



**ABBEY PEOPLE &
CAMBRIDGESHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

CHATTY ABOUT ABBEY PEER RESEARCH



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Acknowledgments

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Content

1. Executive summary	4
2. Objectives and Methodology	5
2.1. Background and current state of Abbey	5
2.2. Objectives and Methodology	5
2.3. Methodology	6
2.3.1. Residents demographics	6
2.3.2. Method of Data Collection	7
2.3.3. Method of Data Analysis	7
3. Results	8
3.1. Environment	9
3.2. Services and Facilities	9
3.3. Community and Activities	10
3.4. Communication and Engagement	13
3.4.1. In touch with community	13
3.4.2. Getting Residents Involved	14
4. Conclusion and recommendations	16
5. References	17

1. Executive Summary

“Chatty about Abbey” Peer Research aims to gain a better understanding of the local community of Abbey and to discover the opinions and suggestions of residents. The responses will be used as guidance for the revamped community group “Abbey People” to develop their understanding of local needs and wishes, and to contribute to future events and projects in the Abbey community.

Local residents’ responses will be presented in four main themes: Environment, Services and Facilities, Community and Activities, and Communication and Engagement. These themes were chosen after careful consideration of all answers and were recognised as best fitting and reflecting given responses.

One of the desired outcomes of this initiative was to stimulate residents to be more involved in shaping their own community. We wanted to inspire people to talk about their interests in the community and use this to fuel an increase in volunteering, creation of more activities to fulfil the need of the community and create overall stronger community cohesion.

Overall, the Chatty about Abbey Peer Research initiative has shown Abbey People many positive lights of Abbey and identified it’s most important asset: the people.

2. Objective & Methodology

2.1. Background and current state of Abbey

Abbey, located east of Cambridge City centre, includes East Barnwell. With a population of just under 9,000 people, Abbey has a diverse demographic. This area has also been recognised as a deprived areas with high numbers of people on long term benefits and unemployment (28.1% of household with no employment)¹, including inter-generational unemployment. The largest group living in Abbey are between the ages of 25 to 44, employed and White British. However, there is a great disproportion in the areas of employment, education and home ownership status, which consequently leads to alienated and divided identities among Abbey people. According to the 2011 Census, 36% of residents aged 16 to 74 have qualification at Level 4 or 5, but 20% of the same age group had no qualification. Additionally, there has been a lack of activities and facilities especially for young people. Equally, the crime offences have risen to over 1000 offences in 2011/12, making Abbey the second highest area in the number of crimes, for Cambridgeshire County. The most common crimes were anti-social behaviour. According to the Health Deprivation information from Cambridgeshire County Council, there is an increase in teenage pregnancy. In 2005-07, the indicator of teenage pregnancy (per 1,000 females between the ages of 15-17) was 65.4 compared to 2007-09 at 85. There is also an increase of non-White British residents now living in Abbey. The percentage of Asian/Asian British increased from 2.5% in 2001 to 8% in 2011. The same upward trend can be said about other ethnic groups. Around 42% of Abbey residents own their home, while 35% live in local authority housing or housing association accommodation.

In 2008, Local Development Strategy written by Marshalls was developed to identify challenges in the area. The report suggested the cause of a feeling of division in Abbey's neighbourhoods which can be due to heavy traffic flows on major roads dividing Abbey into four parts; loss of many facilities such as pubs, shops and the post office; and Abbey has no focal point or so called village centre.

Currently, there are efforts being made to build a strong community, and to facilitate partnership between groups and agencies based in the areas.

¹ Census 2011

Abbey Action has been involved in the area for 15 years. They have recently reformed into an independent constituted organisation, now known as Abbey People, enabling them to apply for more funds, aimed at community development. Abbey People is led by eight trustees, people who live and play a crucial role in the area (Abbey Action newsletter, 2013). Their objectives are to act as an umbrella organisation, bringing the community groups and agencies together, helping to facilitate links between residents, encouraging their involvement in the development of the community, and overall increase the community spirit and act as a voice for local people (Abbey People Constitution, 2013). There are plans to redevelop the local Community Centre into a community hub providing a facility for varieties of activities and events.

2.2. Objectives of the study

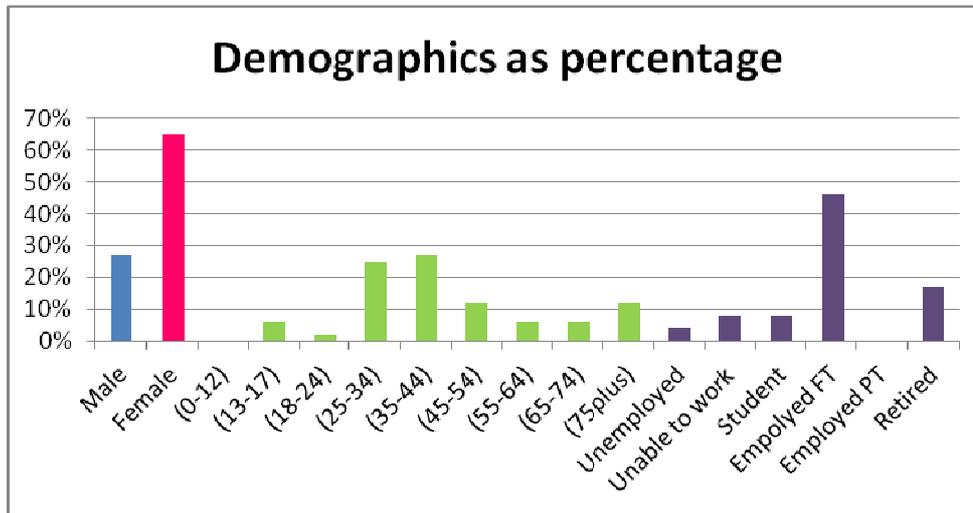
The objective of the Chatty about Abbey Peer Research initiative is to have a comprehensive understanding of the East Barnwell area from the point of view of residents. It is important for Abbey People to be led by the local people and provide a voice for the residents. This initiative also allowed the group to gauge the types of activities needed in the area and understand what types of activities would encourage more residential involvement in the community.

2.3. Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to explore experiences, opinions and wishes of Abbey residents. It was important to capture individual differences and circumstances that these residents live in and to provide a platform of reforms for Abbey People to create future events and projects to enhance the community. Local residents were asked to interview their neighbours and local friends. Peer interviewers were given the freedom to expand on answers. Having the complex and detailed answers provided the researchers with invaluable data from an in-depth analysis on people's experiences, thoughts, and feelings about the Abbey community.

Residents' demographics. Participants were Abbey residents, of which 65% were female, 27% were male and 8% preferred not to say. Forty-five people were interviewed individually and approximately 30 people were interviewed across nine groups. Age of residents ranged from 13 – 75+ years old. Regarding the employment status, 46% of interviewees were

employed or self-employed, 12% unemployed or unable to work, 17% retired and 8% student (see Graph 1 below). Residents were recruited via our peer interviewers as it was felt that via this route, approached interviewees will be more open in giving a more honest picture of Abbey. They received no reward for partaking.



Method of Data Collection. Individual structured interviews were used for data collection. Interviewers were trained by the Abbey People Trustees explaining the information gathering is expected to be more chatty and candid conversation rather than formal questioning. Interviews were conducted in many settings, usually on opportunistic basis, for instance: at the East Barnwell Centre, during community activities, with neighbours, in the garden, at the school gate waiting for children to get out of class, group interviews with patients, young people and clients and in social groups. Residents were explained the purpose of the interview and encouraged to answer the questions to their best ability, but also given the freedom not to comment on a question if they chose not to. Main areas covered in the interview were positive aspects of Abbey, suggestions for improvements, gauging local interests to ignite more resident involvement, recommendation for the development of the Baptist church and the East Barnwell Community Centre, and best points of contacts.

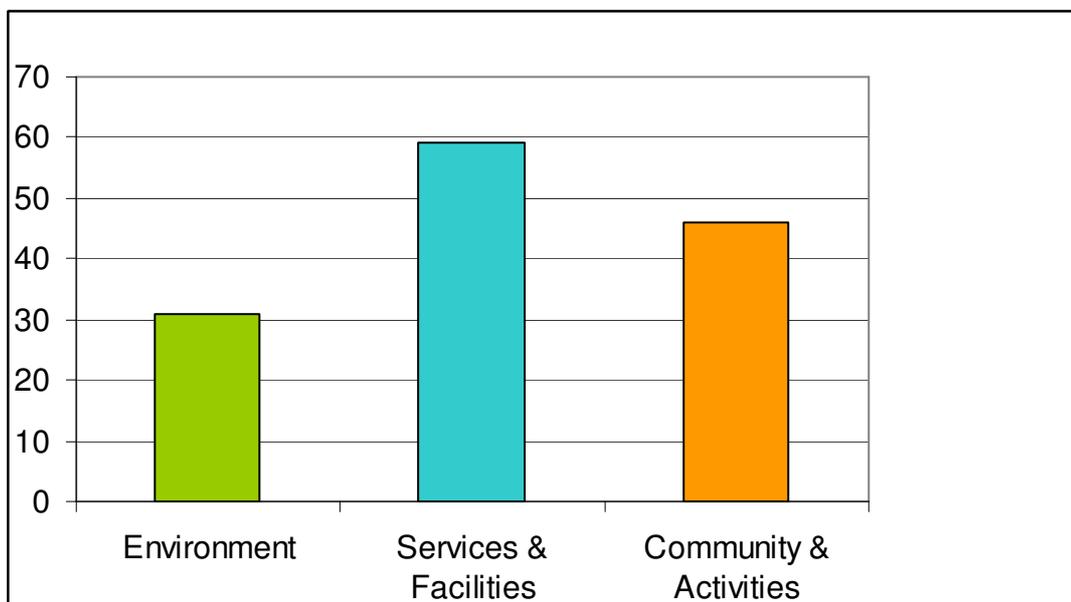
Method of Data Analysis. Interviews were retyped by the Community Project Leader (CPL) and sent to Volunteer Student Researchers for analysis. The choice of thematic analysis was based on the fact that it is more appropriate form of qualitative study as it identified main areas that were of concern to local residents and provided a clear overview. Data was analysed under supervision of CPL over several meetings.

To quantify the data, researchers analysed each individual question, picking out the most frequently mentioned elements of each question. Once the most frequently mentioned wants, needs and concerns were identified, the responses to the questionnaires could then be quantified by counting the number of times each theme was mentioned (example: Children’s activities). This enables researchers to identify a general consensus of what the Abbey people feel are the most important issues within the area and provide a guide of the priorities for improvements.

3. Results

Residents’ concerns, desires and experiences were presented in four main themes: Environment, Services, Community and Activities, and Communication and Engagement (see Graph 2 for themes overview). Separately, residents’ wants and needs were further explored, particularly regarding preferences for community centres and wanted activities. This initiative was also able to identify potential volunteers who could lead or be part of upcoming community activities.

Graph 2. Quantitative overview of themes



3.1. Environment

Around 32% of residents interviewed said the green spaces, countryside and environment were a positive aspect of Abbey. However there were mentions of cleaning up Abbey and beautifying the community more. In needs and wants for the community, 60% of respondents said they wanted to improve the environment of Abbey such as better parks, less litter, less dog mess and more green activities. When asked what types of activities people would get involved with in regards to environment, residents often mentioned litter picking events or nature walks.

'Bring some of the flowers from Cambridge city centre and bring them to Abbey.'

3.2. Services and Facilities

Ranging from public services to facilities, there were a few more detailed items derived from the peer research conversations

- Wants a post office 27%
- Better transportation 21%
- Want a café and shops 21%
- Want a pub to socialise 14%

One positive aspect of Abbey is its close proximity to the city centre and having a direct bus route to Cambridge City centre. However, it was suggested a direct bus route to Addenbrookes was needed for the community, especially for older people and residents with no access to a car.

Abbey use to have a post office; however this was closed several years ago. For residents to access the multiple services and benefits offered by the post office they would have to travel a significant distance. This could be difficult for residents who do not have a car.

A majority of people did not welcome the services of McDonalds especially it's attraction of noise, however there was a consensus that a community café or restaurant would greatly benefit the area. Some more specific requests and suggestions were to have a café in a community centre or nearby other facilities, allowing people to socialise over a drink while waiting for children or visit to the shops. The same argument can be made for a local pub where adults can come together especially in the evening with longer hours. The mention of these facilities was to show the great benefits of people socialising and getting to know neighbours, building a stronger and unifying the community. With such a high

demand, there could be a potential source of volunteers to run a community café.

'There is no natural interaction with older people'

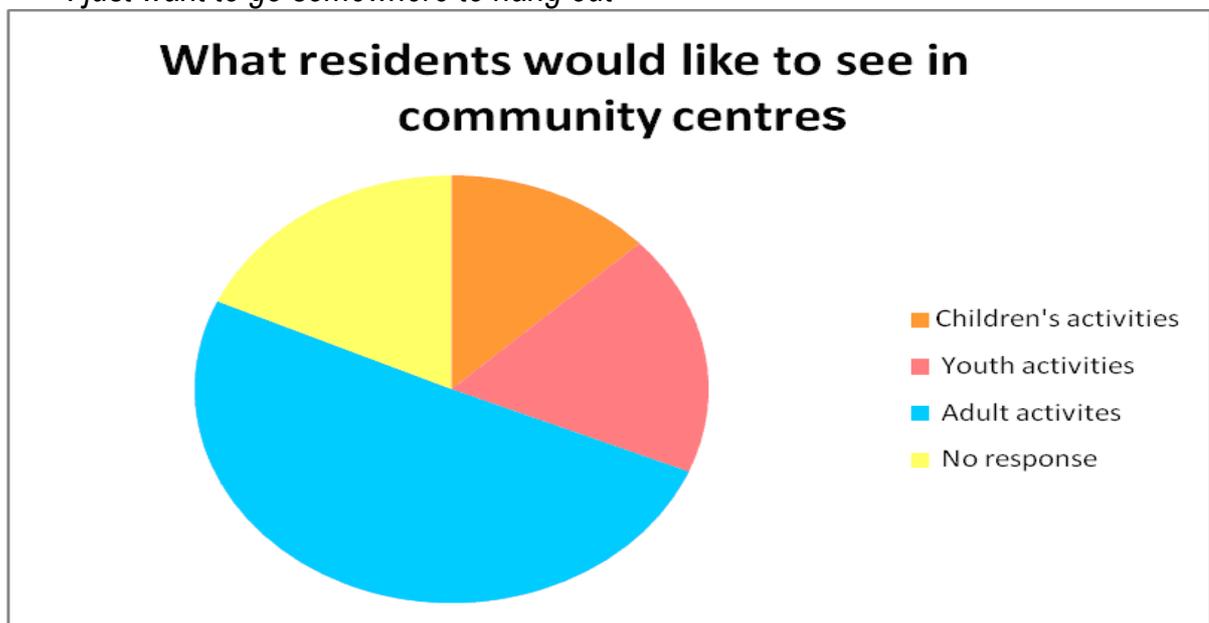
3.3. Community and Activities

3.3.1 Community Centre

With upcoming plans for community centres in Abbey, the questionnaire asked residents what type of facilities they would like to see in their community centres. The largest portions of respondents were activities for adults such as yoga, learning a new language or other skills. Residents did not want to travel far to attend social groups and many wanted activities to happen in Abbey, hoping to bring in more people from the city centre to the area.

The second most asked for item was youth activities (young children and teenagers) and identified the community centre as an ideal space for youth activities such as soft play areas, sports activities and a youth club.

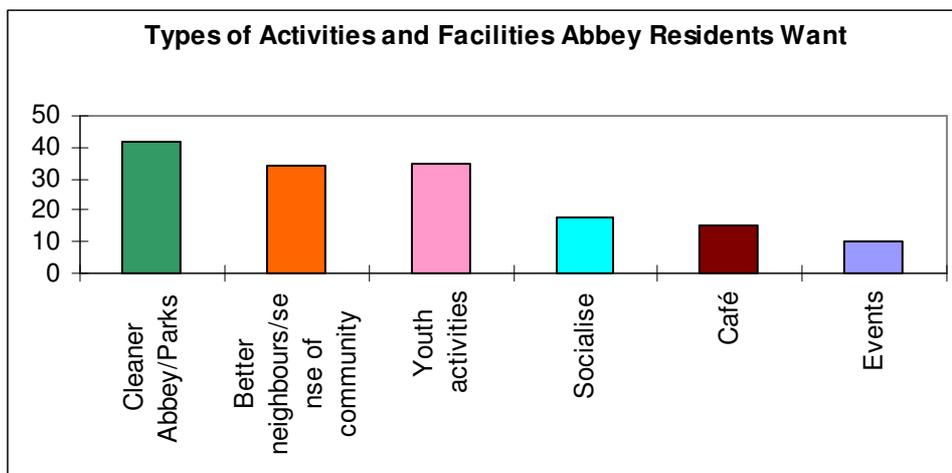
'I just want to go somewhere to hang out'



3.3.2 Activities in Abbey

Based on experience, activities and events are excellent ways to bring people together and combat apathy, social isolation and division within the community. The questionnaire asked residents what types of activities they wanted to do and possibly take the lead on. The graph below illustrates the top reasons for various activities. The environment of Abbey

was an important factor; listing litter picking, planting flowers, better parks and equipment was a priority for residents. The second type of activity residents wanted was more things for young people to do in the area. Many respondents had said the area desperately needed a youth club and/or things for young people to do because there is a lack of activities for 'bored' young people, which many believe leads to anti-social behaviour and crime. For example, teenagers going to parks to hang out and use young children play equipment, putting off many parents from taking their young children to use, fearing confrontation with the teenagers. In addition, this perception possibly plays a part in the division Abbey residents have with each other, creating an 'us versus them' obstacle.



The third items to Abbey residents want are groups and activities that will bring people closer together, especially creating a neighbourly community. Some feel there is a divide such as professionals vs. unemployed or young vs. older. It appears there have been many barriers put up based on stereotypes or bad experience. Residents would like more events, activities and social interactions to help overcome the barriers and to build a stronger and united community.

Furthermore, each area/estate of Abbey identified preferred activities to serve the residents living in that specific area. This information can be valuable deciding on where to set up activities and where to go to reach your target audience along with finding potential volunteers.

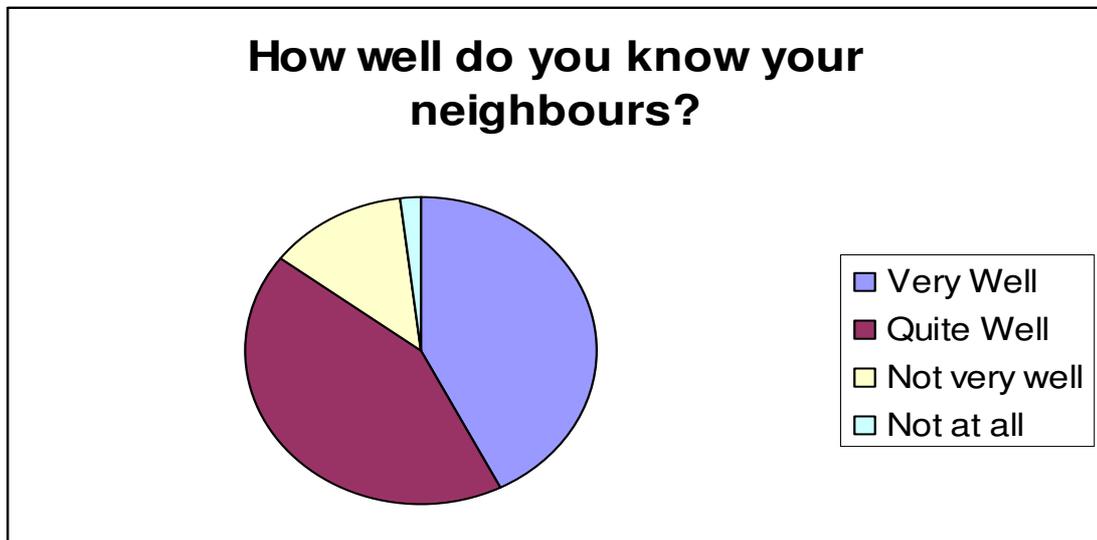
Abbey Area	1 st preference	2 nd preference	3 rd preference
Ditton Fields	Youth Activities	Beautify Abbey	Better sense of community
Whitehill	Beautify	Better	Social

Estate	Abbey	sense of community	
Dudley Area	Beautify Abbey	Better sense of community	Social
Pevelerl	Beautify Abbey	Youth Activities	Better sense of community

Please note, not all respondents answered where they lived. This is an early indication and future research would be beneficial.

3.3.3 Hello Neighbour!

A majority of Abbey residents knew their neighbours. Unsurprisingly, it was more prevalent for residents to know their immediate neighbour and less mention of knowing neighbours down the street. Some of the remarks for why people did not like or know their neighbour is due to bad neighbourly relations such as people running businesses in their front garden or temporary student residents not staying long to get to know one another. There were a few mentions of ‘bad’ families not being good neighbours creating a strain in the community.



Some examples of the positive relationships seen with Abbey residents were pet sitting while away, having chats, child minding and checking in on elderly neighbours. There are a lot of Abbey residents who have lived in the area for a long time and this has contributed to building good and strong neighbourly relationships. This can also help explain the difficulty in long time Abbey residents engaging with people who privately rent with the perception of not staying long.

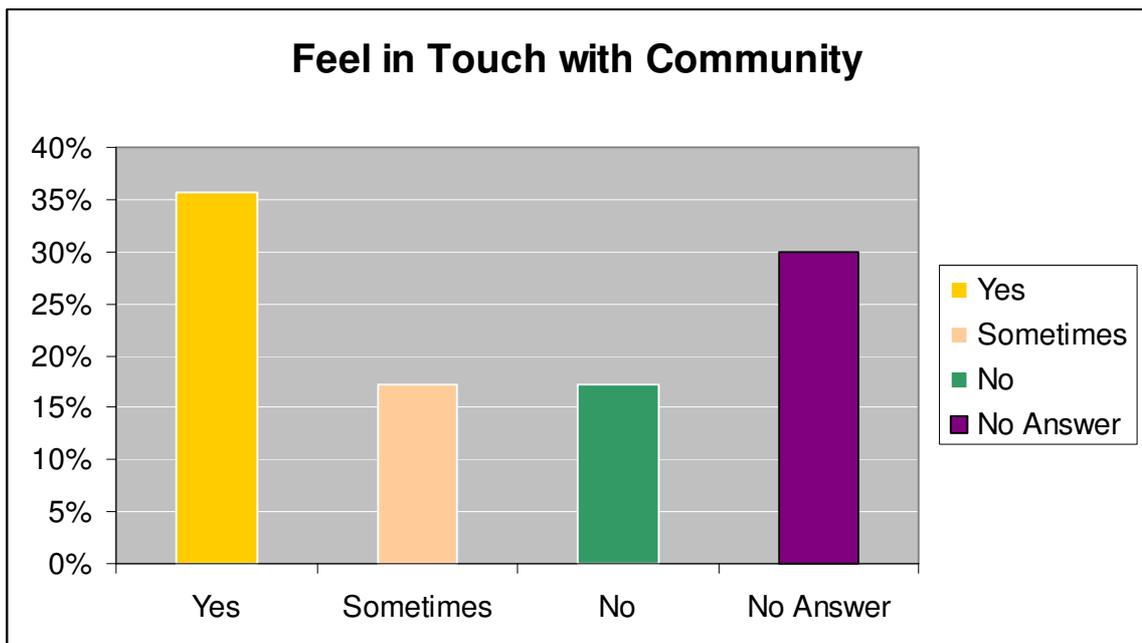
' I know my neighbours well, I walk my neighbour's dog and check in on one another'

' Some neighbours not so well, but we are still civil with each other. I'm very close to our neighbour across the street. We socialise such as BBQs, coffee chats, borrow items and babysit once in a while.'

3.4. Communication and Engagement

3.4.1. In touch with community

Even though Abbey has quite a lot already going on and there is more to come, we need to properly engage with residents and to improve our promotion strategy to reach out to all and persuade people try new activities and interact with one another. The graph below showed people's responses on how they feel they are in touch with the community and know what is going on.



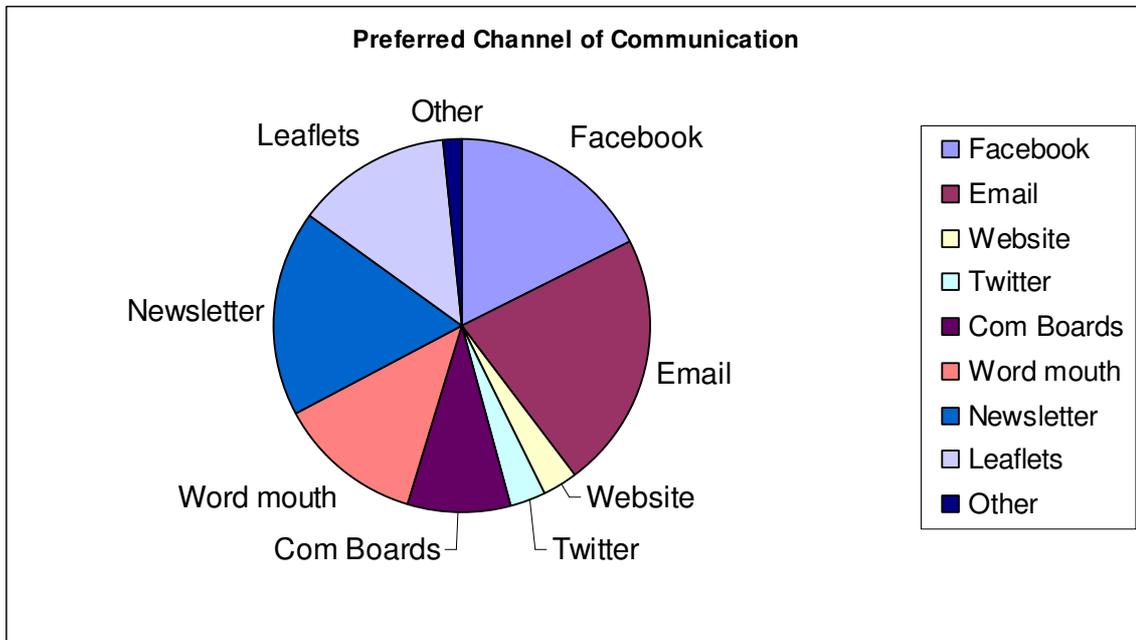
' I would like to see more news about events, road works and good news stories. Nice stories that motivate me to get involved in the community would be good.'

' I sometimes know what is going on, but not always aware of what is happening until after events.'

There were some differences of opinions such as the bus service in Abbey. Some would note the convenience of having a bus service to

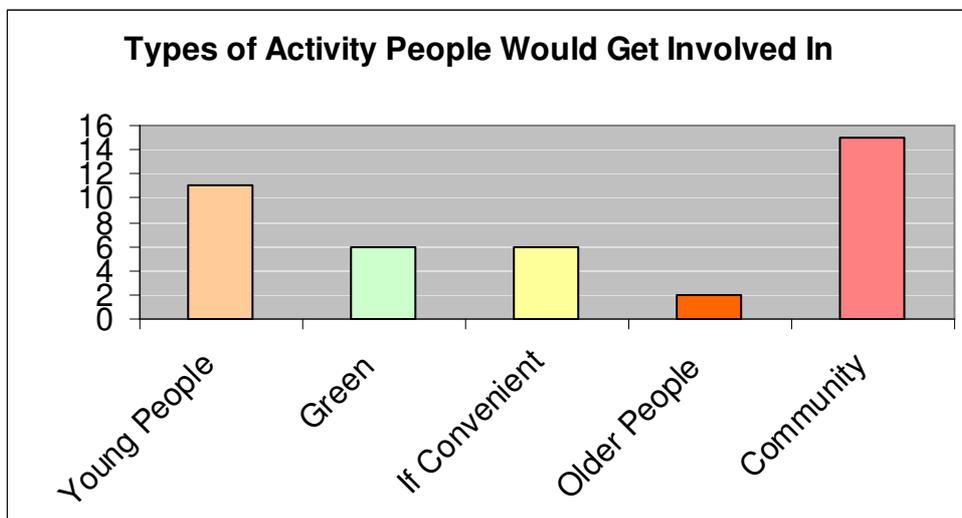
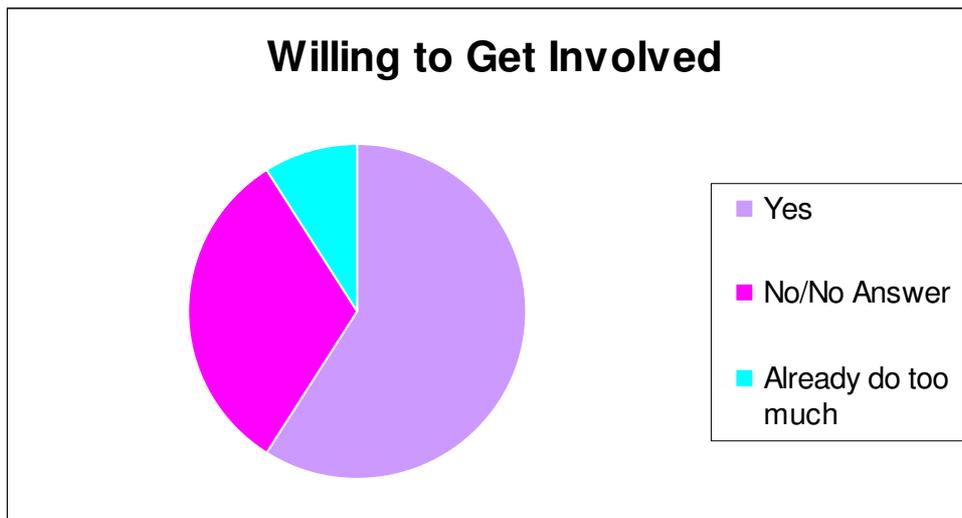
the city centre, however others found the route inconvenient. There could be a perception problem and identifying issues that are 'low hanging fruit' problems. This could be addressed by better communication and sharing of information. Also, having more discussions and managing expectations could allow residents to move beyond the obvious issues and concentrate on more in-depth community problems and co-designing activities to help solve complex issues.

With a need to better promote activities and updates, we asked what would be the preferred way of getting information out to people, without them having to go the extra mile. The graph below states the top channels to get information out to Abbey residents. According to the data collected, email, Facebook and the Newsletter are the best forms of communication for Abbey residents.



3.4.2 Getting Residents Involved

One of the objectives of the Chatty about Abbey Peer Research initiative was to promote the idea of residents getting more involved with their community. This meant creating more community activities, giving feedback and volunteering. The graph below shows how many are willing to get involved. The second graph also asks what types of activities would residents more lively to get involved with and volunteer to help run.



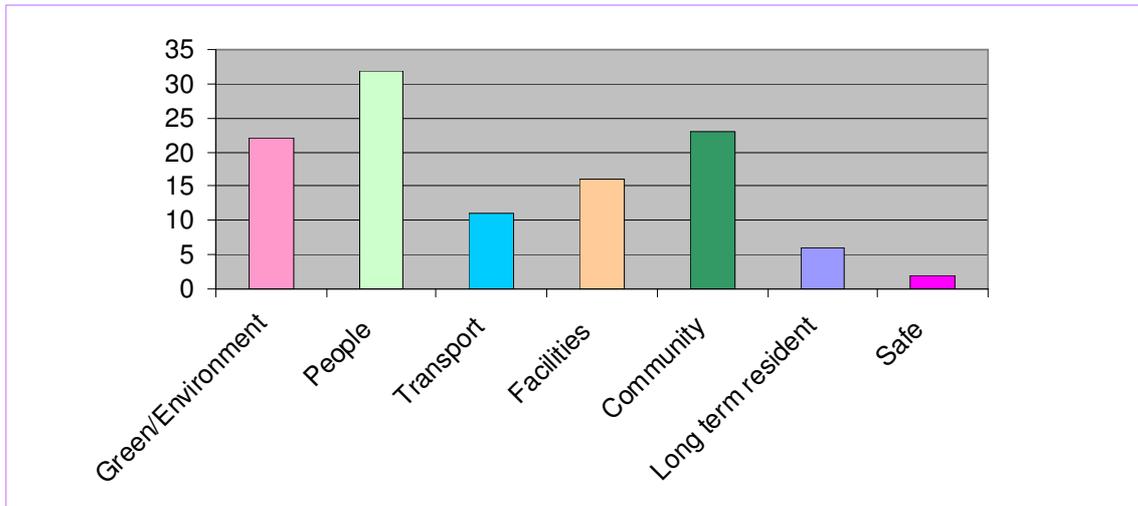
It is apparent that many residents would be open to the idea of getting more involved with the community and the top activities identified by residents qualified for are community cohesion, young people and green spaces/environment. These topics compliment the types of activities Abbey residents want to have more of in section 3.3.2

Through conversations, there were a lot of enthusiasm from residents to change Abbey for the better and many had expressed interest to get more involved, if harnessed correctly. There is great potential to ignite more resident involvement.

3.4.3 Abbey is Great!

The first question of the interview is 'What do you like about your community?' This question was to identify the positive aspects of Abbey

and ensure the good things in the community are to continue and be protected.



The purpose of the research was to explore residents' perspectives on their local community and to understand the types of activities they were willing to get involved with. This report performed a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to analyse the importance and relevance of the perceived issues by local people.

Findings have identified four main themes

- Environment
- Services and Facilities
- Community and Activities
- Communication and Engagement.

This report highlights areas where Abbey People can facilitate more community interaction and engagement to help combat various issues that were raised. For example, the identification of more youth activities and a youth club could address the problem of a fractured community and combat perceptions of teenager 'hanging out' in the community. Or creating a cleaner and more 'beautiful' Abbey could spark more residents to take ownership of their 'beautiful Abbey' and be proud as a resident of your own neighbourhood.

Suggestions for future developments of the East Barnwell area are covering...

- Welcoming new residents to the area and bringing long standing residents together with newer residents to celebrate living in Abbey
- "Volunteer Celebrity awards"
- Youth Club and youth activities

- Adult activities in learning new skills
- Small social groups such as gardening club or dance society
- Days dedicated to cleaning up and beautifying Abbey
- Community events
 - Abbey event allowing all residents to come together and bring a sense of a larger community
 - Neighbourhood community events allowing residents in each area of Abbey to get to know each other better and build friendships

A strong community is built on local residents, their mutual efforts, strong relationships and cooperation. It is important to take this information to shape future activities and initiatives run or facilitated by Abbey People. However the conversation and engagement still needs to continue. There are plans to have a Chatty about Abbey Peer Research second phase, where we follow up with the residents and interviewers on what they would like to do next, further delve into what people want, such as the exact type of wanted activities, create a collaborative plan to move forward in setting up initiatives and co-design projects and activities to fulfil what the community wants.

There is great potential in building a strong community and harnessing the positive characteristics of Abbey. Many had said they knew their neighbours well and found the good people of Abbey an attractive quality. Perhaps, we can use this friendly environment to create small groups aimed at specific interests. These types of activities would not only provide enjoyment or a source of recreation for attendees, but build social and community cohesions, creating a more united Abbey to combat problems and celebrate successes.

5. References

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