

Liskeard Neighbourhood Plan

Community Consultation and Engagement

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Abstract

Liskeard Neighbourhood Plan Team initiated a series of consultation and survey activities between April and October 2014, focusing on awareness raising and community engagement. An on-line survey, developed by the Planning Team, was completed by nearly 600 respondents, either directly or their views expressed elsewhere were then submitted on line by an intermediary. Analysis of the responses to the questionnaire was subsequently undertaken by Lynne Butel of the University of Plymouth, Graduate School of Management. The survey made it clear in the introductory paragraph that the key issues relating to a Neighbourhood Plan were housing, business, shops and leisure. Unsurprisingly these themes recur in the responses to the questionnaire but respondents were also given the opportunity to contribute additional comments on each of the themes and these comments, particularly the linkages identified between the themes are particularly valuable. There was a remarkable degree of agreement on key issues.

At the end of the questionnaire respondents were asked to identify the top four themes which they considered to be most important to include in Liskeard's Neighbourhood Plan. These were 'a place to live', 'a place to meet, to shop and do business', 'a place to work and learn' and finally, 'a place to relax and enjoy'. Nearly three quarters of respondents identified these four themes as most important. However what is of particular interest is the ways in which the respondents develop these core themes and identify approaches to solving some of the issues related to them. These same themes were also identified at meetings with local business leaders, community groups and open access sessions over the same period.

It is clear from the responses that, in general, whilst people acknowledged that there were opportunities and indeed a need to develop Liskeard on several fronts, any developments should not be at the expense of Liskeard's considerable attractiveness, in terms of its current facilities and size, its rich architectural, agricultural and mining heritage, and the proximity to open countryside.

Although housing was widely recognised to be a priority in the Neighbourhood Plan in almost all responses, it was linked to the creation of employment. Respondents do not want Liskeard to become entirely a dormitory town for Plymouth, St Austell and further afield. Employment opportunities were very frequently cited as a necessary precursor to the provision of housing in the town. Children, teenagers and young people were thought to be poorly served by the town not only in terms of employment but also education and training, play areas and the provision of social activities.

Figure 1 Liskeard 2015



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Introduction

This report is based on an analysis of the responses to an on-line and paper-based questionnaire developed by the Liskeard Neighbourhood Planning Team, plus additional material generated by consulting the local community as broadly as possible. The purpose of the survey and related activities was to raise awareness in the community of the importance of the Neighbourhood Planning Project and to identify key areas of interest and concern amongst people from the town and its environs.

Methodology

The Neighbourhood Plan leaflet was delivered to all households in the town and was also available in two town centre cafes, Seasons and Stuart House cafes, Cornwall Council's One-Stop shop at Luxstowe, the Liskerrett Community Centre, the South East Cornwall Area Chamber of Commerce and at the Liskeard Community Network Area meetings. The Town Council's newspaper, Town Crier, highlighted the survey and encouraged participation. The Cornish Times newspaper, based in Liskeard and The Cornish Guardian also carried pieces on the topic. A simple, nineteen question survey was developed by the Town Team using SurveyMonkey which people were encouraged to complete. Paper based versions were also available.

In order to engage as wide a cross section of the population as possible the Neighbourhood Plan Team made a considerable effort to involve all parts of the community. They attended the Mayor's Charity Market, the Mayor's street engagement, an art exhibition held in the Public Hall foyer, old people's accommodation and supported living accommodation at Passmore Edwards, several mother and toddler groups, the junior and secondary schools, the latter involving media studies student regeneration project presentations, the special needs unit at Morley Tamblyn Lodge, and at the edge of town supermarket, Morrisons. They organised a Business Breakfast for managers of local firms and held an engagement day in the town centre's Public Hall. In recognition of the role Liskeard plays as a market town the surrounding villages and the parishes of St Cleer, St Neot, Dobwalls, St Pinnock, and Menheniot were also visited. The Neighbourhood Planning process and the survey was also promoted at the annual Liskeard agricultural show. The local Rotary club, the Liskeard Town

Forum, ethnic minority groups, various church groups (Community, Catholic, Church of England, and Wesleyan churches) were also encouraged with Team presentations and reports. At many such events participants were encouraged to write ideas on Post-it notes and these responses were then added to the survey.

The questionnaire was introduced with a paragraph on the Localism Act, and the Neighbourhood Planning process. It makes it clear that land use, specifically for housing, business, shops and leisure, the protection of green spaces and building and estates design is central to the process. The questionnaire consists of nineteen questions, of which seven simply asked if the respondent thought the following topic should be included in the Neighbourhood Plan. The topics were housing; employment and training; leisure and green spaces; regeneration of the town centre; transport; energy and the environment; design and heritage. The responses to these questions required simple dichotomous yes/no responses. These questions were each followed by the opportunity to comment on each of these six subjects. The responses to these questions yielded very rich data which is analysed below. Respondents were given an opportunity in question fifteen to propose additional topics to be included in the plan. Question sixteen asked respondents to identify the four most important items to be included in the Plan. Finally respondents were asked if they were male or female and to tick an age band.

Dichotomous Questions (yes/no)

Figure 2 Themes that should be included in the survey

Total respondents:

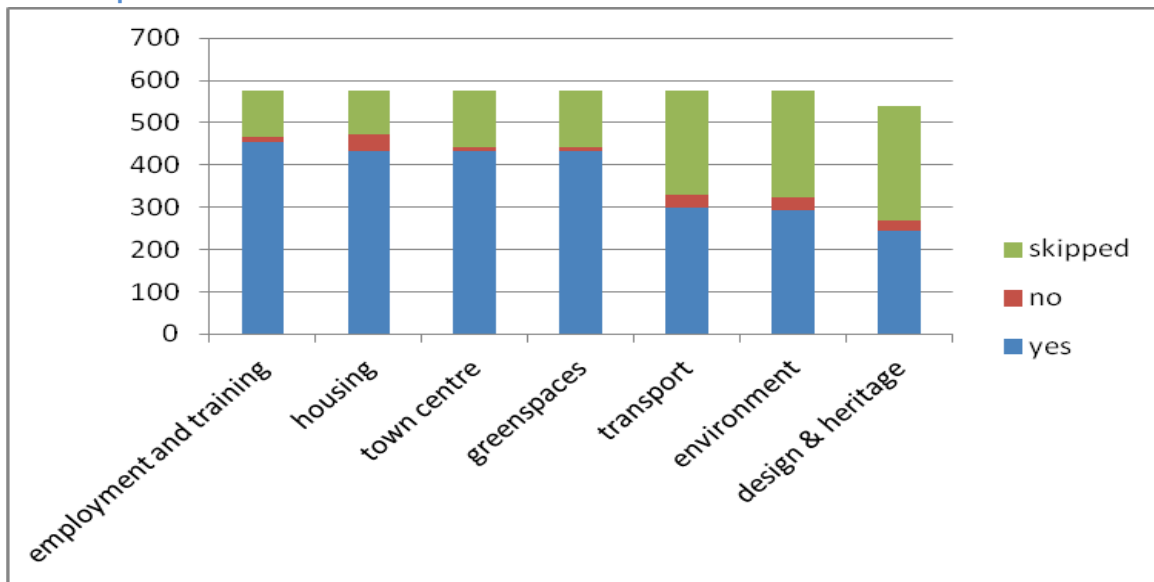


Figure 2 above shows the responses made to the dichotomous questions. These questions required the respondents simply to tick a yes or no box. The response rate to these questions was consistently double the response to the more time consuming 'Do you have any comments about...' questions. This suggests that the responses to these seven questions, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 and 13 are the most accurate reflection of the views of those who completed the questionnaires. As can be seen in the graph above, the results here suggest that the topic that people thought was most important to be included in the Neighbourhood Plan was **Employment and Training** (with 453 yeses), closely followed by both **Housing** (434 Yeses) and **Leisure and Green Spaces** (434 yeses) and then by **Regeneration of the Town Centre** (also with 433 yeses). The response rate to these early questions was high, although the numbers skipping these questions, 1,3,5,7, was already increasing, markedly so in the remaining questions.

It is worth noting that despite the introduction to the questionnaire saying that Housing *must* be included in the Neighbourhood Plan, a significant number, 8% of those who responded to this question, said it should *not* be included, and 104 people skipped the question entirely, despite it being the first in the questionnaire. This was the largest 'no' vote for any theme. It is clear from Figure 2 that the numbers who skipped questions, even these simple questions, yes/no questions, increases very significantly as the questionnaire progresses. However it is also clear that the top three topics, **Employment and Training**, **Leisure and Green Spaces**, and **Regeneration of the Town Centre** received 97-98% support from those who responded to the relevant questions, **Housing** then came next at 92%, **Transport** at 91%, **Energy and the Environment** and also **Design and Heritage** both at 90%. For these dichotomous questions, where the time it took to respond was short, it is reasonable to assume that most people were engaged and responded. If three topics achieved 97-98% and the remaining four clustered around 90-92%, this means that all seven topics were considered to be very important elements of the Neighbourhood Plan by well over 90% of the respondents. It is important to note that the results for later questions are likely to be significantly skewed by a decline in respondent engagement as the questionnaire progressed, as illustrated in green in Figure 2 above.

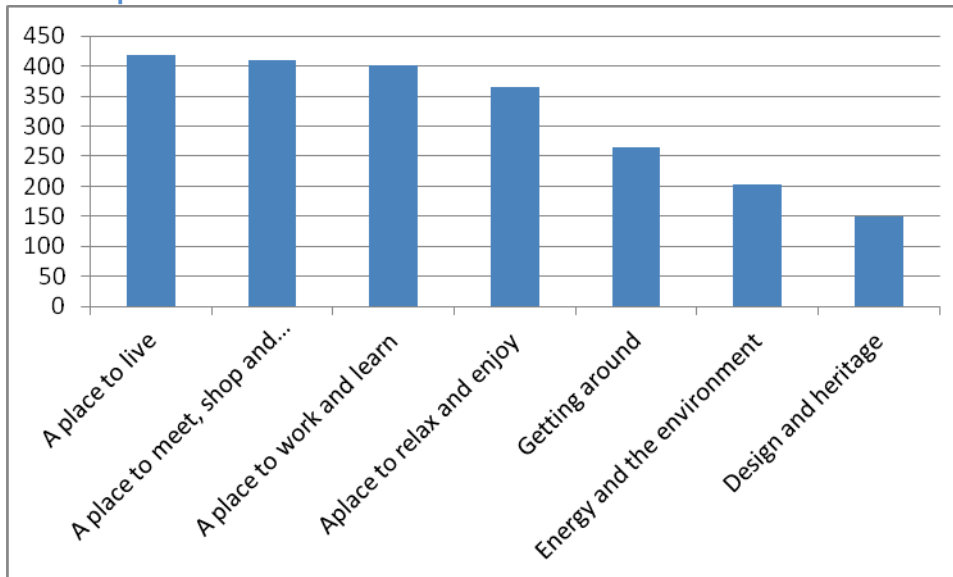
It is worth comparing the findings detailed above with the responses to Question 16 which asked '*Please tick the four headings you think it most important to include in Liskeard's Neighbourhood Plan*'. As Figure 3, below demonstrates the

most chosen topics are the same as in Figure 2, with **Transport, Energy and the Environment** and **Design and Heritage** receiving fewer votes. In this section, **A Place to Live** received the most support, closely followed by **A Place to Meet, Shop and do Business, A Place to Work and Learn** and some way behind **A Place to Relax and Enjoy**.

Figure 3

Top four priorities to be included in Liskeard's Neighbourhood Plan

Total respondents:



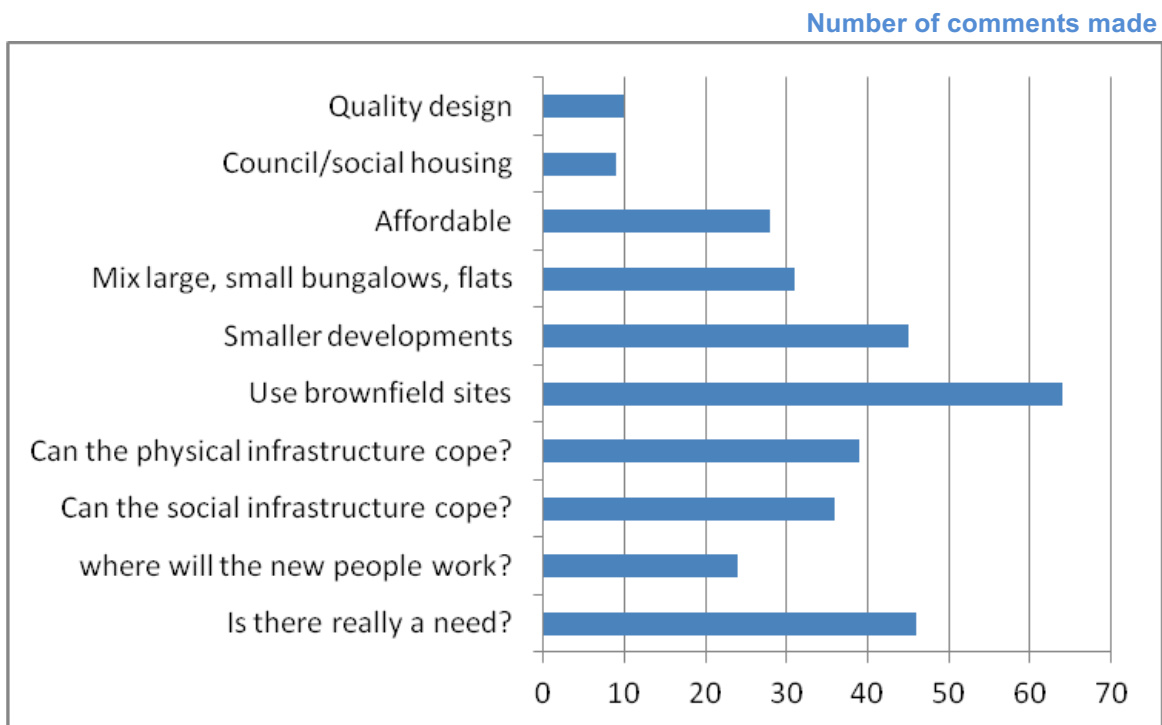
A place to live

260 people responded to Question, 2, which asked respondents if they wish to add comments on key housing issues and the importance of this theme to the Neighbourhood Plan. Whilst acknowledging housing must be part of the Plan, there was considerable agreement that every effort should be made to use brownfield sites, not good agricultural land and that better use should be made of empty housing and commercial property. It was also strongly argued that if houses were required, and many needed convincing of the real demand, it should be built in smaller developments with mixed properties, larger houses, bungalows for older people, starter homes for young singles and families. The term 'affordable' was used by many respondents but this should be treated with some caution as no-one would ever ask for unaffordable housing. However, when accompanied by other terms such as 'social housing', 'starter properties' it

is clear that the respondents meant low cost. There were other respondents who argued that the houses should of a higher build quality than recent new housing in town, and others that homes for professionals and quality homes for an aging population would attract people to the town.

A substantial number of respondents questioned the need for housing. Several respondents pointing out that there are many empty and unsold properties and that house prices were not rising. Concern was also frequently expressed that the social infrastructure (schools, hospital, surgeries,) and physical infrastructure (roads, drains, parks and green spaces) would not be able to support a sizable increase in population. Most significant of all was the point made very frequently by respondents, that without employment Liskeard would become more of a dormitory town for Plymouth, St Austell and beyond or draw in the unwaged from elsewhere. Many suggested that employment was more important that housing.

Figure 4 Most popular Comments on Housing Needs and Priorities



A place to meet, shop and do business

The second most popular category to include in the Neighbourhood Plan was a place to meet, shop and do business. Seventy four percent of those who ranked their top four themes chose this. Whilst acknowledging the importance of the

town for these activities, respondents were less confident about how best to achieve this. One continual theme was the need for cheaper parking to encourage more people to shop in town, either for a quick loaf of bread or for a bigger shop which would be difficult to carry, possibly up-hill to a car park. The steepness of the hills surrounding Fore Street and the associated problems of access, particularly for less mobile people was made by several respondents.

The second most commented on aspect of the town's facilities in this respect was the lack of high street chains, such as Next or Marks and Spencer's, a town centre supermarket such as Sainsbury's or Waitrose, a family restaurant or pub which is family friendly; Weatherspoon's was mentioned by several. A cinema, bowling alley and associated leisure facilities were also popular. The town centre was criticised for having too many charity shops and estate agents. A significant number criticised the opening hours of shops; early closing on Saturday afternoons when many people busy during the week want to shop, some closing Wednesday afternoons and also very little, if anything, open on Bank Holidays, not even a coffee shop. It was argued that a consequence of this was that tourism was also hit by the poor facilities.

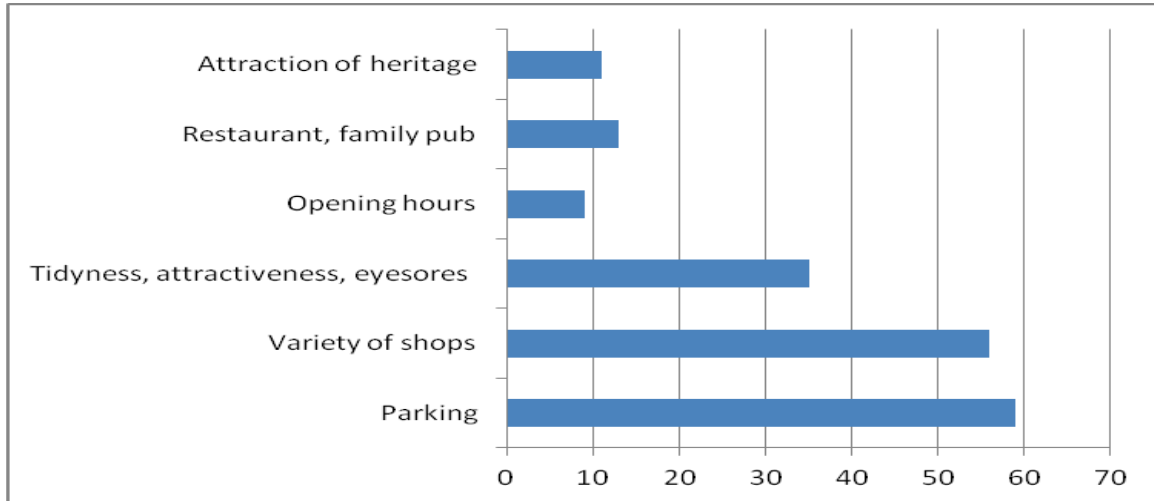
Three eyesores were identified; the old garage site adjoining Stuart House, the old Eurospar/Somerfield site and the cattle market. In addition to these other empty properties made the town look unattractive. Some buildings were in need of maintenance and care. Weeding, litter picking and cleaning, tree planting and better signs were all suggested as ways to improve the attractiveness of the town to locals and tourists alike. Generally people thought that the town had a lot to offer in terms of its attractiveness; its architecture, its heritage and its proximity to open countryside, and many expressed concern that the addition of chain stores would undermine the essential character of the place. More should be made, it was argued, of its good communications both rail and road east and west, south to the coast and north to the moors.

The respondents emphasised that Liskeard is a town for its residents, who know it is an attractive place, but think that with a few small changes in terms of shopping and leisure facilities coupled with improved cleanliness and tidiness could be very special. This would attract tourists, which of course would create more jobs.

Figure 5

Comments relating to Liskeard as a place to meet, shop and do business:

Number of comments made



A place to work and learn

Seventy two percent of those who ranked their top four themes included 'a place to work and learn'. Its rank in third position probably reflects the fact that whilst people may live in Liskeard and its environs and use the town centre shops to a greater or lesser extent, not everyone works in Liskeard, nor are all the Liskeard children educated here. However this was a very widely supported theme, perhaps with more confidently expressed views about its importance than any other category. It was tied to the 'place to live' by a significant majority. The point was made repeatedly, 'jobs first, then houses'. Many respondents considered ways to bring more employment into the town. Accessibility and attractiveness were considered critical. The availability of suitable industrial units of different sizes, business rates and rents, poor access to the A38 from Moorswater and similarly poor links from the A38 to the south of town, were all identified as critical issues.

The limited post-school education and training facilities and a shrinking adult education provision in town was criticised. Two respondents said that basic literacy and numeracy skills training was required, in addition to the higher level skills and entrepreneurial/business training that was suggested by others. Respondents argued that specific sectors should be encouraged to set up in

town, perhaps in the small incubator-style units in converted Victorian villas, currently surplus to Cornwall Council's requirements. The ICT sector, arts and craft businesses were suggested as suitable for small clusters. The expertise of local professional business advisers should be made more widely known and available. The high speed broadband should be publicised. Financial support should be sought from the EU.

A meeting of the leaders of the business community drew out more specific details relating to the concerns of doing business in the town. One critical issue repeatedly raised was the availability, cost and accessibility of good quality industrial units with good transport access. It was suggested that the town needed small starter units and also larger units for successful firms to move to as they grew. Better road links, particularly from the southern end of town to the A38 was identified as important. Business leaders also suggested that the town was not promoted well; Liskeard does not get a mention until 22 miles east of Liskeard on the A38. The signs on the M5 just have 'Plymouth and the West'. The good rail links and high speed broadband should attract businesses to the town. Although the town population is less than 10,000, as a market town Liskeard serves a rural hinterland of up to 30,000 people. Respondents thought that all these things should make Liskeard attractive to businesses.

Figure 6.1 General concerns expressed about Employment and Training

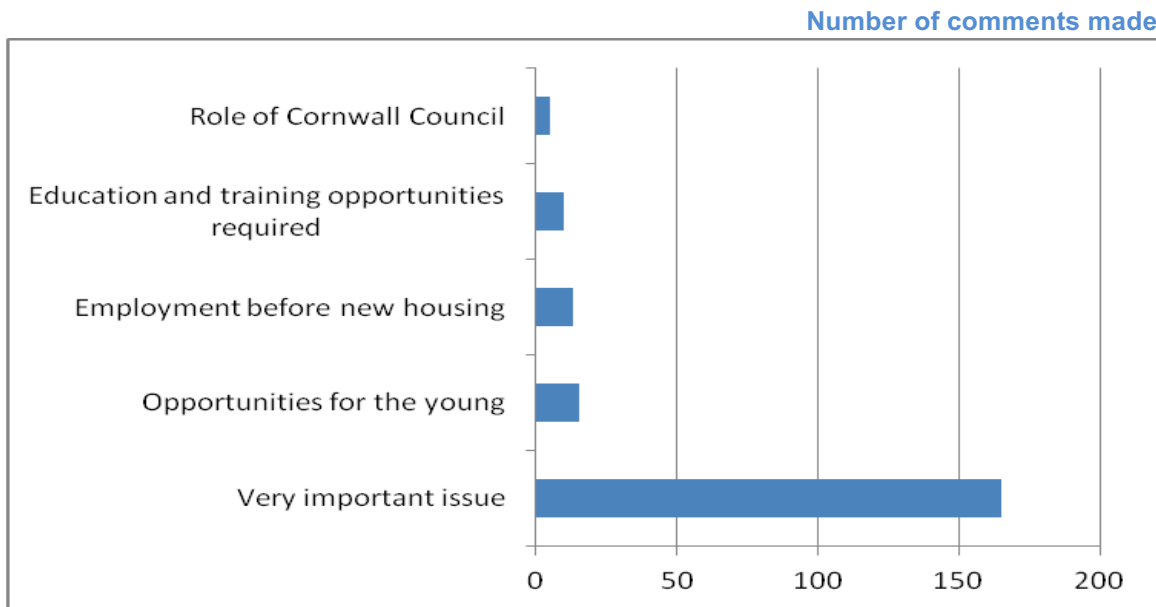


Figure 6.2 Liskeard's Potential

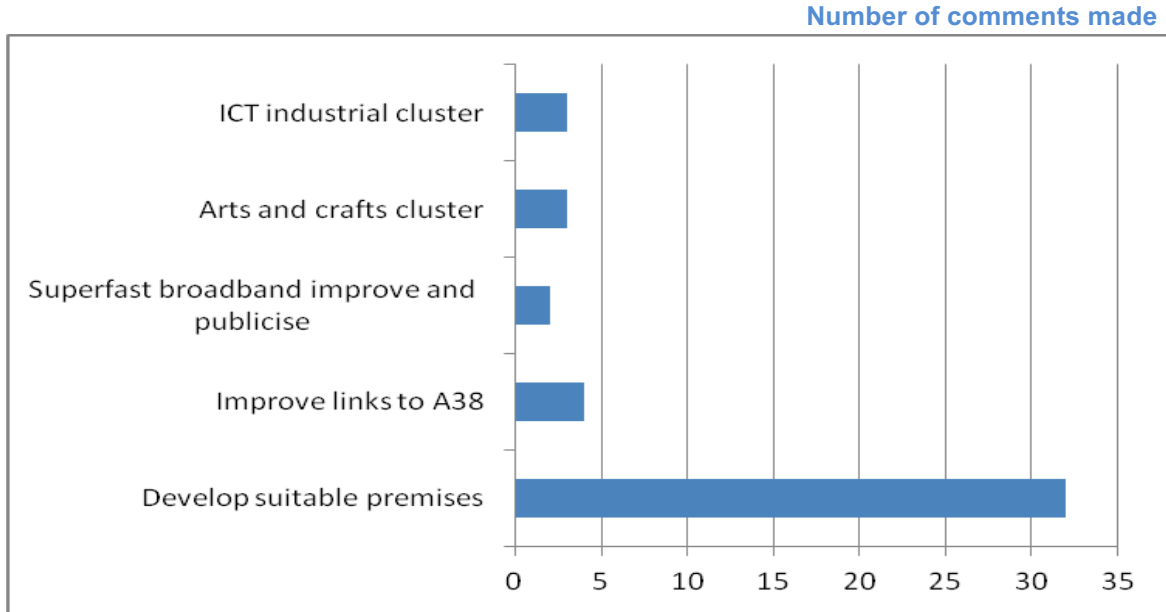
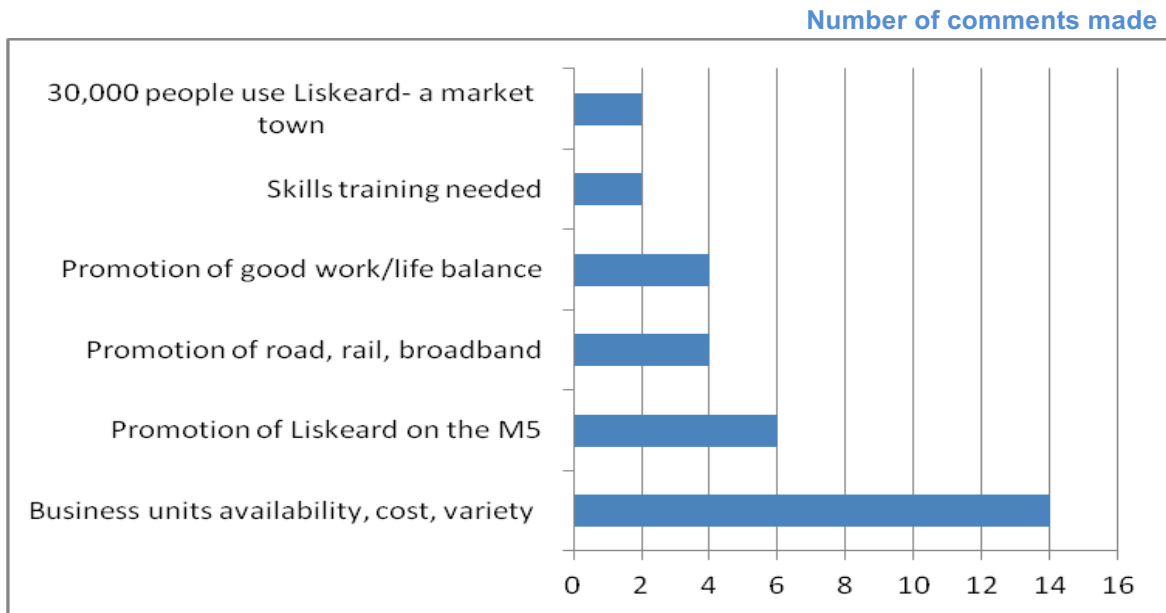


Figure 6.3 Business Leaders Views on Employment and Training issues



A place to relax and enjoy

Two thirds of respondents selected this as one of their top four priorities. There was a considerable consensus that Liskeard has beautiful green spaces in town and that the green environment around the town should be preserved and, if possible, made more accessible and more attractive. Local walks, cycle trails, heritage trails, links to St Cleer, Minions and the moors, to Lanhydrock through the Glyn Valley and down to Looe, there was considerable support for the need to identify ways of developing these existing, widely appreciated resources. This was linked to the housing question, as people wanted to keep the green spaces and agricultural land around the town, to avoid linking up with other settlements and to keep the green parks in the town itself. If housing must be built, respondents said it was important to ensure green spaces were included in the plans and, more importantly, that the developers delivered as promised. This was first and foremost for residents but also it was recognised that the parks and walking, cycling and heritage activities would attract tourists.

Some changes were suggested. The local parks were criticised as having poor facilities for children, and no baby swings. They are considered unsafe by some, as they are in secluded places and some have problems of litter and vandalism. Lux Park Leisure centre was criticised as being too expensive and too geared up to adults, not children and families. Some more substantial developments were proposed, a cinema and bowling alley, an indoor soft play facility, perhaps a family friendly restaurant or pub to ensure Liskeard does not 'die at night' as one respondent claimed. This section in particular was the focus for considerable concern amongst many people of all ages, about the lack of facilities for children and young people. For young and old better security and more affordable activities in the evening were suggested. It was widely recognised that attracting these kinds of investments would be difficult. If there was thought to be a market for these sorts of facilities, the businesses would possibly already be here.

Figure 7.1 Concerns about Leisure and Green Spaces

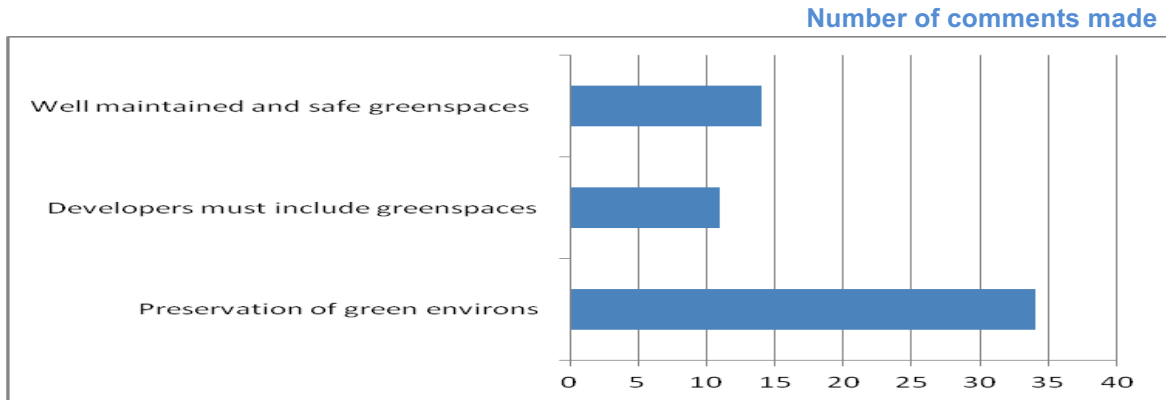
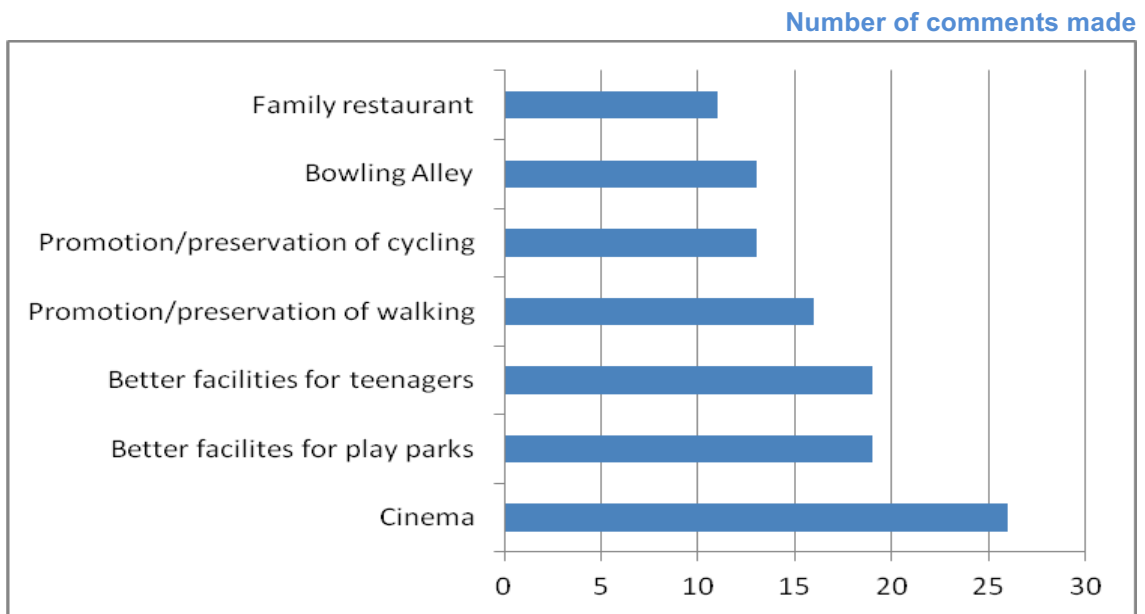


Figure 7.2 Facilities that respondents would like to have:

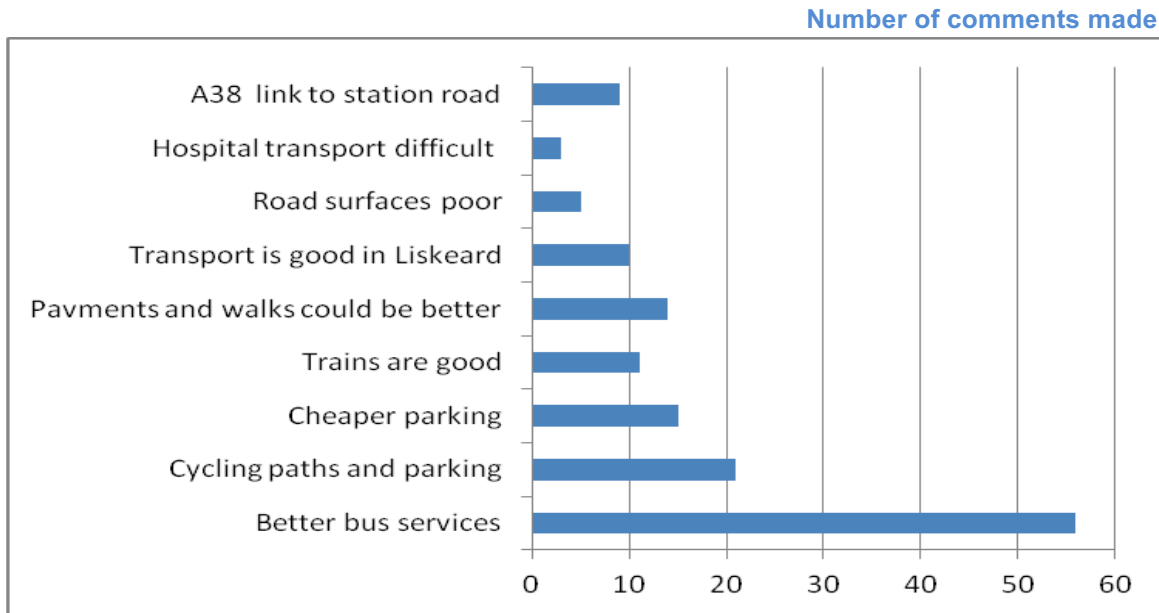


Getting Around

Question 10 asked respondents to comment on how to use the road network more effectively, how to make cycling and walking safer and easier and also asked to comment on public transport. The local bus services received the most criticism with respondents claiming that the services were infrequent, unreliable, and in some cases unavailable, especially in the outlying villages but also on some town estates. The evening and early morning services to Plymouth,

Bodmin and Callington were also criticised. There was considerable support for the provision of better cycling routes and also for bike racks in town. Better safety for cyclists and pedestrians was supported; wider pavements, lower speed limits and one- way roads, were also proposed. The railway was widely supported as a huge asset to the town. Many people did not think that transport was an issue.

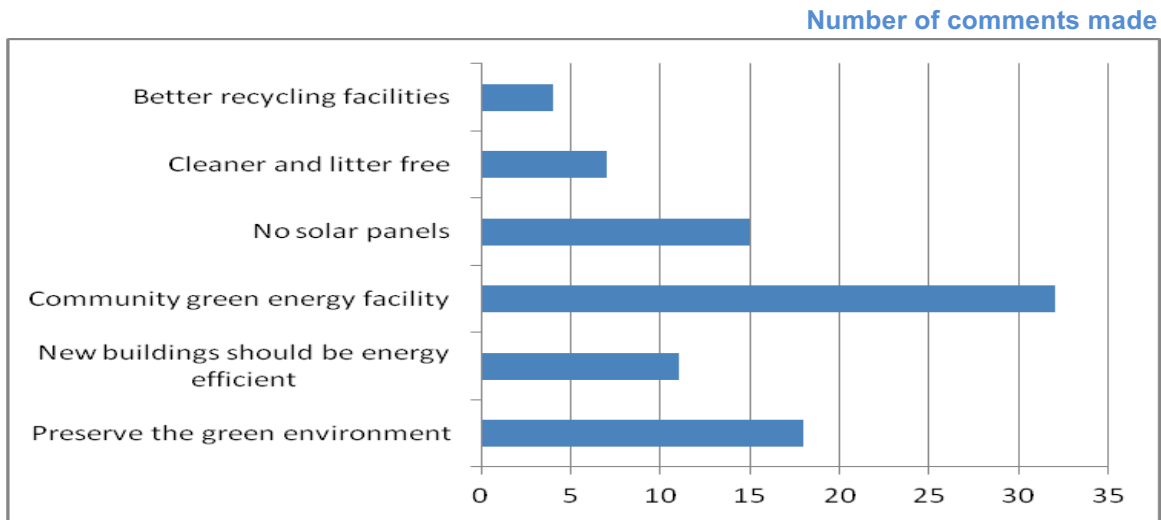
Figure 8 Transport and travel



Energy and the environment

This section received 128 comments to the questions *‘How can we protect our local environment? What role should renewable energy play? Do you have any comments about key environmental issues for Liskeard?’* The respondents were generally in favour of including renewable energy schemes, solar, and wind, in the town plan either as community schemes or individually on all new developments of housing and industrial units. There was also considerable support for maintaining the green spaces in the town and environs but there were fifteen respondents who were against any renewable energy schemes. The other widely supported idea was that the town environment should be cleaner, free of litter and better maintained.

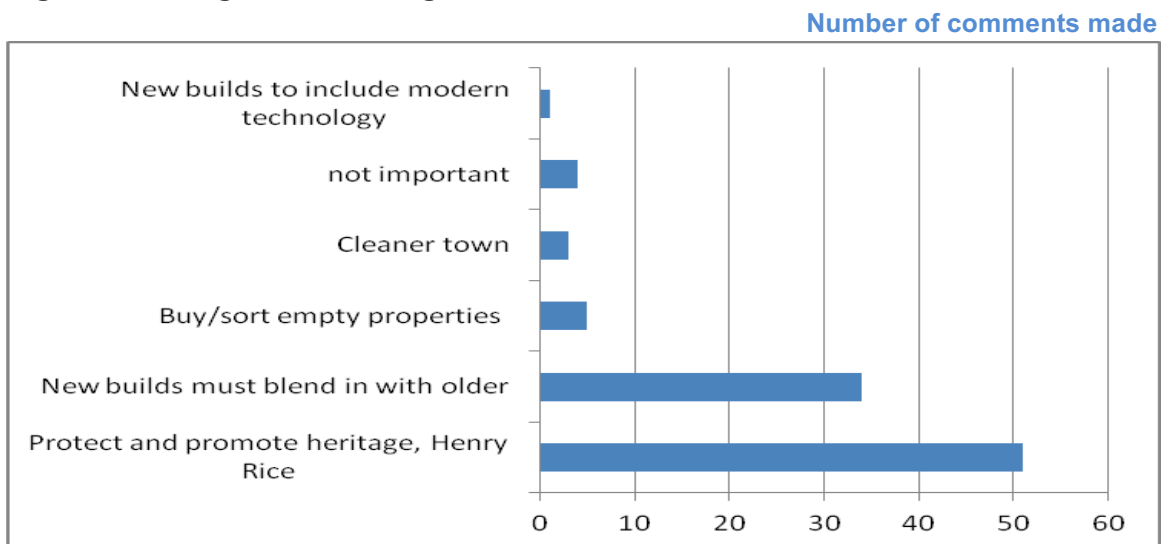
Figure 9 the Environment



Design and heritage

Question 14 asked respondents about the historic buildings in Liskeard and what respondents thought the new buildings should be made of and should look like. Although this question was answered by only 125 people there was a considerable degree of agreement that the rich heritage of the town should be preserved and that the new buildings should blend with the old in scale and materials, using local stone and slate. New buildings should be of a high quality and use energy efficient designs. Respondents also commented that derelict and empty buildings should be subject to improvement orders.

Figure10 Design and Heritage



Details of the respondents

Many respondents did not complete the details of their age and sex. Of those who did, 57% were female and 43% were male. The age distribution is a reasonable match for the local population as shown in Figure 12 below. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the respondents are representative of those residents of the locale who are inclined to complete questionnaires and who feel strongly about the issues raised.

Figure 11 Respondents' sex, when given

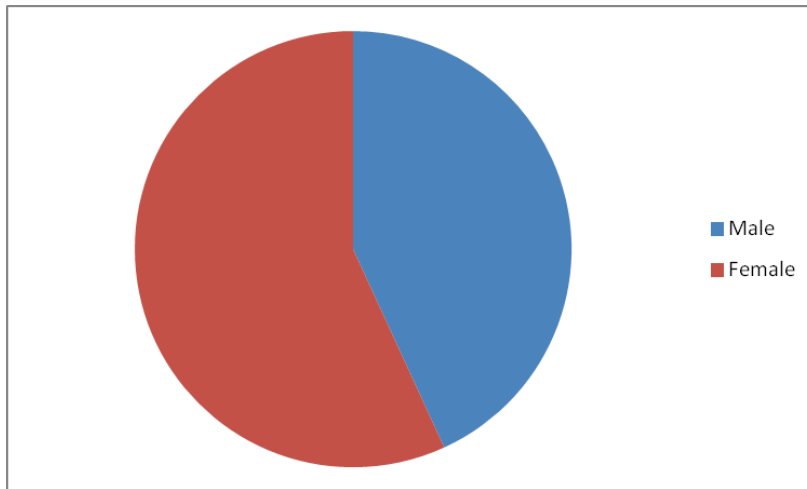
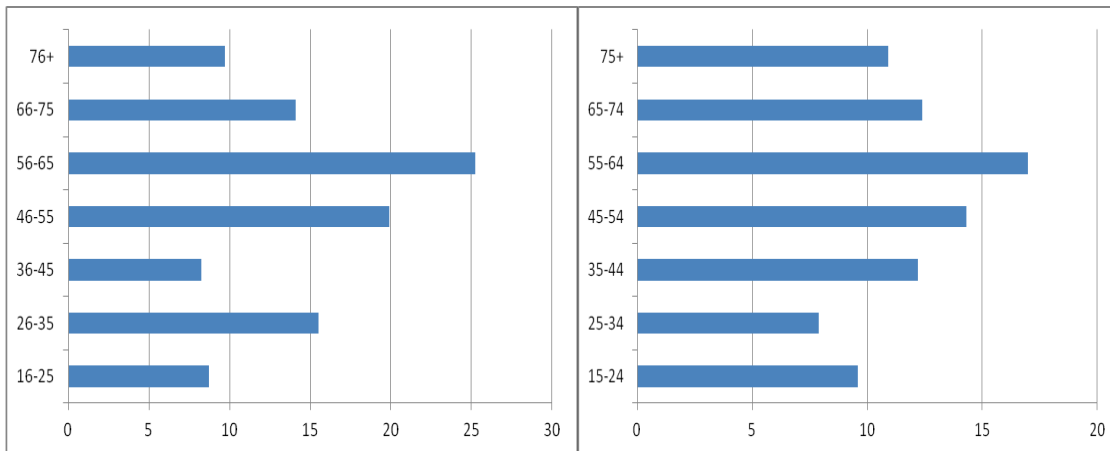


Figure 12 Ages of respondents, when given, compared with census data.



Ages of respondents, when given

2011 Census data

Conclusion

There is a remarkable degree of agreement in the responses from the nearly six hundred people who completed the questionnaires and also a general acknowledgment that the issues are complex, inter-related and therefore difficult to consider in isolation. Whilst four themes **Employment and Training, Leisure and Green Spaces, Regeneration of the Town Centre** followed by **Housing** received the most 'yes' votes and were identified as the top four themes that should be included in the Neighbourhood Plan, the three other themes, **Transport, Energy and the Environment** and **Design and Heritage** all received the support of over 90% of the respondents. It is clear from the responses that the themes were seen by most respondents to be related. Respondents consistently argue that the Neighbourhood Plan should be an opportunity to improve the town, building upon its current strengths and making good any weaknesses.

The theme people felt most strongly about was probably Employment and Training, with ideas on the subject coming through under **Housing, Town Centre Regeneration** as well as **Employment and Training**. However whilst people acknowledged its importance they were less sure how to create and maintain jobs. The role of Liskeard as a market town serving a hinterland of farms and villages is changing. Respondents were clear that the range of social and leisure activities offered by Liskeard, included as elements in **A place to Meet, Shop...**, **A Place to Relax and Enjoy, A Place to Live, Design and Heritage** and **Energy and the Environment** were very important to them. Respondents were clearer here about what was good (heritage, greenspaces, walks), what could be improved quickly (litter, baby swings, cycle paths) and what they would really like (cinema, family friendly restaurant). Respondents were very clear that the requirement to build more houses should not be done at the expense of all the core strengths Liskeard currently has.

Recommendations

Any planning process generally starts with an appraisal of current strengths, weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats presented by future scenarios. The respondents to the questionnaire have identified what they consider to be Liskeard's strengths and weaknesses. It is clear that the requirement to build more houses in the town is seen by the overwhelming majority to be a threat to the town, a threat to the social and physical infrastructure provision; from schools and doctors to drains and roads. Respondents have identified what they consider they will lose if, for example, too many green spaces are built upon.

The respondents see the town primarily as a focus for social and leisure activities. They would also like there to be more work, for themselves and for their friends and relatives. This is a tacit acknowledgment that the traditional role of the market town, where people worked and lived, and which also served as a social and commercial hub for the farms and villages in its hinterland, is no longer applicable. There is also a very strong belief that Liskeard still has a role to play beyond being a dormitory town. Therefore it is important that the key strengths of the town are identified and secured for the future.

There are studies of market towns and other towns of similar sizes, which could be used to inform the next stage of the process. The evidence of the questionnaire suggest that whilst people may shop on-line and work, for example, in Plymouth; many respondents still want Liskeard to be a social hub. In fact they would like there to be more social and leisure opportunities locally. Many would also prefer to work locally, Respondents to the questionnaire are saying, quite consistently, housing if we must, but not at the expense of all Liskeard currently offers. New buildings should be of a high quality, similar to the better properties in town, infrastructure and greens spaces should be included in the plans. Respondents are very concerned about employment but do not know how to attract jobs and, most significantly, they see Liskeard as a social and leisure hub for the old market town and its hinterland, but would like the facilities to be a lot better.