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"AN AUDIT ON EXISTING PUBLIC CONSULTATION INVOLVING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY OF STREET"

Board Minute 4 of the meeting of The Mendip Strategic Partnership held on Tuesday 4th March 2003 refers.

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**AN AUDIT**

**ON**

**EXISTING PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

**INVOLVING**

**THE LOCAL COMMUNITY OF**

**STREET**

Conducted by [Professional PR](#)

On behalf of the Street Community Appraisal Partnership

March 2002

## **AIMS**

- **To collate existing information about Street from consultation exercises carried out by a range of agencies over the last 3 years.**
- **To summarise the problems, and identify gaps where further consultation could usefully take place in order to assist in positive planning for the local community.**

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# SUMMARY

This Audit has demonstrated that little consultation has taken place amongst the community of Street.

Most consultation uncovered by this Audit has been broad brush, in the form of postal surveys at County or District level, mainly through Somerset or Mendip Influence Panellists. These information gathering postal surveys are the most cost effective method by which local authorities, and other agencies can access users of the service, address key topic areas and – more crucially - satisfy the requirements of Best Value. The ‘results’ of such surveys are taken to reflect the views of the wider community, and are used as the mandate for policy and / or action.

Whilst there is a large amount of county / district wide (statistical) information, comparatively little relates specifically to Street, and only a small amount is distilled to Area 3 – the combined areas of Glastonbury and Street. The views of younger people were also noticeably absent.

Separation of the responses for Street amongst County or District wide data is not an option. Even if this were possible (it often apparently isn't) to do so would bring the sample level so low as to negate the accuracy of the results. The whole objective of obtaining a representative view of the local community would not be met.

As a consequence, a large number of ‘gaps’ have been identified within this Audit where consultation could usefully take place, at local level on more specific topics, to further the aims of assisting in positive planning for the Street community.

The Audit also confirmed that consultation is largely un-coordinated amongst a variety of agencies, groups and organisations undertaking the process. Some information is scattered, or otherwise difficult if not impossible to obtain. Undiscovered consultation information on Street might well exist. A co-ordinated approach should be adopted to optimise consultation resources, and ensure that information is accessible, and easily retrieved.

Based on the evidence of this Audit, SCAP could now lobby for further consultation, involving the Street community on more specific topics, using methods where issues can be defined; problems debated; and solutions agreed.

Such altruistic aims may prove difficult given the acknowledged lack of resources, human and financial, that restricts the ability of key consultation players to do other than mainly use the County / District wide postal surveys method.

The key to future progress, and meaningful dialogue with the Street community, may therefore well lie in collaborative work with central players, and the tapping into resources available within the Partnership itself (eg Street Civic Society, Street Youth Centre), as well as drawing in business, education, and other groups key to the Street community.

The process, however, must have meaning. In undertaking, or supporting such consultation, SCAP will need to bear in mind the:

Purpose; Method; Timescale; Budget and Expectations

initially perhaps consulting on a topic where a tangible outcome – whatever that may involve – can be credibly achieved.

## Recommendations

The Audit has identified gaps in the consultation process with the Street community, with much of the consultation evidence uncovered relating to the Mendip District. Only some results have been distilled down, and these relate to Area 3 – the towns of Glastonbury and Street combined.

Realistically, lack of resources may inhibit further consultation at local level. However, collaborative working with other agencies, and tapping into resources available within the Partnership (SCAP) itself (eg Street Civic Society, Street Youth Centre) as well as drawing in business, education, and other groups key to the Street community, may well allow progress on one or more of the following recommendations.

### *Recommendation One*

There needs perhaps to be less emphasis on district consultation in general, and increased focus on local consultation. This would reduce the current confidence interval showing from district wide surveys; increase the reliability of results, and gain a truly representative view from the Street community,

### *Recommendation Two*

The Local Authority has indicated commitment to accommodating more detailed analysis and investigation of specific issues in the coming years. This could be an opportune time for SCAP to press for more local consultation that would better inform future priorities for Street.

### *Recommendation Three*

In particular, more consultation, in Street itself on more specific topics, would uncover how the local community would like to see the Local Authority's current initiatives, and new priorities, taken forward.

### *Recommendation Four*

Street's population in particular is fairly evenly distributed across the age ranges, and whilst the age 18-24 group is the smallest for the area, they form a significant number. However, even at district level, younger people's views are not truly represented.

Further effort should be made to remedy this, perhaps through direct links with schools, colleges and other youth organisations, in consultation with the community of Street.

In addition, the failure to attract younger people onto the Somerset Influence Panel or to obtain their views must be addressed, particularly as Mendip Panellists' views in particular inform district wide strategies / actions.

*Recommendation Five*

Information that exists within other groups, organisations and agencies, needs to be shared. Such information gathering would avoid covering old ground, and would help establish the wider picture. This could be the starting point prior to further, more detailed consultation in the Street area, and to providing the community with what it needs. The aim should also be towards co-ordinating the consultation process, and equally importantly, ensuring results are easily accessed.

*Recommendation Six*

A similar exercise to that carried out by the PCG in Frome and Shepton Mallet on the specific topics of health, poverty, accidents, education, and housing could usefully be conducted in Street North and South, both areas having been identified as being affected by poverty and deprivation.

*Recommendation Seven*

Some three years has elapsed since action was taken in respect of the Street Town Centre Plan. Follow up consultation could now take place to discover what people living and working in Street now feel about the Plan and improvements of 2000, whether changes need to be made, and what more can be done in terms of the level of service, the environment (street furniture, planting, litter, lighting), community safety, leisure, tourism, and public art.

A further focus could be around transport, accessibility, choice of shops, what other types of retail provision in the High Street would attract further High Street shopping and at the same time complement the retail provision of Clarks Village, *See additional comments on Retailing, MDC Local Plan*

*Recommendation Eight*

In wider terms, at higher level perhaps, there could be scope to consult with retailers and other business to ask what can be provided to encourage them to invest in Street.

*Recommendation Nine*

The views of those suffering disability and impairment should also be sought, to ensure their needs are being met, and that difficulties do not preclude them from accessing and moving around the town.

*Recommendation Ten*

Data from Somerset Influence responses to the Crime and Disorder audit are available for the Mendip District, but are not available for a specific town. The system does not allow for representation from under 18 year olds, and only 2.2% district wide fall within the 18-24 age category. However low it may be, crime, and the fear of crime exists in Street. Opportunity should be given to uncover the level of community concern, and to arrive at agreement on how such concerns could be addressed.

*Recommendation Eleven*

Some two years have passed since a district wide Grass, Trees and Planted Areas Survey was conducted. Respondents clearly signalled the improvements and changes they would like made across Mendip. Consultation, closer to home, could re-visit this topic, to obtain the views of the residents of Street on what they feel about progress. Such consultation could link with the previously mentioned parks appraisal, about to be carried out.

*Recommendation Twelve*

A growing trend towards an alternative rather than traditional burial (eg woodland / nature reserve burial) is being identified across all age ranges, with 25% of the 75+ age band in agreement.

No facility for this type of burial, or that of cremation, currently exists in Mendip. Whilst no real 'gaps' are identified in this survey, should alternatives on traditional burials be under consideration now or at any future point, further consultation could take place district wide to seek community views as to the best and most convenient location.

*Recommendation Thirteen*

Consultation should be undertaken in respect of the requirement to provide for the recreational needs of future occupants of new developments outlined in the Local Plan.

There are also transport issues to be resolved, which may benefit from further consultation, in tandem with the transport assessment / review.

Retail Provision Draft Local Plan: As with the recommendation in relation to Street's Town Centre Plan, consultation could usefully take place amongst the Street community, and beyond, to establish what in their view, would add to the viability, sustainability, and interest to the Town Centre.

*Recommendation Fourteen*

Concerns specific to Street have been picked up through the District wide Public Cleansing Survey. Further work could be done amongst the local community to pick up on issues relating to adequacy of public toilets for toddler / child use; and problems connected to Litter, Graffiti (paying attention to the youth aspects mentioned) and Dog Fouling.

## Background

This research is essentially a Street Consultation Audit, commissioned by the Street Community Appraisal Partnership, a partnership made up of a number of representatives from a variety of groups and organisations from the Street community.

A substantial amount of consultation had been taking place for some time, partly fuelled by the 1998 Local Government Bill which emphasised the Duty to Consult upon local authorities and other agencies. Much of this, however, was known to be taking place at County or District wide level.

It was also known that some work had been undertaken with various community groups in the town that informed the latest Street Town Centre Action Plan.

Shoppers were also surveyed for the 1999 Clarks Village Development Research. This survey was not about gauging what the local community thought about the shopping provision around the town centre, the amenities, facilities or the environment. It was aimed at gaining a greater understanding of how Clarks Village shopping interacted with that of the town's High Street; the impact a direct pedestrian link might have between the two, and the factors influencing transportation to both sites.

Street Community Appraisal Partnership wanted to establish what other consultation had taken place *with the community of Street* that embraced topic areas such as housing, health, transport, crime, leisure and the environment, education, or access to services.

Consulting with the public or other partners is a key element in the provision of services, community planning and Best Value. It is aimed at providing information and opportunities for the public to be better informed, and for the public to gain an understanding of policies and priorities. It is also about listening and learning from the public; working with them to define issues, debate problems and find solutions.

The choice of consultation method (the so-called Fitness for Purpose participation techniques) is dependent on whether the objective is to give information *to* the public; receive information *from* the public; or actively involve the public in methods where there is *Exchange*, so that knowledge and understanding builds consensus.

The expected outcome of consultation is information that will improve service delivery, or changes in decision making that are reflected in shifts in policy, budgets or new commitments. Equally important is the development of a better relationship with the public, able to understand, and approve of, whatever decisions or actions are being taken or made on their behalf.

So had consultation taken place that would provide sufficient information about the needs and views of people living or working in Street, consultation that would assist in positive planning for the local community? Or was more consultation required? This research was commissioned to find out.

## METHODOLOGY

SCAP undertook to provide such consultation reports / other information as could be found to feed into this Audit report. Contact was made with staff at MDC, and with other individuals and groups, notifying them this research was underway, and seeking information. Some thirteen reports and statistical information were produced, however an apparent difficulty in obtaining relevant information, or even establishing what, if any, consultation had taken place, was quickly discovered.

Part of the problem was the fact that the consultation process isn't fully co-ordinated – in whichever district it is taking place. Mendip is aware of the difficulty, and is understood to making progress in this direction, but the current position is that not all departments routinely make others within or outside of the authority aware of any consultation they are undertaking. Equally, groups and organisations unconnected to the local authority or any other agency are also likely to be 'doing their own thing', without necessarily informing others it is happening, or sharing the results.

Some information was uncovered through verbal contact. There was also mention of a report due from the Somerset Drugs Action Team on a local needs assessment for young people, that would include profile information to assist in the assessment of risk factors for using drugs. Some of this information *may* apparently relate to individual towns, so perhaps there was something on the needs of the Street community here. However, at the time of this Audit, there is no information available from the Drugs Action Team.

Enquiries about consultation with younger people in Street with a recently appointed Senior Youth Worker for the area established that whilst verbal 'consultation' had been and was taking place amongst young people, few actual reports existed, and what did exist was largely out of date.

It is also known that Street Parish Council are about to carry out an appraisal of Merriman Park, leading to a Park Strategy. The Parish Council is also evidently looking to use funding, awarded by a local developer via a 106 Agreement, to provide some equipment to the Woodsbatch Play Area in Street, following a Safety Audit. The local youth club and Cubs were written to, seeking their view as to what was required, though there was no consultation as such.

MDC is also said to be exploring options (*involving consultation with younger people and others?*) for a BMX track on an open space at Street Football Club, one of a number of current initiatives mentioned in relation to MDC's 2002 / 3 Priorities. Other work is also said to be underway with 'the youth in Street on the possibility of a skateboard amenity.' No actual evidence was on hand for these topics at the time of this Audit.

Another important Report, the Housing Needs Survey, expected in late January, was not produced in time to be included in this Audit.

Other, Countywide consultation about Sustainable Somerset was evidently undertaken during 2000, with results distilled to district level. There was also a district survey on major leisure facilities throughout Mendip (the Leisure Users and Non Leisure Users survey). Neither were analysed at area level, and were not explored in the context of this Audit. *However they do point to a 'consultation opportunity' for Street in terms of these topics.*

Consultation responses from a Cleansing Survey carried out at District level were looked at, as although not analysed at Area level, there was some comment that related directly to Street.

Such 'missing' information inevitably leaves gaps and means that realistically, the Audit is unlikely to determine the quantity and detail of all consultation that may be relevant to the period under examination.

The following information, however, was sourced, and examined, having been provided or obtained by the Street Community Appraisal Partnership, or through verbal contact made by the Consultancy from the following sources:

## **Evidence of ‘Consultation’**

Mendip District Council – Identifying Priorities for 2002/3

Statistical Information taken from Health & Social Needs in Somerset Report Nov '99

Mendip Primary Care Group Annual Report 2000-2001

Somerset Health Panels Report – July 2001

Rural Policing - A Compiled Report prepared for Avon and Somerset Police

Mendip Community Safety Partnership – Crime and Disorder Audit 2001

Street Town Centre Action Plan 2000

Shopmobility Survey MDC

Clarks Village Development Research carried out for MEPC August 1999

Results of Survey of Grass, Trees and Planted Areas conducted with Mendip Influence, Spring 2000

Cemetaries and Burials Service – Somerset Influence – Mendip Panellists January 2000

Mendip District Local Plan May 1998

Mendip District Local Plan Schedule of Suggested Pre-Enquiry Changes February 2000

Mendip Public Cleansing Survey 2001

# Current Position – Based on an Examination of the Available Reports

## Looking first at:

### *Mendip District Council – Identifying Priorities for 2002/3*

A significant report to Area 3, Glastonbury and Street Area Board, was presented on 8 August 2001 on the topic of Corporate Priorities, significant because the information it contained assisted Area 3's decision as to what recommendations they would make to the Executive Board regarding Mendip's strategic priorities for 2002 / 3.

The report contained information on the needs of the area, identified from appropriate Needs Indices (explored later in this Audit) and other relevant surveys, and mention of current proposed initiatives for the district, such as looking at the future of Street Football Club; developing a new Market for Street; assistance with the redevelopment of the Morlands site and improving land drainage by implementing a scheme in Street.

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There were also the results of a consultation with 2,000 Somerset Influence Panellists from the Mendip district using a *postal questionnaire*. This asked respondents to consider how important they rated key services and projects to be for 2002 / 3 under the broad headings of:

Care of the Environment

Community Safety

Transport

Creating a Vibrant Economy

Healthy Communities

The key topics panellists from Glastonbury and Street (Area 3) see as being **Very Important or Fairly Important** are shown in Table 2, alongside a comparison with the same topics, district wide.

<b>Table 2</b>	<b>% rating very important or important</b>	
	<b>District-wide</b>	<b>Area 3</b>
<b>Item</b>		
Work with partners to improve Health of people of Mendip	86.4	88.1
Support local businesses	87.3	87.5
Continue to work with partners to improve Transport infrastructure	88.3	86.5
Support use of Locally Produced Goods & Services	89	86.4
Invest in Public Transport Improvements to increase usage	86.4	86.3
Develop and support Rural Economy	87.7	84.7
Improve how we work with partners to tackle Crime	85.7	84.5
Develop Safe Routes to School	83.7	83.3
Encourage/support people and businesses to produce less waste	81.3	83.1
Improve Access to facilities /services for people with disabilities	83.6	83.1
Raise awareness of Env issues with young people/wider community	77.6	81.9
Encourage / support businesses to adopt Environmentally Friendly practices	78.5	79.6
Ensure safe Private Water supplies	77.4	77.7
Regenerate our Town Centres	85	76.8
Improve facilities and Support for Recycling and Composting	76.6	76.3
Work with partners to improve poor Housing Conditions	78.6	76.1
Encourage & support Energy Efficiency at home & work	72.5	75.5
Continue to develop Neighbourhood Watch	77.2	74.6
Promote / support Renewable Energy sources	72.8	74.3
Seek Gov't funding for Community Safety Initiatives	72.1	74.1
Minimise Noise Pollution	68.7	73.5
Promote Accident Prevention / Fire Safety	72.5	73.4
Invest in Pedestrian Improvements	73.6	72.9
Work with partners to reduce Social Exclusion	69.2	72.5
Improve protection and diversity of Natural Env	71.1	72.3
Continue to subsidise specific Bus Services	72.2	72.3
Improve Air Quality	69	72.2
Promote Insulation Grants	67.9	72.1
Develop new Footpaths and Cycle Routes	65.9	70.4
Work with partners and communities to reduce Homelessness	72.6	70
Increase Tourism promotion	70.3	68.8
Develop our CCTV Strategy	69.3	68
Integrate Community Safety into all Council Services	65.8	67.5
Promote Food Safety	66.3	67.1
Improve standards of Street Cleansing	71.4	67
Develop Local Stall Markets	69.9	66.4
Tackle localised Flooding	60.6	65.9
Improve Public Toilets	67.6	65.8
Provide more public information about Community Safety	64.5	65.3
Continue to work with partners to address Gypsies and Travellers issues	60.5	65
Support repair and maintenance of Historic Buildings & Conservation Areas	62.9	64
Increase access to Community Sports, Leisure & Cultural Activities	64.2	63.6

Encourage Not-for-Profit Community Enterprises	65.1	63.3
Encourage Physical Activity	59.1	62.6
Promote Mendip as Area of Investment for larger Businesses	66.3	62.5
Improve control of Pests & Dogs	62	62.4
Speed up removal of Abandoned Vehicles	59	62
Improve Leisure Facilities	61.6	61.9
Invest in Play Equipment	53.7	57.6
Improve maintenance standards of trees / grass / planted areas	56	56.4
Extend the Concessionary Bus Fare Scheme to 16-18 yr olds	51.9	52.6
Improve Street Furniture	50	47.3
Improve service for dealing with Planning Applications	46.4	46.4
Improve Bus Shelters	43.1	43.6
Improve maintenance standards in Cemeteries and Churchyards	37.6	41.9
Raise income from Car Parks for priority Transport Projects	33.9	30.8

The total responses to the district wide consultation numbered 1376 out of the 2000. *Of these, 342 were from Area 3 – the combined areas of Glastonbury and Street. Of these, respondents living in Street itself numbered 118. Street’s population numbers approximately 10,000.*

*On the reliability of results, as MDC’s report to Area 3 Board notes, at district wide level, the number of responses received for each question provides a maximum confidence interval of +/- 2.6 at the 95% confidence level. If the exercise were repeated on a different or larger sample, we could be 95% certain the results would be the same to plus or minus 2.6%.*

However the smaller the sub sample, the larger the confidence interval will be, and therefore *the less conclusive those results will be.* The smaller sample of Area 3’s 342 responses, for instance results in a larger confidence interval of +/- 5.3.

The confidence gap increases, when we break this down even further into urban / rural areas, the 229 urban giving a maximum confidence interval of 6.5, whilst the even smaller 111 responses from the rural area gives a maximum confidence interval of +/- 6.1.

The key point to bear in mind is the comparatively small number of Street responses that almost match this latter figure. As the Report to Area 3 notes, the variations between the Glastonbury and Street responses and that of the District wide ‘scores’ are not particularly marked, but the poorer confidence interval for the smaller sample Glastonbury Street responses means these variations should be viewed with caution.

**To reduce the confidence interval, increase the reliability of results, and gain a truly representative view from the Street community, there needs perhaps to be less emphasis on district consultation, and increased focus on local consultation.**

The information on the needs of the various areas, the consultation responses, and the current initiatives informed both Area 3 Board's priorities recommendation to the Executive Board, and the Executive's subsequent target priorities for the District.

### **Area 3's Priorities**

Unemployment  
Tourism – Holistic  
Affordable Housing  
Morlands site resolution  
Basic Services

### **District Priorities**

Morlands site resolution with Partners  
Regeneration of Shepton Mallet  
Review of Transport Policy with Partners  
Promotion of local goods and services  
Regeneration of rural villages /  
Affordable housing

**More consultation at grass roots level, ie Street itself, if not already done, could be considered to discover how the local community would like to see the current initiatives, and new priorities, taken forward.**

*District wide, respondents between the ages of 16-24 (in fact only 10 in that age range responded to the consultation), represented just 3.0% of the total respondents..*

*The majority were those aged 45-64 who made up 46.1%, followed by the views of 25-44 year olds totalling 23.8%. Next came those aged 65-74 making up 18.4% of the sample. Those aged 75+ made up 8.7%..*

***Arguably, even at district level, younger people's views are not truly represented. Further effort should be made to remedy this in consultation with the community of Street***

The "needs" information for the individual areas and the District were drawn from the DETR Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2000 and the Health and Social Needs Analysis Group (HASNG) study of November 1999 undertaken by Somerset Health Authority and Local Authorities.

The report to Area 3 Board also contained reference to the Benefit Dependency Survey of April 1999 by MDC and SCC.

MDC acknowledges that the information that informed their priorities is “potentially over simplistic without more detailed analysis of specific issues” but that it is felt that “sufficient information was available to enable a decision on broad and/or specific priorities for the area.”

*MDC say the need for more detailed analysis is something that will be “accommodated to a greater extent during the next year, in preparation for the 2003/4 Service Plans”. It would seem a clear signal is given in the Report to Area 3 that “Whilst recognising the potential “weakness” in the current information base, the Board may wish to investigate specific issues in more detail in order that next year’s process can be better informed at a local level.”*

**The Partnership should be encouraged by this obvious commitment to accommodate more detailed analysis and investigation of specific issues in the coming years. This may be the time to press for more local consultation to better inform future priorities for Street.**

The HASNG is particularly useful in examining the Street North and South Wards in particular, and this information is now explored.

### ***Health and Social Needs Study November 1999 And DETR Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2000***

The DETR Index gives weighting to Low Household Income and to Unemployment indicators in its calculations, but also measures other factors including geographical access to services.

Compared with other districts across England, the Needs analysis for the *district as a whole* shows that, along with a number of other District Councils, Mendip ranks joint equal last on the IMD. However there are distinct areas of deprivation and needs within Mendip, but only one ward – Glastonbury St Benedict’s – falls within the top 2000 deprived wards in England, qualifying for Government grant funding. A further five Mendip wards – *none of which are in Street* - are placed in the top 3000.

*Neither, according to the IMD analysis, do any of the Street wards feature in terms of lack of access to services and facilities, only the Vale and Avalon wards ranking at the top of the Mendip list.*

**Do these statistics actually tell us what these communities actually think about their access to services and facilities? Consultation could uncover this information.**

*A comparison of the deprivation 'score' within Mendip District itself however, shows the two Street wards, North and South, are just outside the top 10 on the Mendip deprivation listing on rankings of income, unemployment, health and child poverty, with Street South ranked as having the greatest housing need.*

**The provision of affordable housing is one of MDC's Priorities for 2002/3. Current and future housing need in Street is an obvious area for consultation, however this has been addressed through a Housing Needs Survey commissioned by MDC. The HNS has been conducted amongst households in Mendip, though the results were not available at the time of this Audit. The Survey looked at the levels and type of current accommodation, as well as future housing need across the district.**

The Health and Social Needs Analysis Group study also looked at the prevalence of income support claims and unemployment, and also at other indicators of social needs.

These included statistics on youth justice referrals, children excluded from school, children with special educational needs, those suffering from long-term illness, use of home help services, residents without a car, pedestrian and cycle accidents, and social housing as a proportion of all accommodation. Key statistics were also analysed by age range.

The IMD carries great weight. It is recognised by central Government as the national measure of deprivation and as such is used in their funding allocations and priorities. The HASNG work is recognised at regional level as being a valuable tool to assess priorities and for its comparative analysis across a wide range of social information.

The following Table is taken from the HASN in Somerset Report illustrates the categories in which Street is placed in the 5 highest scoring areas across the PCG.

## STREET NORTH AND SOUTH WARDS

*Statistics taken from Health and Social Needs in Somerset Report – November 1999*

	<b>Street North</b>	<b>Median for Mendip</b>	<b>Median for Somerset</b>
Domestic Fire incidents/per 1000 households	3.7	1.9	1.1
Children out of school/per 1000 school age population	3.7	2.1	1.2
Council and Housing Assn housing/per proportion of all housing	0.19	0.1	0.13
Proportion of households not owner occupied	0.41	0.26	0.26
Home Help customers-per 1000 population	15.8	6.8	9.6
% of households with children under 18 and below LCB poverty line	13.7	8.6	10.4
Children on child protection register/per 1000 population (0-17)	15.8	1	1.5
Proportion of households with no car	0.28	0.17	0.18
Crude emergency hospital admissions rate/per 1000 population	47.1	21	35.3
Referrals to adult team per/1000 population over 65	215.5	138.8	138.7
Proportion of households with long term limiting illness	0.24	0.2	0.22
People injured in cycling accidents/per 1000 average yearly population	6	1.6	1.6
Housing benefit/Council tax benefit claims per household	0.3	0.16	0.17
Disability living allowance claims/per 1000 population over 65	33.4	24.1	25.2
Breadline Britain - % of households below the poverty line	20.7	13.6	11.2
Deprivation Indices – Jarman	9.4	-5.2	-3
Deprivation Indices – Townsend	2.5	-0.9	-0.7
	<b>Street South</b>	<b>Median for Mendip</b>	<b>Median for Somerset</b>
Severe disablement allowance claims/per 10000 population over 16	11.3	7.1	6.8

From the same source, this next table illustrates further categories in which Street is placed in the top 25% in Somerset.

	<b>Street North</b>	<b>Median for Mendip</b>	<b>Median for Somerset</b>
Income Support claimants/per 1000 households	159	119	119
Incidents of Domestic Violence in families/per 10000 population under 18	6.5	3.1	3.2
Proportion of households with single parent	0.03	0.02	0.02
Proportion of working households in social class IV or V	0.22	0.15	0.16
Proportion of economically active population which is unemployed	0.08	0.07	0.07
Children in income support families/per 10000 population up to 17	147	90	91
Children with statement of educational need/10000 school population	24.4	23	21.9
Pensioner income support claims/per population over 65	0.15	0.14	0.15
Attendance Allowance claims/per population over 65	0.15	0.13	0.11
Proportion of households with a lone pensioner	0.19	0.14	0.16
Incapacity benefit claims/per A27 population over 16	40.1	26.5	28.8
% of Births weighing less than 2500g	9.9	7.2	6.5
	<b>Street South</b>	<b>Median for Mendip</b>	<b>Median for Somerset</b>
Children out of school/per 10000 school age population	3.6	<b>2.1</b>	<b>3</b>
Pensioner income support claims/per population over 65	0.17	0.14	0.12
Attendance allowance claims/per population over 65	0.15	0.13	0.11

**Statistics only tell us what is happening, but they don't tell us anything further. Consultation at local level may provide answers and establish what the community feels needs to be done to address the issues and provide solutions.**

As stated elsewhere in this Audit, further information on health trends for acute and chronic illnesses and diseases, vocational qualifications and participation in learning, travel to work patterns, and police contact and cautions as well as reported and recorded crimes is held by other agencies.

Mendip District Council have indicated in the Report to Area 3 on Corporate Priorities that such information is available through a number of separate reports and studies.

However these have not been collated or aggregated, and would require further detailed work in order to form part of a district profile.

One of these sources is undoubtedly the *Mendip Primary Care Group*.

*Their Annual Report 2000 – 2001* details an overview of the general health of the communities of Mendip, and lists their key achievements for the previous year in preventing ill health, improving health care, developing local services, developing primary care, and developing the Estate. This Report deals with the district, and *does not address specific areas such as Street*.

The Report touches on the multi agency Somerset Health Improvement Programme (HimP) that has been created to improve the health of the community as a whole by collaborative working and integrated health and social service planning.

Their analysis of the health of people living in the Mendip area shows slightly higher levels of heart disease than the national average, and that the risk factors such as excessive smoking and drinking are known to contribute to this. *The PCG Report also highlights the number of Mendip communities particularly affected by poverty and social deprivation, including Street North, and that such a community suffers from a number of the factors that damage the health and well being of those who live there.*

District wide PCG initiatives are supporting improving health care, eg working with the Somerset Partnership to provide good mental health services that can be accessed through primary care teams. Details of this issue were contained in a *Report by the Somerset Health Panels July 2002*, which was also examined as part of this Audit. It focused on the attitudes and barriers to seeking help for depression and stress-related disorders and confirmed that Somerset residents suffered significantly higher levels of stress related disorders and depression than the national average.

The PCG Report also details its activity in supporting GP s and primary health care professionals to deliver NSF targets to reduce coronary heart disease, and to improve cancer services by leading local initiatives and co-ordinate links between community and hospital based care. There have also been initiatives in local services such as smoking cessation, and counselling services.

The PCG is also working to help make the services at GP practices throughout Mendip more easily accessed and more responsive to patient need.

On a more local level, Mendip's PCG has undertaken two assessments of the needs of disadvantaged communities.

Consultation was undertaken at Keyford, Frome, to identify what the local people considered were their needs. Key areas of concern included access to information, the development of community facilities for the area, improvements to the local environment and community safety.

A similar exercise at Hillmead, Shepton Mallet involved people living and working in the area. Having identified the key concerns, an action plan was drawn up to develop a series of local initiatives that includes:

- Work and Training, including job seeking, basic skills and computer literacy
- Addressing Community Safety, including a police presence in the area
- Making available leisure and play activities, particularly safe play opportunities for young children
- Refurbishing the community hall and encouraging community use
- Housing Issues, including support for vulnerable young adults, and improving some housing conditions
- Access to information on health issues
- Addressing Social isolation
- Low incomes and the need for financial advice to people before crisis intervention is needed
- Aiming to clean up the local environment
- Maintaining and developing facilities for young people
- Traffic and transport, particularly road safety and improved public transport facilities
- Improving family support services
- Improving communications within the area to ensure increased awareness of services and facilities on offer within the area.

**A similar exercise to that carried out by the PCG in Frome and Shepton Mallet could usefully be conducted in Street North and South, both areas having been identified as being affected by poverty and deprivation.**

In selecting their priorities, Mendip District Council have used the IMD and HASNG datasets because they provide objective and comparative data. It is, though, acknowledged that the indicators are unlikely to reflect a full picture of need in very small pockets of deprivation. The Countryside Agency is working on a set of indicators that will better measure and define needs in rural areas but these are still awaited.

A large number of the categories where Street is placed in the 5 highest scoring areas across the PCG demonstrate figures that are worryingly high.

Why are we seeing almost double the number of domestic fire incidents in Street North than for the rest of Mendip? What is the reason for a high proportion of cycle accidents in the same area? Why are such large numbers of children living in this area on the Child Protection register, and why are so many listed as being out of school?

**Health, poverty, accidents, education, and housing could be some of the specific issues mentioned above that merit investigation in more detail.**

Information gathering from relevant agencies should precede further consultation involving partners – eg Local Authority, Social Services, Health and Benefits Agencies, Fire Service etc - working with the people of Street to address the difficulties being encountered by some sections of the community.

The aim should be to raise awareness, (even about support that may currently exist but which is not being tapped into for instance) and find solutions. Street needs to discover what is needed – perhaps even what isn't needed - and what can be realistically provided or introduced.

**Information that exists within other groups, organisations and agencies, needs to be shared. Such information gathering would avoid covering old ground, and would help establish the wider picture. This could be the starting point prior to further, more detailed consultation in the Street area, and to providing the community with what it needs.**

## Crime and Disorder, and Rural Policing

Limited consultation took place in Street during research into Rural Policing. A Report was prepared for Avon & Somerset Police. Research was carried out over a four-week period across the Avon and Somerset Region involving eight Focus Groups (six actually completed the research) from across Somerset, of which Street was one. The aim was to:

- Establish how rural policing differs from urban or city policing
- To understand the direct and real concerns of the community
- To establish how and what changes have occurred within rural communities that effect the policing of those communities
- To discuss what actions may be taken to more effectively police rural communities.

A typical Focus Group (we do not know the numbers of people involved in each group) included a GP, parishioner, Teacher, Farmer, a local business person, and parents. *Once again, there appeared little representation from younger people amongst the groups overall, the researchers commenting they did not receive the input they wanted from the youth sector. Anecdotal evidence suggests one or two younger people were part of the Street focus group.*

The research established that countywide, the focus groups shared the following key concerns about:

- Visible policing
- Opening times of local police stations and support services
- Underage drinking and alcohol related crimes
- Drugs abuse and limited support services
- Speeding
- Vandalism
- Lack of Public Transport
- Lack of Community interaction (local parishes, schools and councils not working together)
- Farm crime
- Security for property and belongings
- Information on Neighbourhood Watch.

The conclusions are drawn from these county wide responses. In view of the very small sample of people who took part from the community of Street itself, just three of the topics have been looked at here in detail.

*On visible policing*, and the need for more police officers on the beat, the opinion was this perceived need did not actually necessitate a police officer with powers. Additional services thought to overcome a low police presence included a community link worker, improved information, increased direct involvement with communities, and greater input into schools and the education system.

*On underage drinking and alcohol related crimes*, the problems were felt to stem from lack of public transport, lack of funding for, and lack of youth activities, reduction in funding for youth workers, and no where to go. Solution included the introduction of skate parks, café bars, youth centres, public houses to accommodate younger people but with no access to alcohol, practical and safe transport systems, better education and information about the effects of alcohol, and police officers enforcing spot checks on local pubs.

*Drug abuse was evidently perceived to be a particular problem for Street (and Wincanton)*. Local GP s were concerned with the lack of support services for families and users of substances. The effects of drug abuse spread through the community. Solutions included controlled methadone use, to be drunk as prescribed on pharmacy premises, project centres, counselling centres for drug users and their families, skills projects for the unemployed and less academic (an intriguing assumption given the recent high profile case of a University undergraduate who recently died of drug abuse), and greater integrated support across schools, police, local authority, and GPs.

*Vandalism* was felt to refer back to underage drinking and lack of youth activities, and one solution was greater police presence or a community link worker combined with a more integrated neighbourhood watch scheme.

**Have the needs and views of the Street community been adequately reflected? Will the awaited Report from the Drug Action team tell us what we really know about the levels of Drugs and Alcohol abuse in Street? Would the reasons or ‘solutions’ put forward by the respondents in terms of under age drinking and alcohol related crimes, drugs abuse and limited support services be owned and shared by the Street Community in particular? Had younger people been more fully represented in these Forums, would the issues, concerns and solutions have remained the same?**

**Police statistics for Street** for the month of December 2001 were also made available..

These show there were 67 incidents of Dwelling burglaries; 95 Non Dwelling Burglaries; 42 thefts of Motor Vehicles; 137 thefts from Motor Vehicles, and 193 reports of Violent Crime.

Different reporting systems may account for apparent variations in the figures, as a *Beat Breakdown* for December 2001 revealed some interesting information on the numbers and types of crime occurring across the four beats of (1) Street (2) Walton, Sharpham, Mere, Westhay, Godney; (3) Glastonbury and (4) West Pennard, Butleigh, Baltonsborough across to Marshalls Elm.

A total of 60 crimes ranging from Violent Crime, Dwelling Burglary, Criminal Damage, Theft and Burglary were recorded for Street, the highest number for these four beats, with 48 crimes recorded in Glastonbury, and 5 and 6 for the remaining two beats.

More consultation took place during the development of *The District wide Crime and Disorder Audit*, produced in 2001 by the Mendip Community Safety Partnership (MCSP).

The Partnership comprises Mendip District Council, Avon & Somerset Constabulary, Somerset County Council, Somerset Fire Service, Avon and Somerset Police Authority, Somerset Health Authority and Avon & Somerset Probation Service.

This again was district wide, the Audit taking information from the responses of the Somerset Influence Survey and produced to ensure that the focus of the MCSP for the coming 3 years was “based on statistical evidence, the views and wishes of the community, the experience of people who worked in the community, and examples of good practice.”

Details on the population age structure (a fairly even age range spread for Street), employment rates (93.4% of Street’s population are employed), and ethnic group numbers (0.61% of Street’s population are shown as belonging to an ethnic group) are shown by town. There are also some statistics (not easily decipherable) by town but not covering identical periods, that relate to numbers of people in contact with the probation service, levels of abandoned vehicles (clearly here Street has the lowest number), incidences of disorder (again Street appears to be ranked low), or hoax calls to the Fire Services.

The remaining statistics however illustrate responses for the district as a whole. *As with all Somerset Influence data, information about a specific town cannot be extracted, and even if it could, the representation is in any case likely to be so small as to not provide a representative view for the town.*

There is no representation from under 18 year olds, and only 2.2% fall into the 18 – 24 age range.

*Statistics for the Mendip area show that 84% of those who responded view Violent Crime as being Very Important. 74.8% put their concerns about House Burglary in the same category, along with Drugs and alcohol (65.4%), Vehicle Crime (49.8%), Disorder (46.4%), and Victimisation (45.3%). These categories are now the Crime and Disorder priorities in Mendip, alongside Road Safety.*

The information it contains - the statistics on the number of occurrences, the level of importance people attach to each category, what kinds of crime they most fear, how fear of crime affects behaviour, down to how they feel about the use of CCTV – is without doubt comprehensive.

Community Safety issues were given fairly high rankings from Area 3 respondents in MDC’s district wide Priorities Survey (See Table 2).

Individual topics within community safety scored as follows:

- Improve how we work with partners to tackle crime – 84.5%
- Continue to Develop Neighbourhood Watch – 74.6%
- Seek Government funding for Community Safety Initiatives – 74.1%
- Develop CCTV – 68%
- Provide more information about Community Safety – 65.3%

Street itself would not appear to be a problem area in terms of Crime and Disorder, the 1999 Crime and Disorder Strategy having identified Shepton Mallet, Frome and Glastonbury as having the highest incident levels of domestic burglary and public order offences.

Trudoxhill and Pilton are highlighted as having high levels of criminal damage. District wide, violent crime is noted as being extremely low.

Even so, as with everywhere else, crime exists in Street, and however low the levels compared with the rest of the County or country, we should be finding out the level of community concern, and what the Street community think should be done to address it.

**Here again we have statistical information that tells us what may be happening, but nothing further. There was no focus on the Street Community.**

**In addition, the failure to attract younger people onto the Somerset Influence Panel or to obtain their views must be addressed, particularly as Mendip Panellists' views in particular inform district wide strategies / actions.**

**Street's population in particular is fairly evenly distributed across the age ranges, and whilst the 18-24 age group is the smallest for the area, they form a significant number. Effort should be made to obtain their views.**

## The Street Town Centre Action Plan

Focus was placed on Street during the drawing up of a **Street Town Centre Action Plan** in 2000, led by the Senior Town Centre Officer, appointed by the District Council, working in partnership with key groups and organisations. The Plan refers to the need for the business community of Street to maximise the opportunities arising from the 2 million plus visitors each year and the need to continue to make greater links, physical and otherwise, with Clarks Village.

Although reference is made to various projects having been “identified by the community”, there is no detail of actual consultation available. There is however reference to the need to work with the Chamber of Trade, Parish Council and other community groups, in partnership for the benefit of the town, which may indicate this was done.

The aim at the time of the Plan’s development was to:

- Encourage and promote investment in shops and other business in the town centre, within a suitable setting. *(This resulted in the High Street Enhancement Scheme, Leigh Road to Greenbank – the widening of footways, improvements to lighting, providing signing and street furniture)*
- Improve accessibility to and within the town centre, meeting the needs of business, pedestrians, cyclists, and people with disabilities. *(This included the provision of an improved environment for bus and taxi passengers, and for cyclists and pedestrians. There was also improvement to the pedestrian link with Clarks Village, and a review of the desirability of having advertising boards on the High Street pavements)*
- Provide and maintain a clean, attractive and safe town centre environment. *(This involved an extension of an existing radio link scheme to licensed premises, the removal of a seating area to prevent antisocial behaviour, an extension of private security patrols into the High Street and car parks to maintain a safe and secure atmosphere and encourage people to stay. New litter bins were to be provided, and a local organisation was also to be given support to ensure high standards for Street in Bloom.)*

- Promote and market Street by providing good quality information about the town centre. *(This included PR to exploit publicity from events and good happenings affecting the town centre; events, such as the Christmas Extravaganza with street theatre, lights, carnival etc, the creation of a Street shopping leaflet, and retail map).*
- Enhance the role of the town centre in addressing community needs. *(This encompassed support for the Street Self Help Group to address social issues in the town, supporting a High Street Arts project, and fostering community involvement in High Street matters.)*

The projects identified as supporting each of these aims appear to have been completed. It would not appear that follow up consultation has taken place to discover what people living and working in Street now feel about the Plan and improvements of 2000, whether changes need to be made, and what more can be done. The exception to this appears to be a *Shopmobility Survey*, examined later.

We know from the HASN deprivation figures that Street has a high proportion of households with long-term limiting illness, and that the levels of disability allowance claims and severe disablement allowances are high. In addition, a good proportion of Street residents are elderly.

**Consultation should remain ongoing to ensure the needs of those suffering disability and impairment are being met, and that these difficulties do not preclude them from accessing and moving around the town.**

The results from the **Shopmobility Survey** shows that whilst the Shopmobility service and its staff is highly regarded, and well used by people who spend money in the town, there remains work to be done generally to improve accessibility. An MDC Officer confirms the most frequent comments are that high steps and shop thresholds are often a barrier. Visually impaired people often note that the streetscape can be cluttered (hazardous), with planters and boards, with a lack of contrast between protruding features. They also comment that traders' wares spilling onto the pavement can create problems, and others with a disability say the internal layout of the stores have inadequate aisle space, making getting around inside the store difficult. *There is also some evidence to suggest that this group at least would like to see a greater variety of café's and restaurants in the high street area. (See later comments on the Clarks Village Report.)*

The good news is that the Shopmobility service influences people's shopping habits, that over a quarter of shoppers with a disability spend £50-100 on their trips to Street, one fifth spend £100 and over, and over a third spend between £20 -£50. The vast majority rate the equipment loaned by Shopmobility as being excellent, and over 90% would be prepared to pay a nominal charge for the service.

The position of a Senior Town Centre Officer, dedicated to Street itself, no longer exists, but there could, perhaps, be scope for further consultation in Street, with the support of the Regeneration Officer for Glastonbury and Street combined who has been appointed in place of this role.

Studies undertaken indicate that Street has a viable and vital town centre. Mendip's Draft local Plan states that only a small amount of capacity for additional convenience floorspace has been identified, and no specific site needs to be allocated, but that the town centre would be able to support additional comparison floorspace by 2011, Clarks Village has expanded, but there is some potential for extensions and redevelopment within the Town Centre to increase comparison floorspace, with additional bulky goods retail warehousing being directed to the nearby former Morlands site.

**Consultation with the community of Street could be based on the earlier objectives of the Street Town Centre Plan, to check what the community thinks is working well, and identify areas where more can be done.**

## **Clarks Village Development Research.**

Running almost in parallel with the development of the Street Town Centre Action Plan, the Clarks Village Development Research Report was commissioned by MEPC Factory Outlets to look at the interaction between Clarks Village and Street High Street.

This Report reviews the planning policy context with reference to the vitality and viability objectives at national, regional, and local plan level, and provides nonetheless comprehensive information on the retail context. It provides a 'retail health check' on the High Street and Clarks Village that looks at the provision of comparison goods, floor space actual and requirements, retail developments, voids, rents and demand, and explores existing social and community facilities, accessibility, car parking, pedestrian flows and amenity.

The Report was requested by Mendip District Council, who had given a commitment to High Street retailers to maintain the function of the traditional retail area for full price goods, and ensure that the High Street continues to serve the needs of the local population.

MEPC had submitted further proposals for the development of Clarks Village, including a proposal to locate a china and glass unit. Mendip District Council, on the other hand, was seeking to address the retail implications of the proposals to increase the retail capability of Clarks Village in the context of the Government's PPG6 and the development control process.

The survey was about gaining a better understanding of the role Clarks Village and the Town's High Street play for current users, and look at what influenced the mode of transport in getting to either or both sites, and explore the impact of a possible direct pedestrian link between the two sites (*which might increase shopping activity in the High Street and therefore fulfil the MDC commitment made to retailers in the High Street*)

*It was not about focusing on what the local community – or other shoppers - thought about the shopping provision, amenities, facilities or the environment around the shopping area **away from Clarks Village.***

People were surveyed if they were visiting either the town's High Street, or Clarks Village, or both, were surveyed, irrespective of where they lived.

Questions to 400 interviewees included: method of transport getting to Street, origin and length of journey, where shopping took place (High Street, Clarks Village or both), parking, possible alternatives to car use, how long the visit to Street lasted, the reasons for the visit, whether the High Street was visited, why it was visited, and how long the shopper spent in the High Street.

As to what range of choices would make Shoppers more likely to visit the High Street from Clarks Village (access – signage), the answers (selected from choices on a Showcard) were as follows:

Those surveyed in Clarks Village said:

	%
A direct pedestrian link between Clarks Village and the High Street	27
More fashion shops at <b>Clarks Village</b>	17
Signposts showing the way to the High Street	10
Cleaner environment in the High Street	5
Safer environment in the High Street	4
More car parking close to the High Street	4
Go there anyway	3
Greater range of china and glassware at <b>Clarks Village</b>	1
Better variety of shops	1
Other	4
Nothing	23

*The need for a direct pedestrian link between the two sites and better signage was therefore established.*

Around three quarters of people who responded made the trip from their own homes (ie not holidaymakers), the vast majority (91%) of users of Clarks Village and Street High Street didn't take more than an hour to get there, and over half travelled less than 20 minutes.

It was found the majority of users of both sites live within a short distance of the town, but that more local people use the High Street than those who use Clarks Village. Shoppers also visit the High Street much more frequently than Clarks Village, *so the most frequent shoppers in Street are those who shop alone, live locally and are using the High Street.*

According to the Report, Clarks Village and the High Street offer, and are used for, quite distinct shopping experiences. The primary reason people use Clarks Village is for clothes and footwear shopping. Questions about the length of time spent at either of the sites revealed that the visit to Clarks Village tends to be that of the ‘pleasure and leisure’ experience, and the shopping itself lasts longer.

The visit to the High Street, on the other hand, to access food shops and supermarkets, as well as banks or cash machines, is more concentrated, shorter, and more functional.

According to the latest GOAD data for Street (*including Clarks Village*) cited in this Report, the retail profile of Street is that of a town with an above average provision of comparison goods retailers and a below average vacancy level. This Report confirms that in a district wide context Street has the lowest proportion of vacant units of all five centres in Mendip, highlighting its attraction as a retail destination that benefits from the proximity of Clarks Village.

**The presence of Clarks Village and its distinctive shopping function has attracted a number of multiple retailers, none of which would arguably have otherwise sought representation in a centre the size of Street.**

**Consultation could perhaps establish what other types of retail provision in the High Street would attract further High Street shopping and at the same time complement the retail provision of Clarks Village. *See additional comments on Retailing, MDC Local Plan***

In terms of non-food sectors, the GOAD analysis highlights the level of footwear outlets (unsurprisingly) as being significantly above the national average. The Report also establishes Street is fairly well provided for in terms of convenience goods, but the number of service operators in Street accounts for almost 16% of all units, well below the national average of 26%.

Services with below average representation include restaurants, coffee bars, fast food and take-aways, which account for around 5% units in the town compared to 10% nationally. (*This chimes with responses from the Shopmobility consultation where comments alluded to poor choice of restaurant / café*).

According to Mendip District Local Plan, the draft policies seek to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of the District town centres by ensuring a balance between retail services, leisure, community facilities and housing.

Measures that have been identified as contributing to the vitality and viability of town centres are:

- To retain the primary role of Street's town centre as a retail centre and to strengthen its shopping function for the local community
- Build upon the town centre's strengths and distinct identity
- To strengthen the town centre as a tourist destination, while maintaining its distinctiveness

Award winning Clarks Village has arguably helped to protect Street from some of the external pressures experienced by other retail centres elsewhere, and has undoubtedly impacted on the local economy. Attractive, lively towns can draw in investment, therefore it is important to strike the right balance between retail services, leisure, community facilities and housing.

*The key components of town centre vitality are identified as:*

Retaining and developing a wide range of attractions and amenities

Creating and maintaining an attractive environment

Ensuring good accessibility to and within the centre

Attracting continuing investment in development or refurbishment of existing buildings

**Further consultation could focus on the High Street itself, around transport, accessibility, choice of shops, level of service, the environment (street furniture, planting, litter, lighting), community safety, leisure, tourism, and public art.**

**Is there, for instance, scope to consult with the Street Community (or further afield) - and business to ask what can be provided to encourage retail investment - what further improvements / actions might encourage them to spend more time and money in the High Street. See previous recommendation.**

## Grass, Trees and Planted Areas Survey – April 2000

MDC conducted a postal survey to establish what Mendip residents thought of the District Council's performance in taking care of the parks, open spaces and road verges for which it is responsible.

Some 3448 questionnaires went out, of which 3,200 were randomly selected from the register of electors, with 248 going to existing Mendip Influence Panel members. There were a total of 712 responses, of which 18% came from the random sample, with 50% from the existing panellists.

*Here again, consultation was district wide, and there is no data or information specific to Street.* However, the age and geographic spread is understood to closely reflect the age and spread of the district's population, and this, together with the high level of responses is thought to provide a representative view of all people living in the district.

District wide, then, in relation to public open spaces, the most common concerns related to general tidiness and dog fouling.

In general, Mendip residents were satisfied with the standards and frequency of grass cutting, though satisfaction levels were lower in relation to standards and frequency of grass cutting in villages, housing common areas and cemeteries.

Just over half (51%) of respondents said they visited parks in the district, with age ranges 25-44 using the parks the most.

Merriman Park in Street was amongst those visited most often, with respondents giving a high rating for the maintenance of these grounds. Some 70% of those visiting Woods Batch in Street think the standard of maintenance is at least adequate, good, or very good.

**'Adequate' is some way from 'Very Good'. Does this consultation indicate there is room for improvement. Could consultation 'results' better clarify the true position?**

Litter, glass and dog fouling are common problems for most of the parks visited in the survey, whether managed by Mendip or others.

Planting schemes appeared to be important, and there were requests for more shrubs and flowers in the parks managed by MDC. A high number (81%) also wanted more trees planted throughout the district, the preferred types being those supporting wildlife and native species.

Around 76% wanted more bulbs planted, the most popular locations being along roads in towns or villages, depending on where the respondent lived.

The survey appears to have thrown up specific sites described as being “of greater concern than others.” At the time of this survey, some two years ago now, these were being investigated to improve the standards of general maintenance in terms of planting, weeding and removal of litter.

Quality of service was deemed of most importance, followed by value for money, and then good customer care.

**Respondents here clearly signalled the improvements and changes they would like made. This may tie in with the parks appraisal, previously touched on, that is about to be carried out.**

**Some two years have passed since this survey. It is perhaps time to re-visit this topic, closer to home, to explore what has been done, and what Street residents think about it.**

## **Future Options for Cemeteries and Burials in Mendip.**

This *postal survey* was conducted amongst a geographically representative sample of 1000 Somerset Influence Panellists in the district.

Some 718 responses were received, representing a response rate of 72%. The confidence interval is therefore +/- 3.7%, meaning we can be sure the answers are representative of the general population to +/- 4%.

*According to this report, the geographical spread of results is fairly representative, particularly so for Street, where the responses number 10% of the total.* (The population spread of the district puts Street at 10% of the total: 1991 census.) Certainly in regard to the respondents from the Street community, the statistics for the BA16 post code area compare closely to the key findings.

As one might expect, more responses were received from the group aged 65-75, (the 16-24 age group particularly underrepresented with 21 responses). This older age group, together with those in the 45-64 band, were - understandably - the groups most likely to have had contact with MDC's burial service.

Only 38 respondents (5% of the total) said they had had contact with Mendip's burial service, and of that number, 21% rated the service as being excellent; 39% said it was good; and 26% said it was reasonable. Only 6% said it was poor or very poor.

- Just over two thirds of respondents expect MDC to provide a burial service.
- Just over half consider there should be a choice between a central cemetery and burial in their own town or parish
- A minority would opt for traditional burial in the district. These were most likely to be the 64-74 age group, and they were also those most likely to want additional burial space to be provided in their local parish or town.
- 41% of respondents would support having a crematorium in the district, and around 33% would support woodland / nature reserve burial facilities in the district.

The majority of respondents (82%) felt it was important that town cemeteries are maintained through local arrangements.

The majority (85%) also felt it important that parish burial grounds are maintained through local arrangements.

The majority (87%) felt it important to have staff based on site at town cemeteries.

**A growing trend towards an alternative rather than traditional burial (eg woodland / nature reserve burial) is being identified across all age ranges, with 25% of the 75+ age band in agreement.**

**No facility for this type of burial, or that of cremation, currently exists in Mendip. Whilst no real 'gaps' are identified in this survey, should alternatives on traditional burials be under consideration now or at any future point, further consultation could take place district wide to seek community views as to the best and most convenient location.**

## **Mendip's Draft Local Plan**

This of course is a key document in that it is the blueprint for the future development of Mendip.

In accordance with statutory requirements, the Plan has been the subject of wide consultation involving individuals, groups and various organisations. Some fifty events, exhibitions and public meetings have been held in various parts of the district over the past three years.

Key responses are that:

- Brownfields should be built on as a first priority
- Small sites are in keeping with the area rather than the fewer large ones originally suggested
- Employment areas need to be provided to reduce the need to commute and to provide local prosperity
- The number of new homes being put forward for Mendip is too high.

The scope of this Audit is not to examine in depth the content of any of the Reports, but simply to explore what gaps in consultation may exist.

In terms of housing, consultation established resistance to the suggestion that most of Street's housing needs could be met by developing a large site between Street and Walton.

New homes are likely to be provided on current open areas off Hindhayes Lane, thought to be a rare opportunity for new housing development close to the town centre. The site is suitable for a relatively high density scheme, ideal for sheltered housing. Land has also been identified south of the Houndwood factory. Such houses would be readily accessible to a wide range of services and facilities and would be within easy walking distance of the town centre, and development would not result in the loss of significant environmental assets.

The Local Plan also earmarks Brooks Road for further development, being within cycling distance of the town centre and within the existing built up area.

Pedestrian cycle links are to be improved, and although the site is reasonably well served by public transport, improved passenger facilities will be required. Here too, the recreational needs of the future occupants will need to be provided for.

Some Greenfield land is also required on the edge of the Town to provide the number of homes likely to be needed, some land having been identified west of Brooks Road. (within Wilton Parish) This site has good access to primary education and a site is allocated nearby for the expansion of the local school. *Other facilities are more distant, including the town centre, but the potential to provide bus, cycle and footpath links is said to be good.*

**Consultation could be undertaken in respect of the requirement to provide for the recreational needs of future occupants of both developments in accordance with Policy SN10.**

**There are also transport issues to be resolved, which may benefit from further consultation, in tandem with the transport assessment / review.**

**In terms of Retail Provision:**

The Plan has identified a site at Farm Road for development that will encourage linkage between the High Street and Clarks Village, maximise the potential beneficial effect of Clarks Village on the High Street, and allow for retail expansion.

It is suggested ground floor frontage for retail use, whilst residential, leisure or other town centre uses may be acceptable on the upper floors.

*Concerns and objections to the expansion of Clarks Village were picked up as a result of consultation. These are issues that are recommended in the Local Plan amendments as needing to be addressed in a separate policy.*

MDC's Planning and Transport Policy Team, authors of the Report on Pre-Enquiry Changes (February 2000), state that the strength and attractiveness of Street and its role in serving the community is best assisted by a vital and viable specialist (factory outlet) function.

As a source of employment and a tourist attraction, Clarks Village is deemed an important part of the Mendip economy.

Whilst every opportunity should be taken to maximise the potential beneficial effects of Clarks Village on the town centre, the Pre-Enquiry Report acknowledges that any future proposal will need to demonstrate that Clarks Village needs to complement, rather than compete with, the services and facilities of Street Town Centre.

The Report emphasises the need for the Town Centre to take every opportunity in maximising the potential beneficial effects of Clarks Village may have by capturing expenditure which would not otherwise be available to it. .

It states that in order to assist in encouraging linkage between the two, measures should be taken to improve the physical, social or economic integration of Clarks Village and the Town Centre, and that the various roles of Street Centre should be developed in parallel within the overall objective of sustaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of the Town Centre.

**As with the recommendation in relation to Street's Town Centre Plan, consultation could usefully take place amongst the Street community, and beyond, to establish what in their view, would add to the viability, sustainability, and interest to the Town Centre.**

## **Mendip Influence – Public Cleansing Survey 2001**

This survey covered public conveniences, litter problems and disposal, bus shelters, dog fouling, signage and name plates, and maintenance.

The responses from the district wide survey were not broken down to Area level, but the survey was examined as a number of additional comments directly reflected views expressed about Street.

*District wide*, The majority (53.3%) felt there were too few public toilets in the district, a little over a quarter of respondents thinking the number was just right. *A comment from one respondent was that they couldn't find a public toilet in Street.*

A very high percentage (92.3%) of respondents felt it important or very important to have public toilets located in car parks. An even higher number (96.1%) thought they should be available in town centres. Some 45.0% of respondents thought the standard provided was only average.

*One comment on car park toilets in Street was that the small cubicles in the middle of the busy car park was not a safe place for toddlers. Suggested designated parent and young children's toilets with space for pushchairs, and with nappy changing facilities, to be open from 8.0 am until 6.0 pm.*

*Southside Car Park toilet cubicles noted as too small when taking a child in with an adult.*

The level of cleanliness discouraged 55.8% of respondents from using public toilets, a further 49.7% said they preferred not to use public toilets at all (cleanliness reasons again?)

The majority (80.75) felt the District Council should play a major role in the provision of public loos, and 46.4% felt the Parish or Town Council should also play a major role. Of those who responded on where funding should come from if money was needed to improve public toilet facilities, 54% said it should be via entry charges.

72.0% thought it was necessary to have at least one block of public conveniences open 24 hours a day in each town.

Almost a fifth of respondents said they did not know how to obtain a Radar key to access a public toilet if they had a disability, or were caring for someone with a disability.

**Litter:**

- Litter on streets ranked as a high priority with 93.4% of respondents. On the question of dumped rubbish, 94.5% rated this as a high priority.
- 53.8% of them considered town centres to be *fairly* litter free, 27.7% think town centres are averagely litter free.
- Rural lay bys seem to be the greatest concern with 40% of respondents saying they think they are littered, with 16.8% saying they are very littered.
- Parks and Open Spaces fare a little better: 30.7% of respondents think these are littered, with 39.9% saying they are averagely littered.
- Over a quarter of respondents (27.7%) consider equipped play areas to be littered, with 38.5% saying they are averagely littered.

The amount of Town Centre litter bins were felt by the majority to be just right (57.1%) whilst a substantial number 42.2% thought there were too few. The majority (72.3%) thought there were too few litter bins in residential areas.

Fast Food outlets were perceived by at least two respondents as being the location for litter problems, both mentioning McDonalds in Westway, and highlighting the youths behaviour re litter disposal rather than the outlet.

*Another survey comment about Street was that “certain areas of the town centre are made worse by the unruly behaviour of young people, especially at weekends (around) the Crispin Centre, and Leigh Road, especially around the Library.”*

This perhaps explains why the majority of respondents (81.8%) say that in respect of street cleaning issues, a greater emphasis should be placed on education , with 87.2% saying emphasis should be placed on Enforcement and Prosecution

Fly tipping was not a huge problem, but over 90% of respondents thought those caught should be prosecuted. *One survey comment was that Travellers had dumped caravans and possessions along the road to Street / Glastonbury, with no sign of them having been removed, attracting vandals.*

On the standard of Street Cleansing throughout Mendip, 67.8% said the standard was acceptable; 18.9% said the standard was high. *Two survey comments were that far more street cleaning is needed in the area, including Brook Road, location of McDonalds. See comment above..*

### **Dog Fouling and Dog Waste Bins:**

90.8% of respondents rated dog fouling as a high priority concern. The majority of respondents felt there were *too few* dog waste bins provided in Town Centres, Residential Areas, Parks, Villages, and in lay-bys.

*At least three survey comments for Street were made here. "To my knowledge there is only one dog litter bin in Street." One complained about dog fouling outside Strode College and difficulties in getting action on it. Another described dog fouling as the worst kind of litter.*

District wide, the majority of respondents ranked graffiti, chewing gum, broken seats, damaged structure, fly posting and broken glass as being only 'slight problems' in relation to the cleanliness and maintenance of bus shelters.

*However, one survey comment was that "Living in Street, I am appalled by the amount and content of graffiti along the two underpasses."*

In relation to the maintenance of public benches where the respondents lived, 60.3% thought this was average, whilst 57.7% thought maintenance of the benches was average district wide.

Signage did not appear to be of concern to respondents, the majority saying they were satisfied in terms of location, cleanliness, accuracy, maintenance, style and number. *(See comment on inability to find a public toilet in Street.)*

**Further work could be done amongst the local community to pick up on the concerns relating to adequacy of public toilets for toddler / child use; and issues surrounding Litter, Graffiti (paying attention to the youth aspects mentioned) and Dog Fouling.**

## Conclusion

The Audit has demonstrated the fact that whilst consultation is taking place at County and District level, little consultation is taking place amongst the community of Street.

Gaps have been identified where consultation could be conducted on a more local level, and which could address specific topics that would appropriately inform positive planning for the Street community. The views of younger people are not being obtained or heard.

More could be done to provide information and opportunities for the Street community to define issues of importance to them; exchange information; debate the problems, and find agreed solutions. Lack of resources may well be to blame, but currently, what we are seeing is a system of County / District wide information gathering surveys.

The consultation process as a whole needs to be better co-ordinated. A mechanism should be in place to ensure there is uniformity of approach, and that expertise about, and information gleaned from, consultation is accurately recorded, evaluated and shared. Ideally, such information should be centrally held, and equally importantly, needs to be accessible, and easily retrieved.

The commissioning of this Audit is evidence of a community intent on helping itself. SCAP's use of lateral thinking – collaborative working with key agencies, making use of resources within the community itself by tapping into other available expertise, and drawing in other support from other groups, industry and commerce – is likely to be the key to progress, and future meaningful dialogue with the Street community.