



Rolvenden Parish Council

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2018

ROLVENDEN BUSINESS SURVEY, 2015

COMPILED BY:

**NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
AND ROLVENDEN PARISH COUNCIL**

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1 Introduction

As part of the Neighbourhood Plan process, a survey of businesses in the Parish was undertaken over a three-week period during October and November 2015.

2 Aims and Methodology

The survey sought to understand the business community; to establish its health, its constraints and opportunities and also to glean information as to its future needs. By understanding this, it was anticipated that emerging Neighbourhood Plan Policies could be tailored, where appropriate, to support economic activity within the Parish.

The survey included the widest range of enterprises in the Parish and was not limited in planning terms to just the business use class. A list of businesses in the Parish was used as a starting point. This was fully updated following extensive telephoning and using KCC Libraries information, Valuation Office data, Yellow Pages listings, advertising in local papers, and detailed knowledge from local councillors and other individuals.

Using Smart Survey, a web-based survey facility, invitations were sent by email to all known businesses, from sole traders to limited companies.

86 invitations were sent out, and 48 replies were received representing a 55.8% return. Respondents were not asked to answer every question, as some would have been inapplicable to their particular type of enterprise.

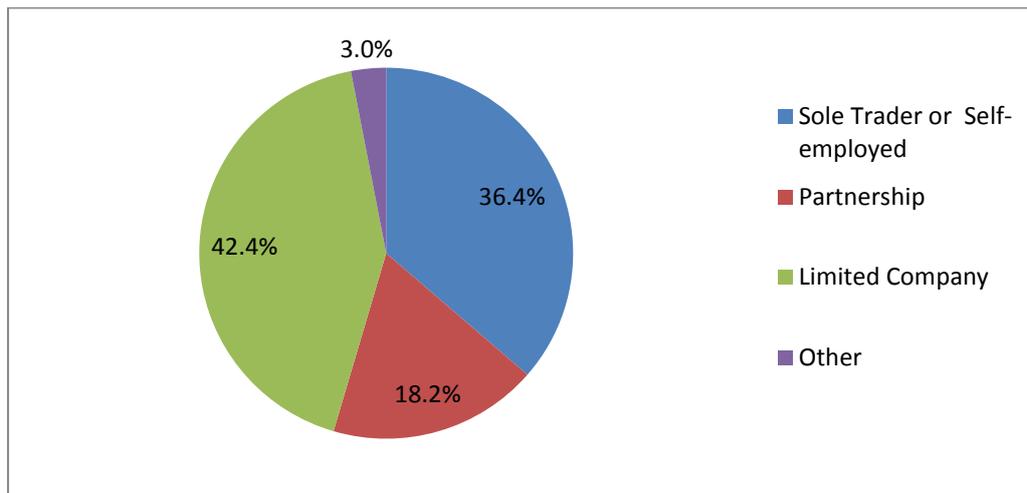
There were some notable absences among those who replied. For example, out of 15 farms invited to participate only five responses were received (this seems particularly unfortunate since one farming respondent asked the Parish/Borough Council to take "a positive and supportive attitude to the farming community") and there were no replies from the Bed & Breakfast establishments in the parish.

3 Businesses in Rolvenden Parish Today

Reflecting the UK as a whole, the majority of businesses operate an office/administrative function rather than being involved in manufacturing.

3.1 TYPE OF BUSINESS

Most businesses surveyed were run as limited companies (42%), with the second largest category being Sole traders or Self-employed (36%).



3.2 NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

Of the twenty-eight businesses recording staff numbers, the two largest employers had a staff roll of 28 and 24 respectively. However most businesses were small and, with the two largest employers discounted, the average staff number was 3.

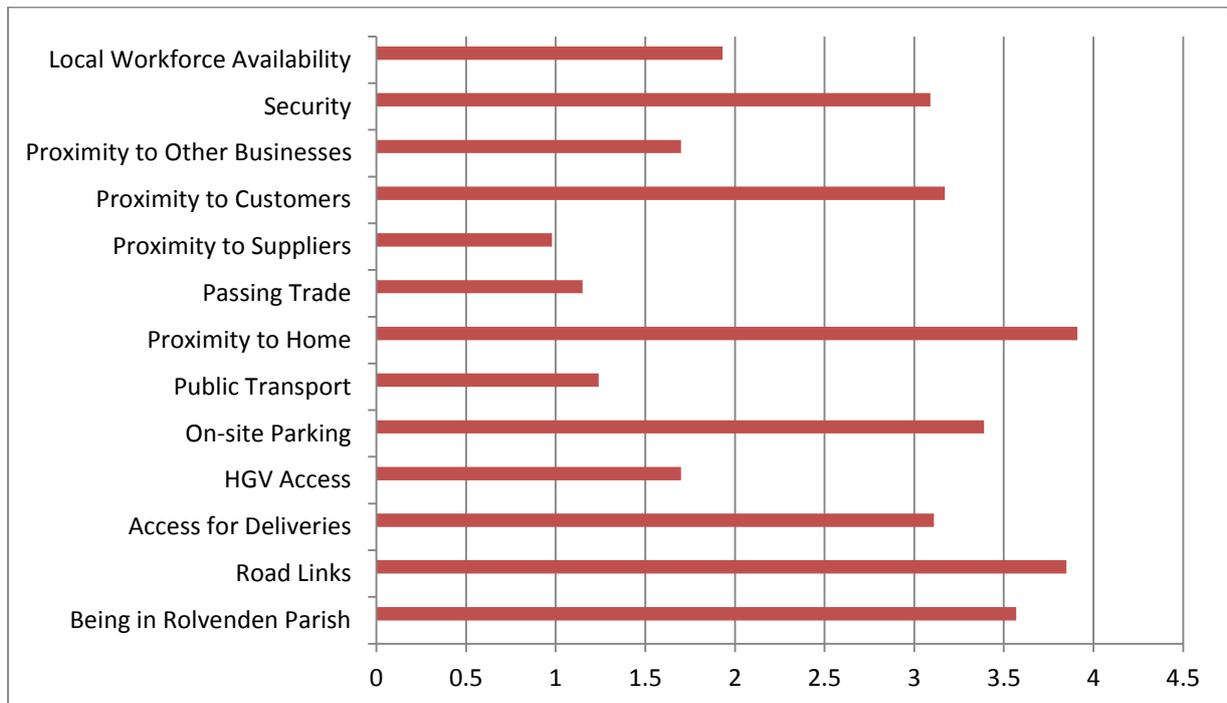
3.3 NUMBER OF YEARS TRADING

A number of established businesses in the Parish, such as public houses and farms, have been trading for over 100 years. Of the remainder, the average number of years trading is 17 with two of these having been established 53 and 56 years ago respectively.

9 businesses have been trading for ten years or less and 5 for five years or less.

3.4 FACTORS OF IMPORTANCE TO YOUR BUSINESS

Respondents were asked to score a number of factors affecting their business location. 0 = least important, 10 = most important. Average responses are shown below:



It can be seen that the most important factors were:

- Proximity to Home [See 5 below] and
- Road Links/ access for deliveries

and the least important were:

- Public Transport and
- Passing Trade

3.5 TYPE OF PREMISES

By far the majority of businesses (38%) are situated in a home/offices, which explains why the most important factor affecting a business was “proximity to home”.

Answer Choice		Response Total	Percent
1	Industrial Unit	2	5.41%
3	Workshop	2	5.41%
4	Office	5	13.51%
5	Home/Office	14	37.84%
6	Retail Unit	2	5.41%
7	Barn	2	5.41%
8	Studio	2	5.41%
9	Farm	4	10.81%
10	Other *	4	10.81%
		Total Responses	
		37	100.00%

* Others listed: Public House & home; English Language School; Nursing Homes; Storage Unit. 67 % of all premises were owned Freehold and 33% either Leasehold or Rented.

3.6 SPACE OCCUPIED

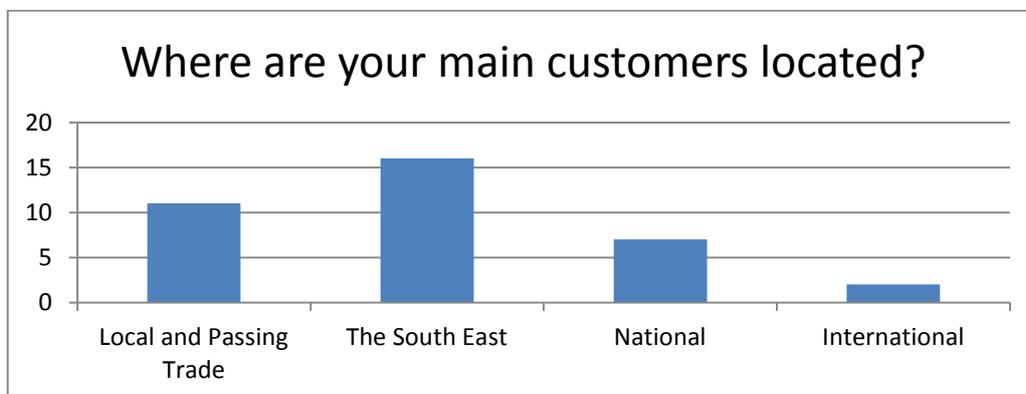
The largest Business premises in the Parish is 4,000 m² although no breakdown of this working space was provided.

Of those businesses providing a breakdown of their working space, average use was:

Admin/Office	63.35%
Industrial /Manufacturing	52.50%
Storage	40.00%
Retail	13.25%

3.7 CUSTOMER BASE

27 companies had a customer base within the local area and the South East, 7 companies enjoyed a national customer base, and just 2 firms traded internationally.



31 responses

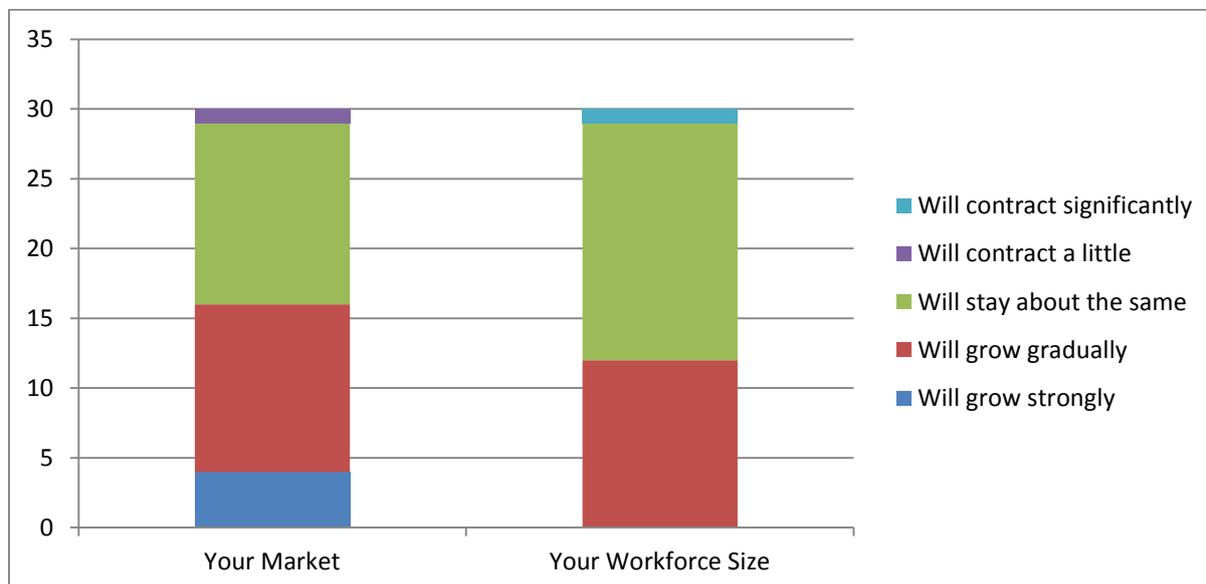
3.8 DELIVERIES AND DESPATCHES

Respondents were asked to record the average number of deliveries and despatches per week. Only 10 respondents completed this section, so the figures recorded here do not provide a clear overview of the amount of businesses traffic generated within the parish.

IN	Vehicle Type					OUT	Vehicle Type				
	Car	Van	Rigid	Artic	Other		Car	Van	Rigid	Artic	Other
	10	2	1	5	4		12	1	8	5	4
	12	2	8				60	20			
	60	8	1				14	2			
	14	1	2				2	5			
	2	4									
		20									
		5									
		5									
		19									
		1									
TOTAL	98	67	12	5	4	TOTAL	88	28	8	5	4

4 Future Needs of Business

Asked about anticipated changes in coming years the majority of businesses expressed an optimistic view. Of the 30 who expressed a view, 4 expected their market to grow strongly, 12 expected it to grow gradually, 13 anticipated it would stay the same. Only one respondent predicted a contraction with a corresponding decrease in workforce.



4.1. NEED FOR NEW PREMISES

From 31 responses:

Two stated they would move within five years, and two after 5 years.

In addition one respondent said they would move some operations, one said they would move all operations and a further three said they *might* move all.

Only four replies were received about why a move was anticipated or planned. Reasons included were:

- Need for larger premises to facilitate expansion (1)
- Need to move closer to suppliers/customers (1)
- Need for better public transport/road links (1)
- Closing down (2)

It is not possible to draw any conclusion from such a small sample number.

The majority of businesses expressed optimism about the future, either expecting the market to remain the same, grow gradually or grow strongly. The largest built facility (as opposed to space occupied by a farm) comprises 4,000 sq metres of space, averaging 100 customers per week. This company stated that it would wish to move after five years due to shortage of space. In order to supplement this information, a subsequent more detailed interview was undertaken with the company to discuss this point. This revealed that they are now hoping to remain and expand at their existing site, rather than move elsewhere.

5 Planning Policies and their Effect

Businesses were asked if Planning Policies had any effect on them.

The following comments were received:

a) Housing

Lack of local properties to rent meant it was easy to find tenants (1)

b) Transport

Lack of school buses disrupt the working day for parents (2)

Limited public transport is unhelpful - inability of workforce to get to work without using private vehicles (2)

Traffic jams on A21 disrupt journeys (1)

Poor state of roads, road markings and potholes (1)

c) Environmental

Flooding has previously created maintenance issues (1)

Noise can be an issue (we do try to keep it down though) (1)

Road noise and farm noise - reversing alarms cause stress whilst working in the office - there is no need for them if the only person working outside is the driver (1)

d) Socio-Economic

Lack of local work opportunities mean that tenants tend to be retired, disabled or on other types of benefits. This means properties need to be appropriately equipped and (rents) often capped at levels payable by Borough Councils (1)

Lack of affordable housing (which would) allow me to live and work in the village I was brought up in (1)

(More) infrastructure projects could provide contracts for my business (1)

Overall, lack of affordable housing was shown as a concern.

Inadequate public transport in this rural area and lack of school buses figured in responses.

The other item mentioned was a lack of small industrial/business units, but from the survey results it would appear there is little, if any, demand for such facilities from existing businesses. Thus if planning permission was to be granted for such use, and either speculative or built-to-order units constructed - they would most probably be occupied by businesses from outside the Parish, rather than from within.

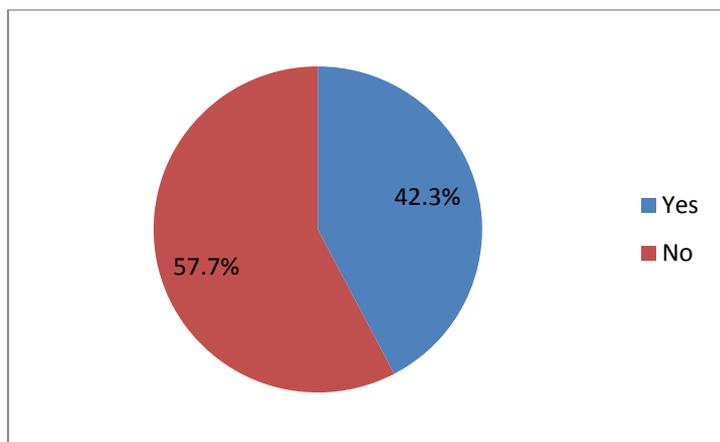
6 How Might the Parish/ Borough Council support Your Business

- Extend traffic speed restriction (on A28) outside our home/office and prevent reversing sensors on farm vehicles from working when lone operative in Cab (2)
- Help get good telephone and broadband (1) *[See 6.2 & 6.3 below]*
- Ensure there is a balance of work, housing and transport available to attract different types of professional tenants (1)
- By taking a positive and supportive attitude to the farming community (1)
- Supporting applications for small businesses locally e.g. Windmill Farm outlets (1)
- By supporting employment (1)

6.1 WHAT MIGHT BE INTRODUCED TO IMPROVE THE PARISH'S ECONOMY IN THE FUTURE?

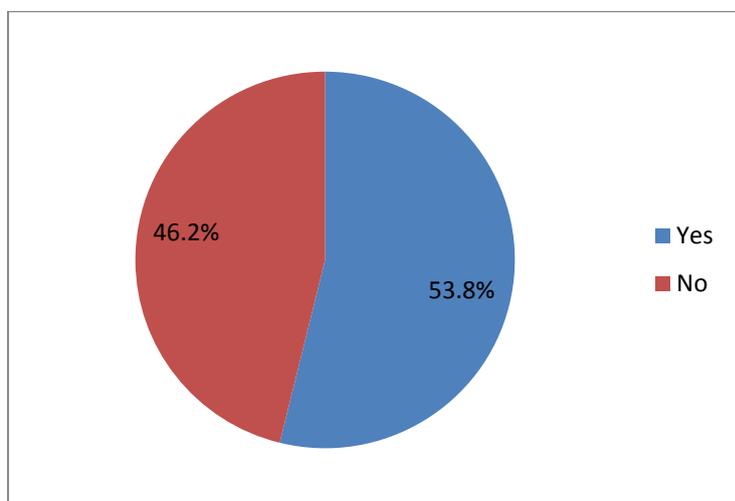
- More environmentally friendly businesses such as micro generation/solar etc. (1)
- Smaller houses as starter homes, both to buy and 'affordable', retention of council homes and affordable homes rather than selling off (1)
- Encourage tourism (1)
- More retail premises (1)
- More (affordable) light industrial units (1)
- More business units (outside of built-up areas within easy commuting distance (1)
- Reliable and frequent public transport, subsidised if necessary to make this happen, so children, teenagers and young workers all have more mobility and freedom, without relying on expensive cars or their parents (1)
- Good telephone and much better faster broadband to encourage home working so other local businesses benefit e.g. shop, Post office (3) *[See 6.2 & 6.3 below]*

6.2 DO CURRENT BROADBAND SPEEDS ADVERSELY IMPACT YOUR BUSINESS?



29 % of respondents would be prepared to contribute towards broadband improvement

6.3 DOES POOR MOBILE RECEPTION ADVERSELY AFFECT YOUR BUSINESS?



56% of respondents would support an initiative to improve reception

Broadband speed and poor mobile phone reception were seen as major inhibitions to economic growth.

42% stated that poor broadband speed affected their business and 29% were happy to provide financial support to improve it. 54% stated that poor mobile reception affected their business and 56% stated they would support an initiative to improve reception.

Improvements to both of these is likely to represent both the cheapest and quickest way to improve the economic viability of the Parish.

6.4 FURTHER CONTACT

All but 6 respondents were happy to be contacted regarding their survey answers.

7 Conclusions

The presence of businesses is important to the sustainability of Rolvenden Parish and a number of businesses have long term associations with the parish. Businesses provide local employment opportunities; help sustain the social and economic fabric of Rolvenden High Street and Rolvenden Layne and, in relation to farming, help sustain the landscape quality of the countryside.

The principally small scale businesses generally operate from small premises (in many case these are home based). There are a number of offices and workshops located in the parish, many within converted rural buildings. There is no significant identified need for additional premises – though with businesses generally optimistic about the future and some expressing a need to move premises in the next 5 years or so, some flexibility in supply will be advantageous in sustaining local enterprises.

Apart from a flexible supply of business units, additional affordable housing and improved infrastructure (roads, broadband and mobile connections) are also seen as important.

Although the agricultural and tourism sectors were not well represented in responses they are clearly important aspects of the local economy.

The Parish Council would like to express its thanks to all those who participated in the Business Survey which now forms the basis for this report KM 29.11.15