stay in Axbridge they will not be able to find anywhere to live."

Recommendations

- Before further proposals are considered the following data should be requested from Sedgemoor District Council :
 - The number of social rented homes in Axbridge (e.g. Council & Housing Association)
 - The numbers of households on Sedgemoor's housing register requesting Axbridge as their first choice for re-housing (including the number of those considered to be in priority need e.g. homeless)
 - The number of social housing lettings made in Axbridge each year, for the last 3 years
- The Town should then ask Sedgemoor District Council to undertake a Housing Needs Study of Axbridge taking on board the feedback from The Parish Plan

Community Well Being

This section reports on the local services and shops in Axbridge, and how the community uses and depends on these services.



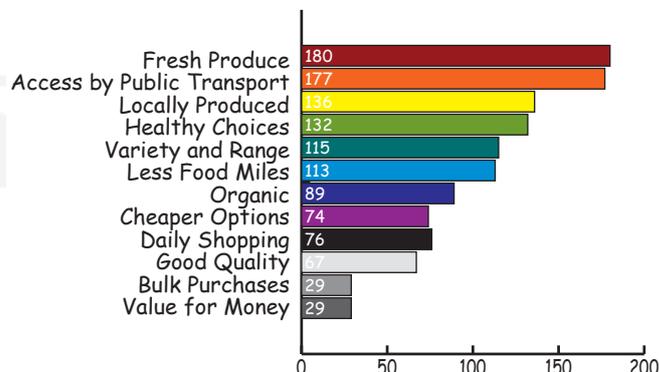
Where Do You Shop In Axbridge?

Nearly nine in ten (213) respondents said that they do not depend on local shops for the bulk of their shopping with one in ten (26) saying that they do. It is important to recognise a link between this and disability and access in Axbridge in that a significant proportion of people in Axbridge are dependent upon local shops.

Eight out of ten of residents want more shops in Axbridge.

Five in ten (120) respondents said they depend on the chemist and nearly three in ten (65) rely on the butcher. Three in ten (72) people use the pubs. The result of the pub coming third in this question is linked to the fact it provides a focus and a meeting place for the community.

What are the most important considerations regarding locally bought products?



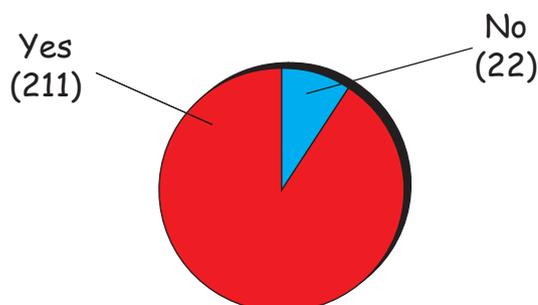
Nearly eight out of every ten respondents said that they use the Farmers' Market.

What Other Shops & Services Would You Like In Axbridge?

Over four in ten (104) respondents stated they would like to see a fresh food co-op.

There was a strong response from nearly nine in ten (211) respondents that residents would like to buy more locally produced goods from Somerset or the South West in Axbridge shops.

Would you be interested in buying more locally produced goods in Axbridge shops and the Farmers' Market?



In terms of ease of disabled access to the shops, services or facilities in Axbridge, nine in ten (219) said they had not experienced problems while less than one in ten (17) said they had.



When asked if services and shops in Axbridge adequately met their needs and those of their family, nearly seven in ten (163) said yes and less than one in ten (19) said no. When this question was applied to the needs of the community over six in ten (151) said yes while over one in ten (34) said no.



Although the majority of the respondents said yes to this question it is important to compare this to other sections where people would like to see improvements to services.

The suggestion of the creation of a community centre in Axbridge prompted many respondents to indicate what services they would like it to provide. A fresh food co-op and fitness training were by far the most popular requests, with 106 and 104 votes respectively. Other suggestions included a lunch club for elderly people (54), advice on healthy living (52) and nutritional advice (47).

If there was a community centre in Axbridge what services would you like to see?



"With the loss of local shops the character of Axbridge has changed for the worse."

Elderly People and People With Disabilities & Health Problems

We had a poor response in the questionnaire regarding the needs of people with disabilities or health problems. This is despite national figures that indicate 10% of the local population will have long-term health conditions or disabilities.

Nevertheless the following suggestions were made :

- Improved range of GP services
- Wider pavements
- Better provision for disabled parking
- Improved access for those with disabilities
- Establishment of a buddy/companionship scheme



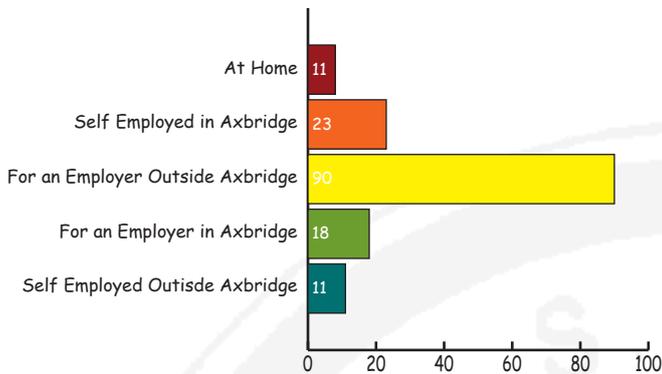
"[We need] better facilities for wheelchair users. Also, disabled bay parking in the Square."

Recommendations

- Survey the people who rely on the shops and in particular analyse the responses from elderly and disabled people in Axbridge.
- Survey Axbridge residents to explore what type of shops they would like to see in the town and share the findings with local businesses.
- Discuss with organisations and funding bodies within the town as to how the Public Houses can be supported and helped to continue to aid the community life in Axbridge by supporting clubs, activities and the possibility of services such as an internet café.
- Contact local food suppliers to discuss ways of improving the provision of locally produced food within the shops.
- Explore the possibility of increasing the frequency of the Farmers' Market
- Set up a food co-op
- Undertake a specific survey to identify the needs of older people and people with long-term health conditions or disabilities in Axbridge

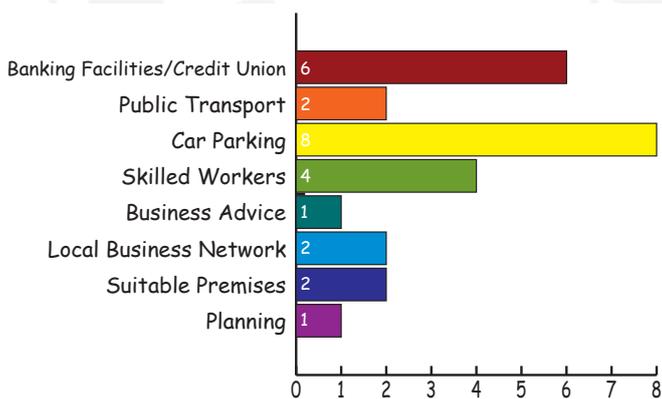
Economic Success

If you are in employment, where do you work?



Over three in ten respondents (52 people) who said that they were in employment indicated that they worked in Axbridge. This suggests a higher rate of local employment than some may assume to be the case.

As an employer, what would help you develop your business?

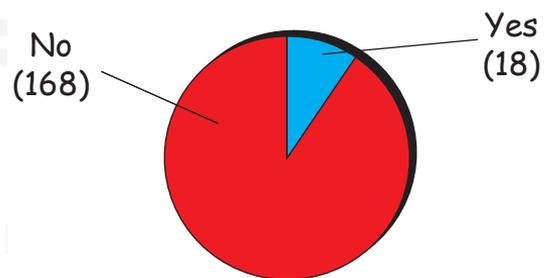


With regard to respondents' views about business development in Axbridge, people say that there is scope to increase financial services, cafe provision and various retail services. There is also a demand for small business units. The demand for more residential care, sheltered housing, dentistry and optician services are addressed in the 'Community Well-Being' section of the plan.



In relation to the problems experienced and what help is needed in the search for work; six of the responses indicated a need for a job centre or some other facility where employment could be advertised and/or discussed. There was a strong implication that available jobs are not being advertised effectively.

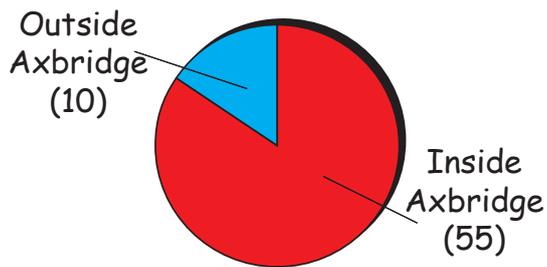
Are you currently job seeking?



Two responses highlighted affordable and available childcare as a problem. One response sought support with access due to disability when attending interviews.

It would appear that the majority of people who work in Axbridge also live in Axbridge. Less than half of the businesses that responded are taking advantage of free advertising on the Town Council website to attract local workers.

Residency of Axbridge Employees (from 65 workers)



When asked what issues are affecting the development of business and what type of support might help, respondents advised the following :

"Broadband has made working from home much easier"

"Marginal and small businesses struggle"

"We need more short term free parking in The Square. Axbridge businesses attract custom from as far as Brent Knoll, Star/Churchill and Draycott"

"More space is needed at the surgery especially for parking"

"There is a decline in retail premises due to conversion to residential property"

"More tourist promotion is needed in the town"

"A Chamber of Commerce would help local networking"

Recommendations

- Increase advertising of available jobs and improve access to a job centre or some form of employment counselling service.
- Better promotion and advertising of existing childcare facilities.
- Better information regarding access by disabled people needs to be actively promoted to businesses.
- Parking facilities - specifically in The Square - need to be improved.
- The Town Council is to encourage more business premises in The Town when responding to planning applications.
- More could and should be done to encourage tourism in The Town and the immediate area.
- A Chamber of Commerce is to be established in The Town. Such an organisation should be run by and for the local businesses but it could be created with help from The Town Council. This may be the best forum to disseminate information on disabled access, promotion of tourism, advertising of employment opportunities etc.

Young People of Axbridge

The youth of Axbridge had a specially commissioned questionnaire carried out by the Somerset Rural Youth Project (SRYP). The Youth Workers, led by Lyndia Hind, engaged with some 42 Young People over three separate visits.

There was a wide age range of responses from youngsters aged 10 years to 23 years, and the ratio of boys to girls was two-thirds male (28) to one-third female (14).



The young people were asked if they attended clubs run in the town; three in ten (14) said no while under two in ten (7) said yes.

The questionnaire was very short, however it enabled the youth workers to engage with the young people and discuss with them what they would like in Axbridge.

- 26 out of 42 Young People requested a Youth Shelter or Youth Club facility
- 18 requested basketball or tennis provision
- 19 requested a skate area
- 19 requested an internet café or café they could comfortably use



The youth worker felt the young people were very positive and responsible as a whole in considering what they would like and what is practicably possible. The main suggestion for the positioning of a shelter, basketball, tennis courts or a skate park was at the very bottom of the Furlong. They felt this would be out of the way of residential areas and would not inconvenience other members of the community.

The youth workers during their visit were informed by several separate groups of young people that there is a group that are using drugs and that this causes them concern.

There is a fear of crime between the differing age groups; the younger ones would like to be able to express how they feel and are affected by the behaviour of the older ones.



As a result of this consultation action has already been taken with the CRIS project coming to Axbridge for five months. This will give help and support to young people and empower them to have a voice in the community.

It is interesting to compare the young people's ideas with those of the wider community as sporting activities, an internet cafe and more clubs and groups have been suggested in the larger consultation.



Recommendations

The young people of Axbridge will be submitting their own proposals to the Town Council. As a result of the survey carried out by the Rural Youth Project the CRIS project has been coming to Axbridge every Wednesday evening from January 2005 and will be in the town for a period of 5 months. This will enable the young people of Axbridge to have a voice within the community and to develop their own proposals with the help and guidance of the project youth workers.

Little Ones of Axbridge

This section touches on some of the recurring likes and dislikes of the pupils of Axbridge First School. It is made up of responses from 4 to 9 year olds from five classes at the school. We would like to thank Mrs Briggs for making this important information available.

What we like...

- The Furlong Field
- The Square
- The clubs and activities
- The reservoir

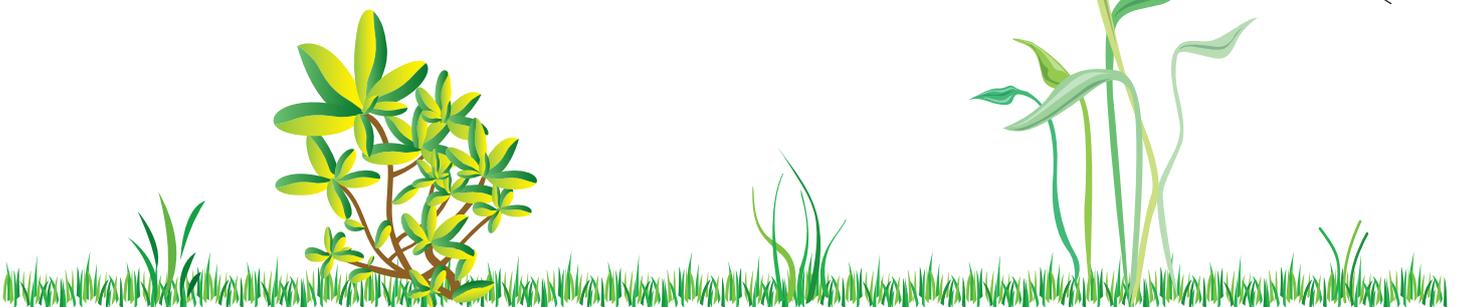
What we don't like...

- Lots of cars making too much noise and going too fast
- Dog mess and litter



What we would like...

- A swimming pool
- More facilities in the park
- More shops
- A library



Axbridge Steering Group Members

Barry Hamblin
Sidney Miller
Jenny Cater
Phil Sweet
Dennis Bratt
Annabel Hackney
Peter Harding
Clive Header
Maggie Stanley
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Patricia Tallack
Tom Littlewood

The Steering Group is appreciative of the support from Andrew Freeman and Val Granger from Community Council for Somerset, Julie Cooper from Sedgemoor District Council, Axbridge Town Council and the Somerset Rural Youth Project. Thanks also to Aqueous Publishing for producing the final report and for helping with the information leaflet.



For further information please visit the Axbridge Town Council website at www.axbridge-tc.gov.uk or contact the Town Clerk (Vicky Brice - 07884 264033)