

Shaping Central Bedfordshire

- report of consultation



Background

Central Bedfordshire is a predominantly rural area with 58% of residents living in rural areas. There are 10 towns that play an important role in providing services, employment and businesses to the villages and rural areas around them. Central Bedfordshire has high levels of home ownership with 73% of residents owning their own home, compared to a national average for the UK of 64%. Local insight indicates that half of our residents (50%) have lived in their current house for ten years or more.

Residents tell us that they have a high level of satisfaction with Central Bedfordshire, with 90% of residents satisfied with the local area as a place to live and 82% of residents satisfied with the existing towns and villages.

Sources:

Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs, 2011 Rural Urban Classification of Local Authority Districts).

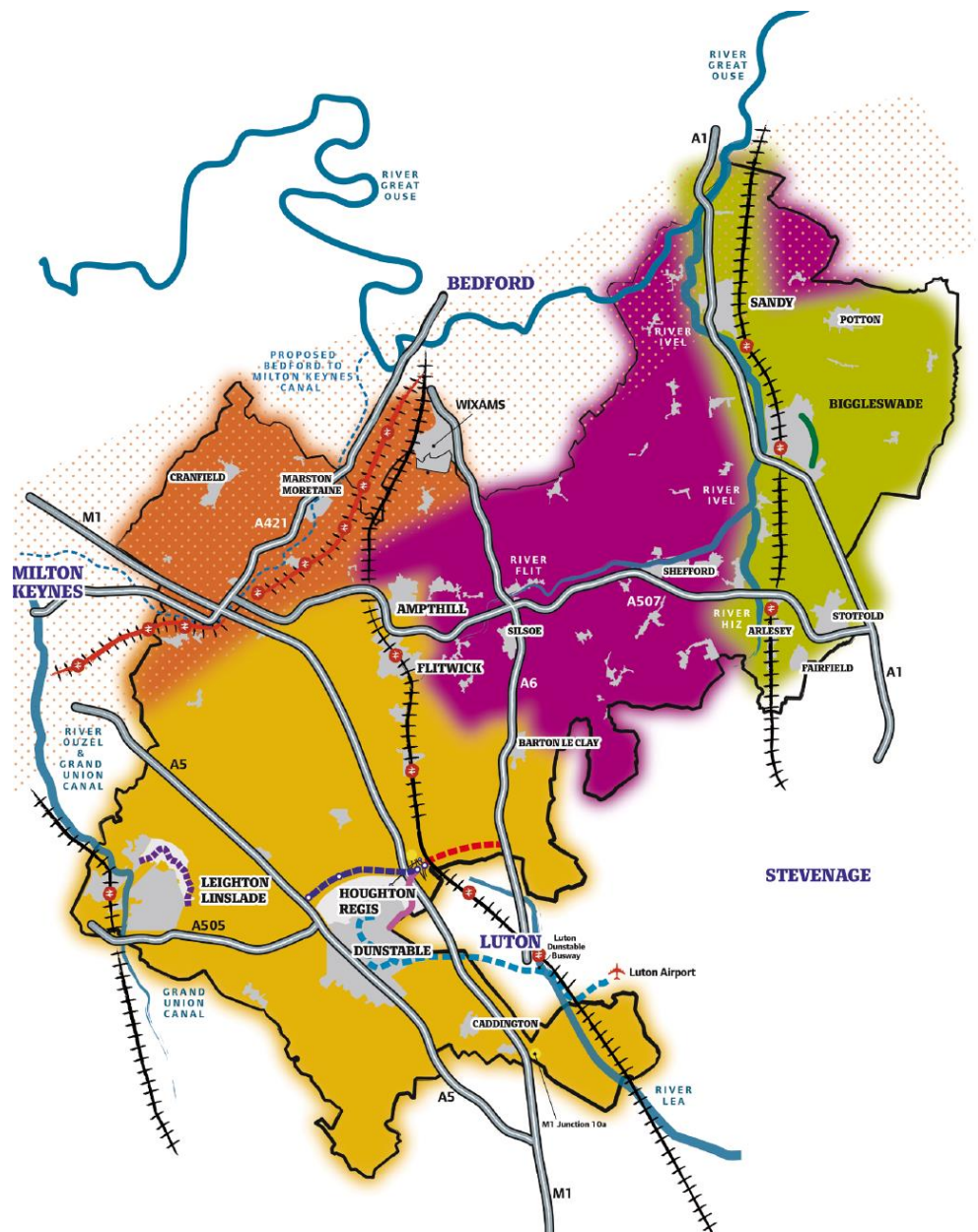
Consultation

The 'Shaping Central Bedfordshire' consultation was an important first step in our Local Plan public engagement with the aim of asking our residents, organisations and businesses to help shape 'big picture' options for growth which will then be set out in the initial draft of the Local Plan. The consultation was launched in October 2016 and supported by a comprehensive communication campaign on the website, social media, email bulletin and through face to face engagement with Town and Parish Councils and at local Community Planning events across Central Bedfordshire. The questionnaire and supporting document was developed in both online and paper form with copies made available to the public in Council Customer Services offices and Libraries.

The consultation identified four areas in Central Bedfordshire which reflect the character of our towns, villages and countryside, existing and planned transport corridors, and areas of green belt designation. This is to help us to assess, in broad terms, the growth potential for development of homes, economic opportunities and the scope to invest in local services and amenities.

The areas are described as:

- A - South and West/ M1 Corridor (yellow)
- B - East/A1 Corridor (green)
- C - East/West Corridor (orange)
- D - Central Section (purple)



Consultation Responses

The consultation achieved a good level of engagement with 785 stakeholders providing their views on the proposals. The majority of responses came from residents of Central Bedfordshire (679) with others representing a number of businesses, Town and Parish Council's, voluntary and community organisations. The age range of respondents was broadly representative of the age profile of the Central Bedfordshire population with good engagement from working age adults (age 30-44, 45-59) and older persons aged (60-74 years). Responses were evenly split between male and female.

The consultation results are summarised below.

Question 1. Have we identified the right types of infrastructure needs?

This question listed seven types of infrastructure which would be identified in the Local Plan and asked if we had correctly identified the right things or if there was anything we had missed. These were: Green Infrastructure; Transport; Schools; Affordable homes; Heath facilities; Communication/Broadband and Community Facilities.

Including a text box to allow people to respond openly we were hoping to capture a wide range of views which would help us to understand local perceptions.

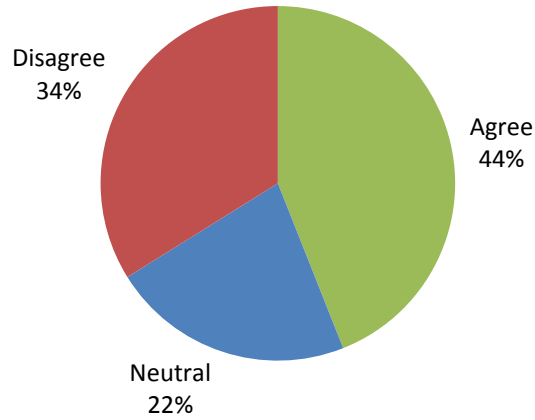
390 responses were received identifying items that residents felt were missing from the list of infrastructure. However, further analysis has shown that the majority of suggestions are addressed by the 7 infrastructure types and therefore will be considered in the Local Plan. Only two suggestions did not fall directly into the 7 types: these were agriculture and the upgrading of existing infrastructure. These issues will also be considered in the Local Plan.

Question 2. Do you agree with the broad description of growth potential for the four areas?

For each area, people were asked if they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the description. For the purposes of illustrating the results, these responses have been amalgamated into 'agree' or 'disagree'. Public perception of the description of growth potential varied across the four locations.

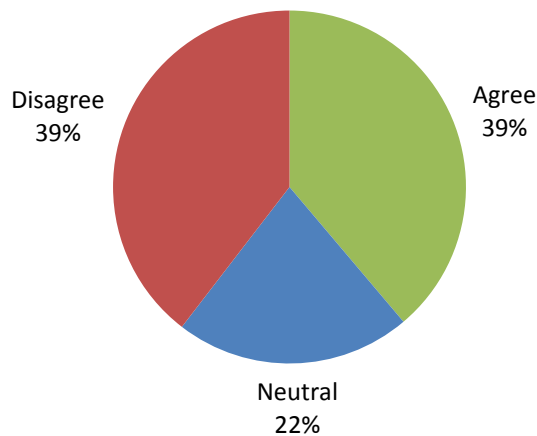
There was no 'Don't know' option, but a neutral option was given to allow people who did not feel they could answer in a positive or negative way. Neutral responses are not being commented upon because we cannot interpret the intentions of the people who used this option.

Area A – South and West/M1 Corridor



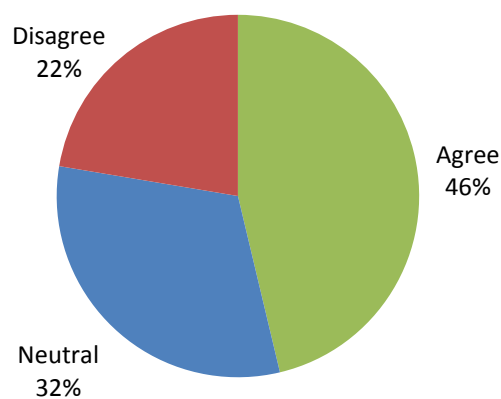
The consultation suggested that this area had the potential for all levels of growth including strategic scale growth adjoining urban areas, where Green Belt release can be justified. As shown in the chart, the majority of the 691 responses received agreed with the description.

Area B – East/A1 Corridor



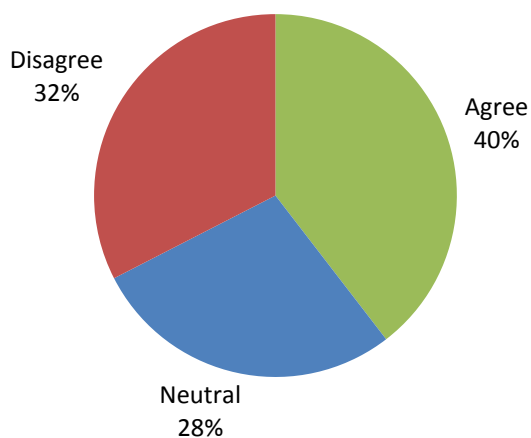
This area is well served with the A1 and East Coast railway. It is suggested that it has potential for all levels of growth, including new settlements, if appropriate supporting infrastructure is provided. The views of the 680 respondents are balanced with 39% agreeing with the description of the area and 39% disagreeing.

Area C – East/West Corridor



As an important economic area with advanced research and development at Cranfield Technology Park and Millbrook Proving Ground, there is potential for medium to strategic scale growth including new settlements. However, it was suggested that there is limited potential for small scale growth at existing settlements. The results showed that the majority of respondents agreed with this suggestion (46% agreeing and 22% disagreeing). This shows strong support for the description of potential growth of the area.

Area D – Central Section



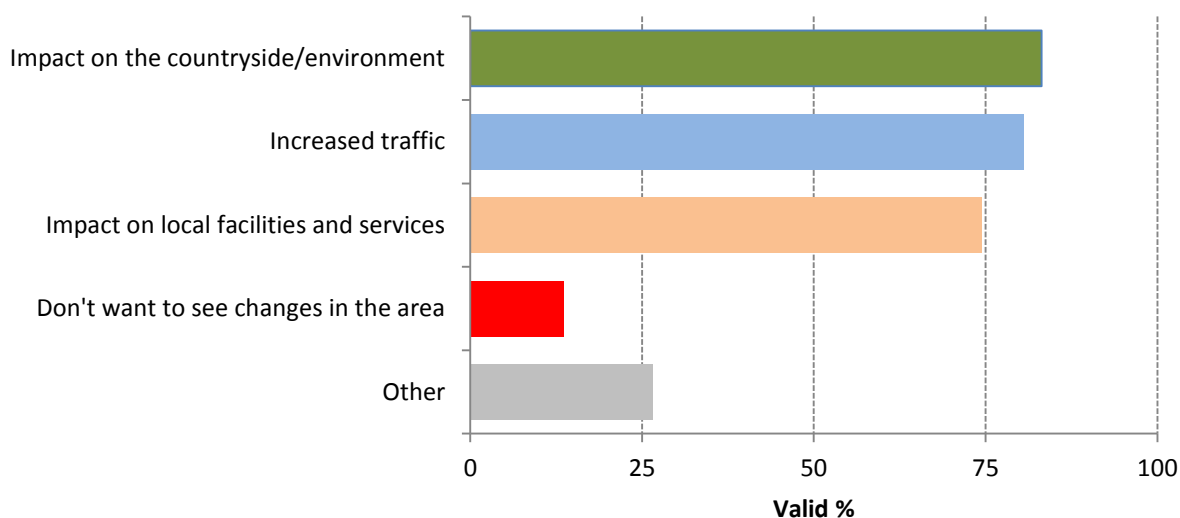
Characterised by market towns and villages linked by rural roads, there is potential for limited small to medium scale growth in this area. Although 32% disagreed with this description, 40% agreed, again showing support for the description given.

Question 3 – If you disagree with our descriptions for each area, please tell us why.

For this question, 5 options were given:

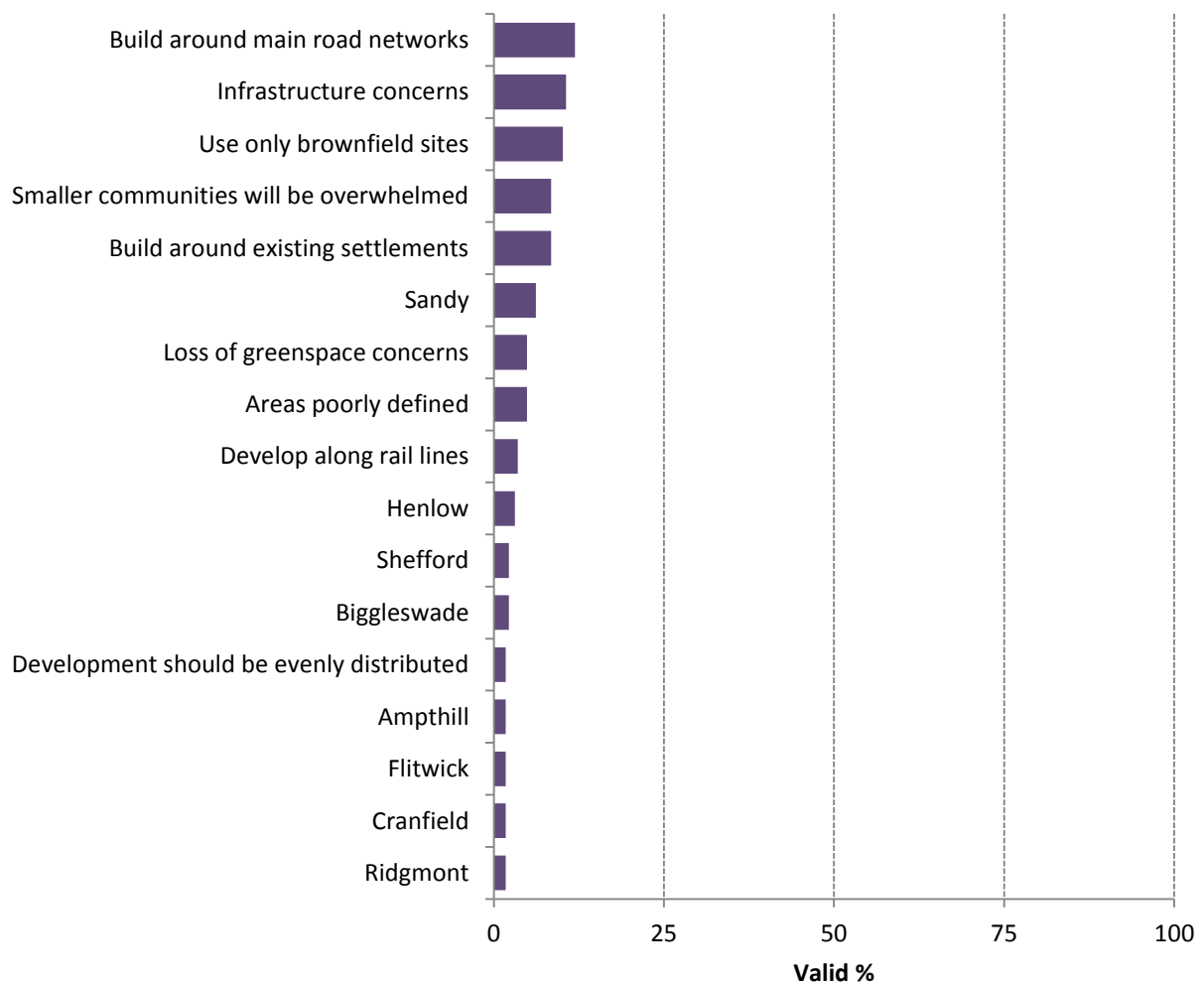
- Impact on countryside/environment
- Increased traffic
- Impact on local facilities and services
- Don't want to see change in the area
- Other

Where 'other' was chosen there was a limited space to provide an answer ensuring that the responses given were concise. Of the people who did choose 'other' the majority of answers given did naturally group to the other options given, e.g. an objection to more housing in the countryside links back to 'impact on the countryside'. The majority of respondents gave the impact on the countryside and environment as the main reason for objecting to the area descriptions, followed closely by an increase in traffic and impact on local facilities and services.



Question 4 – Are there any broad locations suitable for growth you want to put forward?

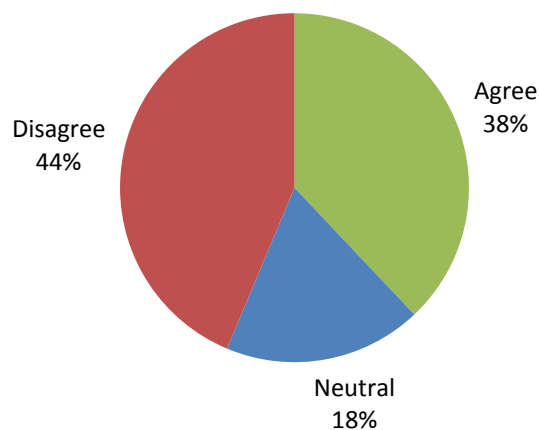
Only 226 people responded to the question. Although some locations were put forward, the majority of responses suggested that growth should be located around existing infrastructure and settlements and suggested the brownfield sites should be used.



Question 5 – Should new settlements (of around 1,500 to 3,000 plus homes) be included?

The consultation gauged public opinion on the concept of establishing new settlements in Central Bedfordshire. Responses were quite even although slightly more people were against new settlements (43.7%) than in favour (38%) whilst 18.4% stayed neutral.

This perception suggests that there may be a link between the high levels of resident satisfaction with Central Bedfordshire as a local area (90%) and a concern over the potential impact of new settlements on the local area.



Question 6 – Environmental Enhancement

This question sought to understand if there was a preference for the Council focussing on existing highly valued environments or new environmental projects in each of the 4 areas.

In each area, two thirds of respondents indicated that existing features in the environment should be protected and enhanced whilst only one third of respondents indicated that they would support the delivery of new projects. This suggests that strong value is given to the existing features in the environment and that further information would need to be provided to residents to help them objectively assess any proposal to introduce new environmental projects

Note: Both the online and paper versions of the questionnaire gave the same two response options (i.e. existing or new) however the online questionnaire constrained respondents to a single answer whereas on the paper copy some respondents ticked both existing and new response options.