

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

This document sets out the public and stakeholder consultation carried out during the preparation of the Houghton Regis Town Centre Masterplan.

It is intended that the Masterplan will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which will form part of the Joint Luton and South Bedfordshire Local Development Framework<sup>1</sup> (LDF) and will be used as a material consideration in planning applications.

### **1.2 The importance of consultation**

The objectives of the SPD are far ranging but above all, the aim is to ensure that future development in Houghton Regis Town Centre promotes regeneration and addresses economic, social and environmental issues that are prevalent in the area. It will take into consideration the future growth proposed in the wider area and support future demand for a high quality living, working and shopping environment in the town centre.

For the SPD to be a success in the long term it needs to meet the needs, and to be consistent with the aspirations of the local community. To help achieve this it was essential that both stakeholders and the public were involved in the process throughout.

Furthermore, the involvement of stakeholders and the wider community is a legal requirement under Regulation 17 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations, 2004, which sets the minimum requirements for community involvement, with which local planning authorities must comply in the preparation of SPDs. PPS12<sup>2</sup> states that the SPD route must “not be used to avoid policies being subject to public examination”. Thorough consultation throughout the SPD preparation process is therefore essential.

### **1.3 Structure of this report**

Following this introduction, the report is structured in the following sections:

Section 2 considers the planning context;

Section 3 sets out the consultation that was carried out;

Section 4 summarises the responses received;

Section 5 summarises the responses to the feedback received; and

Section 6 concludes.

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<sup>1</sup> Luton Borough Council, South Bedfordshire District Council and Bedfordshire County Council are working together to produce a joint Local Development Framework (LDF) covering the whole of Luton and South Bedfordshire.

<sup>2</sup> PPS12 Local Development Frameworks (ODPM; September 2004)

## **2.0 PLANNING CONTEXT**

### **2.1 The Statement of Community Involvement**

The Joint Luton and South Bedfordshire Statement of Community Involvement<sup>3</sup> (SCI) explains the way in which the Joint Planning and Transport Committee (JPTC) will consult and involve people in the preparation of the Joint LDF and individual planning applications.

2.2 The SCI provides guidance on the level of consultation required at the pre-production and production stages of SPDs. This project comprises both the 'pre-production' and 'production' stages of the SPD. The consultation detailed in this document meets the SCI requirements on both the pre-production and production stages

### **2.3 Consultation under Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004**

The Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 requires the JPTC to prepare a Consultation Statement prior to the adoption of a SPD. The Statement should set out:

2.4 The names of any persons whom the authority consulted in connection with the preparation of the SPD;

- How these parties were consulted;
- A summary of the main issues raised through consultation; and
- How these issues were addressed by the SPD.

2.5 This statement will therefore illustrate how the consultation process meets the requirements of Regulation 17 and its compliance with the Joint SCI.

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<sup>3</sup> Submission Draft Statement of Community Involvement, January 2007, JPTC

### **3.0 CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT**

#### **3.1 Issues and Options**

#### **3.2 Early Stakeholder Workshop**

**Aim:** The aim of the stakeholder presentation and workshop for the Houghton Regis Town Centre Masterplan was to help identify issues and opportunities, by drawing on local stakeholder knowledge.

**Date:** 25 May 2007

**Venue:** Houghton Regis Memorial Hall

**Invitees:** 152 people were sent invitations

**Attendees:** 34 stakeholders attended on the day.

- 3.3 A briefing note, Site plan and agenda for the day were provided on arrival. An exhibition of a variety of draft plans was on display. These included an aerial map of the study area and plans highlighting traffic analysis, urban design analysis, heritage analysis, green and open space, as well as emerging ideas for the future urban design of the town centre.
- 3.4 The stakeholder meeting commenced with a welcome by Andy Lewis (Team Leader of South Bedfordshire's Economic Regeneration Service) and followed by a presentation from two members of the Halcrow team; Anna Woodhams, Associate Planner and Bob Schmidt, Senior Urban Designer. This presentation highlighted the aims and objectives of the study; an overview and aims of the workshop; the role of Halcrow; stakeholder and the wider public consultation timescale; and outputs and progress to date.
- 3.5 Following the presentation, there was an opportunity for questions. The group then divided to form 6 smaller groups ranging in size from 4- 8 people to complete 2 tasks.
- 3.6 Each group was provided with a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities) analysis grid and a Site Plan (including Conservation Area).
- 3.7 Task 1: The groups were asked to discuss in their groups, the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats that are applicable to Houghton Regis Town Centre and record their comments on the piece of paper provided. They were reminded to give particular thought to Social, Economic and Environmental issues that may be prevalent in the area.
- 3.8 Task 2: This task gave stakeholders a broader scope for discussion and aspiration. Groups were asked to consider the future of the town and note down any ideas on the plans provided. As a guideline they were reminded that Houghton Regis is part of a growth area and will be subject to much change and were asked to give consideration to the following topics:
- The Economy and Town Centre
  - Urban Design
  - The Conservation Area
  - Townscape and Landscape
  - Heritage and Culture
  - Traffic and Transport
  - Housing

A copy of the attendees is provided in Appendix 1: Early Stakeholder Workshop Attendees.

### 3.9 Presentation to the Houghton Regis Town Centre Management Committee

Aim: To provide an overview of the consultation so far and to give the Committee sight of preliminary ideas and solutions and to input throughout the SPD process.

Date: 21 June 2007

Invitees: All members of the Houghton Regis Town Centre Management Committee

A copy of the presentation given at the meeting is provided in Appendix 2: Houghton Regis Town Centre Management Committee Presentation

### 3.10 Preferred Options Consultation

#### 3.11 Public Exhibition

Aim: The key purpose of the exhibition launch day was to provide an opportunity for the team to explain the Draft SPD, answer questions and encourage the public to help feed into the preferred development option.

Date: 8 September 2007 and 10 September 2007

Venue: The Houghton Regis Medieval Fayre – Information point

Advertising: Medieval Fayre was advertised through leaflets and notices at the Council Offices, Houghton Regis Library, Houghton Regis Town Council

3.12 The public consultation was launched at the Houghton Regis Medieval Fayre. Six boards were on display containing information about the Masterplan at the South Bedfordshire Council stall in the Fayre. About 238 residents from in and around Houghton Regis viewed the exhibits and picked the consultation leaflets and feedback forms. A copy of the boards is provided in Appendix 3: Display Boards. Appendix 4 gives a list of number of attendees at the Medieval Fayre and their towns of origin.

#### 3.13 Six week Consultation Period

Aim: To gather feedback from stakeholders and local residents regarding the preferred development option.

Date: 8 September to 22 October 2007

Venue: Material from the public exhibition, above, was displayed in the foyer of the SBDC offices

Advertising: A public notice was published in the **Dunstable on Sunday** on the **2<sup>nd</sup> September 2007**. Additionally, the consultation period was advertised on the Council's website. An article was published in **The Dunstable Gazette** on **27<sup>th</sup> September 2007** regarding the consultation period. A copy of the article and the public notice is included in Appendix 5: Advertising.

3.14 Following the launch at Medieval Fayre the consultation exhibition continued at the Houghton Regis Town centre Office Chamber on September 10, 2007(10.00 am to 7 pm). Exhibition boards were displayed and feedback forms provided. Feedback forms were also available for distribution at the Houghton Regis Library, South Bedfordshire District Council offices, Houghton Regis Town Council Offices, Houghton Regis Medical Centre and at the Houghton Regis Memorial Hall. These feedback forms and summary of the exhibit was also sent out to a list of statutory consultees and other stakeholders including businesses and other relevant associations. A copy of the consultees is provided in Appendix 6: Consultation List. A copy of the feedback form is provided in Appendix 7: Feedback Form.

#### 3.15 Presentation to the Houghton Regis Town Centre Management Committee

Aim: To provide a review of progress so far and to show the preferred option Masterplan before the consultation period started.

Date: 6 September 2007

Invitees: All members of the Houghton Regis Town Centre Management Committee

- 3.16 The Houghton Regis Town Centre Management Committee is made up of the District Councillors, members of the Town Council and members of Bedfordshire County Council. The Committee is involved in developing plans to aid the regeneration of the town centres and acts as a forum for all those who provide services and are interested in town centre promotion.
- 3.17 A copy of the presentation given at the meeting is provided in Appendix 8: Houghton Regis Town Centre Management Committee Presentation.

## 4.0 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

### 4.1 Issues and Options Consultation

### 4.2 Early Stakeholder Workshop

### 4.3 Task 1: SWOT Analysis

After completing the task, each group was asked to prioritise their Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats and report back to the group with their top 2 for each category. Key themes that recurred in this feedback session and also from analysing the recorded comments are highlighted below.

### 4.4 Strengths

- Green open space
- The community/the people
- The historic environment
- Local skill base
- Prospects for growth

4.5 Group 1 identified a total of six strengths. Working together as a community and taking advantage of the green space and historic buildings (with particular reference to the church) were all noted by this group. Further to this, they indicated that Houghton Regis's status as a growth area is a strength as it gives scope and prospects for growth. Finally, they noted good transport links and significant economic activity as prevailing strengths within the area.

4.6 Group 2 had a list of nine strengths for the area. Similar to group 1, this group also highlighted people and the community and the quantity and quality of green space, as strengths, mentioning that community investment, local identity and pride were all key aspects of these strengths. Further to this, group 2 noted infrastructure, faith groups, schools (pre-school, lower and middle), the voluntary community section of the community, neighbourhood centres (including Tithes farm) and a health centre located in the town centre as Houghton Regis's strong qualities.

4.7 As with groups 1 and 2, Group 3 also came to the conclusion that green open space (with particular reference to the green and the park) is a strength of the area. The group also noted that the Kingsland community centre and strong skill base that exists in Houghton Regis are also strong points of the area. The opportunity for development, the development of the health centre and library and free parking (regardless of poor signage) were also listed as strengths. The final points recorded under this heading were the existence of small business units for recently qualified people and also the police, however they did specify that the Police have to work well with communities.

4.8 The comments recorded for Group 4 were clear and concise. Once again the recurring strength of green space was identified, but in this case, the strength was expanded to the Conservation Area. Further to this, public transport (in certain areas) and also all basic services, including the library, local doctor, dentist, already exist in the area and are simply in need of development.

4.9 Group 5 identified the need for regeneration (with a holistic approach) and long term planning as a strength of Houghton Regis. Local distinctiveness and the maintenance of its name and identity and also the local town council and young people were all noted as strengths. The historical buildings in Houghton Regis have been recognised and exploiting them is thought to build on the uniqueness of the area.

- 4.10 The historic environment, Houghton Hall, the people and the community focus were all mentioned by Group 6, which are similar to a number of the comments made by the other five groups. Groups 6 also highlighted the pockets of social activity and Dunstable colleges input (as an employer) as strengths for Houghton Regis.
- 4.11 Weaknesses
- Lack of Infrastructure
  - Lack of leisure facilities
  - Existing image of Houghton Regis
  - Traffic and congestion
  - Nothing for young people to do
  - Poor Signage
- 4.12 Group 1 had a very concise list of weaknesses, noting prevailing traffic (both density and through), the lack of entertainment for young people and a lack of “name shops” as the predominant weaknesses of the area.
- 4.13 In contrast, to group 1, group 2 had a number of comments regarding weaknesses in Houghton Regis. They emphasized that there is not enough community involvement, even though they had listed people as a strength, hence indicating a desire for communities to be able to make more of a contribution in processes such as this. They also identified the lack of policy to gain Section 106 funding, lack of all planning social manifestations, Houghton Regis’s poor image, the absence of an upper school and lack of stakeholders as weaknesses of the area. This group highlights the risk of recreating the mistakes of the 1970’s with regard to development of the town and also that a weakness of the area is that it detracts from bringing people in to the community.
- 4.14 Group 3 also recorded a relatively extensive list of weaknesses. Poor infrastructure, roads and traffic, the unattractive design of Bedford square, which discourages footfall, bad signage, lack of leisure and social facilities in the town centre, lack of police manpower, lack of community identity, lack of lit facilities at night time (eg parks, basketball courts), limited spending power of the population and the past destruction of heritage were all among group 3’s list of weaknesses. Further to this, the group highlighted concern that the County Council’s funds are directed to the north part of the county and not to South Bedfordshire and areas like Houghton Regis.
- 4.15 The concern over the lack of infrastructure recurred as a weakness among group 4 as well as group 3. The group described the area as “ugly” with particular reference to the rear of Bedford Square. Other weaknesses with regard to Houghton Regis included the poor crossing points on the High Street, the limited shops and services on offer and the insufficient efforts of promotion and attraction in to the area and finally the prevailing reputation of Houghton Regis and whether this perception can be changed.
- 4.16 Group 5 recognised historic buildings as a strength of the area, however, they also noted that blocking them with unattractive buildings can be considered a weakness. Group 5 have made specific reference to funding timescales, the uncertainty and indecision surrounding the Northern By-pass and Translink, the lack of maintenance of open space, lack of signage, traffic and congestion and regard them all as weaknesses within Houghton Regis. They noted that there is a lack of youth facilities, affordable housing, lack of car parking space and believe that the time scale and delivery of the new library is not appropriate. The group’s final two comments included concerns over planning permission for the change of use and the confusion surrounding this topic and finally, queries regarding whether Halcrow’s contractual response to the Statement of Community Involvement will be innovative and inclusive enough.
- 4.17 Finally, Group 6 considered the location of the town centre to be a weakness. The group noted that the study area should have been defined after consultation as opposed to

before. Further to this, other weaknesses mentioned by group 6 include, the underutilisation of the Green compared to Houghton Hall Park, the fact that locals are not allowed in Houghton Hall, the unsafe feeling parkside people suffer from, the loss of a community room at the co-op, the distance from Parkside to Tithe Farm. The group also expressed a concern for the over subscription of Houghton Regis.

#### 4.18 Opportunities

- Opportunity to provide facilities/leisure and recreation for youths
- Exploit quarry
- Opportunity to involve the community/ work in partnership
- Funding opportunities
- Redevelopment of Bedford Square

**4.19** Group 1 identified a number of opportunities in the Houghton Regis area. These included the extension of the High Street, the redevelopment of Bedford Square, opening up the quarry with leisure opportunities, Linking Bedford Square with the Co-Op site, generating a night time economy in the area and also creating funding from new developments.

**4.20** Group 2 also raised funding as an opportunity, but highlighted that there is funding available but through channels of community involvement. The group also identified that there is opportunity to bring in affordable retail units, work with the young community and investigate social enterprise and niche markets. They also highlighted an opportunity to build on the Masterplan, for example by enhancing heritage (family, time capsules).

**4.21** A number of suggestions made by group 2 are mirrored in the ideas and opportunities noted by group 3. Group 3 also felt that there was scope for working with the community more, particularly young people. They had ideas for obtaining further funding and emphasized that there is financial support available for areas of deprivation and also for communities. They also identified providing better signage for promoting open spaces, executing the Conservation development of Houghton Hall Park, Rail Link and the availability of space for development as a result of derelict buildings and sites, as definite opportunities for Houghton Regis. Finally, the group noted that there was an opportunity to keep the re-development timescale short and also create welcoming flowerbeds.

**4.22** Group 4 had succinct comments regarding prevalent opportunities for Houghton Regis. They identified the possibility of working in partnership and government policies as opportunities. They also noted that there was an opportunity for re-development to be carried out in a sympathetic way, giving consideration to heritage materials and design.

**4.23** Group 5 identified a number of opportunities including the historic buildings, attractive approach from the east, the chance to have well maintained green open space, to regenerate the current High Street to make it more attractive and vibrant, to promote Bedford square as a “meeting place” for people of all ages, to provide youth facilities and to provide a mix of uses (housing) in the town centre. The group re-emphasised the opportunity that the local community pose and remarked that there is prospect for investment in pedestrianisation of some parts to improve accessibility, traffic diversions for pedestrians, incorporating business representatives (identified as a weakness at the moment) and also on re-directing heavy goods traffic.

**4.24** Group 6 lists a number of ideas that are classified as opportunities, including the opportunity to look in to the road and pedestrian routes (including lighting), utilising the quarry as a resource, being adaptable and “building for all communities”, setting up small businesses, providing more things for youngsters to do eg. Cinema, providing a new supermarket. The group’s idea of working in partnership is reflective of the opportunities highlighted by group 4.

#### 4.25 Threats



- Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)
- Traffic
- Delay in the delivery of Northern Bypass
- New homes
- Other growth areas

- 4.26 The two threats identified by group 1 in this task were firstly the continued delays to the delivery of the Northern By-pass and secondly, the other growth areas that are near by, for example, Milton Keynes will provide a lot of competition for Houghton Regis.
- 4.27 Group 2 listed a number of threats including a lack of vision, damage to existing businesses, the risk of current development conflicting with future, long term development, congestion and the dis-jointment of current town status. Further to this the increase in development (housing) and the expansion of population by three fold were also considered a threat by this group.
- 4.28 Group 3 categorised similar points as threats including traffic and congestion and the delays to the delivery of the Northern By-pass, the new homes that are being built (they will be provided before any infrastructure is and there were also concerns over whether they will have their own town centre). The group also expressed that the fear of crime, anti social behaviour are also threats along with the potential for the growth area to dilute any community identity that already exists.
- 4.29 Once again, anti social behaviour, traffic (in particular rush hour traffic) and the over provision of housing without improved infrastructure and roads were all identified as threats by group 4. In addition they also noted government policies as a threat.
- 4.30 Group 5 proposed pedestrianisation as a possible threat to encouraging incoming from the town centre. They noted that by putting more attractions in the town centre, there would simultaneously be an increase in the number of cars entering the area and a limited amount of parking. However, in contrast, removing the cars altogether can also be detrimental to the success of the area, hence they commented that a balance between the two needs to be established. Finally, the group highlighted the “waiting blight” as a likely threat. They urged that providing and seeking to provide options to deal with issues now should not stop while plans are made and change approaches, for example, they suggested the use of current buildings to develop services that can transfer in to the new buildings once they are ready.
- 4.31 Group 6 stated a number of threats that included the location of the town centre, the use of old data as indicators, the fact that there are no go areas and it is not inclusive. Finally the group also commented that high price houses are a threat and there is a definite need for change and movement in and out of the area.

#### **4.32 Task 2: Design Ideas and Solutions**

- 4.33 As with task 1, after completing the task, each group was asked to prioritise their Design Ideas and Solutions and report back to the group with their top 2 for each category. Key themes that recurred in this feedback session and also from analysing the recorded comments are highlighted below.
- Sensitive re-development
  - Keep residential presence/mixed use
  - Utilise and take advantage of open space
  - Enhance community facilities
  - Safety should be given consideration
  - Extend footprint of Town Centre (extend Site)

- Leisure facilities at; the Quarry?; Tithe Farm Road?; along the High Street?

- 4.34 The results from each group were extremely varied in terms of design ideas and the changes they would like to see in Houghton Regis.
- 4.35 Group 1 specified a number of suggestions regarding the High Street and noted a need to provide an alternative link across the town from the High Street (from the Church to Tithe Farm Road), to re-align and re-develop the High Street, provide crossings along the High Street and potentially extend the retail along Houghton Road. Further to this the group proposed leisure facilities at the quarry, enhanced community facilities and also further traffic controls.
- 4.36 Group 2 had a number of ideas regarding the design of Houghton Regis. They suggested extending the footprint of the Town Centre so that it is able to cope with demand, whilst simultaneously creating a new gateway in to the town. Civilising the High Street and main road with cinema and leisure facilities was mentioned along with relocating the leisure centre so it is closer to the shops and also putting leisure facilities on Tithe Farm Road and 140 dwellings on Houghton Road. The group was keen for a holistic approach to be undertaken towards the process and in particular towards the green. Further to this, they advocated for consideration to be given to the dog mess in Houghton Park and an altogether dog free Conservation Area and Green. They noted that finding out what the community wants in the Conservation Area and Green is important, along with improving signage, and bringing Translink up to Houghton Road and exploiting it as a focal point. Finally, Group 2 commented that the area of land to the South West of the High Street should be registered as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- 4.37 Group 3's design ideas included re-routing the High Street behind the AA insulation building and the Co-op to create a partially pedestrianised town centre, restoring the history of the area through building design and street layout, creating floodlit sports areas and joining the AA Insulation building and Bedford Square to a leisure/entertainment/community complex. The group emphasised that greenery was necessary along with new play equipment and grounds, a good cycle path network and along side this, the continued residential presence and small town character should be retained. They suggested re-designating the car park in front of the church and using the space for an arena/amphitheatre, or an alternative idea of that nature. They also had a number of suggestions regarding parking in the area, more specifically, they noted that either underground or overhead parking was necessary in the area (but showed a preference for underground) and also that disabled parking on the street was required. Finally, group 2 expressed that consultation and inputs from the Architectural Liaison Officer is compulsory.
- 4.38 Group 4's design ideas were concise and the three points identified under this task were the need for sympathetic redevelopment on the South Side and North East side of the High Street, traffic calming along the High Street and at the top of Houghton Road and finally the need to change existing perceptions of the area.
- 4.39 Group 5 had a more extensive list of design ideas, but similar to other groups, it included the utilisation of the AA insulation building, (the suggestion for use was facilities for local people eg. Retail centre) the protection and use of Houghton Hall Park with regards to what can and can't be done there, the use of Bedford Square by youths and for social activity with the aim of attracting people in to the town centre and providing health facilities such as a "one stop shop" for youths and young people. Group 5 encouraged the idea of promoting a night time economy, activities such as hosting farmers markets in the area, promoting cafés and restaurants and incorporating safety in to the plans. Further to this, the group highlighted that creating a "style" for Houghton Regis is important through building attractive buildings that compliment and enhance the older and original heritage. Finally, the group noted that there should be interim activity while development occurs, for example, using the SBDC offices as a youth centre.

4.40 Group 6 focused on two main aspects that need to be considered in the design of Houghton Regis which were making the area a safe place to live and also giving consideration to the economy and the town centre. With regard to safety, the group recommended creating safer routes in to the town centre, reducing the fear of crime and perception of vandalism whilst simultaneously improving the perception of the environment. The group suggested that the latter point, the economy and town centre, should be addressed by creating a balance of chain shops and small shops, improving access and understanding, looking at Brownfield sites for development and placing corner shops outside.

#### 4.41 Preferred Options Consultation

4.42 The key consultation feedback received during the preferred options consultation was the response forms and letters received during the six week period of public consultation.

4.43 105 responses were received. All the responses received were entered into a spreadsheet and a copy of this included within Appendix 9: Consultation Feedback Response. A summary of the responses received are provided below.

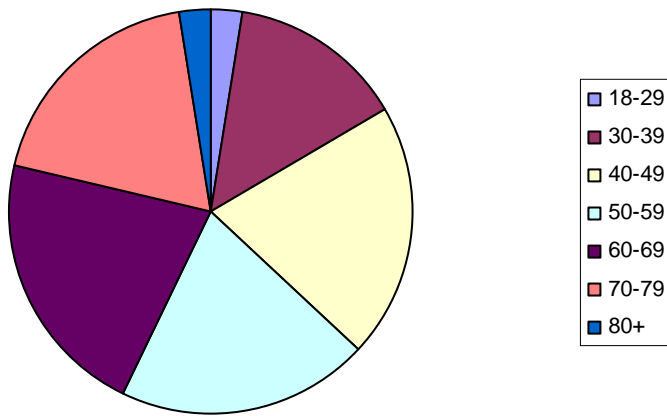
<b>Method of Receipt</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
Email	11	10%
Web	4	4%
Letter	12	11%
Response Form	79	75%
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>100%</b>

<b>Response From</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
Statutory	11	10%
Stakeholder	4	4%
Business	7	6%
Community Group	3	3%
Resident	76	72%
Other	5	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>100%</b>

(Percentages rounded to nearest whole number)

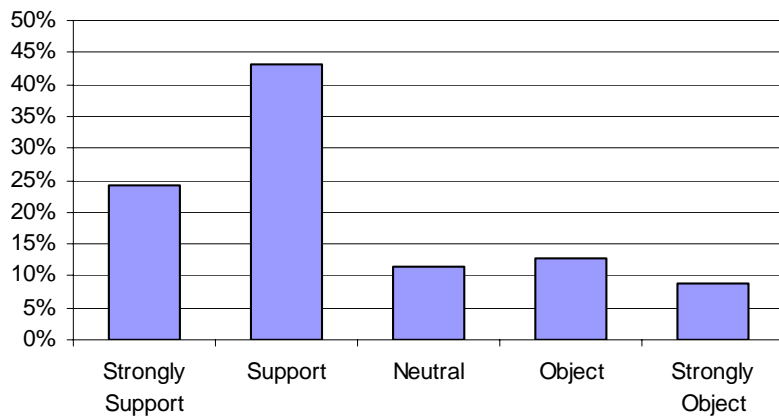
4.44 Please note that not all respondents answered every question from the response form. Analysis below is based on total responses received for individual questions.

**Age of Respondents**

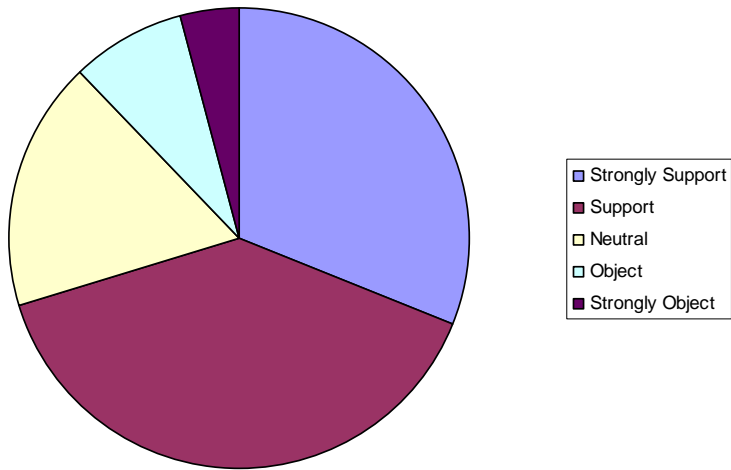


Gender	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Male	40	45%
Female	49	55%
<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>100%</b>

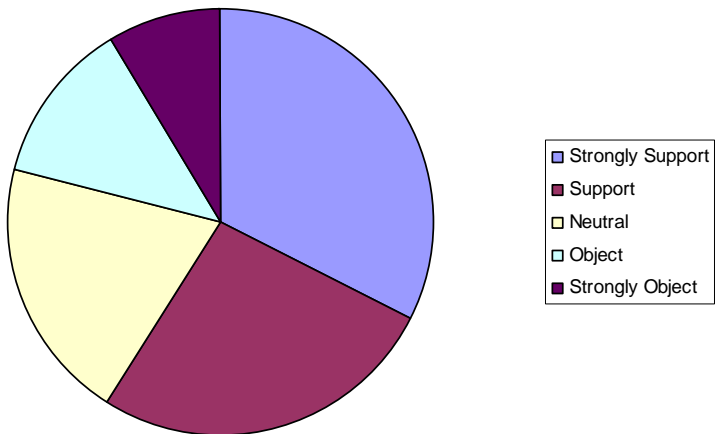
**The Masterplan Overall**



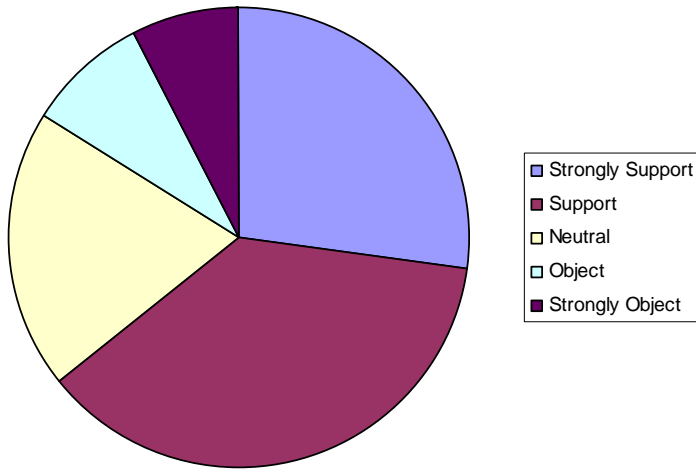
**Creating an Enhanced High Street - Short Term**



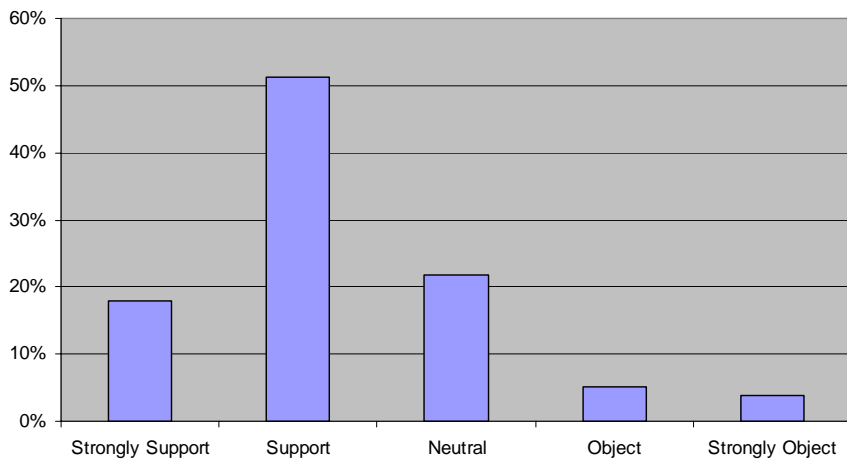
**A New Street Realignment Allowing for the High Street to Become Pedestrian and Cyclist Priority - Long Term**



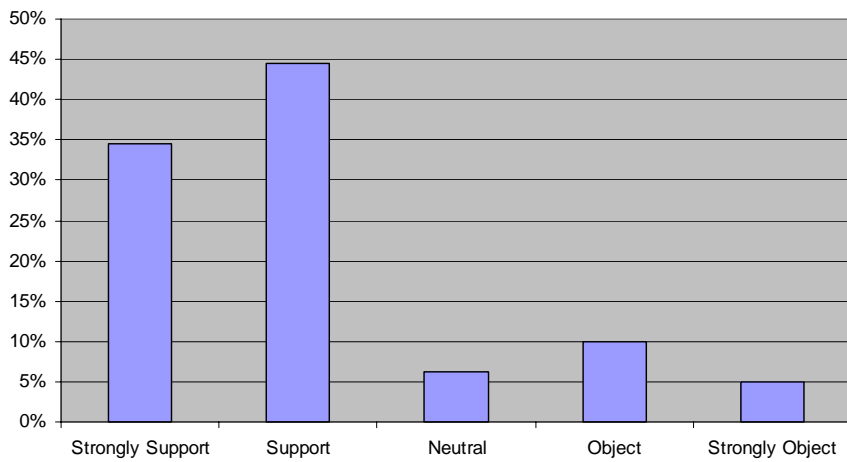
**Creating New Views of the Church and Enhancing Views from the High Street and The Green**



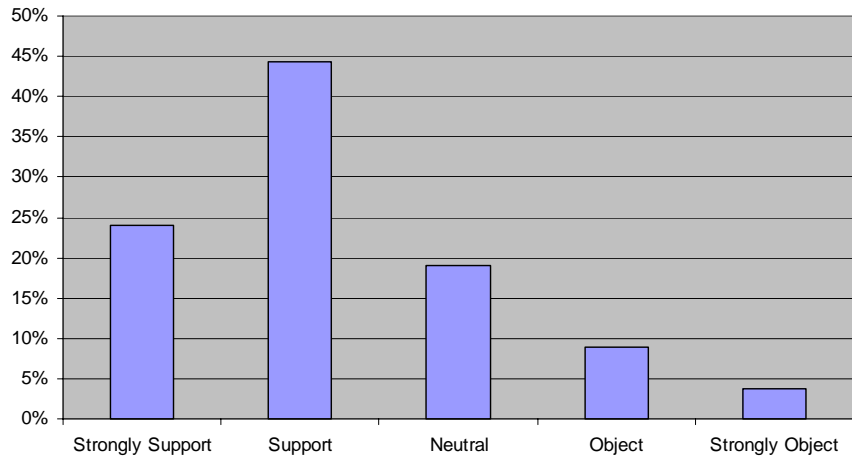
**Proposals for High Street West**



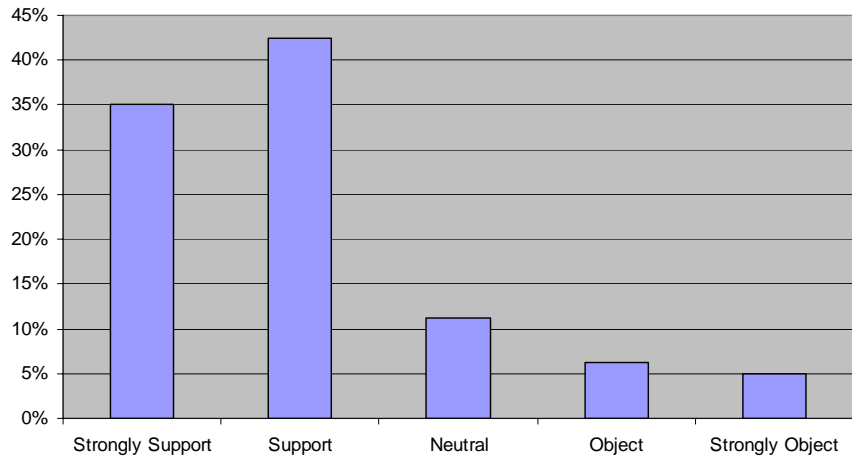
**Proposals for Bedford Square**



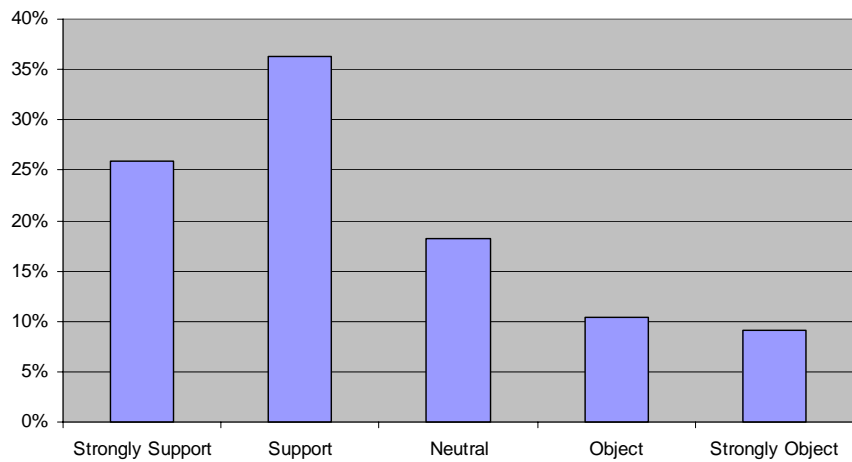
**Proposals for Queen Street/King Street**

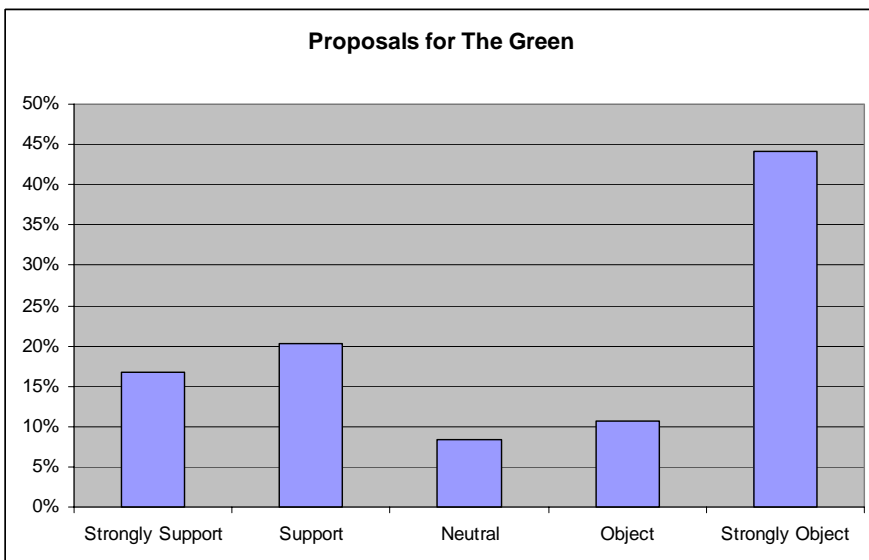
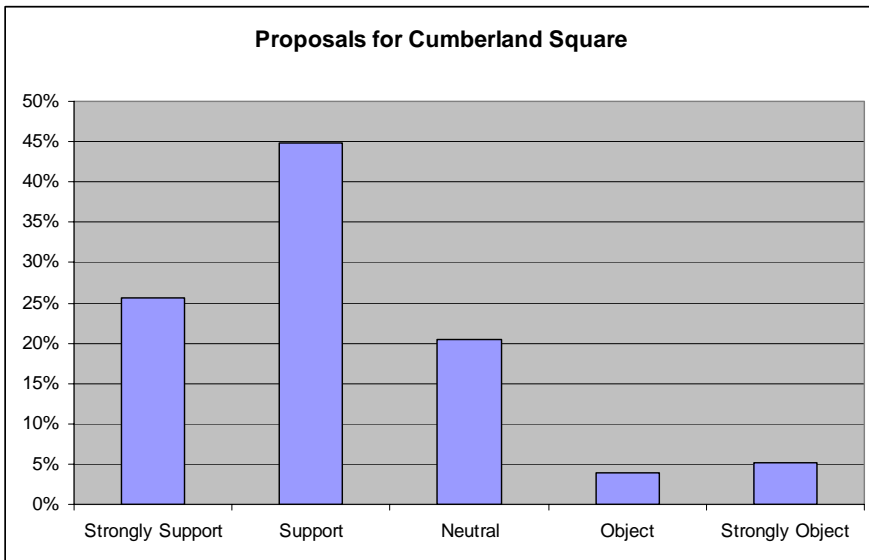
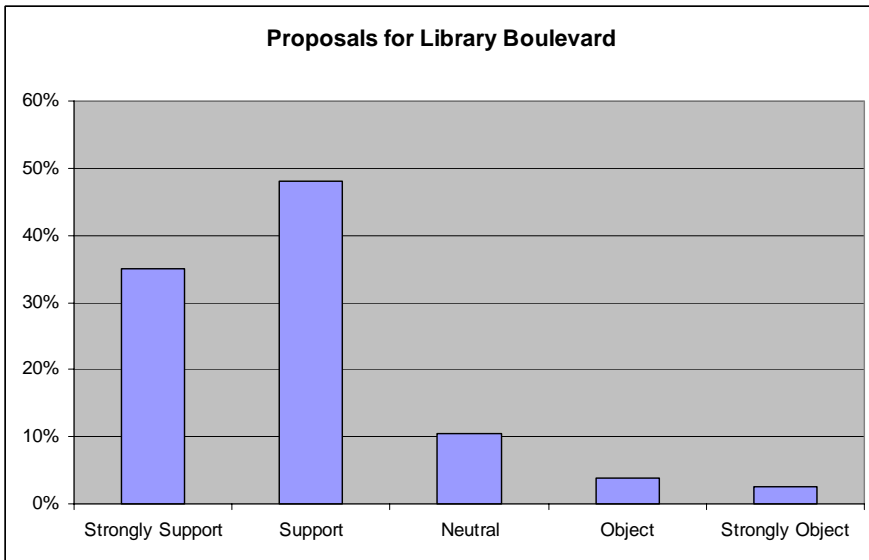


**Proposals for High Street (the Co-Op Site)**



**Proposals for Church Plaza**







4.45 The majority of the proposals within the Masterplan were either strongly supported or supported by the respondents. The only proposal to receive significant objections was the proposal relating to housing on a section of The Green. 44% of respondents strongly objected to this with 11% objecting.

#### **4.46 Other Comments**

In addition to the response form questions a number of comments were received. There were a number of themes that reoccurred through these comments. Below is a summary of the key themes that emerged through the comments. Appendix 10 provides a complete schedule of all comments received.

#### **4.47 General**

There was general support expressed for the Masterplan proposals with comments including:

- Supports constructive change that will enhance the community;
- It will be a definite improvement to Houghton Regis short term; and
- Considers whatever is planned will be an improvement, at the moment the town lacks character and identity.

#### **4.48 The Green**

A large number of respondents expressed strong opposition to the proposal for housing on The Green both in terms of additional housing provision and also in using land from the Green for the proposed homes. Comments included:

- Concern about further housing impacting the historic views of the Green
- Access to the proposed new houses will consume part of the Green and also limit/discourage walking activity to the area

#### **4.49 Housing and Mixed Use**

There was both support and concern raised about proposals for housing and mixed use within the town centre. Comments included:

- Recommend residential development on derelict sites
- Fears an apartment culture like Hitchin
- Objection to housing on the co-op site as it is considered it will replicate the current nuisance at Bedford Square.

#### **4.50 Car Parking and Traffic**

The loss of car parking was highlighted as an issue by many respondents. There was concern that any loss of car parking would cause problems. Specifically, the loss of car parking spaces at the Church was opposed. The Church car park serves weddings, funerals, Sunday services as well as parents dropping children at the Thomas Whitehead School. Additionally, the loss would impact on disabled parking.

4.51 Respondents felt that there was not enough parking in Houghton Regis currently and concern was expressed that the proposals would not meet parking demand. It was felt that the additional housing proposed would make this worse.

#### **4.52 Youth**

A number of comments were received regarding young people and children. There was much concern expressed about youths hanging out and causing problems with anti-social behaviour and vandalism.

4.53 However, many of the comments related to ensuring that there was provision within the town centre for youths to have somewhere to go. It was felt that if there was something for youth to do or go to then it would help the problems of anti-social behaviour.

4.54 The provision of a youth centre came through in a number of comments.

- Youth provision to keep them occupied and away from vandal/ anti social activities; and
- Would like to have seen plans for teenagers, somewhere they can perhaps play pool, purchase soft drinks and be able to meet up with their friends. It would keep them off the streets.

## 5.0 RESPONSE TO FEEDBACK

- 5.1 A table of comments and action was produced to tabulate the consultation feedback along with the Council's and their consultant's response. All feedback received was carefully considered during the drafting of the final Masterplan.
- 5.2 In response to the feedback the plan was amended in the following ways:  
Document re-structuring and changes to the wording of the Objectives, Issues and Options and Urban Design Strategy to ensure the SPD is clear and understandable.
- 5.3 There were a number of specific areas where some respondents were not happy with the SPD, and changes were made as a response. These are summarised below:
- 5.4 Housing on the Green: 44% of respondents strongly objected to this and so this element of the Preferred Option has been deleted, to be replaced instead with enhanced landscaping to improve this edge of the Green
- 5.5. Further reference to wider transport options needed: changed text inserted
- 5.6 Need to include reference to engagement with younger people: changed text inserted in Introduction on need for further public and stakeholder engagement
- 5.7 Uncertainty regarding parking capacity and traffic generation from new development: new text inserted identifying requirement for a future parking and town centre traffic management strategy
- 5.8 Lack of detail regarding retail impacts: further explanation of retail calculations provided and statement inserted that detailed applications will need to be accompanied by retail impact assessments
- 5.9 In some instances respondents raised detailed implementation issues, which will be addressed as the SPD is taken forward. These are summarised below:
- 5.10 Need for car parking adjacent to the Church on a regular basis: Explanation provided that this is a detailed implementation issue which will be agreed with local stakeholders
- 5.11 Concern about the orientation of some of the new buildings proposed on the south side of Queen Street: Explanation provided that building orientation has been mainly influenced by the requirement to safeguard the corridor for a potential future High St realignment
- 5.12 Relationship to wider Growth Area; Explanation provided that the plan has made assumptions about future Growth and these have been factored into assumptions about future transport and retail needs. However the Core Strategy is still at an early stage and there is no certainty as to where growth will occur
- 5.13 Need for archaeological assessment: Explanation provided that normal practice is to consult with County Archaeologist at time of detailed development considerations and conditions attached to any subsequent planning permission. It is proposed to involve the County Archaeologist at the early stages of any redevelopment proposals

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The process of preparing this SPD has been undertaken in a transparent manner and with the full involvement of local stakeholders and members of the public, who have made valuable contributions at various stages of SPD production. Consultations have provided valuable information which has been incorporated in the SPD and changes have been made to the final version of the document in response to concerns raised during earlier stages.
- 6.2 It is considered that the consultation undertaken is consistent with the strategy and methods for involving local people in planning and development issues as set out by the Joint Luton and South Bedfordshire Statement of Community Involvement, January 2007.