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LIFE IN ASHINGTON

Listening to Residents, Businesses
and Visitors



“There’s been the redevelopment of Station Road, new housing estates, the Memorial Garden, the new leisure centre and the arrival of the AKZO Nobel factory. Ashington IS improving but there’s more to do”

“It’s evident that efforts are being made but the County Hall debacle is a great disappointment”

“People’s attitudes can be pretty negative and the shops are becoming less diverse and less attractive”

“The place is rundown, forgotten, not good for shopping and there is a lot of dog fouling, litter and anti-social behaviour!”

“As a business, I’ve seen progress in the town, and I know that it has the potential to be much more than it currently is. I feel disappointed that the people of the town fail to recognise the true potential. Make whatever opportunity you can”

“You can always keep on improving things. Doing surveys like this is the best way to find out what’s needed. Well done to the Council”.

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Introducing the Research

In 2012 Ashington Town Council carried out the first residents' survey in the town.

Over 2,000 residents participated in the survey at that time, providing a wealth of information about what they thought of, and wanted for, Ashington. This information was used to assist the Town Council and its partner organisations, including Northumberland County Council, to undertake a programme of local improvements and regeneration schemes in Ashington.

Since then a number of improvements and developments have taken place, or are underway, including the opening of the new leisure centre, the re-design and opening to traffic of Station Road and the commencement of major plans for Town Centre regeneration.

On a smaller scale, the Town Council directly undertook the work for the Ashington Memorial Garden, installation of new bus shelters, a planned programme of new, larger ground-mounted litter bins to tackle litter problems, and more recently the installation of a new Town Centre CCTV system and town-wide highways interactive speed signs.

This second residents' survey - designed and independently conducted by Eljay Research Ltd. - was designed to elicit further, comparative information from residents, drawing out key changes in the last six years in terms of behaviour, attitudes, needs and demographics.

This survey is supplemented with additional feedback from both businesses (traders) in, and visitors to, the town.

From this information, Ashington's key successes, challenges and priorities can be effectively determined.



How the 2018 Survey Data was Collected

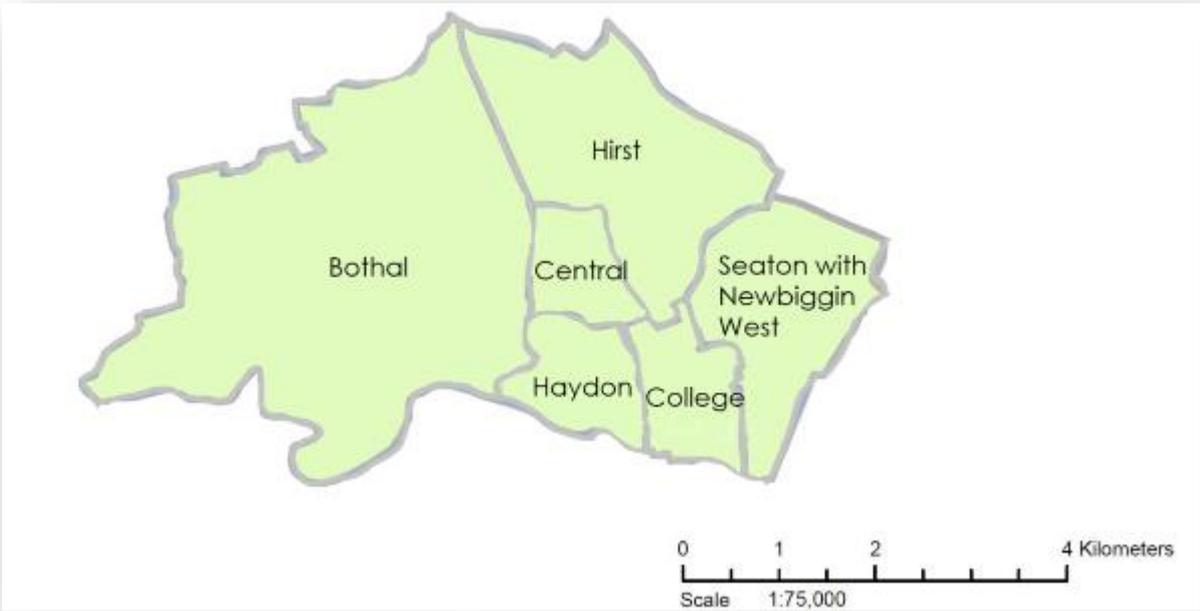
The data which informs this report was collected using a structured questionnaire, hand-delivered to every household in Ashington in May 2018. This questionnaire was accompanied by a letter from the Leader of Ashington Town Council, explaining the purpose of the survey and requesting resident participation. An online survey was also offered to all residents. All households were encouraged to participate with the incentive of a prize draw, with the opportunity to win local shopping vouchers.

The questionnaire spanned questions covering perceptions and experiences of local neighbourhoods, Ashington and its local services, and the redevelopment of Portland Park. A copy of this questionnaire and letter is available on request.

Additional surveys of 30 businesses and 50 visitors to the town were also undertaken.

How the Survey Data is Presented

Findings throughout this report are presented in terms of overall, town-wide percentages, together with comparisons from 2012 to 2018. A number of additional analyses consider how responses differ according to other demographic characteristics (age, gender, income, length and ward of residence, etc.). Wards are as follows:



How the Survey Data was Weighted

The survey data has been weighted to accurately match the adult population of the town in terms of gender and age. When the data collected from survey respondents are adjusted to represent the population, the resulting data are called 'weighted data'.

This 'weight' does not change a respondent's answer. Rather, it gives appropriate and relative importance to the answer; in this case turning the volume up slightly on the views of males and younger residents, and down slightly on the views of females and older residents.

Grateful Acknowledgements are Extended to all Research Participants

Thank you to almost 3,000 people who participated in the research. Your opinions are very much appreciated.

Further Research to Be Undertaken

Additional research will be undertaken with Ashington's young people, together with follow up interviews with a selection of adult residents. This research will add subsequent layers onto the information already collected, enabling the broadest possible collage of life in Ashington to be assembled.



Executive Summary

Over the course of May and June 2018, online, postal and face-to-face research was independently undertaken for Ashington Town Council with the town's residents, businesses (traders) and visitors.

This was the second occasion on which research of this nature has been carried out, repeating many of the questions originally posed in 2012, to compare key findings with the initial baseline of findings generated six years ago.

Almost 3,000 people contributed to the research, giving the findings a robust, current and reliable framework from which to derive key messages and conclusions.

The research findings show improvements in relation to a number of neighbourhood satisfaction and priority indicators. This suggests that whilst there is still work to be done – with a spotlight on repairing roads and pavements, and cleaning streets, Ashington's local neighbourhoods ARE improving.

Residents, traders and visitors alike *have* noticed many of the town's developments in the last six years, but often feel that these alone fall short of what they expect for Ashington.

There is clearly a desire for the Town Centre to *continue to be improved*, with a real, repeated and underlined focus on the need for a diversified range and increased number of shops to uplift what many feel is an offer which is currently 'low-end', parochial and provincial. Interestingly, this is a view shared by a number of Town Centre businesses themselves, in addition to the visitors to Ashington.

In this context, transforming the 'hole' which is currently Portland Park is seen as a key priority. This is felt to be an excellent opportunity to bridge the shopping facilities gap, to include places to eat and drink, and to consider the possibility of a cinema or theatre. All three would undoubtedly go a long way to overturning the disappointment associated with the previously intended, but subsequently reversed, development of this site.

Other key improvements chiefly focus on a need to remedy Town Centre congestion, parking difficulties and littering, together with a need to also uplift the quality of the current market.

Read on for the detail behind this summary.

20 Key Messages

1. Heading the key messages to emerge from the research is the theme of a number of **small, but notable neighbourhood improvements** in perceptions of Ashington over the last six years.
2. The research findings suggesting that an **increasing proportion of residents are satisfied** with the neighbourhood in which they reside.
3. Note also a **decreasing percentage of residents highlighting neighbourhood improvement priorities** (of which the top two remain road/pavement repairs and cleaner streets). Residents also feel slightly safer in their local neighbourhood than they did in 2012.
4. The town is described as a **friendly community**, embracing a rich **history**, with **accessibility and convenience**, and a real sense of **improvement and further potential**. There is a clear sense of **pride** associated with living in Ashington, together with a strong sense of **belonging**. Note also the telling statistic that two-thirds of residents intend to **stay in the town**.
5. **Criticisms are reducing**, but they are still wholly evident. These focus on perceptions of a rundown and dirty environment, with **poor shopping facilities** and an unshakeable level of unemployment. Thus, whereas a third of residents believe the town to have improved in the last six years, a slightly higher proportion feel it to have declined.
6. This latter belief is solidly founded on what residents consider to be a **limited breadth and poor quality of shopping facilities** and the uncertainty of/disappointment associated with the **Portland Park development**. Traffic congestion, crime, anti-social behaviour and perceptions of a lack of adequate investment also contribute to a feeling of decline.

7. A majority of residents also hold the view that two-way communication is notably lacking – not only feeling that their opinions go unheard, but also that they are not kept informed about news and developments in the town.
8. Many of the critical themes which residents associate with Ashington are directed towards the Town Centre. 55% of residents view this as a poor place to visit, with over 40% regarding parking in the Town Centre as difficult.
9. Whilst more residents are doing at least half of their shopping in the Town Centre, and fewer residents are critical of it than in 2012, there remains a feeling that this is a locality, together with the weekly market, which is in need of improvement.
10. The detail of this improvement is almost identical to that flagged six years ago, with a clear focus on the provision of a wider number and range of higher end shops, together with further ‘quality’ goods on offer at the market. There are other considered improvements – improving parking, relieving traffic congestion, planting flowers and reducing litter – but these are eclipsed by the need for simply a better shopping offer.
11. This clearly links to preferences for the development of Portland Park, with increased and broadened shopping facilities topping the wish list collectively put forward by residents for this site. This is accompanied by a desire for an increased number of places to eat and drink, and a cinema or theatre.
12. Interestingly, the vast majority of Town Centre businesses – despite several encouragements - did not participate in the research. This effectively means that the views of the very businesses to whom so much resident criticism is directed, are limited. Among those business who *did* participate there are some useful views to note.
13. The proportion of businesses who indicated an increase in trade in the last three years has almost trebled when compared to 2012. This mirrors the finding that more residents are now doing more of their shopping in the town.

14. Yet despite this finding, a majority of traders are **more negatively focused** – being critical of the Town Centre and its parking. Almost 90% request increased improvement in this context, with many highlighting issues with parking availability and traffic congestion.
15. Accompanying these parking concerns are again a number of issues related to the **quality, diversity and appearance** of shops on Station Road, again paralleling many of the concerns spotlighted by residents.
16. Also paralleling resident feelings are high trader levels of **pride, sense of belonging and intentions to stay in Ashington**, whilst also feeling far less satisfied with their opinions being heard and being kept informed.
17. Traders would like to **see public toilet availability at Portland Park** as the number one priority. This is followed by an increase in shop numbers and diversity and a cinema or theatre.
18. Visitors to the town are often of the same opinion as residents, **noting some recent improvements to the town** – including the leisure centre, library, Station Road locale and revamped market – but requesting *continued* improvement.
19. Again, these requested improvements tend to mirror many of those detailed by both residents and traders, and include a need for a **broader range of shops, together with increased quality, diversity and attractiveness**, measures to tackle Town Centre dog fouling and littering and measures to ease traffic congestion and increase parking availability.
20. Perhaps unsurprisingly, as many visitors to the town travel either by car or bus, in the context of bus travellers, the number one priority for Portland Park is **an enclosed bus station and facilities**. This is followed by the omnipresent request for more shops and a wider range of goods, and a greater choice of places to eat and drink.

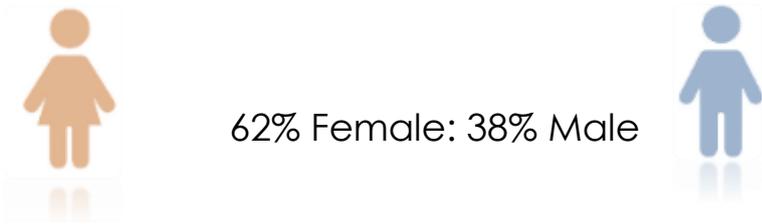
Listening to Ashington's Residents

A total of 2,919 adult residents participated in the 2018 Residents' Survey.

This is a figure which represents a response from approximately 22% of the 13,096 households in Ashington, or around 1 in every 5 households. This percentage participation represents an increase from that of 2012 (19%).

The Gender of Respondents

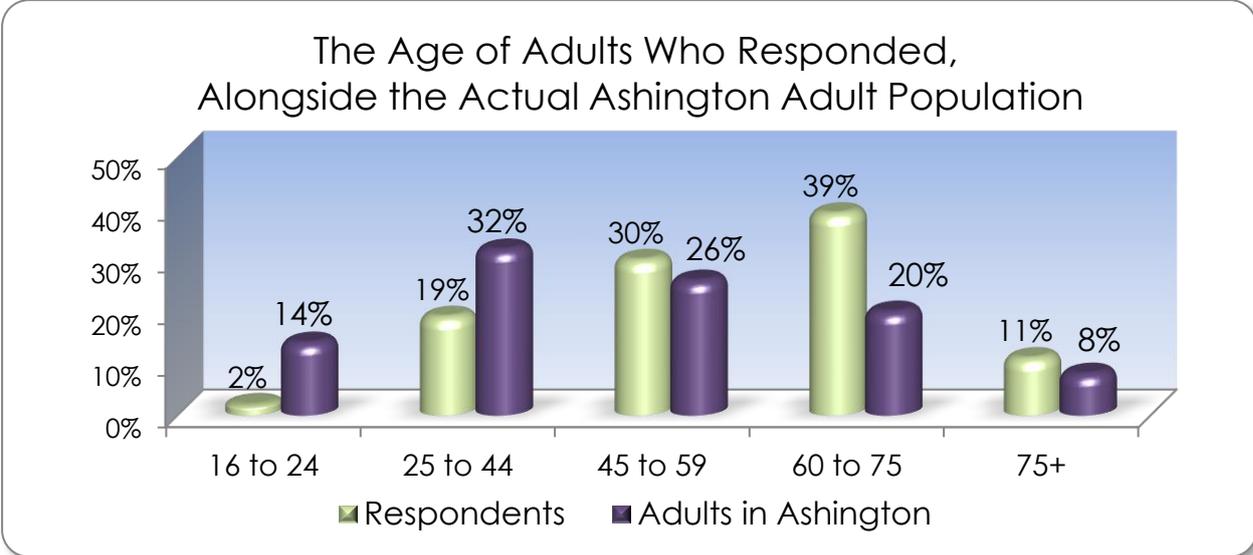
38% of residents who responded were male and 62% were female.



This gender split clearly under-represented males and over-represented females, and the sample was weighted accordingly to adjust for this (as previously described).

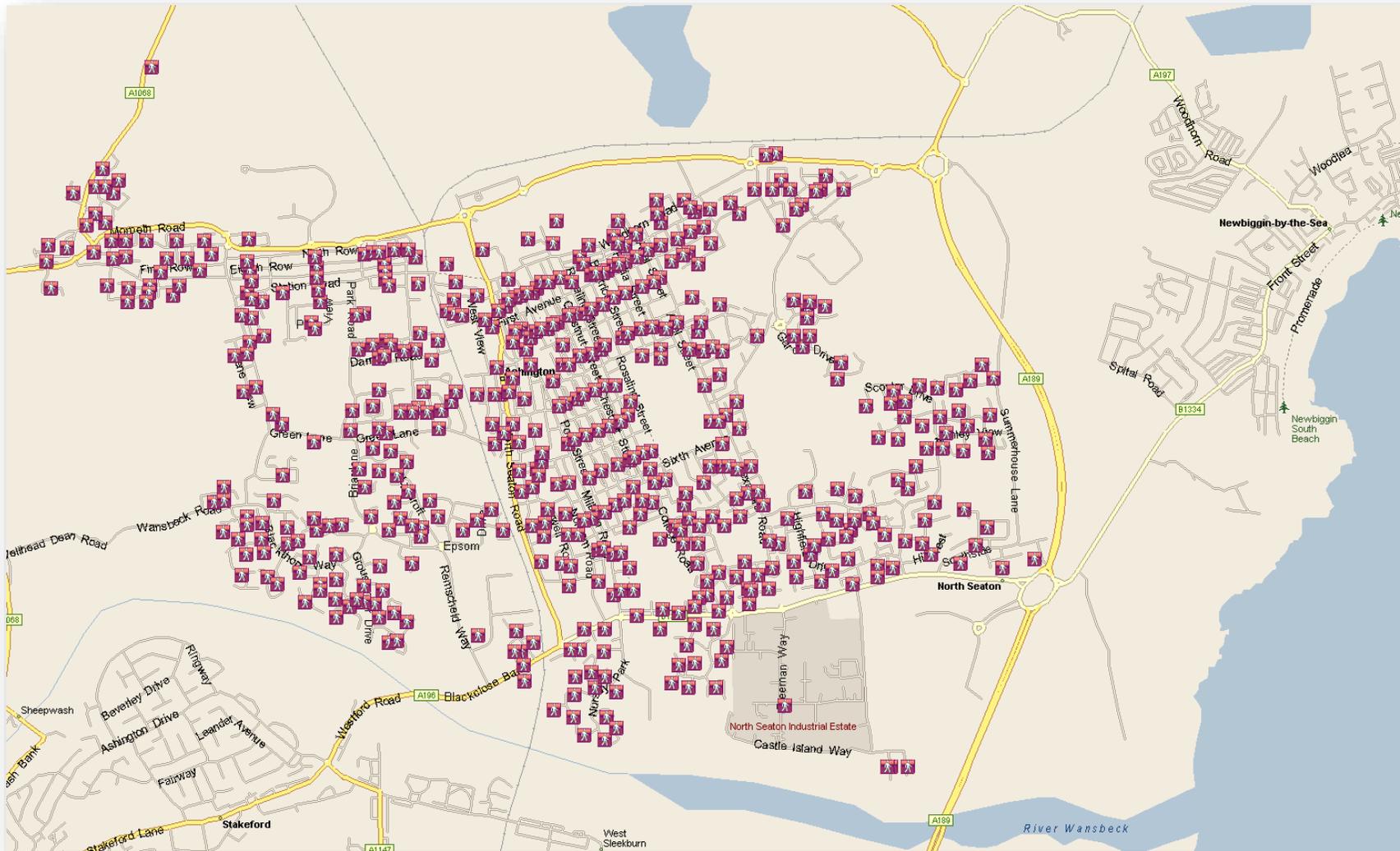
The Age of Respondents

The average age of residents who responded was 58 (this compares with 59 in 2012). This meant that the age profile of survey respondents was significantly skewed away from younger adults, and towards older adults. To remedy this, age data was also weighted to more accurately reflect the actual age profile of adults in Ashington.



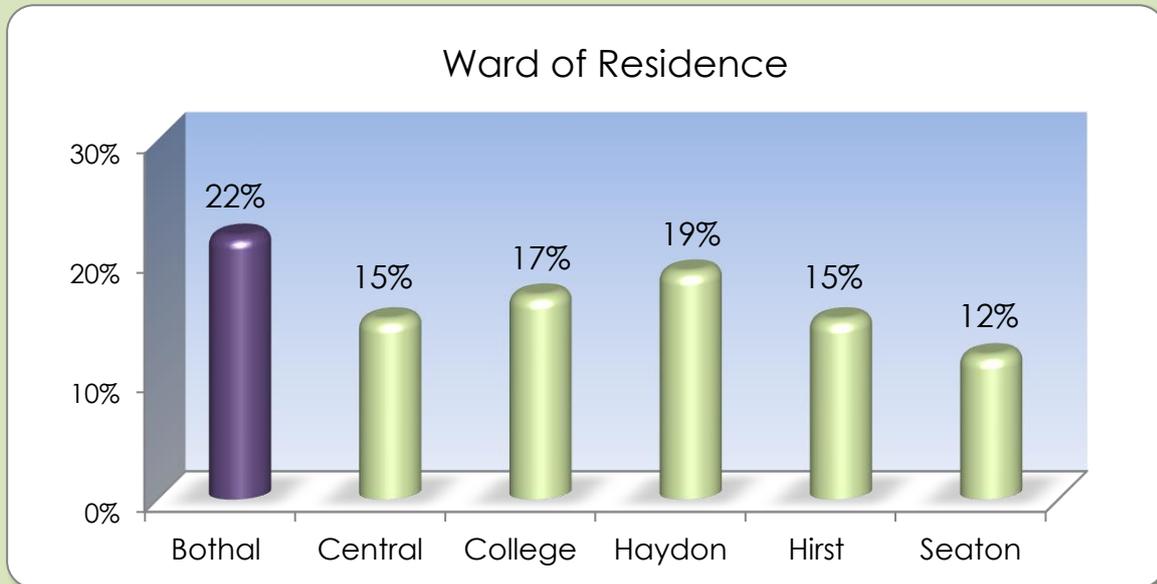
The Residence of Respondents from Across Ashington

Here we see the distribution of respondents across Ashington – highlighting the solid geographical coverage achieved by the survey.



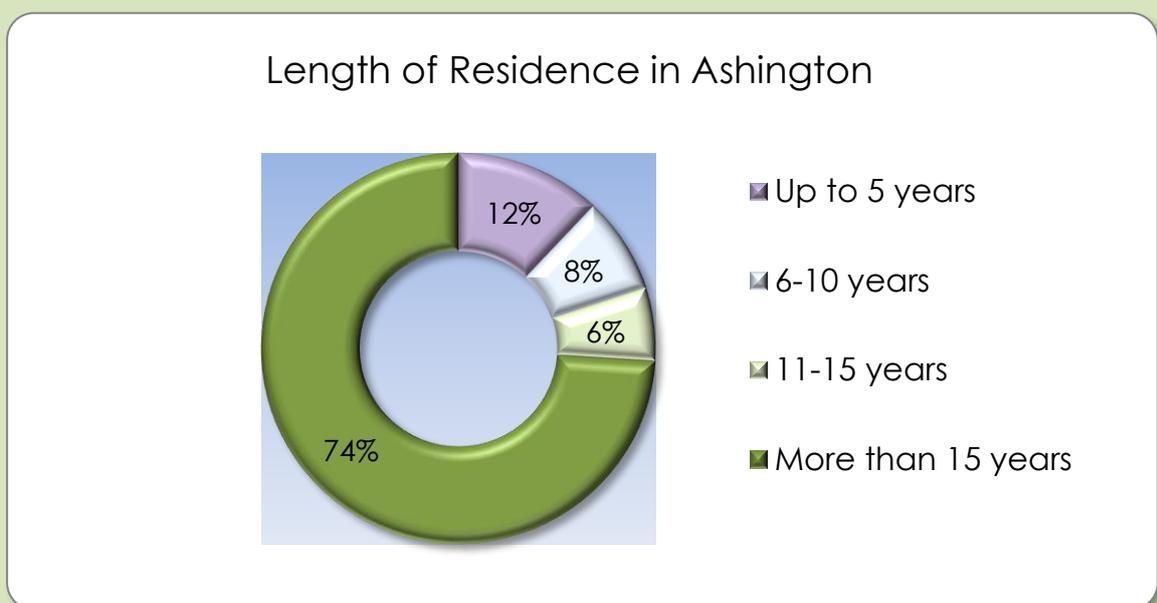
Responses from Each of Ashington's Six Wards

Survey participants were evident from every ward of Ashington, with, as in 2012, responses peaking from residents of Bothal ward.



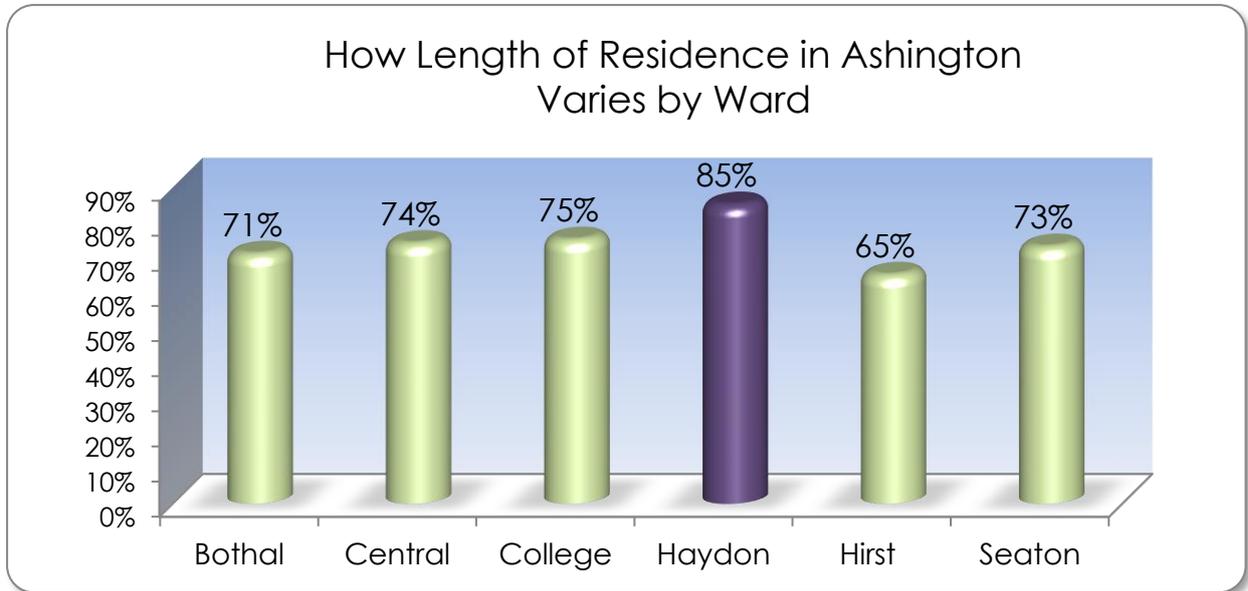
Significant Length of Residence in Ashington

Adults in Ashington have been living in the town for an average of 32 years. Almost three-quarters (74%) of residents have been living in Ashington for more than 15 years. Just under 40% of residents have lived in Ashington all of their life.



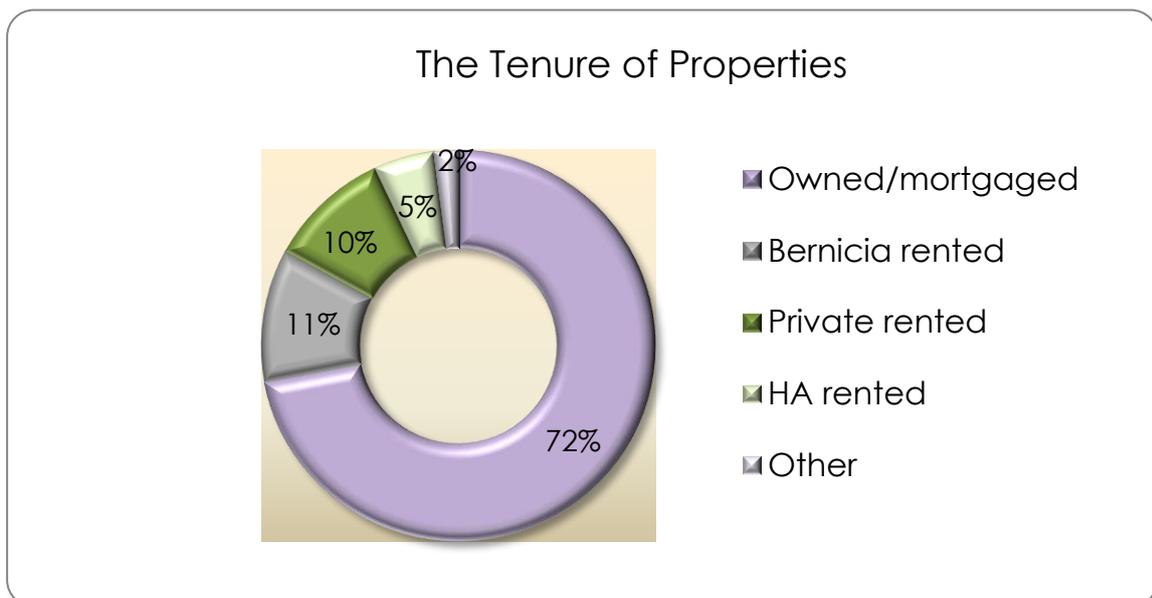
How Residence Varies by Ward

If we look at how the longest length of residence (15+ years) varies across wards, this peaks in Haydon ward, where over 85% of residents have lived in Ashington for more than 15 years.



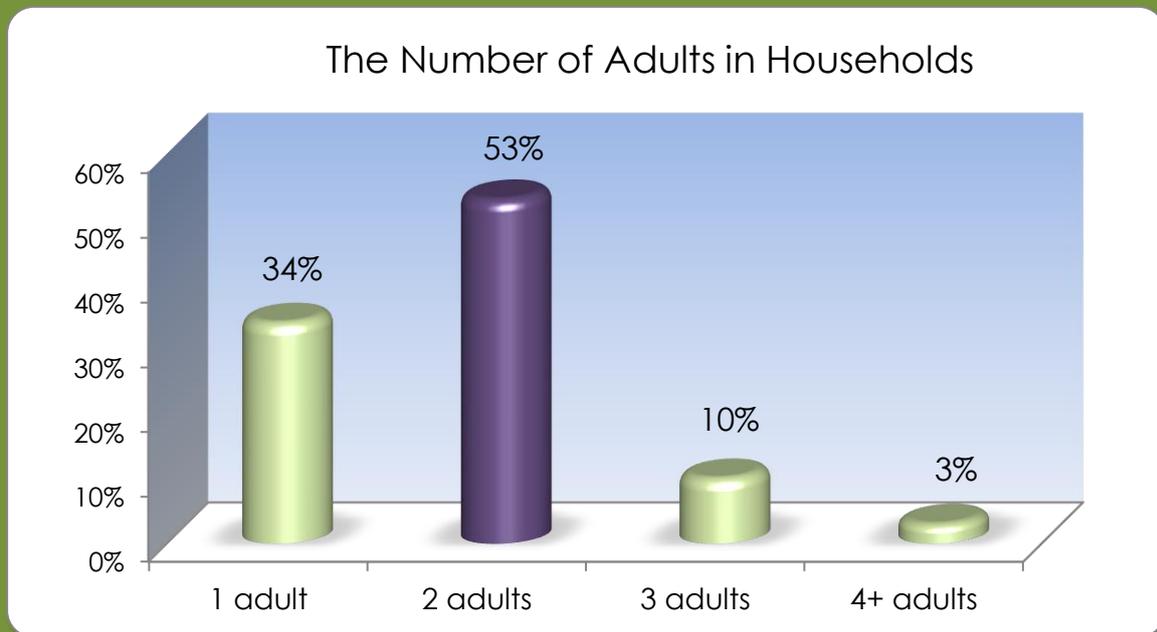
The Tenure of Properties

As in 2012, residents are most likely to be living in owned or mortgage properties (72%). This is a figure higher than that recorded in the 2011 Census (60%).



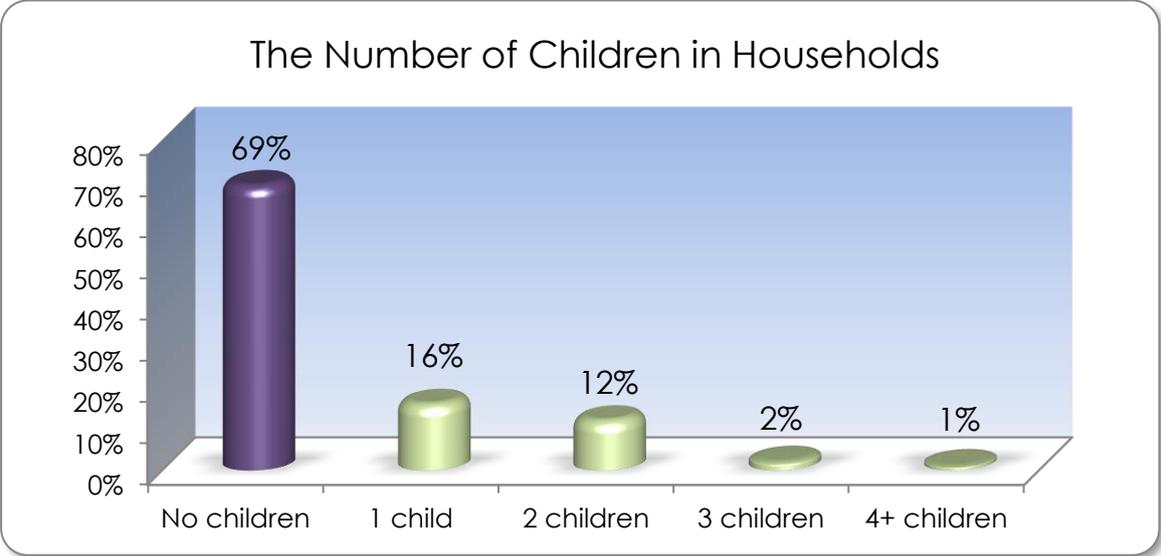
The Number of Adults in Households

As in 2012, Ashington residents are most commonly living in two adult households (53%). 34% live in a single adult household, while 13% of households comprise 3 adults or more.



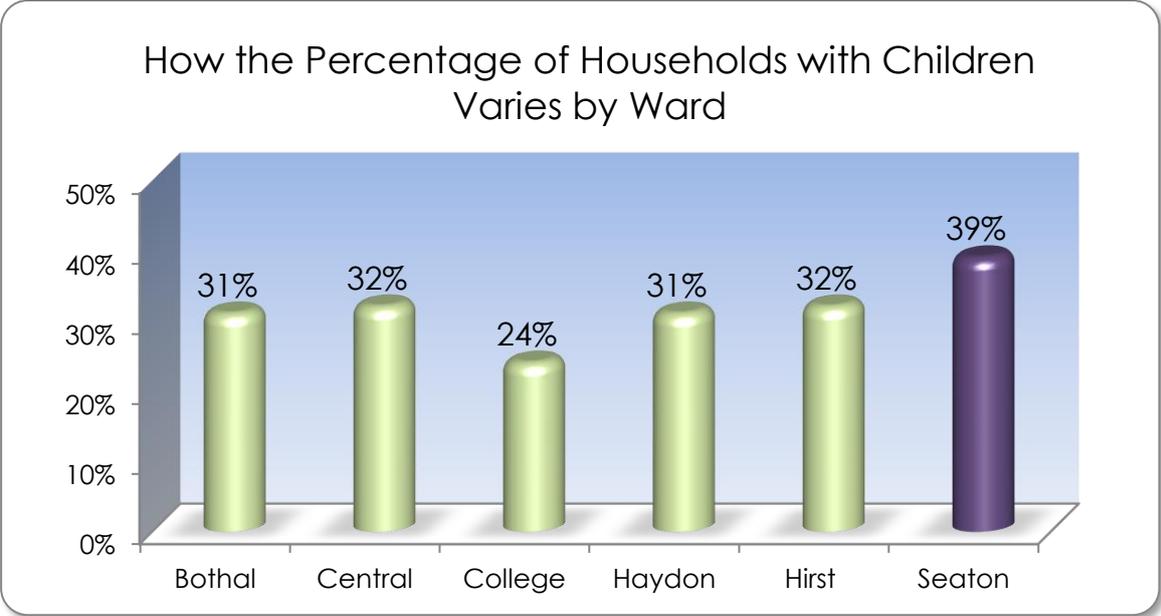
The Number of Children in Households

Just under 70% of households in Ashington are inhabited by adults only. This is a percentage very close to that recorded in 2012. The most frequent number of children in households is one (16%).



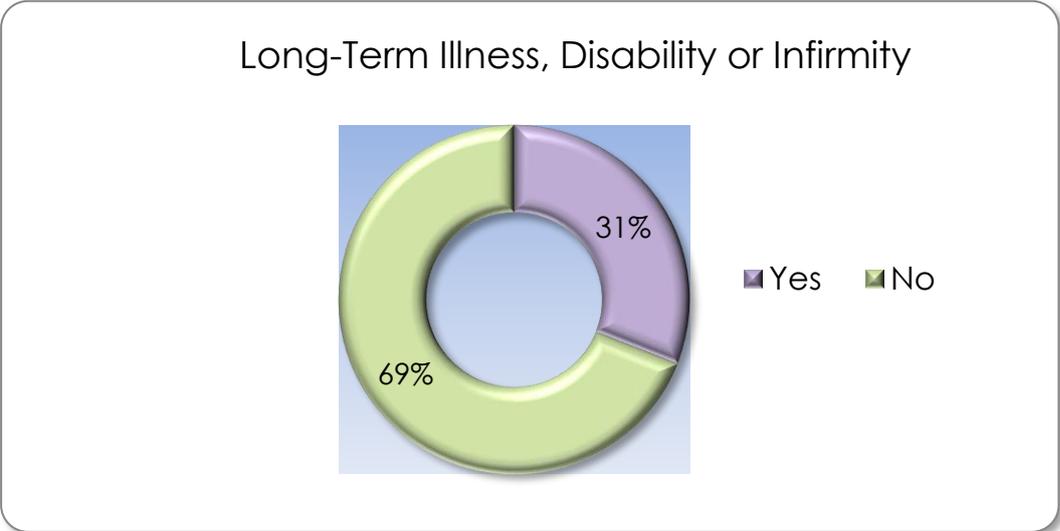
How the Number of Children in Households Varies by Ward

Across the six wards of Ashington the highest percentage of households with children is found in Seaton ward.



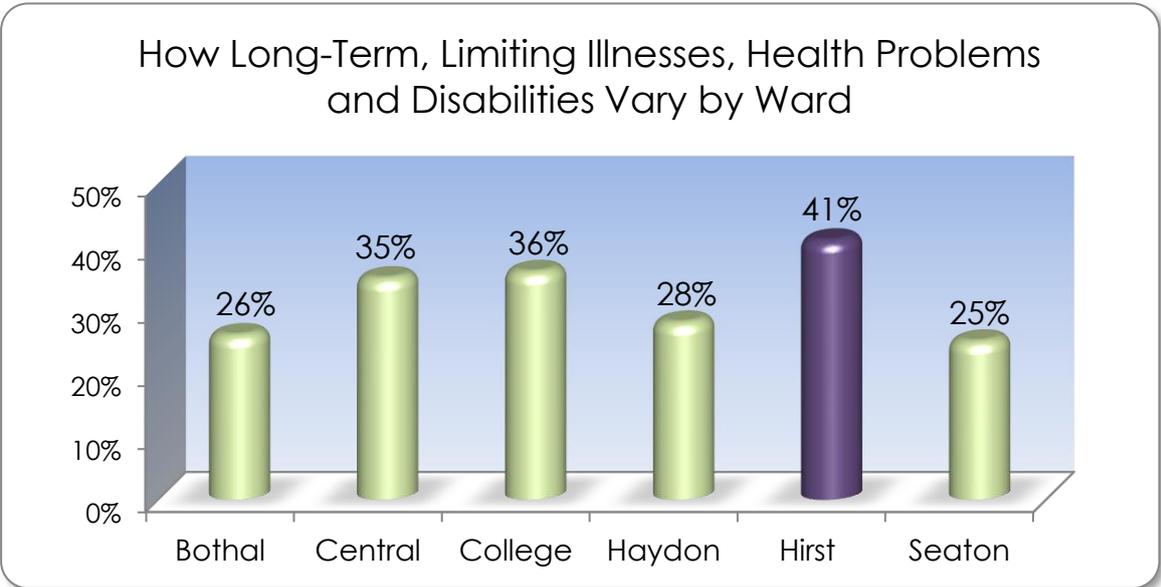
Long-Term, Limiting Illnesses, Health Problems and Disabilities in Ashington

As in 2012, just over 30% of residents (higher than the 24% recorded in the 2011 Census) have a long-term, limiting illness, health problem or disability. This incidence rises alongside the age of residents – the younger the age group, the lower the percentage with a long-term condition. Thus, whereas just 17% of those aged 16-24 reported a limiting condition, this rose to more than 70% of residents aged 75+.



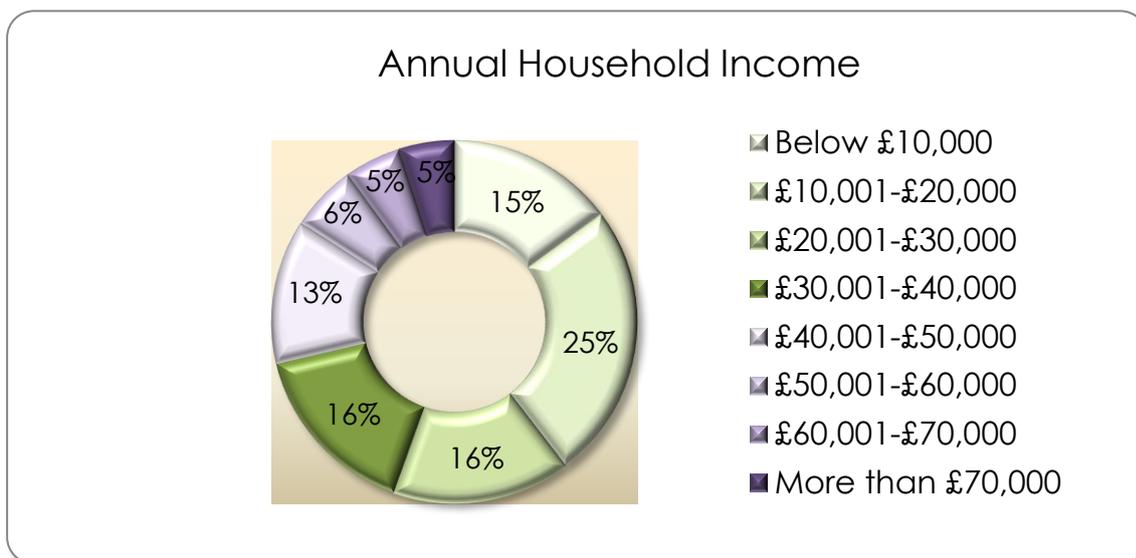
How the Incidence of Long-Term, Limiting Illnesses, Health Problems and Disabilities Varies by Ward

Paralleling the findings of 2012, the highest incidence of long-term limiting illness, health problem and disability is found in Hirst ward (41%).



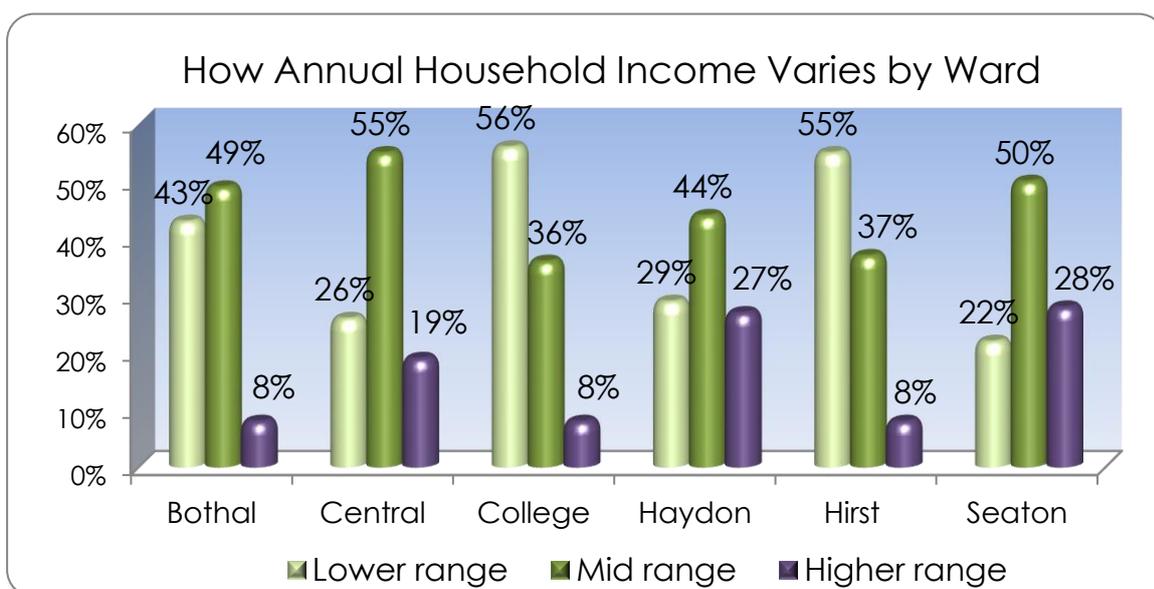
Annual Household Income in Ashington

Around a quarter of all survey respondents chose not to provide their annual household income details. However, excluding these from the calculations shows that around 40% of households in Ashington have an annual household income in the lower range of up to £20,000. 45% of households sit in the mid-range of £20-£50,000, with 16% having a higher range income of £50,000+.



How Annual Household Income Varies by Ward

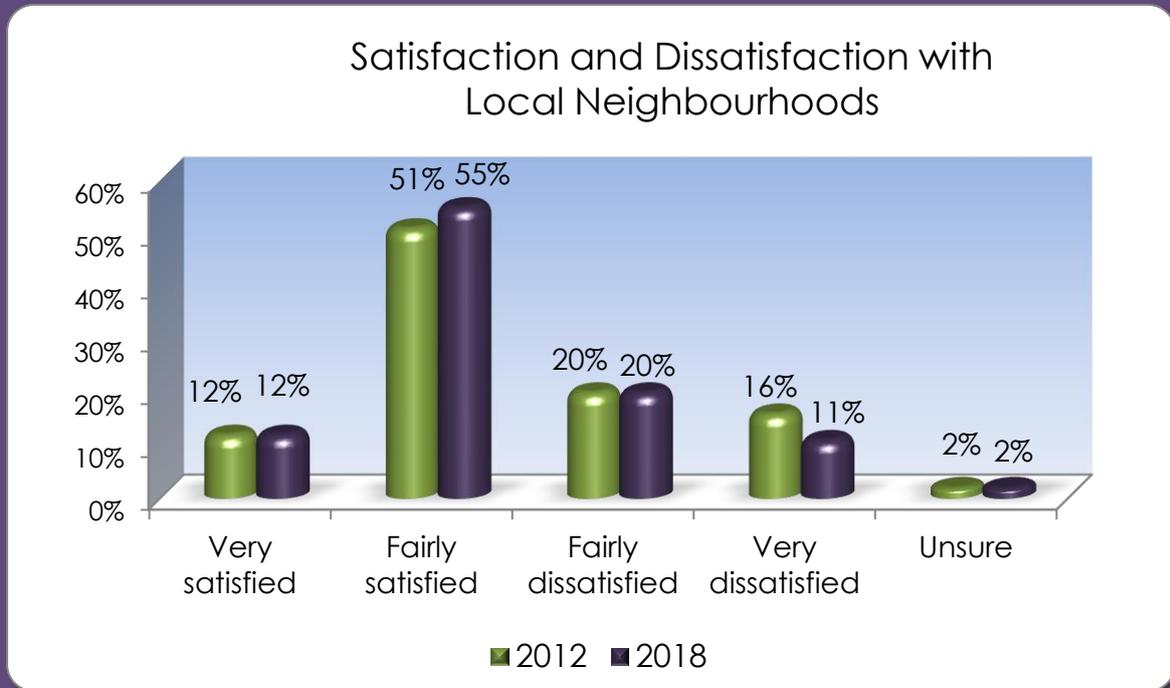
The lowest household income levels are found in College and Hirst wards (with 55-56% earning up to £20,000 per year). In contrast, Haydon and Seaton wards have the highest incomes (with over a quarter earning in excess of £50,000 per year).



Having considered the demographic characteristics of the sample, we can now move on to look at resident perceptions.

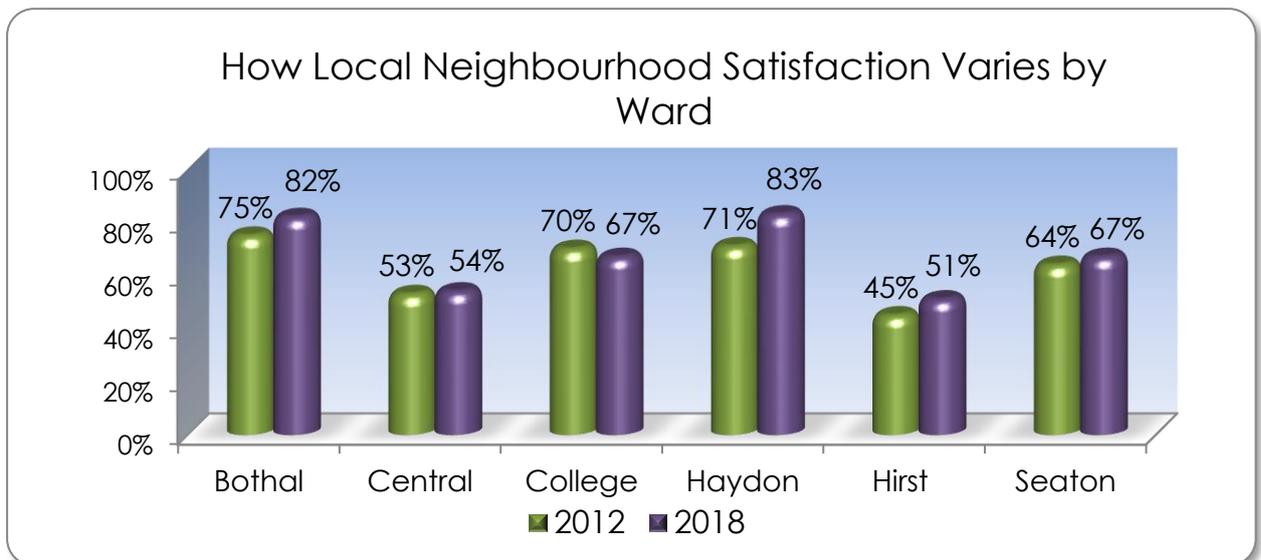
What Residents Think of their Local Neighbourhood

The 2012 Residents' Survey showed that 63% of residents were satisfied with their local neighbourhood, whilst a third (36%) were dissatisfied. The 2018 Residents' Survey shows a very slight improvement on these figures, with neighbourhood satisfaction rising to 67%, and dissatisfaction falling to 31%.



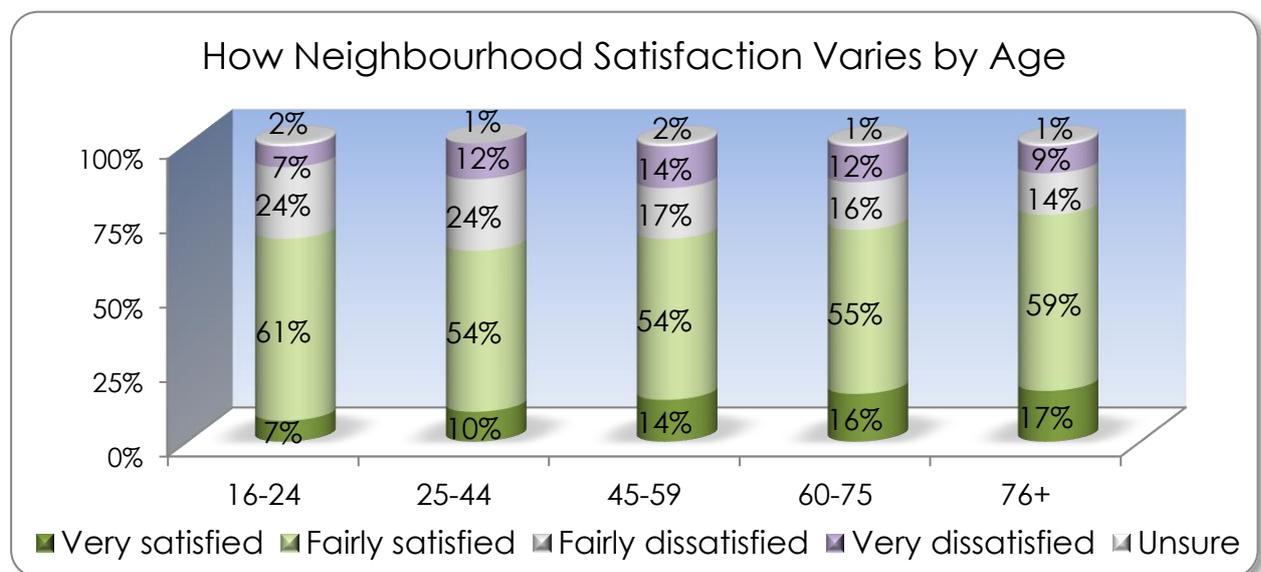
How Local Neighbourhood Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction Varies by Ward

Analysis of how neighbourhood satisfaction has changed from 2012 to 2018, reveals an increase in 5 of the 6 wards. The highest increase in neighbourhood satisfaction is evident in Haydon and Bothal wards. In just one ward – College – a decrease in neighbourhood satisfaction is evident.



How Local Neighbourhood Satisfaction Varies by Age

Satisfaction with local neighbourhoods tends to increase as the age of residents increases. Dissatisfaction also peaks among younger residents, with 31% of those aged 16-24 and 36% of those aged 25-44 dissatisfied.



Neighbourhood Improvement Priorities

Two key priorities for neighbourhood improvement were identified by more than 50% of residents – increased road and pavement repairs and cleaner streets (litter). Cleaner streets (dog fouling) also featured strongly.

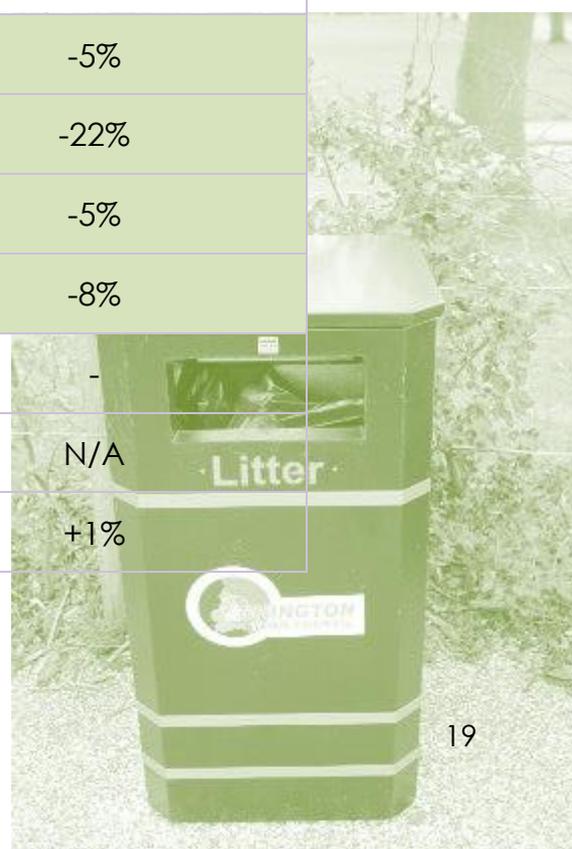


A number of residents identified additional neighbourhood priorities, most frequently including parking issues (9%), speeding traffic (7%) and weeds and tree pruning (6%.)

How Requested Neighbourhood Improvements Have Decreased Since 2012

As shown in the following table, decreasing percentages of residents requesting neighbourhood improvements are evident across 11 of the 15 comparable categories from 2012 to 2018. These are highlighted in green. There were only 3 instances of small increases in requested improvements.

Requested improvement	2012	2018	% point change from 2012-2018
Road/pavement repairs	62%	58%	-4%
Clean streets (litter)	69%	53%	-16%
Clean streets (dog fouling)	69%	49%	-20%
Shopping facilities	47%	37%	-10%
Job prospects/opportunities	55%	35%	-20%
Teenager activities	40%	31%	-9%
Play fac. for young children	27%	28%	+1%
Crime levels	38%	26%	-12%
Traffic congestion	21%	22%	+1%
Street lighting	N/A	19%	N/A
Public transport	20%	15%	-5%
Parks and open spaces	37%	15%	-22%
Affordable decent housing	18%	13%	-5%
Community activities	20%	12%	-8%
Access to health services	11%	11%	-
Grass cutting	N/A	7%	N/A
Education provision	6%	7%	+1%



Top Improvements Requested Across Wards

In 2018, across the six wards of Ashington there is a clear consensus for a need for cleaner streets, and improved roads and pavements.



Bothal

- Road & pavement repairs (55%)
- Clean streets litter (45%)
- Clean streets dog fouling (44%)



Central

- Clean streets litter (56%)
- Road & pavement repairs (53%)
- Clean streets dog fouling (51%)



College

- Road & pavement repairs (64%)
- Clean streets dog fouling (56%)
- Clean streets litter (55%)



Haydon

- Road & pavement repairs (57%)
- Clean streets litter (44%)
- Job prospects/ops (44%)



Hirst

- Clean streets - dog fouling (66%)
- Clean streets - litter (65%)
- Road & pavement repairs (63%)



Seaton

- Road & pavement repairs (56%)
- Clean streets - litter (49%)
- Clean streets - dog fouling (43%)

Key Peaks in Requested Neighbourhood Improvements across Wards

It's also worth noting some additional peaks in neighbourhood improvement requests (in addition to the aforementioned need for road and pavement repairs, cleaner streets and shopping facilities which dominate across the six wards). The table below shows the percentage of residents requesting improvements in each ward, and highlights instances (shaded in lilac) where percentages are notably higher than in other wards.

Ward	Bothal	Central	College	Haydon	Hirst	Seaton
Road/pavement repairs	55%	53%	64%	57%	63%	56%
Clean streets (litter)	45%	56%	55%	44%	65%	49%
Clean streets (dog fouling)	44%	51%	56%	39%	66%	43%
Shopping facilities	38%	39%	36%	38%	35%	41%
Teenager activities	31%	32%	29%	35%	33%	34%
Job prospects/oppo.	36%	32%	32%	44%	31%	34%
Crime levels	12%	30%	34%	14%	35%	31%
Play fac. for young children	35%	34%	23%	28%	24%	24%
Public transport	21%	17%	9%	15%	10%	18%
Street lighting	19%	26%	18%	16%	17%	16%
Parks and open spaces	18%	13%	15%	18%	11%	16%
The level of traffic congestion	31%	22%	21%	16%	20%	15%
Access to health services	12%	7%	12%	19%	7%	13%
Grass cutting	7%	6%	6%	10%	5%	10%
Community activities	14%	15%	12%	12%	10%	9%
Education provision	5%	5%	4%	12%	6%	9%
Affordable decent housing	12%	18%	15%	10%	15%	8%

Slightly Improved Safety in Local Neighbourhoods

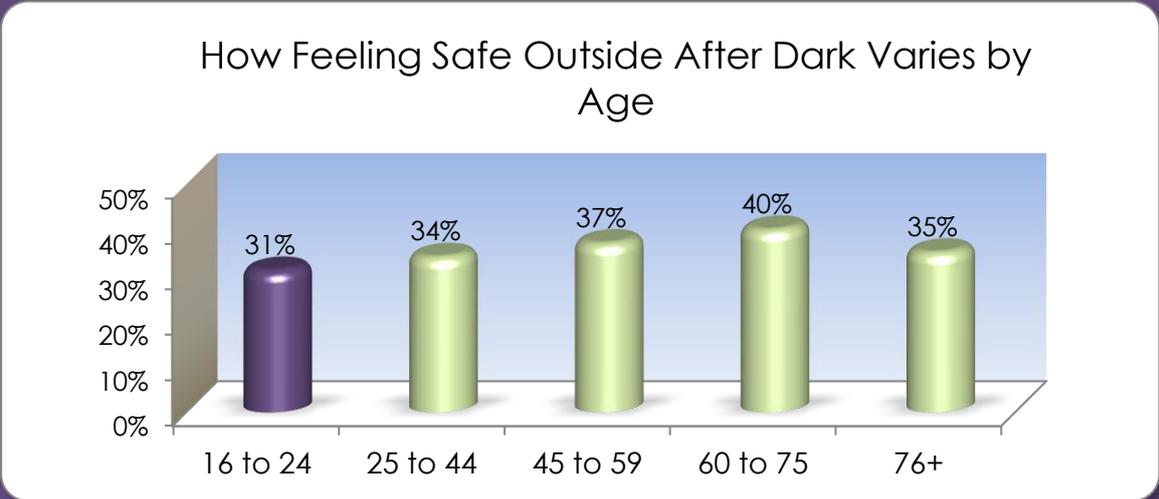
An increasing majority of residents rising from 81% in 2012 to 84% currently feel safe in Ashington during the day. More feel FAIRLY safe (49%), rather than VERY safe (35%), but very few (just 3%) feel unsafe.

After dark, feelings of safety change. Just 9% of residents feel VERY safe, and 29% feel FAIRLY safe. In contrast, 30% feel UNSAFE, with many having mixed feelings. However, again these findings represent a very slight positive improvement since 2012.



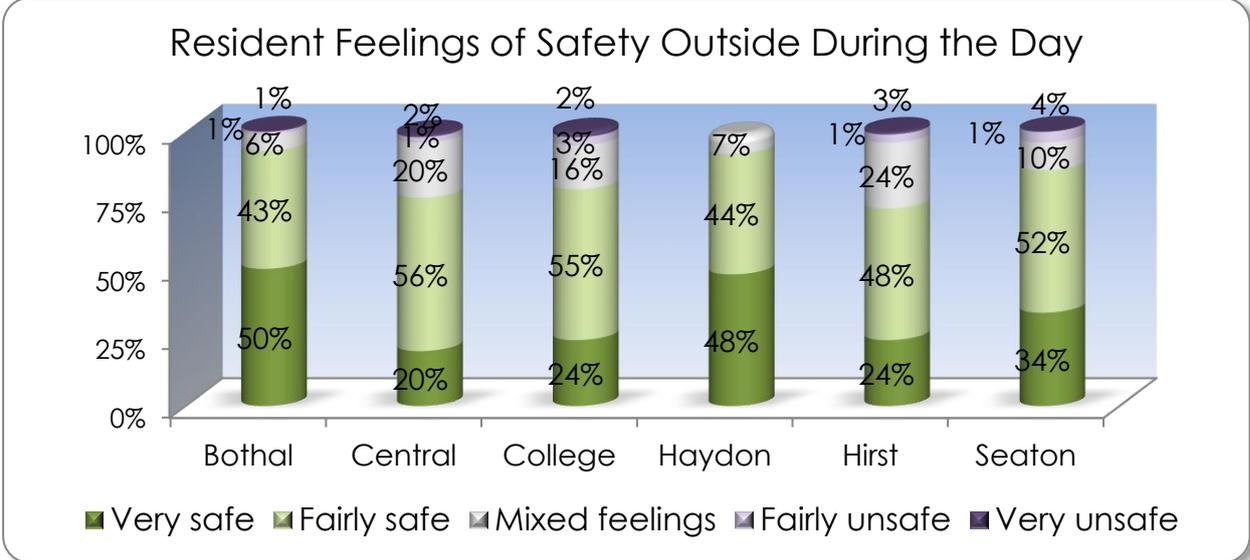
Females and Younger Residents Feel Less Safe Outside After Dark

Perceptions of safety during the day are fairly consistent between males and females. However, they change after dark, when females (32%) are less likely to feel safe than males (46%). It is also interesting to note that as in 2012 it is the very youngest adult residents of Ashington who feel *least safe* outside after dark.



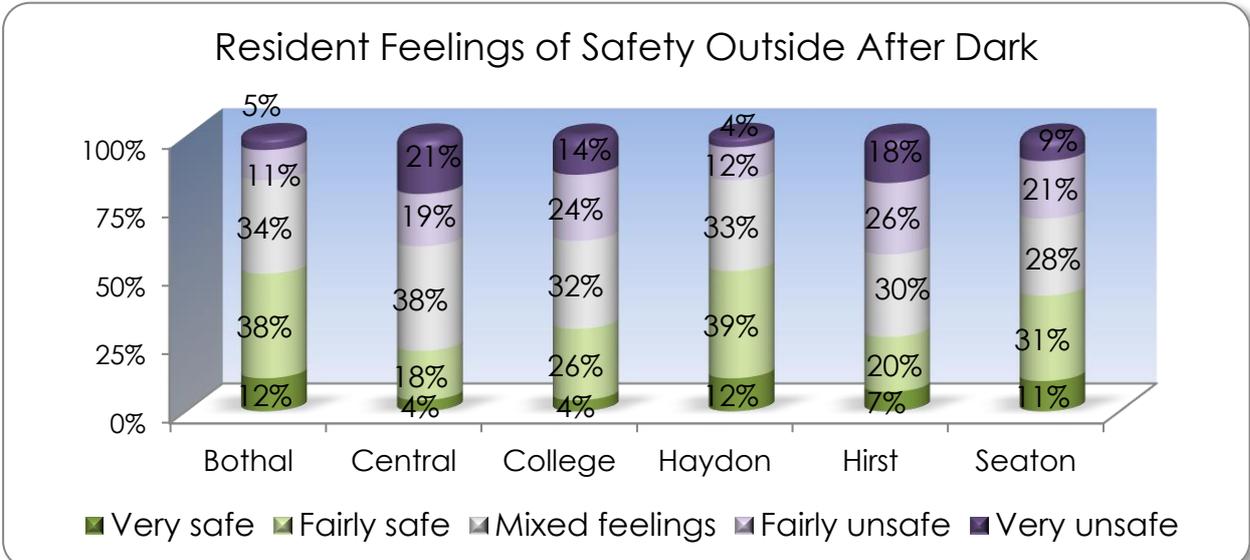
How Feelings of Safety Outside Vary by Ward

Feelings of being safe and unsafe vary across wards. Across all wards a majority of residents feel safe outside during the day. However, note that 24% of respondents living in Hirst ward have mixed feelings, with a further 4% feeling unsafe.



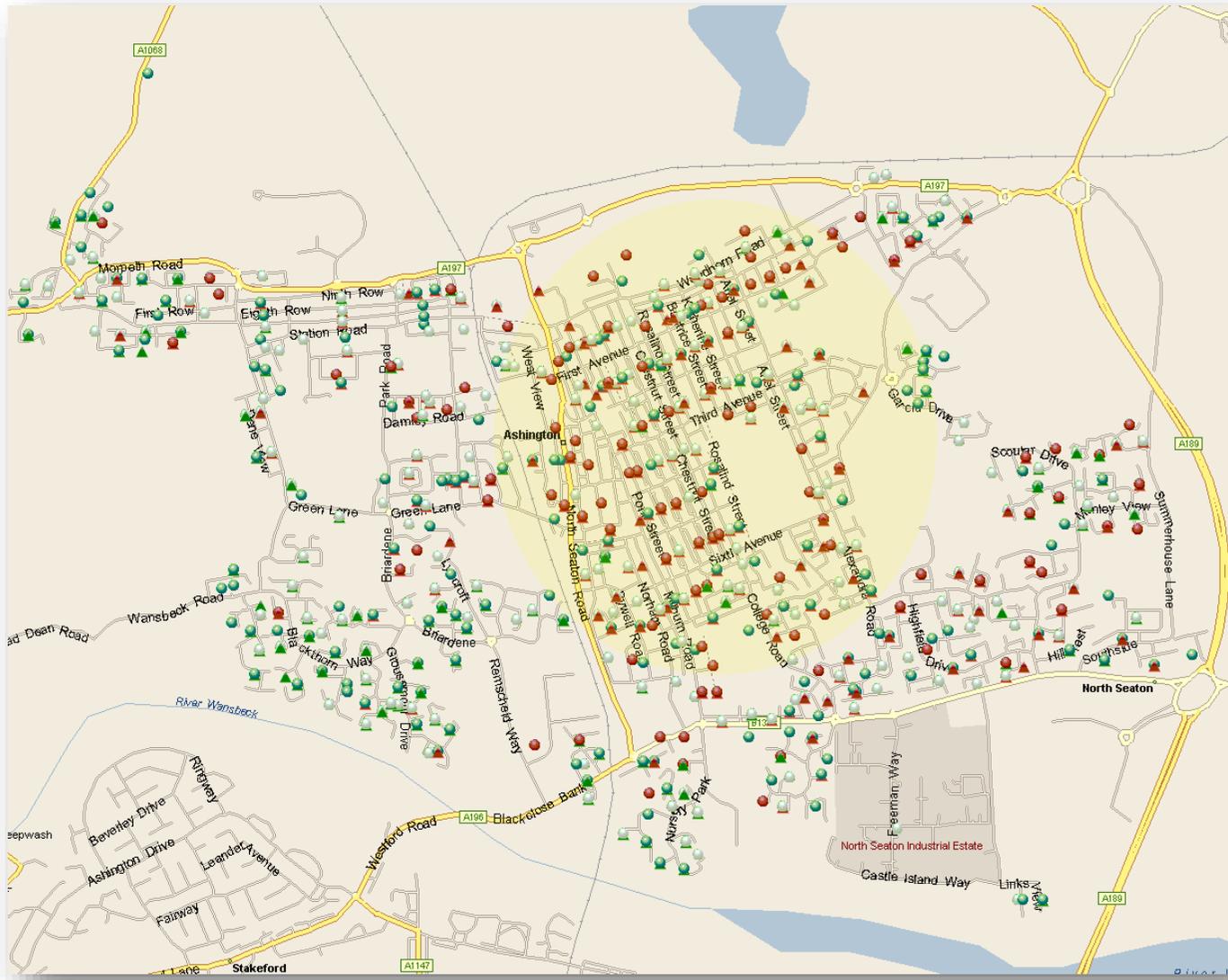
After dark, feelings of being unsafe outside increase, and feelings of safety diminish. This is particularly true in Hirst ward, where 44% of residents feel unsafe after dark.

Note also, comparatively high levels of feeling unsafe in both Central (40%) and College (38%) wards.



Where Residents Tend to Feel More Unsafe Outside After Dark

We can plot residents who feel safe and unsafe outside after dark. Green markers show feelings of safety, with red markers showing feelings of being unsafe. Note a concentration of residents feeling unsafe in the central part of Ashington.



- ▲ Very unsafe
- Fairly unsafe
- Mixed feelings
- Fairly safe
- ▲ Very safe

Broadening thoughts away now from local neighbourhoods and into wider Ashington considerations, some interesting findings are highlighted.

The Balance of Compliments to Criticisms

Aggregating all comments, reveals the following range of compliments and criticisms, with an overall split of around:

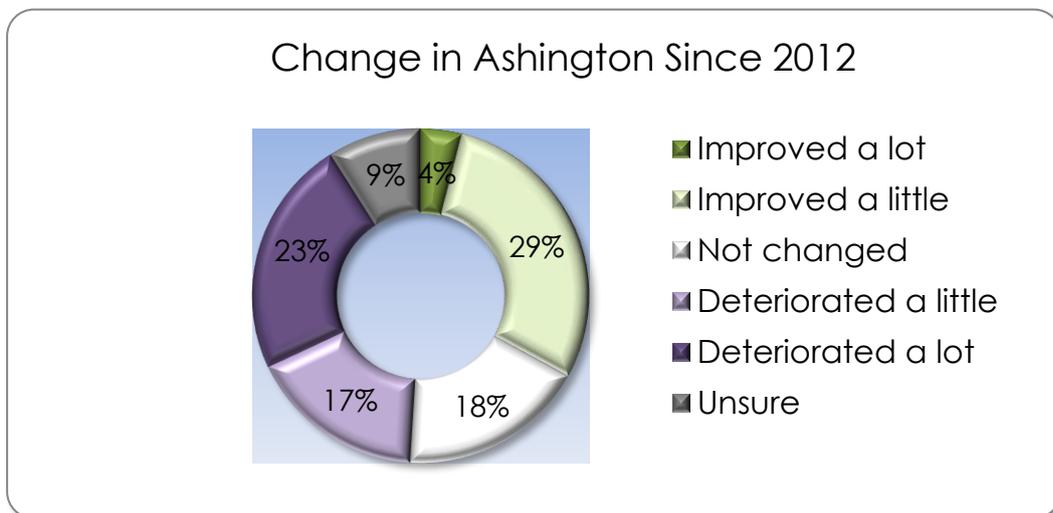
40% compliments vs. 60% criticisms



In 2012 there was, arguably, a more pessimistic and resigned outlook on Ashington, with critical descriptions eclipsing complimentary descriptions by around 5 to 1.

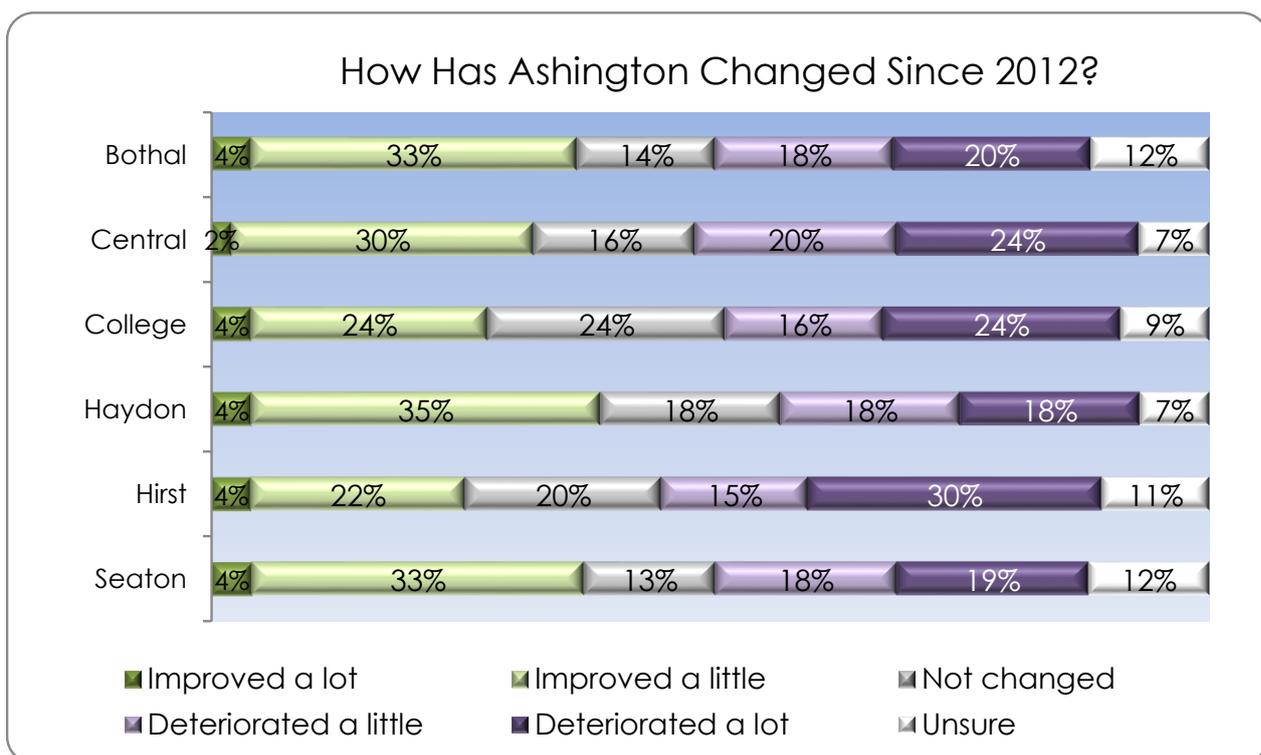
Perceptions of Change in Ashington Since 2012

Around a third (33%) of Ashington residents feel that the town has improved since the 2012 Residents' Survey. 18% feel it has not changed, whilst 9% were unsure. 40% of residents feel that the town has deteriorated, with almost a quarter observing what they feel is *significant* deterioration.



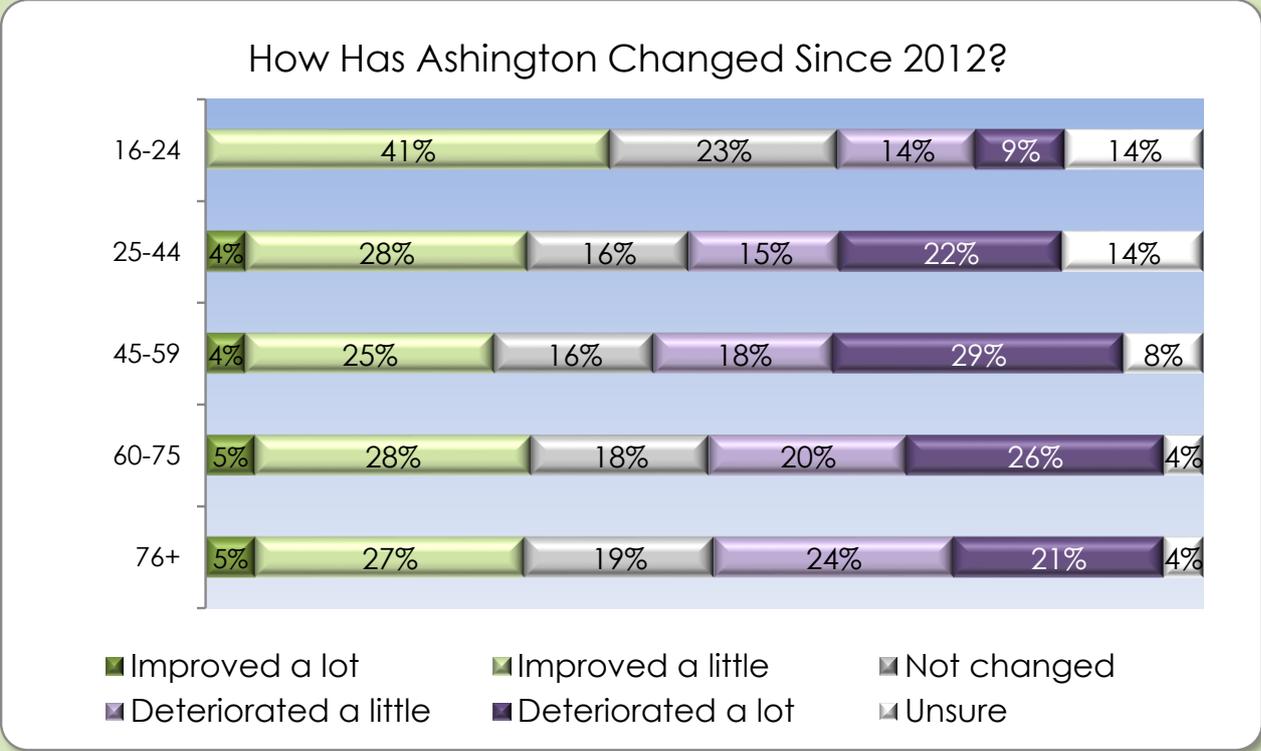
Perceptions of How Has Ashington Changed Since 2012 Across Wards

The most positive perceptions of change in Ashington since 2012 are found among residents in Haydon ward. In contrast, residents of Hirst ward have the most critical perceptions of change.



How Perceptions of Ashington Changing Since 2012 Vary by Age

Note also that the most positive perceptions of how Ashington has changed are found amongst the town's youngest residents aged 16-24. In comparison, the highest sense of deterioration in the town is expressed by those aged 45+.



What Drives Perceptions of Improvement and Deterioration?

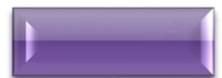
It's useful to look at those factors which underpin perceptions of improvement and deterioration in Ashington since 2012.

On a positive note, improvements to Station Road, the addition of the new leisure centre, increased cleanliness and housing and redevelopment prevail.

However, on a more critical note, deteriorating shops (largely in terms of quality and choice), together with the lack of a definite Portland Park development, increasing crime and anti-social behaviour, litter and fly tipping, traffic congestion and a lack of investment, head more critical perceptions of change since 2012.



Improvements to Station Road
Generally improving
New leisure centre
Cleanliness
Housing and redevelopment



Limited shops
Portland Park 'hole'
Crime & ASB
Litter & fly tipping
Traffic congestion
Lack of investment

Overleaf we see typical accompanying comments from residents.

What Drives Perceptions of Improvement and Deterioration?

“The leisure centre is a welcome improvement”

“Little improvement has been made in terms of town centre shops”

“I monitor the crime statistics and burglary and violent crime continues to escalate but nothing is done to resolve it”



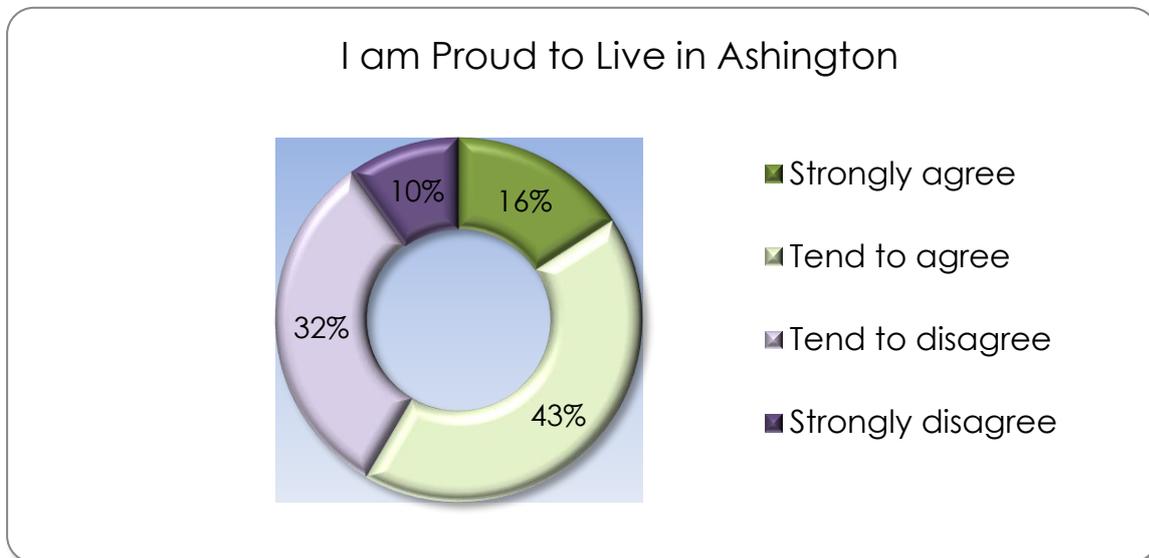
“There have been several improvements around the town”

“The County hall fiasco has really damaged the town. It feels like we are the bottom of the pile in Northumberland”

“There’s a massive lack of variety and quality in shopping”

Pride of Residence in Ashington

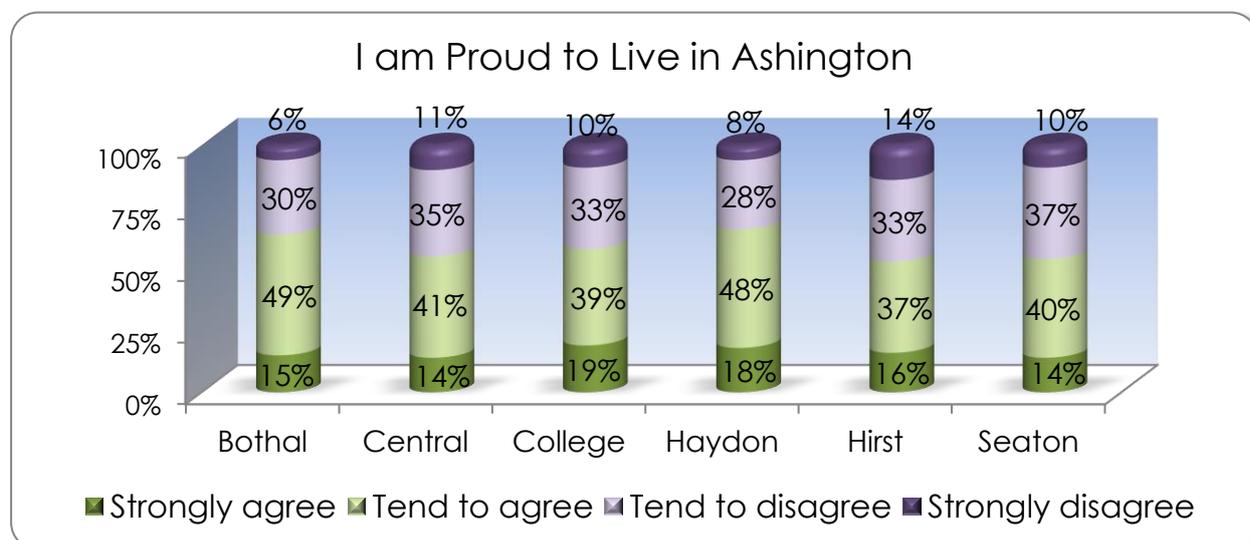
Almost 60% of residents who participated in the survey are proud to live in Ashington. This contrasts with just over 40% who feel that they *do not* have this level of pride in the town.



The strongest levels of pride peak amongst Ashington's oldest residents. Over 60% of those aged 60-75, and over 70% of those aged 76+ are proud to live in the town. These percentages compare with around the 55% mark across younger age residents.

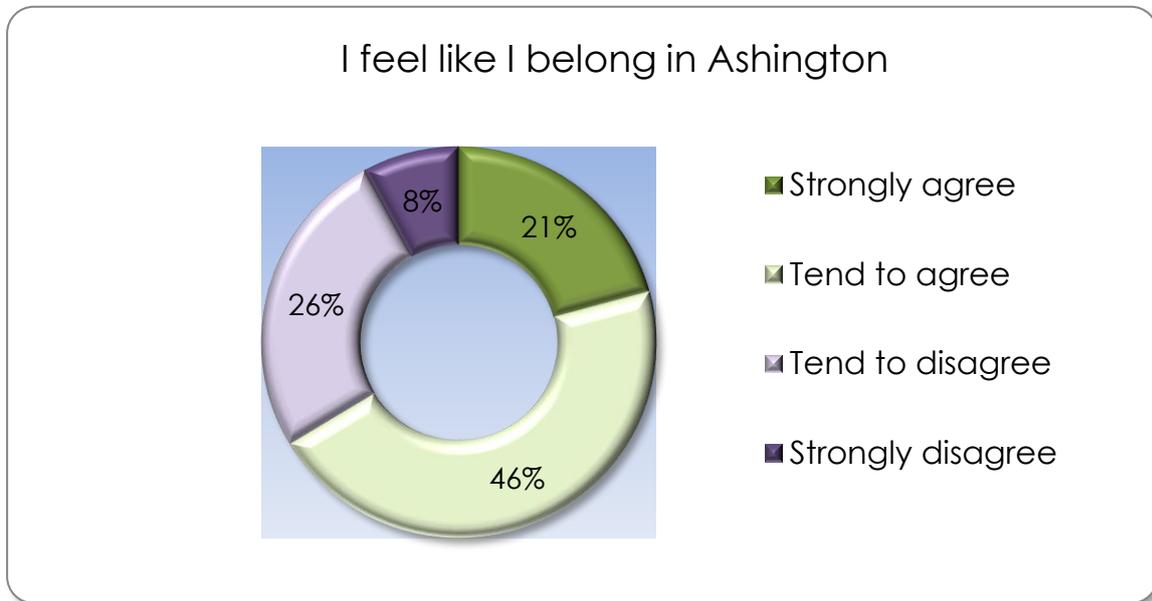
How Pride in Ashington Varies Across Wards

The highest levels of pride in the town are found in Haydon and Bothal wards (64-66%). In contrast, note that pride is far lower in three wards – Central (46% lacking pride in the town), Hirst (47%) and Seaton (also 47%).



A Sense of Belonging in Ashington

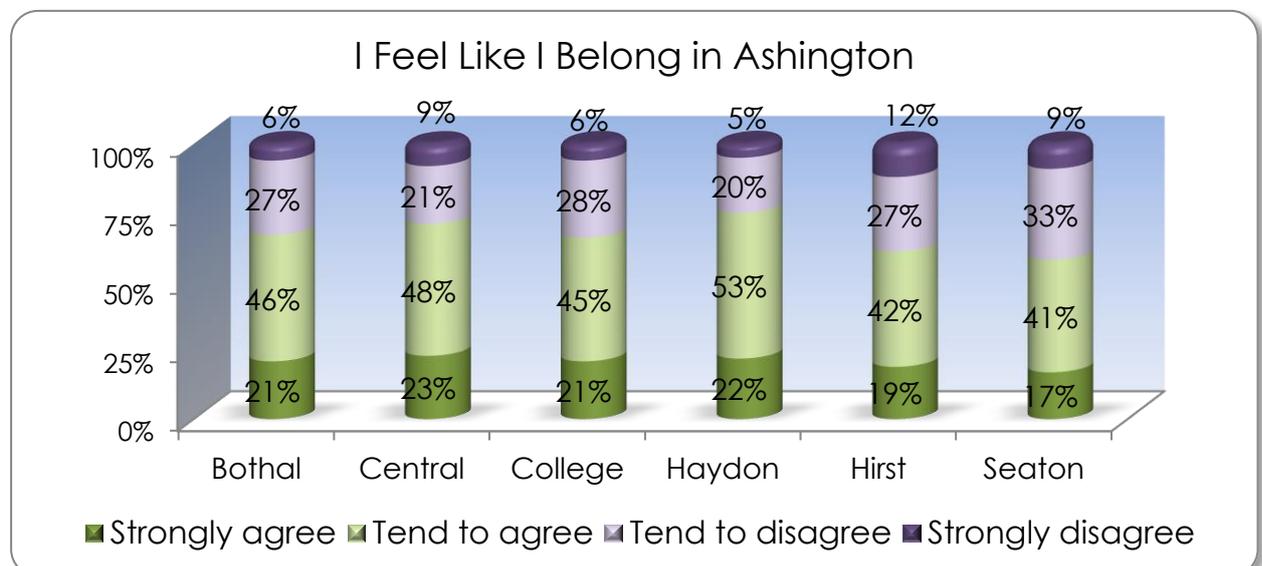
Two-thirds (67%) of residents who participated in the survey felt like they belonged in Ashington. This contrasts with just a third (34%) who disagree.



Generally, the older the resident, the greater the sense of belonging in Ashington. Thus, whereas just 51% of those aged 16-24 feel they belong, this percentage rises to over 80% of the town's older (76+) residents.

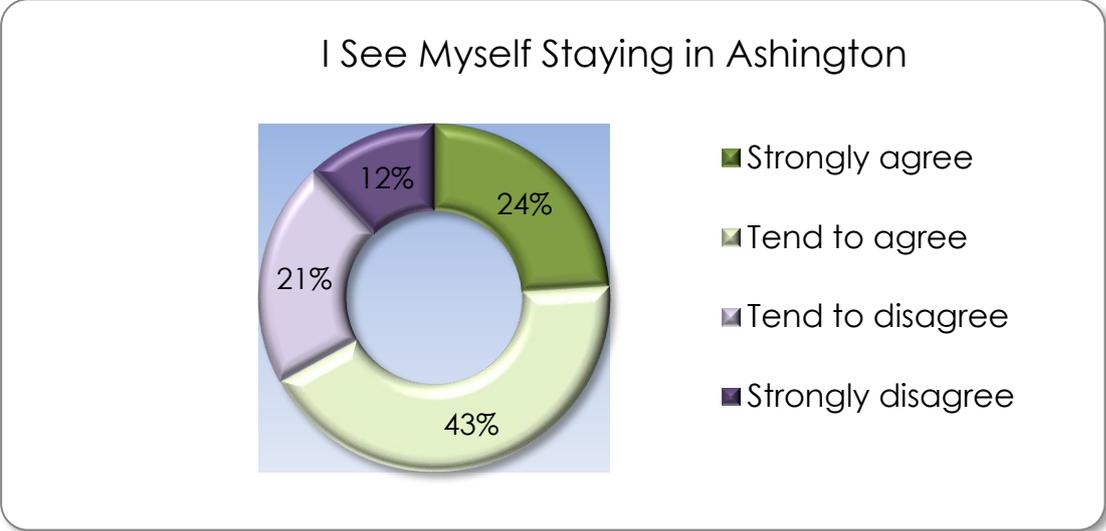
How a Sense of Belonging in Ashington Varies Across Wards

The highest sense of belonging in the town is found among residents of Haydon wards (75%), closely followed by those in Central ward (71%). In contrast, note that around 40% of Hirst and Seaton residents do not feel this sense of affinity with the town.



Staying in Ashington

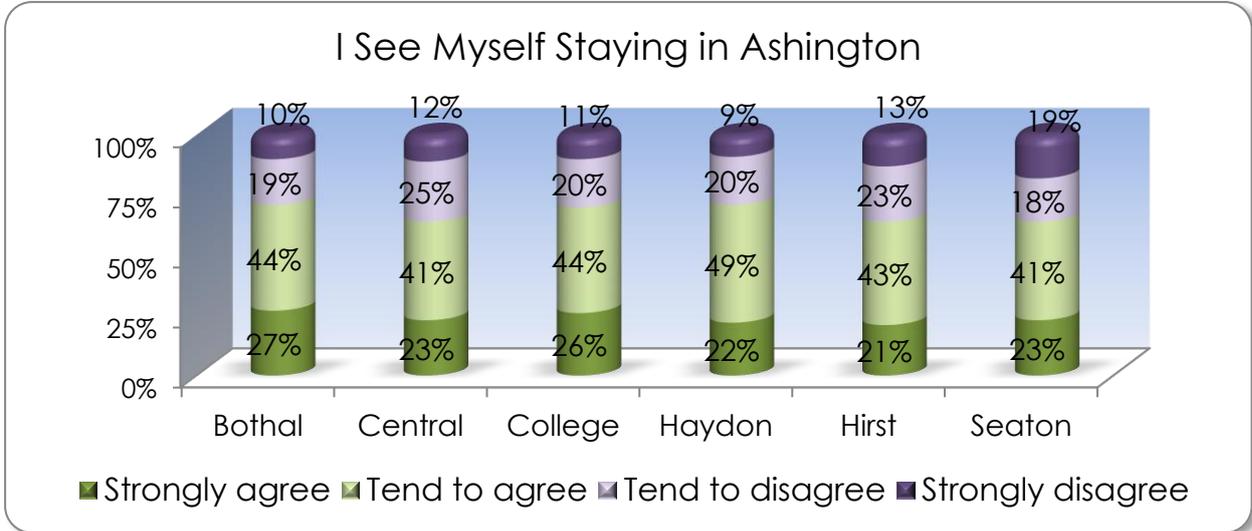
Two-thirds (67%) of residents who participated in the survey indicated that they intended to maintain their residence in the town. This contrasts with a third (33%) who disagreed.



Generally, the older the resident, the greater the intention to stay in Ashington. Thus, whereas just 40% of those aged 16-24 intend to stay, this percentage rises significantly among older residents, standing at around 65% of those aged 25-59, and rising to over 80-90% of the town's older (60+) residents.

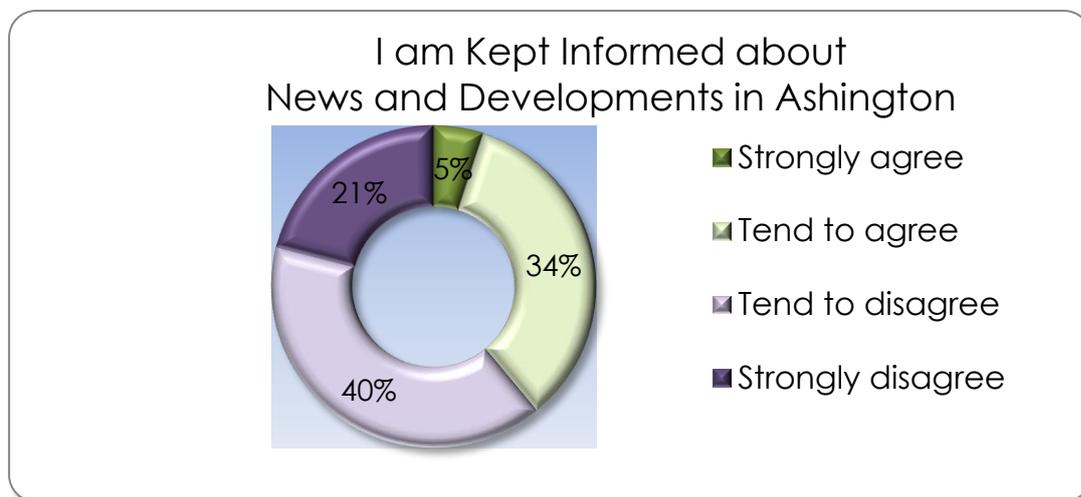
How Intentions to Stay in Ashington Varies Across Wards

Intending to stay living in the town peaks in Bothal (71%) and Haydon wards (71%). Closely followed by residents of College (70%) ward. In contrast, note that over a third of residents in both Hirst and Seaton wards do not envisage their residence continuing.



Being Kept Informed About News and Developments in Ashington

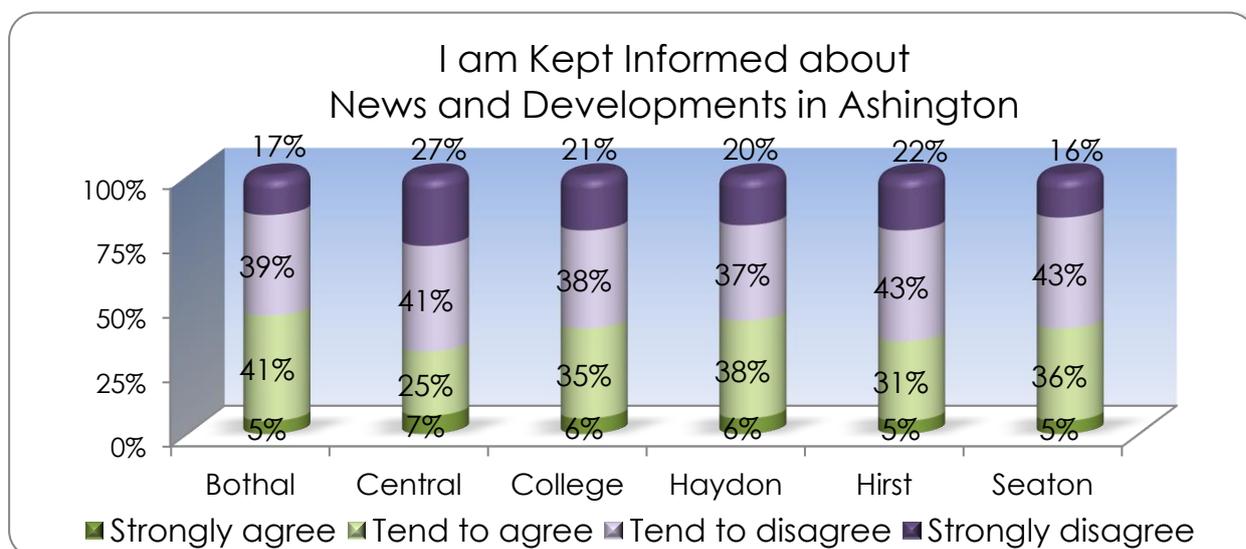
Fewer than 40% of residents who participated in the survey felt well-informed about news and developments in Ashington. In contrast, a majority (over 60%) felt less well-informed.



Again, generally, the older the resident, the greater the likelihood of them feeling well-informed. Thus, whereas just 30% of those aged 16-24 feel well-informed, this percentage rises to over 40% of the town's older (60+) residents.

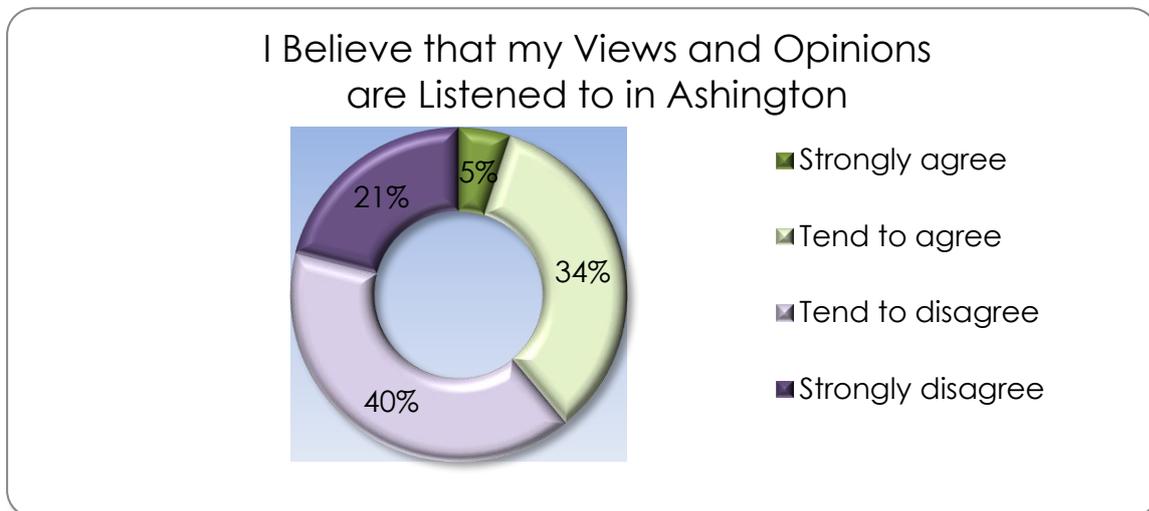
How Being Kept Informed in Ashington Varies Across Wards

The highest sense of being kept informed in the town is found in Bothal (46%) and Haydon wards (44%). In contrast, note that a feeling of being ill-informed is most evident in Central (68% feeling ill-informed) and Hirst (65%) wards.



Views and Opinions Being Heard in Ashington

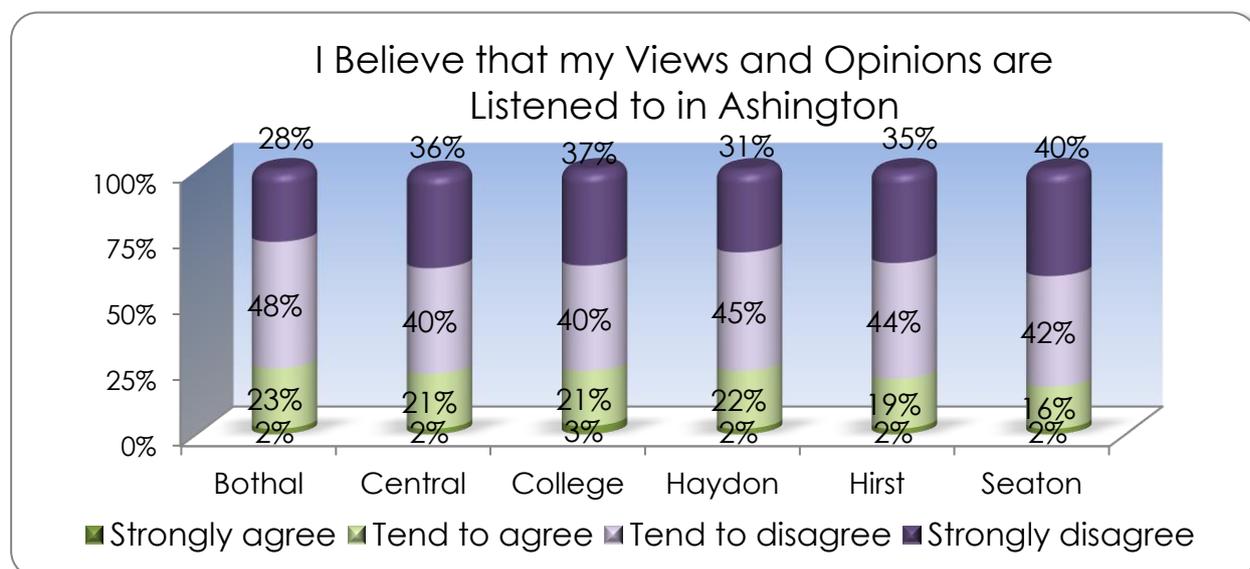
Fewer than 40% of residents who participated in the survey felt that their views and opinions were listened to in Ashington. In contrast, a majority (over 60%) felt less heard.



Again, generally, the older the resident, the greater the likelihood of them feeling listened to. Thus, whereas just 24% of those aged 16-24 feel their views are listened to, this percentage rises to over 40% of the town's older (60+) residents.

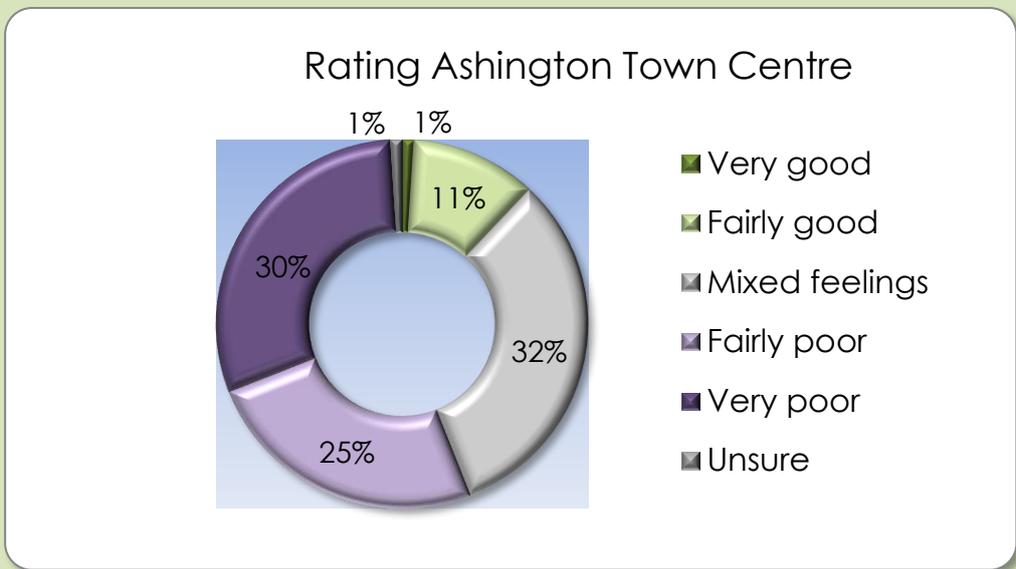
How Views and Opinions of Being Heard in Ashington Varies Across Wards

Across the board, a majority of residents in every ward feel that their opinions and views go unheard. This is a feeling which peaks in Seaton (82%), Hirst (79%) and College (77%) wards.



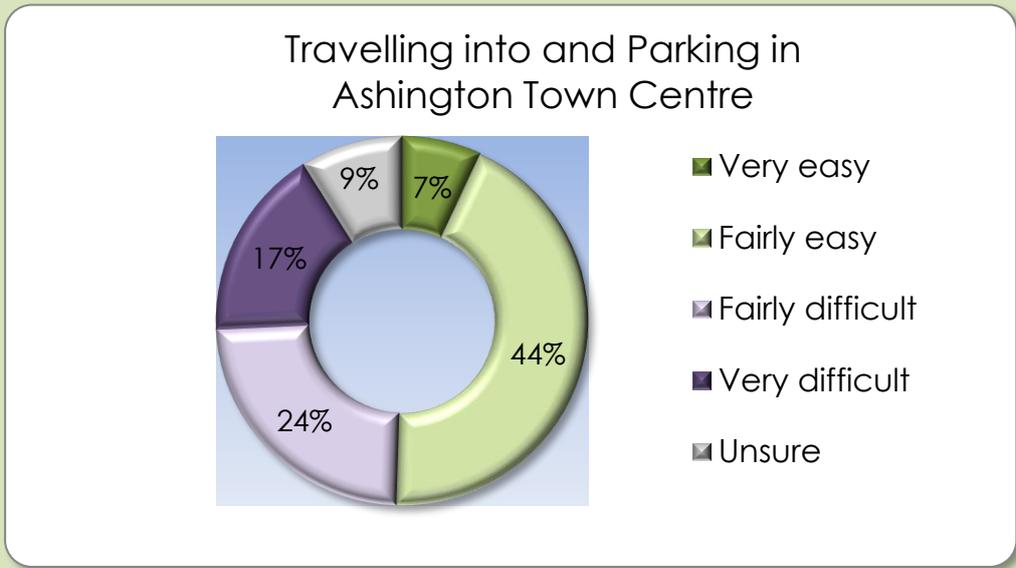
Rating Ashington Town Centre as a Place to Visit

Just 12% of residents positively rate Ashington Town Centre as a place to visit. In contrast, 32% have mixed feelings and 55% view it as being poor. No comparative information is available from 2012.



Travelling into and Parking in Ashington Town Centre

Just over half (51%) of all residents positively rate travelling into, and parking in Ashington Town Centre. In contrast, 41% view this as difficult and 9% are unsure. No comparative information is available from 2012.



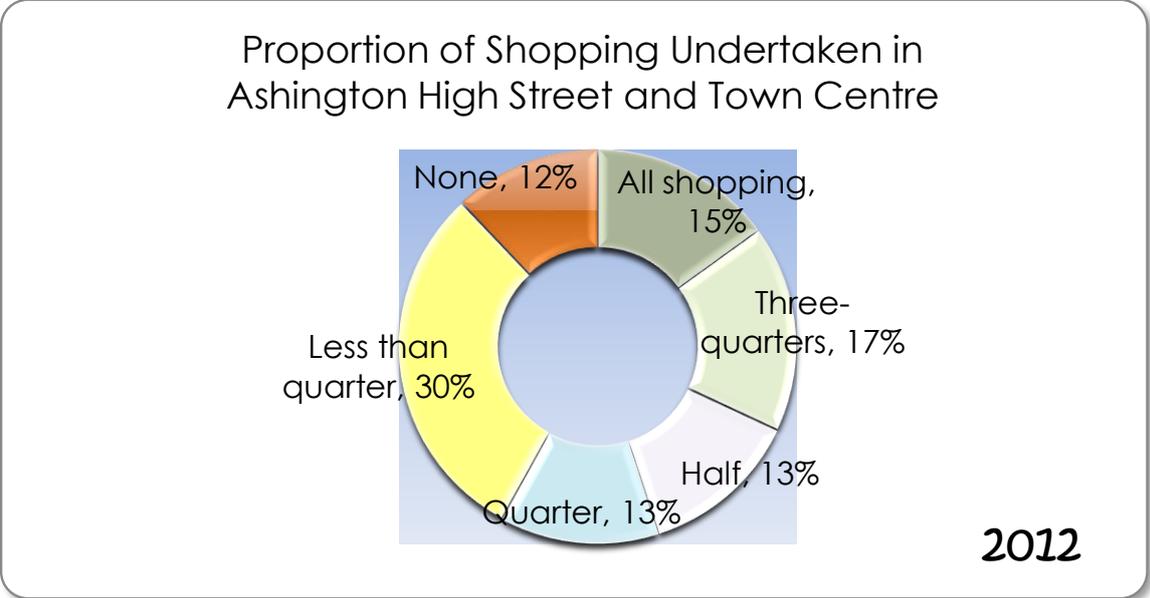
The following issues are highlighted by those who regard travelling into the Town Centre as a relatively difficult experience:

- Lack of right turn into Station Road coming from Asda
- Congestion caused by vehicles waiting to find/reversing out of a parking space
- Traffic congestion backed up beyond ASDA
- Incorrect phasing/synchronisation of traffic lights
- Infrequent bus services
- Limited number of parking spaces
- Permit zones in and around the Town Centre
- Increasingly challenging to park on market day due to the additional volume of traffic and traders' vehicles
- Disabled parking limited to two bays on Station Road
- Limited parking times
- One-way system
- Potholes/poor roads
- Lack of cycle lanes.



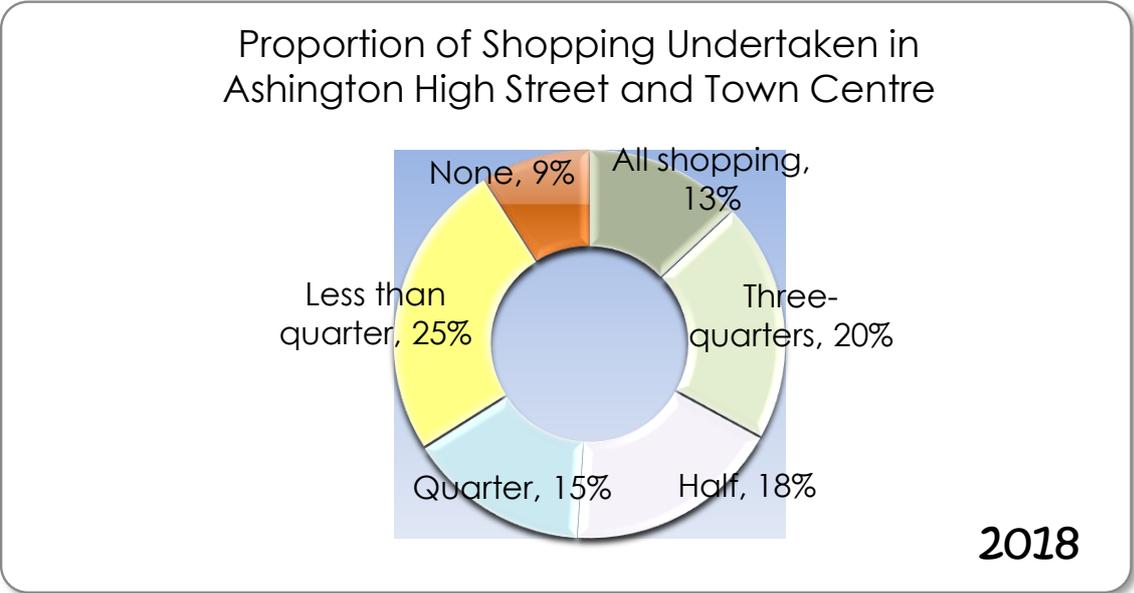
Shopping in Ashington Town Centre

In 2012, very few Ashington residents - just 15% - were doing *all* of their shopping in Ashington Town Centre. 45% were doing at least half of all their shopping in the Town Centre, however, 55% of residents did little or no shopping at this location.



In 2018, very few Ashington residents - just 13% - are again undertaking *all* of their shopping in Ashington Town Centre.

However, an increasing proportion - 51% - are doing at least half of all their shopping in the Town Centre, with a reducing proportion of 49% of residents doing little or no shopping at this location.



How Shopping in the Town Centre Varies by Ward

Residents in Central (63%) and Hirst (61%) wards are most likely to do at least half of their shopping in Ashington High Street and Town Centre. In contrast, those living in Seaton ward (36%) are notably less likely to shop there.

Most Shopping Undertaken in the Town Centre by the Youngest and Oldest Residents of Ashington

It's also interesting to note that the oldest (aged 60+) Ashington residents (59%) are most likely to do at least half of their shopping in the Town Centre. However, note that this percentage is closely followed by that of Ashington's youngest (16-24) residents, among whom 54% do at least half of all their shopping in the Town Centre.

...And Those with the Lowest Household Incomes

There is a notable difference in the proportion of shopping undertaken in Ashington according to the household income of residents. The lower the income, the larger the share of shopping undertaken in the town. Thus, whereas almost two-thirds (64%) of households with the lowest income (up to £20k) are undertaking at least half of their shopping in the town, the equivalent figure among the higher income (£50k+) households is just 37%.

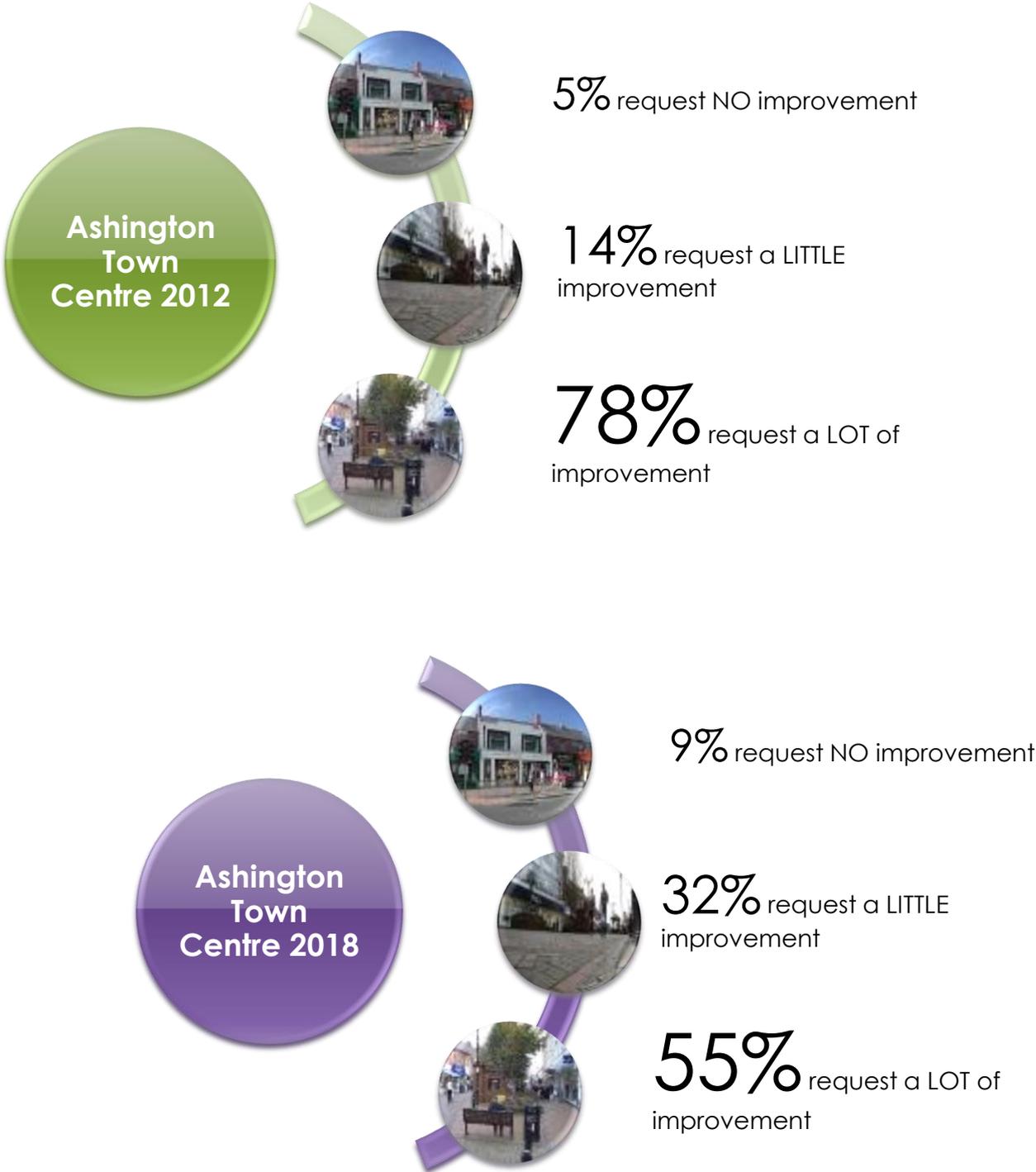
Where Residents Shop Outside of the Town

When residents shop outside of the town they are most likely to go to one of two destinations – Cramlington (25%) and/or Morpeth (22%). Other locations most frequently included Newcastle (13%), the Metro Centre (13%), online (7%) and Blyth (5%).



A Decreasing but Still Prominent Need to Improve Ashington Town Centre

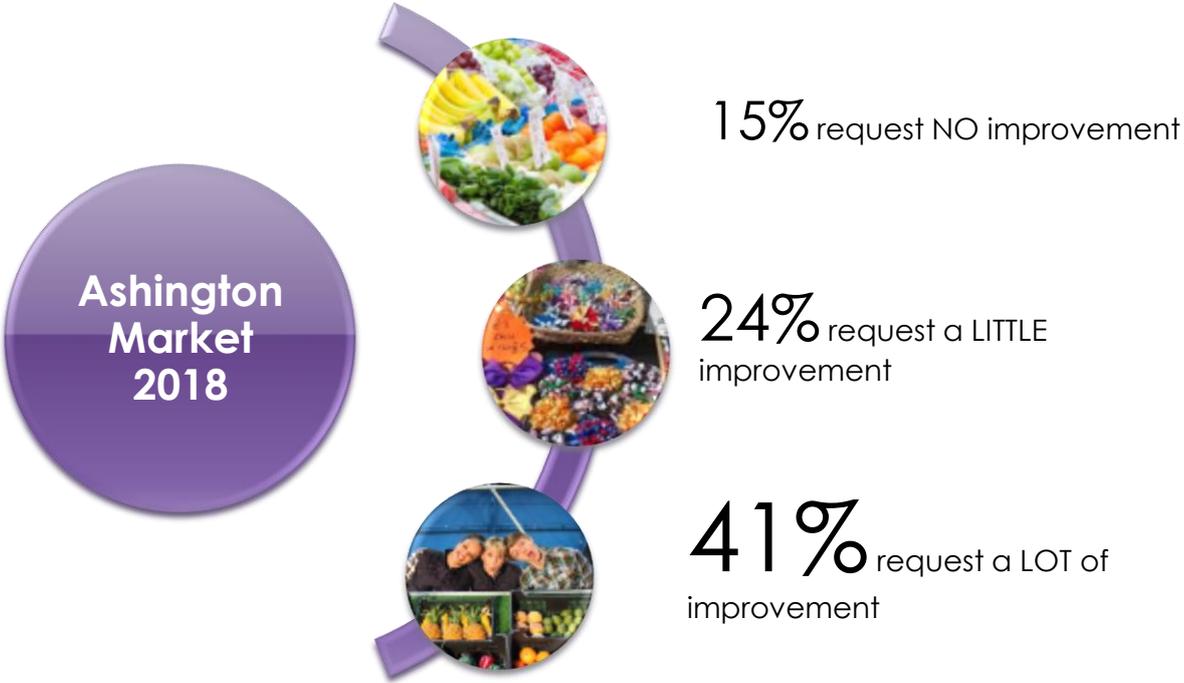
In 2012, close to 80% of residents requested significant improvement to Ashington Town Centre. This request was evident among residents of all ages. However, in 2018 this figure has decreased to 55%.



Remaining residents were unsure.

A Decreasing Need to Improve Ashington's Market

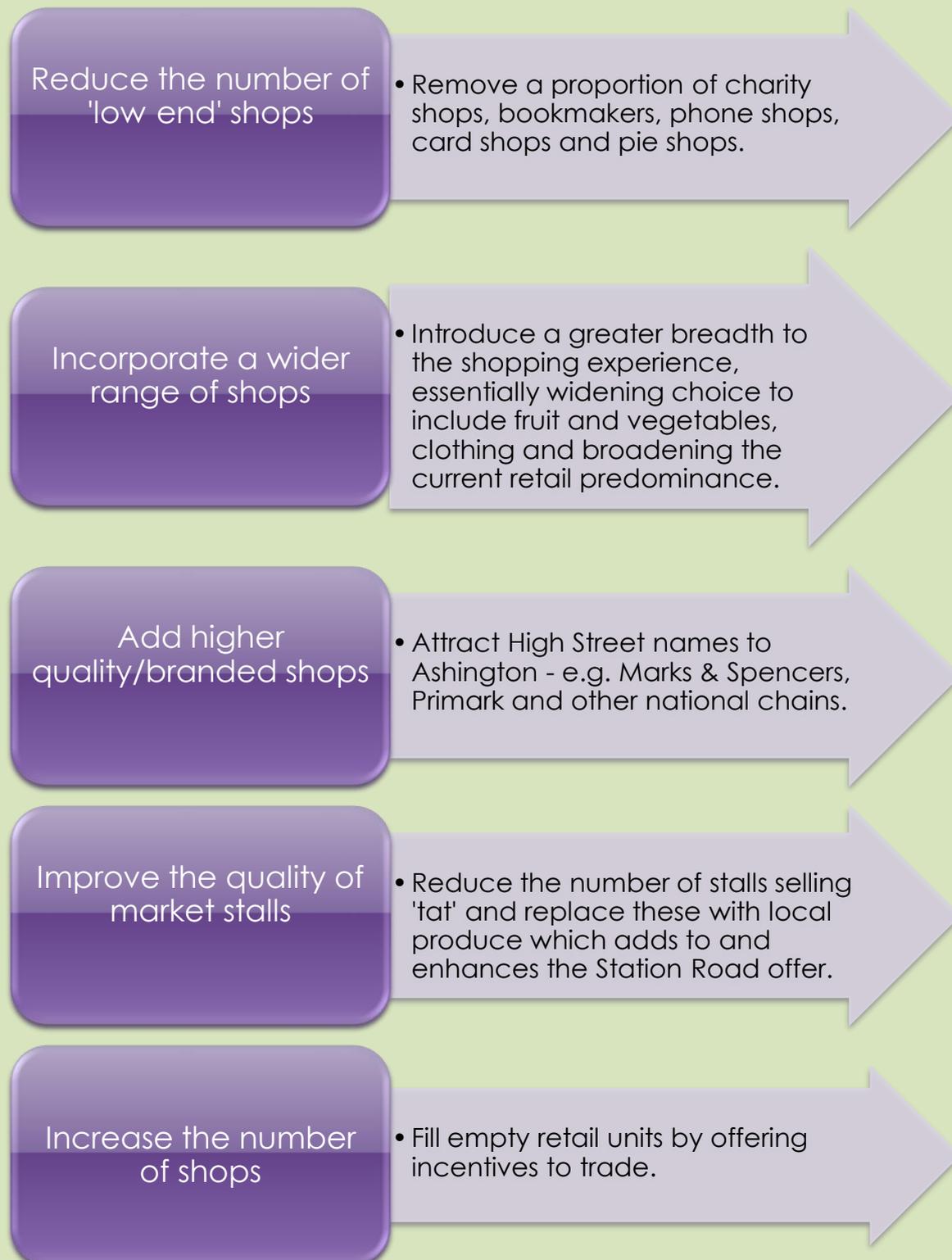
In 2012, 56% of residents requested significant improvement to Ashington's Market. This request was again evident among residents of all ages. However, in 2018 this figure has decreased to 41%.



Remaining residents were unsure.

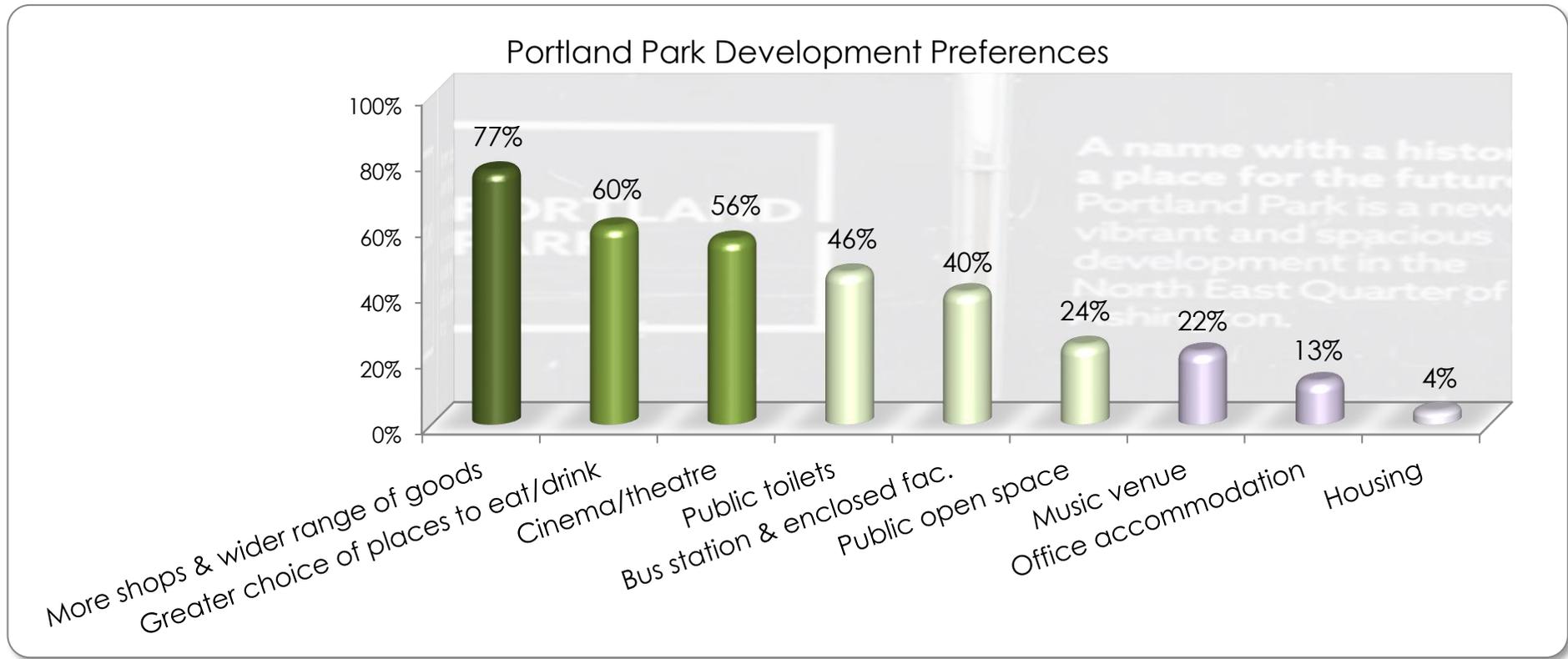
How to Improve the Town Centre and Market?

In terms of improving the Town Centre and Market, the message from residents is again loud and clear, underlining many of the concerns expressed in 2012. This is one of essentially replacing what are seen as low-end shops with a wider number and range of what are seen as 'quality' shops, accompanied by complementary market stalls which focus on offering higher quality, local goods.



How Residents Feel About Developing Portland Park

Resident aspirations for the future development of Portland Park focus chiefly on three things - additional shops with a wider range of goods (77%), a greater choice of places to eat and drink (60%), and a cinema/theatre (56%).



Other suggestions included leisure facilities (e.g. snooker, bowling, ice rink), facilities for children, a covered shopping mall (akin to Eldon Square, Newcastle or Manor Walks, Cramlington), large, retail park style shops and parking facilities.

How Preferences for Portland Park Vary by Age

Analysis of how preferences for Portland Park vary by the age of residents reveals that across every age category there is a consistent top three request for more shops and a wider range of goods. The top choices for each of the three younger age categories (up to 59) all focus on this, together with a greater choice of places to eat and drink and the provision of a cinema or theatre.

Age	1 st Choice	2 nd Choice	3 rd Choice
16-24	More shops and a wider range of goods (78%)	Greater choice of places to eat/drink (71%)	Cinema/theatre (69%)
25-44	More shops and a wider range of goods (82%)	Greater choice of places to eat/drink (77%)	Cinema/theatre (69%)
45-59	More shops and a wider range of goods (77%)	Greater choice of places to eat/drink (60%)	Cinema/theatre (56%)
60-75	More shops and a wider range of goods (75%)	Public toilets (63%)	Bus station & enclosed fac. (57%)
76+	Public toilets (78%)	Bus station & enclosed fac. (74%)	More shops and a wider range of goods (68%)

How Preferences for Portland Park Vary by Household Income

Analysis of how preferences for Portland Park vary by the household income of residents reveals that across every income band there is a consistent top three request for more shops and a wider range of goods. This is a choice most frequently accompanied by requests for a greater choice of places to eat and drink and the provision of a cinema or theatre.

Income	1 st Choice	2 nd Choice	3 rd Choice
Lower (up to £20k)	More shops and a wider range of goods (74%)	Cinema/theatre (56%)	Public toilets (52%)
Mid-range (£21-49k)	More shops and a wider range of goods (79%)	Greater choice of places to eat/drink (70%)	Cinema/theatre (58%)
Higher (£50k+)	More shops and a wider range of goods (83%)	Greater choice of places to eat/drink (83%)	Cinema/theatre (59%)

Listening to Ashington's Businesses

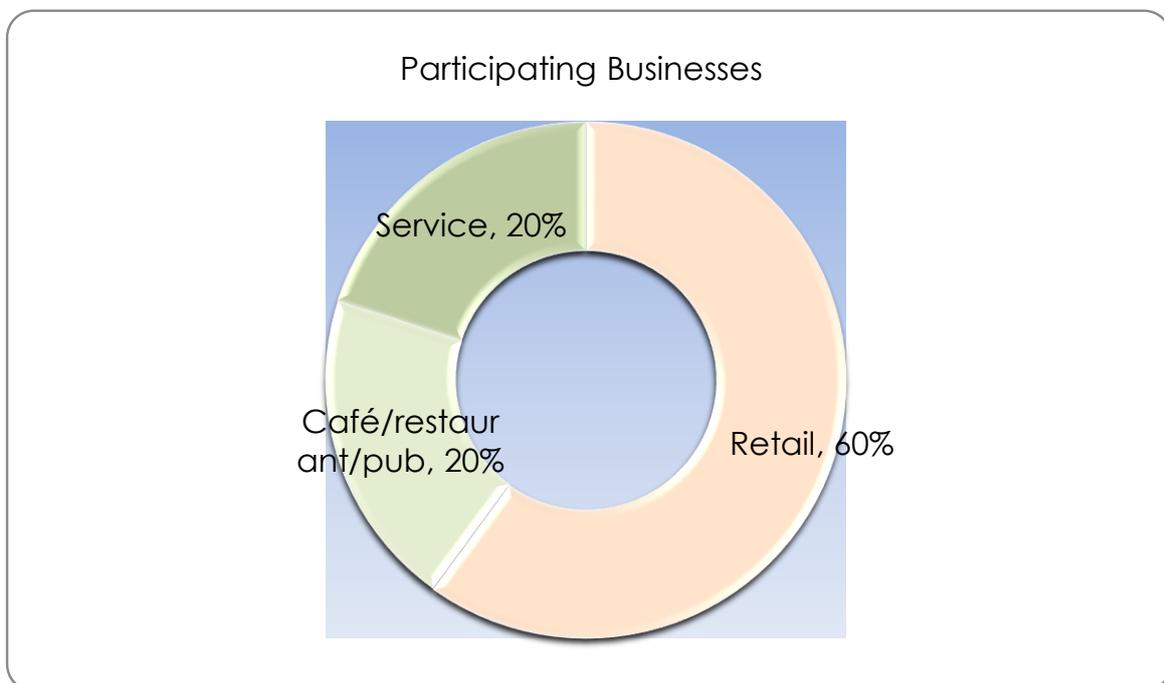
How the Businesses Survey Data was Collected

Businesses survey data was collected using a structured questionnaire, hand-delivered to every business in Station Road and the immediately adjacent streets. This questionnaire was accompanied by a short letter from the Leader of Ashington Town Council, explaining the purpose of the survey and requesting business participation. A face-to-face or online survey option was also offered to all targeted businesses.

30 businesses took the opportunity to participate in the survey. Responses therefore provide a limited but valuable snapshot of business opinion in the town, with which to complement the more comprehensive residents' survey undertaken.

Participating Businesses

The majority of businesses (60%) who participated in the research were retailers. However, service businesses and café/restaurants/pubs also participated.

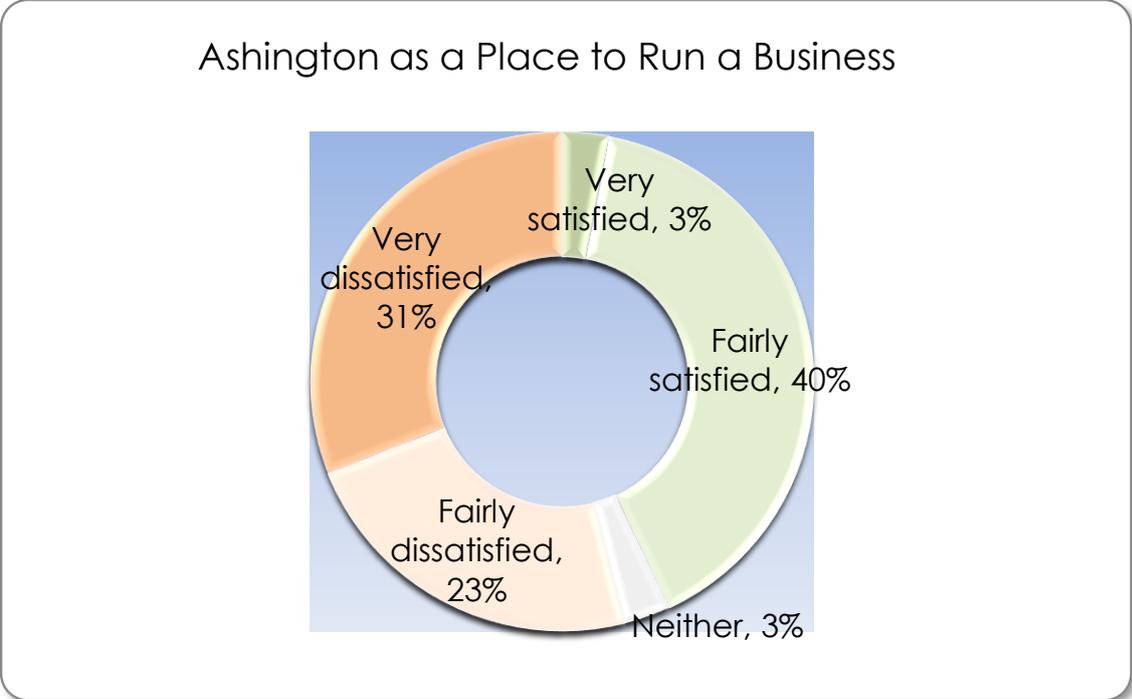


Businesses were often employing just 1 person (with 40% fitting this profile). The remainder were either employing no employees (7%), between 2 and 5 employees (47%) or more than 5 employees (7%).

Almost half (47%) of all participating businesses had been trading in Ashington for more than 15 years. In contrast, just 10% were newly established, trading for less than a year. The remainder had been trading for between 1-5 years (17%) or 6-15 years (26%).

Views on Ashington as a Place to Run a Business

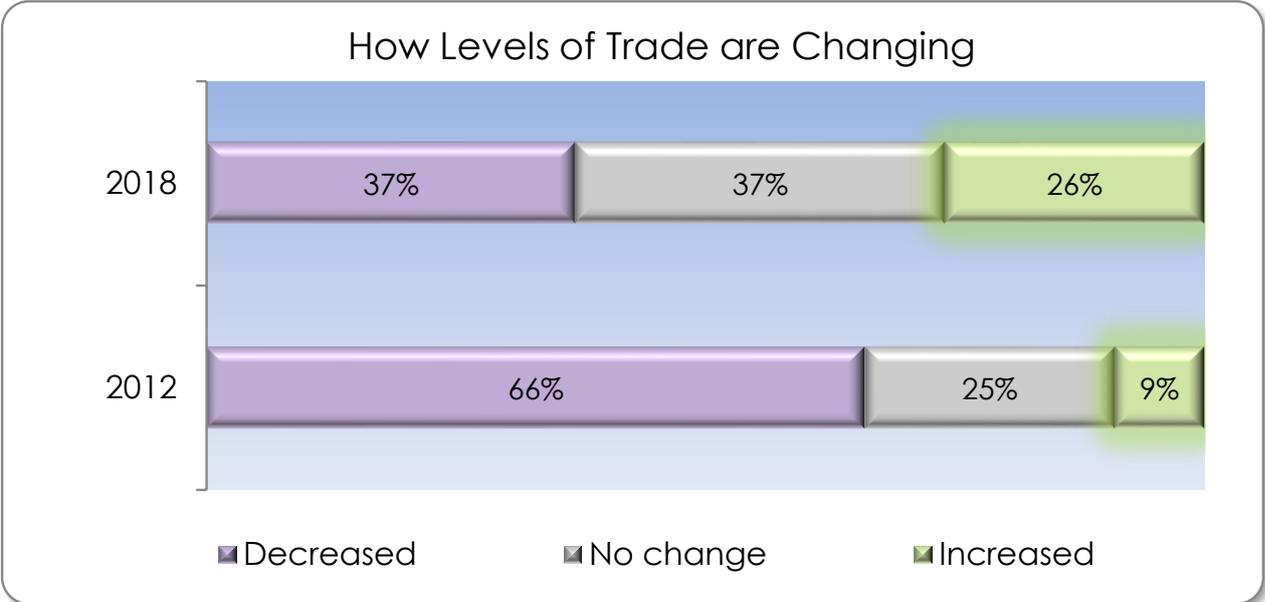
Traders were also asked to quantify their satisfaction with Ashington as a place to run a business. This revealed a clear split of opinion, with 43% of traders indicating satisfaction, compared to 54% indicating dissatisfaction.



How Levels of Trade are Changing

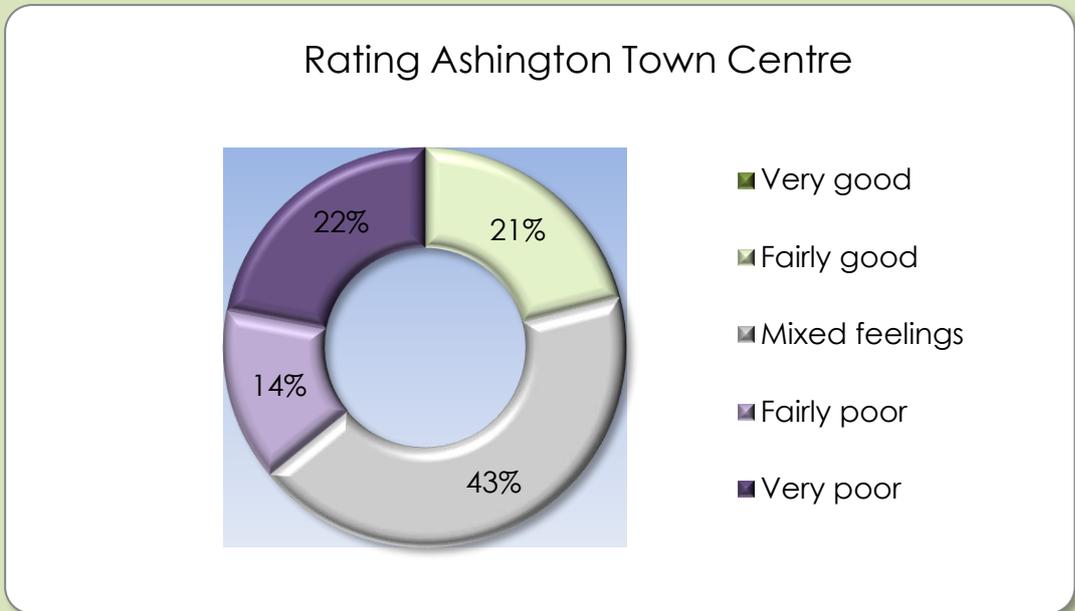
In 2012, 66% of Station Road businesses who participated in the survey said that their level of trade had decreased over the previous three years. 25% indicated no change and just 9% indicated any sort of increase.

In 2018, just 37% of these businesses said that their level of trade had decreased over the previous three years. A further 37% indicated no change and 26% indicated an increase.



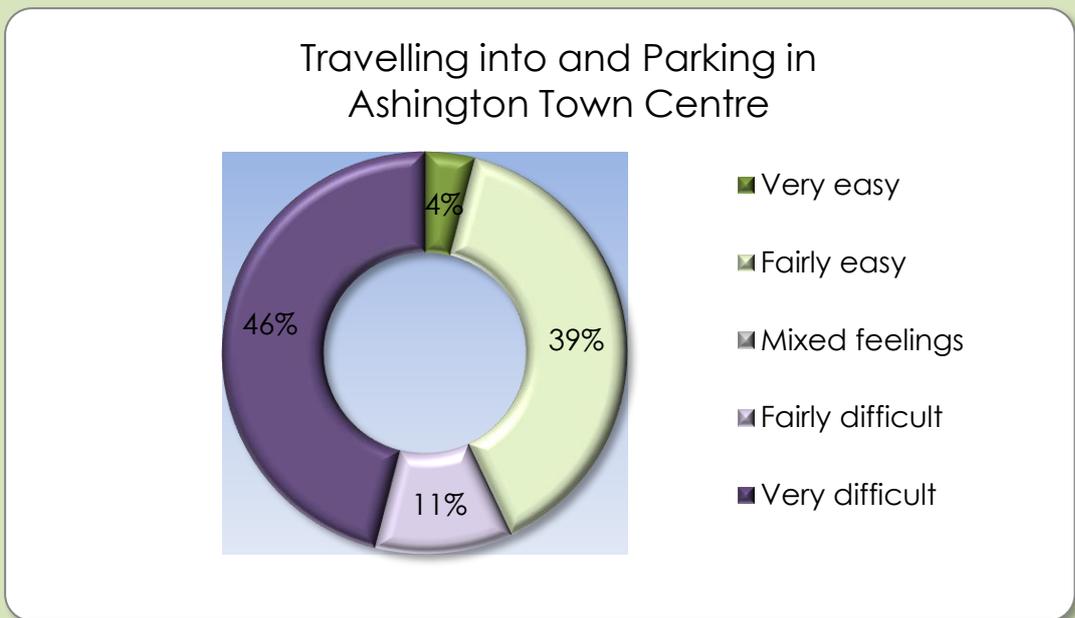
Rating Ashington Town Centre as a Place to Visit

Businesses are most likely to have 'mixed feelings' about Ashington Town Centre as a place to visit. Other feelings clearly lean towards criticism (36%) rather than praise (21%).



Travelling into and Parking in Ashington Town Centre

Businesses are most likely to consider travelling into and parking in Ashington Town Centre to be difficult – a view expressed by almost 60% of traders, many of whom regard this to be 'very difficult'.



A Real Need to Improve Ashington Town Centre

Over half (56%) of all traders would like to see a little improvement to Ashington Town Centre. A further 33% requested significant improvement. Thus, almost 90% of Ashington's Town Centre businesses who participated in the survey requested further improvement.



A Real Need to Improve Ashington Market

37% of Ashington's Town Centre traders requested no improvement to Ashington's Market. However, 40% all traders would like to see a little improvement to the Market, with a further 23% requesting significant improvement. Thus, over 60% of Ashington's Town Centre businesses who participated in the survey requested further improvement.



Issues and Priorities in Ashington Town Centre

- Streetscape/townscape improvements (50%)
- Increased parking facilities (43%)
- Smart premise frontages (20%)
- Lower rents (20%)

Note that many traders are currently dissatisfied with parking in the Town Centre, detailing a number of issues connected to a lack of parking availability:

“after 9am there are no parking spaces”

“the trouble is now everyone wants to park in the High Street so you can never get parked. The nearest parking is occupied by shop owners. The parking should be on both sides”

“there is poor parking so unless you use the bus or live nearby it is nearly impossible to park without having to walk quite a way to what you need”

“for a larger family car, spaces are often too small and there are limits to parent and child spaces”

“parking is a big problem and the one-way system is a nightmare where you have to drive round and round to find a parking space”

“while it’s fantastic that we now have parking on the High Street, it’s only for 30 minutes...nowhere near long enough for a shopping trip!”

The consequences of the aforementioned issues are felt to be customers receiving parking tickets, cutting their stay short and business being depressed:

“my customers get parking tickets. Selling off car parking to private companies is disgraceful and discourages customers”

“the residents only parking in Laburnum Terrace makes it extremely difficult for customers to park. Driving them away to other parts of town and perhaps from the area entirely. The limited parking is always full during the day while some streets are empty as most residents are at work. A shared parking scheme would be a much more efficient use of space”

“parking is insufficient and the time restrictions discourage people from staying”

“the lack of parking has a big effect on my business as large sacks of food are difficult to carry as are other bulky products. Customers prefer to pull up near the shop to be able to get these things. But with only 5 parking spaces being opposite it's near impossible”

“since the High Street has been opened to traffic it has killed our business”.

Note issues also linked to inconsiderate parking, a lack of dedicated staff parking, traffic congestion and unfinished roads:

“there are people who think they can park where they like on double yellow lines. This is a problem at the post office traffic lights”

“there is no staff parking, a simple permit scheme could solve that”

“there is traffic congestion around the Asda traffic lights...traffic does not flow. With the opening of the main street to one-way traffic this has led to problems at the Grand corner traffic lights”

“bus stops are in bad locations causing tailbacks”

“the road/junction system around ASDA, Lintonville and Station Road is in an unfinished state”.

Accompanying these parking concerns were a number of issues related to the quality and diversity of shops on Station Road:

“Ashington needs more shops opened in the main High Street...there are a lack of decent retail shops”

“some of the shops need modernising”

“we need more big names in the town to attract more shoppers”

“charity shops are too many and should be limited”

“the street is nice now...it’s the choice of shops that is lacking but that’s not the Council’s fault”.

Note also the suggestion that the appearance of Station Road requires further aesthetic improvement:

“there are a number of businesses that make an effort but this is damaged by the number of charity shops in prime locations and the shop buildings in a state of poor repair”

“we need better landscaping. Council workers do their best to keep the high street tidy but there are so many plots for nice flowers that would really brighten up the area. There are currently only a couple that have colourful flowers”

“the open road has driven a lot of business to us and the Town Centre looks much nicer. However, we could do with more attractive planting. There have only been a couple of new plantings and as we come into summer the rest look terrible”

“we need more litter pickers/traffic wardens with greater fines for people who feed the birds on the main street”

“litter is a problem which needs sorting”.

A number of traders suggest the need for increased co-ordinated events, promotions and marketing:

“there needs to be a cohesive ongoing programme of Town Centre development that is well communicated to avert rumour and misinformation being propagated”

“community events are badly organised and advertised. There is not much to entice people to come or stay in Ashington to shop”

“we need increased promotions and advertising”

“there should be more business incentives to encourage different businesses...there are too many hot food outlets”

“we need a better and more proactive use of the Town Centre for events”

“Ashington has the potential to be a great family friendly Town Centre, not just for those that live here, but also for people all over the north east if they had an easy way of getting here, and something to not only bring them once, but to keep them coming”.

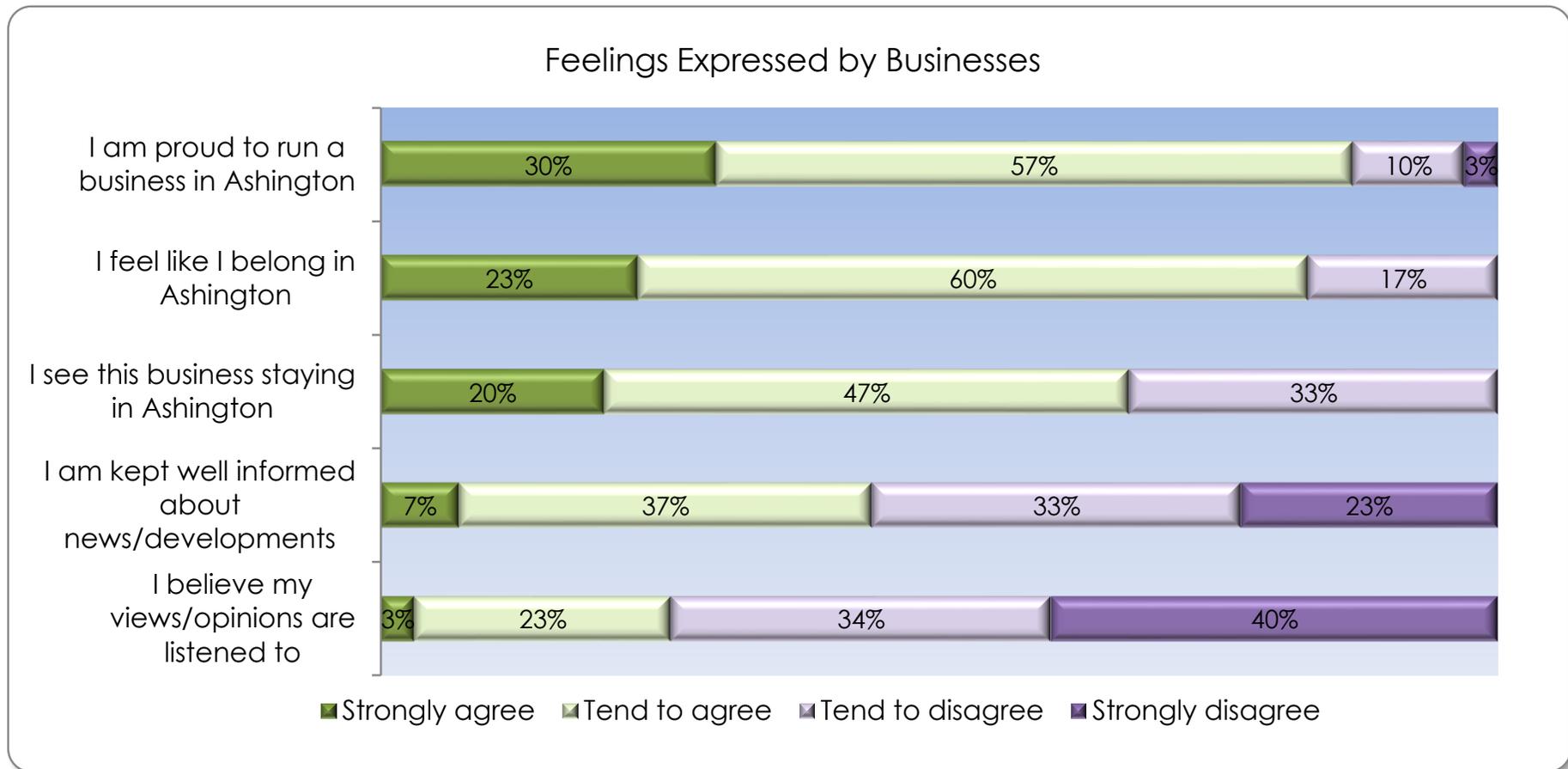
Finally note two additional comments:

“when plans are made for Station Road, the west end of Station Road and High Market are always forgotten. These areas should also be taken into consideration”

“while there has been some improvement in security, several shop windows are continually being broken overnight”.

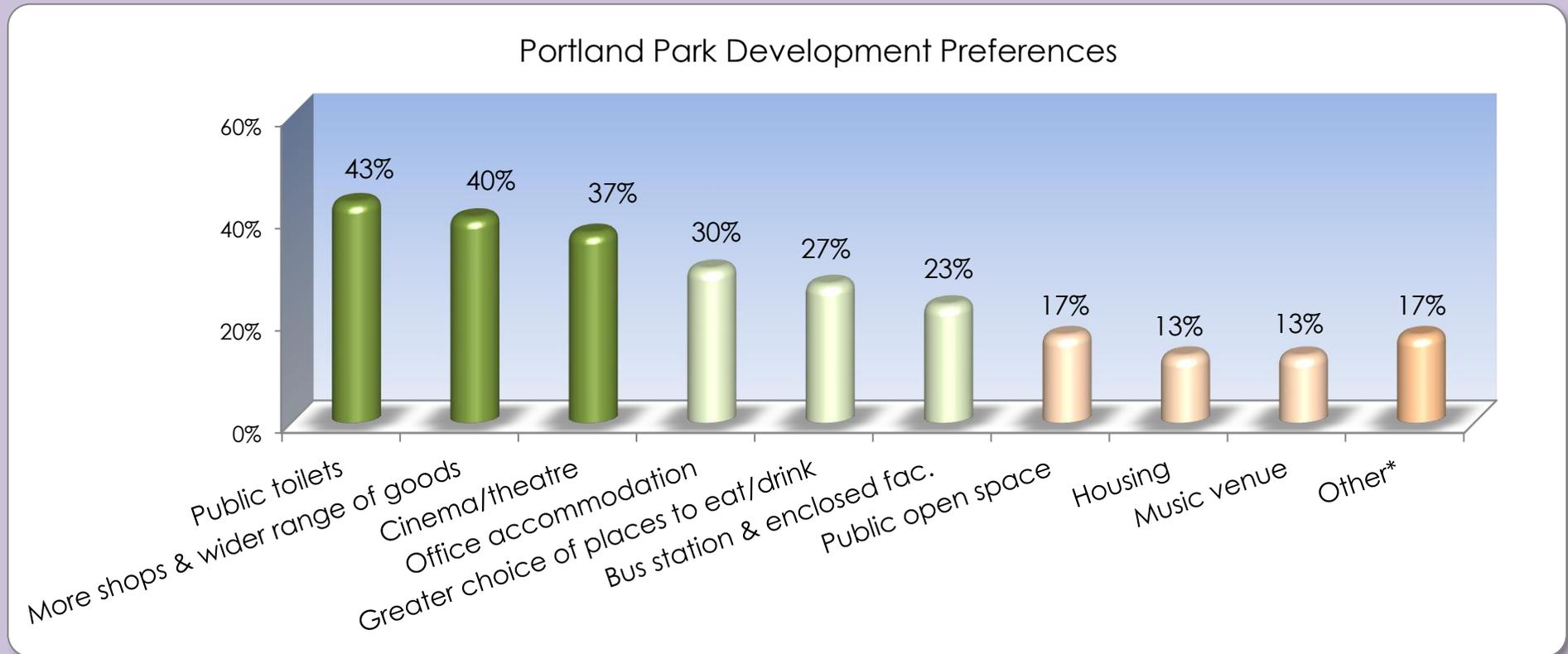
Overall Feelings Expressed by Businesses

Despite many of the concerns, issues and complaints expressed by businesses, overall feelings show that almost 90% of traders are proud to run a business in Ashington; over 80% feel that they belong in Ashington, and over two-thirds see their business staying in the town. However, note far lower levels of satisfaction in relation to being kept well-informed about news and developments (44% satisfied) and feeling that views and opinions are heard (just 26% satisfied).



How Businesses Feel About Developing Portland Park

Business aspirations for the future development of Portland Park focus chiefly on three things - the provision of public toilets, additional shops with a wider range of goods and a theatre/cinema.

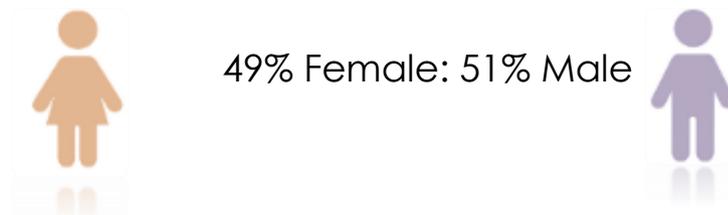


Additional suggestions included ten pin bowling, outdoor play facilities, an indoor market, an outdoor seated area, event space and unrestricted car parking.

Listening to Ashington's Visitors

The Gender of Visitors Interviewed

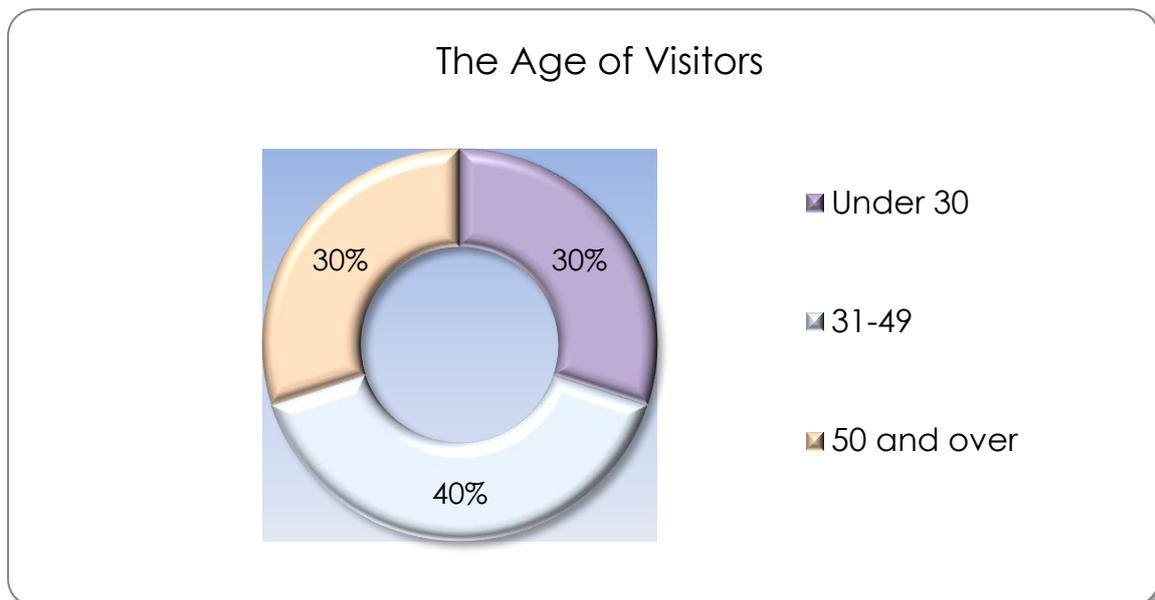
50 visitors to Ashington were interviewed.



51% of visitors were male; 49% were female.

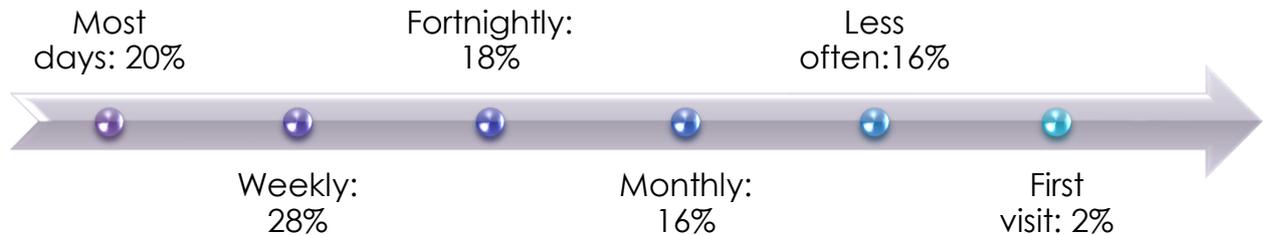
The Age of Visitors Interviewed

Visitors were aged from 22 to 78, with a good spread of younger, middle-aged and older visitors interviewed.



A Number of Very Regular Visitors to Ashington

Many of the visitors interviewed were regular visitors to Ashington, with almost 50% travelling to the town at least weekly.



Initial Impressions of Ashington

Few interviewees (just 2%) were visiting the town for the first time. However, mainly positive perceptions were in evidence:

“it seems very nice...we love the old pit street houses...
they are so quaint”

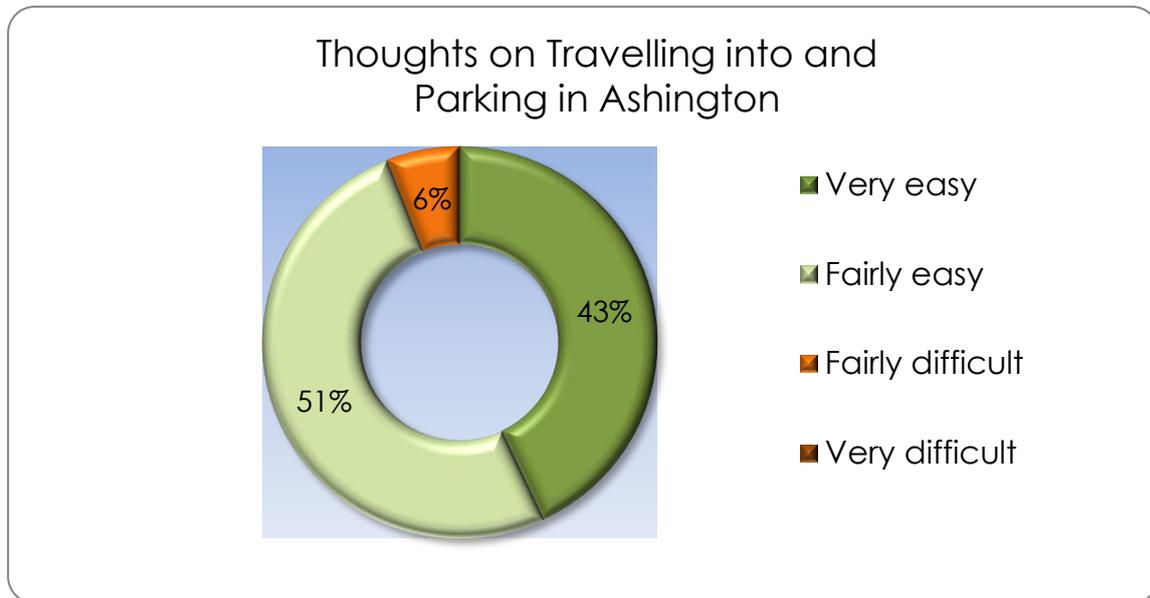
“we love the museum and it’s our first time here”

“the lake could be more inviting with information points and an observatory
for bird watching, etc.”

“the town is a typical Northumberland mining town and looks very busy, lots
of people and traffic so something must be right”.

Visitor Thoughts on Accessing Ashington Town Centre and Market

A majority of visitors (94%) find travelling into and parking in Ashington to be easy.



Where there are concerns – and these are limited in terms of being expressed by visitors – these focus on experiences of congestion and parking difficulties:

“the bus stand needs sorting out quickly or people will get into the habit of going elsewhere to shop and may not return to shop in Ashington”

“the traffic on the High Street is holding cars up at the lights and is dangerous for pedestrians”

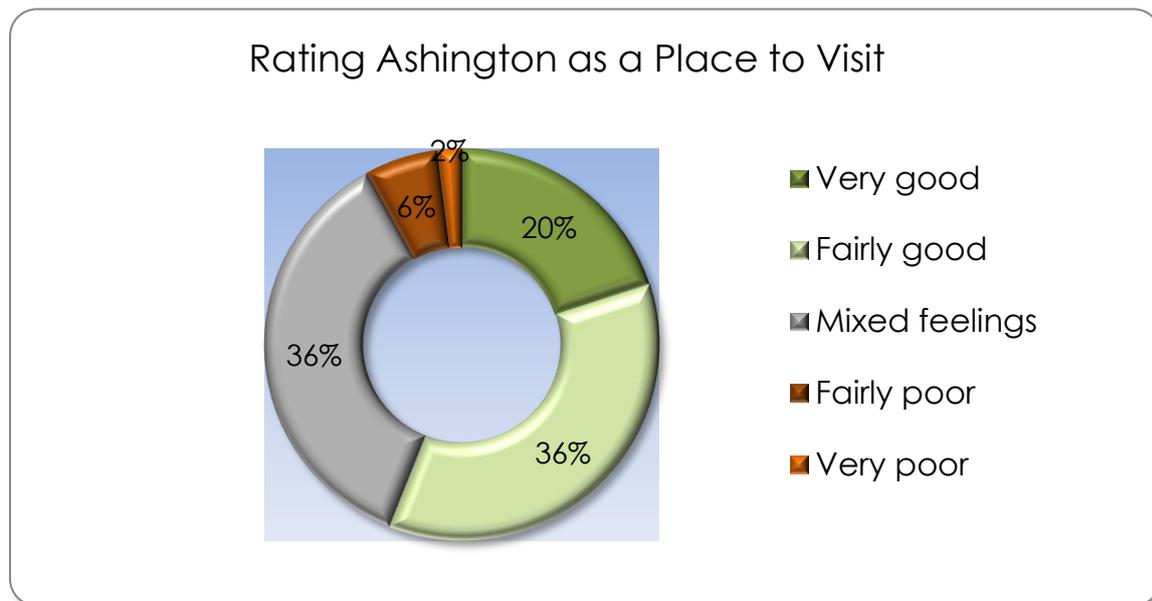
“the traffic lights are not working in sync”

“there is just so much traffic. You can only get parked if you come in early morning. Maybe looking at restoring the rail infrastructure would be worth some serious consideration”

“it depends when you come...sometimes you just cannot get parked!”

Overall Visitor Thoughts on Ashington as a Place to Visit

In overall terms, whilst 56% of visitors regard Ashington as a good place to visit, this is almost counterbalanced by 36% who have mixed feelings and 8% who are decidedly less satisfied with their experience.



Visitors specifically compliment the addition of the new leisure centre and library, industrial park, housing developments, the riverside area and the variety of shopping facilities:

“it’s better now with the leisure centre and library”

“all the new industrial park, new housing and parks are great. A new bus station will be the icing on the cake”

“the riverside is fabulous for jogging, cycling and even nature observation”

“it’s definitely improving...the leisure centre is a massive improvement”

“there’s a great range of good value shops”

“the pedestrianised and paved High Street looks great”

“we love Ashington...it offers so much more than Darlington. There is a good range of everything you could need along with beautiful caravan parks and beaches”

“the new leisure centre has certainly given it a facelift as will Portland park when it’s finished. Out with the old in with the new is the way forward”

“the new leisure centre is a great start, making the place a bit more upmarket. You seem to have done everything that’s needed, it will be good when you finish the bus station, maybe more shops could generate jobs for locals”

“the market is better now and there are a lot of shops”

“it still has a good range of independent specialist shops...all we have in Morpeth is charity shops”

“it seems fine to me, you can see the evidence that the council are determined to make it better than it is. Apart from the new bus station and the traffic congestion on the High Street all is great”

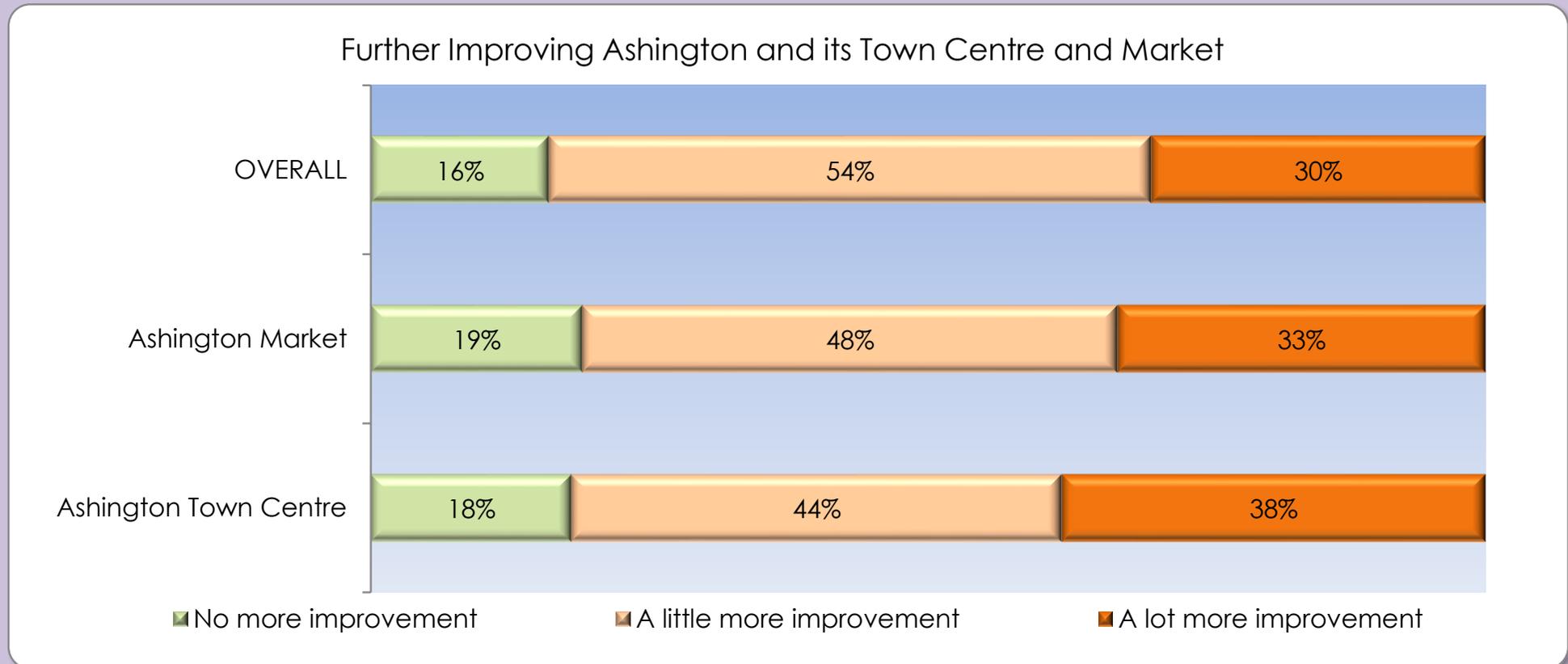
“every time I go it is very busy and seems to have lots going on”

“it has everything...the nature walks, the new leisure centre, an abundance of home cooking cafes, good transport links and a great choice of shops. There’s a lot on offer and people need to be proud of it”

“Keep up the good work!”.

Visitor Thoughts on Necessary Improvements to Ashington

In this context, the vast majority of Ashington visitors feel that the town needs, together with its centre and its market, additional improvement – though this is likely to be a little, rather than major improvement.



In the context of most visitors suggesting a degree of improvement, it's useful to take a look at the nature of these improvements.

In terms of the Town Centre, suggested improvements focused on a need for a broader range of shops, together with increased quality, diversity and attractiveness:

“there are lots of shops that cater for residents, but more diverse and ethnic shops need to be encouraged to attract a wider range of people from further afield”

“there are a lot of cheap shops. You need better shops and fewer charity shops. There are plenty of different shops but they are not what you would call upmarket”

“you need a good restaurant on the High Street”

“gambling shops and charity shops are depressing”

“you need more night time restaurants to draw more people in the evening”

“the Town Council seems to be doing the right thing, it's starting to look modern with the leisure centre and Asda, etc.”

“it's much nicer now but it needs brightening up with the likes of hanging baskets”

“ask the owners of the empty shops to keep them clean and tidy. It is their duty to do so whether they are empty or not”

“some of the shops need tidying up badly”.

Note also suggestions for measures to tackle Town Centre dog fouling and littering:

“dog fouling drives me mad, nothing worse when out shopping and you stand in shit. Ban dogs altogether from shopping areas. Chewing gum on the new paving area is terrible, fine them same as fining for littering”

“the litter bins aren't working as there is lots of litter about and tons of cigarette ends, which are spoiling the lovely paving”

“Keep it clean...ban dogs from the shopping area and have heavy fines for fouling and littering”

“it's congested with the cars...it should be for disabled parking only”

“the traders block off the disabled bays with cones to offload and load their vans which is a problem. I have to park some distance away”

together with improvements to car parking and traffic congestion:

“car parking could be better organised, keep it free parking. I think the all day parking should be limited to a few hours”

“one sure-fire way to discourage visitors is insufficient and unsafe parking as well as traffic congestion”

“traffic flow on and out of the High Street needs to be alleviated with the use of a road through Portland Park”.

In terms of the market there is a perceived need for an increased number of stalls, with wider variety of goods, and a consideration of the current location:

“the Market is not as big as it used to be”

“it was better at the football ground and it used to provide a lot more variety”

“more stalls and variety are needed”

“I liked the market much better when it was at the old football ground...it was a real market. The new market is a poor imitation of what it used to be...it's limited in what it offers”

“there's not much to buy on market days...it's normally cheap tat stuff. It was a great market when it used to be on the old site”

“many of the market stalls are typical of what you can see anywhere. Instead of having it on just once a week why not do something very special with a greater variety, say once a month with ethnic food stalls, etc.”

Developing Portland Park

Visitor aspirations for the future development of Portland Park focus chiefly on three things - the provision of a bus station and enclosed facilities, additional shops with a wider range of goods and a greater choice of places to eat and drink.

