ONH
Planning for Good

LEIGHTON LINSLADE
NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN – EARLY ENGAGEMENT OUTPUTS

Introduction

Early engagement formed "Step 3", in the 5-step process to scope a potential Neighbourhood Plan for Leighton Linslade. Designed to generate early elements of the vision and policy ideas for the neighbourhood plan to take forward, this took place from 1st – 20th February 2024.

Content was prepared by ONH including a "slide pack" and a survey for community stakeholders to complete (separate questions were prepared for CBC as a key stakeholder) The Town Hall team did an amazing job promoting the sessions, with display boards in the Library and at the White House and arranging four informal drop-in sessions to chat with councillors about the background to neighbourhood plans and policy themes which may be included as part of the scoping exercise. Promotion was via social media, website, a banner outside the town hall, "About Town" newsletter, local press, and posters/flyers .

Officers contacted 30 of the identified groups from the stakeholder mapping by email.

Relevant engagement with CBC included a meeting in respect of Land South of the High Street (in advance of the main engagement period) and correspondence with the CBC Neighbourhood Plan Officer.

In total 296 responses to the community survey were received. Of particular note, most respondents took on average around 30 minutes to complete the form which demonstrates the consideration people gave in forumating their replies.

What did we ask the community?

The first section of the survey (Q2 – Q10) posed a number of general statements to which respondents were asked to rank as either very important, important, not important or don't know. This was designed to obtain a broad understanding of subject matters that concern local people, where solutions through land use policies in a neighbourhood plan are well established.

The results are detailed in Appendix 1 and in summary the areas of most importance to local people are centred around

- protecting and enhancing community facilities, (social infrastructure)
- a vibrant town centre (commercial and cultural infrastructure) and
- protecting and enhancing local green spaces. (green infrastructure)

These responses very much reflect commentary throughout the survey, which place these themes at the forefront as of the highest priority.

The survey then gave respondents a free form box (Q11) to say what else should the neighbourhood plan be considering (excluding housing which was considered later in the survey). Overwhelming the comments centred on two main areas, creating more community facilities and promoting and revitalising the town centre. Clearly the community are passionate about ensuring that the town centre provides a location to promotes arts and culture, recognises local heritage and history and

thrives as a social public realm space, locating community facilities alongside retail space to create a vibrant hub with good footfall.

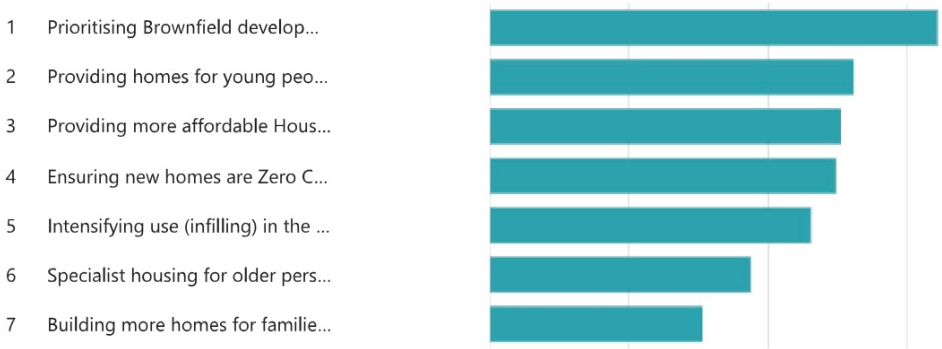
The need for a health hub as well as a community centre and arts/heritage space was a recurring theme through the responses.

There was also good support and recognition of the value of local green spaces and a want to ensure they are well maintained and protected; some respondents suggesting more tree planting may be appropriate and support for community gardens.

There were also a number of comments relating to transport and highways infrastructure in this free form question, principally around the provision of adequate levels of parking, particularly in the town centre and the volume of traffic and congestion generally. (It was also noted that Vandyke Road was singled out as a local hotspot in terms of speeding, safe crossing and the state of pavements.)

The next section of the survey focused on housing and asked respondents to rank the type of housing that should be prioritised.

12. What should our highest priority be for the types of homes we plan for? Please rank in order of importance (1 – 7) with 1 being the most important. Drag and drop your answers.



This was followed by free form box (Q13) asking "*What are the three most important factors we should take into account in identifying suitable land for housing development?"* The most frequently used words are captured below but recurring concerns were articulated over ensuring infrastructure was delivered alongside housing, worries over flood risk and the negative impacts arising from rising population on local facilities, services and roads.

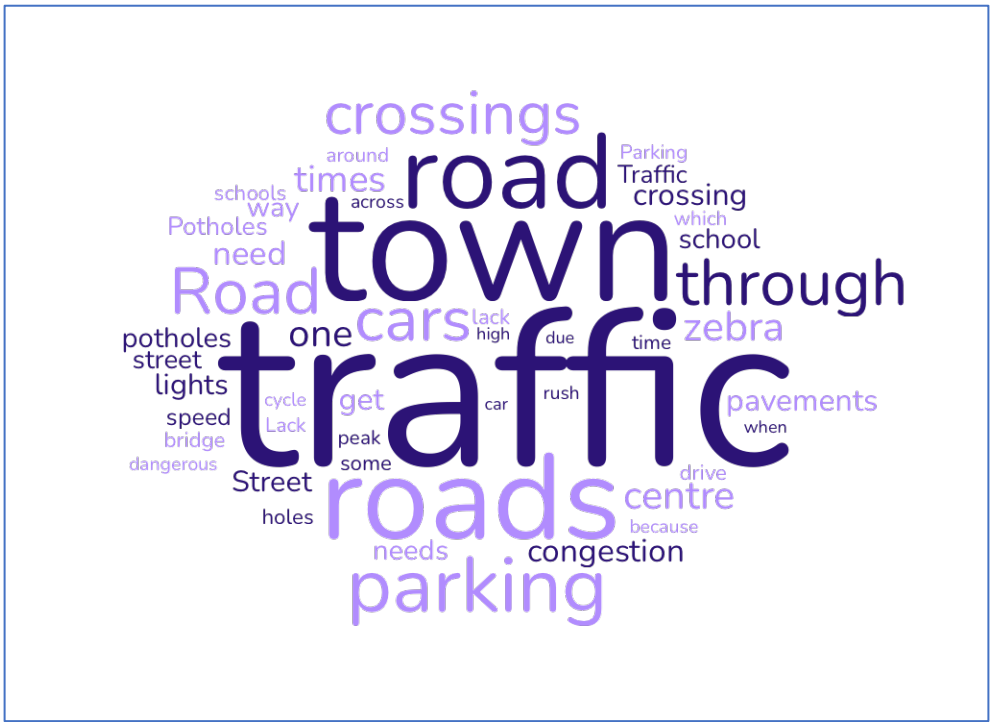
Word cloud of responses(Q13)

The next question (Q14) asked "*Should we be considering other ways of providing homes in our community*?" to which many respondents answered by expressing their view that until better infrastructure is in place there should be no more building in Leighton Linslade.

Others felt that if any more building should take place it should be brownfield repurposing, with the creation of flats for older or younger people with a view that flats for younger people may be more affordable and apartments for older people downsizing could free up larger housing stock for families. Making better use of space above shops for conversion to residential was also mentioned as well as a frustration that there are empty homes which should be brought back into use.

There was a mixed response to the Q15 which asked about building style and materials. Some felt it should be in keeping with existing housing but this was not a concern for approximately 1/3rd of respondents.

The next section asked a number of targeted questions; the first about what concerns people about local roads and traffic, to which there was a general concern over levels of congestion, with many respondents lamenting the time it takes to get across town, the levels of emissions that this results in, and the stop start nature of traffic. Of particular frustration to many appears to be the location and use of zebra crossings, the number of potholes, the lack of cycle routes and the volume of cars at school drop off and pick up times.



Word cloud for Q16

Question 17 and 18 referenced existing facilities in the Parish for sport, leisure and lifestyle purposes asking firstly, "*which are the most important to you?"* Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre was the top answer with a number of respondents very keen to see the facility retained if and when any new centre is built on the other side of town. With the exception of this response, many comments demonstrated a lack of awareness of facilities in the town saying they felt there were very little available. The second and related question, asked what enhancements or changes there should be to existing sports and community facilities. Again Tiddenfoot Lesiure Centre was the top answer, with a restatement of the need to keep the facility open with updating and refurbishment regardless of whether another leisure centre is built. It was suggested that this site could double as a health hub or have more community facilities contained within to help its viability. There was certainly a desire to see more pre-school/creche facilities and spaces for young people to have activities. There was an appreciation of the library and all it does, but a few respondents felt that the space could be even better utilisied for community activities outside of library hours for activities such as community cinema and pre-school activities.

The next question (Q19) asked about new community facilities. This was a free form comments box which consistently reflected previous responses about the provision of community facilities for arts/culture and performance with flexible use space for youth clubs, creche and activities for different age groups. There were repeated calls to retain Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre, with comments echoing previous comments relating to expanding its remit to include more focused activities for health and wellbeing, with suggestions that this is run as a community rather than commercial facility.

Word cloud Question 19 new faciltiies.

Q20 asked respondents to identify their favourite landscapes in the parish that they enjoy being in using. There is clealy a high value placed on blue as well as green infrastructure with Rushmere Country Park, Tiddenfoot Waterside Park fand the canal all being very popular; epitmimised by one respondent:

"*All of it. The whole reason I moved up to Leighton from Greater London nearly 8 years ago was because there was so many green open spaces parks and the forest to explore and get out into nature*."

Local parks with play facilities also valued and there were compliments for LLTC saying the sites were well looked after.

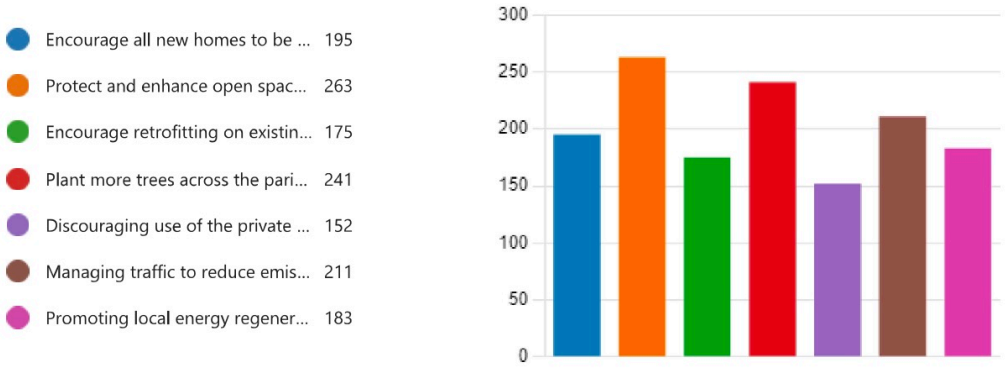
Word cloud for Q20

Question Q21 asked what should be included in any canal or riverside development, to which a number of respondents preferred there be no housing in any development in this area and improvements should be limited to providing enhanced recreational facilities, including a possible dedicated cycle way and protecting and promoting biodiversity. It is also clearly a popular area for dog walking and general exercise so the maintainance of the towpath was also cited.

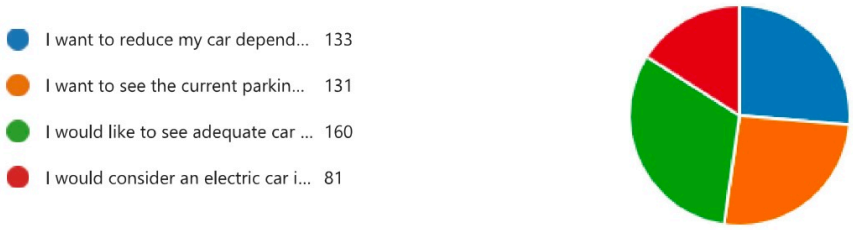
The survey then asked two questions about tackling climate change. Every option put forward to tackle climate change locally scored well with the highest scoring (263/296) stating protecting and enhancing open spaces was the best way to do this, with tree planting in second place (241/296).

However, the least popular option was discouraging use of the private car (152/296) with the second least favourite suggestion being retrofitting (175/296). Local energy regeneration schemes, encouraging new homes to be zero carbon and managing traffic to reduce emissions all scoring with over 50% of respondents. The least popular option (discouraging private car use) was reflected in Q22 as town centre parking and parking for local shops and services to facilitate short journeys is clearly important.

22. How do you think we, as a community, should tackle climate change locally? Tick all that apply.

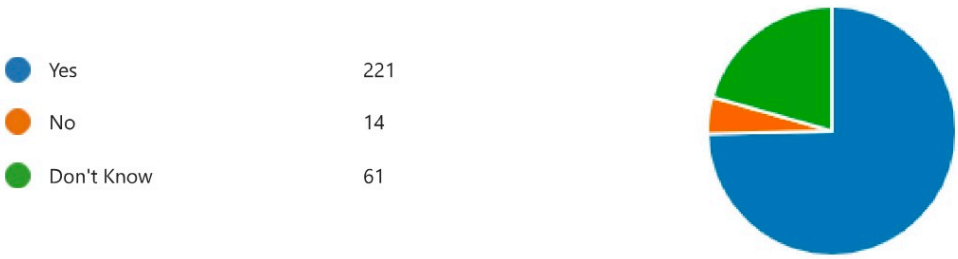


23. There is often a conflict between responding to a call to reduce car dependency due to the environmental impacts and the need for convenience and access to services. What is most important to you when it comes to car use?



Respondents to Q24 were very much in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan should bring forward town centre regeneration with only 14 answering no to this question.

24. Do you think that the Neighbourhood Plan should bring forward town centre regeneration for Leighton Buzzard?



The follow up question (Q25) asked what three things should be included in any regeneration of the town centre? Unsurprisingly the issue of centrally located community and cultural facilities were popular but also popular was a desire to see the “beautification” of the town centre, through planting and introduction of green canopies, attractive shopfronts and reducing the number of vacant units.

Many recognised that high streets are not just for retail activities and seeing the town centre as an attraction in its own right, with a cultural/arts/museum offering to encourage visitors and making better use of landmark buildings for community activities or for cafes/restaurants were also popular comments. A few respondents felt that pedestrianisation would also help the "feel" of the high street as a social public realm space but overall, any measures which create additional footfall were supported.

The next questions asked about healthcare and educational faciliites. There was no surprise that GP services were felt to be lacking and this is reflected in the comments throughout the survey that more healthcare and health and wellbeing provision is required. In respect of education, those respondents who had children commented that they felt the provision was excellent, however there was no SEND provision locally. There was also a number of comments for and against two tier v three tier systems. There was a perception that with the amount of development locally could the schools support more pupils (however this would have to be discussed with the local authority to undertand current and future capacity as part of any evidence gathering for a neighbourhood plan)

The final free form question (Q28) was a catch all question which asked was there anything else planning related that people wished to raise. Many responses echoed those throughout the survey, principally relating to the need for more infrastructure, particularly social infrastuture, community buildings for leisure, community activities and health and wellbeing as well as protecting green spaces. There were a number of comments about visible community assets which were lacking, such as a Police base, a home for groups like Mens Shed and Community Cupboard. This question was also answered by many to say "no more housing " until the right infrastructure is in place.

What did we learn?

In summary the responses were very insightful in understanding what is most important to the people of Leighton Linslade. These are:

- Creating and improving social and cultural infrastructure, notably around a new community facility, a new leisure centre (with the current one retained),an arts centre, museum and heritage centre, a health centre and multiuse spaces for local groups and organisations.
- Safeguarding and improving the town centre, including regeneration, repurposing landmark buildings, creating an aesthetic which welcomes people into a vibrant public realm space and provides a mix of community and retail services. Car parking is very important and should not be reduced.
- A general sense that Leighton Linslade has undergone significant housing development without the appropriate level of investment in a number of areas of infrastructure and any further development taking place should be based on a brownfield first approach, with a focus on smaller units for older and younger people and more affordable units.
- Protecting and enhancing open spaces is important and there is a high value on both blue and green infrastructure.

How did CBC respond to early engagement?

i) Neighbourhood Plan Officer

The only direct respondent from CBC was their Neighbourhood Planning Officer, with the indication being that senior officers would be likely to engage only at the Regulation 14 consultation stage.

However, having identifed that the Neighbourhood Planning Officer is the main contact into CBC hopefully she will be well placed to liaise with senior colleagues on behalf of the Working Group throughout the process as needed to ensure that collaborative working is established to assist in the smooth progress of any Plan and to ensure it sits alongside the emerging Local Plan as it is refined.

ii) Land South of High Street.

Councillors and the Town Clerk did secure a roundtable meeting with CBC officers and Members to discuss "Land South of the High Street" in late January and the outputs from that session have been considered as part of the overall scoping of the Neighbourhood Plan.

What do we do with this information?

ONH has now considered the outputs to early engagement as detailed above and has produced a background reading slide pack to sit alongside the agenda for the meeting on the 19th March. This will be circulated to members in advance of the session.

Appendix 1 – Responses to Q2 – Q10

2. Avoiding harm to the natural environment/promoting biodiversity.

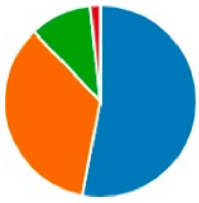
Very Important	200
Important	89
Not Important	5
Don't Know	2

3. Mitigating the effect of climate change/ promoting a low carbon future for the town

Very Important	163
Important	104
Not Important	28
Don't Know	1

4. Making "Active Travel" easier around the town (walking/cycling/use of public transport.

Very Important	157
Important	103
Not Important	31
Don't Know	5



5. Preserving the heritage and historic buildings in our town.

Very Important	187
Important	98
Not Important	9
Don't Know	2

6. Protecting and enhancing our green spaces.

Very Important	234
Important	62
Not Important	0
Don't Know	0

7. Retaining and enhancing our community facilities.

Very Important	218
Important	69
Not Important	7
Don't Know	2

8. Ensuring a vibrant, commercially viable, town centre.

Very Important	211
Important	80
Not Important	4
Don't Know	1

9. Protecting sensitive landscapes/important views.

Very Important	177
Important	97
Not Important	19
Don't Know	3

10. Being able to reduce dependence of the use of the car for short journeys.

Very Important	130
Important	117
Not Important	44
Don't Know	10