

Ward Profiles

Central

Central ward is a large area situated at the heart of Darlington, encompassing the vast majority of Darlington's retail activity as well as a number of small industrial sites. The new ward is based largely on the old Central ward, but the boundary has undergone a number of alterations, including an extension into the old College and Northgate wards.

Central is ranked 261st (worst 3% nationally) in the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (estimated using combined LSOA scores).

Central has a population of 3,611 resident in 1,745 households. 19.5% of the population is aged under 16 with 17.1% over the age of retirement compared with 21.4% and 16.0% nationally. The proportion of the population from ethnic minorities is 3.8% compared with 2.1% in Darlington and 8.7% in England in Wales.

The highest unemployment rate in Central is the highest in Darlington at 7.1%. This fact is also reflected in youth unemployment, which is 34.3%. 52.5% of households are classed as in receipt of low incomes, which is again the highest in Darlington, with 88.8% of the areas children living in low income households. Central has the fifth largest proportion of pupils on free school meals at 27%. Educational attainment is generally poor in this ward, with the third lowest GCSE attainment levels in Darlington, yet the area has a relatively high rate of participation in learning in the over 17 year old age group (6.9%).

Central ward suffers the second highest level of people needing care in Darlington with 9.3% of the population in receipt of Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance. The area also has the fourth highest mortality rate and the fifth highest rate of conception among under 18 year olds.

As the ward containing the majority of the Town's retail and nightlife activity, Central is unsurprisingly the worst hit area for crime. Central has the highest rates of violent crime, vehicle crime, criminal damage and theft in the Darlington area, all of which are well above the Tees Valley average. The crime problem is further confirmed by the third highest rate for domestic burglaries in Darlington.

Central has a low level of car ownership compared to the national rate, with 44.3% of households not owning a car compared to 26.8% in England and Wales. House prices are an average of £116,900, which is greater than average mortgage amounts (3.5 times the average household income). This is reflected in the percentage of houses in the lowest two Council Tax bands, which is 95.9% compared to 68.5% for the borough as a whole.

Neighbourhood Strengths

Participants at all the community consultation events were encouraged to identify what they felt was good about their neighbourhood. There was a reasonably high level of consistency across the various groups and individual responses.

High levels of 'community spirit' were reported particularly in the Albert Hill area. The area had a long industrial tradition and established families formed what was thought to be a tight knit community.

The social, economic and geographical diversity of the Ward was described as a positive attribute although the disadvantages of this were also discussed (see Neighbourhood Needs). It was suggested that there are a wide variety of ages and abilities and housing of all kinds.

Local people in the Albert Hill area were described as helpful, friendly and welcoming. There was a considerable amount of loyalty in this particular neighbourhood and one of the focus group participants was adamant that she would not live anywhere else.

Focus group participants referred to the popularity of local social clubs and to the high levels of church attendance. The social clubs were described as good meeting places and it was suggested that they were used by all ages.

Gurney Pease School and the local Nursery, both located in Albert Hill, were also praised by local residents.

The open green spaces and the paths along the river at the edge of the Ward were appreciated by local people and it was suggested that the fields behind Haughton Road were well used especially during the summer.

The new housing on Allan Street was thought to have improved the area but little contact had been made with new residents, possibly due to their work commitments.

The main railway station is located in the ward and the bus service was described positively.

Residents in the Ward were pleased about their proximity to the town centre and to resources such as the theatre, Dolphin Centre (swimming pool and sports centre), shops, restaurants and takeaways. While there continued to be concerns about community safety (see Community Needs section) the presence of Community Wardens and Beat Officers was welcomed.

Neighbourhood Needs

Participants in all of the consultation events were encouraged to identify those aspects of life in the local neighbourhood that were not so good and to explore what the underlying problems might be. The discussions that followed ranged widely from quality of life issues, such as the state of the local environment, to broader socio-economic issues such as job availability. The issues raised have been grouped under theme titles that relate to the eight connecting themes of the Darlington Partnership's Community Strategy¹.

Local economy

There was only limited discussion about the high level of unemployment in the Ward .

Inclusive communities

The size and diversity of the ward was thought by members of the Central Community Partnership to have worked against the active involvement of residents from all neighbourhoods. It was also recognised that the population of certain streets, such as older terraced housing, was fairly transient. This, it was agreed, worked against community engagement in the Ward. There was also concern expressed about the needs of certain sections of the community. Focus group participants described the behaviour of some young people towards Asian shopkeepers as racist. Those living in bed-sits were thought to need additional support and it was suggested that older people in the ward often felt isolated.

Educational achievement

No educational needs were raised during the consultation.

¹ Darlington Partnership (2003) "Where Quality Comes to Life: A community strategy for the future of Darlington" (Darlington: Darlington Partnership).

Leisure activities

The absence of youth facilities specifically for the residents of the ward was highlighted by several participants. In particular the needs of children and those over 12 years was mentioned.

Community Safety

Participants in the focus group and contributors to the community appraisal event raised several community safety concerns. They claimed that cars were regularly broken into and that there were frequent domestic burglaries. Figures supplied by Durham Constabulary confirm that the rate of crime is very high in the Ward but it should be noted that the figures include the town centre and this will distort the picture in the residential areas.

Vehicle crime has actually declined significantly over the last three years while domestic burglaries have remained relatively constant .

Discussion also took place on the behaviour of groups of young people in the Ward. There were reports of gangs of young people hanging around and causing annoyance and of police regularly chasing young people. Some claimed the problems were being caused by alcohol but said that they did not consider drugs to be a problem.

There were some accounts of vandalism and specific reference to young people damaging a phone box.

A view supported by many was that there needed to be a greater police presence.

Health and well-being

No health issues were raised during the consultation despite prompts.

Environment

A major environmental concern of the Central Community Partnership was the old industrial area at the back of Albert Hill. Much of this land had been abandoned and had fallen into disuse. This distracted from the positive attributes of neighbouring residential areas and detrimentally affected the image of the area.

Other buildings in poor condition, such as the old St Williams School, were thought to reinforce the run-down impression.

There were also concerns about the housing conditions of older terraced, often privately rented property, especially in the Borough Road area.

Beyond the physical issues there were more general concerns about litter, fly-tipping and Graffiti. The school had also suffered from vandalism and this was attributed to young people, not necessarily from the area.

The introduction of recycling boxes had been welcomed but some residents felt the scheme was limited and were concerned that boxes were being left out at the wrong times and items were being blown around the streets.

Residents in Grey Street felt that many of the trees in their area needed pruning.

Transport system

Traffic on Houghton Road was a concern for residents throughout the Ward, and especially those living between Alexander St and Westgarth Terrace. Most wished to see swift action on the proposed A66 Houghton Road link road.

There was also concern about the bus stop on Houghton Road at the end of Barton Road. This was thought by many to be dangerous location.

While many had seen the bus service as a positive attribute of the ward there were some participants at the community appraisal event who felt that buses were irregular – running early or late but not on time.

Cockerton West

Cockerton West is located in the north west of Darlington and is largely made up of the Branksome Estate and Cockerton Village. The new ward boundary is based on the old Cockerton West ward, but has also been extended to cover a large part of the significantly reduced Cockerton East ward.

Cockerton West is ranked 434th (worst 5% nationally) in the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (estimated using combined LSOA scores).

It has a population of 4,180 resident in 1,848 households. 24.4% of the population is aged under 16 with 19.9% over the age of retirement compared with 21.4% and 16.0% in England and Wales. The proportion of the population from ethnic minorities is 0.7% compared with 2.1% in Darlington and 8.7% in England in Wales.

The unemployment rate in Cockerton West is 3.9% compared to the Darlington figure of 2.8%. Youth unemployment is high with over 15.9% of unemployed people aged under 20. 44.8% of households are classed as in receipt of low incomes, with 53.0% of the areas children living in low income households, the fifth highest in Darlington. Educational attainment in Cockerton West is generally poor. Results in Key Stage 2, GCSE grades, and the percentage of people progressing to university all fall below Darlington and national levels. The proportion of adults with poor literacy skills is the third highest in Darlington (33%), although the area has shown improvement in the number of adults attending further education (climbing from the 2nd least attendees in 2003 to the 11th least a year later, out of the 24 wards in total).

Cockerton West suffers the highest level of people needing care in Darlington with 9.6% of the population in receipt of Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance. The area also has the second biggest problem with dental health among children, with an average of 3.2% suffering from decayed, missing or filled teeth.

Cockerton West has levels of car ownership which are significantly lower than the national rate, with 51.2 % of households not owning a car compared to 26.8% in England and Wales. House prices are an average of £114,400, which is less than average mortgage amounts (3.5 times the average household income). This is reflected in the percentage of houses in the lowest two Council Tax bands, which is 95.5% compared to 68.5% for the rest of the borough.

Neighbourhood Strengths

When asked to describe the positive attributes of Cockerton West, focus group participants and those attending the appraisal event referred to the good community spirit in the area (although this was not everyone's view). Cockerton West Community Partnership members, for example, suggested that local people were friendly and welcoming. Others suggested that they felt safe and secure in Cockerton West and that the area had been improved as a result of the clearance of flats.

There were also positive comments about the pleasing environment of Cockerton Green and other green areas in the ward and it was suggested by the Community Partnership that the local community association was a good thing. Branksome Community Centre was thought to be improving and the activities taking place there were welcomed. The schools, Branksome Comprehensive School, Mount Pleasant Primary and the local nursery, were all described positively. The presence of a local Housing Office was also thought to be a positive thing.

The young people from Cockerton West who undertook the community arts work also thought it was a close community where neighbours looked out for each other. They spoke positively about

the Churches in the area and reported that they ran activities for young people. The youth club based at Branksome Community Centre was thought to be a good place to go especially in the winter. The library was described as good and the young people welcomed the (recently introduced) recycling collection service. The benefits of speed bumps to slow traffic in some streets was also mentioned.

The SureStart initiative in the area was welcomed by focus group participants and they agreed that there was a lot of potential benefits from this work. This view was supported by the Cockerton West Community Partnership who described how a pantomime had been organised by SureStart participants had led to an improvement in self-esteem and confidence among those who had taken part.

Neighbourhood Needs

Participants in all of the consultation events were encouraged to identify those aspects of life in the local neighbourhood that were not so good and to explore what the underlying problems might be. The discussions that followed ranged widely from quality of life issues, such as the state of the local environment, to broader socio-economic issues such as job availability. The issues raised have been grouped under theme titles that relate to the eight connecting themes of the Darlington Partnership's Community Strategy².

Local economy

Cockerton West Community Partnership members suggested that unemployment was a serious issue in the ward. One participant claimed for example:

“There are families where three generations are without experience of work. They have very low aspirations”.

It was generally agreed by focus group participants that there was a shortage of manufacturing jobs and few jobs that match the skills of local people.

Concern was also expressed about the “unrealistic expectations” of some school leavers. One participant had worked with seventeen boys in a local school and suggested that:

“Some have no idea what they want to do, others describe careers that are clearly beyond their reach: footballers, football managers, RAF pilots and firemen etc”.

Participants felt it was important that aspirations were not quashed but also that the status and image of more attainable occupations were raised. The shortage of tradespeople (plumbers and electricians etc.) was mentioned and it was claimed that one of the underlying problems was the low status of these occupations compared with employment in information technology.

Participants also claimed that there was a shortage of apprenticeships in the area and that while the ‘Modern Apprenticeships’ scheme might be helpful they had to be genuine opportunities.

A Community Partnership member suggested that some parents were unaware of the requirements for certain jobs and that further information and advice could be made available.

² Darlington Partnership (2003) “Where Quality Comes to Life: A community strategy for the future of Darlington” (Darlington: Darlington Partnership).

Inclusive communities

Local community agencies reported a need to develop self-esteem and empowerment in order to promote community participation. It was suggested by one agency that parents had not had opportunities but now they were developing confidence.

Many of the other issues discussed also related to a lack of self-esteem and self-respect. It was suggested by one participant that these things were essential if people were to find their own voice and respect others.

Boundaries were perceived between different parts of Cockerton West and a need to break these divisions and the spiral of decline that occurred within some parts of the ward.

Participants felt that there was not enough information circulated about the activities in the area by the local Community Newsletter (Cable Courier) and there was a need to promote more of the activities on offer around the estate.

Educational achievement

Attendance at schools was described as a major issue by a member of the Cockerton West Community Partnership and it was suggested that this might be a case of condoned truancy. Concerns were expressed about the future of Branksome Comprehensive School due to demographic changes.

Leisure activities

Residents who participated in the appraisal event and the focus group raised the issue of young people 'hanging around' and suggested that there was little for them to do and nowhere for them to go.

Community Safety

Gangs on the Branksome estate were described as intimidating and it was suggested that they had vandalised fences and bushes. Specific mention was made of groups of young people in the open area behind Branksome Comprehensive School and the back of Selby Crescent. Concern was expressed about young people taking drugs in these areas.

The Cockerton West Community Partnership suggested that the problems were sometimes hidden. One participant noted that:

“People often don't see the drug problems in Minors Crescent, for example, and also don't see trouble with gangs of youths, in Nickstream Lane, for example”.

Focus group participants suggested that young people were not afraid of authority anymore and that drug and alcohol use was aggravating a lack of respect. There was also concerns about parents who were not interested in knowing where their children were. In addition to the issue of young people hanging around there was reference to cars being vandalised and broken into and to people feeling less safe. It was reported that eggs had been thrown at windows in the area. Complaints were also made about nuisance neighbours and loud music being played particularly in Whitby Way. There was a general feeling that police and community warden coverage in the area was inadequate.

Health and well-being

Few health issues were raised during consultation and participants in the focus groups thought the standard of health in the area was high.

There were however concerns about environmental health. This included concerns about the residue of asbestos from the old industrial area to the north of the ward (West Park). There were also reports of occasional water discolouration.

SureStart had also identified isolation as an issue. Branksome, for example, was described as a quiet estate. One participant said “you don’t see many people out and about”.

There were also concerns about mental health problems and it was suggested that there was a lot of stress related illness in the more problematic parts of the Ward due to heightened anxiety. Depression and post-natal depression was described as big issues. Concern was also expressed about poor diet and money management. Training courses were thought to be needed in cooking and healthy eating.

Environment

Most of the issues raised during the community appraisal event, and by the random focus group participants, concerned environmental and/or ‘quality of life’ issues. The young people also focused almost exclusively on these matters when discussing problems in the area³.

Litter and graffiti were common topics of discussion. It was suggested that school dinner times were a particular problem but focus group participants also suggested that some shop owners in the area were not acting responsibly. Fly tipping on open areas was also reported at the Community Appraisal event.

Mention was made by the Cockerton West Community Partnership and young people of local play areas being ruined by vandals. It was suggested that drug users often used these areas and were responsible for the damage.

There were also many references to the general state of the environment. Young people felt that burnt-out and boarded-up houses gave a negative impression. Jedburgh Drive was mentioned specifically. Several people including the young people also expressed concerns about the empty and boarded up Westfields Nursing Home – described as an eyesore. The Branksome estate was described as untidy and uncared for with shrubs that needed trimming. Local shops were described as ‘tacky and uninviting’ and residents were also concerned that many of the shops in Cockerton Village were vacant.

The street lighting was also criticised in certain parts of Branksome. Some garage blocks were described as badly lit and these had been subjected to vandalism and had been broken in to.

Concerns were expressed about the new housing development at West Park. Residents at the Community Appraisal event suggested that the houses in Jedburgh Drive needed sorting out and that a more sensitive approach to lettings should be adopted in the area. A similar issue was raised in the resident focus group about the top end of Whitby Way and Warwick Square. It was suggested that ‘problem families’ were being moved around the estate and that this was causing neighbour nuisance problems.

Another common assertion was that the Branksome estate had missed out on regeneration while other areas of the town had received large-scale investment on several occasions.

³ This may be partly due to the approach adopted in the community appraisal. By encouraging young people to look around the area they may have been more inclined to point to issues ‘out there’ rather than more personal needs and issues ‘within’.

Transport system

Relatively few transport issues were raised in the consultation events. There was concern about the high levels of traffic on West Auckland Road (on the far South East perimeter of the Ward) and that this would increase as a result of the West Park development. Some of those attending the community appraisal event expressed a wish to have 20 mph speed restrictions in certain parts of the estate and there was some concern about potholes in the roads.

There were few comments about public transport but the need for weather proof bus shelters was expressed and residents in the Branksome Hall area felt that changes to the bus routes were required.

Bank Top

Bank Top is located in the South East of Darlington, and covers the area behind the Town's main railway station. The new ward boundary has lost the northern portion to Lingfield, but gained a small southern section from Lascelles.

Bank Top is ranked 638th (worst 8% nationally) in the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (estimated using combined LSOA scores).

It has a population of 3,754 resident in 1,739 households. 20.9% of the population is aged under 16 with 18.3% over the age of retirement compared with 21.4% and 16.0% in England and Wales. The proportion of the population from ethnic minorities is 2.1% compared with 2.1% in Darlington and 8.7% in England in Wales.

The unemployment rate in Bank Top is 3.4% compared to the Darlington figure of 2.8%. 45.8% of households are classed as in receipt of low incomes, with 78.3% of the areas children living in low income households. Educational attainment is poor, with GCSE attainment below the average for Darlington. Progression into university is low, with 1.3 people per thousand population compared to the Darlington rate of 4.0 people per thousand.

Bank Top suffers the third highest level of people needing care in Darlington with 7.5% of the population in receipt of Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance. The area also has the second highest mortality rate and the sixth highest rate of conception among under 18 year olds.

Bank Top has levels of car ownership which are significantly lower than the national rate, with 44.3% of households not owning a car compared to 26.8% in England and Wales. House prices are low, with an average of £66,100, which is less than average mortgage amounts (3.5 times the average household income). This is reflected in the percentage of houses in the lowest two Council Tax bands, which is 96.9% compared to 68.5% for the rest of the borough.

Neighbourhood Strengths

When asked to describe the positive attributes of Bank Top, focus group participants and those attending the appraisal event referred to the good community spirit in the area especially among the older people in the King William Street and Wesley Court areas. Bank Top Community Partnership members suggested that local people got on with one another and were neighbourly and participants at the community appraisal event suggested that local people were helpful. It was agreed that relative to other areas the area had few problems and focus group participants described Bank Top as “a nice area to live in”.

The young people from the Ward welcomed the open spaces especially Eastbourne Park, which they described positively. They also felt the Nursery and Dodmire School (which is just outside the Ward) were good aspects of their neighbourhood. Bank Top Community Partnership members felt that the introduction of goal posts on the field between Florence Street and King William Street had helped by providing young people with a place to play football.

One participant referred positively to the active community groups in the area such as the Eastbourne Road Residents Association. A member of the Bank Top Community Partnership thought that the Scout Troop made a positive contribution but it was agreed that few of those participating in this activity were from the Ward.

It was suggested that the area had quietened down having previously had a reputation as being 'rough'. Participants at the focus group believed house prices had increased but they were unsure whether they had done so relative to other areas of Darlington.

Neighbourhood Needs

Participants in all of the consultation events were encouraged to identify those aspects of life in the local neighbourhood that were not so good and to explore what the underlying problems might be. The discussions that followed ranged widely from quality of life issues, such as the state of the local environment, to broader socio-economic issues such as job availability. The issues raised have been grouped under theme titles that relate to the eight connecting themes of Darlington Partnership's Community Strategy⁴.

Local economy

Bank Top Community Partnership members recognised that unemployment, which currently stands at 3.8%, was higher than the national average and felt that the lack of employment opportunities was an area of concern. While it was felt that the closure of local industries had improved the air quality it was also recognised that this had also removed established jobs.

This had led, according to one participant, to an increase in the number of "disenfranchised young men who still believe in the days of physical labour". Another suggested that the only jobs available were poorly paid.

Inclusive communities

The Bank Top Community Partnership was concerned about an apparent decline in community participation and a widespread apathy among residents to the neighbourhood. Reference was made to the decline in membership of social clubs and a falling off in church attendance. Young people pointed out that some of the graffiti was of a racist nature and Bank Top Community Partnership members mentioned that Asian shop owners had experienced problems with young people. There were also concerns about tensions between the established travelling community and other residents in Bank Top.

Educational achievement

While there were no primary schools located in the Ward, this was not considered a problem. There were concerns about the attitudes and behaviour of young people. One participant suggested that the educational culture of working hard had declined whereas another suggested that the needs of those with learning difficulties were not being met locally. Focus group participants suggested that there should be a greater focus on 'life skills' in the curriculum.

Leisure activities

There was broad and extensive agreement about the need for facilities for young people in the area (particularly the 11+ age group).

Concern about young people drinking on streets and "making a nuisance of themselves" was expressed by focus group participants and this, it was claimed, demonstrated the need for additional youth facilities. Attitudes towards youth clubs differed. While it was suggested that young people were no longer interested in youth clubs, others claimed there was a need for a more contemporary approach to this form of provision.

It was reported that a youth club had been based at Eastbourne Methodist Church but that this had been closed because volunteers could not cope.

⁴ Darlington Partnership (2003) "Where Quality Comes to Life: A community strategy for the future of Darlington" (Darlington: Darlington Partnership).

Community Safety

Residents involved in the Bank Top Community Partnership and focus group participants raised concerns about community safety. One participant described how her door had been 'kicked in' and another how plants had been stolen from her garden. The church and local shops had been the target of vandalism and there was, it was claimed, considerable 'fear of crime'.

Young people in gangs were perceived to be intimidating and threatening and one participant had experienced abuse from young people while travelling on a local bus.

There were also concerns about 'boy-racers' driving recklessly in the Ward and motorbikes being ridden across the parks.

Participants maintained that many of these problems were due to a lack of respect and discipline among certain people. Some targeted their criticism specifically at the travelling community but it was also clear that empty houses belong to members of this community had also been targeted by vandals.

Bank Top Community Partnership members claimed that crime, especially vehicle crime, had increased in the Ward since CCTV had been introduced in the town centre⁵.

Health and well-being

When asked about health issues members of the Bank Top Community Partnership raised concerns about life expectancy, as the members were aware that mortality rates in the Bank Top Ward were among the highest in the Borough⁶. It was suggested that this was probably a consequence of unemployment and poor housing which they suggested often lead to poor diet and increased drink and drug problems, which in turn affected physical and mental health.

Focus group participants attributed many of the health problems to the condition of the old terraced housing in the Ward. These properties were described as damp, with thin (single brick) walls and poorly insulated. Participants suggested there was a high incidence of asthma as a result of the housing conditions. They also claimed that poor sound insulation meant there was a disproportionate problem with noise from neighbours in the ward. Those with walking problems also highlighted poor pavement conditions and high cambers on the roads as issues of concern.

Environment

The main environmental concern raised in the Bank Top Ward was the poor quality of the terraced housing much of which was let privately by absentee landlords. Some buildings had been burnt out and some had been boarded up.

There were also concerns about litter and dog dirt particularly in back alleys and parks. The young people felt that there was a lot of graffiti in some areas. It was noticeable, during the walkabout that some of the bins in Eastbourne park had been vandalised but it was generally agreed that the state of the park had improved since a CCTV camera had been introduced.

⁵ Vehicle crime has increased in the Ward while the figure for the Central Ward has decreased significantly. Given the proximity of the two wards it is reasonable to assume that some of this criminal activity has been displaced.

⁶ The Ward has the second worst rates of mortality .

Transport system

There were no reported difficulties with public transport in the Ward but there were concerns about parking and traffic levels. Parking problems were regarded by focus group participants as the second most serious issue in the ward and Bank Top Community Partnership members reported that problems were caused by the parking of commercial vehicles in residential areas.

The traffic along Geneva Road, on the edge of the Ward, was described by a local resident in a written submission as particularly dangerous.

Eastbourne

Eastbourne is located in the south east of Darlington, the majority of which is comprised of Firthmoor Estate. It is a direct combination of the old Eastbourne North and South wards.

Eastbourne is ranked 664th (worst 8% nationally) in the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (estimated using combined LSOA scores).

It has a population of 5,090 resident in 2,220 households. 24.6% of the population is aged under 16 with 5.1% over the age of retirement compared with 21.4% and 16.0% nationally. The proportion of the population from ethnic minorities is 2.2% compared with 2.1% in Darlington and 8.7% in England in Wales.

The unemployment rate in Eastbourne is 4.4%, the third highest in Darlington compared to the overall Darlington figure of 2.8%. Youth unemployment in Eastbourne is the second worst in Darlington, with 20.2% of unemployed people aged under 20. 48.4% of households are classed as in receipt of low incomes, with 90.7% of the areas children living in low income households, the worst in Darlington. Eastbourne has the second highest proportion of single parent households in Darlington at 15.3%. Educational attainment is low, with results at Key Stage 2 and GCSE being significantly lower than the borough level. Within the whole borough therefore, Eastbourne has the second highest level of adults with poor literacy skills in Darlington (34%), and the lowest rate of adults in further education (4.6%).

The area also has the biggest problem with dental health among children, with an average of 3.5% suffering from decayed, missing or filled teeth.

Eastbourne has levels of car ownership which are significantly lower than the national rate, with 42.0% of households not owning a car compared to 26.8% nationally. House prices are low, with an average of £67,600, which is less than average mortgage amounts (3.5 times the average household income). This is reflected in the percentage of houses in the lowest two Council Tax bands, which is 88.1% compared to 68.5% for the rest of the borough.

Neighbourhood Strengths

Participants at all the community consultation events were encouraged to identify what they felt was good about their neighbourhood. There was a reasonably high level of consistency across the various groups and individual responses. The main themes to emerge were

Residents of the Eastbourne Ward described the area as a friendly place with high levels of community spirit. Many suggested that there were no 'real problems' and that the area had quietened down over the last two years in particular. The Firthmoor Partnership also suggested that there were many committed local residents who were 'prepared to speak their minds' and get actively involved in neighbourhood activities.

A participant in the focus group explained how she had got excellent neighbours but that she had experienced problems with neighbours in the past.

The new 'Moorfield' private housing development on Firthmoor was welcomed by the Firthmoor Partnership as was the new older persons accommodation and the investment of £22m in improving housing conditions.

Firthmoor, in particular, was described by participants in the consultation exercises as being set in a good location with a pleasing environment – ‘leafy green and on the outskirts of the town’. Several people commented positively about local facilities including the shops and the variety of services that were being delivered on the estate.

It was suggested that there were several popular projects operating in the neighbourhood and the various youth and play initiatives, such as the Youth Clubs and ‘Better Play’, were specifically mentioned on several occasions.

A participant at the focus group meeting said how she appreciated the contribution of these projects and how they ‘offer to help at no cost’. Others noted how they were pleased about the development of the new school on Firthmoor. Many, although not everyone, welcomed the development of the new Community Centre

The positive contribution of community safety interventions such as CCTV was welcomed by all.

Neighbourhood Needs

Participants in all of the consultation events were encouraged to identify those aspects of life in the local neighbourhood that were not so good and to explore what the underlying problems might be. The discussions that followed ranged widely from quality of life issues, such as the state of the local environment, to broader socio-economic issues such as job availability. The issues raised have been grouped under theme titles that relate to the eight connecting themes Darlington Partnership’s Community Strategy⁷.

Inclusive communities

While most felt that there was a strong and active community involvement in the Eastbourne Ward the Firthmoor Partnership recognised that there was still a level of apathy among the local population.

Several issues were highlighted throughout the consultation that pointed to continuing problems with exclusion. It was suggested that there was a general mistrust between community and agencies and some doubts about authorities. Much of this was attributed to a lack of communication which often exacerbated other problems. It was suggested, for example, that there was too much council control and that they would “sometimes just says no without explaining why”. The ‘control’ of the new centre was a particular issue and the decision to ban smoking in the centre was resented by many.

The Firthmoor Partnership were also aware that there were tensions between the older and younger generations and that this had created barriers to the full inclusion of both.

Tensions had also arisen from the regeneration of the Firthmoor estate. It was suggested, for example, that residents of Eastbourne Ward not living on the estate resented the money that has been spent and were unwilling to associate with the projects on the estate.

Local economy

Concerns about the economic prospects of residents in Eastbourne were expressed by Firthmoor Partnership members and by other local residents.

⁷ Darlington Partnership (2003) “Where Quality Comes to Life: A community strategy for the future of Darlington” (Darlington: Darlington Partnership).

It was suggested that unemployment continued to remain high and one Firthmoor Partnership member indicated that child poverty was a particular issue.

There were ongoing concerns about debt, postcode discrimination, low skills, low wages and a lack of affordable childcare provision.

While local enterprise initiatives were welcomed there was concern that the Community Café had closed and that the local hair-dressing club had folded.

While local shops were clearly regarded as a positive aspect of the area it was suggested that a greater variety of local shops would be beneficial and there was some concern about the limited competition in the area. The closure of Morrisons (in Neasham Road – Bank Top Ward) had caused problems for those without vehicles and residents were anxious to see the development of new shops along Neasham Road.

Educational achievement

Very few comments were made about education but some concern was expressed about the low levels of attainment in the Ward .

Leisure activities

Considerable discussion about youth provision occurred during the community appraisal event and in the random focus group. There was concern about the loss of play-workers and the reduction of youth-worker input on the Firthmoor estate. There was also a concern that the new centre had only limited facilities for young people and that they had effectively been excluded from much of the centre.

It was generally agreed that further provision for young people was needed to overcome boredom and associated problems.

It was also suggested that the existing play areas could be improved and illuminated during the winter months.

Community Safety

The main community safety issues mentioned through the community consultation concerned groups of young people hanging around and under age drinking.

There were also accounts of other anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance problems. This included noise at night and noise from young people playing football tennis and golf in the street in the summer. Several people complained about motorbikes being driven along pavements.

It was suggested that the fear of crime was more of an issue than crime itself on Firthmoor.

Several people suggested that there was insufficient police presence and that the Community Wardens were not visible.

Some maintained that children's behaviour had deteriorated because young people now had 'too many rights and not enough responsibility' and adults were frightened to chastise those aged between 8 and 17 years.

Health and well-being

The Firthmoor Partnership suggested that there were health issues in the Ward reflecting the relative disadvantage of the area and specific references were made to poor nutrition, stress, heart problems and strokes in the consultation.

Environment

Relatively few comments were made about environmental issues in Eastbourne and there was only a limited amount of litter observed on the walkabout in Firthmoor. Dogs fouling pavements was considered to be a problem.

There was more concern, in contrast, with the impact of the refurbishment scheme itself. One participant in the random focus group indicated that it was 'like living on a building site'.

Residents in the random focus group felt that certain individuals in the locality needed to be more responsible for looking after their gardens and the appearance of their homes.

There was some concern about the 'run-down appearance' of the cemetery and it was suggested that railings were being removed to create short cuts.

It was also thought that the area would benefit from more attractive lighting and some seating areas.

Transport system

Few transport issues were raised during the community consultation and there were mixed views about the adequacy of the current bus service.

In parts of the Ward the issue of cars parked on both sides of the road was highlighted. This, it was claimed, prevented certain vehicles from passing and there was concern that ambulances and fire engines would be unable at times to gain access.

The lack of road crossings on Geneva Road was also noted by one participant.

Lascelles

Lascelles is located in the south east of Darlington, bordering the wards of Park East, Bank Top, and Eastbourne. The only boundary change is a slight decrease in territory on the north eastern side, which has moved into Bank Top.

Lascelles is ranked 684th (worst 9% nationally) in the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (estimated using combined LSOA scores).

It has a population of 3,518 resident in 1,540 households. 22.3% of the population is aged under 16 with 16.6% over the age of retirement compared with 21.4% and 16.0% nationally. The proportion of the population from ethnic minorities is 1.4% compared with 2.1% in Darlington and 8.7% in England in Wales.

The unemployment rate in Lascelles is 3.9% compared to the Darlington figure of 2.8%. 40.2% of households are classed as in receipt of low incomes, with 52.1% of the areas children living in low income households. Attainment levels at both Key Stage 2 and GCSE level are below both the national and borough averages (with GCSE being the second worst performer in Darlington). Lascelles has the lowest progression rate into university, with no representatives in the last year. The area also has the highest level of adults with literacy problems (34%) and the low participation rate for adults in education (7.1%).

Lascelles has levels of car ownership which are significantly lower than the national rate, with 44.9% of households not owning a car compared to 26.8% in England and Wales. House prices are low, with an average of £65,500, which is less than average mortgage amounts (3.5 times the average household income). This is reflected in the percentage of houses in the lowest two Council Tax bands, which is 94.1% compared to 68.5 % for the rest of the borough.

Neighbourhood Strengths

Participants at all the community consultation events were encouraged to identify what they felt was good about their neighbourhood. There was a reasonably high level of consistency across the various groups and individual responses.

Local residents found the Lascelles ward pleasant, friendly and neighbourly and quiet peaceful during the day. Lascelles Community Partnership members also suggested that the children in the area were well behaved. All suggested it was a convenient location - close to town with good bus routes – and had lots of potential.

Some also felt that the visual appearance of the area was good, as local residents looked after their houses and some had taken individual action to fence off their own garden. The street cleaning and grass cutting services provided by the Council were thought to be of a good quality and also contributed to the positive image of the area.

In the view of participants in the random focus group the area was also being improved by the demolition of some blocks of flats.

Members of the Lascelles Community Partnership described the wide variety of housing types in the ward and thought this was a positive attribute. As one member put it:

“There are all aspects of the community together”.

The local schools were praised and particular mention was made of the new outdoor play area at Dodmire school.

The open spaces around the Ward were described as a positive attribute, as was the nearby Eastbourne Park (in Bank Top Ward).

It was generally felt that residents were getting more involved in community initiatives and key professionals suggested that the Lascelles Residents Association and Lascelles Community Partnership had developed in confidence and become more empowered.

While there were concerns about the lack of a youth/community centre the introduction of the pod facility was generally welcomed.

Local residents welcomed the police involvement and appreciated the PCSO's input on young people's activities. The introduction of CCTV was also considered to be a positive development.

Proposals to establish Surestart initiatives and associated outreach services were welcomed as were the various social opportunities provided at Rosemary court such as the art courses and healthy eating courses.

Residents were described as active and were involved in organising various events through the year including a residents' fun-day.

Neighbourhood Needs

Participants in all of the consultation events were encouraged to identify those aspects of life in the local neighbourhood that were not so good and to explore what the underlying problems might be. The discussions that followed ranged widely from quality of life issues, such as the state of the local environment, to broader socio-economic issues such as job availability. The issues raised have been grouped under theme titles that relate to the eight connecting themes Darlington Partnership's Community Strategy⁸.

There were a number of general points made which reflect a level of despondency in Lascelles. It was described as a 'forgotten estate' compared with others and there were suggestions that not much had been spent on it compared with other estates. Local people claimed that there was an expectation that they should use the community facilities in the neighbouring Eastbourne Ward but that there were entrenched barriers that put people off using services at Firthmoor. They said there was little interaction with Firthmoor, newsletters from Firthmoor were not delivered in Lascelles and that they were given the impression that they were not welcome there.

Local economy

Local residents suggested there was a shortage of employment opportunities and many local people were on low wages.

The loss of Morrisons from the neighbouring Bank Top Ward was regarded as a blow to jobs and had posed problems for residents without their own transport. Many of the shops in Lascelles were closed and boarded up and it was generally felt that there was a need for more shops in the area. One participant suggested the local credit union would benefit by having a different base as the current location was regarded as off-putting to some.

⁸ Darlington Partnership (2003) "Where Quality Comes to Life: A community strategy for the future of Darlington" (Darlington: Darlington Partnership).

Inclusive communities

Some residents felt that there was a lack of community spirit in the Ward. It was generally agreed that there were low levels of community involvement due to apathy. Some suggested that they had “filled in so many questionnaires with no results that now they couldn’t be bothered” but there was also a view that the problems stemmed from low levels of self-confidence. Youth access to community involvement was thought to be particularly low. One local resident said there was “not a lot going on to get involved with.”

Educational achievement

Attendance figures in the local schools was described as poor and it was suggested that there was a high rate of turnover. Part of this was explained by the presence of the travelling community from Lascelles and neighbouring Wards.

Leisure activities

The lack of any suitable community facilities was an issue that was raised on several occasions throughout the consultation. Most participants agreed that there were no real links with Firthmoor Community Centre and that Lascelles needed its own community centre.

While the pod had been welcomed there were concerns about limited access and its reputation as a place for those with problems. More activities and play areas were thought to be needed and the development of a community centre was thought to be central to addressing these needs. The provision of a dedicated area for young people to ride motorbikes was also suggested as a means of resolving some of the nuisance problems that existed in the area .

Community Safety

Local residents were concerned about groups of young people hanging around especially outside shops and in garage blocks where, it was suggested, they would often make fires. It was suggested that some of the vandalism that was committed by these people was intended deliberately to cause conflict with the police.

Young people aged 12 and upwards, were also accused of unruly behaviour, throwing stones and climbing on roofs. It was reported that when residents challenged young people about their behaviour they were abusive in their response. Concern about this type of behaviour came from all sectors of the community including young people.

There were several reports of car and garage break-ins and claims that drug dealing was taking place within the Ward.

Members of the Lascelles Community Partnership suggested that there was a problem with ‘the fear of crime’ and a number of residents reported that they felt unsafe and were often frightened to go out.

It was suggested that there were a number of ‘no-go’ areas at night such as the black path from Lascelles to Dodmire and the Caldwell Green area.

Residents also complained about anti-social behaviour such as people working on cars and motorbikes in front gardens and young people riding bikes on paths and playing football against garage doors and gable ends.

The layout of the estate with its numerous access points and exits were thought to provide easy escape routes for those involved in crime and nuisance. Some suggested that the cuts should be closed off with alley gates.

Some residents claimed that the police were rarely to be seen on the estate and one suggested that they had not turned up when called about some damage that had been caused to a parked car.

One participant wished to see one of the vacant shop units used as a contact point for the police and Community Wardens.

Health and well-being

Few health issues were raised during the community consultation. There were concerns about a perceived increase in the numbers of residents suffering from asthma and it was suggested that this was linked to smoking.

Also, there were reports of high levels of drug dependency.

When asked about access to health provision a focus group participant suggested that he was worried about “getting a GP” when he became older.

Environment

Several environmental and quality of life issues were mentioned during the community consultation and this was clearly one of the subjects that concerned most focus group and community appraisal event participants.

The issues ranged from general points about graffiti, litter and fly tipping to problems with the built environment and open spaces.

Specific mention was made about fly tipping in the open spaces and behind the flats and there was particular concern about hypodermic needles being discarded in the Ward.

The visual appearance of the Lascelles shops was regularly criticised, some suggesting that this was the major issue in the area.

Areas described as wasteland in the ward and in the neighbouring Bank Top Ward were also thought to detract from the visual appearance of the Ward and this was exacerbated by the damage caused by motorbikes and cars (allegedly stolen) that were, according to residents, periodically driven in these and the open green areas.

Some residents suggested that young people had created a ‘quad bike circuit’ on one open piece of land causing a lot of noise and churning up the grass.

The containers located in the car park behind the pub were also thought to be unsightly and residents wished to see them removed.

Several people were concerned about the state of the black path between Lascelles and Dodmire and one resident was concerned that hedges were being cut back at times of the year when birds were nesting.

Several concerns were expressed about Council and private sector housing in the Ward. Council tenants suggested there was a need for a local neighbourhood house and claimed the one in Firthmoor was too far away. It was claimed that certain people were choosing to move out of the area because of the worsening situation.

There was thought to have been an increase in private renting and residents were concerned about these properties falling into a state of disrepair.

One resident was concerned that the fences used to cordon off derelict housing were inadequate. It was suggested that quicker action was needed to replace flats and develop new houses.

Transport system

Few transport issues were raised in the Lascelles Ward. There were some concerns about the speed of traffic along Fenby Avenue and it was suggested that some traffic calming measures were required.

Residents also claimed that Lascelles was poorly served with public transport and that the buses that were used were unsuitable for many older and disabled people.

Park East

Park East is located in the southern most part of Darlington and contains the large South Park area and Skerne Park Estate. The new ward is based largely on the old Park East ward, but the boundary has undergone a number of revisions including a significant extension into the old Park West ward.

Park East ward is ranked 693rd (worst 9% nationally) in the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (estimated using combined LSOA scores).

It has a population of 6,061 resident in 2,620 households. 26.7% of the population is aged under 16 with 13.2% over the age of retirement compared with 21.4% and 16.0% nationally. The proportion of the population from ethnic minorities is 3.4% compared with 2.1% in Darlington and 8.7% in England in Wales.

The unemployment rate in Park East is 4.2 compared to the overall Darlington figure of 2.8%. Park East has the seventh highest rate of low income households and the eighth highest proportion of children living in low income households with 36.9% and 47.5% respectively. Park East has the highest proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (37%) and the third highest rate of single parent households (15.1%). The ward has the lowest level of educational attainment in Darlington for younger pupils (in terms of scores for both Key Stage 2 and GCSE).

Park East has a level of car ownership that is significantly lower than the national rate, with 31.2% of households not owning a car compared to 26.8% in England and Wales. House prices are low, with an average of £69,800, which is less than average mortgage amounts (3.5 times the average household income). This is reflected in the percentage of houses in the lowest two Council Tax bands, which is 83.9% compared to 68.5% for the borough as a whole.

Neighbourhood Strengths

When asked to describe the positive attributes of Park East (or the Skerne Park Estate), focus group participants and those attending the appraisal event referred to the good community spirit in the area. Skerne Park Community Partnership members, for example, suggested that local people cared about the ward and enjoyed living in the neighbourhood.

It was suggested that there were many established families on the Skerne Park estate often comprising more than one generation.

Local residents on the Skerne Park Community Partnership and those participating in the focus group or attending the community appraisal event indicated their liking for the area and local people and frequently suggested that they had “no plans to leave”. There were also positive comments about young people on Skerne Park. One participant, for example, said:

“Most young people on estate are polite. It’s just a few that spoil it for the majority.”

A member of the Skerne Park Community Partnership commented positively on the diversity of the Ward and the mixture of housing types and tenures: council, private – terraced, detached, etc. Agency representatives noted the high levels of community involvement, co-operation and capacity. Skerne Park Community Partnership members agreed that there were good existing networks. There were also several positive comments about the quality of the housing and the housing service on the estates. The housing improvements on Skerne Park, which comprised the replacement and/or installation of central heating, wall/loft insulation, kitchens, patios to rear and double-glazing, had all been extremely well received.

The local primary and junior schools were highlighted as positive aspects of the neighbourhood by young people and the courses that were being offered at the junior school were rated highly by local residents.

Several other agencies and interventions were described positively. This included:

- The Clifton Road SureStart sessions
- Activities at St Columbus Church
- The youth club at the Skerne Park Community Centre
- The Blitz Bus

The Chatterbox Café was described as providing good affordable food and also provided an access point for employment advice and the local credit union.

It was also the residents' view that the estate was reasonable well serviced, with shops, chemists, green space, open areas and plenty of walking areas. It was described as "handy for the town" and as having a good bus service to a number of routes (although there were concerns about this service). Finally, it was suggested that the area had improved as a result of Council interventions on anti-social behaviour and local Community Policing.

Neighbourhood Needs

Participants in all of the consultation events were encouraged to identify those aspects of life in the local neighbourhood that were not so good and to explore what the underlying problems might be. The discussions that followed ranged widely from quality of life issues, such as the state of the local environment, to broader socio-economic issues such as job availability. The issues raised have been grouped under theme titles that relate to the eight connecting themes of the Darlington Partnership's Community Strategy⁹.

Local economy

Community Partnership members reported continuing prejudice towards the Skerne Park estate from other areas. It was suggested that much of this was fuelled by inaccurate media coverage that had created stigma for those residing in the area. There were reports of postcode discrimination when shopping in Darlington and when trying to get decorating companies to do work on estate. It was also suggested that local people found it hard to get bank accounts. There were reports that people had been refused credit because of where they live and that this had made them dependent upon 'loan sharks' who were charging high rates of interest.

It was further suggested that these experiences were demoralising for young people and had resulted in low aspirations.

Inclusive communities

The stigma about residents of Skerne Park was thought to exacerbate social exclusion for all residents but there were also reports of prejudice on the basis of gender and sexual orientation.

Leisure

It was generally thought that there were not enough activities and clubs being run at the Community Centre and especially a lack of youth provision. It was reported that the youth club was only running one night a week. There was a recognition that teenagers on the estate were often bored and this had led to problems with nuisance and anti-social behaviour.

⁹ Darlington Partnership (2003) "Where Quality Comes to Life: A community strategy for the future of Darlington" (Darlington: Darlington Partnership).

It was reported that the Council does not have enough qualified Youth Workers and that there are difficulties getting volunteer support. One Skerne Park Community Partnership member also suggested that there was little parental support.

Residents at the community appraisal event pointed out that there was nowhere for children to play safely and that young people had been 'moved on' from grassed areas when playing cricket. One resident said:

“The signs say no ball games, but there's nowhere for them to play.”

Community Safety

Residents were concerned about the level of drug usage on the Skerne Park estate and claimed that dealing was taking place in certain properties. This, they believed, was contributing to other crime and anti-social behaviour problems.

There were high levels of concern about groups of young people hanging around. It was reported that groups would congregate near the shop and wonder around the Skerne Park estate drinking and creating nuisance. Children participating in the community arts work claimed that people had been “beaten up by gangs”. Some of these young people were concerned about their personal safety in the cuts.

Young people were also accused of 'attacking buses' (throwing eggs and opening emergency doors) and throwing mud, stones and other things at people's windows.

Some suggested that much of the trouble was caused by young people coming in from other estates to cause trouble.

Police representatives reported that complaints about young people and nuisance had increased on the estate after the youth club had been reduced from 3 to 1 night a week. The police figures for 'youths causing annoyance' were thought to be the highest in the town.

Other problems that were reported in the community consultation included motorbike nuisance and noise, 'joy riding' and burnt-out cars between the community centre and the railway track.

Skerne Park Community Partnership members reported that the anti-social behaviour unit that had moved off the Skerne Park estate would need to come back.

Environment

Environmental concerns in the Skerne Park area were largely restricted to fly tipping, litter, graffiti and vandalism. There was evidence of recent fly-tipping on the walkabout and the young people photographed what appeared to be building debris dumped behind the community centre. The exterior of the community centre had been damaged and its general appearance was described as poor and uninviting. There were concerns that the proposed new school/youth provision buildings might also be a target for vandalism.

Dogs were also described as a problem in the Ward and it was reported that they were running wild causing a nuisance, fouling the pavement.

One resident also reported that the cleaning of and attendance to the River Skerne had been cut back – it was now thought to be an annual not quarterly service and this what not thought to be adequate.

Transport system

A number of traffic and transport issues were reported in the Ward. Cattle trucks going to and from the Cattle Market in the Clifton Road area of the Ward were described as noisy and disruptive. It was suggested that they caused a lot of traffic problems in the area and there were reports of damage to cars belonging to local residents.

There were, as mentioned above, concerns about 'joy riding' in Skerne Park and there were suggestions that lots of vehicles were speeding on the estate especially during week-days. It was reported that several accidents had occurred near the pub and that residents had been knocked over. There were also concerns about motorbikes being precariously driven along the railway sidewalk as well as in the open areas, as mentioned above.

The bus service was reported to be unreliable, though not all residents agreed with this. It was suggested that some drivers had refused to come on to Skerne Park because of the behaviour of young people (see above).

While the new Green Bus service was welcomed it was claimed that the new 530 service had only been on the estate once since Christmas and that the number 23 service was "always pulled first, if they had to take a bus off".

Health and well-being

No issues were raised.

Educational achievement

No issues were raised.

Northgate

Northgate is located in the central part of Darlington and contains an element of the town's central retail area. The new Northgate ward has been formed by amalgamating large elements of the former Northgate North and Northgate South areas, although a large portion of the previous Northgate North ward is now classed as North Road.

Northgate is ranked 728th (worst 9% nationally) in the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (estimated using combined LSOA scores).

Northgate has a population of 1,950 resident in 4,521 households. 21.7% of the population is aged under 16 with 12.5% over the age of retirement compared with 21.4% and 16.0% in England and Wales. The proportion of the population from ethnic minorities is 9.5% compared with 2.1% in Darlington and 8.7% in England in Wales.

The unemployment rate in Northgate is 5.9%, the second highest in Darlington compared to the overall Darlington figure of 2.8%. Unemployment is currently just under two and a half times the national average. 46.9% of households are classed as in receipt of low incomes, with 81.6% of the children living in low income households, the third highest rate in Darlington. Key Stage 2 educational attainment in Northgate is the second poorest in Darlington. The average numerical grade for GCSE results is 36.6, which is lower than that for Darlington as a whole (41.5) and is ranked as the eighth lowest achievement rate in Darlington.

Crime is a problem in Northgate, with all categories of crime exceeding the borough average and all but Domestic burglary exceeding the Tees Valley average.

Northgate has a level of car ownership that is significantly lower than the national rate, with 41.7% of households not owning a car compared to 26.8% in England and Wales. House prices are the lowest in Darlington, with an average of £65,300, which is less than average mortgage amounts (3.5 times the average household income). This is reflected in the percentage of houses in the lowest two Council Tax bands, which is 90.2% compared to 68.5% for the rest of the borough.

Neighbourhood Strengths

Participants at all the community consultation events were encouraged to identify what they felt was good about their neighbourhood. There was a reasonably high level of consistency across the various groups and individual responses.

The area was described positively by the Northgate Community Partnership members and by participants in both the random and specialist BME focus groups. Local people were described as friendly and the Community Partnership suggested there were generally good relationships within the community.

Residents in the Ward thought that the accessibility of the town centre and resources such as hospital, arts centre, theatre, cinema, Dolphin Centre (swimming pool and sports centre) and shops were positive attributes. As one resident put it:

There's no need to use any transport you're able to walk to most places.

Those who used buses were, however, very positive about the local routes and timetables. Residents were very enthusiastic about the new SureStart facilities and programmes in McNay Street. They said the services ensure that parents "don't lose out" and described the centre as easily accessible to local residents.

Corporation Road School was also described positively and participants in the BME focus group particularly appreciated the ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) course that was held there.

It was also stated that community wardens were visible in the area and this was thought to be a good thing.

Neighbourhood Needs

Participants in all of the consultation events were encouraged to identify those aspects of life in the local neighbourhood that were not so good and to explore what the underlying problems might be. The discussions that followed ranged widely from quality of life issues, such as the state of the local environment, to broader socio-economic issues such as job availability. The issues raised have been grouped under theme titles that relate to the eight connecting themes Darlington Partnership's Community Strategy¹⁰.

Local economy

Local residents held the view that there were few employment opportunities in the area and that many of the jobs on offer were poorly paid. This was particularly the case for those residents with limited English.

The lack of shops selling halal meat was also commented on by members of the Bangladeshi community. It was reported that there was only one shop specifically catering for the needs of Moslems and the lack of competition meant that prices were high. They also felt the area needed a supermarket.

Inclusive communities

There were some indications that the community was becoming disillusioned with consultation. One resident reflected these feelings when she claimed:

I'm getting sick of opinions being asked for and [then there's] no response or action taken - wasting money, speaking to residents.

Members of the Bangladeshi community felt there was a need for some form of 'call-to-prayer' (possibly an electronic system). They reported that the current Mosque was not large enough to include facilities for women as well as men and indicated that they would like to see the development of a new Mosque.

They also expressed some concerns about racist behaviour in the area.

Educational achievement

Only one comment was that related to education. A participant in the focus group session suggested that more education was needed on litter. Members of the Bangladeshi community were worried that the ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) course would come to an end.

Leisure activities

There was a consistent message across the consultation that facilities and services for young people were required in the Ward. As one participant put it "there's nothing for young people to do around here."

¹⁰ Darlington Partnership (2003) "Where Quality Comes to Life: A community strategy for the future of Darlington" (Darlington: Darlington Partnership).

Participants at the BME focus group pointed out that there was no community hall in the area and reported that some members of their community were uncomfortable about attending community events in the local church hall.

Community Safety

Residents felt that crime and anti-social behaviour had risen. Particular mention was made of a perceived increase in house and car break-ins. Muggings (grabbing handbags) were also reported as occurring in the evening but this was not everyone's view. Specific mention was made of problems with anti-social behaviour and cars being vandalised in the Barningham Street area. Members of the Bangladeshi community reported that they had had their milk stolen from their doorstep and were worried about the noisy, sometimes racist, behaviour of people in the park. This was often young people under the influence of alcohol, it was suggested.

Members of the Northgate Community Partnership reported that there were problems with housing being rented to tenants who engage in anti-social behaviour. One resident claimed that private landlords were only interested in the money and not concerned about the behaviour of their tenants.

Participants in the random focus group claimed that private landlords were giving tenancies to drug takers/dealers and that this had caused many of the problems. Others thought that private landlords were not conscious of who they were letting to. They suggested that certain people were being excluded from other areas and estates and that the consequence was that they were moving into the private rented sector.

Some of the more serious problems in the area, including arson attacks, were thought to be the result of conflict between rival groups of drug dealers.

Beyond these issues the community safety issue which most people reported concerned young people 'hanging around' and drinking. Specific mention was made of groups of 15 year olds, and upwards, loitering outside local shops on evenings. Participants indicated that they had felt intimidated by these 'gangs'.

Young people were also accused of setting off fireworks in the Denes and residents in Derwent Street complained about damage to windows as a result of football being played in the street.

Health and well-being

Few health issues emerged from the Community Appraisal Event but focus group participants and Northgate Community Partnership members highlighted concerns about low self-esteem and confidence and suggested this was an important underlying cause of many of the other problems in the area.

One participant suggested that there were important mental health issues ranging from stress to depression. This, it was claimed, made coping difficult and had a spiral effect on other aspects of health.

It was suggested that many local residents were unable to afford good food and had limited 'energy' or resources to draw on when preparing food. This led, it was suggested, to higher dependency on convenience and cheaper take-away foods. The need for education about healthy eating and cooking was specifically highlighted by Community Partnership members.

It was also suggested that proportionately high numbers of residents in the area were smokers leading to higher incidences of respiratory problems.

Elderly residents highlighted a need for more home helps and better residential homes at a reasonable cost.

Environment

Residents in the Northgate Ward were concerned about the poor state of repair of some of the housing, especially the older terraced housing, and also about the general appearance of the area. It was suggested that many of the private landlords who own property in the Ward did not look after their properties. Private tenants were also criticised for not 'making an effort'.

There were several comments about the amount of litter in the parks and back lanes of the Ward. Residents were concerned that dogs and cats were getting into bins and spreading the refuse around because they were being put out at the wrong time.

While residents were positive about the presence of open green areas and parks in the area they felt improvements were required. The poor condition of parks and play areas were specifically mentioned. Vandalism was described as a problem and it was reported that needles had been left lying around. It was also suggested that the beck in the Denes area needed clearing out.

There was also concern about irresponsible dog owners and dog dirt on pavements and in the parks. This was a particular concern for participants in the BME focus group, for whom contact with dogs and dog waste has cultural and religious implications.

Transport system

Residents were concerned about the amount of traffic using North Road and claimed this had a knock-on effect on residential streets. Station Road, in particular, was described as a 'rat run' and as "an accident waiting to happen".

A number of problems with parking were also reported due to local businesses and commuters parking in streets to avoid charges. Residential Streets near the Halfords car park were particularly affected.

Haughton East

Haughton East is located in the east of Darlington, and includes Red Hall Estate. The boundary of Haughton East ward is largely unchanged, with just a small area moving into Central ward.

Haughton East is ranked 919th (worst 12% nationally) in the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (estimated using combined LSOA scores).

It has a population of 4,133 resident in 1,717 households. 25.0% of the population is aged under 16 with 15.3% over the age of retirement compared with 21.4% and 16.0% in England and Wales. The proportion of the population from ethnic minorities is 1.5 % compared with 2.1% in Darlington and 8.7% in England in Wales.

The unemployment rate in Haughton East is 3.2% compared to the Darlington figure of 2.8%. Youth unemployment in Haughton East is the fifth worst in Darlington, with 17.3% of unemployed people aged under 20. 33.6% of households are classed as in receipt of low incomes, with 35.3% of the areas children living in low income households. Haughton East has the highest proportion of single parent households in Darlington with 15.7%. Educational attainment is generally poor, with results at Key Stage 2 the seventh worst in Darlington, and GCSE achievement the fourth worst in the borough. University progression is set at 3.8 people per thousand, compared to 4.0 people per thousand for the whole of Darlington.

Haughton East suffers the high level of people needing care in Darlington with 7.4% of the population in receipt of Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance (ranked 4th overall).

Haughton East has levels of car ownership which are significantly lower than the national rate, with 39.8 % of households not owning a car compared to 26.8% in England and Wales. House prices are an average of £79,500, which is greater than average mortgage amounts (3.5 times the average household income). This is reflected in the percentage of houses in the lowest two Council Tax bands, which is 78.6% compared to 68.5% for the rest of the borough.

Neighbourhood Strengths

When asked to describe the positive attributes of Haughton East, focus group participants and those attending the appraisal event referred to strong feelings of neighbourliness. Residents at the random focus group indicated that they found the Red Hall estate a pleasant and relatively quiet area with “nice people”.

It was also clear from discussions in the random focus group that there was a view that the area had got better and that people were now keener to stay in the locality. As one participant explained:

“There are established families on the estate that have lived here a long time and now their children are choosing to continue [to] live in the area too.”

Many of the improvements were attributed to the activities of the Community Partnership (the Red Hall Partnership), the Residents’ Association and the Community Centre.

Residents were very appreciative of the many activities for young people that were available on the estate including the play area for children and teenagers and the summer play schemes.

Red Hall Partnership members praised the local Red Hall Primary School and suggested that it provided a wonderful service to the children on the estate. The fact that the pupils were mixed and varied, coming from Haughton Village as well as Red Hall was thought to be a positive thing.

Other local services that had been well received included the courses being run at the Community Centre such as 'Coping with Children' being run by a Health Visitor and Computer courses.

The Red Hall Partnership also felt that there were more things now being developed for the older people on the estate too and the Red Hall Reveller (Community Newsletter) helped to keep people informed.

Red Hall was described by participants in the consultation exercises as being set in an attractive location by the river with a pleasing environment and lots of open space. Its location on the edge of town also ensures good access to open countryside. The area was generally thought to be quiet because of the lack of through roads (although some thought this as a negative point).

Opinions on the proposed road linking the A66 and Haughton Road differed. Some felt this would decrease the isolation of the Red Hall estate while others felt it would damage natural areas along the old railway line and reduce local bird and wildlife. The bus service was generally described positively.

Many of the participants also liked their proximity to Haughton Village.

While there was a general feeling that the council properties in the area had been neglected, the installation of full central heating systems and the improvements to the driveways in the courts area (of Red Hall) were thought to be positive developments. The modernisation the flats in Red Hall was also welcomed and the Council was praised for its management of the stock and especially for getting repairs undertaken quickly.

Neighbourhood Needs

Participants in all of the consultation events were encouraged to identify those aspects of life in the local neighbourhood that were not so good and to explore what the underlying problems might be. The discussions that followed ranged widely from quality of life issues, such as the state of the local environment, to broader socio-economic issues such as job availability. The issues raised have been grouped under theme titles that relate to the eight connecting themes of the Darlington Partnership's Community Strategy¹¹.

Inclusive communities

Residents were concerned about the negative perceptions that outsiders had about the Red Hall estate particularly when few if any of these people had actually visited the estate. Some outsiders, they claimed, regarded the estate as a 'drugs haven' and provided accounts of how they had been looked down upon because of where they lived.

In one case a resident reported how her Doctor had responded to the news that she had moved onto the estate with the question "what do you want to move up there for?"

Another resident and member of the Red Hall Partnership described how he had overheard a conversation at a bus stop where a woman was 'effing and blinding' because the Council had offered her a place on Red Hall.

Residents did not feel that they had been stigmatised or treated unfairly because they lived on Red Hall but did not make the actual location of their home known. They recounted how they would simply give their address and say they lived 'out Haughton way' without mentioning Red Hall.

¹¹ Darlington Partnership (2003) "Where Quality Comes to Life: A community strategy for the future of Darlington" (Darlington: Darlington Partnership).

Within the estate residents suggested the area was divided and that some parts of the estate are worse than others. They mentioned that ‘kids from either ends of the estate clash – they don’t mix’. It was the view of the Red Hall Partnership that there was a high number of people with problems concentrated in this area but there was only ‘two or three real trouble-makers’.

Residents described how they believed a ‘culture of being given what you want’ had caused much of the problems with certain residents not respecting the rights of others. They also suggested that people didn’t trust anyone anymore.

There was recognition among Red Hall Partnership members that the area had not qualified for support because the Ward statistics had been skewed by the neighbouring Haughton Village and many held the view that if the estate was bigger they would have been able to attract more services.

Environment

Many of the concerns highlighted by local residents concerned environmental and quality of life issues. On Red Hall there were also concerns with the condition of the housing.

Litter, graffiti and dog dirt was a problem highlighted by residents during the community appraisal event often linked to young people hanging around the shop but also in the vicinity of the community centre. There were, for example, several references to glass on the roadside. It was also reported that there was an issue with needles being discarded on the estate, however it was thought by the majority of people that this wasn’t an excessive problem.

It was claimed that the street cleansing machine only did the front of the estate and missed the internal areas and that the graffiti was not being removed.

It was suggested that refuse was not being collected often because the bins were not put in the right place and there was concern about the new recycling container as they had no lids.

The young people’s work highlighted their concern with fly tipping, especially in the beck and also with the prevalence of graffiti.

Several residents highlighted the condition of some of the courts and there was concern about the state of the pavements and paths around the estate as a whole. Some of the problems were attributed to subsidence but there was also concern about the lack of ramps for wheelchairs and prams.

Residents had other concerns about the visual appearance of the estate. The appearance of the systems built housing they claimed gave the area a dowdy feel and the ‘back to front’ layout was visually unattractive as well as causing other practical problems with letterboxes and deliveries. There were mixed views about recent suggestions to paint the flats and houses up in bright colours with some adamantly rejecting the proposition.

The area was described as muddy and prone to flooding and several of the drains were blocked at the time of the walkabout.

It was suggested that the current street signs looked awful and that fencing was needed in front of the bungalows.

The alternative construction techniques used when the estate had been built were thought to be failing. One participant reported that:

“All the [other] houses designed by the Red Hall architect have been knocked down or completely transformed”

Some residents reported that they could see where the girders in the houses were rusting. There was also a problem with a UPVC panel below the kitchen windows causing condensation in many of the properties.

It was suggested that Red Hall had often missed out on large housing renewal funding and that the maintenance programme on the estate had been at best piecemeal. It was suggested that central heating programmes were started and then not completed.

There were also limited reports of poor repairs services in the private sector rented stock.

Educational achievement

Few problems were reported in respect of education though one of the Red Hall Partnership focus group participants suggested that young people were not being taught how to cook.

Leisure activities

There were relatively few complaints about the availability of leisure activities but some concerns were raised about the muddy state of the football pitch and it was suggested that a hard (possibly tarmaced) area with a wall against which a ball could be kicked in a suitable location would prevent many of the problems caused by those playing in close proximity to houses and flats.

Some felt that the youth provision was very sports orientated and wished to see the development of alternative activities.

Parents were criticised by some residents for expecting others to run events but not getting involved but it was also recognised that there were a lot of single parents on the estate who would have difficulties making time to do this.

Local economy

Very few local economy issues were raised during the consultation. There was, however, some concern about the lack of affordable childcare provision.

There was also a feeling that the estate would benefit from more retail outlets. While it was felt that the existing store was better stocked than before a greater variety was desired including a fish and chip shop.

Community Safety

Several anti-social behaviour issues were mentioned through the community consultation. This included concerns about loud music from cars at unsociable hours, groups of young people hanging around drinking alcohol and vandalism. One participant in a focus group described how, on occasions he had had to force his way through to get into the shop. Others questioned the need to have the shop open as late as 11 pm.

There was also concern about noise from young people playing football in the street and kicking balls against garages. It was suggested that the courts area, in particular, suffered because noises echoed around the walls. It was reported that there were particular problems during school holidays. A participant in the random focus group said:

“I hate it when the kids are off school.”

Other neighbour nuisance problems that were reported in the focus group meetings included 'dogs howling' and problems associated with drug dealing.

Red Hall Partnership members were concerned about the standards of parenting in the area and felt that relationship breakdowns had contributed to the problems they faced. It was felt that parents were failing to take an interest in community needs and that they were not taking enough responsibility about the behaviour of their children. Some residents were of the opinion that the Council were allocating properties to people with severe problems and that it was these people in particular who lacked respect, caused problems and did not look after their gardens. One of the Red Hall Partnership members asserted that:

“The good move away when you move rowdy people in.”

Other residents reported that they had been the subject of abuse when challenging anti-social behaviour. One participant was told that if he “didn't like it here, move!”

Instances of vehicle crime were also reported but the general view was that the situation was no worse than elsewhere.

It was agreed, however, that the modernist layout of the estate with several 'rabbit runs' by the courts presented escape routes for those involved in criminal activities.

There were also claims about drug dealing on the estate and the suggestion that a particular house should be the subject of police surveillance (this has since been dealt with by the Police).

Health and well-being

Health was a relatively salient issue in the Haughton East appraisal. Residents from the Red Hall estate raised, unprompted, their concerns about the prevalence of chest infections and asthma in the locality. This was variously attributed to pollution from local industry, the dampness of the properties and to the effects of the high power overhead cables that cut through the estate. One participant noted how his wife had never suffered with asthma before moving to the estate.

A Red hall Partnership member suggested that the dampness was a result of water penetration through concrete in the no-fines properties. Others described how you could hear the buzzing of cables and believed that the electro-magnetic radiation was having a serious impact upon health on the estate.

Beyond these concerns, Red Hall Partnership members agreed that the continuation of the baby clinic at the Community Centre was vital.

Transport system

Several concerns were expressed about traffic in and around the Haughton East area. The roads were described as gridlocked on McMullen Road at factory closing time and some were particularly keen to see the development of the new A66 to Haughton Road south of the Red Hall estate. Views about the new road on the estate, however, were mixed (see above).

There were other concerns about traffic on Red Hall. Some claimed that many of their problems derived from the lack of through roads and believed the image of the estate would be improved if it had more than one entry and exit point or was better linked to the road network.

Local residents were concerned about reckless driving and the noise from speeding traffic. During the 'walkabout' local people pointed out how certain residents and visitors to the estate were taking

short cuts across grassed areas. This they claimed was dangerous and damaged the environment by churning up the grass. It was further claimed that several types of vehicles were involved: quad bikes, cars, four-wheel-drive vehicles and motorbikes.

The Red Hall Partnership members and other local residents felt that traffic calming chicanes, rather than humps, were required to reduce speeding and that bollards were required to stop vehicles taking short-cuts. Particular problem was highlighted outside the shop and between White Hart Crescent and Bramall Lane.

While public transport was, as mentioned earlier, generally well thought of there were concerns about buses not turning up and / or not sticking to times.

Red Hall Partnership members noted the need to have bus routes to gain access to post offices and were concerned about the condition of bus shelters.

North Road

North Road is located towards the north of Central ward in Darlington. The new North Road ward amalgamates large sections of the old Northgate North ward with the previous North Road ward. The new ward has been increased to the north taking an area from Harrowgate Hill, but reduced to the south.

North Road is ranked as 980th (worst 12% nationally) in the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (estimated using combined LSOA scores).

It has a population of 6,054 resident in 2,817 households. 23.1% of the population is aged under 16 with 15.8% over the age of retirement compared with 21.4% and 16.0% in England and Wales. The proportion of the population from ethnic minorities is 1.8% compared with 2.1% in Darlington and 8.7% in England in Wales.

The unemployment rate in North Road is 4.1% compared to the Darlington figure of 2.8%. Youth unemployment in North Road is the eighth worst in Darlington, with 13.8% of unemployed people aged under 20. Long term unemployment is a problem, with 18.8% of residents in North Road having extended trouble finding suitable work (second worst in the borough). 33.3% of households are classed as in receipt of low incomes, with 37.2% of the areas children living in low income households. Educational attainment is generally poor, with results at Key Stage 2 and GCSE below the average for Darlington as well as nationally. University progression is set at 1.6 people per thousand, compared to 4.0 people per thousand for the whole of Darlington. The number of adults with poor literacy (27%) is also higher than those for Darlington (25%) and England and Wales (24%).

North Road has levels of car ownership which are significantly lower than the national rate, with 43.7% of households not owning a car compared to 26.8% in England and Wales. House prices are an average of £86,500, which is less than average mortgage amounts (3.5 times the average household income). This is reflected in the percentage of houses in the lowest two Council Tax bands, which is 88.0% compared to 68.5% for the rest of the borough.

Neighbourhood Strengths

Participants at all the community consultation events were encouraged to identify what they felt was good about their neighbourhood. There was a reasonably high level of consistency across the various groups and individual responses.

The North Road Ward was described by participants in the random focus group as a “little town in its own right” due to the local amenities such as the Morrison’s Supermarket, the chemist, Doctors and Dentists and Post Offices etc. The bus service into town was also described positively.

Areas of the Ward were described as quiet and while there was clearly a problem with traffic on North Road and with pedestrian crossings it was suggested that the crossing near Morrison’s had been improved.

A participant at the community appraisal event said that most of the young people have a “good sense of responsibility and morality”. The improvements to the pavements near the cemetery were also welcomed by one participant.

Neighbourhood Needs

Participants in all of the consultation events were encouraged to identify those aspects of life in the local neighbourhood that were not so good and to explore what the underlying problems might be. The discussions that followed ranged widely from quality of life issues, such as the state of the local environment, to broader socio-economic issues such as job availability. The issues raised have been grouped under theme titles that relate to the eight connecting themes Darlington Partnership's Community Strategy¹².

Inclusive communities

Residents in the random focus group expressed a desire for more consultation about specific issues and requested that local residents should be more involved in the schemes that are developed. One participant suggested, for example, that:

Residents are the best people to know what is going on as we live in the area – living in the area gives us the ability and experience to know what is best. They should work together with us.

Another resident was pessimistic about whether this would happen in practice. He was concerned that consultation might only be “a paper exercise” and felt that more action was required. It was also suggested that all projects should be piloted “as a means of checking whether they work”.

Educational achievement

Only one comment was made relating to education and this was that local schools were not working with the local community to sort out problems with young people.

Leisure activities

Local residents consistently highlighted the need for more activities and ‘places’ for young people. Often it was suggested that this would divert them away from causing trouble.

Specific mention was made of the need for skateboarding facilities because of the noise that resulted from their use in residential streets.

It was also suggested that the local play areas were very limited. One resident claimed that the Council was taking them away, because of safety concerns, but not replacing them.

Community Safety

There was a high level of concern in the Ward about young people drinking on the streets often in large groups. Some suggested there were frequently gangs of about 15 young people hanging around local take-away shops and off-licences or roaming around the area and allegedly intimidating residents late at night.

There were also concerns about local children playing football. One resident was, for example, worried about her windows getting damaged and another that they were playing in a dangerous spot where they might be knocked down. Some were especially concerned about children playing out late at night

¹² Darlington Partnership (2003) “Where Quality Comes to Life: A community strategy for the future of Darlington” (Darlington: Darlington Partnership).

Residents in the streets between North road and Longfield Road were concerned about the anti-social behaviour of school children going to and from school.

One participant suggested there was a problem in Henry Street: “the kids hide in the bushes and frighten old people”.

Other community safety issues highlighted by residents during consultation concerned drug usage in the area. Residents suggested that there were particularly properties where the occupants were using drugs and causing problems. Private landlords were criticised for not taking any interest in the behaviour of their tenants.

One participant claimed that parents were not taking responsibility for young people and others wished to see more police officers on the beat.

Environment

Most of the issues raised during the community appraisal event, and by the random focus group participants, concerned environmental and/or ‘quality of life’ issues. There were frequent complaints about litter and dog dirt, for example.

Specific mention was made of litter in back alleys and under bushes. Residents were concerned that bin-bags were being put out at the wrong time and that dogs and cats were getting into them and spreading the refuse around.

The recently introduced recycling initiative was also criticised and it was suggested that a previous company had been much better.

One participant at the focus group session reported that Morrison’s trolleys were scattered around the area. Another that there were needles left lying around.

A number suggested that the roads needed clearing more frequently and that there were problems with flooding as a result of blocked drains.

Focus group participants suggested that the local park was not being kept well and reported that the bowling green had been vandalised. Play areas were also criticised because of the hard surfaces. Concern was also expressed about the physical condition of housing in some parts of the Ward. It was suggested, for example, that some of the older properties in Westmoreland Street had been affected by subsidence.

Residents also raised the issue of private landlords (see above under community safety). They felt that the area was becoming less stable with a higher level of transience.

Transport system

Problems with speeding and the general level of traffic in the ward were highlighted throughout the community consultation. Residents felt that the road system had “not been thought out very well” and while the recent consultation was welcomed by many the Council was also criticised for not making the plans visible¹³.

Crosby Street and Leyburn Road were described as ‘rat runs’ and it was suggested that traffic calming in some areas had exacerbated the problem in others. Several people suggested that speeding was a problem on Eldon Street and Westmoreland Street.

¹³ The consultation predated the North Road leaflet distribution.

Others highlighted parking problems caused by the parents of school children at drop-off and pick-up times.

It was also suggested that there was a need for a crossing on North Road near the Post Office and B&Q.

Health and well-being

No issues raised.

Local economy

No issues raised.

Lingfield

Lingfield is located in the east of Darlington and spreads across areas of housing and a significant proportion of the Town's industry. Under the new ward boundaries, Lingfield now comprises of the old Lingfield ward with additional areas taken over from Bank Top and Central.

Lingfield is ranked 1,479th (worst 19% nationally) in the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (estimated using combined LSOA scores).

It has a population of 3,538 resident in 1,536 households. 22.0% of the population is aged under 16 with 20.8% over the age of retirement compared with 21.4% and 16.0% in England and Wales. The proportion of the population from ethnic minorities is 2.2% compared with 2.1% in Darlington and 8.7% in England in Wales.

The unemployment rate in Lingfield is 2.3% compared to the Darlington figure of 2.8%. 24.5% of households are classed as in receipt of low incomes, with 29.5% of the areas children living in low income households.

Educational attainment in Lingfield is improving but still poor overall. Performance in Key Stage 2 has shown progress when compared to the 24 wards in total: in 2003 Lingfield was the 3rd worst achiever in this field, yet a year later the ward had risen to fourteenth overall. GCSE grade achievement has also improved from second to thirteenth worst, while university progression remains the second worst in Darlington. Vehicle crime in Lingfield is still an issue, the third worst in Darlington.

Lingfield has levels of car ownership which are significantly lower than the national rate, with 35.7% of households not owning a car compared to 26.8% in England and Wales. House prices are low, with an average of £69,300, which is less than average mortgage amounts (3.5 times the average household income). This is reflected in the percentage of houses in the lowest two Council Tax bands, which is 95.9% compared to 68.5% for the rest of the borough.

Neighbourhood Strengths

Participants at all the community consultation events were encouraged to identify what they felt was good about their neighbourhood. There was a reasonably high level of consistency across the various groups and individual responses. Several positive aspects of life in the Lingfield Ward emerged from the community consultation.

A common comment was that there was not a lot wrong in the Ward. The area was described as pleasant and attractive with high levels of neighbourliness. One participant, who had moved into the area from the South, described how she had been made to feel welcome and how she "felt at home" in the community. Others suggested that they felt safe. A member of the Lingfield Community Partnership suggested that many residents were house-proud and took particular care of their gardens.

Community group relations were described as good and the Lingfield Community Partnership was thought to be a strong and positive force in the Ward.

Most participants agreed that the area had been improved and specific mention was made of the regeneration in Hundens Lane. A participant at the community appraisal event pointed out that the house prices had gone up and claimed this was an indication of the general improvements that were occurring in the area.

The Lingfield Community Partnership said there was little neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour in the Ward and that most of the children were well behaved.

While there were some ongoing problems with the behaviour of students from Eastbourne School it was agreed that the school was making an effort and “getting to grips” with the problems.

It was also agreed that the area was well serviced with public transport.

Local residents appreciated the trees and open green spaces and one participant was impressed with the planting on the Yarm Road roundabout and reported that it had won awards.

While seen as a facility for the whole of Darlington, residents were positive about the facilities available at the Eastbourne Sports Complex that is located in the Ward just off Hundens Lane.

It was also suggested that there were good facilities for older people.

Neighbourhood Needs

Participants in all of the consultation events were encouraged to identify those aspects of life in the local neighbourhood that were not so good and to explore what the underlying problems might be. The discussions that followed ranged widely from quality of life issues, such as the state of the local environment, to broader socio-economic issues such as job availability. The issues raised have been grouped under theme titles that relate to the eight connecting themes of the Darlington Partnership’s Community Strategy¹⁴.

Inclusive communities

While residents in the Lingfield Ward did not regard themselves as particularly disadvantaged or excluded they felt that the area had not benefited from investment in the same way as other parts of the town. They suggested that money had been spent in other more deprived areas and the town centre and that there “was little left for private estates”. One participant in the random focus group said he was appalled at the way they had been ignored.

It was also suggested that the community was fragmented and that there was little sense of pride.

Leisure activities

There was common agreement about the lack of opportunities for young people in the ward. Specific mention was made of play equipment and the need for a dedicated young people’s venue.

The young people agreed that there was little to do in the Lingfield Ward, they welcomed the Sports Centre but said this was for anyone in Darlington and that there was little for those who were not interested in sport. They also noted that some of the school buildings are not used and they were concerned that “kids go there to smoke”.

Community Safety

Several community safety issues were reported during the consultation. Concerns about “noisy gangs” and “young people hanging around” were the most prominent. Mention was also made of fires being lit in open areas and vandalism of the church hall and these actions were also attributed to young people.

¹⁴ Darlington Partnership (2003) “Where Quality Comes to Life: A community strategy for the future of Darlington” (Darlington: Darlington Partnership).

There was also considerable discussion about the behaviour of children in the area of Eastbourne School and Eastbourne Sports Complex.

Local residents alleged that kids had “trashed nets and changing rooms” in the centre thrown golf balls through house windows from the school fields and taken short cuts through people’s gardens by climbing over the walls.

Residents regularly blamed poor parenting. They felt adults in the ward had little control over the young people and they themselves were concerned about being victimised if they were to intervene.

Beyond these issues there was also some concern expressed about the number of cars that had been broken into in recent times.

One resident claimed, “the police don’t attend when called”.

Environment

Most of the concerns expressed about environmental issues related to litter. There were several reports of litter being dropped and blown around. Mention was made of specific problems associated with take-away shops on Yarm Road and it was also claimed that young people were dropping litter on the way to school and back and at lunchtimes. It was alleged that young people were using gardens as dumping grounds and were kicking rubbish around.

There was criticism of Eastbourne School for allowing students to leave their premises at lunchtimes.

Other general environmental issues reported during the consultation included graffiti and fly tipping.

Several comments were made about cars parked on pavements and grass verges. It was recognised that there was a parking problem in certain parts of the ward and that the grass verges were being churned up in certain areas.

Concerns were also expressed by Lingfield Community Partnership about the poor street lighting in the vicinity of Heathfield School.

Only one comment was made about housing in the area and that was that there were lots of ‘for sale’ signs. It was suggested that people seemed keen to move but that this might be because house prices had improved.

Transport system

There were relatively few comments about transport and traffic issues.

Concerns about the quantity and speed of traffic along Yarm Road, the Broadway and Hundens Lane were highlighted during the consultation. It was felt that the existing traffic calming measures along Hundens lane had not been effective. There were specific concerns about motorbikes in these areas too.

Little was said about public transport but one resident bemoaned the discontinuation of route 26.

Finally some felt that there had been little support from the Council about problems with the car park near Lingfield shops.

Educational achievement

No issues raised.

Health and well-being

No issues raised.

Local economy

No issues raised.

Cockerton East

Cockerton East is located towards the north-west of Darlington. The ward is based primarily on the old Cockerton East ward, with the only boundary revision being a slight extension into part of the old Cockerton West ward.

Cockerton East ward is ranked 3,310th (worst 42% nationally) in the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (estimated using combined LSOA scores).

It has a population of 5,081 resident in 2,122 households. 23% of the population is aged under 16 with 15.3% over the age of retirement compared with 21.4% and 16.0% nationally. The proportion of the population from ethnic minorities is 0.9% compared with 2.1% in Darlington and 8.7% in England in Wales.

The unemployment rate in Cockerton East is 1.8 compared to the overall Darlington figure of 2.8. Cockerton East has a relatively few low income households (ranked seventeenth out of the 24 wards). Only 14.6% of children live in low income households, which is second most favourable ward rate in Darlington. Cockerton East has an average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (12%) and the twelfth highest rate of single parent households (10.8%). Only 2.2% of students go on to university (the sixth lowest progression rate) and the ward has the fifth highest amount of adults with poor literacy in Darlington, at 29%.

Cockerton East has a level of car ownership that is comparable with the national rate, with 27.9% of households not owning a car compared to 26.8% in England and Wales. House prices are on average £94,600 each, £4,900 below the average rate for the whole of Darlington. This is reflected in the percentage of houses in the lowest two Council Tax bands, which is 80.6% compared to 68.5% for the borough as a whole.

Neighbourhood Strengths

Participants at all the community consultation events were encouraged to identify what they felt was good about their neighbourhood. There was a reasonably high level of consistency across the various groups and individual responses. The main themes to emerge were

Residents in Cockerton East enjoyed their access to the shops and the green in Cockerton Village (in Cockerton West Ward).

Beyond this the participants in the random focus group had few comments about the positive aspects of Cockerton East. They referred to the beck, to other open areas and to the quality of the housing. The predominance of opportunities for parking on driveways was also mentioned specifically.

Several people who participated in the 'new years wish exercise' said they had no problems in their area.

Neighbourhood Needs

Participants in all of the consultation events were encouraged to identify those aspects of life in the local neighbourhood that were not so good and to explore what the underlying problems might be. The discussions that followed ranged widely from quality of life issues, such as the state of the local environment, to broader socio-economic issues such as job availability. The issues raised have been

grouped under theme titles that relate to the eight connecting themes Darlington Partnership's Community Strategy¹⁵.

In Cockerton East where a Community Partnership is yet to be developed the major issues raised by local residents during the various consultation exercises concerned community safety and environmental issues. While there were also several points made about transport issues there were no issues raised about improving the local economy, health and well-being and community inclusion.

Community Safety

A high level of concern was expressed about groups of young people hanging around in the parks, near the allotments, in school grounds, and by shops. It was suggested that groups of up to 20 to 30 young people would often be found drinking and smoking in these areas and on the street. Those described as hanging around the shops (thought to be 15 and 16 year olds) were alleged to have been knocking on windows and generally causing a nuisance. Some referred to 'disturbances in open spaces'.

There was also concern about the riding of motorbikes in the Brinkburn Pond nature reserve. Shop windows had been a target for graffiti and it was suggested that shop signs had been stolen and sometimes vandalised. There was concern among the random focus group participants that some of the behaviour towards local shopkeepers was racist. One resident expressed concern about the security of the existing school building once the school had relocated.

Other issues raised included break-ins (especially to garden and allotment sheds), garden fencing getting broken and cars getting damaged.

Residents felt there was an insufficient police presence and that police did not always respond adequately. Others suggested that local parents were not taking sufficient responsibility for children and young people.

Environment

Residents were concerned about the image of the Ward. It was suggested that local shops needed 'tidying up' and that footpaths and pavements needed maintaining.

The condition of the becks in the area was mentioned by many and it was suggested that flooding was a particular issue in West Auckland Road and Bates Avenue. The Sugarhill Park was also described as boggy and flooding.

Concern was also expressed about the state of the pond and residents were worried about the rats that they felt had been attracted to the area.

Several people complained about the presence of litter and dog dirt. Much of the rubbish and broken glass in the area was attributed to the behaviour of the groups of young people mentioned above.

A concern was also expressed about drug-users not looking after their houses and gardens.

¹⁵ Darlington Partnership (2003) "Where Quality Comes to Life: A community strategy for the future of Darlington" (Darlington: Darlington Partnership).

Transport system

Residents were concerned about the traffic levels in the Ward, especially on a morning and afternoon. This was associated with school drop-off and pick-up times. There was a high level of concern about the quantity of traffic using West Auckland Road and a concern that this would continue to increase with the development of the West Park area. This, it was believed, would have a knock on effect for Brinkburn Road. Residents were also concerned about the speed of traffic along Bates Avenue. It was suggested that traffic lights were needed at the junction West Auckland Road and Bates Avenue.

Leisure activities

The lack of good quality play areas for children and young people was highlighted (especially in the Sugar Hill area) and it was suggested that there was nowhere to play football that is lit.

Local economy

No issues were raised.

Educational achievement

No issues were raised.

Health and well-being

No issues were raised.

Inclusive communities

No issues were raised.