

Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan



A Vision For The Future 2011

WHITCHURCH TOWN AND PARISH PLAN

CHAIR'S WELCOME

This is the Whitchurch people's plan for our parish; a community-led plan developed from the 'Have Your Say' survey. It is the largest and most detailed survey of local opinion ever undertaken in Whitchurch and follows over two years of consultation and deliberation.

The Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan shows what people feel about various aspects of living and working in the community. It provides a solid framework for making the changes that people want for Whitchurch over the coming five to ten years.

A great number of people from all sectors of Whitchurch society responded to this community survey.

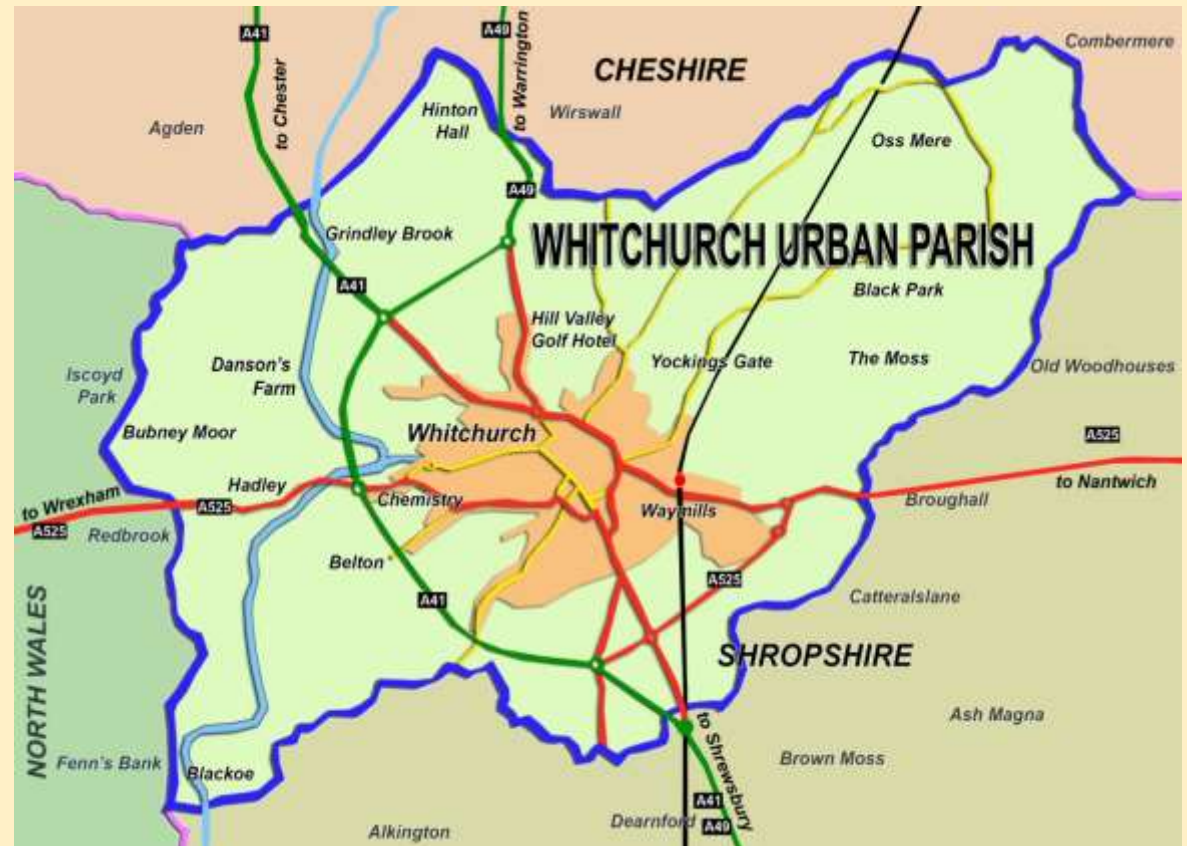
The ball is now rolling; changes are on the way and, with the strength of the Parish Plan leading the process, the changes should reflect what the people of Whitchurch want.

I hope that this momentum can be carried forward to ensure that the people of Whitchurch, with the support of our Town and Shropshire Councillors, can build an even better community for the future.

I would like to thank all those people involved in the creation of this Plan: the Steering Committee, the people who attended public meetings, the schools, clubs and organisations that allowed us to talk to members, those who talked to us in the street and those who responded to the Survey.

Philip Walker

Chair Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan Steering Committee



WHITCHURCH PARISH BOUNDARY

HOW THE PLAN WAS PREPARED

After two public meetings in the autumn of 2008 the Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan Steering Committee of 15 volunteer members was formed in order to develop a Community-led Plan for Whitchurch.

To achieve this objective the Committee consulted widely in a variety of ways.

These included:

- the development of a website and keeping the press informed
- public meetings
- the production and distribution of information leaflets;
- an initial survey to discover what people loved, disliked or felt needed improving in Whitchurch
- wide consultation with clubs, societies and interest groups
- consultation with the children and young people attending the Town's three state schools
- stalls and displays at many community events
- the development of the 'Have Your Say' Survey from the issues identified by the community. This Survey was circulated to all 4300 homes, and 300 businesses in the Parish. 450 students at Sir John Talbot's Technology College and 6th Form completed the Survey as part of their Citizenship classes.



The response to the Survey was very good with a 29% return and a good spread of responses across all age groups. The Survey results were closely analysed by age, home circumstance and geographical location and as a response from a student, resident or business. This analysed data has been used as the basis for the development of the Plan. It is interesting to note that there was a marked similarity in responses given by young people [11-21 years] and those of older people. Where there were significant differences between groups the figures have been provided.

The Steering Committee has tried to ensure that the Plan has been developed to take account of the significant political and organisational changes that have taken place at local, regional and national level during its evolution.

**'Strive to be unique.
Build on town's history as a
natural crossroad and trading point.'**

**'I would like to have more quality shops
and a really good supermarket'**

'Long live the Friday Coffee mornings!'

**'Whitchurch has lots of activities
... but they are not well publicised'**

'Community Learning - a must'

'I like living in Whitchurch'

**'Blackberry Fair shows there is great
underlying creativity community spirit -
let's do more of it!'**

**'places for the young people to go
especially at night instead of
hanging around Tesco'**

'Market needs to be reinvigorated'

'T'd like an allotment for me and my children'

**'Whitchurch is a lovely
place to live, providing we keep and
maintain our green spaces and country areas.'**

quotes from 'Have Your Say', 'We Need Your Views'
and discussions with people in the shopping area of Whitchurch

HOW THE PLAN WILL BE IMPLEMENTED AND USED

The Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan has 18 sections, each of which has a context statement, the results of the Survey and ideas for Action Points. The separate Action Plan summarises the Action Points together with the identification of key partners and success criteria. Each household will receive a summary document containing an outline of the Action Plan.

The evidence gathered by the Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan should be used to help influence and inform local service providers, policies and decisions. The information can be used by the Town Council and local groups and organisations to back up grant applications, negotiations and campaigns. It will feed into Shropshire Council's planning and policy development including the Local Development Framework [LDF]. To this end the ordering of the sections follows that of the LDF.

It is to be hoped that the Plan will be the first point of reference for the Town Council, groups and individuals. This should lead to a more cooperative and coordinated approach to the development of all aspects of Town life.

A Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan Implementation Committee involving key partners will be established to ensure prioritisation and progress on the Action Plan.

The setting up of a Resource Strategy Group [Action 18.2] will bring together knowledge of funding streams and how to access them to support the Plan.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Following the launch of the Plan the Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan Steering Committee will cease to exist. Specific monitoring and evaluation of progress towards achieving each Action Point will be part of the brief of the Plan Implementation Committee and those taking a lead on particular Action Points.

An Independent Monitoring Group will be established with the specific role of ensuring that the momentum is not lost and that there is real progress in delivering the Plan as a whole. An additional role of this Group will be to provide support and encouragement to the Town Council and other organisations in implementing the Plan.

The Annual Parish Meeting for electors would seem to be the ideal occasion for the Town Council to inform the community about progress with the Plan.

The outcomes of monitoring and evaluation, together with continually changing circumstances, will require the Plan to be regularly updated. A full review of the Plan should take place after 5 years and a new Plan may be needed within 10 years.



OVERVIEW OF THE TOWN AND PARISH

Whitchurch is located in north Shropshire, abutting the Cheshire and North Wales borders. The Town is the longest occupied settlement in Shropshire. There are good transport links as it is located at the junction of the A41, A49, and A525 trunk roads, some 20 miles from the larger centres of Shrewsbury, Chester, Wrexham, and Nantwich. The Town is served by a station on the Manchester to Cardiff railway line, and the Shropshire Union Canal Llangollen Branch passes close to the Town.

The Town centre of Whitchurch combines historic old buildings and landmarks alongside 1960s and later developments. It is an important service centre for the surrounding area, and has a weekly charter market. The majority of shops are independently owned but there are some branches of national chain stores. The local newspaper "Whitchurch Herald" is published each week.

There is a range of community based facilities including a library, swimming pool, leisure centre, community hospital, day care centre, two community centres, youth centre, Heritage Centre, four places of worship [and two other Christian groups who meet in community buildings] and a multipurpose Civic Centre. Statutory education is provided by separate Infant, Junior, and Secondary schools, and a private Primary school. Whitchurch has an ambulance station, a police station and a fire station.

Data supplied by Shropshire Council shows that Whitchurch is the fifth largest market town in Shropshire with a population of 9,379 at the most recent assessment. Its population is comparatively young. There are more residents under the age of 18 than 65 and over. 68% of the population is in the age range 18 to 64 giving 5516 people of working age. Around a third of these have no recognised qualifications. The percentage of people claiming out-of-work benefits is above the average for Shropshire.

A higher proportion of residents work in elementary occupations or as process, plant and machine operatives than in professional, associate professional and technical occupations. The industrial estates contain some nationally and internationally known firms, but also local enterprises. However, significantly more people commute to work out of the Town than commute in.

Whitchurch has many voluntary organisations and groups including successful sports clubs, service organisations like Rotary, youth groups, drama groups, Photographic Society, History and Archaeology Group, Wildlife Trust, and Waterways Trust. The Chamber of Trade supports local businesses, and other groups are active within the tourism sector. Many national and local charities have branches in Whitchurch.

Whitchurch is a Fair Trade Town.



1 HOUSING AND GROWTH

Significant growth in Whitchurch took place at first in Victorian and Edwardian times and then at the end of the Great War when much new housing was provided by the Urban District Council [UDC]. Slum clearance and greater demand for housing after World War 2 led to the development of more council estates. In total over 700 houses were built by the UDC.



These new estates were scattered around the Town. Remnants of the surrounding open countryside remained as green corridors into the Town centre. Early private housing estates were constructed mainly on infill sites. Since 1970 most private building has been on the edges of the built

up area. In the Town centre there has been some more recent building of apartment complexes. The upper floors of some commercial premises have been converted into living accommodation.

Further development is constrained by the A41/A49/A525 bypass, the Shropshire Union Canal, the railway line and Whitchurch and Waymills industrial parks. The land between the existing built up area and these barriers could, potentially, be developed. The Conservation Area in the Town centre means that the style and quality of any new building work here is closely examined.

In 2004 there were 3,935 dwellings in Whitchurch with 54% being semi-detached, 32% detached and 14% flats, maisonettes and apartments. 69% of the dwellings were owner occupied, 17% rented from a social landlord and 14% rented from a private landlord. There is a hostel near the Town centre for young people moving out of the care system.

The 'Spotlight on the Shropshire Economy - Draft for Consultation' identifies the key issues related to housing.

"House prices in Shropshire are higher than national and regional averages [house prices tend to be lower in northern Shropshire towns] however workplace wage levels are lower, resulting in an affordability issue. Unaffordable house prices in addition to a lack of smaller dwellings and shared accommodation in some places contributes to out-migration of the young and can make it difficult for local people to live close by their place of employment.

There is a lower penetration of socially rented accommodation in Shropshire. Conversely the level of privately rented accommodation is high.

The number of households in Shropshire is forecast to grow faster than the regional average; this will put additional pressure on the housing market and means that substantial housing developments will be needed if there is to be sufficient housing supply to meet demand over the next two decades."

All these issues are relevant to Whitchurch.

Whitchurch shows a lower level of employment self-containment than other similar towns in the county. Just 48.5% of the resident working population is employed in the Town.

The future growth of Whitchurch will need to ensure that housing developments, service provision and job creation are considered as a whole.



What the Survey said

There was a universally very high level of support [94%] for starter homes probably reflecting the comparatively young population and the desire to remain resident in the Town. High universal levels of support [88%] were recorded for the provision of 2-3 bed family homes. There was a lower priority given to the need for larger 3-5 bed houses [68%]. Respondents had high recognition [89%] of the need for sheltered housing to support the elderly and people in difficulty. Support for bungalows [81%] rises with age. Single persons particularly thought there should be more sheltered housing, bungalows and starter homes. Demand [67%] for Housing Association housing and property for commercial rent was significant.

Survey respondents were keen that the green corridors remain and 44% thought that modest development on land already allocated for building should take place. 33% [51% businesses] supported development up to the line of the bypass. A significant minority of respondents [27%] saw no need for more housing in Whitchurch.



Action Points HOUSING AND GROWTH

- Initiate and deliver a local vision for the growth and development of the Town to meet housing need, expand employment opportunities and protect the environment. The views of residents should strongly influence planning.

Town Council

- Feed local community housing priorities, particularly affordable starter homes, into Shropshire Council housing planning.

Town Council

- Provide sufficient sheltered and extra care housing to meet local need.

Shropshire Council, Housing Associations

- Ensure that as the number of homes increases proper provision is made for the additional demands on services and infrastructure made by the increased population.

Town Council, Shropshire Council

- Ensure that residential and other planning takes account of the need to retain open green space and wildlife habitats in Whitchurch.

Town Council, Shropshire Council



2. BUSINESS AND JOBS

The location of Whitchurch and its good transport links provide potential for attracting and sustaining new businesses.

In 2007, there were 3080 employee jobs located in Whitchurch. Not including those who were self employed, 48.5% of jobs were occupied by men and 51.5% by women. Male full time jobs account for 39.3% of the total, male part-time 9.2%; female full time 22.4% and female part-time 29.1%. The service sector accounted for 85.7% of jobs, manufacturing 9.2% and construction 5.0%.

Only 48.5% of the working population is employed in the Town. Significantly higher numbers commute out of Whitchurch for work than into it.

The Town is particularly dependent on distribution, hotels and restaurants and the transport and communications sectors which absorb 45.8% of employees. Of an estimated 430 workplaces only 3% employ more than 50 people while 87% employ 10 or fewer. 32.2% of employees work in what are classified as declining sectors. At the time of writing this Plan two major supermarkets are each seeking planning permission to build large stores which would increase the number of larger employers in the area. The impact of such development on other businesses in the Town remains unknown.

In April 2009, the number of people out of work was 295. The highest proportion of these was found in the 25-49 year age group [47.5%] with youth unemployment running at 33.9%. 61% of the population of Whitchurch is aged between 18 and 64 years, and is therefore of working age. There is a greater number of residents under the age of 18 than 65 and over. National changes to pension arrangements in the future are likely to result in an increase in the number of people over 65 requiring employment. The proportion of people of working age in the Town is therefore likely to rise overall in the future.

A recent Skillsmart survey identified a total population of 45,527 living within a 20 minute drive time of Whitchurch. Analysis of consumer categories within the local population compared against the national average shows higher than usual proportions of Affluent Greys [38%], Wealthy Executives [16%] and Flourishing Families [11%]. All of these

groups fall into a higher than average income bracket. These statistics indicate positive possibilities for attracting relatively affluent users to the retail outlets and services in the Town.

However, compared to the rest of Shropshire, Whitchurch Town emerges as relatively deprived with almost half of the population living in the 20% most deprived areas in the county. The 2001 Census showed low academic achievement with over one third of residents having no recognized qualifications. However more recently, standards of academic achievement have been rising in the local secondary school and increasing numbers of young people are accessing further and higher level qualifications.

This wide range of social circumstances found within the local population of residents and users of the Town poses challenges and opportunities for the development of jobs and businesses.

A recent Skillsmart survey rated the town 7th in a UK wide survey of over 80 towns on overall retail experience. The Town offers a wide range of local retail services. Retail expenditure retention in the convenience good sector is high at 81%. The town also retains 73% of expenditure for DIY goods, 76% chemist goods and 51% on electricals.

In recent years, a number of new high street enterprises have been established and continue to flourish while others have been less successful.



What the survey said

The survey identified strong support for development of the retail sector in the Town, 75% by all respondent and 34% of businesses. There was

some lack of clarity in interpretation of the views on retail expansion regarding whether it was viewed as an area for more job creation or as a means of improving choice in the shopping experience.

There was significant support for the expansion of manufacturing [49%], Higher Education and training [48%], food production [46%] and specialist trades and workshops [44%]. 51% of business respondents saw Arts and Media as important compared to 33% of respondents overall. Higher Education and training was viewed as important by 48% of respondents overall but by only 36% of business respondents. 46% of businesses saw tourism as an important area for expansion. An increase in technology and internet based business was most strongly supported by young people under the age of 21.

Action points BUSINESS AND JOBS

- Town Council and Shropshire Council to work with partners to attract new businesses which will offer full time employment opportunities to the Town.
Town Council, Shropshire Council, Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, Chamber of Trade
- Support improvements to business infrastructure including supply of electricity to industrial units and faster broadband, and increasing the provision of serviced land.
Town Council, Shropshire Council
- Develop a business park with professional employment to enable young people to stay in the area after further education.
Shropshire Council, developers
- Press for continuation of support for business start ups from the Shropshire Enterprise Fund and its successor.
Shropshire Council, Town Council, Chamber of Trade
- Audit the potential work spaces in the town suitable for the development of small businesses.
Shropshire Council, Chamber of Trade
- Use the audit information to establish the use of the spaces identified – including provision for young people.
Shropshire Council

- Further encourage links between Sir John Talbot's Technology College and existing and potential high technology businesses.
Sir John Talbot's Technology College, Chamber of Trade
- Development of a Town Centre Retail Experience Strategy including supporting shops in order to maximise their sales and attract the more affluent shopper while still providing for those on more limited budgets.
Town Council, Regeneration Team, Shropshire Council, Chamber of Trade
- Explore sources of funding to support a Town Centre Property Improvement Scheme.
Town Council, Shropshire Council
- Set up imaginative schemes to use empty properties until they can be filled by traders.
Town Council, Chamber of Trade
- Examine successful initiatives for regeneration in other market towns across the country as a basis for future planning.
Town Council, Regeneration Team Shropshire Council
- Identify and agree a Unique Selling Point for Whitchurch to be used in the development of a strategy to promote and coordinate tourism to the Town and North Shropshire.
Town Council, Chamber of Trade, Better Welcome Whitchurch, local community groups, North Shropshire Market Towns Group, Shropshire Tourism
- Development of an Arts, Media and Information and Communication Technology Strategy to create jobs and regenerate the town.
Town Council, Chamber of Trade, Better Welcome Whitchurch, local community groups, North Shropshire Market Towns Group, Shropshire Tourism
- Encourage development of a thriving night time and weekend economy.
Chamber of Trade, Shropshire Council

3. COMMUNITY LEARNING

There are 'cradle to grave' learning opportunities in Whitchurch. There are at least two playgroups and two day nurseries listed for the Town. The NE Shropshire Children's Centre has a base at the Whitchurch CE Infant and Nursery School [ages 3-7]. There is Whitchurch CE Junior School [ages 7-11] and Sir John Talbot's Technology College (SJT) [ages 11-18] and in addition a small private school [the White House School, ages 3-11]. There is a lack of capacity at the Infant and Nursery School and the buildings at the Junior School and parts of SJT are old although both are kept in generally good condition. There is currently a review of all schools in Shropshire. Whilst falling rolls is an issue in most of the county it is not the case in Whitchurch and any additional residential building in the town will increase the demand for school places. All three state schools aspire to creating a learning campus for the Town. This might also meet the needs of adult groups.

The local authority schools are 'Extended' Schools and therefore offer a range of activities and learning opportunities for families and young people.

After the age of 16 many young people stay on at SJT. In order to access particular courses some young people travel to other education and training provision in nearby towns. County Training provides additional opportunities based at the Talbot Campus.

A small number of adult education classes are held in the Town [eight courses in January 2011 held at the Market Hall and Beechtree Community Centre (formerly Chapel Centre)]. More courses are available in Wem and Ellesmere for those with access to transport. It is evident from pre-Survey consultation that there is a need for more vocational and non-vocational learning opportunities in the Town.

There is a very active local group of the University of the Third Age (U3A) which meets weekly. This group has over 300 members all of whom are over 55 years of age. Currently some 32 different interest and activity groups meet in a variety of locations. The Beechtree Centre offers a range of courses, activities and opportunities for all ages. The Bradbury Day Centre at the Hospital offers older people the chance to rediscover old interests and hobbies as part of its broad range of services.

Concerns have been expressed about the lack of suitable affordable venues and also about the impact of the coming parking charges on groups which meet in the Town Centre. There is also a view that more needs to be done to inform people about the learning opportunities which are available and also to better coordinate this information.

What the Survey said

There were very high levels of support for improvements to the facilities for learning for our children and young people [91%]. There was good support for the notion that these facilities should be available for use at all the times [90%]. The need for more opportunities for learning for jobs and skills was thought to be very important by 96% of respondents. The importance of opportunities for all to undertake academic qualifications was supported by 93% of respondents. A very high 95% of respondents would like to see more courses which allowed people to develop knowledge and skills in interests and hobbies and a fairly high number of people thought that inter-generational learning opportunities were a good idea.

Action Points COMMUNITY LEARNING

- Continue to explore and work on the proposed idea of a 'learning campus' for Whitchurch.
Local schools, Shropshire Council
- Lobby for better adult education opportunities within the town to include vocational, academic and leisure courses.
Town Council, Walford and North Shropshire College, local community
- Support the Beechtree Community Centre in its plans for community education.
Town Council, Shropshire Council, local community
- Work with and encourage the trustees of the Brownlow Centre in their ambitions to improve the quality of the building and what it is able to offer as a venue for community learning and other activities.
Town Council, Shropshire Council, local community

4. IMPROVEMENTS TO THE PARKS

Whitchurch has two large Parks [Victoria Jubilee Park, Deermoss Meadow] and four smaller areas with play facilities that are managed by the Town Council. There is also a children's playground in Wayland Road run by local residents. A further large park, Queensway Playing Fields, is managed by the Residents Association.

The Town Council employs a contractor to carry out maintenance work on its parks and play areas. These involves regular safety checks of play equipment and play surfaces, seating, litter collection, and maintenance of the gardens and grassed areas.

What the Survey said

Whilst Victoria Jubilee Park and Deermoss Meadow are regularly used for organised activities for young people these are mainly football matches and training sessions. The survey shows that 91% of respondents would like there to be more facilities and organised activities to be available in the parks. 98% of Survey respondents indicated the need for stronger action to be taken over anti-social acts. These include the dropping of litter and fouling by dogs. 90% of respondents would like improved lighting.



Action Points IMPROVEMENTS TO THE PARKS

- Review provision of lighting, litter and dog waste bins in all the parks and replace and provide more where needed.

Town Council

- Install better signage informing users of park by-laws and how to report infringements.

Town Council

- Encourage community involvement in the prevention and reporting of infringements of laws and other anti-social acts.

Town Council

- Identify which additional facilities might be provided to meet the needs of all users but particularly younger people

*Town Council, Interest Groups, young people,
Sir John Talbot's School Council*

- Encourage community involvement in the provision and building of these facilities.

*Town Council, Queensway Residents Association,
Youth Services, local tradesmen*

- Identify a range of potential activities which would increase the use of the parks by the whole community both young and more mature.

Town Council

- Put together a series of events to be held in the Town parks.

Town Council, Interest Groups

5. SPORTS, CULTURE and the ARTS



There are clubs in Whitchurch for a very wide range of sporting activities most of which have their own dedicated facilities where these are required. The Swimming Centre and the Sports and Leisure Centre are both open to the general public. The Civic Centre has spaces for some sporting activities including

indoor bowls and badminton. Private facilities are available for exercise and fitness. There is an equestrian centre near to the town.

There is a good range of opportunities for participation in culture and the arts. Whitchurch Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society and Whitchurch Little Theatre Group regularly put on public productions in both the Civic Centre and the Talbot Theatre which is based at the Leisure Centre. The Talbot Theatre is also used by touring productions. There is a youth theatre group. Concerts are held in both the Civic Centre and St Alkmund's Church by organisations such as Whitchurch Band and the Border Singers. Two Edward German Festivals have been held recently recognising the connections of the composer with the Town. These have wide audiences and national recognition. A Community Choir has recently been formed.

Films are shown at the Talbot Theatre by 'Flicks in the Sticks'. This venue is not purpose built for cinema. Many Whitchurch residents travel out of town to specialist facilities in nearby larger settlements.

Whitchurch Heritage Centre has recently achieved museum status which will enable it to enhance the collections which it holds pertaining to Whitchurch. It is possible that artefacts which are at present held elsewhere will now be returned to the Town. Whitchurch Historical and Archaeological Group has a collection of local photographs. Meetings of this group are held in the winter months and small groups of members research topics about the town which often lead to the publication of books.

There is a long established and active Photographic Society in the Town and art groups meet regularly at the Beechtree Centre and at the Senior Citizens Club.

There is an identified need for more spaces for learning and practising art, craft and performing arts activities across all ages. Small art exhibition space is available at a coffee shop in town, at a small commercial gallery and occasionally at the Library but generally there is insufficient space.

Many people go to surrounding similar sized towns for entertainment rather than staying in Whitchurch.



What the Survey said

Improving local facilities and activities

81% of all respondents felt that the 11 – 18 years group should have improved local facilities and activities. Support for this was more than double that for any other age group. There was 40% support for providing for older people and people with disabilities. Improved access for families on low incomes was supported by 36% of respondents. 35% of respondents thought that children aged 5 to 11 were a priority.

Sports facilities

The highest level of support [71%] was for the provision of facilities for a wider range of physical activities and sports. The 22 – 45 years group gave this particular support [80%]. It is likely that people in this age range will be the most active and may well be parents.

Provision of a combined swimming and sports hall on one site was considered important [51%]. Support for provision of a new swimming pool including a children's pool was particularly high with 22 – 34 years group [68%] and also with families [59%].

The provision of public tennis courts had 33% support.

There was 24% support for the provision of more football pitches but 39% wanted to improve existing facilities for football, rugby and cricket.



Arts

The highest priority was for a local cinema [77%]. Support was particularly strong amongst young people. Provision of a theatre was supported by 46% and of a museum by 42%. This support was particularly strong in older age groups.

36% of respondents supported provision of rooms for art & craft activities. Support for this was strongest in the 22 – 34 years group.

Provision of an exhibition centre, a concert hall and music/drama workshop space were each supported by about 30% of respondents. There was minority support for an art gallery and for small spaces for performance [both 17%].



Action Points SPORTS, CULTURE and the ARTS

- Lobby for the improvement of swimming facilities – including a children's pool.

Shropshire Council

- Redevelop the Civic Centre for improved multipurpose use.

Town Council, Shropshire Council

- Explore the possibility of a purpose built Arts Centre to include a theatre/cinema and spaces for other activities.

Shropshire Council, Town Council, Lottery funding, local groups

- Explore the possibility of funding for improvements to the facilities for team sport.

Shropshire Council, other funding streams

- Facilitate the increased provision of an even wider range of activities for all ages and abilities in a variety of sports and exercise and in arts and crafts.

Shropshire Council



6. IMPROVED OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

In Whitchurch there are many clubs and facilities for young people. Centre North East welcomes different aged groups on each evening of the week and on Saturday and there are two voluntary church-based youth groups. Army and Air Cadets and Scouts and Guides and their younger and older affiliated groups meet each week. Clubs for at least eight different sports have young persons sections. The Sports and Leisure Centre has many facilities open to young people and both the Junior School and Sir John Talbot's have representative teams. Young people can join the Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society and the Little Theatre Group and take to the stage in their productions. There is also a Youth Theatre group. The Beechtree Centre runs information technology and other courses. In addition there is space for less organised activities on the Victoria Jubilee Park, Deermoss Meadow and Queensway Playing Fields.



There is an identified need for more and different activities for young people.

What the Survey said

The need for more informal activities for young people was shown in early consultations and was confirmed by the Survey.

Improving opportunities for young people came top in the list of priorities chosen by respondents to the Survey. Respondents were asked to choose four from the alternatives listed. The percentages recorded here are the average score for all respondents [A] and the average score for respondents aged 11-21 years [YP]. The list has been ordered using the average score for all respondents.

Multi Use Games Area	49% [A] and 55% [YP]
Drop in place like Coffee Bar	48% [A] and 53% [YP]
More informal meeting spaces	34% [A] and 40% [YP]

More green spaces for informal games	33% [A] and 37% [YP]
Skate Park/BMX facility	32% [A] and 33% [YP]
Climbing wall and other outdoor activities	31% [A] and 44% [YP]
Summer activities and play schemes	29% [A] and 26% [YP]
More opportunities to join clubs and societies	24% [A] and 18% [YP]
More provision for regular art/music/drama	22% [A] and 17% [YP]
Outdoor roller skating rink	21% [A] and 34% [YP]
Area in library for young people with computers	20% [A] and 12% [YP]
Organised activities	18% [A] and 8% [YP]
Visits to facilities in larger towns	7% [A] and 10% [YP]

Whilst the provision of a Multi Use Games Area [MUGA] and a drop in place/coffee bar were the universal top priorities, most of the other suggestions received significant support.

Action Points OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- Identify the best site for a full MUGA taking into account the experience gained during the development at the Deermoss Meadow and subsequently build the MUGA. *Town Council*
- Explore opportunities to provide a Youth Café/meeting place. *Shropshire Council*
- Explore opportunities to increase provision for young people to participate in regular art, music and drama, and computer and media activities. *Shropshire Council*
- Review provision of
 - green spaces for informal games
 - informal meeting spaces
 - climbing wall and other outdoor activities
 - roller skating, skate boarding and BMX facilities.*Town Council, Shropshire Council*
- Involve clubs, organisations, businesses and the wider community in considering the provision of summer activities and play schemes. *Town Council*
- Create more opportunities for young people to join clubs and societies. *Town Council, interested parties in clubs and societies*

7. CIVIC CENTRE COMPLEX including LIBRARY

The Civic Centre complex was built in 1970 and is a typical concrete faced building of that time. It houses the Town Council office and council meetings are held in the large meeting room upstairs. In addition to this,



the rest of the main building consists of a main hall with adjoining kitchen, a bar lounge mostly used for meetings, a small committee room and another kitchen upstairs. On the other side of the Mall is the Library and behind that the Market and Sports Hall. There are very small car parks to front and rear. The building is leased

to Whitchurch Town Council by Shropshire Council.

The main hall can be laid out with close seating for 400. However the size and shape of the room cannot at present be altered for smaller numbers or other uses. The acoustics are considered to be poor by many users. A fairly large kitchen leads off the Hall but is in need of updating. The toilets on the ground floor have recently been refurbished. The lift from the ground to first floor was installed with funds raised by the public.

The Town Council Office is open for public enquiries each morning but not in the afternoon.

Shropshire Library Service has consulted on plans to improve the Library but currently funding is unavailable.

When the public was consulted prior to the Survey many people indicated that they were dissatisfied with the Civic Centre Complex and felt that it should be brought up-to-date for 21st Century use. Others felt that it would be best to knock it down and start again.

What the Survey said

Usage and levels of satisfaction were questioned.

Three quarters of respondents indicated that they used the facilities at the Civic Centre in general but used the small rooms more. Younger people figure highly as non-users. Pupils and students have access to additional Library services at their schools.

When considering the Civic Centre as a whole 23% of respondents considered the facilities to be good or excellent, 50% felt them to be satisfactory and 28% found them to be poor.

The exceptions to this are the Library, with 58% good or excellent and 37% satisfactory, and the toilets, with 62% considering them to be poor. However, improvements have been made since the Survey was conducted. Only 23% of respondents consider the facilities to be good or excellent which indicates that there is room for improvement.

Action Points CIVIC CENTRE COMPLEX

- Identify the needs and aspirations of the community in relation to the Civic Centre Complex and Library.

Town Council, Shropshire Council

- Consult with the Community over plans for the improvement and refurbishment of the Civic Centre Complex.

Town Council, Shropshire Council

- Alter, improve and refurbish the Civic Centre buildings to meet the identified present and future needs of the community.

Shropshire Council



8. TOWN CENTRE

The town centre of Whitchurch is a Conservation Area with some medieval and many Tudor, Georgian and Victorian listed buildings. The town centre has a 20mph one way traffic system along the main retail streets. The pavements have been widened and repaved and the kerbs dropped at strategic points to help wheelchair users and parents. There is a pedestrianised area in the Bullring with seating and planting. Cast iron finger signposts and a cast iron pavement disc and footprints help visitors



to find their way around the Town. Some of the town centre buildings are in good condition but many others have uninspiring frontages and neglected upper floors and rear elevations much in need of refurbishment.

There is residential use of buildings within the town centre. Many upper floors have been converted into living spaces above the shops. Watergate and Dodington have fine Georgian frontages on much older buildings which have had retail uses in the past but which are now largely residential.

The High Street, Green End and Bullring are lined with retail premises, public buildings, all the major banks, offices, pubs and cafes. Although a number of the major national companies are to be found their premises tend to be small. However Whitchurch is characterised by the large number of independent traders. There are sometimes empty shops but new businesses continue to establish in the Town. There are just two well run charity shops in the town. Supermarkets are currently to be found just outside the central area. There are proposals from competing supermarkets for large developments on the edge of Town.

There is a wide range of services to be found centrally. Dentists, opticians, solicitors, estate agents, travel agents and insurance brokers all have a presence in the Town centre.

There is an issue over deliveries to retail premises in the Town. Very few have rear access and delivery vans have to park in the street. This problem is particularly acute in the one-way streets.

The Country Market is held each Friday and the Farmers' Market once a month. The goods on sale are of high quality but the number of stalls has diminished over time. In this respect Whitchurch is not untypical of market towns elsewhere.

A recent report to Northern Shropshire Market Towns Group said

"In recent times markets generally have suffered something of a decline with dwindling numbers of regular stallholders leading to less diversity. This can be attributed to a change in shopping habits and an increase in the availability of a range of competitively priced goods from other sources. So people are only attracted to shop at a market if it has a unique offer, which will only exist through a number and variety of high quality businesses operating regularly. But this will only happen if the customer base is active and thriving".

There are moves within Shropshire to develop a scheme to offer support for business start-ups in markets. It is possible to buy most everyday things and obtain most services in Whitchurch but for larger purchases many people travel to surrounding centres such as Shrewsbury, Chester and Wrexham.

What the Survey said

This section was divided into the consideration of four issues.

Appearance

There was very high support for improvement of the appearance of the Town centre – pavements [94%], businesses maintaining the public space around their premises [92%], owners improving the building frontages [95%]. It was notable that many business respondents indicated that they are prepared to maintain areas around their premises [89%] and the frontages [97%]. There was also high



support for this from people living in the inner Town centre. There was 81% general support for more flowers and shrubs but business respondents gave 91% support.

Shopping improvements

There was a very high level of support for a wider range of shops [97%]. Overall 68% of respondents favoured the development of out-of-town shops. Younger people and families were more enthusiastic with 90% and 80% of them believing this to be a good idea.

Market

Whilst a majority thought that the market is good [66%] a significant minority [34%] thought that improvements are necessary. This might include more stalls [72%] and special markets [77%]. There was support [63%] for the Council paying for improvements.

Other issues

There was universal high support [89%] for improvements in access to buildings and pavements for wheelchairs and pushchairs.

Most respondents [90%] supported provision of toilets in High Street and the Town centre.

There was some support [75%], including businesses, for a bus stop near the Civic Centre.

67% of respondents supported the appointment of a Town Council officer to promote the town centre and local area.

78% felt that information signs need improvement.

Action Points TOWN CENTRE

- Create a scheme to upgrade and maintain the appearance of the Town Centre. *Town Council, Shropshire Council*
- Ensure that all areas of the Town are regularly cleaned and encourage the population to take personal responsibility to reduce the amount of all types of fouling. *Town Council, Shropshire Council*
- Identify owners of run down property to initiate improvements. *Town Council*

- Lobby Shropshire Council to use their planning powers where necessary to enforce improvements to run-down properties. *Town Council*
- Consider entering the Britain in Bloom competition once more. *Town Council*
- Create a campaign to develop civic pride across all sectors of the community. *Town Council, schools, businesses, traders, community groups*
- Investigate ways of providing and supporting a wider range of shops and services and develop schemes to encourage local people to use local shops and services. *Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Town Council*
- Review of Market arrangements
 - venue
 - number of stalls
 - encouragement of, and support and help for, new traders
 - access
 - cost of stalls
 - variety of market types. *Town Council, Market traders*
- Improve access to buildings and pavements for wheelchairs and pushchairs. *Shropshire Council*
- Ensure that well maintained public toilets remain available and examine the feasibility of providing additional public toilets at the top end of the Town. *Town Council, Shropshire Council*
- Review all Town centre signage to ensure that there is no duplication or excess signage and that signs are readily accessible to all. *Town Council, Shropshire Council*
- Continue to provide information about the history and buildings of Whitchurch for visitors and residents. *Heritage Centre, Better Welcome Whitchurch*

9. PROTECTION OF THE HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND ARTEFACTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE TOWN

Whitchurch is the oldest continuously occupied settlement in Shropshire. It dates from Roman times but there is little evidence of this on the ground. The oldest building, part of which dates from about 1400, is the 'Old Eagles' in Watergate Street.

In total there are 109 listed buildings in Whitchurch. These are buildings of architectural or historical merit which are given special protection from unsuitable development.



Most of the buildings in the central core of the town are listed and form part of the Conservation Area. Most are Grade II or II* but the Parish Church of St Alkmund is a fine eighteenth century Grade 1 listed building. Many of these buildings are older internally than their

outward appearance would indicate because many older buildings were later updated and given stone or brick frontages. Unfortunately many of the buildings are in need of care and redecoration and this is an issue for many town residents. The potential for increased tourism which the attractive street scene could present should not be overlooked.

The Civic Centre Complex replaced the Victorian Town Hall [damaged by fire in 1941], the Corn Exchange and Museum and Art Gallery. The Heritage Centre was opened in 1998. Its permanent displays include pre-historic and Roman artefacts found in the Parish, clocks made by Joyce's Clocks and a small art gallery. Small temporary exhibitions of local interest are frequently assembled. It is much used by residents of all ages and by visitors. In 2010 museum status was achieved and it is hoped that the facility can be improved by returning artefacts and archive material at present stored elsewhere.

What the Survey said

96% of respondents strongly agree that there is a need to look after the historic buildings properly.

There was very strong support [92%] for the establishment of a Town Museum to house all the town's historical objects and information.

Action Points

PROTECTION OF THE HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND ARTEFACTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE TOWN

- Develop the recently fully accredited Heritage Centre into a working Town Museum for the use of local people and as a tourist attraction.
Town Council
- Research good practice in relation to the improvement of historic towns and apply some of these practices to Whitchurch.
Town Council, Shropshire Council
- Develop a scheme for the improvement of the buildings in the Town centre and their continued good maintenance so that they are preserved for future generations.
Town Council, Shropshire Council
- Investigate the re-launch of the Civic Society.
Town Council, interested members of the community



10. PROVISION FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Of residents in Whitchurch 9.8% are aged 65-74 years and 9.7% are over 75 years. Together this is the same number as those aged 0-15 years. Whilst many elderly people live independently in their own homes, either owned or rented, there is provision for assisted living at Fairfields, Kingsway Court and St John's Park. There are four residential and nursing homes within the Parish.

The Senior Citizens Club in Pearl Yard organises social events and day care is available at the Bradbury Day Centre. Day care sessions are held twice a week at Kingsway Court. There is a Meals on Wheels service. Age UK will close its branch office in Whitchurch in 2011.



Many older people are active in the clubs and organisations in the Town. In fact many of these would not continue without the enthusiasm and willingness of older people. The University of the Third Age [U3A] in Whitchurch meets together every week and many classes and group activities take place at various venues and times throughout the week.

Older people are key users of all medical services at Whitchurch Community Hospital. They are able to access a range of specialist clinics at the hospital.

The Town Bus Service which allows easier access to the Town centre and its facilities is particularly well supported by older people. There are some dropped kerbs along the streets and the speed limit allows older people to cross the main shopping streets in relative safety. The wider pavements in the Town centre mean that older people can easily use mobility scooters. There is disabled parking in the High Street, Green End and Mill Street and in all the public car parks.

There are still some access issues for older people and those with restricted mobility. Access to the southbound platform at the railway station is extremely difficult for these people.

What the Survey said

There was no section specifically devoted to provision for older people. However across the range of sections included in the Survey the needs of older people were considered to be important e.g.

- medical services available locally at the hospital and in the home
- improvement of the Town Bus service and trains
- learning opportunities
- sheltered housing and bungalows [98% and 95% support from older people]
- better access to buildings and pavements and south-bound station platform
- improved maintenance of public footpaths and pavements.

These issues are covered in other sections including Transport, Housing, Community Safety, Town Centre and Community Education.

Action Points PROVISION FOR OLDER PEOPLE

- Lobby for continued and improved provision of medical facilities and services for the elderly [to include appropriate respite care] in the Whitchurch area.
Shropshire Council, Senior Citizens Forum, Town Council, families, Friends of Whitchurch Hospital
- Ensure that there is an adequate choice of housing that meets the needs and wishes of the increasing numbers of older people.
Shropshire Council, Senior Citizens Forum

11. MEDICAL

There are three family doctor practices in Whitchurch. They are all situated just outside the core area of the Town and are easily accessible. All of them have a wide range of services. The Community Matron and District Nurses are based with both the GP practices and the hospital. This enables patients to move from the District Hospitals to either rehabilitation care in Whitchurch Community Hospital or directly into their own homes with community nursing care. Community physiotherapy and occupational therapy can also take place in the home.

Whitchurch Community Hospital serves the town and the surrounding area. Its facilities have been updated several times in recent years. Sometimes this has been done with funds supplied by the very active and well supported Friends of Whitchurch Hospital. The local General Practitioners provide the medical support and the Shropdoc out of hours service has a base at the hospital. The hospital has a Rehabilitation ward - 32 beds predominantly for Rehabilitation and End of Life Care and Beech ward – a ward of 16 beds for elderly mentally frail patients. There is a physiotherapy suite, radiography department and phlebotomy, minor injuries and audiology services. At least 14 consultant outpatient clinics are held at Whitchurch which saves the need for some people to travel to the district hospitals in Shrewsbury and Telford for appointments. Older people are particularly dependent on this service since many in this age group are not car drivers and long distance public transport is difficult. Midwives and health visitors also hold regular clinics at the Hospital.

Whitchurch has an ambulance station providing a valued service.

Shropshire Health Authority is consulting on future plans for Beech Ward and its services and there has been much support from Whitchurch residents for the retention of the facility.

Local community health practitioners and organisations like Macmillan are coming together to provide high quality palliative and end of life care.

There are two dental practices in the town and there is provision for National Health patients. There are three opticians and three pharmacies serving the town and surrounding area.

A medical herbalist runs a centre in the town for alternative therapies and there are also private physiotherapist and chiropodist services.

What the Survey said

There was no separate section in the Survey for this topic. However, respondents were asked to place it in order of priority along with 17 other statements.

Nearly 5 in 10 respondents placed “Extending medical and health treatment available at Whitchurch hospital and in the home” in their top 6 priorities. This suggests wide community support for the Hospital and its attendant services. It was the number one priority for older people [57% of people aged 60-71 years and 63% for those over 72 years]. Families were also concerned [39%]. Families chose this statement within their top six priorities.

Action Points MEDICAL

- Ensure the retention and development of Whitchurch Community Hospital and all its facilities and services, including provision for telemedicine.

*Town Council, Shropshire Council,
Friends of Whitchurch Hospital, GPs, individuals*

- Lobby for more clinics to be held at Whitchurch Community Hospital.

*Town Council, Shropshire Council,
Friends of Whitchurch Hospital, GPs, individuals*

- Ensure that the option of care and treatment at home, including palliative and end of life care, is delivered from a local base.

*Town Council, Shropshire Council,
Friends of Whitchurch Hospital, GPs, individuals*

12. COMMUNITY SAFETY

Statistically North Shropshire is a relatively safe place in which to live. The crime figures are higher in the more populated Town centre of Whitchurch than in the more rural hinterland of the Parish but low in terms of a national and regional perspective. Good relations exist between the Police and the community helped by work done at Local Joint Committees and with young people in schools and youth groups. Neighbourhood Watch Schemes operate in parts of the Town. There is a police station in the Town.

Whilst serious crime is very rare the more persistent and regular crimes include shoplifting and anti-social behaviour.

The Community Safety Partnership and its successor the Safer Stronger Communities Board [now part of the Shropshire Partnership] have overall responsibility for trying to reduce crime. The Safer Stronger Communities Board includes Shropshire Council, West Mercia Police [and the Police Authority], the Fire and Rescue Service and the Primary Care Trust. Other organisations are also included where required e.g. Probation Service and Youth Offending Service.

The public can air issues relating to crime at PACT sessions [Police and Communities Together] that are held in conjunction with the Local Area Committee meetings. The Police leave these meetings with priority tasks to undertake before the following meeting.

It has been acknowledged that people's 'fear of crime' is an issue which needs to be addressed.

There is CCTV in the Town. The provision has recently been upgraded.



What the Survey said

How safe?

Most people feel safe during the day [93%] but many [63%] do not feel safe at night. Young people and older people [over 72] were the two groups who felt most unsafe whereas those in the 35 – 45 age group were concerned the least.

Key concerns?

Respondents' key concerns were related to anti-social behaviour. This scored 74% overall. Most concerned [93%] were the 25 to 35 age group and least concern [57%] was felt amongst those less than 15 years of age. Drunken behaviour was noted by 52% of respondents. Other concerns were drug related crime [45%] and dangerous and fast driving within the town [40%].

Key improvements?

Many people wished to see more Police 'on the beat' [75%] and there was also support for improved CCTV [57%]. The highest support for the improved CCTV came from young people [67%].

Additional information

25% of all additional comments in the Survey related to aspects of Community Safety.

There were some positive comments about Whitchurch being 'a great place to live and bring up a family' and also some calls for the community itself to become more involved in creating a feeling of pride in the Town. In early consultations with young people they said that they sometimes felt intimidated by groups congregating on White Lion Meadow and also groups of adults smoking outside public houses.



Action Points COMMUNITY SAFETY

- Create a culture in Whitchurch whereby community members feel comfortable in challenging anti-social behaviour.
Town Council, Police, community groups, Chamber of Trade, schools, parents
- Maintain a high positive profile for the local Police.
Town Council, Police
- Examine all possibilities to increase the numbers of Police 'on the beat'.
Town Council, local Policing Inspector
- Address any problems arising from groups forming outside public houses and on the White Lion Meadow.
Police, Shropshire Council, supermarkets, licensed premises
- Explore means of increasing community awareness of issues of safety through improved provision of information.
Police, Whitchurch Gossip, Whitchurch Herald, schools, youth groups, other community groups, Neighbourhood Watch
- Maintain high quality CCTV coverage.
Shropshire Partnership, Town Council, Police

13. COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Whitchurch is served by three newspapers: the weekly publications the Whitchurch Herald and the North Shropshire Chronicle and the daily Shropshire Star. The free magazine Whitchurch Gossip is published monthly. The Whitchurch Town Guide is published every two years. Radio Shropshire and Beacon Radio broadcast every day to the Whitchurch area and from time to time Whitchurch FM Community Radio is available.

There are three websites serving Whitchurch:

www.2shrop.net/whitchurchtowncouncil , www.gowhitchurch.co.uk , and www.whitchurchsalop.org.uk . Some clubs and organisations have their own websites.



Local authority information is available at the Shropshire Council Customer Service Point in the Heritage Centre and at the Town Council office in the Civic Centre. Further general information is to be found at the Library. There are notice boards outside the Civic Centre

and some shops will display information in their windows. Statutory bodies currently produce information on their services which is circulated to all households.

Public consultation identified shortcomings in finding out about events and obtaining up-to-date contacts details for local clubs and organisations. None of this information is coordinated and there is no one place which holds all the information. Organisers of events do not have access to a central calendar of local events to check for clashes of dates. This has led to reduced attendance at some events.

What the Survey said

Respondents were asked their views about a range of ways in which information could be communicated.

90% agreed that there could be better use of the local press. 89% supported an information point in town with reliable, current and up to date information. 87% felt that a 'What's on' magazine with an events calendar would be useful. 85% thought that more regularly updated internet information on the Town would be helpful. There was rather less support [56%] for appointing an events coordinator for the Town. Highest support for this came from the 21 – 34 years age group.

Action Points

See after Community Events section below.

14. COMMUNITY EVENTS

There is a range of events that take place in Whitchurch that are open to the whole community. These include, among others, the Town Council Meetings and the Annual Parish meeting; the Remembrance Day activities; the Christmas Festival; the Blackberry Fair and the Canal Boat Rally. There are more active events such as the Queensway Fun Day and Run and music events such as the Edward German Festival. A range of community organisations, such as theatre and amateur dramatics groups, run programmes of events including music, drama, and other entertainments that are both varied and aimed at a wide range of age groups.



In recent years the 'We R Whitchurch' event has allowed local organisations to showcase their work and the 'Wonders of Whitchurch' event highlighted the benefits of the market town.

What the Survey said

Respondents were asked which Community Events they would support. Some of these events already take place and some would be new or revived events.



Across all age groups there was a very high level of support [80%+] for annual events – Food Festival, Town Fête, Carnival, Fireworks /Bonfire Night.

Positive support was given overall to a wide range of musical concerts or festivals – Pop or Rock 71% [young people 81%], Band Concerts 75% [older people 91%, young people

60%], Classical music 60% [older people 80%, young people 39%].

There was a very high level of support for Amateur productions 82% [older people 94%, young people 72%]. Street performances had universal support 76%.

A good level of support was given to already existing events – Blackberry Fair 72% [young people 60%], Running events 75%, and Events for local organisations to show work 75% [young people 62%].

The level of support for Folk concerts or festivals overall was 56% with good support [76%] from 60 – 72 year olds. Support from young people was 36%.



Overall support for the development of a Community Choir was 57% but older people were particularly interested [81%] with young people less so [35%].

It was clear from the Survey and all other consultations that the community wanted more events.

Action Points

COMMUNITY INFORMATION and COMMUNITY EVENTS

- Create and maintain a new high quality overarching website for Whitchurch Shropshire with links to all other relevant websites.

Town Council, webmasters

- Bring together events organisers to share expertise and good practice and to establish a regularly updated diary of all events taking place in the Town to be available for wider public dissemination.

Explore the possibilities of:

- equipment sharing
- central purchase and storage
- single insurance cover for a number of events
- linking events
- establishing a list of people who would like to help with events.

Town Council,

*Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan Steering Committee [WTPP],
all community organisations and clubs*

- Investigate the possibility of appointing a part-time coordinator to bring together, keep up-to-date and publicise all community information about services, contact details for clubs and organisations, and events.

Town Council

- Investigate the possibility of organising those events enjoying strong support from the community – Food Festival, Town Fête, Fireworks, Carnival, Festival of Music, Community sporting events.

*Town Council, WTPP, Talbot Theatre,
Chamber of Trade, interested individuals and groups*

15. CANAL AND COUNTRY PARK

The Canal and Country Park area currently stretches much of the way from Victoria Jubilee Park to the Llangollen Canal. This Green Corridor is a route into the Town for visitors cruising on the canal, a route out into the country for town residents and is also one end of the Sandstone Trail for long distance walkers. Planning Permission for a small housing development may interrupt this natural corridor. Adjacent to the canal is the Greenfields Nature Reserve which is owned and managed by Shropshire Wildlife Trust.



The Canal Arm Extension towards the Town was opened in 1993. It is owned and maintained by Whitchurch Waterway Trust. The Trust still has the ultimate aim of further extending the canal towards the town. However at their AGM in 2010 it was decided to investigate a more modest project to extend the canal a short distance and build a basin with

moorings for up to about a dozen boats. Boreholes have been dug on the basin site to investigate the soil conditions and a report is being written. Later the feasibility of the project will be investigated, funding will be sought and an application for planning permission made.

In the Parish the Sandstone Trail stretches from Grindley Brook through the Country Park to the Victoria Jubilee Park. This and a system of adjacent circular walks is a popular walking route. Cheshire County Council, who maintained the whole length of the Trail, has now decided to withdraw their support for the Whitchurch section and its upkeep will now need to be undertaken by Shropshire Council.

A project, funded by Whitchurch and Prees Local Joint Committee, is currently under way to improve the signage from the canal, through the Country Park and into the Town. This project will be undertaken by Whitchurch Waterway Trust in co-operation with Shropshire Council and the Whitchurch branch of Shropshire Wildlife Trust, which wishes to improve access to the adjacent Greenfields Nature Reserve.

What the Survey said

There was a high level of support [80%] for extending the Canal closer to the Town. This support was less amongst younger people. Very high support [88%] was recorded for developing other activities like fishing and canoeing along the Canal and Country Park and for nature conservation. Most support was in the 22-34 age group. 90% of respondents wanted further development of the Country Park. There was very high support for this amongst older people.

People living nearest to the Canal showed greater levels of support for the Canal and Country Park.

Action Points CANAL AND COUNTRY PARK

- Develop the Canal towards the Town.
Whitchurch Waterways Trust, Town Council
- Explore the use of the Canal and Country Park for other outdoor activities.
Whitchurch Waterway Trust, Shropshire Council
- Create a scheme to improve the management of the Country Park and its associated paths. *Shropshire Council, Whitchurch Waterway Trust*
- Ensure that the Whitchurch end of the Sandstone Trail is fully maintained.
Whitchurch Waterway Trust, Shropshire Council
- Complete the scheme for publicity and signposting associated with the Canal and Country Park to enhance its use as a green corridor from the Town to the canal for both residents and visitors.
Whitchurch Waterway Trust, Shropshire Council
- Establish liaison with Whitchurch branch of Shropshire Wildlife Trust over Greenfields Nature Reserve and with the Meres and Mosses HLF Landscape Partnership Scheme.
Whitchurch Waterway Trust, Shropshire Council

16. ENVIRONMENT

There is a range of sites of environmental importance in Whitchurch. Some are protected and managed, like the Country Park and Greenfields Local Nature reserve, and some are privately owned, like the land to the north of Claypit Street/Alport Road and land to the south of Wrexham Road. Many of these sites are under threat from development and some valuable sites have already been lost or may soon be lost.



Stags Brook is an important corridor which runs through the town. It is home to an important population of water voles as well as sustaining insects, plants and other animals.

The Canal forms a man-made route with significant potential for further development as a wildlife corridor. The Woodland Trust manages the recently planted woodland alongside the Canal at the former Danson's Farm.

In Whitchurch Parish there are 52.8 kilometers of Public Rights of Way, but in general they are in a condition which is well below the national average. Whilst nearly one third are easy to walk, another one third are

obstructed. These paths provide public access to the surrounding countryside as well as routes through the Town.

There only 12.5 half-sized allotment plots within the Parish, and at least fifty people on the waiting list [probably more if it was advertised], which is totally inadequate considering that many new dwellings have either very small gardens or none at all.



What the Survey said

In the Survey there was very high support [over 90%] across the population for maintaining and improving the natural environment and access to it through improvements to footpaths. 89% of respondents supported improved provision for allotments. Concerns were expressed about the inter-relationship between the built and natural environments.



Action Points ENVIRONMENT

- In consultation with relevant groups and individuals develop a cohesive and sustainable strategy for environmental issues in the Town and Parish.
Town Council
- Ensure that the views of interest groups and individuals associated with protection of the environment are fully considered in planning decisions relating to Whitchurch to make sure that future developments do not encroach on environmentally valuable and sensitive sites.
Town Council, Shropshire Councillors, Shropshire Council
- Support the initiatives proposed through the Lottery funded Mosses and Meres Action Plan and ensure good liaison and partnership working.
Shropshire Wildlife Trust project leader
- Use information obtained through surveying and mapping of the Parish to enable the development of more green corridors to support wild life.
Whitchurch branch of Shropshire Wildlife Trust supported by Town Council
- Increase the planting of trees and hedges to support wildlife. Engage with local farmers to encourage environmentally friendly approaches to their management of hedgerows and trees.
Town Council, Wildlife Groups, Shropshire Council, farmers
- Improve the appearance of the approaches into the town, including the roundabouts on the bypass and the industrial estates. Seek sustainable sponsorship for improving traffic islands.
Shropshire Council, Town Council, Better Welcome Whitchurch, local business
- Initiate an anti-litter campaign to educate and involve the whole community with the aim of making Whitchurch a litter free Town and Parish.
Town Council, schools, organisations, community

- Shropshire Council, with local farmers and community action, work to protect and improve the footpaths of the area to maintain rights of way for regular access and use by residents and to enhance the promotion of tourism.
Shropshire Council supported by Whitchurch Walkers, Parish Path Partnership, farmers, Tourist Centre
- Produce an easy to understand map of the footpaths in the Parish.
Tourist Centre supported by Town Council, individuals, Whitchurch Walkers
- Develop and distribute materials to encourage canal users to explore wildlife areas with access from the canal.
Tourist Centre, Whitchurch Waterway Trust, British Waterways
- Initiate a “Walkers are Welcome” weekend event in Whitchurch which would benefit businesses in the Town.
Tourist Centre, Town Council, local Tourism development group, Chamber of Trade, local businesses, Whitchurch Walkers
- Shropshire Council to meet its statutory obligation to provide allotment space to meet local demand.
Shropshire Council



17. TRANSPORT

Whitchurch is well served by transport links. The town is at the junction of the A41 Chester to Wolverhampton road, the A49 Warrington to Shrewsbury road and the A525 Newcastle-under-Lyme to Wrexham road. These roads are all linked by the Whitchurch bypass. They also provide a good link between the M54, M56 & M6 motorways. In and around the Town many road surfaces are very poor.



Whitchurch is on the Cardiff to Manchester main railway line. There is a range of long distance and local trains that stop at the unstaffed Whitchurch station. Currently there are fewer northbound than southbound trains. The train providers are aware of this issue. Access to the southbound platform is only by means of a footbridge across the lines creating problems for users of wheelchairs, prams and pushchairs, bicycles and those having difficulties with stairs or carrying heavy luggage. Inbound passengers are also affected. This issue has been a subject of debate for some years.

There is a frequent around-the-town bus service during the day and other routes connect to Chester, Shrewsbury, Nantwich, and Wrexham.

The White Lion Meadow, leased by a supermarket, provides the largest number of car parking spaces. In addition to this there is a range of smaller car parks around the Town. All car parking is currently provided free of charge but there are time limitations. Shropshire Council is proposing the imposition of car parking charges. There is a lack of all day parking. In some car parks surfaces are often poor. The last full census showed that 23% of Whitchurch households do not own a car compared to 17.7% for the whole of Shropshire.

There is [in part] a dedicated cycle lane alongside the main north - south road through Town. Some dedicated cycle ways, such as the Hatton Way, utilise an old railway line and there are C2C [Coast to Coast] routes on quiet lanes.

What the Survey said

Bus services

Of people responding to the Survey 94% supported provision of the Town Bus service and 83% thought the service should include more of the Town. 69% of respondents wanted better bus services between towns.

Trains

The train service to and from Whitchurch was considered by 97% to be essential to the Town. 89% asked for a more frequent stopping service. 96% of respondents wanted equal access to both platforms for all passengers including those with difficulties.

Car parking

There was overwhelming support by citizens [94%] and businesses [100%] to keep free parking in the Town. There is a strong demand for more all day parking [87%], and for more car parks, while 60% of respondents wanted more consistently enforced parking controls.

Roads

Completion of the bypass to completely encircle the Town was supported by 73% of respondents. There was no clear view on traffic calming measures 61% versus 39%, but it was given a higher priority by under 15 year olds and families.

Road surfaces

There was very strong support for improved surfaces of roads and pavements [95%].

Cycleways

The provision of more “safe from traffic” cycleways was strongly supported [80%]. The highest support came from secondary school students [92%].

Action Points TRANSPORT

- Use the Town Plan Survey and other sources to develop a Local Transport Strategy for Whitchurch. *Town Council*
- Encourage the provider of the Town Bus service to include more areas of Whitchurch. *Town Council, Shropshire Council*
- Lobby for better bus connections between Whitchurch and other towns. *Town Council, Shropshire Council*
- Work with local train companies to improve the frequency and regularity of both north and southbound services stopping at Whitchurch. *Town Council, Crewe and Shrewsbury Passenger Association, individuals*
- Continue to press for improved access for all to both station platforms. *Town Council & Shropshire Council*
- Investigate the means by which free car parking can be maintained. *Town Council, Chamber of Trade*
- Make better provision for more car parking space, especially for all-day use. *Town Council, Chamber of Trade, Shropshire Council*
- Investigate the feasibility of completing a circular bypass. *Shropshire Council*
- Identify areas throughout the Town which would benefit from speed reducing measures. *Town Council, Police*
- Identify where new cycle routes could be created. *Shropshire Council, SusTrans or other interested groups*
- Improve the quality of road and pavement surfaces and the means by which defects can be reported by the public. *Town Council, Shropshire Council*



18. CIVIC LEADERSHIP

Whitchurch Parish is covered by two councils: Shropshire Council and Whitchurch Town Council. There are three Shropshire Unitary Council councillors and fifteen Town Councillors representing the Parish. This pattern has come about from the abolition of North Shropshire District Council in 2009 and the formation of the Unitary Authority. This has resulted in new structures and patterns of working which are still evolving. Additionally there has been a change in political leadership at a national level.

The Town Council's current main responsibilities include managing the Civic Centre and Market Hall complex, the Heritage Centre, parks and play areas, CCTV, and designated areas of lighting. The Town Council is also responsible for expressing a local view on any developments affecting the Town and Parish.

Shropshire Council provides the main services such as Education, Housing, Development and Planning, Highways and Transport, Environmental Maintenance and Environmental Health, Leisure, Health and Social Care, and Economic Development. Local Joint Committees have been established as a means of enabling dialogue to take place between councils, local service providers and the public. They are provided with a small budget to support local community-led projects.

Both Councils call occasional public meetings on specific issues. Shropshire Council has an extensive website where consultation documents are published for public response. There is a Town Council website which has scope for further development. Shropshire Unitary Councillors hold periodic surgeries.



What the Survey said

The Survey results show that 16% of respondents are fully aware of who their Town councillors are, 40% are quite aware and 44% are not aware. When asked about Shropshire councillors 14% are fully aware, 33% are quite aware and 53% are not aware.

The Survey results show that 7% of respondents feel that Town councillors seem sufficiently aware of their local concerns and feelings, 37% feel they are quite aware and 56% feel they are not aware. When asked about Shropshire councillors 7% feel that they are fully aware, 33% feel they are quite aware and 60% think they are not aware.

The Survey results show that 4% of respondents feel that Town councillors consult the local population very well, 35% feel that they consult quite well and 60% feel that they do not consult well. When asked about Shropshire councillors 5% feel they consult very well, 33% quite well and 62% not well.

The Survey results show that 5% of respondents feel that Town councillors publicise their decisions and activities very well, 34% think that they do this quite well and 61% consider that they do not do this well. When asked about Shropshire councillors 6% feel that they publicise their decisions and activities very well, 34% quite well and 61% not well.

For being kept informed about the work of their local Councils 75% of respondents overall think that the local press is most useful [20% very useful, 55% useful, 24% not useful]. Newsletters have 71% overall support [17% very useful, 54% useful, 29% not useful]. Council websites have 53% overall support [10% very useful, 43% useful, 46% not useful]. Public meetings also have 54% overall support [9% very useful, 45% useful, 46% not useful].

The results of the Survey showed that there were few people prepared to give the highest rating in any aspects of Civic Leadership and many people chose the lowest rating.

Comments recorded in the Survey, at meetings and in conversations on the street showed that there is a common perception that proposed actions do not always materialise and when they do there is a lack of coordination.



Action Points CIVIC LEADERSHIP

- By using the Town and Parish Plan and other consultations develop a clear vision for the future of Whitchurch.
Town Council
- Set up a fund raising strategy group to ensure the Vision and Town Plan for Whitchurch can be successfully delivered.
Town Council
- Creatively explore and develop processes which allow two way consultation between both the Town Council and Shropshire Council with the people of Whitchurch.
Town Council, Shropshire Council
- Explore alternative ways of organising Town Council meetings to encourage greater public attendance and participation.
Town Council
- Ensure that the Town Council always responds to consultations about issues affecting Whitchurch.
Town Council
- Improve the lines of communication to the public about the work of the Town Council and Shropshire Council through such means as the press, newsletters, website, information boards in supermarkets.
Town Council, Shropshire Council
- Improve and continuously update the Town Council website and link it to a website for Whitchurch Shropshire. (See also Section 13)
Town Council
- Ensure that the Whitchurch and Prees Area Local Joint Committee is continued, fully supported and funded.
Shropshire Council

Priorities from the Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan Survey 2010

At the end of the Survey respondents were asked to choose six from a list of eighteen priorities for making Whitchurch an even better place to live.

ALL the issues on the list were identified as priorities by members of the community.

The table shows the list in an order based on the percentage of respondents choosing each statement of priority.

It is important to note that some priorities are also to be found expanded in other sections e.g. Improved Opportunities for Young People [Priority 1] is also to be found in Parks, Arts, Community Events and Sports sections amongst others.

Priority order	%	Statement of Priority	Section No.
1	58	Improved opportunities for young people	6
2	54	Measures to reduce crime	12
3	53	Maintaining and developing the Town Centre (appearance, shops, market)	8
4	50	Support and encouragement for local businesses and job creation	2
5	47	Extending medical and health treatment available at Whitchurch hospital and in the home	11
6	37	Development of a transport strategy (buses, trains, parking, roads)	17
7	33	Development of the Canal and Country Park	15
8	29	Improved provision for the elderly	10
9	26	Better range and provision for physical activity and sports	5
10	25	Improvements to the parks	4
11	24	The protection and improvement of the environment (green spaces, allotments, wildlife)	16
12	22	Development of a housing strategy determined by local needs + growth of town	1
12	22	Better communication between the community and its councils	18
14	20	Protection of the historic buildings and artefacts associated with the town	9
15	19	Improved community information and more community events	13/14
15	19	Improved provision for school and community learning	3
17	17	Improvement to the facilities and functions provided by the present Civic Centre	7
18	9	Improved facilities for culture and the arts	5

% of respondents choosing to put the priority in their top 6 choices

Acknowledgements

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- Whitchurch Town Council and the Town Clerk, Peter Martin, for the continuing support they have provided, especially in making meeting facilities and funding available to enable the work to be completed.
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- John Patrick, Prees Parish Council, for sharing the experiences of our neighbouring Parish and setting us off on the right track.
- Julie Ruler, Shropshire Council, for all her support and work while Development Officer for Whitchurch.
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- The Community Council of Shropshire for the initial grant and guidance provided to enable the process of development to commence.
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- Greg Smallbone, Headteacher and the School Council of Whitchurch CE Infant School for ensuring the views of our youngest residents were both seen and heard.
- Many members of the public who contributed to our six focus groups.
- Matthew Copping, former Headteacher and the pupils of Whitchurch Junior School.
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- Shropshire Council Local Joint Committee for providing regular information to help ensure a coordinated approach to planning during a period of significant local and national change and the financial support needed to ensure that the community were able to fully express their views to inform the Plan.
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- Kate Garner and Corrie Davies for their work with North Shropshire Market Towns Group which has kept the Committee well informed of local developments and provided a forum for the North Shropshire Towns to work together.
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- All of the clubs and organisations in Whitchurch and members of the community who attended meetings, sent us their views and allowed us to talk to them.
- Tony Stephens for proof reading.

Steering Committee Membership May 2011

Philip Walker - Chair
Sue Simper - Secretary
David Ryder - Treasurer
Tony Clay
Jan Cross
Ray Hatton
Thérèse Hickland
Sue McKeon
Gerald Moss
Malcolm Rigley
Pauline Stokes
David Torrens
Jackie Vaughan
Nicki Young

Initial Steering Committee Membership December 2008

Chris Chambers – Chair
Sue Simper – Secretary
Jo Richardson - Treasurer
Hayley Aston
Tony Clay
Jan Cross
John Dodson
John Lewis
Lynton Macrae
Sue McKeon
Gerald Moss
Malcolm Roddy
David Ryder
David Torrens
Philip Walker

Others having served as Steering Committee Members

Simon Edge
Philip Davies
Jessica Grudgings
Julie Ruler

Text and Editing

Tony Clay, Sue McKeon and Sue Simper
with support from Gerald Moss, David Torrens and Philip Walker

A FINAL WORD FROM THE COMMITTEE

Producing this Plan has been hard work but also an enjoyable experience. Whilst we acknowledge that there are things that need to be developed and improved, there is a great deal about Whitchurch that should be valued and protected. We have found a great deal of goodwill among people of all ages and backgrounds. To ensure the success of the Plan the whole community now needs to work together.

Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan

A Vision For The Future 2011
Part Two

Action Plan