

Ministerial visit to Eastertown on the 9th of February

On the 9th of February, villagers from Eastertown were treated to a rare visit from our constituency MP, Mr James Heappey (Wells), currently the Minister for the Armed Forces. Mr Heappey had become aware of the activities of the Eastertown Evolution Community Interest Company, which coincided with his interests in farming and climate action and the preservation of wildlife in his area. He has previously attended the openings of the Mendip Supernational Nature Reserve and the Somerset Wetlands Super National Nature Reserve. Prior to the on-site meeting, he had been provided with information about the proposals to create a green space and community common for the benefit of local people. He was interested to hear of the history of Eastertown Common prior to the drainage and enclosures.

Donning his Wellington boots to cross the saturated ground, he was able to view the potential green area and meet residents with properties adjoining the land for sale. Mr Heappey listened carefully to the comments and concerns about the nature of the proposed project and made some observations of his own.

He was aware of the primary interest of Eastertown Evolution CIC to purchase part, or all the land for sale and thus prevent any future building that would fundamentally change this rural amenity. Whilst he is aware of the current pressure to release more land for building to ease the National housing crisis, he acknowledged the desire of those in rural areas to preserve wild spaces and existing green land. There was a useful discussion about the relative strengths of covenants that may already be in place, or the possibility of strengthening the covenants to satisfy the ambition to preserve the ground. He noted that there had been a tendency for green land elsewhere to be developed by the progressive placement of agricultural buildings, that in time become dwellings.

The concerns about possible increased road congestion in the narrow lanes around the hamlet, the risk of antisocial behaviour and the future succession of ownership of the land were also aired. He was pleased to have had a courteous and friendly meeting and offered to review the progress of the CIC after further investigations of the covenants and the outcomes of any future consultation meetings that will be held to address the points that were raised.

Currently, there is a bid by the Eastertown Evolution CIC in progress for the release of Government funds to enable purchase of the land for sale. This land may be of interest to those with equestrian pursuits, as well as farming and other leisure activities, however it remains the desire of the current owners who have inherited the estate from the late Dr Ann Codman, to see it pass into community ownership for the benefit of the residents of the Eastertown and Lympsham and remain a green space in perpetuity.

Further consultations with the community will be held during the month of March. At these events we will report on the changes we have made to the business plan in response to the comments we have received and how we will endeavour to ensure that any use of the land meets with the full approval of all concerned parties.