

# Skelmersdale Town Centre



**West Lancashire District Council**

**Draft Masterplan Consultation Assessment Report**







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## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report examines the methods of consultation and the outcome of that consultation for the draft Skelmersdale Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document. A wide variety of consultation techniques were employed but most feedback was elicited from the questionnaire that was sent to over 16,000 local households and which illustrated proposals for the redevelopment of the town centre and asked for feedback on these proposals. Analysis of the results is summarised in the sections below.
- 1.2 **93%** of respondents support the proposals to create a new pedestrian friendly high street with a range of shops, cafes, bars, restaurants, a cinema and leisure and community facilities; **6%** do not support these proposals; **2%** expressed no opinion
- 1.3 **85%** of respondents support the proposals to move the College, the Library, the Swimming Pool, the Sports Centre and the Ecumenical Centre to new purpose-built facilities within the new town centre; **8%** are opposed to these proposals; and **6%** were of no opinion
- 1.4 **91%** of respondents support the proposals to develop parts of the Tawd Valley for recreational and leisure uses providing careful thought is taken to protect its natural environment and character; **6%** disagreed with these proposals; and **3%** had no opinion
- 1.5 **92%** of respondents support the proposals to create new routes, links and car parks to allow better access to the town centre; **5%** do not support these proposals; and **4%** expressed no opinion
- 1.6 **90%** of respondents support the proposals to move the bus station at the Concourse Shopping Centre to the new location at ground floor level and improve accessibility and links to the town centre; **5%** are opposed to these proposals; and **5%** were of no opinion
- 1.7 **73%** of respondents support the proposals for the provision of new homes in the town centre as part of the wider town centre regeneration, which would also involve the clearance of the Firbeck estate and the development of land adjacent to Yewdale, to create a range of modern and family housing; **14%** disagreed with these proposals; and **13%** had no opinion
- 1.8 **68%** of respondents support the proposals to demolish and redevelop the Firbeck estate to allow the town centre area to be planned and redeveloped as a whole, providing residents are fully compensated and given alternative accommodation options; **17%** do not support these proposals; and **16%** expressed no opinion
- 1.9 **80%** of respondents support the proposals to develop open areas of land near Yewdale for carefully designed housing, providing this improves the Tawd Valley and funds new public and leisure facilities in the town centre; **12%** are opposed to these proposals; and **8%** had no opinion.

\*Please note as the percentages in the results' columns have been rounded up, the sum of these percentages may not always add up to exactly 100%.

## 2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 This report details the consultation programme undertaken by West Lancashire District Council concerning the proposed regeneration of Skelmersdale Town Centre, as set out in the draft Skelmersdale Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document.
- 2.2 This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), once adopted, will detail a framework for how this regeneration should occur when determining all planning applications for the town centre.
- 2.3 It identifies the key development principles of the project, including the mix and scale of different land-use and how these fit together to create an integrated, functional and vibrant town centre. It also deals with the important issue of urban design, to be considered through the preparation of an accompanying Design Code, and sets out how new travel links and pedestrian routes will make the town centre more accessible and create better connections with surrounding estates.
- 2.4 This 'Masterplan' for Skelmersdale Town Centre marks a key stage in the process of regenerating the town - the largest scheme in West Lancashire since the creation of the New Town itself - and represents an opportunity to learn from design problems of the past and to create a user friendly and vibrant town centre.
- 2.5 The proposals in the Masterplan differ significantly from previous proposals for the town centre in that the scheme is in no way dependent on external grant-funding either regionally, nationally or from Europe. The development and sale of new housing as part of the project will provide the finance necessary to secure many of the less commercial aspects such as the new library, Ecumenical Centre and sports centre, and some difficult choices may need to be made to ensure a town centre that is fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, both for residents and visitors.
- 2.6 With a Development Agreement now signed with regeneration specialist St Modwen Properties Plc, the Council is confident that this Masterplan is deliverable and achievable within a realistic timescale.
- 2.7 From the outset, the Council has sought wide public and stakeholder involvement in the project, which began in 2005 when the Skelmersdale Vision was drawn up following extensive consultation with local people. In 2007, initial options were developed and the Council carried out further consultation. Comments received were then taken in to account and used as a foundation for drawing up the Masterplan proposals and it was these proposals that West Lancashire District Council have been addressing during the latest phase of consultation.
- 2.8 Between 13 March and 24 April 2008, a six-week public consultation was held to identify what local residents and businesses thought of the Masterplan proposals.
- 2.9 As the Masterplan includes the proposal that Firbeck and Findon should be demolished to create space for new housing, a specific element of the consultation was targeted towards those residents and businesses located there.

## 3.0 The Role of Community Engagement

### The Policy Context

- 3.1 Planning shapes the places where people work and live, so it is right that people should take an active part in the planning process.
- 3.2 West Lancashire District Council and its partners recognise that national planning policy is evolving to make community involvement an integral and important component of planning. The Council is aware that the decisions it makes set a precedent for other developments in the area and that it has a responsibility to adhere to best practice at all times. Therefore the approach to consultation for the proposals for the regeneration of Skelmersdale Town Centre have been informed by latest Government policy and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 3.3 Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 1: 'Creating Sustainable Communities', finalised in February 2005 and 'Community Involvement in Planning; the Government's Objectives' place heavy emphasis on the importance of consulting with local communities:

*"One of the principles of sustainable development is to involve the community in developing the vision for its area. Communities should be asked to offer ideas about what that vision should be, and how it can be achieved. Where there are external constraints that may impact on the vision and future development of the area (for example, those that may arise from planning policies set at the regional or national level) these should be made clear from the outset. Local communities should be given the opportunity to...be consulted on proposals for development."*  
(Planning Policy Statement 1, Paragraph 41, ODPM, now referred to as the DCLG, Department for Communities and Local Government)

- 3.4 West Lancashire District Council have attempted to adopt an approach, which is fully compliant with national policy and reflects the local policy context as defined by the local authority itself.

## **4.0 Objectives of the Consultation Process**

- To involve as many people as possible in Skelmersdale in the consultation programme
- To provide the local population with information about the proposals in the Masterplan, enabling them to have an input into the scheme throughout the planning process. The consultation was aimed at maintaining lines of communication between the local community and the local council and to enable any potential concerns/issues to be addressed
- To allow local residents to help redefine the town for future generations by providing input that will ultimately form the town's final Masterplan
- To establish partnerships and joint working with local community stakeholders in order to help coordinate subsequent efforts in community regeneration
- To accord with the guidelines and recommendations of national and local policy with regard to consultation.

## 5.0 The Proposals

- 5.1 This latest phase of consultation outlines the proposals for Skelmersdale Town Centre. The Masterplan shows the features that local people have said they want in the town centre - a new high street, more shops, another supermarket, a new leisure centre, community facilities, improvements to the Tawd Valley and new housing - and illustrates how these key features will fit together to create the integrated, functional and vibrant town centre that Skelmersdale deserves.
- 5.2 The proposals have been arranged around four categories, which are as follows:
- Tawd Valley
  - Shopping and leisure
  - Housing
  - Transport
- 5.3 The Masterplan Consultation Paper, which was delivered to every house in Skelmersdale, gave detailed information about each of these aspects.
- 5.4 During the visioning exercise conducted in 2004/5 a number of key principles were established that provide fundamental building blocks to the regeneration of Skelmersdale town centre. These Key Principles are:
- To ensure high quality design will be key to creating a vibrant town centre
  - To make Skelmersdale a leisure, recreational and retail centre of excellence within the North West
  - To ensure the parks and open space in and around the town centre are integral to its regeneration and are more accessible to Skelmersdale's communities and visitors
  - To reconnect the town centre and community through the building of new roads and footpaths
  - To increase the number of residents within the town centre and diversify the style and range of residential accommodation available
- 5.5 These five principles formed the basis for preparing the key issues and options for the development of the town centre, on which consultation took place in 2007. Working with its Partners, the Council has taken account of the feedback from the local community, stakeholders and other interested parties in preparing the draft Supplementary Planning Document and Masterplan for further consultation. These five key principles and ideas have continued to evolve into the identification of preferred options for proposals within the Masterplan.

## 6.0 Methodology and Programme

### Methodology

- 6.1 The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act requires each local planning authority to prepare a 'Statement of Community Involvement' (SCI), which formally sets out its commitment to involving the public in planning matters and the way it will ensure this.
- 6.2 The SCI is to specify how the authority will meet the minimum requirements for community involvement as defined in the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004.
- 6.3 In order to ensure that stakeholders and the local community were provided with every opportunity to contribute their views on the proposals, the consultation programme was designed and organised in line with the West Lancashire Statement of Community Involvement.
- 6.4 The Statement of Community Involvement for West Lancashire District:
  - Sets out which documents will make up the West Lancashire LDF
  - Sets out how the Council's vision for community involvement is linked with its Community Strategy and other strategies currently in place
  - Aims to combine and co-ordinate planning consultation with other consultation the Council carries out
  - Explains the legal requirements of the new planning system
  - Lays down the standards to be achieved by the Council in involving the community in the preparation and review of all of its LDF documents, and in the determination of planning applications (Development Control)
  - Describes the various stages in document preparation when the Council will involve the community, the different groups to be contacted at each stage and for each type of document, and the different ways in which the groups will be involved at each stage
  - Explains how the Council will provide feedback on any comments received;
  - Provides a list of the organisations and community groups that the Council will consult, both formally and informally.
- 6.5 The Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) provides more detailed guidance on policies contained within the development plan, and is subject to the consultation arrangements and standards set out in the Statement of Community Involvement.

## Preparation of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

6.6 West Lancashire District Council Statement of Community Involvement, section 3.17 states SPDs go through the following stages in their preparation:

- Evidence gathering
- Identification of issues
- Pre-draft community involvement on issues (optional)
- Prepare draft SPD
- Community involvement on draft SPD (*Regulation 17*)
- Finalise SPD
- Adoption and incorporation of the document into the LDF
- Monitoring and review

6.7 Section 3.18 of the Statement of Community Involvement states:

*“There will be opportunities for interested parties to get involved during the Pre-Draft and Draft stages of the SPD's preparation. Note that the first stage is not a statutory requirement, but is generally seen as good practice, and where appropriate, the Council will seek to carry it out in some form.”*

### Opportunities for involvement in preparing Supplementary Planning Documents

Stage	Consultation methods to be used	Groups who will be targeted
Pre-Draft Consultation ( <i>Note - optional stage; this “informal” stage of consultation will not be carried out for all SPDs.</i> )	We will advertise the consultation exercise on the Council's website and will carry out the consultation by using at least one of the following: a questionnaire, an Issues and Options Paper, distributing leaflets at various accessible locations around the District, or through holding presentations /public displays at accessible locations across the District. We will also send letters and emails to inform interested parties of the consultation exercise.	We will target those groups whom we feel are specific to the particular topic or area covered by the document.
Outcome of Consultation: The comments received during Stage 1 will be used to produce a draft document which takes account of the issues raised during the pre-draft consultation exercise. In certain cases, it may include a number of different options; this depends on the type and scope of the SPD in question.		
Stage	Consultation methods to be used	Groups who will be targeted
Draft Document (Regulation 17)	We will advertise the availability of the draft document on our website and in the local press. We will make copies of the draft document available at the Council offices, in the locations listed in <i>Appendix 5</i> (where appropriate) and the document will be made available on the Council's website.	We will target those groups whom we feel are specific to the particular topic or area covered by the document.  If a previous stage of consultation was carried out, we will consult all those who

	We will also send letters and emails to inform interested parties that the document is available for a 6-week consultation period.	were originally consulted and any other individuals /groups who submitted comments during this stage.
<p>Outcome of Consultation: The results of this consultation will feed into the production of a final document which will take into account all the issues raised. The Council will produce a statement setting out the main issues raised during consultation and how the final SPD has addressed these issues (to meet the requirements of Regulation 18(4)(b)).</p> <p>Next Step: Following on from this, the Council will adopt the Supplementary Planning Document.</p>		

- 6.8 When preparing Supplementary Planning Documents it is also a legal requirement to prepare a joint "Sustainability Appraisal" (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).
- 6.9 The purpose behind this is to promote sustainable development by integrating social, environmental and economic considerations into the preparation of the Local Development Framework. The exercise involves considering the likely effects of each document's policies and proposals on the environment.
- 6.10 As the SPD may have significant environmental impacts, an initial Scoping Report was published in October 2006 and sent to all relevant consultees for comment. Four comments were received relating to the inclusion of further information within the Report.
- 6.11 The SA for the Skelmersdale Town Centre proposals and related documents – the SA Scoping Report, the Habitats Regulations Assessment and the Health Impact Assessment - were made available for viewing or downloading on the Council website.

**Consultees**

- 6.12 All potential stakeholder groups that might take an interest in the proposals were identified and categorised so that the most appropriate methods of consulting with them could be adopted. These included statutory consultees, local stakeholders, business and business groups, politicians, local community groups and the public.

**Consultation tools**

- 6.13 In order to make the consultation process accessible to all individuals and groups, the consultation programme comprised of a variety of events, publications and meetings:

**Draft Supplementary Planning document**

- 6.14 The Draft Supplementary Planning document (SPD) was available to view at the Customer Service Point in the Concourse Shopping Centre, the Ecumenical Centre, Skelmersdale Library, local post offices and the Council offices in

Ormskirk. West Lancashire Local Development Framework Official Response Forms were provided to enable people to comment in more detail on the SPD.

- 6.15 An electronic copy of the masterplan was also made available to download and view on the West Lancashire District Council website. Alternative formats including different languages, Braille, audio CD and tape were made available on request. Copies were also available to view at the Exhibition.
- 6.16 Printed copies and DVD's of the Draft Supplementary Planning document were also available to purchase from the Customer Service Point in the Concourse Shopping Centre and the Council Offices in Ormskirk.

### **West Lancashire Local Development Framework Official Response Forms**

- 6.17 West Lancashire Local Development Framework Official Response Forms (appendix 4) were provided alongside the Draft Supplementary Planning document to enable people to comment in more detail on the SPD. These were available at the Customer Service Point in the Concourse Shopping Centre, the Ecumenical Centre, Skelmersdale Library, local post offices and the Council offices in Ormskirk.
- 6.18 An electronic copy of the response form was also made available to complete on the West Lancashire District Council website Consultation Portal. Alternative formats including different languages, Braille, audio CD and tape were made available on request. Copies were also available to complete at the Exhibition.

### **Masterplan Consultation Paper**

- 6.19 A Masterplan Consultation Paper (appendix 2) was sent out to every household and business in Skelmersdale. Copies were also sent to local politicians and local stakeholders, a comprehensive list of which can be seen above. The Masterplan Consultation Paper contained information about the proposals for Skelmersdale, outlining the guiding principles for the town centre regeneration and inviting people to give their views on these proposals in an accompanying questionnaire. It also publicised information about the exhibition and provided points of contact for further information regarding the proposals.
- 6.20 An electronic copy of the Masterplan Consultation Paper was also made available on the West Lancashire District Council website and copies were available to view or take away at the Exhibition.
- 6.21 Alternative formats including different languages, Braille, audio CD and tape were made available on request, and those people of whom the Council are aware require different formats were contacted to ascertain their requirements.

### **Questionnaire**

- 6.22 A questionnaire (appendix 3) was sent out to all Skelmersdale households, businesses and stakeholders with the Masterplan Consultation Paper, inviting people to give their views on the proposals. A prepaid envelope was provided to return the questionnaires.

- 6.23 The questionnaire was also made available on the District Council's website which allowed people to complete it online, and copies were available to complete or take away at the exhibition.
- 6.24 Alternative formats including different languages, Braille, audio CD and tape were made available on request, and those people of whom the Council are aware require different formats were contacted to ascertain their requirements.

### **Contacts**

- 6.25 Telephone and email address details were provided to ensure that local residents, businesses and stakeholders would have a means of contacting the council if they wanted to find out more about the development proposals for the town centre or if they had a specific query relating to planning. It was also an opportunity for anyone to feed in their comments about the proposals. It established a line of communication between the local residents, businesses and stakeholders and the Council's Planning Officers.

### **Website**

- 6.26 West Lancashire District Council's website was updated with all the latest consultation information to coincide with the launch of the current round of consultation. The information could be viewed at:  
[www.westlancsdc.gov.uk/skelmersdale](http://www.westlancsdc.gov.uk/skelmersdale).
- 6.27 The Masterplan Consultation Paper and the Questionnaire were available to view, as were the Draft Supplementary Planning document and West Lancashire Local Development Framework Official Response Forms.
- 6.28 Exhibition dates, press releases and contact details were also posted on the website. The web pages were, and will continue to be, updated on a regular basis throughout the planning process.
- 6.29 As part of the Supplementary Planning Document, a joint "Sustainability Appraisal" (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) was prepared. The SA for the Skelmersdale Town Centre proposals and related documents – the SA Scoping Report, the Habitats Regulations Assessment and the Health Impact Assessment - were also made available for viewing or downloading.

### **Accompanying documents sent to statutory consultees:**

- 6.30 Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 require that the Council consult with a number of statutory consultees, where appropriate and if the planning documents affects that particular body. In this instance the following organisations - Government Office for the North West, North West Regional Assembly, North West Development Agency, Natural England, Environmental Agency, United Utilities, English Heritage and Lancashire County Council were all sent the correspondence providing information about the scheme, which included the Supplementary Planning Document, the West Lancashire Local Development Framework Official Response Form and the Masterplan Consultation Paper and Questionnaire.

## Media

- 6.31 The public was kept up-to-date on the progress of the proposals and on the public consultation through the local media.
- 6.32 The Council issued press releases to get coverage of the regeneration project, the consultation exercise and the exhibitions.
- 6.33 Press and radio contacts were invited to the exhibition to look at the plans in more detail and to talk to the team. The two main local papers – the Champion and the Advertiser were also briefed on the Masterplan and the consultation in advance and were given copies of the Masterplan Consultation Paper along with press releases announcing the unveiling of the Masterplan.
- 6.34 A 'Notice of Pre-submission Public Participation' advertisement (appendix 5) was placed in both the Champion and the Advertiser on the 12 and 13 March respectively to inform local residents and stakeholders of the consultation process.
- 6.35 The exhibition was advertised within the local media via editorial and through the inclusion of advertisements in both the Skelmersdale Champion and Advertiser (appendix 6).

## Exhibition at the Concourse

- 6.36 An eight-day public exhibition was held at the Concourse Shopping Centre during March and April 2008 (Thursday 27 March to Saturday 29 March from 11am to 4pm, and Monday 31 March to Friday 4 April from 12 noon to 2pm).
- 6.37 The exhibition was advertised within the local media and was also publicised in the Masterplan Consultation newsletter and by way of posters publicising the dates and location of the exhibition that were sited in and around the town centre.
- 6.38 The exhibition comprised four sets of exhibition stands, containing information on the proposals, a diagrammatic image of the masterplan and artist's impressions of the new high street and the relationship between the Tawd Valley and the town centre (appendix 7).
- 6.39 The Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was made available to view and the West Lancashire Local Development Framework Official Response Forms were provided alongside to enable people to comment in more detail on the SPD. Additional copies of the newsletter and questionnaire were also made available.
- 6.40 Several officers from the Council's Planning Policy Section and Housing Management Section were present throughout the duration of the exhibition to discuss any issues, queries and concerns with attendees.



## **Engaging hard-to-reach groups**

- 6.41 *"In order for the planning process to be effective, it is essential that a representative cross section of the community be involved."* West Lancashire District Council Statement of Community Involvement, section 3.12
- 6.42 The planning system places great emphasis on involving communities in the development of their towns and neighbourhoods to ensure the places that are created are suitable for everyone. It can be difficult to know how and when to engage younger people in planning but it is important to give them an opportunity to participate in the process.

## **Schools**

- 6.43 The Council approached all the Primary Schools within Skelmersdale town centre and all the high schools in the town, and asked them to participate in the consultation process.
- 6.44 Two out of the three high schools in Skelmersdale – Glenburn Sports College and Lathom High School took part and several pupils participated in a workshop at Glenburn Sports College on 22 April 2008, organised by staff from the Council Planning team and community planners from North West Planning Aid.
- 6.45 This involved presentations from Planning Aid to help understand what 'Planning' is and then a presentation from the District Council on the specific details of the Skelmersdale Town Centre Masterplanning exercise (appendix 8)
- 6.46 The purpose of this workshop was to explain the importance of involving young people in consultations about the future of their town centre and to outline the proposed developments and improvements. This was combined with a site visit to the town centre to help the students visualise the planned changes and to encourage discussions and explore issues about the town centre redevelopment.
- 6.47 The day concluded with the students being asked to identify their likes and dislikes of the scheme and discuss issues arising from the workshop sessions. A questionnaire was also provided (derived from the Masterplan questionnaire) in order to obtain the views of the students about the proposals (appendix 9)
- 6.48 Both the primary schools in the town centre – St. John's Primary School and Woodlands Community Primary School – participated in an event that introduced them to the key concepts of planning and what will be happening in their town in a fun and educational way (appendix 10).
- 6.49 The session consisted of a simple talk on planning, and then with the aid of photographs, a group discussion on the good and bad points of the existing town centre, after which the children studied the Masterplan and discussed their likes/dislikes about it, and what other changes they would like to see. After a short break the children were then split into two larger groups to work on creating their ideal town centre using models and what they had learned about planning.

- 6.50 Children of primary school age in Skelmersdale will, over the next few years, see the adopted Masterplan for the town centre become a reality and will experience the benefits or detriments as they grow into young adults. It is central to their understanding of these changes that they find out some simple facts about planning and about how (and, importantly, why) their local environment is going to be transformed, and to give them the chance to have a say in how their future town centre is shaped.
- 6.51 Council Planning team staff were also invited to visit a class of Year 5 pupils at Crow Orchard Primary School on the 18 March 2008 to discuss the regeneration proposals for the town. This was merely an informal talk with the pupils and gave them the opportunity to ask questions about the proposals. We asked that all the pupils make comments on the proposals, what they liked, what they didn't like and what things they may like to see within the regenerated town centre.

### **Children and Young Adults**

- 6.52 Both Lancashire County Council's Youth Support Services and Connexions Lancashire who work to engage a wide range of different groups and young people including the Youth Council, the Youth Bank and the Young Carers Project were approached and asked for ideas for how the Council could reach out to these groups and those young people who are not members of an established group with the aim of involving them in the consultation exercise.
- 6.53 The Skelmersdale Information Shop for Young People, a specialist one stop shop (operated by Lancashire County's Youth Support Services in partnership with Connexions Lancashire and Skelmersdale Information for Young People Association) which offers various services to young people aged 11-25, and the 'Positive Action Young People' project (operated by Connexions Lancashire) offered to take copies of the newsletter and questionnaire and canvass people calling in to their centres.

### **Support for Blind and Partially Sighted**

- 6.54 West Lancashire District Council maintains a list of residents who have requested any Council literature sent out to them to be in either large print, Braille, audio CD or tape.
- 6.55 17 copies of the newsletter and questionnaire were produced in Large Print format and 4 in Braille, 1 on Audio CD and 1 on tape to fulfil the requests of these Skelmersdale residents.

### **Voluntary and Community Groups**

- 6.56 The West Lancashire Council for Voluntary Service (WLCVS) was also contacted and an article was placed in the April edition of 'The Beacon', the WLCVS newsletter, which stated that the Council were keen to hear from the voluntary sector, and wanted opinions on the town centre proposals from a voluntary or community group's point of view. It also asked whether these proposals would affect groups in any way, from access issues, environmental concerns to business matters.

## **Firbeck and Findon Residents Consultation**

- 6.57 Tenants living within Firbeck and Findon were hand-delivered a leaflet and a questionnaire from the Council's Housing Services Division providing full information about the options and support available and explaining what will be offered to tenants if the Council decides to go ahead with demolition of Firbeck and Findon and if planning permission is granted. The questionnaire asked whether the options in the leaflet were acceptable and what would be the preferred options for re-housing if it is decided that demolition would go ahead.
- 6.58 Homeowners living within Firbeck and Findon were hand-delivered a leaflet and questionnaire from St Modwen Properties Plc, providing full information about the options and support available and explaining what will be offered to homeowners if the Council decides to go ahead with demolition of Firbeck and Findon and if planning permission is granted. St Modwen is the appointed town centre developer and will be responsible for purchasing homes and developing the Firbeck and Findon area. The questionnaire asked whether the options in the leaflet were acceptable and what would be the preferred options for re-housing if it is decided that demolition would go ahead.
- 6.59 Council Officers from the Housing Management Section offered visits to all tenants in Firbeck and Findon to discuss people's individual needs, to give information about what will be provided if demolition occurs and to carry out further consultation.
- 6.60 Members of St Modwen's Development Team offered visits to all homeowners in Firbeck and Findon to discuss people's individual needs, give information about what will be provided if demolition does go ahead, and to undertake additional consultation.
- 6.61 A contact number for the Housing Management Section was provided to ensure that Firbeck and Findon tenants would have a means of securing a response if they wanted to find out more about the development proposals for the estate. It was also an opportunity for anyone to feed in their comments about the options and support being put forward.
- 6.62 A telephone number for St Modwen was provided to make sure that Firbeck and Findon homeowners would have a contact if they wanted to find out more about the development proposals for the estate. It was also an opportunity for homeowners to deliver their comments about the options and support being offered.
- 6.63 At the time of writing this report, results of the tenants and homeowners questionnaires are still being received and collated. A separate report detailing the findings will be made available when it is completed.

## 7.0 Consultation Findings

### Introduction

7.1 This chapter presents the results of the consultation programme and provides a breakdown of the feedback received. It will look at results from the variety of consultation techniques used, namely the:

- Questionnaire responses
- Firbeck and Findon Residents Responses to Question 7 of Questionnaire
- West Lancashire Local Development Framework Official Response Forms
- Exhibition
- School's consultation findings

### Questionnaire Results

7.2 A total of **1879** people completed the questionnaire which was issued to households with the Masterplan Consultation Paper, made available at the exhibition, and published online for people to complete via the website. **1825** paper questionnaires were returned and **54** were completed online.

7.3 The questionnaire contained eight questions, falling under the four themes: 'Shopping and Leisure', 'Transport', 'Tawd Valley' and 'Housing'. Respondents were given the opportunity to review the proposals in the accompanying Masterplan Consultation Paper. At the end of the questionnaire, people were invited to give additional comments

7.4 Whilst the questionnaire was sent to all Skelmersdale households, businesses and stakeholders, it was still open to anyone. Therefore, from the results received, two separate analyses have been made of the responses to the questions – first an analysis of all respondents, regardless of their address and second, an analysis of the respondents who gave their address as in Skelmersdale.

7.5 Results from each of the questions are given below, using pie charts for illustration, with a table underneath showing the results produced from the analysis of all respondents alongside the analysis of the Skelmersdale residents.

7.6 With the results of each question is an Issues Section that contains a sample of the additional comments made on that particular question. Many of these were positive and people clearly welcomed the proposals and wish to see their rapid implementation, but for the purposes of this report the issues refer to questions and concerns raised. A full record of comments can be found in the Appendix 1.

7.7 A total of **1879** responses were given to each question, of which **1717** were Skelmersdale residents; **34** were non-Skelmersdale residents and **128** did not give an address.

7.8 Please note as the percentages in the results' columns have been rounded up, the sum of these percentages may not always add up to exactly 100%.

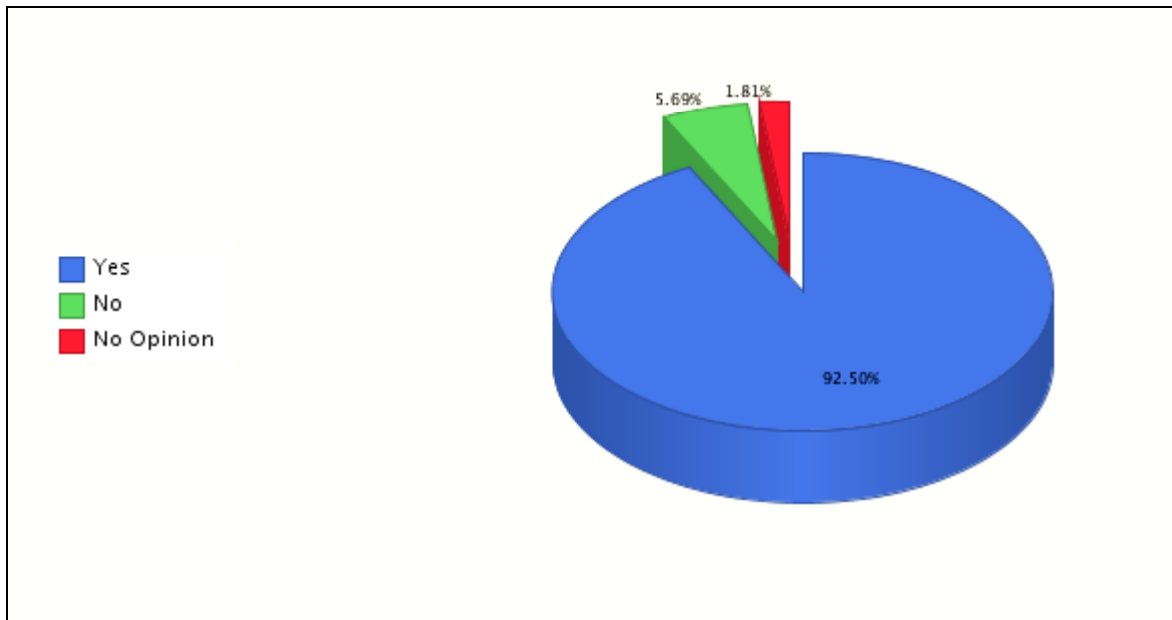
## Shopping and Leisure

7.9 **Question One:** Do you support our proposals to create a new pedestrian-friendly high street with a range of shops, cafes, bars, restaurants, a cinema and leisure and community facilities?

### Results

7.10 The results show considerable support for plans to create a new pedestrian-friendly high street for Skelmersdale with **93%** of respondents giving it their backing and only **6%** opposing the proposals and **2%** offering no opinion.

Figure 1: All Respondents - Question One



#### All Respondents (as in figure. 1)

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1738	93%
No	107	6%
No opinion	34	2%

#### Skelmersdale Residents

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1602	93%
No	89	5%
No opinion	26	2%

### Issues

7.11 Several issues arose from the comments made on question one, most notably:

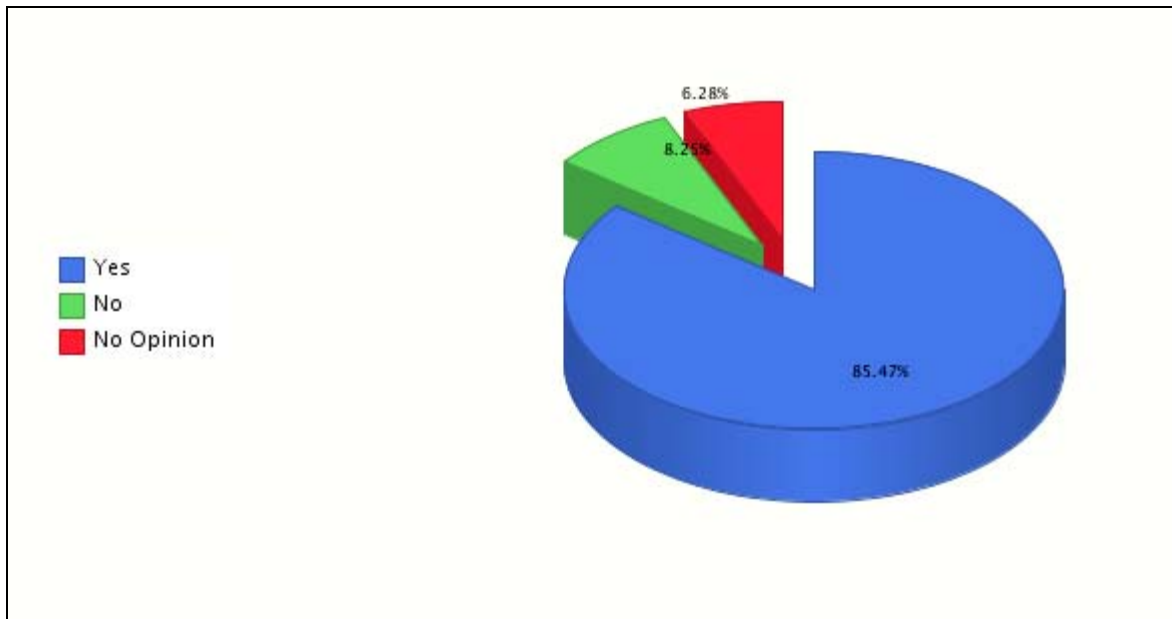
- That there is no indication of a police station, a town hall, a retail park or an arts centre on the masterplan
- Questioning why a new high street is to be built when not all the units in the Concourse Shopping Centre are occupied
- Why plans show only town centre regeneration and not other areas of the town
- Enquiries about funding the development and the belief that the Council will carry out the redevelopment regardless of people's opinions.

7.13 **Question Two:** *Do you support our proposals to move the College, the Library, the Swimming Pool, the Sports Centre and the Ecumenical Centre to new purpose-built facilities within the new town centre?*

### Results

7.14 The results show that a sizeable majority of respondents, **85%** support the proposals to move the College, the Library, the Swimming Pool, the Sports Centre and the Ecumenical Centre to new purpose-built facilities within the new town centre. **8%** do not agree with these proposals and **6%** gave no opinion.

Figure 2: All Respondents - Question Two



#### All Respondents (as in figure. 2)

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1606	85%
No	155	8%
No opinion	118	6%

#### Skelmersdale Residents

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1485	86%
No	132	8%
No opinion	100	6%

### Issues

7.15 A number of issues were raised in the comments made on question two, these included:

- Questioning why not refurbish the existing facilities rather than move these facilities when they are already in the town centre
- Concern about the facilities being downgraded
- Enquiries about whether the replacement buildings will be built first, where the swimming pool will be moved to and how accessible the new facilities will be.

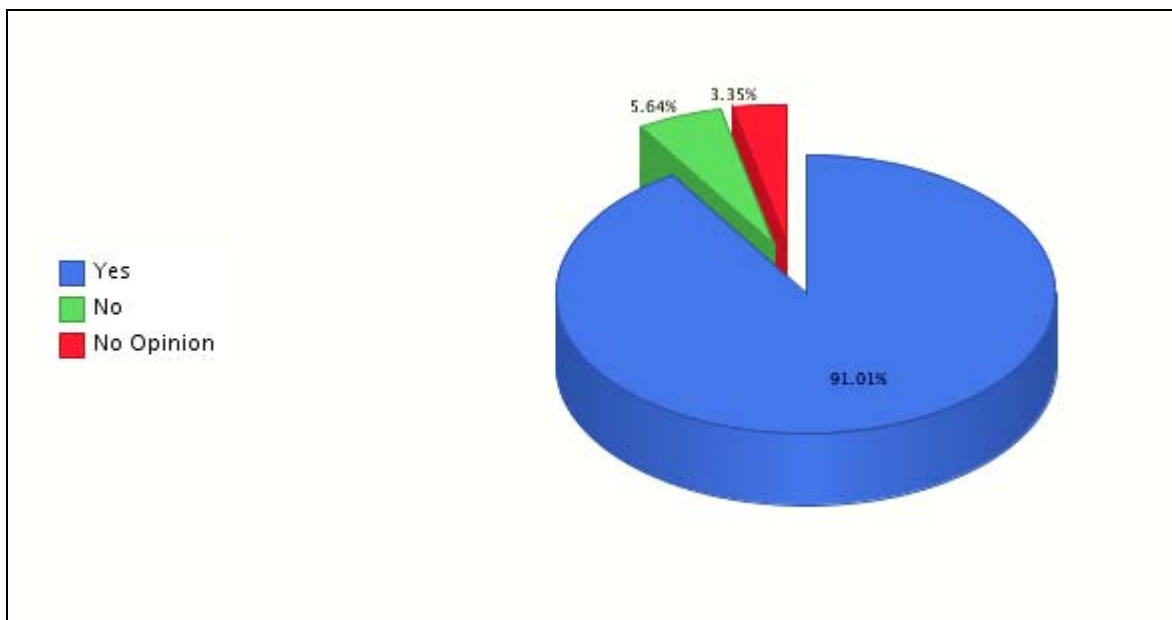
## Tawd Valley

7.16 **Question Three:** Do you support our proposals to develop parts of the Tawd Valley for recreational and leisure uses providing careful thought is taken to protect its natural environment and character?

### Results

7.17 Proposals to develop parts of the Tawd Valley for recreational and leisure uses, providing careful thought is taken to protect its natural environment and character, secured huge support, with **91%**, of respondents agreeing with the scheme. Just **6%** said that they do not agree with the proposals presented, with **3%** providing no view.

Figure 3: All Respondents - Question Three



#### All Respondents (as in figure. 3)

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1710	91%
No	106	6%
No opinion	63	3%

#### Skelmersdale Residents

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1579	92%
No	88	5%
No opinion	50	3%

### Issues

7.18 The comments made on question three contained a variety of issues including:

- Concerns about the wildlife and how the Tawd Valley can be developed without destroying its natural character
- Questions about facilities for off-road bikes
- The subject of how the Tawd Valley will be maintained and policed

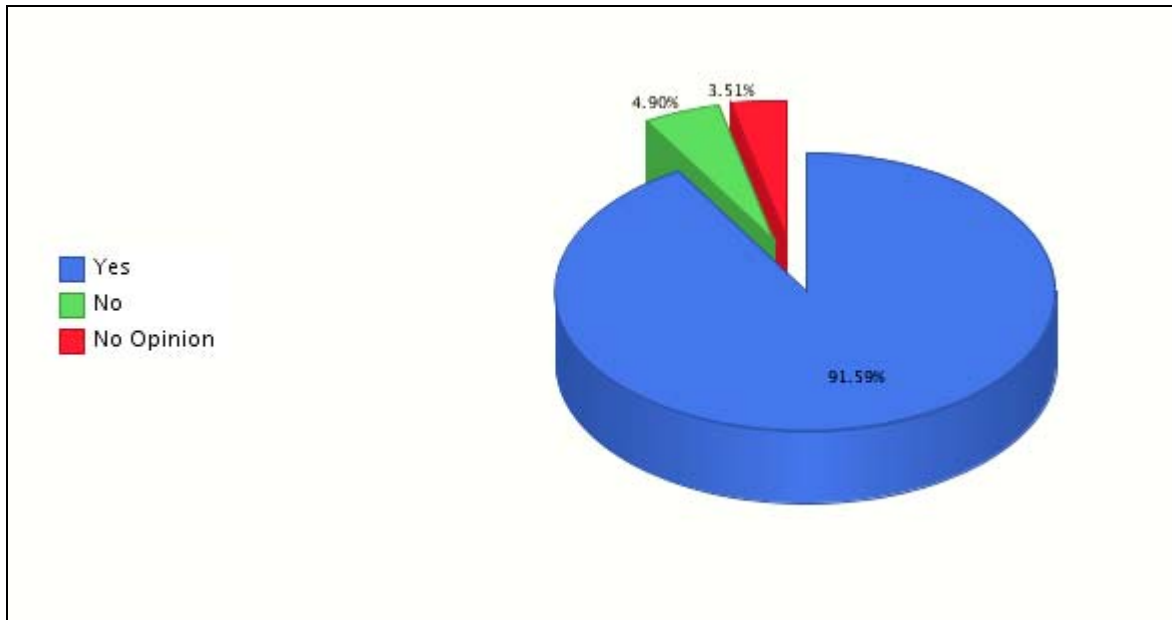
## Transport

7.19 **Question Four:** Do you support our proposals to create new routes, links and car parks to allow better access to the town centre?

### Results

7.20 **92%** favoured proposals to create new routes, links and car parks to allow better access to the town centre. Only **5%** were against these proposals and **4%** gave no opinion.

Figure 4: All Respondents - Question Four



#### All Respondents (as in figure. 4)

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1721	92%
No	92	5%
No opinion	66	4%

#### Skelmersdale Residents

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1587	92%
No	76	4%
No opinion	54	3%

### Issues

7.21 A range of issues were made in the comments section on question four, such as:

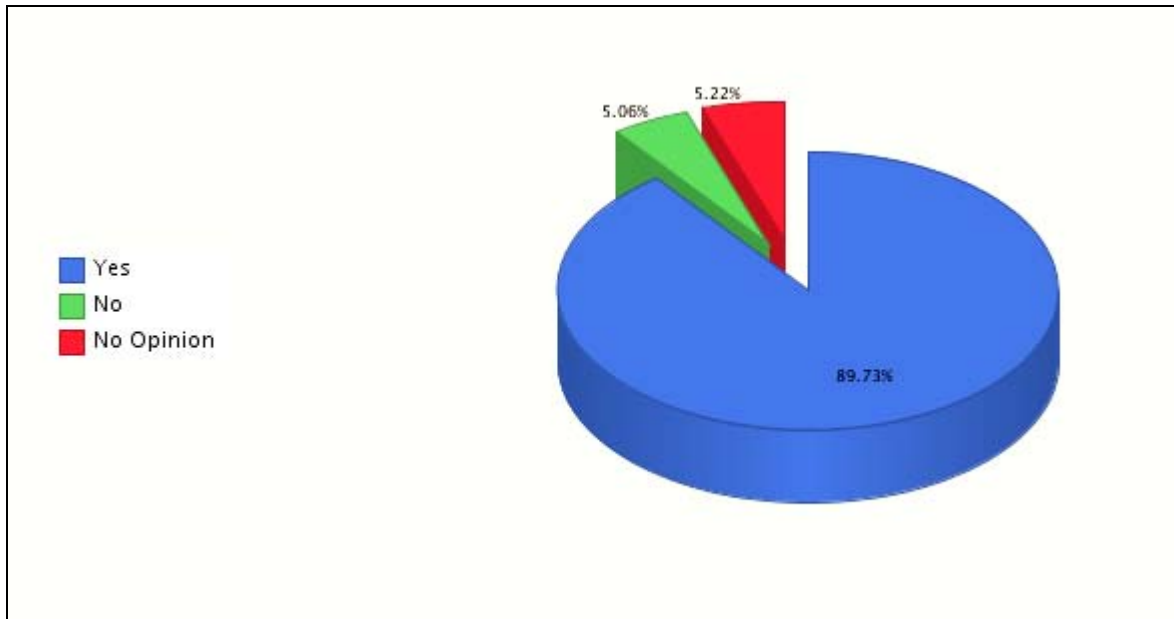
- Concern about the new “traffic-calmed” road splitting the town centre and why have a road running through the shopping area
- Questions about free car parking and disabled parking
- The topic of pavements alongside roads and the provisions for footpaths and cycleways

7.22 **Question Five:** Do you support our proposals to move the bus station at the Concourse Shopping Centre to the new location at ground floor level and improve accessibility and links to the town?

**Results**

7.23 **90%** of respondents agreed with the proposal to move the bus station to the new location at ground floor level and improve accessibility and links to the town. **5%** said it should remain where it stands at present and **5%** of people chose to respond with no point of view.

Figure 5: All Respondents - Question Five



All Respondents (as in figure. 5)

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1686	90%
No	95	5%
No opinion	98	5%

Skelmersdale Residents

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1561	91%
No	83	5%
No opinion	73	4%

**Issues**

7.24 Included in the comments made on question five were issues relating to:

- Why the bus station is being moved, having only just recently been improved
- There being no train station on the plans
- The subject of improving public transport

## Housing

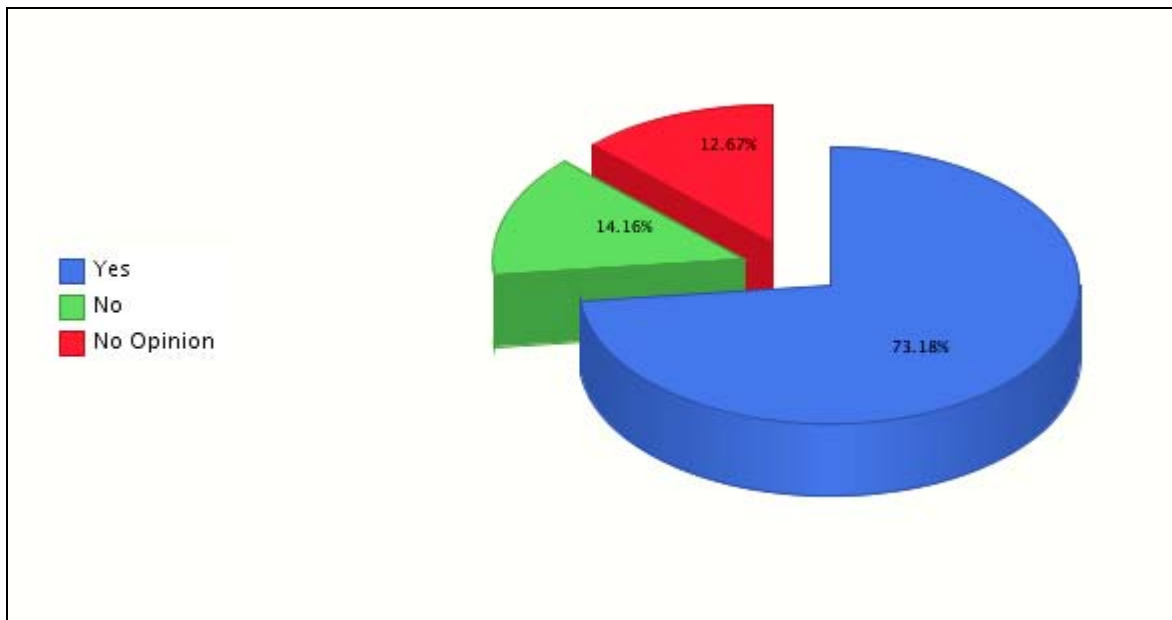
7.25 **Question Six:** We propose to create new areas of housing as part of the wider town centre regeneration. This would involve the clearance of the Firbeck estate and the development of land adjacent to Yewdale, to create a range of modern and family housing.

Do you support the proposals for the provision of new homes in the town centre?

### Results

7.26 In total, **73%** of those responding to the issue of said that they support the proposals for the provision of new homes in the town centre. **14%** were opposed and **13%** had no opinion.

Figure 6: Question Six - All Respondents



#### All Respondents (as in figure. 6)

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1375	73%
No	266	14%
No opinion	238	13%

#### Skelmersdale Residents

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1274	74%
No	233	14%
No opinion	210	12%

### Issues

7.27 Question six generated a number of issues, some of which are outlined below:

- Questions asking why housing is being built in the town centre
- The matter of money not being spent on improving existing homes
- Enquiries about whether the new housing will include council housing and affordable homes
- Concern about building on green-space

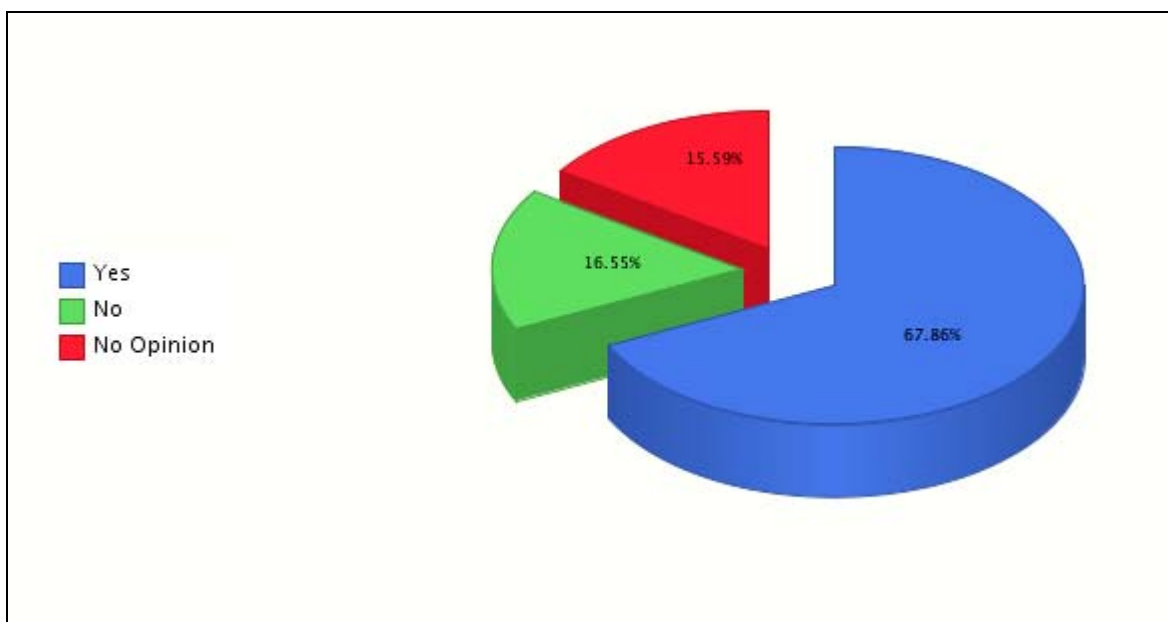
7.28 **Question Seven:** *Do you support our proposals to demolish and redevelop the Firbeck estate to allow the town centre area to be planned and redeveloped as a whole, providing residents are fully compensated and given alternative accommodation options?*

7.29 Whilst the questionnaire was open to everyone, from the results received three separate analyses have been made of the responses to this question – first an analysis of all respondents, regardless of their address; second an analysis of the respondents who gave their address as in Skelmersdale; and third, an analysis of the respondents who give their address as either Firbeck or Findon. Unfortunately, those who answered this question only cover a minority of people on the estate. Therefore, it does not present as full a picture as the more detailed questionnaires sent to residents by the Council’s Housing Services Division and St Modwen Properties Plc. These results are analysed separately.

### Results

7.30 When asked about proposals to demolish and redevelop the Firbeck estate, providing residents are fully compensated and given alternative accommodation options, a mixed response emerged with **68%** of all respondents supporting the proposals. **17%** of respondents said they were opposed and **16%** did not give an opinion.

Figure 7: Question Seven - All Respondents



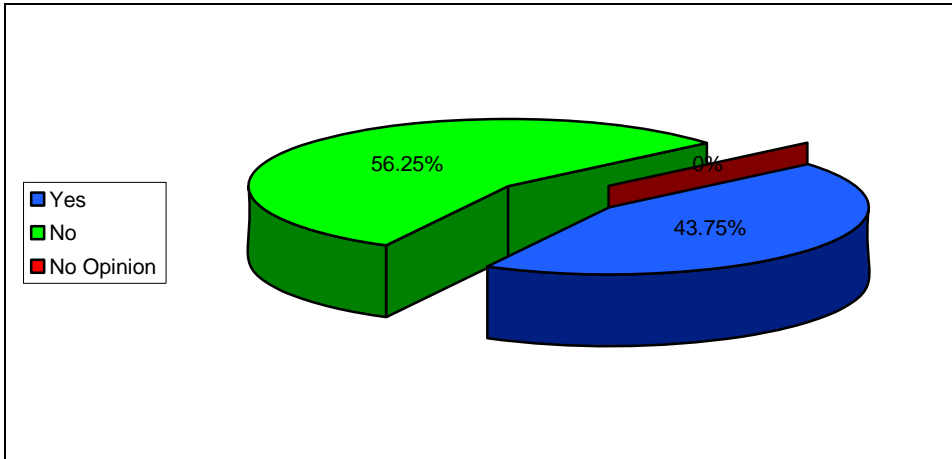
All Respondents (as in figure. 7)

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1275	68%
No	311	17%
No opinion	293	16%

Skelmersdale Residents

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1187	69%
No	272	16%
No opinion	258	15%

Figure 8: Firbeck and Findon Residents - Question Seven



Firbeck and Findon Residents (as in Figure 8)

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	22	45%
No	27	55%
No opinion	0	0%

### Issues

7.31 A number of issues arose in the comments made on question seven by Firbeck and Findon residents, including:

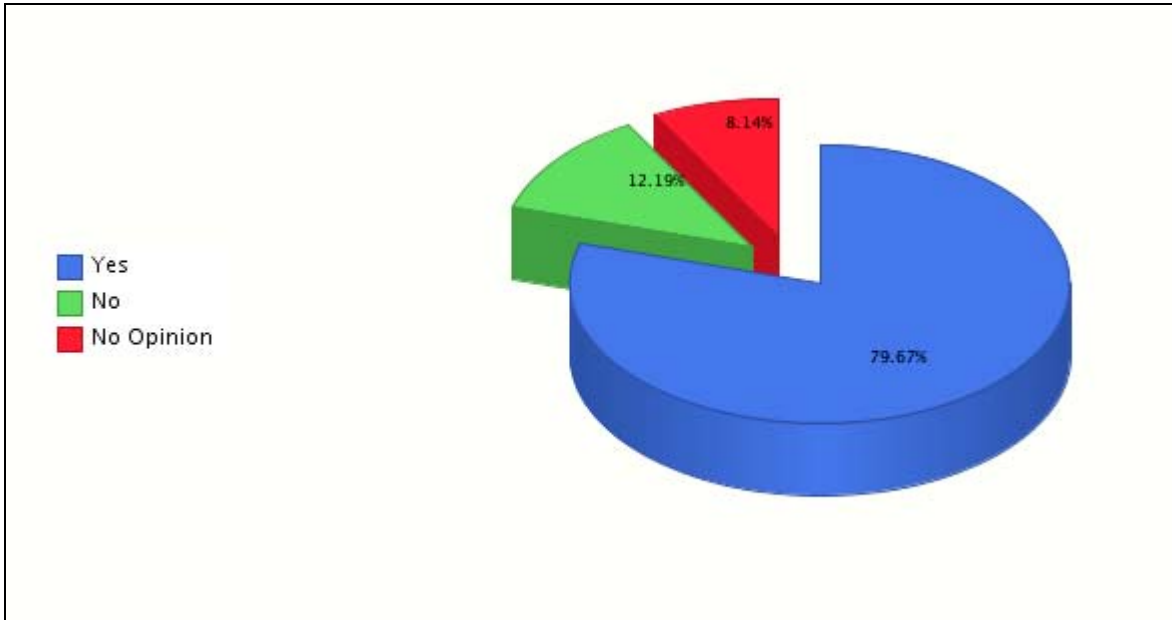
- The issue of deals for homeowners not being acceptable
- Questioning the building of affordable homes when they are already there
- Questioning why houses are not being built on the outskirts of town rather than Firbeck
- Appeals to re-house those residents who wish to retain the Firbeck 'community' close together.
- Why non-Firbeck and Findon residents were asked to comment on this
- The question of whether the new houses will be affordable to the residents already living on Firbeck and Findon and homeowners not being able to afford to buy again in view of house price increases
- The argument for refurbishing homes instead
- Requests for information about what will happen to the dentist and day centre

7.32 **Question Eight:** Do you support our proposals to develop open areas of land near Yewdale for carefully designed housing, providing this improves the Tawd Valley and funds new public and leisure facilities in the town centre?

**Results**

7.33 **80%** of respondents to this question chose to give their backing for proposals to develop open areas of land near Yewdale for carefully designed housing, providing this improves the Tawd Valley and funds new public and leisure facilities in the town centre. **12%** were against these proposals and **8%** offered no opinion.

Figure 9: Question Eight - All Respondents



All Respondents (as in figure. 9)

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1497	80%
No	229	12%
No opinion	153	8%

Skelmersdale Residents

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	1391	81%
No	197	11%
No opinion	129	8%

**Issues**

7.34 From the comments made on question eight the most common issues included:

- The issue about building on Greenbelt / Greenfield / Parkland, losing open space and the removal of the amphitheatre
- Concern about flooding in this area
- The problem of access and parking around Yewdale

## **West Lancashire Local Development Framework Official Responses**

- 7.35 Several statutory consultees, partners, stakeholder organisations and individuals made more detailed comments on the Supplementary Planning Document through the West Lancashire Local Development Framework Official Response Forms.
- 7.36 A full report outlining all the comments and the Cabinet's responses to these comments will be made available, but for the purposes of this report some of the key issues raised are set about below.
- 7.37 **Lancashire County Council** expressed general support, with some detailed comments made about their land and future property needs within the town centre. The County Council, as **Strategic Planning Authority** have expressed some concerns about the ecological and landscape/visual impacts of the proposals, and these will need to be carefully examined.
- 7.38 **St Modwen Properties PLC** have suggested that the draft SPD should not define too closely the design and location of buildings and that it is overly prescriptive in places and suggest various wording changes to 'strengthen' the document.
- 7.39 **The Ecumenical Centre** do not feel that the location of the Ecumenical Centre, as identified on the Masterplan, is central or visible enough. Given the important function that the building will have.
- 7.40 A wide variety of comments have been made by **Lathom South Parish Council** including concerns about the loss of open spaces; the need for the north-south road link; and the loss of properties at Firbeck. The **South Lathom Residents' Association** has also commented in respect of these issues and the boundary of the town centre.
- 7.41 **English Partnerships** have expressed general support for the draft SPD, but also made several detailed comments about the need to remove the large roundabout near to Asda; the need to minimise ecological impact; and improving the southern approach to the town centre.
- 7.42 **English Nature** have welcomed the opportunities to improve certain green spaces in the Town Centre but wish to see the document saying more about biodiversity.
- 7.43 The **Skelmersdale Limited Partnership** (the owners of the Concourse Centre) have expressed concerns about the north-south link road and suggested an alternative layout plan for the town centre. They also wish to see close physical integration between the Concourse and the new High Street.
- 7.44 The **North West Regional Assembly** support the key principles of the draft SPD as they are in line with RSS policy, and support the amount of retail and housing development, although suggest careful consideration will need to be given to the phasing of housing.
- 7.45 **The Government Office for the North West** have said they are content with the draft SPD and have made a few detailed comments to improve the clarity of the document.

- 7.46 The **Environment Agency** support the draft document in relation to services and infrastructure, and implementation and phasing. Concerns have been raised in relation to how certain culverts are treated and on recognising the biodiversity value of the Tawd Valley. **United Utilities** have expressed support for the document and provided information on the two main sewers in the town centre.
- 7.47 The **CPRE** support much of the document but have commented on a variety of issues including the loss of open space for housing, the north-south link road and the boundary of the town centre. The **Theatres Trust** have stated that they would like to see a multi purpose venue rather than just a cinema. The **Learning Disability Partnership Board** have asked a series of questions related to access and parking issues.
- 7.48 A few other individuals have commented on the document. Issues raised include many of those set out above as well as two individuals objecting to the housing areas shown as H5 at Ferndale and H8 at Eskdale/Southway.

### **Exhibition Outcome**

- 7.49 The exhibition in the Concourse Shopping Centre was considered a huge success with over 600 people attending over the course of the eight days. This represented a wide cross section of people including: passers-by, shoppers, residents, politicians, onsite retailers and other stakeholders.
- 7.50 The exhibition was an opportunity for attendees to enter into discussions with representatives of the Council, with many of those present expressing support for the scheme.
- 7.51 Attendees were encouraged to complete the Questionnaire forms, if they had not already done so. This was done so a written record of their issues, concerns or support would be available. A few of the issues that were raised verbally at the exhibition include:

### **Issues**

- Enquiries about the type of paving that will be used in the town centre, as the cobbles and flags currently in the town centre are not wheelchair-friendly
- Questions about public toilets and the provision of “changing room” facilities for disabled use
- Matters relating to the need for more activities for children and young adults
- The issue of police presence in the town centre
- Project timescales
- The potential impact that the regeneration of Kirkby town centre may have on the regeneration of Skelmersdale town centre
- Concerns about the Firbeck and Findon redevelopment proposals

## **School's Consultation Findings**

7.52 During the workshop sessions with pupils from Glenburn Sports College and Lathom High School, the pupils were invited to discuss and debate the draft masterplan proposals at length. Generally the pupils were supportive of the proposals, but the positive and negative points and issues arising from their discussions and their comments in the questionnaire included the following points.

### **Positives:**

- The creation of a new town centre core, including a high street and a variety of retail and leisure facilities
- Creation of a new cinema within the town
- Development of a new multi-purpose Sports Centre
- The development of new housing within the town centre, as long as it is affordable to the people of Skelmersdale
- The development of a new library in the town centre
- The new foodstore would provide extra choice for consumers
- Some of the group felt that the redevelopment of Firbeck would be a good thing and make for a better town centre, provided that the residents were satisfied in where they would be relocated

### **Negatives:**

- Amphitheatre should be left as it is, no redevelopment of this area. It is an historical asset to the town
- The redevelopment of Firbeck should not happen, if the majority of people want to stay in their homes then they should not be forced to leave
- There is too much car parking proposed within the town centre, particularly to the town around Asda
- Consideration should be given to whether there is a need for another foodstore.

### **Issues:**

- The majority of the group wanted the Concourse to remain as part of the town centre proposals; some of the group though thought it should be demolished
- Future of Glenburn should be considered, the facilities are out of date and the school could do with refurbishment
- Accessibility to both the Ecumenical Centre and the Library should be good, particularly for the elderly and the disabled. It is not clear from the Masterplan how good this access will be
- The development of a crèche / day care centre in close proximity to the school and college would be of great benefit
- Will new sports centre be in competition with the existing facilities at Bannatyne's?

## **Additional Comments**

7.53 Below is a sample of comments from all the schools that were made in relation to the questionnaire.

7.54 **Question One:** *Do you support our proposals to create a new pedestrian-friendly high street with a range of shops, cafes, bars, restaurants, a cinema and leisure and community facilities?*

- They should build a bowling alley or and ice skating rink on the top floor of the Concourse – put it to use
- I believe that road use within the pedestrianised area should be kept to a minimum
- Make spots of greenery for old people (woodland area)
- I think the Concourse needs revamping a lot
- I think the town won't work as planned because Skem isn't big enough and has a bad reputation so people won't want to come
- Police station in the town centre
- I think that supermarket is a bad idea, as Asda is already posing too much of a risk to the local producers of food

7.55 **Question Two:** *Do you support our proposals to move the College, the Library, the Swimming Pool, the Sports Centre and the Ecumenical Centre to new purpose-built facilities within the new town centre?*

- Don't agree with the swimming pool in the sports centre
- I believe the Ecumenical Centre should stay
- Yes they will be a lot more accessible and the sports centre parking needs addressing

7.56 **Question Three:** *Do you support our proposals to develop parts of the Tawd Valley for recreational and leisure uses providing careful thought is taken to protect its natural environment and character?*

- Do not build on the amphitheatre
- I think sustaining its condition will be tough
- Maybe get residents to help with clean up
- Can we have a tree-climbing site?

7.57 **Question Four:** *Do you support our proposals to create new routes, links and car parks to allow better access to the town centre?*

- It is ok as it is
- Congestion on roads could become an issue

7.58 **Question Five:** *Do you support our proposals to move the bus station at the Concourse Shopping Centre to the new location at ground floor level and improve accessibility and links to the town?*

- No comments made on this question

7.59 **Question Six:** *We propose to create new areas of housing as part of the wider town centre regeneration. This would involve the clearance of the Firbeck estate and the development of land adjacent to Yewdale, to create a range of modern and family housing.*

*Do you support the proposals for the provision of new homes in the town centre?*

- Don't build on the amphitheatre

7.60 **Question Seven:** *Do you support our proposals to demolish and redevelop the Firbeck estate to allow the town centre area to be planned and redeveloped as a whole, providing residents are fully compensated and given alternative accommodation options?*

- I like the plans for the new town centre but not for Firbeck
- People will lose their homes and it is ok as it is

7.61 **Question Eight:** *Do you support our proposals to develop open areas of land near Yewdale for carefully designed housing, providing this improves the Tawd Valley and funds new public and leisure facilities in the town centre?*

- Not sure as there should be a lot of open areas

7.62 At the workshop sessions with pupils from Woodlands Community Primary School and St John's Primary School, the children expressed their thoughts about the good and bad points of the present town centre. This was followed up with their likes and dislikes of the proposals for the new town centre and any other changes / issues that they thought needed to be added. These opinions are listed below:

#### **Existing Town Centre**

Good Points:	Bad Points:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sports activities</li> <li>• Library</li> <li>• Fast-food restaurants</li> <li>• Shops</li> <li>• Schools / Colleges</li> <li>• Police Station</li> <li>• Parks</li> <li>• Wildlife</li> <li>• Outdoor activities</li> <li>• Access in to town</li> <li>• Safety from cars</li> <li>• Close to houses</li> <li>• Care homes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Litter / Dog mess / broken glass / drugs</li> <li>• Graffiti</li> <li>• Groups of young people hanging around</li> <li>• Not safe</li> <li>• Rats / insects in subway</li> <li>• Not enough food places</li> <li>• Subways flood</li> <li>• Not well looked after</li> <li>• Houses being burgled</li> <li>• Not enough big housing / bungalows</li> <li>• Housing too expensive</li> <li>• Scruffy houses</li> <li>• Scary in woodland</li> <li>• Not enough cleaning</li> <li>• Environmental damage</li> <li>• Car parking problems</li> </ul>

### Masterplan

Likes:	Dislikes:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More things to do</li> <li>• More shops</li> <li>• More visitors</li> <li>• More restaurants</li> <li>• Hotel</li> <li>• Play areas</li> <li>• Good access for wheelchairs/prams</li> <li>• Road safety</li> <li>• CCTV and police</li> <li>• Better housing</li> <li>• Better roads / routes/ footpaths</li> <li>• Pedestrian safety</li> <li>• CCTV and policing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No hospital</li> <li>• Have to walk to shops</li> <li>• High street affected by weather</li> <li>• People being moved out of their homes</li> <li>• Not enough medical facilities</li> <li>• New road – unsafe / barrier to shops</li> </ul>

**Other changes the pupils would like to see include:**

• Cinema
• Skate park
• Graffiti park
• Bowling Alley
• Places to sit / relax
• Better bridges / subways
• Less anti-social behaviour
• More police

## 8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 West Lancashire District Council have conducted an extensive consultation programme on its proposals for the regeneration of Skelmersdale Town Centre to ensure that the redevelopment plans for the area reflect the aspirations of local stakeholders and the wider community.
- 8.2 The consultation programme has formed a significant part of the overall process thus far. It has made an important contribution to the evolution of the scheme and has outlined to the Council and its partners the preferred options thus far, along with highlighting any other comments relating to the proposals for the area.
- 8.3 The consultation has been carried out in accordance with best practice guidance from central Government and is fully compliant with West Lancashire District Council's Statement of Community Involvement.
- 8.4 The District Council believes that the consultation on the Masterplan for Skelmersdale Town Centre went beyond the requirements of the Statement of Community Involvement, including consultation methods such as the drafting of a comprehensive Masterplan newsletter, questionnaire and an extensive period of consultation.
- 8.5 A wide cross-section of people living and working in Skelmersdale have participated in the consultation since its inception. These include the attendees at the exhibitions, stakeholders, politicians, local residents and all with an interest in the future of Skelmersdale. Extensive work was also undertaken to obtain the views of those groups considered 'hard-to-reach' including the young and those with a lack of resources and knowledge related to planning issues.
- 8.6 The level of engagement achieved throughout draft masterplan stage of consultation has been extremely high and the views expressed during the process accurately reflect those of the wider population of Skelmersdale with regard to this scheme.
- 8.7 A total of 1879 people responded to West Lancashire District Council's invitation to give their views on the town centre masterplan, and it is clear from the results that there is strong support for the regeneration plans with the majority in favour of the proposals.
- 8.8 A wide variety of comments were made on the questionnaires in relation to each question. These comments and the consultation results will now be fully considered in making modifications to the masterplan before it is finalised later this year.
- 8.9 The Council and its partners will continue to engage with these consultees and stakeholders throughout the development process to ensure that they are kept informed of the progress of the scheme.

8.10 St Modwen will be submitting planning applications later this year and local people will again be given the opportunity to comment on those applications, at both the pre-application stage and on the formal planning applications themselves.

