



Background and Aims of the Consultation

The background to the conversation programme carried out by Community Roots CIC for the Longford Village Hall Group and the Longford Parish Council is centred around a sum of money from Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended.

'Contributions can be sought from developers towards the costs of providing community and social infrastructure, the need for which has arisen as a result of a new development taking place'

Following on from the initial meeting with the Steering group Community Roots CIC, who are grass roots engagements specialists, were engaged to undertake a Community Conversation Programme. The aim of which was too:

- **Find out from residents of Longford what they need or would like for their community.**
- **To find out from residents their ideas for the development of the Village Hall.**
- **To identify people with ideas who would get involved.**

Method: How was it done?

Community Roots CIC works using a method called Community Organising which has lots of aspects to its delivery. In Longford we used a neighbourhood-based approach which begins with knocking on doors and listening deeply to the motivations and concerns of residents based on their lives living in their community. The aim is to bring together residents with shared interests, help them develop their confidence and sense of collective power. By identifying common goals and developing a strategy to achieve those goals. These actions are collectively known as community action – organised activity that seeks to improve health and well-being, develop community spirit and nurture a feeling of commitment to others and to the community.

But how did we do it?

Over the following months we worked weekly in Longford knocking on doors and speaking to as many residents as we could, to hear from them what it was like living in Longford. We knocked on 781 doors, covering all the identified areas in Longford. We met lots of very interesting people who spared us the time to go through our conversation framework. We recorded 190 conversations with residents using our conversation framework that was agreed prior to the commencement of the work. We also asked permission to take contact details from those that would like to become more involved.



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At this stage it is good to acknowledge that there are three levels of involvement:

1. Having a conversation using the framework at the doorstep
2. Agreeing to give contact details to stay informed of activities, events and projects that will happen as a result of this community conversation programme.
3. Those residents that have expressed an interest in getting involved in volunteering, at this stage it is important to stress that all actions are valued. Residents can be put off by thinking it will take up all their time but any contributions big and small are important in communities.

We also did a community pop up in the playing field, at our second attempt as the weather was not with us on our first attempt, the pop up gave us the opportunity to talk to dog walkers who make up quite a large part of the Longford community. We spent a day knocking doors in Sandford Lane and this meant we went to the last house on the furthest tip of the area. We also attempted to engage with the travelling community however although we did manage to have conversations with a couple of residents there it was not easy as most of the gates were locked and dogs were running loose, which is an occupational hazard, but also a barrier to having conversations. We were able to be given a contact number and so given more time maybe we could have had more success. This could also be contrasted with the new development where our ratio was 4:1 when it came to getting the door answered.

Using this framework enabled us to undertake an analysis of our findings at the end of our door knocking phase, and recommended priorities for the Village Hall and Parish Council to consider.



Narrative throughout this document comes from the comments that we heard on our door knocking phase when having conversations with residents.



LOVES: Things that can be built on:

Overall residents find Longford a quiet place to live, they have good neighbours who are friendly, and they look out for each other. There is still a village feel even with the housing development making Longford much bigger. It is a place that has a good reputation, a nice area to live and There are well families who area for a long have their indicating that community.

Longford is close countryside and rural community, nearby for dog walkers. mentioned how walk into town proximity of Oxstalls Sports Particularly open spaces and in easy walking where residents

Longford has links, the access

was felt to be advantageous either to the South West or the Midlands/North. The bus service is felt to be good with access to Cheltenham and Gloucester at regular intervals. Residents liked that the location was also far enough out of town to have its own identity.

There was felt to be a good community spirit, Longford also feels relatively safe with a feeling of a low crime rate. Longford also has good family facilities with local nurseries and a new local school that was built as part of the development. This school is very keen to be part of the Longford community. The new estate looks neat and tidy and the balance of types of housing in Longford is good.

The village hall is thought to be a good venue for parties and wedding receptions. One section of the community appreciated being able to use it as some people discriminate against them when they know who they are. Residents enjoy the events at the village hall especially family events like the Easter Egg Hunt.



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CONCERNS: Things that need tackling/addressing

The biggest concern expressed to us in Longford was the fear of losing its village feel by being overdeveloped. Adding to this was a dread of losing more of the countryside especially the open fields and hedgerows and its implications for the environment and local wildlife. Residents were worried that Longford would continue to lose open spaces and parks to building developments and that Longford will have more mature trees cut down. There was anxiety expressed of more developments on the flood plains and the devastation that flooding brings with it. It was felt that if you moved out of our house then your property was vulnerable to looting. It was felt that building developments caused tensions between new and old residents, this was mentioned by both sections of the community.

Traffic congestion followed over development and residents were also concerned about the air pollution during key congestion times. Many residents citing the increase in the volume of traffic being caused by the new developments which hadn't been planned well enough for the existing roads to cope with the volumes of traffic. Several roads were said to be 'rat runs' and this was worse since the new estate had been built, there were key times when this was worse and residents that we spoke to also said they were often caught in traffic trying to get to and from work.

Linked to this were major concerns about the speed of traffic, mainly mentioned were Longford Lane and Tewkesbury Road. As well as speeding there were concerns about road safety and the state of the roads. Residents living on Tewkesbury Road mentioned the recently resurfaced road and some thought that the surface that had been used was noisier than the old surface, there were also claims that before the speed limit was marked on the road but since being resurfaced it was not there and it was thought to make a difference as there was no speed warning for drivers that already drive too fast. The pavements were constantly mentioned as a problem either too narrow in places where traffic could be heavy or fast depending on the time of day. Also, pavements that were overgrown making the situation even worse especially for those pushing prams, buggies, wheelchairs etc. The state of the verges was a concern with one row of houses opposite the new development who all said that the verges had not been cut since the new development began. This was on Longford Lane opposite what will be the shopping facility. High levels of Council Tax were said to be disappointing considering that some residents felt that Tewkesbury Borough Council did very little to keep Longford's appearance acceptable. Complaints that are made about the roads, parking and general lack of maintenance of foot paths seem to be ignored so residents don't feel listened to.

Anti-social behaviour was a growing concern with youths on bikes being mentioned regularly. Some young people that we spoke to mentioned bullying going on in the parks. There was a view that the young people were not necessarily from Longford and that it was because there wasn't enough for young people to do to blame for the rise in unacceptable

behaviour and criminal damage. Residents were concerned about the number of vehicles that were being damaged sometimes because of inconsiderate parking, also vehicle break ins were mentioned but mainly residents had heard from neighbours about a car being broken in to, so felt this was a problem.

Dogs came up a lot, mostly positive but some were not so happy with the number of dogs running loose where playing. Dog muck also lots of residents acknowledging that many were very responsible but those that are not. On the development a field next to popular with dog walkers residents stated that it was muck. Residents also the footballers should not the pitch of dog muck could play football and concerned about health for players.

Other concerns mentioned inconsiderate parking on Rugby home matches, lack concerns for the GP surgery

houses are built. Buses are more crowded since the new houses and it is sometimes difficult to get on the bus or get a seat once on the bus which particularly affected older residents. The lighting by the bus stops was mentioned by some residents. Residents say they don't see the police patrolling the area. Comments were recorded about the length of time it was taking to spend the 106-planning gain funding and there were concerns that it would be lost to the area if it wasn't spent soon. Importantly there was a high percentage of residents who said they had no concerns at all. On the whole people were optimistic that positive things could be done about their concerns and had enjoyed being able to express their opinions. In community organising terms there is a good feeling that people can be moved into action if their concerns are taken seriously.



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VISION: What people want Longford to be like in the future

This question made residents pause and think - it puts a person on the spot a little. However, overwhelmingly residents would like Longford to stay the same with no more developments to give the community a chance to stabilise and regain a sense of community bringing old and new residents together, which was important to many residents.

We heard how residents wanted no more changes, most said they didn't want any more developments. It was hoped that it would remain a nice place to live, where neighbours knew each other and there was a sense of belonging to a community.

Residents wanted to keep the open spaces, the play fields and parks and still have access to fields for walking with their families and dogs. It is a good environment for families, for bringing up your children and they wanted to keep that feeling by the area not getting any bigger over the next 5 to 10 years.

It was hoped that there would be more activities for everyone from babies to the elderly, this would include outside activities especially for young people. There were residents that didn't really know what their vision was for the area and a small amount that didn't care or didn't have any vision.

Residents wanted to keep the good community spirit, some wanted to get the village feel back even though the area is much bigger already. They wanted to see the village hall upgraded so that more activities could be held there so the space was used more. There was a hope that there was no more tension between the old and new residents.

Residents wanted to see adequate infrastructure, roads, shops, a chemist and doctor's surgery and a family friendly pub were all things that were mentioned specifically. It was hoped that Tewkesbury Borough Council would take more notice/interest in Longford. It was felt that the local authorities and MP should have considered the impact on residents that the increase in homes and residents would have on the existing roads, it was felt that there was a need for better road planning to improve the flow of traffic to improve the air quality and decrease the pollution especially at peak times when traffic was congested.

Residents wanted to see the pathways improved and the verges properly maintained. There would be less litter as residents felt ownership of the area and it would be clean and tidy. It was also important to residents that it would still feel like a safe and peaceful place to live.

Other things mentioned were a hope that the roads would be safer, with new crossings in operation on Longford Lane and Tewkesbury Road. That a business in one area was made to consider their neighbours or it was gone. That dog owners would be more responsible. Increased fear that if there were more developments that the risk of flooding would be even greater. That Longford would lose the village hall if a community centre was built on the new development and then the land would be sold for more housing.



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OWNERSHIP: Do people feel they have a say in Longford's future

Residents generally answered this question by thinking about who or how they might go about reporting concerns or finding out information plus voting to have a say in Longford's future. It was at this point in the conversation we also asked if residents could think of other ways of being involved for example volunteering, campaigning or attending meetings.

In the main residents said that they would know how or who to get in touch with if they needed to. The Parish Council newsletter was mentioned, and residents found it useful for being kept informed. Although there were as many residents that said they would not know how or who to get in touch with (there was a very small percentage between the two answers).

Residents said they would go online to either google an answer to their questions, to find out who to contact or to find out which layer of local authority would deal with their questions i.e. Parish Council, Borough Council or County Council. The Facebook page was found to be very useful for information and sharing news and views. Very few residents knew of the Village Hall website and those that did said they had problems getting through to the number on it in the past.

Residents also said they felt more informed from talking to their neighbours, when they received the newsletters and leaflets. Others say that they use the notice boards to stay informed and felt it was important that the notice boards were kept up to date. There was a mixed reaction to who knew or didn't know about the Village Hall group and that included not being sure of what they did. On the other hand, there were residents that knew of the group and thought they did a great job. The Parish Council also came out with mixed reactions some residents saying they were very fit for purpose and others saying that they had tried contacting them and hadn't felt listened too so had lost faith in them. Residents told us of broken trust due to the campaigning that had not been successful over the building on flood plains. This was partly why residents had not felt that they did not have influence in Longford's future.

When we were having conversations about volunteering many elderly residents felt that 'they had already done all that' and some residents said they keep themselves to themselves and it wasn't for them. Many others said they would consider getting involved in the future, or for helping to organise one off events. Residents said they may be able to help with fundraising, litter picking, or going to meetings. Residents also said that if they knew of events they would support them by attending especially if they were family events, the Easter Egg Hunt had been very popular and it was mentioned many times.



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ACTIVITY & PROJECT IDEAS: Ideas for community action

We heard lots of ideas for possible solutions and actions that residents would like to see and they fell into four different sections – Ideas for inside the Village Hall, external to the village hall and ideas for capital spend, then those ideas and activities that the Parish Council could assist with, either things within their powers to address or those that needed brokering or negotiating solutions with the local authority.



With the ideas for inside the village hall we also tried to look at who the target audience would/might be the categories are:

All ages

The most popular idea for the whole community, residents of all ages was a café, the village hall should be a community hub with a paid worker to oversee the management of the space and developing community ideas and actions. The community would like to see regular seasonal events like the Easter Egg hunt, suggestions were – Halloween party to stop residents being worried about trick or treaters, a bonfire night celebration not necessarily fireworks but toffee apples, hot dogs, chilli and baked potatoes, with appropriate games like apple dunking etc. A Christmas party to bring the community together and a summer fete. Tabletop sales and car boot sales were also repeatedly suggested with a lot of residents remembering how nice it was to walk around them and see their neighbours for a chat, it was felt that the car boots broke down social isolation and gave the community a reason to come together as well as raising funds.



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Families

Parent toddlers and baby groups were a popular suggestion. Residents suggested quizzes and social evenings for the whole family, maybe the Village Hall could be open after school so families could meet up and do homework with their children. A children's arts and craft group and affordable holiday activities ran by the parents were also suggested. One parent wanted to organise activities for children with diabetes and to raise more awareness of childhood diabetes.

Health and Well Being for the community

Residents of different ages would like to see dance, keep fit and yoga all being mentioned. In a cross over with the capital suggestions the floor would need upgrading for dance groups and a separate yoga section was suggested. A gardening club for flowers and vegetables and to make the exterior of the village hall look nicer. Residents asked about rugby posts for the children, a football camp, something for girl's netball, rounders, football, rugby etc. In the main many residents wanted to see more for children. A community bar-b-que, outdoor gym equipment, walking groups both for walkers and parents with pushchairs. Community litter picks for the whole community was a popular suggestion and activities for the older residents which would break down social isolation. Ideas such as, Tea Dances, lunch clubs, whist drives, beetle drives etc.

Village Hall Committee and Parish Council

Many residents said that Facebook is a good source of information for events happening and the Parish Council Newsletter was very informative. It was important to residents that the notice boards were kept up to date as they did use them as a source of information especially the dog walkers. It was felt that the Village Hall should look welcoming to all community members. The Village Hall committee should advertise the Hall effectively to attract bookings for children's birthday parties as most parents said it was a good size for a party and the kitchen was well equipped although for some the deposit was a bit high and meant that they were excluded from hiring the hall. One section of the community appreciated being able to use the hall as they face prejudice in a lot of venues. A licenced bar was also mentioned, and residents thought that the Village Hall committee might be able to apply for a temporary licence occasionally. The Village Hall was certainly felt as a venue that had potential for bringing the community together and many residents said they should make more effort to support the activities as many communities don't have such a facility and so the Village Hall should be appreciated more. There were concerns that the Section 106 money would be lost because the planning was taking to long, and other areas were after the money for their own communities. A fundraising idea was suggested which might help the parking congestion on Gloucester Rugby home matches. It was suggested that the car park could be opened and charging for parking on home match days could raise money for the Village Hall.

These ideas were suggested by many residents and the capital items that residents suggested were as follows:

- The Hall made bigger
- Create separate rooms with a room divider
- Update the changing rooms
- Spring flooring to attract lettings by dance and ballet class providers



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- A concreted path around the field for roller blades, scooters, tricycles and learners on bikes
- A covered dog friendly space so the dog walkers could use the café if it were opened.

Parish Council (possibly broker/influence the local authority)

Overwhelmingly the suggestions for activities/campaigns/social action was about traffic congestion, the lack of places to cross safely on the local roads and speed limits.

Residents want to see speed limit reductions and traffic calming on Longford Lane, Tewkesbury Road, Sivell Road (which is used as a rat run) and Winterbourne Road. Vehicle Activated Signs which flash the speed the vehicle is travelling at were felt to make a difference. The need for proper crossings on Longford Lane and Tewkesbury Road were felt necessary for those who were elderly, sight impaired, wheelchair users, parents with pushchairs and children and young people. It was felt these crossings should be by the bus stops. On the 'new' estate it was felt that speed signs were needed, and parking needed to be improved with double yellow lines on junctions being reviewed and this included the whole area. Residents would like to see more traffic enforcement officers and police patrols. Other ideas suggested were benches on Longford Lane, a family pub, residents wanted more information about the new traffic route being developed. An upgrade of the play park facility in the Village Hall field was needed.

Conclusions and Observations

Longford is a community that is stretched out and is seen by many as separated by certain factors –

- ❖ Its geographical spread
- ❖ The mixture of New and Old housing stock, causing the 'village feel' to be put under strain.
- ❖ Separation by main roads which are barriers to belonging i.e. Tewkesbury Road
- ❖ Our observations were very positive as we saw that:
- ❖ Residents are passionate about Longford, it is seen to be a great place to live, a good place to bring up your family.
- ❖ Residents are willing to volunteer and make a difference to their community if there is support and flexibility to enable them to contribute.

Next step Opportunities

- ❖ There is an opportunity using the evidence gathered to substantiate claims for improvements to services in Longford delivered by the local authorities. It would feed well into the Parish Plan.
- ❖ There is an opportunity to increase the number of residents involved in community action
- ❖ Community Roots CIC would be willing to deliver further training to enhance residents' experiences of taking action in their communities
- ❖ Community Roots CIC could continue working in the area by accessing further funding being offered by CO Ltd (national body for Community Organisers) to bring together Local



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Community Organising groups. These are 21 people signed up as members of the Community Organising National body which works in communities all over England.

- ❖ Awards for All funding from the National Lottery could also be accessed with the amount of resident led evidence that has been collected.

That concludes our report, Community Roots CIC has enjoyed talking with the community of Longford and would like to thank everyone for taking time to have conversations with us on their doorsteps, in their homes and whilst taking their dogs for a walk.

Penny Liddicot – Senior Organiser and Director - Community Roots CIC

