

Meole Estate Needs Assessment November 2024

Evidence of Deprivation on Meole Estate: Census Data for Meole Estate provided in separate attached document.

Since Meole Estate was built in the mid 1950s, it has not received the amount of Council & community support that it needs and deserves, being an isolated small settlement of multiple deprivation within the otherwise socio-economically comfortable electoral Ward of Meole.

South Shrewsbury as a whole is itself relatively affluent.

Meole Estate was identified in both the 2011 and 2021 Censuses as an area of multiple deprivation.

From the 2021 Census, Meole Estate has 650 homes and a population of 1600.

There are high numbers of young people on Meole Estate aged 0 to 15 years, at 399 (26.6% of the population), compared with England figures (18.6% of the population). There are also approximately 43 young people aged 16/17 years.

On Meole Estate,

1. only 30% are **not** deprived in any way, compared with 51% in Shropshire
2. there are almost twice as many deprived in 2 dimensions at 22% compared with 12% in Shropshire
3. there are over 3 times the number deprived in 3 dimensions at 8.5% compared with 2.6% in Shropshire
4. half (52%) of households are in social rented accommodation (pus another 10% in private rented accommodation) compared with 13% in Shropshire
5. 7% of the working population are registered as unemployed compared with 2.4% in Shropshire
6. 1 in 4 (25%) adults have never worked, compared with 1 in 6 (17.5%) in Shropshire

Meole Estate's population is among the 20% most deprived in England and the 5th most deprived Lower Layer Super Output Area (LLSOA) in Shropshire

Meole Estate's children and young people are among the 10% most deprived in England and the 4th most deprived LLSOA in Shropshire.

Meole Estate Characteristics

The residents of Meole Estate are proud of their community, but they also face serious challenges in their day to day life. The 2011 and 2021 censuses demonstrated the extent of deprivation on Meole Estate, compared with the rest of Meole Electoral Ward, Shropshire and England statistics, which may explain why this deprivation has not so far been addressed.

Meole Estate ranks in the bottom 10% for child deprivation nationally, these are some of the most vulnerable of the population, there currently are 399 0 -15 year olds within the estate, making up 24% of the population. Meole Estate Community Action feels that there are too many children languishing below the poverty line in Meole Estate, it is an unfair situation and must start to be rectified.

According to the 2021 census, 25% of the residents of Meole estate have no qualifications at all and 48% have qualifications of level 1, 2 or 3. These limits qualification statistics make it difficult for the residents to be upwardly mobile or aspirational regarding career prospects due to level 4 qualifications being the standard for higher paying occupations. There are no current schemes in place for MECA to support academic qualifications. However, by removing other elements of stress and uncertainty it is possible that some people will be more inclined to pursue academic qualifications, this is an element that MECA can provide support within.

7% of the residents (excluding those under 16) are economically inactive and unemployed whilst a further 35% are employed by economically inactive. With 42% of the residents being economically inactive local businesses are put under increased strain as they are not able to tap into the consumer base nearby, this also means that many of Meole Estate are in danger of dropping below the poverty line. MECA aim to stop this from happening. By providing access to food and sound financial advice, those that are in a position to help in Meole are willing to do so in an attempt to prevent the further degradation of their community.

52% of households are socially rented, and a further 10% are privately rented. Only 18% of households own their property outright and only a further 20% are on course to do so with a mortgage still to pay off. Due to people's reliance on Housing Plus, it is imperative that a good relationship continues to be cultivated and then maintained, MECA are hoping that their ongoing support will yield more benefits for the people of Meole.

A mere 29.8% of households on the estate are not deprived in any state, this leave 70.2% of households that face some form of deprivation, whether that be in one, two or three dimensions. This is in stark contrast to the rest of Shropshire where 50.8% of households face no deprivation. This is a very unfortunate set of statistics and demonstrates that Meole Estate is well below the national average and is currently in need of the assistance that MECA is uniquely positioned to provide. Charitable status will assist MECA to push forward their plans for the Estate by enabling access to grants that will improve community life and facilities.

There is a small but still sizable elderly population within Meole Estate, 236 individuals are 65+ and thus are either entering or already in, retirement age. These individuals are also falling into the category of vulnerable. They are no longer of working age and as a result most rely upon a pension that is depreciating in value given persistent rises in inflation. Many of these individuals also struggle with financial hardship and loneliness, a trend that was exacerbated by the pandemic. MECA can help to combat this by providing social clubs, tea mornings and a variety of other events in order to get the elderly from their homes and into a social environment, thus hopefully limiting the loneliness that people experience.

There have been noted increases within the Meole Estate Community that anti-social behaviour and this is on the rise. Petty crimes ranging from such things as graffiti and shop lifting, all the way up to criminal damage, the intimidation of residents and physical violence, including knife crime. Most of these smaller crimes are committed by younger members of the community, principally due to their lack of alternative activities to prevent them from engaging in more damaging pass times. By providing a safe warm space, social contact and activities, we should see a marked drop in petty crime by the simple fact that those committing them are occupied with activities beneficial to themselves, the community or both.

Drug related crime is high on Meole Estate and police have raided several properties, removing significant amounts of illegal substances and prosecuting individuals responsible. County Lines are active on Meole Estate and vulnerable children recruited into drug distribution. MECA has regular contact with the local police to develop joint strategies to reduce this issue.

As seen above, the residents of Meole are faced with significant disadvantages and current national financial constraints may result in worse circumstances. Many struggle with financial, emotional and isolation issues.

Meole Estate has previously had a community centre which was an excellent venue for the hosting of all sorts of activities, from the larger community events to youth clubs on week day nights in order to keep children off the streets and allow them their own warm safe space in which to interact and express themselves. Unfortunately, this centre was burnt down in 1999 from an arson attack and has never been rebuilt. As a result of this tragedy, there are currently few places that children and teenagers can socialise within the Meole Estate and as described, this has led to anti-social behaviour.

Petty crimes are flaring up, with vandalism, criminal damage, and intimidation of residents. These are harming Meole Estate and its community.

Use of the Meet Place has increased towards pre-Pandemic levels over the last 2 years. Despite the loss of the Youth Club, the Meet place is becoming more popular all year round. Virtually all of the users are residents of Meole Estate. Some of the activities could continue successfully without change to the building, but many are constrained by the space now available. The very popular lady's exercise class only has room for 8, and sometimes disappointed ladies

have to watch rather than take part. 'Bacon Buddies' is well utilised The Food Hub currently caters for 40 families each week. However, queuing in the rain and leaving buggies in the rain is a frequent problem, due to space constraints of The Meet Place

'The Meet Place' is licensed by Homes Plus to The Meole Estate Community Action Group (MECA). Homes Plus rent their properties to 52% of the residents on the estate, with a further 10% in private rented accommodation. It is also the place that the community gathered for a vigil when there was a murder on the estate in 2016. It is located in the centre of Meole Estate, next to the Post Office and convenience store and the 'Community Hub' which is also owned by Homes Plus, previously named the digital den. Previously, residents could book appointments and teaching slots for a variety of purposes, including assistance in writing benefit applications, computer lessons to gain employability skills and other services, but there is currently no funding for this.

Homes Plus own the ground floor flat next door to The Meet Place and a MECA proposal to knock through the shared wall to it, effectively doubling the size of The Meet Place, was declined due to loss of £6000 per year revenue from the flat. An increased size of The Meet Place would mean that the building could accommodate more people and enable events and activities requiring larger physical space..

It has not so far proved possible to restart a Youth Club, largely because the current space is not suitable for the number of teenagers who would need to be accommodated, however, Shropshire Council's Youth Team provide a weekly outreach service & The Hive have used some temporary grant funding to provide craft sessions.

MECA's Background.

MECA (Meole Estate Community Action) is an organisation that was set up by the residents in the dwellings of the Meole Estate in 1998, the longest running residents' group in Shropshire and has done much to support the local community

MECA partners with a collection of departments within Shropshire council and external stakeholders, all of which are working for the benefit of the people of the estate. There has been a long-standing relationship with the Trinity Church who support both MECA and the Meole Estate community with various projects, with the local Councillor, with Homes Plus Housing Association and local police.

Meole Anti Social Behaviour over the financial year 2023/24

The Meet Place front door has been kicked in 3 times & chairs stolen. The key code lock has been melted recently with a flame & needed to be replaced.

On Meole Retail Park, last year scooters & bicycles were ridden down shop aisles & staff verbally abused when they tried to eject the young people. Spray paint was stolen from Halfords and used to spray graffiti, including on the Rea Brook Nature Reserve. Insects from The Pet Shop were released.

Young children have been intimidated by older youths.

The rubberised surface on the Mary Webb Road Playground has very recently been damaged & needs repair.

Litter has been dropped all over Meole Estate (some due to adults) including the Rea Brook Nature Reserve, where fires have also been lit.

There are frequent reports of youths using single-use Vapes & discarding the canisters.

3 dens have been built on Meole Estate, the first in a garage owned by Homes Plus, which was then boarded up. The second was built near to the Mary Webb Road Playground & contained stolen articles plus weighing scales (possibly used for weighing substances).

The third was found within the last 2 weeks behind Bestune Way & an armchair plus other debris had blocked a culvert into the Rea Brook, causing flooding.

There were 2 knife incidents, one in The Post Office and the other on Stapleton Road at a block of apartments.

In April 2024, several steel barriers and their supports, which were protected exposed gas pipes attached to the footbridge over the Rea Brook (this links Meole Estate to Meole Village), were thrown over a fence into the Rea Brook. There have been multiple other events, some of which have been reported to the Police.

In June 2024, the local Councillor met with Shrewsbury Police, Homes Plus & concerned residents regarding rising anti-social behaviour (ASB), following which there were multiple arrests, warning letters to tenants from Homes Plus & 1 resident was evicted.

ASB & crime continue to be prolific, with damage to cars & property, burglaries & gang beatings of vulnerable young people.