

The Crawley Business Debate 2009

Voting Results and Commentary

Compiled by Steve Sawyer (Economic Development Officer)
(e) steve.sawyer@crawley.gov.uk (t) 01293-438704



1. Introduction

150 people signed up to attend the Crawley Business Debate 2009, that took place at Virgin Atlantic's The Base on Fleming Way on 24th June 2009. Over 120 people actually attended the event, 70% of which were representatives of the business community from all business sizes from sole trader to large employer.

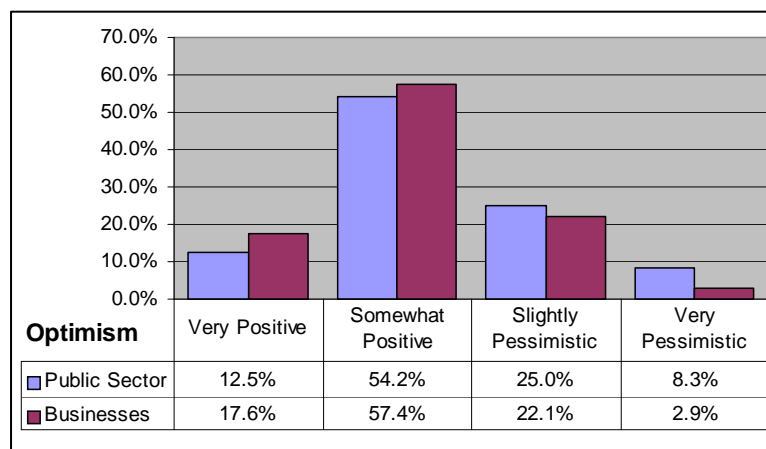
In an attempt to make the event more interactive, a key feature of this year's debate was the introduction of an electronic voting system. Every member of the audience was issued with a voting pad and asked to vote on key business issues posed throughout the evening. This allowed for the opinion of the audience to be captured and presented. The technology also allowed for post-event analysis to help isolate the opinion of businesses from those of the public sector (i.e. local government) and to analyse the results by sector and business size. These are the results.

2. The Interest in Crawley – the make up of the audience

Less than a quarter of people lived and worked in the town, a result that held regardless of whether people represented the public or private sector. The vast majority of people at the event worked in the town but lived somewhere else. This is not an entirely surprising result given the high numbers of in-commuters to Crawley for work everyday. Fewer Crawley residents also tend to be represented at more senior levels within organisations. Of the businesses represented most were medium or large businesses employing 50 or more people (57%), 18% employed between 10 and 50 people and about 20% employed less than 10 people (including self employed).

3. Recession & Business Support

As an introduction to a debate about the economic downturn and what was being done to support local businesses and residents, members of the audience were asked to rate how optimistic they felt about the year ahead.



When asked to rate how optimistic they felt about the year ahead most people tended to feel more positive. This was true of both the public and private sector, if anything the business community tended to feel a little more positive. There were some differences depending on the size of business, which could be taken to mean that micro businesses (employing less than 10 people) were among the least positive.

4. Development & Investment

This section of the debate concentrated on the town's development plans. Members of the audience were asked to indicate what they saw as the key economic priorities for the town. Members of the audience could choose up to two priorities. This section of the debate also focussed on assessing the perceptions of the town's image and the impact that might be having on business.

Clear differences emerged in terms of the emphasis placed by the public and private sector on what the economic priorities for the town ought to be with businesses more likely to choose Gatwick Airport as a priority compared to just 3% of the public sector vote.

However, something like 80% of businesses voted for something other than Gatwick, although analysis of the first button response (which could be taken as a priority vote of a multi-choice response) would suggest a third of the voting business audience would give Gatwick priority.

Taken overall, the public sector would favour improving workforce skills and building a low carbon economy (perhaps representing national policy drivers in this respect) while recognising the role of manor royal, other employment areas and small business.

The private sector is much more evenly split showing support for Gatwick, Town Centre, Manor Royal and supporting small business. Businesses tended to give less support to addressing low-carbon issues and skills, although larger employers were much more likely to identify a skills issue and a need to diversify the economy.

Analysing the business vote a bit further revealed that small businesses, unsurprisingly, were much more likely than larger businesses to vote for supporting small business (about a third voted for this) but that both large and small businesses placed almost equal weight on supporting Gatwick.

Almost 73% of the audience felt Crawley had some sort of image problem. However, only about a third of all delegates felt Crawley had an image problem that was having a negative impact and 40% felt the town had a bit of an image problem but not one worth being too worried about. This held whether they represented the public sector or a private business.

While this means that the vast majority did not think Crawley had an image problem that required attention it was perhaps telling that just 6% of people felt Crawley had a good image – most of who were from the public sector.

Awareness of the Gatwick Diamond was very good. Most people had heard of it and almost two-thirds claimed to know "all about it". This result was consistent across both the public and private sector. The Micro businesses (less than 10 employees) and self-employed were among those who had less awareness of the Diamond.

5. Gatwick Airport

It is almost impossible to talk about Crawley's economy without discussing Gatwick Airport. On signing up for the event a high proportion of delegates wanted to discuss the role of the airport. This section of the debate tried to encourage delegates to consider how important they felt the airport was to the local economy, an issue that had been touched on in a previous section, to be honest about the relationship their businesses had with the airport and to indicate their support – or not – for a second runway.

5.1 How important is Gatwick

Over half of all business (55%) claimed that Gatwick was either very or somewhat important to their business, with very few medium to large businesses (6%) claiming that Gatwick was not at all important. In fact 59% of the medium to large sized employers said that Gatwick was very or somewhat important. However, 50% of all businesses claimed they did not use the airport for anything or have a direct relationship with it.

5.2 Second runway

While the public sector was somewhat less supportive, 48% of the business community were supportive of a second runway at Gatwick. 32% were either not in favour or just wanted a decision either way, while a further 17% of businesses were undecided. This pattern of response tended to hold across different business size.

6. A new identity for Manor Royal

As part of the work to improve Manor Royal, one of the town's key employment areas, TileyWoodman (the appointed design consultants) presented two design solutions to help create a more positive image and identity for the area. These design solutions were the product of a number of exercises involving a range of stakeholders, including businesses and commercial property agents. This part of the debate formed the last phase of consultation the results of which would be used to inform the final decision and create the identity for Manor Royal that would appear on new signs and map boards.



A. the Ribbon design



B. the Hermes design

Overall there was more support for the Ribbon solution than for Hermes. The public sector vote was almost evenly split between the two, although the businesses were much clearer about the design they preferred with almost 56% of all businesses preferring the Ribbon design.

The next stage will be for the favoured solution to be worked up to a point where it can be used on signs, map boards and other promotional material for the area. Prior to the event considerable debate had been had throughout the process about whether to keep the Manor Royal name, how to use Crawley and Gatwick in any design and what to call the area i.e. a District, an estate, a business park etc. Following the debate the final design solution will seek to resolve these issues.

7. Shall we do it again?

96% of delegates wanted to see a repeat of the Business Debate in 2010.

For more information or analysis, please contact:

Steve Sawyer
Economic Development Officer

(t) 01293 - 438704

(e) steve.sawyer@crawley.gov.uk