

Leighton-Linslade Residents' Survey: Report of Key Findings

1.0 Research Methodology

A total of 488 interviews were completed. Interviews commenced with 3 pilot shifts on 9th (1) and 11th September (2) and then, following an early review - after which a few small questionnaire modifications were made - a further 21 shifts were conducted from late September through to early November.

A number of different locations were used for the interviewing:

- Most commonly, interviewing was completed around the Town Centre on market days. This accounts for 171 (35%) of the completed interviews
- Interviewing was also completed around the Town Centre on non-market days (152 interviews/ 31%)
- Morrisons kindly gave permission for four interviewing shifts to be conducted on their premises, by the customer services desk. These account for 70 interviews (14%) of the total
- Similarly, Tesco came on-board in the latter half of October and a total of 39 interviews (8%) of interviews were conducted in their foyer
- Finally, we also obtained permission from Leighton Buzzard Train Station. A total of 56 interviews (12% of the total sample) were completed here

To be eligible for interview, respondents needed to be Leighton-Linslade residents, be aged over 18 and, critically, not have any family members working directly for either the Town Council or Central Beds. This final criterion lost us only a few interviews across the life of the fieldwork; the residency criteria, however, was more difficult to navigate. This was particularly true at the train station and at Tesco's, where an estimated total of c. 70 interview opportunities were lost owing to the respondent living outside of Leighton-Linslade.

A total of 10 interviewers were used. These were the two project directors (Philip and Simon), plus 8 personally-briefed and fully-trained interviewers.

1.1 Overview of Length of Tenure, Resident Demographics and Key Sub-Samples

Within our sample, the following profile of length of tenure (continuous) was evidenced:

LENGTH OF TIME LIVED IN LEIGHTON-LINSLADE	%/ no of interviews
Two years or less	10% (49)
Between 2 and 5 years	13% (64)
Between 5 and 10 years	11% (53)
Between 10 and 20 years	14% (68)
More than 20 years	52% (254)

While it is unsurprising that the majority of respondents are long-term residents, it is important to note that we have fairly robust samples in all the other intervals. As such, this affords the opportunity for interesting sub-analysis.

Demographically, the profile of our interviews was as follows – and note, this should not be taken as a snapshot of the profile of Leighton-Buzzard residency, though we aver that our only significant difference is a slight under-representation in under 25s, offset by an over-representation in over 55s.

Aged 18-24	:	26 interviews, 5% of the total sample
Aged 25-34	:	75 interviews, 15% of the total sample
Aged 35-44	:	70 interviews, 14% of the total sample
Aged 45-54	:	68 interviews, 14% of the total sample
Aged 55-64	:	97 interviews, 20% of the total sample
Aged 65+	:	152 interviews, 31% of the total sample
Male	:	198 interviews, 41% of the total sample
Female	:	290 interviews, 59% of the total sample

As it stands, this means that all sub-samples can be analysed in isolation except for 18-24s, who we would envisage merging with 25-34s to form an 'aged under 35' group.

2.0 Resident Affinity to Leighton-Linslade Town Council

Residents were asked to comment on their affinity/ engagement with the Town Council and their answers are summarised below:

Amount known	Total	Length of residency				
		< 2 yrs	2 – 5 yrs	5 -10 yrs	10 – 20 yrs	20+ yrs
Very little/ nothing	42%	65%	52%	30%	44%	36%
A little	37%	25%	33%	55%	28%	38%
A reasonable amount	19%	10%	14%	13%	24%	21%
A lot	3%	0%	2%	2%	4%	4%

Unsurprisingly, those who have been in the town longer (10+ years) claim to know most about LLTC. When we review by age:

- A reasonable amount/ a lot is claimed by 22% of the total
 - This is at its lowest among under 35s (13%)
 - And climbs to a peak of 32% among 55-64s

2.1 Awareness of Leighton-Linslade Town Council Communications Methods

The following summarises answers to 3 questions:

- a) awareness of the communication method shown as a vehicle for LLTC
- b) whether the method is preferred (1st or 2nd) method of communication for the resident (i.e. whether it is a vehicle through which they would like to hear)

Method	Awareness of LLTC use	Preferred method	2 nd most preferred method	Total 1 st + 2 nd
Leighton Buzzard Observer	80%	18%	21%	39%
Leaflets, flyers, banners and posters	73%	10%	17%	27%
Public Community Noticeboards	62%	3%	6%	9%
Web Site	61%	21%	12%	33%
'About Town'	59%	16%	15%	31%
Social Media	41%	18%	10%	28%
Local Radio	25%	2%	4%	6%
Consultations	24%	1%	0%	1%
Opt-in Email Newsletter	19%	10%	8%	18%
Trade Publications	14%	0%	0%	0%
Town Council App	8%	1%	3%	4%

Taken at an overall level, then, it is evident that whilst the Town Council web site has only the 4th highest awareness, it is the most preferred vehicle (1st place). Aggregating 1st and 2nd place votes, the Leighton Buzzard Observer takes over the top spot.

But here we see significant differences by tenure and age group:

- Among those who have been in town for less than 5 years, the leading answer is social media (30%) as first preference; by contrast, only 13% of longer (20+ years) residents cite social media as their first preference, with the Leighton Buzzard Observer (22%) taking top ranking ahead of the Town Council web site (20%)
- This phenomenon is even more pronounced when reviewed by age. Here, 43% of under 35s nominate Social Media as their first choice ahead of the web site which, with 24% of the vote, is the only other channel in double figures. By contrast, social media dwindles to 2% among over 65s and the Observer now has 29% of the preference
- The appeal of the web site (either 1st or 2nd choice) peaks among 45-54s. This notwithstanding, the web site as a communication vehicle is popular for all age groups and hence we advise as much content for all ages as possible is held on the web site

3.0 LLTC Responsibilities within the Council Tax Framework

Residents were shown two lists of services; one featured LLTC's remit and the other featured the larger remit of Central Beds. Upon reviewing the lists, residents were asked to state if anything in the list particularly stood out and verbatim answers were recorded.

- Two-thirds (66%) felt nothing stood out or seemed out of place
- Thereafter, results become very granular, with respondents falling into three groups
- In the first group, respondents commented on things that 'stood out' because they were familiar to them. For example:
 - 8% of residents commented that an LLTC service they use stood out in a positive way, whilst 2% said similar but in a negative light
 - 7% generally mentioned LLTC services that they use
 - For Central Beds these findings are 1% positive, 4% negative and 3% general
- In the much smaller second group, a smaller number of respondents mentioned a service or facility that they were unfamiliar with
 - 3 respondents (0.6%) – Astral Park
 - 4 respondents (0.8%) - TACTIC
- In the third group, some residents commented on things they found in one list that they expected to be in the other. However there was no common theme or consensus here, as evidenced by the responses below
 - 6 respondents (1.2%) expected TACTIC to be Central Beds
 - 5 respondents (1%) expected LLTC to have some parking or transport responsibilities
 - 4 respondents (0.8%) expected some elements of street cleaning to fall under the wing of LLTC
 - 3 respondents (0.6%) expected LLTC to have some library responsibilities
 - 3 respondents (0.6%) expected some open space/ parks elements to fall under Central Beds' remit
 - 2 respondents (0.4%) expected LLTC to have some education/ schooling responsibilities
 - 2 respondents (0.4%) expected the Xmas lights to be Central Beds responsibility
 - Similarly, 2 respondents (0.4%) thought that Central Beds ran the market

3.1 Reaction to LLTC share of Council Tax Bill

Residents were asked whether they were aware that a proportion of their Council Tax bill (issued by Central Beds) is paid to LLTC for the services it provides. Results are summarised below:

- A total of 81% of residents claimed to be aware of this
 - By length of tenure, the variation is not huge: a high of 85% among those who have lived in the town, a low of 72% among those who have lived in the town for between 2 and 5 years
 - Things vary more by age group with the finding being at its lowest among under 25s (70%) and its highest among over 65s (87%)

Having reviewed the split of responsibilities (see section 3.0) and having been informed of LLTC taking 7.8% of the total bill, respondents were asked to answer whether they felt they were getting value for money from LLTC Town Council. Here we see:

- A total of 69% (with rounding) feel that they are getting very (26%) or quite (42%) good value for money. Note that among the 'dissenting voices', a total of 8% have claimed to be unable to answer – removing these would increase the very good plus good score up from 68% to 74%
 - Less than one in ten (44 residents – 9%) felt that they were NOT getting value for money
- Interestingly, satisfaction with value for money is at its highest among those newest to the area, with 78% of those in situ for under 2 years claiming that they are getting value for money. By contrast, this dips to 65% and 67% respectively among the (larger) groups of residents who have lived in the town for 10-20 and 20+ years.
 - This correlates to a degree with age, though it should be noted that not all older results have been in the town for a long time and vice-versa with younger residents
 - By age, we see that 75% of under 35s feel they are getting good value for money; the lowest finding here is with 45-54s, where satisfaction dips to 60%, a significantly lower rating

Reasons for satisfaction with value for money were also taken. These reveal that:

- Among the 69% with a good/ very good rating, key reasons were that 'they don't get much but spend it well' (26%) and 'they cover a lot of areas' (21%). Additionally, 18% commented that they were happy with the service currently provided and 17% felt that the key facilities in the town were in good condition
- By contrast, among the 9% feeling that they were not getting value for money, 27% were unhappy with the level of service provided, 25% commented that important things were being missed out and 18% felt that elements of the town/ facilities were in poor condition

Residents were also asked to answer whether they were aware of the Town Council amount of their total bill remaining unchanged for the past 6 years. Here only one in four (26%) admitted to being aware of this fact.

4.0 The Residents' Voice: Areas of Focus for LLTC (Unprompted)

Prior to being shown the LLTC's four areas of focus for the coming years, residents were asked to nominate what their areas of focus for the council would be. Please note that whilst respondents had previously seen the list of responsibilities, they were advised not to post-rationalise or censor their responses. In essence: 'there are no right or wrong answers'.

Key answers (achieving in excess of 5% at a total level) are shown in the tables below. Note that there are a further 15-20 codes/ answers 5% response or lower – these are shown below the tables and commentary. In all instances, we recommend reviewing the verbatim responses provided – these provide an unexpurgated overview of sentiment and indicate the granularity (and detail) of the response

	Total	< 35	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Focus on roads/ traffic/ infrastructure	17%	9%	20%	28%	12%	20%
More policing/ a station	14%	17%	14%	13%	16%	10%
Parks, open spaces and sporting provision	13%	11%	11%	18%	16%	11%
More for young people/ teenagers	12%	23%	11%	9%	7%	9%
Reinvigorate/ promote the town centre	9%	9%	11%	13%	8%	7%
Maintain cleanliness/ upkeep of town	8%	7%	6%	10%	6%	10%
Improve/ maintain the market	8%	5%	7%	13%	6%	11%
No comment/ nothing to say	8%	16%	4%	4%	7%	5%
Potholes	7%	7%	10%	3%	7%	7%

	Total	Length of tenure in town				
		< 2 yrs	2-5 yrs	5-10 yrs	10-20 yrs	20+ yrs
Focus on roads/ traffic/ infrastructure	17%	10%	20%	21%	22%	15%
More policing/ a station	14%	14%	13%	15%	10%	14%
Parks, open spaces and sporting provision	13%	12%	8%	19%	13%	13%
More for young people/ teenagers	12%	14%	13%	8%	15%	11%
Reinvigorate/ promote the town centre	9%	6%	14%	8%	12%	8%
Maintain cleanliness/ upkeep of town	8%	12%	3%	9%	7%	8%
Improve/ maintain the market	8%	4%	14%	4%	10%	8%
No comment/ nothing to say	8%	20%	8%	4%	7%	6%
Potholes	7%	4%	6%	9%	7%	7%

Whilst there are clearly some differences, there are also several commonalities:

- Whilst we appreciate that LLTC has influence across all areas, technically the first area under its remit is parks, open spaces and sporting provision – third place overall
- Policing is at 10% in every age group, as is parks, open spaces and sporting provision
- Disappointingly, 'no comment' levels are significantly higher among those newer to the town and those aged under 35
- A need for additional services/ facilities for youth is significantly more prevalent among under 35s; however it occurs fairly consistently by length of tenure

As mentioned, there is a significant 'tail' of responses with a smaller incidence. For the sake of completeness, we list these below with any interesting sub-analysis

- Stop/ minimise town growth = 3%
- Health services (doctors) = 4%
- Schools = 2%
- TACTIC = 2%
- ASBO review = 3%
- Attract/ promote new businesses = 2%
- Help homeless = 4% - mentioned in all age groups/ tenures
- Pavements and paths = 3%
- Bus services = 2%
- Allotments = < 1%
- Parking = 5% - no mentions among under 35s, peaking at 9% among over 65s
- Social housing = 1%
- More for older residents = 3%
- Traveller issues = 2%
- More community events = 1%
- Focus on current responsibilities only = 1%

4.1 Reaction to Four areas of Focus for LLTC

Residents were then asked to review the four areas selected for focus by LLTC. For each, they were asked whether they were in favour of or against the focus.

In detail, the four areas as they were outlined to residents were as follows:

- 1) **Operational Efficiency**: running the Town as efficiently as possible to ensure best value for money and the highest level of local services
- 2) **Town Growth**: ensuring the infrastructure needed to meet the needs of our growing town by influencing the local authority and other partners
- 3) **Keeping the Town and Town Centre Vibrant**: supporting the market, local businesses, town and community promotions as well as other town centre improvements
- 4) **Open Spaces, Sporting Provision, Cemetery and Allotment Services**: providing great open spaces for a wide variety of sport and leisure activities and delivering the best possible cemetery and allotment services

Initially we show a table that summarises all four areas together.

	Strongly in favour	Slightly in favour	Neutral	Slightly against	Strongly against	Selected as #1 area
Operational Efficiency	59%	24%	15%	2%	1%	16%
Town Growth	64%	19%	10%	4%	3%	36%
Keeping the Town and Town Centre Vibrant	69%	24%	3%	3%	1%	31%
Open Spaces, Sporting Provision, Cemetery and Allotment Services	60%	28%	11%	1%	0%	17%

Here there are two key things to note:

- Each area has an 80% approval minimum
- Town Growth; whilst this has the lowest overall approval (82% when rounded), it garners the highest proportion of residents saying they wanted it to be the number 1 focus. We observe that many were (anecdotally) simply turned off by the phrase 'growth' and hence discounted this option out of hand

Looking at each of the four areas in more detail:

Operational Efficiency

- Overall 83% in favour.
- Broadly flat by age, peaking at 89% among 55-64s
- Over 90% of those newer to the town (under 2 years residency) are in favour – the highest residency finding

Town Growth

- Overall 82% in favour
- 90% of those newer to town (under 2 years) in favour; by contrast only 76% those with a residency of 5-10 years and only 79% of those with a residency of 20+ years are in favour
- By age, higher among the 3 age groups between 25 and 54 (86%)
- Nominated by 36% as their key area
 - This peaks at 47% among 45-54s
 - By tenure, little difference seen – varies between a low of 35% and a peak of 41%. This means that it is the leading concern// area of focus for residents irrespective of the time they have been in the town

Keeping the Town and Town Centre Vibrant

- Overall, when rounded, 92% in favour – in excess of 88% in favour in all key sub-audiences (age and length of tenure)
- For all sub-audiences excepting one, this is the second most preferred option/ area of focus. That exception is under 35s who make it their number 1 concern

Open Spaces, Sporting Provision, Cemetery and Allotment Services

- Overall, when rounded, 87% in favour
- This is very consistent by age group – 82% (55-64s) is the lowest
- It is similarly consistent by length of tenure, not dipping below 83% and not exceeding 91%
- However when set against other priorities/ areas of focus it does only come in third

5.0 Reaction to the Devolution Issues

In the final section of the survey, respondents were asked to comment on devolution issues. Questions were posed as follows:

‘Earlier, I showed you a list of services that are the responsibility of the Town Council and a list of the services that are the responsibility of Central Bedfordshire. There is a possibility that some of the services that currently sit under Central Bedfordshire could be devolved/ switched to Leighton-Linslade Town Council. In principle, how confident would you feel in the Town Council delivering any such services (assuming appropriate resource was provided)?’

Responses to this question are highlighted in the tables below:

	Total	< 35	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Very Confident	13%	18%	17%	13%	6%	11%
Confident	36%	38%	39%	37%	35%	34%
Neutral	34%	35%	30%	35%	41%	30%
Not very confident	12%	9%	11%	9%	12%	16%
Not at all confident	5%	1%	3%	6%	5%	9%

	Total	Length of tenure in town				
		< 2 yrs	2-5 yrs	5-10 yrs	10-20 yrs	20+ yrs
Very Confident	13%	16%	13%	8%	19%	11%
Confident	36%	41%	34%	51%	38%	32%
Neutral	34%	33%	41%	26%	28%	35%
Not very confident	12%	8%	8%	15%	12%	14%
Not at all confident	5%	2%	5%	0%	3%	8%

So confidence at a total level is a shade under 50% - noticeably many are neutral, generally because they feel unable to comment (‘I don’t have enough information/ Know too little too comment’ and ‘It depends on what would be devolved’ being their key rationale).

There are clearly noticeable differences by age group; both under 35s and 35-44s come in at 56%, but confidence slips well below 50% among 55-64s and those aged over 65.

By length of tenure the findings fluctuate with less consistency; the shortest tenancy/ under 2 years has the highest confidence (57%), but one group up on this (2-5 years) dips significantly to 47%. But most noticeable is that confidence is at its lowest among those who have lived in the town for longest.

Residents were also asked to qualify their reasons for their confidence rating. Results here can be categorised into the following groupings:

Among the 49% who are confident:

- LLTC 'having a good record' – 38%
- 'LLTC being local/ having greater affinity' – 30%
- General feeling that LLTC could be successful – 18%
- 'Critical of Central Beds ... LLTC would be better' – 8%

Among those with who are not confident (17%)

- From LLTC 'underperforming' in their current duties – 29%
- Need them to focus on what they are currently doing only – 18%
- A lack of confidence that they would actually have the resources – 17%
- From 'reluctance to see them move outside their remit' – 16%
- A general feeling that LLTC would struggle with the extra responsibility – 6%