

Young Persons

1.0 Introduction

Aim:

- To gather the views of 11 to 18 year olds in Boston Spa and use them to inform the policy within the Boston Spa Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Objectives:

1. To gather the views of young people in Boston Spa on the issues that are impacting upon them; including gathering the views on the delivery of youth services, the provision of green spaces and transport.
2. To give young people the opportunity to discuss how they feel about living in Boston Spa.
3. To gather the views of what young people think they need to improve their quality of life in Boston Spa and how the village does this already.
4. To facilitate a discussion about what young people think their needs might include in the future and what sort of facilities they think will need to be available.

The aim of this report is to help aid the production of Boston Spa Neighbourhood Plan by outlining some of the views given by young people within Boston Spa youth groups. A series of 7 focus groups took place over several weeks with well-attended groups of young people in Boston Spa. Consultation with young people is vital in helping to identify the needs of Boston Spa over the coming years and focus groups were chosen as the most suitable option due to various factors which included time-constraints for the steering committee, limited access to young people at Boston Spa School due to the time of year and the availability of local youth groups. As a consequence this brief report should be identified as being limited in scope and as such provides a commentary on the issues facing young people within Boston Spa rather than detailed scientific evidence.

With a primary focus on the everyday issues rather than the very long term (although there is some discussion around these issues) the report is intended as a starting point to continued consultation, if this can be achieved, as well as being a supplementary document to the household survey which may not identify all of the issues affecting young people.

Consultation should be described as a two way process with dialogue taking place between the young people and the steering group to facilitate the collection and dissemination of knowledge, opinion. The result of this should be the identification and then resolution of issues through a commitment to listen and to change.

As a consequence this report should be read in the following context:

- It seeks to receive comments and information from young people.

- It seeks to use these opinions to conclude a better way forward for young people in Boston Spa.
- It seeks to begin the process of including young people in decision making on issues which impact on them in their area.
- It shall inform the policy within Boston Spa Neighbourhood Plan.

What was the situation before this round of focus groups?

The NP steering committee did not have the views of 11 to 18 year olds within the community. There is some information relating to primary school age children. It was felt at a meeting [21.03.13] that this is sufficient for the purpose of this Neighbourhood Plan given the time constraints. This data is in the form of teacher analysis of pupil's feelings/discussion.

A questionnaire has been produced and delivered to every house in Boston Spa. It is recognised that this will produce sufficient information to create a significant proportion of the data that will inform policy making. In addition there have been other methods of consultation with the people of Boston Spa including at village fetes, galas and in the local streets. However, it is felt that the results of this questionnaire and other methods on consultation are unlikely to accurately reflect the views of the young people living in the community, as more senior members of their households are most likely to fill them in.

There had been very little additional consultation with young people for the Neighbourhood Plan.

How will young people benefit from this round of focus groups?

Young people are in the minority in Boston Spa and as a consequence it has been identified that there is the potential for their views to be missed. This is a chance for the young people to have their views heard on the issues they're passionate about, impact upon them and to have the opportunity to influence a legally binding policy document that will shape the future of the community, with real weight in planning decisions. Young people will benefit further from more rounds of consultation as the production of the Neighbourhood Plan progresses.

2.0 Method

The following method was chosen as it was felt during discussions that this would gather views of the young people in Boston Spa whilst leaving the opportunity for further consultation.

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Action Plan:

Icebreaker – small groups around a table

- Questions about Boston Spa and an introduction to who we are and why we are here.
- Do you agree, disagree or strongly disagree with our statements on Boston Spa?

Focus group

- Small groups of between 8 and 10.
- Discuss the positives and negatives of Boston Spa for young people.
- Each table equipped with a map, pens, post-it notes and pictures.
- Use the map for discussion around “now” and for “the future” to highlight discussion points.
- Draw on the “action points” using a combination of post-it notes with comments and small stickers to highlight the location of the issue. To be collected at the end and used for evidence base
- Pull together for a group discussion of “why?”
Finish with filling in quick questionnaire for qualitative data analysis.

The method was applied in the following way:

- There were 7 groups of young people identified as being suitable (i.e. between the ages 11-18).
- These included a mixture of scout groups, church groups and local authority run youth clubs.
- Over 85 young people were spoken too.
- 85 questionnaire responses were returned.
- 4 maps of the Parish of Boston Spa were used and filled with comments using post-it notes (Please see appendix two).

The use of this method was decided as the best for the following reasons:

- The simplistic and engaging nature which could be delivered within a very short period of time per youth group (2 hours for a group of approximately 20).
- The open nature of the discussion during which there is scope for discussion to tackle multiple issues.
- The ability to collect evidence to be analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively.
- To allow scope to deliver the information back to the young people and for further consultation based upon this round of focus groups.

3.0 Results

Questionnaire results from 85 respondents:

Age of Participant

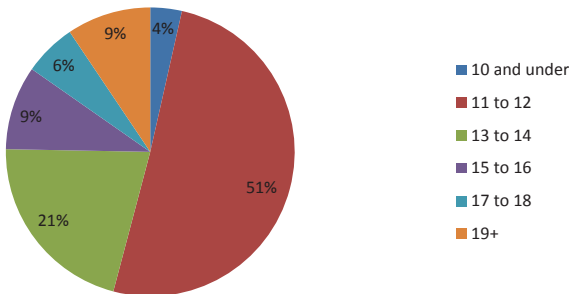


Figure 1 – showing the age of participants who replied to the paper questionnaire.

The graph shows the age of the young people who responded to the questionnaire were predominantly aged 11-12 with the second largest majority from the age group 13-14.

% who use each mode of transport

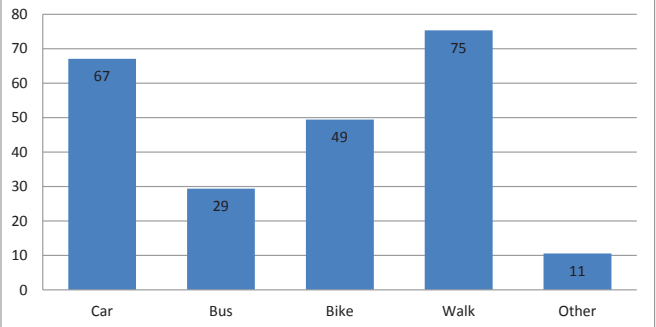


Figure 2 – showing the total percentage of respondents who use each form of public transport.

The graph shows the predominant method of getting around Boston Spa is walking with the second highest the use of the car (clearly this means the parental taxi). Notably only 30% of the young people said they used the bus.

% who take part in each activity

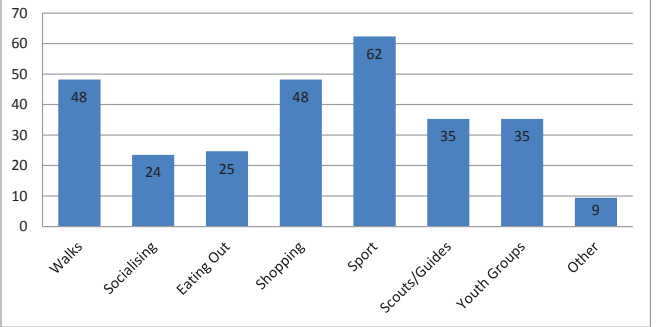


Figure 3 – showing the percentage of young people taking part in each type of activity

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The graph demonstrates the percentage of young people partaking in sports activities as being the highest in Boston Spa at 62%. After this, 48% said they go for walks and go shopping with Scouts/Guides and youth groups the next at 35%. This is followed by similar percentages enjoying socialising and eating (or just hanging out).

Are there enough activities for your age group?

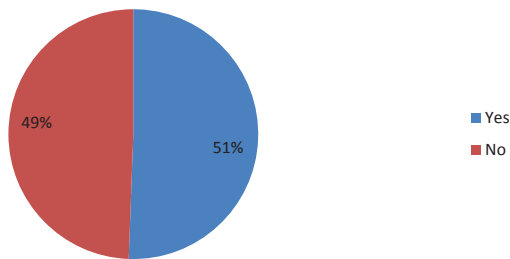


Figure 4 – showing the percentage of respondents who thought that there were enough activities.

This graph shows almost a direct split in respondents that thought there were enough activities for young people in Boston Spa.

Are services easily accessible?

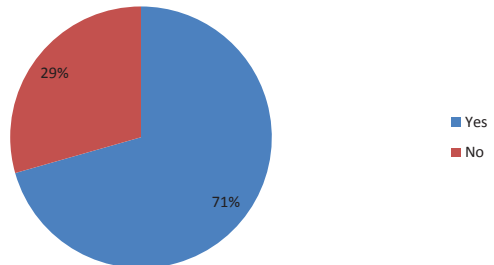


Figure 5 – showing the percentage of respondents who thought that access to services (youth, transport, health care etc) was easy.

The graph shows that the majority of young people who responded to the survey thought that services were easily accessible.

Likelihood of living in Boston Spa in 10 years Time.

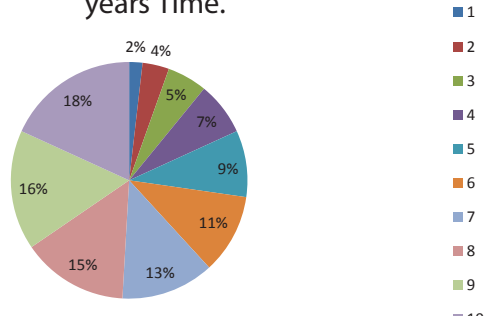


Figure 6 – showing the likelihood of the respondents to live in Boston Spa.

This graph shows almost an even split across the top four categories. On the scale, 7-10 inclusive shows that people are wanting to live in Boston Spa. However it should be noted that this may be little more than an aspiration to remain in the village.

Issues with getting around Boston Spa:

15 comments mentioned cost of the buses

- Bumpy Pavements
- Petrol cost
- Traffic (local and A1)
- Not enough paths
- Cost
- Too many parked cars
- Scary people – feel unsafe
- Busy parents – means I cannot get around
- The cost of the buses
- The reliability of buses
- I find it OK to cycle
- Few buses to Tadcaster – I feel isolated
- Cars on the pavement
- Expensive buses
- Slow and lengthy routes of buses (not direct enough)
- Inconsiderate motorists

Summary:

This is a snapshot of the total comments and many are repeated more than once.

Issues with access to services:

- Young people harassing shops giving us all a bad name
- Difficult to get access to a doctor
- Too many idiots wasting police time
- We need a local police station but everything else is fine
- All services are too spread out
- No one listens to us
- Overall healthcare is good
- We don't know how to access the services
- The doctors is cramped and over crowded
- I travel to Leeds for the dentist

What kind of things do young people want to see in Boston Spa (from the paper questionnaire)?

- Boston Spa is good already!
- Even more sports and youth groups!
- Access to a swimming pool
- Bigger and better designed skate park Trees/grassland
- Access to golf
- A main football club
- A park
- Places to go
- A shop for young people to go
- Shops for our age group
- More clubs

- McDonalds
 - A dedicated youth centre for young teens to relax in both summer and winter
 - More information/adverts about youth and sports groups
- I'm not sure that they would be well used even if we got everything we wanted. People go to Harrogate, Leeds or Wetherby so better access to those places.

What did the young people say in the focus groups (a selection of comments)?

- There are things for adults and young kids to do but not mid-teens
- I like the park
- I like the scout hut
- Better/more parking to improve traffic
- A bus to York
- A doctor's surgery open on a weekend
- The doctors are always busy
- Renewable energy schemes
- Better public toilet facilities
- A space for taxis or at least a board with a phone number
- A better skate park with a more thought-through design (consultation with young people)
- Gym times for young people
- We don't have anywhere to hang-out without being moved on
- Events in the park
- A safe cycle route to Tadcaster
- Jobs for young people
- Advertise the things that are available more
- All parking on one side of the road
- I'm 14 and quite isolated because of the transport cost and other difficulties to get around

4.0 Discussion of key points

The aim of this report has been to bring together the findings of 7 focus groups that took place during early 2013 with young people's groups in Boston Spa. The information that was gathered is intended to inform the policy of Boston Spa Neighbourhood Plan and this discussion will begin the process of examining the way in which these findings can begin to do this.

The overall theme throughout the focus groups is that Boston Spa is generally a positive place to live with lots of activities for young people with a generally high quality of life. However, the young people sometimes feel that they are under-represented and not always listened to and engaged in decisions that often impact upon their lives. One particularly good example of this was the perceived lack of consultation to create a better skate park, which resulted in the equipment that was installed as not being suitable for that which it is intended.

In addition to this, there are issues which it is felt impact upon the young people more than other demographic groups and which are sometimes not addressed in the best possible way. A good example of this is the issue surrounding the pricing and availability of public transport. Bus prices are clearly too high for many young people to afford and so they rely on their parents to drive them around, which in turn contributes to the issues with traffic in the village. In addition, there are combined issues with the provision of public transport and other methods of getting around such as walking or cycling. Young people were generally happy to use the local cycle and footway connections to Wetherby as a result of expensive public transport and the not-always-available, if at all, parental taxi. However, they felt that the connection to Wetherby using this method was not as it should be within Boston Spa – the footpath was narrow, in poor condition and potentially dangerous – not very suitable for use.

The provision of groups for young people it is felt, are good and this is demonstrated by the percentages that are using the facilities – 62% of the respondents to the questionnaire took part in sport – even though we attended no sporting groups. However, it could be that the type of person who attends youth groups would attend sporting activities and are generally active but it demonstrates that people are attending more than one group per week. The young people also stated that they felt that there should be better promotion of other activities in Boston Spa – a one stop shop to find out what they can do and when. One example of why this should be created is that one youth group was taking place within a room approximately 10 metres away from another concurrently and they had never met and it was stated that this would be good.

Moreover the lack of a safe, relaxed atmosphere in which young people can 'socialise' without fear of someone complaining, moving them on or being intimidated was also discussed often. The young people spoke of wanting somewhere which is informal, relaxed and safe but without the added pressure of "being watched". Likewise the suggestion of wanting a KFC, McDonalds, milkshake bar or young person's café also alluded to this as they are the type of place which is normally safe, secure, well-lit and ultimately welcoming to young people where there is no one particular person assigned to 'watch' what they are doing. It is understood that this is a difficult area to tackle and one in which requires significant thought and engagement but there is potential to reduce a conflict within the village through giving young people ownership and responsibility of a project.

Additionally, health care provision in Boston Spa received mixed comments both good and bad. Some young people simply stated that they went to Leeds for various services and therefore it didn't impact upon them. This, in itself could be a cause for concern as the decision to travel to Leeds has been made by their parents in response to the lack of adequate facilities in Boston Spa. However, on the flip-side of this it is possible that the reason for going to Leeds was made for any number of reasons. Some young people were not aware of how to access the facilities and what was on offer, this may be of concern, however it could be argued that they simply were too young to need to know these and their parents were the people with this responsibility. Several young people who had tried to use the doctor's surgery stated that they found access difficult – to get an appointment when needed – and that even the time of the appointment was potentially conflicting, with none available at a weekend when they are not in education or working.

Finally, the young people were asked if they intended to be still living in Boston Spa in 10 years. This was one of the most difficult areas to extract as there was a range of ages at different stages of development and thinking. Clearly, this was to be expected and many of the young people gave very good answers. A snapshot of these are demonstrated on page 11 and range from intending to go to university, to the lack of affordable housing and just the fact that they were only in Boston Spa to attend school and groups and live elsewhere. Many of the comments related to the notion that jobs are not available in Boston Spa to the standard that they would like and these are available somewhere else or "in the city somewhere." Behind some of the comments we received here could also be explained by the general need of young people to 'fly' and leave Boston Spa and again some of the comments picked up on this with people stating that they "had lived in Boston Spa forever".

5.0 Recommendations

- The on-going inclusion and involvement of all young people in Boston Spa Neighbourhood Plan including those within hard-to-reach groups.
- Continuing to gather the comments and thoughts of the young people of Boston Spa and how it can move forward to remain a great place to live.
- Creating policies within the Neighbourhood Plan which are pro-young people and take their views from this and subsequent reports into account.
- Creating community actions which will deliver the over-arching needs identified within this and subsequent reports and give ownership of projects to the young people.

Appendix One - suggested themes for focus group to facilitate discussion with young people include (but not limited to):

Transport:

- Public transport
- Cycle and Pedestrian connectivity
- Walking and pedestrian safety
- Lighting [Skate park?] and signage

Environment:

- Green spaces [and other hangout spaces] and their uses

Community:

- Healthcare – doctors, dentists
- Facilities for the young
- Leisure/community facilities and services
- Personal safety

Business and employment:

- Employment and training for the young

Housing:

- Affordable housing
- Remaining in Boston Spa in the future

Key Features from the questionnaire

Key features from Questionnaire that need to be addressed.

Overall:

- 91% are satisfied with life in Boston Spa
- 37% household response deemed to be high for a postal survey
- We have an aging population – 50% of respondents are retired
- 25% of respondents are limited in mobility – 10% with significant mobility problems
- Boston Spa is a place you move to and stay judging by the 49% of respondents who have lived in the village for 20 or more years

Housing:

- 90% believe that village cannot cope with more than 75 new houses
- Residents would not like to see more large scale housing developments preferring small infill developments
- 71% say we have enough detached homes
- Eco housing is to be encouraged
- The stated need is for more housing for the elderly and affordable housing for the first time buyer
- Building styles should reflect those already in the area with no keenness for contemporary design
- Only 8% of respondents were in rented accommodation

Environmental:

- Residents were keen to explore Hydro Power but are anti wind turbines
- Solar Panels are supported by 47% but a large minority – 32% are anti
- Overwhelming support for hedges and green corridors and the planting of native trees

Facilities:

- Visiting the centre of the village was felt to be a pleasant experience and residents claim they regularly use local shops and services. However they would like to have more places to socialise
- More facilities for teenagers are needed
- Facilities and access for the mobility impaired were believed to be poor
- Whilst residents (surprisingly) indicated that there were enough facilities for young children (including play areas) there was a strong opinion that more green spaces were needed
- Their favourite place in the village is the riverside and associated walks

Key Features

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Traffic and Getting About

- Most respondents claimed to be regular users of the bus services particularly the 770 to Leeds and Harrogate and were generally happy with it
- 78% highlighted the need for a direct bus link with York
- Retired residents and people with limited mobility have greatest need for public transport
- The Junior Survey highlighted the high cost of public transport for teenagers
- 86% believe there is too much traffic passing through the village
- 70% would like to see more pedestrian crossings whilst they also say the village is safe for pedestrians
- 66% would like more parking in the village centre
- 61% would like a lower speed limit
- Whilst it was felt provision for cyclists was poor there is only a small majority in favour of cycle lanes

Housing needs Advice

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Introduction.

Previous housing needs assessment work for the Parish Council Re'New provided a Housing Market Assessment in April 2014 to inform Boston Spa Parish Council's emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

The Parish Council (henceforth BSPC) have asked RTPI/PAE to review this, using URS to provide an independent, unbiased critique of the Re'New HMA based on our knowledge and experience of the housing market in the Outer North East part of Leeds City Council's area and recent housing needs advice work carried out for neighbouring Clifford and nearby Collingham Parish Councils.

Our approach to the review has been to fill some of the evidence gaps uncovered in the Re'New HMA document which are relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan with a view to providing an indicative estimate of housing need for Boston Spa.

The Re'New HMA compiled data from a wide range of relevant sources, and we consider it contains much of value as a result. For this reason, this advice note does not seek to develop an alternative to it along the lines of our housing needs advice to Clifford and Collingham; rather, it seeks to build on the extensive work already carried out, while applying relevant data sources and methodology which has proved useful in other parishes. In particular, we sought to provide information in line with best practice as set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), and in our review of the existing Housing Market Assessment, we have tested its approach against the NPPG approach.

The NPPG guidance is primarily aimed at local planning authorities preparing SHMAs. However, it helpfully states that those preparing neighbourhood plans can use the guidance to identify specific local needs that may be relevant to a neighbourhood, but that any assessment at such a local level should be proportionate.

However, the NPPG also notes that establishing future need for housing is not an exact science, and no single approach will provide a definitive answer. The process involves making balanced judgments, as well as gathering numbers and facts.

REVIEW OF RE'NEW HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT:

This section of our advice note comprises a section-by-section review of the Re'New Housing Market Assessment (henceforth RHMA) of April 2014.

Section 1: Introduction.

The RHMA states that it has been informed by use of the Hometrack Housing Market Intelligence database, the www.home.co.uk and www.rightmove.co.uk websites, ONS Income statistics, 2011 Census data, Leeds City Council Local Statistics and Leeds Neighbourhood Index statistics and searches of key housing market websites. It states that it was also informed by consultation with local estate agents, local residents and other key stakeholders in the area.

Use of a wide range of sources is recommended in the NPPG, as the broader the range of facts and opinions gathered about a local housing market, the more robust the resulting assessment of housing need. The NPPG states: 'no single source of information on needs will be comprehensive in identifying the appropriate assessment area; careful consideration should be given to the appropriateness of each source of information and how they relate to one another. Plan makers will need to consider the usefulness of each source of information and approach for their purposes.'

Section 2: Neighbourhood Data

In Tables 1-7 of Section 2, the RHMA sets out a range of data gathered at local level and compares the local data against the Leeds average for each topic. This approach is in line with the NPPG, which states that: 'At a neighbourhood planning level, one important consideration is determining the extent to which the neighbourhood diverges from the local authority average, reflecting the fact that a single parish almost never constitutes a housing market on its own and must therefore be assessed in its wider context.'

The data thus presented covers the following topics:

- Tenure
- House price
- House price change
- House price change by type
- House price by surrounding settlement
- Affordability

Tables 8-14 then consider affordable housing in more detail, including the rental market, and Tables 15-19 cover the social housing market. We would question, however, whether it is necessary to cover affordability and the social housing market in this much depth at the level of neighbourhood planning and given the relatively low need for affordable housing in the Outer North East part of Leeds City Council's area.

Table 20 (and later, section 3.1) cover housing sites and development timescales in Boston Spa and surrounding settlements, based on the 2012 Leeds SHLAA. In other words, it is examining future supply of housing, which we do not consider appropriate within a document that should concentrate purely on demand-side analysis, as it risks the supply of available land becoming a factor influencing the assessment of housing demand, when the two issues should be initially assessed independent of each other. The NPPG is clear on this point when it states that:

'the assessment of development needs should be an objective assessment of need based on facts and unbiased evidence. Plan makers should not apply constraints to the overall assessment of need, such as limitations imposed by the supply of land for new development, historic under performance, viability, infrastructure or environmental constraints.'

The requirement to avoid analysis of future supply can be contrasted with the usefulness of assessing existing supply, as per Tables 1-7 of the RHMA, and as recommended by the NPPG, such as investigating range of existing house types and existing house prices as a market signal of over or under-supply.

Tables 20-25 return to comparison of relevant indicators between the local area and the Leeds average, this time presenting a range of socio-economic data, covering the following topics:

- Age composition
- Household size, including overcrowding and under-occupation
- Household types
- Ethnicity
- Employment status
- Occupation type
- Educational qualifications

Section 3: Assessment of Housing Market Conditions.

The RHMA then discusses the key points arising from the tables noted above in Section 3, 'Assessment of Housing Market Conditions'. It suggests that there will be a growing demand for rented housing for those unable to secure a mortgage. Sub-sections 3.3 and 3.4 suggest that there is currently a lack of affordable housing for households with below average incomes in the local area. Sub-section 3.4 suggests that an additional 350 social rented homes over a ten year period could be required (although it does not state whether this figure applies to Boston Spa itself or to the wider local area).

Based on our work for Clifford and Collingham, we consider that this scale of affordable housing development is unlikely and to some extent undesirable in the Boston Spa context, as it could result in a mismatch of supply and demand. The 350 figure seems to be based on Table 17's presentation of the Leeds Housing Register for the local area. However, it is standard practice in housing needs assessment to apply a discount to the overall housing register figure, and no such discount seems to have been applied, meaning the 350 could be an over-estimate. We will address this point in more detail below.

Sub-section 3.5 then considers the potential sources of demand. It states there is a potential demand for higher or mid-market owner occupied housing. We would agree with this conclusion, and indeed the RHMA could present even more evidence of such demand than the three bullet points provided, such as high relative house prices. It also concludes that the local rental market caters more for households on average to high incomes. We agree with this conclusion but would question why, therefore, the RHMA suggests that rental properties in the area would suit households on the Leeds Housing Register, who are more likely to have below average incomes.

We also agree with the RHMA conclusion that housing for older people could be required and that this can comprise new housing for older people to free up family houses to meet local and incoming need, as well as specialist housing such as extra care units.

Section 4: Investment and Intervention Needs

Sub-section 4.1 on housing growth provides a useful and relevant overview of local opinion; we agree with Re'New's approach of ensuring the study is informed by qualitative judgments as well as quantitative facts. Sub-sections 4.2 to 4.5 present overall conclusions based on all data, divided into 'housing for sale', 'housing for rent' and 'housing for older people' respectively. Sub-section 4.2 discusses reaction to Church Fields, a large recent development of 153 homes on former open space, and the potential for future development to better address a range of needs, including:

- some residents needing to downsize;
- housing for below average income groups; and
- housing for young people.

Sub-section 4.2 concludes by stating that 60% of new homes for sale should comprise 1-2 bedrooms and 40% of homes should be 3-4 bedroom sized properties.

Sub-section 4.3 notes that the existing rental market is dominated by the private sector and that affordability is an issue. It concludes by re-stating the need for 350 new affordable socially rented houses over 10 years and an unspecified number of intermediate rental properties.

Sub-section 4.5 (there is a numbering error- it should be 4.4) suggests a range of housing solutions for older people that could be considered, including:

- Extra care housing
- Retirement villages
- Smaller housing units aimed at older people
- Intermediate rental properties
- Housing and support menus.

Overall, we consider Section 4 to be the weakest part of the RHMA. It is too short, does not provide clear answers in terms of housing numbers, makes seemingly arbitrary judgments and does not build sufficiently on the detailed and useful analysis presented mainly in Section 2 but also in Section 3.

We consider it surprising that the only specific figure provided (350 houses over ten years) relates to affordable need only (and has not been discounted appropriately in any case). The RHMA does not attempt to project forward rates of market and/or overall housing provision either on the basis of past development rate, the Core Strategy requirements or DCLG household projections. The figure of 350 homes over ten years, even if it were correct, is of little use in isolation and for a neighbourhood plan whose period will be longer than ten years.

The Executive Summary of the RHMA states that the local housing waiting list is likely to be just the tip of the iceberg as there are likely to be a number of local households in need of affordable housing to the same extent as those on the list but that do not appear on the list, for whatever reason.

Although this may well be the case, no proof is offered and it would be very difficult to estimate the number of households falling into this bracket. Rather, we would suggest that the most effective option of meeting the needs of those households that have not explicitly expressed a preference for social or intermediate housing would be to seek to raise the supply of smaller and/or entry level housing units on the open market for younger families and/or those earning a below average income.

Although we agree that the evidence reviewed therefore suggests that a mix of house sizes from 1-2 bedroom to 3-4+ bedrooms would be appropriate, the division into 60% of the former and 40% of the latter seems to be arbitrary and should be underpinned by firmer evidence. It is questionable whether the 60:40 split even needs to be stated; in our work for Clifford and Collingham we proposed a similar mix of housing but considered the precise mix to be unquantifiable; instead, we recommend ongoing monitoring to be the most effective way of ensuring a suitable mix of unit sizes. This allows for a more flexible, responsive approach over time.

Additionally, some of the data sources stated as informing the conclusions of Section 4 are not presented in as much detail as they could have been, either in Section 4 or previously. For example, the Introduction section stated that local estate agents were used as a data source.

The only subsequent reference to local agents is in sub-section 4.2, which states that 'the responses from both local agents and residents would support the conclusions drawn from the data that a mix of housing is required. . . There is no elaboration of what these responses were.

This is regrettable, as at a local level, qualitative and anecdotal data, if used judiciously, also has an important role to play, to a perhaps greater extent than at local authority level. We found, for example, in our housing needs advice for Clifford that our estate agent interview was among the most valuable components of the analysis, as it offered local knowledge complementing the Census data and other statistics gathered at a national level. As such, we presented a summary of the entire conversation, and imagine the RHMA (and BSPC) would benefit significantly from a similarly detailed presentation of the estate agent viewpoint.

A further criticism of the RHMA is that it makes insufficient reference to the Leeds SHMA, referring to it only once in passing and deriving no data from it. The Leeds SHMA provides a comprehensive, relatively recent overview of the housing market around Boston Spa which has been scrutinised and successfully defended at the Leeds Core Strategy Examination in Public. As such, it is a natural starting point for any assessment for Boston Spa (which falls into the same housing market as Clifford and Collingham). This approach has the additional benefit of being in line with NPPG best practice, which states that 'Designated neighbourhood forums and parish/town councils can refer to existing needs assessments prepared by the local planning authority as a starting point.'

We also note that although the RHMA, quite rightly, recognises that the economic context is a strong driver of housing need, reference to this context appears only in passing. A more comprehensive assessment would take into account local economic and employment projections, ideally across a wider area, to investigate how they might impact on future housing demand. Again, this is in line with NPPG best practice, which states:

'Plan makers should make an assessment of the likely change in job numbers based on past trends and/or economic forecasts as appropriate and also having regard to the growth of the working age population in the housing market area.'

Finally, we understand from the RTP/Planning Aid England that the parish council had specific concerns that the RHMA's analysis was too wide, and it concentrated on the local area instead of focussing sufficiently on Boston Spa itself.

Having reviewed the document, we understand the Parish Council's concern in this regard but given that housing market areas are almost always larger than a single parish, consider that this approach is not inappropriate and that the data presented in Chapter 2 remains largely robust as a picture of the housing market area of which Boston Spa forms a part. However, specific housing targets for an individual settlement are more difficult to generate without understanding existing dwelling and household numbers within that settlement; we have therefore added data at a parish level in Chapter 4 below to generate appropriate housing targets.

General approach:

In our work for Clifford, Collingham and other neighbourhood groups, URS has developed a methodology for housing needs advice for neighbourhood planning. It is interesting to compare and contrast our approach with that of the RHMA.

Our approach to housing needs advice at a neighbourhood plan level is underpinned by a desire for straightforward but robust and replicable analysis, taking full account of the existing plans, assessments and strategies relevant to each neighbourhood. As it is a basic condition for all neighbourhood plans to be in strategic conformity with the relevant Local Plan, we think the provisions of the Local Plan and its supporting documents, in particular any existing housing market assessment, should be the starting point for housing need assessment at a parish level.

Using the National Planning Practice Guidance:

As stated previously, the NPPG now explicitly states that its housing needs assessment guidance can be used at a neighbourhood level, and our approach seeks alignment with NPPG advice wherever possible. The NPPG advice is primarily aimed at local rather than neighbourhood planners, however, so not all of it is relevant at a neighbourhood level. For example, as noted above, there is no statutory requirement for neighbourhood planning bodies to provide affordable housing, unlike the obligation that applies at local authority level.

When seeking to align our neighbourhood plan-level housing needs advice with the NPPG, we have had to use our professional judgement on which parts of the guidance need not apply at a neighbourhood level, bearing in mind NPPG advice that assessment of development needs should be thorough but proportionate and does not require planners to consider purely hypothetical future scenarios, only future scenarios that could be reasonably expected to occur.