

# Residents' survey analysis



This report summarises results from the Residents' survey conducted November 8th – December, 8th 2023. In addition to 369 Resident survey forms, we have also received 65 responses from Businesses and Landowners and 307 Housing Needs surveys. We are still collating the thoughts of our younger generation through our online survey and collaboration with local primary schools. Findings from these other surveys will be published separately.

Over the next few weeks, we will use this analysis to draft a Neighbourhood Plan Community Vision and Objectives and explore ideas with you further in small discussion groups.



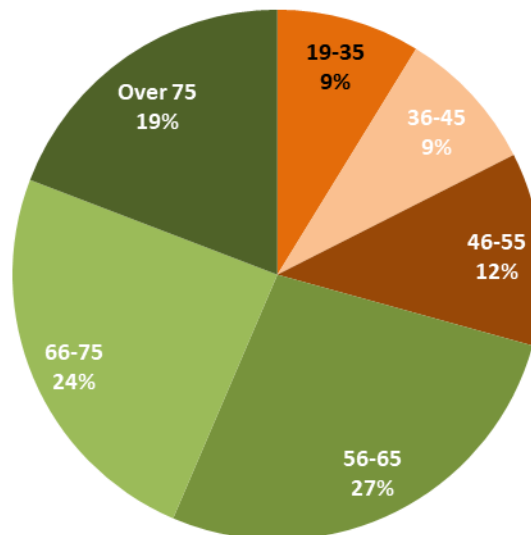
If you would like to take part in these discussions or would like further details on the survey findings or the Neighbourhood Plan in general, please email us at [fwnp@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:fwnp@braintree.gov.uk) or look at our website [www.fw-np.org](http://www.fw-np.org) or follow our page on Facebook.

# Who completed the survey?

***Thank you!***

A big thank you to all of you who filled out our Residents' survey. We received **369** anonymous responses - nearly 1 in 5 of all adults. As many people told us that they chose to complete only one form per house, this could equate to a response rate of 1 in 3 households which is great!

48% of you lived in the centre of Finchingfield or Wethersfield but 52% lived in surrounding villages or hamlets. This is in line with the UK Census.



**Percentage of returns by age group**

70% of returns were from over 55s which is higher than their portion of the population. However, we had good response rates across all age groups and how people answered most questions did not vary much by age.

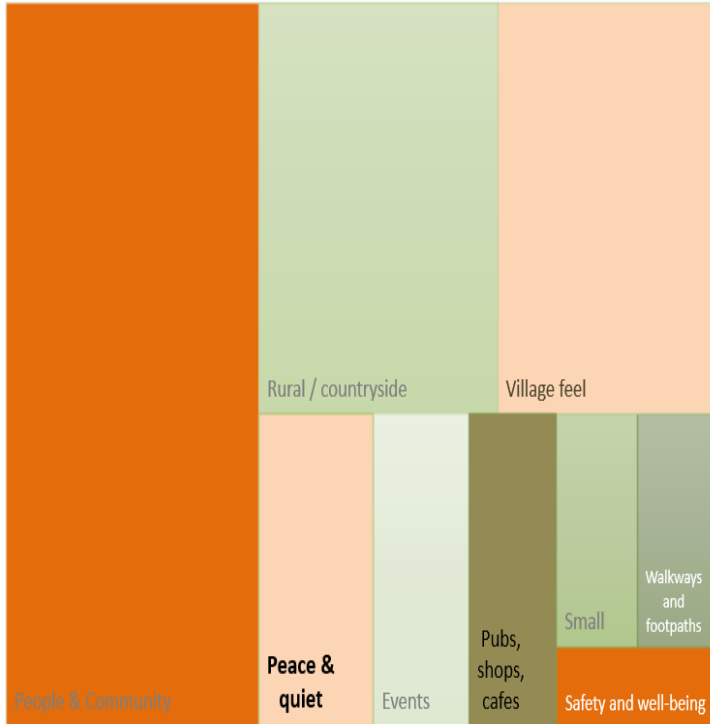
21% of you were self-employed; 31% employees; and the rest were homemakers, retirees or in full-time education. 61% of self-employed people work within the parishes compared with only 30% of employees.

Three-quarters of businesses also filled out the Business survey. Of these, 35% were 'home-based'; 26% Agricultural or Equestrian; and 12% Hospitality or Tourism<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See Resident Business Survey for more details

# What do you like?



**What makes your community special to you?** You most frequently highlighted people and social interaction, 'village feel', events, walks, clubs and pubs, and how our natural rural countryside setting contributes to our feeling healthy and safe.

Responses including words such as 'friendliness', 'neighbours' and 'community spirit', as well as how our well-being and 'peace' and 'quiet' rely on our natural setting were common themes throughout the survey.

## Which public views people value most?

One third felt that all current views were important and that it was simply impossible to prioritise or nominate individual ones.

The fact that nearly half highlighted green and open spaces, fields, and woodland shows once again that our natural environment is important to almost everyone.

Views of buildings, fields, paths, and woodlands are recognised not just for their aesthetic value but also as an essential contributor to our health and well-being.

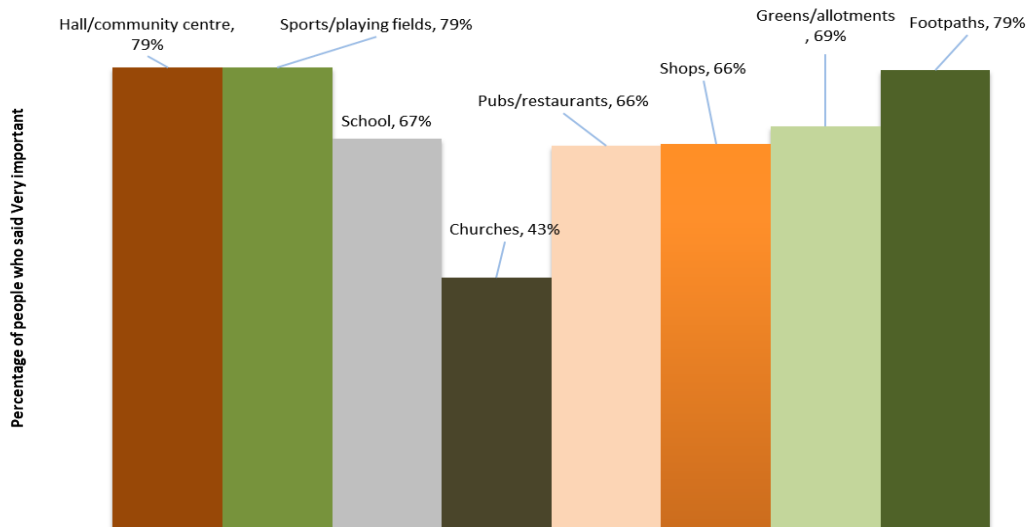
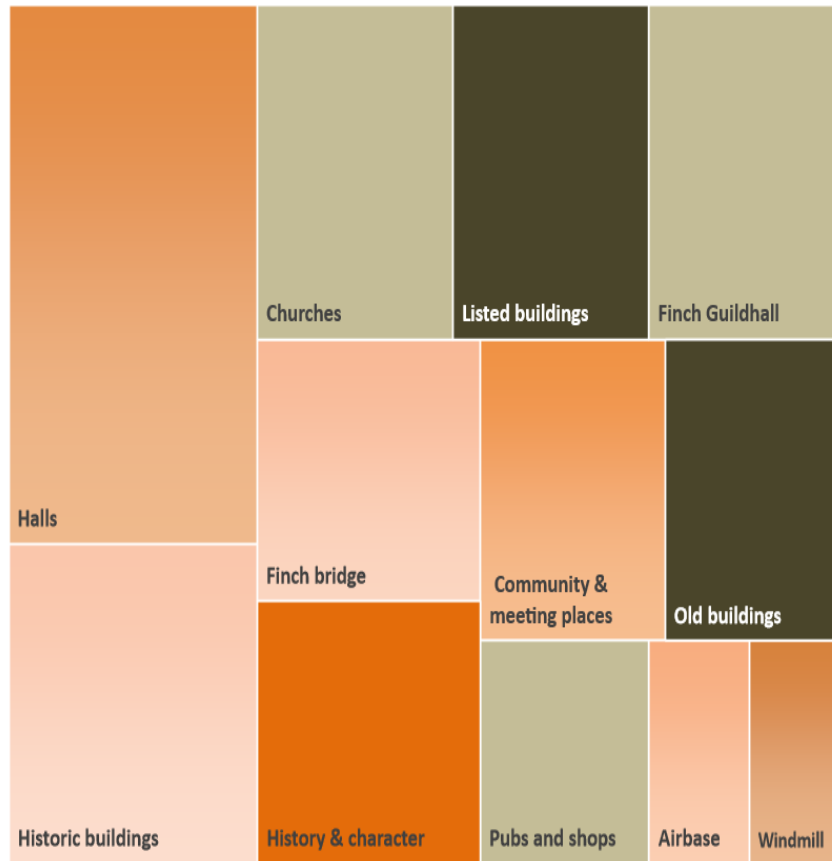


When asked to identify which particular **buildings or structures** that you feel are important, most said all old or heritage structures, including Churches, Pubs and Village Halls even if they did not use them.

Some specific ones, such as Finchingfield's Guildhall and Bridge and the Airbase, featured frequently.

Like all valued structures, they are seen as key parts of the entire community setting.

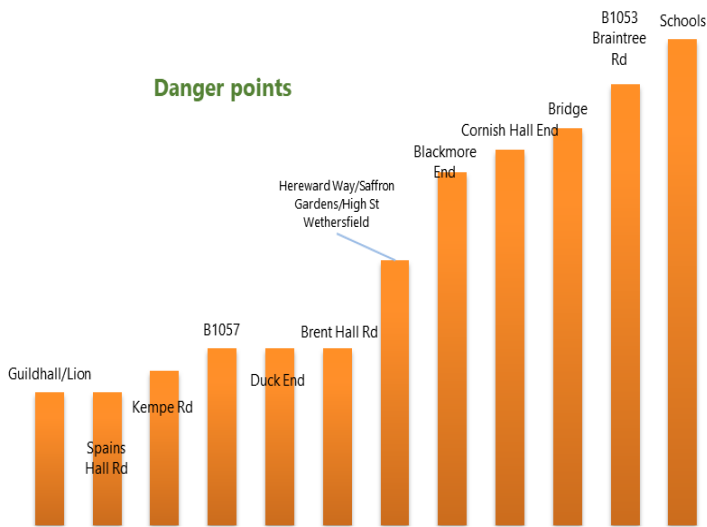
If you remove one, element you detract from the whole.



A wide range of **Community assets** was also seen as invaluable to our health and well-being. The importance of Community centres (to meet indoors) and of footpaths and playing fields (to meet outdoors) was reflected in the very high percentage of respondents who ranked these as very important. Although pubs and shops were ranked slightly lower (or skipped), this may be due to their demise in many parts of our parishes. This fact raised a lot of comments throughout the entire survey as many of our businesses were considered as key communal (not simply commercial) assets to be nurtured and preserved.

# What don't you like?

Precisely because they were valued, many respondents saw scope for improvement of all types of community assets. This included better footpath maintenance as well as better visibility for Wethersfield's Community Shop, renovation of Finchingfield Village Hall and preservation of remaining pubs/cafes (and encouragement of new ones).



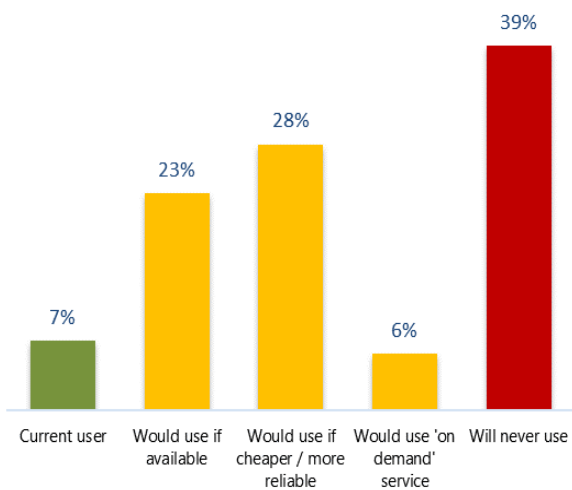
Respondents also saw the growing number of danger points as a threat to our continued enjoyment of outdoor community assets and our health and well-being.

Common complaints included the B1053 and B1057 and routes through Cornish Hall End and Blackmore End. Several junctions, especially near schools, the bridge and Guildhall were also mentioned.

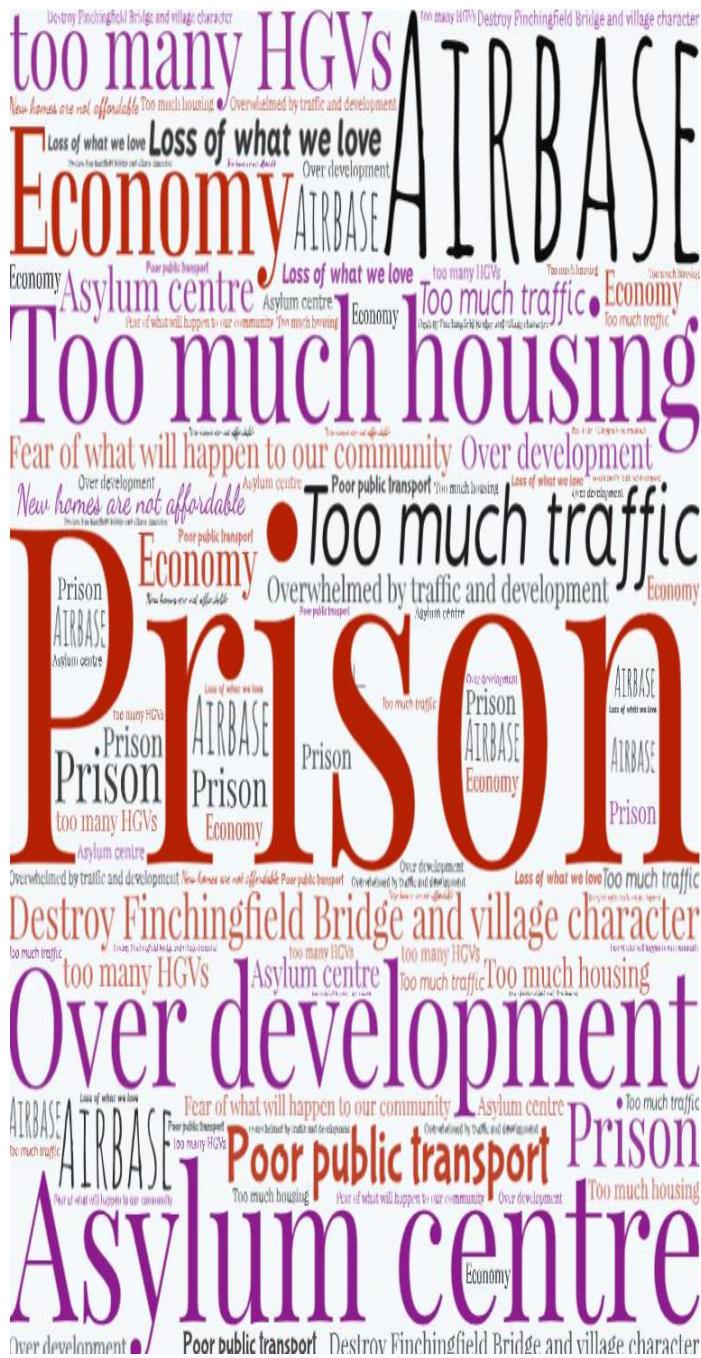
These problems were attributed not just to high volumes of speeding traffic and HGVs but also to poor footpath maintenance and design. Although some of these existing highway issues are beyond the scope of the Neighbourhood Plan, we can make comment and take steps to ensure any future developments do not exacerbate them.

The same is true of **Public transport** where the findings are striking. Only 7% of us currently use public transport. Users are mainly elderly residents in village centres. In part this is due to poor service. 23% said they would use it if it was available and 28% said if it was more reliable and economical.

However, it was clear public transport was not for everyone. There was little interest (6%) in an 'on-demand' service and 39% said they would never use public transport whatever improvements were made.



This was especially true outside village centres and for those under 45 years old but was also true for 26% of over 65-year-olds.



Traffic was also central to people’s worries about the future. When asked about their **main concerns about the next 10-15 years**, respondents frequently expressed fears about the erosion of community cohesion, and damage to treasured landmarks (such as the bridge) and the natural environment through ill-considered excessive development.

These were most amplified regarding the Airbase. Over half of survey respondents saw the current asylum centre and the prospect of a multi-prison complex as the single biggest threat to the entire community’s social, economic, and environmental sustainability and individual and communal well-being.

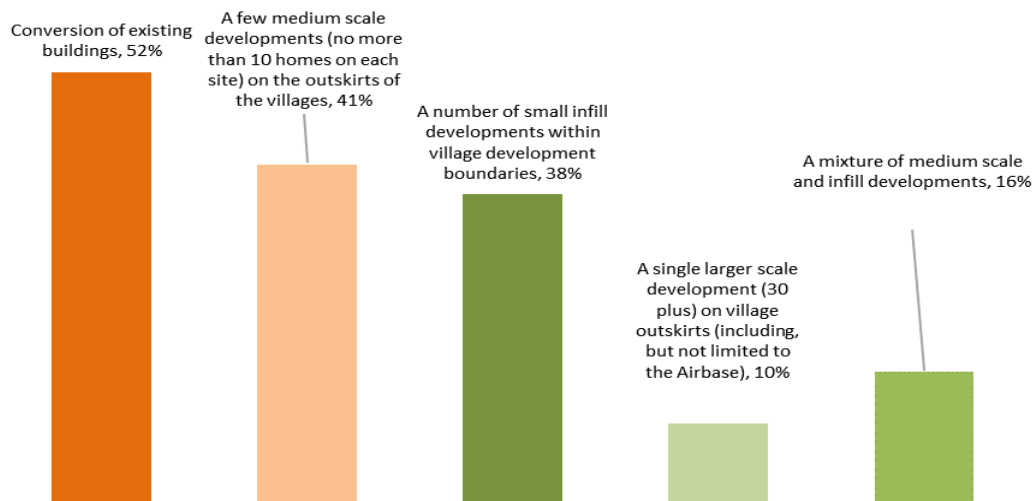
The frequent use of particular words and phrases, such as ‘too many’, ‘too much’, ‘over-burden’, ‘over-development’ and emotive language - such as ‘loss’, ‘destruction’, ‘worry’ and ‘fear’ – suggest deep concerns about the potential erosion of community cohesion and failure to consider the needs of particular social groups, such as the young and elderly.

Residents have told us during Information sessions that the experience of the last few years during which local concerns about the Airbase, Finchingfield’s bridge or housing developments have fallen on deaf ears, has engendered a strong sense of being wronged and a powerful desire for a strong local communal voice.

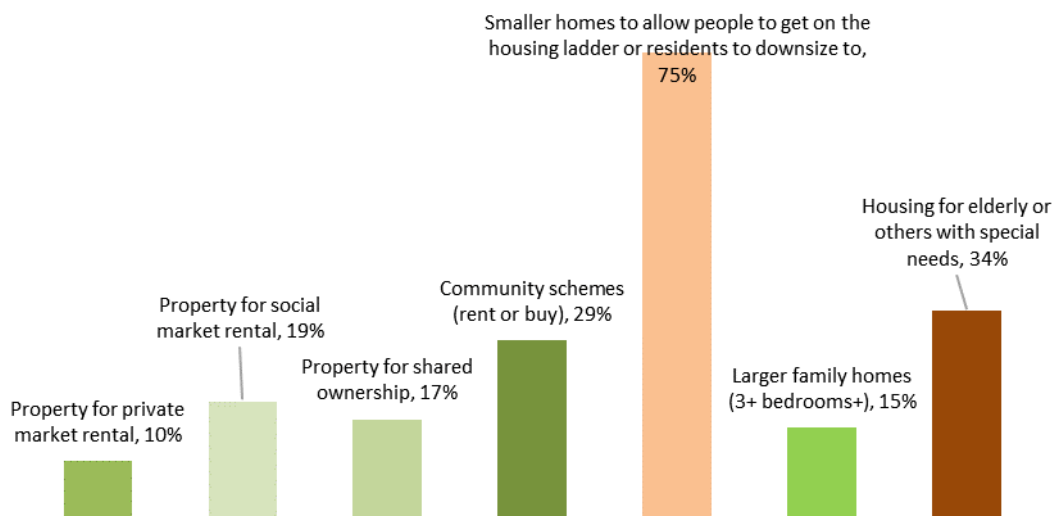
# What about development?

These fears for the future were reflected in answers to questions on development. Many said no development at all and others said housing should be on a very limited **scale** and of a specific **type, tenure, design, and style**.

**Scale:** Conversion of existing buildings was favoured the most and large-scale development the least. Many of those selecting this option nominated the airbase as the only suitable site.

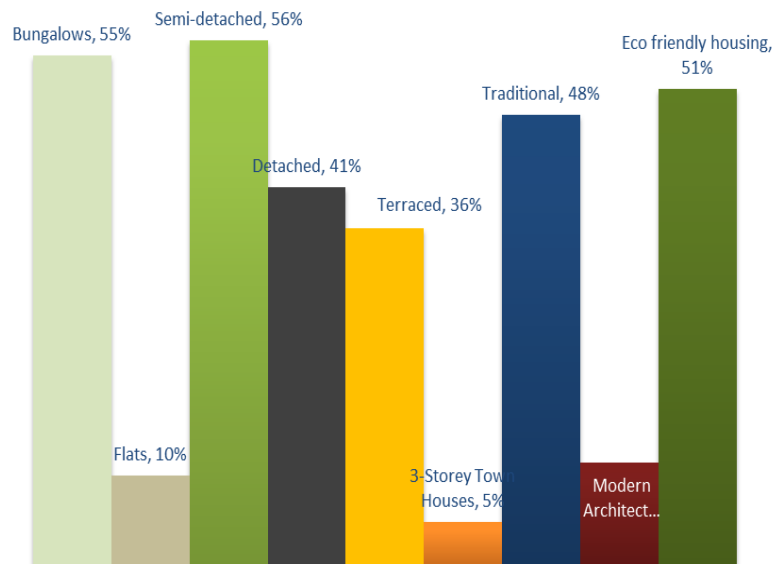


**Type and tenure:** Respondents felt there was a need for smaller, more affordable houses, for younger local people to take a step on the ladder and for others to downsize. This could free up properties at the larger end. There was some support for 'affordable homes for local people' but the precise definitions of communal ownership and affordability require further discussion.

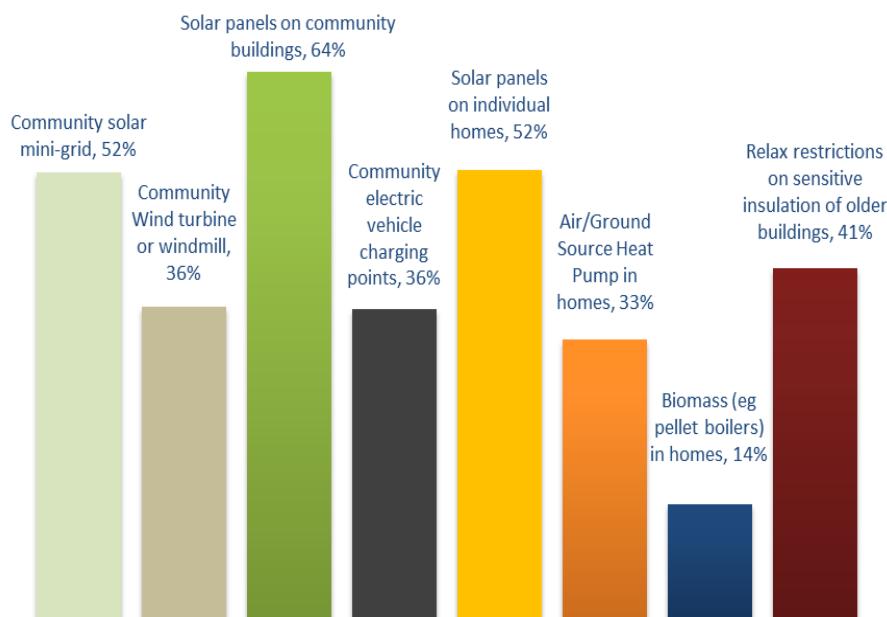


**Design:** Of the 336 responses to the question about housing **design**, 88% said that matching styles was extremely or quite important.

**Style:** Preference for traditional, rather than modern, architecture was also evident in terms of style. Respondents strongly preferred bungalows and semis but were keen for all builds to be eco-friendly. The popularity of bungalows and terraced is consistent with perceived needs for housing for the elderly and affordable starter homes.



**Energy:** The popularity of Ecofriendly homes is also consistent with strong support for measures to reduce rural fossil fuel reliance through some form of solar energy generation – either on communal buildings or a mini-grid but less for a wind turbine. Some people were concerned about solar panels on older homes and in village centres and the suitability of heat pumps but there was strong support for relaxing restrictions on insulation of older buildings.

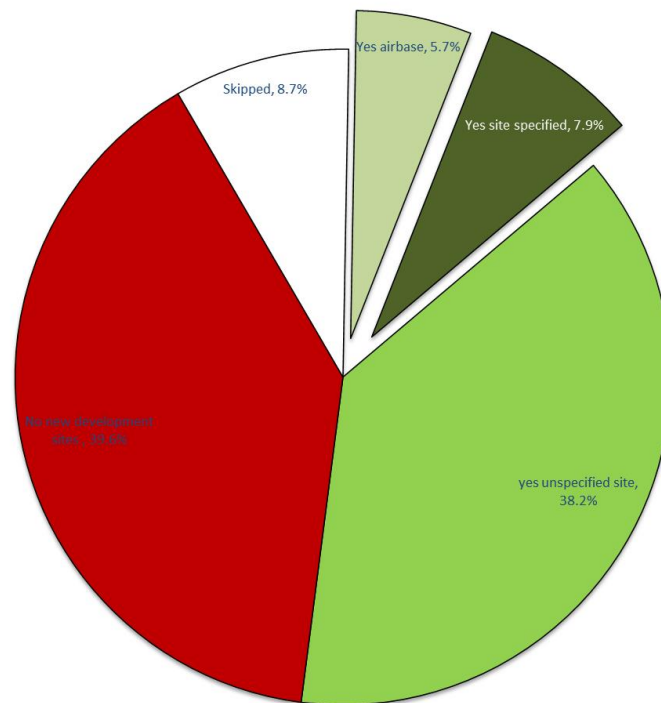




# What about Development sites?

According to population projections by the Office for National statistics and our Housing Needs survey<sup>2</sup> conducted by the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE), our parishes' future demand for new housing is likely to be low but the mix may need to change. A Neighbourhood Plan does not have to allocate development sites, especially if there is not strong evidence of housing or other needs. Support for doing so was not entirely clear in our survey.

191 said yes and 178 said no or did not answer. Although the majority were in favour, a significant number (39.6%) said 'no' (often quite strongly) and 8.7% skipped the question.



There were also several important caveats - of those who said 'yes at a specific site', over 40% specified only at the airbase and only then if road infrastructure was improved.

Various alternatives were suggested but usually for small scale 'fill-in' type development. There were also some differences depending on where people lived but these differences did not seem to correspond to recent development. For example, opposition to new sites was most evident in Cornish Hall End, whilst those in Finchingfield (centre) were evenly split and those on the outskirts of Finchingfield and in the centre of Wethersfield largely in favour.

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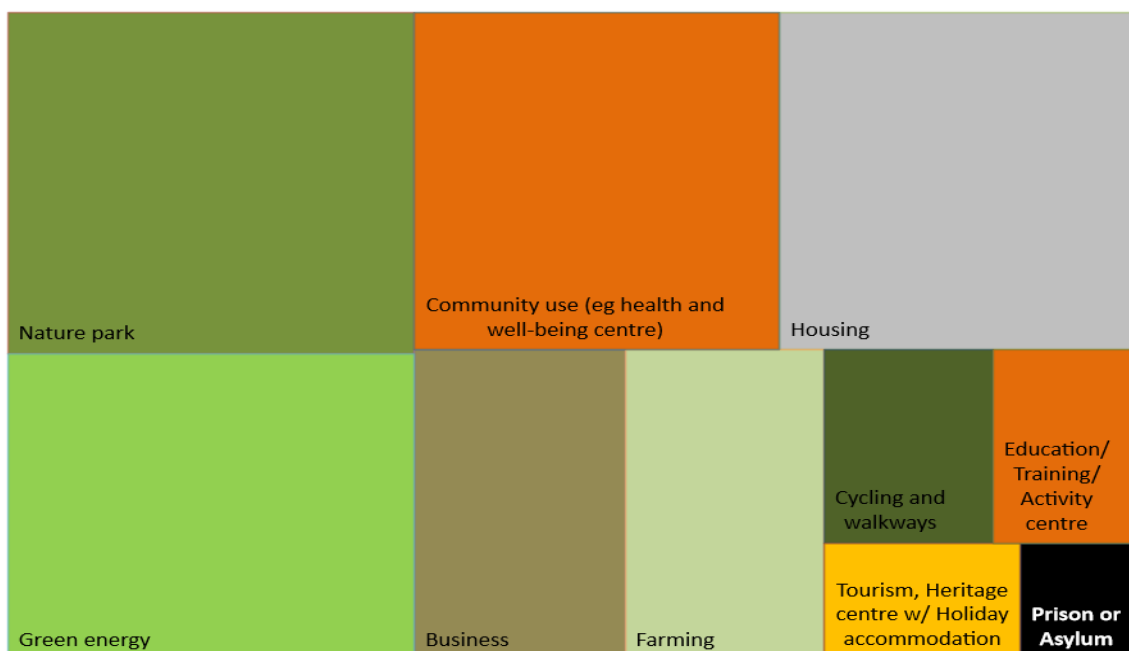
<sup>2</sup> See Housing Needs survey summary for more details

Our survey was much clearer on the utilising the potential at the Airbase.

There was very strong support for a nature park including cycleways, equestrian paths and walkways, a communal leisure, arts, education, research, heritage and rural training centre and some form of food production and green energy generation.

There was also recognition that a *small* amount of appropriately designed residential and commercial development might be feasible subject to infrastructure constraints – traffic being the main concern. Ideas to support business included an innovation, workspace, or training hub, as well as spin-offs from onsite leisure facilities.

Not only does this dovetail with findings from our Business survey<sup>3</sup> but also with residents' attachment to where they live. Such a blend of sustainable development could create local skilled jobs but at the same time respect history and the setting of the site and enhance community health and well-being.



This diagram only records the degree of positive support for each idea. The proposals for a prison or housing, for example, also received numerous very strong objections (on the same grounds of suitability and sustainability) but these are not recorded here as most people only recorded what they did want, not what they did not.

It is also important to realise that (other than a prison or asylum centre), many of these ideas may not be mutually exclusive. The idea of a park, walkways, and cycle paths, for example, could operate alongside small business facilities, a training hub and high value horticulture.

Our Neighbourhood Plan can design policies that dovetail with our Community Vision and this broad range of ideas which the community may seek to develop further as we go forward.

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<sup>3</sup> See Resident Business Survey for more details