

Wells Constituency Levelling Up Fund bid - Improve Cheddar Consultation

Statement of Stakeholder Engagement and Support

1. Executive summary

Sedgemoor District Council has been working with key stakeholders to consider the priorities for investment in Cheddar, in order to support the council's bid to the Levelling Up Fund for the Wells Parliamentary Constituency. The Levelling Up Fund provides support for local transportation projects that have a positive impact on the town centre and high street regeneration schemes, and maintaining and expanding cultural and heritage assets.

The council has identified a number of projects within Cheddar which meet the aims of the Levelling Up Fund and which we believe would have a positive impact, including:

- Exploring the creation of a travel hub at Cliff Street/Tweentown car park, with better pedestrian links to the Gorge, improved cycle parking, electric vehicle charging and improved bus stops, as well as visitor information
- Examining opportunities for improved pedestrian accessibility, electric vehicle charging and cycle parking throughout the Gorge, as well as improving interfaces with other pedestrian routes such as the Mendip Way
- Introducing traffic calming measures to slow traffic speeds and prioritise pedestrians and cyclists, as part of improvements to pavements in the Gorge
- Identifying opportunities to declutter streetscapes and provide consistent street furniture (for benches, bins, signs, bollards) and surface treatments, and will provide improved separation between various Gorge car parks and pedestrian areas.

Sedgemoor District Council ran a consultation from 20 – 30 June 2022 seeking feedback on priorities for investment in Cheddar. Of the 153 people who responded to the consultation, 98% agreed that investment in Cheddar was needed. There was broad support for many of the projects set out above, with those prioritising safe pedestrian and cycle routes proving particularly popular.

This report outlines the engagement process that was undertaken by the project team in order to ensure that the framework and associated bid to the Levelling Up Fund meet the needs of local residents and stakeholders.

2. Stakeholders and consultees

Our Cheddar-focussed consultation activity in connection with the Levelling Up Fund bid was tailored to reach a wide range of audiences, of various ages and backgrounds. We focused on those with a connection to Cheddar, either due to their place of residence or place of work being in the local area, but also engaged with a range of stakeholders based elsewhere with a particular interest in the town.

3. Approach and methodology

In Cheddar, Sedgemoor District Council held a ten-day consultation in June 2022, targeting businesses, residents and key stakeholders in the Cheddar area and seeking their feedback on

improvements that could be made in Cheddar if funding was secured via the Levelling Up Fund. Businesses were contacted directly, with leaflets hand-delivered to premises across the Cheddar village and Cheddar Gorge areas during the consultation period. The consultation was also publicised via the Somerset County Gazette, Burnham-on-Sea.com and Somerset Live. The consultation produced 153 responses.

The community consultation included the methods detailed below:

3a. Website

The details of the Improve Cheddar consultation were launched via a special page on the Sedgemoor District Council website on 20 June 2022.



You are here: Sedgemoor District Council Home > Latest news & announcements > Current consultations and advice sessions > Improve Cheddar Gorge



Latest news & announcements

- Hot Weather Warning
- Support for Ukraine
- Sedgemoor District Council News
- Current consultations and advice sessions
- Old Bridgwater Hospital Consultation
- **Improve Cheddar Gorge**
- Public Notices
- Travel and Transport News

Improve Cheddar Gorge

Sedgemoor District Council seeks feedback on proposals to improve Cheddar Gorge.

Sedgemoor District Council has ambitious plans to make Cheddar the very best that it can be by putting in a bid to the Government's Levelling Up fund. The plans include the village and Gorge well connected and welcoming for everyone who spends time in Cheddar; support businesses and create more opportunities for people who live and work there.

The council has put together a short survey, listing the ideas that have already come forward such as new transport hubs, attractive public spaces and ways to make it easier to visit and spend time in Cheddar. The survey runs until 30 June and can be found here: [Improve Cheddar questionnaire](#)

The initial ideas were recently presented to the Cheddar Vision Group - a local stakeholder organisation which works to identify opportunities for investment to regenerate the economy of Cheddar.

There will also be leaflet in and around Cheddar to explain the proposals with the following aims:

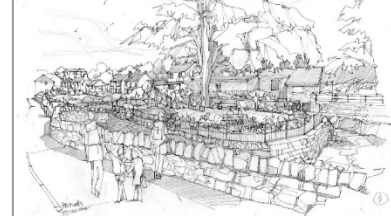
- Create an improved destination for visitors, with attractive public spaces
- Enable alternatives to car use, including park and ride, cycling and walking routes
- Improve pedestrian footways within Cheddar Gorge, slow traffic speeds and tackle anti-social behaviour.

Potential areas already identified for consideration include:

- Exploring the creation of a transport hub at Cliff Street/Twentynine car park, with better pedestrian links to the gorge, improved cycle parking, electric vehicle charging and improved bus stops, as well as visitor information.
- Examining opportunities for improved pedestrian routes, electric vehicle charging and cycle parking throughout the gorge, as well as improving interfaces with other pedestrian routes such as the Mendip Way.
- Introducing traffic calming measures to slow traffic speeds and prioritise pedestrians and cyclists, as part of improvements to pavements in the gorge.
- Identifying opportunities to decouple streetscapes and provide consistent street furniture (for benches, bins, signs, bollards) and will produce a better link between Cheddar Gorge Car Park and other areas.

Sedgemoor District Council's Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment and Growth Gil Sibcombe said: "Cheddar is a great place to live, work and visit, but we want it to be the very best that it can be. That is why we have been looking at how long and short term improvements like creating new transport hubs, enhancing public spaces could make visiting and spending time locally easier and more enjoyable. Making Cheddar more attractive and encouraging visitors would benefit the local economy and support businesses, creating more opportunities for people who live and work in the area."

For more information, or to share views on the proposals for improvements, local people are encouraged to contact the council's consultation project partners, Delictivo, via cheddardelictivo@ecomm.co.uk, or complete our online [Improve Cheddar questionnaire](#).



3b. Media

A [media announcement](#) was issued to the local press and key stakeholders by the Sedgemoor District Council press office to launch the consultation on Monday 20 June 2022, with the content simultaneously uploaded to the council's website. The release highlighted the consultation and encouraged all those who live and work in Cheddar to respond.

The consultation was covered in the local media as follows:

- 21 June – Somerset County Gazette – Levelling Up Fund bid to make Cheddar 'the best it can be' – <https://www.somersetcountygazette.co.uk/news/20223165.levelling-fund-bid-make-cheddar-the-best-can-be/>
- 21 June – Burnham-on-Sea.com – Sedgemoor District Council seeks feedback on proposals to improve Cheddar Gorge – <https://www.burnham-on-sea.com/news/sedgemoor-district-council-seeks-feedback-on-proposals-to-improve-cheddar-gorge/>
- 21 June – Somerset Live – Bid to tackle 'reckless driving' at Cheddar Gorge – <https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/somerset-news/bid-tackle-reckless-driving-cheddar-7232532?>
- 22 June – Somerset Live – Have your say on plans to regenerate Cheddar through the levelling up fund – <https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/somerset-news/your-say-plans-regenerate-cheddar-7232443>
- 22 June - Somerset County Gazette - Have your say on plans to regenerate Cheddar - <https://www.somersetcountygazette.co.uk/news/20228059.say-plans-regenerate-cheddar/>

3c. Social media

The Cheddar consultation was a popular topic of discussion for residents on social media, both on local Facebook groups and content was promoted via the Mendip Hills AONB, Sedgemoor District Council, Sedgemoor District Council.

3d. Direct contact with businesses in Cheddar

Given their particular interest in the subject matter, the project team contacted as many of the readily-identifiable businesses with a public-facing presence in central Cheddar as possible both via email and by hand-delivering leaflets about the consultation to them.

3e. Emails and telephone conversations

A dedicated project email address (cheddar@distinctivecomms.co.uk) gave people direct access to the project team to ask any questions throughout the project so far. We received a number of enquiries from the community regarding the consultation and responded accordingly.

4. Schedule of activity

Activity type	Date
Media and stakeholder launch	20 June 2022
Website and survey launch	20 June 2022
Email outreach to Cheddar businesses	21 June 2022
In person visit / leaflet drop to Cheddar businesses	23 June 2022
Closure of consultation	30 June 2022

5. Feedback

This section details the feedback that the project team received through the “Improve Cheddar” feedback form from 20 - 30 June 2022. In total, 153 people chose to provide written feedback. The feedback form contained a mix of multiple-choice questions, and an open response for comments, which are summarised below.

5a. Questions 1 and 2

These questions asked for information about the individual responding.

5b. Question 3 – Do you agree investment in Cheddar is needed?

- Yes - 98% (150)
- No - 2% (3)
- Any other comments?

Feedback in response to our invitation for further comments here focussed on the significance of Cheddar as a destination and gateway to outdoor pursuits, noting the lack of investment in infrastructure and managing traffic issues as the village has grown. A number of comments highlighted the current dominance of cars in Cheddar and appealed for more safe pedestrian routes.

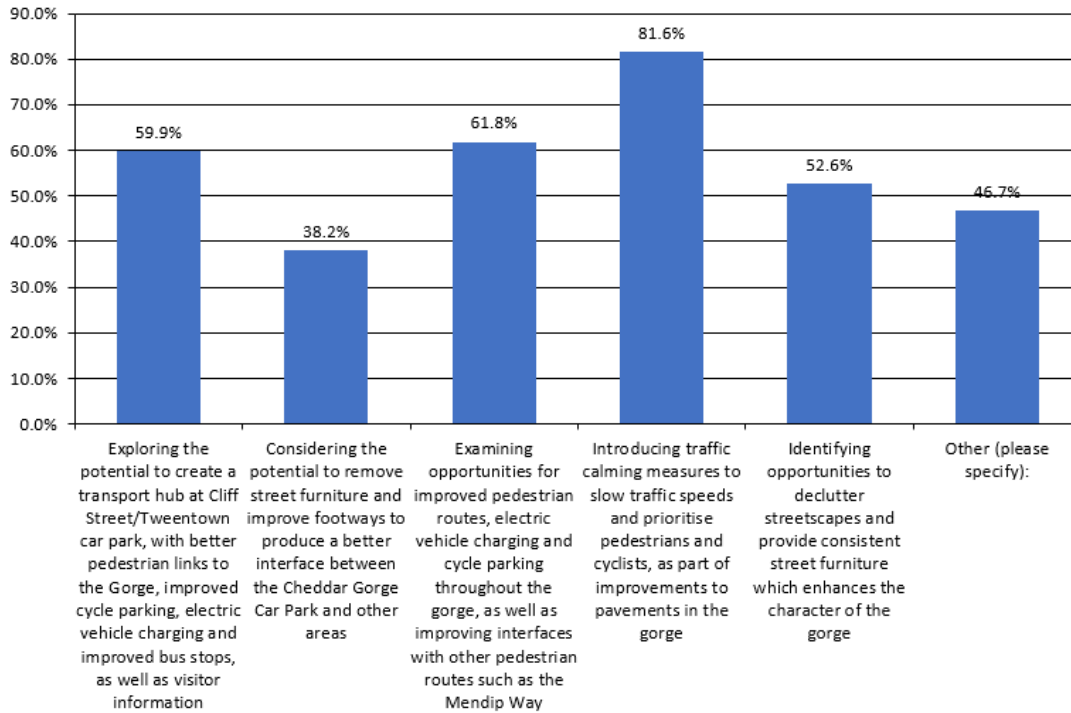
5c. Question 4 - The project team have identified the following projects for consideration as part of a Levelling Up Fund bid. Which of the following do you think should be included? (you may select more than one option)

Whilst there was broad support for many of the projects suggested, those that prioritised safe pedestrian routes and measures to manage traffic scored best in the responses to this question. A need to address car dominance in Cheddar was once again a theme in comments received, but those who responded were careful to note that any changes should not demonise drivers and recognise that a lack of alternatives has led to reliance on car use in the village. Others noted that a significant proportion of those who visit Cheddar do so by car, so proper car parking and provision for these visitors is vital to support the local visitor economy.

- Responses to individual questions:

Project	Number of responses	Percentage
Introducing traffic calming measures to slow traffic speeds and prioritise pedestrians and cyclists, as part of improvements to pavements in the Gorge	124	81.6%
Examining opportunities for improved pedestrian routes, electric vehicle charging and cycle parking throughout the Gorge, as well as improving interfaces with other pedestrian routes such as the Mendip Way	94	61.8%
Exploring the potential to create a travel hub at Cliff Street/Tweentown car park, with better pedestrian links to the Gorge, improved cycle parking, electric vehicle charging and improved bus stops, as well as visitor information	91	59.9%
Identifying opportunities to declutter streetscapes and provide consistent street furniture which enhances the character of the Gorge	80	52.6%
Considering the potential to remove street furniture and improve footways to produce a better interface between the Cheddar Gorge Car Park and other areas	58	38.2%
Other (please specify)	71	46.7%

- Bar chart visualisation of responses to question 4



5d. Question 5 - Are there any other short-term projects that could be delivered by the 31 March 2025 deadline for this round of Levelling Up funding which you would like us to consider? (We will ask for your longer term priorities in the next question)

Along similar lines to responses to question four, many answers to this question included projects which would seek to address traffic and parking related issues in the village, and improve walking and cycling links. A need to address issues of dilapidation in existing building stock (e.g. Cox's Mill) was raised in a number of comments, whilst others called for support to allow owners to upgrade shopfronts in the village. One theme which was reproduced in a number of comments – inspired by the closures that took place during the COVID-19 lockdowns - was the potential of closing the Gorge to traffic, either occasionally or on a more permanent basis. A suggestion to close on one Sunday a month appeared more than once, whilst others called for weekly closures or even permanent pedestrianisation. Other commenters suggested removing parking spaces within the Gorge.

5e. Question 6 - Thinking about the longer term, which are the other parts of Cheddar where you would like to see investment in significant public realm or regeneration projects?

Feedback in response to this question focussed largely on longstanding issues which have been much-debated in the village, including the future of the old Cox's Mill / Cliff Hotel buildings and the issues at the A371 - B3135 'magic roundabout' junction. Other responses focussed on traffic issues and the need for traffic calming, and also the need for more parking / a park and ride facility. Improvements to bus and cycle routes also proved popular among those responding.

5f. Question 7. Any other comments?

Further feedback in response to this question noted the need for further measures to address antisocial driving in the Gorge, and to prioritise the needs of those undertaking natural pursuits within the Gorge and surrounding area over vehicles. Many responses also noted the significance and uniqueness of the Gorge, as well as its natural importance and situation within the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The need for connectivity and extension of the Strawberry Line making the Gorge more pedestrian and cycle friendly was also a key theme alongside enhancing community and green space, areas for picnics, to sit, for events. Other responses requested further consultation if the bid is successful, whilst some were keen to ensure that investment included the whole village and not just the Gorge.

6. Conclusion

The consultation exercise demonstrated a good level of engagement among those who live and work in Cheddar for investment in Cheddar via the Levelling Up Fund. Of the 153 local people who responded to the consultation, 98% agreed that investment in Cheddar was needed. There was broad support for many of the projects set out above, with those prioritising safe pedestrian and cycle routes proving particularly popular.