



Appendix

BIGGLESWADE TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY & MASTERPLAN SPD
Summary of Community Consultation

(Regulation 18 Document)

July 2011

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. Engagement overview
 - A. Consultees
 - B. Engagement process
4. Regulation 17 Statutory Consultation & Feedback (February – March 2011)
 - Representations Received
 - Questionnaire Responses
 - Actions taken/ Recommendations
5. Conclusion
 - Appendix 1 – Regulation 17: Schedule of Representations Received
 - Appendix 2 – Regulation 17: Summary of Questionnaire Responses Received
 - Appendix 3 – Questionnaire and Exhibition Boards produced for the Regulation 17 Public Consultation

1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to set out the details and findings of the overall statutory public consultation ('Regulation 17') undertaken for the Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy & Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document ('SPD').

The Statutory Consultation process ran from 23rd February to the 30th March 2011.

This document follows the previous Options Consultation Report prepared December 2010 which summaries the previous consultation stages undertaken in 2009 and 2010.

The document has been set out as follows:

- Section 2 of the document provides a **background** to the project and defines the Town Centre Masterplan and Strategy.
- Section 3 provides an **overview** on the general approach to engagement throughout the project as background.
- Section 4 provides details of the '**Statutory Consultation Period**' undertaken from **February to March 2011** on the final draft SPD, feedback received and actions taken in finalising the SPD.
- Section 5 provides a set of **conclusions** which outline how the consultation process has informed the Strategy & Masterplan.

This Statement and the appendices are also a requirement of the Local Development (England) Regulations as part of the 'Regulation 18' Adoption Statement. This means that each of the representations/ summary of questionnaire responses have been addressed with possible changes to the SPD and actions taken from the representations noted. The full schedules are outlined in the Appendices.

2. Background

In March 2009, Central Bedfordshire Council and its key partners, Biggleswade Town Council, Chamber of Trade and Biggleswade Town Plan Steering Group started work on preparing a strategy and masterplan for the future of Biggleswade Town. Consultants Savills and Alan Baxter and Associates have been assisting with the preparation of the work.

The masterplan and town centre strategy has two main objectives:

- To provide a masterplan and strategy which will assist in bringing forward and guiding change within the town centre.
- To be used as part of the statutory planning framework as a Supplementary Planning Document ('SPD').

It is intended that the SPD document will be used by a range of stakeholders who are responsible for bringing forward change within the town centre including Central Bedfordshire Council, Biggleswade Town Council, Landowners, Developers and members of the local community. It can be used in a number of ways to:

- Promote opportunities to invest in the town centre
- Identify physical and environmental issues and solutions.
- Understand land ownership issues.
- Identify and prioritise existing funding for specific projects.
- Explore opportunities for future funding and delivery mechanisms.
- Assess the risk associated with development within the town centre.
- Inform the development of future maintenance and management programmes.
- To guide and support community projects.
- To identify requirements for planning applications.

Throughout the two year preparation process the Council has engaged with a wide range of consultees to inform the drafting of the strategy and masterplan. This has included events and exhibitions as well as the internet and one to one meetings.

The previous Options Consultation Report prepared December 2010 summarises the previous consultation stages undertaken in 2009 and 2010.

3. Engagement

A. Consultees

Throughout the project the Council has engaged with a range of key stakeholders and consultees to ensure that the development of the strategy and masterplan was a collaborative process which was fully informed by the community and other stakeholders.

Biggleswade Community

The local community are well informed and interested in seeing improvements to the town centre. Their local knowledge and background has meant that their engagement has been important to the creation of a strategy and masterplan. The local community has been able to engage throughout the process and most specifically at key milestones in the project such as events/ workshops and exhibitions.

Key stakeholders

Stakeholders are, by definition, individuals or groups who are affected by the strategy and masterplan proposals. Consultation therefore focused on those who have a legitimate interest in engaging in the assessment of a proposal's effects as per the requirements of Annex 2 of the adopted Central Bedfordshire Statement of Community Involvement ('SCI') (which forms part of the Local Development Framework).

Consultation with key stakeholders has included:

- Biggleswade Town Centre Partnership
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- Biggleswade Town Council
- Biggleswade Town Plan Steering Group
- Biggleswade Chamber of Trade
- Police
- Primary Care NHS Trust
- Landowners
- Network Rail/First Capital Connect
- Public transport operators

General

At all stages of the consultation process any organisation or individuals have been able (with some specifically invited) to input. The formal 5 week consultation period which this report relates to was held between February and March 2011.

B. Engagement process

The process of engagement throughout has been based on an ongoing dialogue with the key stakeholders and the community. This has been achieved using a number of techniques including:

Direct meetings

Various meetings with the key stakeholders were held including relevant project updates.

Exhibitions/ events

Three dedicated events were held in the town centre as part of the development of the masterplan and strategy (in Summer 2009, 2010 and February 2011). Feedback was obtained at these events via questionnaires and discussions with the project team.

Website/ Email

A project website and direct email address were available throughout the project allowing residents and members of the public to keep up to date with activities, make comments and suggestions, and also participate in consultation events on-line. This was hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council and accessible through its main website. Links to the website were included in the exhibition material throughout the project.

Direct Street Questionnaires

Undertaken by specialist public opinion canvassers as street questionnaire to gauge general opinion.

4. Regulation 17 Statutory Consultation & Feedback (February – April 2011)

Following the Options Consultation (held during July and August 2010), the final draft Strategy and Masterplan SPD was developed over Autumn/ Winter 2010/2011 with the previous feedback incorporated. The final draft was then published for 'statutory' five week public consultation. As the document is an SPD as part of the LDF this is a consultation stage required by the Local Development (England) Regulations of 2004 as amended in 2008 and 2009.

The statutory consultation incorporated a public exhibition held on Saturday 26 February 2011 from 10am to 4pm. **The five week period ran from 23rd February to 30th March 2011** with details of the consultation widely publicised.

The statutory consultation sought comments from the public, stakeholders and business on:

- The final draft masterplan and proposals as exhibited
- The final draft text of the Strategy and Masterplan SPD

Comments were invited as either:

- formal written representations sent to the Council offices,
- or via the completion of formal questionnaires prepared

A copy of the final questionnaire prepared and the exhibition boards is included in the Appendices.

Written Representations Received

23 representations on different points concerning the Masterplan and Strategy SPD were received.

A full schedule of representations is outlined in the Written Representations summary document split by Organisation. Any individual comments are summarised with the response to the questionnaire comments.

In summary the following principal comments were made:

- In general, strong support for the vision and overall intent of the SPD.
- Further development site opportunity identified at the Royal Mail site on Station Road (by the Royal Mail).
- Requirement to increase the clarity on water infrastructure (capacity and constraint) and surface water drainage requirements associated with new developments (by the Environment Agency/ Anglian Water).
- Opportunities arising associated with the proposed out of town development at London Road Retail Park (by LXB Retail developments).
- Increase the coverage of heritage conservation within the SPD and consider improved crossovers with the Conservation Area Appraisal/ evidence base (by English Heritage).
- Comments on the accuracy of certain aspects of the SPD.
- Possibility of a waste facility on land south of the Railway Station.
- Viability of relocating ALDI questioned and request for an alternative site made (by ALDI)
- Desire to ensure that residents and stakeholders remained involved with the process.

A response to each of these representations is contained with the Written Representations Summary.

Questionnaire Responses

A total of 155 respondents completed the questionnaire. The vast majority of respondents (133) were local residents. One hundred and five responses were from Biggleswade. The majority of respondents were 45 years of age or more, although substantial elements were 30-44 year olds. Limited responses were made from the under 30s.

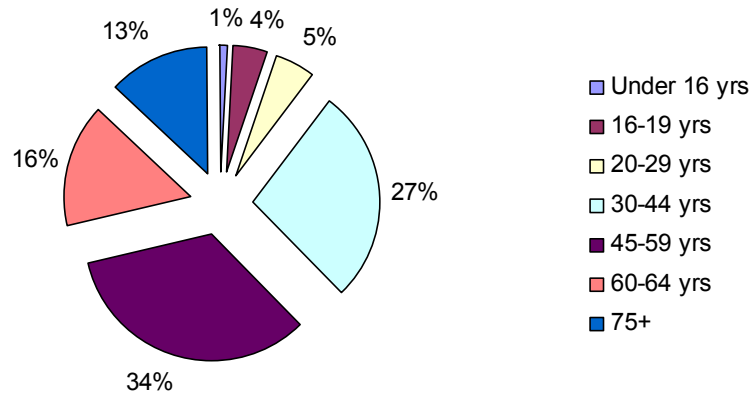
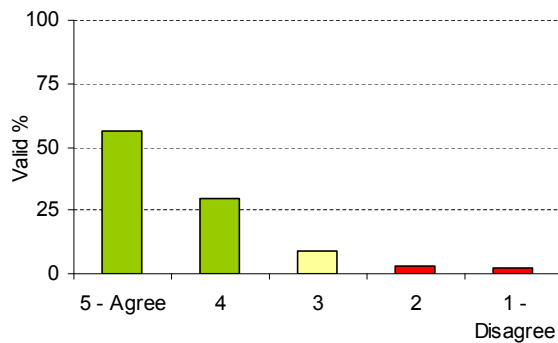


Figure 1. Pie chart profile of respondents to the statutory consultation questionnaire

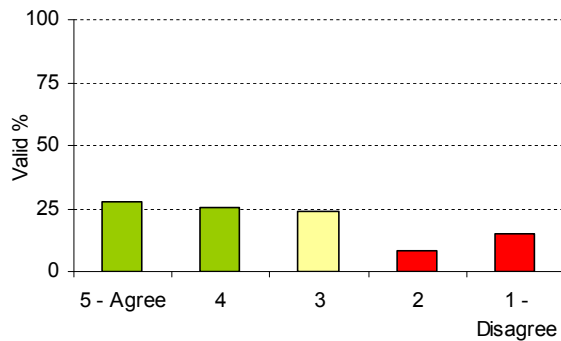
The following general answers were received to each of the eight questions asked. The value 5 represented 'strongly agree' and the value 1 'strongly disagree'.

Q1.a. (VISION) Biggleswade town centre should become a confident, distinctive and sustainable town centre, which should be the destination of choice for everyday shopping and local services for its residents and those of the surrounding villages.



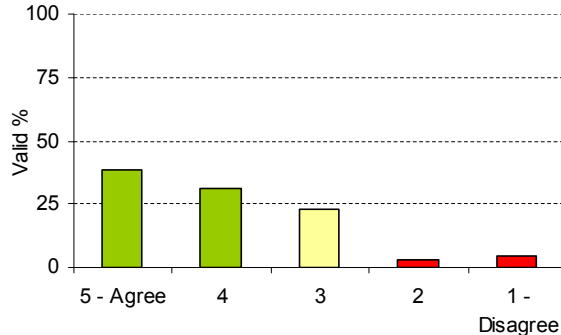
There was strong support for the proposed Vision.

Q2.a. Summary: **(Key Area 1 – Market Square)** A decluttered Market Square with improved retail and leisure offer based on redevelopment of identified sites, alternative uses at Century House and removal of bus loop.



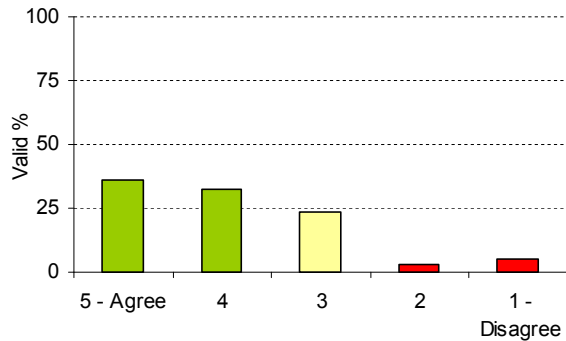
The majority were supportive of the initiatives in Market Square albeit less so than other Key Areas. In analysing the more detailed comments anecdotally it seemed that there was support for the ongoing operation of the Market and also for public realm improvements, but that there was opposition to the removal of any car parking and furthermore the relocation of the bus route/ stop onto the High Street. Some people also expressed concerns about the removal of the bus terminus at Century House, although on analysis of the detailed comments this view was conflicting with wider support for public transport improvements.

Q3.a. Summary: **(Key Area 2 – High Street Junctions)** Improvements should be made to make more of the gateway junctions into the town centre as set out in the Strategy and Masterplan.



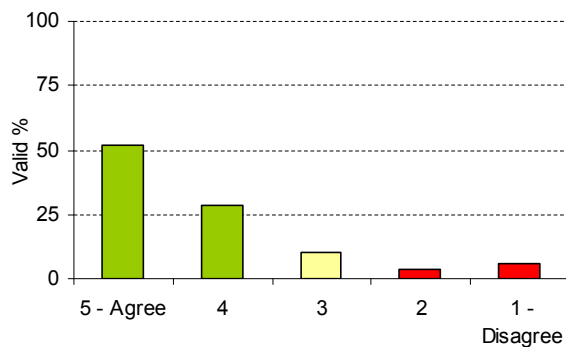
Many people felt that the identified junction improvements were necessary.

Q4.a. Summary: (Key Area 3 - Hitchin Street) The Strategy and Masterplan suggests new mixed use development sites, public realm improvements, and a 'shared space' environment with equal priority for all users.



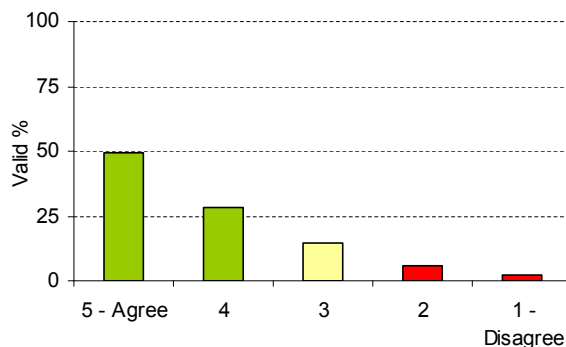
There was broad support for the Hitchin Street proposals.

Q5.a. Summary: (Key Area 4 – Bonds Lane and Foundry Lane) New development in this area should be co-ordinated in a comprehensive fashion. The new development should be based on mixed uses including retail, leisure, parking and new public spaces.



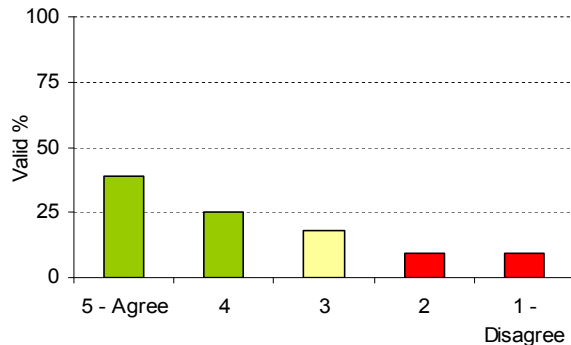
The regeneration and redevelopment of the Bonds Lane area received the most support of all of the Key Areas; this has been a consistent theme through plan preparation.

Q6.a. Summary: (Key Area 5 – Franklin's Recreation Ground) Improvements should include better pedestrian links to the town centre including enhanced lighting and signage



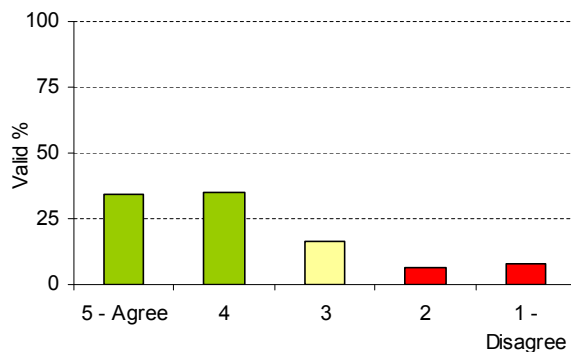
Improvements to access to, and crime prevention measures at Franklin's Recreation Ground were widely supported.

Q7.a. Summary: **(Key Area 6 – Transport Interchange)** should become the Transport Interchange for the town by combining both facilities and access to public transport provision. It should also provide good quality car parking at levels appropriate to demand.



Generally on view of the detailed feedback many people wanted accessibility improved at the station (specifically disabled access), but also for wider public transport. The views supporting the interchange are converse to those expressed still wanting Market Square retained as the bus interchange.

Q8.a. Summary: **(Key Area 7 - Land South of Biggleswade Railway Station)** Where opportunities exist to attract new uses to the town centre which require large footprint buildings, this provision should be directed towards the land south of Biggleswade Rail Station site. The type of uses preferred for this site includes bulky goods, retail, leisure and commercial uses.



Support for redevelopment within the Key Area south of the station was not as strong as other Key Areas but nevertheless supportive, possibly reflecting the peripheral location in the town centre and owing to wider priorities.

Consistent General Comments

Overall it can be seen from the questionnaire responses that there was generally strong support for:

- The overall vision.
- Improvements to key junctions.
- General public realm enhancements, notably the principle of 'shared spaces' widely supported in key town centre locations. Furthermore, better pedestrian links in the town centre, notably via signage and lighting.
- A focus on bringing forward development sites in a co-ordinated and comprehensive fashion notably Bond's Lane/Foundry Lane. Mixed use principles supported on most sites.

- Transport 'hub' to be located at Biggleswade Train Station with bus stop provision retained in the town centre.
- Large footprint buildings to be located on land South of Biggleswade Train Station.

Therefore there was broad support for the Strategy and Masterplan as drafted; this was also reflected in the written representations received.

There were also a number of individual comments received, owing to the number of individual comments (circa 100) and the fact that many covered similar issues these have been summarised and grouped (A-R). These comments included:

- (A) Focus on the economy/ jobs / need for space for an office park.
- (B) More parking required.
- (C) Community facilities such as the Library and Medical Centre should be in the town centre.
- (D) Public Transport improvements to include later running services and also Taxi Ranks.
- (E) Disabled access required at Biggleswade Train Station/ also public realm improvements to assist mobility scooters.
- (F) Waste/ Dog litter bins required.
- (G) Discourage traffic.
- (H) Greater mix of shops required but no more supermarkets.
- (I) Young people activities required i.e. Cinema.
- (J) Why move the bus station? Support for retained bus provision to serve Market Square.
- (K) Opportunity must be taken to improve access via foot and link to the wider strategy and 'Green Wheel'.
- (L) Biggleswade Recreation Centre is to close – it makes no sense relocating facilities into the town centre (if that is what is proposed).
- (M) Why change? Biggleswade should remain a small market town.
- (N) Requests for further clarifications.
- (O) How is this being paid for?
- (P) Need for action now!
- (Q) Pedestrianise Market Square at weekends.
- (R) No traffic calming/ reverse Hitchin Street one way.

A full schedule of these comments with response and change taken forward into the final adopted Strategy and Masterplan SPD is provided in the Grouped Representations. In summarising the comments Central Bedfordshire Council has taken care to ensure each matter raised has been responded to.

Actions taken/ Recommendations

In summary the following recommendations are made to inform the final Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan for adoption as SPD. The full list of proposed changes is outlined in the Accepted Changes Document..

Vision/ Key Sites

The vision and key areas and sites were retained from the draft version of the SPD. A further development site opportunity identified at the Royal Mail site on Station Road results in a proposed amendment to the Masterplan to include this additional site (titled 'Key Site 11'). This results in a change to the Key Site reference numbers for all proceeding sites.

Within Key Area 4 (Bonds Lane/Foundry Lane) general refinements have been made. The reference to 'Anchor' store has been deleted as the term is ambiguous.

Generally updates have been provided regarding 'Key Site' reference numbers and the total floorspace proposed to reflect the final Masterplan.

Local Development Principles

Appendix A to the SPD has been modified to include additional planning principles (Local Development Principles) for new development relating to:

- Water infrastructure and surface water drainage requirements to better reflect existing sewage capacity, sustainable surface water drainage and to reflect national planning policy contained within PPS25 (following representations from the Environment Agency and Anglian Water).
- Heritage principles added alongside design principles (following representations from English Heritage and in order for the plan to read as a whole).
- Planning Obligations (in order for the plan to read as a whole).

General Plan Content

The Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan has been updated to reflect the proposed additional site at the Royal Mail on Station Road.

Various clarifications and updating of sections have been made following public comments during the final statutory consultation and also to reflect the recent adoption of the Site Allocations DPD (April 2011). Paragraph numbering was added for plan clarity and ease of reference.

An update of the position regarding Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) has been provided along with other relevant text added or amended to ensure the SPD reads as a whole and is more useful as a planning document.

It has been clarified within the Transportation Strategy section that it will continue to be important for buses to serve the town centre after implementation of the Interchange at the Station. Furthermore, the key findings of the SPD preparation would influence the forthcoming Central Bedfordshire wide Parking Strategy.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this document is to set out the details and findings of the overall statutory public consultation ('Regulation 17') undertaken for the Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy & Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document ('SPD').

There has been considerable public consultation and engagement throughout all stages of this project. The feedback from the various engagement exercises including the initial Visioning Consultation (July 2009) and Options Consultation (July/August 2010). Public consultation has been pivotal in determining the relevant background and approaches in the development of the Town Centre Strategy & Masterplan and in formulating the final version for adoption.

The Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan has evolved over a period of time and responds positively to the feedback to the community and key stakeholders comments and ideas. In summary the engagement has informed the masterplan in a number of key areas.

Overall

- Biggleswade is already an attractive and well liked place to live, however, the town has the potential to be much more.

Key Sites and Areas

- The station interchange concept is well supported, but a clear strategy for implementation particularly in relation to the management of bus services will be required, and a phased approach may be most effective.
- Redevelopment of retail units within the centre is supported, encouraging greater provision of comparison and leisure based shopping and discouraging further convenience retailing. This could be provided in a number of key areas, most notably in the Bonds Lane and Foundry Lane area. It is clear that the town centre performs a strong retail role already.
- Some landowners have signalled an interest or willingness to consider bringing forward sites for development now included in the Masterplan.

Car Parking, Public Realm, Links and Transport

- Increased parking levels are supported along with better management, particularly of commuters, and the addition of payment for stays over 2 hours. Whilst there is potential for a new town centre decked car park it can only be delivered as part of a larger comprehensive and commercially driven development scheme. There is an overall need to ensure no net loss of parking from the realisation of the strategy.
- Whilst the loss of car parking in the Market Square, in particular outside of the White Hart public house was not supported, there is scope for improvements to the public realm in this area which can accommodate everyday parking requirements and occasional events whilst improving the appearance of the Market Square as a whole.
- Improvement of junctions was supported, in particular the junction between Station Road and High Street. There is general support for reduced speeds, but little overall support for a 20mph limit. Many felt it was not necessary and suggestions included the removal of speed humps and the introduction of interactive signage.
- There is clear support for improvements and improved links to Franklin's Recreation Ground via Hitchin Street and Mill Lane.

- General improvement of the public realm across the town centre is supported, with 'way-finding' and cycle parking popular. It will be important for appropriate materials to be used that complement the historic character of the conservation area.
- Disabled access improvements at the Station were strongly encouraged.

Heritage, Physical and Social Infrastructure

- The heritage features of the town centre and key conservation area requirements should be clearly outlined by the SPD, notably within the Local Development Principles.
- The need to make explicit the high quality urban design/ architecture expectations.
- That there was a need to recognise the sewage infrastructure constraints on Hitchin Street and role of sustainable urban drainage associated with new developments.
- There was significant support throughout the consultation to retain and enhance healthcare facilities in the town centre.
- That opportunities exist from the potential redevelopment of the London Road Retail Park to also enhance the Town Centre, in terms of realising complementary development sites and access improvements.
- Improvements to the public realm on Hitchin Street are well supported in principle, but there is no clear favoured proposal with regards the level of intervention; a phased approach could therefore be pursued. There appears to be limited appetite to change the direction of traffic, though this is supported by the Chamber of Trade which is active in this area, with the majority of respondents indicating anecdotally that they felt public realm changes would be sufficient.
- There are some waste water capacity constraints in the town centre which require consideration at the detailed planning stage.

Community Involvement and Young Persons

- A strong desire for the provision of services and facilities for young people was expressed by a significant proportion of consultees throughout the development process. Opportunities for such provision should be explored further as part of measures to attract investment and ensure the implementation of the Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan.
- Local people should continue to be involved with the implementation.

Delivery

- Action is required to enable the realisation of the vision and ensure co-ordinated and comprehensive development.