Broomhaugh & Riding Neighbourhood plan:

Results of a Parish survey

Contents

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1. Introduction

The purpose of neighbourhood plans is to create locally distinctive planning policies to manage and guide development within a defined neighbourhood area. They are important documents in the planning system because decisions on planning applications must be made in accordance with planning policies, including those in a neighbourhood plan which, once approved, becomes part of the statutory development plan.

Neighbourhood plans should be aspirational and deliverable but also need to complement the Local Plan. They can create planning policies to cover any land-use matter which is important to the local community. This could include planning policies on:

- Employment (for example, allocating sites for employment development)
- Housing (for example, allocating sites for residential development and identifying the types of housing required)
- Transport (for example, extensions to cycle routes or footpaths)
- Natural environment (for example, protecting wildlife corridors)
- Design (for example, local guidance)

Northumberland County Council agreed in October 2020 to the Parish Council's request for designation as a neighbourhood area for the purposes of neighbourhood planning. The next steps are to gather information about the neighbourhood and engage with the community to identify aspirations and priorities. The Parish Council's first step in that community engagement has been through undertaking a village survey. This brief report shares the results of that survey. It is hoped that these results will stimulate further discussion, not least around a vision, objectives and policy planning areas, on which further views will be sought.

2. Approach to the research

A questionnaire was prepared by a group of Parish Councillors and then shared with Sarah Brannigan, Planning Officer in the Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure team at Northumberland County Council for comment. Following revision, it was tested by a small group of potential respondents to ensure that the language was appropriate and easily understood and that the options for the closed questions covered all the likely responses. A printed copy of the questionnaire was delivered to every residence in the village and, for all those residents for whom e-mail addresses were available, an invitation to complete the questionnaire was sent by e-mail. Posters promoting the survey were pinned to parish notice-boards and displayed at the village shop. Respondents were encouraged to respond through Survey Monkey and some 295 responses were received electronically. A further 120 residents completed printed versions which were then transcribed to give a single dataset. All residents, from the age of 15 upwards, were invited to participate. The survey was undertaken between 24 January and 28 February 2021.

According to the 2020 electoral roll there are about 770 voters in the Parish, but as we have extended the age range, it is estimated that about 790 people are eligible to complete the survey. For the results to be statistically significant, we therefore needed some 267 responses. This is well exceeded by the 425 responses which represents some 54 per cent of those eligible to participate.

Survey Monkey records the IP address of respondents so it is possible both to estimate the number of households responding as well as the number of individual respondents. This also offers the ability to check that households have not responded more times than the expected number of residents and to identify false starts, where respondents have started the questionnaire, been interrupted with most questions unanswered, and then started again. Those responses (of which there were just seven) have been eliminated from the dataset. For the hard copy responses, it was generally easy to identify responses from a single household. Responses were received from 222 households, representing 54 per cent.

3. Survey population profile

The 2011 census report a male/ female split of 46/54 and this was reflected in the responses, with 53 per cent from women. There was a good response rate from all age ranges.

Figure 1: Profile of respondents

Gender of respondents   **Age of respondents**
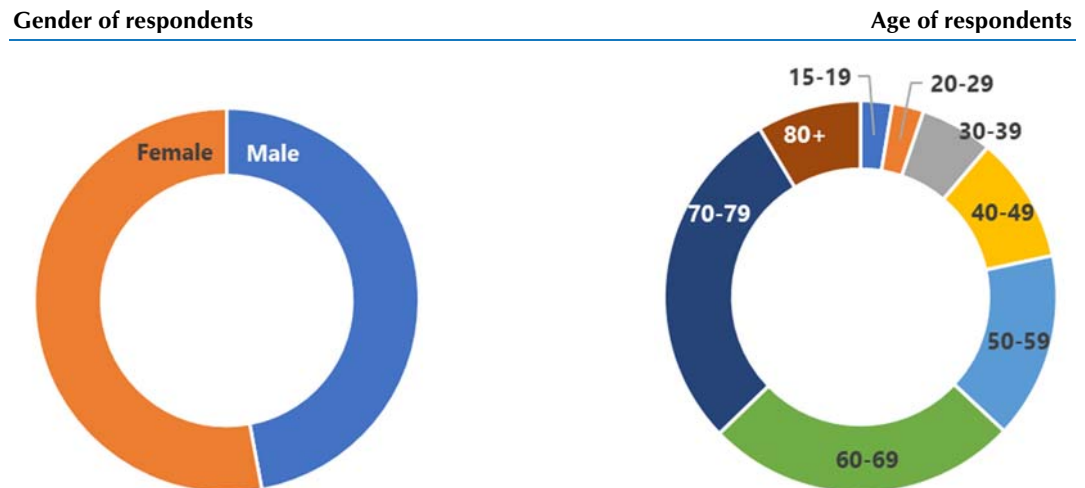
Whilst the age ranges that were used in the survey do not exactly match the age ranges used by the Office of National Statistics to report on the census data, it is possible to compare them with a cumulative frequency chart.

The 2011 census recorded a parish population of 966. The Parish, as Northumberland as a whole, has an ageing population. In 2001, the Parish had almost a quarter of residents aged 65 years or over; by 2011, this proportion had risen to just over a third. In 2001, the average of residents in the Parish was 47 years; in 2011, the figure was 51 years. It might be expected now to be higher. The estimated mean age of respondents is 62 years. Thus we can conclude that the profile of respondents matches very well the profile of the population.

**Figure 2: Comparison of respondents with census data**
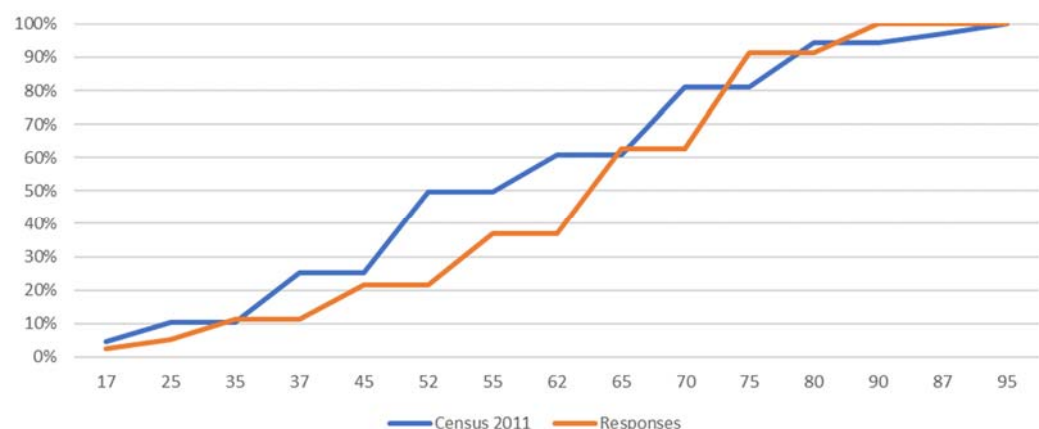
Source: census data from Office of National Statistics

Some 54 per cent of respondents are retired, consistent with an aging population, with 29 per cent in employment and 11 per cent self-employed.

People live in the village for a long time, with 38 per cent of respondents having lived in the village for longer than 20 years. Just 22 per cent of residents have lived in the village for less than five years.

Figure 3: Profile of respondents

Employment status   **Length of time in village**
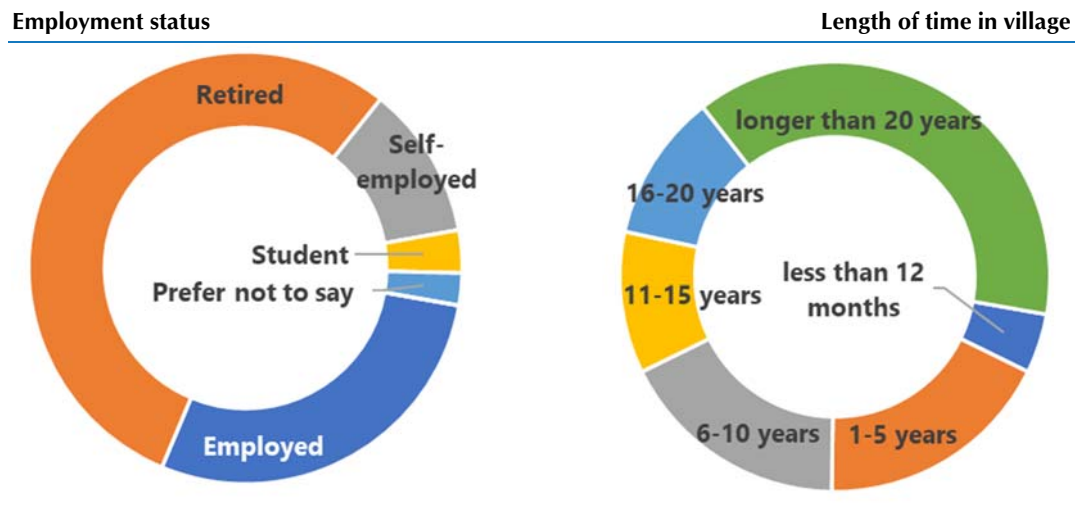
The survey asked households to report on the number of children aged under 15 (since those aged 15 and over were encouraged to respond to the survey). Respondents thus reported 115 children.
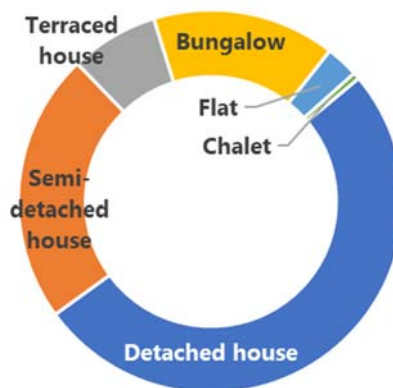
Figure 4: Age profile of children
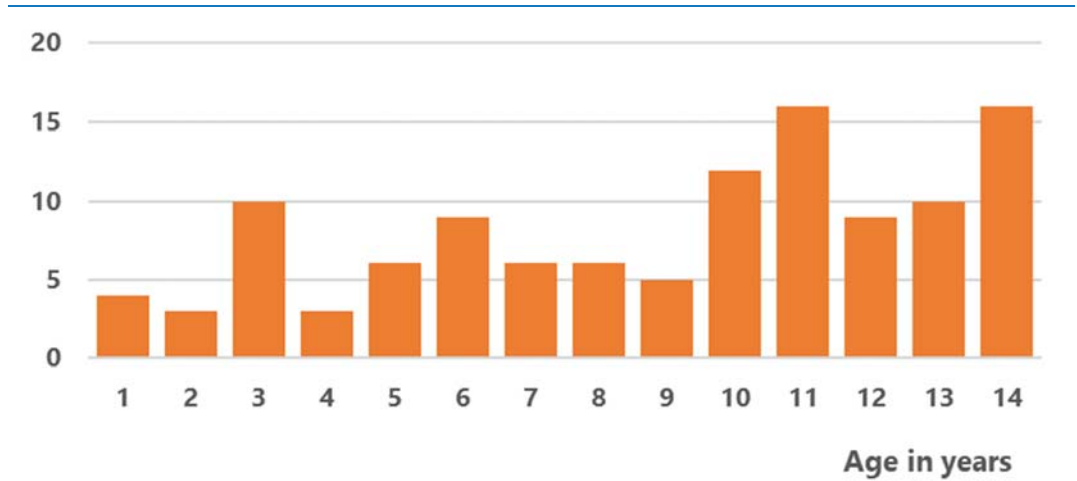
Respondents were asked to report on the type of housing in which they live.

Some 54 per cent reported living in a detached house with a further 23 per cent in semi-detached houses.

There has been limited building over the last 10 years and thus responses can be compared to the 2011 census, though it should be noted that the census recorded bungalows either as detached or semi-detached houses.

Figure 6: Comparison of respondents with census data
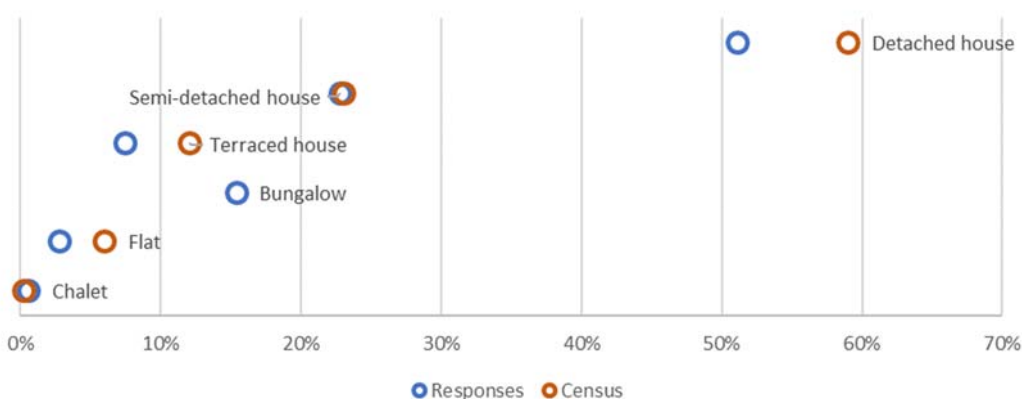
The housing of respondents is very similar to the housing profile for the Parish.

As can be seen the profile of respondents is very close to the profile of the whole village population and it seems reasonable therefore to regard the responses as being representative of the village as a whole. However, it should be noted that no decisions will be taken based solely on the results of the survey. Rather, the results will be shared with several working groups that will now be created to take forward thinking on different aspects of the neighbourhood plan.

The responses allow an analysis of views using variable such as gender, age of respondent, years lived in village, type of house currently occupied and nature of employment. It is not possible in a short report to provide all the variations and, indeed, even providing for eight age groups or six types of housing on a single chart can make the charts hard to read. Where there is variation in results across variables, the ones with the most difference have been selected. The next section thus provides a snapshot of the results though the data can be analysed in much more detail and will be made available, in anonymised form, to the working groups.

4. Results

4.1 The environment of Riding Mill

The overwhelming reason why people like living in the village I easy access to the surrounding countryside and green spaces with 88 per cent of respondents. A close second, with 82 per cent, is the rural atmosphere. Some 75 per cent regard it as a safe place to live and 75 per cent also value the good transport links.

shows the results by age of respondent and there is no great variation in reasons by age. Additional reasons for liking living in the village included the tennis courts, the community spirit (mentioned by several respondents), the active Parish church, and being a 'caring village'.

Figure 7: What liked about living in Riding Mill (by age group of respondents)
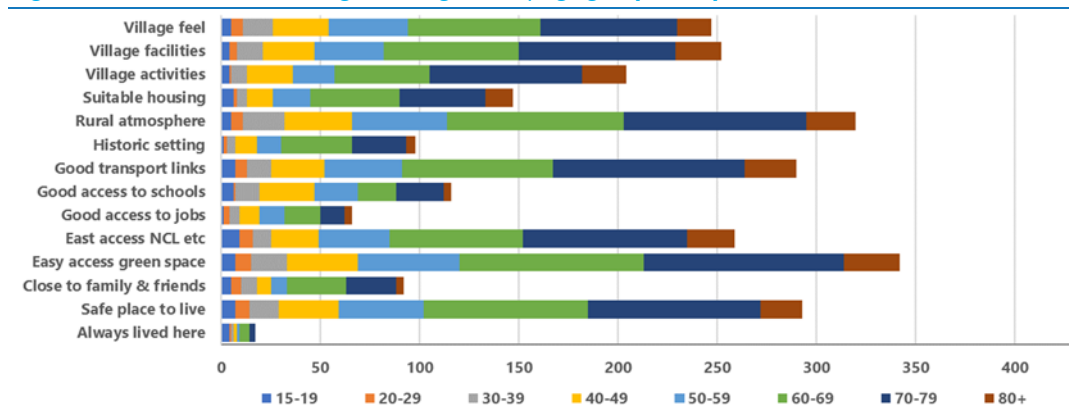

Respondents were asked to consider the importance (from not important, through fairly important and important to very important) of a range of aspects related to the local environment. The responses were scored 0 for not important to 3 for very important and averaged. There is little to pick between the scores of respondents according to their employment status, except for students, who are more concerned than any other group about climate change, but less concerned about everything else. The highest degree of importance is given to protecting rural footpaths (with a score of 2.6), then to protecting green spaces and then to protecting the village's ecology including trees, woodland, hedges and countryside. Noise pollution, flooding and heavy traffic are seen as much less important. Additional comments focused attention on the need to protect the green belt, the level of heavy traffic passing through the village, light pollution, protecting the Tyne and Marchburn and recognising the need to continue to improve facilities.

Figure 8: Importance of local environment (by employment status of respondents)
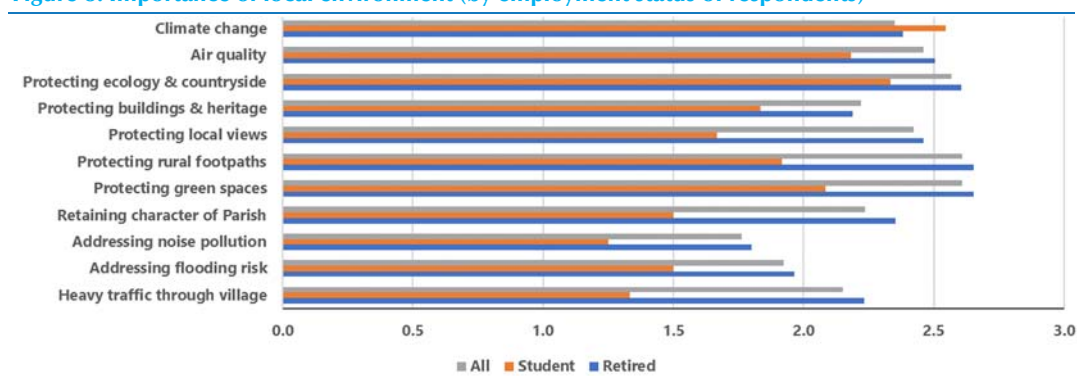
Respondents considered a number of issues broadly concerned with safety and security on a scale from not an issue (0) through a small issue and a big issue to a priority issue (3). Scores were averaged. Dog fouling was considered the biggest issue followed by litter and then noise pollution (though the need to address noise pollution was only considered fairly important in the previous question). Whilst crime and burglary was only ranked fourth, its importance increased with the age group of the respondent. Otherwise, there was little difference in the views based on age group – except for those age 15-19 who did not consider any of the factors to be an issue. Additional comments mentioned climate change, traffic speeding through the village, people parking on pavements and green spaces, loss of footpaths and conflict with landowners, inadequate road and footpath maintenance, dogs off leads and not under control.

**Figure 9: Issues within the parish (by age group of respondents)**
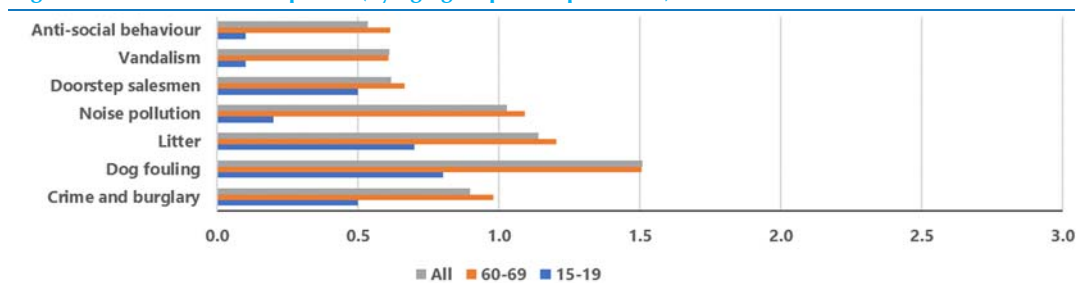
The next question offered residents the chance to identify up to three concerns related to the speed of traffic and dangerous junctions. This resulted in more than 600 'open question' responses. The greatest concerns were of traffic speeding through the village, the large number of blind junctions on the main road and the footpaths which in many places are too narrow or non-existent (for example, along the road between Riding Mill and Corbridge). Several respondents were keen to see more dedicated cycle lanes and some complained about the potholes which are of particular concern to cyclists. Several respondents noted the difficulty at certain times of the day in crossing the main road, though others questioned whether a pedestrian crossing would in fact imply to motorists that pedestrians were not an issue and thus speed more. The big sweeping turn out of Whiteside Bank was seen to encourage fast driving. Several respondents asked for a 20mph limit on the main road. The proliferation of street signs was criticised. As will be seen later, there are suggestions that better streetscaping could both improve the ambience and slow down the traffic.

More than one respondent complained about the bollards on the Millfield Road bridge. Several respondents complained about parking.

Some of the issues raised in the comments were included in the next question which asked about the importance of a number of factors (with answers scored 0 for not important to 3 for very important). The factor ranked first was the need to keep roads well maintained, followed by the need to keep footpaths and pavements well maintained. Safe road crossings and the provision of footpaths to adjacent parishes were also perceived to be important. Given the earlier comments on parking it should be noted that more off-road parking was ranked last. As with the issues above, the only age group that was out of step was those aged 15-19. Additional comments mainly repeated the responses in the previous question. There were some requests that stiles be replaced with gates or other means to allow access for people unable to climb over a stile. Several respondents were keen to have a darker sky, that is less street lighting, overnight. Drainage of rainwater on the A695 appears to be a big issue.

**Figure 10: Importance of selected factors (by age group of respondents)**
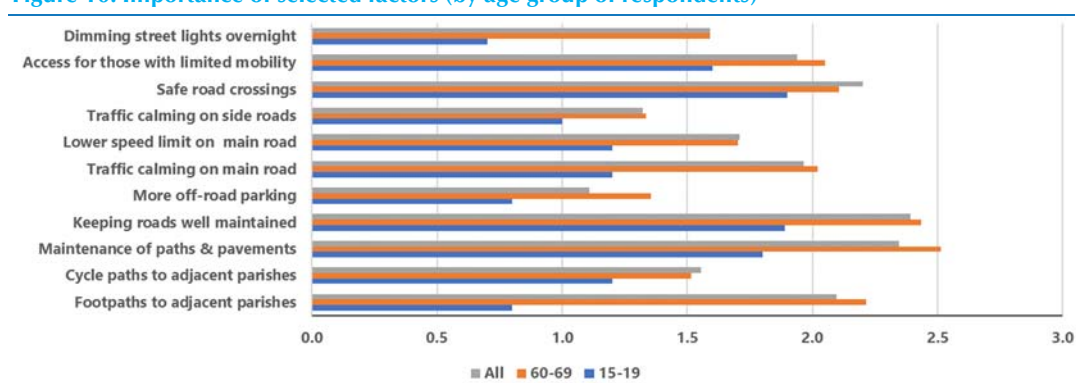
4.2 Housing & development

Whilst the scope of the neighbourhood plan is still to be determined, it is anticipated that it will cover housing needs and may also cover other development. It will, however, be a key component of the county's development plans and thus the Parish's views on housing, housing needs and housing design are important. There is pressure on all local authorities to make available more land for housing but the adoption of appropriate policies will increase the likelihood that any additional housing will meet the needs of the village.

Most respondents (some 62%) stated that they neither wanted nor needed to move out of their current property. For the age group 60-69, 74 per cent expected to remain in their current home and this was true of 65 per cent of those aged 70-79. The group least expecting to remain in their current home was those aged 50-59 where only 50 per cent expected to stay. A further 30 per cent overall thought that a member of the household might have to leave home within the next five years. Amongst those aged 15-19, unsurprisingly, this increased to 70 per cent. Overall, just nine per cent reported that a member of the household wanted or needed to move out now.

Figure 11: Expectation of requirement to move from current property (by age group of respondents)
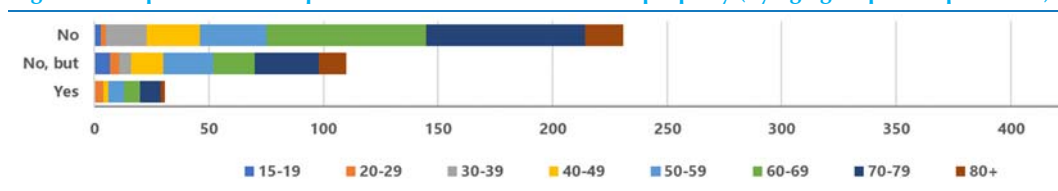
When asked about the classification of household members who might want to leave, some 38 per cent stated that it was single adults wanting to move followed by adult couples (19%) and then older couples (18%).

Figure 12: Classification of member of household wanting or needing to move in the future (by age group of respondents)
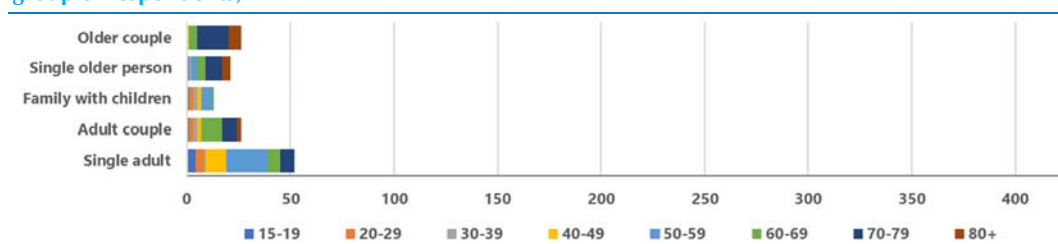
The prime reason for people wanting to move, also unsurprising given the proportion of young people, was to live independently, though 20 per cent of respondents said that they might move because their home was too large.

Figure 13: reasons to move out (by current housing of respondents)
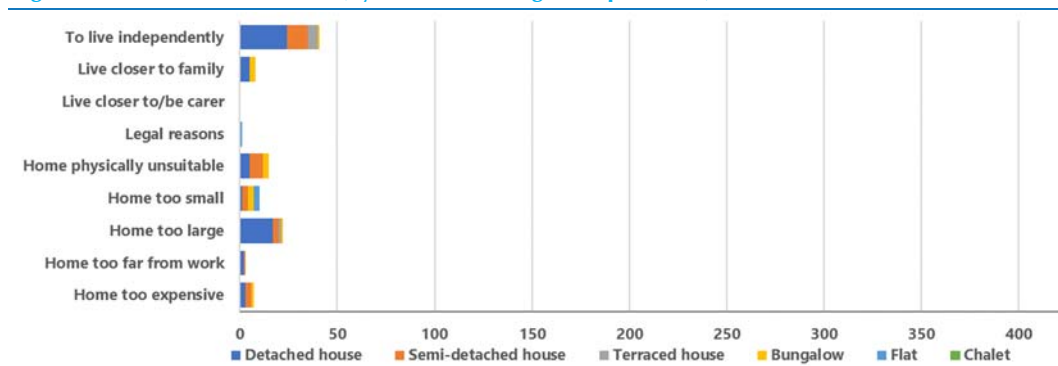
The next question explored the type of housing that respondents might like to see in any new development. Answers to this question ranged from strongly disagree through disagree and agree to strongly agree. Responses were translated into scores ranging from -3 for strongly disagree to +3 for strongly agree and averaged. No scores for the overall sample population exceeded 1 or -1, from which we can deduce that feelings generally are not too strong. Interestingly, however, whilst most respondents were in favour of most types of housing, most respondents were also against the building of larger detached houses. On this question, there was much more of a difference between ages groups (Figure 15) with the group aged 30-39 being against any new housing. Additional comments included a desire for 'age restricted' developments with housing specifically designed for older residents and a desire for houses which will attract families with young children which would

effectively support the school and pre-school. Several respondents stressed the need for sustainable housing, affordable housing and energy efficient housing. A small number indicated in this question that they were against any new housing, though as will be seen in the next question, more respondents shared that view. Several respondents were strongly against building in green belt. Many respondents noted that, whilst they could see the need for more housing, wanted to preserve Riding Mill's rural character and not put yet more pressure on the main road.

Figure 14: Type of housing in new developments (by current housing of respondents)
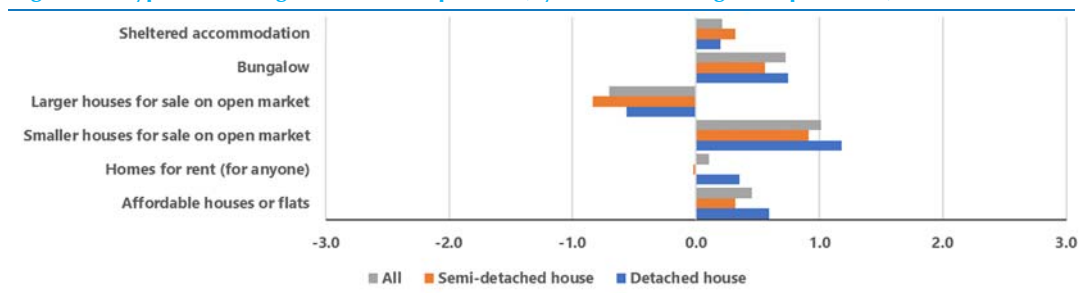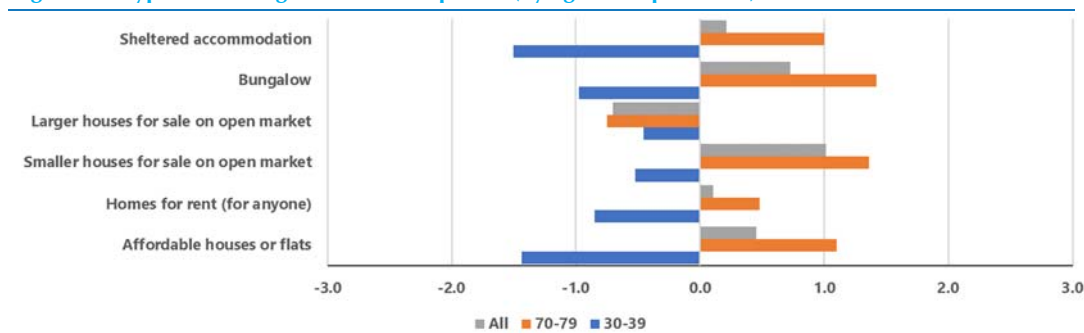

Figure 15: Type of housing in new development (by age of respondents)

Respondents were asked to consider how many additional homes could be accommodated within the village. Some 20 per cent of respondents did not want any additional housing and just 15 per cent thought that the village could accommodate more than 15 units. The balance of respondents was fairly evenly split between 1-6 units (34%) and 7-14 units (31%). Women respondents were rather more positive than men about accommodating 1-14 units.

**Figure 16: Number of new housing units that could be accommodated**
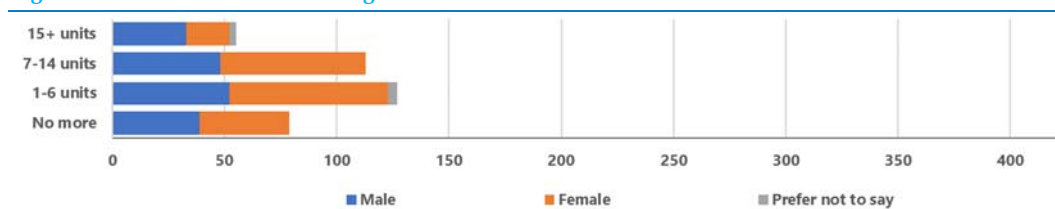
Respondents were asked whether new developments should respect the local character, landscape and heritage of the Parish. Perhaps not surprisingly some 87 per cent of respondents said yes, with 10 per cent saying that they had no opinion. Respondents were asked to explain the features that they thought were most important. Responses included focusing on in-fill; having plenty of space between

houses to maintain the rural feel (commented by many respondents); keeping the look of the village with a mix of housing styles, though traditional and not large, glass boxes, and sympathetic to the environment. It was suggested that all new houses should have at least two car parking spaces and an electric vehicle recharging point. There was a suggestion that there should be a design code. Many respondents commented on the feeling of space, the natural landscape and the scope to support wildlife (including retaining existing wildlife corridors) and wanted to ensure that feeling was retained. The need for affordable housing, which can attract young families, was noted. The potential for new development to the east of the village was noted by more than one respondent though others specifically argued to retain the green space that surrounds the village. Indeed, a large number of respondents argued for the complete retention of the green belt with no exceptions.

The comments were largely reflected in the answers to the next question which asked about a range of factors related to new development. There was little to differentiate groups based on current housing and how long they had lived in the village. However, there was some differentiation based on age. Maintaining green spaces was seen as the main priority, followed by protecting and enhancing natural and historic environmental assets and then energy efficiency. The only factor not regarded as important overall, though was regarded as important by younger age groups, was contributing to employment opportunities. Younger age groups also attached more importance to the provision of off-road parking and contribution to improving the village's infrastructure. Comments included wondering how the village can use the natural environment to mitigate climate change; stressing, again, the importance of the green belt; not impacting on the wildlife; new development to be carbon neutral; and implementing local small scale energy generation.

Figure 17: Importance of factors related to development (by age group of respondents)
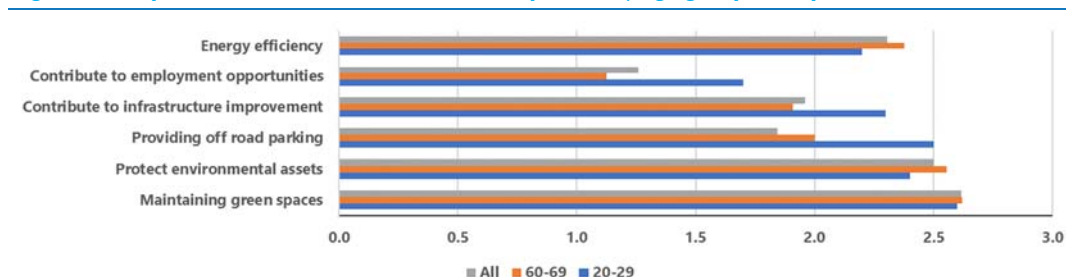
4.3 Community facilities

Respondents were asked which facilities in the village they used and how often, on a scale from never (0), through occasionally (1), monthly (2), weekly (3) to daily (4). We might expect some variation by age and indeed there is. The age group 40-49 uses the facilities the most, and for them amenity land scored 3.2 (the only facility in the only age group to exceed 3). Indeed, overall, the village amenity land is the most used facility with a score of 2.4. The second most used facility, though with a score of just 1.6, is the station coffee house. Interestingly, the 40-49 age group was also the greatest user of the school. The age group 30-39 was the greatest user of the play area. The age group 80+ used the facilities the least, though the age group 15-19 was only marginally ahead, confirming the comments made elsewhere that there needs to be more facilities for teenagers.

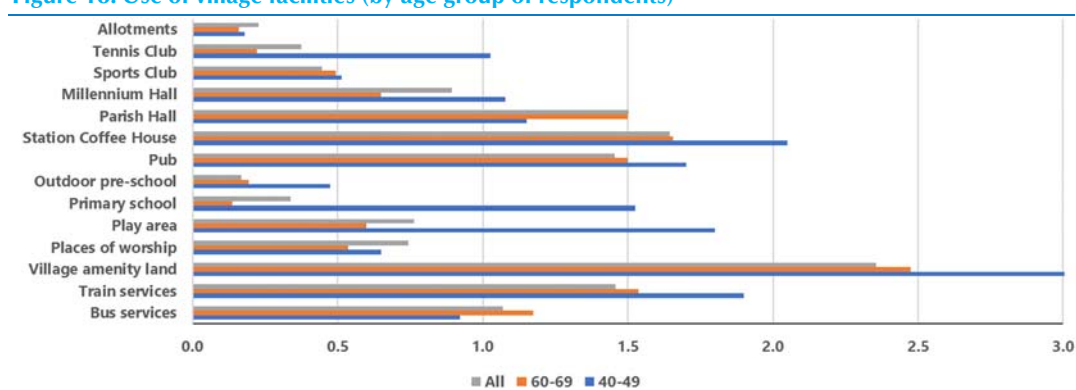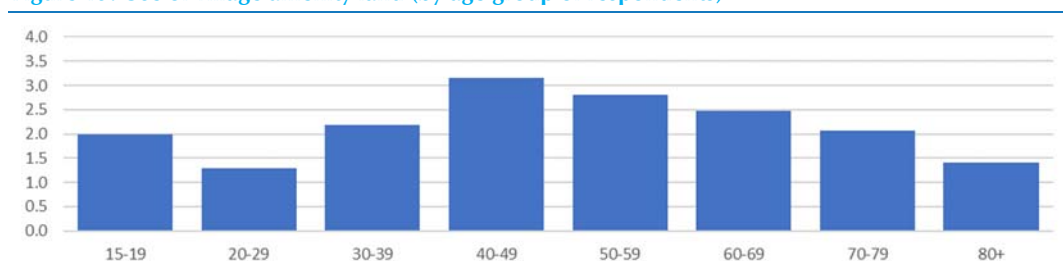**Figure 18: Use of village facilities (by age group of respondents)**

Figure 19: Use of village amenity land (by age group of respondents)

Respondents were then asked about the need for additional or improved facilities (scored on a scale of 0-3). It seems that those aged 20-29 attach less importance than other age groups to every possible facility except parking! The two facilities seen as most important are to improve are broadband and the shop. It is rather disappointing therefore that very few people from the village responded to the invitation late last year to participate in a government funded pilot for 'gigabit' broadband. There is a desire for post office facilities in the village (see Figure 20).

There is also a desire for more facilities for teenagers and clubs for those aged under 18s. Whilst this view is shared by those aged 15-19, they regard improving the village shop and improving broadband as more important. There is not much support for additional outdoor activities, either allotments or outdoor exercise equipment

Figure 20: Importance of additional or improved facilities (by age group of respondents)
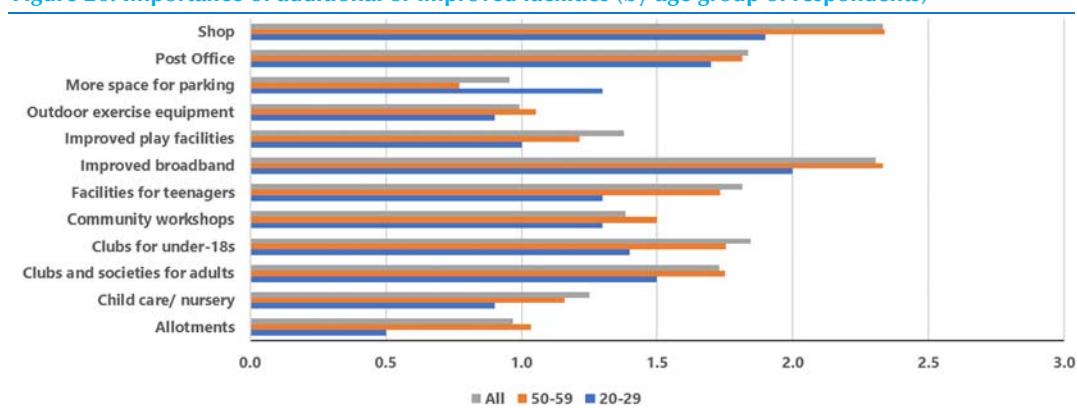
4.4 Communications

Word of mouth and the Riding Mill Parish News (with 72% of respondents saying that they use these sources) are the main sources though the village notice boards are well used (with 66% of respondents saying this is a source) as well. It is notable that, with the exception of the parish website, women use all the methods more than men. Other methods included social media, occasional e-mails, the station coffee house, local whatsapp groups and the church.

Figure 21: Finding out about what is happening (by gender)
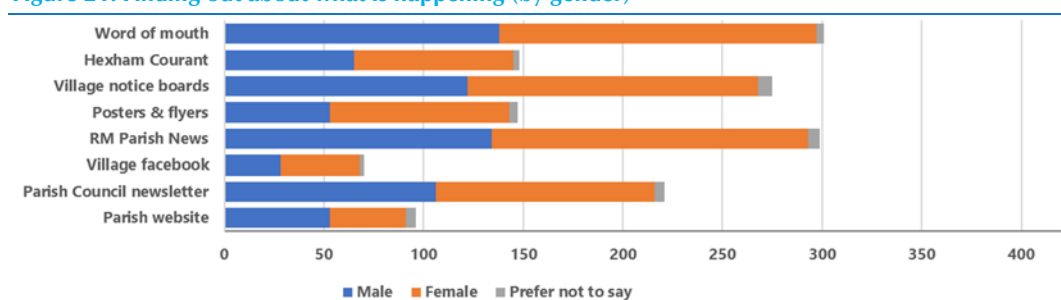
Respondents were asked if they thought that there was a need to improve communications from the Parish Council to which the response was a resounding no. Only one respondent, out of 319 who answered this question, thought communications needed to be improved. Respondents were, nevertheless, very happy to give ideas and suggestions on how to improve communications. These included making better use of the website; increasing the frequency of the Parish Council newsletter to quarterly; and more use of social media and e-mail (with several people asking for there to be e-mail distribution of the Parish Council newsletter). Whilst not in the remit of the Parish Council, several people suggested that the Riding Mill Parish News could be improved. Several respondents asked for there to be more publicity on how to access Parish Council meetings and there was a suggestion for there to be a notice on each of the notice boards describing all the village's communication methods.

4.5   Employment opportunities

Most respondents (60%) did not feel that there was a need for more employment opportunities – except for students where 67 per cent were keen that there should be more employment opportunities.

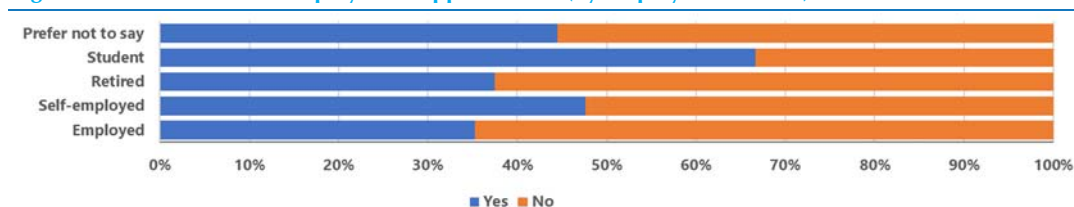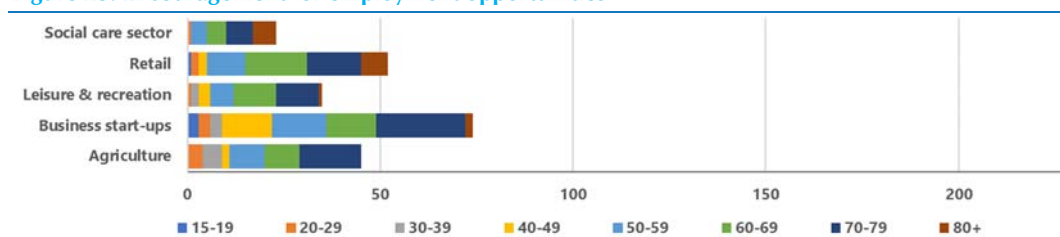**Figure 22: Need for more employment opportunities (by employment status)**

Figure 23: Encouragement for employment opportunities

Respondents were also asked to suggest the type of opportunities that should be encouraged. Business start-ups came top, followed by retail and then agriculture. Despite the aging population, social care was ranked last. Further ideas included have a cycle hub and persuading Northern Rail to allow more bikes on to the trains. Attention was drawn to the fact that many people are now working from home and that this will open up new opportunities. One respondent referred to Roe House and Stocksfield Hall and suggested that Riding Mill could potentially have a similar provision. Another respondent observed the need for improved broadband which will support local business activity. Overall, however, even amongst those in favour of additional employment opportunities, was a desire not to change the character of the village.

4.6   Renewable energy

One question was included in the survey to gauge households use of renewable energy. Some 40 per cent of respondents reported that they sourced at least some of their energy from renewable resources with a further 42 per cent saying that they did not and 17 per cent not knowing. Several respondents returned to renewable energy in the general comments, asking for the village to do more.

4.7 Other comments

The invitation to give other comments provoked some very positive comments, such as "thank you for all the work done by the Parish Council and volunteers – you are doing a really good job", as well as others which, whilst well meant, were critical of activities undertaken by groups other than the Parish Council. Comments included:

Climate change is the most pressing issue we face. Parish council can help locally but also by encouraging Northumberland County Council to approve planning applications that prioritise environmentally friendly buildings or building modifications including allowing double glazing in listed buildings, requiring solar panels on new builds.

Local energy generation schemes would be good.

The Wellington owners should be asked to smarten up their premises and car park area- it. really brings the village down.

Whilst some development is probably inevitable and there are identifiable spaces, I think it is very important to maintain the character and scale of the village. It is generally a tranquil village and long may this continue.

If there is new housing then it would be great if this could be affordable to young families - it would increase the number of children in the school from within catchment and even up the ageing demographic of the village a bit.

A footpath linking up the top of the old A68/High Shilford up along the A68 to the High Plains Road would be brilliant - it would create a number of fantastic circular routes.

It would be great to have some village renewable energy e.g. solar on the Parish or Millennium Halls.

The fundamental in any future development is protecting the green belt. Otherwise, I feel the whole reason that we moved to Riding Mill would be void. We moved here as we wanted to walk in the countryside in green open spaces.

In terms of any new developments, the area that may have less of an impact could be the fields to the side of the A695 either on entering or leaving the village.

A footpath between Riding Mill & Corbridge along main road – should have been done years ago.

Affordable housing in the village as children born and raised here cannot afford to buy or rent in Riding Mill.

Would the Parish Council consider setting up a community orchard and provide a pressing and bottling service, please.

Too many HGvs are now using the village as a route to Hexham. Riding Mill is a rural village but the noise, volume and pollution of traffic is making it an unpleasant place to live.

All new buildings should be constructed to maximum energy efficiency, that is, passivhaus standards.

With climate change, would be good to have electricity generation locally.

Please make sure that the green belt is protected now and for the future and that any new development lies within the agreed area, that is, the eastern edge of the village.

I would greatly value development of cycle paths up/down the Tyne valley.

I would like the Council to have greater powers to oppose developments like Fold House that threaten our landscape and ecology.

More than one respondent e-mailed additional views. One stressed the need to sketch out our preferred 'use' of all land within the Parish continuing with the thoughts that the Parish could aspire to create an access path along the Tyne to the A68 and under the bridge to link to north and to the west to Corbridge, or that we want a community orchard, or a commercial plantation so that there is some sort of future income for the PC. The same respondent also suggested setting up an endowment fund for the village – so that people could leave legacies in their wills – with the purpose being to promote the natural landscape by buying up land when the opportunity arises and then planting with trees etc.

Another mused on the scope for removing tarmac from the main road, especially on the wide junction with Whiteside Bank and whether a change in the streetscape could both make the main road more attractive visually, slow down the traffic and make it safer for pedestrians. More trees and hedges along the road and, for example, around the sports field would support more wildlife. Another respondent wondered whether there were lessons for Riding Mill that could arise from the 'Smart Villages' initiative (see beasmartcommunity.wordpress.com/sustainable-villages/).

5. Conclusions & next steps

The village survey attracted a response rate of more than 50 per cent which is generally regarded as an excellent response rate for a survey. There was a high level of unanimity around many of the issues facing the village. Perhaps the biggest challenge, however, will be resolving the tension between those villagers who perceive a need for more housing and those who would rather that the village did not grow at all.

The next step will be to create a small number of working groups to take forward various aspects of a potential plan, with a focus on the built environment (especially housing), the natural environment, the local economy, climate change, transport and streetscape and leisure and recreation. The results will then be combined into a draft neighbourhood plan which will be shared for the purposes of further consultation.