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Monmouthshire Well-being Assessment 2022

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Version Control

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The well-being assessment is made up of different parts:

- Gwent as a whole (see www.gwentpsb.org/well-being-plan/well-being-assessment for more details of the Gwent well-being assessment)
- Monmouthshire as a whole
- 5 local areas within Monmouthshire centred around Abergavenny, Monmouth, Usk, Chepstow, and Caldicot.

A summary of the Monmouthshire well-being assessment is also available. To see further analysis please visit www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/our-monmouthshire

Chepstow and the Lower Wye Valley

Environmental Well-being

This area is centred around the town of Chepstow, and the southwestern quarter of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The historic core of the town is centred around the castle, overlooking the River Wye. Tree cover from the outskirts of Chepstow northwards is almost continuous, and on the plateaux above the Wye, there are important concentrations of flower-rich neutral and calcareous meadows, particularly in the Shirenewton and Caerwent areas.

The landscape and nature conservation value is reflected by the many protected areas. The Severn Estuary is of international importance for wintering and passage waterfowl, saltmarshes, exposed sandbanks, fish feeding areas and an unusually large natural tidal range which influences the species that occur here. The estuary is protected as a Ramsar site, overseen by the United Nations.

The Severn Estuary is also a Special Area of Conservation, protected under the EC Habitats Directive, as is the River Wye because of the cleanliness of its waters and the wide range of species that it supports. There are 14 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the Chepstow and Lower Wye area, the most important sites for nature in Wales, comprising meadows, woodland, bat sites and geological, as well as 185 SINC's, sites of local importance for nature conservation.¹

Unlike many other parts of Monmouthshire, many of these sites are well connected to other



Autumn in the Wye Valley, from Eagle's Nest

sites, with woodlands well connected to other large woodland blocks, including on the English side of the border in the Wye Valley Woodlands Special Area of Conservation. This means that these sites are more resilient to change or disturbance because species can easily migrate.²

However, as elsewhere in the county, ash dieback is a threat. First confirmed in Monmouthshire in 2014, we have seen the effects worsen across the county in recent years and have already had to remove all infected trees at Old Station Tintern.³

The Woodland Trust owns a large part of Wentwood Forest and other sites, and NRW also owns and manages many sites in the Lower Wye Valley. Wentwood Forest has been affected by Larch disease, which means that large areas had to be felled in 2021.⁴

As well as wildlife designations, the area is also valued for its landscape, hence its Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty status. The beauty of the landscape for centuries brought visitors and tourists to the area to do a tour, and the popularity with visitors continues today, which is an important contribution to the local economy.⁵ Projects such as the Tintern Ambassador scheme aim to involve volunteers in welcoming tourists and helping them to get the most out of their visit.⁶

"We have only lived in Chepstow for a short time having moved from a large city. The natural beauty of the area is what I love most"

Chepstow marks the start of several long-distance walks, the Wye Valley Walk, Offa's Dyke and the Wales Coastal Path, and will soon have a new link connecting with the England Coast Path across the old Severn Bridge.

Although Chepstow town has many public green spaces, such as Warren Slade and Park Redding Woods, overall there is a deficit of accessible natural green space. Likewise, rural parts of the Lower Wye are not well served by accessible natural green space, and some rural areas have no access to sports pitches and few amenity open spaces.⁷ Despite Chepstow's proximity to some extensive woodlands, the town itself only has 15% urban tree cover and has lost 5 hectares of tree cover between 2009 and 2013.⁸

Greater urban tree cover could help to reduce the air quality problems that Chepstow faces. The A48 at Mount Pleasant, Hardwick Hill and Newport Road has been designated as an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), due to high levels of nitrogen dioxide and particulates from traffic, especially HGVs, on this busy road. This type of pollution is particularly detrimental to health, causing respiratory problems.⁹ Despite this designation in 2007, and the development of an Air Quality Action Plan, concentrations within the Chepstow AQMA still exceed the objective for long-term nitrogen dioxide, despite a large decrease between 2012 and 2019; therefore this AQMA will remain.¹⁰

"Traffic is a huge problem and makes Chepstow unbearable at times"

The Severn Bridge tolls were removed in December 2018, which has led to increased congestion in Chepstow as more people are commuting across the border or have moved from Bristol to Chepstow to take advantage of lower house prices.¹¹ Data from Highways England shows that in the year after the tolls were removed, the average number of cars crossing the Severn Bridge per day increased by 16%.¹² There has been substantial local campaigning to reduce congestion and the impact of car



Protesters as part of the Save the Wye pilgrimage (source: @nyebeauty)

transport, led by Transition Chepstow which has published a Transport Plan for the town.¹³

The River Wye and its tributaries support many important species including Atlantic salmon, white-clawed crayfish, sea and river lampreys, and otters. However, concerns over a deterioration in water quality in the Wye – potentially because of pollution from chicken farms and sewage treatment over recent years – has led to both national campaigns and local protests.¹⁴

The Nedern Brook, the northerly part of which is in the Chepstow and Lower Wye area, is of poor quality, due to pollution from sewage and misconceptions.¹⁵

There are 3 Groundwater Source Protection Zones in this area, in Penterry, Chepstow Park Wood and much of Caerwent and part of Shirenewton, where special care is needed to protect underground aquifers from contamination.

Parts of the Chepstow and Lower Wye area are at risk of flooding due to the proximity to the Severn Estuary, the River Wye and the various tributaries of the River Severn.¹⁶ In Chepstow town, 221 people are at high or medium risk of surface water flooding.¹⁷ This equates to 19 properties at risk, which is relatively low, but there is much important infrastructure at risk, such as the Severnside rail line and industrial units southwest of Chepstow.

Parts of Tintern flood regularly at high tide, but residents are notified of the forecast high tide dates annually by Monmouthshire County Council; the council has a presence during those times to close the road if necessary, sandbags are stored locally, and many residents often have measures in place to mitigate the effect of flooding such as floodgates and sandbags. Despite these measures though, 10 residential properties and 9 commercial premises were flooded by tidal flooding in March 2020.¹⁸

The Gwent Levels are an important feature of the landscape of southern Monmouthshire. The levels extend over 5000ha between Chepstow and Cardiff from the Severn Estuary shoreline to the M4. The Levels are one of the largest surviving areas of ancient grazing marsh and drainage ditch systems, known as reens, in Britain. Some ditches date back to Roman times. The Living Levels Partnership is key to ensuring the Levels are managed sustainably, and to involve the public.

Wetlands provide many economic, social and environmental benefits which can be conservatively valued at over £65 million a year for an area the size of the Gwent Levels. The water levels in the reens are kept high in summer to provide water for farmland and ideal conditions for wildlife. In winter, the water levels are dropped for flood protection.¹⁹ Much of the Levels are protected by flood defence, and discussions over the maintenance of these are ongoing with NRW.

Agriculture is also an important feature in this area. Monmouthshire has very little Grade 2 agricultural land, but most of those areas that are Grade 2 are found in the south of the Lower Wye area.²⁰

Chepstow has a number of environmental and sustainability groups working in the area. Transition Chepstow is very active with projects on energy, transport, food and more. Gwent Energy Community Interest Company are based in Chepstow, which have many excellent and pioneering community energy projects around the county. There are also groups looking after local woodland, promoting Fairtrade and local cycle routes.

Economic Well-being

Chepstow is the second most expensive area for house prices in Monmouthshire, of which 3 wards are in the county's most expensive 10. However, it also has 2 wards in the 10 least expensive, demonstrating the potential differences that can be found within a single area.²¹

The overall vacancy rate of 13.5% in Chepstow is the highest since 2003. The town retains a high percentage of trade for convenience goods but in comparison, trade is being drawn away from the town given its proximity to Cribbs Causeway in Bristol and Spytty

"Increase the number of shops at Chepstow"

"Chepstow High Street needs urgent action – it is totally run down"

Retail Park in Newport.²² Nevertheless, engagement responses noted the recent improvements to the high street, such as making it mostly pedestrianised, and the draw of the weekly Sunday market.

In this area, 8% of the working-age population receive employment-related benefits, with 12% considered to be income deprived. 145 people are claiming Job Seeker's Allowance or Universal Credit for unemployment, of which 35 are aged 16-24. 13.4% of children are in low-income families.²³

In the Chepstow catchment area, 15% of households are below 50% of the median income for the UK, and 20% are below 60%, as compared with 17% and 22% respectively for Monmouthshire, and 25% and 33% for Wales as a whole.²⁴ Thornwell has the second-highest percentage of people in income deprivation in the county, while St Kingsmark 1 and Trellech United 2 have the joint first and joint second-lowest percentage of people in income deprivation in the county, respectively.²⁵

Social Well-being

The population of Chepstow and the Lower Wye Valley is 19,762, and similar in demographic profile to Severnside. 60.5% of the population are of working-age, the second-highest after Severnside. 23.2% of residents are aged 65 or older, the second-lowest of the five areas after Severnside.

Chepstow and the Lower Wye Valley has one area in the most deprived 20% of areas in Monmouthshire. Part of Thornwell (Thornwell 1) is ranked the third most deprived area in Monmouthshire, largely due to deprivation in health, income and education.²⁶ One-quarter of people in the area are in income deprivation, and repeat absenteeism in school is one of the

highest in Monmouthshire. Pre-school children residing in particular postcodes in Thornwell are eligible for Flying Start.

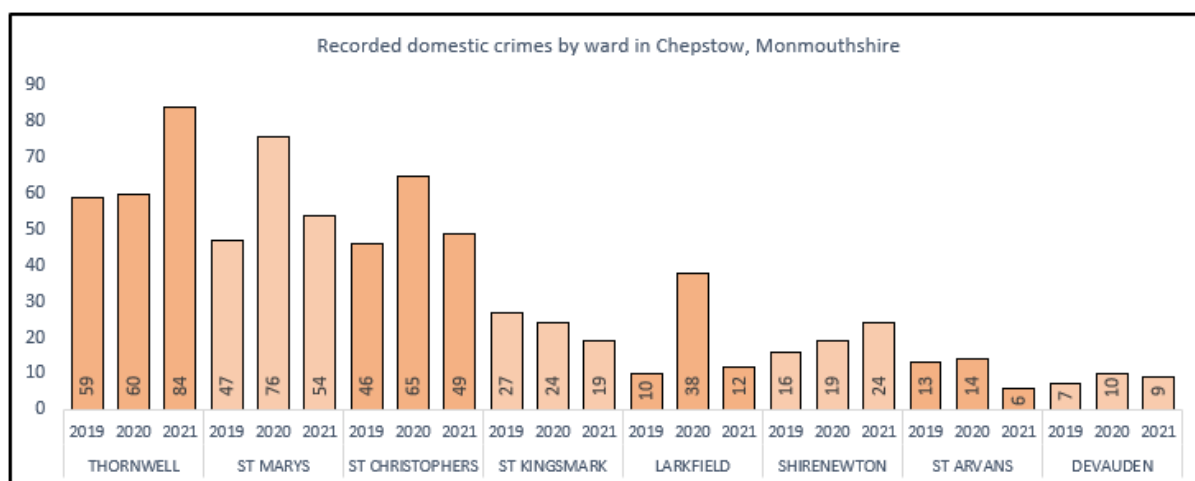
As with other areas in Monmouthshire, access to services is an issue in some parts of Chepstow and the Lower Wye Valley, for example, Devauden and St. Arvans. Average travel times for key services in the area particularly by public transport, are longer than average time for Wales.²⁷

The health of 83% of people in Chepstow and the Lower Wye Valley is reported as good or very good, which is the highest of the five areas. St. Mary's had the lowest proportion, with 78%, and St Kingsmark 2 the highest, at 89% (this is also the third least deprived of Monmouthshire's areas). In the Chepstow area, more people live with long term limiting illnesses, and more suffer from cancer in Thornwell 1 than in other areas.²⁸

Of those in Monmouthshire on the affordable housing waiting list with a recognised need, the largest demand is for one-bedroom accommodation, particularly in the Chepstow Housing Market Area (as of May 2021).²⁹

From November 2020 to November 2021, overall crime in Chepstow remained the same at 19.5%. There has been a reduction of Rape, Commercial Burglaries, Drug Offences, and Robbery which could be due in part to the pandemic and lockdowns, and the reduction in Stop And Search activity within the county. There have been notable increases in all Other Thefts, Public Order Offences, and Other Sexual Offences. From April 2020 to March 2021, 294 incidents of ASB were recorded, accounting for 25.9% of all reported ASB across Monmouthshire. The wards with the highest prevalence were St Mary's, Thornwell and St Christopher's, with a brief spike in Shirenewton. As of January 2021, there were 99 adults accessing support, 39 for alcohol and 60 for other substances. The highest recorded substances for which initial help is sought are heroin and alcohol. The Crime Volume in Chepstow of Violence Without Injury has increased from 270 to 294 and Criminal Damage has also increased from 121 to 142 incidents.

Thornwell in Chepstow has recorded the most domestic-related crime over the last three years. From January 2021 to November 2021, Thornwell made up 33% of all recorded crime in the Chepstow area.



Cultural Well-being

Chepstow is one of Monmouthshire's historic market towns, and the area is bordered by Gloucestershire and Forest of Dean in England. The landscape of the area, with the river Wye, which has one of the highest tidal ranges in the world, and the natural beauty of the lower Wye valley are particular highlights.

Figures from the 2011 Census show that this area has the lowest level of Welsh skills (87% stated they have no Welsh skills). Additionally, the proportion of people who stated that they could speak Welsh (8.8%) and speak, read and write Welsh (6%) were the lowest in Monmouthshire, when comparing across the 5 areas. The Welsh society, Cymdeithas Cas-gwent, Cil-y-coed a'r cyffiniau, covers the area and regularly hosts themed evenings as well as Chat Clubs.

30% of the population stated they had no religion in the 2011 Census, the highest figure of the 5 areas; however, the area is consistent with other areas, with 62% declaring themselves as Christian.³⁰

The area has a rich built heritage including Chepstow Castle overlooking the river Wye, Town Gate and Port Wall and the Old Wye Bridge. Tintern Abbey in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a heritage site of national and international importance and is one of the most instantly recognisable buildings in Monmouthshire. This is widely identified as an important British heritage site.

Chepstow and the surrounding area also host a number of festivals and arts events including an annual agricultural show, theatrical and other events and shows held at the Drill Hall, and Chepstow Museum, which displays the rich and varied past of the town.

Public transport travel time to a library in the area is also above the average for Wales, taking, on average, 56 minutes (45 minutes is the average in Wales). Travel time by private transport is 13 minutes, slightly above the Wales average of 10 minutes.³¹

Chepstow Racecourse is one of the more prominent sporting venues in the county, and hosts the Welsh Grand National every December, the biggest race day of the year in Wales. The

racecourse also plays host to a range of live music and other sporting events each year, although these have been impacted by the pandemic.

What would make the area better?

“Public transport is appalling”

“Better bus services. Currently bus services finish ludicrously early. E.g. last bus from Newport to Chepstow”

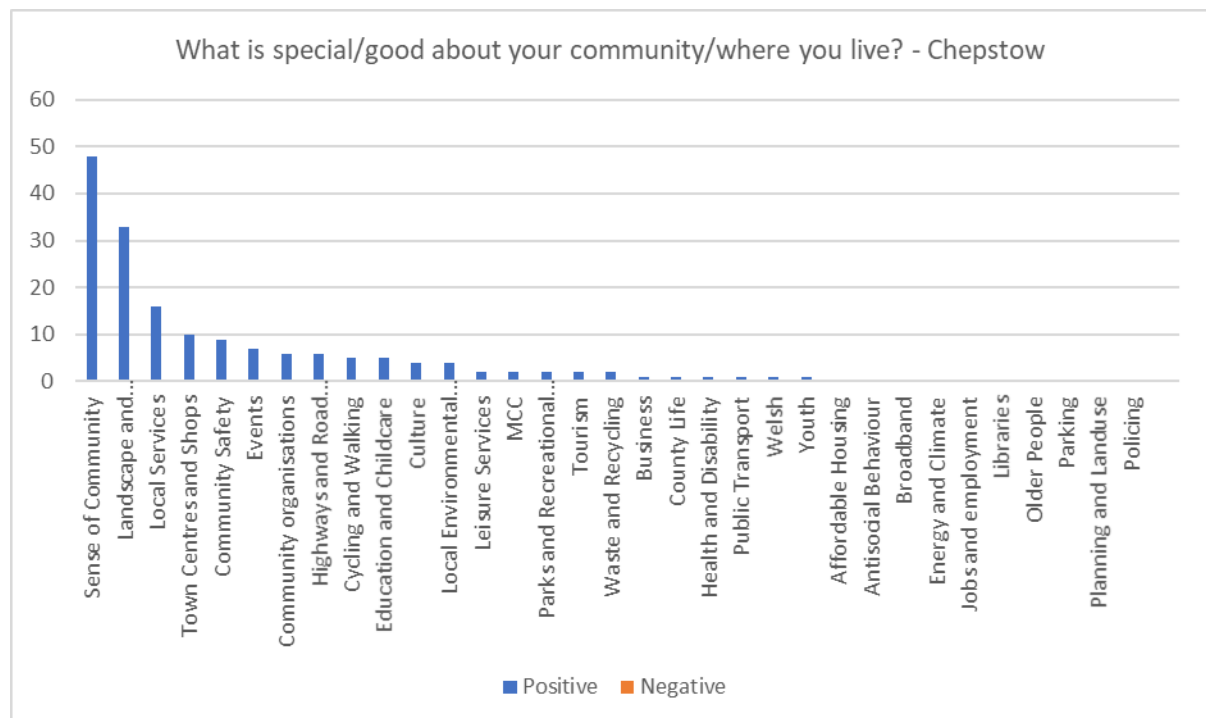
Travel time to a sports facility in the area on public transport is above the average for Wales, at 70 minutes (Wales Average, 52 minutes). On private transport it is 12 minutes, which is slightly higher than the average for Wales.³² Chepstow has a train station, making it well connected to south Wales and England. However, feedback from residents during the engagement for the

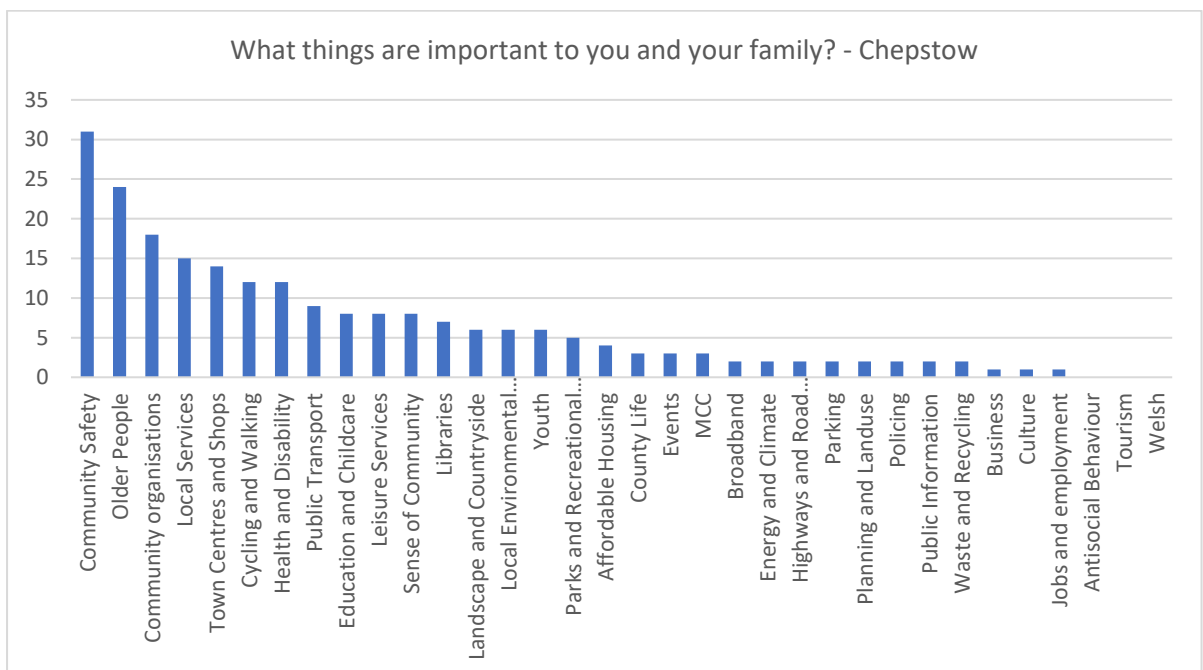
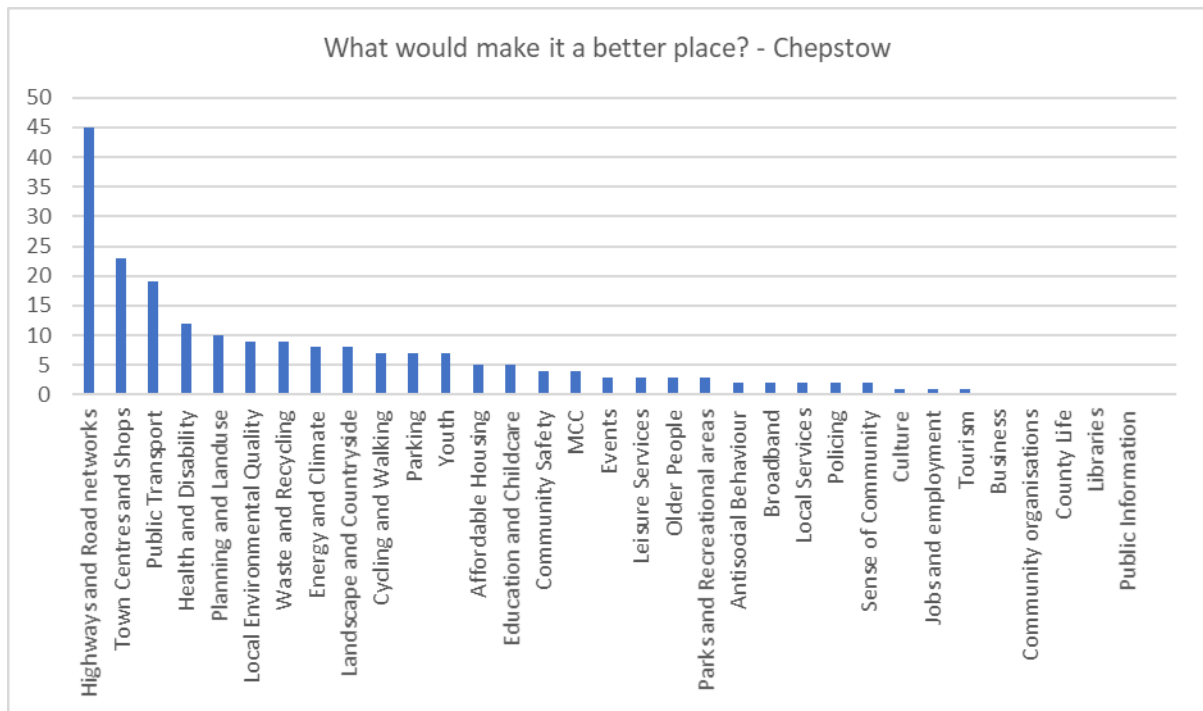
assessment suggests that many are very unhappy with current public transport provision.

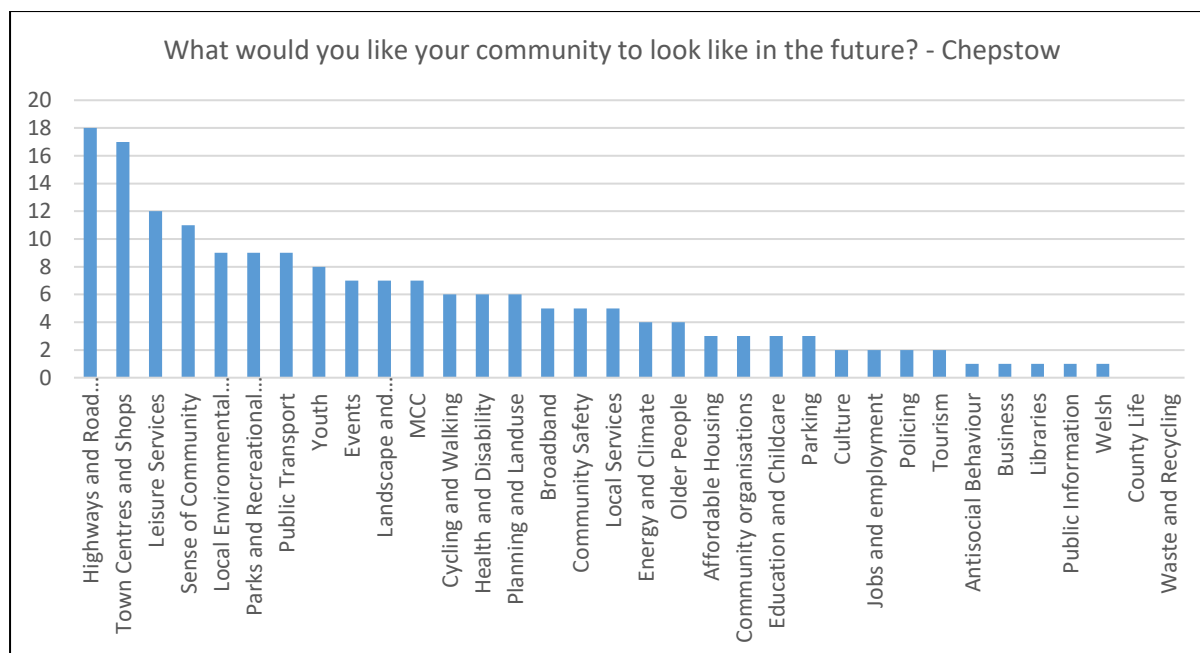
Engagement responses

A summary of the responses from the area to some of the engagement exercise questions is provided. To make it easier to analyse the many diverse comments that were received to the open-ended questions that were asked, comments were grouped into categories or themes. This allows us to identify some of the most common themes that respondents in the area mentioned.

The following graphs show the themes that were used to categorise the comments, and where appropriate, whether these were more positive or negative in response is provided.







¹ Monmaps Countryside Layer

² Public Service Board Monmouthshire Environmental information for well-being assessments, NRW, 2016

³ Ash Dieback At Old Station Tintern

www.monlife.co.uk/ash-dieback-at-old-station-tintern-2

⁴ Information on larch felling – Wentwood and Trellech Common <https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/our-projects/forestry-projects/information-on-larch-felling-wentwood-and-trellech-common/?lang=en>

⁵ Destination Management in Monmouthshire

[www.visitmonmouthshire.com/dbimsgs/FINAL%20July%202017%20Monmouthshire%20Destination%20Plan%202017-2020\(1\).pdf](http://www.visitmonmouthshire.com/dbimsgs/FINAL%20July%202017%20Monmouthshire%20Destination%20Plan%202017-2020(1).pdf)

⁶ Tintern Ambassadors

www.visitmonmouthshire.com/destination-management/abergavenny-and-tintern-ambassadors

⁷ MCC Open Space Study, Ashley Godfrey Associates, 2008

www.planningpolicy.monmouthshire.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/MonmouthshireOpenSpace-Dec08.pdf

⁸ Tree Cover in Wales' Towns and Cities, NRW, 2016

<https://cdn.naturalresources.wales/media/679615/eng-urban-tree-summary-2016.pdf?mode=pad>

⁹ Public Service Board Monmouthshire Environmental information for well-being assessments, NRW, 2016;

Committee On The Medical Effects Of Air Pollutants Statement On The Evidence For The Effects Of Nitrogen Dioxide On Health, Public Health England 2015

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/411756/COMEAP_The_evidence_for_the_effects_of_nitrogen_dioxide.pdf

¹⁰ Air Quality Action Plan: Chepstow

www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/app/uploads/2013/06/Chepstow-AQAP-Final-31-August-2011.pdf;

MCC 2020 Air Quality Progress Report

www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/app/uploads/2021/01/MCC-AQ-APR-2020.pdf

¹¹ Calls for action as Chepstow traffic worsens since Severn Bridge tolls were scrapped

www.itv.com/news/wales/2020-01-22/commuters-in-and-out-of-chepstow-sitting-in-traffic-for-hours-since-severn-bridge-toll-removal

¹² A year after the Severn bridge tolls were scrapped, what has the impact been for Gwent?

www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/18111704.year-severn-bridge-tolls-scrapped-impact-gwent

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- ¹³ Chepstow transport group's plan to rid town of congestion
www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/19271866.chepstow-transport-groups-plan-rid-town-congestion
- ¹⁴ Wye Crisis and intensive chicken units in Powys
<https://cprw.org.uk/cms-data/resources/200619%20%20River%20Wye%20in%20Crisis%20BRB-CPRW%20Press%20Release.pdf>;
- Pilgrims complete journey along River Wye in name of threatened river
www.gloucestershirelive.co.uk/news/gloucester-news/pilgrims-complete-journey-along-river-5729672
- ¹⁵ Public Service Board Monmouthshire Environmental information for well-being assessments, NRW
- ¹⁶ Public Service Board Monmouthshire Environmental information for well-being assessments, NRW
- ¹⁷ Monmouthshire Flood Risk Management Plan
- ¹⁸ Winter Flooding 2019/2020 Summary of Main Impacts and Actions
- ¹⁹ Gwent Levels M4 Relief Road Briefing
www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/gwent_levels_m4_relief_road_briefing_final.pdf
- ²⁰ Public Service Board Monmouthshire Environmental information for well-being assessments, NRW
- ²¹ UK House Price Index summary: July 2021
www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-house-price-index-summary-july-2021
- ²² MCC 2020 Retail Background Paper – March 2021
www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/app/uploads/2021/05/Retail-Report-2020.pdf
- ²³ Profiling Places: Chepstow
www.profilingplaces.wales/Data.aspx?place=W38000061
- ²⁴ MCC 2020 Retail Background Paper – March 2021
www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/app/uploads/2021/05/Retail-Report-2020.pdf
- ²⁵ Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019
<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/welsh-index-multiple-deprivation/?lang=en>
- ²⁶ Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 by rank, decile and quintile, Lower-layer Super Output Area
<https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Welsh-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation/WIMD-2019/welshindexofmultipledeprivation2019-by-rank-decileandquintile-lowerlayersuperoutputarea>
- ²⁷ WIMD Indicator Data by Lower Layer Super Output Areas – Access To Services Domain
<https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Welsh-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation/WIMD-Indicator-data-2019/indicatordata-by-lowerlayersuperoutputarea-accessstoservicesdomain>
- ²⁸ WIMD Indicator Data by Lower Layer Super Output Areas – Health Domain
<https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Welsh-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation/WIMD-Indicator-data-2019/indicatordata-by-lowerlayersuperoutputarea-healthdomain>
- ²⁹ Affordable Housing: Local Authority Prospectus, September 2021
<https://democracy.monmouthshire.gov.uk/documents/s29938/2%20210921%20Adult%20Select%20-%20Affordable%20Housing%20-%20Local%20Authority%20Prospectus.pdf>
- ³⁰ Ethnic Group, Census 2011
www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks201uk
- ³¹ Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019
<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/welsh-index-multiple-deprivation/?lang=en>
- ³² Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019
<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/welsh-index-multiple-deprivation/?lang=en>