



Leominster Town Council 2021/22 Budget Consultation Report

Background

Aim

The Leominster Town Council 2021/22 Budget Consultation questionnaire sought to inform Town Council decisions on spending and strategy, by consulting residents on both their experiences of Town Council services and their priorities for future investment.

Methodology

The Leominster Town Council 2021/22 Budget Consultation was launched on 11th November 2020. Residents were invited to complete an online questionnaire, with hard copies of the survey available by post for those without online access. The consultation end date was initially set as 25th November 2020, however the Council voted to extend the deadline to 16th December 2020 in order to provide additional opportunities for resident engagement, following the end of the second national COVID-19 lockdown on 2nd December 2020. Participation was also incentivised, with survey respondents offered the chance to enter a prize draw to win a Christmas hamper provided by the Leominster Tourist Information Centre.

The consultation was advertised via the following channels:

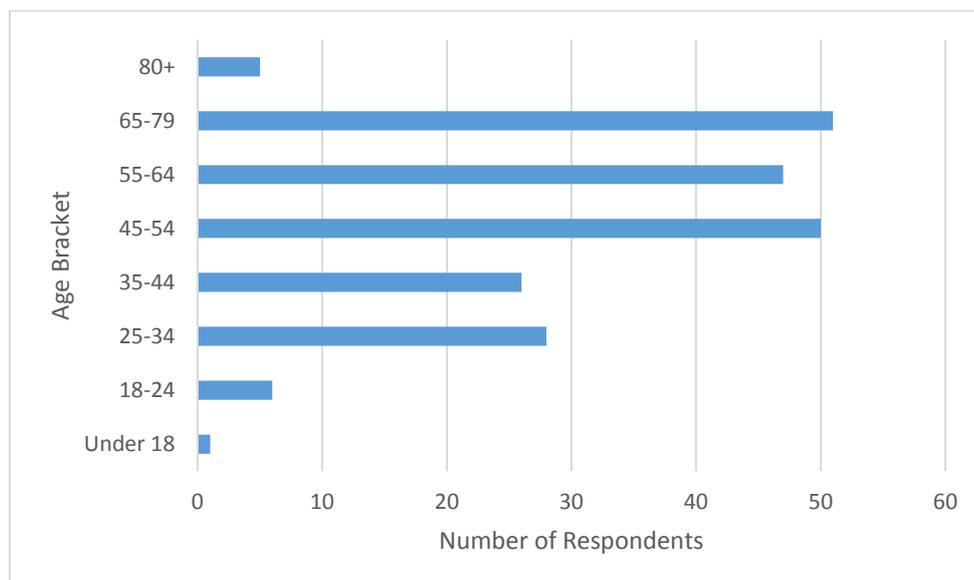
- Leominster Town Council website
- Leominster Tourist Information Centre social media accounts
- Posters displayed in the Tourist Information Centre windows and Town Council notice boards
- Email distribution to local organisations and community groups
- Promotional flyers distributed with Tourist Information Centre 'click and collect' orders
- Information stands and Councillor presence at the weekly market on Friday 4th December 2020 and farmers' market on Saturday 12th December 2020.

The Hereford Times also reported on the consultation deadline extension and Christmas hamper draw, which is believed to have significantly contributed to the number of residents taking part (see <https://www.herefordtimes.com/news/18911527.one-lucky-person-herefordshire-town-win-hamper-christmas>)

Response

A total of 272 survey responses were received by the deadline of midnight on 16th December 2020. The vast majority of responses were submitted online, with only 3 responses returned in hard copy. Graph 1 (below) outlines the distribution of respondents by age group. The majority of respondents were aged between 25 and 79 years. The lower response rate in the 80+ bracket may be a result of decreased online access in that age group, combined with the need to self-isolate as a result of increased COVID-19 vulnerability.

Graph 1: Distribution of Respondents by Age Group



Findings

Resident Experiences

Respondents were asked to rate Leominster Town Council services and amenities using the following scale: ‘excellent’, ‘good’, ‘acceptable’, ‘poor’, ‘very poor’, ‘service not used’. Table 1 ranks Town Council services according to the percentage of respondents who indicated that they used the service and rated their experience as being either ‘excellent’ or ‘good’.

Table 1: Services and Amenities Ranked by Positive Rating Response

Service/Amenity	Percentage of Respondents Rating as ‘Excellent’ or ‘Good’
Running the Friday market, Farmers market, speciality markets	72.6
Allotments	65.4
Christmas lights	57.6
Emergency Response (Flooding, COVID-19)	56.3
Grass cutting, looking after trees and wildflower areas at the Grange, Sydonia Park and Ginhall Green	55.8
Street cleaning in the town centre	52.2
Litter picking in the Priory churchyard and parks	50.6
Play equipment at Sydonia Park	48.8
Play equipment at Ginhall Green	36.2
Maintaining town verges	33.1
Play equipment at the Grange	28.7
Management and maintenance of key local footpaths	25.2
Public toilets in Central carpark	21.8
Public toilets on the Grange	17.5

BUDGET CONSULTATION REPORT 2021/22

Table 2 ranks Town Council services and amenities according to the percentage of respondents who indicated that they used the service and rated their experience as being either 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Table 2: Services and Amenities Ranked by Negative Rating Response

Service/Amenity	Percentage of Respondents Rating as Poor or Very Poor
Management and maintenance of key local footpaths	43.7
Public toilets on the Grange	41.8
Play equipment at the Grange	40.0
Public toilets in Central carpark	38.6
Maintaining town verges	27.0
Play equipment at Ginhall Green	24.5
Play equipment at Sydonia Park	17.3
Christmas lights	15.5
Street cleaning in the town centre	14.2
Grass cutting, looking after trees and wildflower areas at the Grange, Sydonia Park and Ginhall Green	13.1
Emergency Response (Flooding, COVID-19)	12.6
Litter picking in the Priory churchyard and parks	12.5
Running the Friday market, Farmers market, speciality markets	5.0
Allotments	1.2

Town Council services that were rated most highly include: markets, allotments, Christmas lights and emergency response (flooding, COVID-19), grass cutting and maintenance on open spaces, and street cleaning in the town centre. The 3 items highlighted as being most in need of improvement (Central toilets, Grange toilets, Grange play area) are all amenities that have been transferred to the Town Council from Herefordshire Council in the last 5 years. It is positive to see that all 3 concerns are already being addressed in the Town Council's capital projects programme. The 'further comments' field for this section of the survey particularly highlighted support for investment at the Grange, emphasising the importance of the Council's Grange Improvement project and providing important evidence of need for funding applications to be submitted in the 2021/22 financial year.

43.7% of respondents rated 'management and maintenance of key local footpaths' as being either 'poor' or 'very poor', however the accompanying comments indicated that many respondents understood the term 'footpaths' to include pavements and kerbs, which are maintained by Herefordshire Council as part of the public realm. This confusion could potentially be avoided in future consultation by using the term 'public rights of way' and defining it clearly. Several respondents also referenced footpaths that are outside of the area managed by Leominster Town Council. Despite the fact that introductory notes outlining the extent of Town Council services and responsibilities were provided at the start of the survey, respondent comments indicate that there are still significant levels of confusion regarding the distinction between Town Council and Herefordshire Council services. It is hoped that the new Town Council website will help to provide additional clarity for residents.

BUDGET CONSULTATION REPORT 2021/22

Nearly a quarter (23.8%) of comments submitted for this section of the survey were complaints regarding the poor quality of roads and pavements within Leominster town centre. All comments on local authority services will be anonymised and fed back to Herefordshire Council on behalf of Leominster residents.

Just over a quarter of respondents (27%) rated verge maintenance as being either 'poor' or 'very poor', despite the fact that 55.8% of respondents rated grass cutting on Town Council managed open spaces as being either 'excellent' or 'good'. Any specific locations identified within the survey responses will be raised with the Town Council's Environment and Services Team, who have worked hard to maintain cutting schedules throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to note that verges in some areas of Leominster are owned and maintained by organisations such as housing associations, which can cause confusion. The 'further comments' field also indicated that opinions are split in regards to verge maintenance, with some respondents requesting more regular cuts and others requesting that more areas are left uncut to encourage wildlife.

Dog fouling and kerbside weeds were also raised as issues of concern in the comments field. Initiatives for reducing dog fouling have been trialled by the Town Council's Environmental Team in the past, but it is recommended that these measures are revisited. Spraying of kerbside weeds is no longer undertaken by Herefordshire Council. Leominster Town Council staff spray a limited number of key routes within the town centre as part of support for Leominster in Bloom, however resources are limited. A number of respondents also indicated in the comments field that the work of Leominster in Bloom volunteers and litter picking groups is greatly appreciated by town residents.

Resident Priorities

Respondents were asked to rate Town Council services and amenities in order of priority. It is worth noting that approximately one fifth (21%) of survey respondents chose not to complete this question, suggesting that a more user-friendly method for indicating resident priorities may be required for future consultations. Percentages listed in the tables below have been calculated using only the responses of respondents that fully completed the priorities section of the budget consultation questionnaire.

BUDGET CONSULTATION REPORT 2021/22

Table 3 ranks Town Council services and amenities by the percentage of respondents listing that service as being either 1st, 2nd or 3rd *highest* priority.

Table 3: Services and Amenities Ranked by Highest Priority Rating

Service/Amenity	Percentage of Respondents Listing as a Top Priority
Street cleaning within the town centre	56.8
Maintaining and cleaning public toilets in Central carpark and on the Grange	40.4
Maintaining important public footpaths in and around the town	19.7
Maintaining play areas on the Grange, Sydonia and Ginhall Green	16.4
Watering Leominster in Bloom displays in town	16.0
Supporting activities for young people	14.1
Providing grants and support to local groups and community facilities	12.2
Friday market, Farmers market, speciality markets	10.8
Maintaining town verges	9.9
Organising events for the town (e.g. Through the Wardrobe)	8.9
Grants to support local bus services	8.5
Supporting and facilitating town projects	7.0
Running the Tourist Information Centre and supporting local tourism	6.1
Providing funding to Citizens Advice Bureau	5.2
Managing trees on the Grange, Sydonia and Ginhall Green	3.3
Civic events (e.g. Remembrance Day)	2.4
Allotments	2.4
Christmas lights	0.5

BUDGET CONSULTATION REPORT 2021/22

Table 4 ranks Town Council services and amenities by the percentage of respondents listing that service as being either 1st, 2nd or 3rd lowest priority.

Table 4: Services and Amenities Ranked by Lowest Priority Rating

Service/Amenity	Percentage of Respondents Listing as a Lowest Priority
Organising events for the town (e.g. Through the Wardrobe)	43.7
Allotments	41.3
Running the Tourist Information Centre and supporting local tourism	34.7
Christmas lights	30.1
Friday market, Farmers market, speciality markets	27.7
Civic events (e.g. Remembrance Day)	23.9
Watering Leominster in Bloom displays in town	17.8
Grants to support local bus services	12.2
Providing funding to Citizens Advice Bureau	11.7
Maintaining town verges	11.3
Managing trees on the Grange, Sydonia and Ginhall Green	10.8
Providing grants and support to local groups and community facilities	7.5
Supporting and facilitating town projects	7.5
Maintaining play areas on the Grange, Sydonia and Ginhall Green	5.6
Supporting activities for young people	5.2
Maintaining important public footpaths in and around the town	3.8
Street cleaning within the town centre	1.9
Maintaining and cleaning public toilets in Central carpark and on the Grange	0.9

Survey responses identified the following Town Council services as being of the highest priority: street cleaning within the town centre, maintaining and cleaning public toilets in Central carpark and on the Grange, maintaining important public footpaths in and around the town, and maintaining Town Council play areas. The low level of priority awarded to the Town Council's allotments provision is not unexpected, given that 70% of respondents indicated that they have not previously used this service.

The Leominster Tourist Information Centre is not listed as being a high priority service, however a large proportion of respondent comments emphasised the importance of attracting additional visitors to Leominster. This may suggest that there is a lack of awareness in regards to the role that the Tourist Information Centre plays in supporting Leominster's tourism offer and economy. Similarly, 43.7% of respondents listed town events as one of the lowest priorities for Town Council resources, yet a large number of accompanying comments requested additional events and activities for residents of all ages. This demand should be addressed, in part, by the Leominster HAZ Scheme projects and accompanying Cultural Programme.

Several respondents suggested that they felt that all services listed were of importance for the town. In future consultations it may be helpful to provide respondents with an option for indicating which existing services (if any) they feel should not receive any funding from the Town Council. Comments submitted in

BUDGET CONSULTATION REPORT 2021/22

response to this section of the form also highlighted the continuing need to emphasise when Town Council initiatives – such as the LEADER signage project – are funded by external sources, so that residents are clear that funding is not being diverted from other Town Council services.

Other Suggestions

In addition to the points outlined above, the following suggestions for Town Council projects or activities were raised in survey responses:

- Advertise Friday market in county-wide newspapers
- Provide a fenced-off area for exercising dogs at Ginhall Green
- Install additional Christmas lights in Corn Square
- Provide more equipment for the under 5s age group at Sydonia Park
- Arrange communal manure/wood chipping deliveries for allotment holders
- Provide a town events calendar (N.B. a What's On page is maintained via the TIC website, but a hard copy events calendar may also be helpful for those who cannot access the internet)
- Opportunities to speak to Town Council representatives outside of working hours
- Tree planting in the town centre
- Improvements to the facades of buildings in town centre (the HAZ Scheme renovation grants project will help to address this)

Suggestions relating to street lighting, bin collection, drainage, roads/public realm, crime/policing, parking, and cycle lanes, will be relayed to the relevant authorities.

Communication Methods

Respondents were asked to indicate how they source information on Leominster Town Council services and events. A summary of responses is provided in Graph 2. Other methods mentioned in the comments section included local shops, county newspapers (e.g. Hereford Times), and word of mouth. Electronic communication methods were shown to be accessed most frequently, however the survey results indicate that hard copy communication channels remain popular. It is also worth considering the impact of COVID restrictions on the way that people choose to access information. This data helps to inform future consultation strategies and highlights importance of the Town Council continuing to engage with residents using a combination of physical and digital formats.

Graph 2: Sources of Information on Town Council Services

