

Overview

With the support of the Parish Council, we have published a questionnaire to get input from Casterton's permanent residents, business owners and employees, second home owners, and regular visitors to find out if there are things we could do to improve our village. We believe strongly that those who live or work in the village are best placed to identify opportunities and make things happen, and this belief is guiding our approach.

Anonymous Note

The concerned resident's note started *'As a resident of Casterton, I am concerned about the following:'* The author then raised a series of concerns, emphasised below in italics. Underneath each comment is a response from the Casterton Village Plan team ('the team').

i) *'none of the villagers who have constructed this Plan appear to have attended any training for this task'*

While no specific training was taken to undertake this task, three of the team have significant experience in putting together questionnaires. One helped create and analyse several online surveys for a running club with more than 2,000 members. Another was involved in the creation of the 2013 Casterton village plan, as well as the aborted 2016 plan. Another has had a 30 year academic career where they designed and analysed questionnaires as part of their research brief. In addition, the software used to construct the questionnaire offered advice on best practice.

ii) *'the villagers have never been consulted regarding the need or motive for devising this questionnaire'*

All villagers were canvassed for their input about what should be included in the questionnaire before it was put together. The team were encouraged to have received many replies with thoughts and suggestions about what should be included in the questionnaire. This input was diligently reviewed and incorporated into the questionnaire.

iii) *'the last questionnaire, asking for ideas, was sent to all villagers in 2016 - Minute 16/43 - and 39 responses received - Minute 16/60 - when Cllr. Humphris and the other Parish Council members removed themselves from analysing the results'*

As you note, the last questionnaire was 9 years ago and there was no final output. This is one of the reasons why the current team think it timely to try again. Unfortunately, due to disagreements within the 2016 project team about how to analyse the results and on the back of a low response rate, the team splintered. As you have pointed out, in the minutes some members removed themselves from the project. Also recorded in the minutes was that *'the remaining 3 working group members intend to progress the gathering of information from the community'*. Nothing seems to have transpired.

iv) *'what information has been assembled already regarding Casterton, its size, profile of villagers, numbers of properties and how they are used: this questionnaire answers none of this'*

The questionnaire is not a census. Its purpose is not to collect such data. The questionnaire will elicit some very limited demographic information, e.g. main home, second home, holiday let, work here etc, which will be used to help analyse the data.

v) *'this questionnaire is presented well, but does not focus on this very small rural village in old Westmorland and the aspects of everyday village life pertinent to us all'*

Thank you for the positive feedback. If you have identified pertinent aspects of 'everyday village life' that have been missed, when you complete the questionnaire, please leave notes in one of the open text boxes so that they can be taken into consideration.

vi) *'there is no assessment of the people targeted in this questionnaire - age groups, employment status, dependant on public transport for moving about, the Council tax band of respondents'*

As noted in the first letter sent to residents introducing the questionnaire and in the second letter announcing the roll out of the questionnaire, the village community was identified / targeted as residents, second home owners, businesses, the school and local farms.

vii) *'no predicted account of the confidence respondents should have in the data collected and analysed because those who compiled the questionnaire either do not live in the village or are 'incomers' and know little about the village, reducing the validity of this exercise'*

The team consider the contribution of, in the author's words, 'incomers' and longer term residents in equal measure. As noted above, all villagers were canvassed for input about what should be included in the questionnaire. The team consists of a mix of people who have had both very long term experience of the village, and people new to the village who can bring a different viewpoint with fresh eyes and enthusiasm. One of the team owns a second home in the village which offers a different perspective.

viii) *'the questionnaire has not avoided bias in the questions asked'*

The project team has done its best to avoid bias in the questions asked, primarily by seeking input from the village about what they would like to see in the questionnaire.

ix) *'no open questions that would encourage novel and new ideas to be put forward'*

To ensure that data received can be analysed, the questions are mostly 'closed'. However, there are also many open text boxes asking open questions such as 'What else and where?', 'If no, what could be better?', and, 'Anything else?' in order to capture other thoughts.

x) *'for ease of analysis, the questions are mostly closed to provide quantitative rather than qualitative data'*

Agreed, see team response to ix) above.

xi) *'it is suggested that respondents take about fifteen minutes to complete the questionnaire, that does not encourage thoughtful, meaningful answers'*

A balance has to be struck between the length of a questionnaire and putting off people because it is too long. Some responders will offer their support but want to answer questions quickly, while others may want to provide more 'thoughtful, meaningful answers'. Within the free text boxes, the latter cohort has ample opportunity to provide such feedback, and take as long as they wish.

xii) *'some leading questions are asked which indicate villagers of long standing in this community have had little to do with the questions being asked'*

As noted in response vii) the team is a blend of people who have a long and a shorter term connections with the village. Furthermore, the whole community was asked their opinion about what should be included in the questionnaire in the first communication, and their feedback was incorporated into the questionnaire.

xiii) *'there has been no 'dummy run' before the questionnaire was sent to all villagers'*

10 people trialled the questionnaire before it was finalised and improvements were made during this process.

xiv) *'difficulties exist when completing the questionnaire using a computer'*

If you have any difficulties completing the questionnaire online, please advise us using the contact email so that we can look into it.

Transport Section

At this point, the author of the letter moved away from reasonable questions and concerns to using inappropriate and aggressive language. Calling the compilers, all of them volunteers, 'ignorant' is not acceptable. Were the author known to the team, they would have respectfully requested a written apology.

It seems that author has a specific interest in transport. The thrust of the survey questions in this section was to try to establish that IF other modes of transport were available other than the car, would villagers be inclined to use it. If for example there appears to be a lot of interest in using a taxi, a post questionnaire team could be assigned the task of working out how this might be achieved.

'The Section on Transport, Page 9, shows just how ignorant the compilers of this questionnaire are, because:

i) *'you should have been aware of the profile of villagers who use public transport, those who are not inclined to use their car or use a car only for part of their onward journey;'*

We respectfully disagree that this information would have been useful. To obtain the information you suggest would have required a separate questionnaire.

ii) *'you need to know why villagers have to use their cars rather than buses to get to Kendal, Lancaster, or further afield;'*

We do not agree that with this assertion.

iii) *'you have no idea of the size of buses that ply the bus routes from Kirkby Lonsdale to Kendal, Lancaster or elsewhere. To think their routes could be altered to include Casterton is pure nonsense, and shows none of you use this form of public transport to move around;'*

You are correct, like most people in Casterton, none of the team use the local bus network. As noted above, the thrust of the survey questions in this section was to try to establish that IF other modes of transport were available other than the car, would villagers be inclined to use it, or is there an indifference because owning a car is now so ubiquitous.

iv) *'I suspect none of you can name all the providers of public transport in or around Kirkby Lonsdale, relative to the service they provide to schools or general public;'*

The team does not consider that knowing the names of the transport provider was important information for preparing the questionnaire.

v) *'none of you know the commercial objectives of the companies delivering bus services to Kirkby Lonsdale. Why not? That would suggest a practical way forward, rather than ".. diverting buses to Casterton."'*

The team does not consider that knowing commercial objectives of the companies delivering bus services to Kirkby Lonsdale was important information for preparing the questionnaire. If the survey results indicate that many of the villagers are interested in using buses, then this knowledge could become useful.

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