

**MARKET AND COASTAL TOWNS INITIATIVE**

**WINCANTON PEOPLE'S PLAN**

# **WINCANTON**

**Healthcheck Report**

January 2006

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## **Acknowledgements**

Data was gathered by members of the Wincanton People's Plan Working Group during 2005 and reflects the state of Wincanton and its surrounding settlements as it could be determined at that time.

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## Executive summary

The Market and Coastal Towns Initiative (MCTi) is a government programme which aims to help market and coastal towns and their surrounding communities to identify priorities and implement a plan to shape their future.

At the heart of the initiative is the preparation of an Action Plan covering social, economic, environmental and cultural themes. The Action Plan is drawn up through a process of strategic planning. A key step in this process is conducting a clear assessment of where the community is now in order to highlight the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats it faces and to provide a baseline against which future progress can be measured. This assessment is the 'Healthcheck'.

This report presents the findings of the Wincanton Healthcheck. It gives a snapshot of the community as it stood in 2005 and identifies a number of key themes and issues as follows.

### Population issues

- The town of Wincanton has a population of around 4,600 but potentially it serves at least another 3,500 people in surrounding settlements.
- The population of Wincanton and its neighbouring parishes has grown by 8.5 per cent over the decade to 2001.
- Both Wincanton and South Somerset have proportionately more elderly people than England as a whole. Wincanton has a high proportion of pensioner households (30 per cent compared with 23 per cent for England). One household in five in Wincanton is a pensioner living alone.
- Ageing of the population is a national trend forecast to continue for the next few decades.
- Households with children account for 34 per cent of Wincanton households.

### Economic issues

- **Economic deprivation.** Based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, parts of Wincanton are fairly deprived relative to the rest of South Somerset. Tower (the ward immediately to the north of Wincanton), which on most counts shows low levels of deprivation, exhibits the highest level of housing and service deprivation in the whole of South Somerset.
- **Employment.** Employment rates are good but earnings are relatively low. The local economy is not overly dependent on any one large employer. Nearly half the local labour force works away from Wincanton but there is a net migration of workers into the town.

- **Business.** Over 300 private sector businesses operate in and around Wincanton. A survey in 2001 found around a third thought their premises might become unsuitable over the following two years. A variety of grants and business rate relief may be available to local businesses. The nearest Business Link is located in Taunton, although considerable information is available by Internet. Wincanton has the benefit of Broadband.
- **Retail and town centre.** Wincanton town centre hosts 57 goods shops and 30 other commercial outlets. Vacancy rates were low at the time of the Healthcheck.
- **Tourism.** Wincanton itself does not have any significant natural or historic tourist attractions. However, there is potential for Wincanton to act as a holiday/short-break centre for visitors to attractions in the surrounding area. Wincanton hosts some significant events which draw visitors nationally, including racing at Wincanton Racecourse and Discworld® events. (Wincanton is home the only Discworld® Emporium and is officially twinned with Ankh Morpork, the fictional world created by Terry Pratchett in his Discworld® books.) There is insufficient visitor accommodation locally to meet demand from visitors to Discworld® events.
- **Training and education.** Wincanton has a lower proportion of working-age people with higher skills and educational attainment than South Somerset or England. There is probably a shortage of pre-school provision. In 2004, educational attainment of pupils at Wincanton Primary School is broadly in line with the averages for Somerset and England, but has been tending to decline over the last few years. The best performing local primary school was Abbas & Templecombe. Attainment by pupils at King Arthur's Community School was in line with England but lags behind other secondary schools in the area. Wincanton offers no post-16 education. Wincanton has a significantly higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs than South Somerset or England but seems to lack adequate SEN funding.

## **Environmental issues**

- **Character and vitality of Wincanton.** Residents particularly value the friendliness of the town and its people. So far, Wincanton has avoided becoming an urban sprawl and should guard against this in the face of rapid planned expansion.
- **The countryside around Wincanton.** The countryside is very scenic and rich with the evidence of previous settlement. The majority of the countryside continues to be farmed in traditional ways, but there is great uncertainty over the future, particularly of the dairy industry.
- **Links between Wincanton and its surroundings.** The visual links from the town over the Blackmore Vale are partially threatened by housing development.

A considerable number of footpaths link the town and its environ. Wincanton is also close to some important national trails and cycle routes.

## **Social and community**

- **Housing.** Wincanton has grown by nearly 50 per cent over the past 20 years and is forecast to grow by 50 per cent again over the next ten years. The challenge for Wincanton is to retain its distinctive character as described in Chapter 4 in the face of this rapid growth and to ensure that service provision keeps pace with the population growth. Affordability is a major housing issue. Planned new developments should provide a major boost to social/affordable housing.
- **Access to services.** Wincanton is well provided with services. Its importance to the surrounding settlements is underlined by the very limited range of services available in most of the villages.
- **Health needs and provision.** The older population of Wincanton seem to be in poorer health than elderly people generally in South Somerset. At all ages, there is a high incidence of mental health problems relative to the rest of the District. Wincanton is fortunate to be one of only three towns in Somerset with a Healthy Living Centre.
- **Social needs and provision.** There is a much higher incidence of domestic violence in Wincanton than in the rest of South Somerset. Teenage pregnancy rates are higher than the average for the District.
- **Public safety.** There is a high level of accidents involving pedestrians and cyclists in Wincanton. Reclassification of Wincanton police station as a rural rather than urban unit may lead to longer response times. Criminal damage, violent crime and theft from motor vehicles are key problems in Wincanton. Overall crime detection rates for Wincanton fall short of the police's own targets. A high proportion of local residents are fearful of using the streets in the evenings and at night.
- **Local government and community organisations.** In general, public access to all tiers of local government is good. There is an extensive range of community organisations active in the area. They have the potential to involve most parts of the community and include key initiatives aimed at young people.
- **Recreation.** Wincanton has exceptional sports facilities for a community of its size. Remaining gaps are squash courts and an astro-turf pitch. The countryside provides good opportunities for walking and some opportunities for cycling and horse riding.
- **Culture and heritage.** For a small town, Wincanton has a diverse and active cultural sector offering a museum, library, film club, amateur dramatics, choral society, silver band, and more. The surrounding villages also stage their

own musical and dramatic events. Wincanton has eight main venues for events plus its churches. Village halls are the usual venue in the outlying settlements. A range of cultural events take place throughout the year. However, there is a marked lack of culture and events specifically for the younger population. Although there are some minor cultural and heritage links (for example to Nathaniel Ireson, potter and architect), there are no major ones.

### **Transport and accessibility**

- **Access to private transport.** One in five Wincanton households does not own a car or van. This is higher than the proportion for South Somerset as a whole.
- **Ease of travel to and from the area.** Good East-West road links ensure easy access by car. Road travel on the North-South axis is less good. Wincanton is within close reach of three railway stations offering three rail routes. Apart from a good bus link to London, commercial bus services are poor. Many of the gaps are filled by a Community Accessible Transport (CAT) bus scheme. However, restrictions on who can use the CAT bus mean that the bulk of the Wincanton population has little choice but to be dependent on the car.
- **Ease of access to services.** As noted in Chapter 5, most villages have few services, so travel to Wincanton is important. Access by car is easy. The CAT bus is helping to ensure access from the villages to Wincanton and the other towns nearby. However the CAT bus operates only on weekdays 8am to 6pm.
- **Ease of movement around the town.** Free car parking is viewed as an asset thought to facilitate access to services and to boost the town's trade. However, the District Council would like to introduce parking charges in Wincanton. Pedestrian safety could be enhanced through the provision of additional designated crossings. A very small minority of residents cycle and facilities for them are currently poor – the establishment of dedicated cycle routes might promote greater take-up of cycling.

## SWOT analysis

From the key issues identified in each chapter of this report, it is possible to map out the main strengths and weaknesses of the community and the major threats and opportunities it faces. These are summarised below.

### SWOT analysis

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High employment</li> <li>• Large base of businesses</li> <li>• No over-dependence on single sector or employer</li> <li>• Good range of shops</li> <li>• Friendly town</li> <li>• Past growth has avoided urban sprawl</li> <li>• Scenic countryside</li> <li>• Lot of footpaths</li> <li>• Good range of services in the town</li> <li>• Healthy Living Centre</li> <li>• Extensive range of community organisations including many aimed at young people</li> <li>• Excellent sports facilities</li> <li>• Wide range of cultural associations and events</li> <li>• Close proximity to national trails and cycle routes</li> <li>• Community accessible transport scheme</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively high economic deprivation in Central Wincanton</li> <li>• Low earnings</li> <li>• Lack of suitable business premises</li> <li>• Low skills of working population</li> <li>• Shortage of pre-school provision</li> <li>• Declining attainment at primary school level</li> <li>• Poor attainment at secondary school level</li> <li>• No post-16 education</li> <li>• High proportion of SEN pupil and inadequate SEN funding</li> <li>• Poor range of services in villages</li> <li>• Poor health of older population</li> <li>• High incidence of mental health problems</li> <li>• High level of domestic violence</li> <li>• High level of teenage pregnancies</li> <li>• High level of pedestrian and bicycle accidents</li> <li>• High level of criminal damage, violent crime and theft from vehicles</li> <li>• Overall low crime detection rate</li> <li>• Many residents fearful of going out on foot in evenings and at night</li> <li>• Lack of culture and events for younger people</li> <li>• No direct link to national trails and cycle routes</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing population</li> <li>• Ageing population</li> <li>• Extensive housing development taking place and planned</li> <li>• Increase in supply of social/affordable housing</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing population</li> <li>• Ageing population</li> <li>• Uncertain future for farming, especially dairy farming</li> <li>• Extensive housing development taking place and planned</li> <li>• Housing development threatens visual links from town to countryside</li> <li>• Service provision might not keep pace with population growth</li> <li>• Longer police response times if Wincanton reclassified as rural rather than urban unit</li> </ul>

# 1 Introduction

The Market and Coastal Towns Initiative (MCTi) is a government programme which aims to *'help market and coastal towns and their surrounding communities to identify priorities for the future of their area, to gain the skills necessary to take action, and then to implement their plans. It will help co-ordinate activity of local and regional agencies and provide a gateway to funding programmes'*<sup>1</sup>.

At the heart of the initiative is the preparation of an Action Plan for the town and surrounding communities covering social, economic, environmental and cultural themes. The Action Plan is drawn up through a process of strategic planning. A key step in this process is conducting a clear assessment of where the community is now in order to highlight the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats it faces and to provide a baseline against which future progress can be measured. This assessment is the 'Healthcheck'.

The Wincanton Healthcheck has been conducted using worksheets devised by the Countryside Agency, supplemented by further information from existing surveys and statistics about the town and its surrounding communities. The answers and information gathered have been collated into this report to provide a snapshot of the community as it stood in 2005.

The Healthcheck and the report focus on five broad themes:

- **Population** covering demographic and household data. These are the subject of Chapter 2
- **Economy** looking at employment, earnings and the main drivers for local economic well-being. See Chapter 3
- **Environment** considering the character and vitality of the town and surrounding countryside and the natural and manmade links between the two. See Chapter 4
- **Social and community** issues, such as housing, provision of healthcare, other essential services, recreation, and the cultural well-being of the area. See Chapter 5
- **Transport and accessibility** looking at the ease of movement to, from and within the area. These are covered in Chapter 6.

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<sup>1</sup> Market and Coastal Towns website. Retrieved from [www.southwesttowns.net](http://www.southwesttowns.net) on 22 September 2004.

## **2 The Wincanton area and its population**

### **Key issues**

- The town of Wincanton has a population of around 4,600 but potentially it serves at least another 3,500 people in surrounding settlements.
- The population of Wincanton and its neighbouring parishes has grown by 8.5 per cent over the decade to 2001.
- Both Wincanton and South Somerset have proportionately more elderly people than England as a whole. Wincanton has a high proportion of pensioner households (30 per cent compared with 23 per cent for England). One household in five in Wincanton is a pensioner living alone.
- Ageing of the population is a national trend forecast to continue for the next few decades.
- Households with children account for 34 per cent of Wincanton households.

### **2.1 The Wincanton area**

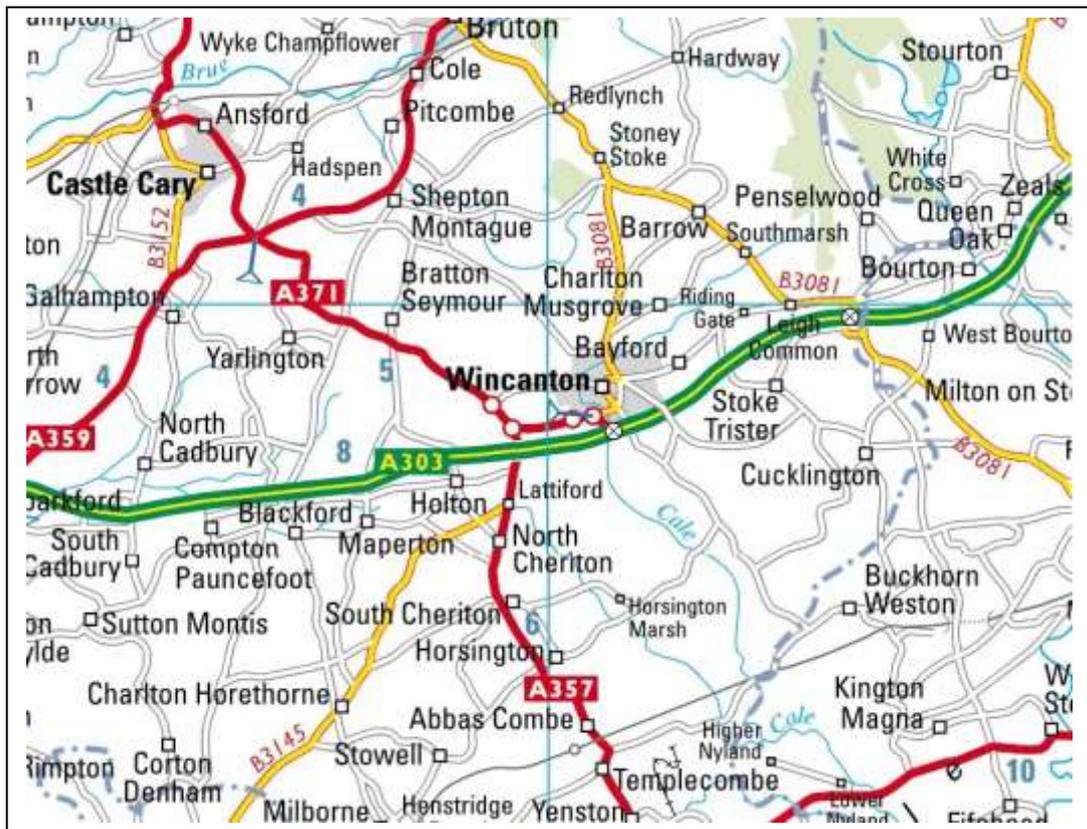
Wincanton is a former market town situated on a strategic road link from London to the West Country. The town's name is widely known, since it is home to part of a publicly quoted logistics company called Wincanton and also to a nationally renowned jump-racing course. Despite this fame, Wincanton itself is only a relatively small town though also a service centre for a wider community of settlements in the surrounding countryside, in particular, the neighbouring parishes of:

- Abbas and Templecombe
- Bayford
- Bratton Seymour
- Charlton Musgrove
- Cucklington
- Holton
- Horsington
- North Cheriton

- Penselwood
- South Cheriton
- Stoke Trister.

At the political and administrative level, most of these settlements fall with the Wincanton ward. But those lying to the North generally fall within the Tower ward

**Figure 2.1 Wincanton and the surrounding settlements**



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## 2.2 Population

Table 2.1 shows the population of Wincanton and its main satellite settlements as recorded in the 2001 census and the 1991 census. Wincanton and North Cheriton have both experienced marked growth in population over the last decade. Some of the smaller settlements have seen a small decline.

Wincanton and South Somerset as a whole both have extremely low ethnic diversity with 99 per cent of the population classified as white. The next largest groups – Asian and black – each account for less than ½ per cent of the Wincanton population.<sup>2</sup>

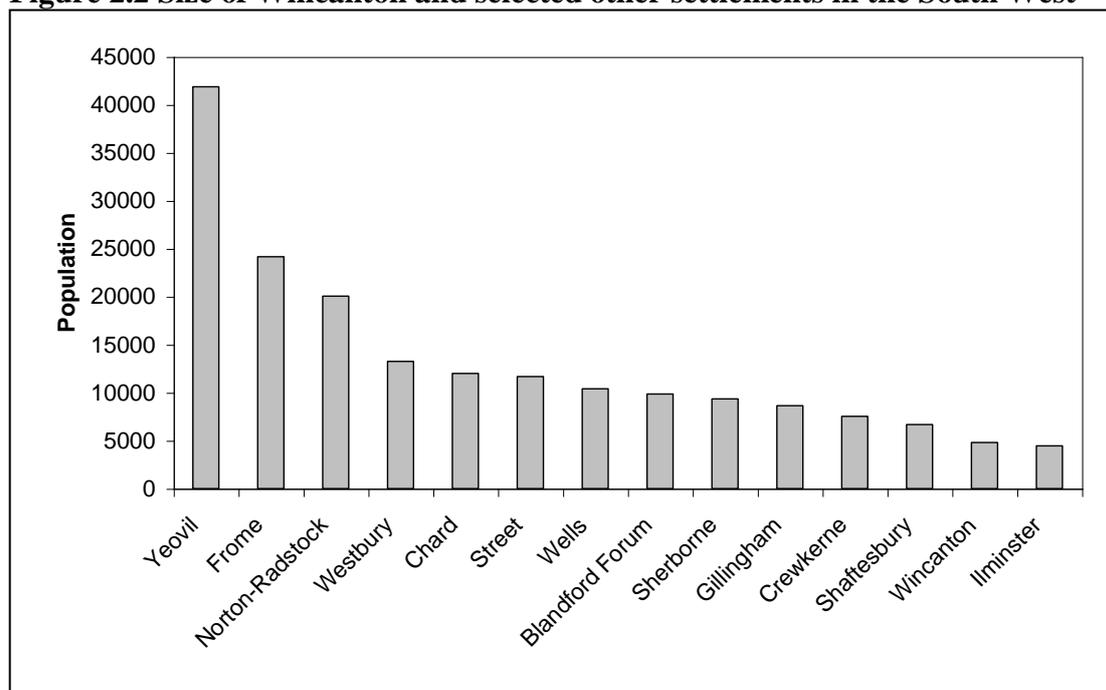
**Table 2.1 Population of Wincanton and surrounding parishes**

Parish	Population in 2001	Population in 1991	Growth over the decade
Wincanton	4,639	4,151	11.8%
Abbas and Templecombe	1,462	1,377	6.2%
Bratton Seymour	117	120	-2.5%
Charlton Musgrove	385	394	-2.3%
Cucklington	185	190	-2.6%
Holton	187	174	7.5%
Horsington (including South Cheriton)	572	536	6.7%
North Cheriton	243	203	19.7%
Stoke Trister (including Bayford)	300	312	-3.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,090</b>	<b>7,457</b>	<b>8.5%</b>

Source: Data from National Statistics, *Census 2001* and supplied by South Somerset District Council

Although Wincanton acts as a retail and service centre for the surrounding communities, in terms of population it is a small town compared with other comparable centres in the South West – see Figure 2.2.

**Figure 2.2 Size of Wincanton and selected other settlements in the South West**



Source: South West Regional Assembly, *Functional Analysis of Settlements*, Final Tables, April 2005.

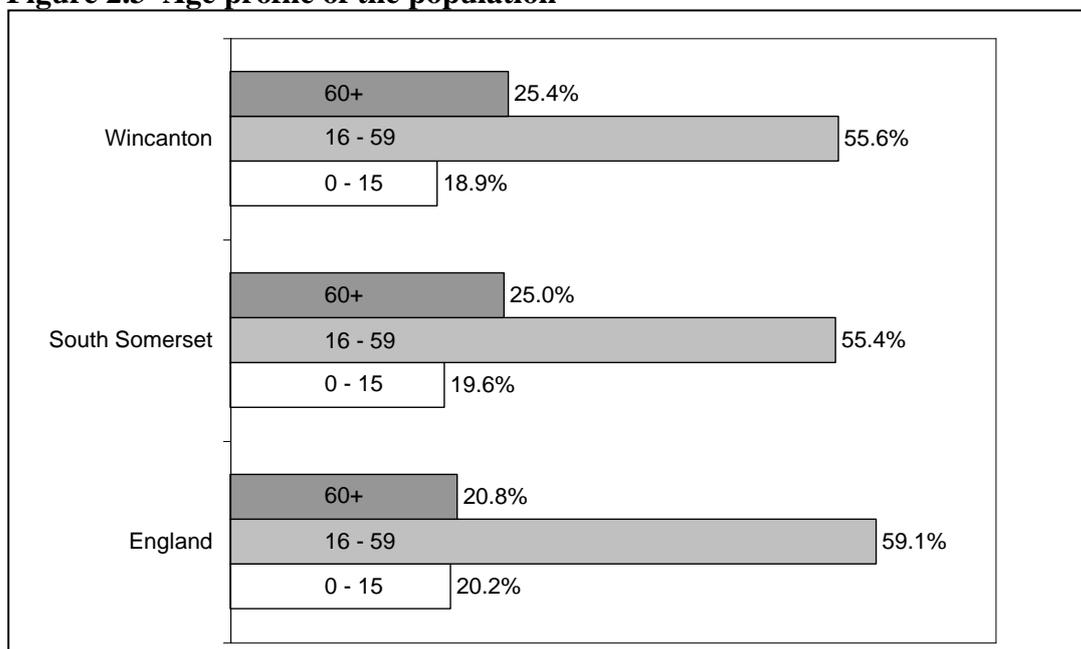
<sup>2</sup> Source: Data from National Statistics, *Census 2001* and supplied by South Somerset District Council

As Figure 2.3 shows, the age profile of Wincanton is slightly older than the average for South Somerset as a whole and significantly older than the average for England. This divergence from the national average is largely due to a higher proportion of people over age 60 and to a lesser extent a smaller proportion of under-16s.

Table 2.2, which ranks communities according to the proportion of population aged 65 or over, shows that the age pattern varies considerable across the surrounding villages with Shepton Montagu having the smallest population over 65 (11 per cent) and Penselwood the greatest (30 per cent).

Ageing of the population is a national trend occurring because of increasing longevity, the retiring of the post-war ‘baby boom’ generation and lower birth rates than in the past. The Government Actuary’s Department has forecast a fall in the support ratio in the UK from 3.4 at the start of this century to 2.4 by 2040. (The support ratio expresses the number of people of working age per person over state pension age.) There will be a particularly sharp increase in the number of pensioners over the period 2020 to 2030.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 2.3 Age profile of the population**



Source: Data from National Statistics, *Census 2001* and supplied by South Somerset District Council

<sup>3</sup> Department of Social Security, 1998, *A new contract for welfare: partnership in pensions*, Cm 4179, London, The Stationery Office.

**Table 2.2 Age profile in Wincanton and surrounding villages**

Settlement	Percentage of population		
	16 or under	17 to 64	65 or over
Penselwood	15%	55%	30%
Bayford	15%	56%	29%
Cucklington	12%	61%	27%
Lattiford	13%	62%	24%
North Cheriton	30%	47%	23%
Wincanton	20%	59%	21%
Horsington	14%	68%	18%
South Cheriton	21%	63%	16%
Bratton Seymour	25%	60%	15%
Stoke Trister	18%	67%	15%
Charlton Musgrove	21%	66%	13%
Yarlington	24%	64%	12%
Shepton Montagu	29%	60%	11%

Source: Data from National Statistics, *Census 2001* and supplied by South Somerset District Council

## 2.3 Household composition

Of the 2,010 households in Wincanton at the time of the 2001 census, 30 per cent were pensioner households (see Table 2.3). This is significantly higher than the proportion for England as a whole (23 per cent of households). In Wincanton, 19 per cent (379 households) comprised pensioners living alone, compared with 16 per cent for South Somerset and 14 per cent for England.

Just over one third (34 per cent) of Wincanton households have children, which is in line with South Somerset but a little lower than the average for England as a whole. Lone parents made up 6 per cent of Wincanton households compared with an average for England of 9 per cent.

**Table 2.3 Household composition in 2001**

Type of household	Percentage of all households		
	Wincanton	South Somerset	England
Single pensioner	19%	16%	14%
Single person, non-pensioner	14%	13%	16%
Lone parent	6%	7%	9%
Pensioner couple	11%	12%	9%
Married, no children	14%	16%	13%
Married with children	23%	24%	24%
Cohabiting, no children	5%	4%	5%
Cohabiting with children	3%	3%	4%
Other	2%	4%	7%
<b>Total households (number)</b>	<b>2,010</b>	<b>63,769</b>	<b>20,451,427</b>

Source: Data from National Statistics, *Census 2001* and supplied by South Somerset District Council