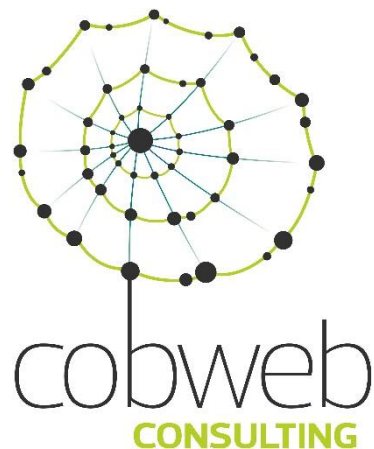


East Challow Parish Council

EAST CHALLOW BUSINESS SURVEY

A report for East Challow Parish Council from Cobweb
Consulting

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Executive summary

- The business survey was completed by 22 respondents. Their businesses were varied in nature and size with consultancy and management services the largest single group.
- The length of time in business ranged from one year to fifty but more than half had been established for at least ten years.
- Two out of three employ staff with the total amounting to 131 full time and 50 part time employed. Around one in four of these employees live locally to East Challow.
- Recommendation/word of mouth and business to business contact were the most important sources of business.
- Seven businesses were very satisfied with East Challow as a place to do business, fourteen satisfied and only one dissatisfied.
- Advantages included: a location central to key business areas, easy access and convenience for staff and being close to home for some.
- The main perceived disadvantages were poor local transport infrastructure and poor public transport links.
- The three factors which appear most important to every business, in their ability to affect business, are broadband speed, customer confidence and business confidence.
- Eight respondents felt there was nothing to restrict the growth of their businesses but others noted high business rates, availability of premises, availability of staff or weak customer demand as the main potential limiting factors.
- Two of the businesses taking part in the survey were run completely from home and there were a further five who did so partly. The main advantages were seen to be a lack of commuting and flexible hours but potential disadvantages were lack of contact with others/isolation, variable internet connection and the distractions of family life.
- Nine of the sample thought that there was a need for more, smaller, start up premises within East Challow or the Grove Business Park. Their ideas on what was needed varied.
- The two main types of support to assist them were facilities such as Boston House or financial help of some kind.
- Five businesses thought that further housing development might affect them. Three were positive about obtaining more work or customers but two thought that there would be disruption to the roads.
- The three main infrastructure changes that respondents would like to see were: a rail station/rail links, better broadband and improvements to the road system.

1.0 Method and sample

A short business survey was distributed in two ways: a copy was included in a mailing of a housing survey to all households in the Parish (with the particular objective of reaching those who run businesses from home) and copies were delivered by hand by Paul Barrow to most addresses on the W&G estate and the Grove Business Park. A web version of the survey was also made available to all potential respondents. The manager of Boston House on the Grove Business Park offered to pass on the link to businesses not accessible for hand delivery.

A total of 22 responses were received, 9 on paper and 13 in the web version.

The questionnaire is included in Appendix 1

2.0 Survey results

2.1 Profile of businesses taking part.

The nature of the businesses contributing to the survey is shown in table 1 below and a good deal of variety may be seen.

Table 1 Nature of business

Consultancy/management services	7
Construction/civil engineering	3
Logistics/distribution	3
Health and well being	3
Marketing/websites	2
Professional services	2
Garage	1
Tour operator	1

Base: all respondents (22)

This list includes those who work from home, those who have their own premises and those using a facility such as Boston House. Beyond the broad categories above the list ranges from beauty treatments to sewer work, from website design to a local garage.

The number of years the business has been operating range from one to fifty with no apparent patterns according to the nature of the business.

Table 2 Years in business and at current site

	In business	At current site
Under 5 years	5	10
5 – 10 years	3	2
11 – 20 years	4	5
Over 20 years	10	5

Base: all respondents (22)

Most of the businesses appear well established with more than half in place for at least ten years. The longest established, at fifty years, had obviously come under new management about five years ago.

The third column in Table 2 records how long the business had been at its current location. Eight had remained at the same location for their whole trading period but the rest had moved at some point.

Some of the most recent moves had been made by those currently located at Boston House. But as there are also organisations who have been established in Boston House for many years we assume it is not a new facility but probably just coincidence.

2.2 Staffing

Around two out of three – 14 of the 22 - of the businesses employ staff. The numbers of full time staff are generally low with eleven of the fourteen employing fewer than ten people.

Table 3 Full and part time employees

	Full time	Part time
None	-	8
Fewer than 5	6	3
6 – 10	5	2
11 – 20	2	-
More than 20	1 (50)	1 (30)

Base: all employing staff (14)

In addition, six businesses also employ part time staff. In total, this amounts to 131 full time and 50 part time staff employed by local businesses.

Respondents were also asked how many of their staff lived locally ie within three miles of the premises. All but one was able to provide an answer, giving a total of 38. This means that only 23% of employees in local businesses were from the East Challow area. This presumably has implications for inward travel on a daily basis, although some of the businesses may have employees who work from home or at other sites.

2.3 Source of business

Asked from where the majority of their business came, recommendation/word of mouth was the most frequently given answer and is clearly of great value to a wide variety of organisations and individuals.

Table 4 Source of business/custom

Recommendation/word of mouth	18
Business to Business	10
Telephone	7
Social media	7
Website/mail order	6
Advertising/mail shot/leaflets	4
Personal visits to premises	3
Reps/agents	2
Passing/casual trade	1
Other source	1

Base: all providing information on source of trade (21)

Also of importance was business to business contact, in the appropriate arenas. Beyond that there was little in the way of patterns relating to the nature of the business. Clearly some businesses relied on more than one source and there is a place for both traditional and more modern methods of reaching customers.

2.4 Attitudes to doing business in East Challow

Respondents were asked to express their overall view in terms of their level of satisfaction with East Challow as a place to do business.

Table 5 Satisfaction with East Challow as a place to do business

Very satisfied	7
Satisfied	14
Dissatisfied	1

Base: all respondents (22)

All but one were satisfied to an extent with about a third being very satisfied. When asked to explain the reasons for the rating given, the main theme of comment was that they liked or were happy with the location, their office/building or being established /settled. There was some favourable reference to the business park suiting their needs, being fairly quiet and offering parking. Two companies had recently moved to Boston House from the Harwell campus and were satisfied so far. A couple made reference to working from home, although one combined this with office space as well. The only real business related comment was from a respondent who said that he had experienced steady growth in business to business contacts.

The one business who said they were dissatisfied was one of those working in logistics. Their criticism was that there was 'room for improvement' in road transport links locally.

Everyone had previously been asked what they felt were the advantages and disadvantages of doing business in East Challow. Amongst the advantages, 'location' was mentioned in several ways.

Table 6 Advantages of doing business in East Challow

Central location/good transport links/good access to industrial, scientific and commercial areas.	5
Easy access/convenient for staff.	5
Like location/close to home	4
Parking	3
Rent suitable	2
Good facilities at Boston House	2
Rural/out of city	2
High demand	2
None particularly	2
Other	3

Base: all commenting on advantages (20)

In a macro sense, five businesses thought the location was sufficiently central and close to good transport links for this to be an advantage. At a more local level, the same number thought the area was convenient for their staff and offered easy access. Further, it was close to home for some of them. Other comments may be seen above. Only two people could not think of any particular advantages. The three 'other' comments were that there was good passing trade (from the garage), that it was a good community and that the new building in the village had brought increased opportunities for trade (from one of the well-being businesses).

On the negative side, most of the criticism concerned transport.

Table 7 Disadvantages of doing business in East Challow

Poor transport infrastructure locally	5
Poor public transport links/ no rail station	5
Road works in the area	3
Poor internet	2
Other	3
No disadvantages/no response	8

Base: all respondents (22)

Further comment was added to that about local infrastructure - access to the Grove Business Park, that the roads were not adequate for the volume of traffic, Wantage was mentioned twice and there were several references to the A417. Public transport was very limited too, with London and Oxford mentioned as two possible destinations. The three 'other' comments concerned: limited meeting and entertainment venues, being 'in the middle of nowhere' with a lack of shops and bars etc, power cuts. There were eight people who could find no disadvantages or made no comment.

2.5 Factors affecting business and growth.

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a number of factors in their ability to affect their business.

Table 8 Factors affecting business

	Very important	Important	Not partic important	Not at all important	DK/no response	Average score
Business confidence	13	6	1	0	2	1.4
Customer confidence	15	5	1	0	1	1.3
Local business support and advice	4	5	7	3	3	2.5
Broadband speed	15	5	0	0	2	1.2
Crime, security and safety	9	9	1	1	2	1.7
Location and access	9	6	5	1	1	1.9
Contact with local councils	2	5	6	7	2	2.9
Availability of local workforce	4	6	3	6	3	2.5
Suitability/availability/flexibility of premises	5	11	2	2	2	2.1
Transport connections	9	6	3	3	1	2.0

Base: all respondents (22)

The three factors which appear important – mostly very important – to every business are broadband speed, customer confidence and business confidence. It has been seen earlier that location and transport matters are important to some but from this table we can see that is not everyone.

The final column gives an 'average rating' which is calculated by assigning values 1 to 4 to very important down to not at all important. Therefore the closer to 1, the more important the factor. It is an useful measure of comparison without having to consider a set of five figures. It shows that broadband speed is overall the most important factor, very slightly ahead of customer and then business confidence. It also illustrates that least important is contact with local councils, followed by

availability of a local workforce and local business support and advice. Those who did place some importance on the last of these were very diverse in nature but tended to be smaller businesses.

Respondents were given the opportunity to note any other factors capable of affecting their business but only four commented. They mentioned: local facilities such as post, access to arterial roads, international links and, of course, Covid 19.

Everyone was also asked to note any factors which might restrict their growth, from a list shown to them. Business rates was the one mentioned most often. The businesses to whom this mattered varied in nature but again tended to be smaller.

Table 9 Issues restricting business growth

Business rates	5
Weak customer demand	4
Availability/affordability of premises	4
Availability of appropriate staff	4
Increased competition	3
Transport	3
Technology changes	3
Rent	3
Legislation	2
Access to finance	1
Customer parking	1
Desire to stay below VAT threshold	1
Nothing restricting growth	8

Base: all respondents (22)

Premises, staff and weak customer demand came next, each mentioned by four businesses. The tour operator had obviously been adversely affected by the pandemic and one consultant had found their clients struggling to pay for the same reason. There were eight businesses displaying the confidence that nothing was restricting them; six were among those offering consultancy, management or professional services.

2.6 Working from home

Two of the businesses taking part in the survey were run completely from home and there were a further five who did so partly, including one who seems to allow some staff to work from home.

The advantages were found to be:

- Lack of travel/commuting (4 people)
- Flexible hours (3)
- Lack of overheads/cost savings (2)
- One mention each for: lack of office politics, being good for family life, better for the environment, being more comfortable.

Four of the seven noted some potential disadvantages though. These included: lack of contact with others/isolation, variable internet connection, the distractions of family life. Each of these were mentioned by two people.

2.7 Business start ups

Nine of the sample thought that there was a need for more, smaller, start up premises within East Challow or the Grove Business Park. Their ideas on what was needed and the types of business that would benefit were varied. What is needed:

- A small shop/post office/cafe
- Something else like Boston House
- Office space in a rural/farm setting with good quality refurbishment
- Small industrial units allowing for trade counters
- Affordable office space for one or two people
- One sole trader used and liked the co-working space at Boston House. More meeting room space might be beneficial.

Who would benefit:

- Builders Merchant
- Small engineering companies
- Technical development businesses
- One felt there was scope for businesses who could take advantage of the growth in house building locally
- Small businesses that need flexible space to meet and work. It should give them a professional 'face' for their clients and visitors. On site services such as financial and media should be available too.

Another question asked specifically what type of facilities and support should be provided for start ups. Four mentioned facilities such as Boston House/ Grove Business Park or described something very like it without actually naming it. Four mentioned financial support. This might take the form of affordable or subsidised rents, loans or free rates for a period of time, low cost finance. One person specifically mentioned those who might be wanting to start their own business following redundancy but would need financial support.

In addition to these two themes respondents mentioned marketing and business advice in general, signposting to specialist support options rather than generic access to grants and access to networking opportunities.

2.8 Looking ahead

All businesses were asked if any local housing development was likely to affect their business. Five thought that it would, fourteen that it would not, with three unsure. Amongst those five, three were

positive about the prospect, they thought that more residents would bring them more work or customers. Two of them were linked to construction and one to the health and well being sector. However, the other two businesses who expected to be affected had negative comments about the likely increase in traffic on already busy roads. This could lead to congestion, delays and pollution.

The final question gave respondents the chance to mention any changes they would like to see to local infrastructure which might help their business. Thirteen of them took this opportunity and the comments are summarised below.

Table 10 Desirable changes to infrastructure

Railway station/rail links	6
Improved Broadband	5
Charging points	3
Sustainable energy/housing developments	2
Road improvements	2
Wantage bypass	2
Other	4

Base: all commenting on infrastructure (13)

The most frequent plea was for a railway station to provide links to major cities. It was felt that the road system was not adequate for the increasing demands being placed on it, not least by the increase in house building, and that rail was an obvious alternative. One of the other changes suggested was an electric bus to Didcot station, presumably to achieve the same. On a similar theme, four people talked about improving the road network, including two references to a bypass for Wantage. On the other hand, one respondent complained that road works affected his trade.

Broadband improvements were also high up the wish list and sustainability is also salient with requests for charging points and wider sustainability objectives. The remaining 'other' comments were: a footpath to the new houses, a more reliable electricity supply (one respondent had earlier mentioned power cuts), improved leisure and entertainment facilities including green spaces.

Appendix 1 Questionnaire used

East Challow Parish Business Survey

If you run a business in East Challow, either from your home or from premises in the parish, we would ask you to complete this questionnaire on how you see the working environment in East Challow and how it might be improved. *If you also receive a questionnaire at your business premises please only complete one of them.*

You can also complete this survey online at:

https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/E_CHALLOW_BUSINESS_SURVEY

Please return in the Freepost envelope or complete online by the closing date of Friday 14th August 2020

All information will be kept confidential and individual businesses or staff will not be identified. To complete the questionnaire please tick the boxes next to the answers you wish to give or write in the spaces available. Answer N/A if not applicable.

Name of business	
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Business address including postcode	
Telephone number	
Email address	
Website address	

Contact name and position	
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Q1. What is the nature of your business?

Q2. How many years has this business been operating?

Q3. How many years has it been operating at this site?

Q4. Do you employ any staff?

Yes	1
No	2

Q5. If yes, how many are

Full time	
Part time	

Q6. If you employ staff, how many of your staff live locally ie within 3 miles of the premises?

Q7. Where does the majority of your business/custom come from?

Personal visitors to premises	1	Passing/casual trade	6
Website/mail order	2	Business to business	7
Telephone	3	Recommendation/word of mouth	8
Advertising/mail shots/leafletting	4	Social media (eg Facebook, Instagram)	9
Representatives/agents.	5	Other (please explain)	

Q8 What do you consider are the advantages of doing business in East Challow?

Q9. What do you consider are the challenges to doing business in East Challow?

If you run your business from your home in East Challow, please complete questions 10, 11 and 12. Otherwise go on to Question 13

Q10. Do you run your business completely from home?

Yes	1
No	2

Q11. What do you consider are the advantages of running your business from home?

Q12. What do you consider are the challenges to running your business from home?

ALL TO ANSWER

Q13a. How would you assess the importance of each of the following in their ability to affect your business?

	Very important	Important	Not particularly important	Not at all important	Don't know
Business confidence	1	2	3	4	5
Customer confidence, as far as you are aware	1	2	3	4	5
Local business support and advice (if relevant)	1	2	3	4	5
Broadband speed	1	2	3	4	5
Crime, security and safety	1	2	3	4	5
Location and access	1	2	3	4	5
Contact with local Councils	1	2	3	4	5
Availability of local workforce (if relevant)	1	2	3	4	5
Suitability/availability/flexibility of work premises	1	2	3	4	5
Transport connections (if relevant)	1	2	3	4	5

Q13b Are there any other factors which affect your business significantly? Please explain

Q14. What, if any, do you consider are the key issues restricting the growth of your business?
(Please tick all that apply)

Increased competition.	1	Technology changes.	9
Weak customer demand.	2	Business rates	10
Legislation.	3	Rent (if relevant)	11
Council bureaucracy.	4	Energy costs.	12
Transport.	5	Material costs.	13
Access to finance.	6	Customer parking (if relevant)	14
Availability/affordability of premises.	7	Desire to stay below VAT threshold	15
Availability of appropriate staff	8		
Other (Please specify)			
Nothing restricting growth	16		

Q15a. Overall, how satisfied are you with East Challow as a place to do business?

Very satisfied	1
Satisfied	2
Dissatisfied	3
Very dissatisfied	4

Q15b. Please explain why you have given that answer?

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Q16. Do you think there is a need for more, smaller start-up premises in East Challow/Grove Business Park, or not?

Yes	1
No	2

Q17a. If the answer to this is yes, could you be specific about the type of premises needed and the likely type of business that would benefit from this?

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Q17b. In your view, what type of facilities and support should be provided for start ups?

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Q18. In your opinion, is any local housing development likely to affect your business? And if yes, in what way?

Yes	1	In what way?
No	2	
Unsure	3	

Q19. Are there any major changes to local infrastructure (roads, rail, broad band speeds, sustainable energy such solar panels, charging points etc) that you would like to see in or around East Challow which might improve your business?

No	1
Yes (please explain)	

Q20. Please use this space for any additional comments that may be relevant to business success in East Challow and which may be relevant to the neighbourhood development plan.

***Thank you for taking part in this business survey.
Please return it in the Freepost envelope (with the housing questionnaire if you have received it at home).***

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