

Town Strategy – Questionnaire

The Questionnaire was divided into three sections concerned with:-

- **Business, Employment, Amenities and Facilities**
- **Environment**
- **Future Development**

The Questionnaire was distributed within the Ottery Gazette in June 2005. This was distributed to all homes in Ottery as a loose leaf insert into the distribution. The Gazette has a claimed run of 3500 copies and is also available at retail outlets.

1. Business, Employment, Amenities and Facilities

The principal facilities in Ottery St Mary were listed in the Questionnaire and required a value judgement by the respondent to give five marks for the highest level of approval reducing to one point for the lowest.

Facility	Rank	% highest importance
Medical Centre	1	97%
Post Office	2	90%
Shops both Retail/Service	3	86%
Hospital	4	83%
Pharmacies	5	82%
Schools	6	78%
Dentist	7	76%
Public Open Spaces	8	75%
Banks	9	68%
Public Toilets	10	65%

In taking those who awarded the highest mark in each category there were no real surprises in the “top ten” as can be seen by the Medical Centre taking the first place with 97% of the votes. The Centre is maintained at a high level of efficiency and innovation with the regular introduction of new equipment, techniques and staff training. It works closely with the Ottery Hospital (4th) and thus it is able to offer a

-2-

comprehensive service with an increasing number of treatments provided locally, including X-Rays and Minor Injuries Unit. Support is also offered by two up-to-date pharmacies that offer home delivery of prescriptions available upon request. A private Dental Practice is also present in the town with three Dental Surgeons and support staff whilst a Chiropodist has recently opened

The Post Office (2nd) together with three banks, serves the Parish and there is currently a very high level of dependence upon the former by parents with young children and the elderly. Although the bus service to access Exeter and several East Devon towns is adequate many people still depend upon a Post Office within the town. Currently there is concern that measures proposed by the Government to change the facilities offered may place the future of the Post Office in jeopardy.

Although the town is served by seven churches covering most denominations the results appear to reflect the modern trend, in that they received only some 50% of that achieved by the Medical Centre or Post Office in level of importance. The Parish Church, based on Exeter Cathedral, has been voted as one of the twenty finest churches in England by Simon Jenkins in his book “*England’s Thousand Best Churches*” whilst the United Reformed Church is of great antiquity and significance. A modern Roman Catholic Church

and a Methodist Church with a notable frontage form an important group on the lower part of Mill Street.

There was criticism over the suitability of the remaining Public Houses in the town for family use. Over the past ten years the total number of public houses has fallen from eleven to four with one of those already scheduled for conversion to flats. Those remaining are well used by adults but they do not have the availability expected by modern parents of children's rooms or a "family dining" space for lunch or early evening meals.

-3-

Satisfaction was expressed over the availability of facilities and activities for adults with 61% of the vote expressing approval. 72% of respondents believed more should be done for the young people of the town. Football, cricket and similar sports are adequately covered, as are Scouting and Guiding in all age groups. A Planning proposal has just recently been approved for a Skate and BMX Park to go ahead as no such facility exists at present. Schools and pre-school groups within the town boundary enjoy a fine reputation with children coming from other parts of the District by coach or car to attend both the Primary School and the King's School. A wide range of facilities have been introduced at the King's School including additional sporting opportunities and a Dance Studio. Work is also carried out at the Primary School to enlarge and enhance the classrooms and computer studies facilities. The quality of the education in both instances is well above the national average. There is concern regarding the over capacity of both schools. Shops, restaurants and businesses scored highly, in part due to the very wide range of products offered. Over the last year there have

been a number of new businesses that have set up in the town whilst others have spent significant sums in modernising and enlarging their properties.

The total number of shops and services available is however quite large for a resident population of only some four and a half thousand. This makes it essential to encourage those from the whole of the catchment area to visit the town together with visitors, both holidaying and working in East Devon, in order to ensure that the total “spend” available is sufficient to maintain an acceptable level of trade and survival.

For some years a Supermarket has been suggested as essential for the town to stem the tide of townspeople making their “big purchases” of food and household requirements in one of the large out-of-town stores within easy reach by car or bus. Should this

-4-

development come to fruition it is of the outmost importance that the right site is selected. A Supermarket could go potentially on either one of two sites: the now defunct factory buildings of Cutler Hammer or on the originally proposed site in Hind Street, adjacent to the current car-park. The Tourist Information Centre, whilst operating in its recognised national form, also acts as a service point for residents by both supplying local information on events, concerts and similar entertainments together with the sale of tickets for National Express Coaches, outings and local functions. The use of TICs in this manner offers a further justification for their retention as a hub from which information is disseminated to all.

The proposed closure by the District Council of some public toilets in town has been a major concern and the Town Council has taken on

the cost of maintenance of the toilets in The Flexton. These are sited near to the Parish Church which, apart from recognised religious services, features a variety of concerts and other secular performances. Public toilets remain open both in Hind Street car park and The Flexton.

The adjacent public library is in urgent need of re-location as the premises are accessed by a steep flight of stone steps that preclude easy access by the elderly and infirm. A site offering easy access, coupled with a level approach and adequate parking facilities is essential to ensure maximum usage by the whole community.

The remainder of the facilities listed met with general approval mostly rated in the top three grades. The exception concerned the “take-away food outlets” where, due to the large amount of the external packaging materials spread around the town, they were very unpopular with residents. An improvement to the situation has subsequently occurred following the introduction of a Police Community Support Officer

-5-

2. Environment

The first three categories scored very highly with 80% rating the importance of the trees and hedges that create green “islands” around the town. Over 99% indicated a wish to protect the public open spaces and emphasised the need for the creation of an open space at the eastern end of town where three housing estates have no play facilities or other facilities available without youngsters having to cross the busy streets into the town centre.

Some 70% agreed that an enhancement of the town square in Broad Street would be an asset. Ten years ago the County Council produced a Plan for just such an improvement but it was rejected at

a Public Meeting by a large number of residents as being inappropriate at that time!

Litter and dog mess remain a problem, especially in the public open spaces where litter connected with take-away outlets (confectionery wrappers and soft drink containers) spoil the street scene, particularly at weekends. Irresponsible dog owners abuse the Land of Canaan and Winters Lane playing fields by letting the dogs loose and ignoring the inevitable results. The presence of a PCSO has had a beneficial effect but unfortunately those residents who witness an incident complain bitterly but are unwilling to give evidence as is necessary to obtain a conviction or a fixed penalty.

At the time when the Questionnaire was prepared the presence of PCSOs in the town was still under discussion as to whether the cost would form part of the Parish Precept. Even so, 70% of respondents considered them a good idea and 52% indicated a willingness to pay if required. Subsequently Officers were sent to Ottery on a three month's trial and, following their successful introduction, one full time and one part-time PCSO have been posted in on a permanent basis without charge. The visible presence of a uniformed officer on a regular basis has relieved some of the "perception of crime" amongst the elderly who are gently reassured by the officer concerned. The PCSO involved has also carried out much valuable work within the schools, with local youngsters and with problems including dog fouling and litter reduction.

-6-

3. Future Development

67% of respondents favoured further development in Ottery although a majority felt it should be limited to infilling rather than the creation of new estates. 90% expressed the need for low-cost housing for local people as there is a deep concern that young people will have to move away due to a combination of high housing costs, coupled with inadequate wages and salaries. 77% were against the extension of the boundaries of the town to accommodate further housing.

The major site for re-development within the current boundary is the Cutler Hammer/Ottermill site adjacent to the River Otter. The majority of responses wanted the site to be used for mixed housing and business purposes in order to bring some further employment into town, but also to fill a much needed addition to affordable and to private housing within the town boundary.

The proposed development at Higher Thorne Farm was also well supported at 75%. This proposal could vastly improve the safety of pupils attending The King's School by removing the existing conflict with traffic at the junction of Barrack Road and Cadhay Lane. A newly created roundabout to the north of the present junction could be coupled with a new road passing round the back of the relocated playing fields rejoining Cadhay Lane to the east of the school campus. The site should contain a car park, coach park and "dropping off point" for parents as well containing on-site playing fields, swimming pool and other facilities. The result would eliminate traffic at the mouth of the present Cadhay Lane, remove coaches parked in a busy Barrack Road and remove the need to cross the main Barrack Road and negotiate the dangerous access to the current playing fields.

The road layout in the town centre, dating from mediaeval times, is really unsuited for modern traffic flows. The entrances from these roads are narrow, the turning angles acute whilst sightlines are restricted due to the positioning of the surrounding buildings. Some are listed buildings that are situated at the narrowest points thus leading to traffic chaos. These problems are further exacerbated by the lack of on-street parking coupled with parking by “exempt” vehicles that belong to the elderly and disabled permitted to park on the double yellow lines. In view of the increased size of delivery vehicles, tractors and mobile farm machinery, the problem has worsened -considerably over the past few years and is unlikely to improve. It will therefore be necessary to consider an inner by-pass to take vehicles not needing to access the town centre to find an alternative route.

The importance of the businesses at Gosford – Otter Nurseries, Joshua’s Country Store and the pet food store have all expanded considerably and thus a route that could relieve some of this traffic would be most advantageous .