

Eynsham Parish Plan 2007-08

57 SERVICES and VISITORS

57.1 The Facts

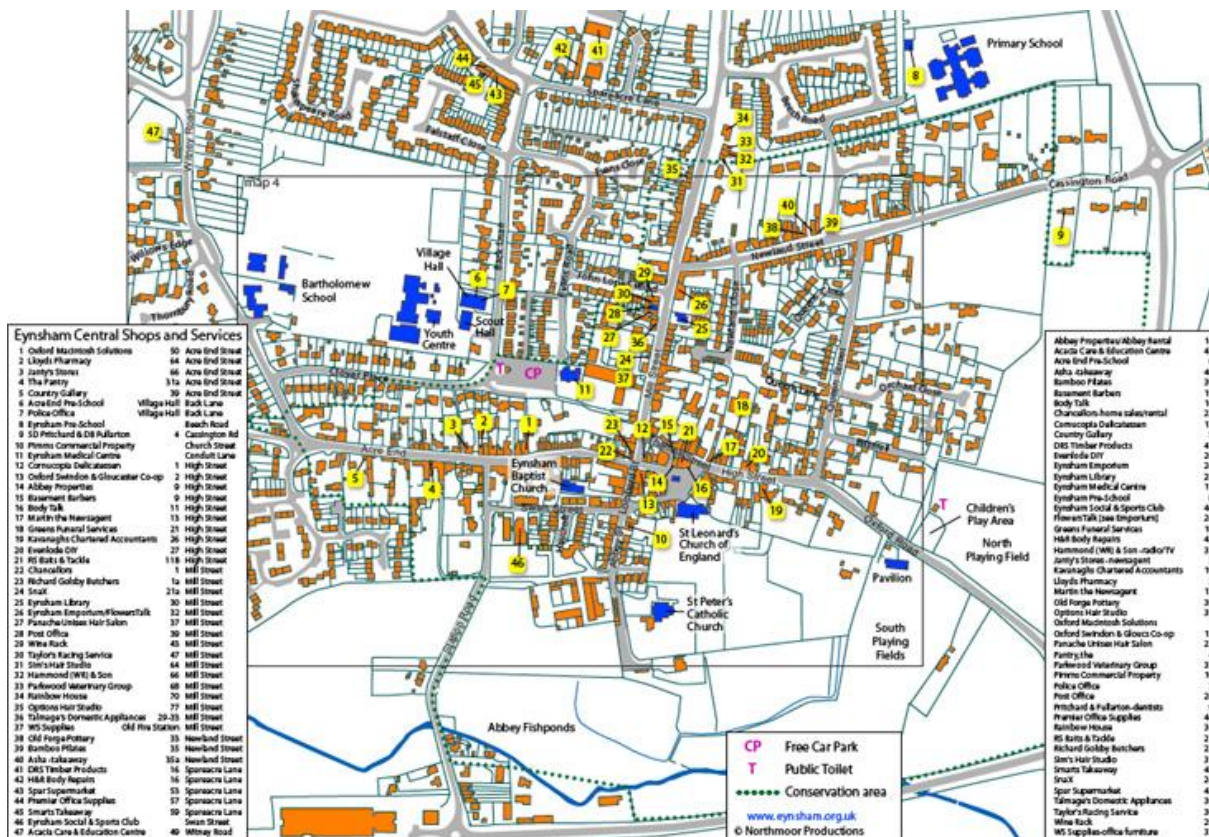


Illustration 1: Eynsham Central Shops and Services

57.1.1 Eynsham has been a significant village since its setting and resources were recognised by early settlers and traders. The river made it rich. Later, as roads improved and the trading route between London, Oxford and South Wales developed, it became an important stop-over point for watering horses and accommodating travellers.

57.1.2 Eynsham's amenities were widely lamented in the first half of last century. The Eynsham Record contains many references to problems with water, firefighting, sewerage and street lights. Shopping and other services were hardly better:

*“Just met Rupert Davies who said that when he was a student (all of fifty years ago) Eynsham was a terrible place. He went to take a service and, waiting for a bus home, found his way to the local pub, which was even drearier than the chapel! He has driven through recently and finds a great improvement”.*¹

57.1.1 Better quality, wider choice and cheaper prices could clearly be found outside. As travel became easier and bus services improved, the nearby centres of Oxford and Witney grew and Eynsham saw corresponding decline. Closure of the local Barclays Bank in 1993 may be seen as a turning point.

1 Christine Lillington, member of the Bristol local history group, 1986. Eynsham Record 9, 1992

57.1.2 Today the village is a popular place to live and still supports 9 old hostelrys. It also offers three churches, primary and secondary schools and ample nursery provision. A doctor's surgery, chemist, library, post office and core provision shops have all survived the decline. There are also several business parks, whose custom helps to sustain the local pubs and catering services.

57.1.3 Eynsham's facilities naturally bring in custom from beyond the parish. Visitors also appreciate its quiet attractions, though it is far from a tourist resort. River users find their way from Eynsham Lock to the village square; and the conservation area provides endless photo opportunities. Leaflets such as Eynsham Abbey Heritage Trail and Eynsham Unlocked, which have extended resident and visitor horizons, are in constant demand and widely admired. The District Council supports such initiatives, being: *“committed ... to manage tourism in a way that contributes to the conservation of the environment, recognises that the great attraction of the District lies in its natural and built environment, generates employment and supports the local economy”*

57.1.4 Eynsham's service infrastructure is already impressive for its size and developments over the last 15 years seem to offer further possibilities:

- i. Road congestion and increasing transport charges are forcing people to reconsider their shopping habits.
- ii. Campaigns for locally-grown produce and organic supplies are strengthening the opportunities for local sales.

57.1.5 These trends have been reinforced by successful redevelopment of the Market Square and an emerging “hub” based on Eynsham Emporium. Internet and high-speed communication links are enabling more people to work from home. A suite of 30 refurbished offices in the village centre is entirely broadband-enabled.

57.1.6 Nevertheless, some established businesses are being forced to shrink (e.g. Siemens) or relocate (e.g. Oxford Instruments) and the population is static or even in decline (1991 Census: 4,800 – 2001 Census: 4,665).

57.1.7 Key issues for the continued success of the village – and the district – are summarised in WODC's Economic Development Strategy 2004-7:

- i. *Population growth*
- ii. *Availability of employment sites and business premises*
- iii. *Health of market towns*
- iv. *Rural economy and rural community life*
- v. *Economic development through tourism*
- vi. *Education and employment*
- vii. *Information and communications technology (ICT)*
- viii. *Transport.*

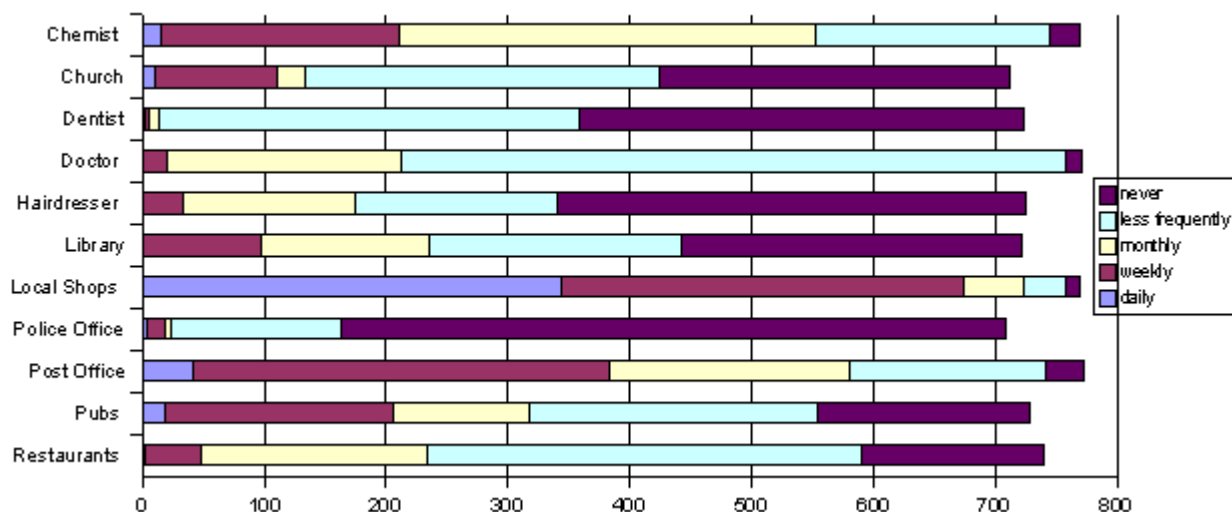


Illustration 2: Eynsham Emporium, former site of Barclays Bank

57.2 Services & Visitors: The Opinions

57.2.1 Question 10 asked “How often do you use the following shops and services”? From the 793 responses, the most commonly visited (daily/weekly) were:

- i. Local shops 674 84%
- ii. Post office 383 48%
- iii. Chemist 211 26%
- iv. Pubs 206 25%



57.2.2 Other services, visited monthly or less frequently, included:

- i. Doctor 738 92%
- ii. Restaurants 543 68%
- iii. Library 344 43%
- iv. Church² 315 39%

57.2.3 The facilities least (never) visited included:

- i. Police Office 545 68%
- ii. Hairdresser 385 48%
- iii. Dentist 366 46%
- iv. Church 287 36%

57.2.4 Question 9, on service development options, asked “Should the following be encouraged in and around Eynsham?”

57.2.5 407 people answering this question (53%) were in favour or strongly in favour of encouraging small retail development. The free-form responses reinforced this, tending to equate smallness of scale with quality and friendliness; and calling for more of the same – though there were also requests for “a bigger Post Office”.

² Unfortunately, St Leonard's Church is not regularly open to visitors outside of service times.

- 57.2.6 Surprisingly, given years of intensive fund-raising by the Friends of the Library, there were only 5 proposals to extend the Library.
- 57.2.7 People pointed to the “empty shops” ... “small, useful shops are disappearing” ... “several have gone in the 14 years I have lived here.” Unfortunately, however, there was no useful guidance on type or content for the new enterprise/s.
- 57.2.8 Several respondents called for attention to the “poor condition of public toilets” (6) – an unwelcome visitor experience – and the “depressing appearance of the Spareacre Lane retail block” (26), which is seen as a focus for “gangs hanging around”.



Illustration 3: Public toilets in Back Lane Car Park.
Negotiations between district and parish council are still unresolved

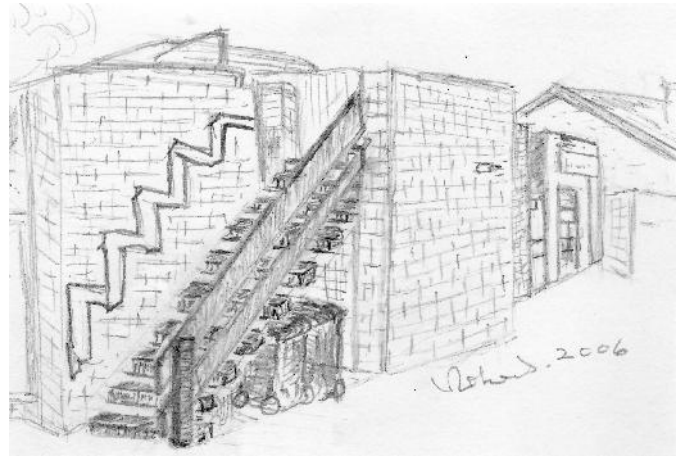


Illustration 4: Part of Spareacre Lane retail block

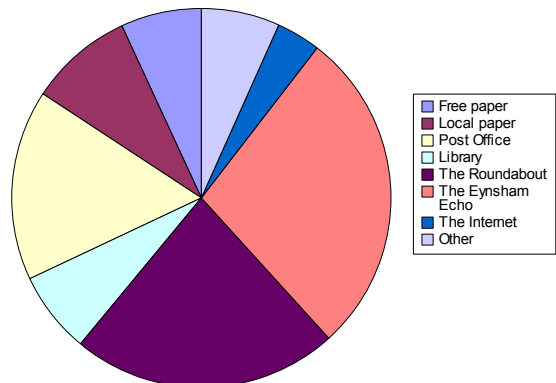
- 57.2.9 There was no clear mandate for visitor attractions, though the work requested on the street scene would benefit visitors too:

“Not enough has been done to keep Eynsham's heritage alive ... Only the Square has been done well. Can't the rest of the village get some TLC?”

“More benches and seats” ... “more trees in the centre” ... “a fountain and water feature”

- 57.2.10 Question 13, which received 760 responses, asked: “Where do you usually get information about events taking place in Eynsham?” People used several sources, as demonstrated by multiple-choice voting:

i.	Eynsham Echo	568	74%
ii.	The Roundabout	465	61%
iii.	Post Office	332	43%
iv.	Parish notice-boards	255	33%
v.	Local papers	181	23%
vi.	Library	143	18%
vii.	The Internet	77	10%



Top of the free-form suggestions was Word of mouth (65 votes)

57.2.11 Question 14 on new services , with 549 responses, asked

“Do you think that Eynsham needs any of the following?”

Overall numbers were down but feelings strong:

- | | | | |
|------|---------------------------|-----|-----|
| i. | Local information point | 327 | 59% |
| ii. | Notice board | 215 | 39% |
| iii. | Map | 210 | 38% |
| iv. | Visitor information point | 208 | 37% |

57.2.12 Other suggestions included a leaflet covering the various meeting places, because:

“The Village Hall is always booked”

57.2.13 Signposting occurred as an issue several times in free-form responses – *“especially to the car park”* – and anecdotally at events that attract people from further afield, such as Open Gardens and the Carnival. No coherent approach has yet been taken to signposting within the village: several are battered and uninformative while some are downright misleading.



Illustration 5: Mill Street / Oxford Road sign to car park: “one of Eynsham’s best-kept secrets”



Illustration 6: Sign to car park from Spareacre Lane obscured by other street furniture



Illustration 7: Station Road / Acre End Street – no sign to village centre or car park



Illustration 8: Oxford Road – no sign to village centre or Market Square

57.3 Services & Visitors: The Vision

57.3.1 West Oxfordshire District Council promises to:

“ ... encourage market towns and their surrounding villages to work in partnership to enable market towns to be;

- i. Comprehensive local service centres*
- ii. Access points for a range of education, training and employment opportunities*
- iii. Gateways for tourism capitalising on the Oxfordshire Cotswolds*
- iv. Centres for processing local products*
- v. Focal points for local transport networks*
- vi. Centres for culture”*

57.3.1 Possibly Eynsham could do more itself to engage with villages in the hinterland. Already, however, there are signs of more conscious interaction among local businesses. A flyer distributed at the end of February drew a warm response to the concept of a business network. This could develop a more integrated approach to services, with support from the Oxfordshire Town Chambers Network (OTCN), and act as a catalyst for the WODC vision outlined above.



Illustration 9: a more integrated approach to services

57.3.2 Small-scale improvements to the street scene and to information services, which might be funded from the Parish Council communications budget, include a central street map and notice-board/s. Wider work on signage would fit in with District Council proposals for street furniture:

“Minimise signage, and locate signs on existing lamp posts or buildings, or at the back edge of the pavement; use a single dark colour for all items.”

57.3.3 This might be a good time to implement recommendation 3.106 of the Village Design Statement (2004):

“Put up new signposts to show off-road paths for tourists using the moorings at the locks, or for those using the Thames Footpath, and provide footpath maps at Eynsham Lock and Pinkhill Lock.”

57.3.4 Longer-term, perhaps, it may be possible to replace ugly overhead cabling with wireless networks.



Illustration 10: Typical view of Eynsham's overhead cabling