

Consultation Summary

This document summarises the consultation phase of the Shepton Mallet Neighbourhood Plan (NP). It includes details of the process and the content that was gathered and refined. Planning for this phase began in March 2013.

Neighbourhood Plan Governance

A Steering Group (SG) formed and was supported by Matt Day, a consultant with considerable community planning experience. Cllr Jeannette Marsh was the Portfolio holder on the SG, with Chair Terry Marsh and Cllr John Parham also attending.

The Group included Stuart Brown, Chief Executive, and Anna Blackburn, Senior Planning Policy Officer, both Mendip District Council, and Kevin Newton and Pat Bridgeman, both landlords with large portfolio of properties in the town. Nick Marsh from Denelas Bakery was the town centre business representative. Three residents also volunteered for the SG. Peter Hillman, representing residents action group the Shepton Mallets, was part of the SG from March to July 2013.

Additional community representatives joined in late 2013 and early 2014.

Cllr Parham became the Portfolio holder in May 2013. He was joined in January 2014 by Cllr Neal Shearn. The SG has met roughly monthly. Reports to the Town Council were initially verbal, but written reports were submitted in August and October, and from October Town Councillors were sent SG Minutes. A further report was given in person at the November Town Council meeting, where Councillors voted to re-commit to the production of the NP.

Statutory Consultees

The following Statutory Consultees were informed that a Neighbourhood Plan was being produced;

Homes & Communities Agency
Natural England
Environment Agency
English Heritage
The Highways Agency
Wessex Water
Somerset County Council – Strategic Planning
NHS Somerset

This has led to useful ongoing discussions with English Heritage.

Engagement methods

The Steering Group decided that a variety of engagement methods would be used - a series of informal drop-in events held at a variety of locations over the summer, a structured feedback form for written submissions, use of a Facebook page to engage with local people online, and speaking about the Neighbourhood Plan at the many clubs and organisations in the town. A [section of the Town Council website](#) was used to give updates on the Plan, minutes of SG meetings and documents, and an email address was created solely for the Plan.

To promote the first two events, a leaflet was distributed by hand to all homes in the town (5,000 copies). We estimate this was 95% successful in reaching all homes.

Business groups in the town – the Chamber and Shop group - were informed of the events and asked to promote to members.

Each event was also promoted through press releases carried in the local newspaper, the Shepton Journal, and posters in the Mendip Council offices and the library.

Events

As there had been two previous major consultations in Shepton since 2006, the SG felt that these should be our starting point – our events should check whether the issues identified in these are still live issues, and identify new issues.

Event 1 - Saturday 18th May at The Club, High Street, 10am-4pm

54 residents, shoppers and businesses attended. 22 feedback forms completed, others taken away.

Event 2 – Saturday 8th June at Collett Day, 10am-5pm.

Collett Day is the town’s annual fair that draws a large audience. Approx 80 residents, shoppers and visitors visited the NP stand. 72 feedback forms given out, 13 completed, others taken away.

There was a deadline of 30th June for completed Feedback Forms – in total there were 86 submitted.

Event 3 – Sunday 18th August at the Mid-Somerset Show

The Mid-Somerset Show is a popular country show and fair. Around 75 people attended the NP stand, with 33 giving comments. We showed the issues raised at the first two events and asked for comments. Two of the landowners of the allocated site, Julian Vagg (Vagg family) and Ian Harvey (Mid-Somerset Show) spoke with us.

In total, 209 people attended these three events. This is a low % of the population (2%), but is understandable given the focus of many people in the town in trying to stop the Showground development, ‘consultation fatigue’ and an apathetic view from some that the NPlan will make no difference (partly due to the perception that previous regeneration efforts had not worked). As all the people of Shepton will have a vote at the referendum, and there was strong agreement at the third event with the issues raised so far, the SG felt the NP should proceed.

The number of young people at the events was noticeably small, so we organised a drop-in event for them in January 2014. Despite widespread promotion, this failed to attract young people.

We also needed more discussion and agreement on the issues relating to the town centre, so organised a workshop for businesses, landlords and shoppers on 14th January 2014. This was successful, with 26 participants working in small groups to discuss the issues raised at the earlier events. Notes from this were published via Facebook and the Town Council website.

There were also 15 comments via the Facebook page and 12 by email.

7 Town Councillors took part in one or more of the initial 3 events, and 6 took part in the town centre workshop.

Summary of issues identified

The first two events showed a list of issues that the two most recent major consultations had identified. People were asked to add any new issues and prioritise all issues, to give an initial view of importance. Alongside this, suggestions & ideas to address the issues were displayed, and discussion on these recorded. Maps of the town were available. The Feedback Forms were completed individually.

Issues identified were;

- There was a strong view from many people that Shepton had not seen the facilities that should have come with the substantial amount of new housing that has been built in the last 10-15 years. A primary school and community centre had been promised as part of the Tadley Acres development on the southern edge of the town, but had not been delivered. Other priorities included better facilities for young people, more cultural, sport and leisure facilities, a central community facility where the many community groups and clubs can meet, better cycling routes, etc.
- Another strongly supported view among those who commented was that Shepton had grown substantially with the new housing, and that no additional housing should now be built. Many of these views were from residents of Compton Road and Tadley Acres, the two areas nearest to the allocated site, though there were others from elsewhere in the town. This is clearly a problem for a Neighbourhood Plan, when Plan's are designed to be 'pro-growth' by the Government, can only propose housing that's additional to the Local Plan numbers, and cannot argue against allocated site proposals. There have been some NP's that have argued for alternative better sites to be used for allocations, but this is not the case in Shepton.
- The biggest single concern was the proposed development on the Showground site. Reasons for this were varied, including over-development in the town, flood risk that the development may exacerbate, the loss of the site's use for the Mid Somerset Show and concern that access to the site for informal recreation would be at risk. Also the site has a high landscape value – people appreciate the quality trees which are a distinctive feature of the town. These are most noticeable on the approach into the town along Cannards Grave Road, as well as contributing to wider landscape views across the valley from the northern part of the town.
- Another significant set of concerns centred on the historic Cowl Street and Hillmead area. Poor quality in-fill development, the threat of development on neighbouring open spaces and poor access to the town centre were repeatedly mentioned.
- There were many comments that the town's heritage is not being promoted enough, and that when the Prison is redeveloped it should include a heritage centre or museum or some other community use in some of the buildings.
- Concerns for the town centre, including empty shops and run-down buildings to poor paving and signage, to the lack of people using the town centre, access issues from car parks and from the Townsend Retail Park.

The full list of issues [can be viewed here](#).

The issues raised were summarised into the following 5 aims;

- providing the community and leisure facilities that the town needs
- protecting the town's historic environment
- protecting the town's natural environment
- revitalising the town centre
- making the town centre more accessible

Following further feasibility work, the following draft objectives of the NP were established;

1. Protect open spaces that are used for informal recreation – specifically the northern part of the Showground, the Meadows and land north of the Cemetery
2. Retain the views of surrounding countryside, a key characteristic of the town – ensure development does not impact the skyline as seen from 1. Waterloo Road (junction with Prince's Road) looking south and 2. Cannards Grave Road (adjacent to Mendip District Council's offices) looking north.
3. To improve design quality of all developments (including infill), develop a Town Design Guide (linked by a policy to the NPlan)
4. Make the most of the town's historic or key buildings – try to ensure that the town's key buildings contribute positively to the social, cultural or economic life of the town. Develop a Heritage Centre/Museum, if feasible in one of these buildings, and develop signage and a Heritage Trail to promote the town's history.
5. Develop the sports facilities the town needs – refine and prioritise the list, though an all-year swimming pool is clearly the highest priority from our events
6. To give young people more to do, develop youth facilities and services - including a central Youth Club
7. Make the town centre a lively, safe and attractive place to meet and shop – including creating a Community Centre, marketing of the town, a better cultural & leisure offer, plus a number of initiatives to be refined in workshops with shoppers, town centre businesses, other users and the town council.
8. Improve cycling access across the town and to neighbouring towns –prioritise the routes and identify what else is needed to improve the cycling experience

Not Planning related

9. Better bus services to Bath, Bristol and Frome and across town
10. Tackle on-street parking congestion issues – specifically in the Cowl Street/ Waterloo Road and Compton Road/Kingsland Road areas.
11. A competent Town Council with the drive and skills required to lead and deliver projects is needed for the next 5-10 years.

Looking at the options to deliver these is the next phase of the Plan. However, consultation is not 'closed' – we will react when planning-related issues arise in the town (for instance, Tadley Acres), and of course there will be a formal consultation on the draft Plan.

Residents of Tadley Acres, the housing development on the south of Shepton, lobbied the Town Council and the NP SG in December 2014 following a threat of development on the green space known as Tadley Place. Over 40 residents wrote letters, emails and completed forms arguing for the retention of the open space. The NP SG on 7th February agreed that Tadley Place should be included in the Neighbourhood Plan as green open space of local community value, following the 40+ letters, emails and forms from residents that show its a well-used and important open space. This means we will include a policy in the Plan to retain it as open space. We will need to gather more evidence of use so that we have a strong case for the Examination.

Further work on strengthening the evidence base and exploring options to deliver the objectives is currently underway.

Matt Day
Coordinator, SMNP
12th Feb 2014