

Business/Employment Survey Findings



Background

As part of our Neighbourhood Plan development it was decided that businesses within the Parish should be surveyed to find out their specific needs for the future.

A survey compiling of 10 specific questions about current and future needs were asked which also allowed for free text comments. In addition, questions seeking general information about businesses were asked, and businesses were also asked if they would like the opportunity to meet with the Neighbourhood Plan Employment Topic Group (2 businesses responded positively).

57 businesses were sent a questionnaire through the post on Friday 10th November 2017 with a closing date 3 weeks later, on Friday 1st December 2017.

The survey was advertised through the Ruishton Village Hall Newsletter which is distributed to every house within in the Parish, on the Ruishton website, and on the Ruishton, Thornfalcon & Henlade Facebook page. To help distinguish the survey from junk mail, the Neighbourhood Plan logo was put on the front of the envelopes in colour.

Of the 57 issued, 11 were returned. One of these was returned by a business which had closed, therefore the return rate was 10 out of 56 giving a return rate of 18%.

The businesses were either asked to score the importance of something out of 5 with 5 indicating a strong degree of importance and 1 indicating of no importance, or they were asked for their comments in free text format.

About the businesses that responded

2 of the businesses who responded employ 30 or more employees. The remaining 8 respondents employ between 1 and 4 people which could include the owner of the business.

5 of the respondents' businesses are located in Thornfalcon, 3 in Henlade (including Lower Henlade) and 2 in Ruishton. These businesses are conducted from specialist premises (1 respondent), unit on a business park (1 respondent), an office (3 respondents) and from home (5 respondents).

3 of the businesses have been operating in the Parish for up to 5 years, 2 between 6 -10 years, 3 between 11-30 years and 2 have been operating in the Parish in excess of 90 years.

When asked why the business is located in the Parish, of those who responded to this question, 4 stated they had moved home/Live here/Part of home, 2 stated they were family businesses, 1 took over an existing business and 1 was due to being close to J25 M5.

Summary of findings

It was clear from the responses that of most importance to these businesses is improvement in Broadband and communications, and improvement to traffic with traffic flows, congestion on the A358 and a reduction in through traffic specifically being mentioned.

Of least importance is the provision of more business premises with “improving car parking” and “the need for more housing in the Parish for potential employees” also of least importance.

Findings by Question

Question 1 – How important are the following to your business?

“Broadband and communication links” was clearly the most important to businesses with all businesses rating it as 5, of strong importance.

“Transport links” was clearly the next most important to the businesses with an average score of 4.5 out of 5. 8 out of the 10 businesses scored a 5 finding it to be of strong importance. Only 1 business scored it as of no importance.

“The environment within the Parish” scored an average of 3.9 out of 5 with businesses rating it either 4 or 5, or 1. “More local amenities” scored an average of 3.2 with a spread of scores from 1 to 5.

“Availability of new local employees” scored an average of 2.8, “Availability of work experience employees” scored an average of 2.7 and “Education including further education facilities” scored an average of 2.6. “Availability of employment land/commercial/industrial buildings” scored an average on 2.4. All of these topics included ratings from 1 to 5.

Of least importance was “Access to a Commercial/retail centre” with an average score of 2.2. None of the businesses rated this as a 5.

Free text comments were:

- The environment is critical to our business and its employees, and to the prospects of attracting new employees.

Question 2 – How does the Parishes of Ruishton & Thornfalcon meet your business needs?

This was a free text question only and the comments were:

- We have been allowed to grow our business through site expansion.
- Parishes contribute nothing I am afraid!
- It doesn't, I operate my business from my home.
- Good access to M5. Good internet connection but not as good as it could be.
- Good central location to all of our clients.
- Apart from Henlade post office and the garage there are no local shops. Would rather use local than Hankridge Farm. The traffic on A358 is dreadful.
- No issues.
- We're a business who needs to welcome clients and contractors to an attractive area.

Question 3 – What should the Neighbourhood Plan encourage, to meet your business needs now and in the future?

This was a free text question only and the comments were:

- Growth in housing and consideration towards the effect of any new road system locally.
- Reduced bureaucracy re business rates.

- Improve cycle route along river to Taunton. Improve internet connection so fibre into all premises. Cheap energy via community energy project such as windfarm/turbine or solar farm.
- Single development opportunities.
- Better broadband and mobile phone links. Lousy reception on phone.
- Faster broadband.
- Broadband is critical – we don't have fast broadband. Also bookable meeting rooms in village halls etc and networking opportunities.

Question 4 – What changes to transport would improve your business prospects?

“Improve traffic flows” was of most importance to the businesses with an average score of 4.1. 7 of the 10 businesses rated it either a 5 or 4 and only one business rated it as a 1, of no importance.

Of second importance, with an average score of 3.6, was “ensure new developments contribute to improving traffic flows”.

“Reduce traffic flows” scored an average of 3.3 and “improve and increase public transport serving the area” scored an average of 3.2. Both of these received scores across the range of 1 to 5.

“Improve pedestrian walkways” averaged 2.9 with 4 businesses rating it of no importance, and 4 businesses rating it as either a 4 or 5. “More cycle lanes” averaged 2.7 with a spread of scores from 1 to 5.

Of least importance were “increase traffic calming measures” scoring 2.2 with 1 business scoring it a 5 and “improve car parking” scoring 2.1 with no businesses scoring it a 5.

Question 5 – What transport changes would you like to see?

This was a free text question only and the comments were:

- The proposed changes in the A358 could be critical to our business. If we are cut off by a new road to the M5, our passing business will die and we will become another “Stewley Cross” site. Not good for us or the parish.
- Henlade, bypass, improve J25 M5, dual carriage remaining A303/A30 to Exeter.
- We would like to see improvements to the A358 through Henlade leading to Taunton to prevent lower Henlade being used as a rat run. It is believed that the new proposed road (super highway) will not improve traffic going into Taunton via the A358 Henlade.
- Cycle way along river to Taunton. Better/more parking off road for new developments.
- Bypass for Henlade.
- Additional motorway junction at Walford Cross.
- Reduce through traffic.
- I am not in favour of bypass extensions and further roads at the expense of the environment. We need to think about 21st Century SMART development i.e. its not just about driving a car into a business park.

Question 6 – What changes to business facilities would help your business?

“improvement to broadband” was clearly the top issue for businesses with all respondents scoring it as 5, a strong degree of importance. “Greater economic activity” averaged 3.5 with scores ranging

from 2 to 5. “More land allocated for commercial development” averaged 2.5 with 2 businesses scoring it a 5, and 4 businesses scoring it a 1. “Provision of more business premises” averaged 1.8, the lowest average score across the full survey with 9 of the respondents scoring it either 1 or 2.

Question 7 – Any other employment considerations you would suggest?

This was a free text question only and the comments were:

- Increase broadband speed.
- Multiple sites are better than one large site as encourages competition and a broader range of potential deals.
- Faster speeds and better reception.
- Fibre to premises.
- Broadband needs to reach the isolated housing – often this is where enterprise is happening.

Question 8 – do the majority of your employees live within the Parish?

50% of the businesses have the majority of employees living in the Parish; 5 businesses responded Yes and 4 responded No with 1 business reporting it as N/A. Both Yes and No responses had one each of the largest employers. There was no clear difference regarding whether employees lived within the Parish or not.

Question 9 – How important is the need for more housing in the Parish for potential employees?

The average response to this question was 2.1 with the highest score of 5 being given by 2 businesses and 6 businesses giving it the lowest score of 1.

Question 10 – What sort of housing development would most help your business?

This was a free text question only and the comments were:

- Any housing development would provide recruitment opportunities and potential customer increase.
- Housing development does not necessarily contribute to our business.
- No more housing development is required for the business. More houses will result in more traffic and more congestion slowing my journeys to clients.
- Some aspirational properties.
- SME development sites need to be made available for small-medium house builders.
- None.

Respondents were also asked if they had “Any other comments”. One business made the following comment:

- We are a long established business (100+ years). The site also leases premises to two other local businesses, so the site itself employs 50+ people. A lot of this employment could be put at risk if we are isolated by the proposed new link road to the M5.



Ruishton & Thornfalcon Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan

Business/Employment Questionnaire

This process is about you, your business and its future. We can't stop the future from happening; we can help make it a better future. A few minutes spent filling out this questionnaire can make a difference and the Parish Council hopes, through its Neighbourhood Plan, to make for a better future for its community as a whole.

Return completed questionnaires in the SAE by **Friday 1st December 2017**

Q1 – How important are the following to your business?

(For each, please indicate a score of 1 to 5 where 5 indicates a strong degree of importance and 1 indicates of no importance)

- The environment within the Parish
- Transport links
- Broadband and communication links
- Education including further education facilities
- Availability of new local employees
- Availability of work experience employees
- Availability of employment land/commercial/industrial buildings
- More local amenities
- Access to a Commercial/retail centre

Comments:

Q2 – How does the Parishes of Ruishton & Thornfalcon meet your business needs? (Please describe this in the comments box below)

Comments:

Q3 – What should the Neighbourhood Plan encourage, to meet your business needs now and in the future?

Comments:

Q4 – What changes to transport would improve your business prospects?

(For each, please indicate a score of 1 to 5 where 5 indicates a strong degree of importance and 1 indicates of no importance)

- Improve traffic flows
- Reduce through traffic
- Improve car parking
- Ensure new developments contribute to improving traffic flows
- Improve and increase public transport serving the area
- More cycle lanes
- Increase traffic calming measure
- Improve pedestrian walkways

Q5 - What transport changes would you like to see?

(Please describe this in the comments box below)

Comments:

Q 6 – What changes to business facilities would help your business?

(For each, please indicate a score of 1 to 5 where 5 indicates a strong degree of importance and 1 indicates of no importance)

- Provision of more business premises
- More land allocated for commercial development
- Greater economic activity in the Parish
- Improvement to broadband

Q7 - Any other employment considerations you would suggest? (Please describe in the comments box below)

Comments: <i>(Please include comments on what sort of improvement to broadband would benefit your business)</i>
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Q8 - Do the majority of your employees live within the Parish? Yes / No*
 (*Please delete as appropriate)

Q9 - How important is the need for more housing in the Parish for potential employees?

(Please indicate a score of 1 to 5 where 5 indicates a strong degree of importance and 1 indicates of no importance)

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Q10 - What sort of housing development would most help your business? (Please describe in the comments box below)

Comments:

<p>Comments:</p>

Q10 - About Your Business

(Please complete this section as it will help us identify trends by area. We will NOT use this information for any other purpose than developing our Neighbourhood Plan and will not pass this information to any other third party)

- Name of your business?
- Nature of your business?
- Where is your business located?
- Number of employees at your business?
- Is your business conducted from: (*Tick most accurate*)

- a) an office
- b) unit on a business park
- c) retail outlet
- d) specialist premises
- e) your home
- f) other (*Please describe*)

- How long has your business operated in the Parish?
- How did your business come to be located here?

Comments:

Q11 - Would you like the opportunity to meet with the Neighbourhood Plan Employment Topic Group? Yes / No*

(If so, please ensure you provide your contact details on this form so that Catherine Faulkner, Neighbourhood Plan Administrator, can contact you.)

Thank you for completing this business questionnaire. Your answers will be treated in confidence and no response outputs will be published except in aggregate so that no individual business can be identified.

There will be further opportunities for you to participate in the process of producing the Neighbourhood Plan. Your input into the Plan really is essential in providing evidence of the views of the businesses in our Parishes.

For your information, all meeting notes and appropriate documents are published on the website www.ruishton.org.uk/parishcouncil/np/index.htm, as well as notice of future events.

Please return completed forms in the enclosed SAE by **Friday 1st December 2017**