

Chapter 3. Issues and Proposals raised by People in the Local Community

Introduction

The Neighbourhood Planning Group sent out a questionnaire in April 2015 to all parishioners asking them to consider what they thought was important about their parish, features they valued, aspects they didn't like, and changes they would like to see. Parishioners were also consulted on additional points at two well attended annual events, the Bridestowe Ram Roasts, and at numerous other consultation events in both parishes over the period from August 2014 to Summer 2017.

Monthly open meetings were held, alternating venues between the two parishes. As noted in Chapter One, 48 households, including more than 10% of the total population of the two parishes have been closely involved in providing feedback via email or in person at every stage of the plan's development.

More detailed information on the extensive evidence base, including reports on the Parishes' consultations can be found in in Appendix I and via Bridestowe's and Sourton's websites.

This section of the Plan looks at the results of that consultation, highlighting the issues raised and the proposals that were put forward, as well as highlighting issues raised by other consultations and research.

The issues considered in this chapter relate to future land use and are therefore directly relevant to the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). Other issues identified that do not fit into this category such as new recreational facilities for older children, traffic calming measures, and establishing a green off-road cycle/walking route between the 2 communities are dealt with by both parish councils jointly. See Appendix VIII (Community Aspirations).

The April 2015 Questionnaire (see Appendix III for details)

A total of 178 questionnaires were completed out of approximately 475 questionnaires distributed; people chose to respond either on line or by completing the paper questionnaires. This gives an approximate 38% return overall.

Despite the length of the questionnaire - 42 questions in the main section and another 26 in the supplementary sections - most people completed the whole questionnaire, and few people omitted any significant parts.

Most questionnaires included information about all members of the household and the households from which completed questionnaires were received included a total of 397 people; this is 40% of the total population of the parishes of Bridestowe and Sourton (Total population 996 in the 2011 census).

A detailed report of the consultation process and the results of the April 2015 questionnaire and the May 2016 Housing needs assessment are given in Appendix III and Appendix IV respectively.

Summary of key issues raised in the consultation processes.

Housing	More high-quality affordable homes required to meet local need More housing for younger and older people Small pockets of developments rather than one large site
Employment	More employment opportunities to boost local economy Utilisation of brownfield sites for new businesses Need for improved broadband speeds
Traffic and Transport	Inevitable increase in village traffic with development Insufficient car parking Speeding traffic endangering pedestrians
Young people and Recreation	Poor recreational facilities specifically for over 12s Lack of facilities for physical activities
Environment and Amenities	Threat to valued landscape from development Ensuring appropriately scaled renewable energy installations Need to protect existing amenities

3.1. HOUSING

3.1.1 Background.

West Devon Borough Council (WDBC) in its emerging draft strategic core-planning document (prepared jointly with Plymouth City Council and South Hams District Council) has allocated a figure of 30 additional homes to be built in Bridestowe for the period 2014 – 2034.

Whilst this Plan has not yet been adopted, it contains the most recent comprehensive assessment of the likely future housing needs for the Local Authority area, and the local parishes of Bridestowe and Sourton. We have therefore used this assessment as indicative of the likely need for new housing in the two parishes over the period covered by this Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Sourton has been assessed by the Local Authority as a community that is unsuitable for sustainable housing development as it has no shop or school within the main settlement. Although the Joint Local Plan has not allocated any required new housing in Sourton, this still leaves it vulnerable to development should land be put forward.

The WDBC Sub-Regional Housing Market and Needs Assessment (HMNA) carried out in 2006, highlighted the need for more affordable homes and a growing gap between the need for, and the current provision of, appropriate housing, including both affordable housing and market price housing for elderly and disabled residents in West Devon.

As noted in Chapter 1, and shown in Table 3.1 below, the 2011 Census showed that the proportion of the population in the two parishes aged over 65 is significantly higher than the national average, whilst the proportion between 15 and 29, and the proportion under 16 are both significantly lower than the

national average.

Table 3.1. Age of population

[2011 Census]

	Bridestowe	Sourton	National average
Under 16	93 (16.1%)	61 (14.7 %)	18.9%
Over 65	156 (27.1%)	129 (31.2%)	18%

This is in line with the local perception of an ageing population caused by increased life expectancy, and people retiring to the area, with younger potential residents being priced out of the property market. These demographic pressures are factors contributing to the increasing need for both low cost high quality affordable housing and the need for housing suitable for older residents seeking to downsize but remain within the community.

There is a significant issue of out-migration among young people in the area, particularly school leavers, with 3 times more 15-19-year-old people leaving the area than coming in. The retired population of West Devon is projected to rise by 56% by 2026. (The Great Dartmoor Leaf 2015 -2020).

In 2006 an Employment Land Review identified that West Devon has a high proportion of relatively low paid employment opportunities. (WDBC Strategic Plan 2011)

This is confirmed in more recent (2016) data from the Office for National Statistics:

<u>Average Gross weekly pay</u>	<u>West Devon</u>	<u>Great Britain</u>
Full time workers	£431.8	£540.2

(Source: ONS annual survey 2016)

There are also notable differences between average annual earnings of residents in employment and workplace earnings, suggesting that those with higher qualifications and earning power are commuting out to work, while those commuting into West Devon to work are in lower paid employment. (CPRE Report Rural Connections 2015)

The discrepancy between local incomes and the high cost of housing is detailed in Chapter 1. The affordability gap is such that in 2016 the average home in West Devon cost 9.7 times the average income in West Devon, having risen from 5.6 times average income in 2000.

(<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths>)

Many of the older residents although of retirement age still work, many in agriculture, making the profile of the local economy slightly different from national statistics.

The work of the Sub-Regional Housing Market and Needs Assessment also showed that in West Devon about 87% of newly forming households are looking to occupy one or two bedroomed units. However, within the Borough only 34% of current stock is of one or two bedrooms. (WDBC Strategic Plan 2011) These figures, together with the results of our housing needs assessment indicate that there is a need for smaller housing including both affordable homes and market price homes rather than larger homes.

Table 3.2. Distribution of sizes of housing stock compared to national average:

[2011 Census]	<u>Bridestowe</u>	<u>Sourton</u>	<u>National average</u>
Houses with 1-2 bedrooms	34.2%	26.1%	39.6%
Houses with 4 or more bedrooms	30.8%	27.8%	18.9%

3.1.2 Bridestowe and Sourton Housing Needs Survey

To obtain accurate, up to date data a Housing Need Survey (HNS) was carried out in April 2016 with funding from the National Lottery. (See Appendix IV for detailed report).

All households in Bridestowe and Sourton were canvassed.

Detailed and accurate information on existing housing stock was obtained together with a clearer understanding of what type of housing was needed to meet the present and future needs of the local population.

The survey identified a current need for a minimum of 12 units of affordable housing, with 1-3 bedrooms, in the two parishes, together with a need for at least 9 market price smaller homes for residents seeking to downsize within the locality.

There is also a need for homes with level access that would suit young families, the elderly and those with disabilities. People with disabilities require wide, level access within the home.

Although the response rate to the questionnaire was higher than in most similar recent surveys, the actual level of housing needs identified in this survey must be considered to be a bare minimum requirement.

3.1.3 Where should new homes be sited in Bridestowe and Sourton?

The questionnaire sent to all Bridestowe and Sourton households in 2015 showed that generally the community supports an increase in the housing stock. Development within the settlement boundaries was the preferred location (50% of respondents), rather than outside the village or in the outlying hamlets, and a significant minority (25%) favoured conversion of existing agricultural buildings. Despite

this preference Bridestowe has no infill sites that will accommodate more than 1 or 2 houses.

Several specific sites for possible development, which had been put forward by the landowners were set out in the questionnaire and residents were asked their opinions on them – (5 sites in Bridestowe and 1 in Sourton).

It should be noted that all the sites put forward for Bridestowe fall outside the settlement boundary but are adjacent to it. These sites must be considered as 'Exception Sites'; the NPPF states these sites must be used for affordable housing in perpetuity where normally housing would not be permitted.

The sites in Bridestowe put forward are shown in Appendix III of this report, and are:

1. Town Farm; Adjacent to Town Meadow
2. On the northeast side of Pool Hill
3. On the south side of Pig's Leg lane/Rectory Road
4. Between Bridestowe Cemetery and Hunter's Moon
5. North side of Pig's Leg lane/Rectory Rd (Proposed housing for the elderly, adjacent to Springfield Residential Home)

One site was proposed in Sourton, northwest of the A386 near the Highwayman Inn as shown in Appendix III (this site has now been granted planning consent).

The responses revealed a considerable variation in opinion as to which site or sites would be appropriate options; the proposed site between the cemetery and Hunter's Moon received the greatest number of most positive responses and the lowest proportion of objections.

At a later event, the Ram Roast, parishioners were asked if certain conditions could make any of the sites more acceptable. There was broad agreement that if the possible new development at Town Farm was provided with its main vehicular access from the old A30 this could help alleviate traffic problems through Bridestowe Village.

There has been a long history of concern about sewerage provision for the previous new developments of housing in the village and concern was expressed by many people that further development would overload an already struggling system.

The development on Pool Hill would be considered more favourably if the development was landscaped into the hill to minimise it towering over that part of the village.

Asked if there were other specific sites in either parish that would be suitable for new housing developments, land adjacent to (on the North side of) Launceston Road was suggested by several people. To date this site has not formally been proposed as a possible site for development by the landowner.

There was a clear preference for several smaller developments rather than a single large new housing development.

This was confirmed by the findings of the Housing Needs Survey (HNS)- 91% of respondents favoured small pockets of development (i.e. developments of 10 or fewer homes).

3.1.4 Size and type of new Housing in Bridestowe and Sourton.

56% of respondents to the extensive 2015 questionnaire thought it was important that some of the new housing in the villages should be low cost/affordable housing to rent and many emphasised how important it was that local residents particularly young people should be given preference in allocating such homes.

The findings of the Housing Needs Survey in 2016 revealed that a total of 12 households in the two parishes were identified as being in current housing need, (9 in Bridestowe and 3 in Sourton), 11 of which will need a 1- or 2- bedroom home and one will need a 3- bedroom home. Of these 9 will need affordable rented accommodation, whilst 3 could afford shared ownership. Because of mobility needs three will require level access. A further 9 households of older residents expressed the wish for smaller market price accommodation to allow them to downsize within the locality.

3.1.5 Style of new housing in Bridestowe and Sourton

When asked, which features of new homes were particularly important, low energy design, traditional and local style, green space and off-road parking, were all rated as being particularly important, whilst almost half of the respondents gave contemporary (21st century) style the lowest possible score.

Key issue that are important to local people:

- Need for developments of smaller (1-3 bedrooms) and affordable homes in preference to larger or more expensive homes.
- Development should preferably be within the settlement boundary if possible.
- Support small pockets of development rather than large developments.
- Support conversion of agricultural buildings where these are amongst other farm buildings.
- Consider suggested sites in the Plan in the light of resident's opinions, especially giving weight to suggestions on how to reduce any negative aspects.
- Support developments that take account of residents' opinions as expressed in this Plan, with particular weight being given to approaches to minimise the identified negative aspects of each of the proposed sites for development.
- Include statements on the importance of good design, sensitive to the character of the communities
- Support the use of sustainable drainage systems to reduce the potential impact of new and existing developments with respect to surface water drainage discharges.

The policies in this plan will seek to address these issues.

3. 2 EMPLOYMENT

Historically, in this rural area, agriculture has made an important contribution to the local economy of West Devon for centuries; it has played a major role in shaping and maintaining the Borough's

landscape character. (JLP Strategy 2013-34 page226).

Although agriculture provides only about 7.5% of total employment, this figure is still above the national average, and, as noted in Chapter 1 many other residents are dependent on agriculture-related employment (e.g. equipment supply and maintenance, retail and tourism).

Tourism is an important part of West Devon's economy and within the two parishes there is a wide variety of holiday accommodation on offer from hotels, bed & breakfast, bunk barns, self-catering cottages and camping and caravan parks. Visitors swell the numbers using existing facilities, shops, pubs, garages and make use of bike hire facilities to explore the Granite Way, an increasingly popular Sustrans route. Tourism not only contributes to the local economy but provides employment.

An ageing population brings with it a need for residential accommodation and community care services.

Springfields is a well-established residential home within Bridestowe with extra care bungalow accommodation; many of its employees are drawn from the local area, where it is one of the most important employers. Residential and nursing homes in Okehampton also provide local employment opportunities.

There are many small businesses and trades that serve the local communities, such as electricians, builders, providers of financial services, chiropodists, mobile hairdressers etc.

One of WDBC's overarching Core Strategy objectives is to *"Sustain an active and working countryside, acknowledging the importance of agriculture, tourism and small rural businesses "* (WDBC Core Strategic Plan 2011 SO9).

This is further emphasised in the draft JLP where there is emphasis on encouraging diversification. *"Supporting rural entrepreneurial culture and setting aside land to support start up survival rates will help build resilience in the rural economy"*

Rates of employment are close to the national average: in the 2011 Census 72.6% of people of working age in Sourton and 73.2% in Bridestowe were described as economically active compared to the UK average 76.7%. As noted in Chapter 1, this figure is distorted by the relatively large number of family farms in the parishes, to which many family members contribute although they may not be formally identified as economically active.

From the 2011 Census 5.5% of working age residents were reported to be receiving 'out of work' Benefits (National Average 8.4%).

Many people work from home (see Appendix III).

Whilst no specific sites for business development have been put forward by the landowners for formal consideration at the time of preparation of this Plan, two possible sites have been identified with the landowners' permission: these are the site of the Second World War military encampment in Leawood Estate, to the East of Station Road, just North of Bridestowe village, and old farm buildings on Standon Farm, to the West of Station Road, to the North of Bridestowe village. For both possible sites it would be important for access by heavy goods vehicles to be primarily from the A386 rather than through the village, but both would be potentially acceptable sites for such development.

3.2.1 Location of new businesses, their size and factors inhibiting local business development.

Almost 60% of respondents to the Bridestowe and Sourton questionnaire thought that encouraging new business to the parishes was quite or very important. New housing without access to new job opportunities could lead to the two parishes becoming “dormitory” settlements with the occupants all commuting outside for work, leaving the villages empty and soulless. The great majority of respondents (78%) favoured siting new businesses on already developed sites within settlement boundaries if possible, whilst 15% of respondents preferred development on farmsteads. No respondents suggested encouraging a large enterprise to locate to the area.

Local residents showed great appreciation of existing small businesses and trades and a desire to see them flourish.

Factors adversely affecting local businesses include business rates (noted by 19%), lack of suitable premises (25%), lack of skilled labour (25%) and poor broadband connection (50%).

Of the 149 respondents who reported using broadband internet, 42% found it be poor or variable, with many respondents reporting extreme slowing of their internet connections during the early evenings and at weekends, whilst many drew attention to the wide discrepancy in service depending on how far they were from the main villages.

Although the Broadband service has improved since April 2015 with the provision of fibre optic connections to the main cabinet in Bridestowe village this has not resulted in a measurable improvement in service for residents living more than a mile or so from the cabinet.

Whilst there is a current programme to provide wide area high speed Wi-Fi internet connection to areas outside the reach of the fibre optic network the precise specifications, geographical provision and accessibility of this proposed new service is not yet clear for residents of the two parishes.

For 80% of residents who use the Internet for business purposes a fast connection was reported as being important or very important, particularly for those who worked from home.

Factors that might support or facilitate local businesses included faster broadband (mentioned by 82%) better public transport (mentioned by 41%), and business accommodation units to lease (mentioned by 22%).

On a positive note, almost half of those completing this section (47%) stated that they would or might be able to offer work experience or apprenticeships to local young people in the future. The questionnaire included a section specifically to canvass the views of those running or considering starting a business.

A total of 36 respondents completed this section, including 31 who currently run a business here and 5 who are thinking of expanding relocating or starting a business here. These included 9 farm-based businesses, 2 based in business premises and 28 who conduct at least part of their business from home.

Most are quite small, with 12 employing 1-3 people, 3 employing 4-10 people, and 2 employing more

than 10 people.

Key issues that are important to local people:

- Support sustainable growth and expansion of appropriate, new small businesses as well as existing ones
- Support new business units in appropriate local locations through conversion of existing buildings or discreet well-designed new buildings
- Promote the retention and development of local facilities, such as shops, pubs, etc.
- Encourage improvements in broadband connection, including the provision of transmission facilities for high speed Wi-Fi or mobile phone-network-based broadband where this can be achieved without significant negative visual impact.

3.3 TRANSPORT AND TRAFFIC

West Devon is a rural, sparsely populated area and there is heavy reliance on the car to access essential services and facilities. Both parishes have seen the reduction of public transport services. WDBC, in its strategic core plan (2006-2026), recognises that public transport is not accessible to everyone and that certain rural areas run the risk of isolation despite larger villages having a bus service.

The relative lack of public transport in the two parishes and the concomitant increased dependency on cars leads to an increased need for car parking within any proposed new housing development (see below).

The Draft Joint Local Plan notes an intention to promote flexible car use through park and ride facilities, car sharing and car clubs and to promote good quality, accessible and safe footpaths and cycle routes.

The Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2006-2026) states:

'Development should be located so as to reduce the need to travel and to optimise the potential for the most sustainable forms of travel having regard to the following hierarchy:

- 1. Walking*
- 2. Cycling*
- 3. Public transport*
- 4. Private vehicles.'*

3.3.1 Possible railway developments. (see also Appendix VII).

The draft Joint Local Plan sets out an intention to reinstate the railway from Bere Alston to Tavistock, to reduce congestion on the A386 into Plymouth. This is reinforced in the South West of Tavistock Masterplan with funding for the railway and associated infrastructure to come in part from proposed development. This proposal is supported by both Devon County and Plymouth City councils in their respective transport plans. Depending on funding, it is possible that Tavistock station could be open from 2022.

The East of Okehampton masterplan seeks to safeguard the ability to provide a shelter, platform and car park as an alternative point to access rail services, as part of proposed development. This sits within aspirations to reinstate daily passenger services between Okehampton and Exeter (*Facilitating Economic Growth in South Hams and West Devon -JOHT Resources Ltd, May 2014*).

This leaves a relatively small gap in the rail line, between Meldon and Tavistock. Re-establishing a second main line from Exeter to Plymouth has been explored and benefits to the local and regional economy are clear. The 2015 report commissioned by the Campaign for Protection of Rural England (CPRE) *Rural Reconnections; The social benefits of rail reopening**, highlighted the increased likelihood of local housing development; the reinstatement would transform the locality into a commuter belt for Exeter and Plymouth. The proposal for reinstatement of this railway was also viewed in a mainly positive light by the cost/benefit analysis conducted on behalf of Dartmoor National Park.

[* <http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/transport/rail/item/3986-rural-reconnections>]

In the questionnaire in 2015 respondents were asked in the questionnaire whether they supported or opposed the possibility of the railway being re-opened between Meldon and Tavistock. Of the 162

respondents who answered this question, 64% were in favour or strongly in favour and 20% opposed or strongly opposed the idea.

Whilst the potential advantages of better travel links to the rest of the country, and the possibility of not needing to take the car for long journeys were recognised and emphasised by many respondents, the possible disadvantages of disruption during construction, increased noise and adverse effects on the cycle track were also identified. The potential benefits of being able to travel easily to work in Exeter or Plymouth for local residents were to some extent balanced by the likelihood of increased numbers of people moving to the area, with increasing pressure on housing and house prices.

Overall however the overwhelming view was to support the proposed development, with many people making this conditional on retaining the cycle track in its present or slightly revised position.

As noted in Chapter 1, opening of additional rail links will have substantial and only partially predictable effects on the local economy and housing needs. Such a development will potentially require review of policies in this Plan within the time period that the Plan covers (2016-2034).

3.3.2 Traffic in the Villages.

Major roads run through the parishes: the A30, old A30 (West Devon Way) and A386. Because of the speed of traffic on the A386 and the old A30, crossing these roads is hazardous and it can prove particularly difficult to cross safely for those who are hard of hearing, or unable to walk briskly. There is a current proposal to reduce the speed limit on the old A30 as it passes the Village Hall and turnoff to the village, which has very strong local support. Such a change would potentially have implications for the possibility of an additional access road to the old A30 from the proposed housing development on Town Meadow.

Additionally, the volume of traffic through Bridestowe was considered a problem by 58% of respondents. Children walking from the primary school to Treetops Preschool have no complete pavement route.

West Devon Borough Council do not address speeding problems in their strategic plan but residents in both main villages expressed a wish for future housing developments to be linked to the introduction of possible traffic calming/ speed reduction measures. Whilst outside the remit of the Neighbourhood Plan these aspirations are important to the local population. Some of these issues are aspirational and are included in the comprehensive list in Appendix VIII.

3.3.3 Bus Services

Although buses pass through the centre of Sourton, Bridestowe residents must walk some distance to the nearest bus stop. A recurring theme in many responses was the inadequacy of the bus services and, in particular, the lack of a usable bus service to Tavistock.

A further concern raised by many people was the distance of the bus stops on the old A30 from the village in Bridestowe and the great difficulty faced by the elderly, those with limited mobility, or those with young children of getting up Pool Hill to the bus stops.

The community transport *Ring and Ride* service operates to take people with no access to a vehicle to Okehampton and Tavistock once a week. Only 8% of respondents reported that they used the Ring and Ride service – mainly for travel to Tavistock or Okehampton, and 15% reported that a locally organised community car service would be of interest to someone in the household.

3.3.4 Parking

The questionnaire highlighted that 62% of people have 2 or more cars available for use in the household whilst 10.6% had no car. Cars parked on the roadside in the middle of Bridestowe village narrow the road to such an extent that the free flow of traffic is difficult. This problem is particularly bad at the start and end of the school day when the additional volume of traffic makes it difficult to get through the village at all. There is concern that with an increase in the village population, further pressure will be put on the road system by the increased number and movement of cars, thus increased provision of off-road parking is seen as essential for any new housing development.

Key issues that are important to local people:

- Ensure that all developments in Bridestowe have sufficient off road parking provision for residents and visitors.
- Encourage developments where traffic is not increased in the centre of the village.
- Support the provision of additional parking in Sourton
- Ensure that development around Sourton Down does not lead to additional parking along this section of the A386.
- Support in principle the opening of the railway, but flag up concern about the potential consequential increased number and price of houses in the parishes.
- Ensure that residential and environmental amenity is not adversely affected by traffic;
- Ensure the provision of new and improved footpaths not just within new developments but with appropriate extensions to create safe pedestrian routes to the key locations in the villages
- Ensure that roads in new developments should be wide enough to allow vehicles (especially emergency vehicles) to pass each other without using the pavements;
- Promote the development of cycleways with entry points that provide adequate parking facilities.

4. YOUNG PEOPLE, SPORT AND RECREATION

Provision of play facilities for primary school aged children is generally good in small communities with play equipment funded and maintained by parish councils. Older children are less well served.

“Children and young people in rural Devon are at greater risk of social isolation which has consequences for their emotional and physical health and wellbeing. Isolation and lack of reliable and affordable public transport impacts on their ability to access education, recreational facilities and services.”

from Devon County Council’s “Rural Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Devon 2010 -2013” (Children and young people).

This Report recognises the unique problems faced by young people living in rural areas such as long walking distances to school buses and/or public transport on unlit, isolated and/or unsafe country roads; heavy reliance on school bus transport that can make it difficult to participate in extracurricular activities due to rigid bus timetables, fewer youth clubs/activities within smaller settlements.

Limited opportunities, boredom and low self-esteem impacts on the wellbeing of this age group and can lead to high-risk activities including antisocial behaviour, substance misuse and self-harm as well as tension with other residents.

The 2015 questionnaire sought the views of respondents on provision for the needs of children and young people. Whilst social, play and recreational provision in the parishes for the needs of children aged between 4 and 11 years was considered as excellent by over 60% of people, provision for children aged 12-14 and over was considered very poor by 80% of respondents.

Many respondents made suggestions about how to better serve the young people of the parishes, including establishing a skate park in the sporting green/ playground area, more activities focused on their needs and better public transport to allow teenagers to access Okehampton or Tavistock. Many respondents drew attention to the hazards faced by teenagers playing or skateboarding in the villages because of the speed and high volumes of traffic, as well as the hazards to children from large traffic volumes at the beginning and end of the school day.

A section of the questionnaire that was specifically aimed at children and young people was only completed by 15 (6 boys and 9 girls) and not all answered all questions. Because of this poor uptake a further survey was carried out in July 2015 targeting young people (see Appendix III). Reassuringly 76% of the respondents to the comprehensive questionnaire said that they thought Bridestowe and Sourton were good places to grow up – and cited safety, peace, good links to the countryside, the parks and sporting facilities as things they particularly liked.

Poor internet connection, poor public transport (to meet with friends from other villages or Okehampton) and a lack of activities focused on teenagers in the parishes, plus lack of access to a skate park were all given as things they did not like about living here.

Only 25% thought that they would stay in the parishes when they grew up, and 50% thought they would not, whilst 25% were not sure. The things they said they did not like about Bridestowe and Sourton as listed above were all cited as reasons they might not stay (presumably with their own future children in mind).

Key issues that are important to local people:

- Promote the provision of better facilities for older children
- Promote opportunities for play and physical activity
- Support development that enhances and increases community facilities, recreation and local services within the core villages

5. THE ENVIRONMENT AND AMENITIES

The scenic quality of the area is reflected in the fact that part of the area is designated as a National Park (the highest status possible for landscape). The beautiful scenic nature of the area is well recognised. Devon County Council in their landscape character assessment in 2008 described the local area thus:

“A gentle agricultural landscape of high scenic quality, characterised by ribbon-like rivers. Slow-flowing, meandering streams fringed by trees glide through quiet, inaccessible floodplains. A semi-regular pattern of fields, edged with hedges and earth banks, covers the undulating landform and adds pattern and texture to the landscape. The area feels remote and peaceful, and away from Okehampton has seen very little C.20th development; the scattered stone-built farms and villages have a timeless quality. Narrow, earth-banked lanes thread across the valleys, contrasting with the A30 which cuts across the landscape”.

Single wind turbines are a feature of the local area but are not numerous and none have been installed within the two parishes.

Photovoltaic panels (solar electricity) and solar thermal panels (solar hot water) are becoming more common and Boasley School is an example of an amenity building that has deployed them. Following the results of a renewable energy feasibility study, instigated by Okehampton Town Council and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council, the group CORES (Community of Okehampton Renewable Energy Society) has been set up as a community benefit society by a working group of volunteers. CORES aims to generate electricity locally, sell it at near half-price to local businesses and put the profit made to good community use in the Okehampton area.

3.5.1 Physical well-being

If the built environment is well planned and implemented to a high standard, it will have a beneficial impact on the physical well-being of its inhabitants. Similarly planning for an environment that supports people of all ages in making healthy choices, helps to promote active travel and physical activity, promotes access to healthier food, provides high quality open spaces, green infrastructure and opportunities for play, sport and recreation, will all contribute to promoting healthy lifestyles.

There is strong community support for safeguarding existing parish assets - halls, schools, churches and sports fields and an enthusiasm for creating future sports' facilities and green ways. The supplementary questionnaire circulated in July 2015 that sought the views of younger residents in particular on the subject of recreation, revealed that 69% of respondents were interested in keep-fit classes and 43% in playing tennis. Maximising the opportunity for physical activity, including sports and leisure by providing/improving facilities and sharing use of community buildings has strong local support, particularly if this caters for the needs of the 11 - 18-year-old age group as they are perceived to be poorly served.

Bridestowe's shop and post office is visited by over 50% of respondents to the main questionnaire every day.

The rural surroundings are an important leisure asset for local inhabitants wanting to be physically active; they enjoy the proximity to the Dartmoor National Park providing many opportunities for walking, cycling, horse riding and other outdoor pursuits. Almost 25% of respondents reported using footpaths and cycle paths several times a week.

3.5.2 Social well-being

The numerous clubs and church activity indicate a strong community spirit. There is an appetite for additional activities such as dance and evening classes. Creating places and spaces for people to meet promotes community engagement, helps foster community spirit and counter rural isolation. Creating a social hub for young people was one suggestion put forward.

It is important to ensure that the disabled as well as the able-bodied have equal access to all aspects of community life.

Measures to address local transport deficiencies by introducing alternative schemes like car sharing should be encouraged. Increased connectivity through telecommunications is not only important for rural enterprise and home-working but allows fuller interaction for young and old across the area and beyond.

3.5.3 Landscape, renewable energy and amenities.

The landscape is treasured by parishioners with 100% of respondents to the questionnaire considering it important or very important to them and 100% of respondents considered conserving unspoilt countryside, village greens, open spaces, wildlife designated conservation areas and rights of way were important or very important to them. In the survey 34% said that they used the footpaths and cycle paths on a regular basis.

Development of existing footpaths to improve pedestrian and possibly cycle access between the villages received unanimous support.

A significant majority of respondents to the questionnaire showed strong support for small scale developments of each type of renewable energy other than wind turbines, but strong opposition to larger scale developments. There was some opposition to the development of wind turbines on any scale.

Several alternative suggestions were made by respondents, including several suggestions of installation of community sized ground source heat pump systems as possible sources of low cost renewable heating within villages or settlements.

In response to a question to gauge interest in a community energy scheme as a way to buy electricity, gas, oil or other fuels at lower cost, or to manage and generate energy, 83% of respondents expressed a definite or possible interest.

Amongst the specific local facilities listed the ones rated as most important included the Village Halls, and Methodist Hall, the pubs, the sporting green and cricket field, the children's play area, but overwhelmingly the one rated the most important by the largest number of people was Bridestowe Shop and Post Office.

Key issues that are important to local people:

- Include a strong statement about the importance of the landscape quality to ensure that development does not diminish the scenic quality of the area.
- Support small scale renewable energy projects
- Investigate community energy schemes