

Dronfield Neighbourhood Plan

Community Consultation Drop-in Events – Indicative Findings

August 2017

Introduction to Dronfield

Dronfield is a large parish in North East Derbyshire in the north midlands region of England. It comprises the three communities of Dronfield, Dronfield Woodhouse and Coal Aston interspersed with large areas of open countryside. It is sited in the valley of the small River Drone, and lies between the town of Chesterfield and the city of Sheffield.

Dronfield covers an area of 3,457 acres (13.99 km²) and has as neighbours the villages and hamlets of Unstone, Holmesfield, Barlow, Apperknowle, Hundall, Marsh Lane and Eckington.

In the 2011 census, Dronfield Parish had 9,388 dwellings and a population of 21,261, of whom 10,333 were male and 10,928 female. 25.1% of the population were aged 65 or over (compared to 16.4% for England as a whole), and 16.1% were under the age of 16 (18.9% for England).

The Survey

The Dronfield Town Council carried out four community consultation drop-in events to assist in the preparation of the Dronfield Town Neighbourhood Plan and North East Derbyshire Local Plan. The Town Council is keen to engage with the community, and the survey was conducted during March 2017.

A series of questionnaires were produced on a number of key topics:

- Green Belt & Open Spaces
- Community
- Heritage
- Economy
- Housing
- Transport

All the questions relating to the above topics were open-ended, asking for people's comments. In answer to some of the questions respondents gave multiple responses. The following sets out the key findings from three of the four consultation findings.

THEME 1: GREEN BELT & OPEN SPACE

“Dronfield is surrounded by a protected Green Belt. The purpose of the Green Belt is:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Question 1: Is the Green Belt important to you and why?

The importance of the Green Belt to the residents of Dronfield was reflected by the highest number (196) of residents who took part in this section of the survey.

100% (196) of residents agreed that the Green Belt was a valuable and important feature of the town.

The following points were raised:

Environment: Respondents placed great emphasis on the value of the Green Belt contributing to the reduction of pollution, providing clean air and to the well-being of the town’s residents.

Supports Wildlife: A number of residents highlighted the importance of the Green Belt for the support of wildlife sites and habitats.

Access to the Countryside: There was strong support from residents to protect their open access to the countryside, which is used for a variety of recreational pursuits such as walking and spotting wildlife.

Prevents Coalescence and Urban Sprawl: Many responses highlighted the importance of maintaining and protecting the Green Belt to act as a barrier to the future merging of urban areas and towns, preventing urban sprawl and focusing development on brownfield sites.

Other: Other main reasons that were given for maintaining the Green Belt included:

- Part of our history.
- Adds to the character of the town.
- Protect for the future.
- Support farming

Question 2: What would you like to see happen with our Green Belt land?

Over 811 (94%) of the 192 residents who responded to this question would like the Green Belt to remain as it is and protected for future generations.

Of the 11 remaining respondents, 8 (4%) would support minor changes to the Green Belt. 3 of the 11 respondents made general comments about the Green Belt.

Question 3: Are local woodlands and spaces important to you?

All 190 (100%) residents who responded to this question felt that the local woodlands and green spaces were very important to them.

THEME 2: COMMUNITY

“When discussing community we refer to things like health care provision, education and policing as well as the opportunities which are available for all residents.”

Question 1: What community services would you like to see protected or enhanced in the town?

81 residents responded to this section of the survey. A wide range of responses were received. Some of the major themes (broadly ranked in terms of importance) were:

Health facilities: Protecting and enhancing the provision of health facilities (doctors, dentists, chemists, clinics etc.) within the town was identified as the major issue for residents.

Policing: Several respondents identified this community service as a particular area that they would like to see protected and enhanced. A few made specific reference to the planned closure of the Police Station.

Education: A number of residents identified schools, particularly secondary education, as an area for improvement.

Library: Residents felt very strongly that Library services were a key community service.

Other: A few respondents also stated the need to protect and enhance:

- Public transport.
- Leisure and sporting activities
- Parks and spaces

Question 2: How would you describe the town centre?

There were mixed views on this from the 141 responses received. With a roughly 50/50% split between respondents who considered the town centre to be good or adequate (45 respondents) and those that considered it to be poor or could be improved (46 respondents).

Several respondents made general comments including the need for more shops.

That it would benefit from a better selection of shops and general improvement was specifically mentioned by a number of people. Many respondents also commented that there were too many charity shops. The lack of a Post Office was also noted by several respondents.

On the positive side, many respondents thought that it was attractive. Also, that there was a good mix of shops, restaurants and small businesses, especially for its size.

Question 3: What threats do you see to the community of Dronfield?

166 responses were received to this question.

A wide range of views were received.

The main theme was the risk of overdevelopment and the linked issue of strain on infrastructure/services: Many residents believed that Dronfield was in danger of becoming overstretched/overdeveloped (“getting too large”) with too many people and cars, leading to congestion and stretching of already limited services such as roads, schools and medical facilities. Several respondents considered that overdevelopment could mean that the town would lose its identity.

Loss of Green Belt land, wildlife and recreational land.

Loss of identity.

TOPIC 3: HERITAGE

“Dronfield has a long and rich history, with its origins traceable to before the Domesday Book. We have an array of fine buildings and structures, 42 of which are now listed nationally. Recent development has also seen historically significant buildings brought back into use as cafes, event spaces and shopping areas.”

Question 1: How do you feel about the heritage and historical features of Dronfield?

All 74 residents who responded to this question expressed positive views in favour of protecting and maintaining the heritage and historical features of Dronfield. 36 of respondents stated that they made them happy and 33 proud. That these were important to the distinct character and history of Dronfield was a common theme. A number were positive about activities to date to conserve the heritage and history of Dronfield, especially in relation to ‘The Barn’.

Question 2: What other buildings should be protected?

About 50 residents responded to this question.

This open-ended question asked for people to identify other buildings of note that they thought ought to be protected.

While many respondents made general comments regarding protecting buildings of architectural interest, others made suggestions regarding specific buildings/locations within the town, such as:

- Buildings on Sheffield Road
- High Street Barn
- Dronfield Hallows Golf Club house
- Library

Question 3: How can we make the best use of our town's heritage and identity?

54 residents responded to this question.

There was a general view that better promotion/education may be beneficial, particularly for schoolchildren, and to make residents and visitors aware of the wonderful heritage and historical buildings that already exist within Dronfield.

A co-ordinated approach towards tourism is suggested together with identifying a central location where information on heritage, places of interest and walks in the general area can be found.

TOPIC 4: HOUSING

“Dronfield is home to over 23,000 residents and has around 10,000 houses. Most residents own their own home and we have very few properties for rent, either privately or through social rent. Most of our houses are detached or semi-detached and have 3 or more bedrooms.”

Question 1: Do you think more houses should be built in Dronfield, and if so where?

123 residents responded to this question.

No: 77 (55%) were against any more houses being built in Dronfield.

Yes: 60 (43%) were in favour of more housing. However, many of those indicating yes were against large developments, particularly on Green

Belt land, and indicated that small pockets of housing would be acceptable on brownfield/infill land.

4 or 2% of respondents did not know.

When asked about where new houses should be built the overwhelming preference of those replying to this question was on brownfield sites.

Question 2: Looking at positive and negative aspects, what effect do you think more housing will have on Dronfield?

139 residents responded to this question.

Negative Aspects: The vast majority made negative comments. Residents felt strongly that more housing would have a negative impact on pressure on existing services (e.g. schools and health services, 109 respondents mentioned this); congestion (65 respondents mentioned this) and the town's existing infrastructure (43 respondents mentioned this), which they felt was already under pressure. Many respondents referred to the loss of green belt land.

Positive Aspects: A small number of residents made some positive comments. These mainly related to the provision of housing, including affordable, that would be available to buy or rent, particularly for young, first time buyers.

Question 3: What type of houses should be built?

118 residents responded to this question. A wide range of views were expressed, some of the main themes were:

Affordable houses: especially for younger and first-time buyers figured most strongly in the responses.

Other types that featured strongly in the responses were:

Social rented housing.

A mix of housing types.

Bungalows and specialised housing to enable elderly residents to downsize, but still remain within the town. It was felt that this would, in turn, free up larger homes for families to buy.

Some residents indicated that they did not want to see any type of housing being built in the town.

TOPIC 5: ECONOMY

“When we talk about Dronfield’s economy we are particularly thinking about its shopping provision and the businesses which operate out of the town. We have several smaller shopping hubs as well as the Civic Centre which is considered to be the retail core. Our business offer is quite diverse ranging from industrial units at Callywhite Lane and the Gunstones Factory to smaller local businesses dotted around the town.”

Question 1: Do you think we have the right types of shops and businesses in the town?

73 residents responded to this section of the survey, with a roughly 60%/40% split between those answering yes and those answering no.

Of those answering no, many respondents commented in relation to the Civic Centre, that the range of shops was reducing in quality and number.

Question 2: What shops and businesses do you think are lacking in the town?

A wide range of views were expressed. Some of the themes were that the town needed more general type shops such as a those selling food and clothes as well as pubs and other forms of entertainment. Fewer charity shops was mentioned by several respondents.

Question 3: What are your views on the potential extension to Callywhite Lane?

There were 82 responses to this question. Of these which expressed an opinion, 35 (53%) thought that extending Callywhite Lane was not a good idea and 31 (47%) that it was a good idea.

The main issues identified were:

- problems associated with increased traffic (more HGVs).
- access to the site (possible new entrance required).

Some residents recognised that extension of this area would be good for the economy (jobs) and that it would afford the opportunity of cleaning up this area.

TOPIC 6: TRANSPORT

“By transport we mean walking, cycling, car use and public transport. This includes your own way of using these methods as well as the impact others’ use has on you.”

Question 1. What are the main transport issues in Dronfield?

102 residents responded to this section of the survey.

The survey results indicate the main issues to be in relation to bus services, traffic levels and parking, which attracted the highest number of comments regarding transport. Some of the main themes were:

Public Transport: Residents were concerned that the bus service was inadequate, particularly in/to the Hallows Estate and Coal Aston. There was specific mention of problems with the 43, 43a and 44 bus services.

Congestion/Traffic Levels: This was a specific cause of concern with many residents, especially in relation to the high volume of cars and HGVs passing through the town.

Poorly maintained roads: This was raised an issue by many respondents.

Parking: Several residents identified inconsiderate illegal parking as an issue, especially on pavements and on-street parking. Particular reference was also made to the narrowness of the streets and issues of parking at the Train Station.

Question 2: How do you feel when you move around Dronfield?

100 residents responded to this question. Residents were split over this issue.

About 40% (43) of those residents who responded to this question indicated that they felt safe and confident when moving around the town, citing the many footpaths that allow people to move freely both in the town and through the valley.

Roughly 60% (57) were concerned. The high and growing volume of traffic being experienced and the impact it had on residents ability to move freely and safely around the town was a major theme here. Often associated with this issue, residents also highlighted the problems of pollution, noise, congestion and parking.

Question 3: How do you feel about the level of traffic?

101 residents commented specifically on this question.

The overwhelming 89 (88%) of residents felt that traffic levels were too high and worsening. 12 (12%) had no major concerns about traffic levels.

Several residents mentioned that they felt that more housing/industry would exacerbate the problem.

General concerns centred on the number of lorries/HGVs especially using the narrow roads and the speed of vehicles.