

CONSULTATION FEEDBACK REPORT

AGENDA ITEM No. 9

MEETING: ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

DATE: 14TH JANUARY 2015

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE & POLICY OFFICER AND
COMMUNITY NEIGHBOURHOOD ENGAGEMENT OFFICER**

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide members with an overview of the findings from the first round of consultation for information and consideration.
- 1.2 Members are asked to endorse the topics agreed by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

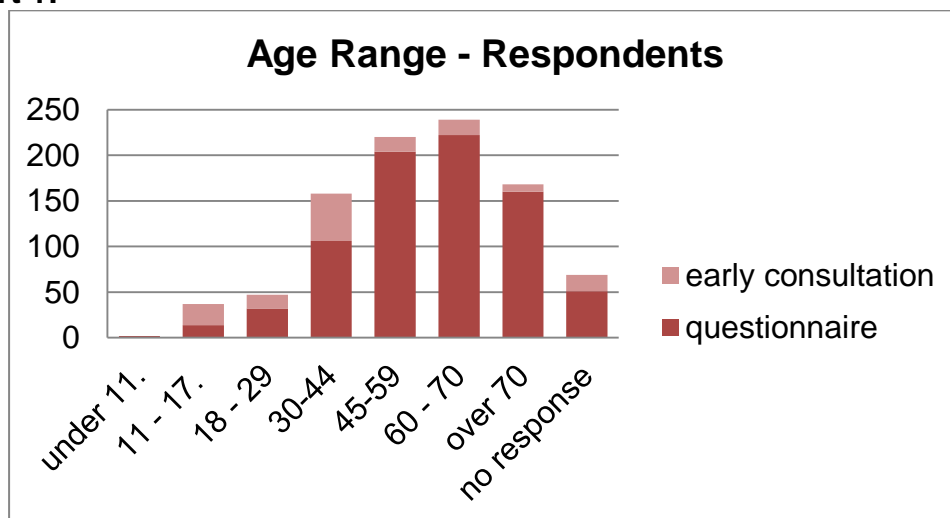
2.0 Background

- 2.1 The first round of consultation ran from July to November 2014. Residents were consulted in a number of ways to ensure the most comprehensive reach possible. As previously reported, officers have consulted with residents and the public via events, meetings, social media, local press and a town wide questionnaire.
- 2.2 791 questionnaires were returned from 11,500 households giving a 6.9% response rate. However, overall 1268 individuals completed some form of consultation taking the response up to 11%.
- 2.3 To date 6485 individual responses to 16 questions have been documented.
- 2.4 In addition, approximately 8000 people attended specific activities or events where the neighbourhood plan was being promoted and had the opportunity to speak to officers.
- 2.5 Members may not consider an 11% response rate is very high however, as a comparison, the *County Durham Local Plan Preferred Options Statement of Consultation* document states:-
- 100 public events took place,
 - 3766 comments were received, 900 of which were related to specific site allocations,
 - 803 responses from the Citizens Panel and
 - approximately 2000 people attended drop-ins and workshops.
- 2.6 Work on the various thematic groups will commence in the New Year with Environment, Housing and Retail being the main groups. Discussions on the sustainability aspect of the plan and how best to address this cross cutting issue will also be undertaken in the New Year. Further information on the thematic groups is set out in paragraph 13.

3.0 **Consultation Information**

- 3.1 The chart below shows the age range of respondents. This data is shown in 2 colours to highlight the age differences from the 791 questionnaires where respondents were predominantly aged 45 and over and 149 respondents who took part in the early consultation during summer events where respondents were predominantly aged 44 and under.

Chart 1:



- 3.2 As part of the engagement process all schools were consulted via the logo competition, provided with questionnaires and presentations were made to the Youth Council. 138 under 18s took part in the logo competition, which has not been included in the chart. The youngest participant was aged 4, who completed a tops and pants activity at Fun in the Park Event at Moore Lane, with help from her parents.
- 3.3 Respondents were predominantly 'White British' with 6 respondents indicating 'Black/Black British' and 2 respondents indicating 'Mixed Asian'. 16 respondents indicated they were not born in the UK. 713 people responded to the question.

4.0 **Consultation Launch Event – Summary**

- 4.1 91 residents and organisations attended the consultation launch event at Newton Aycliffe Youth & Community Centre. There were a number of consultation activities around the room and guests were asked to participate in the topics in which they were interested. This helped give a feel for issues which were important to residents.
- 4.2 Environment/Green Spaces and retail were already being highlighted as priorities even at this very early stage. The Tops and Pants activity, which was very popular as it was easy to undertake and had an immediate visual impact, provided the following responses. People of all ages completed this activity.

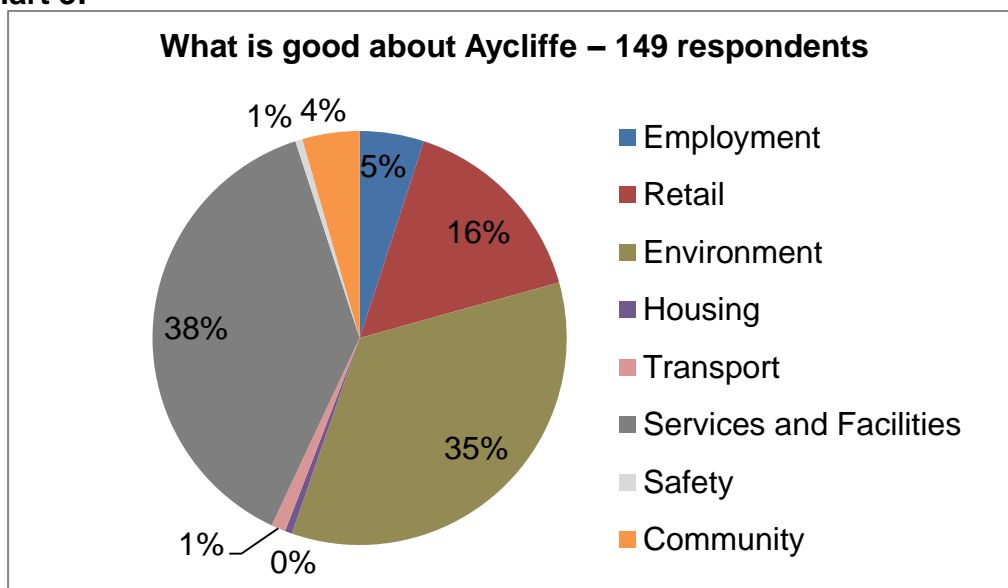
Chart 2:

	Total Comments	Top comments
Tops	66	33 - Environment/Green spaces
Pants	58	28 - Retail

5.0. Early Consultation Responses

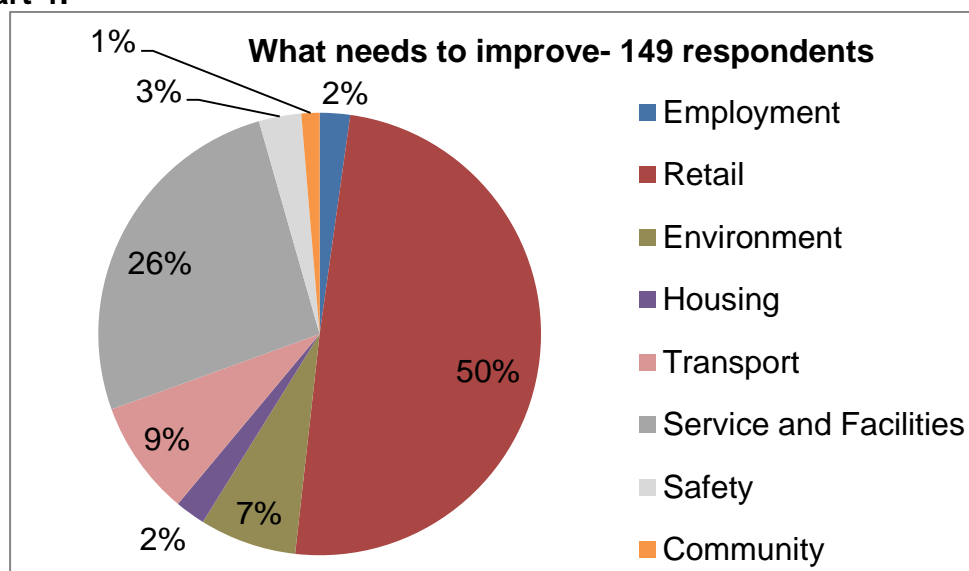
- 5.1 In order to gain an idea of priorities for the neighbourhood plan the CNEO attended events and meetings over a number of weeks where residents were asked to complete a quick question sheet, giving 3 good things about Aycliffe and 3 things they would like to see improve. 149 residents took part in the survey.
- 5.2 The responses for **3 good things about Aycliffe** can be seen in Chart 3 below.
- 5.3 38% of respondents liked the services provided by Great Aycliffe Town Council and in particular the parks and play areas. However, schools and activities also featured highly.
- 5.4 35% of respondents said the environment was the best thing about Aycliffe, the open green spaces was the main reason given for this answer.
- 5.5 16% said retail was the best thing about Aycliffe, however, these answers did not relate to the quality of the shops but rather the visual improvement to the town centre since the redevelopment had commenced.

Chart 3:



- 5.6 Chart 4 shows the response for **3 things residents would like to see improve**.
- 5.7 50% of respondents would like to see the retail offering improve, there is a call for a wider choice of shops including sports, clothing and high street brands. There is also support for using the town centre for a more social experience including bars and restaurants.
- 5.8 26% of respondents would like to see services improve. However, there was a wide range of reasons for this answer, which included improving the facilities and activities in the Durham County Council Leisure Centre, more activities for teenagers, toilets in the town centre and education.
- 5.9 9% of respondents wanted to see an improvement in transport, which was predominantly parking and bus service issues.

Chart 4:



6.0 Questionnaire

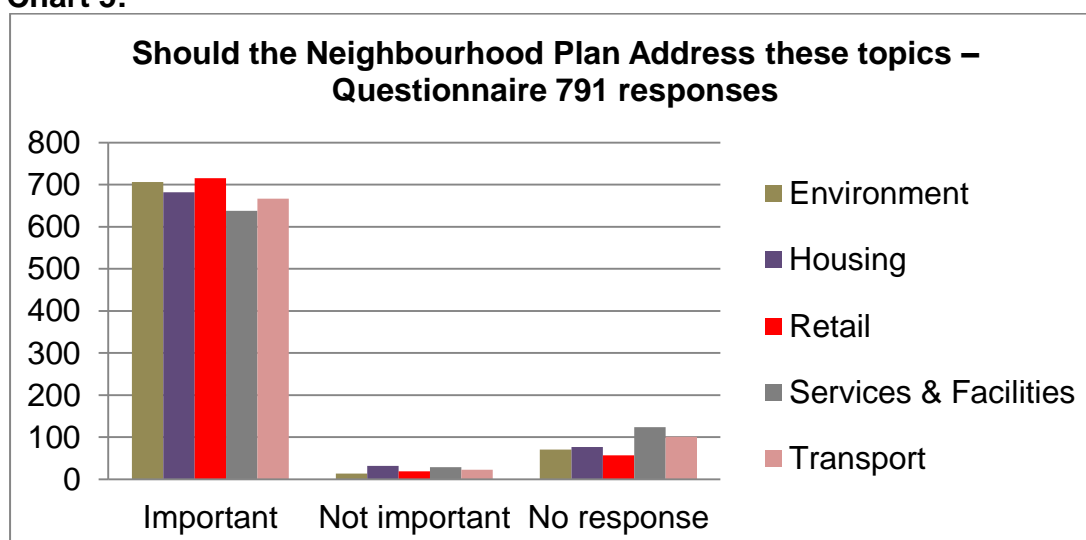
6.1 The questionnaire, which was delivered to every household, received 791 responses. There were 5 main topics to address Environment, Housing, Retail, Service & Facilities and Transport. Residents were given the option of ranking how important each topic was for the neighbourhood plan to address. There were 4 options: extremely important, important, unimportant and very unimportant.

6.2 For the purpose of this report the responses have been amalgamated to either important or not important which are shown in Chart 5. The top 3 priorities for respondents were:

1. Retail – 715
2. Environment – 706
3. Housing – 682

6.3 Although housing was shown as the third most important topic, further analysis of the responses showed that few supporting comments had been made, therefore making it difficult to analyse its importance as a priority.

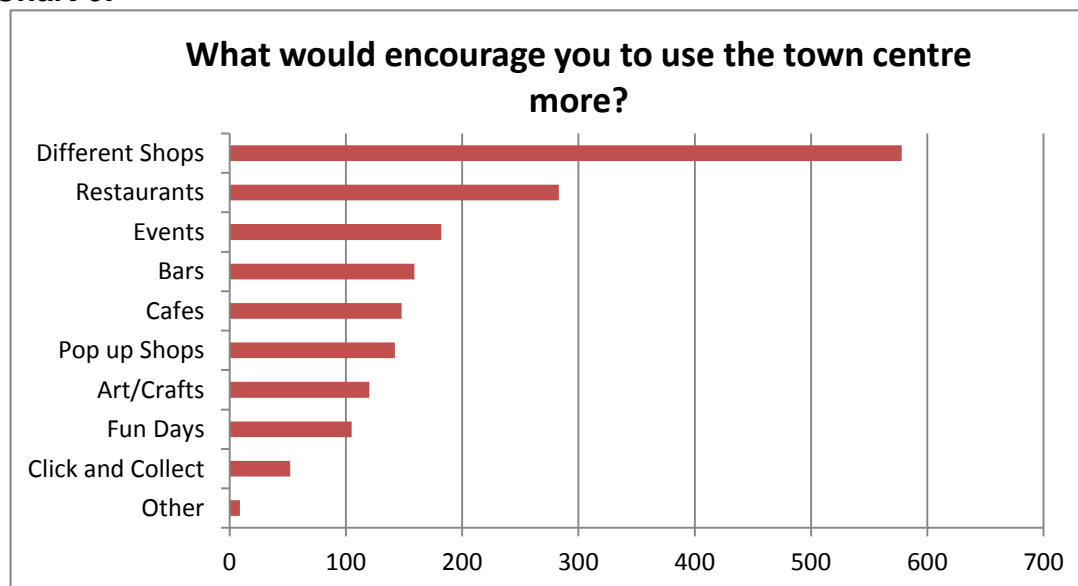
Chart 5:



7.0 **Retail**

- 7.1 This topic was ranked the most important by respondents. This was also supported by the level of detail and number of comments that went into each answer.
- 7.2 The County Durham Local Plan states that *“the County will support appropriate proposals that can improve the evening economy in Newton Aycliffe Town Centre”*. Residents were asked if they thought an evening economy would be successful in Newton Aycliffe. 58% of respondents to the question replied yes, with 22% indicating no and 20% did not comment. Overall 422 individual comments were made on this question with a variety of reasons for (53%) and against (21%). 26% of comments were general statements with no clear support for or against an evening economy. 30 respondents suggested a cinema and 23 respondents specifically wanted a retail park.
- 7.3 Residents were asked about their shopping habits. 94.5% of respondents said they used the Town Centre to shop and 52% reported using various local precincts across the town e.g. Cobblers Hall, Simpasture. 63% said they shopped online and this appeared to be mainly for good quality clothing, sports equipment, electrical items and gifts. This also echoed respondents’ out of town shopping habits.
- 7.4 From the early consultation, it would seem that residents are happy with the appearance of the town centre after the redevelopment. However, there are still vacant units and in an effort to gather evidence of what would encourage residents to use the town centre more they were given a range of options detailed in Chart 6.

Chart 6:



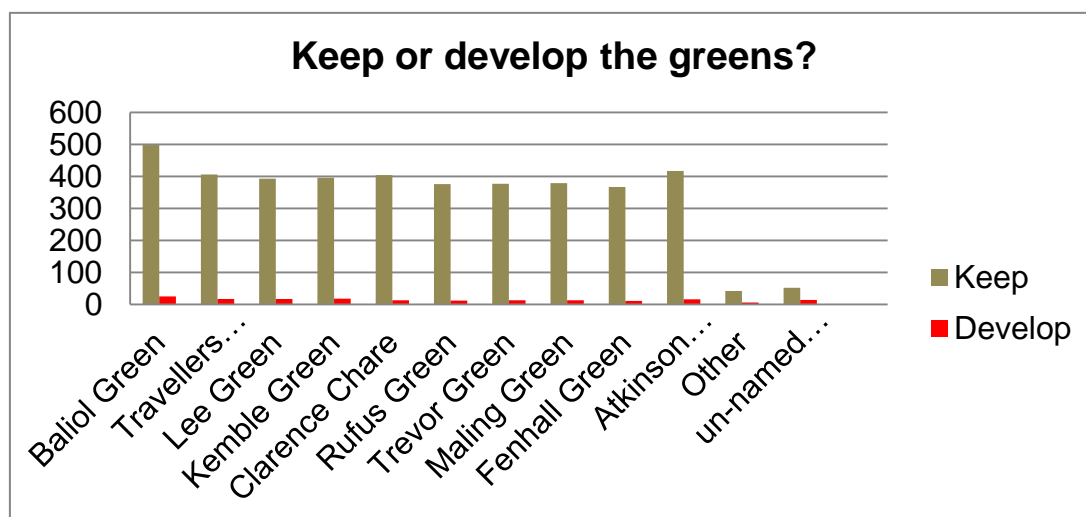
- 7.5 Using evidence from the above table and comments respondents made within the retail section and other sections of the questionnaire, there is overwhelming support and a clear priority to improve the retail on offer both within the town centre and/or an out of town retail park.

- 7.6 It is acknowledged that, currently, improved retail would not be 'in general conformity' with the Local Plan. However, after meeting with DCC Officers it was agreed that the evidence gathered from the neighbourhood plan (NP) consultation highlights the need for the retail situation to be reviewed.
- 7.7 Town Council Officers are currently working with DCC planners to prepare a brief for an independent soft retail market analysis that will hopefully provide an answer to many questions.
- 7.8 It is worth noting, once again, that the NP process cannot bring retailers to the town or indeed provide an out of town retail park but it can help make it easier should a developer or retailers be interested in locating to Newton Aycliffe. Most importantly the Town Council can be seen to be listening to and acting upon the views of the residents.
- 7.9 Although it was anticipated that retail would be one of the top priorities, the amount of adverse comments received was greater than anticipated. Creative ways to write planning policies to address some of the retail needs/problems should be investigated. However, at the NP Steering Group meeting in December the members agreed that, although retail was a priority, a retail thematic group should not commence until the soft retail market analysis had been undertaken which would help steer the direction of the group.

8.0 **Environment**

- 8.1 This topic was ranked the second most important by respondents which is also evident from the level of detail which has been given for the additional questions.
- 8.2 Protecting green open spaces has been identified as a priority (Chart 7). However, there was some support that part of these green areas be developed to alleviate parking issues in certain areas of the Parish. There was an additional 94 comments where other green spaces/areas were identified to be maintained as green open space, again with some support for parking.

Chart 7:



8.3 There were a number of reasons for maintaining green spaces including:

- “Visually important”
- “To preserve the look of the town, for children to enjoy”
- “I believe the great attraction of the town is the green spaces”

8.4 Lord Beveridge’s vision for the town has been cited on a number of occasions throughout the whole of the consultation by young and old alike.

“Newton Aycliffe was to be ‘a paradise for housewives’ with houses grouped around greens, so children could play safely away from the roads”

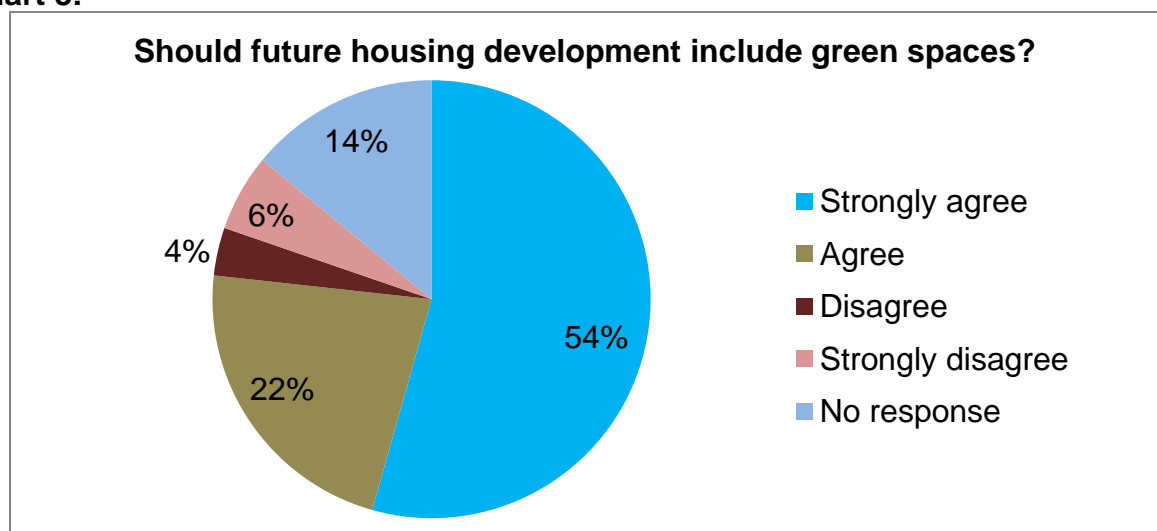
8.5 There was some concern from the Steering Group that these questions were leading people to a ‘protect the greens’ outcome and that many green spaces had been missed off the list when they were equally as important. However, it was highlighted that there had been complaints about the length of the questionnaire and trying to include all green spaces would have added even more to the overall length. The main green spaces were listed and space was left on the questionnaire for ‘other’. The environment thematic group will undertake further research on this area.

8.6 A draft of the questionnaire had been circulated to the Steering Group and Town Councillors for comments prior to the final versions being agreed and printed.

8.7 Residents were asked about future housing developments and whether green spaces should be included in the design. 76% rated this as either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’. (Chart 8)

8.8 Although 10% said that they disagreed, it could be argued that respondents mistakenly chose incorrectly, in as much as their answers do not tally with a question in the housing section regarding ensuring new development must contain green spaces.

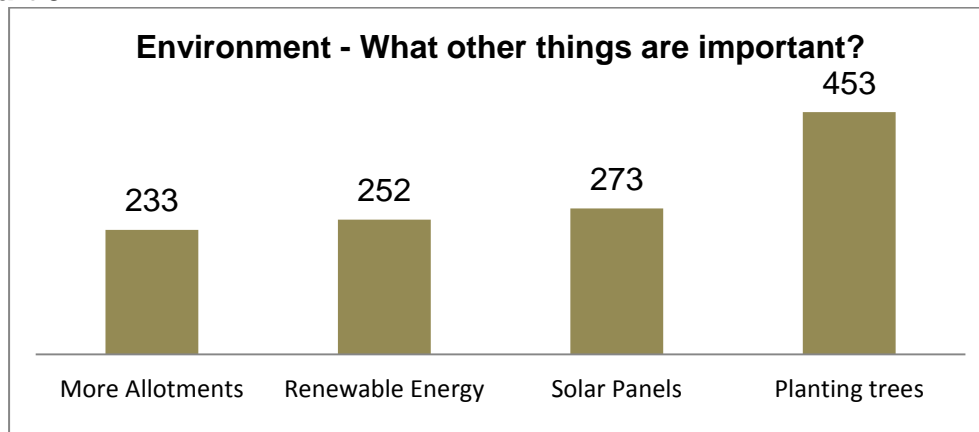
Chart 8:



8.9 When asked additional questions about the environment, respondents thought the planting of trees was important. As the chart 9 shows this was by far the most important thing for residents, supported by an additional 277 individual comments. Many felt this was important for a number of reasons the main ones being:-

- “to enhance/improve the environment”
- “to maintain the garden feel”
- “they are the town’s lungs and attractive to view”
- “for the wildlife”

Chart 9:



- 8.10 Respondents were also concerned about the cost of energy/fuel and the general cost of living and thought that renewable energy/solar panels and more allotments would help alleviate this in the future. It was interesting to note that a number of respondents were not in favour of wind turbines.

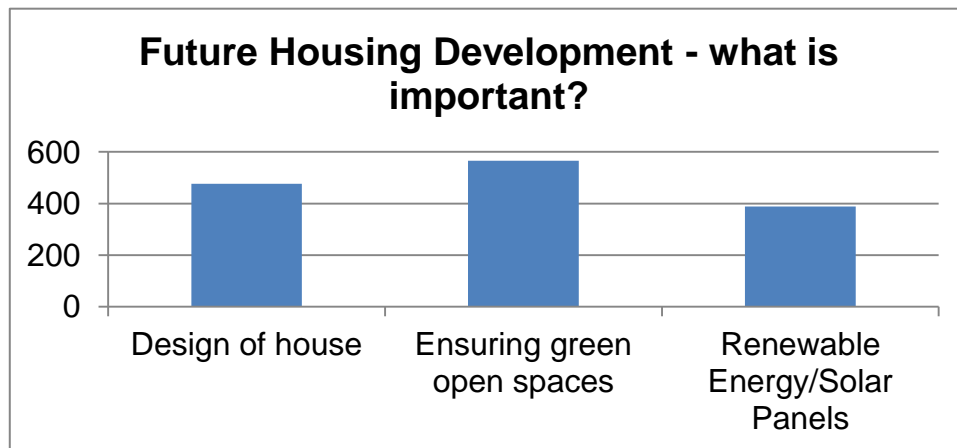
9.0 **Housing**

- 9.1 This topic was ranked third most important. However, respondents added very little detail in the subsequent question to support this level of importance.
- 9.2 When asked if ‘your home meets your personal needs now or in the future’ the following table shows respondents who answered no.

Currently	4.5%
In 5 years	10%
10 years	17%

- 9.3 When asked what their future housing needs would be, there was very little response. There could be two reasons for this
- as most people who responded to the question stated their home meets their future needs there was no need to add any further information or
 - people did not understand the question.
- However, when people did respond, most requests were for bungalows. This question was asked to assist Livin with their future housing needs and to help plan the types of houses needed in future developments to meet the needs of the residents.
- 9.4 Respondents did feel that having an input in future housing development was important, see Chart 10 below. It was felt that the design should include green spaces in keeping with the rest of the town and should incorporate renewable energy where possible, which echoed the previous question under the environment heading.

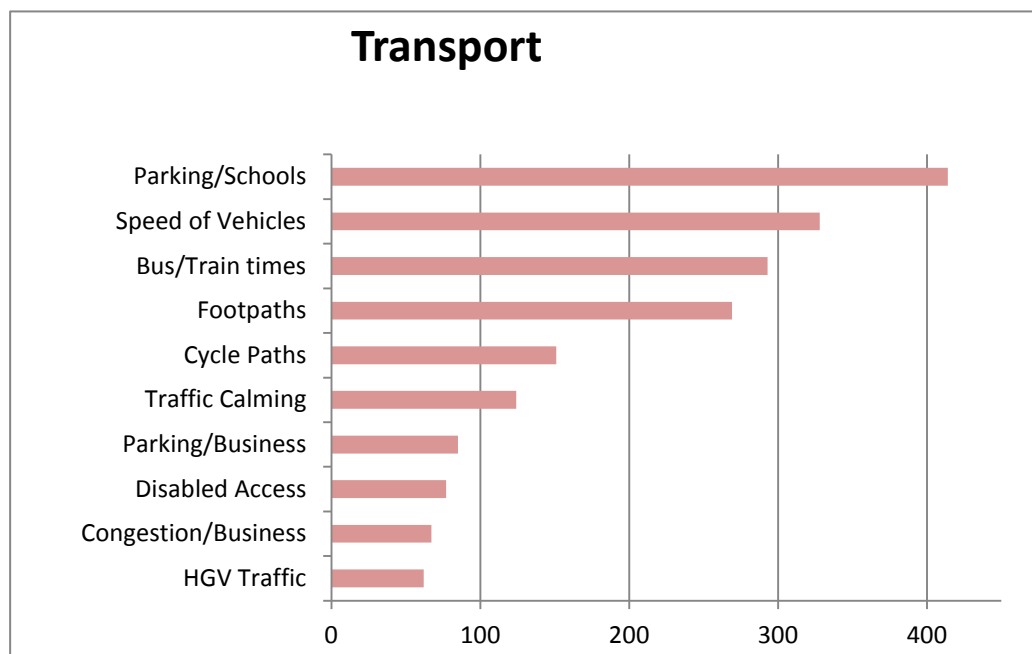
Chart 10:



10.0 **Transport**

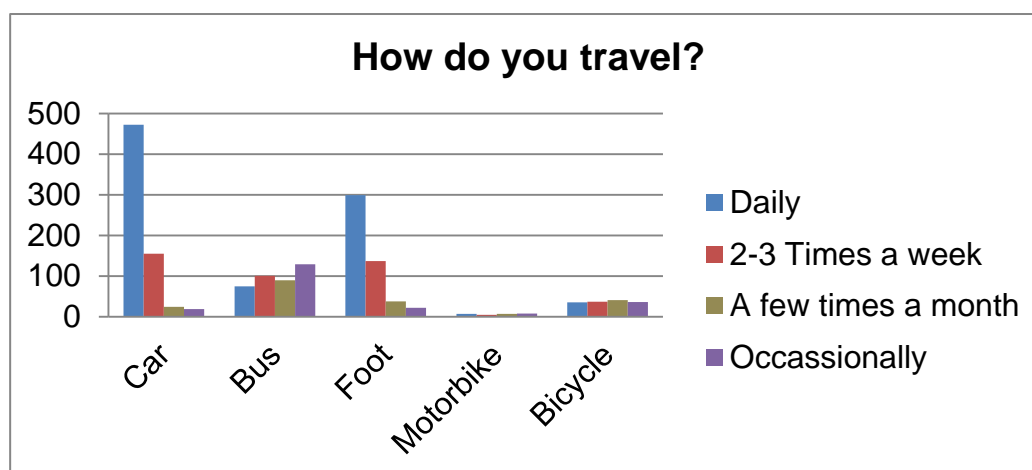
- 10.1 Although transport was ranked fourth as a priority, issues raised in this topic cross over into other areas, for example environment.
- 10.2 Residents were asked about the importance of various transport issues. Chart 11 demonstrates the priorities for residents, with significant support for parking. Parking was also identified as a need even when residents had indicated it was important to protect green spaces in the environment section of the questionnaire.

Chart 11:



- 10.3 Residents were asked a series of questions regarding how they travel, amount of cars per household and if parking at their home was adequate. Chart 12 demonstrates that respondents travel predominately by car on a daily basis.

Chart 12:



- 10.4 Respondents have an average of 1.4 cars per household and the majority said they have adequate parking. Of those who do not have adequate parking (predominately those with more than one car) suggestions were made to use small sections of green space and grass verges to help alleviate this problem.
- 10.5 When analysing responses from the questions asking residents *'to choose three things to change about your area'* parking problems gained a large response. These have been incorporated into the 'transport' heading, see Chart 21 below.

11.0 **Service and Facilities**

- 11.1 As anticipated, due to the large number of facilities available to residents in the Great Aycliffe Parish, this topic was ranked with the least priority. In addition, a high proportion of respondents did not answer any subsequent questions within this section.

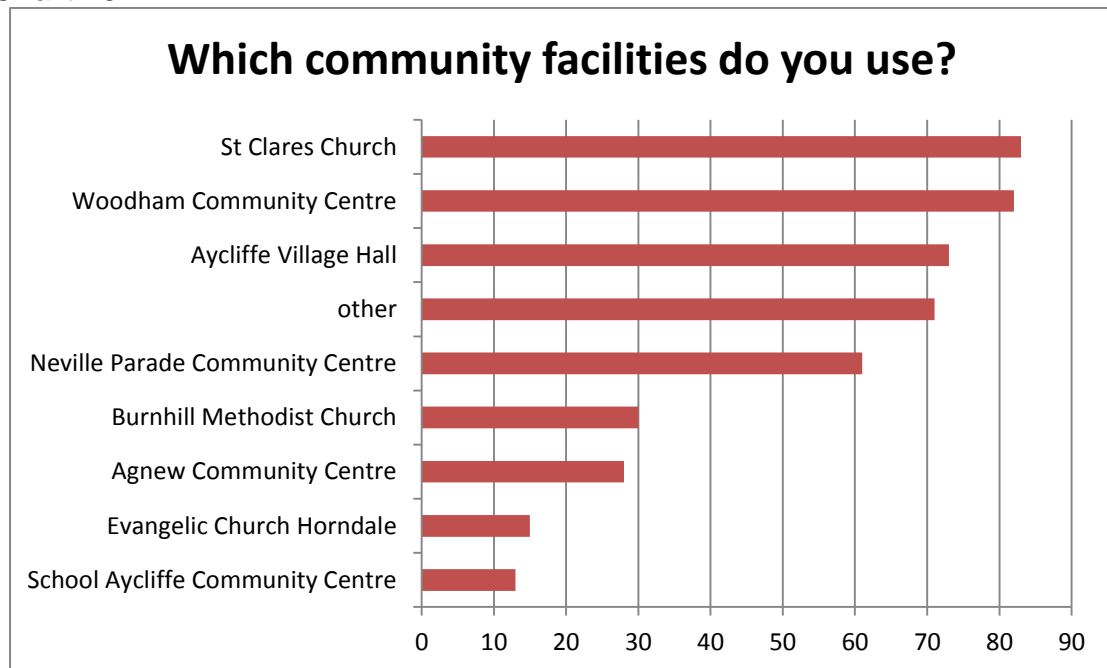
Education

- 11.2 The majority of people who responded felt that pre-school, primary and secondary school provision was sufficient. However, respondents did report issues with accessing Further/Higher Education and Adult Education, with there being none on the town or access to suitable transport being the most cited reasons.
- 11.3 It is anticipated that the forthcoming Universal Technical College should alleviate some of the problems in respect of further education.
- 11.4 A large number of people commented on the lack of adult education available in the Town which is supported by the fact that only 17 people said they used The Learning Centre. This could be due to a number of factors such as respondents are not aware of its existence or the courses offered are not what people are looking for.

Community Facilities

- 11.5 Although the community centres appear to be well used, see Chart 13, it is apparent that there is an issue with the publicity of events and activities. Over 300 respondents indicated they do not know what goes on in each centre. A large number of respondents also said there was nothing to interest them or they had no interest in the facilities.

Chart 13:



- 11.6 Although 117 respondents said the town lacked community facilities, 131 individual comments were made, with the town centre (23) and toilets needed (22) receiving the most comments. There were only 3 references to a cinema in this section and the Elmfield School site was only mentioned 4 times.
- 11.7 From the evidence provided it would appear there is very little that planning policies could help deliver, therefore this information would be forwarded to relevant partners to action.
- 11.8 There was, again, some concern from the Steering Group that these questions were leading people to a desired outcome and that many community facilities had been missed off the list. The main community facilities were named and space was left on the questionnaire for 'other' facilities not listed.
- 11.9 The Great Aycliffe Parish has a large number of community facilities and part of the aim of this topic was to:-
- provide a list of the main facilities which are available to residents,
 - find out if residents knew what was available, and
 - find out if residents felt any areas were lacking in facilities
- This question was included as some members of the Steering Group felt there were no facilities in the West Ward. Only 6 respondents stated the West Ward was lacking in facilities.
- 11.10 When asked '*what facilities we were lacking*' 239 people responded with 109 stating a cinema and 18, a theatre, there were 25 comments asking for more things to do, 17 people suggested restaurants, 15 stated different/better shops only 2 people mentioned boats in West Park. 8 people said 'nothing as there was enough already'.
- 12.0 **Community Infrastructure Levy and Planning**
- 12.1 The section on CIL and Planning followed the recommended questions provided by Durham County Council.

- 12.2 The following questions were asked to determine the priority for any Community Infrastructure Levy received as a result of future development. This is for information only at this point and will be dealt with at a later date. Charts 14 and 15 provide an overview of responses.

Chart 14:

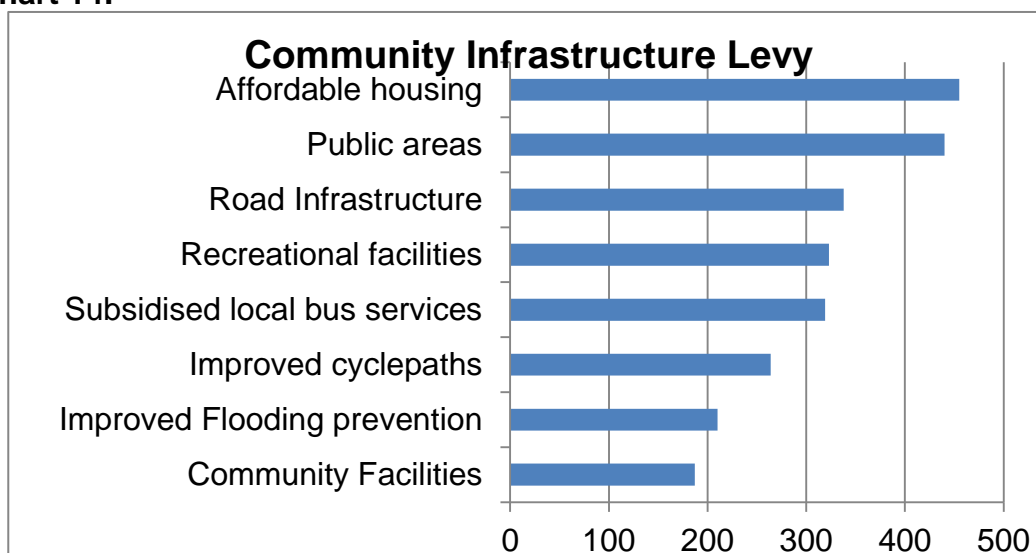
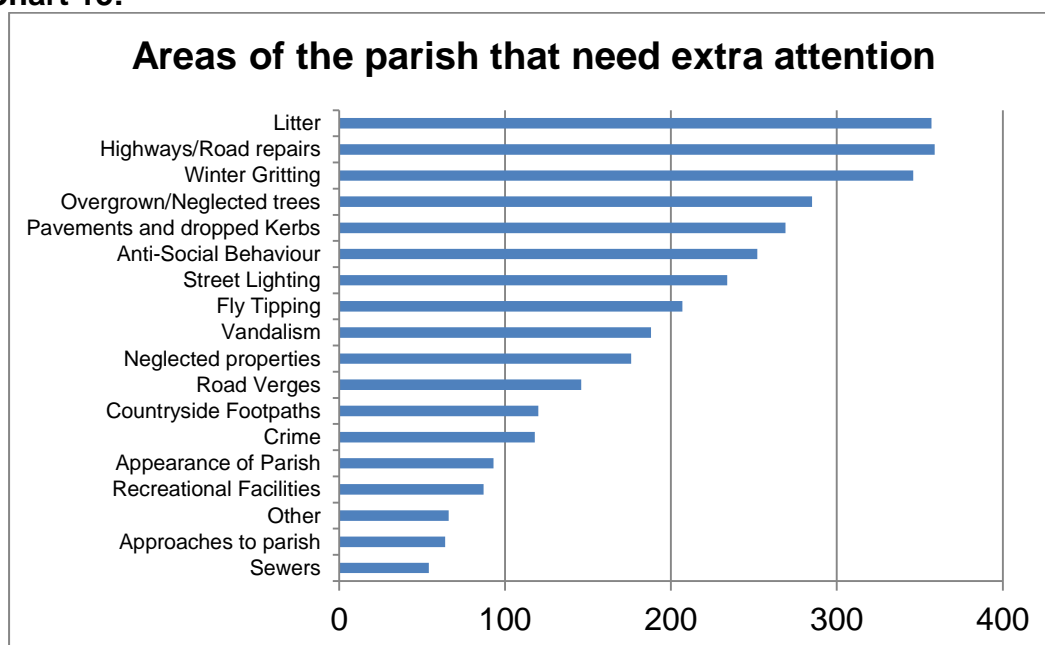


Chart 15:



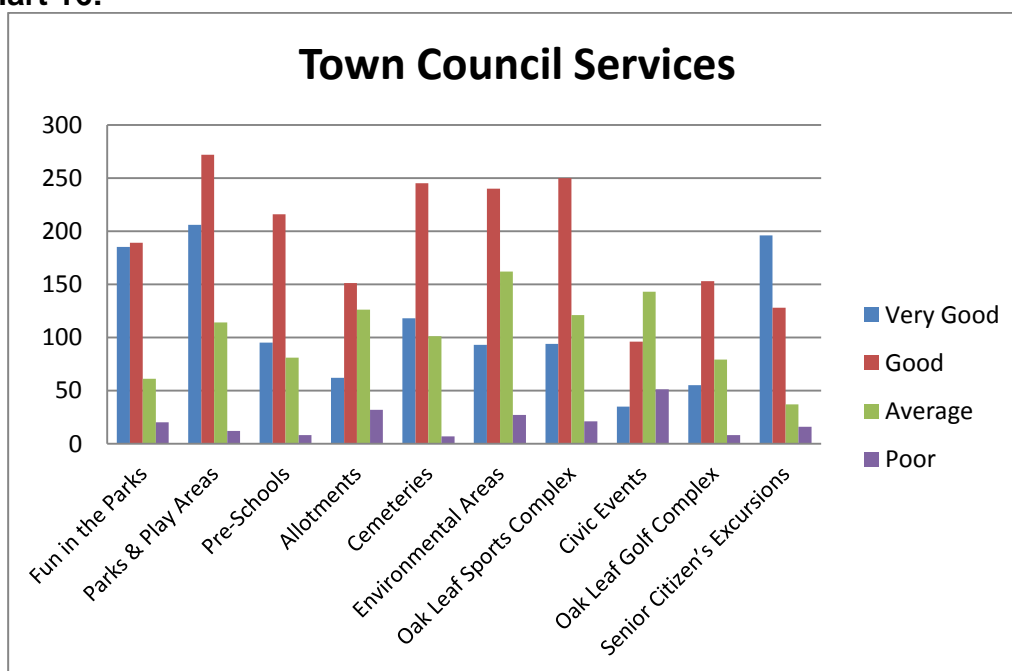
- 12.3 It is suggested that the GANP should have two specific policies to ensure that the Town Council are consulted in advance where CIL or Section 106 monies will be available and another to set local priorities for investment. This will help mitigate the government suggestion allowing LPAs to take longer to put CIL in place, or not at all if they so choose.

13.0 **Thematic Groups**

- 13.1 Following the NP Steering Group meeting it was agreed that there is still a considerable amount of detailed analysis to be undertaken. However, it is evident that there are two clear priorities for the Neighbourhood Plan, which are retail and environment. It was also felt that additional work needs to be undertaken on housing to clarify responses.

- 13.2 **Retail** – Although this was the most important topic for residents, officers need to gather independent evidence to support the way forward on retail to ensure the ‘general conformity’ aspect of the County Durham Plan is not challenged at a later date. As agreed at the previous Steering Group meeting, officers will continue to work with Durham County Council Officers to agree a brief and company to undertake a soft retail needs analysis. Therefore any action in terms of retail should be postponed until the outcome of these meetings is known.
- 13.3 **Environment** – The evidence suggests an environment thematic group should be set up. Work will start on this in the New Year.
- 13.4 **Housing** – Once the environment group has been set up and has met a number of times the housing thematic group should then be progressed. A number of issues on environment and housing are likely to apply to both groups, it will therefore be important for these groups to liaise closely.
- 14.0 **Town Council Services**
- 14.1 When asked if the Town Council’s vision was still suitable, 93% of respondents who answered the question replied yes.
- 14.2 92.5% of respondents also thought the strategic aims were still appropriate. A number of the negative responses said the council does not listen to its residents and one stated ‘*doesn’t cover retail sufficiently*’.
- 14.3 Residents were asked to rate a number of Town Council services, the details of which can be found on the following table.

Chart 16:



- 14.4 Officers were disappointed when environmental areas scored so low on ‘very good’ as the Town Council prides itself on the green open spaces and environmental areas. However, comments made throughout the questionnaire about poor services or when negative comments were made, these generally referred to land not owned or managed by the Town Council. Officers were expecting a much higher ‘very good’ response for the Senior Citizens’ Excursions.

- 14.5 79% of respondents agree the Town Council provides value for money. This is extremely satisfying in the current climate and shows continual improvement on previous surveys.

2007	2009	2014
63%	72%	79%

- 14.6 77% of respondents agreed they were satisfied with the work of the Town Council. Again this is an excellent response and, as can be seen by the table below, shows improvement on previous surveys.

2007	2009	2014
67%	72%	77%

- 14.7 However, if the negative responses which do not relate to Town Council services, such as the state of the town centre, comments about street lights, refuse collection and the state of the tip, are removed altogether this would take the adjusted figures to:-

Providing Value for Money **84%**
Satisfaction with the Town Council **82%**

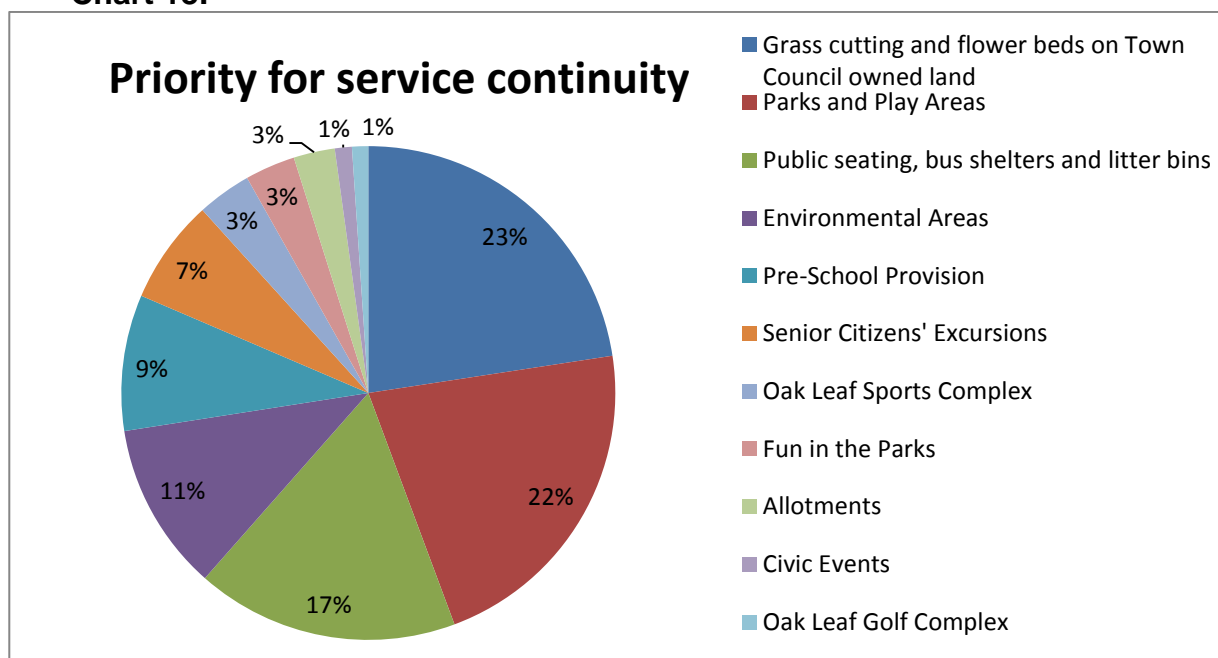
- 14.8 Residents were provided with some financial information regarding the cost of Town Council services and then asked to make three choices from a list and rank them in order preference for continued service delivery. The chart below shows the numbers of respondents with the ranking responses and then an overall ranked priority.

Chart 17:

Service Ranked by Priority	1st	2nd	3rd	Overall Priority
Grass cutting and flower beds on Town Council owned land	114	192	120	426
Parks and play areas	210	111	89	410
Public seating, bus shelters & litter bins	101	120	103	324
Environmental areas	65	46	97	208
Pre-School provision	84	55	29	168
Senior Citizens' Excursions	18	39	72	129
Oak Leaf Sports Complex	16	28	23	67
Fun in the Parks	5	26	31	62
Allotments	8	16	27	51
Civic Events	7	2	12	21
Oak Leaf Golf Complex	3	8	9	20

- 14.9 In summary 23% of respondents ranked grass cutting and flower beds on Town Council owned land as the top priority for continued service delivery. Parks and play areas were ranked second with 22% and public seating, bus shelters and litter bins were ranked third with 17%. The least important were Civic Events and the Oak Leaf Golf Course with only 1% support for each. See chart 18.

Chart 18:



14.10 The four Town Council questions requesting further information elicited 341 individual comments.

15.0 **General Comments**

15.1 The general comments section was included as a way for residents to make comments even if they did not want to complete the full questionnaire and as a way to link the earlier summer consultation to provide a more robust evidence base for the NP.

Three Best things about Aycliffe

15.2 Residents were asked '*what are the best three things about living in the Great Aycliffe area*'? There were 1455 individual comments and as the answers could be wide ranging and cover a multitude of issues, officers agreed a number of headings which they felt most comments could be grouped into. The headings and number of responses are listed below.

Chart 19:

Heading	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Environment	289	182	100	571
Community	116	64	78	258
Transport	52	73	61	186
Services and facilities	35	81	71	187
Safe	32	35	31	98
Retail	10	17	21	48
Housing	19	20	19	58
General	6	12	10	28
Employment	5	5	11	21

15.3 Environment was ranked as the top priority with a 39% response rate, community was ranked second overall with 18%, transport and services and facilities were joint third with 13% of respondents supporting these. 1455 comments were made.




15.4 In the earlier consultations when residents had been asked what were '*three good things about Aycliffe*', services (38%), environment (35%) and then retail (16%) were the most stated response, see chart 4. This is could be attributed to the fact that these consultations were undertaken during Town Council events.

Rate the Following Areas

15.5 The following chart, listing a number of areas, was included in the questionnaire to give residents the opportunity to take part in the consultation even if they didn't want to complete the detailed questions. In addition, it was hoped this would summarise some of the questions asked throughout the questionnaire.

Residents were asked to rate them with 1 being poor and 10 being excellent.

Chart 20:

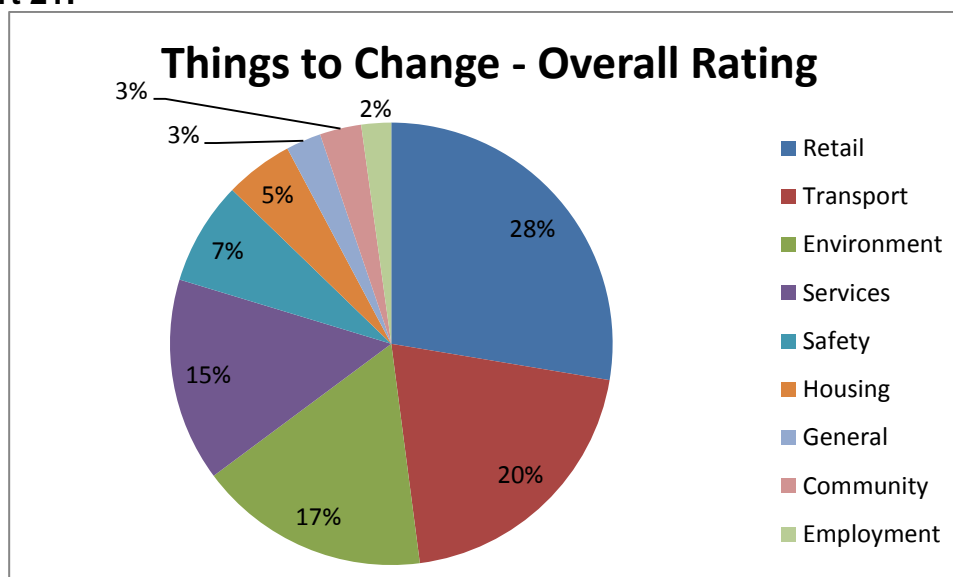
	1 	2	3	4	5 	6	7	8	9	10 
Schools	5	2	3	7	62	31	100	185	76	89
Green Spaces	8	4	10	15	45	59	98	152	102	177
Leisure Facilities	14	17	23	49	89	86	115	137	59	51
Community Facilities	4	19	27	40	100	83	127	129	31	35
Housing	11	8	22	38	100	84	138	121	59	29
Health Provision	6	8	5	22	54	55	125	168	97	100
Retail Opportunities	139	85	100	79	108	47	45	30	15	11
As a place to live	13	11	14	19	82	49	106	155	113	109
A place to bring up your children	10	13	17	21	56	47	99	156	93	94
As a place to visit	94	89	88	61	101	59	44	58	24	23
Employment Opportunities	44	43	60	53	126	68	90	66	30	18
Friendly	10	11	13	27	81	75	109	133	114	91
Safe	13	13	19	25	89	68	129	140	99	75

15.6 The majority of responses rated the areas 7 or above, except retail which was predominantly 4 and below. The lowest number of responses given was for schools, this may be due to the age profile of the respondents as very few of them (125 respondents) had school age children.

Three things to Change

15.7 1285 comments were made on this question. A number of respondents stated they wouldn't change anything. The poor quality of the new street lighting was commented on a number of times both here and on the CIL question. The chart below provides the overall rating of 'things to change' and continuing the general thread, which has become apparent throughout the questionnaire, retail was the top priority.

Chart 21:



Vision

15.8 Residents were also asked what their vision for Great Aycliffe would be. Overall 454 comments were received. However a large number of these comments could not be interpreted as a vision and were largely just additional comments from respondents or re-stating what they had said previously.

15.9 A number of comments have been provided to the Steering Group to choose five to be posted on the NP Facebook page for people to vote on.

16.0 Impact on Great Aycliffe Town Council.

16.1 Residents are still confused over which council provides what services and facilities. The Town Council is the body closest to and more visible to the residents and therefore is held more accountable regardless of whether it provides the service or not.

16.2 The neighbourhood planning process is a large piece of work which will not be finished until around May 2016. However, it is important for the Town Council to be seen to be dealing with as much as possible following the consultation process.

16.3 Although the Town Council has never owned, nor been responsible for the Town Centre there were many comments regarding the fact that the Town Council should never have sold it, leading to many negative comments about the Town Council.

17.0 Policy Implications

17.1 Conforms to assisting the delivery of the following council aims and targets.

Aim 1 "To provide good quality governance and management of the Council".

Aim 2 "To manage the Council's finances and assets in a responsible manner".

Aim 7 "To encourage the residents of Great Aycliffe to become involved in local democracy".

Aim 8 “To research information and make the case for Great Aycliffe”.

18.0 Staffing Implications

18.1 None at this current time.

19.0 Financial Implications

19.1 None at this current time. Financial implications have been highlighted in previous reports where necessary and the budget is closely monitored.

20.0 Crime and Disorder Implications

20.1 None.

21.0 Equal Opportunities Implications

21.1 None

22.0 Environmental Implications

22.1 None.

23.0 Risk Assessment

23.1 It is not considered that the matters contained in this report pose a risk to health and safety of staff or to the financial or public standing of the Council to a degree that a risk assessment should be appended to this report.

24.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that:-

24.1 Members accept the report.

24.2 Members endorse the recommendations from the NP Steering Group that:-

- I. work on the Environment Thematic Group is progressed in the New Year;
- II. the Retail Thematic Group is put on hold until the findings of the soft retail needs assessment are known; and
- III. a Housing Thematic Group should be commenced once the Environment Thematic Group has been set up and has met a number of times

Contact Officers: **Chrissy Walton**
 Corporate & Policy Officer

Angela Corner
Community Neighbourhood Engagement Officer