

REPORT TO LEEK TOWN COUNCIL

Tuesday 20 November 2018

By Leek Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

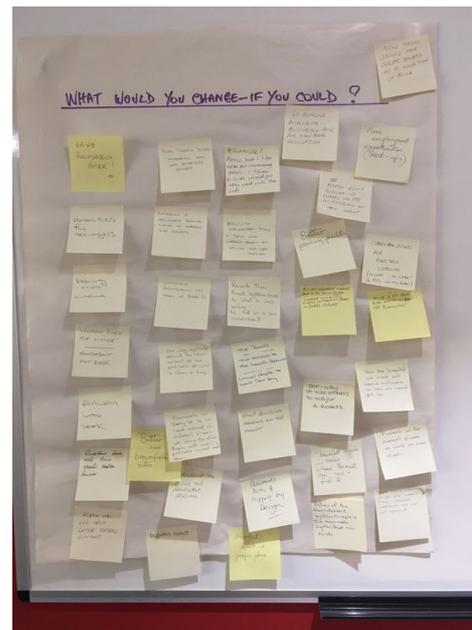
RESULTS OF STAGE 1 CONSULTATION AND NEXT STEPS

1. During the summer of 2018 the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group held five public consultation events to seek the views of the people of Leek about the town, as baseline information for the preparation of the Leek Neighbourhood Plan. People were asked three questions: what do they like about Leek, what don't they like, and what needs to change. People made their comments on post-it notes or printed feedback forms. Responses were transcribed by the Town Clerk and then collated by the Steering Group.
2. The five consultation events were organised and attended by members of the Steering Group and took place as follows:
 - Thursday 21st June from 7:30pm – 9pm at Leek Fire Station, Springfield Road
 - Wednesday 4th July from 7pm – 9pm at Leek Bowling Club, Beggars Lane
 - Wednesday 11th July from 7pm – 9:45pm at Sainsbury's Supermarket
 - Saturday 21st July from 11am – 4pm at The Foxlowe
 - Sunday 2nd September from 9:30am to 4pm at Totally Locally in Market Place

In addition feedback forms were distributed at the Leek Show on Saturday 28th July.



Drop-in event at Leek Fire Station on 21 June 2018



3. In order to give as many people as possible an opportunity to attend, events were organised in different parts of the town, at different times of day, on week days and at the weekend. Advance publicity was given in the Leek Post and Times.
4. The responses have been collated according to the topic referred to in the comment and the aggregated results are in the attached summary document Stage 1 Consultation Aggregated Results. These are verbatim transcripts of comments made, grouped under the subject heading. A brief summary is given after each group of comments.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

Q1: What do you like about Leek and what do you think should be preserved and retained?

5. A total of 159 comments were received in response to this question.
6. The Town Centre was the most popular with 59 positive responses (37.1% of replies). People value Leek Town Centre for its unique character deriving from the good range of independent shops, cafes, restaurants and public houses, the historic market, its accessibility and welcoming atmosphere, and the active support for local traders provided by Totally Locally.
7. The next most popular aspect of the town was its architecture and heritage with 23 positive comments (14.3%). People thought that Leek has a rich built heritage based on its distinctive townscape, outstanding local architecture, and long history, exemplified by St Edward Street, the Sugden buildings, the Nicholson Memorial, and the town's mills.
8. 19 people (11.9%) thought that Leek has a strong, active and friendly community.
9. 18 people (11.3%) said that Leek is surrounded by beautiful countryside and offers easy access to many attractions such as the Peak District National Park, Rudyard Lake, the Roaches, Caldon Canal, river Churnet, and Tittesworth Reservoir, as well as Brough Park within the town itself.
10. 15 people (9.4%) appreciated the arts, culture and recreational opportunities in Leek. Leek has a lively artistic and music scene, and a good range of sports activities and recreational events.
11. 13 people (8.2%) thought that Leek has many high quality local services including the doctors' surgeries, schools, churches, U3A provision, and good range of housing.
12. 6 people (3.8%) valued the library and museum and 6 people (3.8%) also highly valued the Leek Moorlands Hospital.

Q2: What do you dislike about Leek and what are the problems that need to be dealt with?

13. A total of 185 comments were received in response to this question.

14. The biggest issue was transportation and movement with 68 people (36.7%) expressing concern about this. Many problems were highlighted, including poor traffic flows and congestion, inadequate pedestrian crossing facilities in many parts of the town, unsatisfactory car parking facilities, safety concerns in the shared space by the Monument, and the poor bus service offering insufficient connections to neighbouring towns.
15. 29 people (15.9%) were concerned about the town centre, particularly with regard to the increasing number of empty shops, high business rates causing shop closures, the unattractive Smithfield Centre, the location of some markets outside Market Place, and the lack of a town vision.
16. There were 28 comments (15.1%) about the maintenance of the public realm, particularly the litter, the need to repair potholes and pavement surfaces, the poor condition of the Bus Station and toilets, and dirty pavements.
17. 21 people (11.3%) raised concerns about the number of large empty buildings and sites around the town, particularly the old mills, and the lack of substantial action to regenerate these buildings. People thought that opportunities to re-use these buildings for productive purposes including employment and housing were not being sufficiently actively pursued.
18. 17 people (9.2%) thought there is a lack of services and facilities for young people in the town.
19. 7 people (3.8%) expressed strong opposition was expressed to the closing down of Leek Moorlands Hospital.
20. 5 people (2.7%) objected to the proposed housing development on The Mount, and the lack of affordable housing.
21. There were a 4 comments (2.2%) objecting to development on open spaces and gardens.
22. There were a few comments (6 persons) regarding subjects that are outside the scope of a Neighbourhood Plan.

Q3 What do you think should be changed in Leek and what improvements should be made?

23. There were a total of 244 comments received in response to this question.
24. The most frequently mentioned topic was transportation and movement with 88 comments (36.0%). There were many suggestions on ways of improving transportation and movement in the town. These focused on an improved traffic management system to reduce congestion and improve pedestrian facilities, including a one-way system around the town, one-way access onto main roads, more pedestrian crossings, pedestrianisation of Derby Street, parking and speed restrictions in residential side streets, better car parking, and better cycle facilities. 11 persons asked for the roundabout to be reinstated. 10 persons wanted better bus and rail connections to Stoke, Cheadle, and Biddulph. 5 persons proposed a bypass, including access from Cheddleton Road to Barnfields. 2 persons proposed charging points for electric cars.

25. 43 suggestions (17.6%) were received for improvements to the town centre, including to concentrate market activities in the Market Place and not use separate locations in the town, to support local businesses by reducing business rates, to put the Tourist Information Centre in a more accessible place and promote tourism, and to protect the historic character of the town by preventing or removing inappropriate alterations to shop fronts. Noteworthy individual suggestions were to use space above shops for residential accommodation, to create a programme of festivals in the town, to produce a town centre strategy, and to actively encourage more quality retailers such as an M&S food store.
26. 32 suggestions (13.1%) were received for improving local services and facilities, including providing more activities and facilities for young people, and creating a public venue for cinema, music and theatre. Noteworthy individual suggestions were to create a modern website for the town which is accessible and inspiring, to support an arts and events programme, and to provide more adult education and activities for older people.
27. 28 comments (11.5%) were received on heritage, regeneration and employment. There was clear strong support for action to regenerate the redundant old mills in the town by schemes to re-use them for employment, housing, and perhaps a textile museum. 7 persons thought action was required to improve the appearance of redundant buildings on the main approaches to the town. Several people stressed the need to build on brownfield sites as a priority before greenfield sites.
28. 16 persons (6.5%) expressed strong support for retaining Leek Moorlands Hospital and increasing the use of it by expanding the range of services available.
29. 9 persons (3.8%) suggested improvements to the public realm including improvements to Brough Park, repairing pavement surfaces, and providing recycling bins in the town centre.



Totally Locally Market Stall

Sunday 2 September 2018

30. 8 persons (3.3%) said that existing green space should be protected, and Brough Park should be improved.
31. 7 persons (2.8%) wanted more affordable housing and more sustainable housing.
32. There were 13 comments (5.3%) concerning matters which are outside the scope of the Neighbourhood Plan or cannot be influenced by the Neighbourhood Plan, which can only deal with the use and development of land.

NEXT STEPS

33. To take things forward the Steering Group proposes to set up small focus groups of 3 - 6 people to deal with the main topics identified in the Stage 1 consultation. The focus groups will cover the following themes:
 - Transportation and Movement
 - Green Infrastructure
 - Arts and Heritage
 - Town Centre
 - Regeneration and Employment
 - Housing.
34. The remit of these groups is to review the issues and ideas highlighted in consultation, to find out what existing evidence is available on the subject, to determine what further evidence is needed and how it should be gathered, to consider all the information, and to produce a written summary with suggestions about what the Neighbourhood Plan can do in response. It is proposed that each focus group produces a topic paper by the end of February 2019.
35. From this it will be possible to produce a first draft Neighbourhood Plan with draft policies and proposals which can be tested in a second round of public consultation later in 2019.
36. Transportation was the major concern which emerged from consultation, but Neighbourhood Plans have only limited powers to deal with transport issues: primary responsibility for this lies with the highway authority, Staffordshire County Council. Locality has produced a short guide identifying the transport issues that can be dealt with by policies in a Neighbourhood Plan and those which have to be addressed elsewhere (*Neighbourhood Planning and Transport – a guide for neighbourhood planners*).
37. Grant funding has been confirmed by Locality for specific items of expenditure. Some of this money is allocated for setting up a website dedicated to the Leek Neighbourhood Plan and the steering group will now commission this piece of work. The website will have links to relevant documents, such as the results of consultation, draft plans and progress reports, as well as general information about neighbourhood plans. A Facebook page will also be created to keep people informed about progress and up-coming events.