

JANUARY 2019 BUSINESS SURVEY SUMMARY FOR THE ALDERLEY EDGE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Introduction

A Cheshire Business Survey was done in 2017 with a representative sample of 752 out of 17,000 businesses in Cheshire East (4.42%).

This business survey was undertaken to further understand how Alderley Edge businesses can be helped through the developing Neighbourhood Plan policies up to 2030. It seeks to identify their challenges, issues and opportunities as well as where their customers are coming from in order to create the right conditions for local businesses to flourish and grow.

Methodology

At a Love Alderley meeting in March 2018, businesses were given an outline of what a Neighbourhood Plan can achieve and its relevance to businesses and the local economy now and up to 2030. Issues and challenges were discussed in more detail at a business focus group in July 2018.

This helped with developing the Local Economy outline policies, highlighted at subsequent Love Alderley business meetings and at a public consultation event in November 2018.

In January 2019 an online questionnaire was distributed to all businesses on the Love Alderley circulation list, publicised via the Parish newsletter, the village news website, the Neighbourhood Plan working groups, social media and word of mouth. This included large and small businesses in a variety of sectors, with premises or self-employed home-based businesses.

It should be acknowledged that it is difficult to estimate total number of businesses active in Alderley Edge, given that not all are registered as limited companies, registered for VAT or pay business rates in the village, and some are likely to be 'home based workers'. There were 197 premises-based businesses in 2017 (from Valuation Office 2017 rateable value tables), some of which may be self-employed individuals occupying upper floor offices. Of the 17,000 businesses estimated in the 2017 Cheshire East Business Survey for the whole of Cheshire East, a sample of 752 was used. Based on that and as a percentage of population size, a conservative estimate of Alderley Edge businesses, including non premises-based businesses would be 241, however there are likely to be more home-based businesses not accounted for. On the above bases of this estimate, the business survey is estimated to account for 14.5% of the overall active businesses in the Neighbourhood Plan boundary.

Business Profiles of Respondents

25% of respondents were self-employed/home-based businesses. A range of sectors including retail, health and beauty, professional services, creative & IT, leisure and restaurants were represented.

The majority of responses (69%) came from small businesses with between 1-10 employees, 15% with 11-20 employees and 11% with 21-30 employees. This substantiates the fact that Alderley Edge is home to mainly smaller independent businesses with only a few larger employers.

54% of those replying had been established over 10 years, 20% had been in business 5-10 years, 14% between 2 and 4 years with 12% in business for less than 2 years. This demonstrates that Alderley Edge is home to a large number of well-established businesses but still welcomes newcomers.

Customer Catchment Area

46% of businesses responding had over half of their customers coming from Alderley Edge with another 20% having between 26% and 50% of customers from the local catchment area. A third of respondents reported less than 25% of their customers came from Alderley Edge. A substantial number of customers do appear to come from the local catchment area although this does not appear to be borne out from the

parking survey analysis of where visitors are arriving from. This may be because of the type of businesses who responded to the questionnaire.

In terms of online trading only, 57% of respondents did not do any form of online trading with another 20% doing less than 25% online. Only 12% of respondents did over 50% of business online. When more and more people are browsing and shopping on the internet and a multichannel approach to business is becoming more popular to increase sales and awareness, it is interesting that this does not appear to be the case with these Alderley Edge businesses although this may be because of some of the types of business that have responded, ie food and drink, health and beauty, consultancy etc.

Future Plans

57% of respondents would be staying the same, 22% plan to expand and 21% preferred not to say.

Transport to Work

Most respondents had the majority of their employees living outside Alderley Edge, especially the larger employers and some cited the need to travel on a regular basis from their work site. 49% considered public transport inadequate and lengthy because of a lack of direct links. Only 34% considered it adequate. For 17% it was not applicable, possibly because they were home based workers.

54% considered parking inadequate for staff, 34% felt it was adequate and for 12% it was not applicable.

Improvements that would help Businesses

Better use and upkeep of vacant units topped the list, with faster broadband and better mobile signal coverage close behind. Environmental improvements and better pedestrian/access links as well as enhanced locational signage were also cited as important.

Free parking was mentioned by nearly all respondents as something that would be beneficial for their business.

Type of Business Mix

Most respondents wanted to continue to see a mix of retail, health, creative service, bars and restaurants to provide vibrancy and sustainability.

Help for Home Based Businesses

A specific question for home-based businesses to assess their needs elicited the following response. The majority were in favour of a coworking/collaborative space or business meeting space.

Recommendations

The majority of businesses are well established and likely to remain so or have expansion plans.

The survey analysis indicates that transport issues (lack of suitable parking for employees and customers as well as inadequate public transport provision) are a serious problem for businesses, also causing productivity and recruitment issues.

Faster broadband speed and better mobile signal coverage were cited as key improvements that would assist businesses. Environmental improvements and enhanced pedestrian links and signage would also help businesses as would better use and maintenance of vacant units. A co-working/collaboration space and meeting space for home-based workers would help this growing sector.

For businesses, a variety of different types of uses will create a pleasant experience for people and help local traders retain and attract customers now and in the future.