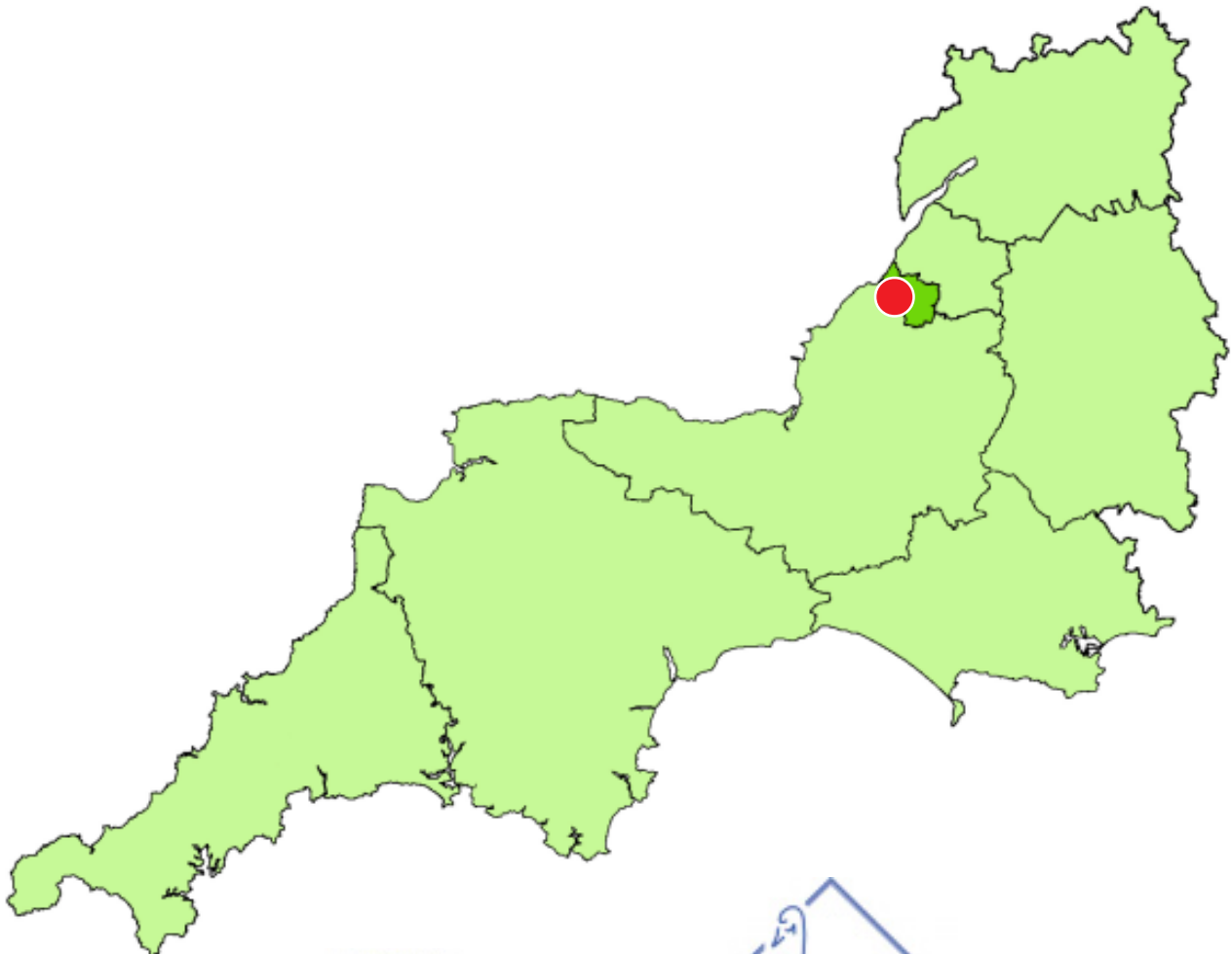


Easton in Gordano Community Plan

Completion Date: 2006



Compiled by Community Action
In partnership with the South West Acre Network (SWAN)

Easton in Gordano Parish Plan Case Study

Interviewees

Parish Plan Steering Group Representatives, Forum Members, plus members of the Community

Background

The Civil Parish of Easton-in-Gordano comprises the settlements of Easton-in-Gordano, Pill and Ham Green together with extensive industrial areas to the north, including Royal Portbury Dock, and agricultural areas to the west. It is bounded on the north by the Severn Estuary and the east by the River Avon. Two major roads pass through the Parish, the M5 motorway east-west in the northern part of the Parish, with direct access via junction 19, and the A369 north-south, which links the area to the centre of Bristol, five miles away, via the Clifton Suspension Bridge.

The Parish, formerly within Avon, is now within the District of North Somerset and comprises two wards, St. George's and Pill. The Parish Council has 15 Councillors, 10 from Pill and 5 from St. George's. The Parish is within the Parliamentary Constituency of Woodspring and is currently represented by a Conservative MP.

Until late into the 20th Century almost the entire Parish was farm land. The main settlement was Pill, a riverside village with connections to the sea stretching back more than 500 years.

Easton-in-Gordano, too, has had a long history with parts of the Church of St. George dating back to the 15th century.

To the south of the Parish, the mansion of Ham Green House, built on profits from the sugar trade, was the childhood home of Richard Bright, an influential doctor known for his rigorous scientific approach to medicine. In 1890, the estate was purchased by Bristol Corporation to be developed as an isolation hospital for patients with infectious diseases. The majority of the hospital closed in the early part of the 1990s and has been redeveloped for housing and the Eden Office Park, a valuable new local employment centre.

The largest change in land use in the Parish was the development of Royal Portbury Dock which with the Avonmouth Dock on the opposite side of the River Avon comprises the Port of Bristol, which has more deep water berths than all other major UK ports combined. In 2005 a major expansion of the Port of Bristol was announced with the proposed construction of a deep water dock at Avonmouth creating the biggest port in the UK by 2009.

What is a Community-Led Plan

A Community Led Plan of which Parish Plans in part grew out of the "Rural White Paper" published by the Government in 2000. The concept was developed by the Countryside Agency within the "Vital Villages" scheme, offering grants and advice to help rural communities take action for themselves on issues like transport and community. They are produced by communities for communities and give everyone in the Parish a chance to participate in the process and help shape the future of the area.

They also give a chance for local policy, in its wide holistic sense, to be underpinned by a local evidence base. A parish planning approach can help realise these aims and this new system provides scope for Parish Plans to evolve even further.

The Process

In 2002, a Plan entitled "Pill 2012: A ten year action plan" was produced. It arose out of recognition that Pill faced some unique challenges rather different from the rest of the North Somerset area. The Action Plan brought together the work of the previous 2-3 years in the Pill Community to improve the quality of life in the area. However, it was concerned only with the Pill part of the Parish and did not extend to the areas of Easton-in-Gordano and Ham Green. Towards the end of 2003 the Parish Council resolved to promote the preparation of a Parish Plan covering the whole of the Parish. Following two public meetings a Steering Committee was formed of local residents with a wide range of interests. A grant was obtained from the Countryside

Agency under the "Vital Villages" scheme and the Parish Council agreed to provide matching funding. Following informal consultations and the responses to a leaflet distributed with the Pill Paper in April 2005 a formal questionnaire was delivered to all households in the Parish in March 2006. A wide range of issues was covered in the questionnaire and there was a special set of questions to be completed by the elderly. 1,311 questionnaires were completed and returned representing about 60% of all households across the Parish, although the response rate for Easton-in-Gordano was higher (76%) than that of Pill and Ham Green taken together (53%). The completed questionnaires were analysed and the Plan prepared based on the main issues of concern to residents. The Plan was presented to the Parish Council for adoption in December 2006 with the recommendation that a Community Forum be set up to take the Actions forward. A Community Forum was set up following a well attended public meeting in March 2007. The Forum is a community led organisation representing a wide cross-section of interests with just over 20 regular members and others joining as appropriate. It has a formal constitution, corporate identity through a logo and is in the process of opening a bank account to enable it to take direct control of funds allocated from the Parish Council and other agencies. It meets formally every 3 months mainly to deal with administration issues and to consider support for new projects. It acts directly on projects, provides financial support for community led projects and assists with publicity.

What are your achievements as a community to date, as a result of the Community-Led Plan?

Health

- Working with local surgery to improve public awareness of out-of-hours service
- Local surgery working on improvements to waiting times

Traffic & Transport

- Lobbying for re-opening of Portishead to Bristol railway line. Local authority looking at possible purchase of disused track to safeguard land from any alternative development.

Environment & Planning

- Re-useable cotton bags produced in conjunction with local retailers.
- Management plan prepared for Watchhouse Hill amenity area.

Leisure, Recreation & Education

- Public consultation by Parish Council on potential sites for play facilities.
- Multi-use games area designated to be funded by section 106 money from the local authority.
- Playpod funded under Heritage Lottery Fund approved and due to arrive shortly.

Crime & Vandalism

- Discussions between Parish Council and police regarding levels of policing in parish, response times and improving peoples' perceptions of levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Liaison between police, Parish Council and schools over truancy problems.

Community Centre

- Publicity for refurbishment of existing centre and support for fund-raising

Resource Centre

- Publicity for activities of the Centre and support for fund-raising to secure its future

Community Website

- Website set up and being developed

How has the Easton-In-Gordano Parish Plan helped you to engage with your local authority about services your community needs?

- The Parish Plan has raised the profile of many local issues and the results of the questionnaire completed as part of the Plan process are frequently quoted as evidence of community opinion.
- North Somerset Council is becoming more involved in the Parish Plan process and discussions through the Parish Plan officer will, hopefully, generate direct action on specific service needs.
- The local MP has taken a direct interest in issues coming out of the Parish Plan.

Quote

on the Community- Led Planning Process

“Hard work but well worth it..”

What other projects have you got planned for the future?

- Continuing liaison between the Forum, Parish Council, local authority and local interest groups to implement the Action Plan.
- The Parish Plan and the setting up of the Forum have acted as a catalyst for new initiatives, not specifically mentioned in the Action Plan.
- A very active Environment Group is looking at further steps to reduce the use of disposable plastic shopping bags, introduction of low-energy light bulbs, “Transition Town” status, “freecycle” project, general publicity on environmental issues, riverside walk destination plan, etc.
- Improving liaison between the community and the two local schools to improve community use of school facilities. Support for feasibility study to be carried out by St. Katherine’s School to support proposals for additional school facilities to be made available for community use.
- Disability awareness project.
- Litter picking scheme.
- Various “fairtrade” activities including possible “Fairtrade Village Status”.

Have the actions from the Plan brought any funding into the community e.g. lottery grants, trusts, Village of the Year etc.?

- Grant funding for setting up Community Website to improve publicity for community activities and spread of information about community issues.
- Grant funding for a Citizens Advice Bureau held in the Resource Centre - £2200
- Indirectly, publicity resulting from the Parish Plan may have helped the approval of the improvements to sports facilities being provided in the Parish through funding from the local authority and Heritage Lottery Fund.

How are you keeping the process alive and advising progress to the community?

The Forum is continuing to look at new projects and sources of funding. Publicity for specific projects and regular reports in the local press. The Parish Council receives regular reports on the activities of the Forum and progress on implementing the Parish Plan.

How has this benefited the community?

The process has brought together a lot of local residents interested in specific projects in the community, has raised the profile of many issues of concern and has acted as the catalyst for many new community lead activities.

What lessons have you learned?

- The Parish Plan process is very time consuming.
- It is impossible to generate interest/support from parts of the community, which are frequently most critical of inaction by others.
- Generating support from the business community has been particularly difficult with some exceptions.

How does the Action Plan link into the Parish Council’s future business planning?

The Parish Plan was “adopted” by the Parish Council, which has approved continuing funding for implementation of the Action Plan. In some cases, the Forum will act jointly to address issues and in other cases the Forum is able to pursue projects for which the Parish Council does not have the resources, time or mandate.

One piece of advice for others?

Do not under-estimate the time these projects take, particularly in analysing questionnaires, and the importance of communications / publicity.