

Report on Hemingford Grey Neighbourhood Plan Survey – March/April 2020

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Summary

In March 2020 a survey for residents was delivered to all households in the Neighbourhood Plan area (the whole Parish). Children aged 9 to 11 (Key Stage 2) at the local primary school also completed the survey as part of their classwork.

The response rate was a disappointing 16% with 221 households replying. This was probably due to the impact of the Covid lockdown from March 23rd. The absence of any immediate planned major developments in Hemingford Grey may also have limited the number of residents motivated to participate. The response rate was less than 10% in the estates along London Road - perhaps an issue of identifying with St Ives rather than Hemingford Grey?

67 children completed the survey.

Responses were overwhelmingly positive about living in the Parish. Spontaneous comments often mentioned the peacefulness, community spirit, facilities and location of the parish relative to main roads and Huntingdon railway station. Being close to St Ives was also regarded as an asset. A clear majority of responses indicated no desire for any significant changes to the parish – its population, environment or character

The residents' survey identified the following issues to be relevant to living in Hemingford Grey: General facilities; Road issues; Planning control; Buses (lack of). The physical environment that surrounded residents was also identified as being enjoyed and appreciated. Qualitative issues were also 'written in' (unsolicited) such as community spirit, friendliness, mixed demographics and general tranquillity.

The children had a positive view of the parish as a place to live. Many of the children commented on its 'friendly community' and the village being a 'quiet' and 'calm' place to live. The children's responses focused on the natural environment, parks, sport facilities and the shop.

The results from the survey will underpin the development of the Neighbourhood Plan including planning policies and actions for the Parish. Further consultation with residents and local interested parties will be undertaken to further explore the results of the survey.

Methodology

The survey deliberately used only three open ended questions as recommended by our Cambs ACRE advisors. The concept is to find out what people like or dislike about the parish and living here without feeding them specific questions. This provides an idea of residents' priorities without forcing them to answer questions about matters that do not immediately come to mind. However this presents much more work for analysis than if tick box questions or yes/no answers were used.

The only prompts were in general areas of interest with a set of key words and a map of the parish showing places of interest.

Residents were provided with a free post envelope and completed surveys could be handed in at the Esso Garage, The Village Store or the Parish Centre. In addition, the survey could have been completed on the parish council website.

The Survey was hand delivered by volunteers to approximately 1,380 households (3,000 residents).

See Appendix 1

A Neighbourhood Plan Update flier was also delivered to every household prior to the Survey being delivered. See Appendix 2 Informing residents that the survey was shortly to be delivered. It was hoped that this would raise awareness and increase the response rate. See Appendix 3.

In addition a member of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group co-ordinated a session with Key Stage 2 children at the Primary School with 67 children aged 9 to 11 participating.

A consultation with landowners and businesses is also planned using a similar survey but also with informal breakfast/tea meetings. This was postponed due to the lockdown and has been rescheduled for Winter 2020/2021

Unfortunately the timing of the survey coincided with the developing Covid pandemic and in early March no one really understood the scale of the pandemic and its implications for daily life.

Response Rate

The Survey was delivered to all households in March 2020 - total approximately 1380 households with 3,000 residents.

The response rate was 16% with 221 households replying.

Survey response was disappointing despite an on-line option but reasonably spread across the parish except for the London Road developments where residents often consider themselves as being in St Ives. There were also 18 responses with no street addresses.

We received 221 responses of which 9 did not enter the number of residents. So 212 responses accounted for 341 people and a pro rata count for 221 responses would therefore be to cover 355 residents.

There were 1378 addresses delivered and the percentage return is therefore only 16% representing about 12% of the population of all age groups. This implies a greater response rates from smaller (older?) households.

The return rate in the London Road area was less than 10%.

The Survey was also undertaken by 67 Key Stage 2 children at Hemingford Grey Primary School. See appendix 2 for the School Report

The survey was delivered just before lockdown on March 23rd in response to Covid 19. It was therefore impossible to knock on doors to chase returns as had happened in the 2010 Village Plan survey.

The survey provided prompts for residents and these were used to record the interests or concerns of residents. In addition residents provided comments and observations on more qualitative aspects of living within the Neighbourhood Plan area which are also recorded below. (underlined comments relate to the quality of life in the NP area)

General Comments

The results show, in general, a very positive view of the parish as a place to live with the sentiment of ‘keep it as it is’ being clearly articulated by nearly 40% of respondents with the same percentage specifically using the word ‘community’ in a positive sense without any prompting. Another commonly expressed sentiment was ‘peaceful’, ‘tranquil’ or words of a similar meaning.

The most positive comments on the analysis were applied to the facilities provided in the village including the shop, pub, pavilion, parish centre and reading room. The most negative comments concerned the reduction in bus services, illegal or anti-social parking and speeding.

Other aspects of the parish that stood out were the general environment including the river, footpaths, playing fields and open spaces such as the walk around the fishing lake.

There were mixed messages about dogs (or their owners?), cyclists, affordable housing, the wakeboard business and access to the river for boat owners.

Analysis of Residents Survey March-April 2020

Very significant interest or concern (items mentioned by more than 50% of respondents)	
<p>General facilities- pub, cafe, parish centre (52%)</p> <p>Positive 101 46%</p> <p>Improve 5 2%</p> <p>Future 15 7%</p>	<p>General facilities Residents were positive about the facilities available in the parish as shown by the 101 positive responses. There were 20 comments in relation to Improvement and the future but no overall picture emerged. For example there were comments about green spaces, improvements to the footpath network, improved Reading Rooms, a village hall, and access to Arthur’s Meadow SSSI.</p>
<p>Road issues (53%)</p> <p>Positive 14 6%</p> <p>Improve 104 47%</p> <p>Future 30 14%</p>	<p>Road issues</p> <p>Roads and traffic attracted the most ‘complaints’ with 47% of responses requesting or suggesting improvements. The main complaint was about parking – particularly at the school but also in the village where pavement parking is perceived as a real problem. Speeding was also a prominent complaint with a 20mph limit requested by some. A small number wanted speed cushions removed and several requested better road maintenance. Overhanging hedges were an issue as were trees blocking street lights.</p>

Significant interest or concern (items mentioned by between 25% and 49% of respondents)

Planning control (44%)

Positive	6	3%
Improve	10	5%
Future	86	39%

Planning control

'Same as it is now' there was overwhelming support for the NP area to stay as it is- this included bricks and mortar issues but also the qualitative aspects that residents appreciated about the parish. 71 surveys contained information that clearly expressed this view. Developing the desire for no development 16 households were opposed to any new housing while a further 7 were opposed to large housing developments. In contrast 18 households made comments that were more nuanced and stated that some development might be acceptable (such as not wanted to see the parish overdeveloped). Some comments related specifically to some housing being acceptable. There was little mention of commercial development with 7 respondents opposed to commercial development. This reflects probably the absence of large scale commercial developments within the parish. (see below for specific comments) The protection of green fields from development was mentioned 6 times. As was 'creeping development' 1. The desire to retain the spatial separation of the village from St Ives and Godmanchester was mentioned 6 times. However many respondents referred to the village feel. There were a few comments in relation to the following; opposed to infilling with new houses 5; control over future development of Lake Ashmore and the Poultry Farm 6. Mick George was also mentioned (but that is in the adjacent parish), the treatment of front gardens 2; overdevelopment of existing houses 4.

Shops (43%)

Positive	75	34%
Improve	20	9%
Future	16	7%

Shops

As the survey responses were skewed towards the village centre there was only 1 comment about the shop in the Esso garage and that one comment wanted an improvement in healthy products stocked by the shop. The village shop was seen as a key facility within the parish with 64 positive responses (two thirds of those mentioning shops). However the village shop also attracted some adverse comments that related to prices and range of products. The comment was made of 'unfulfilled potential'. There was a desire to see local produce, deliveries for older people, and eco-refill facilities. A very small number of surveys included a desire to see additional shops including a butcher and bakery.

<p>River (40%) Positive 81 37% Improve 4 2% Future 12 5%</p>	<p>Rivers Residents were positive about access to the River with especial mentions of the Regatta. A slipway was requested by one resident as was an improved riverside footpath between Hemingford Grey and Hemingford Abbots and a footbridge across the river between the two villages.</p>
<p>Landscape (39%) Positive 78 35% Improve 5 2% Future 16 7%</p>	<p>Landscape Residents were positive about the natural environment that surrounded the parish. Several comments were made about planting more trees. Additionally there were comments made on verges for wildlife and 'managing for nature.'</p>
<p>Buses (37%) Positive 5 2% Improve 61 28% Future 40 18%</p>	<p>Buses Residents did appreciate access to the guided bus in St Ives. However generally residents sought an improvement in public transport as there was an appreciation of the importance of a regular bus services for older residents. One wrote 'I'm sad that I will probably have to leave due to lack of transport.' Over 70s made up some 40% of households responding to the survey. Cambs Insight estimates for 2018 for HG are that 22% of the population would be over 70. Further analysis is needed to see how age of responders correlates with bus comments.</p>
<p>Walking (36%) Positive 66 30% Improve 19 9% Future 13 6%</p>	<p>Walking Residents were positive about the walking opportunities with mention being made of the access to river walks and being dog friendly. In terms of improvements and the future mention was made of maintenance, a footpath to link the Yes estate with the village centre and school. Some wished for additional footpaths creating circular walks.</p>
<p>Sports facilities (29%) Positive 59 27% Improve 8 4% Future 16 7%</p>	<p>Sports facilities Residents listed the sport facilities with specific references to the Pavilion and the Regatta. In terms of improvements and the future 5 mentioned a swimming pool and 4 improvements to the tennis facilities.</p>
<p>Some interest or concern (items mentioned by between 10% and 24%)</p>	
<p>Parks and gardens (21%) Positive 43 19% Improve 1 0% Future 10 5%</p>	<p>Parks and Gardens Residents were positive about the open spaces within the parish with Daintree Green being mentioned. Residents wished to see the green/open spaces being protected in the future and being improved. For example by tree planting.</p>

<p>Affordable housing (19%) Positive 1 0% Improve 17 8% Future 27 12%</p>	<p>Affordable housing Of those who mentioned housing or affordable housing the vast majority were positive in their comments. Only 2 objected to affordable housing and it was mentioned by 18 households. Though it is important to note that the term 'affordable' was probably used for affordable housing for rent (as understood in local government terms) but also for affordable market housing. 8 Responses directly referred to affordable housing for younger people and younger families and 4 for smaller houses/bungalows for older people. There was one request for a care home. The overall tone of the responses was that some small scale housing development was in principle acceptable but that it should be affordable i.e. rented or for younger people and families. Some responses linked housing provision to ensuring the parish was a demographically mixed community.</p>
<p>Cycling (17%) Positive 11 5% Improve 20 9% Future 20 9%</p>	<p>Cycling Residents recognised the cycling opportunities in the parish. However improvements were sought to improve cycling and its safety for all. Access to the primary school and safe cycling to and from St Ives were specifically mentioned.</p>
<p>Historic buildings (12%) Positive 23 10% Improve 0 0% Future 10 5%</p>	<p>Historic sites and buildings Key words- village, atmosphere, character, architecture, pretty.</p>
<p>Place of Worship (11%) Positive 24 11% Improve 0 0 Future 0 0</p>	<p>Church Obviously much appreciated by many in the community and many will have included the church run facilities in their comments on facilities in general.</p>
<p>School (11%) Positive 23 10% Improve 3 1% Future 3 1%</p>	<p>School The local primary school was seen as an asset in the parish. However it also raised issues in other categories- parking, footpaths and cycling.</p>
<p>Play areas (10%) Positive 17 7% Improve 7 3% Future 6 3%</p>	<p>Play areas These were mentioned but little detail. Improved provisions for older children and teenagers were mentioned. Perhaps this reflected the demographic profile of the respondents.</p>
<p>Specific items areas of interest/concern (mentioned by <10%)</p>	
<p>Nature reserves (9%) Positive 16 8% Improve 1 0 Future 8 4%</p>	<p>Nature reserves There is one little known SSSI (Arthur's Meadow) which is rather inaccessible. However the Marsh Lane lakes are a county wildlife site and responses were probably in relation to nature in general</p>
<p>Health Facilities (7%) Positive 0 0% Improve 9 4% Future 6 3%</p>	<p>Health facilities These were mentioned in 15 surveys with respondents asking for a doctor's surgery in the parish even if only one morning a week.</p>

Written in (Unsolicited) headings featuring in multiple responses

Continuity (59%)	This encompasses all 131 responses specifically wanting the parish to remain as it is in general terms though not all ruled out 'sensible' infill or a small development. Actual comments range from 'keep the village as it is now' to 'no development please'
Community (57%)	125 responses specifically mentioned 'community' in a positive way with words such as 'spirit', 'friendly', 'mixed demographics', etc.
Tranquility (22%)	49 responses used words such as tranquillity, peaceful, quiet to describe the perceived environment

Conclusion

The two surveys showed how residents - young and old - liked living in the parish. They appreciate qualitative elements such as friendliness, a sense of community and tranquillity. These elements drew from the natural and built environment; shop, recreational facilities, the river and green spaces. There were issues associated with roads and traffic and concerns over new homes being built in the parish. Not surprisingly for the school children the sports facilities were important along with the school, youth facilities and play areas. The 'green' aspects of the parish were important for the children ranging from parks such as Daintree to nature and its importance and the desire to see more nature reserves and tree planting. The children were very conscious of the environment and there was the desire to improve it.

Importantly the majority of residents wished the parish to remain essentially as it is, but there was awareness that some change could be beneficial.

The Next Steps

The next step in the Neighbourhood Plan Process is a scoping workshop facilitated by our consultant to tease out the vision and objectives for the parish. This then leads to the development of planning policies for the Neighbourhood Plan.

However before the workshop can be arranged the initial consultation with landowners, businesses and local organisation has to be undertaken. This should all be completed by April 2021 however Brexit and its impact on agriculture may impact on our ability to speak to landowners in a meaningful way.

The continuing impact of Covid means that activities will be limited until the vaccine is rolled out and the restrictions on daily life can be relaxed.

For further information on this report, the scoping workshop or the Neighbourhood Plan please contact either Anne Meredith or Robin Waters (contact details available on the Parish Council Website)

Appendix 1 Copy of School Survey Report

Appendix 2 Copy of Survey, map and prompt words

Appendix 3 Copy of Neighbourhood Plan Update

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