



# **Willaston Matters**

## **Findings & Conclusions**

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September 2024

## Executive Summary

In August 2024, a survey was conducted among the residents of Willaston to gauge opinions on the future structure and role of a residents' organisation after the closure of the Willaston Residents and Community Society (WRCS). With 436 responses, the survey aimed to engage the community and inform the Working Party in their recommendations for moving forward.

Key findings suggest strong support for a new group, with 94% of respondents in favour of establishing some form of replacement for the WRCS. Opinions on the specific structure of this group varied, but there was widespread consensus on its primary role: raising awareness, supporting community efforts, and representing residents on significant issues such as large planning, environment, and traffic. The survey also highlighted a preference for a more democratic and representative structure, with many advocating for a formal body, such as a Parish Council, to ensure fair representation.

Despite concerns about self-selection bias and non-respondents, the survey results are considered a fair reflection of the views of residents who care about the village's future. While maintaining an informal structure is appealing to some, there is significant support for a formalised organisation to provide the necessary influence on key local issues.

This report presents the survey findings objectively and offers insights for the Working Party as they consider the next steps for Willaston's community governance.

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# Introduction

In August 2024, a survey was issued to residents of Willaston. The survey was an attempt to understand views about how any future residents organisation should behave in relation to various matters deemed of importance to villagers. Its purpose was twofold:

1. To inform the Working Party, when considering what recommendation it should make to the village after the closure of the WRCS, and;
2. To provide residents with an opportunity to have their views included in the process of moving forward after 20th September.

As an exercise in transparency and engagement, it is probably fair to say that the survey has been successful, relative to similar previous exercises. However, the deduction of clear preferences from the response data is more of a challenge. Therefore, the extent to which the exercise succeeded in its primary objective is somewhat debatable.

In any case, this report seeks to position the results of the survey in a way which is useful to the Working Party. Although when interpreting the results, a positive slant is preferred, this report attempts to remain objective, providing conclusions based solely on analysis of the survey responses.

Recommendations are to be made by the wider Working Party and must take into consideration other external factors out of scope of the survey and its results.

## Distribution and Collection

- Around 2000 surveys were delivered to the households in the village.
- Copies were available via the participating shops and businesses.
- A website was created, and an online copy of the survey was made available.

The survey was open for the full month of August 2024 and advertised on social media, in shops and via posters that have been visible in various locations around the village.

In total 436 responses were received. 100 were on paper, with each being manually transcribed into its own electronic survey, minus written comments.

## Opening Remarks

Many comments were received expressing gratitude for taking on the exercise and a number of comments specifically praised the accessibility of the survey. A 'help-desk' was provided, via email, and was not notified of any issues, other than the over subscription of the initial survey which was inadvertently limited to just 200 responses.

Despite the excellent level of availability and engagement (circa 3x more responses than the last comparable exercise), it should be noted that there will be a small number of residents who wanted to respond but were unable to do so. Nevertheless, the efforts to ensure the accessibility and availability of the survey largely inoculates against the potential for future grievances along the lines of not having had the opportunity to participate. It also helps deal with the prospect of dissenting voices that may choose to make themselves heard only at later stages of the process.

## On Bias

Self-selection bias, whereby individuals select themselves into a group, causing a biased sample, is a concern. In particular 'volunteer bias' is going to be present in the results, with those people volunteering to respond very likely to have a stronger interest in the affairs of the village, compared to the typical resident.

Importantly, responses reveal views at both ends of the spectrum, both in favour of, and opposing, the continuation of some type of residents society after the 20th September. It is noted however, that voices in favour heavily outnumbered those in opposition.

Notwithstanding the above, it should be assumed that residents who felt strongly about the future of the village were able to make their opinions known, and did so. But to better address the issue of bias in the results, something must also be said regarding the non-respondents.

## Non-Respondents

In simple terms, approximately three-quarters of the village did not respond to the survey.

At face-value, this is somewhat disappointing. It may be tempting to attribute the lack of responses to apathy amongst residents, and conclude that this undermines Otherwise encouraging levels of engagement - but this may be an overly pessimistic interpretation.

It may be preferable to take the view that most of the residents of the village are instead generally happy with the status quo, having no strong negative views about what has gone before and no significant aversion to anything new.

A pragmatic stance is to therefore assume that a continuation of the current arrangements, or provision of something not dissimilar in the future, is likely to be acceptable to the majority of residents.

Furthermore, should it later transpire that the pool of non-respondents embody some as yet undiscovered cohort of discontent, the lack of participation in the exercise to date limits any right to influence the actions of those who have been prepared to volunteer and take-part in the process so far.

## **On Reliability**

If it is accepted that residents with opinions have aired them, or at the least had ample opportunity to do so, and that residents who have not responded are not apathetic, but instead comfortable with affairs as they are, then it is probably reasonable, insofar as it is possible, to rely on the findings of the survey as a fair indication of the direction to take in the future - as long as any final recommendations are not a significant departure from what has gone before.

## Summary of Numerical Results

- 94% of respondents were in favour of 'something else' to follow the WRCS.
- 74 people said YES they would be prepared to volunteer in some capacity.
- A further 196 respondents said they MAY BE interested in volunteering.
- Across all matters, residents clearly want an organisation that is able to represent their views, raise awareness and influence decision makers.
- Numerical results are slightly skewed toward raising awareness of matters of interest, with this option recording the most responses overall.
- 'Representing residents views' was the second most preferred behaviour overall, despite scoring a notable zero in this category on matters of local business. It should be acknowledged that there is almost certainly some cross over between the categories 'representing residents views' and 'influencing decision makers'.
- On its own, influencing decision makers also scored highly, with pronounced interest in having influence over matters of large planning, environment and traffic.
- 'Stay Silent' was the least preferred behaviour across all of the matters. Respondents were most keen that the new group be silent on matters of Small Planning and Local Business. Within the confines of the 'stay silent' category, this preference was clear. However, in the context of the wider results it was not particularly pronounced.

## Summary of Written Comments

156 individual comments, provided in the electronic returns, have been reviewed. Further comments from paper copies have also been informally analysed. The feedback provided reflects a wide range of opinions and concerns from residents about the future of their community group and village.

Many comments relate to specific issues and challenges facing the village. A broader analysis can be found in appendix B. Briefly summarised, comments not related specifically to the future group include but are by no means limited to:

- Concerns about the village's upkeep, including overgrown footpaths, untidy public spaces.
- Traffic safety, particularly speeding.
- The need for more community events, such as family-friendly activities.
- Highlighting the importance of preserving the village's green belt and historical charm.
- Expressions of gratitude for past volunteer efforts and the sense of community.
- Better communication and engagement through digital platforms.
- Frustration with the decline in the village's aesthetic and infrastructure.

For the purposes of this report, further analysis will be confined to views that relate specifically to the future group or society.

## Summary of Views on the Future Group Structure

Residents have provided a spread of views on the specific type of group that should replace the WRCS, but there is a strong consensus on several key points:

### **Role of the Group:**

A recurring theme is that any new group should focus on raising awareness and coordinating community efforts rather than acting on behalf of residents or assuming decision-making power. The group's role should be to inform and support, without overstepping into areas like small-scale planning, which are seen as the council's domain.

*"I think the most suitable role for any future society would be to raise awareness and co-ordinate community action... but without taking on an over-reaching role of authority or power over those who choose to live in this wonderful little place."*

### **A More Democratic Group:**

Many residents express the need for a more democratic and representative group, with suggestions leaning toward a Parish Council model where elected officials represent the entire community.

Some are concerned that the current society, as a volunteer-led group, does not represent all voices equally, particularly those who are unable to participate due to other commitments.

*"You are not a democratically elected organisation which represents the people of Willaston. In a democratic organisation (e.g. a parish council), everyone in the village would get a vote on who is elected without any other requirements."*

### **Mixed Opinions on the Need for a Formal Group:**

While many favour a Parish Council or formal group, others suggest maintaining a community-driven, informal structure like the WRCS, but with reforms. There is a desire to preserve the sense of community without creating an overly bureaucratic organisation.

*"No need to change the group name, keep WR&CS and the logo but revamp the existing constitution to reflect the new group (if one is set up)."*



## Conclusion

There is a clear desire for a future group and for that group or society to be more democratic. Many residents advocate for a formal structure like a Parish Council to ensure fair representation. Regardless of the structure, the new group should focus on coordinating community activities and raising awareness without exerting undue influence over matters at the level of individual residents or households.

Apparent disinterest in matters of local business should not necessarily be viewed negatively. Residents were asked about matters important to them, as residents. It is perhaps not unexpected therefore, that results were clearly focussed in this direction and away from the concerns of local business. Furthermore, any future business-led community group should take a positive view of the wider set of results and comments, which indicate many opportunities to deliver initiatives within the gift of a Community Interest Company and that will be welcome to the village.

Written comments and numerical results are closely aligned. However, it should be noted that approximately double the amount of numerical responses are available, compared to written comments. Considering this alongside the likely cross-over between responses noted above, it is recommended that the preference seen in the numerical results for 'influencing decision makers' on matters of large planning, environment and traffic, be weighted accordingly.

Finally given the preference towards raising awareness and coordinating community action, it is likely that a voluntary, residents-led organisation, correctly incorporated and constituted, could address the *majority* of the needs of the village. However, it is unlikely that anything other than a Parish Council, for which there appears to be much support, can provide both the democratic transparency, *and* the necessary level of influence required, to be truly effective in representing the residents views in the matters they care about most.

## Acknowledgements

Willaston Matters, the design of the survey, the collection and analysis of the results, and ultimately this report, was a team effort. The team was acting in its capacity as the sub-working party, appointed by and reporting back to the Working Party, itself convened by the Village to take the Village forward after the WRCS.

Irrespective of the results and conclusions, Willaston Matters would not have come about were it not for the input energy and expertise of the wider group of individuals who contributed. They are not named here but they know who they are, and their views accord with the conclusions drawn in this report. I am grateful to everyone who contributed and I want to fully credit all contributors for their part in bringing Willaston Matters about.

Furthermore, many additional residents are to thank for giving up their time to distribute and collect surveys, without whom the whole exercise would have been substantially more challenging.

Thanks must go to the residents who responded. Taking the time to share views and opinions in this way has provided valuable direction to not just the Working Party, but to anyone else interested in taking the Village forward in the future. It is hoped that, regardless of views, residents appreciated the opportunity to be heard and to be involved in a transparent process.

And finally, anyone with enough interest to have read this far, particularly anyone part of the 74 YES's, is urged to get involved in whatever comes next. We all want the Village to thrive, but it doesn't happen on its own. A few hours a month might be all it takes.

Willaston matters. Willaston needs YOU.

AI

# Appendices

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## APPENDIX A: Matters & Examples

### (a) **Planning** (Small)

For example: Applications from individual households in the village, etc.

### (b) **Planning** (Large)

For example: Green-belt protection, applications for commercial or multiple dwelling developments, etc.

### (c) **Traffic**

For example: Speeding, parking, volume of traffic, etc.

### (d) **Environment**

For example: Care of green spaces, parks and footpaths, littering, fly-tipping, etc.

### (e) **Community Life**

For example: Village events, existing societies, social wellbeing etc.

### (f) **Local Business**

For example: Enhancing the village retail, hospitality, business services and visitor offering.

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## APPENDIX B: Analysis of Comments

From the feedback provided, several key conclusions can be drawn about the concerns, values, and desires of the village residents regarding their community and its governance:

### 1. Strong Appreciation for Community Efforts

There is broad recognition of the hard work and dedication of the current volunteers (WRCS), with many expressing gratitude for their initiatives, especially those related to maintaining the village's appearance and organising community events like Christmas lights.

However, this appreciation is tempered by concerns over the perceived lack of democratic representation in the society's structure.

### 2. Focus on Village Maintenance and Safety

Village upkeep is a major concern, with complaints about overgrown paths, untended trees, and weed-infested footpaths. The desire to restore the village's aesthetic appeal (once recognised as the "Best Kept Village") is clear.

Traffic and speeding are recurring safety issues, with calls for stricter speed regulations and better enforcement in areas with dangerous bends and high pedestrian traffic.

### 3. Need for a More Defined Role for Any Future Group

Residents want the future organisation to focus on raising awareness and coordinating community actions rather than taking authoritative stances on behalf of the village. They suggest any voluntary group should potentially serve as a communication hub and facilitator.

There is caution against a group composed of self-selecting volunteers overstepping into matters like small-planning, which some feel should be left to democratically elected bodies.

#### 4. Desire for a More Inclusive and Democratic Structure

Many residents feel that the current organisation (WRCS) is not democratic, as it relies on voluntary participation without wider elections. There is a strong call for a governance structure that allows all residents to vote, such as a Parish Council.

Respondents are concerned about a small group of individuals making decisions on behalf of the whole village, which can lead to the misrepresentation of the wider community's views.

#### 5. Enhanced Communication and Engagement

Residents emphasise the need for better communication mechanisms, such as an interactive website and more use of social media to share updates, meeting minutes, and village events.

Ensuring that all residents, including those with busy work lives and families, are kept informed and feel represented is critical.

#### 6. Desire for More Community Events and Spirit-Building Activities

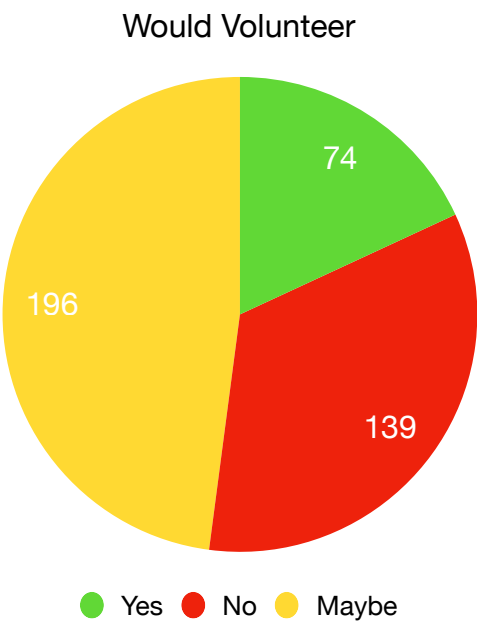
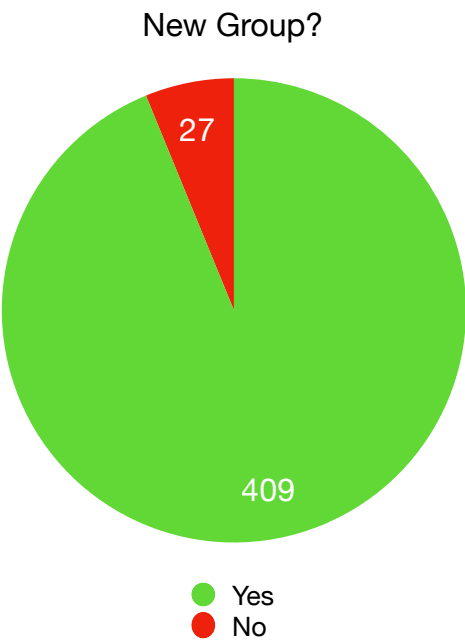
Many respondents are interested in more community-centred events that foster a sense of unity and engagement, especially family-friendly activities.

There is also concern that the village's community spirit, once strong, has begun to fade and needs to be rekindled through joint activities and engagement.

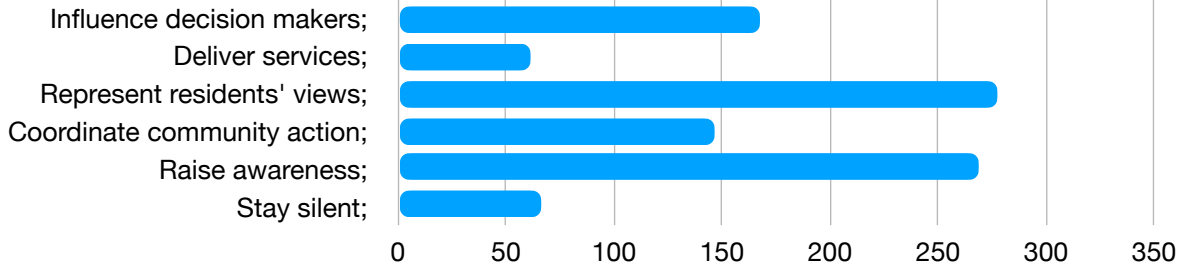
#### 7. Concerns About Future Representation

Respondents fear a continued decline in the village's appeal and community spirit if a new group does not step up to fill the void left by WRCS. The community desires an organisation that will protect village interests (e.g., against external threats like losing green spaces) and advocate effectively for them in larger local planning

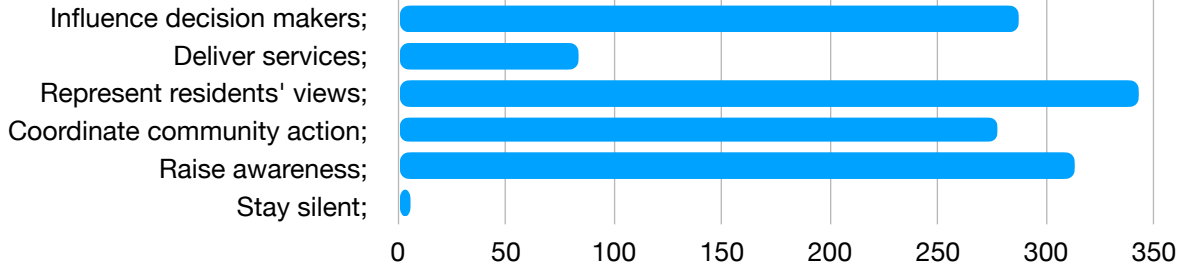
APPENDIX C: Survey Results



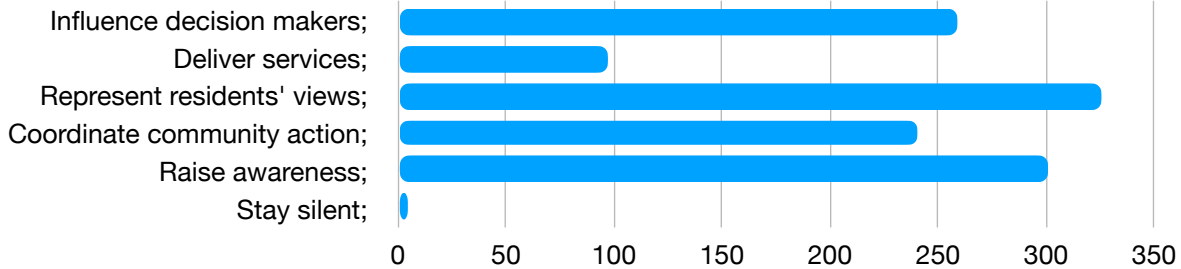
### Small Planning



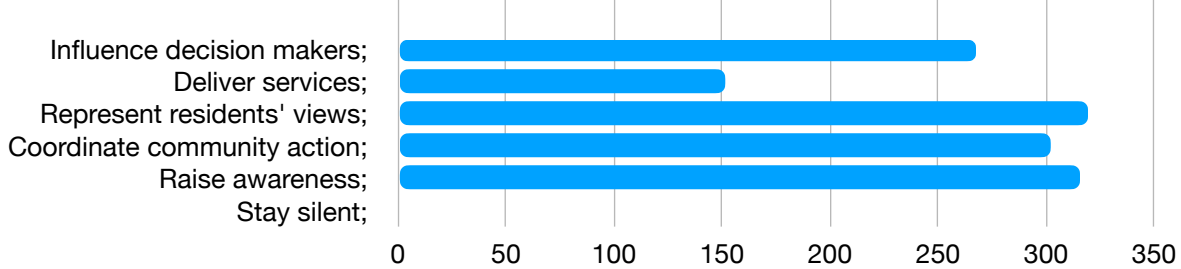
### Large Planning



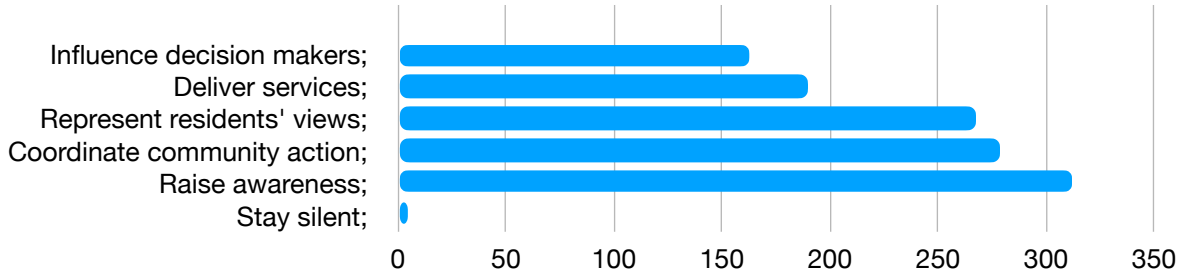
### Traffic



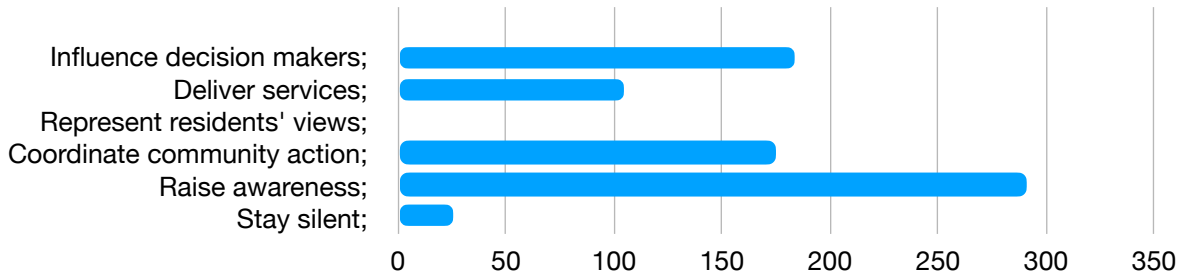
### Environment



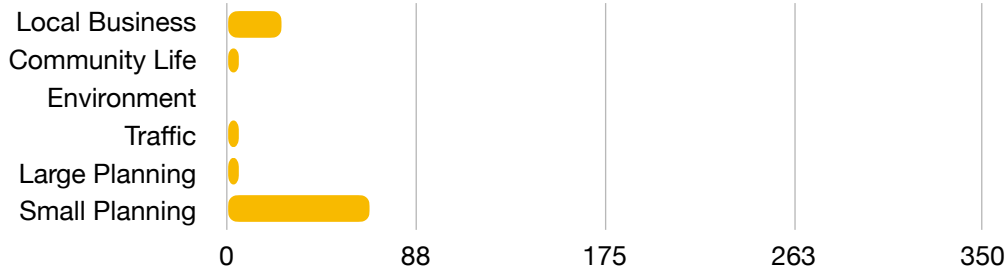
### Community Life



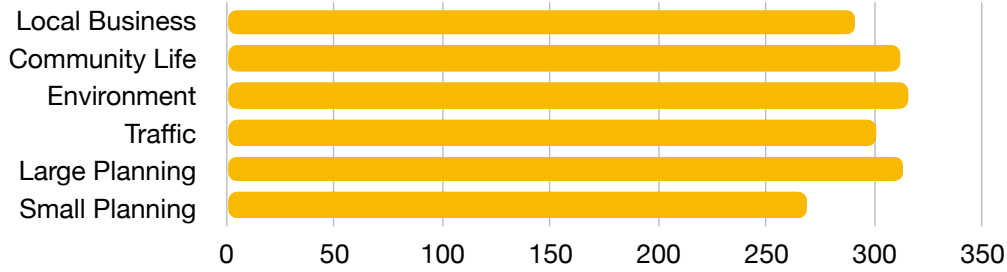
### Local Business



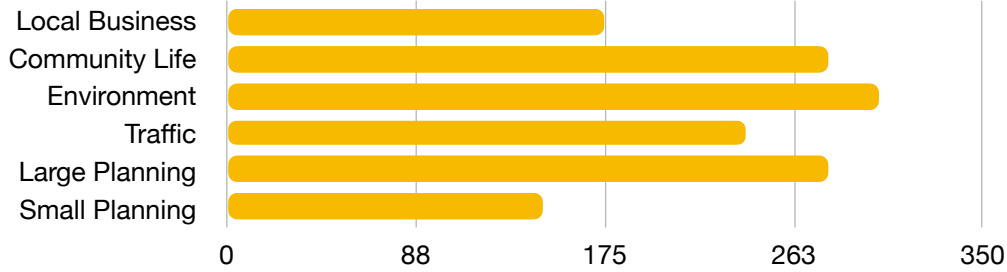
## Stay silent;



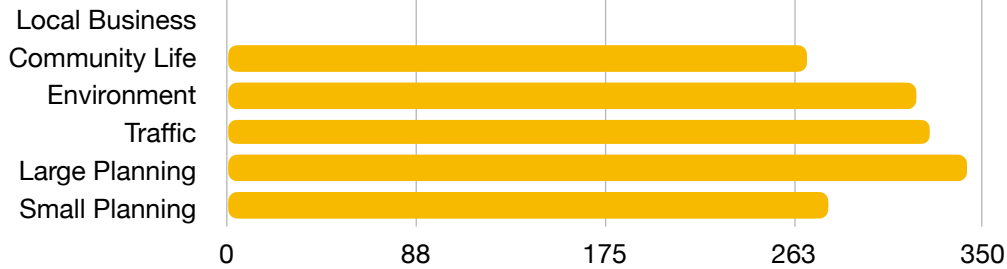
## Raise awareness;



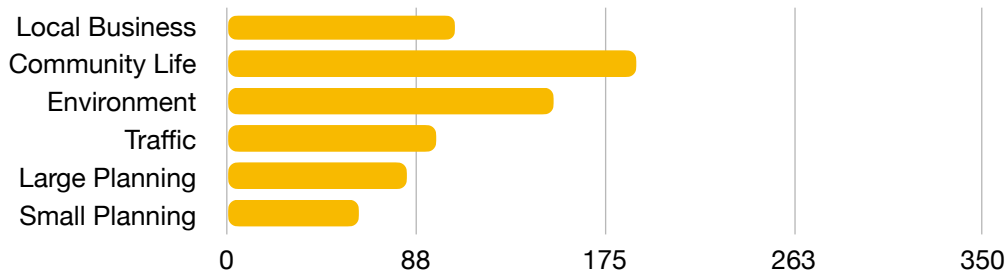
## Coordinate community action;



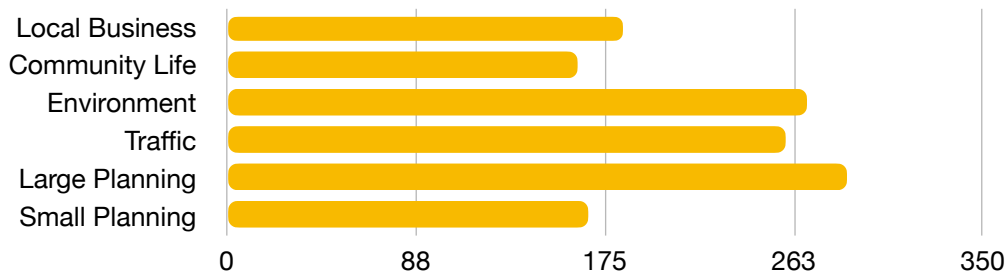
## Represent residents' views;



## Deliver services;



## Influence decision makers;



August 2024

# Willaston Matters

Dear Resident,

Please find enclosed a survey which is being delivered to every household in Willaston, over the coming days.

**Please complete the survey online where possible.**



[www.willastonmatters.org/survey](http://www.willastonmatters.org/survey)

- **The survey is open until the end of August 2024**
- All responses are confidential and anonymous
- Please do not submit more than one response per person

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The current Willaston Residents' & Countryside Society (WRCS) brings together the voices of seventeen existing village societies, residents representatives and the elected councillor.

WRCS' stated aims are to:

- Protect & improve the environmental amenities of the village and its surroundings
- Preserve & encourage village cultural and social activities
- Represent the views of the village and monitor matters of common interest

**In September 2024, the WRCS will be permanently wound up.**



This survey is to understand what type of New Group/ Society (if any) should replace the WRCS.

Results will inform a recommendation which is to be presented at the village meeting being held on 20th September 2024.

If you prefer, you can complete the paper copy of the survey.

Paper copies of the survey can be obtained from, and returned to, either of the following locations:

- SPAR Convenience Store, Willaston
- White Feather, Willaston
- Jillian Dawn Floral Designs, Willaston

If you need any help completing the survey, please contact [support@willastonmatters.org](mailto:support@willastonmatters.org)

We have a group of volunteers ready to support you.

**Please complete the following questions.**

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# Survey

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## 1: Should We Replace the WRCS At All?

(a) In principle, do you think that the WRCS be replaced with a New Group/ Society, to continue to represent the views of residents and existing societies?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If you selected No, please go to **Question 4**.

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## 2: What Should the New Group/ Society Do?

Here are some matters that might be important to a resident of Willaston. Consider:

- How should the New Group/ Society behave?
- Which matters should the New Group/ Society seek to influence?
- When should the New Group/ Society be silent and when should it be heard?

*HINT! Please chose as many answers as you want.*

(a) On matters of **Planning** (Small) the New Group/ Society should:

For example: Applications from individual households in the village, etc.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stay silent                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Represent residents' views |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Raise awareness             | <input type="checkbox"/> Deliver services           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate community action | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence decision makers  |

(b) On matters of **Planning** (Large) the New Group/ Society should:

For example: Green-belt protection, applications for commercial or multiple dwelling developments, etc.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stay silent                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Represent residents' views |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Raise awareness             | <input type="checkbox"/> Deliver services           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate community action | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence decision makers  |

(c) On matters of **Traffic** the New Group/ Society should:

For example: Speeding, parking, volume of traffic, etc.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stay silent                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Represent residents' views |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Raise awareness             | <input type="checkbox"/> Deliver services           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate community action | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence decision makers  |

(e) On matters of **Environment** the New Group/ Society should:

For example: Care of green spaces, parks and footpaths, littering, fly-tipping, etc.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stay silent                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Represent residents' views |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Raise awareness             | <input type="checkbox"/> Deliver services           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate community action | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence decision makers  |

(e) On matters of **Community Life** the New Group/ Society should:

For example: Village events, existing societies, social wellbeing etc.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stay silent                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Represent residents' views |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Raise awareness             | <input type="checkbox"/> Deliver services           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate community action | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence decision makers  |

(f) On matters of **Local Business** the New Group/ Society should:

For example: Enhancing the village retail, hospitality, business services and visitor offering.

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stay silent | <input type="checkbox"/> Represent residents' views |
|--------------------------------------|---|

☐ Raise awareness

☐ Deliver services

☐ Coordinate community action

☐ Influence decision makers

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### 3: Volunteering

There are several options as to how we may replace the WRCS, but they all have one thing in common: They need people to volunteer their time and energy.

(a) Would you consider volunteering to participate in the New Group/ Society, in the future?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Maybe

(b) Please tell us the name of the road you live in. (Optional)

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### 4: Anything Else?

(a) Do you have any further comments to add?

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### Thank You

To hear the outcome of this survey, please remember to attend the **village meeting on the 20th September 2024.**

Thank you for taking the time to provide your views.