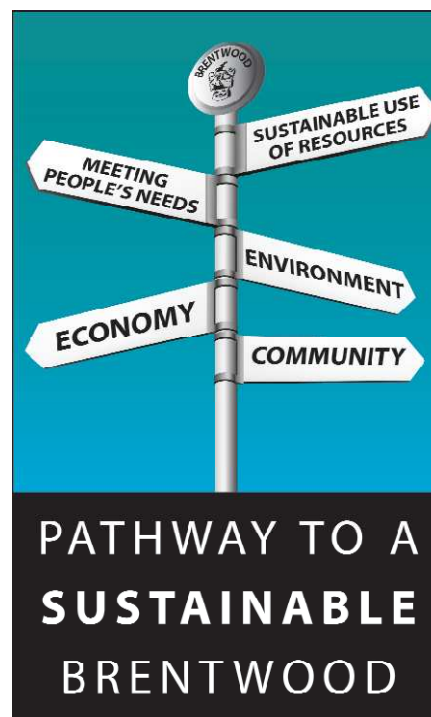# Brentwood Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Development Framework Core Strategy Issues and Options Consultation

Analysis: Part 2

May 2010

Brentwood Borough Council
Town Hall
Ingrave Road
Brentwood
Essex CM15 8AY

Telephone: 01277 312500
Website: www.brentwood.gov.uk
Email: planning.policy@brentwood.gov.uk

1   Introduction

1.1   This analysis builds on the preliminary analysis of consultation responses completed in February 2010 (referred to as Part 1 in this report). It provides further commentary on responses from the formal Issues and Options consultation in November and December last year and takes into account feedback from six focus group discussions held at Brentwood Town Hall in January.

1.2   Policy implications arising from the consultation and potential responses to these for the Council and Local Strategic Partnership to consider taking forward in the Core Strategy and Sustainable Community Strategy forward are set out.

1.3   Finally, the validity of the consultation is considered along with potential lessons for future consultations.

1.4   A breakdown of responses is given in Part 1.

1.5   Chapter titles and ordering reflect themes in the consultation paper. Issues raised in the 'general comments' and 'further comments' sections of the Issues and Options comment form are dealt with under appropriate themes below.

1.6   Where appropriate, reference has been made to other sources of information and views, such as the Brentwood Place Survey (2008) and evidence base studies.

2   A Vision for Brentwood

2.1   The *Pathway to a Sustainable Brentwood* consultation paper (2009) proposed replacing the existing Community Strategy mission statement and Local Plan vision with a single vision. The reasoning behind this was that the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and Core Strategy (CS) are complementary studies to guide future change in the Borough and would benefit from a shared vision. This should reflect the community's longer terms aspirations and issues and challenges facing the Borough. The text of the draft vision consulted on is reproduced below:

'To build on and enhance all that is best and valued of the existing character and environment of the town and its surrounding rural areas, ensuring that it is a place that provides a high quality of life for those that live, work and relax in the Borough, both now and in the future.'

2.2   More than two thirds of respondents (70%) agreed with the proposed vision; less than a third (30%) disagreed. Focus group participants were asked to consider the vision and suggest how it could be improved.

Key issues

2.3   A wide range of comments and suggestions have been received, some supportive and some critical. Some consider the draft vision is too ambiguous and generic, and should be made more specific and locally distinctive. Others consider it focuses too much on Brentwood town, whereas it should apply to the Borough as a whole and say something about rural areas and the Green Belt. Some question whether the vision would be followed through or is capable of being implemented. The following questions were raised:

- Are we only talking about 'what's best'? What about other places that need revitalising?

- What about taking measures to redress what is devaluing the character and environmental qualities?

- How do you define high quality of life?

- What do we want 'Brentwood' to stand for?

- What should we be doing to differentiate' Brentwood' from all other similar-sized towns and e.g. Chelmsford and Bishops Stortford?

2.4   Suggestions for improving the vision include:

- making it more locally distinctive;

- adding the word 'safe' (as per the existing Community Strategy mission statement) and substituting high quality of life for 'good quality of life';

- working with natural lifecycles;

- making the vision more proactive saying where we're going as well as what we have; describing actions needed to make the Borough sustainable; and

- replacing the phrase 'build on' with 'conserve' and adding 'but also incorporating the

best of the new' or 'develop and make it good.'

Implications

2.5   Consultation responses suggest the vision has a fair degree of support, although the level of support for proposed objectives is higher. In light of this, and comments received, it might be prudent to consult on a revised version.

2.6   Careful consideration will need to be given to putting in place policies and actions to deliver the vision, once agreed, and setting indicators which will monitor progress towards achieving it.

Next steps

2.7   The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is expected to consult on a draft SCS containing a revised vision in the near future. This will be before the Council's draft Core Strategy is available for consultation. Ideally, we should continue to pursue a joint vision for the SCS and CS. Different timetables, procedures and lead responsibilities for the two documents, with the Council leading on the CS and the LSP on the SCS, may make this hard to achieve in practice, however. It may be more practicable to have one vision for the SCS and another for the CS and ensure that these are complementary.

3   Strategic Objectives

3.1   12 objectives were put forward for consideration in the consultation paper. Their purpose is to help deliver the vision and provide the context for more detailed policies.

3.2   Responses indicate a high level of support for the proposed objectives with three quarters or more of respondents agreeing with 10 out of the 12 objectives proposed. The objective over which there most agreement was shown is *Preserve and enhance the natural and historic environment, biodiversity and visual character of the Borough.*

3.3   90% or more of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the following objectives:

- *Reduce the negative impacts of development on people and the environment by encouraging the prudent use of resources; reducing pollution and waste and encouraging the use of renewable energy*

- *Reduce crime and fear of crime and ensure safe and secure living and working environments*

- *Improve public transport and encourage sustainable transport choices*

- *Ensure a prosperous and vibrant local economy*

3.4   The objectives over which there was least agreement, albeit still supported by a majority, are *Seek to provide everyone with access to appropriate local housing in order to create balanced communities* (63% agreed) and *Promote social inclusion through equality of access to employment, housing, education, health and recreational facilities and open space* (74% agreed).   For a breakdown of responses see Part 1 Analysis (Chapter 4).

Key Issues

3.5   Issues raised and suggestions made with regard to the strategic objectives include the following:

- Important that infrastructure is there or can be provided to support development;

- Make better use of underutilised employment locations;

- Ensure Brentwood benefits from its good location - focus group participants pointed out that a particular strength of the Borough is that it offers the best of both worlds: proximity to London and pleasant countryside;

- Most of the objectives are ideals rather than practical opportunities;

- Maintain and enhance the sustainability of the smaller towns and villages;

- Be more ambitious.

Policy Implications

3.6   Given the high degree of support shown for the objectives, these appear to provide a good starting point for the SCS and CS. Specific issues raised during the consultation suggest the need to:

- Ensure that SCS and CS objectives apply across the whole Borough unless there is a good reason for an objective to be geographically specific;

- Acknowledge the need for and potential to provide or improve infrastructure, e.g. by adding: 'or where appropriate infrastructure and services can be provided in a sustainable manner' at the end of the objective 'Direct growth to the most sustainable locations and manage it to that which can be accommodated by available infrastructure and services';

- Achieve a good balance between retail, leisure and other uses in Brentwood High Street, and elsewhere in the Borough;

- Consider measures to maintain and enhance sustainability of the smaller towns and villages;

- Address issues relating to the public realm through the SCS and CS;

- Explore the scope for transport improvements, including Park and Ride schemes;

- Identify measures to enhance the attractiveness of Brentwood Town Centre;

- Identify policies and measures needed to deliver the objectives and a framework for monitoring progress towards achieving these;

- Identify policies and measures to control development affecting gardens.

4   Theme 1: Sustainable Use of Resources

4.1   Theme 1 is concerned with safeguarding finite natural resources, minimising the local impact on climate change, responding to environmental concerns and reducing our environmental impact. As well as making more sustainable use of resources, specific issues to address are how to reduce flood risk; improve air and water quality; and promote recycling, carbon neutral development, renewable energy technologies and alternatives to the car.

4.2   Views were sought on the location and impacts of new development, opportunities for sustainable transport modes such as walking and cycling, reducing energy consumption, minimising pollution, promoting greater use of renewable energy, avoiding harm to the environment and natural resources, and minimising flood risk. For a breakdown of responses see Part 1 of this analysis (Chapter 5).

Key Issues

4.3   Overall responses suggest a high level of agreement with all of the consultation paper's suggestions under this theme. The strongest agreement was shown towards the suggestions that new development should seek to minimise the risk of flooding, aim to reduce energy consumption and minimise pollution, and avoid harm to the environment and natural resources. The majority of respondents agreed with the suggestion that development should be directed towards existing larger settlements using previously developed land, although there was less agreement over this,.

4.4   Concerns were raised over flood risk and developing on flood plains or in areas at risk of flooding. There is support for more use of renewable energy in existing homes and buildings as well as on a larger scale, but also concern regarding potentially harmful effects some renewable technologies, such as wind turbines, may have on the environment. Recovering renewable energy start-up costs within a reasonable time period was also raised as an issue. Other issues include the need to minimise waste, encourage more sustainable technology in public transport; and safeguard local character, the environment, green open spaces, and Green Belt.

4.5   The Natural and Historic Environment Focus Group explored issues relating to the sustainable use of resources and conservation of the built and natural environment. Key issues for the group were reducing car use, greater use of local services, protecting the Green Belt and important sites, not encroaching on rural areas, access to green spaces for communities, producing food locally, better transport and access to support agriculture, maintaining hedgerows and landscape, resolving issues relating to use and ownership of Common Land, links between recreation areas and giving communities a say in the planning process.

4.6   Suggestions received include: encourage more recycling, deal more with biodegradable waste, consider the suitability and impact of renewable energy schemes on the local environment (such as the effect of wind turbines on the landscape), identify areas for tree planting, re-use existing buildings, ensure new development is environmentally friendly, and encourage the use of technology to reduce emissions (such as hybrid and electric vehicles and charging facilities to support these).

Policy Implications

4.7   Consultation responses and comments received highlight the need for policy and measures to take forward the suggestions under Theme 1, in particular to:

- consider the role that the Council and LSP have in leading the way to promote more sustainable use of resources, renewable energy schemes, sustainable travel to work patterns, and reduce pollution (including CO2 emissions) and waste;

- promote and encourage sustainable use of resources and energy in existing homes and new residential and other types of development;

- encourage large scale renewable energy schemes where start-up costs can be recovered within a reasonable time period and that have a clear benefit to the local community;

- achieve high standards of design and innovative renewable energy/energy efficiency schemes while minimising the negative impact of development on its surroundings;

- maximise the use of previously developed land in order to safeguard the natural environment e.g. Green Belt, greenfield land, green open spaces and urban open space and quality of life;

- incorporate green space into new development and link existing and new green spaces (green infrastructure);

- consider options to enhance the local environment with tree planting and other schemes (e.g. green roofs);

- achieve more sustainable use of water;

- consider the effects of flooding on both new development and existing buildings, mitigate against flood risk; achieve more use of Sustainable Drainage Schemes (SUDS);

- encourage walking and cycling in the Borough while improving public transport;

- facilitate sustainable travel to work patterns;

- provide facilities to encourage cycling to public transport hubs, such as secure cycle parking at stations and the town centre;

- provide supporting infrastructure for the use of environmentally friendly technology in both public transport and other personal transport means, such as electric cars or mobility scooters; and

- minimise waste by promoting recycling and more use of biodegradable waste.

5 Theme 2: Ensuring the Protection of the Natural and Built Environment & Local Character

5.1 Issues which Theme 2 seeks to address are how to protect and enhance the Borough's environmental and historic assets (built and natural), conserve local character, integrate natural areas into development, maintain and enhance open spaces for leisure and recreation, allow for innovative design and ensure the public realm respects local character.

5.2 Views were sought on protecting the Green Belt, wildlife, habitats and urban open spaces, whether new development should be innovative, protect the character of the local area and incorporate 'green infrastructure' (open spaces and the links between them) and whether public spaces should be improved through the use of high quality materials, landscaping and works of art.   For a breakdown of responses see Part 1 of this analysis (Chapter 6).

Key Issues

5.3 Strong support is shown for protecting the Borough's Green Belt, natural environment, urban open space, wildlife and their habitats. Support is also shown for incorporating green infrastructure into development. Focus group participants remarked that Brentwood features rural areas with rich landscapes that need to be retained and conserved.

5.4 Quality and usability of open spaces is seen as particularly important, with focus group participants noting that this should be an integral part of development, and not simply added on as an afterthought. Participants from the Youth and Natural and Historic Environment focus groups suggested that the Council consider promoting more allotments in the Borough and home-grown food.

5.5 There is considerable concern about the classification of domestic gardens as brownfield development and the loss of green space that can result from development taking place on gardens.

5.6 Strong support is shown for new development that respects local character, and for development that is innovative and well designed; although some question whether it is possible to both innovate and respect local character. Focus group participants suggested that a properly informed brief with stronger design policies would make it harder for poor quality applications to be permitted. The Rural Community Council of Essex suggested encouraging the production of Village Design Statements (VDS).

5.7 The consultation paper's suggestion of providing public art in the Borough to improve public spaces received a lukewarm response. The main concern is how it would be funded and whether this is a sensible use of public funds, given limited resources and other priorities.

5.8 Other issues raised include the need to protect the Borough's skyline and not only statutory historic assets, but also non-designated space and buildings of local significance, and address potential conflict between sustainability measures, such as wind turbines, and protecting the historic environment, landscape and countryside.

Policy Implications

Green Belt

5.9   Protecting the Green Belt is a paramount consideration given the significant role it plays in the Borough. Successful in halting the spread of London outward, the Green Belt has helped safeguard the character and quality of Brentwood town, surrounding villages and countryside. As the consultation paper states, the Council's preference is for brownfield development where possible. The challenge is to ensure sufficient land is available for future development needs in the Borough, while minimising the impact on the Green Belt. Brentwood's *Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment* (SHLAA) and *Employment Land Review* (ELR) will provide evidence on land availability. The spatial option chosen will need to draw on this evidence and take account of the potential impact on the Green Belt.

5.10   Emerging evidence from the SHLAA suggests that there may be sufficient brownfield land to meet housing land requirements for the first fifteen years. Whether this turns out to be the case will depend on the efficiency with which land is developed, annual completions, housing completions on windfall sites, i.e. unallocated brownfield sites and housing requirements (which may change). Should land need to be released from the Green Belt a review would first have to be carried out. This would assess the extent to which land under consideration meets Green Belt objectives and, drawing on the SHLAA, is suitable and available for development. It is unlikely that the Core Strategy will require a Green Belt review as this sets out broad strategy for the Borough, with detailed land allocations dealt with at a later stage, but it may need to suggest the area to be covered by and timing for a future review.

Gardens

5.11   Concerns raised suggest that stronger measures are needed to protect gardens from inappropriate development. An approach some authorities have taken is to produce an SPD on intensification or back land development. This provides guidance on design issues proposals affecting gardens should address and is sometimes linked to a development management policy that sets out circumstances where garden development may be acceptable in principle, subject to other policy considerations.

5.12   Interest in growing food and access to fresh local produce is increasing and therefore suggests the need to provide opportunities for this, e.g. domestically and through community gardens and allotments and by retaining good quality agricultural land.

Design

5.13   Design issues will need to be addressed within the Core Strategy and Development Management policies. The *Essex Design Guide* and *Urban Place Supplement* (Essex County Council, Planning Officers' Society 2007), adopted by Brentwood as a Supplementary Planning Document, provide a useful starting point for these.

5.14   Further research is needed on issues relating to views and tall buildings in the Borough. In light of evidence and drawing on good practice, it should be possible to develop an approach and guidelines for addressing views, skylines and tall buildings.

5.15   Village Design Statements (VDSs) and Parish Plans can provide valuable additional local information to support the planning and development process as well as the benefits of a community led process. The weight that can be given to VDSs and their role in planning decisions will depend on how they are produced, the level of public

engagement and robustness. As a minimum VDSs should be capable of being treated as part of the evidence base for plans and decisions and could be adopted as SPD.

Open Space

5.16   The *Brentwood Place Survey* (2008) reports a high level of satisfaction among residents with the Borough's parks and open spaces. The survey does not identify improving parks as a priority for residents compared with, say, tackling crime. Responses to the present consultation suggest that residents value parks and open spaces highly but would welcome improvements to make them more accessible and, in some instances, better managed (e.g. kept litter free) and better protection for urban parks that may be under threat from development or neglect. These views were also reflected in survey responses to the *Open Space Study* (August 2007).

The Historic and Natural Environment

5.17   We need to consider how best to protect the character of the Borough, while allowing development to take place. Options to consider include creating a list to identify non-designated historic buildings and features of value and requiring good design standards and sustainability measures that enhance, and do not detract, from the historic environment.

Public Art

5.18   Consideration needs to be given to identifying an approach for securing public art in the Borough which the public can support. Potential solutions include requiring works to be externally funded, and employing local artists to produce or work with the local community to help choose or create artworks.

5.19   Issues raised highlight the need for policy and measures to:

- protect and enhance the Green Belt and greenfield land;

- protect and improve the quality and accessibility of the Borough's open spaces, including urban open space, and provide new open spaces, taking into account the type and quality of open space and facilities available or needed;

- encourage local food growing;

- incorporate green space into new development and link existing and new green spaces (green infrastructure);

- control inappropriate development on gardens;

- achieve high standards of design and minimise the negative impact of development on its surroundings;

- ensure that future development respects or enhances local character and at the same time is modern and innovative where opportunities arise;

- recognise the potential for Village Design Statements and Parish Plans to contribute to the planning process and wider objectives;

- safeguard important views and manage the skyline by guiding tall buildings to suitable locations within the Borough and setting out height guidelines;

- develop an approach towards public art in the Borough backed by the local community;

- protect the historic environment while allowing appropriate new development and

- adopt environmental sustainability measures that are compatible with protecting the historic environment;

- identify non-statutory historic assets of local significance; and

- set an indicative process and timetable for a local Green Belt review subject to evidence from the SHLAA and monitoring on the rate at which windfall sites come forward, housing completions and housing needs.

6 Theme 3: Local Economy and Economic Development

6.1   Theme 3 is concerned with the local economy and economic development, focusing on how the Council, in partnership with local businesses and services, can facilitate economic prosperity through supporting existing businesses and providing for additional local jobs and premises, shopping, leisure and cultural facilities.

6.2   Views were sought on whether existing employment land and premises should be retained and new employment sites identified; job opportunities that should be sought; the needs of small and medium sized businesses; improving local skills through education and training; supporting local businesses; the role of Brentwood town centre and district shopping centres; and provision of cultural facilities. A breakdown of responses is given in Part 1 of this analysis (Chapter 7).

Key Issues

6.3   Responses suggest there is a high level of agreement with most of the suggestions other than the suggestion that Brentwood town centre should have a greater variety of commercial activities, such as cafes, bars and restaurants. A majority either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this compared with a quarter of respondents who agreed. The most popular suggestions are taking action to improve local skills through education and training, maintaining Brentwood centre as the principle shopping centre, and maintaining and enhancing the viability of district shopping centres in Ingatestone, Shenfield and Warley Hill.

6.4   The main themes raised by the Economic Development Focus Group were the importance of protecting the uniqueness and character of the Borough while providing for growth, the need for improved transport infrastructure given high levels of congestion, and better promotion of tourism as a key driver of the local economy. Participants discussed the effects of London's economy (good and bad) with high levels of local out-commuting but Brentwood offering the best of both worlds: proximity to London and attractive countryside. There was recognition that the Borough contains pockets of deprivation for those working locally for employers offering the minimum wage and a sense that Brentwood should not try to compete with surrounding towns but instead offer a unique and attractive environment for niche business types. A similar view was shared by other focus group participants, e.g. the youth focus group, and among respondents.

6.5   Suggestions put forward include the need to better utilise existing employment sites, skills training for local people to support local business and industry, fast broadband access for all, more local shops and a farmers' market.

6.6   The topic for the Youth Focus Group was leisure provision in the Borough. They suggested a number of ways in which this could be improved. In their view, Brentwood town centre should offer something for everyone and would benefit from more inclusive, affordable facilities, family oriented restaurants and more regular, reliable public transport.

Policy Implications

6.7   Consultation responses and comments received highlight the need for policy and measures to take forward suggestions under Theme 3, in particular to:

- protect the historic and natural environment while allowing appropriate new employment development;

- provide green spaces to create attractive and pleasant places to work;

- utilise the maximum potential of existing workplaces and employment areas to reduce pressure of finding more land and potentially encroaching on Green Belt;

- prioritise brownfield land and re-use of buildings;

- consider the scope for mixed use or intensification (redeveloping employment land to provide more jobs for a given land area);

- improve public transport and facilitate sustainable travel to work patterns;

- promote Brentwood as a tourist location, and stop over place for hotel business;

- retain cultural facilities for existing or similar purposes;

- improve local skills through training and education;

- better manage the evening economy and encourage 'family friendly' venues;

- maintain a diverse range of shops in Brentwood Town Centre and a complementary mix of cultural, leisure and residential uses taking care to avoid a preponderance of bars and cafes;

- promote local markets and the sale of local food and produce, e.g. through farmers markets;

- address the needs of the rural economy through a sensitive and sympathetic approach to diversification which recognises the vital role played by agriculture as part of a diverse economy and in managing the wider landscape.

7 Theme 4: Meeting People's Needs – Housing

7.1 Issues which Theme 4 (Housing) seeks to address are how to optimise the use of residential land while protecting local character, provide sufficient housing land in suitable locations, achieve a suitable mix of housing and deliver the infrastructure needed to facilitate housing development.

7.2 Views were sought on suggested approaches to addressing these issues. These included increasing housing densities near town and district centres, releasing greenfield land where there is a lack of suitable brownfield land, locating development to reduce the need to travel, use of Green Belt land, housing choice, size and mix, affordable and intermediate housing and community facilities. A breakdown of responses is given in Part 1 of this analysis (Chapter 8).

Key Issues

7.3 Green Belt, the density of development, meeting housing needs, affordable housing provision, infrastructure and car parking are the key issues raised.

7.4 Responses suggest there is strong support for new housing development offering a choice of size and type of homes; for continuing to constrain the amount of new housing by the Borough's Green Belt location; and for developing in locations with good public transport links and which reduce the need to travel. There is less agreement over the statement that greenfield sites should only be released for development where there is a lack of appropriate brownfield sites, although more agree than disagree with this.

Green Belt

7.5 As noted in Part 1 of this analysis, protecting the Green Belt attracted more "strongly agree" responses than any other consultation question. With regard to the possible use of Green Belt land for development in future, responses suggest this to be an issue people feel especially concerned about. The handful of respondents who support development on the Green Belt is outnumbered by those who believe this should be avoided where possible or at all costs. Housing Focus Group participants suggested that developing certain sites within the Green Belt would have less impact than others. For example, sites within a settlement and where a boundary line has been drawn around the site with housing on both sides, might be more appropriate for Green Belt release and therefore should be considered. The Group felt although the Green Belt is worth protecting, this should not be to the detriment of providing places for people to live.

Local housing needs

7.6 Meeting local housing needs is an important issue for respondents and focus group participants with the majority supporting increased provision of affordable housing. Housing Focus Group participants highlighted the need to maintain affordability for the elderly, recognise changing demographics and build homes to Lifetime Homes standards. The Group considered there was a problem with the image of social housing. This, they suggested could be addressed through promoting good quality affordable housing. They considered that more should be done to advertise and promote shared ownership properties, raised concerns about the resale of affordable housing and called for a clear definition of what is meant by affordable housing.

7.7 Suggestions received include lowering affordable housing thresholds to increase provision, developing mixed communities, ensuring homes are accessible for all, providing sufficient outdoor space in new developments and incorporating sustainable design features.

Housing design and density

7.8 With regard to housing density, issues raised included potential overdevelopment, too much emphasis on flats (with some requesting no more flats or high rise development), the need for more affordable family housing and threats to urban open space. Focus group participants noted that higher density tends to have a poor image. This is perhaps reflected in some questionnaire comments received.

Parking and infrastructure

7.9 With regard to car parking within residential development, comments received reflect a call for this to be realistic and for development standards to reflect current car usage while promoting other forms of transport and giving residents a choice of transport. Delivering necessary supporting infrastructure in conjunction with new housing, improving public transport, promoting cycling and walking and reducing the number of empty homes are other key concerns.

Policy Implications

Green Belt and Housing

7.10 Comments received highlight the need for brownfield development to continue to be given preference over greenfield development, while protecting urban open space, the Green Belt and avoiding inappropriate development in gardens.

7.11 As stated above, the Council needs to ensure that sufficient land is available in the Borough for future development needs. Using land efficiently through higher densities, bringing back into use empty properties, good design and layout will reduce the amount of land that needs to be found for development. The impact of development on local character and appropriate densities in rural, suburban and urban areas are key considerations that need to be addressed.

7.12 Brentwood's SHLAA provides evidence on suitable brownfield and greenfield land with potential for development. In the event that Green Belt land needs to be considered for housing development, there would first need to be a Green Belt review. The approach taken will need to consider how to meet housing needs in a way that minimises any loss of or harmful effect on the Green Belt (see also paragraphs 5.9 and 5.10 above).

Affordable Housing

7.13 Brentwood's *Strategic Housing Market Assessment* (SHMA) identifies a significant need for more affordable housing in the Borough. *Brentwood Place Survey* (2008) also identified the need for decent affordable housing as a local issue which needed to be addressed when surveying members of the public. Responding to this need is extremely challenging, given present market conditions. Brentwood *Viability Assessment*, commissioned by the Council, will provide evidence on the level of affordable housing provision it may be economic to provide in future. Given that the Borough has many small residential sites and fewer large sites, it makes sense to review affordable housing thresholds (the size of scheme or site above which private

residential developments must provide some affordable homes) in order to deliver the level of affordable housing needed.

7.14   We need to consider ways to overcome the poor image of affordable housing, promote good quality affordable homes in the future and to retain affordable homes so they remain affordable (or are replaced), working with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) within the Borough to achieve these.

Dwelling mix and type

7.15   Evidence on local needs should help determine the type and size of dwellings that should be provided and wider objectives, such as a balanced housing market and the creation of sustainable communities. Brentwood's SHMA indicates a significant need for one and two bedroom dwellings within the Borough. Although this does not necessarily mean flats, it is likely that some flatted development would be required in order to accommodate this need.

7.16   Concerns raised by respondents suggests the need to develop a better understanding of densities and for an approach that takes into account an area's role and character. Establishing a clear distinction between high-rise and high density within planning policies may help assuage fears among the community and provide a clearer steer for prospective developers and decision makers. Flats do not necessarily mean high-rise development and high density does not always mean high-rise. As housing focus group participants noted, terraced housing can often be relatively high density and residents can still have small gardens and community space. Many concerns about higher densities are due to poor design and failure to consider the local context or address traffic management and parking issues, rather than density.

Local Needs

7.17   Policies will need to consider housing needs across the Borough drawing on evidence from the SHMA and other sources. There is currently a lack of properties that allow elderly people the opportunity to downsize, such as properties that allow a similar lifestyle as before, such as having a garden and pet, but with less overall space and properties with access features (e.g. single storey). There is also a need for more tailored sheltered housing. Extending options available will improve choice and quality of life since people will not be forced to move elsewhere or remain in unsuitable accommodation.

Design

7.18   Well designed housing is an important consideration in order to ensure its success. Making homes accessible for all requires careful attention to be given to design, as does providing outdoor space and incorporating sustainable design features.

7.19   To encourage people to consider alternatives to driving, residential schemes need to offer convenient alternatives, such as secure bike sheds, incentives for car pool schemes and layouts and facilities to make walking, cycling and public transport attractive.

Supporting Infrastructure

7.20   Infrastructure needed to support residential development needs to be delivered in a timely way to ensure a good quality of life for residents and avoid placing pressure on existing services and infrastructure. The Council will need to liaise with service

providers to ensure that their strategies are in line with future development requirements for housing and where necessary improve services for existing residents.

7.21   Issues raised highlight the need for policy and measures to:

- consider the impact of residential development on local character;

- consider the appropriateness and requirement for residential development in the Green Belt;

- deliver more affordable housing;

- improve the image of affordable housing in the borough;

- develop an improved understanding of high density development within the borough;

- consider appropriate locations for high-rise development;

- make better use of the existing housing stock by reducing the number of empty and under-occupied properties;

- ensure homes are built to Lifetime Homes Standards

- promote residential development that is accessible for all and which meets the needs of the borough's ageing population with more specialist housing and options for 'downsizing';

- provide realistic car parking levels, taking into account the need to encourage other forms of transport including walking and cycling;

- secure provision of outdoor space within new development;

- incorporate sustainable design within new development;

- ensure that infrastructure needed to support residential development is delivered in a timely manner; and

- ensure public transport strategies are in line with future development plans.

8 Theme 4: Meeting People's Needs – Transport

8.1 Issues which Theme 4 (Transport) seeks to address are how to direct development to accessible locations, reduce congestion, reduce the high dependency on car use, improve facilities for cycling and walking, improve accessibility throughout the Borough and reduce the number, length and time of journeys.

8.2 Views were sought on new development in relation to car use, public transport, cycling provision, parking and travel plans. A breakdown of responses is given in Part 1 of this analysis (Chapter 9).

Key Issues

8.3 Responses suggest improving public transport to be an overriding concern. There is support for reducing car use, although some do not consider it possible to reduce this significantly, and for promoting alternative vehicle technologies. Focus group participants noted the need to reduce reliance on private car use by encouraging alternatives, such as better public transport, with improved frequency and running times and links to all parts of the Borough, better accessibility, and encouraging walking and cycling, while providing necessary supporting facilities. The suggestion that new developments should incorporate travel plans received some support.

Public transport

8.4 Improving public transport in rural areas was the most popular suggestion in the transport part of the consultation paper (see Part 1 page 18). Concerns raised include a lack of integrated bus links, the need for improved parking at stations (particularly Shenfield), too few buses per day, a lack of buses in the evenings and on Sundays, and a need for station forecourt improvements. The Youth Focus group commented that the Borough's leisure facilities are often difficult to get to due to poor public transport.

Cycling and Walking

8.5 Some respondents said there was a need to improve the network of cycle lanes across the Borough and facilities for walking in rural areas. The Youth Focus Group considered the development of cycling and walking facilities could significantly improve accessibility. Within the Accessibility Focus Group, the need to change the attitudes of parents driving their children to school was raised.

Parking

8.6 Comments received suggest there is widespread concern about car parking levels in the Borough particularly in Brentwood town centre, which many consider insufficient. Opinions on park and ride and park and walk in Brentwood are mixed with some requesting more detail to determine its acceptability.

Accessibility

8.7 The Accessibility Focus Group noted the importance of providing access for all and making services and centres within the Borough easily accessible to sustain the local economy and discourage people from going elsewhere where access is easier.

Policy Implications

Car Use & Parking

8.8 Planning policies need to recognise and address the importance of achieving a shift away from reliance on the private car to more sustainable forms of transport, such as walking, cycling, public transport, while recognising that some car use is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Promoting realistic alternatives to the car will improve transport choice for all and access for people who do not have access to a car and reduce pollution and congestion. The Council and LSP will need to work with the Highways Authority, Highways Agency and public transport providers to identify solutions and ensure that policies are informed by evidence and local aspirations.

8.9 Consideration needs to be given to how vehicle technologies may further develop in the future, including the potential for electric vehicle usage, bearing in mind that although electric vehicles are more environmentally friendly they are unlikely to address the problems of congestion and land requirements for parking.

8.10 Some creativity is likely to be required in addressing car parking issues. We will need to consider appropriate levels of parking for new developments. Increasing car parking within the Borough would make less land available for other uses and increase road traffic and congestion, which in turn increase infrastructure requirements and costs.

Local and strategic road network

8.11 Careful consideration will need to be given to the impact of policies and proposals on the local and strategic road network, such as the A12 and M25. This will involve liaising with the County Council and Highways Agency to ensure policies and proposals are supported by evidence and can be delivered successfully.

Public Transport

8.12 Consultation responses and other evidence suggest that improving public transport should be a high priority within the Borough. Drawing on evidence from the *Brentwood Place Survey* (2008), over a third of those asked mentioned the need for improved public transport when identifying issues most in need of improvement in the local area. Out of all services (i.e. not just transport), the survey records the highest level of dissatisfaction among residents with regard to local bus services. The Council and LSP will need to identify policies and measures and work with public transport providers to secure better services across the Borough.

Cycling and Walking

8.13 Improving facilities for cycling and walking and better use of existing facilities, would improve health and quality of life in the Borough and reduce congestion. This calls for a co-ordinated approach to cycling and walking across the Borough which is well integrated with public transport. The Council, LSP, public transport providers and Highways Authorities need to work together to secure improvements and a joined-up approach.

8.14 With regard to parents driving their children to school, a key factor is perceived safety. Improving facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, encouraging or requiring such provision in new developments and campaigns to promote awareness about the health benefits of walking and cycling would help to address this.

Travel Plans

8.15   One way to ensure that new development fully considers how residents and users travel is to have a requirement to produce travel plans and to encourage these in existing business. Travel plans encourage consideration of alternative modes of transport to the private car, including such schemes as car pools and car sharing.

Park and Ride

8.16   A park and ride/park and walk scheme for Shenfield is currently being considered. There may be opportunities for schemes elsewhere in the Borough.

Accessibility

8.17   Accessibility can be improved by developing where there is good access to services, jobs and facilities, including public transport, designing buildings and spaces that are accessible and improving facilities in areas which lack these. Ensuring that development locations and density guidance reflect a location's accessibility and existing provision of services and infrastructure will also help.

8.18   Issues raised highlight the need for policy and measures to:

- achieve access for all;

- ensure development has good access to services and facilities, including public transport;

- increase the share and number of journeys made by walking, cycling and public transport by promoting alternative convenient transport modes to the private car and in turn, reduce the level of car use;

- accommodate alternative vehicle technologies;

- consider requirements for car parking in the light of the need to provide good access while encouraging a modal shift away from the private car;

- consider the implications of policies and proposals for the local and strategic road networks;

- secure improvements to public transport;

- provide facilities for cycling and walking in new developments;

- achieve a co-ordinated approach to cycling and walking across the Borough and their integration with public transport;

- encourage travel plans in new developments;

- determine the viability of a park and ride/park and walk scheme within the Borough.

9 Theme 4: Meeting People's Needs – Infrastructure

9.1 Issues which Theme 4 (Infrastructure) seek to address are how to safeguard and ensure provision of sufficient land for infrastructure, ensure timely provision of infrastructure to accompany development, ensure that proposals for new developments make appropriate contributions towards the provision of infrastructure and improve access to facilities.

9.2 Views were sought on provision of and funding for new infrastructure and community facilities, how developers should contribute towards these, whether development should be restricted in areas where infrastructure and services are inadequate or unlikely to be capable of improvement and whether facilities should be accessible to all. For a breakdown of responses see Part 1 Chapter 10.

Key Issues

9.3 Issues raised in responses and by focus group participants with regard to infrastructure included funding, delivery, capacity and accessibility.

9.4 Views were mixed on how development should fund the necessary infrastructure and, in particular, over whether developers should only fund infrastructure specifically related to their development, or whether a tariff payment should be levied on them to fund the wider impacts of development.

9.5 There is some support for additional services and infrastructure being provided at the same time as housing development. Some consider that infrastructure needed to support a development should be provided prior to its start.

9.6 There is some concern shown over the appropriate assessment of infrastructure and ensuring that the appropriate bodies with expertise are involved in developing planning policies to ensure they are sound and can be delivered.

9.7 Strong support is shown for making services and facilities accessible to all. The Youth Focus Group noted that although there are a range of facilities and services in the Borough for younger people, access to these by public transport is often difficult. The majority are located within Brentwood town and therefore less easy to reach by those living elsewhere.

9.8 The need to promote mixed communities and green infrastructure in the Borough were among other issues raised.

Policy Implications

Funding for Infrastructure

9.9 Core Strategy and Development Management policies will need to ensure that infrastructure required to support development can be delivered. Further analysis is required into the implications of different types of developer contribution payment structures, in terms of potential infrastructure they could help provide and potential impact of this on the viability of development. We will need to consider the impact on affordable housing delivery that any proposed approach would have. A broad

approach to developers' contributions will need to be developed as the Core Strategy is taken forward with detail developed at a later stage.

Timing of Infrastructure

9.10   It may not always be viable for developers to fund all of the required infrastructure prior to a development starting. Consideration will therefore need to be given to identifying policies, measures and funding to deliver both infrastructure and development in a timely manner. This is likely to require further analysis and evidence gathering in order to identify a robust, defensible, approach.

Infrastructure Requirements and Capacity

9.11   A Water Cycle Study, which will incorporate a Water Cycle Strategy and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, has recently being commissioned. This will assess the requirements and capacity of water and sewerage infrastructure in the Borough and provide evidence to support the Core Strategy. It will also be necessary to work closely with other infrastructure providers to ensure that their requirements and capacity are fully considered. Further infrastructure studies will be considered as appropriate, based on the initial evidence received.

Accessibility

9.12   The Core Strategy will need to ensure that it promotes accessibility for all. This subject is also considered within the transport element of this theme and within Theme 5: *Healthier and Safer Communities*. The Core Strategy and Sustainable Community Strategy will need to consider how to best provide for mixed communities in the Borough and how to promote developments that cater for people's differing needs.

Green Infrastructure

9.13   The development of green infrastructure will be considered alongside that of parks and open spaces. Brentwood's *Open Space Study* (2006) provides evidence regarding the need for open space within the Borough and consideration will be given to ways in which linkages between these spaces can be improved and how we can work with partners to achieve this where necessary.

9.14   Issues raised highlight the need for policy and measures to:

- determine how developer contributions should be calculated;

- secure the delivery of infrastructure in a timely manner;

- sufficiently consider future infrastructure requirements;

- promote accessibility for all;

- provide for mixed communities; and

- promote the development of green infrastructure.

10   Theme 5: Ensuring a Healthier Lifestyle and Safer Community

10.1   Theme 5 is concerned with quality of life, health and safety in the Borough and how the Council and other bodies, such as the Police, the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and voluntary sector, can provide the services and facilities on which these depend.

10.2   Views were sought on community, sport, leisure and health facilities; funding for community groups; whether action should be taken to assist vulnerable groups and those with special needs or on low incomes and to reduce the fear of crime; designing development to discourage crime; facilities for younger and older people, and whether healthier lifestyles should be encouraged. For a breakdown of responses see Part 1 Chapter 11.

Key Issues

10.3   Responses suggest a high level of agreement with all but one of the statements. In particular, for designing new development to discourage crime and vandalism, taking action to reduce the fear of crime, retaining community facilities for their existing use or a similar purpose, encouraging healthier lifestyles and funding community groups. . There is less agreement over the suggestion that the Borough needs more high quality sport and leisure facilities, with the majority neither agreeing nor disagreeing, although more people agreed than disagreed with this.

10.4   Issues raised by the Health, Well Being and Being Safe Focus Group included a lack of awareness about the level of deprivation in the Borough, the need for facilities for rural as well as urban communities and for a culture change within the health service – for patients and professionals. "We run an 'ill health service' rather than a 'health service'" commented one participant. The group suggested that more emphasis should be placed on living a healthy lifestyle, support and care, rather than drugs and operations and on measures to prevent ill-health occurring in the first place. The Group advocated a similar approach toward crime – investing in measures that made it less likely that crimes would be committed.

10.5   The Youth Focus Group considered leisure provision in the Borough and how this might be improved. They suggested making facilities more affordable e.g. through concessionary rates and loyalty reward schemes; improving access by public transport; maintaining existing facilities better; not trying to compete with larger towns but offering something different instead; and providing a range of facilities to cater for diverse cultures, as well as providing more facilities for young people. The Group recognised that tensions existed in the Borough owing to age differences and cultural misunderstandings, and called for more intergenerational tolerance.

Policy Implications

10.6   Tackling the diverse range of issues identified under Theme 5 will require action from LSP members, including, the Council, the voluntary sector, police, PCT and other stakeholders.

Crime and Safety

10.7 *Brentwood Place Survey* (2008) identified crime as the top issue for residents. It is no surprise, therefore, that designing development to discourage crime and vandalism and taking action to reduce the fear of crime are the most strongly supported suggestions under this theme.

Community, Sports and Leisure facilities

10.8 The ambivalence shown towards the suggestion that *the Borough needs more high quality sport and leisure facilities,* may indicate residents are largely satisfied with their ability to gain access to high quality facilities within the Borough or nearby. When this topic was discussed by the Youth Focus Group, the key issue was a lack of reliable public transport, particularly in the evening, rather than a lack of sports and leisure provision within the Borough. Lack of facilities for young people was, however, identified as an area needing to be addressed in the *Brentwood Place Survey* (2008). When asked which local issues were most in need of improvement almost half of those surveyed identified the need for improved activities for teenagers.

10.9 Issues raised by the consultation responses and comments received highlight the need for policy and measures to take forward suggestions under Theme 7, in particular to:

- retain community, cultural and sports facilities for existing or similar purposes;

- design new developments to be accessible and inclusive and to foster a sense of place and community;

- promote best practice in new development to 'design out' crime and vandalism taking forward the approach set out on the *Urban Place Supplement* and the Association of Chief Police Officers *Secured by Design;*

- tackle the fear of crime;

- ensure leisure and cultural facilities are accessible, including by public transport, affordable and cater for diverse cultures;

- consider the scope for shared-use facilities;

- help community groups obtain access to funding;

- improve access to footpaths and bridleways;

- ensure facilities meet the needs of all groups, including younger and older people, families and those with special needs;

- provide more health facilities in the Borough;

- encourage healthier lifestyles, e.g. more active lifestyles, e.g. walking, cycling, gardening and home grown food;

- foster leadership and responsibility, particularly among young people;

- encourage more intergenerational activity, such as the 'silver surfer' scheme whereby Brentwood County School visited a sheltered housing scheme to offer computer advice; and

- improve public transport in rural areas.

11 Spatial Options for the Future Development of Brentwood

11.1 Four spatial options to guide the Borough's future development were set out in the consultation paper. Based on the proposed vision and strategic objectives, these aimed to provide a starting point for discussion. No attempt was made to show that one option is better than another. The consultation paper outlined potential benefits and drawbacks of each. Views were sought on the following options:

- Option 1: Centralised Growth - development within and around the town of Brentwood

- Option 2: Transport Corridor-led Growth - development concentrated along transport corridors and in the main centres

- Option 3: Semi-Dispersed Growth - development around Brentwood town and the main villages

- Option 4: Dispersed Growth - development at all settlements across the Borough

11.2 Out of the above options, centralised growth was most popular; dispersed growth least popular. A handful of respondents rejected all options, saying they would prefer no growth and no change in the Borough.   For a breakdown of responses see Part 1 Chapter 12.

Key Issues

11.3 The spatial options attracted a wider range of views than any other topic in the consultation paper. While there is no consensus, a clear order of popularity is apparent. Centralised growth is the most popular option followed by transport-led growth , semi-dispersed growth and dispersed growth.

11.4 Focus group participants' views were mixed. The Health, Well-Being and Being Safe and Natural and Historic Environment groups considered Options 1 and 2 more environmentally sustainable. By contrast, the Housing Focus Group suggested combining Options 1, 3 and 4. They considered this would provide more opportunities for development and a greater variety of housing in rural areas, while acknowledging there may be a negative impact on sustainability.

11.5 Overall, respondents' and focus group participants' comments demonstrate a good understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of each option and challenges facing Brentwood. Key issues raised are summarised below.

Options 1 and 2

11.6 Option 2 would steer development to areas with good links to services, employment and public transport as, to a lesser extent, would Option 1. By encouraging investment into Brentwood Town Centre, Option 1 would help underpin the future viability of the Borough's main centre.

11.7 Options 1 and 2 may increase pressure on urban open spaces both in terms of use and developer interest. At the same time, they may require less Green Belt to be released than under options 3 and 4 and will ease pressure to develop in the

Borough's smaller villages. A number of respondents were concerned that congestion and overdevelopment may result under Option 1.

Options 3 and 4

11.8   Options 3 and 4 would spread development more evenly throughout the Borough compared with options 1 and 2. This may help improve local services and the viability of local business. These options will require Green Belt to be released across a wider area and would potentially have more effect on the character of Brentwood's countryside and villages than Options 1 and 2.

Other options

11.9   Some respondents disliked all given options stating that they would prefer no growth or did not want to see their area change. One respondent asked why the Council had not included a new settlement among the options offered.

Policy Implications

11.10   Fostering sustainable patterns of development and healthy lifestyles and addressing climate change will require a major shift away from the private car towards walking, cycling and use of public transport. Options 1 and 2 offer most scope for achieving these.

11.11   Options 3 and 4 may enable more brownfield land to be used across the Borough as a whole, but these options will also require more land to be found for development compared with Options 1 and 2 because they offer less scope for developing at higher densities. Options 3 and 4 are likely to require more new infrastructure to be provided to support development compared with Options 1 and 2, since less will already be in place.

11.12   'No growth' is not a realistic option. National planning guidelines stipulate that the number of new homes the Borough is required to accommodate should be decided at the regional level. Regardless of whether present arrangements continue or not it will still be necessary to respond to local needs that exist now or are expected to arise in future and manage growth pressures. It will be essential to monitor and take into account the capacity of the environment and infrastructure to accommodate continued growth, drawing on evidence from technical studies. A strong emphasis on redevelopment and re-use of land and buildings should reduce pressure on natural resources and infrastructure requirements and the need to find Greenfield land for development. These considerations should inform the spatial option that should be taken forward.

11.13   A new settlement option would be very difficult to accommodate and the level of new housing envisaged for Brentwood is too low to justify this.

11.14   Should Option 1 or 2 be taken forward, particular attention will need to be given to addressing the needs of the Borough's communities that lack essential services, such as reliable public transport. This approach would support rural communities by allowing small scale development that is sensitive to the environment and meets local needs. Consideration could be given to meeting needs in ways that do not require built development, e.g. through greater use of mobile or shared facilities or sensitive re- use of redundant buildings. Working with transport and other service providers will be essential to improve access to local services.

11.15   Under all options, particular consideration will need to be given to maintaining the attractiveness of Brentwood Town Centre as a desirable place to invest, work, live and

visit, given the key role the town plays for the Borough as a whole. Problems of congestion and overdevelopment can arise under any option and highlight the need for good design and layout, traffic management measures and vigorous promotion of attractive, convenient alternatives to the car. The Core Strategy will need to address these issues which in turn require the Council to work with the County Council, transport providers, communities and developers to identify solutions.

11.16   In order to determine which spatial option would best achieve objectives, wider evidence will need to be drawn upon, in particular:

- Brentwood *Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment* (SHLAA) – will identify sites that are potentially suitable for housing development in the Borough;

- Brentwood *Employment Land Review* (ELR) (with Epping Forest) – will provide data on employment land and premises and projected requirements;

- data on infrastructure provision and requirements;

- Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal (SA);

- The Mid-Essex *Landscape Character Assessment* (2006), Brentwood *Open Space Study* (2008) and impact on the Green Belt, wildlife and other land designations.

11.17   Issues raised regarding the spatial options highlight the need for policy and measures to:

- monitor and take into account the capacity of the environment and infrastructure to accommodate continued growth;

- ensure the location and design of development is sympathetic to local character and environmental quality, and makes efficient use of land;

- protect and enhance, and where appropriate, provide public open space;

- address the needs of rural, as well as urban, communities and improve access to local services, particularly in villages;

- improve transport between the Borough's main centres and peripheral communities and consider innovative solutions;

- ensure necessary infrastructure is in place or can be provided in a timely way to support new development;

- make better use of existing facilities, including by bringing empty properties back into use and reducing under-occupation;

- support sensitive rural diversification and viable, sustainable agriculture and home working;

- encourage local trade;

- protect the Green Belt, wildlife habitats and natural resources;

- address leisure concerns in Brentwood Town Centre.

12 Validity

Representativeness

12.1 Due to the low response rate (198 responses*) it is not possible to treat consultation responses as being representative of the population of Brentwood Borough as a whole. This lack of representativeness is worsened by the average age of respondents: out of those who gave information about their age (just over half of all respondents) 60% were 55 or over; 42% 65 or over and 16% 40 or under. One respondent was aged between 19 and 24; three were under 19. Nearly twice as many men as women responded (63% of responses were from men and 37% from women). By comparison 21% of the Borough's resident population is over 65, 60% is aged between 16 and 64 and 19% is under 15. Older people and men are therefore disproportionately represented and younger people and women underrepresented. Around a fifth of responses came from organisations. These included some parish councils responding on behalf of their local community. Responses are fairly evenly spread geographically (see Part 1, Chapter 18).

12.2 The issues highlighted above do not mean that consultation responses are of no value. Additional methods are, however, needed to reach groups who are less well represented. A series of focus groups held in January at Brentwood Town Hall fulfilled this purpose in part.

12.3 The response rate achieved is typical of consultations of this nature and comparable to experience in other local authorities. Likely reasons include the time of year the consultation took place - the two months up to Christmas; lack of concrete policies, land allocations and location-specific proposals at this stage of consultation; and the general nature, complexity and breadth of subject matter covered.

The Consultation Process

12.4 The consultation was advertised widely in the press, via leaflets sent to all households in the Borough, a letter sent to those on the Council mailing list, the Council website, posters on notice boards, adverts in local newspapers and travelling displays at various locations around the Borough. Copies of the consultation documents were deposited at the Town Hall, Information Centre, local libraries and sent to specific consultees. Drop-ins at local libraries and village halls and two Citizens' Panels gave people an opportunity to look at the consultation material and discuss issues with Council Officers. Responses were invited by post, e mail or online; around two thirds were received by post. Analysis suggests that this reflects, in part, the older average age of respondents (a breakdown of the age of respondents is given in Part 1 of this analysis).

12.5 In January, the Council convened six focus groups. These brought together participants from a range of backgrounds to discuss in depth issues raised by the consultation, and identify priorities and potential solutions. Each meeting lasted around two hours. Altogether, 58 people took part (35 male, 23 female). Discussions were in small groups of between 8 and 14 people. The age of participants ranged from 15 – 65+, although the majority were of working age. A Youth Focus Group provided an opportunity for younger people to take part and give their views.

* Part 1 of this analysis refers to 197 responses. This difference is explained by two late submissions and one duplicate.

12.6 The Youth Focus Group (with members aged 15-18), Health, Well-being and Being Safe Focus Group and Accessibility Focus Group drew on the knowledge, experience and expertise of a diverse range of stakeholders, giving a unique insight into issues facing some of the Borough's hard to reach groups. Other focus groups held on the Economy, the Natural and Historic Environment and Housing similarly drew on the knowledge and expertise of a range of interests. The format of the groups followed that of a short presentation explaining the purpose of the focus group followed by discussion based on pre-set questions. Participants were asked to consider the proposed vision and objectives relevant to their assigned topic and to identify key issues and priorities up to 2031. Discussions were recorded and a note taken of key points and suggestions made. Notes are available on request. Feedback from the groups has been positive.

12.7 Evidence from this and other consultations suggest that young women aged 20-24 are the hardest to reach group in the Borough (See Part 1 Analysis, page 34). In order to reach a wider range of people, a further consultation exercise was carried out by Hens Theatre Company. Among groups who took part were young people, religious groups, parents, shop keepers and teachers (Hens Creative SCS Consultation March 2010).

Respondent Type

12.8 Part 1 gives a breakdown of respondents by age, ethnicity and geography. Further information is given in the table below which sets out the type of respondents from the 198 responses received broken down according to whether responses were received from individuals or organisations.

12.9 It is estimated that the majority of responses (156) were from individuals. These were made up of 94 responses from local residents (47%) and 62 anonymous responses. It is assumed that the majority if not all anonymous responses are from individuals and not organisations as it would be unlikely for organisations to not submit details due to the desire to be involved in future consultations on the Core Strategy. Out of the 62 anonymous responses 35 supplied a postcode or some form of area details. 27 did not supply any form of address data.

12.10 41 responses were received from organisations. These comprised 21 responses from statutory consultees (11%), including four public regional or county organisations, two public services, three community groups, three Parish Councils, and infrastructure providers such as water suppliers, highways and telecommunications. 21 responses were received from agents or developers (10%). From these, six agents were acting on behalf of another private company, one for a public health authority, one for a healthcare charity, and one for a community/faith group.

Type of Responses Received					
	Individuals		Organisations		
Type	Local Residents	Anonymous	Statutory Consultees	Agents/ Developers	Total
Number	94	62	21	21	198
%	47%	31%	10.5%	10.5%	100%

13   Lessons for Future Consultations

13.1   Several lessons learnt from this consultation can potentially help us improve future consultations.

Publicity

13.2   Despite some issues raised, mailing a leaflet to all households in the Borough advertising the consultation seems to have been relatively successful: 43% of respondents state that this was how they found out about the consultation. Although we made our best efforts to distribute the leaflet to every door, a number of residents appear not to have received this, however. In future, we must ensure that if we invest in this type of mailing, delivery methods are robust and the leaflet is designed in such a way as to grab the attention of those who receive it.

13.3   The consultation was widely advertised in the local press on several occasions. Posters advertising the consultation and copies of the consultation documents were placed in a number of locations around the Borough, including local libraries, the Town Hall and the Brentwood Centre. In future, further consideration could be given to placing posters in prominent locations such as supermarkets and shops in order to advertise the consultation even more widely. In addition, displays could be put up in locations where there is a high footfall of people.

Timing

13.4   We are aware that the timing of the consultation could have been better. Due to the consultation taking place just before Christmas, it proved harder to engage with people who understandably had other commitments at this time of year. In future, it would be better to avoid consulting at this time of year. Where this is unavoidable extending the consultation period would help overcome this issue and give people more time to have their say.

Level of Detail

13.5   Feedback from respondents suggests the overall level of detail provided within the leaflet appears to have been reasonable. Some felt that it was too detailed and others that it was not detailed enough. Potentially, this could be overcome by making it clearer in the leaflet sent out that there is further detail provided in another document. Using straightforward language and avoiding the use of jargon as far as possible should also help.

13.6   We should also consider whether it would be advantageous, in future, to send out a questionnaire with a leaflet as there is some concern that those who read the questionnaire on its own struggled to understand it without referring to either the consultation leaflet or full document. This might also encourage more people to respond. There is, however, a cost to this. Although it was originally felt that a large number of responses would come via the internet, the proportion of these was not as high as had been envisaged.

Question Format

13.7   There has been some concern that statements within the questionnaire were leading or that answers seem obvious. The statements were not intended to be leading and although may have been obvious to some, it was still felt important to get people's views. Responses suggest that on the whole people considered the language and presentation to be satisfactory. It will be important to ensure that future consultations questions/statements are as meaningful as possible for readers.

Methods Used

13.8   In addition to mailing leaflets to all households in the Borough, several other consultation methods were used.

13.9   A number of drop-in events were held, although some of these were poorly attended. This could, in part, be blamed on the timing of the events during the run up to Christmas. Advertising the dates and times of drop-in events further in advance and giving information about these in any leaflets sent out may encourage more people to attend these in future.

13.10   The focus groups convened to discuss themes and issues set out within the consultation document proved to be a successful format for drawing out the key issues and priorities to be addressed. The Youth Focus group was run in association with the Youth Council. Similar focus groups at the next stage of consultation would help build on what has already been achieved through these and encourage more residents and other stakeholders to become involved.

Response Rate and Range of Respondents

13.11   As noted above, consultation responses do not sufficiently reflect the wide range of groups within the Borough and the overall response rate was low. As part of the ongoing work on the Core Strategy and Sustainable Community Strategy, additional efforts can be made to target groups that are under-represented so far within responses. This includes, in particular, young people and younger women. Attending schools and mother and toddler groups would be one way to engage with these groups.

13.12   In view of the low response rate it might be worth considering incentives to encourage more people to respond to future consultations.