

Report of the Southborough and High Brooms Neighbourhood Plan (NP) Visioning Event held on 17th January 2024, Southborough Civic Centre



IN 2038 SOUTH BOROUGHTH + HIGH BROOMS WILL BE...

- VIBRANCY
- A HIGH QUALITY DESTINATION/TOWN PLACE WITH A LIVELY HIGH STREET & EVENING ECONOMY
- DEFIBS
- IT WILL HAVE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR WALKING & CYCLING
- GOOD PUBLIC TRANSPORT
- BETTER LINK BETWEEN HIGH BROOMS & SOUTH BOROUGHTH
- INFORMATION CENTER
- INDEPENDANT COMMERCE
- TOWN MEETING PLACE
- COFFEE SHOP
- MAINTAINING FOOTPATHS
- GREEN AND PROTECTED OPEN SPACES & NATURE
- CULTURAL ACTIVITY
- LIVE MUSIC
- VISUALLY PLEASING
- CONTINUED WILDLIFE OF HOLDEN POND

FOR TRANSPORT WE WILL...

- REDUCE SPEED ON CONSTITUTIONAL RD/HILL
- FREE PUBLIC TRANSPORT
- Have a tram
- Have free, regular buses + on time buses + joined up routes
- PROVIDE CYCLE LANES (SAFETY)
- CONNECTED TRANSPORT
- MAINTAIN FREE CAR PARKING
- CYCLE LANES THROUGH SOUTH HIGH ST.
- have a myriad of buses
- Improve public footpaths
- Move signage for footpaths + to get around + to places

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
What we have learned from the consultation events so far	2
Economy	6
Environment	7
Social.....	8
Parish profile	9
Vision and objectives	14
Visioning	15
Preferred vision	18
Objectives	19
Closing remarks and next steps	22

Introduction

Cllr Brian Dury welcomed everyone to the event and gave a short speech setting out the programme for the evening, the progress so far on the Neighbourhood Plan (NP), about some previous planning challenges in the parish and some quick wins that had been achieved from the start of the programme:

- Working with partner organisations to secure and protect the Bat & Ball listed building and Lloyds Bank site,
- Securing and improving the appearance of the hoardings until the sites are developed,
- Meeting the TWBC Economic Development Team to generate a business strategy for our High Street,
- working our MP Greg Clark, and partner organisations.

What we have learned from the consultation events so far

Jim Boot, the Community Planner advising the parish council on developing the NP, recapped on the findings from the five consultation events carried out so far at the:

1. Civic Centre, Southborough on Thursday 18th September
2. St Matthews Church, High Brooms 25th October
3. Parish Rooms at St Thomas Church 14th November
4. Business Drop-In, Civic Centre, Thursday 7th December

A further stall was staffed at the Winter Fayre focussing on design and character. The results of this event will be analysed in preparation of the Design Codes and Guidance.

5. Winter Fayre, Civic Centre Saturday 9th December

For the first four events alone, 767 issues or ideas were submitted or endorsed:

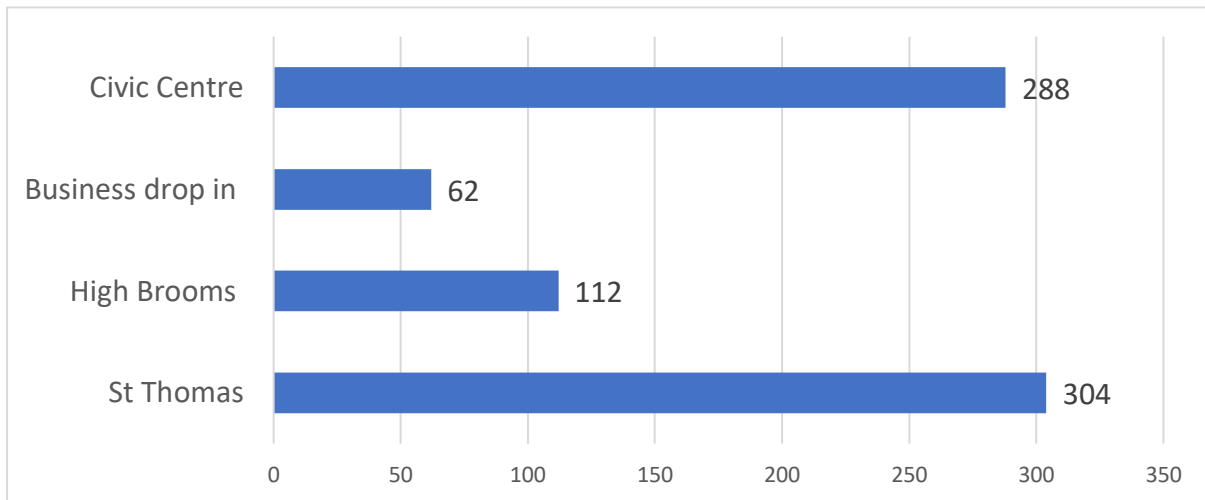


Figure 1: Breakdown of issues / ideas by event

As can be seen, the Civic Centre and the St Thomas' events elicited the most responses. This suggests these will be good venues for future events.

The comments or suggestions have now been sifted into:

- Sustainability objectives – social, economic and environmental
- Prompts – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats etc
- Themes – Community, Housing etc (eventual chapter headings for the NP)
- Sub-categories – infrastructure, regeneration, parking etc

An analysis of all the issues / ideas by Sustainability Objectives reveal:

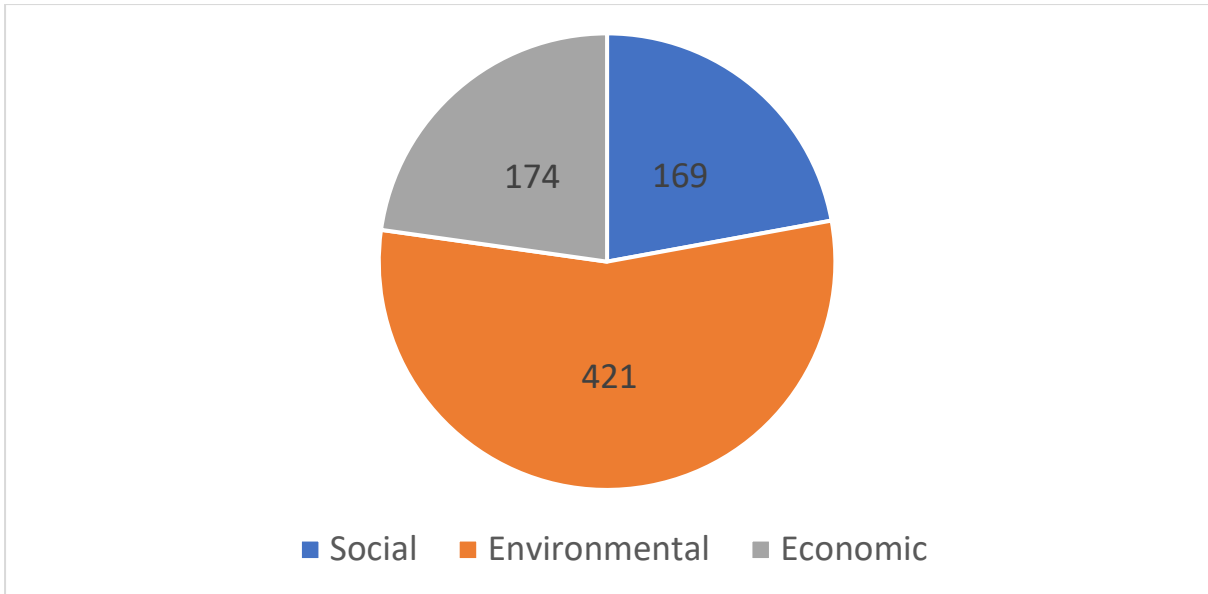


Figure 2: Sustainability objectives

NPs as with all plans must “contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.” “Sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (See National Planning Policy Framework, July 2021 page 5). Therefore it is useful to undertake an analysis of whether the consultation is helping to elicit responses in response to the three key objectives of sustainable development. The analysis shows that the comments received lean heavily towards the environmental objective but as comments on transport were also included in the environment category, including public transport which could be assigned to the social objective, this has led to the issues / ideas for this objective being larger. Transport issues in relation to HGVs / deliveries could equally have been assigned to the economic objective. Overall there was a good spread of comments across all three objectives. The next chart shows how the issues / ideas were elicited:

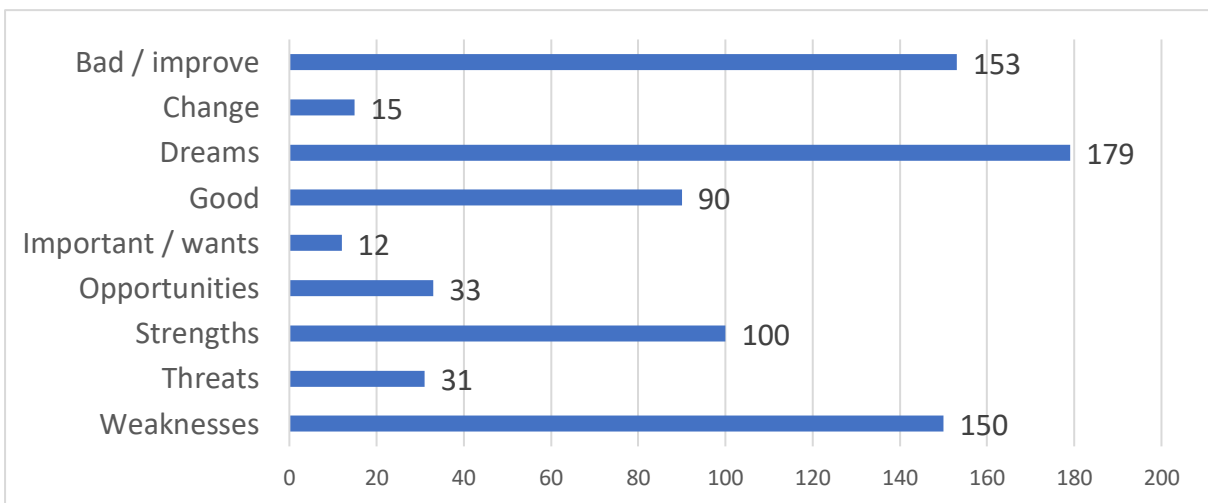


Figure 3: Prompts

Different events used slightly different prompt questions. It is interesting that “What are your dreams?” prompted the greatest number of responses. This ties in with good practice in community development and community planning that plans should build on the positives (good, strengths and dreams) as well as what is bad, needs improving or weaknesses. The events used a combination of prompts such as SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) and What’s Good (strengths), What’s Bad / Needs Improving and Dreams, Important, Wants. These show a good balance of challenges but also strengths to build on and dreams to inform the visioning process.

The intention is develop the NP across six themes which will eventually become chapter headings. These are currently:

1. Transport
2. Local Heritage
3. Nature, Landscape, Views, Environment and Climate
4. Housing
5. Employment, Business, and the High Street
6. Community & Well Being

The comments / ideas received were sorted as follows:

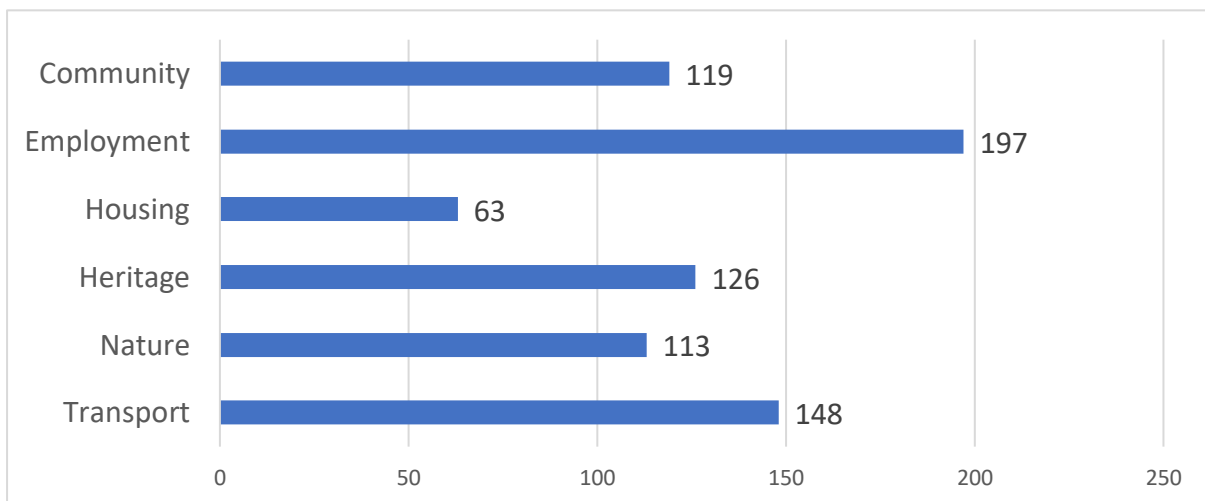


Figure 4: Proposed chapter headings

Again there was a good spread across all six themes although it is perhaps telling that housing received the smallest number. This may reflect that there is currently only limited new housing development proposed for Southborough and High Brooms in the emerging Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) Local Plan.

The highest category by contrast was Employment and this included the poor state of the High Street, empty shops and restaurants / pubs. Transport issues related to congestion and air quality on the A26, public transport – particularly the difficulty in accessing Pembury Hospital and parking in High Brooms.

Heritage was linked to this with particular concerns about underutilised and poorly maintained heritage assets – mostly buildings – again mainly in the High Street. For the Community theme, there was an acknowledgement of all the good activities and events that take place, while a sense that greater use could be made of the new Civic Centre and the adjoining square or “plaza”. In regard of Nature, there were concerns over the protection of the Metropolitan Green Belt, the High Weald National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), the Commons and smaller green spaces and views.

To follow is an analysis of the Sustainability Objectives by Themes and Subcategories:

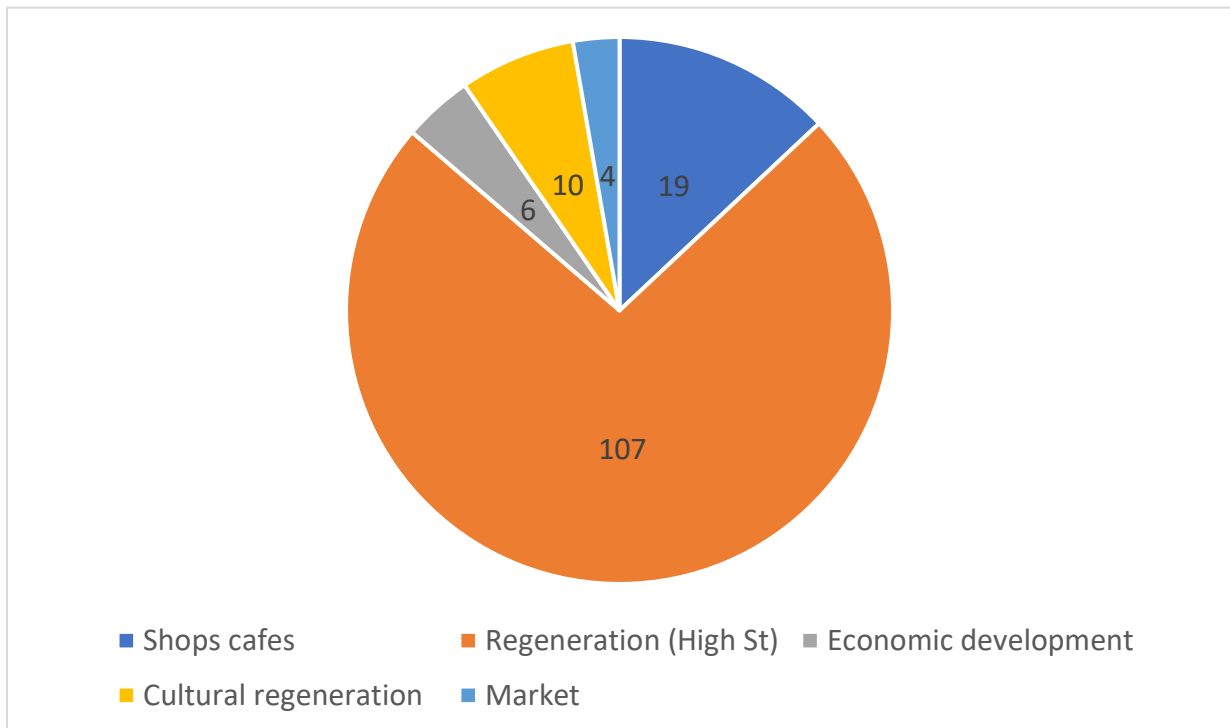


Figure 5: Comments on economic aspects

Economy

As can be seen, the Regeneration of the High Street received by far the largest number of comments. Concerns were raised about “undeveloped and neglected sites”, “needs smartening up”, “empty shops made available as pop up spaces”. Comments were also made on the numbers of takeaways and vaping shops. Comments on shops and cafes include praise in particular for independent shops and cafes in the Conservation Area and using these as inspiration for new inward investment / businesses.

Building on this the arts and cultural activities were seen as a potential catalyst for positive change. More controversially a small number of people (3) supported the view “Ugly signs above shop fronts, empty shops that could be converted to residential”. There were a small number of suggestions for a monthly or more frequent farmers’ market in the Civic Centre plaza area, a café with outside tables, a wine bar, “shops at the hub” and “what happened to the piazza we were promised”. Positively “Early Grey is amazing, positive and a real asset as is Yalta, Osborn and new Costcutter”.

Environment

There was a greater variety although a smaller volume of comments in relation to the Environment except when the Regeneration of the High Street was also added in:

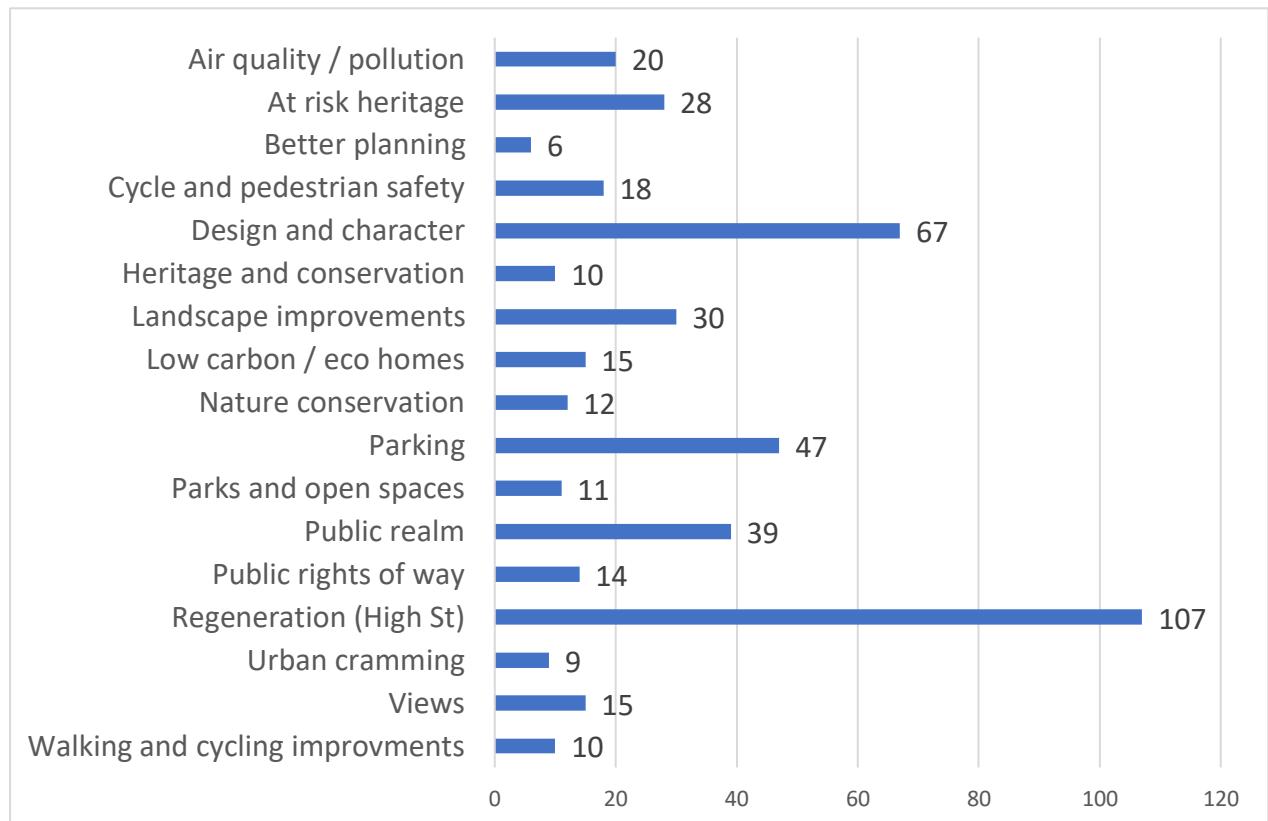


Figure 6: Comments on environmental aspects

For landscape improvements and nature conservation people suggested “Lets have a community orchard”, “wildlife friendly planting of trees and shrubs”, “green space near Holden pond” and a community garden space [at] St Peter’s churchyard”. People liked the “large amount of countryside that is very good for nature” and “Green spaces are well connected to neighbouring areas” but it was suggested that for Barnet’s wood could be made “more accessible, raised walkways, renovation of the pond.”

For parks and open space there were concerns over the potential loss of the allotments with requests for greater investment in fencing and a toilet, for greater facilities for teenagers such as a skate park and a graffiti wall and an adventure playground in Crudwell Road. The poor state of the public realm, with problems of pot-holes, the cutting back of hedges and other vegetation and graffiti were all raised but more positively people “love the litter picking group” which shows the pride people have in their community.

For Design and Character, there was support for the proposed Design Codes but concerns over the loss of High Broom’s unique heritage of redbrick and the High Brooms brickworks: “High Brooms industrial heritage / brickworks could be celebrated more or made a feature of the area”. As well as the parking matters already mentioned in High Brooms there was a

particular concern to retain the free parking at Yew Tree car park in order to support remaining shops in the High Street and the fledgling development at the Civic Centre.

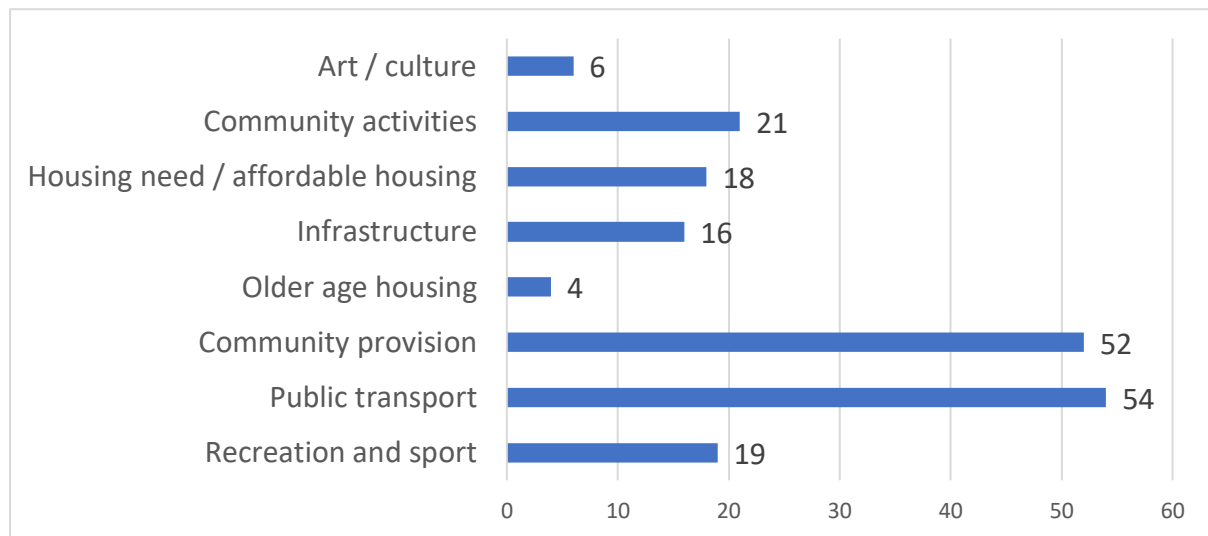


Figure 7: Comments for Community and Well-being

Social

Public transport was the largest sub-category for the social theme. As mentioned public transport is a cross-over topic but when considering its social impact it is important to recognise that for children and young people, people on low incomes and older people, public transport is essential for getting to school or college, to work or leisure and health appointments. While it was recognised that: “Buses into Tunbridge Wells centre very frequent and they run at night” and “Excellent train services to London from Tonbridge and through to where I work (Welwyn Garden City)”, it was also identified that there are: “No direct buses to hospital” and “Please can we have bus indicator boards”.

For community provision and community spirit, people said: “Shops are needed at the Hub” or a Farmers market and “Using the square for more community events / café / open reach”, while others wanted a wine bar! “A High Brooms Hub for coffee shop / central meet - similar to the Southborough Hub” was also suggested. People also recognised there was a “good community feeling” and that “Southborough is really good thanks – compared to other areas – lets also be positive”. However, there was a feeling that the Civic Centre and adjoining square have yet to reach their full potential.

For community activities (rather than facilities), it was felt that there was: “Nowhere for children to go” and “nothing like a youth centre for teenagers / young people”. A comment “Lack of stuff for teenagers to do. Embrace youth, don't chase them off. Designated areas, skateboard zones, mountain biking routes etc” was supported by three others. Praise included: “Southborough SOS brilliant community initiative making a real impact.”

As mentioned, comments or issues relating to housing were fewer (63) but a comment: “Insufficient provision of social housing / affordable housing (genuinely affordable)” was supported by 3 others and another comment was: “Not enough affordable housing for

younger people / teachers / nurses.” A few comments related to “eco homes” such as “Only approve future - proofed housing – sustainable.” Further comments related to planning and how frustrated people were by the planning system.

A full breakdown of all the comments received will be made available on the website <https://www.southboroughandhighbroomsplan.org.uk/>.

Parish profile

Alison Eardley, Planning Consultant to the parish council then gave a summary of the key statistics that are available about the parish. NPs must be based on both the wants or views of local people and their needs backed up by the statistical or other quantitative evidence. Alison was able to compare the latest 2021 Census results with the previous Census in 2011 to show trends over the last decade.

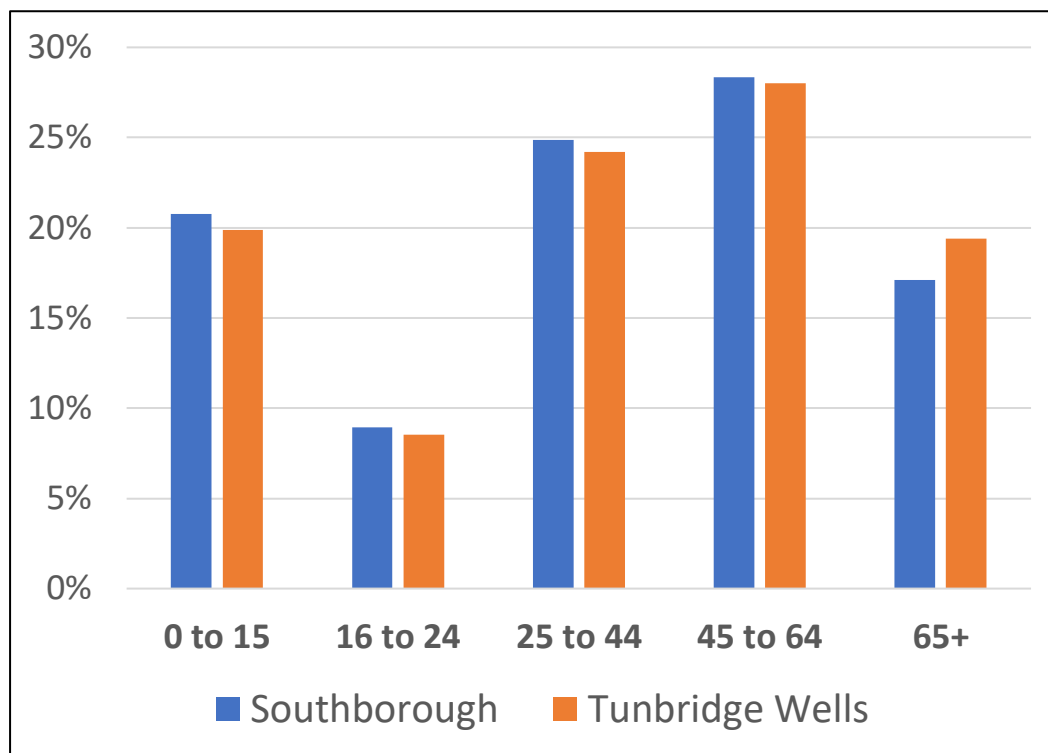


Figure 8: Age profile

The chart shows that not surprisingly Southborough and High Brooms and Tunbridge Wells share a similar age profile with the largest groups in the 45-64 and 25-44 age groups and the smallest at the 16-24 age group which would include students living away from home. The second chart below, shows that there are declining populations in all the younger age groups and increasing populations from 45-65 with the 65+ group increasing the fastest. It was suggested that this might be due to the cost of housing which younger people are increasingly finding prohibitive forcing them to move away to cheaper areas.

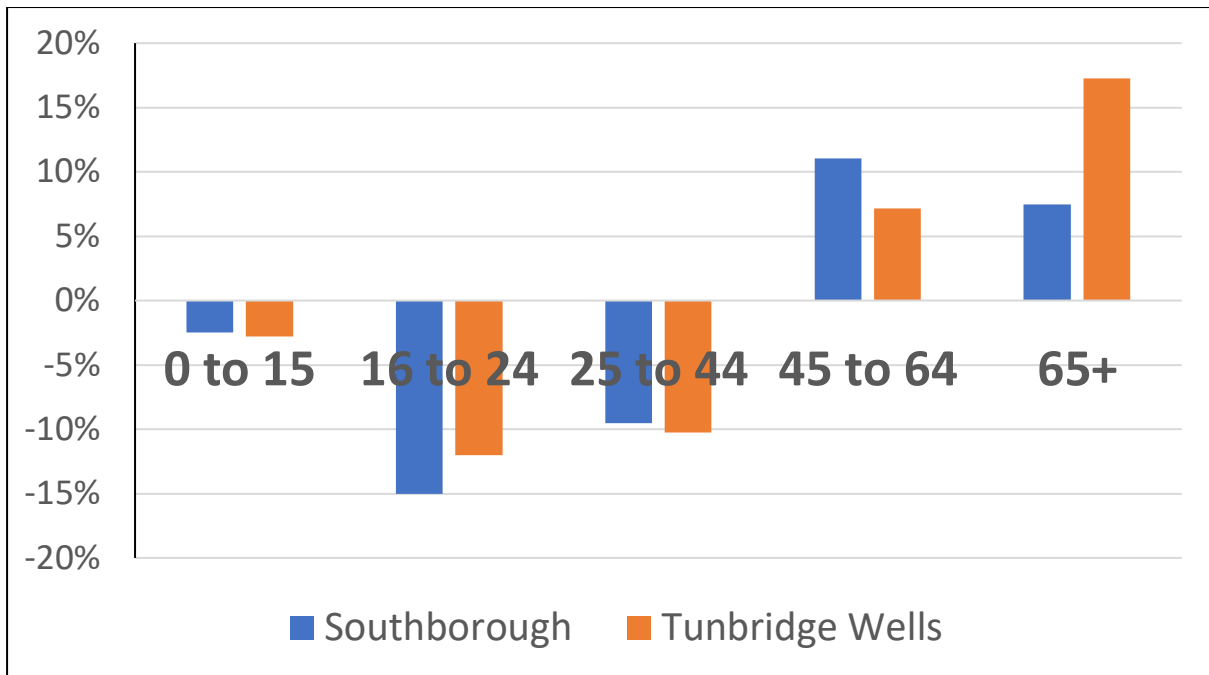


Figure 9: Changes in age profile

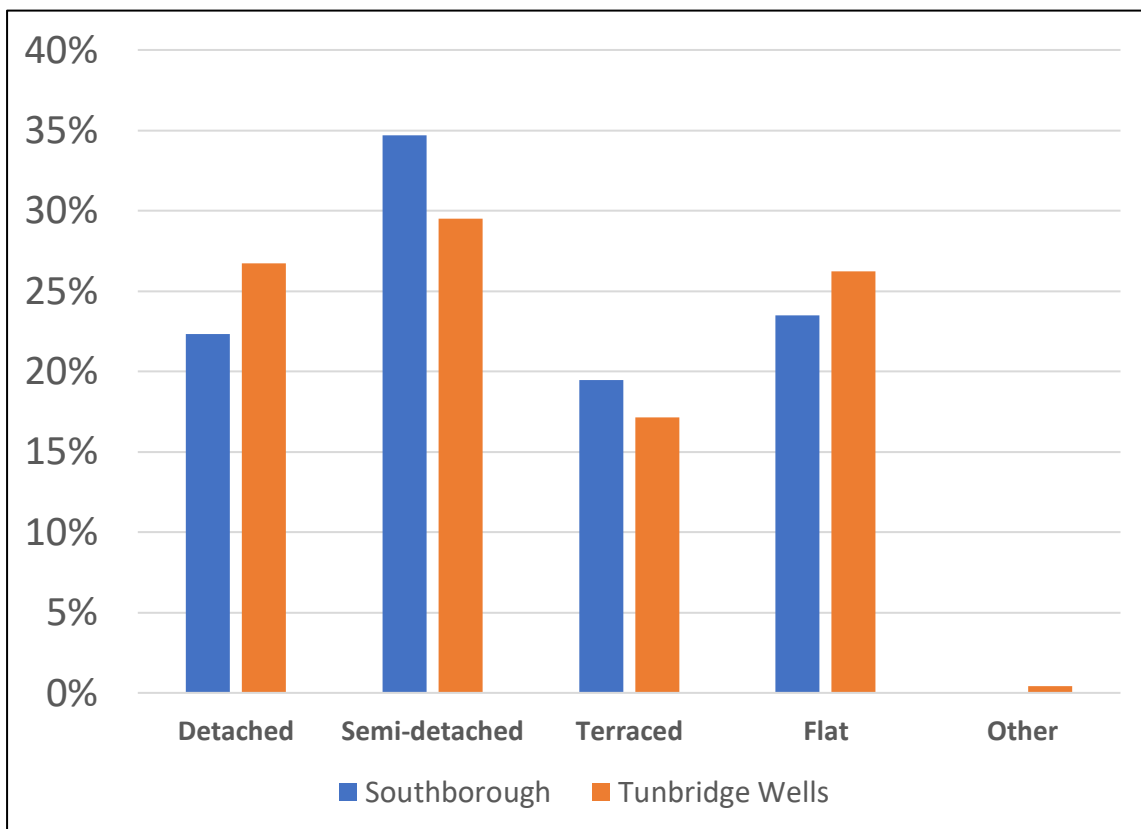


Figure 10: Types of dwelling 2021

Fig 10 shows that Southborough has a larger percentage of semi-detached and terraces than other housing types and has a slightly lower proportion of flats than Tunbridge Wells.

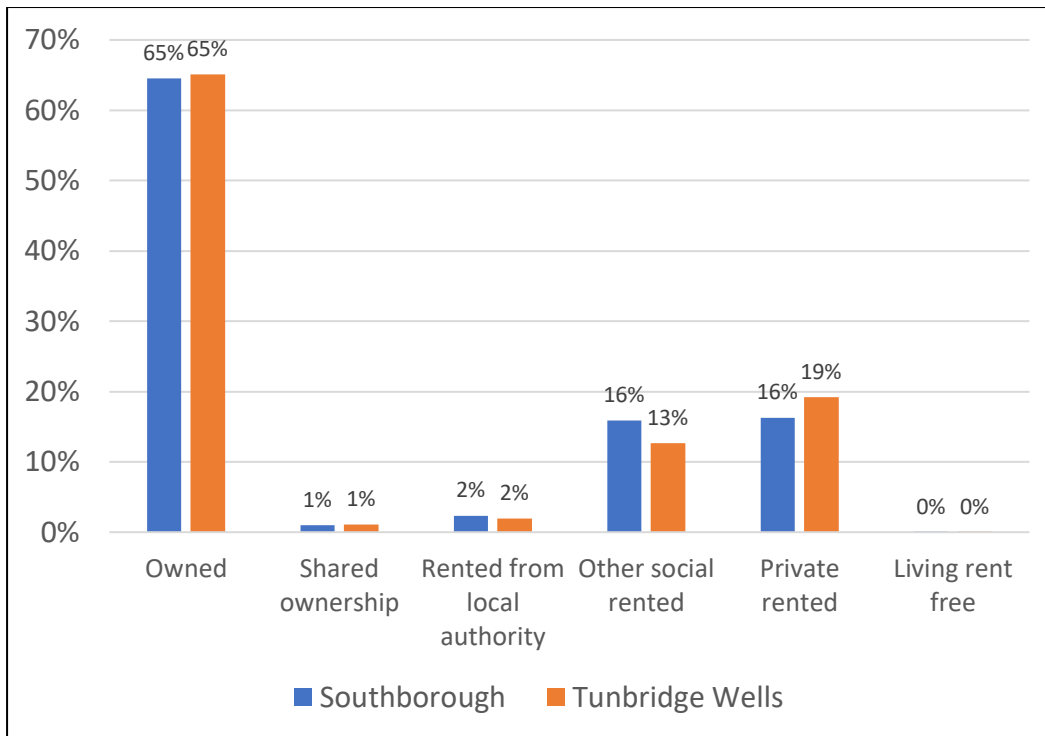


Figure 11: Home ownership / tenure

Figure 11 shows that the majority of people own their own homes and that the percentage of homes that are socially rented (used to be council homes) is slightly higher by 2% than private rented homes.

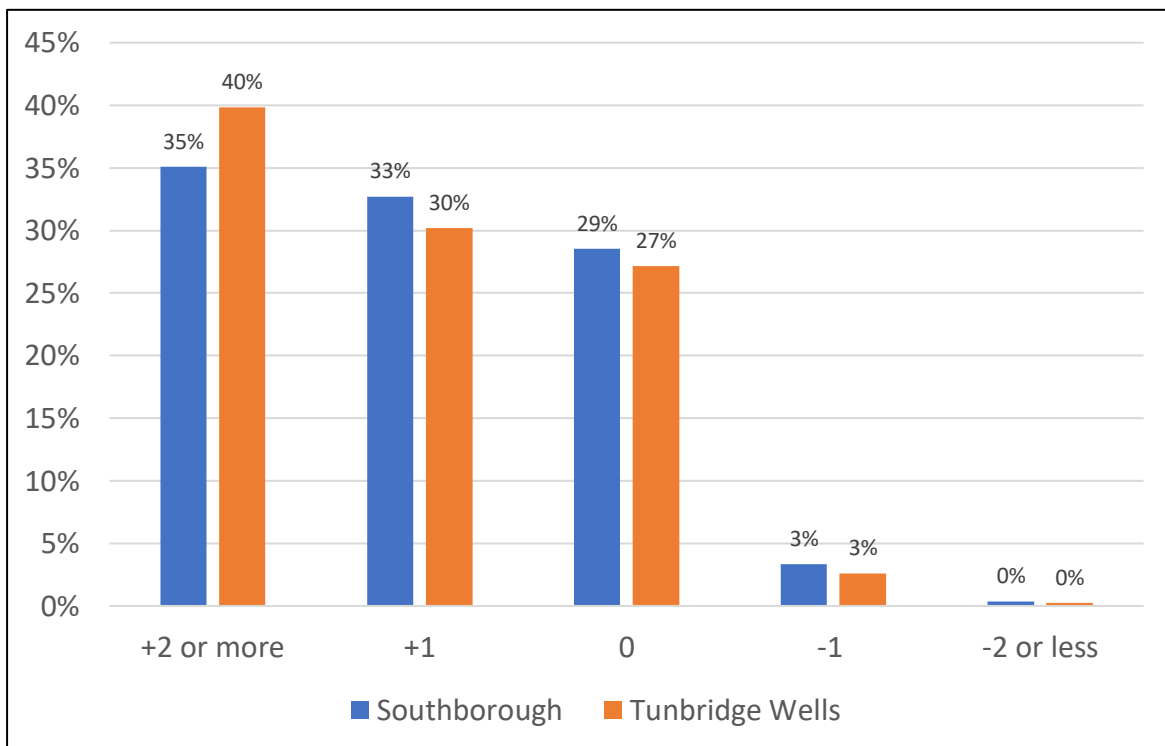


Figure 12: Occupancy

Under occupancy in both Southborough and Tunbridge Wells amounts to 68% of homes with 35% of homes in Southborough having 2 or more bedrooms unused. This suggests that if smaller homes were available, some older residents might consider downsizing, freeing up those homes for families. One person households account for 28% of homes in Southborough of which 44% (of the 28%) are 65 years old or over.

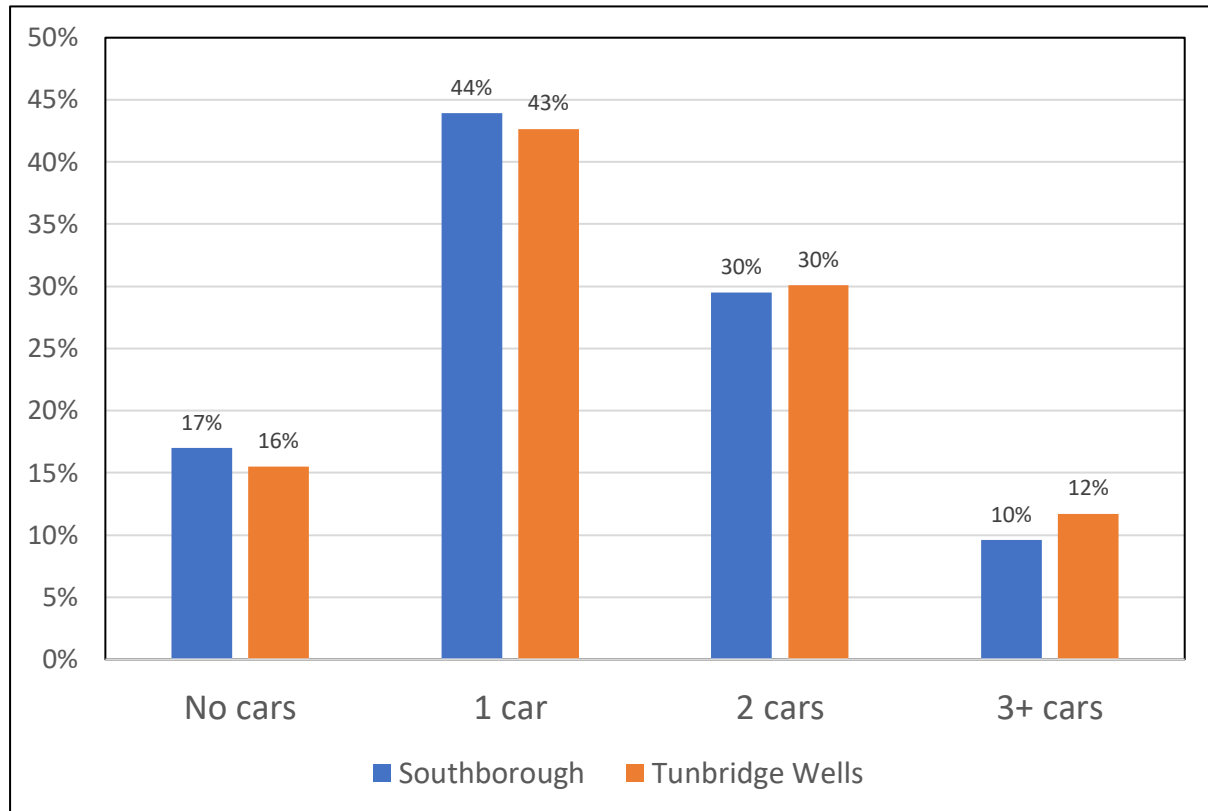
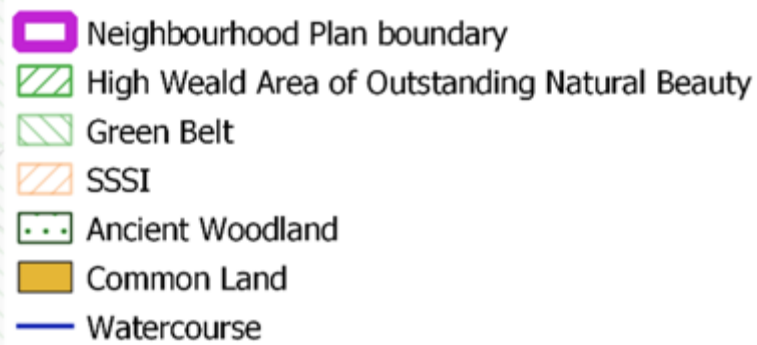
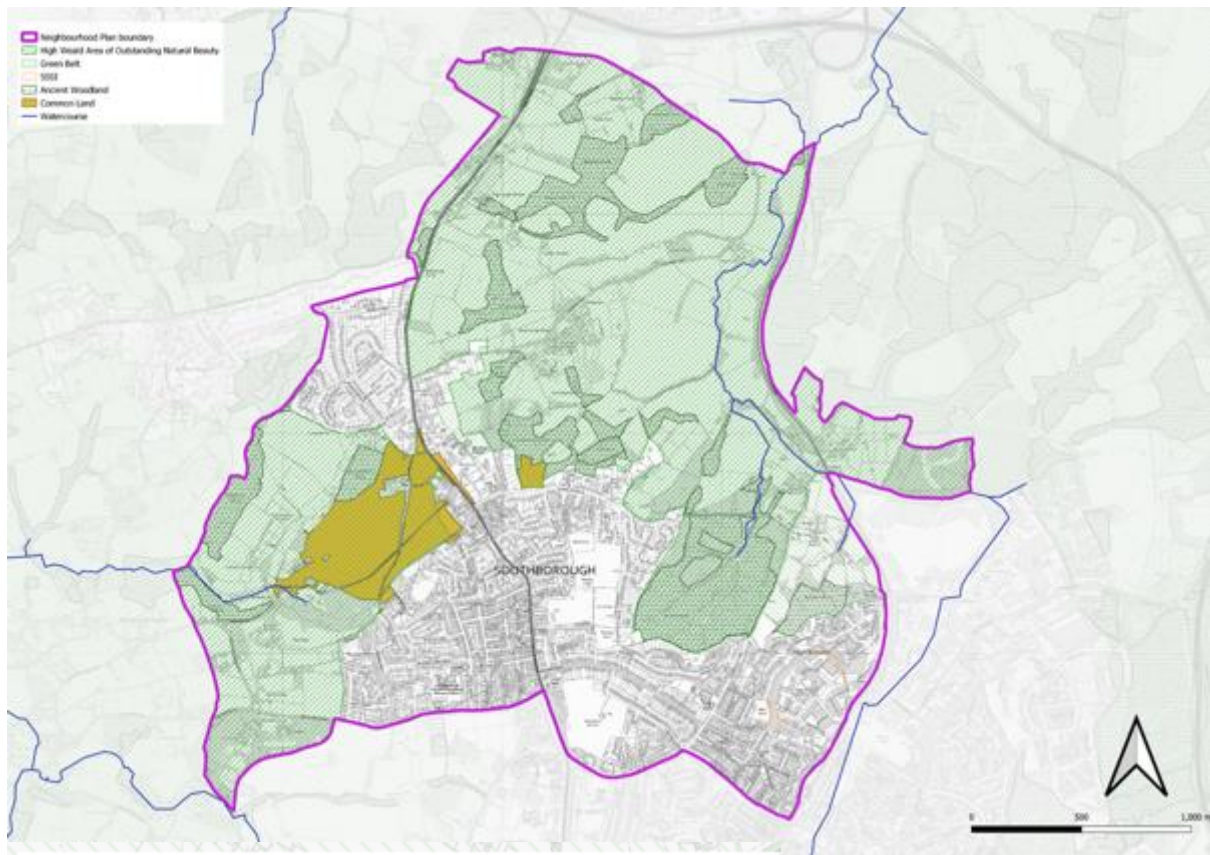


Figure 13: Car ownership

Considering the issues of congestion, air quality and parking problems raised in the comments, 17% of households have no cars and 44% only one car which adds weight to the concerns raised over access to public transport particularly to the hospital but also to local services, particularly if the households one car/van is being used for commuting / work.

Also important to developing the NP is an understanding of the natural environment. As can be seen from the maps presented by Alison overleaf, Southborough and High Brooms include substantial areas of the High Weald National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), Metropolitan Green Belt, Ancient Woodland and Common Land.



The other maps shared showed the Conservation Area (for built heritage – similar to listed building protection) and also the listed buildings. The final map showed the extensive network of public rights of way. These can all be viewed in the presentation which is attached as an appendix.

Alison’s final slide was the strategy for Southborough from the emerging Tunbridge Wells Local Plan.

Policy STR/SO 1

The Strategy for Southborough

The development strategy for Southborough is to:

1. Set Limits to Built Development for Southborough on the Policies Map (Inset Map 3) as a framework for new development over the plan period;
2. Build approximately 42 new dwellings on two sites (Policies AL/SO 1 and AL/SO 3), including affordable housing, allocated in this Local Plan in the plan period. Of these sites, AL/SO 1 already has planning permission for 16 dwellings;
3. Identify the Southborough Hub recreation area as a local sports hub as part of the Sports Strategy;
4. Protect and retain the public car park(s) within Southborough, as defined on the Southborough Policies Map;
5. Retain an appropriate mix of uses within the town centre, as defined on the Policies Map, and support proposals which would contribute to the vitality and viability of the centre;
6. Seek developer contributions, either in kind (normally land) and/or financial, from residential schemes to be used towards the provision of:
 - a. one new health facility to replace an existing facility;
 - b. new play space provision to reduce gap in access to provision;
 - c. enhancements to natural green spaces at Barnetts Wood and Southborough Common;
 - d. additional natural green space and food growing areas/allotments;
 - e. recreation and sports provision at Hawkenbury (site allocation Policy AL/RTW 19) and/or at Land at and adjacent to Rusthall Recreation Ground, Southwood Road, Rusthall (site allocation Policy AL/SP 2);
 - f. other necessary mitigation measures which are directly related to the development and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind.

Figure 14: TWBC Strategy for Southborough

As can be seen, this plans for only limited new development for the plan period up to 2038 for 42 homes and seeking developer contributions for a new health facility, improving play provision, enhancements to local green spaces and contributions to improved sports provision at Hawkenbury. As can be seen this is quite a limited strategy and the NP will act to provide a much more detailed framework for managing change particularly for the High Street, heritage and design as well as enhancing community provision, protecting local green spaces and improving travel options across the parish.

Vision and objectives

In order to develop a plan it is important to have a vision or visions of what you are trying to achieve over the plan period. This visioning activity, introduced by Jim Boot, enabled local residents to develop six draft visions, and choose the one they preferred the most. Then to use the visions to develop objectives – how they would get there – for each theme in the plan. A composite vision based key word frequency – such as “high street” – and other factors is proposed and will be included in the draft NP to be published in the spring.

Visioning

Participants at their tables were asked to imagine what their ideal community would be like in 15 years (the period of the plan) and then write down key words or phrases on card strips to describe it. The key words were then placed in order on a flip sheet, link words added to make a sentence or paragraph and then shared with the other participants. The following visions were created:

<p>The flip sheet contains the following text from sticky notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> IN 2038 SOUTH BOROUGHTH + HIGH BROOMS WILL BE... VIBRANT Community A high quality DESTINATION / TOWN / PLACE with a Lively high street & EVENING ECONOMY OFFICES spread right across Parish INDEPENDANT COMMERCE CULTURAL ACTIVITY & CREATIVE LIVE MUSIC IT WILL HAVE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR TOWN MEETING PLACE COFFEE SHOP Southborough will be VISUALLY PLEASING WALKING & CYCLING MAINTAINING FOOTPATHS GOOD PUBLIC TRANSPORT Better LINK Between High Brooms & Southborough Continued wilding of holden pond INFORMATION CENTER GREEN AND PROTECTED OPEN SPACES & NATURE 	<p>In 2038 Southborough and High Brooms will be a high-quality destination with a lively high street, evening economy and independent commerce. There will be cultural and creative activity, live music, spaces for young people, a town meeting place and information centre. Southborough will be visually appealing, maintaining footpaths, continued wilding of Holding Pond and green and protected open spaces and nature. It will have infrastructure for walking and cycling with good public transport, better links between High Brooms and Southborough.</p> <p>Red group: 30 points</p>
--	--



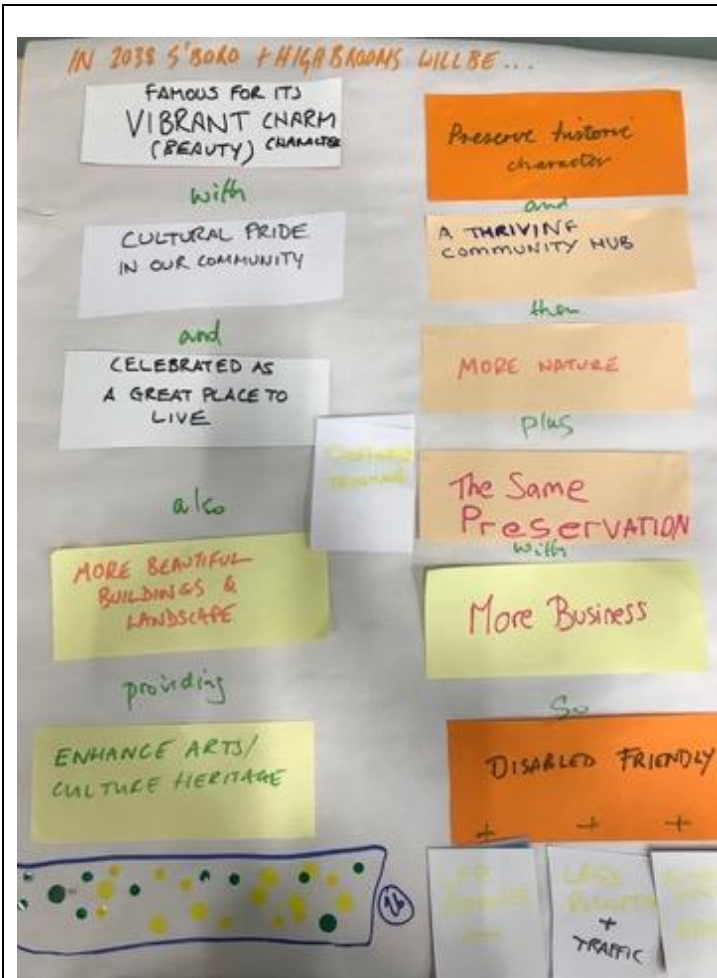
In 2038 Southborough and High Brooms will have a vibrant, busy cultural centre and high street. It will have character, be community driven, with less traffic, integrated public transport, social communications and the Bat and Ball site and Lloyds bank will be used.

Pink group: 8 Points



In 2038, Southborough and High Brooms will be thriving with a quiet A26, a flourishing and pedestrian friendly high street, renewable power infrastructure including lots of solar panels on roofs, so that it has become a destination not a drive through and [there are lots of] reasons for kids to stay.

Blue group: 10 Points.



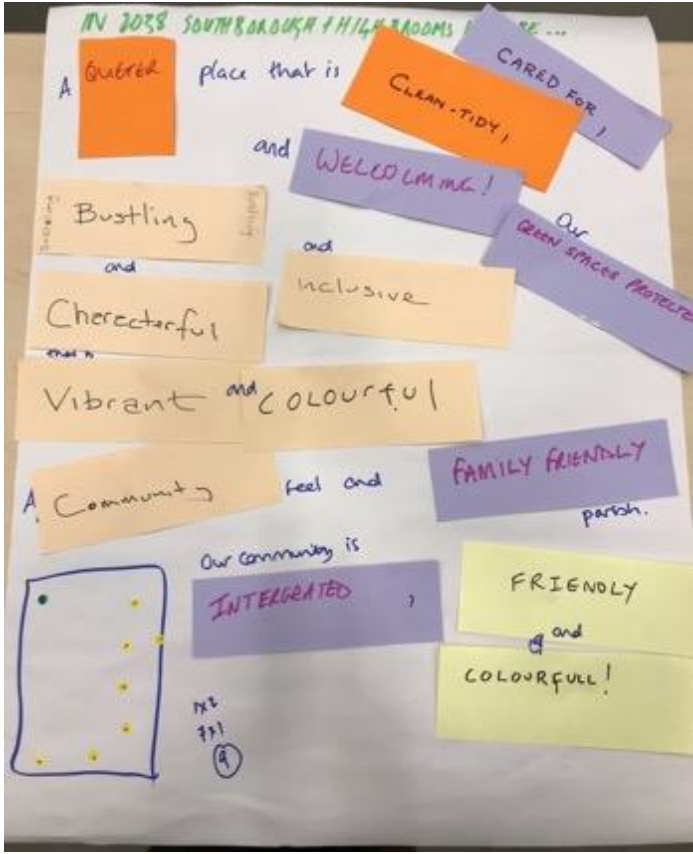
In 2038, Southborough and High Brooms will be famous for its vibrant charm, beauty and character with cultural pride in our community and celebrated as a great place to live. Also, [there will be] more beautiful buildings and landscape, providing enhance[d] arts / cultural heritage, preserve[d] historic character and a thriving hub then more mature plus the same preservation with more business and so disabled friendly. Co-ordinated thinking, less potholes, less pollution and traffic and environmentally friendly.

Orange group: 26 points



In 2038, Southborough and High Brooms will have vibrant high street and community, a place with no graffiti (please?) and no more grot spots, which is intact and cared for serving a thriving community who are proud to live here. [It will be] prettier, welcoming, thriving high street, less traffic / cars, and better use of the square outside Southborough Hub [with a] café and shops, a place with no litter, [a] busy plaza, celebrating our history. The regeneration of the high street [will offer] better employment opportunities and independent shops.

Purple group: 27 points

	In 2038, Southborough and High Brooms will be
	<p>In 2038, Southborough and High Brooms will be a quieter place that is cared for, clean and tidy, bustling and welcoming. Our open spaces will be bustling, characterful and inclusive, vibrant and colourful [with] a community feel and family-friendly parish. Our community is integrated, friendly and colourful.</p> <p>Green group: 9 points</p>

Preferred vision

In 2038 Southborough and High Brooms will be a high-quality destination with a lively high street, evening economy and independent commerce. There will be cultural and creative activity, live music, spaces for young people, a town meeting place and information centre. Southborough will be visually appealing, maintaining footpaths, continued wilding of Holding Pond and green and protected open spaces and nature. It will have infrastructure for walking and cycling with good public transport, better links between High Brooms and Southborough.

While the vision from the red group received the highest number of points (first choices) a small number of key words or phrases were common across nearly all the visions. And while it would be legitimate to use the first vision in the draft NP, by adding in a couple of consistently used key words: vibrant (4 visions) and community (5 visions), the vision is enhanced:

In 2038 Southborough and High Brooms will be a vibrant high-quality destination with a lively high street, evening economy and independent commerce (cafes and shops). There

will be cultural and creative activity, live music, spaces for young people, a town meeting place and information centre. Southborough will be a visually appealing community, [with well] maintained footpaths, continued wilding of Holding Pond and green and protected open spaces and nature. It will have infrastructure for walking and cycling with good public transport and better links between High Brooms and Southborough.

Objectives

The steering group has proposed the following themes or chapters in the NP:

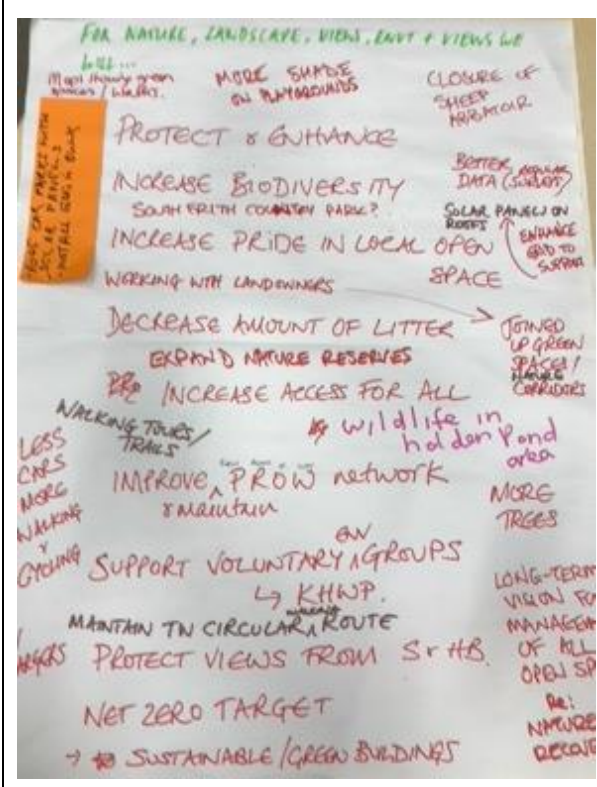
1. Transport
2. Local Heritage
3. Nature, Landscape, Views, Environment and Climate
4. Housing
5. Employment, Business, and the High Street
6. Community & Well Being

Based on these themes, the participants were asked if they could identify objectives for the NP by imagining themselves in the preferred vision of 2038 and what they did for their theme to get there. The results were:

	<p>For Transport we will reduce speed on Constitutional Road and Hill, have free public transport, have a tram, a myriad of free regular buses on time with joined up routes, connected transport, provide safe cycle lanes including through Southborough high street, 20 mph limits, connect the station to the High Street by public transport, maintain free parking, more signage for walking [and cycling] and improve public footpaths.</p>
--	---



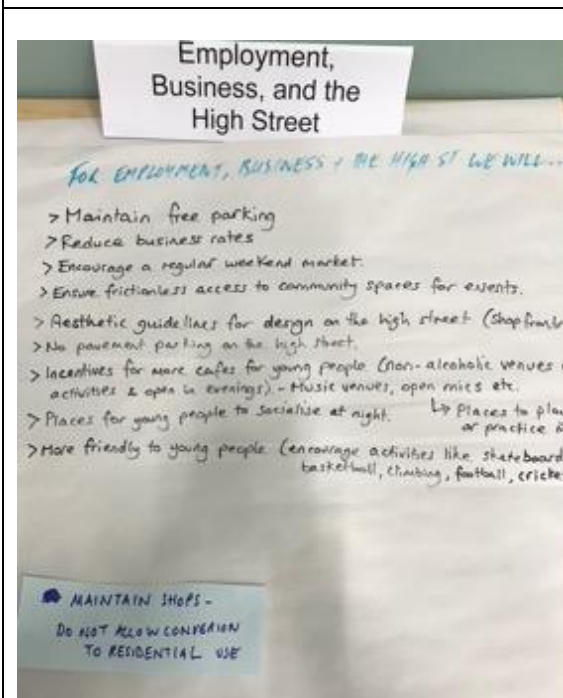
For Local Heritage we will keep using red bricks, High Brooms style, have better character driven planning, preserve all listed buildings, make the piazza well known as a community resources, encourage local artists and performers, have a local museum, ensure original shopfronts are protected and restored, more power to Southborough and High Brooms on the design of new buildings, have an art gallery / centre, preserve the character of the common, identify more buildings of historical interest, ensure new buildings have pitched roofs and finials, adopt stricter adherence to the conservation area and [plant and look after] trees.



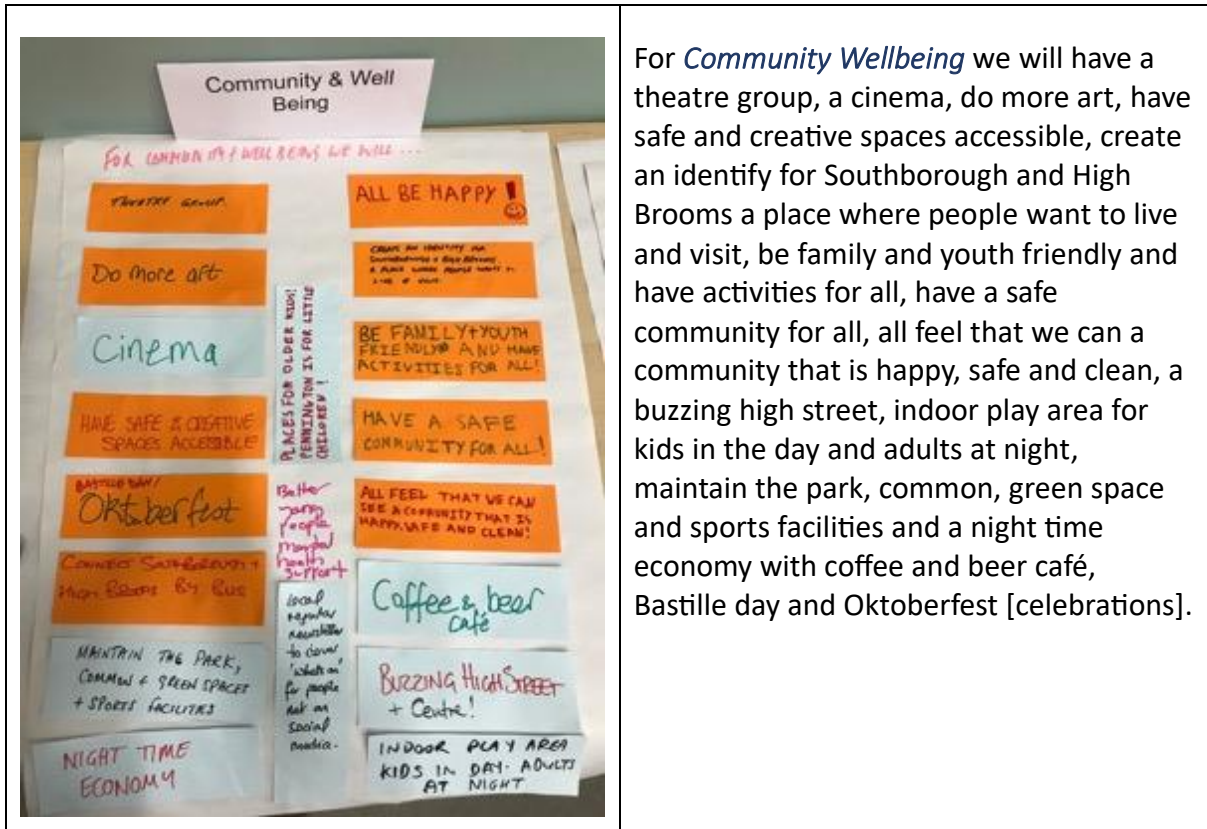
For Nature, Landscape, Views and The Environment we will protect, enhance and increase biodiversity (including at South Frith Country Park), increase pride in local open spaces working with landowners, decrease the amount of litter, expand nature reserves, increase access for all and improve wildlife in Holden Pond area. We will have walking tours and trails, improve the public rights of way network, support voluntary environmental groups including the Kent High Weald Partnership, have less cars, more cycling and walking, maintain the Tunbridge Wells circular walking route, protect views from Southborough and High Brooms, have sustainable green buildings, electric vehicles and be working towards a net zero target with a long term vision for management of all open spaces for nature recovery. Also we will have closed the sheep abattoir, have better data / surveys, ensure the grid supports solar panels on roofs (roof car parks with solar panels, install electric vehicle charging in bulk).



For *Housing* we will meet the need for mixed housing (all ages) so older people can move to interesting areas – no ghettos as St John’s Road, build to match demographic – to be determined by council not developers – more affordable housing, more social housing, provide suitable green housing for all, utilise all empty buildings, all new housing to be zero carbon, better insulation and solar panel initiatives, double glazing on all houses, convert empty office spaces, stop shops being converted into flats / houses, re designate High Brooms light industrial for housing, more retirement flats, gentle densification with sufficient parking in new developments.



For *Employment, Business and the High Street* we will maintain free parking, reduce business rates, encourage a regular weekend market, ensure frictionless access to community spaces for events, aesthetic guidelines for design on the high street (shopfronts), maintain shops / no conversion to residential use, no pavement parking on the high street, incentives for more cafés for young people (non-alcoholic venues, activities and open evenings), music venues, open mic nights etc, places for young people to socialise at night, more friendly to young people (encourage activities like skateboarding, basketball, climbing, football, cricket).



For *Community Wellbeing* we will have a theatre group, a cinema, do more art, have safe and creative spaces accessible, create an identify for Southborough and High Brooms a place where people want to live and visit, be family and youth friendly and have activities for all, have a safe community for all, all feel that we can a community that is happy, safe and clean, a buzzing high street, indoor play area for kids in the day and adults at night, maintain the park, common, green space and sports facilities and a night time economy with coffee and beer café, Bastille day and Oktoberfest [celebrations].

These will be passed to the steering group and working groups (if formed) to refine into a set of objectives, policies and projects.

Additional comments captured included:

- Maintain green belt
- Continued wilding of Holden Pond
- More solar power
- Install air pollution monitor
- Cheaper regular buses to avoid pollution
- Identify unused green space to create more nature friendly planting
- Trees on high street
- More pollinators
- Encourage biodiversity
- Fewer perfect gardens
- More trees and shade around children’s play areas especially Pennington Park

Closing remarks and next steps

As can be seen from the photos at the beginning of this report this was a well attended event where the community worked extremely hard over the course of the evening to develop six visions, choose a preferred vision and work up objectives, projects and policies for the drafting of the plan. At the end of the evening the next steps for the plan were shared with the audience as follow:

- Community survey – **February**
- Theme / topic based workshops – High Street and General – **March**
- Photo competition (views, favourite buildings, spaces and places) – **April**
- Plan writing including policy workshop – **June**

Updates on these will follow in due course. In the meantime, we'd like to thank the participants, councillors and council staff who made this such an excellent evening.

Jim Boot, Community Planner with Alison Eardley, Planning Consultant

1st February 2024