

Ash Neighbourhood Plan Early Engagement Report

EARLY ENGAGEMENT OUTPUTS

Ash Parish Council (APC) ran an early engagement period in October 2024 to validate and inform the scope of the Ash Neighbourhood Plan.

The response level was relatively low (70) which is not unexpected at the early stages of a neighbourhood plan, unless there are particularly controversial parish matters which attract responses.

There were no indications that the policy areas being considered were inappropriate, nor were any planning related matter raised which cannot be covered in one or more of the existing policy areas.

The majority of respondents very much felt that the parish was more village than town and this was reflected in the terminology to describe where people live.

The largest category of respondents were those who had lived in the parish for over 20 years, with the second largest group being those who were relatively new to Ash.

In choosing words to identify Ash, there were some conflicting responses - popular responses were "quiet", "busy" "green" "connected" "community" "friendly" "overcrowded" "congested" "convenient" which indicates that not all parts of the parish experience the same setting and sense of place.

When asking people to identify their favourite outdoor space or community building it was interesting that most of the response related to spaces associated with nature including the ranges, meadows and canal - very few cited built spaces.

Almost half of respondents said they did shop and spend leisure time in the parish with many also using Farnham and Guildford (in preference to other nearby towns and parishes.)

It was interesting that a number of respondents felt there weren't any sports, arts, culture or leisure facilities in the parish. For those who did have an awareness, the ranges, canal, the library were common responses but with few stating that they use other places within the parish.

Nearly all respondents stated that they have a convenience shop within walking distance demonstrating an awareness of services close by, so accessibility to these may be a key consideration for the NP.

In responding to where parts of the parish council be improved, this was the most 'skipped' question - a number of the responses related to non-planning matters such as the type of retailers in the parade in Ash Vale. There were a significant number of comments around parking outside local shops, despite a previous question where virtually all respondents stated they had a convenience shop within walking distance. - it was also noted that a convenience shop to the south of the parish would be welcomed.

44 respondents (63%) said they worked outside of the parish, demonstrating there are local employment opportunities. However, nearly all those travelling to work used a car and travelled alone. Not a single person used a bus and despite three train stations only 5 used the train. This suggested further investigation and engagement is needed at the stations to understand, if local people are not using the trains to get to work, why not and who is using the trains?

The old railway track, the ranges, Ash Green Meadows, Rowan Field and the canal are very popular for walking and cycling, which given the previous response is predominately for leisure purposes. A number of respondents noted that improvements could be made to some areas including the canal towpath, but some felt that no improvements were required. There were concerns raised over safety in relation to cycling.

In asking people what changes they felt would make the greatest difference for Ash, the most popular response was "stop building houses". A number of responses related to road improvements which are not within the scope of the NP. A number referenced a day care or healthcare hub community facility with cafe as a focal point to bring the community together. Lack of parking provision was also highlighted - a number of the suggestions are matters which could be taken up by the parish council, not necessarily planning related but more community matters

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including policing. A few respondents mentioned more business/employment/retail opportunities.

In respect of housing - the overwhelming response was “no more housing” but identifying that if more housing is proposed it should be higher quality, more affordable, more energy efficient and located in accessible areas near facilities and active travel.

In answering how Ash should look and feel in the future, which would establish ideas for the NP vision - the words “village” and “community” were repeatedly mentioned with “connected to nature” and “connected to community” recurring themes. This includes providing appropriate local facilities and services to support each village with good walking and public transport links both within the parish and out into the countryside were also prevalent. Residents wish to be connected to the wider parish whilst retaining an individual sense of place within each village.

In distilling this to objectives in the NP this may include:

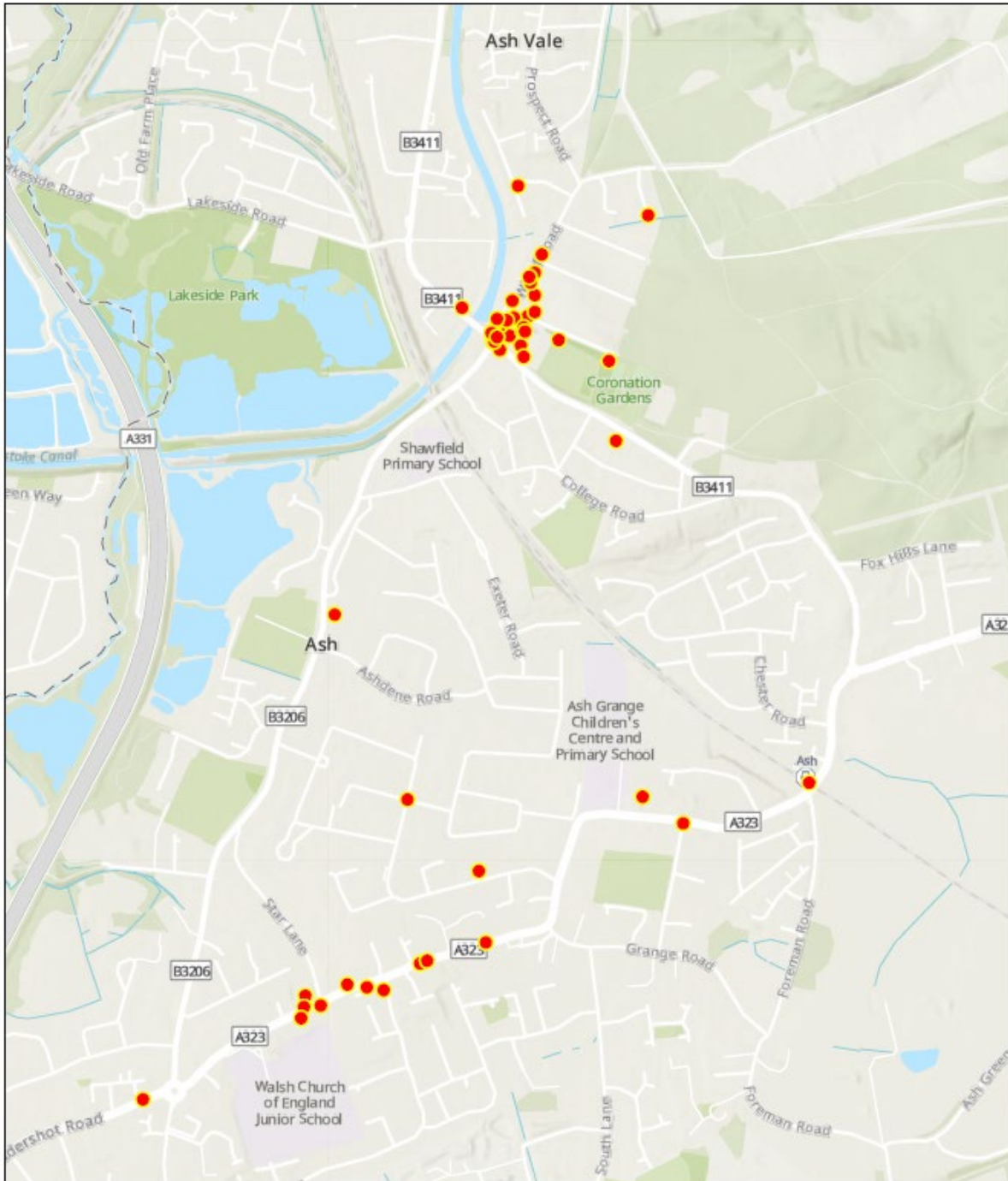
- Safeguarding and promoting local business, employment and retail opportunities.
- Protecting and improving green spaces as well as local green and blue infrastructure.
- Promoting public transport, walking and cycling and reducing the reliance on private car use and parking.
- Providing community space for health and wellbeing.

Finally,

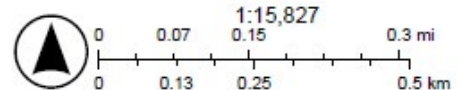
As part of the survey we asked people to identify where they thought the centre of the parish was located. The majority of respondents did pinpoint the district centre at Ash Vale but it was interesting that a number felt that the centre was located around the historic core of Ash (see below) This lends support to the view that the parish still identifies as individual villages rather than one area.

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Ash Residents Survey - Area Centre results 2024



10/25/2024



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