

Somerset Village of the Year

Our Village

Kingsbury Episcopi is a village situated next to the river Parrett, on the edge of the Somerset Levels. In the wider area of the Parish of Kingsbury Episcopi, there are a number of individual villages and hamlets, of which Kingsbury Episcopi Village is one. The settlements of the Parish have a long history of cider-making, gloving and working with willow. These occupations have fostered a rich local identity and a context of working together. There exists a strong sense of community co-operation, participation and self-reliance, which is reflected in a tradition of organising events for the benefit of others.

Community Organisations

Many organisations offer regular social activities. For example, the Garden and Countryside Club, Art Group, History Group, Mothers Union, Craft Club, St Martin's Bell ringers, Football Club, Scottish Dancing, Kingsbury Band, Girl's Brigade, to name a few. The Village organises its own Web Site, Parish Newsletter, a number of linked Facebook pages and a Parish Directory. Social events include Community Breakfasts, Community Meals to celebrate festivals, Bonfire Night, the Pantomime - all arranged by villagers, with several Charities benefiting from the proceeds. The May Festival, Party by the Parrett and the Christmas Market have become huge events enjoyed by many.

Recreation facilities

We have a thriving Public House, two Churches, with Church rooms, and a new Community Centre and Shop. There is a Recreation Ground with a football pitch, Multi-Use Games Area and outdoor exercise equipment; brilliant facilities for all ages in our community. Teenagers and youngsters have been pro-active in using the "Rec", identifying ideas and offering their suggestions and requirements. There have been countless events and burger sales fundraising for these facilities. There is also a network of footpaths, much used by runners, ramblers and dogwalkers, developed and overseen by a dedicated team over many years.

Community Centre

A Community Centre was opened in 2017 on the Recreation Ground, as a result of committed volunteers fundraising £1.2million over 25 years. Its use is developing and already has regular classes, user-groups and social events. This is an amazing legacy for the volunteers, fundraisers and parishioners of Kingsbury Episcopi. The whole Parish now has a wonderful facility, providing a focal point where the community can meet and socialise. Probably the single most unifying benefit for the Village has been in promoting and cementing relationships across a wide spectrum of ages and interests.

Kingsbury Shop & Cafe

Kingsbury Community Shop opened in 2012 in a porta-cabin. Since 2017, the Shop and Café have found a home within the new Community Centre. They have been designed by the community for the community, and as a "not for profit" organisation are able to put any surplus income back into community projects. The Shop and Café stock local produce, with "top-up" items as requested. The Shop acts as box office for local events and offers a book exchange. Three part-time Managers are employed, four youngsters at weekends for valuable work experience, and with 40 volunteers is an essential community resource.

What would your village spend the prize fund on?

We will use the prize fund to initiate and take forward our aspirations for a Sensory Garden at the Community Centre. This new building has modern indoor facilities, with access to a patio and all the outdoor facilities of the Recreation Ground. A group of people have been thinking

about the potential of the adjacent outdoor area, and how we might attract user groups who may be excluded from other similar sets of facilities, due to mobility or other disability issues. Thus, by creating a well-designed out-door garden space, with the emphasis on embracing all the senses, the Community Centre becomes recognised as a truly inclusive site.

We have a track-record in the village of engaging with the community from the start of projects, to increase the sense of ownership. This has been particularly evident in the planning and delivery of the Recreation Ground, Community Allotments, Community Centre, Shop and Café projects. So, a possible avenue might be to arrive at the design of the Sensory Garden through a Parish-wide ideas competition.

We have links with staff who work at The Hub in Yeovil – a local charity providing skills and development opportunities for young people and adults with additional support needs. A small group linked to the Community Centre has also visited a sensory garden in a local respite centre for children with special needs. This incorporated raised beds, wheelchair/pushchair access, sculptures, water, light and shade, with planting of trees, shrubs and flowers. Such contacts have helped to develop awareness of how a Sensory Garden might be planned and what it might include.

Funding would help us to initiate and develop the process of engaging with professionals from the world of sensory garden design. The Parish has recently been working with two local garden centres on projects involving fundraising for its World War One and the People of the Parish Project. There also exists a wealth of horticultural knowledge in the Parish, with commercial bulb and soft fruit companies operating here, and the renowned Marjorie Fish Gardens.

Many people in the Village also have experience of raising plants on allotments and in their gardens. We envisage drawing upon the energy, insights and commitment from the Village and feel sure of a successful process and outcomes. We will be able to call on all these networks, to guide us at the design, planning and planting stages.

The Sensory Garden will be accessible to all the community, both able and disabled, from the youngest to the oldest. We will plan to include elements which will stimulate all the senses, and which will immerse the individual in an uplifting environment. The role of the Sensory Garden will have the potential to evolve as the Community Centre and its functions develop and mature. It will further enhance a community space and offer social opportunities to help reduce issues of isolation and loneliness in a rural area.