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# IMAGINING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

## OUR FINDINGS SO FAR

The covid19 pandemic has highlighted the fragility of our interconnected world – from the importance of our local communities to global trade, insecure jobs and our natural environment.

In response to this and wider challenges about the future, designers from the Royal College of Art together with partners from councils, civil society and charities, would like your help so that we can understand your beliefs, feelings and knowledge about your town.

Our focus is on how you can build your community together, how you get around town and your ideas about the future.

We asked you to be thoughtful and creative; to think about everyone's wellbeing in the future and to help your community become healthier, more vibrant, inclusive and resilient.

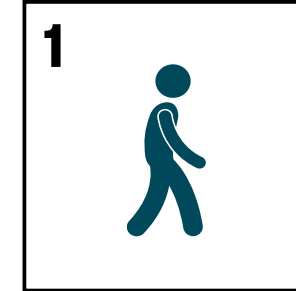
This small booklet is a summary of what we have heard and some initial thoughts on what this may mean for your town.

# ABOUT THE RCA

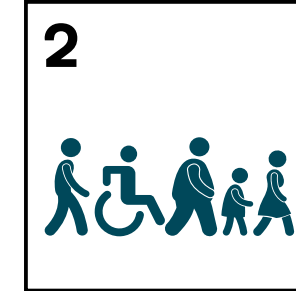


The Royal College of Art is the best place in the world to study art and design. This design and research project is led by the Intelligent Mobility Design Centre and includes a team from mobility design, architecture, communication and service design. We will be using our creative skills to help you to develop a vision of future community planning that is both inclusive and fit for the future! We are grateful to everyone who has contributed knowledge so far and look forward to hearing more.

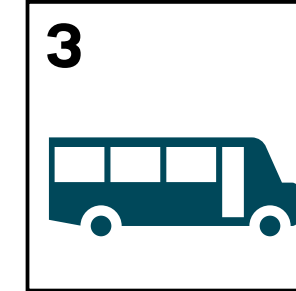
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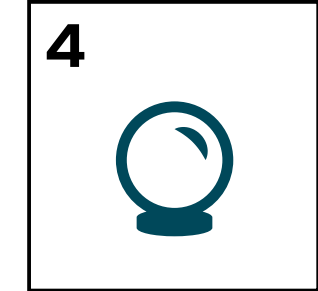
A little about us



About our  
community

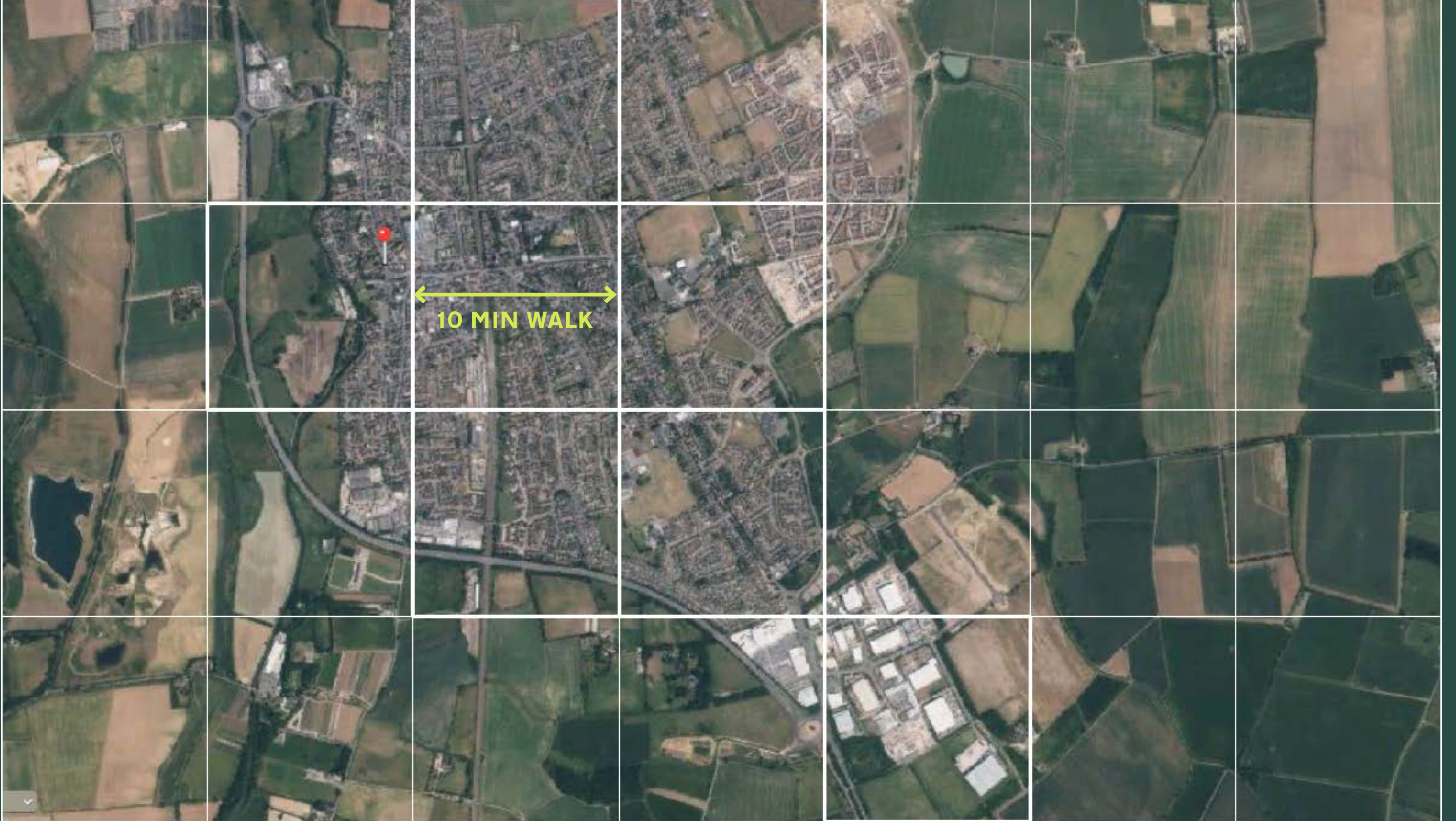


Getting around  
town



Beliefs about  
the future





# **1. A LITTLE ABOUT US**

We've heard from 20 people so far, so this is just a snapshot of your town. We'd love to hear from more of you, especially if you are younger or don't normally get involved in community activities or crazy things like planning the future of your town.

We'd like to hear what is missing and whether this sounds like your town.



## WHO ARE WE?

“ We are workers, parents and healthcare professionals. We work for charities and may be retired, some of us are political and some are musical, some have disabilities, are social and active. Some are artists and some like dancing. We're creative, scientists and teachers. A few of us are growers, menders and makers... How about you?

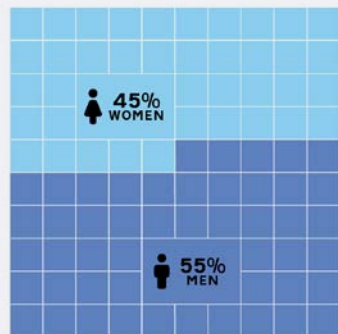
We moved for work, for the great transport connections, we grew up here and discovered that we loved the quiet and rural life. We wanted to be close to our family or needed somewhere affordable, we came to teach and enjoyed the friendliness and space.

WE VALUE HUMANITY AND DECENCY, loyalty and partnership, our homes, our family and our friends. We value the countryside and cultural activities; nature, history, integrity and honesty of course.

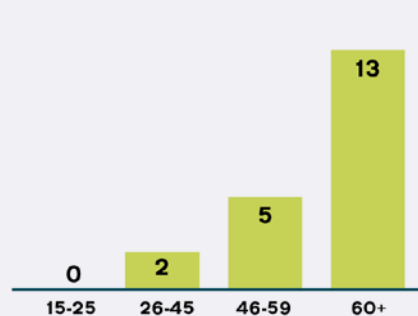
We value working together and bouncing ideas around, we value listening and community to make things work. Some of us are Christian and value integrity, and some of us value the future, to keep climate change in check. We value kindness and empathy to understand each other. We value time and space and nature, and manners if you must!

We are very well situated, and we value our facilities, but our health is as important as the range of shops we have. We love the friendliness of neighbours and community and like to see cleanliness and politeness too. We value independence and want to walk everywhere and if we can stop fly-tipping we'll be very pleased with you!

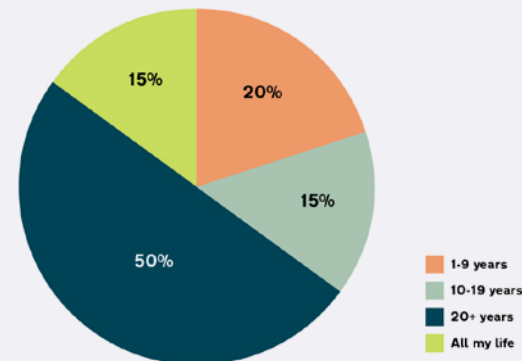
## IDENTITY



## AGE GROUP



## YEARS OF SETTLEMENT



## SOME OF OUR SECRET SKILLS

“

We know about the area, managing economics and development, we like to think strategically and how small businesses can thrive. We're interested in community, engagement, health and society; we can manage projects and fundraise too.

We're internet specialists with social media skills; we love photography, music and history. We're engineers and manufacturers, volunteers and sports enthusiasts who believe in our youngster's future too. We're interested in inclusion and better communication, support for those with additional needs but we have our differences and we'll have to work them through. Some of us can listen and believe in 'can do'.

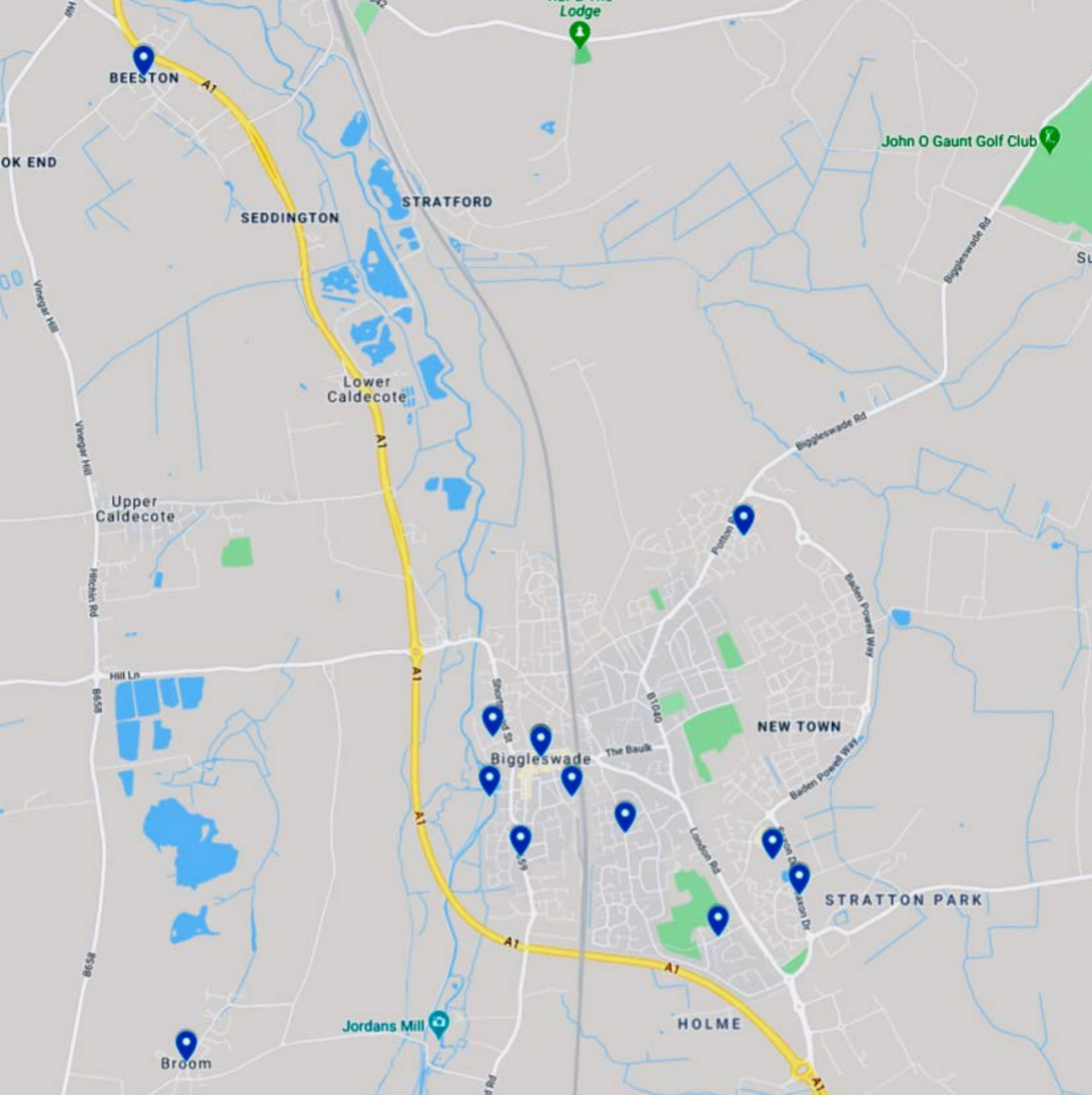
**What are your hopes and ambitions for your community?**

## WHERE WE LIVE

→ A properly planned, green, clean and inclusive place!  
A place that thrives as a market town for everyone around. Better housing, more leisure and sport. Bringing together the old and the new. Returning things to nature.

→ Better buses and better broadband to connect villages and the town. Funding for the centre so that it can thrive. More vibrancy and diversity, an inclusive community so that everyone's voices can be heard. More events and activities in halls, churches and neighbourhood centres.

→ Integration of the 'newcomers' into the community, fairs and events to raise funds and help families enjoy each other's company. A splash park for the kids, sports for everyone and better access to the countryside so it's easy to walk and scoot around. That we can make decisions together both old timers and new, young and old. A miracle perhaps but possible if we try.



**What challenges and problems do you want your community to overcome?**

→ A chance to restart with a greener way of life, with less commuting and more focus on local businesses too. More kindness, more tolerance, less burglaries and shoplifting and a scheme to help policing, health and social services. A way to look after everyone in need - those aging with dementia and the young and homeless too. Let's pedestrianise the centre and make all development sustainable, let's build a greater sense of community and local civic pride!

→ Let's get away from the private car! Let's create a town centre that everyone wants to come to. Let's reduce congestion and stop developing on farmland. We need to create affordable buses and find ways to reduce litter and graffiti. We need to try new things and share what we have. We need less me, me, me and more what's good for us all. That means less speeding cars, zero energy futures and more green business if we can.



What do you  
love about  
where you live?

The history, the people 🚶🚶🚶 The idiosyncrasy. The quirks.  
The fresh produce 🍏🍏 Family and neighbours 🏠 Rotary  
🌀 Choral Society, Town Council, Green Wheel. Baptist  
Church, Green Wheel 🌳 Biggleswade Common 🌳 Nice  
market town, quiet village, camera club 📷 pleasant walks  
and rides 🚶 Generally friendly people 🚶🚶🚶 Everything. The  
retail park. Always be a bus available if I stop driving 🚌  
I live within a 20 minute walk of the town centre 🚶 I  
am close to the countryside 🌳 The park on my boundary is  
not likely to change 🌳 Schools nearby 🏫 and apart  
from the noisy A1, life is all around me. Regular bus route to  
Bedford and its hospital 🚌 All necessary shops are here 🛒  
I live within 10 minute walk of the leisure centre.  
Village Life. Nothing. I like the walks along the river 🌳🌳  
and on the Common 🌳🌳 Community. Beeston Green and the  
rural nature of the area. Parks, river, heritage,  
multicultural. Rural environment 🌳 River Ivel at west side  
of town 🌳🌳





What drives  
you nuts about  
where you live?

The congestion. 🚗 The daft one way system. The clutter in the streets (railings, ghastly bins, street "furniture", badly planted trees etc). 🗑️ Traffic and parking; lack of more upmarket shops and restaurants; 🚚 county lines drugs and homelessness beginning to affect the town; Traffic congestion. 🚗 Lack of consultation about local issues and complete disregard of any feedback given. Traffic, litter, graffiti, blocked storm water drains, woefully poor pavements. 🌳 Only the noise of the A1. If the road surface could be improved, or electric vehicles will be quieter, it would be perfect here. The threat of development. 🏠 Lack of communication, pitiful sense of community. 👥 Issues with parking on the estate, poor quality of roads and dangerous speeding on roads into Town. Not enough places for the elderly to live. Not everyone has their own transport the town centre needs more shops that sell goods that Biggleswade used to have. Like gas and electric cookers clothing 🧥 for the elderly knickers/coats/..not food outlets and estate agents. Litter. 🗑️ The continuing building on agricultural land and unsustainable development. 📶 Lack of 🚲 cycle facilities eg cycle path on London Road from Eagle Farm Road to Dunton Corner. Although the A1 is convenient as a major route, access to it can be difficult at times. Traffic. 🚌 Lack of public transport to local towns. Too many new houses and not enough infrastructure. 🏘️

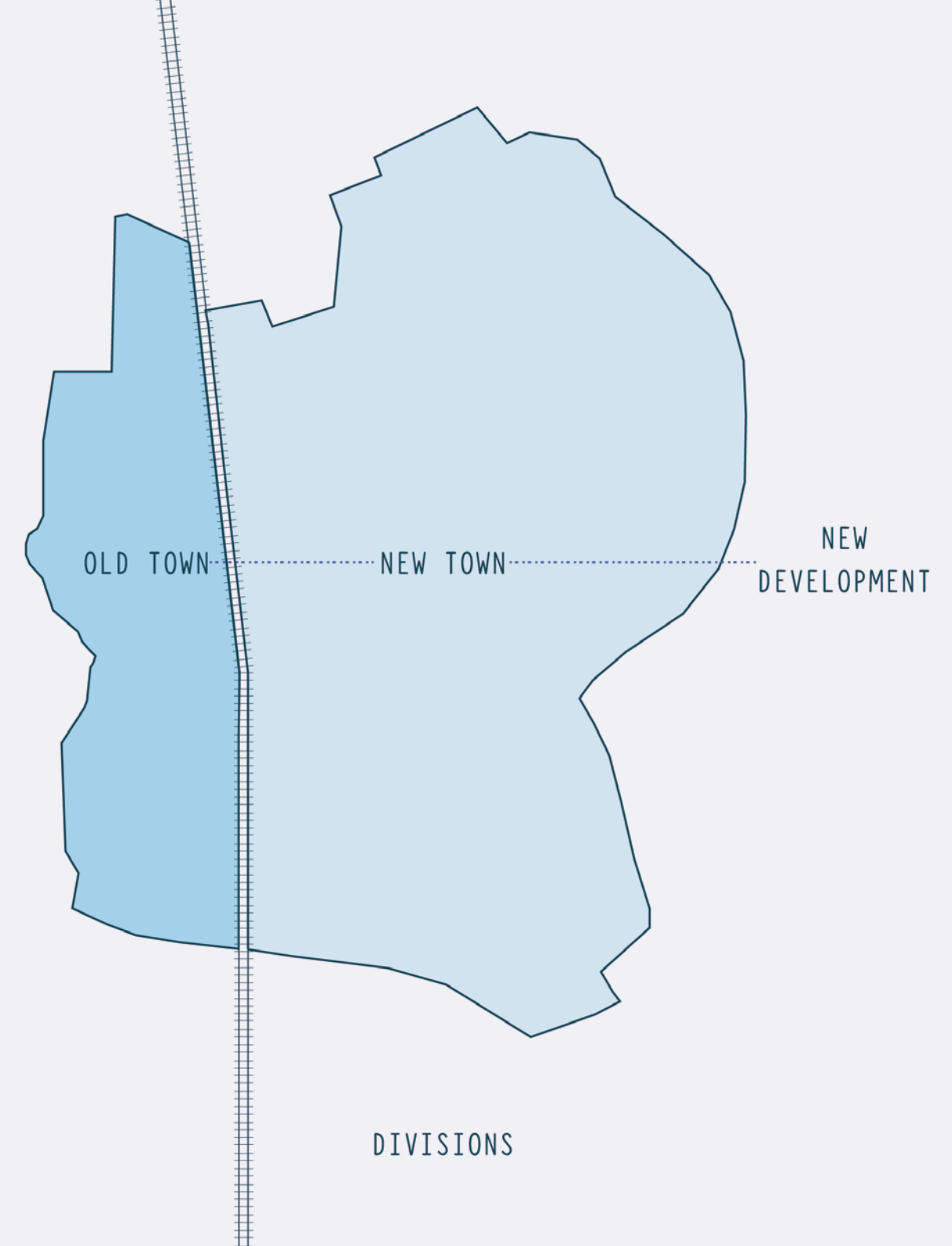


Any barriers?

“ East to west connection takes an eternity, busy, congestion, illegible route. Town centre on the far west of the town.

Integration across communities, new folks moving into King's Reach need to be part of Biggleswade, not Biggleswade New Town. Unwelcoming to newcomers.

We need more leadership locally and nationally, we need more creativity, common sense and care. We need to coordinate our efforts, build capacity and finance. We need to get rid of gridlock and keep development sane. We need new homes to be better quality or not built at all and to get rid of traffic, we need our bus system to work! And if that isn't enough let's reimagine night school, teach everyone new languages, pottery and art!



## 2. ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY

### SPECIAL PUBLIC PLACES

“

→ We love the market square, with its fresh produce and farmer's days, a special place where events take place, the carnival parade, where the Christmas lights come to light up our town.

→ We enjoy village life, a quiet pace of life. Living close to the shops and the leisure centre. Some of our family lives nearby, with friendly people and minimal crime, and schools nearby, Biggleswade Town is a pleasant place, life is all around us.

→ We enjoy singing in the Choral Society at Trinity Methodist Church, we like to socialise at the Camera Club at the Weatherley Centre. We like it when everything's in walking distance.

→ The public space that surrounds Biggleswade is special indeed, with walks and fishing on the River Ivel, and cycles to Beeston Green. Our public space extends far beyond our boundaries across the Common to the RSPB Lodge. The Green Wheel is a special place where we run, we cycle and walk.



**Tell us about a public place in your town that needs improving**

- The town centre is in need of more upmarket shops and restaurants, things for young people to do, that sell the goods we used to have like gas and electric cookers, clothing for the elderly, knickers, coats, we don't just want food outlets and estate agents! We want a vibrant town centre without clutter in the streets, railings, traffic, litter. We want to spend time in the town centre to shop, have a relaxed meal, without worrying our two-hours of free parking is up!
- We're concerned about empty premises in the town centre, and we fear that the new health and social care hub will be placed on the very corner of the town. We fear for losing valuable services in our centre, where older people can easily reach.
- We need space for bike racks in the station now people are riding their bikes more! The station must be accessible to everyone. For those of us who are less able, with buggies or luggage what weighs a tonne.
- We need more events in our community hubs, with hubs that encourage integration of old and new Biggleswade and celebrate our diversity.

**Tell us anything else that you think is important to know about your town and its people**

- We have civic pride in our historic market town, there is not a hectic pace of life here, people care for others and the area. But we need some injection of new ideas and inspiration!
- Our demographic is shifting and our population is growing. We now have a Biggleswade Indian Society and substantial numbers of Eastern Europeans. The aspirations of people living in Biggleswade are shifting, especially with more younger residents. We need more things to do for young people like a youth club, shops and entertainment.
- We need more sport and leisure facilities as our population grows, and we fear for the pressure the new development will have on our existing services and infrastructure.
- Some of us feel that Biggleswade is not always welcoming to those of us moving from Stevenage, Welwyn, Hatfield or London. We need more understanding of the changes which must take place to accommodate and support the very diverse new residents coming here.
- Local people need to give their views, engage with regularity, as changes and new services develop.



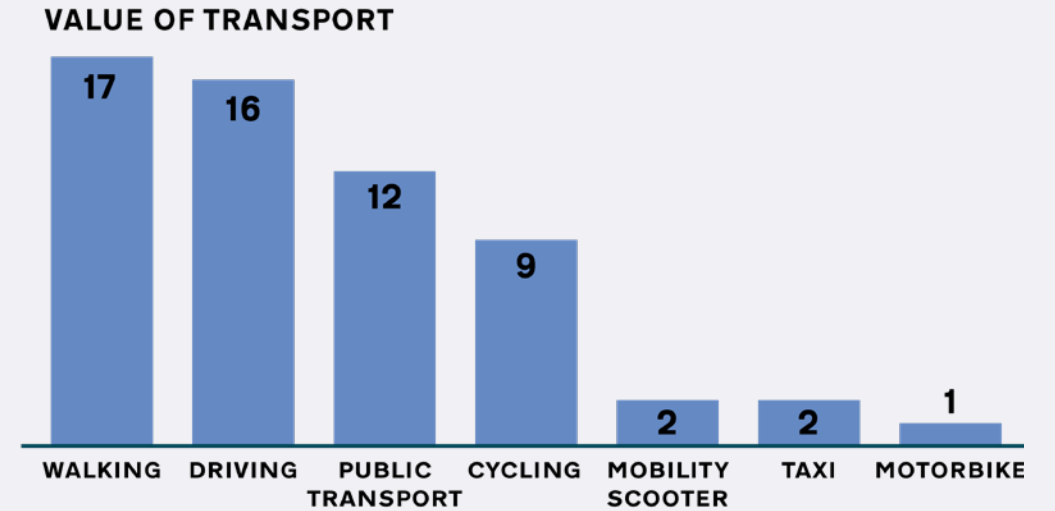
Tell us another  
city or town that  
you love

Deal  
Stamford  
Southwold  
Cambridge  
Axminster  
St Albans  
York  
Ickwell  
Northill  
Old Warden  
Cheddar  
Bridgend  
Hitchin  
Edinburgh  
Amphill





# 3. GETTING AROUND TOWN



## EVERYDAY JOURNEYS THAT MAKE US SMILE

“

→ The Green Wheel makes us smile! We walk there, run there cycle there, and beyond – to local villages we visit, the RSPB to the north, and Beeston Green too. It is quiet and cared for, lovely and open.

→ We walk to the River Ivel to watch people fish, filled with a sense of the history of our lovely old town. We walk through footpaths and alleyways to the historic church of St Andrew, through country roads and open fields, to Jordan's Mill and see that enormous sky – what a pleasant area we live in.

**Tell us about a journey or everyday experience that needs improving**

→ Turning into our road, toward our home makes us smile, seeing regular services visiting the estate makes us smile. The milkman, an ice cream van, the postman, a cbc minibus dropping off neighbours child.

→ Getting from East to West is unpleasant, busy, an illegible route, some might even call it a nightmare.

→ The buses are irregular and unreliable, but driving along the High St can take an eternity! With cars speeding, noise and potholes, with poor surface defects, and cars parked both sides. Watch out for the dangerous corners, and watch out for the parking along Lawrence Rd – its an accident waiting to happen!

→ And what of reaching our surrounding nature, cannot Dan Albone's car park be free for our Town, to walk down the common or to sit near the river?

→ We need some affordable parking in the centre. But there's so much traffic and congestion! Especially at the start and end of the school day. But the roads aren't good

for walking, unpleasant and busy with narrow pavements on a camber in Back st, and unlit pavements with harsh shadows on London rd at night. Some roads are unsafe for people, cyclists, and cars alike.

→ To cross the train track there are but four points to do it. Three need replacing, two are one-way and the other holds a narrow pavement and an unstable surface.

→ Perhaps we need roundabouts along the A1, though joining that road in the morning's not fun. But the worst is when the A1 road is diverted, right through the centre of town!



# 4. BELIEFS ABOUT OUR FUTURE

## LOCKDOWN OPTIMISM

“

→ During Lockdown we found ourselves in nature! We took to walking and cycling more, spending time in the countryside, growing to value our green spaces, like the Green Wheel and Biggleswade Common.

→ Lockdown made Biggleswade more pleasant. People were friendlier which reminds us of what we liked when we first came to Biggleswade.

→ Our community came together to help each other, residents, neighbours showing care and concern for others. With food banks, and volunteering, support for the vulnerable, the Good Neighbour Scheme and the Baptist Church!

→ It was a **reality check** to how people currently live their lives.

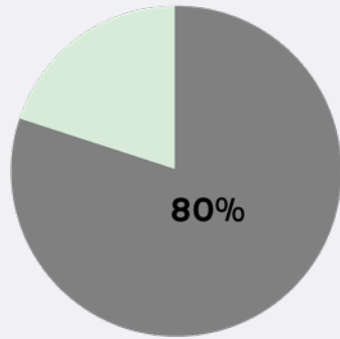
## LOCKDOWN CONCERNS

- We're worried about the collapsing economy leading to job losses, people turning to drugs and violence as a result of losing their livelihoods. We worry for the education of our town's children. And what of future jobs for our young people? Can they really learn from those more experienced through remote-working?
- How will the estate of the economy affect our spaces of culture, our small businesses? Will our thriving market and town centre survive?
- Illness worries us and lack of local healthcare too, especially if we're in the vulnerable category. We worry for those in isolation, we're worried about loneliness. It is concerning for the elderly, who struggle to stand in queues for the chemist, who rely on the now-closed local shops as a life-line.
- We fear because of the poor national leadership in this uncertain time, how long might it take before we can get back to normality? We need to work against selfishness and negativity. We must keep volunteering, we must engage with decision-makers. We cannot work in our silos!

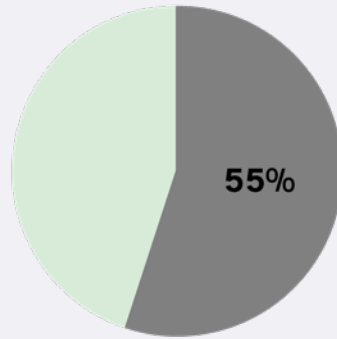
## OUR IDEAL FUTURE TOWN

- We want a 20-minute community that is easy to navigate. A curated jumble of amenities, library, art gallery, restaurants, cafes and shops. We want fun, laughter and love, support and integration and places that are local, so we don't have to drive.
- We want to be able to get around town by bus or park if we need to drive, and facilities so that no-one is disabled by things outside. We want amenities and services that are not driven by profit and a happy and harmonious place that's free from crime.
- We want a town centre that is larger and less cluttered. A place for people not for cars. We want a place for drivers to park so they can walk instead of drive and space for bikes and e-scooters too. We want our schools and centres to be vibrant and inclusive, not to close on the weekends and be separate from the town. We want plays, concerts and music, more dance and activities, more sport and entertainment all round.
- We need more attractive housing, interesting shops and restaurants, less mindless vandalism too. We need better

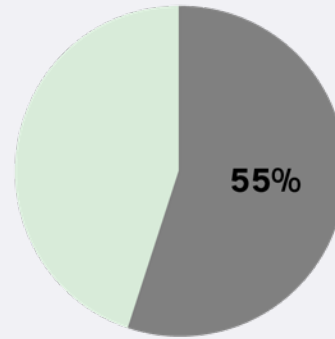
**State of the economy and things like inequality**



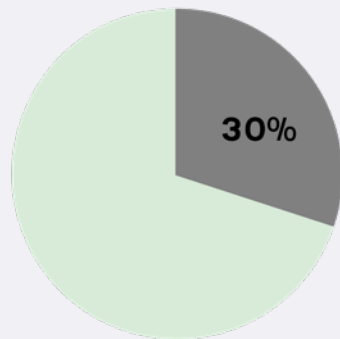
**Environmental issues like climate change**



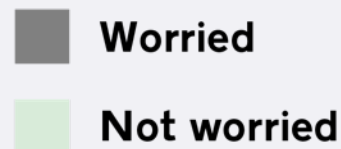
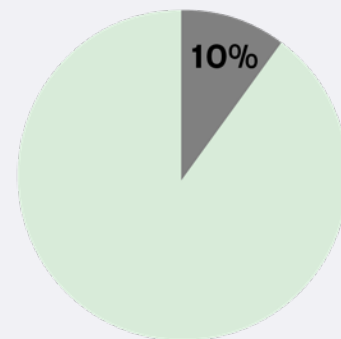
**Social issues like illness and isolation**



**Political differences**



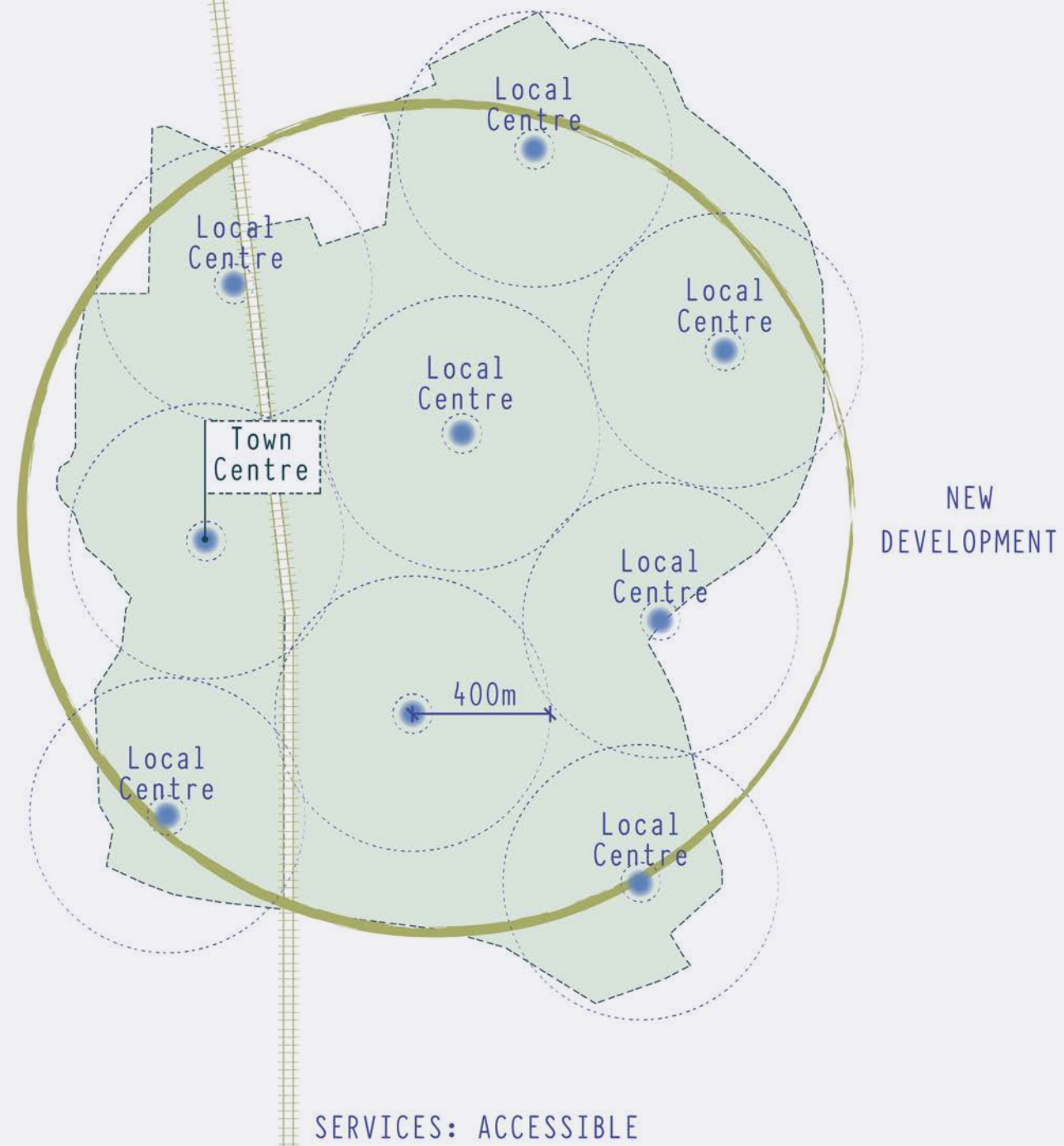
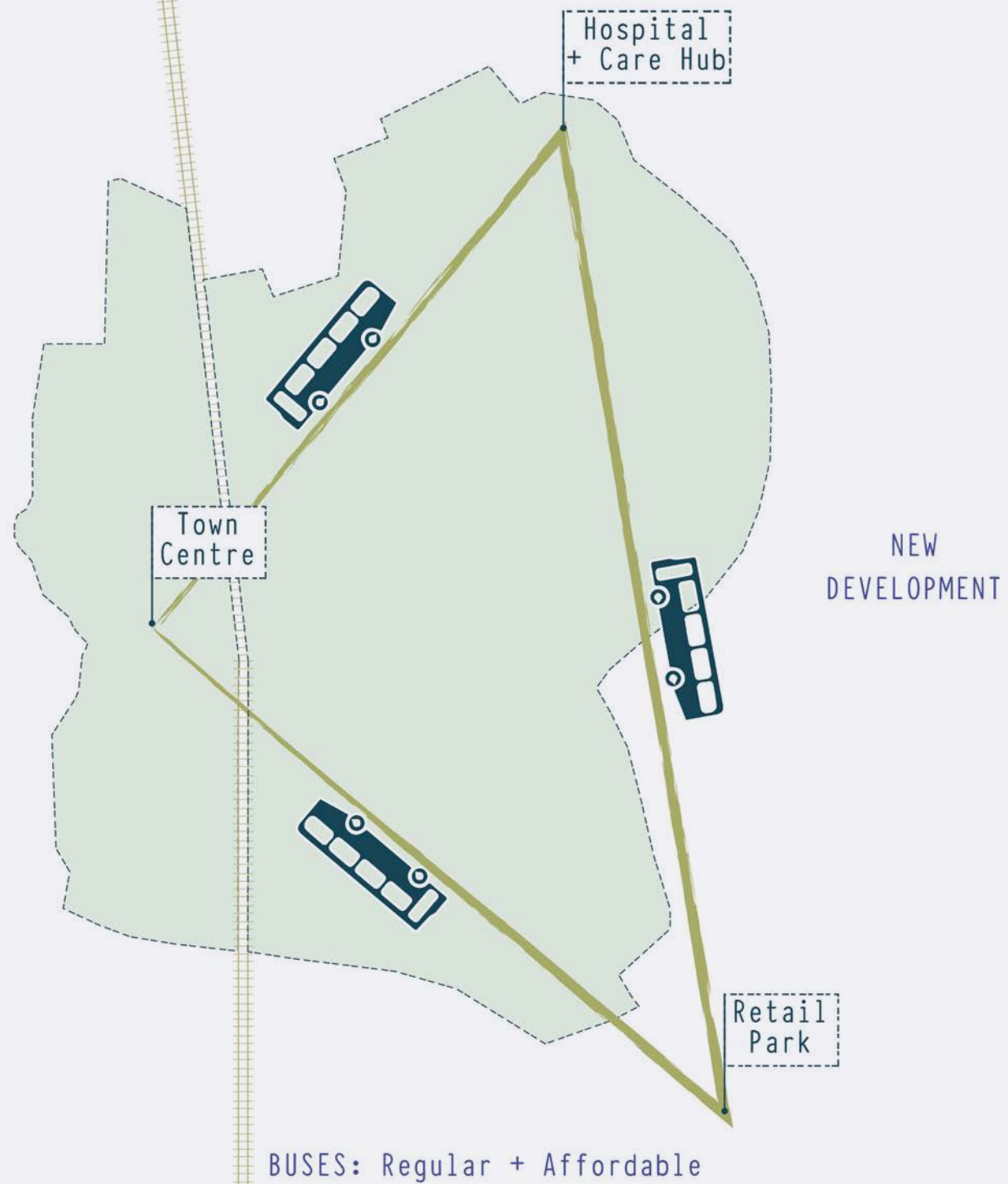
**How technology is affecting your life**



walking and cycling paths and no more new housing, a community that's bustling and friendly too.

→ We want the Green Wheel to develop through the town, to encourage walkers young and old to get around. We want more pedestrianisation and a vibrant town centre, that is welcoming to everyone and attracts people to stop.

→ We need our market square to grow and to be filled with events and activities and if there is new housing then let's have a community cinema as well. The future needs to include more sports, leisure and places for the young and the elderly to get around and have a pee! We need to come together as a town and imagine a better economy for everyone, not just a selected few. We need to be ready to change but keep what is good about the past. We need to be optimistic and ambitious because communities are created together! We need to break down silos – because everything is connected in the end. We need to take notice of what we do each say. We need to become a transition town! We need neighbourhood centres as well as town centres and our planners should care as much about our open space as they do about housing and development. We need to imagine the future and be prepared to debate through our differences.

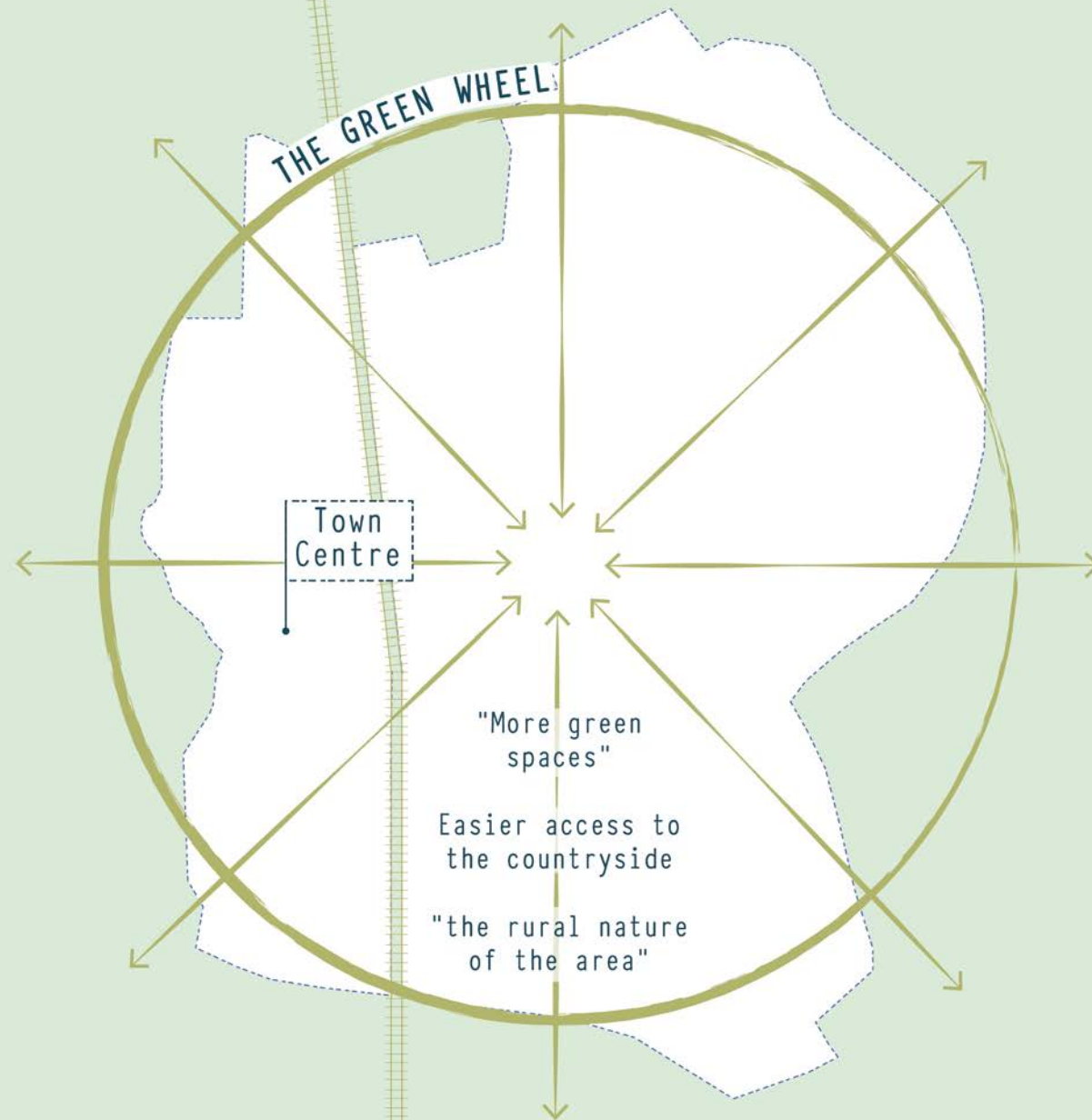




# Biggleswade utopia / dystopia

Based on your hopes for the future we have created a visualisation of what might be possible in one part of town

Based on your worries and concerns for the future we have created a visualisation of what might happen in one part of town if we don't stick together.



Could we make Green Spokes for our Green Wheel?  
Could we pull aspects of our beloved countryside  
into the routes and spaces of our Town?





# BIGGLESWADE UTOPIA

Safe street  
lighting

Wider pavements

Trees cared for

Safe cycle lanes

Mobility  
scooter-friendly



Impromptu  
social contact

Bustling public  
realm



Events in the  
community

Being close to  
nature

Hubs located to  
integrate Old  
and New Town

Regular,  
affordable buses







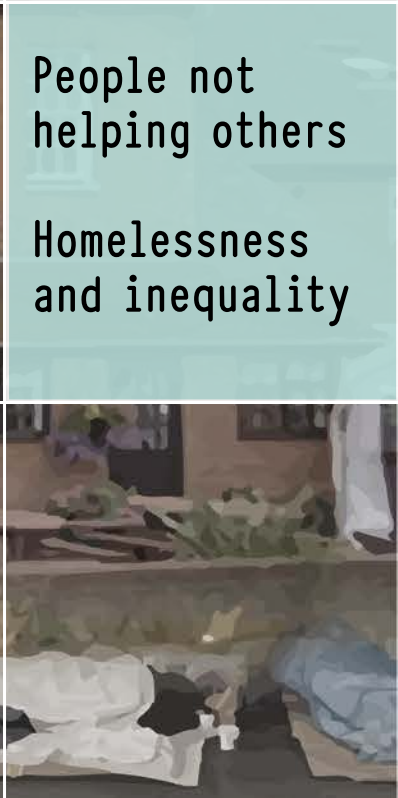
# BIGGLESWADE DYSTOPIA

Irregular and  
unreliable  
buses

Unclear route  
to town centre

Old and New town  
divided

Strain on  
existing  
services

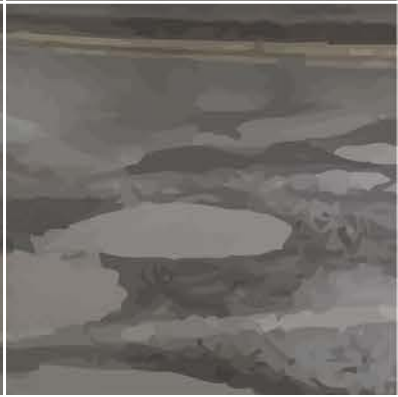


Empty shops and  
litter

Bad mobility for  
the elderly

Uneven road  
surfaces

Traffic and  
congestion, no  
parking



# IMAGINING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

To share your thoughts  
or to find out more about  
the project please email  
**[nadia.lesniarek@network.rca.ac.uk](mailto:nadia.lesniarek@network.rca.ac.uk)**