

2. Listening to the community

Didcot is home to a diverse range of people, who all value different things. As the garden town delivery plan has been developed the team have sought input from as many of these people as possible. This chapter outlines the community engagement that has taken place so far, how this has shaped the various proposals contained within the delivery plan, and how continued community involvement will be ensured.

2. Listening to the community

2.1.1	Our approach to community involvement	32
2.1.2	Engagement via website and other values	34
2.1.3	Masterplan response to feedback	36
2.1.4	Public consultation	41
2.1.5	Conclusions	43

2.1.1 Our approach to community involvement

There are many exceptional assets within Didcot and the surrounding area. Its proximity to the area of outstanding natural beauty and cutting edge science facilities along with its thriving enterprise zones are just a few things that make Didcot an exciting place to be. However, the asset Didcot can be most proud of is its people and, since the vision of this document aims to enrich the community, great care has been taken to ensure that the views of local people are taken into account. To unlock this local knowledge and expertise, three main forms of engagement activity were undertaken to encourage community involvement and engagement, when shaping this draft delivery plan:



The three main forms of engagement activity:

A.

Meetings with stakeholder group representatives, parish councils and community groups.

The garden town team have met with over 100 stakeholder groups, many of these on more than one occasion. Representatives of many of these groups have also attended the stakeholder events between October 2016 and January 2017.

These stakeholders are made up of parish councils, Oxfordshire County Council, utility providers, community groups, environmental groups, sports clubs, residents associations, local businesses, government organisations, educational facilities, leisure providers, housing associations, science industries, emergency services and developers. From the outset of the garden town project the delivery plan has evolved from input from these stakeholder groups.

A summary of outputs from these meetings with stakeholder representative groups up to 18 December 2016 can be found in the phase one community engagement summary report at appendix A.

A summary of feedback received from stakeholder groups on the initial proposals can be found in the phase two community engagement summary report at appendix B.

B.

A dedicated, interactive website (www.didcotgardentown.co.uk) that enabled members of the public to comment on various aspects of Didcot, and provide ideas for accommodating future growth in a sustainable way.

Engagement through the interactive website was broken down into two phases, further details of which can be found in section 2.1.2.

C.

Other engagement activity:

The garden town team realised the importance of using a wide range of opportunities for the residents of Didcot and the surrounding villages to become informed of the garden town project. With this in mind we undertook the following in addition to the activities highlighted in points A and B.

- Public drop in sessions at Cornerstone Arts Centre
- Presentations at nine public parish council meetings
- Pop-up shops in the Orchard Centre, Didcot
- A dedicated phone number and email address for the garden town team
- Facebook advertising
- Advertising in the Herald series newspapers
- Display stands – Orchard Centre, Cornerstone Arts Centre, Didcot Civic Hall, Didcot Wave and South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council Offices.
- Leaflet delivery to all homes in Didcot
- Posters in Didcot and surrounding villages
- Community engagement at Didcot Street Fair
- Press releases leading to articles in local media
- Briefing sessions and mailings to residents of the Ladygrove ward focusing on plans in this area of Didcot.

2.1.2 Engagement via website and other values

The dedicated, interactive website (www.didcotgardentown.co.uk) acted as a platform to keep the public informed of latest developments with the garden town project. News items were automatically forwarded to contributors who requested to receive updates by email and materials presented at stakeholder briefings were made available to download.

The website also allowed the public to comment on the area as it currently is and on the initial masterplan proposals. This engagement was broken down into two phases.

Phase one – 9 November 2016 to 18 December 2016

Phase one of the interactive website enabled members of the public to place 'pins' into a map of Didcot and the surrounding area and record their views of that location in its current state and to suggest improvements.

The purpose of this stage the engagement was to help the garden town team develop a robust masterplan for Didcot Garden Town and identify the best means to deliver this.

The majority of feedback received related to the masterplan which sets out the distribution of physical features. Feedback was also given on how the garden town area should be maintained and managed, therefore the comments received were divided into the following three sections.

Masterplan related –

Comments relating to physical features such as infrastructure, buildings and green spaces

Service and maintenance –

Comments relating to quality of service delivery and maintenance of public spaces

Governance –

Comments on how the garden town is managed and how this is being funded

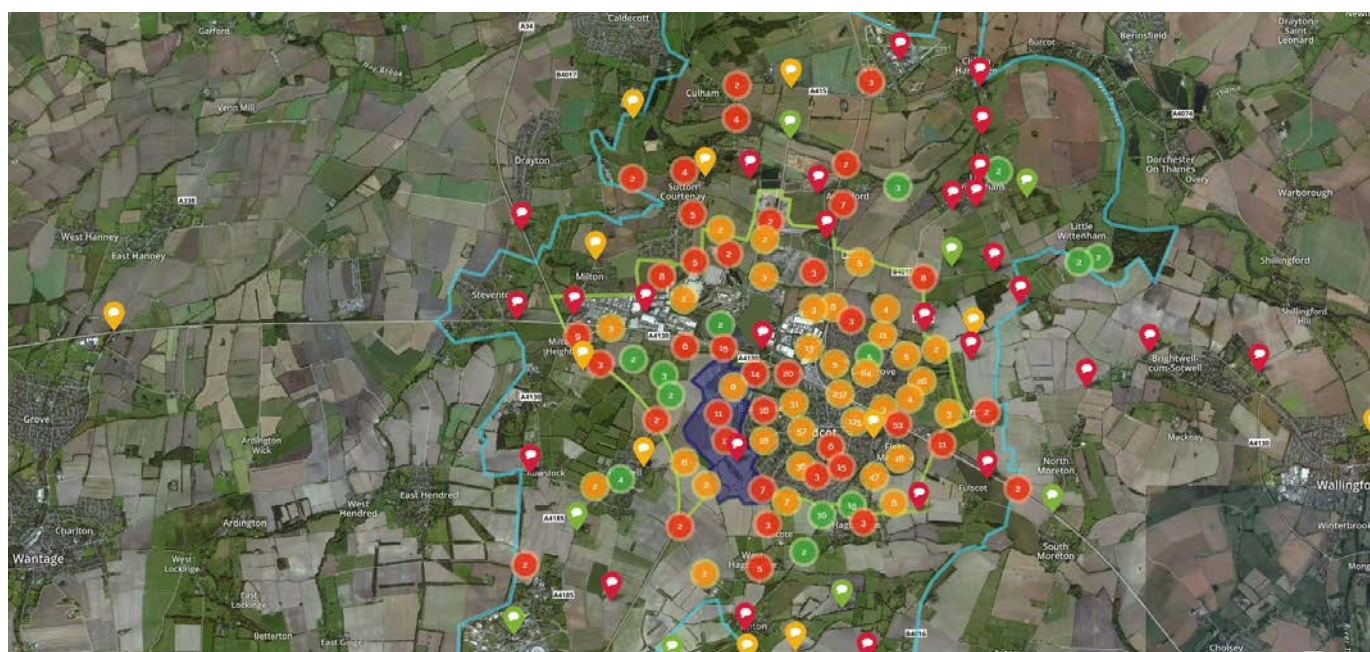
A summary of this phase of engagement can be found in the phase one community engagement summary report at appendix A.

Phase two – 26 January 2017 to 24 February 2017

The second phase of the website enabled the public to comment on the initial proposals for the masterplan, town centre and transport which were launched at the stakeholder representative group meeting on 19 January 2017.

The purpose of this phase of engagement was to help the Garden Town Team understand the views of the public on the initial proposals and to highlight any concerns over feasibility, deliverability and public opinion of the plans.

Comments received through the website along with those received by email, post and telephone were considered when producing the final draft proposals.



Map of feedback given on commonplace

This phase of engagement highlighted that several aspects of the initial proposals were of concern to some local residents. The proposals for development on Ladygrove Park, the proposed closure of Cow Lane Railway Bridge underpass to vehicular traffic and the allocation of land for the potential long-term relocation of Didcot Railway Station accounted for almost 70 per cent of all feedback received during the final phase of the community engagement process. These representations highlight the value of undertaking an extensive community engagement process, prior to the completion of this draft delivery plan document.

The proposed developments on Ladygrove Park attracted 86 per cent of all feedback on the town centre projects. This was accompanied by a petition to ‘Please promise to protect all of Didcot’s green spaces, paths and amenities on Ladygrove from loss, shrinkage or relocation through future development’ signed by 2,039 people.

As a result of this community feedback, which highlighted significant public objection to these proposals, they have been removed from the plans.

The proposals to close Cow Lane to vehicular traffic and the potential long-term plan to relocate Didcot Parkway station continue to factor in the masterplan, but are subject to extensive feasibility studies before these schemes are brought forward.

A summary of this phase of engagement can be found in the phase two community engagement summary report at appendix B.

Understanding the comments

Participants in both stages of the engagement process through the website were required to register to enter their comments. This enabled contributors to sign up to receive updates from the website and (where details were provided) enable the councils to understand the demographic

of those making comments.

By using this information we were able to understand the areas of society that we needed to reach to gain their feedback. An example of this is that the age analysis indicated that we needed to do more to engage with younger residents of the area. This was then followed up with engagement sessions with secondary school students in Didcot.

Age distribution of respondents to phase two of online engagement

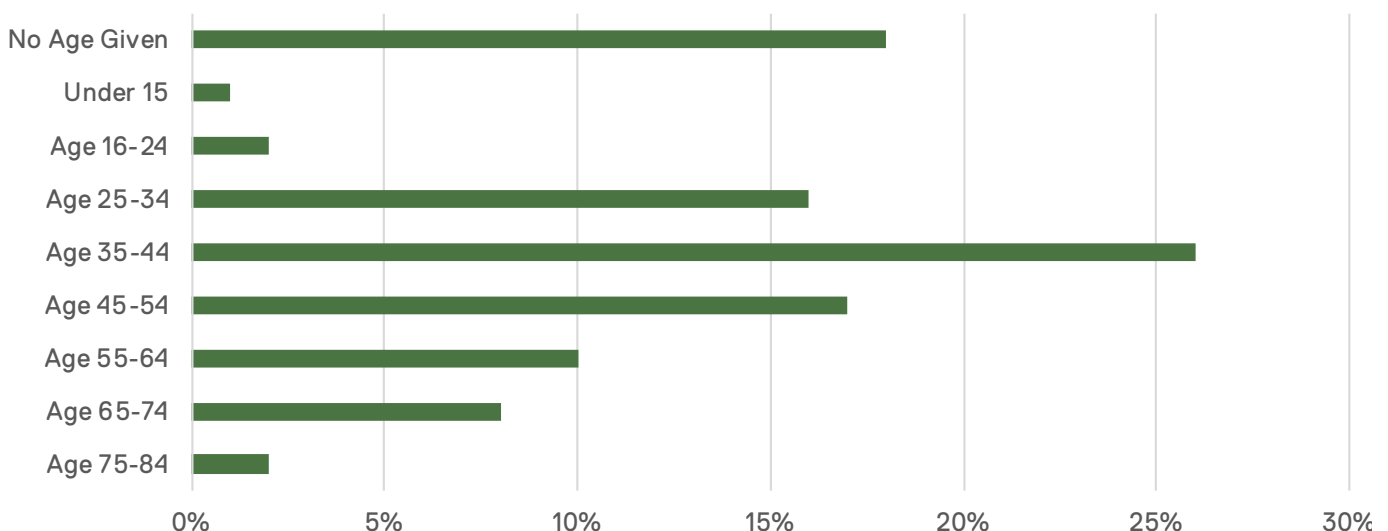


Figure 2.1 - Age distribution of respondents to phase two of online engagement

2.1.3 Masterplan response to feedback

As part of the engagement process members of the public were asked what they would like to see in the area. There were in excess of 1,600 responses given to this question as broken down in figure 2.2 below:

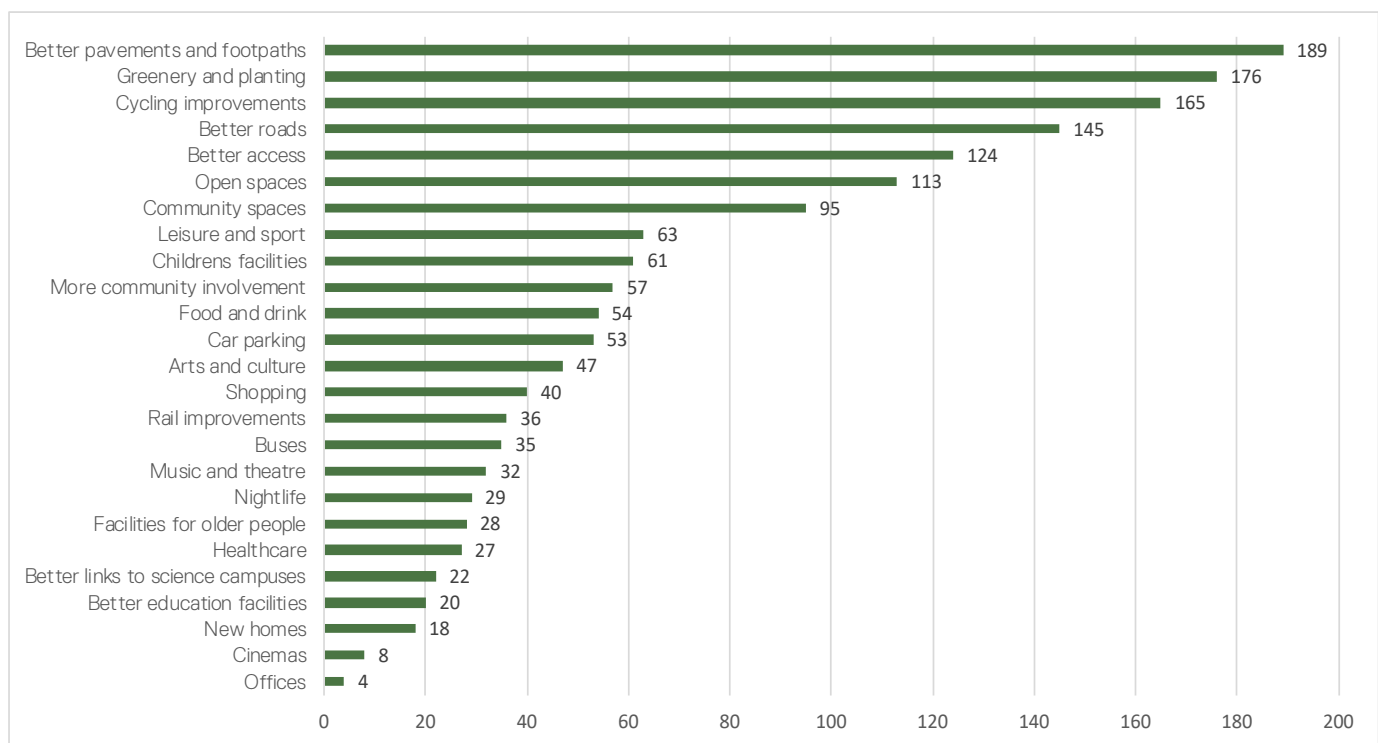


Figure 2.2 - Frequency of issues in feedback

Summarised from this point, in order of level of response, is how the garden town team have incorporated suggestions and responded to feedback:

1. Better pavements and footpaths

- A scheme of improvements to be undertaken to aid in the upkeep of pavements and footpaths
- A better connected town by a network of safe, well-lit and attractively landscaped pedestrian routes both within Didcot and to the surrounding areas
- Encouraging community involvement in helping maintain the amenities of Didcot

2. Greenery and planting

- Integrating high quality green and blue infrastructure into new and existing green spaces and communal areas for the benefit of both the community and wildlife (biodiversity)
- An initiative of community gardens as a focus to bring the community of Didcot together

3. Cycling improvements

- An extensive cycle network around Didcot, linking to the surrounding villages and to key areas of employment.
- With safety in mind, separating cycle lanes from traffic on certain routes
- The creation of Didcot's 'Garden Line' a safe and enjoyable cycle and

pedestrian route linking Culham Science Centre, Didcot Station and Harwell Campus

- Actively encouraging cycling as both a means of getting from A to B and as a key part to a healthy lifestyle.
- A network of charging points for electric bikes
- Well lit cycle routes
- A commitment to work closely with local cycling groups to integrate their knowledge of the area into the proposed cycling improvements

4. Better roads

- Utilising the latest traffic modelling technology to inform the implementation of a road network capable of accommodating the future growth of Didcot and new forms of transport

- Creating an 'East-West Movement Corridor' that channels movement of through traffic along the perimeter roads around the edge of Didcot rather than going through the town centre
- A vision to create an additional River Thames crossing to provide better access to Culham Science Centre and help ease traffic in Sutton Courtenay, Clifton Hampden and on the A34
- More charging points for electric vehicles
- Striving to deliver key road infrastructure in advance of housing delivery
- Working with Oxfordshire County Council to ensure roads are well maintained, essential short, medium and long-term traffic infrastructure schemes are delivered and traffic pinch points are identified and addressed
- Being engaged with national infrastructure schemes such as the Oxford to Cambridge express way

5. Better access

- Ensuring that all community spaces and public open spaces are accessible to all
- A commitment to working with local access groups to ensure that urban and green developments can be enjoyed by all
- Providing a range of mobility schemes

6. Open spaces

- A commitment to ensuring that access to high quality public green space is within 300 metres of all residences
- An undertaking to protect the green buffers surrounding the necklace of

villages neighbouring Didcot

- Innovative uses of green spaces to create attractive landforms accessible to all

7. Community and cultural spaces

- Enhancements to existing and creation of new communal spaces to increase the vibrancy of the town
- A vision to re-invigorate Broadway to become the 'Cultural Spine' of Didcot
- A new market place outside Baptist House to become a focal point of the town
- Building on the success of Cornerstone Arts Centre to bring high quality public art into Didcot

8. Leisure and sport

- The development of a world class leisure centre in Didcot to become a unique destination for leisure activities for the South of England
- Community sports facilities to cater for local teams and clubs
- Ensuring that the popular park run remains a key part of the healthy culture of Didcot
- Easy access to open spaces suitable for all forms of outdoor leisure activities both energetic and relaxed

9. Children's facilities

- Working with the young people of Didcot and the surrounding area to ensure that their requirements are met
- Ensuring that all children's facilities are safe and well maintained
- Ensuring that open spaces are suitable and enjoyable for children to encourage a healthy lifestyle from a young age

10. Facilities for older people

- Retirement type housing for over 55's suitable for those who wish to downsize
- Extra care facilities for those wanting to retain independence but who may require various levels of care and support
- Specialist housing such as dementia care housing

11. More community involvement

- Encouraging involvement of the community in public realm improvements/ maintenance
- Pioneering schemes such as community gardens
- Remaining engaged with community groups to help them realise any initiatives and goals.
- A robust governance model with community involvement at its heart

12. Food and drink

- A variety of cafés and restaurants located in Orchard Centre phase two and on an enhanced Broadway
- Encouraging the use of fresh local produce
- Using community gardens as an opportunity to grow fruit and veg
- Creating community hubs on new developments and provide provisions for cafés and restaurants

13. Car parking

- Using traffic modelling data to ensure sufficient parking provisions are made for the town centre and that this is situated in the correct locations
- Creating a parking strategy for the town centre and station area

- A new multi storey car park on Foxhall Road for users of Didcot Station
- A long stay parking solution that allows easy access to the town centre and railway station
- Sufficient parking at local community hubs
- Ensuring that local access groups are engaged to guarantee appropriate levels of parking spaces for those with limited mobility and that these provide easy access to the key areas of the town

14. Arts and culture

- Using Didcot's railway heritage, its scientific links to Culham Science Centre and Harwell Campus and its location between the River Thames and the area of outstanding natural beauty to inspire a public art programme for the town
- Creating a high quality 'Cultural Spine' along the Broadway
- An enhanced railway museum with improved access

15. Shopping

- Building on the momentum of Orchard Centre phase two to bring a wider variety of shopping opportunities to Didcot
- Using the creation of the 'Cultural Spine' along Broadway to encourage niche business to locate to this area
- The creation of neighbourhood centres in new developments to cater for the needs of residents
- Enhancements to shopping centres such as improved public realm and landscaping and a wider variety of cafés and restaurants to enrich the experience of shopping in Didcot

16. Rail Improvements

- An enhanced railway station with improved facilities and dedicated entrance to Didcot Railway Centre
- A better entrance to Didcot through a welcoming gateway development and pedestrian friendly station forecourt square
- Better access to platforms by using bridges over tracks rather than existing tunnel which is prone to flooding
- Better parking provisions for rail users
- Allow a wider range of rail services to stop at Didcot such as services to the north and south of the country
- A strong working relationship with Network Rail to investigate connectivity improvements around Didcot.

17. Buses

- An improved bus service around Didcot and to the surrounding villages
- Embracing new technology to track timetables and pay for journeys

18. Music and theatre

- Building on the success of Cornerstone Arts Centre by using the garden town to promote its outstanding facilities
- Encourage street entertainment in the town centre, particularly on the area to become the cultural spine of Didcot

19. Nightlife

- A better mix of bars and restaurants in the town centre and along the Broadway to encourage people to remain in Didcot rather than travelling to Oxford or Reading

- Facilities for older people
- Ensuring that public and open spaces are accessible to all
- A wider variety of activities at leisure centres aimed at all age groups
- A mix of cultural entertainment that appeals to all ages

20. Healthcare

- Investigating the possibility of a health care hub within the garden town to cover the needs of Southern Oxfordshire and help ease the burden on the John Radcliffe Hospital
- Maintaining close working relationships with local health centres, Oxfordshire County Council, NHS England and the Clinical Commissioning Group to ensure that the growth of Didcot is accommodated for in future health care plans

21. Better links to science campuses

- Creating a safe and enjoyable cycle and pedestrian route linking Culham Science Centre, Didcot Station and Harwell Campus to be known as the 'Garden Line'
- Exploring new technologies such as autonomous vehicles and electric bikes as alternative means to travel between Culham Science Centre, Didcot Station and Harwell Campus and ensuring that routes can support future innovation
- Establishing an educational link to the science facilities such as an interactive science fair to bring the world leading research and development to the community of Didcot and as an event to bring people into the town

22. Better education facilities

- Working with leading educational facilities with a view of bringing world class learning opportunities to the heart of Didcot
- Tapping into the scientific expertise of Culham Science Centre and Harwell Campus to provide better opportunities to the residents of Didcot in the exciting world of hi-tech developments
- Developing on the outstanding success of the existing educational facilities in Didcot
- Exploring the opportunity of bringing interactive exhibitions, both historic and hi-tech, to the heart of Didcot

23. New homes

- Supporting high quality residential development
- Providing a wider range of tenures, design and unit sizes across developments
- Promoting higher densities at appropriate sites in the centre of town and close to transport links
- Encouraging new residential development to include high quality

accessible public spaces

- Promoting smart, eco-friendly homes

24. Cinemas

- Exploring all avenues of family entertainment to ensure that the residents of Didcot have the best facilities available on their doorstep
- Working with entertainment providers to encourage a wide variety of services to become part of the community of Didcot

25. Offices

- Providing business space and shared workspace for start-up companies in the centre of town
- Providing assistance to companies wishing to start up in Didcot Garden Town and Science Vale.
- Using enterprise zones and local links to leading scientific establishments to attract established global organisations to locate in the Science Vale area

Key points of the engagement process

The community engagement process was wide ranging, transparent and inclusive of all community interests. Ideas and comments were assessed in terms of their overall benefit to Didcot town and the surrounding area of influence. It was therefore inevitable that some ideas and comments, that were contradictory to more acceptable ones, could not be incorporated into the latest masterplan/delivery plan.

Although the proposals are generally welcomed a number of project ideas have caused considerable local concern. In particular the councils have received strong representation against any development on Ladygrove Park, the closure of Cow Lane to vehicular traffic and the potential relocation of the railway station. We have also had a significant number of comments calling for an improved bus service across the town.

All practical comments and ideas were listened to and have been acted upon to produce the latest version of the masterplan and wider delivery plan.



Didcot Garden Town community engagement event

Inspirational comments

It is very clear from the engagement process that residents care very deeply about Didcot and the surrounding areas. These are a few of the inspirational comments made through the engagement process:

“Didcot needs to believe in itself. Identify and address negatives, find ways to deliver enhancements.”

“Let’s do something really inspirational.”

“The transformation of Didcot will demonstrate excellence in its approach to low-carbon living and integrated urban design. Didcot will provide for the needs of all irrespective of wealth or age. Didcot will be the place of first choice for people to settle and its success will be an example used nationally.”

“It is exciting to see Didcot growing. One of the things that makes it a great place to live and work is that there is a good mixture of facilities that are close to hand. We have a mixture of housing and work opportunities, together with leisure facilities, green spaces and cycle/pathways. As Didcot grows it would be good to preserve and enhance these facilities and indeed create more spaces where people walk, play and come together.”

“I want to see my town as somewhere the whole community is proud of with plenty of green space and good transport links.”

“Encourage a stronger sense of community and develop well maintained and sustainable community facilities for all age groups.”

“I think the town is in desperate need of improvement and that DGT is a once in a lifetime opportunity to make some new positive changes. The planned growth of a DGT is to be welcomed, especially where it protects, enhances and respects the unique individuality of nearby historic settlements.”

“Didcot is a great place to live, and I love that we have so many green areas.”

“It’s great to have so many shops nearby where we live and I’m excited about phase 2 of the Orchard Centre. I absolutely love Cornerstone, we are very lucky to have it.”

“It would be great to make Didcot a more welcoming, vibrant town with the plans of the new getaway at the station.”

“I’d like to see Didcot become a Capital for Sustainability through this project by providing a catalyst for innovation and demonstration of sustainable design and transport/mobility.”

“The Garden Town status is an opportunity to get the infrastructure sorted for this housing and make Didcot a pleasant and aspirational place to live.”

“I am proud to say I live in Didcot”

Receiving comments such as these through the engagement process reinforces the drive of the team to produce a garden town that we can all be proud of.

2.1.4 Public consultation

The public consultation on the draft delivery plan ran from 19 June to 31 July 2017 and was designed to capture people’s views and suggestions on the proposals within the plan. The councils put together a survey asking for feedback on the proposed objectives and an online survey was designed that mirrored the chapters within the proposed delivery plan.

The introduction to the survey provided a weblink to download a full copy of the proposed delivery plan and respondents were given the option at the beginning of the survey to choose which sections and chapters they wished to complete. At the start of each chapter the survey provided a weblink to the relevant chapter. This opened in a pop-up window, allowing respondents to review and consider the detail of the chapter prior to answering. At the end of each section, respondents were given the opportunity to provide comments on the chapter.

The councils ran a social media campaign throughout the duration of the consultation to encourage people to participate. This was accompanied by a leaflet sent to each property within Didcot and the surrounding villages. Email notifications, which included a link inviting people to complete the survey online, were sent to stakeholder groups and residents that had previously requested to be kept informed of garden town updates. This was also done for people who had previously expressed an interest in taking part in wider council consultations.

The launch of the proposed delivery plan was also comprehensively covered by the local media.

Paper copies of the proposed delivery plan were available for the public to view at:

- South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, OX14 4SB
- Vale of White Horse District Council, Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JE
- Didcot Civic Hall, Britwell Road, Didcot, OX11 7HN
- Didcot Library, 197 Broadway, Didcot, OX11 8RU
- Cornerstone Arts Centre, 25 Station Road, Didcot, OX11 7NE
- Didcot Wave, Newlands Avenue, Didcot OX11 8NX

Consultation responses

A copy of the consultation report is available in appendix R. In total, 458 people (residents, businesses, stakeholders and other interested parties) provided a response to the survey. 24 of which were postal returns, 105 via email and 329 were made

online. In addition, 36 businesses and other stakeholders provided a written response to the consultation.

The consultation summary report confirms that most respondents agreed with, or had a neutral view of, most chapters of the proposed delivery plan. The support for various sections of the document is summarised in the following 2.3..

The levels of agreement for chapters 3 to 11 of the proposed delivery plan from the public consultation are indicated in figure 2.4:

Many of the comments received are critical of issues that the garden town cannot, and has not, sought to influence. For example, disagreeing with the proposed delivery plan because it does not aim to change the number of houses allocated for development within either district councils’ local plans.

The garden town aims to play its part in delivering the district-wide local

Chapter	Topic	Responses	% of total respondents that agree with, or have a neutral view of, the proposals
3	Vision	93 to 94	49% (bringing vision to life) to 59% (vision)
4	Better Place for Business	64	54%
5	Infrastructure	135 to 157	54% (transport) to 76% (grey)
6	Wider Choice of Homes	80	61 %
7	Connected Smart Community	64 to 67	65% to 67%
8	Super Green Town	100 to 102	60% to 62%
9	Proposed Masterplan	78 to 87	51% (the masterplan) to 64% (design review panel)
10	Managing Delivery	135 to 157	42% (planning) to 50% (planning & governance overview)
11	Funding and Implementation	67	45%

Figure 2.3 - Per cent of total respondents that agree with, or have a neutral view of, the proposals

plans by facilitating higher quality and more sustainable development at a faster pace than might otherwise be the case without garden town status. As such it has never set out to oppose

or amend the local plans, in any way. However, by analysing individual respondents' comments, as well as the overall assessment of various elements of the proposed delivery plan, we have

been able to identify a number of issues which have influenced, and have been addressed in, the final delivery plan.

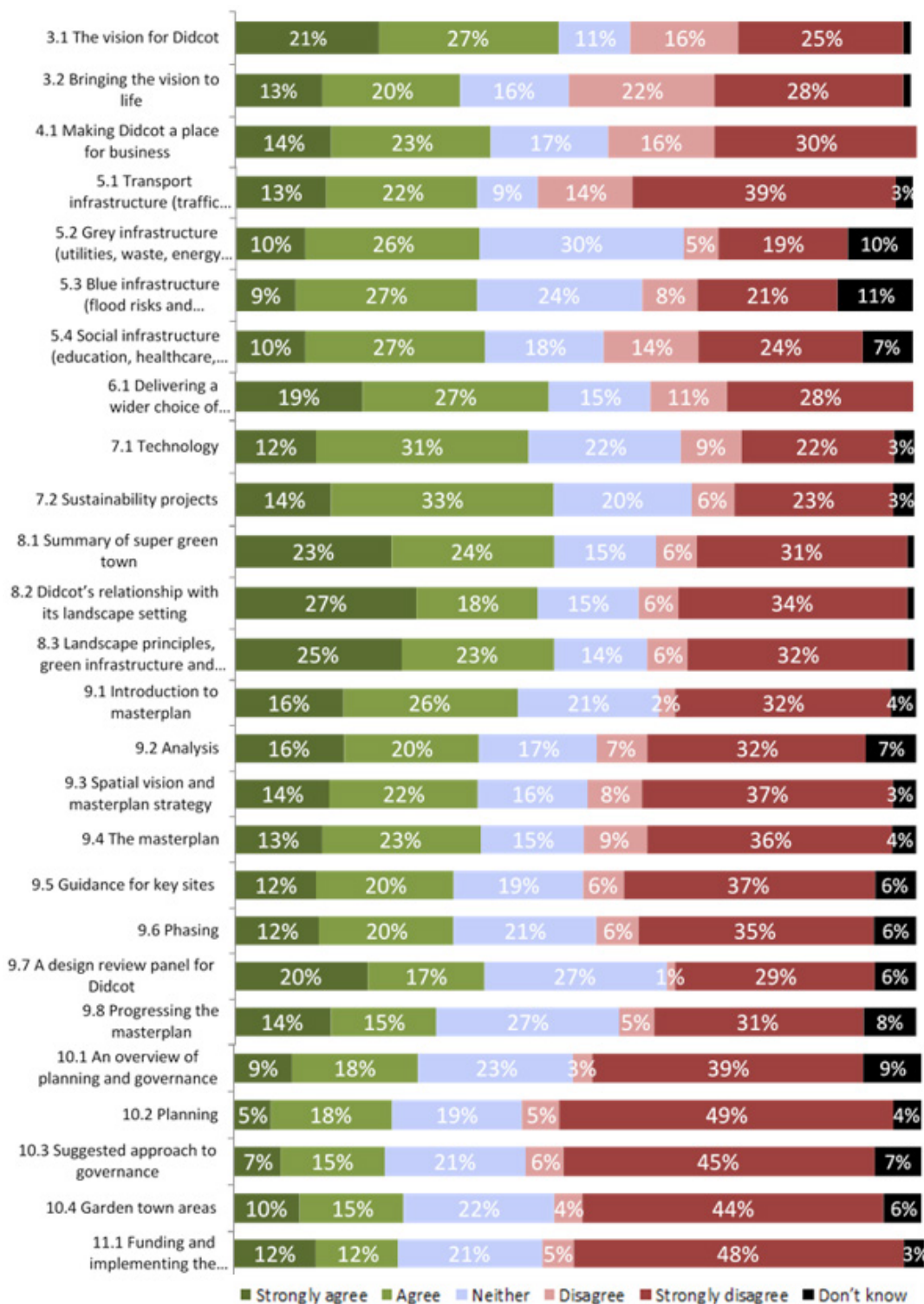


Figure 2.4 - Levels of agreement for chapters 3 to 11

2.1.5 Conclusions

The production of the draft delivery plan is the start of an exciting journey for Didcot Garden Town and we recognise that a key driver to its success is community involvement. With this in mind we will continue to work with stakeholder groups and the public to bring the aspirations in this document to life as we begin to work on the detail of the plans.

From the announcement that Didcot had been granted garden town status there has been excitement over the opportunities that this could deliver. Encouragingly, many individuals and groups have expressed their interest in being regularly informed about the project and having opportunities to

help shape the garden town vision both in the near-future and long-term.

Following the launch of the draft delivery plan the council will conduct a formal six week consultation period to allow the community to give their views on the final draft proposals. However, it is essential that we keep Didcot Garden Town at the forefront of the minds of the residents of Didcot and the surrounding areas and will do so by committing to strong community involvement within the governance structure.

Community engagement will be an ongoing process for the Didcot Garden Town Board and Executive (see

chapter 10 - Managing delivery of the masterplan) – since there is an acute understanding of the need to involve all parts of the local community in the work of the garden town.

To ensure that the community is placed at the centre of the governance proposals parish councils and other stakeholder groups will be asked to nominate a representative to be part of the community panel. As a representative of this panel they will be empowered to provide updates to their parishes/ groups and bring forward feedback to the governance panel.



Milton Park shuttle bus © MEPC

