

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE MALLARD COURT AREA, NEW MILTON.

RESPONSES TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the public responses to the public consultation into the proposals for the Mallard Court area. It recommends changes to the preliminary, draft scheme and asks the landowners, District and County Councils Town Council for their support in implementing the revised proposals.

An exhibition of proposed improvements was held in the New Milton Town council offices from 21 to 22 July, 2006. This was attended by officers of the Councils. An unmanned display was retained in the Town Hall until 4 August. The exhibition was also posted on the Town Partnership web site during this period. ***There was a good public turnout with 216 visitors to the main exhibition and many more visiting the unmanned display.***

Questionnaires were made available which comprised a tick box format for judging public responses to detailed aspects of the scheme, plus the opportunity on the form for more general comments. There were 217 questionnaires returned, including two on the web site.

The project team would like to thank all those who wrote in with their views.

In addition a petition has been received signed by 1536 persons. The petition was raised by a local campaigner during and after the public consultation period on the specific issue of retaining the two existing, mature trees in Mallard Court. The details of the petition are set out in Appendix One.

The Town Council supported the scheme for the purposes of public consultation, subject to some detailed concerns and subject to the opportunity to further consider the scheme following the public consultation. At its meeting, 24 July, 2006 following the manned exhibition, the Town Council resolved to see the two trees retained in any scheme, although this resolution was rescinded at its meeting of September 4, 2006.

A summary of the tick box responses is set out on page Four. Subsequent pages summarise the views expressed on that part of the questionnaire which asked for general comments or for opportunities to be identified which we might have missed. Opposite each comment is the project teams response. Where possible related comments have been combined or grouped together. Of necessity, lengthy comments have been paraphrased to create a brief and readable document.

Not all suggestions can be acted upon because they do not apply directly to the project area, are technically not feasible or because they involve wider or longer term issues outside the scope or budget of this scheme. These are included in paragraph 18. and will be brought to the attention of the relevant departments of the three Councils.

Analysis of Questionnaire Results (tick box survey)

The overall response to the general aims of improving the area was **supportive** with 80% of respondents supporting the scheme and only 10% against.

A number of respondents (24) propose improving the footways in Station Road south in preference to works here.

There are also more ambitious options for Station Road south arising from the New Milton Town Partnership's health check and action plan to accommodate an external events space and expanded weekly market. These options could significantly change the shape and geometry of the street and would be very costly. Now that the County Council is facing significant budget cutbacks in the foreseeable future, those options cannot be funded from within the Council's resources, and could only be considered if substantial new sources of funding were to be identified in the near future, realistically by the end of 2006.

Repaving Station Road south to match Station Road north is an affordable option. This could include some limited, additional improvements but would prejudice future, larger scale remodelling of the street. The intention would be to build in flexibility as far as possible to enable additional improvements to be undertaken in the future, should funding become available. However, the Council could not afford to complete all of the Mallard Court scheme as well as doing this. Further work is being carried out to determine whether or not a reduced scheme for Mallard Court could be afforded as part of a contract for Station Road south works.

Further discussions with principal stakeholders are proposed to consider the way forward.

Meanwhile, the Area Surveyor will undertake such temporary works to the footways as are necessary to make the pavements safer for pedestrians.

Of the remaining features of the scheme there is a solid majority in favour, with only two exceptions. These relate to the removal of the trees in Mallard Court and the introduction of art works. The proportion of respondents disapproving of the inclusion of artworks slightly outweighed those approving. However, because of the high number of neutral responses, those disapproving are only a minority (31%) of the overall respondents.

The removal of the trees, however, is a highly contentious and emotive issue. To assist it in its deliberations, the project team commissioned further arboricultural consultancy advice.

Trees in Mallard Court

This is the most contentious aspect of the scheme and precipitated a private petition against removal of the trees. Of the tick box responses, a majority (55%) disapproved of their removal.

The canvassing of the petition at the exhibition, its attendant publicity and the resolution of the Town Council, later rescinded, may have influenced respondents to the questionnaire survey.

The issues for retaining or removing the trees are complex. They extend beyond simply the current health and amenity of the trees themselves. They embrace the future likely management issues and problems of the trees and their decline in forthcoming years, as well as their obstruction and limiting impact on the use of the courtyard.

There is a difficult balance to be struck between these issues, including the longer term prospects for the trees, given their species, age and situation in the street, and the wider objective of creating a useable space of sufficient size for street events and activities to be held.

Expert advice has been sought regarding whether or not the brick structures within which the trees sit, can be reduced or modified to allow for more circulation space. The unequivocal advice is that the root systems of both trees are such that they cannot be reduced without adversely affecting the health and stability of the trees.

It is proposed therefore that the proposal to remove the trees remains. A full report will be made to the Town Council when consideration of this report is made.

Recommended Changes to the Scheme

The results of the consultation have been considered by the project's Steering Group and are commended to the Councils for approval. The Steering Group comprises elected representatives of the County, District and Town Councils together with representatives of the New Milton Town Partnership and the business community. In addition there has been consultation with other stakeholders.

The project team is indebted to these organisations for their help and enthusiasm.

Trees and ground lighting in The Spencer Road Car Park

It is recommended that these elements are omitted from the scheme, following concerns from the landowner concerning this proposal in relation to future resurfacing proposals. The landowner will be encouraged to implement this when he has the opportunity.

Service Vehicle Delivery Bay Opposite Mallard Court

In view of the prospective loss of car parking spaces resulting from this, it is recommended that this proposal is not progressed at the current time. The change of use of parking bays to a service delivery bay can be considered further when the impact of the new works are known.

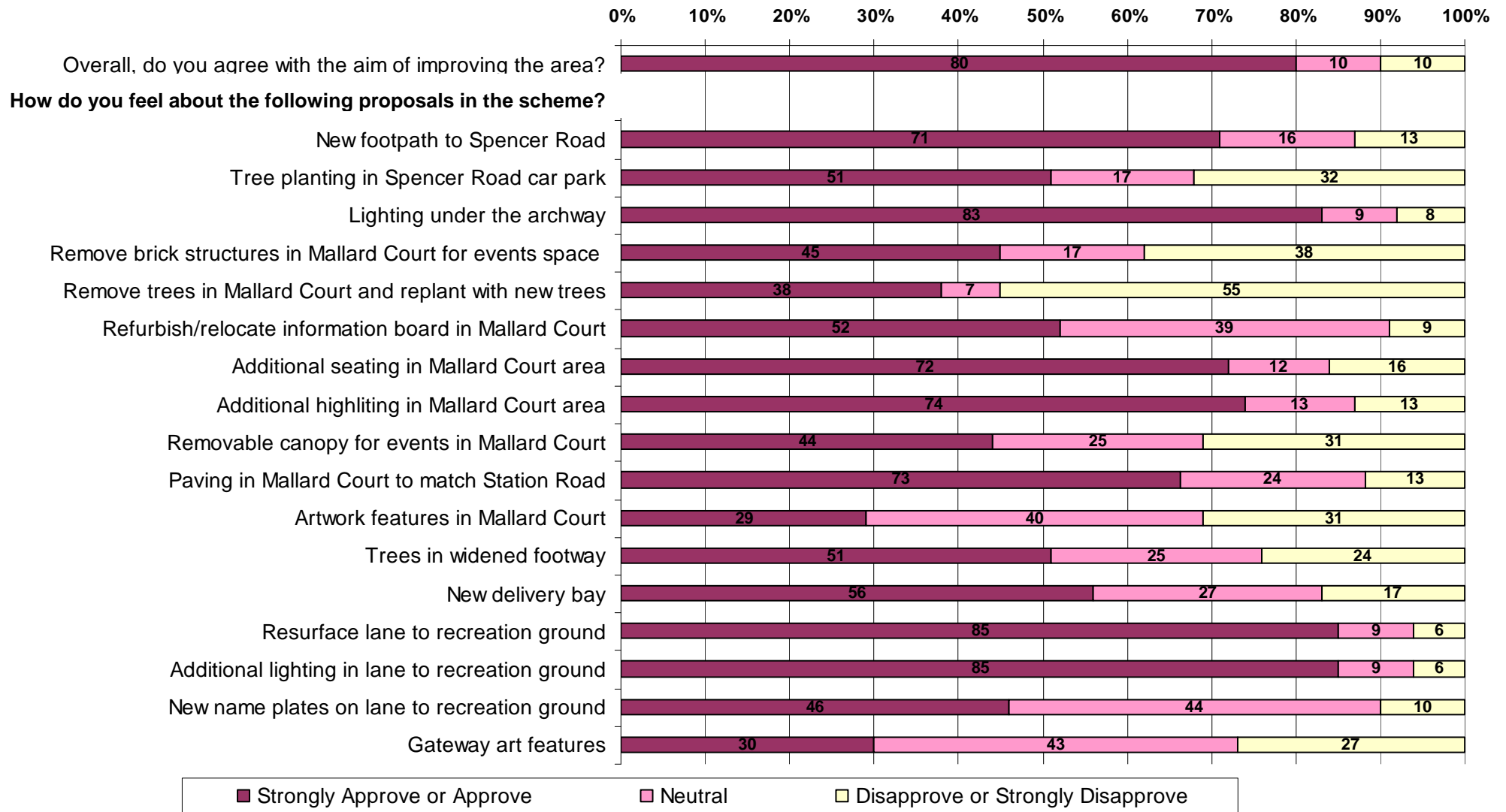
Widening of the Footway in Station Road Opposite Mallard Court

More detailed underground investigations indicate that it would be impractical to insert new trees into this widened area. Concern regarding the loss of parking spaces has also been expressed. Therefore, it is proposed the footway widening is omitted.

Important Note

As stated at the exhibition, future legal and technical matters, including consents from private landowners, together with financial considerations, may require that changes are made to the scheme and determine or limit what can or cannot be achieved.

Responses to the questionnaire (percentages)



RESPONSES TO THE COMMENTS ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE FORMS

Set out below are the written comments on the back of the tick box comments sheets handed out at the exhibition and posted on the Town Partnership Web site. The numbers in brackets refer to the frequency of each comment.

Your Comments

1. Approve of the scheme (29) – monies for Mallard Court should not be set aside for Station Road South (1)

Disapprove of the scheme (4) – waste of money (5) leave Mallard Court as it is (1) – stop crucifying New Milton (1)

Concern for public nuisance (7) – concern for vandalism (5) – concern for noise (3)

Our Responses

Noted. 80% of respondents to the tick box survey indicated support, either unconditionally or subject to comments, compared to only 10% who were against the scheme generally. This indicates a high level of support across the community in principle to the aims of improving the area. It reflects the fact that the scheme is based upon the earlier work of the new Milton Town Partnership in identifying the need and opportunities to improve the environment of Station Road as New Milton's principal shopping street.

See above

The issues of potential anti social behaviour and nuisance are ones which the Councils take very seriously. The links between these and the design of the external environment are complex. There are some obvious pitfalls which will be avoided. Street furniture, for example seating, will be designed to be robust. Areas will be well lit to give a greater sense of personal safety and discourage anti social behaviour. Events will be encouraged which are not intrusive to neighbours – for example in terms of noise and timing – and managed responsibly so that litter and street cleaning are dealt with.

We have a responsibility in the long term to “encourage the positive” i.e. to ensure that by good design and management, responsible citizens are comfortable in public spaces, feel a sense of “ownership” and make full use of them. Encouraging outdoor activities can go some way to achieving this. Informal activity with informal supervision by a public presence can help deter anti social behaviour.

Other priorities (3) – improve Station Road in preference to this scheme or before it (24)

See Introduction above.

Why are we spending public money in private areas? (3) – works in Mallard Court should be paid for by landowners (1)

It is not unusual for Councils to carry out improvements on privately owned land, provided that the land is in the public domain and frequently used by the public, and provided that there is demonstrable and enduring public benefit. An example is the recent repaving of private areas in front of the shops in Station Road north to match and tie in with the remaining public footway. It is important that the future maintenance, access and management of these areas is secured. As part of the scheme the Councils will agree with landowners a protocol for achieving this.

How long will it take? (1)

The precise duration of works will depend upon the final content of the scheme but is unlikely to take more than four months from start on site.

No assessment of costs provided (1)

This will depend on the final, agreed contents of the scheme.

2. New Footpath to Spencer Road

Approve of the footpath (2)

Noted This is a very popular aspect of the scheme with 71% indicating approval and 13% against.

3. Tree planting in the Spencer Road Car Park

Approve, provided they don't reduce parking spaces (2)

Following further consultations with the landowner, this proposal will not be progressed. It is not wished to compromise the landowners intentions to resurface the car park in the future.

Disapprove – no more trees (1)

See above.

4. Lighting Under the Archway

Disapprove, certainly not all night (1)

The tick box survey indicates overwhelming support for this proposal with 83% indicating approval and 8% against. Good lighting in this potentially dark area is especially important for enhancing a sense of personal security.

5. Remove Brick Structures in Mallard Court for Events Space

Approve of removal (3) – use space for exhibitions, art events, music (1) – Christmas market? (1) – perfect place for outdoors café (1) – enlarge to sit in (1) – create courtyard garden (1) – remove plant beds for events (1) – remove bed around the light column (1)

Noted. 62% of respondents either approved (45%) or were neutral to the removal of the brick structures around the trees to create space for events, with 38% against. The range of events which may be considered will depend upon the amount of space which can be released by removing the brick containers. These currently occupy a large proportion of the courtyard space. This will, in turn, depend upon the retention of either or both of the existing trees which, at the moment, largely occupy the space. A detailed survey has been undertaken to determine what parts of the structures, if any, may be removed without effecting the health and well being of the trees.

Disapprove their removal (1) – events likely to cause disturbance (3) – events in street should only be processions (1) local roads and car parks will not support such events (1)

A principal aim of the scheme is to create a public space capable of accommodating events such as charity stalls, sitting out, carol concerts, street entertainment etc. This emerged from the Town Partnership health check which identified the need and opportunity to create space for events to support the economy of the town centre and provide a balance in Station Road north to the weekly market in the southern part of the street. The issues of anti social behaviour and local amenity for nearby residents is important and dealt with in item 1. above.

Retain or introduce plant beds (4) – keep at least one plant bed (1) – do not lose beds completely (1) - retain plant bed around Ash tree (1)

The retention of the plant beds will depend upon the decision regarding the future of the trees and the extent to which they may be retained in a reduced form without compromising the future of the trees.

Design structures to prevent skateboarding (1)

It is proposed, in addition, that a new plant bed be included at the entrance from the car park to the Mallard Court archway.

Any structures would be robust and where possible would be designed to minimise vulnerability to skate board abuse.

Landowner should not be in control of which events can take place (1)

The management of the space will be led by the Town Council in accordance with a protocol to be agreed with the landowner .

6. Remove the Trees in Mallard Court and Replant with New Trees

Approve their removal (4) – replace with evergreen species (1) – can remove the Lime (1) – six new trees is excessive (1) – as new trees mature will their roots make the surface uneven? (1)

Disapprove their removal (20) – trees are important for air quality (1) – they need to be trimmed (2) if cannot be saved (1) – new trees liable to vandalism (1) – no more trees please (1)

Should be subject of TPO (2)

Arboriculture statement in exhibition is very one sided (1)

7. Refurbish / Relocate Information Board in Mallard Court

Where is the information board to be relocated? (1)

8. Additional Seating in Mallard Court Area

Approve new seating (3) – put arms on seats (1) – put in two seats (1) – ensure glazed / surface to sit on which does not spoil clothes (1)

Disapprove of new seats (1) – encourages anti social behaviour (3)

Noted. The species will be chosen for their appropriateness to their location in the street. The number of new trees in the proposed revised scheme will be ?

See previous. The proposed recommendation of the project team is that the trees be removed in line with the original proposals (see Introduction)

TPO's are used where trees are believed by the public authorities to be at risk or under threat. The future of these trees will be determined jointly by the public authority partnership and landowner, in the light of public consultation responses. The use of a TPO would, therefore, be unnecessary and inappropriate.

Not accepted. The statement is objective and was prepared by the arboriculture experts of the District and County Councils.

It is hoped to locate a new notice board on an adjoining wall subject to the consent of the property owner.

Noted. The seats will include those with arms and backs and will be constructed of robust and attractive materials to match those in Station Road north.

The concerns surrounding anti social behaviour are set out in section 1.

9. Additional lighting in Mallard Court Area

Approve of more lighting (1)

Noted. This is a popular proposal with only 13% of respondents against.

Disapprove as encourages anti social behaviour (1)

Disagree - the reverse is normally the case.

10. Removable Canopy for Events in Mallard Court

Approve of canopy (1) – can it be used by charities? (1)

Noted . Of the total respondents 31% objected to this proposal. The remainder (69%) either approved or were neutral. It is hoped and intended that the structure could be used by charities as well as other events. The canopy could represent a local landmark during the periods it is erected and give shelter in inclement weather to stall holders etc.

Disapprove of canopy (2)

See above.

11. Paving in Mallard Court to Match Station Road

Disapprove (1) – problem of chewing gum stains (2) – needs coating to prevent this (1) – glares in bright sun light (1)

The selection of stone paving will need to coordinate with the paving in Station Road itself and some use of the same material will be necessary and desirable. Overall, the popular response in the tick box survey for using the same material was supportive, with 73 % of respondents in favour and 11% against.

Should have been repaved when the rest of Station Road was repaved

The works in Mallard Court were programmed for a later phase in order to be able to expedite the repaving of Station Road as quickly as possible last year and recognised that funding for this element would not be available until this financial year.

12. Artwork features in Mallard Court

Approve of artworks (1) – should have local involvement (1) – should represent local themes (1) for example fields and hedges (1) – not modern sculptures (1) – and should be by British artists (1)

Disapprove of artworks (2) – could encourage vandalism (3) – matters of personal opinion so many people would be unhappy (1)

Noted. Consultation with the Town Council would be essential and, if possible, local artists will be considered for commissions. Possible themes will be discussed with local stakeholders.

Artworks in the public realm are always an emotive issue and rarely is universal approval obtained.

13. Trees in Widened Footway

Disapprove (1) – works would disrupt business

Loss of parking spaces (3) – reduction in carriageway width (1)

Recent surveys of underground services indicate that there is no scope for planting new trees in a widened footway. There are also concerns for the potential loss of parking spaces and so it is proposed that the footway is not widened.

See above.

14. New Delivery Bay

Will reduce pavement space (1)

Would be used illegally for parking (1)

Should reduce the number of parking spaces instead of a delivery bay (1) – allocate parking spaces for deliveries (1)

No pavement space would be removed. It is proposed that the option to introduce a delivery bay will be considered at a future date outside the scope of this scheme.

See above

See above

15. Resurface Lane to Recreation Ground

Approve resurfacing (4)

This is a very popular proposal with 85% indicating support.

Concern regarding increased movements to recreation ground after dark (1)

The improvement of the link , the improved lighting and the occupation of the new dwellings overlooking the locality on adjoining land should help to improve a sense of personal security here.

16. New Name Plates on Lane to Recreation Ground

Approve new name plate (1)

Noted

17. Miscellaneous Issues Raised

Missing bollard under archway needs replacing (1)

Noted

Include a Christmas tree position (1)

Agreed

Important to ensure good future maintenance of scheme (1)

Agreed. A protocol setting out maintenance responsibilities will be agreed with the two authorities and local stakeholders.

Are rubbish bins to be provided? (1)

Yes, provided acceptable emptying arrangements can be agreed.

Could a small water feature be included? (3)

Noted for consideration.

Will there be facilities for Children aged 12 – 18? (1)

Not specifically in terms of play or specialised equipment.

Must cater for the needs of disabled persons (1)
– have the groups representing the disabled been consulted? (1)

Agreed.
The needs of the disabled have been incorporated into the design of the scheme. When the updated scheme is known the New Forest Disability Service will be consulted on the details.

Realign the existing traffic crossing signals to within the scheme (2)

This was considered but rejected on the grounds of highways and pedestrian safety and the problems of vehicles entering and exiting from the lane to the recreation ground.

Incorporate a speed bump outside Barclays Bank (1)

It would not be feasible or desirable to insert a speed bump without it being part of a more widely considered scheme of traffic calming embracing Station Road north.

Could CCTV be incorporated? (1)

This would necessarily be part of a wider CCTV scheme for Station Road and this is not proposed at present by the Town or District Council.

18. Issues Raised which lie Outside the Scope of the Project

Encourage more use of the recreation ground (1)
– need more seats (1) – more effective control of anti social behaviour needed (1)

These are broader or other issues which are outside the direct scope of the Mallard Court Area scheme. They will be drawn to the attention of the Councils for their further consideration.

No more flats in the area (1) – have greater regard for sewerage and water demands (1)

Character of New Milton is being altered and lost (2)

Town needs a bus station and market place (1) – needs facilities for social events e.g. like the Memorial Hall (1) – needs department stores (1) – fashion shops (1) – better mix of businesses (1) – needs more visitor attractions (1) – needs improved shops in Manor Road (1)

Wednesday market is harming high street business (1) – there is ample space for market on both sides of Station road (1)

Future of old Post Office HQ is important for developing civic facilities (1)

Town should have a CCTV system (2)

Station Road south should be improved (14 see also Introduction and Section 1.) – in preference to Mallard Court (24)

Improve paving and roads (1) – improve paving by Somerfield (1)

Whitefield Road is a mess (1)

Need for more parking in the town (3) – need cheaper and easier parking (2)

Some recent paving stones already lifting (1)

Disapprove of reduction of plant beds in Station Road north (1)

Not all seats in Station Road north appear to have watering points. (1)

Where were bench seats in Station Road north made and at what cost? (1)

Inadequate watering of trees in station Road in front of Nat West Bank (1) – some watering points are dangerous (1) – inadequate maintenance of trees (1)

Approve of appearance of Station Road since recent repaving works (2)

Get the road sweeper to do his job properly (1) – greater efforts needed to clean streets and tidy flower beds (1)

Better synchronisation needed between traffic signals at Spencer Road and Station Road (1).

Need traffic signals at the corner of Station Road and Osborne Road (1)

Accidents likely to happen in Station Road north (1)

Bollards needed in Station Road south to prevent parking on footway (1) – More active enforcement of parking controls needed (1)

Why was pedestrianisation of Station Road south not considered? (1) – pedestrianise Station Road (1)

Reduce the cars using Station Road and lorries parking in Station Road north (1)

Reopen the toilets in Old Hilton Road (2)

Signing needed to Spencer Road health centre (1) – signing of previous street works are out of date (2)

Waste collection in Spencer Road needs improving (1)

Disapprove of artworks in children's play areas (1)

Appendix One

The wording of the petition is as follows:

We the undersigned oppose Hampshire County's proposals to destroy the two healthy mature trees in the courtyard area known as Mallard Court, Station Road, New Milton town centre, in order to open up this area for entertainment and other activity. We note that the trees represent no obstruction to the adjoining sidewalk or footpath and that their root activity does not endanger the surrounding paving. We strongly urge the County to consider thinning the canopies of the two trees and perhaps flower bed reduction in Mallard Court as alternative measures to achieve their objectives