

APPENDIX 2b

E-Survey Highlights

Staplehurst Healthcheck - e-Survey Highlights at January 2009

Background

SEEDA has classified Staplehurst as a 'market town' as it has a population of between 3000 and 20000.

Under a SEEDA Market Towns initiative, Staplehurst may be eligible for funding for projects that will deliver economic regeneration. In order to make a bid for funding, communities must create a partnership organisation with cross-community representation and undertake a 'market towns healthcheck', the key purpose of which is to identify potential economic regeneration projects.

The healthcheck requires the completion of worksheets detailing various aspects of local transport, the economy, social and community facilities and activities and the local environment. The data in the worksheets must be based on factual evidence obtained by observation, by community consultation or by extracting information from data previously collected, e.g. the census. Any proposals that come out of the healthcheck are therefore 'evidence-based'.

Staplehurst Parish Council had already undertaken extensive village-wide 'appraisals' in 1993 and in 2000 and a Village Design Statement was published in 2004. After consultation with SEEDA's Market Towns coordinator, it was agreed that much of the data previously obtained was still relevant. To comply with the community consultation element of the healthcheck process, to bring previous data up-to-date, and to create a 'snapshot' of local views and opinions, the Staplehurst Partnership established an online survey (e-survey) which was promoted extensively in the Parish Magazine, on posters, in the local press and by a door-to-door leaflet drop.

Rural communities are often faced with wider issues regarding healthcare, education, policing and crime. It was, however, considered that the market towns initiative would be an inappropriate vehicle to address issues in any of these areas for Staplehurst. Additionally, Staplehurst has recently benefited from a new medical centre which is still 'bedding-in'. There has also been a notable increase in police presence and an associated reduction in crime levels in recent years.

It was therefore decided that the e-survey would focus on securing opinions about what were perceived to be key infrastructure issues for Staplehurst, namely (a) future development of the locality as a whole, (b) the village hall, (c) facilities and activities for young people, (d) parking and (e) recycling, although respondents would have the opportunity to raise other matters.

Results - General

The e-survey has run for just under 1 year, from February 2008 to January 2009. It contains 40 questions.

There have been 247 responses to date, exceeding the target of a responses rate representative of 10% of village households.

Respondents live in 104 postcodes, giving excellent geographic spread. More than half of the postcodes represented had 2 or more, and up to 9 respondents.

As well as responses to multiple choice questions, there have been 886 free text responses to the main topics of the e-survey as well as comments and suggestions about other aspects of community life.

No personal details were collected during the service. The requirement to enter a postcode is the main method of identifying that a respondent is from Staplehurst. There is no evidence that there has been any gross misuse of the survey.

Future Development of Staplehurst

83% of respondents would like to see more development in the village, either within the current boundary or within and beyond it.

There have been 579 expressions of interest against a prompted list of things that could be developed, with most interest being for more small shops (24% of responses), a supermarket (21%), more parking (19%) and a sports centre (19%).

There have been 115 free text, unprompted responses giving other ideas for development. Some responses have multiple suggestions. Most frequent references are more for young people (15 responses), improved village hall (13), more cafes and restaurants (12), improvements to the Parade (7), bypass (6) affordable housing (5) and highway improvements (5).

There have been 156 responses giving ideas for minimising the impact of additional traffic caused by any new development. Some responses had multiple suggestions. There were 63 unprompted suggestions for a bypass and 58 requests for traffic calming of some sort, including improved speed restrictions, speeding management and speeding enforcement.

Village Centre (village hall)

46% of respondents stated that the existing Village Centre building should be upgraded, extended or modified in some way. 68% of respondents stated that the existing Village Centre should remain at the current site, either in upgraded, extended, modified or completely redeveloped form.

51% of respondents would not be prepared to have an increase in council tax to pay for village hall improvements, 37% would.

There have been 1415 expressions of interest in using one or more of 25 prompted activity options that could take place in a village centre/hall. There were 30 responses suggesting an array of additional activities that would be used by people in the households of the respondents.

There have been 116 additional free text comments about the Village Centre building. Most consistent is that the existing building is not fit for its purpose, but there is notable interest in keeping the façade and modernising/extending internally and to the rear. There are suggestions about improving the forecourt, providing a new reception at the front, improving access and improving parking.

Facilities and Activities for Young People

57% of respondents consider there are insufficient facilities for children and young people, with 37% of respondents having under 18's living in their household.

There have been 43 responses, some with multiple suggestions, giving an array of ideas for locally provided facilities and activities that would be used by young people living in the household of the respondent.

There have been 123 confirmations that under 18's in the household of the respondent take part in a prompted list of 11 activities that take place outside of Staplehurst.

48 respondents expressed interest in volunteering to help with youth work. Personal details were not captured to follow this up directly with individuals.

Parking

68% of respondents consider there is insufficient parking in Staplehurst generally.

There have been 311 expressions of interest in more parking at the Parade, at the station and in residential areas. 50% of these are for more parking at the Parade.

81% of respondents would be prepared to have time-limited parking at the Parade (free for a set period).

74% of respondents would not be prepared to have a pay and display system at the parade.

There have been 128 free text responses making comments and suggestions about parking. There is significant interest in controlled, but free, parking at the Parade with widespread belief that it is used for long term parking by shop-workers and residents. Frequent comments are that pay-and-display parking is un-enforceable because many stop for only a short time anyway, and that it would harm the local economy. Numerous suggestions were for existing parking at the Parade to be better marked and for the planting bed area to be used to provide more space. Also many requests were for use of the car to be discouraged and for better enforcement of existing parking restrictions. Numerous comments were about the Medical Centre car park being made more widely available in a controlled manner.

Recycling

59% of respondents think current recycling provision is inadequate.

There have been 269 expressions of interest in alternate or improved recycling facilities, including increasing the facilities at the Bell Lane site (25% of responses), keeping the Bell Lane site and adding new site(s) elsewhere (30%) and emptying the Bell Lane facilities more frequently (38%).

There have been 108 responses giving an array of suggestions for or comments on recycling with requests for plastic recycling being the most frequent.

Future Local Investment

Respondents were asked which of 11 possible improvements to the local infrastructure should be given the highest priority. The highest ranked, in order, were the Village Centre (village hall), improved parking, facilities for young people and general cleaning and maintenance of the village.

Other Issues affecting households

There have been 96 responses on an array of other issues. Most frequent are comments about speeding, pavement parking, anti-social behaviour, litter, improvements to the planting area at the Parade and better Police presence. There

are a notable number of comments about Staplehurst having a good sense of community and that more should be done to promote and develop this.