

Swadlincote Street Scene Consultation June 2006

✦ Introduction

Following work conducted by Derbyshire County Council Sustainable Communities/Cultural and Community Services Improvement and Scrutiny Committee, South Derbyshire CVS was approached with a view to conducting a community consultation exercise in South Derbyshire about the local 'street scene' environment.

✦ Aim of the Consultation

To consult with residents, workers and visitors to Swadlincote Town Centre about the street environment in order to gain their views on the following:

- What they think is good or bad about the street scene, and what improvements they feel could be made
- If they have problems regarding the street environment do they know which authority is responsible for what in order to get them resolved and how quickly this happens
- What are their experiences of contacting the Councils with particular regard to the public's knowledge of the 'Call Derbyshire' centre and their views on a 'single point of access'

✦ Methodology

South Derbyshire CVS uses a community consultation and mapping technique known as Participatory Appraisal (PA). This has proved to be a very successful technique in engaging and encouraging the public to become involved in consultation exercises. SDCVS has a proven track record in using this technique to conduct a number of consultations for a variety of organisations including South Derbyshire District Council, South Derbyshire LSP and Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire PCT.

PA uses innovative and engaging tools which are visual and encourage participation. However, underpinning the process is a system of recording and mapping information about participants which ensures that the results are rigorous and robust.

It was agreed that the consultation should target a sample of approximately 250 people made up of residents, workers and visitors to Swadlincote. In addition to this community interest groups such as elderly people, disabled people and parents were also targeted in order to find any particular issues relating to these groups.

The actual consultation took the form of a number of street sessions as well as targeted meetings.

• What we recorded about people

Underpinning the PA consultation method is a system for recording personal information about participants which allows detailed analysis to be undertaken. A series of symbols and letters known as a 'key' is used to record this information in a confidential manner. For the purposes of this consultation participants were asked general information such as gender and age. It was also recognised that certain communities of interest might have specific issues and in addition to the general information participants were also asked:

If they considered themselves to have a disability.
(mobility/visual/auditory or learning difficulty)

What their first language was.

If they had dependants who were under five or had a disability.

If they had access to a car.

What the purpose of their visit was (Shopping, work, leisure, tourism, education, access to services).

A full representation of the key used for this consultation can be found at **Appendix A**.

By using this key to record information particular themes or issues can be directly attributed to that section of the community which raised it. For example, the issue of vehicle access being allowed at certain times was raised as a problem by a number of people. Further analysis of the personal information provided by these participants showed that they often brought young children into the town centre and that from their comments they felt this partial pedestrianisation to be a danger.

Participants were also asked if they lived in the South Derbyshire District. If so it was recorded by South Derbyshire District Council ward.

• **What we asked people**

In line with the consultation brief a series of questions were asked to illicit people's views on the street environment of Swadlincote.

The key question was an opened ended general question:

'What do think of the street environment in Swadlincote?'

This was followed by a further series of questions intended to tease out more detailed views:

'What could be improved and how?'

'Are there any specific problems in Swadlincote?'

'If there was a problem you wanted addressed, would you know who to contact?'

'Have you ever contacted anyone about a problem and if so what was you experience of this?'

'Have you ever heard of 'Call Derbyshire' and what do you think of a single access point?'

'Have you any ideas about how 'Call Derbyshire' could best be publicised?'

The following report provides an analysis of the emerging themes and issues raised by participants in response to these questions.

- **Sample**

In total 262 people took part in the consultation exercise. Of these 122 (46.5%) were male and 140 (53.5%) were female. A full analysis of age and gender can be seen at **Appendix B**.

Appendix C provides an analysis of the extra information provided by participants.

Appendix D is an analysis of where participants lived.

Not everyone wished to disclose their full personal details so there may be some discrepancy between the totals.

✦ Emerging Issues

In general most people felt that Swadlincote was a good place to live and work and that it had a number of positive aspects including clean streets and free parking. However a number of issues did emerge:

✦ Physical Street Environment and Appearance

• General Appearance

Most people felt that Swadlincote's general appearance is acceptable if a little 'boring'. Some expressed the opinion that the streets could be made more colourful by the use of more trees, plants and pots of flowers.

Many people commented that Swadlincote had a lot of old buildings which they felt were not made the most of. The Town Hall was mentioned several times. People felt that if it were renovated and made more accessible it could be an attractive focal point for the town centre.

People also suggested that the town centre shop fronts could be renovated in keeping with their original appearance.

'The Town Hall needs to be renovated and made more accessible, it has so much potential as a community venue' Female 55-64, Woodville.

'Shop fronts are tacky and shabby, need to be renovated in keeping with the heritage of the town' Male 55-64, Swadlincote.

'Shop fronts need renovating – perhaps council could help towards the cost' Female 35-44, Swadlincote.

• Cleanliness

The majority of people taking part thought that Swadlincote town centre was clean and tidy and several people mentioned that they were pleased to see the green street cleaning machine being used in the town. Very few people felt that litter in the town centre was a problem and only one person mentioned dog fouling as an issue and one person mentioned chewing gum on the paved areas.

A number of people felt that although the main areas of the town were regularly cleaned and litter removed, several sites just outside this area needed attention. Those most frequently mentioned were the town's car parks, Rink Passage and the alleyway behind the 'Instore' shop.

'The alley behind Instore always has litter in it – I would like to see more sweepers and litter pickers outside the immediate town centre' Female 75-84, Swadlincote.

'The High Street is clean but the surrounding areas aren't dealt with' Female 17-24, Newhall.

• Block Paving

Problems with the block paved area of the town were raised as an issue predominantly amongst older people and those with a mobility problem. Many people felt that areas of the paving were uneven, particularly around the bases of the trees in the High Street and that it caused a trip hazard.

'The paving is very uneven in places – it makes people trip and when it rains there are puddles everywhere' Male 64-75, Swadlincote, Mobility Problem.

• Physical Access

Problems with access were raised by a number of people but mainly those with a disability or people who had small children in pushchairs.

Several people found it difficult to walk up the paths from the bus station as the gradient was quite steep. Whilst it is clearly difficult to make any major physical changes to this, it was suggested that benches or seats might be placed at intervals for people to rest if they needed to.

However, in contrast to this idea of more benches a number of people felt that the existing benches and street furniture should be removed as they made access for people with disabilities more difficult.

'The street is like an obstacle course' Female 45-54; Midway with disabled dependant.

'Disabled access is appalling – too much clutter – need to get rid of street furniture and bollards and open it up' Female, 55-64 Hartshorne with a disability.

People suggested that any street furniture should, as far as was possible, be kept to the sides of the street and painted in bright colours. This should go some way to ensuring that people with visual impairments could see it and it would be less of an obstruction.

✦ Facilities

Once again, in general, most people felt that Swadlincote had reasonably good facilities for people using the town centre, but there were two issues which were referred to by a number of people:

• Parking

Many people mentioned that the free parking in Swadlincote was good and should continue but it was also felt that more parking was needed and in particular more disabled spaces.

A number of people also mentioned that in some areas the parking spaces needed remarking.

• Toilets

The lack of clean and accessible toilets was clearly an issue with many people. The poor condition of the current facilities was consistently raised and it was felt that provision for new toilets with good disabled access and facilities for people with small children should be a priority.

✦ Traffic and Vehicle Access

Vehicle access to the town centre and the problems this creates for people was clearly an issue as it was raised by a majority of the people taking part.

People find the partial pedestrianisation and the fact that vehicles have access at certain times confusing and potentially dangerous.

Several people who used the town and often had small children with them felt that they were lulled into a false sense of security by the fact that there were no cars around. They allowed their children more freedom to get out of their pushchairs and walk about only to find that the restriction had been lifted and vehicles were driving on the same street as their children were walking. They felt that the street should either be one thing or the other, full vehicle access or full pedestrianisation but the mix of the two could lead to dangerous situations.

'Traffic shouldn't be allowed through the pedestrian area – it's very dangerous for kids' Female 25-34, Midway with children under 5.

'Don't like the pedestrian zone being used by traffic' Male 57-84, Linton with an auditory disability.

Several people also pointed out that drivers often ignored the restrictions or didn't understand them.

'Amount of traffic using the pedestrian zone at restricted times is dangerous' Female 55-64, Overseal

Some people also felt that the restrictions lead to a lot of congestion just before and immediately after the restrictions came into effect as delivery vehicles were accessing shops. Several people suggested that haulage companies and carriers should be encouraged to make deliveries to the rear of shops although it was recognised that this is difficult to do in some parts of the town centre.

★ Vandalism and Anti-Social Behaviour

A few people mentioned that acts of vandalism were sometimes carried out particularly in the evenings when large numbers of teenagers seem to hang about in the town centre area.

However, a greater problem than this seems to be the issue of cyclists and young people on skateboards ignoring restrictions and putting people in danger with their anti social attitudes.

Many people suggested that CCTV cameras should be used and that police or community safety officers should have a more visible presence to combat this nuisance. It was felt that this could also address the issue of drivers ignoring access restrictions.

✦ Other Issues

Although not strictly connected to the 'Street Scene', there were two issues which were raised by almost every participant and it was felt that some reference to them should be made:

• Indoor Market

An overwhelming majority of people who took part in the consultation mentioned the indoor market and without exception their opinions were that it is in a very bad state and they would like something done to improve it. No one suggested shutting it down but everyone wanted it physically improved including installing heating and some incentives introduced to encourage more retailers to take up stalls.

'The market is a disaster – it needs doing up properly including heating in winter. The rents need reducing to get more stall holders in' Female 45-54 Midway.

'The market is an embarrassment' Female 35-44 Woodville.

• Variety of Shops

The lack of variety of shops was also a major issue amongst people taking part.

Again the overwhelming majority of opinion was that Swadlincote needed more and different kinds of shops catering for a wider customer base.

'There are too many card shops, charity shops and bookies' F54-65 Newhall was a comment echoed by many people.

People suggested that the 'Council' should encourage different types of retailers into the area by offering incentives such as rent and tax reductions.

Opinion over the imminent opening of the Morrisons supermarket was fairly evenly divided. Some people saw it as a good thing which will encourage other traders into the area whilst others felt it might overwhelm existing small retailers and actually put them out of business.

✦ Contacting Relevant Authorities

When asked if they knew which organisation to contact about problems none of the participants knew which authority was responsible for which issues.

Most people's experiences of contacting the authorities to resolve street issues were good and problems were dealt with provided they had contacted the appropriate organisation. However, if they had contacted an authority which was not directly responsible for the issue then they often found themselves redirected and found it difficult to get to the appropriate contact.

'Got passed from pillar to post – totally inefficient' Female 55-64, Linton.

One 54-65 year lady from Swadlincote recounted her experience of trying to contact someone about a piece of uneven paving on the High Street in Swadlincote:

'I saw a lady fall off a mobility scooter. She was tipped off when she went over a rough piece of ground at the end of Rink Passage. As it turned out she was my next door neighbour and I tried to help her get something done about it. I have contacted South Derbyshire District Council (SDDC) three times now and still nothing has been done. No one seems to know who's responsible.'

What is clear from participants is that they want a single contact number for all the problems they have. To them it is irrelevant who is actually responsible for the problem they just want it resolved quickly and without having to make several frustrating calls before they finally contact the correct person. They do not mind if the single point is SDDC or DDC.

When asked if they were aware of 'Call Derbyshire' very few participants said they were. A few of the older people taking part said they had seen the number in Insight magazine. Most people felt having a contact point like Call Derbyshire was a very good thing. The fieldworkers conducting the street sessions carried details of the number with them and were asked for it on a number of occasions.

Participants had a number of suggestions for publicising the number including local media, town centre and parish notice boards, leaflets to houses, posters in public places such as the library and Job Centre. A number of participants had more innovative ideas to publicise the number such as putting it on street signs and printing it onto the yellow reflective jackets used by street cleaners and workers.

It was also pointed out that if the number was to be displayed in public places it should be done so in large print so that people with visual impairment might be able to see it better.

✦ Summary

✦ Physical Environment

- Appearance

This could be improved through more imaginative use of plants and shrubs to add more colour.

Renovation of the Town Hall and shop frontages could be made with particular regard to the heritage and history of the town.

- Cleanliness

In general it is felt to be good but more attention could be paid to the surrounding areas.

- Block Paving

This needs to be maintained to a better standard to ensure it does not pose a hazard and cause accidents.

- Access

Unnecessary clutter needs to be removed. The needs of people requiring benches and seats as resting places needs to be balanced with those of disabled people and those with pushchairs who need clear access.

✦ Facilities

- Parking

This is generally regarded as good especially being free but more spaces, especially for disabled people, are needed and some minor maintenance is required to remark spaces.

- Toilets

This was a major issue for many people who felt improvements should be a top priority.

✦ Traffic and Vehicle Access

• Partial Pedestrianisation

Many people felt that vehicle access to the town should not be allowed at all and that the partial pedestrianisation created confusion and was potentially dangerous.

It was also felt that delivery vehicles should be encouraged to use rear entrances.

People felt that a more visible police or community safety presence would prevent drivers ignoring restrictions.

✦ Vandalism and Anti-Social Behaviour

• CCTV

Many people felt that a CCTV system would prevent a lot of the vandalism and petty crime in the town centre

• Cycling

People ignoring restrictions by cycling and using skateboards in the pedestrianised areas is considered a major problem.

✦ Other Town Centre Issues

• The Indoor Market

The lack of stall holders and the general run down condition was consistently raised as a problem.

• Variety of Shops

Many people felt that retailers should be offered incentives to open shops in the town centre as there is a lack of choice and variety.

✦ **Contacting Appropriate Authorities**

- **Single Point of Access**

It was felt that there should be a single point of access where people could access information or contact the relevant person irrespective of which authority was ultimately responsible.

The research supporting this report was conducted in Swadlincote during May/June 2006. South Derbyshire CVS would like to thank all those who took part and gave their views.

Pam Wood
Consultation Coordinator
South Derbyshire CVS
June 2006

South Derbyshire District Council Wards

It would be helpful to us if you could tell us which of the following areas you live?

Area 0	Out of District	Bumaston Eggington Etwall Radbourne
Area 1	Swadlincote	
Area 2	Midway	Area 12 Hilton Marston on Dove
Area 3	Church Gresley	Area 13 Findern Willington
Area 4	Newhall Stanton	Area 14 Hatton
Area 5	Linton Castle Gresley Caudwell Drakelow Rosliston	Area 15 Barton Blount Church Broughton Dalbury Lees Foston & Scropton Hoon Osleston Thurvaston Sutton on the Hill Trusley
Area 6	Catton Coton Lullington Netherseal Overseal Walton	Area 16 Aston on Trent Barrow Shardlow Swarkestone Weston on Trent
Area 7	Woodville	
Area 8	Calke Hartshorne Smisby Ticknall	
Area 9	Bretby Foremark Ingleby Newton Solney Repton/Milton Stanton by Bridge	
Area 10	Melbourne	
Area 11	Ash Bearwardcote	