

COMMUNITY CONCERNS, HOPES AND EXPERIENCES

Findings from the Sizewell C Community Impact Baseline Study

A study commissioned by Sizewell C

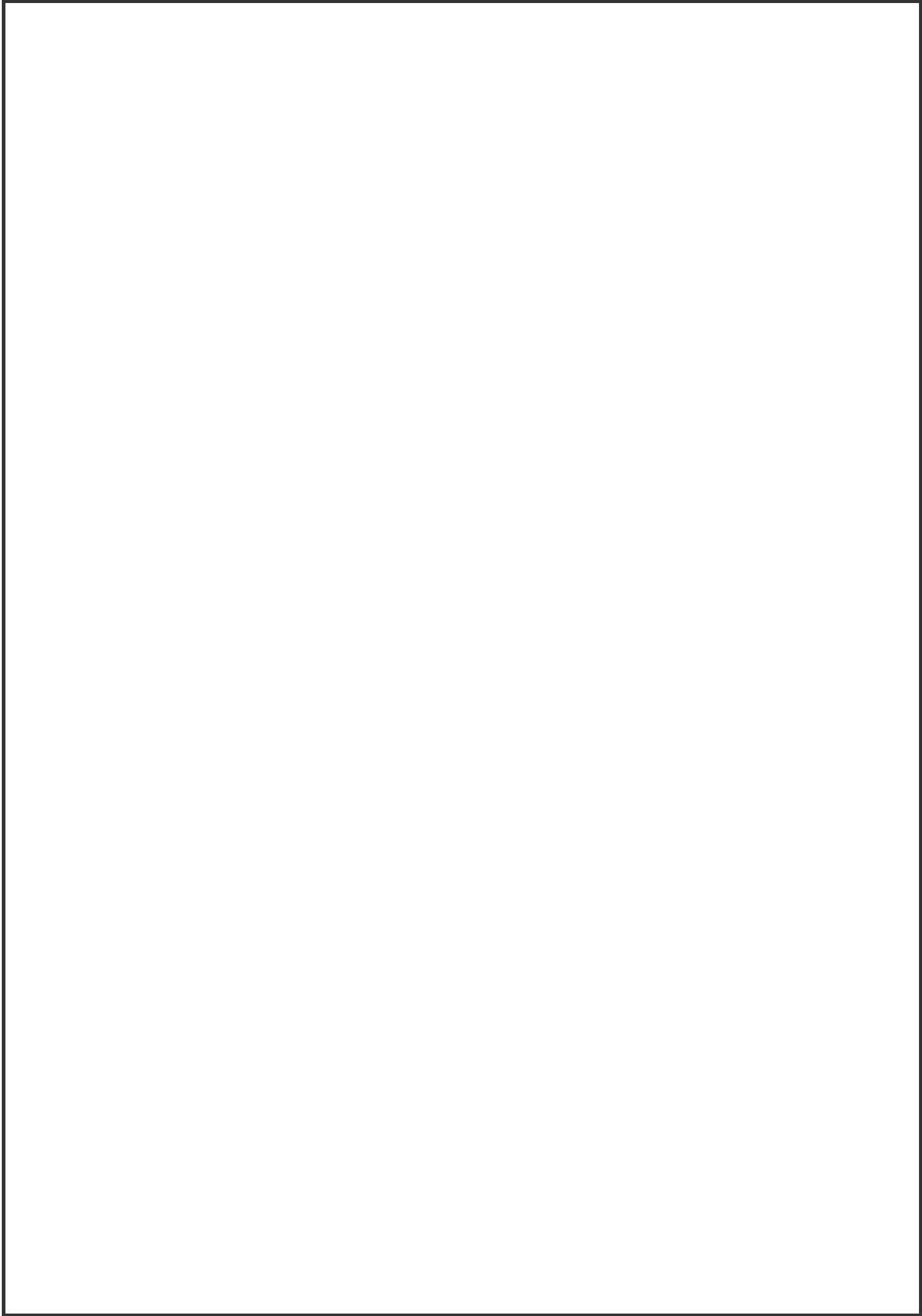


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Executive summary

This summary presents the main findings from the Sizewell C Community Study, an independent baseline undertaken by the University of Suffolk to understand how residents in Leiston and surrounding areas view the project at this early stage. The study brought together survey responses and focus group discussions to establish a clear picture of current experiences, anticipated impacts, and long-term hopes. It provides the foundation for ongoing monitoring as construction progresses and offers an initial reference point against which future community perspectives can be compared.

The findings show that residents are highly familiar with the Sizewell C project itself, reflecting its long-standing presence in local debate and public discussion. However, awareness of specific community commitments, such as the pledges and formal mitigation schemes, is markedly lower. Most current impacts relate to early construction activity, including traffic disruption and visible environmental change in and around the site and key road corridors. Beyond these early experiences, the majority of concerns expressed by participants relate to the future: many anticipate pressure on healthcare services, schools, housing, and local infrastructure as the project scales up. Alongside these concerns, residents set out clear aspirations for investment in skills, youth opportunities, community facilities, and public spaces that strengthen the identity and wellbeing of the town and its neighbouring villages.

A consistent thread across the study is the desire for clearer communication, more accessible information, and opportunities for residents to be heard in ways that feel meaningful. Many participants distinguished between knowing that the project is moving forward and understanding what it will mean for daily life, both now and in the years ahead. These findings underline the importance of sustained, open dialogue during the next phase of construction and inform the approach that will guide future community listening and engagement. They also highlight the value of independent research as a means of documenting community experience over time, providing a shared evidence base for residents, Sizewell C, and local partners.

About this study

The baseline draws on three linked surveys and a programme of twelve independently facilitated focus groups. The public survey captured views from several hundred residents across Leiston and surrounding villages, supplemented by a Families and Teachers Survey and a Stakeholder Survey with representatives from local authorities, public services, voluntary organisations, and local businesses. The focus groups were designed to bring together a broad cross-section of the community, including older residents, parents, young people, educators, and frontline practitioners. However, despite efforts to include a broad demographic spread, engaging younger residents proved difficult, both in the survey and the focus groups. This pattern is not unusual in community studies of this kind, and it means that the findings reflect more strongly the views of older and longer-established residents. It may also indicate that those with stronger feelings about the project were more likely to participate at this early stage.

All data collection followed a consistent framework exploring current experiences, anticipated impacts, and priorities for the future. This mixed-methods approach allows quantitative patterns from the surveys to be interpreted alongside the more detailed insights provided through discussion. While not statistically representative of every demographic group, the baseline provides a coherent picture of community perspectives at the outset of the construction period, forming a foundation for the longitudinal monitoring that will follow.

The public survey participants reflected an older and long-established population. More than 85 per cent of respondents were over the age of fifty, including 47 per cent aged sixty-five and above. Only a small minority were under fifty. Home ownership was dominant at 84 per cent, with very few respondents renting their homes. This was paired with striking residential stability: nearly three-quarters had lived in Leiston or the surrounding villages for more than ten years. Household structures also reflected this demographic pattern, with 54 per cent living in two-person households and 19 per cent living alone. Consistent with the age distribution, almost half of respondents were retired; the remainder were in full-time, part-time, or self-employment, with only very small numbers reporting unemployment or inability to work. Only 13 per cent had children under eighteen living at home. Educational backgrounds were varied. Approximately half of respondents held a university-level qualification, while the rest reported vocational, secondary, or other qualifications. The sample was slightly male-skewed, with 57 per cent identifying as male and 43 per cent as female.

Taken together, this demographic context indicates that the baseline findings primarily reflect the views of older, long-term residents who have deep ties to the local area and strong place-based identities.

What we heard: current experiences and awareness

“This is the first time I feel like someone is listening.”
“We know it is going ahead, but we aren’t always clear about what the pledges mean or where to ask questions.”

At the time of the study – conducted between summer 2024 and spring 2025, during the initial stages of Sizewell C construction – residents were experiencing the earliest signs of change associated with the project. The most noticeable effects related to transport, movement around the area and the related environmental impact. Participants frequently mentioned traffic disruption, temporary road diversions, reduced speed limits, and an increase in construction-related vehicle movements around key junctions, particularly at peak times. Although these changes were generally viewed as manageable, many residents saw them as early indicators of the more substantial pressures anticipated during the main construction phase. Survey responses reflected this emerging pattern: while only a minority reported significant disruption at the time of the survey, more than half expected that travel impacts would increase over the coming years, and 63 per cent identified congestion as an area of extreme concern. Focus group participants also referred to landscape alterations, including tree removal, changes to footpaths, and fenced-off areas. These early changes were often interpreted not only as physical disruptions but also as symbolic markers of a broader transformation beginning to take shape.

Adapting to early changes was another common theme. Many residents described reorganising travel routes, planning around peak traffic periods, or avoiding certain junctions when construction activity increased. Families and teachers, for example, were more likely to mention the effects of construction traffic on school travel and commuting patterns; in their survey, 65 per cent anticipated negative impacts on day-to-day journeys even at this early stage. Younger households and residents living further from the site tended to notice fewer immediate physical disruptions but nevertheless described adjusting their routines in small ways to avoid early congestion or delays. Others observed that minor inconveniences – longer journeys to shops or services, or navigating temporary restrictions on footpaths – could gradually shape their expectations of the project’s future stages.

Alongside these physical changes, the study revealed a nuanced picture of awareness. Residents consistently distinguished between being familiar with the project itself and understanding the detail of what it involves. Survey data reflected that while more than ninety per cent of respondents reported being familiar with Sizewell C, very few felt confident in their knowledge of the twelve community pledges, the mitigation schemes, or the routes through which concerns could be raised. Only 10 per cent indicated strong familiarity

with the pledges, and just 6 per cent felt extremely familiar with the Deed of Obligation. Several participants described receiving information in ways that felt fragmented, technical, or difficult to interpret, which contributed to uncertainty about what particular commitments might mean in practice.

This distinction between familiarity and understanding shaped the tone of many discussions. Residents frequently emphasised that while they knew the project was progressing, they often felt unclear about what the next phases would involve or when they would be informed about them. The wish for clearer communication was expressed in practical, grounded terms rather than as criticism. Participants spoke of wanting information that is concise, timely, and easy to locate, particularly where it relates to daily routines or local services. As one participant explained, *“We know it is going ahead, but we aren’t always clear about what the pledges mean or where to ask questions.”* Another commented, *“This is the first time I feel like someone is listening,”* reflecting the value placed on opportunities for open conversation and independent facilitation.

These patterns were closely linked to a wider sense of uncertainty. Several participants described a feeling of *“not knowing what comes next”*, which shaped both their interest and their caution about future impacts. For some, this uncertainty created a level of anxiety; for others, it reinforced the importance of steady, well-signposted communication as the project develops. Survey responses echoed this more cautious tone: although many environmental and service pressures were understood as future concerns, more than half of respondents reported already noticing early environmental changes, and more than 40 per cent expressed significant concern about construction noise even before major works had begun.

Taken together, these early experiences and awareness patterns form a key part of the baseline. They suggest that while the project is widely known locally, the details surrounding commitments, processes, and potential future impacts remain less visible to many residents. This gap in understanding influenced how people interpreted the earliest signs of change, often combining a mixture of curiosity, caution, and a desire for clearer communication as the project moves into more intensive phases.

Anticipated impacts and future concerns

*"It feels like we're losing things we can't replace... once it's gone, it's gone."
"GPs are already stretched. If thousands more people come in, how will we cope?"
"We're not against change, but we don't want Leiston to lose what makes it feel like home."*

Most concerns described during the study related to anticipated impacts rather than conditions already being experienced. Across surveys and focus groups, participants emphasised that the most significant effects of the project were still to come, particularly as construction intensifies in the years ahead.

Environment and landscape

Environmental concerns were the most frequently expressed across the study. More than sixty per cent of survey respondents reported being extremely concerned about environmental impacts, making this the highest-ranked area of anticipated risk. Residents anticipated loss of wildlife habitats, increased disturbance to coastal and rural landscapes, and a sense of permanent alteration to places they valued for recreation and identity. Several participants described feelings of apprehension or sadness linked to the possibility of irreversible environmental change. Others referred to the cumulative impact of multiple energy projects in the area, suggesting that the combined effect might be more extensive than any single development. These concerns were often rooted in a strong place-based attachment to the natural environment.

Health, wellbeing, and services

Concerns about pressure on health, wellbeing, and local services were also prominent. Nearly half of survey respondents expressed extreme concern about future pressures on healthcare. Residents and stakeholder organisations anticipated increased demand on GP appointments, emergency response capacity, school places, and mental health support. Many framed these issues in the context of existing strain, noting that securing timely appointments or specialist support could already be difficult. Focus group participants often linked these concerns to broader questions of resilience, expressing uncertainty about how services might cope with additional demand associated with workforce growth and population change.

Transport and infrastructure

Transport capacity was another major theme. Sixty-three per cent of survey respondents identified traffic congestion as an area of extreme concern. While current congestion was generally described as manageable, many expected it to worsen substantially as construction peaks and vehicle

movements increase. Families, commuters, and those travelling frequently between villages highlighted worries about road safety, pedestrian routes, and travel reliability. Some noted that modest delays or diversions in the early stages already required adjustments to their routines. These small changes were often interpreted as early signs of the more significant disruptions they anticipated in the coming years.

Housing and affordability

Housing emerged as a notable concern, particularly for younger adults, families, and renters. Several feared that an influx of workers could increase pressure on rental markets, contributing to rising costs and reduced availability. Participants described the local housing system as already tight, with limited supply and high competition for affordable properties. Some younger residents expressed concern that heightened demand could make it harder to remain in the area or form independent households. These views reflected a broader sense that housing affordability was fragile even before construction reached full scale.

Community identity and cohesion

Alongside these practical concerns, residents raised deeper worries about community identity, cohesion, and the pace of social change. Many expressed uncertainty about how the character of Leiston and neighbouring villages might evolve as the workforce population grows. Participants described the area as having a strong community ethos and were keen to preserve a sense of belonging and continuity. Concerns in this area did not reflect opposition to the project itself, but rather a desire to maintain the social fabric, informal networks, and everyday relationships that shape local life. These sentiments were especially common among older residents and long-term households, who spoke about the value of familiar routines, shared spaces, and longstanding neighbourhood ties.

Overall, the findings show that anticipated impacts were central to how residents interpreted early signs of change. While actual disruption remained limited at the time of the study, people were already looking ahead to the years of construction to come. The consistency of these concerns across demographic groups highlights the importance of clear communication, forward planning, and regular opportunities for community listening as the project progresses.

Hopes, priorities, and legacy expectations

“We want our young people to have real chances here.”
“It would make such a difference to have more for families and young people.”
“We want progress, but we want to keep the heart of the town.”

Alongside concerns about the future, the study revealed a strong sense of what residents hope Sizewell C might help bring to the area over the longer term. These aspirations were framed not as expectations placed solely on the project, but as broader hopes for how the town might develop and thrive. Many participants described the coming years as a pivotal moment in which change could also create opportunities, particularly if investment aligns with community priorities and local identity. People spoke about wanting to see tangible benefits that would outlast the construction period and contribute to a sustainable, confident future for the area.

Skills and opportunities for young people

Opportunities for young people were among the most prominent themes across all strands of the research. Families, teachers, and younger participants emphasised the importance of accessible routes into training, apprenticeships, and skilled employment, with several noting that such opportunities had historically been limited in the area. Many described a desire for clear pathways that could help young people develop meaningful careers locally, rather than feeling they must relocate to progress. This was sometimes expressed as a matter of fairness, with residents suggesting that a project of this scale should leave behind strengthened educational and employment pathways. Others viewed it as essential to the long-term vitality of Leiston and its surrounding villages, arguing that retaining younger generations would help maintain community continuity. Stakeholder perspectives reinforced these views, highlighting the potential benefit of stronger links between schools, further education providers, and employers over the coming years.

Community facilities and public spaces

Residents also hoped for improvements to community facilities and shared spaces. The availability of places for families, young people, and older residents to gather was frequently described as essential for sustaining community life during a period of change. Participants referred to existing gaps in provision, such as limited youth facilities or ageing community buildings, and expressed hopes that investment could support a more vibrant and inclusive set of spaces. Well-maintained parks, accessible meeting places, and indoor and outdoor recreation areas were seen as important not only for social connection but also for health and wellbeing. Several participants mentioned the potential to enhance local walking routes, green

spaces, cultural venues, and leisure activities, seeing these improvements as a way to enrich daily life for residents and support a welcoming environment for newcomers.

Service resilience

Strengthening local services was another frequently expressed hope. Participants spoke about the long-term benefits of investment in healthcare capacity, emergency services, and school infrastructure, particularly given existing pressures in these sectors. For many residents, the issue was framed not simply as responding to the needs of Sizewell C, but as contributing to the area's long-term resilience. People reflected that services already carried substantial demand and felt that any future legacy should ensure that essential provision remains robust for both current residents and those who may move into the area during construction and operation. Some participants noted that improving access to mental health support, social care, and preventative health services would have wider benefits beyond the project itself, especially for vulnerable groups. Others underlined the value of sustained planning across agencies, suggesting that strengthened collaboration could help maintain service quality throughout periods of increased demand.

Community identity

Many residents placed significant emphasis on protecting the identity of Leiston and surrounding villages. People described the area as having a distinct character shaped by its heritage, landscape, and longstanding social networks. The prospect of rapid change prompted reflections on what aspects of community life they most wished to preserve. Some participants highlighted the importance of maintaining cherished landmarks, public spaces, and natural features, viewing these as anchors of local identity. Others focused on the everyday rhythms, traditions, and relationships that give the town its sense of belonging and continuity. Several participants suggested that any long-term legacy should reflect and strengthen this identity, whether by supporting local activities, enhancing valued spaces, or ensuring that growth does not overshadow the qualities that make the area feel like home. These views were not framed in opposition to development, but rather as an appeal for a balanced approach that allows the community's character to evolve without losing what residents regard as essential

What we suggest: independent insights

“We all want to be heard, not just the same groups every time.”
“We’re proud of this place. We want change that builds on that pride.”

The themes identified across the baseline study point to several areas where clearer communication, broader engagement, and continued listening may support better understanding as the project evolves. The following insights are offered as independent reflections based on the evidence gathered. They are not recommendations or commitments, but observations intended to inform future dialogue. They summarise the issues that residents most consistently raised, expressed here in a way that supports constructive discussion in the years ahead and can be revisited as new evidence emerges.

Strengthening communication and visibility

Residents expressed a clear wish for more accessible, consistent information about the project, especially regarding community pledges and opportunities for raising questions. Strengthening communication channels may help address uncertainty and encourage more confident engagement. Participants also indicated that communication works best when it is timely, avoids unnecessary jargon, and is clearly linked to practical implications for local people. Several described the challenge of navigating multiple information sources and expressed a preference for updates that bring key messages together in one place. In both surveys and focus groups, people emphasised the importance of knowing where to go with queries and of receiving responses that feel personal rather than generic. These insights highlight the value of communication that is steady, predictable, and attentive to the everyday realities of residents’ lives.

Broadening who is heard

The baseline also highlighted the importance of widening participation beyond those most engaged at this early stage. Future listening activities that reach younger adults, families, renters, and local workers would help generate a fuller picture of community experience. Deliberately varying the timing, location, and format of events may support this aim and ensure that a broader cross-section of voices is able to take part. Several participants noted that some groups face practical barriers to engaging, whether due to work patterns, childcare responsibilities, transport, or simply a sense that they are not the “usual audience” for consultation activities. Creating more flexible and diverse opportunities for involvement may help to bring in perspectives that have historically been underrepresented. This is particularly important given that younger residents and households with children played a

smaller role in the baseline survey and may experience impacts differently over time.

Supporting service resilience

Many participants framed their concerns about health, education, and emergency services as broader system issues rather than project-specific criticisms. Open conversations about how different agencies might work together to maintain service resilience were viewed as important. Such discussions could help clarify responsibilities, set realistic expectations, and identify where collaborative approaches might be most effective. Residents often expressed interest in understanding how planning for increased demand is coordinated across organisations and how community feedback can be incorporated into these processes. Several also highlighted the value of hearing from frontline service providers, not only about challenges but also about ongoing efforts to prepare for future needs.

Investing in skills and youth opportunity

The study also revealed strong aspirations for improved training and employment pathways, particularly for young people. Visible, long-term opportunities in education and skills development may help strengthen the perceived legacy of the project. Participants often linked this to the idea of creating “good work” locally and enabling young people to develop careers that are both stable and rooted in the area. They also highlighted the importance of clear communication about pathways into such opportunities, including how students, parents, and educators can understand what skills are needed and how to access relevant training. Stakeholders echoed these views, noting the value of sustained partnerships between schools, colleges, employers, and community organisations.

Recognising community identity

Finally, discussions suggested that recognising and valuing community identity is important for maintaining cohesion. Engagement that reflects this emotional landscape may support a more grounded sense of continuity during periods of change. This could include acknowledging local histories and landmarks, as well as inviting residents to shape how public spaces and community initiatives develop over time. Several participants spoke about the pride they feel in the character of Leiston and its surrounding villages, and the importance of ensuring that growth and development do not overshadow what makes the area distinctive. Others noted that community identity is shaped not only by physical spaces but also by the relationships, routines, and informal networks that connect people.

Next steps together

A consistent message across the study was the importance of ongoing communication and trust. Residents described wanting clearer information, more ways to engage, and regular opportunities to be heard as the project moves forward. These findings provide the basis for discussions between the University of Suffolk and Sizewell C about how the monitoring of community experience might continue as construction progresses. Any future work under consideration would follow the independent research model used in the 2024–2025 baseline study, ensuring continuity and familiarity for residents.

As part of exploring a possible continuation of the study, the University and Sizewell C are considering how future community listening activities might build on the baseline approach. These sessions would create opportunities to hear from a broader range of residents and to understand how early expectations compare with emerging experiences. The form and timing of any future listening activities would be shaped through discussion and aligned with existing engagement so as not to add to consultation fatigue. The results of the engagement would once again be shared as they are for this baseline study.



SHARE YOUR VIEWS
SHAPE YOUR COMMUNITY!
