Your Quality of Life Community Report

December 2022

Contents

Overview

Harlow and Gilston was designated as a garden town by the Department for Homes, Communities and Local Government in January 2017. The coming together of five councils with a common purpose is part of a new chapter for Harlow and its surrounding areas. In total, 16,000 new homes will be delivered by 2033, with a further 7,000 planned for the Gilston area to be built from 2033 onwards.

The Quality of Life Foundation, supported by Rainbow Services, has been working with Harlow & Gilston Garden Town to map what local people value and need in their local area through a public digital consultation called 'Your Quality of Life'. The consultation, open from 15th July to 14th October 2022, gave local people the chance to pin comments on a digital map, as well as fill out surveys online and at pop-up events. The Commonplace consultation platform can still be visited here: qolmap.commonplace.is.

This project focuses on people's quality of life in the town and surrounding areas and is part of ongoing efforts to ensure the health and wellbeing of current and future respondents is protected and promoted to the highest standard. By combining existing information about the local population with comments made by individuals through consultation, the five local authorities will be better placed to assess the impact of any changes that may occur over the coming years.

This project is also part of a concerted effort to involve more local people in decisions affecting their area. Harlow & Gilston Garden Town's five council partners are committed to involving communities, both now and in the future, and in ensuring approaches are accessible and inclusive. However, the Garden Town is aware that there is further to go in providing meaningful engagement that allows communities greater influence on shaping policies, plans and strategies. The Quality of Life Foundation's role has been to support and champion local people, so the insights that we have gathered – and the learnings and recommendations within this report – will form an integral part of Harlow & Gilston Garden Town's (HGGT) ongoing engagement programme.

We would like to thank the public for taking time to complete the surveys and meeting us at local pop-up events, as well as for taking time to read this report. We value all of your contributions and comments. To keep updated with all things HGGT, please sign up to the newsletter: hggt.co.uk/have-your-say.

The Quality of Life Foundation

Key terms and frequently asked questions

What is meant by 'quality of life'?

We define quality of life as a person's physical, social and psychological wellbeing. By placing more emphasis on health and wellbeing, we can create better places for people to live in. For this project, we have used the Quality of Life Framework, with its six key themes, to paint a full picture of your life and experiences across: Community, Control, Health, Movement, Nature, and Wonder.

1 | Control

2 | Health

3 | Nature

4 | Wonder

5 | Movement

6 | Community
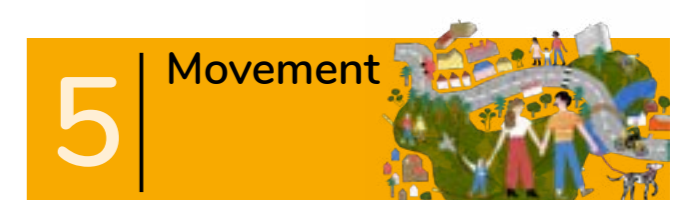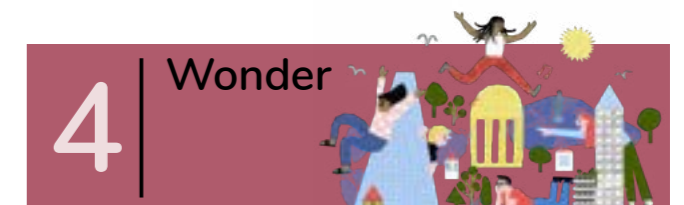
What is meant by social value?

When we talk about social value and the built environment we are referring to the UK Green Building Council's definition: *"... social value is created when buildings, places and infrastructure support environmental, economic and social wellbeing, and in doing so improve the quality of life of people."*

What is stewardship?

When we talk about the built environment, stewardship is about ensuring the long-term care of people and places. This is often talked about as assets – spaces, buildings and infrastructure – but there is a wider acknowledgement that this should be holistic and include community-led approaches.

Harlow & Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) defines stewardship as the *"inclusive, proactive and responsive planning, placemaking and care of* *public assets alongside ambitious community development practices to ensure that the environmental, social, and economic benefits of the Garden Town can be enjoyed by present and future generations, equally."*

Adapted from *Place-keeping, Open Space Management in Practice*, by Nicola Dempsey, Harry Smith, Mel Burton (2014), and based on the HGGT Stewardship Principles & Objectives (2022)

What is masterplanning?

According to the HGGT's Sustainability Guidance: *"A masterplan is the process by which organisations undertake analysis and prepare strategies, and the proposals that are needed to plan for major change in a defined physical area. It acts as a context from which development projects come forward for parts of the area."*

Masterplanning is the process of creating a comprehensive plan to solve an issue or reach a best-case scenario. In this context, masterplanning refers to the process of designing the current and future layout of an area and often requires thinking with a long-term (10 years+) perspective.

What were we hoping to do?

- **Engage in ways that are meaningful and inclusive.** This is to build local relationships, ensure processes are accessible, diversify the way people take part and influence things, build a picture of different points of view, and show good practice.

- **Gather good quality and usable data around quality of life.** This is to shape local policy and guidance, to put forward ideas for masterplans and development, and to make stewardship count.

- **Develop a quality of life framework.** This is based on health and wellbeing, for now and future years, to measure and monitor the quality of growth and stewardship.

- **Create a high quality project.** Show local authorities how good communication and engagement are done, where the approach is trusted and actions taken or decisions made can be explained.

- **Scale up impact.** Share insights and approaches to engagement and monitoring to support a better quality of life, health and wellbeing in other communities as well.

What has the project achieved so far?

The project has delivered:

- **A digital map and survey** with data about groups of people that can be used in the future to measure and monitor change.

- **A snapshot of your views on:** what you like, dislike and think about the future for your local area, and your thoughts on Community, Nature, Movement, Health, Control and Wonder.

- **Research with young people** to teach us how we can adopt better communications and engagement practices with them as they are often left out of planning and development.

- **Digital and in-person workshops and events,** to help with our community engagement (now and in the future) and with how we communicate, as well as how we develop places over time across the local authority areas.

What happens to the information that has been gathered?

This data will enable us to assess the socio-economic impact of development and growth in the years ahead and to reinforce the Garden Town's approach to long-term, community-led stewardship and engagement.

The HGGT Board (made up of nominated Councillors across the five council partners) is being presented with this report so the feedback and recommendations from The Quality of Life Foundation can be noted. The next steps will include reviewing the feedback and recommendations, in order to build these into action plans and feed them into local development strategies.

HGGT will also offer this report and other updates to community networks, including the Youth Councils, through newsletters (both via the Commonplace platform and local ones) as part of their commitment to being transparent about the process and to keeping the conversations going. There will also be community workshops to share the report, with its findings, recommendations and next steps, and as a way to provide regular feedback.

What's next?

The next stage of this work will focus on creating recommendations for the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town based on our insights and findings. We will then work with HGGT to understand how these can be included or actioned in plans and strategies, to ensure that the HGGT Partnership responds and takes action based on your feedback. Recommendations and plans of action will look to be published by early 2023.

Report highlights

Through the Your Quality of Life consultation there were:

- **7,000 visitors** to the Your Quality of Life Commonplace platform

- **1015 comments** to the map and completion of surveys

- **554 individual respondents**

- **365 news subscribers**

- **49 in-person pop-up events** across the Garden Town

Who responded?

As part of the survey we asked local people to answer some optional demographic questions and here is what we captured about those who took part.

- 16% of people were from **ethnic minority and under-represented** communities

- 19% were **under the age of 34.**

- The most active age group on the platform was **55 to 64 who made up 23.5%.**

- Those who engaged with the survey were **far more likely to have or exceed Level 3 qualifications and be in full-time employment.**

- **45% of people worked for small or medium enterprises (SMEs)** with 42% working for large companies (250+ employees).

- **66.5% of responses were from women** who engaged with the survey the most, compared to a 51% female local population (Census 2011).

- **8.7%** of those who engaged in the survey **identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual,** which is over twice the overall national estimated percentage.

- **41% said they had a disability or illness** that impacted their daily life.

What did we find out?

Sense of belonging and public space

- People are satisfied with living in Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas
- People feel like they belong to their immediate neighbourhood
- People feel like public spaces and the town centre could be better maintained

Arts, cultural and social facilities

- People in Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas are highly engaged with local cultural and heritage sites
- Respondents are generally dissatisfied with the current provision of local services and amenities in their area
- Respondents have noted the need for investment into local social infrastructure

Parks and green spaces

- Parks and green spaces in Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas are especially valuable to local respondents
- People are split as to whether the maintenance and upkeep of these spaces is satisfactory

Influence and participation

- A lot of people feel like they can't personally influence decisions affecting their local area
- People feel very strongly about the future of the town and its surrounding areas
- There is a strong desire to have a say in influencing what happens in the future, especially when it comes to regeneration and development

Transport and getting around

- People are generally dissatisfied with buses and public transport connections
- Walking and cycling were rated better, although these two options were scored neutrally across the survey

Regeneration and growth

- Respondents are concerned about the negative impact that the expected growth of the town could have (increased traffic, littering and anti-social behaviour)
- People are also concerned about the future of the green spaces as the area continues to grow

Introduction

The Quality of Life Foundation and Rainbow Services were asked by the Harlow & Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) local authority partners to map what you – the people of Harlow, Gilston and surrounding areas – think about your quality of life. The HGGT is doing this so they can better understand and share your views and thoughts about what you like, dislike and need. They will use this information to help shape future plans for your homes and neighbourhoods, making sure local people play a vital role in planning and decision-making now and in the future.

What did we do?

From 14th July to 14th October 2022, we engaged with the local community, both online and face to face. We wanted to make sure that local people had their voices heard and that every opportunity was taken to engage with as many of you as possible, in order to be truly representative of your communities and reflecting the diversity of the area.

The main way of gathering people's opinions was through the 'Your Quality of Life' platform, run by our partner Commonplace. This meant that you could comment about your own wellbeing and day-to-day life, spanning our six quality of life themes: Control, Health, Nature, Wonder, Movement and Community. The open platform was a chance for you to also see what other people said and to 'like' their post(s). The survey is now closed but you can still access the platform and see all of the comments left for this survey's duration.

To find out more visit: qolmap.commonplace.is.

What's it like to live in your local area?

... TAKE PART AND YOU COULD WIN £100 IN VOUCHERS.

SCROLL DOWN to click and comment on the map, take part in the survey and view themed questions. Any comments you leave will be anonymised.

Give your views about where you live and work to help shape future plans for Harlow, Gilston and surrounding areas.

15th July - 14th October 2022

Your email will be used to contact you about project updates. You can unsubscribe at any point. Please read our privacy policy.

Our engagement methods were varied and combined in order to support local people to get involved in different ways, including:
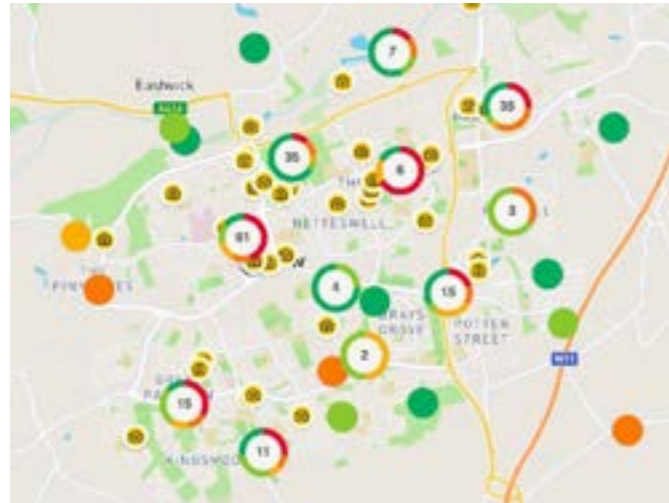
Digital

· Digital comment map
· Digital themed surveys
· Community newsletters and WhatsApp groups
· Targeted Facebook and Instagram advertising
· Platform email newsletters
· Promotional videos and posts linked to social media campaigns

Face-to-face

· Weekly pop-up events in different locations
· Workshops and drop-ins targeting different areas and groups

Printed

· Flyers, banners and posters (directing to the digital survey platform)
· Physical printed surveys and map (pinned comments)
· Adverts in local magazines and media

What was the purpose of this?

By understanding what you said about what you currently value and need, the evidence will support:

· **Good practice and tools:** how the councils can learn from the engagement approach, as well as understand digital, printed and face-to-face opportunities, barriers and accessibility.

· **Influencing how plans are taken forward:** to build new homes, create new communities, and support regeneration (known as development strategies).

· **Growth plans:** current and future planned growth (known as masterplanning).

· **Empowering people to have a say:** on how their homes and neighbourhoods are created and managed (known as stewardship).

· **How changes are overseen:** to quality of life and social value in communities (known as a monitoring framework).

· **Shaping the future:** and the work in community engagement, including questions asked to the public, how quality of life data is gathered, and how this is made accountable and democratic within planning.

Digital comment map

Weekly pop-up events in different locations

Flyers, banners and posters

Physical printed surveys and map

How was this project funded?

This project was funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, a department in His Majesty's Government.

The funding enabled HGGT to put local people centre stage to be part of the future of the local area. This is part of HGGT's commitments in:

- **Informing:** to raise awareness about the project and how important it is for communities to get involved and shape the future.

- **Involving:** to make the most of opportunities and avenues for communities to be involved.

- **Empowering:** to build collaborative relationships with communities and play an active role.

- **Engaging:** to create meaningful, inclusive engagement, prioritising and enabling underrepresented groups in decision-making through stewardship design, planning, delivery and management.

Funding for this project helped to set standards for the HGGT to carry out consultations, with a digital engagement angle that is meaningful and also enables underrepresented groups to be part of decision-making.

In addition to this, funding also provided funding to develop methods for measuring and monitoring quality of life based on six key principles of healthy growth and stewardship:

1. Placemaking and homes
2. Economy and regeneration
3. Landscape, ecology, blue and green infrastructure
4. Sustainable movement
5. Public health
6. Social value and culture

What survey sources did we use?

For this survey, questions were pooled from a variety of sources to help us build a survey that captures thoughts and opinions about the local area whilst allowing us to compare the findings to national survey data:

- Sustrans
- Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
- Office for National Statistics
- Natural England
- Department for Transport
- UK Government Disability Unit

Summary of community consultation

The engagement approach was inclusive and not a 'one size fits all'. This enabled us to engage with local people and groups in ways that were specific to their needs and interests, while also offering a range of opportunities for them to get involved.

What did the project achieve?

Here is a snapshot of what we did, what came out of this, and the difference it has already made.

| What did we do?	What has come out of this?	What difference has been made so far?
Hybrid ways of enabling people to get involved: • Online and face to face • Across all local areas • Via local activities with a range of groups and networks.	• Increased awareness of and community involvement with the HGGT project • Councils learning 'good practice' engagement approaches in communities, as well as the different methods people engage with.	• Local people being part of conversations, sharing opinions and experiences • A chance for the public to discuss local quality of life issues • Councils learning from and working with local organisations, respondents and groups.
Workshops with the Harlow and Epping Youth Councils.	2 sessions with a sample group to capture the insights of 30 young people, with feedback about the platform, communications materials, and their ideas about what would engage their peers.	Involving more young people in the Your Quality of Life project and therefore more local planning.
2,700 flyers distributed in areas where there is low digital access; 184 posters put up; 13 banners popping up in different areas.	7,000 people visiting the platform; 1,015 people contributing to the map and survey; 553 responding individually.	More people getting involved to share their views through the survey and platform, which gained momentum and grew throughout the project.

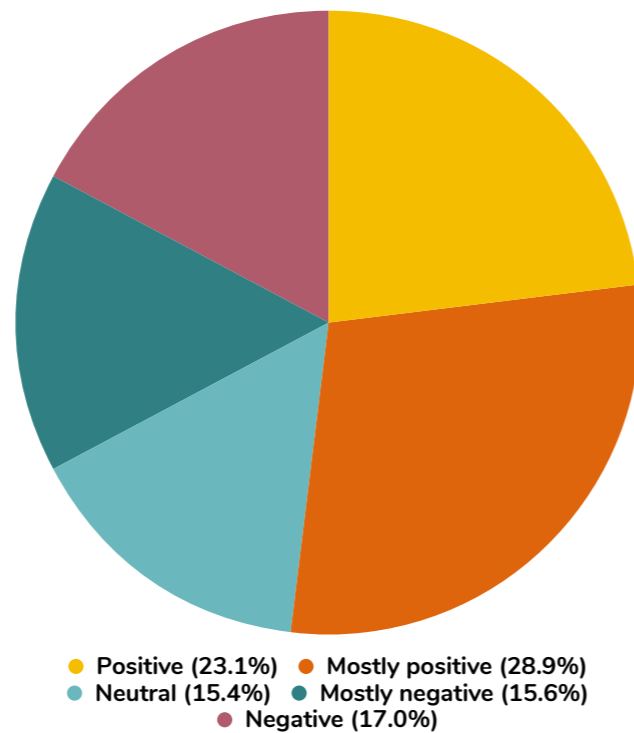| What did we do?	What has come out of this?	What difference has been made so far?
49 pop-up events and weekly drop-in sessions across Harlow, Gilston and Epping areas.	429 people attended the sessions.	Joining forces with and making new local networks, including community groups and organisations.
7 local newsletters, as well as weekly ones via the Commonplace platform.	Creating QR (quick response) codes and UTM (unique tracking links) for posters, flyers and banners.	Tracking allowed us to see if, and where, there was a good spread of community engagement across the area.
Social media: • Facebook – 21 campaigns • Twitter • LinkedIn	A highlight was the bespoke content from Harlow resident "Lord Dave", aka David Simmons from the BBC show, The Ranganation. This produced 70,000 impressions and almost 1000 clicks to the Commonplace platform page. Overall, approximately 179,000 people saw the project at least once across the 12-week period on Facebook.	Despite Facebook attracting more visitors, people using Twitter were more likely to actually complete the survey or comment on the map. Women aged 25 to 54 were the most likely to engage with social media content.
Speaking at local forums e.g. Voluntary Sector Forum and Harlow Business Forum.	Representation from 15 to 20 local VCSE organisations at the Voluntary Sector Forum.	Raising awareness amongst community stakeholders. It was key in setting a clear purpose and message for the project.
Local community researcher job roles.	Employment of two local young adults.	Building the skills, confidence and knowledge of individuals. Training them to use the platform, carry out surveys, and pin comments on the map with the community. Local people speaking to other locals, including young people speaking to their peers.

Mapping your feedback

Feedback received over the engagement period covered a broad area in and around Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas. Red indicates negative comments, amber indicates neutral, with green showing the positive comments.

Your feedback
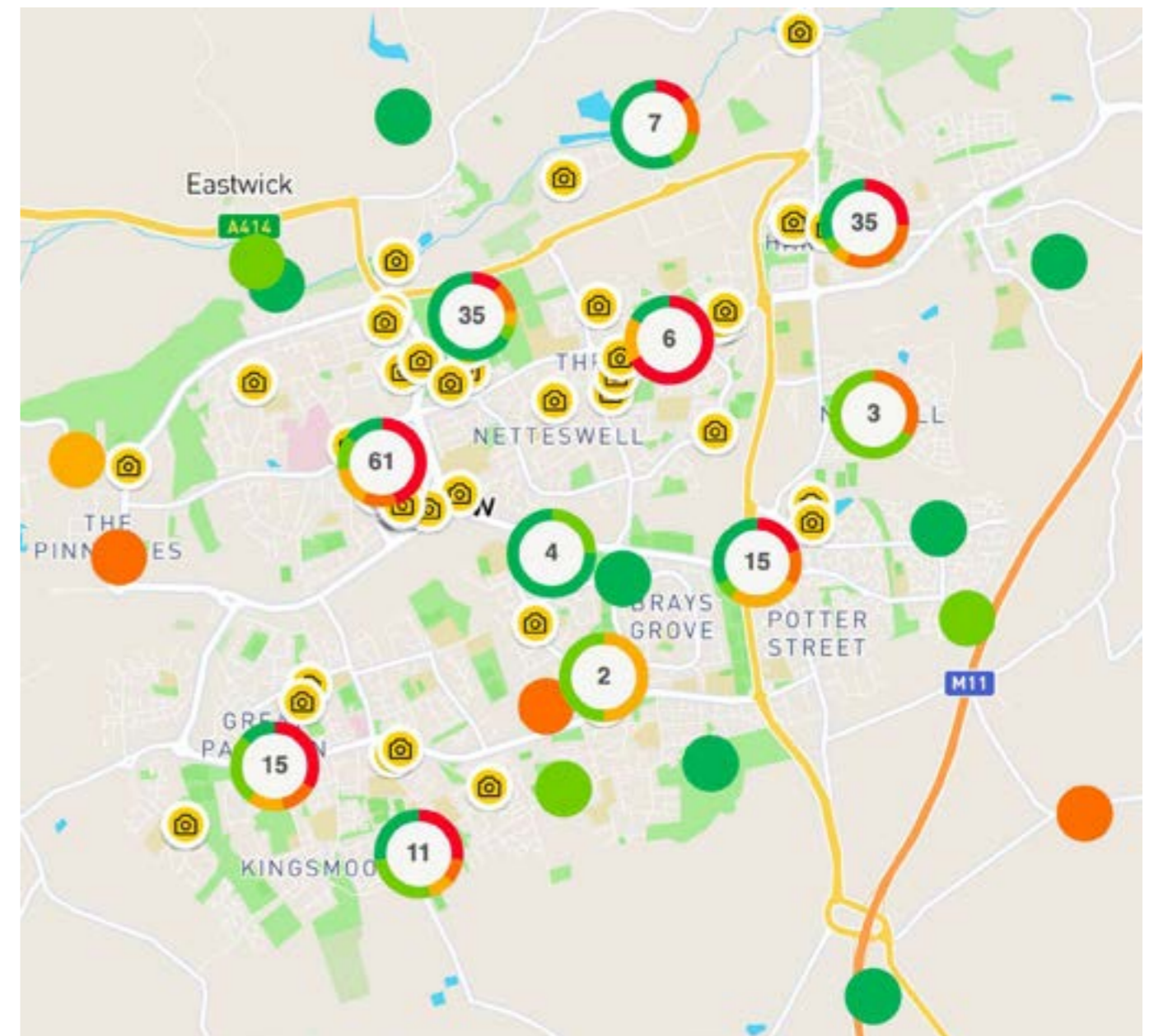
What was the general feeling?

Across all responses for this survey, **52% of people reported positive sentiments** when asked about their thoughts and feelings about the area, compared to the 32.6% that were generally negative. This represents a good starting point for the Harlow & Gilston Garden Town area.

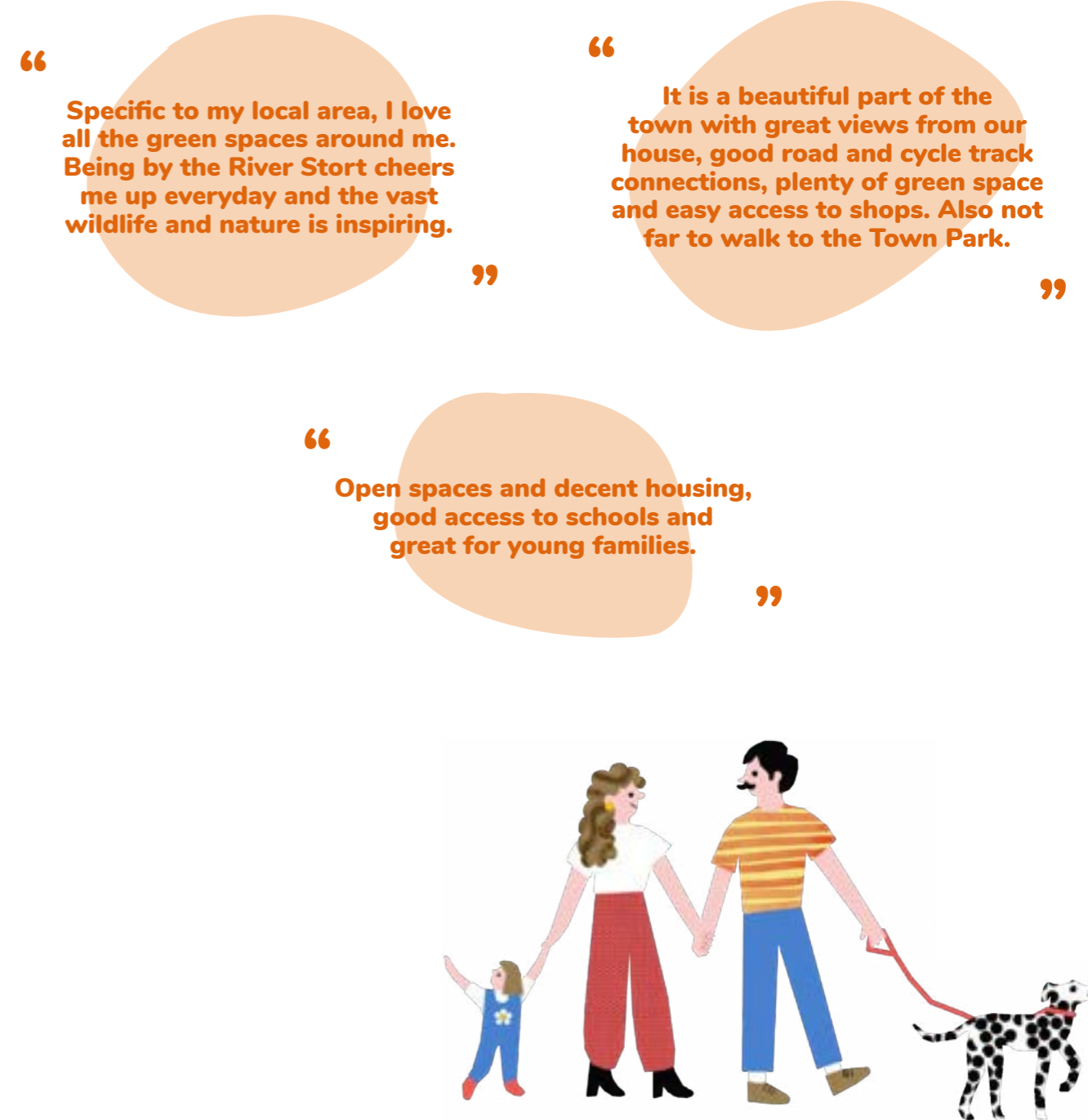**A sliding scale was used to communicate the strength of respondents' feelings across the survey.**

- Positive (23.1%)
- Mostly positive (28.9%)
- Neutral (15.4%)
- Mostly negative (15.6%)
- Negative (17.0%)

We asked you what you liked about your local area. Most of the comments positively highlighted **parks and green spaces,** with a focus on how **many** there are and their **nearness to the town,** namely Harlow Town Park and Harlow Common. Your comments also focused on **access to shared community facilities;** local people noted the ease of access (in terms of proximity) to doctors, shops, libraries and schools.

> **Specific to my local area, I love all the green spaces around me. Being by the River Stort cheers me up everyday and the vast wildlife and nature is inspiring.**

> **It is a beautiful part of the town with great views from our house, good road and cycle track connections, plenty of green space and easy access to shops. Also not far to walk to the Town Park.**

> **Open spaces and decent housing, good access to schools and great for young families.**

What did people say they liked about the area?

church location country library opportunities proximity living things
centre sculptures activities places woods paddling transport
doctors epping rural paths sense people plenty distance lovely feel
peaceful close easy quiet great area countryside amenities years
diversity road community like it's open local links
having stort harlow space cycle london family
beautiful walk schools nearby
need walks walking park green good shops river
pleasant garden spaces parks lots train
nature town tracks areas wildlife
station love it's friendly nice access live m11
residents place neighbours neighbourhood trees street village facilities greenery
shopping housing fields small generally safe wonderful time doorstep high convenient

A word cloud collating responses to the question: "What do you like about your local area?"

What did people say they disliked about the area?

When asked about your dislikes, you emphasised issues around **car parking.** These issues tended to have a wider impact on behaviour, with some people saying they prefer to stay inside out of a concern that they will not be able to find somewhere to park should they go out. These comments went hand in hand with concerns around decaying **road surfaces** and **potholes,** in addition to disagreeable parking practices that have become widespread in residential areas.

> It can get a bit cramped for parking, but I think that is the way things are, due to everyone working and or needing more than one vehicle. There are pot holes in the main road to our area, plus a few scattered around that keep coming back (which if fixed properly might last longer then the quick fill fix).

> Too many multi-occupancy houses, causing parking issues, rubbish waste, people parking on grass areas and pavements, also creating dangerous exits from junctions. Inconsiderate drivers racing up and down the road all hours backfiring, playing loud music.

> Too many cars parked on residential estates on both sides of the road that are a fire hazard. A fire engine would never be able to get through in an emergency. Parking on pavements is also a nuisance.

Anti-social behaviour was also a concern. Comments highlighted thinking that some teenagers are behind this and noted the **absence of any meaningful affordable alternatives for entertainment,** alongside the availability of covered and sheltered spaces where groups of young people are able to congregate. More specifically, people also noted the condition and visibility of **drug use** in their local areas and in town centres. Issues around **littering and general upkeep** of public spaces were also discussed, often being tied in to comments about anti-social behaviour.

> No youth facilities, antisocial behaviour, nuisance neighbours, lack of parking.

> Violence and crime in the town centre, drug dealing and taking around the bus station and underpasses as well as other small shopping centres around the town. Demise of the high street and Harvey Centre, derelict Odeon and empty shops. Lack of safe places to cross busy roads with the alternative being underpasses that aren't always safe to use.

> Unfortunately with many bush areas around it is easy for people to hide that want to commit crime. I speak from experience. You have to weigh up the aesthetic of an area to safety. Also cut back bushes by roundabouts to make a clear vision for oncoming traffic.

Despite the majority of people feeling positive, on the whole, about living in and around Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas, only around half felt they were satisfied with the local facilities and services available.

68.5% of respondents felt 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with their local area as a place to live

The future of Harlow, Gilston and surrounding areas

When asked about what was important to you, as respondents, in terms of the **future** of your local area, the majority of responses identified **green spaces** as a priority. These comments were about the need to **protect** green spaces from future housing development. Comments also noted the importance of preserving and protecting **the River Stort.**

" **For it to stay the same, not get over-built and to maintain the green spaces.** "

" **Reducing non-essential motor traffic and parking-induced congestion. Retaining the green areas and recreational facilities, managing them as sustainable resources.** "

Following on from this, you also felt that greater importance should be placed, in future, on **the regeneration and revitalisation of Harlow Town Centre,** alongside investment in **social infrastructure and amenities.** This theme fed into the issue around future developments in the area, where respondents often highlighted the **decline** of existing facilities and raised concerns about the potential impact of developments on issues such as **traffic, the environment and social infrastructure.**

" **Investment in the public sphere, keeping paths, cycle tracks, shopping areas, etc well maintained and looking nice. Good schools, doctors surgeries and shops in the area.** "

" **More leisure/recreational use of space mixed in with low-level shops. Need to create more social spaces, both indoor and outdoor, with associated facilities, like Spurriers.** "

" **Well, you've already built on the Green Belt land so I think you've done the worst thing already. I worry about all the people who have lived here for decades, like myself, in relative peace, with relatively good, clean air, who will now have to breathe in more fumes, live in a less desirable area, and struggle to see their own GP or dentist because thousands more people have moved into the area and have to use the same services, as no new ones have been provided. What was an attractive area is now an eyesore. We thought we would live here forever but not now.** "

Pop-up events at the 'Around the World Food Festival' in Staple Tye and the Harvey Centre in Harlow town.

Your Quality of Life

Your 'quality of life', and what makes your life happy, active, sociable, interesting and meaningful, is of course influenced by what's around you. The Quality of Life Foundation uses six themes to help measure these factors, with the aim of recommending practical and tangible steps to make a positive difference to people's health and wellbeing.
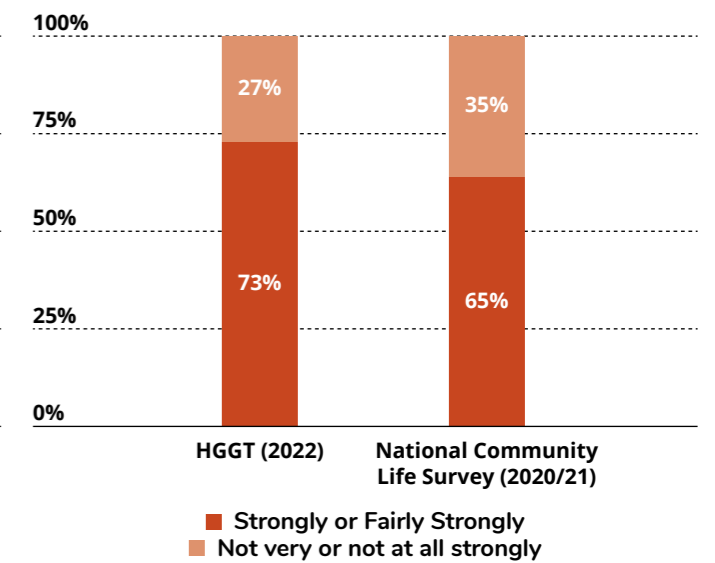
Community

There are many different ways that someone can experience a sense of community or belonging. It's about whether you feel 'at home' where you live; how diverse and inclusive your area is; and whether it encourages social connections and a sense of neighbourliness. But it's also about neighbourhood design and the services and facilities that people can access.

How satisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?

- ■ National Community Life Survey (2020/21)
- ■ HGGT (2022)
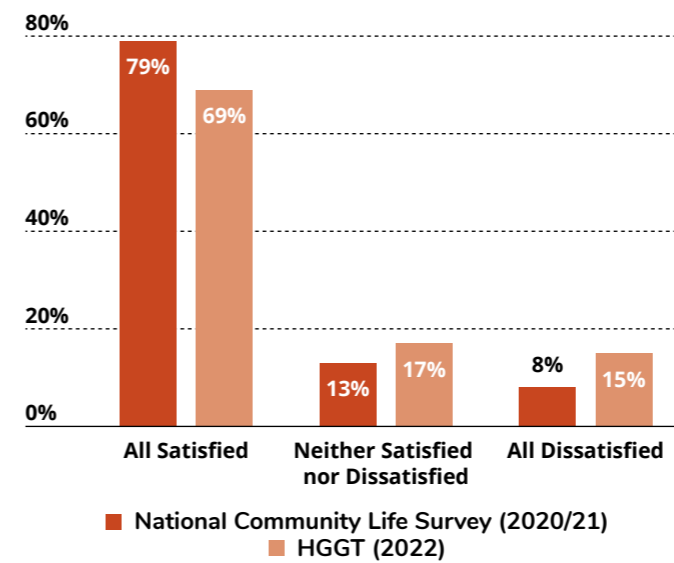
How strongly do you feel you belong to your immediate neighbourhood?

- ■ Strongly or Fairly Strongly
- ■ Not very or not at all strongly

Generally, respondents were satisfied with their local area as a place to live with **69% stating that they were either 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied'.** However, when compared to results from the national Community Life Survey, we can see that people living in the Harlow and Gilston area are generally less satisfied than other respondents nationally.

When it comes to feeling a sense of belonging to the local neighbourhood, a large majority of respondents felt a strong connection. When compared to national sentiment, respondents of the Harlow and Gilston area ranked their sense of belonging higher than the 65% taken from the Community Life Survey (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2020/21) findings.

80%
of respondents aged 24 to 35 and 64+ felt that they 'Strongly' or 'Fairly strongly' belonged to their immediate neighbourhood

51%
of respondents felt 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with the local services and amenities in their area

Nature

Connections with nature and access to diverse green and water spaces are important to our sense of wellbeing. This includes spending time in natural environments, living in green neighbourhoods and near places such as parks and woodlands, as well as helping to create and care for them.

How would you describe your parks, gardens or green spaces?

Comments you made about parks and green spaces were mostly positive, with 46% of comments being of a positive nature. These emphasised the **level of care and maintenance** that green spaces and parks are given, as well as highlighting how close parks and green spaces are to your homes and neighbourhoods.

" **Very fortunate to have so many spaces in the Parndon Wood area.** "

" **Lovely and essential to all our wellbeing.** "

" **Very good we live near Netteswell Pond.** "

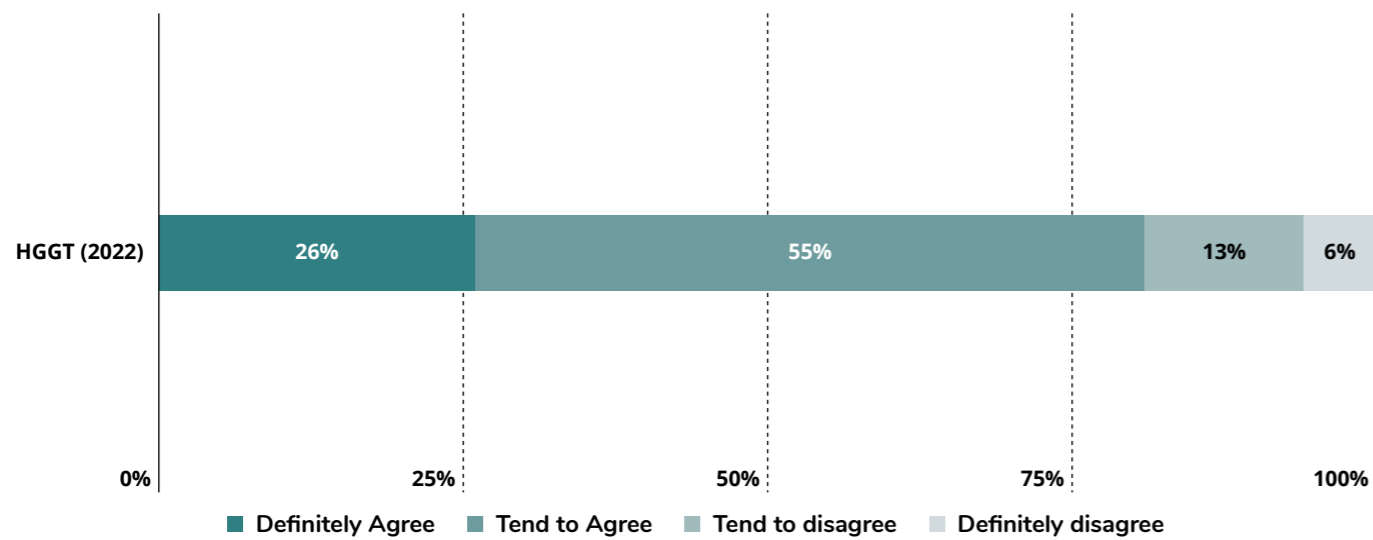" **Wonderful, well kept, clean, tidy, plenty to do and see.** "

On the other hand, comments that were of negative nature included reflections on the **poor level of maintenance,** and highlighted the perception that green spaces and parks are **being given over to development** in the area. The split between your comments about how good or bad green spaces needs to be further investigated, as the comments could be referring to different areas, looking more closely at different areas in Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding area is a key next step.

❝
Under threat.
❞

❝
Ok at the moment but as I say, too much beautiful land is being built on.
❞

❝
Good but need to be better maintained.
❞

"My local green spaces are accessible and inclusive in their design."
(For example: prams, wheeled and seated mobility devices can get in and around these green spaces)

HGGT (2022)	26%	55%	13%	6%

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

■ Definitely Agree   ■ Tend to Agree   ■ Tend to disagree   ■ Definitely disagree

Overall, a majority of respondents felt that they are able to access their local parks and green spaces without any barriers. Taking into account those who identified as having mobility issues, the results show that **76% of those with a disability tended to or definitely agreed** that their local green spaces are accessible and inclusive.
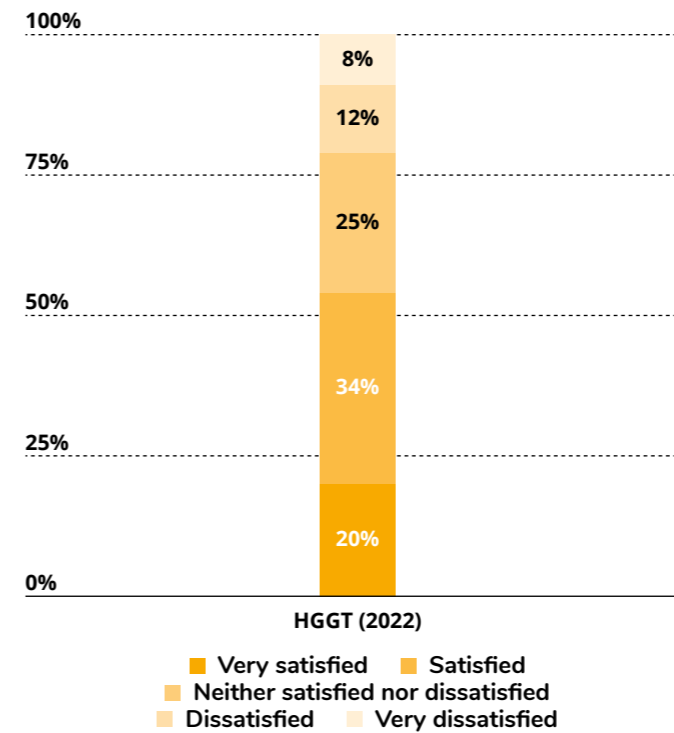
Movement

What form of transport we choose has a direct impact on our health, the air we breathe and our carbon footprint, but also, more broadly, our access to opportunities. In this section, "walk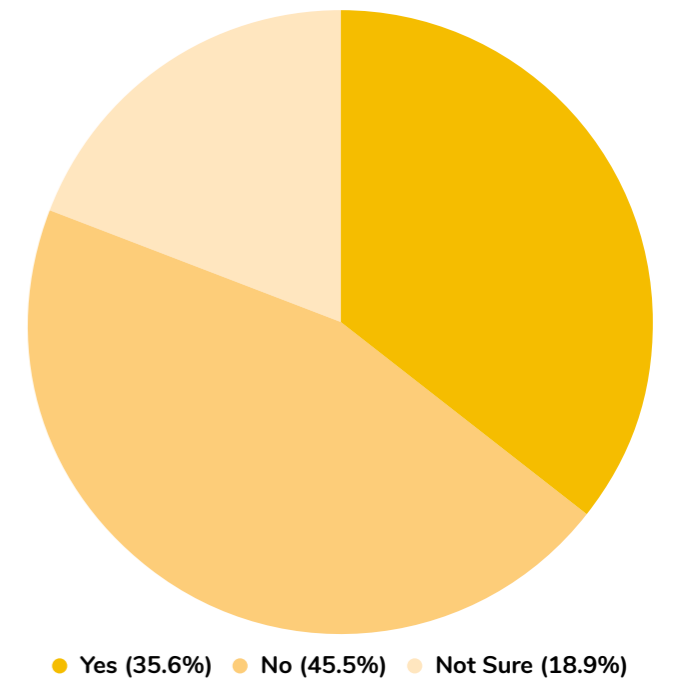ing" refers to any travel by foot, and "wheeling" refers to any travel by wheelchairs, prams, pushchairs, toy cycles, roller-skates, skateboards, non-motorised scooters, or jogging. For this survey, questions around walking also included wheeling to allow for more representative responses.

How satisfied are you with the walking and cycling connections in your area?

100%	
	8%
	12%
75%	
	25%
50%	
	34%
25%	
	20%
0%	

HGGT (2022)

■ Very satisfied ■ Satisfied
■ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
■ Dissatisfied ■ Very dissatisfied

Are you satisfied with the public transport connections to your area?

● Yes (35.6%) ● No (45.5%) ● Not Sure (18.9%)

When asked, **54% of respondents felt 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with their local options when it comes to walking and cycling.** It is worth noting that a significant proportion of people responding felt neutral about their walking and cycling connections. Looking at responses to other questions, this higher proportion of neutral feedback is likely to be based on the positive feelings about the cycle and walking paths around Harlow but is tempered by the condition of these paths. Those with mobility issues felt even less satisfied, with only 33% of respondents from that group reporting that they were either 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied'.

Only a minority of people responding to this survey felt satisfied with public transport connections in their area. Those who indicated that they have a disability were even less satisfied with their public transport connections, with 83% of these saying they were either not sure or not satisfied. Respondents who said they suffered from mental health issues went even further with 100% stating that they were not sure or not satisfied.

What would improve your experience of public transport in your local area?

An overwhelming majority of responses to this question noted the need for a variety of bus routes to either be protected or brought back into service. Most respondents touched on the lack of reliable bus services, with a majority commenting that buses don't follow the planned timetables. Other comments about buses noted the lack of direct connectivity within the Harlow area, with a few noting the need to change buses over the course of a single journey due to current routes.

" **Reliability!! Multiple times waited 1hr+ for a bus that just didn't come and missed out the stop. Cheaper, student options to become available.** "

" **Having a bus route throughout my area. There is none.** "

" **Use nearer bus stops than further away like Peterswood.** "

" **By having a bus route to old Harlow.** "

" **Buses that reach both sides of the town, an easy link to Epping, cheaper trains.** "

" **Bus stops nearer to Berecroft.** "

" **So you cannot get to Bush fair unless you go to town first then onwards. We need transport to Temple Fields shops from our local area.** "

" **Better bus services – cheaper but also running later – e.g. my son plays badminton in Chelmsford weekly and could get there by bus but not back again after 8.30pm.** "

Health

The places where we live and spend most of our time greatly affect our physical and mental health and wellbeing, which in turn impact our quality of life, as well as the health of the environment.

How does your local area affect your mental and physical health and wellbeing?

Many people responding reflected on how **neglected spaces and visible degradation** of the town made any mental health issues that they may be suffering from worse. Comments that were neutral-to-negative mostly did not expand on the reasons, but those that did usually referred to generally **low spirits** and the perceived **lack of leisure activities.** On the other hand, **access to quiet and green spaces** was directly cited as a key positive influence on both mental and physical health. Some of these comments, however, included a caveat – that these green spaces are not being protected in forthcoming or recently completed development in the area.

> **Our physical environment has a big impact on a person's mental and physical health. When there is dog poo, rubbish and rubbish dumped everywhere, it is another reminder that the community is not valued. It gives us the message that we don't matter.**

> **The visible degradation promotes despondency. It is very depressing to see a town in decline, especially when it is home to so many. It makes me want to give up. No one seems happy when you pass them. Immediate environment has a massive effect on mental health. This town causes depression and health problems, look around the town: it's clearly true.**

> **It definitely helps to have green spaces and quiet areas of houses to keep good mental and physical health.**

> **I like we are a short walk distance away from woods which helps my mental health and cycle paths help as well.**

> **I suffer from severe mental health issues and depression. I don't go out on my own but being fairly quiet round here makes me feel better.**

How are people encouraged to have healthy habits in your local area?

Responses to this question were mixed. Though some acknowledged access to **cycle paths, green spaces and community organised walks,** they also noted the **lack of local and, even more so, affordable gyms.** Consistently,

the main barrier to access healthy lifestyle choices was **affordability,** both in terms of exercise and diet options. Where affordable food options are available, they are typically identified by respondents as fast food restaurants.

" Private or public transport is needed to get to the main facilities. Local shops with limited supplies are within 20 minutes walking distance. "

" There are a number of different community groups e.g. walking groups, cycling groups, running groups. "

" I wouldn't say there's much healthy food options but you can see this is something trying to change as a new cafe had opened which is popular that does healthy food. "

" Cycle paths are great but need more maintenance. Lots of green space and easy access to the countryside. "

" Sports facilities are good but only if people can afford it. Free facilities such as tennis courts are available although not always maintained. Cycle tracks and wide walking paths are helpful. There isn't really many healthy options for eating out. Healthy food choices in shops can often cost more than snacks full of sugar and fat. "
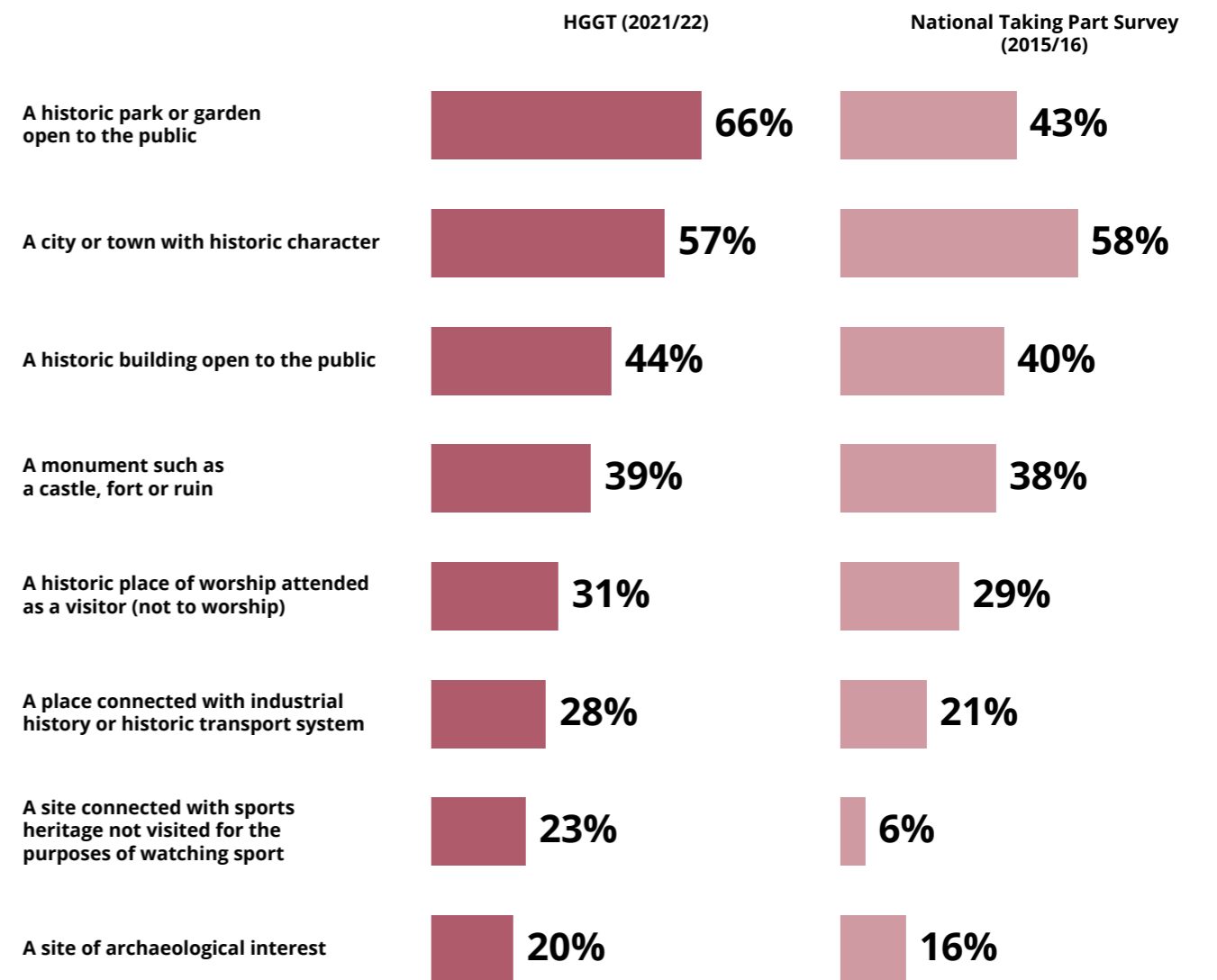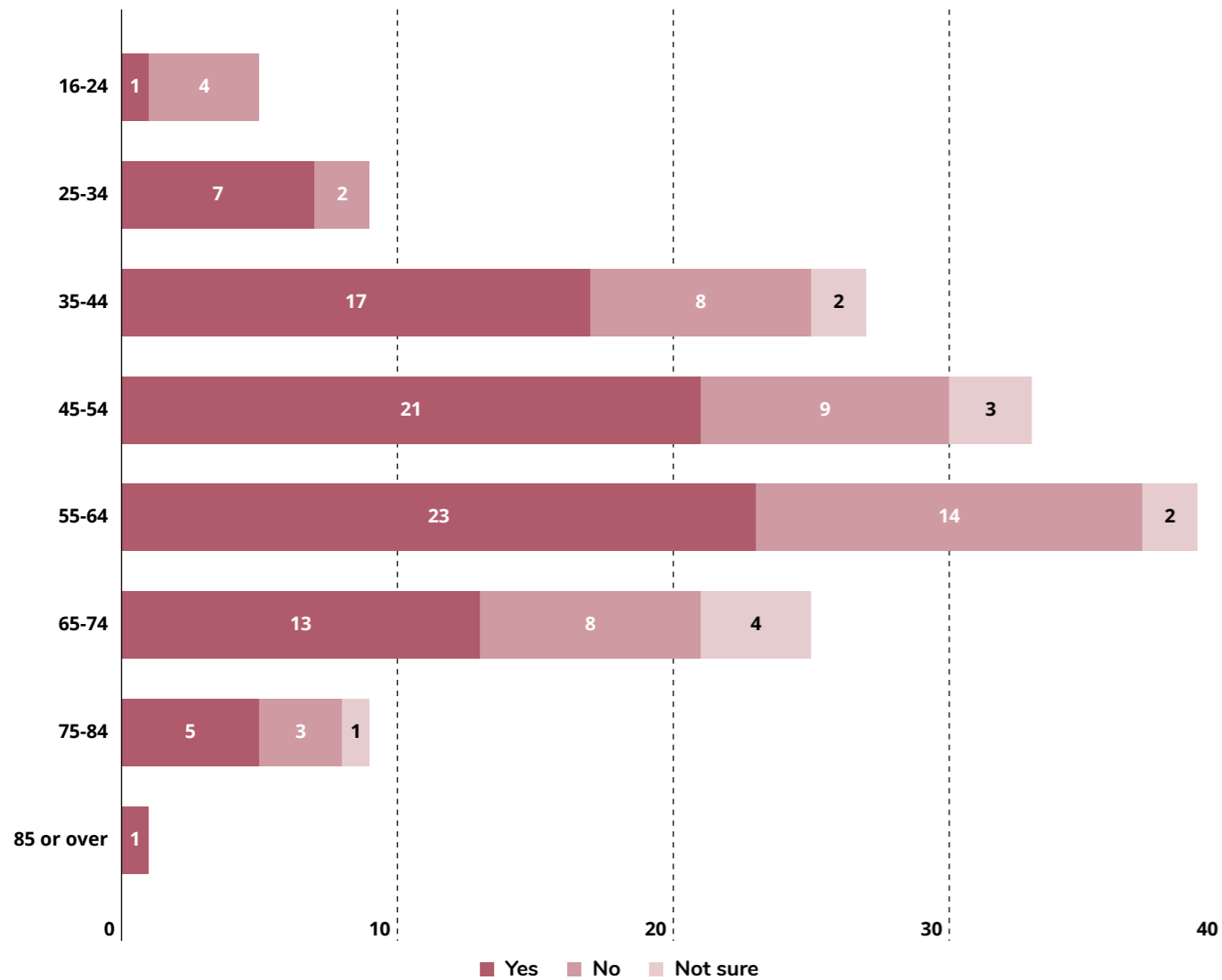
Wonder

When neighbourhoods offer a range of things to see and do, there are opportunities to be delighted and surprised by new encounters that bring inspiration and a sense of wonder into our lives. Arts and culture as well as community pride and a sense of play all have a key role to play in this.

In the last 12 months, have you visited any of these places?

	HGGT (2021/22)	National Taking Part Survey (2015/16)
A historic park or garden open to the public	66%	43%
A city or town with historic character	57%	58%
A historic building open to the public	44%	40%
A monument such as a castle, fort or ruin	39%	38%
A historic place of worship attended as a visitor (not to worship)	31%	29%
A place connected with industrial history or historic transport system	28%	21%
A site connected with sports heritage not visited for the purposes of watching sport	23%	6%
A site of archaeological interest	20%	16%

In general, we can see that the people of Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding area tend to be more active and engaged when it comes to visiting heritage and historical sites. In particular, historic parks and gardens seem to be popular places to visit.

Do you engage with the local arts and culture? *(For example, local sculptures, music and markets)*

Age	Yes	No	Not sure
16-24	1	4	
25-34	7	2	
35-44	17	8	2
45-54	21	9	3
55-64	23	14	2
65-74	13	8	4
75-84	5	3	1
85 or over	1		

■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

In general, **60% of local people said that they do engage with the local arts and culture** facilities. Looking at the breakdown of responses based on age, it becomes clear that 80% of people aged 16 to 24 do not engage with these . However, across all other age groups there was a majority of people stating that they do engage with local arts and culture.

Although younger people felt, proportionately, that they didn't engage with their local arts and culture amenities, 60% of those who responded aged 16 to 24 agreed or strongly agreed that their local area offers people of all ages opportunities to enjoy themselves.

52%
of respondents 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that their local area offered people of all ages the opportunity to enjoy themselves
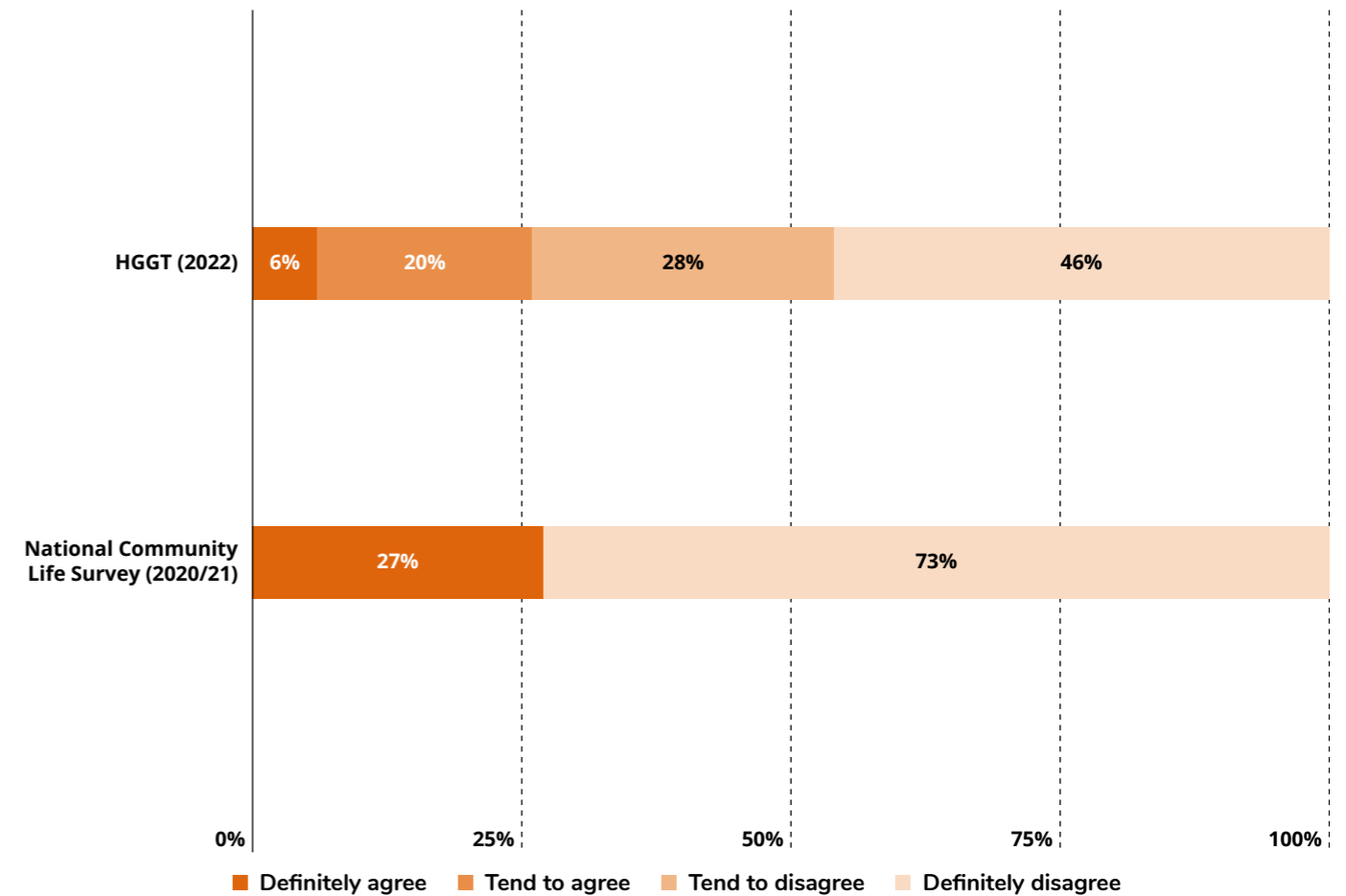
Control

To have a sense of control, we need to feel safe in all aspects of our lives and stable in our homes, jobs and living situation. We also need to feel that we can influence our own circumstances in life and have a say over issues that affect us.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that you can personally influence decisions affecting your local area?

HGGT (2022)	6%	20%	28%	46%
National Community Life Survey (2020/21)	27%		73%	

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

■ Definitely agree   ■ Tend to agree   ■ Tend to disagree   ■ Definitely disagree

In Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas most people tend to not feel able to have any real impact on the decisions affecting their local areas. Responses to this question closely match those collected in national surveys on the same topic. However, more people in the 16 to 24 age bracket felt strongly about this, with **90% responding that they don't feel able to have any influence on their local area.** This is significantly worse than the national average of 73% of those in this same age bracket (Community Life Survey, 2020/21).

What would help you feel more able to affect change or decisions in your local area?

The majority of people who responded to this question referred to a **lack of points of engagement with the local council.** It is key to note that across all comments there is a clear **need to be heard,** with many respondents stating that current consultation programmes and events are either **rushed or not advertised enough.** Going further, other respondents also mentioned that they did not feel as though the local councils **listened to their feedback or concerns,** with a handful referring to the approval of the **decisions to build new homes** and road infrastructure in the area directly in their answers.

> " It would be helpful if I could believe that the people who form the council, and staff would actually listen to the respondents. Not dismiss our suggestions and actually do something positive & very visible. "

> " By keeping updated by local councillors on local things. Now we don't have a local newspaper like The Star or Harlow Guardian, it's hard to get information. Facebook updates are good. "

> " A citizen's assembly, a broader range of political representation within the council. "

> " I feel that the local politicians are not easily accessible. "

> " An understanding of how the local council incorporates policy from the national level into a long-term local civic plan. How do they propose to help respondents prosper? Where is their planning, their working out? Are they leading, following, indifferent or incompetent? Show us the charisma of your office and paint us a picture of the future that we can get behind. "

At this present moment, do you see yourself living in your area long-term? (i.e. 5 years or more)

Although a majority of people who answered stated that they do see themselves living in their area for the next five or so years, looking at the breakdown of responses by age presents a different picture. For example, **54% of 16 to 24-year-olds responded 'No' or 'Not Sure'** to this question.

If 'No' or 'Not Sure', what factor would make you consider moving?

When asked about what factors would lead to respondents choosing to move away, most responses centred around **the anticipated growth of Harlow, Gilston** and surrounding areas. Comments around **developments and increased density** also tied in concerns around **rising amounts of litter and anti-social behaviour.** Other factors touched on a **lack of amenities,** such as local shops and cultural facilities.

57%

of respondents saw themselves living in their local area long-term
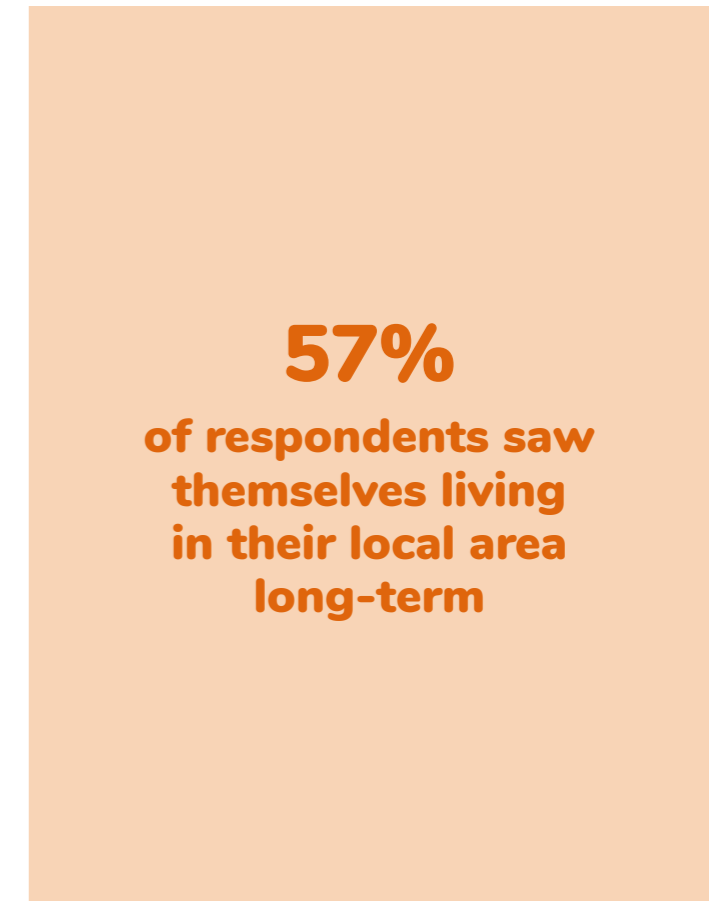
> " I do not want to see the town grow any larger. I fear the garden town development will lead to a them and us community. I do not want to be part of that. The town will just be a place to drive through, therefore making congestion worse. "

> " Just to have that more village feel, or close knit area. I think that what Newhall is achieving with the coffee shops whereas Staple Tye feels more like a place for anti-social behaviour, and is always a place covered in litter from all the fast food places. "

Reflections

Sense of belonging and condition of public spaces

Generally, people reported being satisfied with living in Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas and felt like they belong to their immediate neighbourhood. However, people also felt that there was a clear decline in the upkeep of Harlow's town centre and public spaces across Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas. In this vein, comments around the condition of roads and cycle paths highlighted the need for maintenance and investment in those areas. Some people also reported that the condition of the public spaces and infrastructure in these areas has a negative impact on their mental wellbeing, while comments concerning healthy lifestyles have referred to a lack of affordable gyms and food options. However, having options for community walking groups was mentioned as a positive factor by a small group of respondents.

Arts, cultural and social offer

Whilst respondents of Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas have a high level of engagement with cultural and heritage sites, there is a need for a wider provision of arts, cultural and social amenities in the area. Respondents reported feeling generally dissatisfied with the availability of local services and amenities in their local area. Going further, comments concerning antisocial behaviour were often accompanied by an acknowledgement of the lack of facilities or activities that cater specifically to young people. This begins to highlight how certain issues could be mitigated through investment in social infrastructure.

Parks and green spaces

The parks and green spaces in Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas were repeatedly mentioned as an essential part of life in the area, contributing greatly to the community's mental and physical wellbeing and providing much needed respite. These spaces, comments noted, are accessed by all and incredibly important to the community. Opinions were split as to whether these spaces were well maintained. Others also said that they were concerned about the future of these spaces, as Harlow continues to grow.

Influencing their area

The people of Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas feel very strongly about the future of the town and want to play a big part in it. When it comes to influencing decisions about what happens in their area – especially relating to future developments and regeneration – respondents felt strongly about the lack of clear and direct lines of communication to the council and participation in its decision-making mechanisms. This was reflected in the high percentage of people who said that they don't feel like they can personally influence decisions affecting their local area and is especially the case for younger respondents, aged 16 to 24.

Transport infrastructure

Buses and public transport connections were rated poorly by survey respondents. In addition to this, a disproportionately high number of people with mobility issues especially reported that they were not satisfied. People who use buses noted a lack of reliability, high costs and poor connectivity across Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding area as key barriers. Walking and cycling, on the other hand, scored relatively neutrally. Of those who did respond, the condition of cycling paths around Harlow was noted as a barrier.

Regeneration and growth

When thinking about the future, respondents of Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas are apprehensive about the impending growth of the town. These concerns are closely associated with the expectation that an increase in the area's population will further exacerbate issues of traffic congestion, strained public services, anti-social behaviour, crime and littering which were noted to be of particular concern in Harlow Town Centre. In addition to this, concerns around the loss of green spaces through this process of intensification were consistent throughout the survey. All in all, these were the main reasons listed by the minority who stated that they would like to move away from the area within the next five years.

We will be setting out a number of recommendations for the HGGT team relating to the insights and findings from the consultation. Through this, we will outline the next steps that we think would allow the Local Authorities to best respond to issues highlighted in the community's feedback. Currently, recommendations are being focused around the following areas:

- Better engagement and communications practice
- Empowering existing communities and community-led processes
- Considering local priorities from the consultation in planning, regeneration and growth.

Better engagement and communication practice with communities and organisations

There were many barriers to engagement reported by the local community, which we came across whilst out in neighbourhoods and speaking to people. This gave us a good understanding of the needs that people have to access information and engage with consultations. Going forward, better engagement and communications practice will help individuals, communities and other locals increase their **sense of control** and embed a greater understanding of **community** in plans and strategies.

Epping Youth Council engagement workshop

Harlow Youth Council engagement workshop

Empowering existing community groups and creating community-led processes

At the intersection of most issues raised by the community is a lack of clear and direct access to the mechanisms that make a difference to their environment and everyday lives. Focusing on empowering groups within the community not only help respondents feel more in control of the future of their communities, but also help directly address the specific issues identified – around transport, anti-social behaviour, maintenance and upkeep, as well as improving the sense of agency and control of the community going forward.

Considering local priorities in planning, regeneration and growth

Thinking thematically, community feedback noted the need for an increase in investment into facilities and matters that relate to transport, leisure, entertainment and healthy lifestyles. Involving the community will be essential in ensuring that the work and strategies addressing these issues are sustainable and respond to the needs of the community as it continues to grow.

What's next?

Now that we've crunched the numbers and carried out our analysis, the Quality of Life Foundation team will be working in partnership with the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town team to develop and action recommendations that speak specifically to the feedback received from you. The next stage of this work will then focus on integrating these recommendations into plans and strategies to ensure that the HGGT Partnership responds and takes action on your feedback. These recommendations and action plans will look to be published by early 2023.

Learnings: Community Researchers

As part of the project we employed local young people to take on an active role as community researchers working on the ground with Rainbow Services Harlow. Together they carried out the engagement work, which went hand in hand with that of the HGGT team. For the local researchers, this role was meaningful to their individual work experience by building their confidence, skills and knowledge. It also supported their educational interests and career aspirations in helping the lives of others in their communities (one studying sociology) and health (one studying sciences for medicine).

"Engagement on this project has been on a large scale. We attended many events over the Summer and spoke to people from so many neighbourhoods. It's been interesting to hear what people value in their local area and what they feel should be improved; there were some clear key themes relating to green spaces, transport and regeneration. Although this was a digital project, the face-to-face engagement worked well and I personally found it the most enjoyable part. Having conversations with respondents allowed us to truly understand people's feelings about where they live, their history with their local area and their hopes for the future and future generations. Following these conversations, we were able to encourage people to share their thoughts by either completing a survey or adding a pin to the interactive map to make sure their voices were heard."

Kate Greer
Project Lead – Rainbow Services (Harlow)

"This role has taught me a lot, especially speaking to the younger generation and learning their views and opinions on the area. The whole project was definitely different from my expectations – it was a lot more interesting and diverse than I was expecting. Being a community researcher has provided me with a lot more knowledge on research and engagement and confidence in myself and in working with the public. It has shown me and others in the public that there are ways to voice your opinion and let your voice be heard, which is a positive."

Emma-Lea Bailey
Local Community Researcher –
Quality of Life Foundation

"I saw people getting hopeful and happy for someone to be listening to their voices about their living situations. There hadn't been such sort of [sic] campaign before this project and also people's voices remained unheard for so long. Moreover, this platform gave opportunity for everyone from every age group to speak and share their needs... I felt the intense feeling of joy and peace while I was listening to people and working for noble purposes of bringing changes and making differences in someone's life; it gave me a sense of that I was actually doing something purposeful and meaningful."
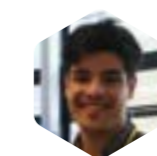
Mohammad Ibrahim
Local Community Researcher –
Quality of Life Foundation