

Sway Carnival Fete 2019 public consultation.

Background: Following the May 2019 Parish Council elections when two-thirds of those elected were first-time Parish Councillors there has been a concerted effort to widen public consultation and participation.

With a far wider diversity in the Parish Council (more women than men, some younger Parish Councillors including parents of children at the local school, and some relative newcomers to the Parish) we felt able to start with what we perceived from our own discussions and consultations with our neighbours and local groups were some broad themes to shape the coming session for Sway Parish Council.

Consultation: For many years the largest annual event in Sway has been the Carnival Week; and the major feature is the Carnival Fete (run by a separate charitable group - not by the Parish Council) this year on July 4th 2019. We therefore felt this was a good opportunity to both test the themes that had been suggested, and to reach some of the residents that we did not otherwise reach. Sway Parish Council and Sway Junior Parish Council had a joint stall, and Sway Parish Councillors, armed with clipboards, roamed the entire Fete engaging with those who, on an initial question, revealed they were Sway residents.

We asked for their choices of what they would want to see Sway be or become; and in those broad themes the replies were:

Conservation friendly:	75 votes
A mixed community:	65 votes
Celebrates its young and old people:	93 votes
A community hub:	42 votes
Safe and healthy Sway:	52 votes
Accessible transport Sway:	46 votes
An engaged and informed village:	63 votes

Note: the raw results comprise the scans of a large number of printed and then hand-written sheets – more than 6MB, and are far too large for this summary; they are, however available for consultation through the Parish Clerk – see <http://sway-pc.gov.uk/contact>

These results, we feel, are a not unexpected distribution across such themes, and encourages us to feel that within these there is no overwhelmingly vital theme we've underestimate, nor any dismally support theme.

Celebrating both young and old residents is a challenge for Sway Parish Council: we certainly support the Village Hall which has a lot of groups and session aimed at the elderly, but there is not as much at the Sway Jubilee Field site (the focus of the Parish council and more aimed at sports) for the older residents. Sway Parish Council do provide a children's playground which we will review, but the main support for youth is through the local faith group via the Sway Youth Centre.

In the conservation friendly area we intend to establish a local group with environmental and climate credit mitigation themes.

On the further establishment of a mixed community, we noted the opportunities afforded by an extensive proposed new estate on the edge of the defined village – which would be of smaller dwellings – encouraging both younger families and older residents, such as empty-nesters looking to downsize, and hence releasing larger properties for growing families already established in the village.

In terms of an engaged village; consideration would be given to improving our website and also working towards becoming a Quality Council – which would ensure good practice in terms of engagement with our residents. We know that in previous consultations Sway residents have been on the whole content that Sway is a quiet New Forest village and want to keep it that way – so as long as things continue as they have been residents have felt engaged.

It seems from our wider knowledge, experience and evidence that a safe and health Sway is widely taken for granted (although road safety might be improved); and a community hub is already provided through a remarkably good provision for such a modest population, of a thriving Village Hall, a separate Parish Council Pavilion with extensive sporting facilities and a children's playground, a scout hut, a youth centre, an arts centre and church rooms; as well as a surgery and shops including a pharmacy, coffee shop, award-winning butcher, convenience store, hairdresser, florist, estate agents, glaziers, pub and restaurant, and a further pub just outside the main village.

Accessible transport is provided by Sway railway station (on the main London to Bournemouth line) but the only bus service is the CANGO – top marks for accessibility because it roams to where clients need it and is easy to board, but it only runs a couple of times a day to the local shopping hubs and already requires a significant subsidy from the Parish council to continue the flexible booking service.

If residents were further engaged with the survey we did have back-up examples of what might fit within such broad categories (pointing out that this would be how Sway Parish Council might allocate priorities to spending our precept – which cash comes from the residents); and we certainly invited further areas we had not included.

A few additional suggestions included: more seating at Stanford Rise Green; and priority to affordable housing, the addition of a Multi-User Games Area; and support for New Forest Commoning.

In the extensive list of examples it was in some ways disappointing to find that there was a more selfish strand. Local residents (who already have housing, and few of whom currently use the CANGO bus service for instance because it is limited and they use their own cars) would support what they individually wanted to see; but were, we felt, less inclined to suggest what would be advantageous to Sway as a community. However the Parish Council felt that perhaps we had biased matters by asking what residents wanted – rather than what they felt Sway should provide for all residents.

One councillor went further as asked for likes, dislikes and improvements. Whilst this was a small sample there was enormous support for the 'community spirit' in Sway, and support for friendliness, location, activities, and the people. Dislikes included the current post office and convenience stores, and the idea of adding a zebra crossing. Improvement suggestions included the pub, an update to the playground and the desire for less development. In each of those three categories there was an extremely long list of further individually suggested items some of which overlapped or were contradictory to others.

Whilst the consultation was not a full consultation of all residents or demographically representative, this did prove to be another valuable addition to inform our priorities. We therefore carried these items forward, along with a large number of less formal or detailed consultations to add to our extensive discussions of the long-list of possible projects as we honed these down, in consultation with the local residents, to the Sway Parish Council priorities for the session 2019-2023.