Town & Parish Council Conference

9th June 2010
Post Conference Report

Contents Page

Introduction

It has been a pleasure to welcome you to our third Town & Parish Council Conference. These conferences continue to provide an excellent opportunity for us to develop our working relationship and to discuss some of the key challenges we need to tackle together on behalf of our residents.

Following your feedback from the last conference in November, we changed the format slightly to enable more two-way communication. This included an extended *"Open Forum"* to respond to your questions, and I would like to thank Councillor Brian Sadler and David Ashlee for sharing some of the significant achievements they are making in their areas in the *"In the Spotlight"* session. Your feedback showed that you appreciated this input and that you would like to hear more about the activities of some of our Parish Councils at the next conference. Please don't wait for a formal invitation to do this. If you have something you would like to share, please let us know, especially if you are a smaller Parish Council.

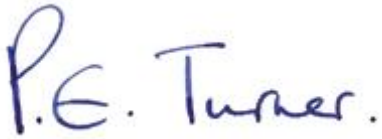
At this conference we considered some of the early policy announcements from the new coalition government and what this might mean for Central Bedfordshire. We also heard about the long-term vision for the area and what we are doing to help create a successful local economy.

Thank you to all who were able to participate as your involvement is critical to our joint working. Our next conference will be held on 13th January 2011 at Priory House, Chicksands. Please put this date in your diaries.

This report provides a summary of the conference, and a write up of all the comments from the feedback forms, as well as responses to all of the questions you submitted.

I look forward to meeting you again in January. In the meantime, we will continue to work closely with you for the benefit of all our communities.

Councillor Tricia Turner MBE
Leader, Central Bedfordshire Council



The Conference

The objectives of the Conference were to:

- understand the financial pressures facing local authorities and consider the impact this may have on Town & Parish Councils;
- consider the importance of securing economic growth and prosperity in Central Bedfordshire;
- enable Town & Parish Councils to share good news stories – helping Town & Parish Councils to learn from each others' successes and achievements; and
- enable open communication between the Council and Town & Parish Councils.

Welcome and introduction

Councillor Tricia Turner MBE, Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council welcomed everyone to the Conference and made some opening remarks. The key messages were:

- the recent general election, and the implications for local authorities of some of the early announcements from the new coalition government; and
- the actions taken since the last conference to devolve services and introduce a hotline phone number exclusively for the use of Town & Parish Councils - 0300 300 8019.

New Government – our challenges and opportunities

Councillor Richard Stay, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Policy & Performance, and Councillor Maurice Jones, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and People Central Bedfordshire Council gave a presentation on the squeeze on public sector finances and the challenges and opportunities this provides.

The key messages were:

- there is common ground between the coalition partners on many areas, particularly around localism, and a shared commitment to local government devolution;
- announced cuts means big challenges for local government, with more demand and less resource;
- the way forward is to be realistic, credible and authentic in our communications and relationships with partners, stakeholders and residents;
- the need to reduce overheads whilst meeting financial ambitions ie. limiting council tax;
- the need to deliver efficiencies of at least £30m over the next 3 years to meet the anticipated reduction in funding from central Government; and
- the requirement to re-think the traditional methods of how things are done, how services are provided, and who provides those services.

Our Sustainable Community Strategy – a New Prospectus for Central Bedfordshire

Richard Carr, Chief Executive of Central Bedfordshire Council, gave a presentation on Central Bedfordshire's first Sustainable Community Strategy.

The key messages were:

- a shared vision for Central Bedfordshire to be …. *"Globally connected, delivering sustainable growth to ensure a green, prosperous and ambitious place for the benefit of all"*;
- Central Bedfordshire's attributes;
- what a successful economy looks like;
- what is happening in Central Bedfordshire to help create a successful local economy; and
- how, with the help of Town & Parish Councils, Central Bedfordshire can thrive through its:
  - excellent connectivity and transport links;
  - vibrant communities;
  - attractive environment;
  - high-quality education and innovation;
  - entrepreneurial businesses;
  - sense of pride and belonging; and
  - a clear sense of purpose.

Town & Parish Councils ….. In the Spotlight

Councillor Brian Sadler, Leader of Leighton Linslade Town Council gave a talk on the I♡LB scheme. The Town Council is leading a consortium of local businesses to work together to encourage people to buy locally and keep small businesses in the area thriving.

David Ashlee, Clerk to Dunstable Town Council gave a talk on the Town's Corporate Plan. The presentation detailed what had been achieved to date, what priorities had been identified and what actions were being taken as a result.

Copies of all of the presentation slides can be found on the Council's website (www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk /council and democracy/parish and town councils).

Open Forum

There was an opportunity to send in questions in advance which could be answered on the night in a session format similar to that of "Question Time". Thank you to everyone who took the time to send in their questions. Although only some could be put forward on the night, the table below gives answers to all the questions which were received.

The following questions were responded to during the conference

Potton Town Council – Cllr Mr Geoff Emery
How does Central Bedfordshire ensure an audit trail for accountability and performance for contractors? Potton Town Council is particularly concerned about the parking enforcement contract and lack of statistics available regarding visits and issue of notices.
The Council takes seriously its responsibilities in ensuring it derives maximum value from all of its contractors. All Town and Parish Council Clerks recently received a copy of the Civil Enforcement Officer Tracking report for the financial year 2009/10. The report details the amount of time officers were undertaking enforcement in each area and gives the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued and those spoilt. The report shows that Potton received approximately 124 hours worth of enforcement during 09/10 with 62 PCNs issued with one spoilt. The amount of enforcement time each location receives is determined by the amount of on and off street restrictions at those locations. Additional enforcement time can be purchased from Central Bedfordshire, or in exceptional circumstances additional enforcement time can be provided by the Council to tackle a particularly severe parking issue. Mr David Bowie would be more than happy to discuss any particular needs. Tel. 0300 300 6206.

Billington Parish Council – Cllr Don Brewin
There are at present at least 5 separate sites in Billington occupied by travellers, most of which are illegal. **The national press has recently highlighted the ability of such groups to take advantage of a legal loophole by submitting late planning applications on a Friday, which would allow them to occupy sites on a Bank Holiday weekend.** **We believe that every citizen has a right to fair treatment under the law, particularly if they pay taxes and show genuine respect for others in the community. It seems that travellers are being treated better than the rest of the population.** **Neither the Police, nor the Council, seem willing to challenge this form of illegal activity.** **What can Central Beds Council do to address this situation?**
There are ten sites occupied by Gypsies and Travellers in Billington Parish, of

which eight are authorised. The two unauthorised sites (The Stables, Site B and Site C, Stanbridge Road) are currently the subject of High Court Injunctions, but any further action is being held in abeyance pending the outcome of a High Court Challenge against the Secretary of State for the dismissal of a planning appeal. There are also current planning applications pending on these sites that will need to be determined prior to the Council considering what further action may be necessary.

The Council closely monitors the sites and local situation, and an important part of this has been to build a working dialogue with the community. Any suspected new sites are rapidly dealt with and all enquiries checked out. Indeed, in the last 3 months the Council has successfully sought and gained High Court Injunctions on land at Little Billington to prevent what it had thought to be a likely new site extension.

Any new applications for new sites, extensions to sites, or additional caravans within existing sites are examined very thoroughly against all the material considerations. Although there is a general presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the considerations of Human Rights, personal circumstances and need for provision of sites are very important, as well as the normal development control considerations such as access, visual amenity and general amenity. Notwithstanding the recent withdrawal of regional figures for the provision of new sites, the Council's own Gypsy and Traveller Assessment Study, (that fed into those figures) and the biennial Caravan Counts of sites, remain powerful material considerations to be taken into account.

The above considerations are similarly important in the Council determining as to where and when it is expedient to take any necessary enforcement action in the case of unauthorised development or breach of conditions on existing sites. As above, in some cases there will be a need to take swift action through the High Court and in others there may be a need to invite applications to regularise matters, or to determine applications (and appeals) prior to considering the next steps.

Given the complexity of the sites and situation in Billington the Parish Council has been invited to a meeting to explore the current situation.

Haynes Parish Council – Cllr Richard James

You cut the number of Councillors etc, when will you be cutting Council Tax?

Due to local government reorganisation the number of Councillors was cut from 124 to 66, and the outcome of the recent ward boundary review proposes a figure of 59.

Our aim is always to ensure that the local Council Tax is as low as possible. One of our aspirations for this coming year is to secure a zero percent increase in Council Tax for 2011/12, and we remain committed to this despite the significant budget cuts we are likely to face to face next year. The new coalition government has also announced its intention to work with local authorities to freeze Council Tax.

Stanbridge Parish Council – Cllr Neil Tidey

A residential development on green belt land in our parish was twice rejected, but subsequently granted on the basis that office accommodation was included in the plans. In view of this, what is the planning policy regarding residential and commercial development in green belt areas and how are objections from parish councils taken into account?

The question refers to Green Farm, Tilsworth Road, Stanbridge. The site lies within the Green Belt and the applications related to existing Listed barns. National Policy Guidance and The South Bedfordshire Local Plan Policies provide for the conversion of suitable existing buildings in these circumstances and would normally require that such conversion would be to a commercial use, rather than residential, unless: there had been every reasonable attempt to secure a business re-use; there were strong reasons to suggest otherwise such as constraints on access or likely disturbance to local residents; or the residential use included some business re-use, often as live / work accommodation in rural areas. As Listed Buildings there is also a requirement to ensure that a change of use preserves their character and setting and continuing preservation.

The Parish Council objections were, as always, taken into account, but permission was granted as the scheme had been amended to overcome the concerns identified from previous refused applications. In particular, a smaller more suitable commercial element in terms of impact on the locality and building was to be provided, and the conversion scheme for the building reduced the intensity of impact on the structure and character of the building.

Tempsford Parish Council – Jim Donnelly

With the drive to transfer certain responsibilities to Parish Councils does Central Beds recognise the fact that Parish Councils are volunteers working for the good of their Parish, and to burden them with more work is not necessarily in the best interest of the Parish?

We fully appreciate the important role that Town & Parish Councillors undertake on a voluntary basis, and do not want to burden you with any work that is not in the best interests of your local communities. We are now entering a new era where the public sector is having to radically re-think the sort of services it should be providing in the future and the best and most efficient way of doing so. The budget cuts mean we will not be able to deliver everything that we do currently. Consequently we want to work closely with Town & Parish Councils, and local community groups, to identify those quality of life services which they would like to see continue and may want to take on for themselves. However, we are not seeking to force any council or community group to take on any services it does not want to.

Leighton Linslade Town Council – Cllr Brian Sadler

What services, building, amenities and responsibilities etc are CB considering devolving to Town & Parish Councils and, where applicable, would support packages be included in such devolvements?

We want to hear from Town & Parish Councils about the sort of services, amenities and responsibilities you would like to take on. We will work closely with you to build the business case for devolving each service to ensure that this is managed appropriately and at no additional cost. The business case template we have developed will examine the resources needed, and the level and type of support required from the Council. Each request will be considered on a case by case basis.

Stotfold Town Council – Cllr Malcolm Smith

Since 2002, Stotfold has been working hard to build its first ever sports centre, buoyed by the 2012 Olympics, and on the basis of a grant of £3m from Mid Beds District Council. Our new unitary authority has confiscated our grant - at least until 2012/13 - and thus thrown the whole project into chaos. We certainly now have little chance of seeing a sports centre in Stotfold this side of the Olympics, if ever. How do you expect the Town and Parish Councils to continue to work with and trust this Conservative administration?

This scheme is one of many potential capital programmes for the Council to consider. The Council agreed its Capital Programme in February 2010, but at the same time instructed a review to be undertaken at the end of the first quarter of the financial year. This was primarily due to the unease at committing to £11m of new borrowing in 2011/12 and the significant impact this could have on the revenue budget in future years.

The review programme needs to be managed in the light of recent announcements about in-year budget cuts, and potentially very significant funding reductions in subsequent years. This review has now begun.

The first part of the review will be to gain a full understanding of the commitments made against the programme agreed in February and against any slippage to existing schemes arising from the closure of the 2009/10 accounts.

The review will enable the Council to prioritise its capital projects over the coming year in line with its Medium Term Financial Plan. This will be reviewed and re-prioritised on a regular basis.

The initial results of this exercise are expected during the autumn.

Husborne Crawley Parish Council – Cllr Rob Hallam

Please could we have a clear statement about policy relating to speed limits in villages? In order for the village to develop and grow it needs a lower speed limit (30 mph) and investment in housing of all types. Without the reduced speed limit, the investment in housing will not be effective.

Following the consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the 'called in' decision of the Traffic Management Meeting to not implement a change in speed limit in Husborne Crawley, a report is to be presented to the next meeting outlining options for possible actions and their respective costs.

A walkabout attended by local people, police representatives, Bedfordshire Highways and Councillor Wells, Ward Member and Assistant Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities and Healthier Lifestyles, has taken place and informed this process.

With regard to village speed limits we have already assessed those which are situated upon the A and B road network and have adjusted speed limits where justified. Speed limits are assessed in accordance with guidance issued by the Department for Transport and this includes an assessment of the road environment as well as considering both traffic speed and volume data. Subject to funding we would seek to adjust a speed limit if the assessment demonstrated that this would be appropriate and beneficial. Due to the different road classifications running through the many villages in Central Bedfordshire we are not able to introduce a blanket 30mph speed limit and accordingly each is assessed on its own merits.

The following questions were submitted but not answered during the conference

Billington Parish Council – Cllr Don Brewin

We have tried to get a safe, dropped crossing point on the busy A4146 from Billington Village Hall to the Church for several years. However, a speed survey carried out this year, indicated that the average speed of traffic was in excess of 40mph in a 30mph limit, so we can't have a crossing as the visibility at that speed is not good enough.

We have worked with partners to implement a range of measures to try to reduce the speed of traffic in the area so we can have the crossing, but to no avail.

What support can the Council give us to install traffic calming measures, including safety cameras, in this area?

The location at which a crossing was requested has been assessed and there is insufficient visibility for the installation of a crossing given the vehicle speeds measured. Traffic calming would be required to reduce speeds and it is not Council policy to implement vertical traffic calming features such as round and flat top road humps, speed cushions (pads), raised table junctions and crossings on A roads.

To assist in raising drivers' awareness and moderating approach speeds a 40mph buffer has been implemented on the A4146 to the north of Billington.

Once the road has been re-surfaced, which was completed on 3rd July 2010, the road markings for the 40mph buffer will take place.

In the last three years there are no recorded injury accidents within the 30mph zone and therefore no immediate justification for further physical intervention.

Aspley Guise Parish Council – Cllr Ian Pickering

It will be a difficult enough challenge for Central Bedfordshire to deal with the needs for housing growth within its area in the coming years of austerity without also having to cater for unwanted growth from other areas. At a meeting on 8th June Milton Keynes Council passed a motion to hold back and reconsider its draft Core Strategy.

The reasons for doing this included the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies and the housing targets that they contain which are now recognised as being undeliverable and the fact that new houses already in the pipeline together with houses to be built on land already allocated for development will take over 20 years to complete. This will leave many hundreds of hectares of undeveloped land within the Milton Keynes area to cater for its growth beyond 2031. In light of this will the council confirm that no further work will be preformed in relation to the unnecessary expansion of Milton Keynes into Central Bedfordshire and that any future housing needs assessment for Central Bedfordshire will only cater for the housing needs of Central Bedfordshire.

The same motion endorsed the terms of a letter sent by the leader of Milton Keynes Council to the Chair of the Milton Keynes Partnership Committee a copy of which is attached. The letter included a request to the HCA to expand the area of MKP's planning authority to include areas of Central Bedfordshire neighboring Milton Keynes. Can the council let us know if they were consulted about or gave approval for this letter and if so what were the reasons for doing this were and why there was no consultation with affected residents before the letter was sent. If as I expect Central Beds Council were not consulted about this letter can the council confirm that it will write to the leader of Milton Keynes Council, with copies to all to whom the original letter was sent, to object to these continuing attempts to wrest planning control for these areas of Central Bedfordshire away from our elected representatives where it properly belongs.

We can confirm that there is no work ongoing in relation to the potential expansion of Milton Keynes through the South East Strategic Development Area into Central Bedfordshire. The Council is currently considering the implications of the abolition of the regional spatial strategies on housing requirements for Central Bedfordshire.

With regard to the letter from Milton Keynes Council to Milton Keynes Partnership we were not consulted upon it. The Council has consistently stated its position that it is opposed to any attempt by Milton Keynes to expand its boundaries or take planning controls away from Central Bedfordshire Council.

Stondon Parish Council – Cllr Peter Brown

At your last T&P conference, 4th November 2009 I asked for Town & parish Council representations to planning decision committees to be afforded the same opportunities to address the Committee as afforded to Ward Councillors. This question put to the test your repeated statement of this unitary Council to work closer together with Town & Parish Councils. The question received widespread support right across the chamber. Your formal response, as emailed 8th January decided "no change …" is consistent with what other Councils do …. etc. You simply aren't listening. You reveal a determination NOT to work closer (in this situation).
Question: Why are you not falling into line with your stated claims of wishing to work closer rather than defending the status quo? This request is most important to Town & Parish Councils.

A similar question was raised at the previous conference in November 2009. As the situation has not changed since then, the response remains the same. The following response is lifted from the previous post conference report:

"Research has revealed that many Councils apply a time limit to speaking rights that tends to be 3 minutes. Best practice guidance states that a time limit of 3 minutes or 5 minutes per speaker should be given. Only one example was found of a Council with a 5 minute speaking rule. The Constitution of Central Bedfordshire Council allows the Chairman of the Development Management Committee (DMC) discretion to vary the 3 minute rule where an application affects more than one town/parish when he or she considers it conducive to the despatch of business and will not cause prejudice to the parties involved. CBC's approach is therefore entirely consistent with what other councils are doing, and with best practice."

The following questions were left on the tables as there was insufficient time for them to be raised as part of the Question & Answers sessions at the end of presentations.

Northill Parish Council – Cllr Wendi Momen

Regarding devolved services to parish councils etc. If a large number of Councils take on a particular service will the others be forced to do so as well, as the infrastructure to provide that service will be destabilised and ultimately unsustainable?

We will work closely with Town & Parish Councils to build the business case for devolved services. Our model makes it clear that if any associated funding is also devolved this will only be provided on a pro rata basis relative to the costs for each area. We have built the facility to do this into our current arrangements, though we would encourage Councils to explore the economies of scale provided by using a common supplier.

The business case will also consider the impact that any local arrangements may have on the viability and sustainability of existing corporate contracts and this will be taken into account during the decision-making process.

Sandy Town Council – Sue Foster

It is becoming apparent that there are service anomalies between the old authorities. Is Central Bedfordshire working to even out these differences as it says it is working to even out the differences in the two Council Tax levels?

With the coming together of three legacy councils to form the new unitary authority in Central Bedfordshire it was inevitable that there would be some services supported by multiple contracts. Our top priority during the first year was to ensure business continuity during the transition phase and to make sure that the existing service levels and standards were maintained. It is the Council's intention to even out these differences as part of its medium term financial strategy. This process may take some time and will be implemented as existing contracts come to a close and new contracts are negotiated.

Supplementary information identified that a specific query regarding parking enforcement prompted this question, and this is addressed in the response below:

Specifically with regard to parking enforcement, the amount of time given in any town and village in Central Bedfordshire is determined by the amount of parking restrictions and car parks in that particular location. As Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard have large amounts of on street restrictions and numerous council owned car parks, these towns will naturally receive more enforcement time than smaller towns and villages with substantially less restrictions and no council owned car parks. If there are particular problems at a given location the parking office (Tel: 0300 300 8005) can be notified and they will ensure that additional enforcement is provided by placing the location on a 'hot spots' list.

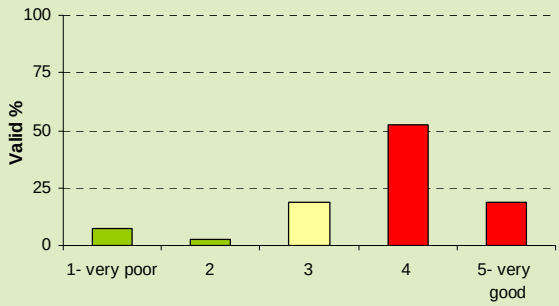
Feedback on the Conference

A conference feedback form was provided in the Delegate Packs, and below are the results from the 43 completed forms received.

Meeting the conference objectives.

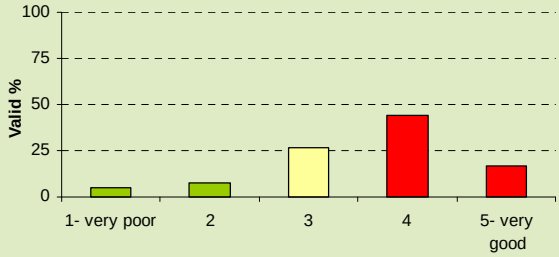
Understand financial pressures

	Count	%
1- very poor	3	7
2	1	2
3	8	19
4	22	51
5- very good	8	19
Total	42	98
Missing	1	2
Total	43	100
Mean score	**3.74**	



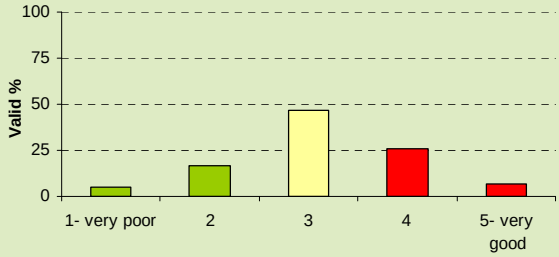
Importance of securing economic growth

	Count	%
1- very poor	2	5
2	3	7
3	11	26
4	18	42
5- very good	7	16
Total	41	95
Missing	2	5
Total	43	100
Mean score	**3.61**	



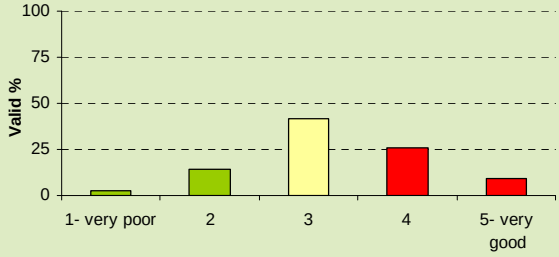
Enable T&PC to share good news stories

	Count	%
1- very poor	2	5
2	7	16
3	20	47
4	11	26
5- very good	3	7
Total	43	100
Missing	0	0
Total	43	100
Mean score	**3.14**	



Open communication

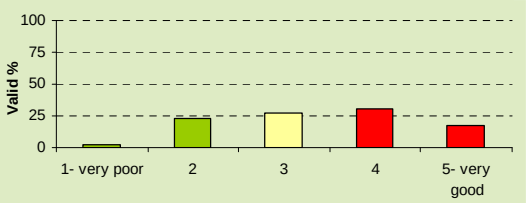
	Count	%
1- very poor	1	2
2	6	14
3	18	42
4	11	26
5- very good	4	9
Total	40	93
Missing	3	7
Total	43	100
Mean score	**3.28**	



Aspects of this event.

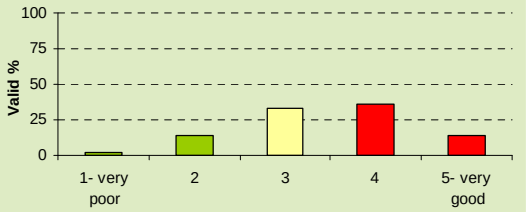
In the Spotlight

	Count	%
1- very poor	1	2
2	9	21
3	11	26
4	12	28
5- very good	7	16
Total	40	93
Missing	3	7
Total	43	100
Mean score	**3.38**	



Open Forum

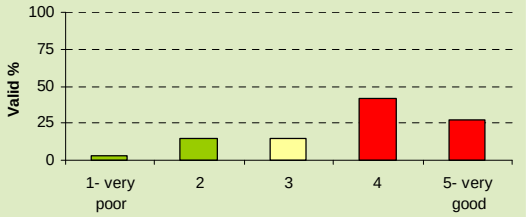
	Count	%
1- very poor	1	2
2	6	14
3	14	33
4	15	35
5- very good	6	14
Total	42	98
Missing	1	2
Total	43	100
Mean score	**3.45**	



Organisation of the event

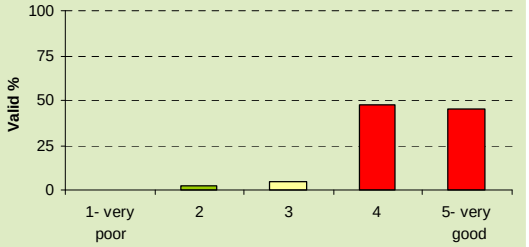
Information sent to you before the event, e.g. booking form, confirmation etc

	Count	%
1- very poor	1	2
2	6	14
3	6	14
4	17	40
5- very good	11	26
Total	41	95
Missing	2	5
Total	43	100
Mean score	**3.76**	



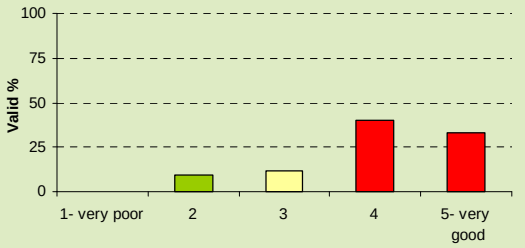
Venue

	Count	%
1- very poor	0	0
2	1	2
3	2	5
4	20	47
5- very good	19	44
Total	42	98
Missing	1	2
Total	43	100
Mean score	**4.36**	



Catering

	Count	%
1- very poor	0	0
2	4	9
3	5	12
4	17	40
5- very good	14	33
Total	40	93
Missing	3	7
Total	43	100
Mean score	**4.03**	



Comments made about this conference		
In summary:	Count	%
More open discussions between T&PC and CBC ie. Q&A, Open Forum	8	19
Presentations too lengthy / went on too long	5	12
In the Spotlight – Parishes not Towns	5	12
Preferred facilitated table discussions	3	7
General questions not Council specific	1	2
Other	10	23

A precis of the comments is given below:

Having 2 large Councils giving their plans should have been balanced with smaller ones which make up the majority of Council's; ditto North & South. Also, more gender balanced please. Also concerned by increasing inequalities by your economic policies - this was not addressed.
More interaction and group discussions. More towards towns than villages, although obviously more money goes towards them. Plus difficult for villages to take on board more than grass cutting.
Preferred previous sessions when each table had a facilitator.
Please be less patronising. 2.5 hours of being talked at is not helpful.
Make more relevant, more open discussions.
Should be more open forum not pre arranged. Require more open discussion from parish councillors to panel.
Not enough open discussion between CBC & others.
Re-introduce the session of each table of delegates being asked a set of questions that relate to Council business views and ongoing objectives. Each table can respond via the delegates.
To make it clear, particularly to 1st time participants, that any questions to be asked in the Open Forum must be asked in advance of the Conference! Whole day event.
Catering excessive. Emphasis was on Town Councils. Needed more specific examples as to what can be devolved, and how the funding would be transferred.
The In the Spotlight sessions were very focused on large town councils.
"Open Forum" was very interesting, but felt that there was not much interaction between Central Bedfordshire Council and the Parishes during the meeting as a whole.

Unfortunately the speakers overran their time. We sat for over 2 hours without the opportunity to speak a word. Too many speakers give the impression of being lectured to, rather than our contributing to this conference. Why 2 town councils in "the spotlight" and no village pc? "Open Forum" needs to be expanded.
In the Spotlight well presented but not applicable to Parish Councils. Open forum very useful. Could questions and answers be put on the website or forwarded to all delegates.
1. Tighter control of time keeping required. 2. More time for Q&A - less "lecture type" presentations.
Late start to the Open Forum. PA system erratic - some speakers not clear. Open Forum - answers needed to be concise - sometimes 2 people - not necessary. Not much post conference networking as ran late and people wanted to go home!! Evening needs to be better time managed.
Possible more frequent conferences but with more specific areas of discussion, rather than all generalities.
Missed the round table discussions with a Council officer chairing them.
We feel that our question was important to our village and was disappointed not to be able to have our question answered. More time is needed to address all questions.
Lovely buffet but we were told it was tea & coffee only. Therefore I suspect much food left over.
In the Open Forum session, the detailed local questions were not necessarily of interest to the audience in general as was evidenced at the table at which I sat. Perhaps the questions could be sifted so that only general ones were asked on the night. The others could be given written answers.
Pre determined questions not best for open forums.
Insufficient time given to the questions delegates wanted to give and the answers that were given were unfortunately (and predictably) very bland and not particularly helpful.
Too lengthy!

Conclusion

The general consensus is that the Conference met its objectives with regard to understanding the financial pressures and the importance of securing the area's economic growth. However there was still some division with regard to the open communication and sharing of good news stories.

What's Next?

We will build on all of the feedback we have received to continue to improve how we work together, and to ensure that future conferences better meet your needs.

We look forward to meeting you all again at our next conference on 13th January 2011 at Priory House, Chicksands. In the meantime, a full copy of this report and the presentations can be found on the Council's website (www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk /council and democracy/parish and town councils).