

Survey reveals strong feelings on Ottery's traffic worries...

Regeneration Group member Dave Moss looks at some findings from the recent local traffic survey.

Ottery St Mary Town Council's regeneration group traffic sub-committee delivered its 86 page report on a range of traffic, parking and related topics to the council in March. The report looks closely at all these issues against a background of possible future town regeneration, one of the objectives of the area's Neighbourhood Plan introduced last summer.

Local views and opinions were sought, to help inform the report's research and develop its recommendations, via a public survey, which was widely circulated in and around the town last Autumn, and gained almost 250 responses. Its important to bear in mind here that this was an informal survey, gauging the feelings of a random selection of local people, so its not statistically representative of the area's population, and won't form a direct basis for future planning. However the survey findings provided much useful guidance in compiling the report, and led directly to a key recommendation for further substantive traffic research to be undertaken - to provide firm evidence from which equitable regeneration planning can be developed.

The same survey questions were asked of the general public and sixth-form students at Kings School. A separate analysis of returns from the school was conducted, to evaluate whether young persons' feelings on key local topics differed significantly from those of the general public. A composite result was also calculated, showing "averaged" feelings across all survey respondents.

Question 1 revealed the public were almost evenly spilt on adequacy of on-street parking, with 50.9% of respondents feeling there are enough spaces - and 49.2% believing there aren't. Off-street parking appears a much bigger issue: only 29.6% thought there are enough spaces; with 70.4% disagreeing. In both cases, however, Kings School students thought exactly the opposite: 33% rated on-street parking as adequate, 66% said its not - while 56.1% considered there are enough off-street spaces, and 43.8% that there aren't. Combining these results, the survey suggests that Ottery has a parking problem. Overall, 54% of those surveyed felt there aren't enough on street parking spaces, and over 62% believe there aren't enough car park spaces.

The survey produced remarkably strong feelings concerning "yellow line" restrictions around town. Over 87% of public respondents wanted better enforcement of existing regulations; Kings School students were slightly less keen, though still 2 to 1 in favour - resulting in a resounding 85.1% majority for more yellow line enforcement. There was rather less appetite for increasing such restrictions to help ease traffic flow - the public were 59% in favour, distinctly at odds with the sixth form's 51% against. There was, however, still a 56% majority favouring more restrictions.

Strong feelings also showed through in the question about strict rules linking bedroom numbers in town centre developments with availability of overnight parking spaces. The idea isn't new, but borders on the radical - and it divided local opinion. While 60% of Kings School 6th form students were against the idea, over 85% of public

respondents were in favour. Overall, some 72% of respondents favoured a link of this type.

Another big gap between younger respondents and the general public was revealed in questions about policies to reduce town traffic volume and size. Students didn't support either concept, with 59% against reducing volume, and 62% against reducing size. However 60% of the public favoured limiting traffic volume - and a conclusive 87% favoured policies to reduce vehicle size. The combined figures suggest 54% would welcome town traffic volume reductions, while almost 72% feel the size of vehicles should be restricted.

The survey also asked about local bus use. In total around 48% of respondents claimed to use buses occasionally, 19% were frequent users, and a sizeable 34% said they never used buses. Amongst students, 26% were frequent bus users, half used them occasionally, and 24% claimed no bus usage. A question was included here to gauge feelings on use of smaller buses, which revealed widespread support - ranging from 56% of students to 76% of the general public. Overall there was a near-70% composite figure supporting use of smaller buses.

This result led us to investigate "smaller bus" support by frequency of use: we suspected those using buses most would probably prefer larger vehicles. In one of the most surprising survey results, this analysis revealed clear majorities favouring smaller vehicles in all use categories, across both public and Kings School respondents. The composite result showed 57% of frequent users supported smaller vehicles; as did 82% of occasional users and 77% of non-bus users.

The remaining questions aimed to gauge reaction to changes which might be included in future regeneration plans. Students and public alike were not happy about raised kerbs and wider pavements, with a combined result showing 54% against. Moves to support walking and cycling around town proved popular, favoured by over 85%. However, this question had the survey's highest abstention rate of 9.6% - rising to 12.8% amongst students.

The question "Would you support policies to provide more public spaces and seating around the town centre?" received a warm welcome across the board. Moves like this - carving out increased public space through traffic rollback, aimed at making town centres more pleasant for people - are a primary regeneration aim. The survey found support for such policies amongst 85% of Kings School students, and over 90% of the general public - the survey's highest score. The composite 88.5% majority favouring the introduction of more places to linger longer around the town is a great starting point from which to set out on the next stage of Ottery's Road to Regeneration.

Our thanks go to everyone who completed the survey. If you'd like to see the results in detail, read about the many local traffic issues considered and see the list of recommendations, a printed copy of the report is available for reference at the library in Silver Street. It can also be viewed and downloaded from the regeneration section of the Town Council website, at <http://www.otterystmary-tc.gov.uk>