

COSSINGTON PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER No 17

May 2016

Members of the Parish Council

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Welcome to this special edition of our newsletter – summarising the results of the recent Village Community Survey.

The Parish Council forms an important part of Local Government comprising elected residents who carry out their responsibilities on a voluntary basis for the good of the community. We meet in the Village Hall - usually at 7:30 p.m. on the second Monday of each month apart from January and August.

More information including full details of meeting times, agendas and minutes can be found on the Parish notice board in Middle Road, opposite the old school and on the Parish Council's web-site at www.cossingtonparishcouncil.org.uk

VILLAGE COMMUNITY SURVEY

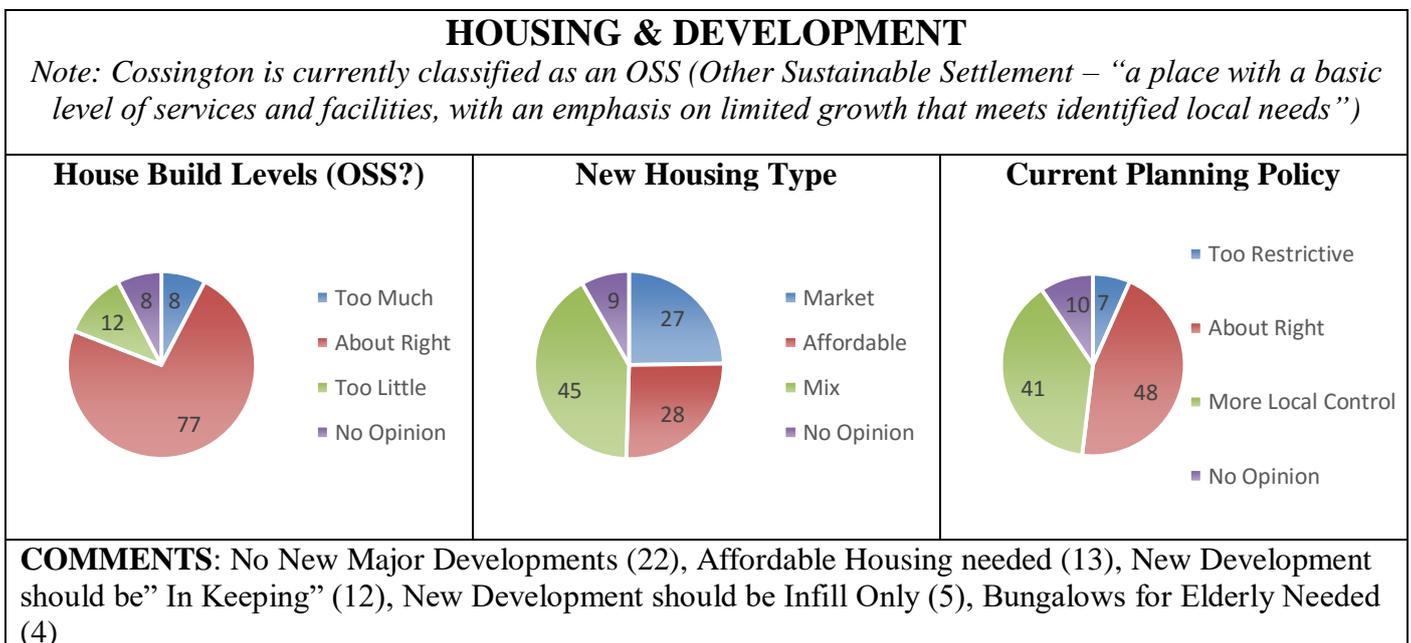
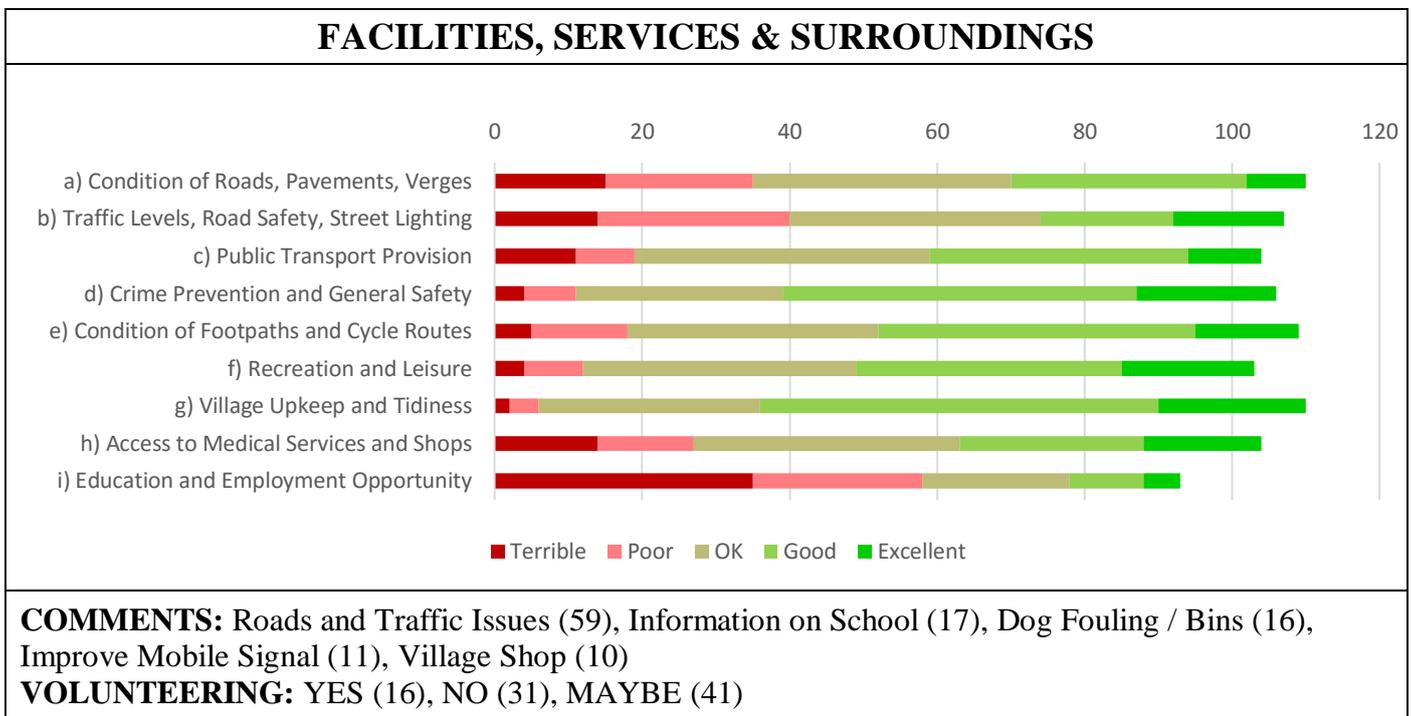
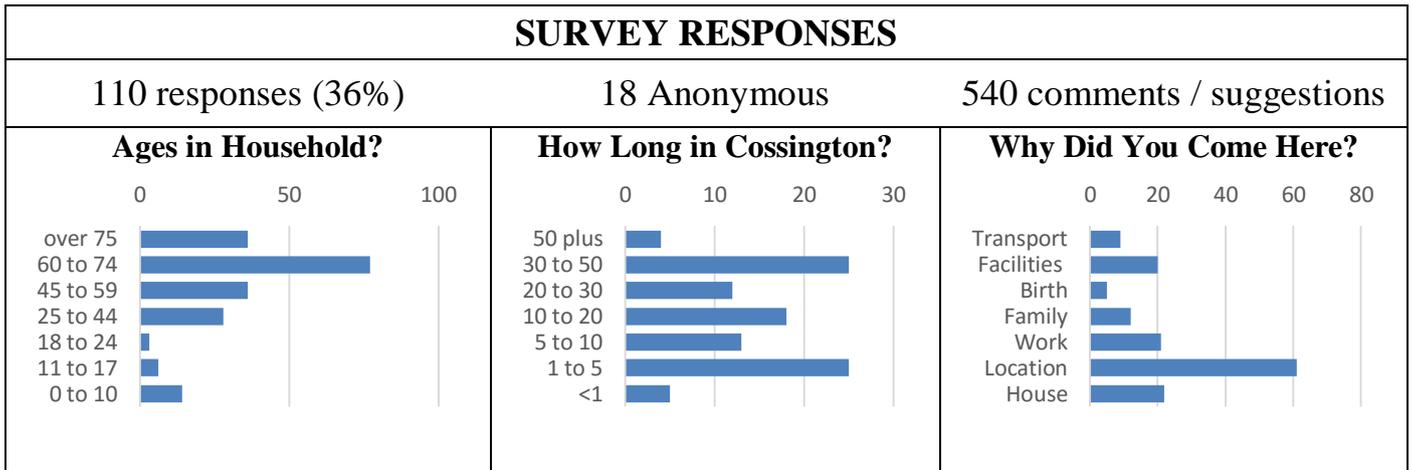
The Village Community Survey received 110 responses from residents. That's about 36% of those sent out - an excellent rate by modern standards. The time and effort residents put into their responses is much appreciated

A summary of responses, along with the most frequent occurring comments and suggestions, are provided on the centre pages of this newsletter. The responses will be fully considered over the coming months – but we have already identified some initiatives to be worked on. These are:

- **A Roads and Traffic Working Group** – from responses, roads and traffic related issues (including road safety and pedestrian footpaths) were the biggest single area of concern. With recent budget cuts and organisational changes at Somerset County Council it is clear that a different and more imaginative approach is needed rather than just reporting issues to Highways as they occur. The decision has therefore been taken to form a small Roads and Traffic Working group involving concerned residents with full Parish Council support and backing to give this important area focus and momentum – just like we successfully did with the Flood Group a few years ago.
- **Housing Needs Survey** – responses show that there is a perceived need for some affordable housing in the village. For this to happen, the next required step is conduct a formal village Housing Needs survey with the help of the Local Authority to develop more detail regarding the need. The last survey of this type was carried out in 2005/6 and only received 8 responses. The low response may have been due to the nature of the old survey form which some found intrusive and inflexible. However, many lessons have been learnt since then and a different approach would be taken this time round. A new survey would also include all local future housing needs (not just affordable) and could also form an important part of providing more local planning control in the future.
- **Playing Field Improvements** – The Playing Field Committee will be looking at improving access from the Car Park and installing additional benches – including in new areas such as on the dog walker route just outside of the play area and by the old “tennis court” hardstanding area. Work on a quarter-pipe skateboard ramp for this area is due to start in August to supplement the basketball hoop installed earlier as part of improving the tennis court area for use by teenagers.
- **Parish Council Communications** – generally, comments regarding Parish Council communications were very positive with most saying they like it as it is. However, following a suggestion received we plan to try out an e-mail-based Parish Council news alerts system later in the year for those who subscribe to the service if the interest is there. 55% of survey responses contained an e-mail address.

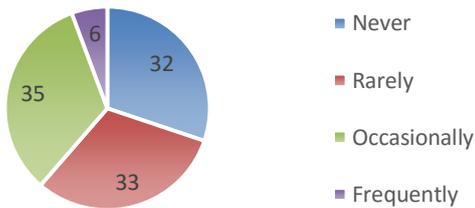
More on the above initiatives will be released as they develop.

Cossington Community Survey 2016 – Response Summary



PLAYING FIELD

Frequency of Use



Areas of Use



Age Suitability



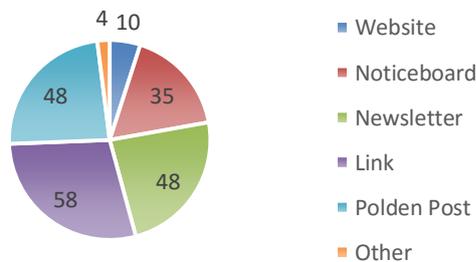
Maintenance & Accessibility



COMMENTS: Wider Range of Equipment Needed (11 in total – 4 Children, 4 Teenagers, 3 Elderly), More Benches / Picnic Tables Needed (10), Improve Access for Disabled / Pram Users (9), General Favourable Comments (9), Provide Showers / Toilets (8)

PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS

Main Sources of Information



COMMENTS: General Favourable Comments (9)

OTHER COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS

COMMENTS: More Community Activities Needed (8), Lack of Activities for Youngsters (3), More Community Focus in Village Hall (5)

ACTIVITIES SUGGESTED: Beer / Wine Tasting, Bingo, Horse Racing, Art Classes, Coffee Mornings in Village Hall, Community Post Office in Village Hall, Mother / Baby / Toddler Groups, Village Show / Village Hall User Open Day

Prize Draw Winner (£50 Garden Vouchers)

Carrie Butcher, Nutmill, Walnut Lane

For those who were requesting news about the future of the school, we now know that The Bridge School will be taking it over in the Autumn (see article below). Dog fouling continues to be monitored closely but has decreased notably since the spate earlier in the year.

Other suggestions, such as improving the mobile phone signal in the area and the return of a village shop are more difficult to achieve but will be born in mind for any new opportunities which might arise.

Cossington's proposed classification as a "Tier 4" settlement (similar to its current "Other Sustainable Settlement" status) in the ongoing Local Plan review should hopefully help ensure new development has a demonstrable local need and support – but we'll know more after the next stage of consultation (due September).

There were many other individual comments and suggestions – including some which fall outside of the Parish Council's remit, some which will be considered for the longer term and others which would be prohibitive without a substantial increase in funding. Where appropriate, we have passed on comments regarding services outside of the Parish Council's control to the relevant parties.

In particular, there were some requests for more community activities. A new group of enterprising residents, "The Village People", are launching a series one-off events. The village hall and playing field teams would be happy to provide advice and encouragement to anyone who wants to roll their sleeves up and start something new.

All non-anonymous respondents who have made comments or suggestions will receive a personal response – by e-mail if an e-mail address was supplied, otherwise by mail. There are over eighty and this could take a couple of months to get through them all – so please bear with us if you haven't received a response yet.

Finally - our thanks are due to those who helped out with stationary and printing services (including for this special newsletter edition), helping to keep costs to a minimum.

The Bridge School comes to Cossington

Somerset County Council have recently decided to utilise the old Cossington Primary School for the expansion of The Bridge School, Sedgemoor – a provider of specialist education from a number of sites in and around Bridgwater, Burnham and Cheddar.

The Bridge School is a pupil referral unit – with the Cossington site planned to accommodate its administration staff - along with a small group (around 4) of younger primary aged children and a small group (around 5) of secondary age pupils whose medical needs prevent them temporarily accessing their normal mainstream school.

We met with the Headmaster, Nigel Shipton (who will be based here), and Phil Curd of Somerset County Council in March. The continuation of the site as an educational establishment doing some very worthwhile work along with the preservation of the historic buildings and grounds is seen as a positive move for the village.

An open event where residents will have the opportunity to find out more and ask questions is planned before the school's scheduled opening in October.

In Short

- **Cossington in Bloom ** New for 2016 – Have your Back Garden Judged ****. Along with the various categories for Front Gardens, this year you will have the opportunity to show off your back garden (*closing date for entries 31st May*). Initial entry information is in the Flower Show flyer delivered to all households by the event organizing committee. Further details will be in the full schedules which will be delivered later in June. There will also be the return of the scarecrow competition with this year's theme being "Pirates". Prize giving for all competitions will take place at the Village Flower Show on the afternoon of Saturday 13th August.
- **Clean for the Queen** – Why didn't Cossington take part in the nationwide "Clean for the Queen" litter-pick campaign to tidy up communities? Mainly due to the fact that there is very little litter in the village. A recent survey concluded that picking up village litter would fill less than half a bin bag – insufficient to justify a community clean-up event (even including the areas just outside of the village along Manor Road south and Middle Rd east.).
- **Increase in Precept Explained** - The precept is the amount the Parish Council receive from Sedgemoor via Council Tax receipts. An increase over the previous year's precept of 8.4% (£804) was approved for 2016/17 - roughly an additional £3 per year for the average Cossington Council Tax payer. The increase is largely due to a new budget item, "Trees" – £1000 as a provision for maintenance work that needs to be done to protected trees on Parish Council land (which typically requires a qualified tree surgeon and planning permission). There was also an increase of nearly £400 budgeted for playing field equipment maintenance based on experiences in 2015/16 where expenditure significantly exceeded budget due to the stringent health and safety standards now in force. However, this increase has been offset by savings made elsewhere.
- **Bus Service Changes** – The recent significant bus timetable changes (25th May) announced at very short notice may not be the last. The County Council have informed us that discussions are still continuing with First Group and further changes could take place in the coming weeks.