

Rother District Council

Evaluation and Report Findings of the 2004 Draft Community Plan

February 2005

1. In March 2004 the draft 'Rother Community Plan' was distributed to 41,089 households in the Rother area. Unlike for the community consultation there were no set questions for residents to reply to but a more general request for feedback on the proposed priority action areas.
2. 42 responses were received between 4th March and 8th of June 2004, a return of 0.1%. This was a low response that makes any in depth statistical analysis difficult however, it could indicate that the majority of those who read the proposals were sufficiently happy with the contents of the plan, and therefore did not feel the need to make any comments. The responses that were received were either by verbal communication, letter or email. All of the responses are available on request. No age or gender information was collected.
3. The responses were then analysed by the University of Brighton and key themes extracted. Although, due to the low response, this information is not conclusive, there are key issues emerging.
4. The table below shows all the issues that were raised by ten percent, or more, of the respondents who made comments on the draft community plan.

Key Issues	Percentage of Respondents
1. Concerns over bus services, including the need for smaller, more frequent buses.	21
2. Concerns over the perceived neglect of elderly residents needs.	21
3. Concerns over how some of the aims of the priority action areas are worded.	19
4. Concerns about speeding cars.	16
5. Inappropriate parking.	14
6. Lack of visible police presence.	14

5. Next is a breakdown, by priority action area, of the issues raised in the replies. There were some priority action areas, like education and children and young people that received a very limited response. In this case the main issues have been highlighted.

Priority Action Areas

Transport

Transport issues was the largest area of concern with 43% (18 responses) all highlighting transport issues that they felt needed addressing.

Speeding

Seven respondents see this as an issue causing serious concern. As one resident explained,

"...since many motorists ignore the speed limits our roads are now a hostile environment to all persons not in a motor vehicle."

Walking along the pavement in town or crossing roads in rural areas, feelings of being unsafe were common. This is exacerbated by the perceived lack of enforcement of speed limits by the police.

1. Improve safety on the roads by reducing speed limits.
2. Have better police enforcement.
3. Improve walkways and pavements to increase safety for pedestrians.

Parking

Cars parked inappropriately and thus restricting access for disabled people in wheelchairs and mothers with prams was the area most commented on. The introduction of some 'resident only' parking and greater enforcement of parking restrictions were suggested as remedies for this issue.

1. Parking restricting pedestrian access.
2. Greater enforcement of parking restrictions.
3. Possible 'resident only' areas.

Buses

There is particular worry over bus services in the area and 21% of all replies were related to this issue. Lack of frequent reliable buses, especially in rural settings, was targeted as a major reason why some residents felt excluded from local shopping and recreational facilities. This is a particular problem for disabled residents not having access to specially adapted buses. Removal from the timetable of buses to and from the Conquest Hospital is causing serious inconvenience due to lack of parking facilities at the hospital and the high cost of taxis. Suggestions were made for smaller, and therefore cheaper to run buses, providing a more frequent service to residents.

1. Have smaller buses providing a more frequent service.
2. Improve bus services to key facilities.
3. Improve access for people with disabilities.

Cycling

One respondent commented that an omission from your delivery objectives is an increase in cycle lane provision. This would help promote cycling, an environmentally friendly and cheap form of transport, as a real alternative to car use. It was suggested that local councillors and council workers could take the lead on this initiative by cycling themselves or devising a car-sharing scheme.

1. Increase number of cycle lanes
2. Promote cycling as a real alternative to the car.

Community Safety

The lack of a visible police presence in the community is the most serious community safety concern for five respondents. This is not just uniformed officers but Police Support Community Officers, whose specific role is to liaise and build relationships with residents. The lack of police presence was blamed as one reason for the perceived rise in low level anti-social behaviour, smashing windows and graffiti were two examples given.

1. More visible police presence.

Housing

There were seven comments made about housing issues but three main areas dominated them. Lack of affordable housing, and particularly, the view that the current plan will not make enough changes to meet the demand. Objection to building new houses, when there are houses that could be brought back in to use. Serious objection to building on green field sites for one respondent as they claim,

"Once green fields are built upon they are lost forever."

1. Lack of affordable housing.
2. Necessity of building more homes.
3. Objections to building on green field sites.

Waste & Recycling

Better-planned and more frequent recycling facilities were the priority in this area. One elderly resident commented on how difficult it is to carry heavy recyclables such as newspapers to designated recycling sites. One suggestion to remedy this would be increasing kerbside collections.

1. Introduction of recycling boxes provided to all residents.
2. Kerb side collections.

Job Creation

This priority area provoked seven responses. Shopping locally and introducing a regular farmers market were suggested as ways to promote local enterprise. Many respondents were concerned that the recent changes to Devonshire Square would have a negative impact upon the local economy. Jobcentre Plus is concerned that they are not part of the consultation process.

1. Increase chances to shop locally.
2. Involve other appropriate agencies in the consultation process.

Education

Broaden the curriculum to include subjects such as financial management and encourage school children to become more involved in environmental issues. The

introduction of parenting classes was also suggested to support parents with school-aged children. Promote lifelong learning.

1. Widen curriculum.
2. Introduce parenting classes.
3. Promote life-long learning.

Children & Young People

Encouraging young people to participate more within their communities by doing voluntary work was suggested, as well as employing an officer to work directly with young people and parents to relate them with the natural world.

1. Encourage voluntary work.
2. Think of innovative ways of working with young people.

Leisure & Recreation

Concern was raised over the declining number of green spaces available for recreational facilities. Two respondents suggested promotion of activities, like cycling and horseriding, which promote a healthier lifestyle.

1. Increase facilities and promote activities that lead to a healthier lifestyle.

Other Comments

Wording of the Document

There were many suggestions as to how the working on the community plan could be amended. These were mainly raised by council officers and are listed below for consideration.

1. Transport – indicate importance of transport in accessing services and facilities.
2. Transport – indicate the need to walk more and share transport when possible. Suggest sustainable transport methods.
3. Transport – suggest walking to work rather than parking further away.

4. Waste & Recycling - under "Our Ambition" revise second sentence to read "To increase public awareness of the issues and encourage the District, County, other responsible authorities and agencies to invest in appropriate solutions" to better reflect the wider involvement/responsibilities of bodies. Under "Who will deliver on this" revise to read "Rother Environmental Group, in partnership with the relevant authorities, agencies and organisations" again to better reflect the wider involvement and responsibilities of other bodies.
5. Job Creation – reword "create work/life balance" to "consider work/life balance". Also, add "support local enterprise" rather than "encourage an entrepreneur culture".
6. Education - under "What we could deliver on" amend second bullet point to read "To improve speaking, listening and social skills in Foundation Stage settings and Key Stage 1 and raise attainment in both stages".
7. Children & Young People - under "Our Ambition" revise first sentence to read, "Is to consult and engage children, young people and their families and enable all to participate".
8. Leisure & Recreation - under "Why is this a priority" amend third bullet point to read "Contributes to the reduction of crime and". Under "What you can do" amend the fourth bullet point to read "join numerous sports clubs for". Under "What you can do" amend the sixth bullet point to replace "goals" with "nets" or "stands".

Representation

Nine respondents expressed serious concern about the perceived neglect of elderly residents in the consultation process. Many of them felt that because they did not 'cause trouble' their needs were being ignored. It was expressed in several of the replies that the Rother area has a large elderly population and that none of their specific needs were being addressed. There was also concern expressed over whether the plan would affect levels of council tax.

It was also raised in one reply that the concerns of people with learning difficulties were being marginalized, as they are unlikely to be able to respond to your written requests for feedback and only make up a small percentage of the population.

Conclusion

To conclude, the low rate of response does not enable any firm conclusions to be drawn from the replies to the draft community plan. However, it has been worth noting what areas received the most attention. There is obviously an issue about how the elderly are going to be included in the final plan and the nature of their representation on the LSP that needs further discussion. Equally some of the wording of the priority areas needs to be considered further. However, despite this over sixty percent of all replies included positive comments about what Rother District Council are aiming to achieve with the Community Plan. They seemed particularly encouraged by the community consultation process and liked the style of the draft community plan.