

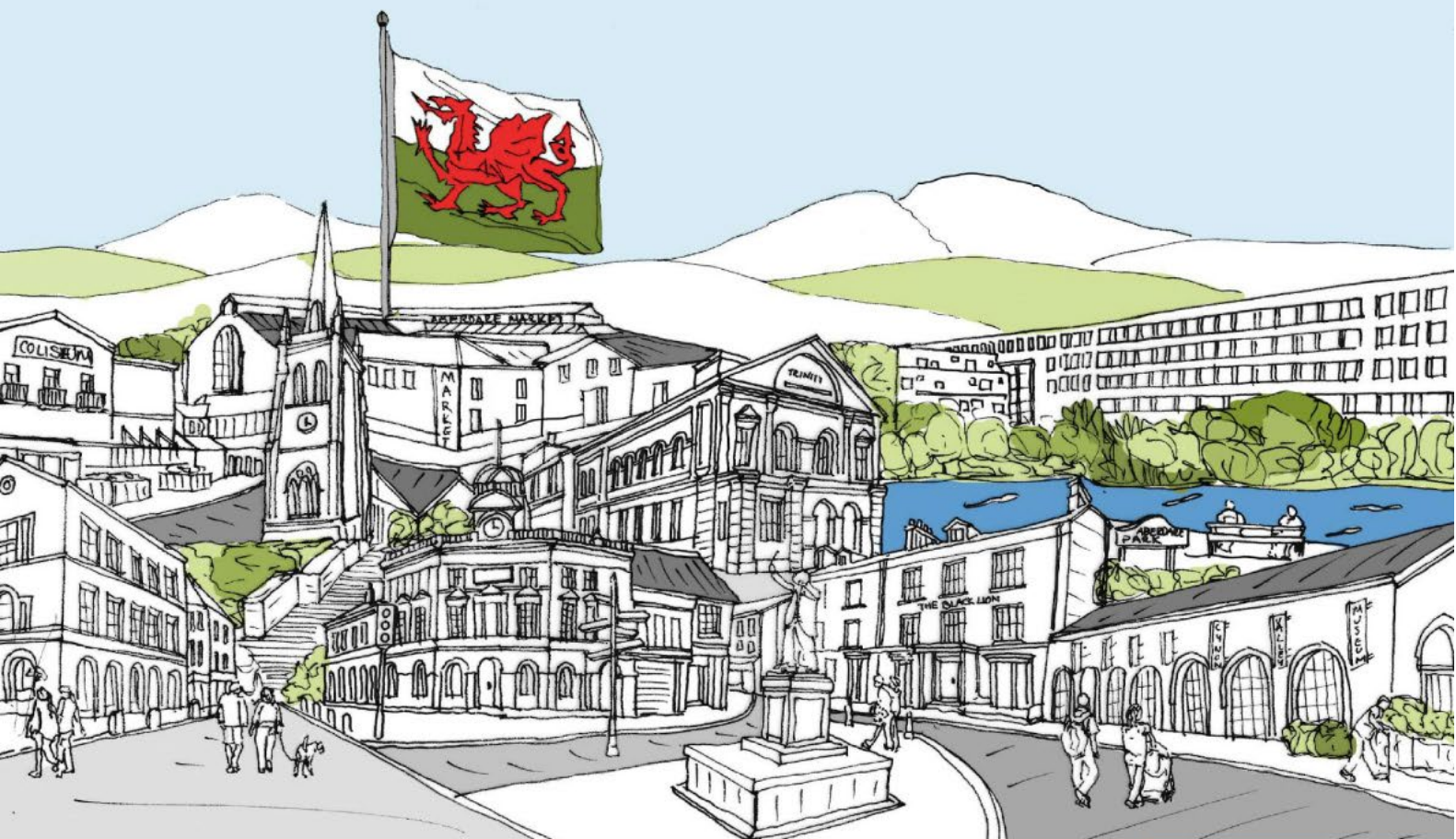
Dewch i siarad
Aberdâr
Let's talk
Aberdare

Aberdare Town Centre Strategy 2023

Consultation Report

Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC

November 2023



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report contains a summary of the main findings from the formal consultation conducted in relation to the Draft Aberdare Town Centre Strategy

- A range of methods were used to consult with the local and wider community including:

An online survey with interactive quick polls, made available on the RCT Let's Talk website. Digital copies of the Draft Strategy and supporting documents were also made available online in both Welsh and English.

A series of in-person events at various locations in and around the town centre where paper copies of the survey, Draft Strategy and supporting documents were available to take away.

Leaflets and posters were delivered to businesses and organisations within the town centre to promote the consultation.

A physical exhibition, held at Aberdare Library, with detailed information about the development of the Draft Strategy and previous early engagement. Paper copies of the Draft Strategy, online survey and supporting documents were available for collection.

Social media posts and emails were also published throughout the consultation to promote all methods of consultation.

More detail about these methods is contained in Section 3 of this report.

- 142 survey responses were received, with a further 17 responses to the "Quick Poll" function on the website.
- 63.8% said that the strategy accurately describes the town's strengths.
- 80.4% said that the strategy accurately describes the town's key threats and challenges.
- 69.3% agreed with the different opportunities that could be explored in and around the Town Centre.
- 86.4% of respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the strategy's overall vision for Aberdare town centre.
- A high majority of respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the strategy's five main strategic objectives.
- More than 77.5% of respondents supported each of the strategies investment themes.

- 17 respondents took part in Poll 1 on the Let's Talk website. 64.7% agreed that the draft strategy accurately captures the range of key opportunities and challenges facing Aberdare town centre.
- 30 young people from 4 schools took part overall.
- 65.5% of young people surveyed, agreed that the Draft Strategy accurately described the town's strengths.
- The majority of young people strongly agreed or agreed with the strategic objectives.
- The majority of young people surveyed, supported the investment themes.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the key findings from the formal consultation conducted in relation to the Draft Aberdare Town Centre Strategy, between August and November 2023.
- 1.2 Section 2 details the context from which the Draft Strategy has been developed.
- 1.3 Section 3 outlines the range of methods used to consult with the local and wider community.
- 1.4 Section 4 provides an overview the results from the online survey which was made available on the Let's Talk Aberdare website.
- 1.5 Section 5 provides an overview of the results from the in-person events which took place in and around Aberdare town centre.
- 1.6 Section 6 provides an overview of the results from the survey carried out in schools.

Appendix 1 containing the full comments received via the survey is available to be viewed separately if requested.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Town centres continue to face unprecedented challenges following the global COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis. Aberdare town centre is no exception and whilst it benefits from the activities of its strong independent business community it nonetheless has suffered from

the departure of important local service providers, including banks and large retail operations.

- 2.2 The town has been the recipient of significant investment over the last decade including the redevelopment of several prominent town centre buildings, the creation of high quality secondary and higher education facilities, new industrial floorspace and 'state-of-the-art' leisure and recreational provision. This investment has assisted Aberdare in repositioning itself in the context of significant local and regional opportunities including those associated with the Cardiff Capital Region, the South Wales Metro and the emerging adventure tourism economy.
- 2.3 The Draft Strategy seeks to build upon this investment momentum, providing a focused and coordinated investment framework which seeks to establish Aberdare town centre as a vibrant, dynamic and attractive destination for both local residents and visitors to the area.
- 2.4 In preparing the Draft Strategy, a phase of 'Early Engagement' was undertaken by Regeneration officers, between November 2022 and February 2023, to ensure that the Draft Strategy is suitably focused and appropriate in its content.
- 2.5 The Draft Strategy takes account of and responds to a range of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with Aberdare town centre as identified through the early engagement process. It is set within the context of the Council's Corporate Plan and reflects the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and the Welsh Government's National Plan 2040 which identifies the need to adopt a placemaking approach when considering the creation of such strategies and plans.
- 2.6 The Draft Strategy sets out the vision as: ***"To build upon Aberdare's unique heritage and strategic location to create a more vibrant, dynamic and attractive destination for both local residents and visitors to the area"***. The strategic objectives seek to:
- Improve the sustainability of Aberdare town centre through increasing visitor footfall and capturing a greater share of visitor spend.
 - Maximise the utilisation of sites and premises within the town centre to diversify and intensify the range of services and amenities available to local people and visitors.
 - Improve utilisation and safe use of public spaces and amenities through enhancing street-level activity and the provision of better connections with nearby destinations.

- Support the development of a greater variety of businesses within the town that satisfy emerging opportunities from both growing visitor demands and local needs.
- Enhance Aberdare Town Centre's overall appearance and identity as a great place to live, work and visit.

2.7 The strategy proposes six investment themes focused upon the realisation of these strategic objectives. These include:

1. The redevelopment and re-use of existing under-utilised, vacant or derelict buildings within the town centre to accommodate high quality restaurants, visitor accommodation, workspaces and a unique retail offering.
2. Working with Aberdare's local businesses and wider community to bring the story of Aberdare to life, making the town's heritage and offering more visible and strengthening its conservation area.
3. Strengthening Aberdare town centre's identity as a desirable place to live, work and visit through enhancing the visitor experience, building on the existing and growing tourism offer and enhancing marketing and promotion.
4. Improvement and promotion of active travel routes, including provision of enhanced wayfinding signage, within the town centre and to nearby destinations, such as Dare Valley Country Park, Aberdare Park and Cynon Valley Museum.
5. Further enhancement of public open spaces in the town centre, including supporting biodiversity, to create high quality outdoor spaces capable of supporting new business and leisure opportunities and hosting events to animate the town.
6. Exploration of partnerships between public, private, educational and community actors, building on the good work of the 'Our Aberdare' Bid to establish new initiatives to support local businesses to make the best of emerging opportunities, such as the growing tourism and visitor economy.

2.8 To further test the draft vision, objectives and investment themes with stakeholders a phase of formal, public consultation was undertaken from 7th August to 18th September 2023, through a Let's Talk Aberdare approach.

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The Let's Talk Aberdare project was conducted in-house by officers from the Regeneration department and the consultation ran from the 7th August to 18th September 2023. This report presents the results from the project run on the Let's Talk website. This report will be presented to Cabinet and Officers to consider the feedback received.
- 3.2 The consultation approach used the Let's Talk online engagement platform, which provides a user friendly and interactive form of engagement. The "Let's Talk Aberdare" project provided key information, including dates, documents, and graphics to outline the background to the Aberdare Town Centre Strategy, engagement tools including online polls and a survey were also used.
- 3.3 Social media was used to communicate the key messages to residents and service users and encourage engagement and feedback regarding the Draft Aberdare Town Centre Strategy.
- 3.4 An email was sent to a range of key stakeholders to promote the consultation.
- 3.5 A leaflet was delivered to all businesses and organisations in Aberdare town centre.
- 3.6 A press release outlining key information about the consultation was published on the Council's website and circulated via social media platforms and news outlets such as Wales online and GTFM.
- 3.7 Our Aberdare Business Improvement District (BID) sent electronic newsletters and social media posts raising awareness of the consultation.
- 3.8 Face-to-face engagement events were held in Aberdare town centre and its surrounding communities. The Council's consultation trailer was also used and Regeneration Officers were on hand to outline the consultation approach, answer questions and collect views. Paper copies of the consultation were available to take away and post back to the Council's Freepost address.

A summary of the findings from the face-to-face engagement are contained within Section 5 of this report.
- 3.9 The following in-person engagement events took place as part of the consultation:

Table 1: In-person Engagement Events

Aberdare Library	8th August (10am -1pm)
Hirwaun Library	10 th August (10am – 1pm)
Sobell Leisure Centre, Aberdare	15 th August (4pm – 7pm)
Cynon Linc, Aberdare	August 17 th (10am – 1pm)
Llwydcoed Community Centre	September 12 th (10am - 1pm)
Asda car park, Cwmbach (Trailer)	September 14th (10am – 1pm)

- 3.10 Information boards were exhibited throughout the consultation at Aberdare Library detailing the Draft Strategy. Flyers, Strategy documents and paper copies of the consultation were available to take away and post back to the Council's Freepost address.
- 3.11 Focused engagement was undertaken with a range of key town centre stakeholders including the Our Aberdare BID, Aberdare Market and Pen y Cymoedd.
- 3.12 This was also extended to include Aberdare Community School, Aberdare Park Primary School, Aberdare Town Church in Wales Primary School and YGG Aberdar.

A summary of the findings from this engagement are contained within section 6 of this report.

- 3.13 As with previous year's "digital by default approach" we continued to consider those having reduced or no access to the Internet and those who prefer to engage through traditional methods.
- A telephone Consultation option is now in place for all Council consultations, through the Council's Contact Centre. The option allows people to discuss their views or as a minimum to request consultation materials.
 - Individual call backs on request.
 - Consultation freepost address for postal responses.

4 Let's Talk Aberdare

- 4.1 The following section outlines the results from the main consultation carried out on the Let's Talk Aberdare website.
- 4.2 There were two ways for page visitors to engage with the consultation. Firstly, the full survey, with questions provided by the Regeneration department of RCTCBC. Secondly, a few "Quick Poll" questions, which were based on select questions from the main survey.

Survey Results

- 4.3 A total of 142 completed surveys were received, including the results from a number of paper copies which were available in Aberdare Library for people to pick up, fill in and then post into a secure box. Freepost envelopes were also provided at the library. For the purposes of this report, any blank responses to individual questions have been discounted. Therefore, all percentages quoted are a percentage of the total responses for that individual question.

Link to Aberdare Town Centre

- 4.4 30% of respondents said they lived in the area. 21.5% said they shopped in the town. 39.1% said they came to Aberdare to dine out or to visit a nearby attraction.

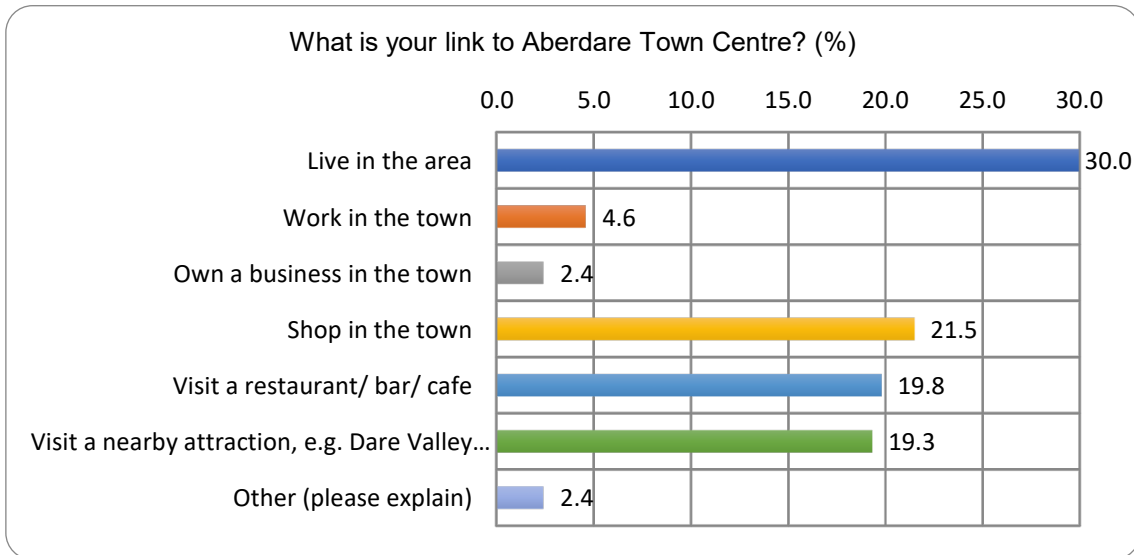


Figure 1 – Link to Aberdare town centre

4.5 The following map has been plotted with postcodes showing where the respondents that took part in the online survey are from.

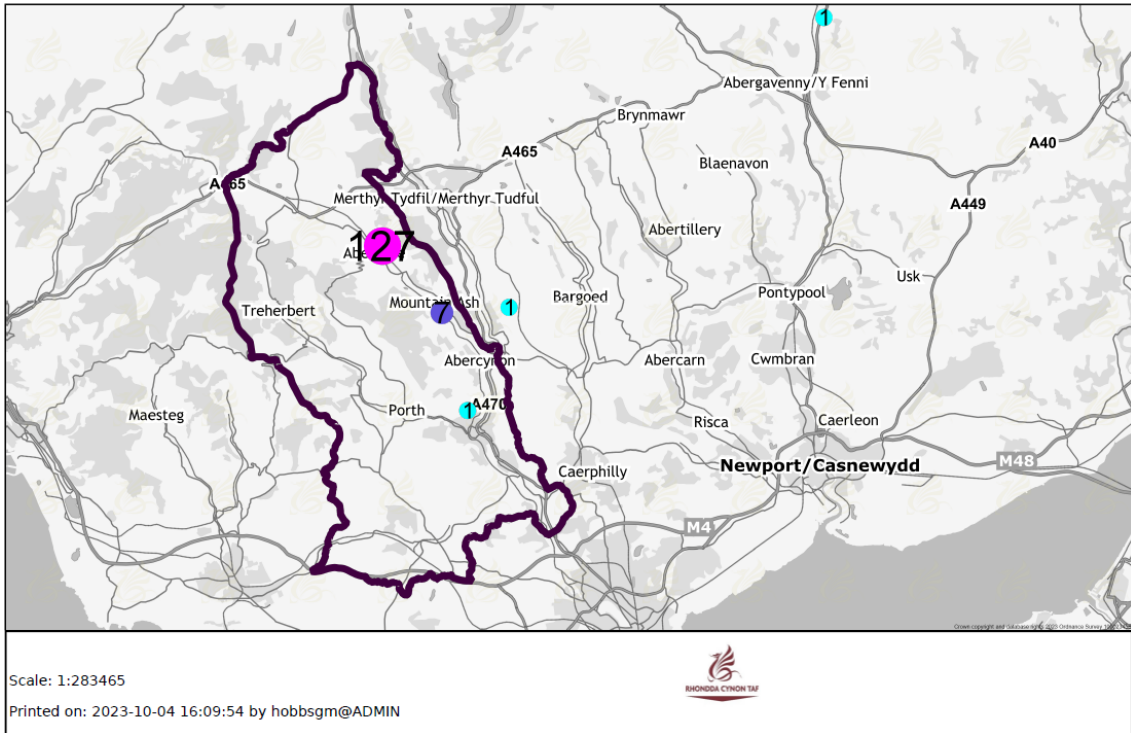


Figure 2 – Map of respondents’ postcodes

4.6 37.3% of respondents said they visited Aberdare town centre more than once a week. 16.9% visited weekly and 14.8% visited daily.

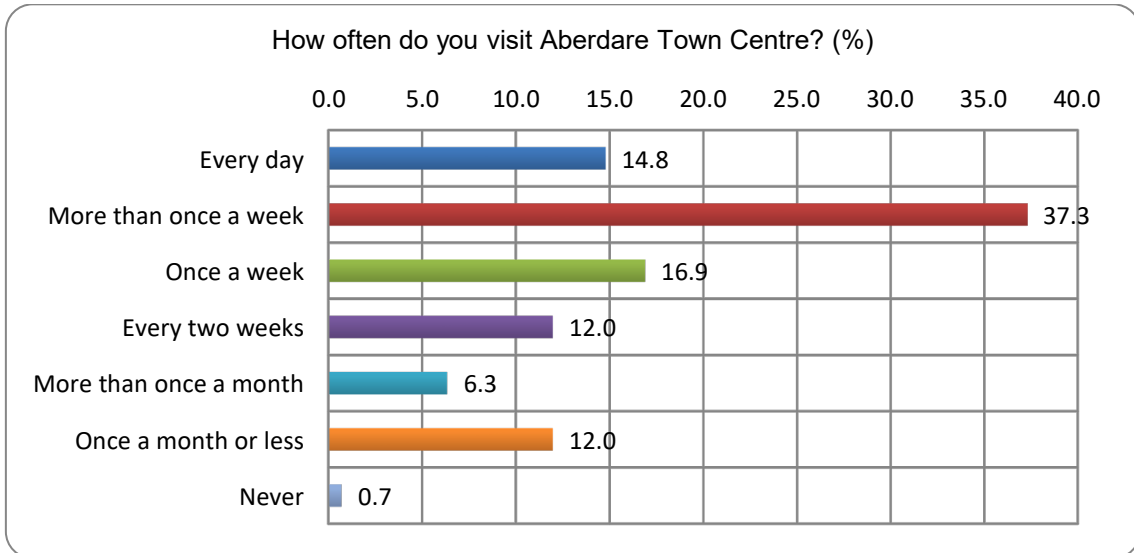


Figure 3 – Visits to Aberdare town centre

Travel

4.7 67.6% of respondents travelled to Aberdare town centre by car, whilst 23.2% walked. A much smaller percentage travelled by bus (8.5%) and by cycling (0.7%).

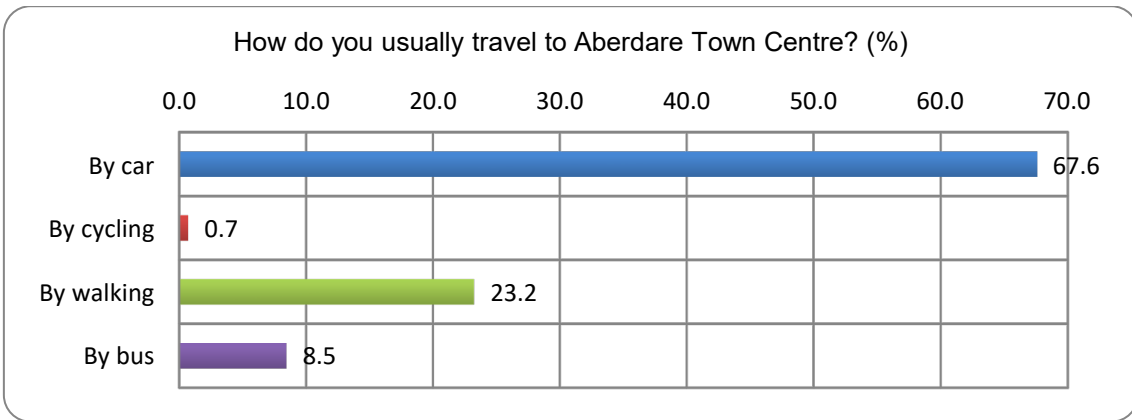


Figure 4 – Travel to Aberdare town centre

About you

4.8 Respondents were asked about themselves.

74% of those responding were between 35 and 64 years of age. 60.6% of respondents were female.

N.B Results of the consultation with young people in schools are reported separately in Section 6 of this report.

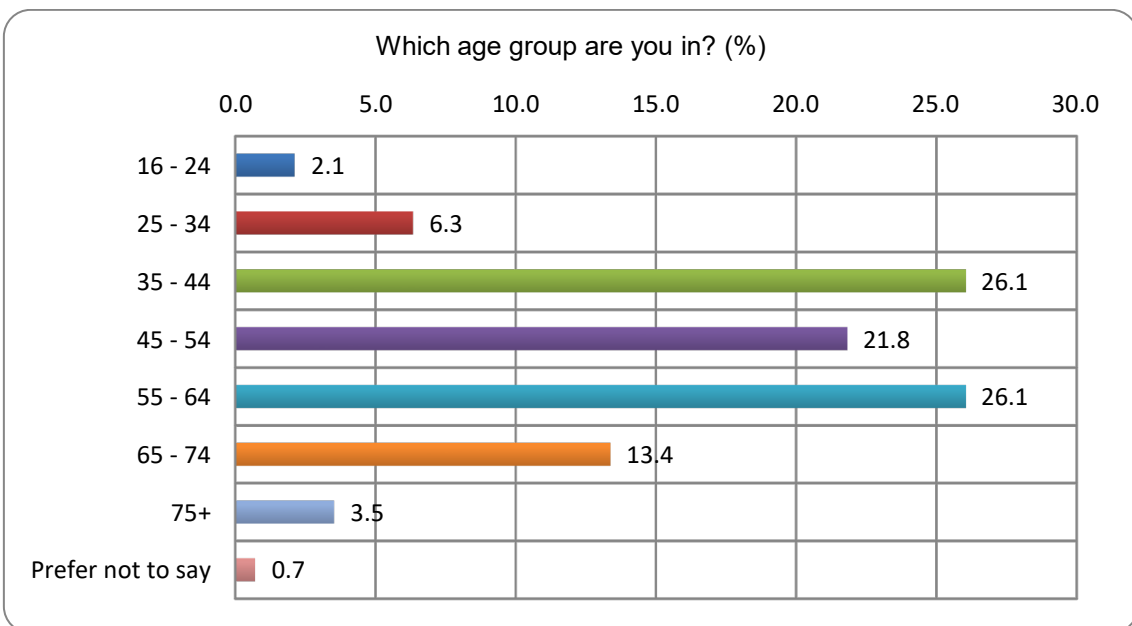


Figure 5 – Respondents' Age

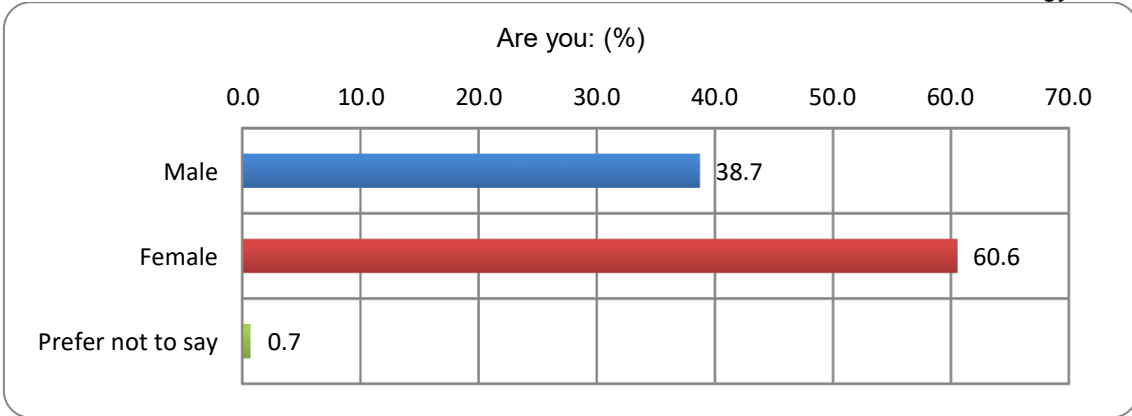


Figure 6 – Respondents' Gender

Town Centre Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

4.9 The Draft Strategy describes different strengths, weakness, challenges and threats to Aberdare Town Centre. These have been found through talking to local communities and by independent experts.

They are organised into the following themes:

- Overall Appearance & Identity
- Sustainable Towns & Communities
- Tourism & Visitor Economy
- Built Environment
- Business Development

4.10 Respondents were asked (once they had read the executive summary of the Draft Strategy), whether or not the Draft Strategy describes the key threats and challenges facing the Town Centre. 80.4% said that it had.

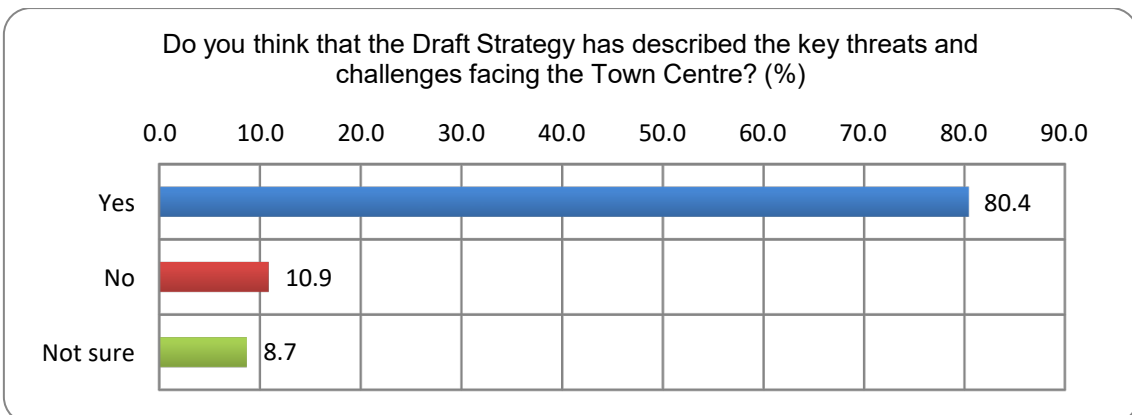


Figure 7 – Key threats and challenges facing the town centre

4.11 63.8% said that the strategy accurately describes the town's strengths. 20.3% said that it didn't.

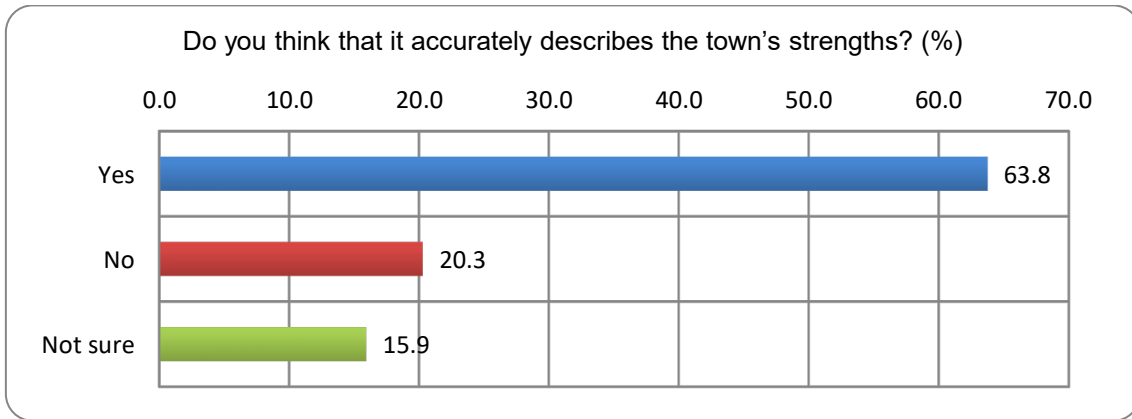


Figure 8 – Town strengths

4.12 Respondents were asked whether they thought there were any strengths or weaknesses not described in the Draft Strategy.

4.13 The following themes were pulled through from comments by respondents:

- Cultural activities and events
- New businesses and redevelopment
- Physical appearance
- Car parking
- Anti-social behaviour and policing
- Transport links
- Café's, restaurants, and bars
- Housing & Buildings
- Access to services

There were crossovers at times where some aspects of these themes were seen as strengths, weaknesses or opportunities where things could be improved on, specifically *new businesses and redevelopment* and *Café's, restaurants and bars*.

Comments received about other strengths

Cultural activities and events

“Traditions I.e. music festival of choirs. Quality businesses.”

“The creativity of the local people needs to be built on. Arts, music etc.”

“Yet live music and music has played a prominent role in the town... Whether Caradog or Cwmbach Male voice choir or Stereophonics there is a strong musical

heritage in the town and continues to be so. Utilise it, support it...This element could be supplemented and the town itself could possibly be a food and drink music hub for a cross section of food dining experience....Street food, Welsh traditional international cuisine”

“St. Elvan's Heritage project has been left out. This is a strength as the Church offers a community space for events and a wide range of engaging opportunities for all ages separate to a traditional worship based congregation with has good facilities for disabled access and a venue to celebrate and highlight the heritage and culture of the town.”

New businesses and re-development

“Growing number of great independent shops to the town”

“Strengths are all independent businesses in the town.”

“the remaining traders, shop owners and small businesses can be seen as a strength, and its vital that these businesses are given an opportunity to be involved and supported through the next few difficult years.”

Physical appearance

“Good location and excellent surrounding scenery if you look up from the squalor of the town centre”

“Large pedestrianised area”

Café's, restaurants and bars

“Key strength is that there are already new restaurants and bars opening, which are fantastic! I believe this is also an opportunity for the council and locals to support these new businesses in whatever capacity. Could having more variety of these types of businesses be the answer?”

Comments received about other weaknesses

New businesses and re-development

“Lack of entrepreneurial support and infrastructure available to local residents and existing businesses operating in the area.”

“The town has to compete with out of town shopping around Asda and in Merthyr retail park.

The town commercial district is too spread out, with Coliseum and museum effectively out of town. (Compare Brecon)”

“Aberdare is a ghost town we need to do more market stalls in the street make it look more presentable for potential investors into the many shops that lay bare and empty in the town centre...”

“... Attract the young and trendy people with money to spend that are being pushed out of the cities by high rent and high prices... Not have empty shops if possible consider how startups could be offered space to try and run a business or have exhibitions in them etc.”

Physical appearance

“Dirty river - be nice to be able to walk next to it and see nature not rubbish.”

“Weakness states Aberdare becoming a commuter town it has been for years. In strengths build on the quality buildings other than the churches not sure which other buildings are considered quality majority are very run down and sad”

Car parking

“Car parking charges, why pay in the town centre where there is nothing there when you can go to a retail park for free and have more choice. Also why do you have to pay for parking in Aberdare and not Mountain Ash?”

“Either free carparking or open up areas around the town for 30min parking in front of Wilko is 1 area that springs to mind, do we really need a 12ft wide pedestrian path. Other 15min zones increase to 30, lower car park so its non-profit, reduce business rates and promote town to large chains to bring them back”

“Parking is a nightmare”

“Weakness is car parking, there should be signage at key entry points to Aberdare town mapping out the position of the car parks. This signage should also include if the car parks are long stay or short stay. Individual car parks should again have visible signage on whether there are long or short stay.”

“I'd say there is a lack of parking rather than 'enough' parking... maybe open up the old car park at the top that backs onto the Country Park path?... There is also no parent and child parking...You should also be able to pay for parking with contactless payments. There's no as well as cash. There's no excuse for having a fine for parking then.”

Anti-social behaviour and policing

“Antisocial behaviour and residents safety especially around the bus station and Ynys carpark”

“Anti social behaviour around town, especially around the bus station has a negative impact.”

“Policing is weak regarding anti-social behavior”

Transport links

“Lack of good public transport at present”

“Lack of taxis and public transport.”

“Pointless roadworks and alterations over the last few years are one of the main weaknesses. It makes people avoid our town/area due to the high risk of getting stuck in a never-ending traffic jam which causes people who have to use our roads to not have the time to stop off in the town.”

“Road infrastructure is poor. We should have a direct link to the A465 from the Upper Cynon Valley to enable visitors far better access.”

“Weaknesses - should be more focus on public transport accessibility of the town centre, at moment services are poor and unreliable. Town has a reasonable bus station but needs better and more frequent services, particularly direct links to Cardiff and Neath/Swansea. Train services may improve after Metro works are completed but at present are extremely unreliable.”

Housing & Buildings

“High rents and rates

Market monopolises decisions on other events going on”

“Landlords should be responsible for ensuring buildings have a standard to be accountable decided by the council.

Weeds growing out of buildings and poor disrepair are easily solvable and should take priority in order to be more attractive and encourage tourism”

“Large amount of single occupancy property conversions in the centre have increased anti social behaviour in the locality”

“Too many take sways, empty buildings, thrift shops. Nothing of real draw for people to visit. Too many decent buildings being turned into flats”

“Weaknesses

Too high rates and rents for businesses.

Too many absentee landlords not held accountable for repairs / condition of their premises.”

Access to services

“Lack of disability access in many of the shops in the town means I tend to travel elsewhere for better shopping experiences.”

Opportunities

4.14 Respondents were asked if they thought the Draft Strategy described the different opportunities that could be explored in and around the Town Centre. 69.3% agreed with the different opportunities that could be explored in and around the Town Centre. 16.8% were unsure.

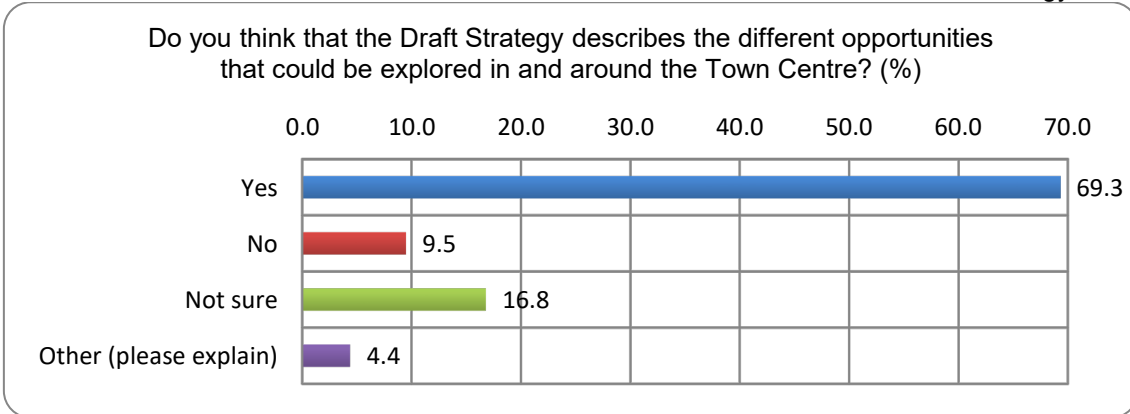


Figure 9 – Draft Strategy opportunities

4.15 Respondents were asked whether there were any other opportunities that they felt should be thought about. A selection of comments can be found below:

Anti- social behaviour and policing

“Higher police presence.”

Cafés, restaurants and bars

“A reduction in small business rates and removal of the parking meters from our public car parks should be seen as a direct opportunity, but indirectly, i'd like to see investment in wider social activity. for example, RCT should actively work with local cafes, restaurants and bars to offer greater opportunity for outside seating and integration with the streetscape.”

“Move from pub culture to bar / cafe and entertainment especially in the evening in and around the town. Encourage a cafe culture in the evenings, get a theatre or show house that attracts events to the town centre... if you had something in the town centre then people would stay and visit the bars and cafes...”

“...There are growing opportunities at Cynon linc and St Elvans but there is very little opportunities for younger people. There is also a lack of high quality restaurants”

Cultural events

“Introduce more incentives for people to shop and visit the town such as celebrating the town's history and culture.”

*“River walkway.
Stereophonics involvement - museum.
Star gazing events on top of Rhigos mountain.”*

Landscape

“Developing lake in Abercwmboi, wetlands area and linking to town and other parks through shuttle bus or tourist train. Having more outside events. Open air stage, opening cafes and restaurants later with outside heaters etc similar to north an European towns...”

“Making aberdare safe for horse riders again. People used to travel here to ride... riders do not visit any more and riders that live here are travelling to other more horse friendly locations”

“Make the area look nicer. Clamp down on double yellow pavement parking so the place doesn't look like a dump nobody cares about.”

Public space development

“A town centre garden area maybe where some of the empty derelict shops are”

“Certainly outdoor dining with possibly heaters so can be utilised all year round. Also, use of outdoor entertainers. Amsterdam has a similar climate to Wales and this works extremely well”

“Creation of new public space. Visiting small towns across Europe I've been struck by the focus on the 'town square' type spaces. The narrow valley streets don't lend themselves to the concept but the exodus of large retail may provide an opportunity to reconfigure part of town and create a space similar to that found outside Redhouse in Merthyr Tydfil...”

Retail

“All our chain stores into Aberdare Town or Build a Retail Park”

“I believe the new businesses popping up in town is an opportunity for the council and locals to support these new businesses in whatever capacity. Could having more variety of these types of businesses be the answer?”

“Support for local independent shops to also grow an online presence to market and supply goods to people outside the town and further afield. Aberdare also has a rich and diverse creative community of quality artisan crafted goods that could be encouraged and utilised to add to attraction to tourism and tourists shopping locally in supporting the development of a craft centre/creative hub/cooperative where artisans/crafters could sell locally produced goods from a larger single venue without the huge overheads that may be encountered for a single independent small local maker”

Transport and travel

“Free parking, greater promotion of the Welsh language.”

*“Improved links from town centre (library / Gadlys Pit) area to country park.
e.g.*

Cycle / electric scooter hire.

Land train

tuk tuk taxi service”

4.16 The vision for improving Aberdare Town Centre in the Draft Strategy is:

“To build upon Aberdare’s unique heritage and strategic location to create a more vibrant, dynamic and attractive destination for both residents and visitors to the area.”

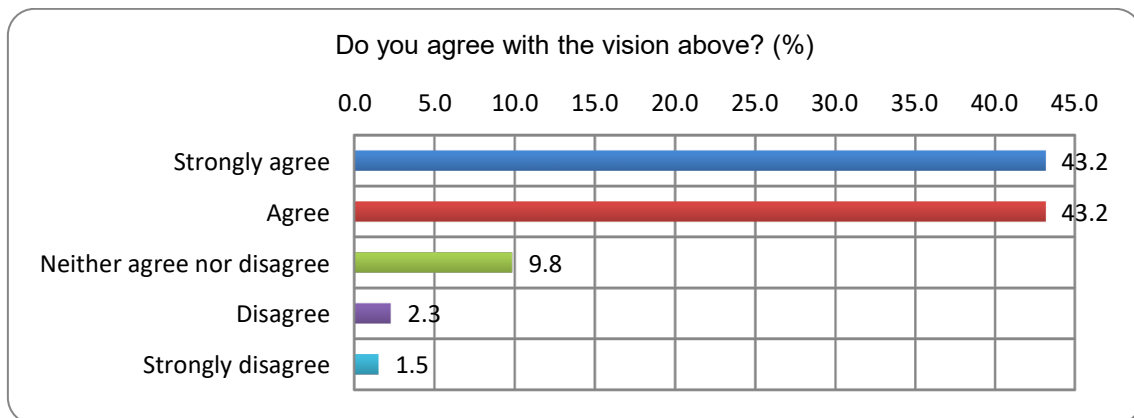


Figure 10 – Agreement with the Vision

4.17 Figure 10 shows that 86.4% of respondents ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ with the vision outlined above.

Strategic Objectives

4.18 Five strategic objectives have been identified to help achieve the vision for the town centre. These will act as steps to take. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the strategic objectives listed below.

1.To improve the sustainability of Aberdare town centre through increasing visitor footfall and capturing a greater share of the visitor spend. This includes:

- More variety of high-quality visitor accommodation.
- More diverse range of dining, leisure and cultural experiences.
- Enhancing Aberdare’s heritage assets.
- Support independent businesses to respond to tourism opportunities.
- Effective marketing of the annual events programme.

2.To maximise the use of sites and premises within the town centre to diversify and intensify the range of services and amenities available to local people and visitors to the town. This includes:

- Repurposing existing buildings and underutilised sites for different, new uses.
- Subdivision of vacant, large premises to optimise opportunities for smaller enterprises.
- More use of vacant upper floors of shops.
- Protecting and enhancing the town centre conservation area by maximising the contribution of historic buildings.

3.To improve utilisation and safe use of public spaces and amenities by enhancing street-level activity and providing connections with nearby destinations. This includes:

- Enhancing the existing annual programme of events which utilise high-quality public spaces.
- Supporting on-street, outdoor café/dining culture in and around the Market.
- Opening up vistas and accessibility to the Dare River to provide opportunities for increased wellbeing.
- Promoting active travel, i.e. walking/cycling, including physical improvements to existing routes.
- Supporting biodiversity and green initiatives in public open spaces.

4. To support the development of a greater variety of businesses within the town that satisfy opportunities associated with a growing visitor demand and local needs. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Ensuring that business accommodation is fit for purpose.
- Supporting partnership approaches to business and community development, focusing on social enterprise.
- Taking steps to support a 'buy local initiative to try to keep money within the local economy.
- Creating more innovative uses within the town centre to increase variety and encourage repeat visits.
- Working with local businesses to enhance their ability to maximise benefits associated with digital technology.
- Working with the local community to promote waste reduction and explore re-use/re-pair initiatives.

5.To enhance Aberdare Town Centre's overall appearance and identity as a great place to live, work and visit. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Enhancing the visitor's arrival experience through improvements at key gateways to the town centre.
- Improving street level way finding signage

- Enhancing provision for the use of the Welsh Language within the town.
- Protection of green spaces and local biodiversity within key areas.
- Involvement of the local community to enhance the town’s regional status by utilising digital platforms.
- Improved promotion of the town’s offer and events

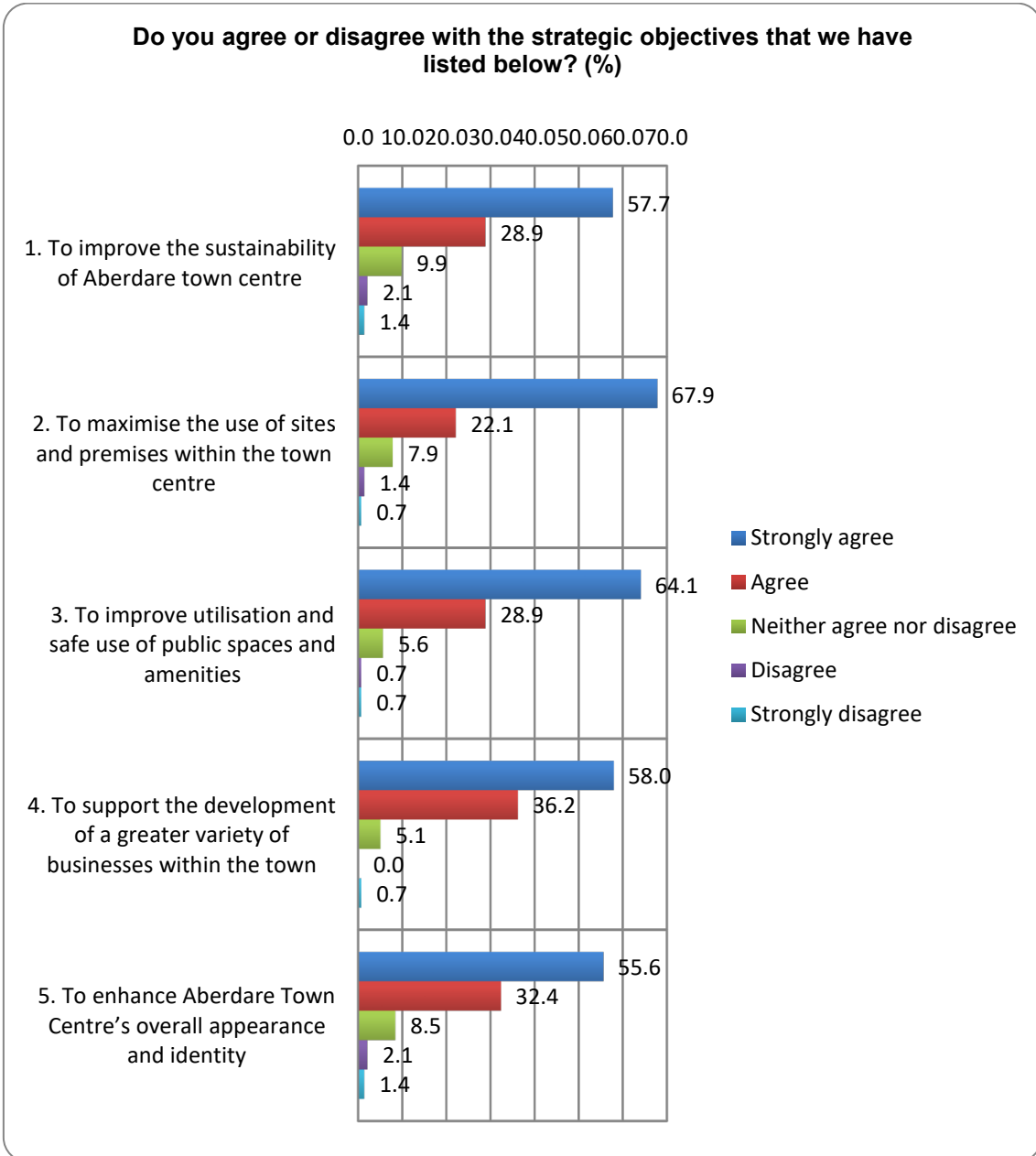


Figure 11 – Agreement with strategic objectives

4.19 A high majority of respondents ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ with the strategic objectives in figure 11.

- 86.6% ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ with the objective ‘*To improve the sustainability of Aberdare town centre through increasing visitor footfall and capturing a greater share of the visitor spend*’.

- 90.0% 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the objective '*To maximise the use of sites and premises within the town centre to diversify and intensify the range of services and amenities available to local people and visitors to the town*'.
- 93.0% 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the objective '*To improve utilisation and safe use of public spaces and amenities by enhancing street-level activity and providing connections with nearby destinations*'.
- 94.2% 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the objective '*To support the development of a greater variety of businesses within the town that satisfy opportunities associated with a growing visitor demand and local needs*'.
- 88.0% 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the objective '*To enhance Aberdare Town Centre's overall appearance and identity as a great place to live, work and visit*'.

Making It Happen: The Key Themes

4.20 The Draft Strategy is both ambitious and realistic in its approach. It is not possible to achieve the vision and strategic objectives described earlier through just one project or theme. Instead, we plan to work on different themes that will link together. These themes will include a range of different projects and actions.

Investment Themes

- **Theme 1:** The redevelopment and re-use of existing under-utilised, vacant or derelict buildings within the town centre to accommodate high quality restaurants, visitor accommodation, workspaces and a unique retail offering.
- **Theme 1 (continued):** Prominent sites, including 'Rock Grounds', provide further opportunities to explore the creation of new high-quality visitor accommodation, dining experiences and cultural/ leisure offerings.
- **Theme 2:** Working with Aberdare's local business and the wider community to bring the story of Aberdare to life, making the town's heritage more visible and strengthening its Conservation Area. The project will consist of enhanced interpretation, creative story-telling and physical improvements to key elements of the townscape combined with enforcement of conservation principles.
- **Theme 3:** Strengthening Aberdare Town Centre's identity as a desirable place to live, work and visit through enhancing the visitor experience, building on the existing and growing tourism offer and enhancing marketing and promotion.
- **Theme 4:** Improvement and promotion of active travel routes and provision of enhanced wayfinding signage within the town centre and to nearby destinations, including Dare Valley Country Park, Cynon Valley Museum, Coliseum Theatre and Aberdare Park, along with enhancement

of facilities for those choosing to take sustainable modes of transport, i.e. electric vehicles, cycling, park and ride etc.

- **Theme 5:** Further enhancement of existing public open space in the town centre, including via landscape improvements aimed at increasing bio-diversity and creating high quality areas capable of supporting new business activities, leisure opportunities and hosting programmes of events through which to animate the town.
- **Theme 6:** Exploration of partnerships between public, private, educational and community actors, building on the existing good work of the 'Our Aberdare' BID to support new initiatives such as those associated with social enterprise together with those aimed at supporting local businesses to make the best of emerging opportunities, such as tourism and the visitor economy.

4.21 Respondents were asked whether or not they supported the different themes.

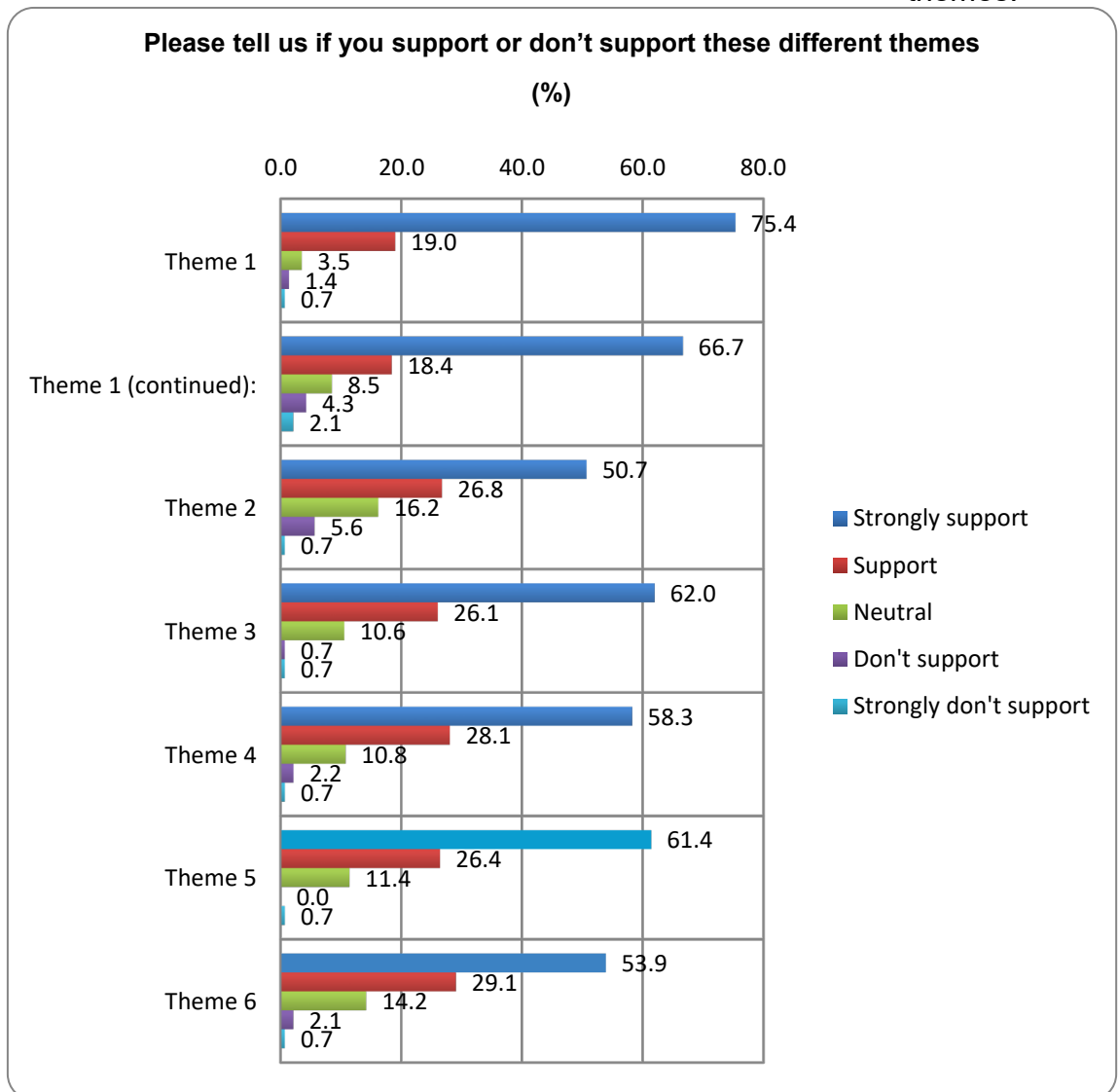


Figure 12 – Support for investment themes

- 4.22 94.4% of respondents were in support (*strongly support or support*) of Theme 1 (*The redevelopment and re-use of existing under-utilised, vacant or derelict buildings within the town centre to accommodate high quality restaurants, visitor accommodation, workspaces and a unique retail offering.*)
- 4.23 85.1% of respondents were in support (*strongly support or support*) of Theme 1 (continued) - *Prominent sites, including 'Rock Grounds', provide further opportunities to explore the creation of new high-quality visitor accommodation, dining experiences and cultural/ leisure offerings.*
- 4.24 77.5% of respondents were in support (*strongly support or support*) of Theme 2 (*Working with Aberdare's local business and the wider community to bring the story of Aberdare to life, making the town's heritage more visible and strengthening its Conservation Area. The project will consist of enhanced interpretation, creative story-telling and physical improvements to key elements of the townscape combined with enforcement of conservation principles.*)
- 4.25 88.1% of respondents strongly supported or supported Theme 3 - *Strengthening Aberdare Town Centre's identity as a desirable place to live, work and visit through enhancing the visitor experience, building on the existing and growing tourism offer and enhancing marketing and promotion.*
- 4.26 86.4% of respondents strongly supported or supported Theme 4 - *Improvement and promotion of active travel routes and provision of enhanced wayfinding signage within the town centre and to nearby destinations, including Dare Valley Country Park, Cynon Valley Museum, Coliseum Theatre and Aberdare Park, along with enhancement of facilities for those choosing to take sustainable modes of transport, i.e. electric vehicles, cycling, park and ride etc.*
- 4.27 87.8% of respondents strongly supported or supported Theme 5 - *Further enhancement of existing public open space in the town centre, including via landscape improvements aimed at increasing bio-diversity and creating high quality areas capable of supporting new business activities, leisure opportunities and hosting programmes of events through which to animate the town.*
- 4.28 83.0% of respondents strongly supported or supported Theme 6 - *Exploration of partnerships between public, private, educational and community actors, building on the existing good work of the 'Our Aberdare' BID to support new initiatives such as those associated with social enterprise together with those aimed at supporting local businesses to make the best of emerging opportunities, such as tourism and the visitor economy.*
- 4.29 Respondents were asked if there was anything else they would like to say about the draft strategy.

A selection of comments can be found below:

“Young people are the towns future and we MUST inspire them to want to stay, work and invest in thier own future and tie it to Aberdare....because they believe it is a great place to live and work ands spend time in. The basis of the plan can not just be about Aberdare's heritige...it has to be about it's future....what will Aberdare feel and look like in 10 years time....what do we want it to be??”

“Looks positive...Let's lean into this and accentuate what we have!”

“Yes all things you mention cover lots of things Aberdare need. Start with the basics Lower rates,, free parking..attract a range of shops.. With Wilkinson going.. Argos going how will you attract the right businesses to Aberdare. The expense is the problem.”

“We need a weekly street market without the indoor market stranding similar projects as they have done the passed.”

“Instead of focusing on getting tourism into Aberdare, maybe focus on getting locals into Aberdare first.”

“Very comprehensive, someone has done a lot of work researching the needs of the town”

“Under Theme 4 you have improved signage and the timescale is 3-6 years. This needs to happen NOW and be in theme 1 under 0 - 1 years as signage is critical to the areas of the town and visitor attractions and the lack of signage is a real problem now”

“To enable more people to be attracted to visiting, free car parking would be good”

“There is a lack of chain stores in Aberdare which means people have to use retail parks. i would add build retail parks as that is the future.”

“Strategy 1 appeals to me the most, even though it is possible that it could take the longest. I would like to then see the timeframe of how this strategy will be implemented. We have enough buildings in the town centre for it to thrive - if they are refurbished on both ground and first floors. Business owners are more likely to want them if they are 'ready to go'.”

“Please start advertising things more clearly.”

“Needs to be more focus on advertising events / opportunities - both locally and wider.”

“For the strategy to be successful people have got to want to come to Aberdare more diverse shops, parking charges need to be realistic the bus service needs to be greatly improved”

“Accessibility must be at the core.”

“Draft Strategy is excellent.”

About you

4.30 Respondents were asked to provide some information about themselves.

4.31 The following questions have been included for the purpose and relevance of this report, however the full list of demographic questions will be available for officers to read independently and to help inform Equality Impact Assessments.

Welsh language

4.32 66.2% of respondents did not speak Welsh, 25.9% were learning Welsh and 7.9% were fluent in Welsh.

4.33 When asked if they'd like to see the Welsh Language featured more prominently within the Aberdare Town Centre, 53.9% said yes, 27% said no and 19.1% said they were unsure.

Ethnicity

4.34 93.4% of those responding to the consultation were White. 2.9% preferred not to say, 2.9% had their own preferred definition and 0.7% where of mixed / multiple ethnicity.

Disability

4.35 Respondents were asked whether they considered themselves to be disabled. (*The definition of disability as defined under the Equality Act (2010) is 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial or long term adverse effect on the ability to carry out day-to-day activities'.*)

80% of respondents did not consider themselves to be disabled, 11.4% did and 8.6% preferred not to say.

Caring Responsibilities

4.36 Respondents were asked whether they had any Caring Responsibilities. (*Do you look after or support family members, friends, neighbours or others because of either: a long term physical or mental condition/disability or problems related to old age?*)

68.1% said 'no', 11.6% said that they were a carer 1-19 hours a week. 8% said they spent 20-49 hours a week, 8% preferred not to say and 4.3% said they spent 50 or more hours a week caring.

Pregnancy and maternity

- 4.37 When asked if they were currently pregnant, or had been pregnant within the last 12 months, 92.6% said they were not, 2.9% said they were and 4.4% preferred not to say.

5.0 In-person Consultation

- 5.1 In addition to online consultation activities, a series of in-person events took place in and around the town centre. These events were spread over the period that the online survey was live, providing people with an opportunity to speak with Council regeneration officers to share their views on the Draft Strategy and/or ask questions.

- 5.2 At the same time, targeted feedback was sought from key stakeholders who engaged in the early engagement exercise undertaken between November and February 2023. This feedback has been included in the findings outlined in this section.

- 5.3 The in-person events took place on the following dates and times:

- Tuesday 8th August - 10am-1pm at Aberdare Library, Aberdare.
- Thursday 10th August - 10am-1pm at Hirwaun Library, Hirwaun.
- Tuesday 15th August - 4pm-7pm at Sobell Leisure Centre, Aberdare.
- Thursday 17th August - 10am-1pm at Cynon Linc, Aberdare.
- Tuesday 12th September - 10am – 1pm at Llwydcoed Community Centre.
- Thursday 14th September - 10am – 1pm at ASDA Carpark Cwmbach.

- 5.4 Paper copies of the draft strategy, supporting documents and online survey were available to take away at each event together with freepost envelopes to enable the survey to be posted back to the Council. A QR code was also available to enable attendees to access the online survey.

- 5.5 Prior to each event a social media post was published by the Council to provide key information about where and when the events were taking place.

- 5.6 The following photos were taken at the in-person events in Hirwaun Library and Llwydcoed Community Centre.



- 5.7 Approximately 50 people attended the in-person events. Attendees ranged in demographic and represented a range of communities in and around Aberdare town centre. Many younger adults attended the event at the Sobell Leisure Centre on 15th August, 4pm to 7pm.
- 5.8 The events largely served as an opportunity for attendees to find out about how the draft strategy had been developed, collect paper copies of the draft strategy and supporting documents and access the survey.
- 5.9 Many valuable conversations were had about the focus of the strategy, specifically in relation to what attendees felt should be priority objectives going forward.
- 5.10 The following key themes were identified within the verbal feedback received at the in-person events:

Strong support for improving the overall appearance of the town centre and improving the promotion of the town's existing offer:

- Vacant shop windows identified as an opportunity
- Need for better, more interactive visitor information identified
- Ideas shared about enhanced promotion of the town's offer, specifically events.
- Enforcement of conservation area rules highlighted as key challenge together with celebration of the old buildings.
- Making more of the great market within the town, promoting local businesses and shop local initiatives discussed.
- Fostering pride within the town centre and local ownership. There is a need to reduce negative perceptions of the town and increase self-sufficiency.

Strong support for focusing on the town's identity as an Adventure Tourism destination, to convert day visitors to weekend stays:

- Via improving links with ZIP World / Bike Park Wales to be explored.
- Opportunities identified to introduce unique experience-based businesses to new Robertstown industrial units.
- More to be made of abundance of walking and cycling routes to and from the town.
- Potential new connection to nearby Cwmbach Community Wetlands and improved connections with Cynon Valley Museum, Dare Valley Country Park and Robertstown Industrial site.
- Discussions had about the need to increase the range of visitor accommodation; opportunities identified for campsite facilities etc.
- Supporting development of businesses to support growing adventure tourism focus and increased visitor numbers, e.g high-quality hospitality, bike repair, walking clothing, activities etc.

- Greater flexibility to new ideas.
- Increasing ease of active travel options and build on the town's green credentials.
- Increased promotion of the local tourism offer together with linking in to regional and national tourism.
- Utilise characterful buildings to provide unique stays.
- Create a clear 'front door for investment' – business from elsewhere aren't sure where to go to ask about units/shops that are available? There is a need to connect out of town businesses with available accommodation/expansion opportunities etc.

Strong support for 'Diversifying the Offer' and building on the growing programme of events held locally:

- Need for different offer for different generations identified, particularly more things for the younger generation.
- Opportunity to build on recent successful events to establish a strong annual programme.
- More vibrancy needed on the streets within the town centre, maybe by outdoor markets/activities.
- Support for introducing more of a unique offer, e.g niche businesses, into the town centre where large retailers have vacated.
- Strong support for supporting grassroots local entrepreneurship programme.
- Opportunities associated with the Eisteddfod coming to RCT in 2024 to be optimised.
- Promotion of the Welsh language identified as a key opportunity.

Strong support for collaboration and partnership working, with a focus on the strong existing network of community groups already doing great work:

- Need identified for a joined-up approach where the Council acts in a facilitation/enabling role.
- Discussions had about the challenges that young people are encountering with finding local groups to join with similar interests to them.
- Suggestion of a bigger community presence on the high street to create a space where people can go to find out about activities in and around the town centre, available grants/funding, how to book community facilities, local groups to join etc.
- Opportunity to strengthen links with local schools and colleges.
- Strong community of creative people locally that are looking for spaces to come together and start projects, exhibit, make etc. Art Hub/Creative Hub?

- Education needed to ensure people understand how a project may benefit them or their community. Joined up thinking to be promoted to avoid duplication.

Strong support for revisions to parking charges, prevention of illegal parking within the town centre and improvements to local transport infrastructure:

- Whilst car parking was thought to be a strength in terms of capacity within the town centre, many strongly argued for free parking in the town to attract shoppers/visitors.
- Greater enforcement of safe parking required to make the town safer for pedestrians.
- Availability of busses to nearby communities highlighted as poor.
- More could be made of bus station, key gateway into the town centre.

5.11 As can be seen from the range of discussions summarised above, most attendees' thoughts and views at the in-person events echoed the content of the Draft Strategy. However, there were some new comments made which will be considered as part of the final round of revisions to the draft strategy.

6.0 Schools Consultation

6.1 Building on the work undertaken during the informal engagement exercise, focused engagement was undertaken with four schools: - Aberdare Community School, Aberdare Park Primary School, Aberdare Town Church in Wales Primary School and YGG Aberdar.

6.2 30 young people took part overall.

6.3 When asked "What is your link to Aberdare Town Centre?", 27.4% said they lived in the town. 19.2% shopped in the town, 19.2% visited a bar or café, followed by 16.4% who visited a nearby attraction. 16.4% said 'other'.

6.4 When asked how often they visited Aberdare town centre, 31% said 'everyday', 20.7% said every week and 17.2% said more than once a week.

6.5 69% travelled to Aberdare by car, 17.2% walked and 10.3% arrived by bus.

6.6 57.1% of young people were under 16, 28.6% preferred not to say and 14.3% were aged 16 – 24.

6.7 65.5% of respondents were male and 34.5% were female.

- 6.8 35.7% agreed that the Draft Strategy has described the key threats and challenges facing the Town Centre. 64.3% were unsure.
- 6.9 65.5% agreed that the Draft Strategy accurately described the town's strengths. 34.5% were unsure.
- 6.10 When asked *"Do you think there are any strengths or weaknesses not described in the Draft Strategy?"*, some comments received included:
- "Good transport links - some of the bus timetables are inaccurate"*
- "No youth clubs"*
- "Lots of litter and gangs"*
- "Unsavoury characters"*
- 6.11 When asked *"Do you think that the Draft Strategy describes the different opportunities that could be explored in and around the Town Centre?"*, 51.7% of young people said 'Yes', 41.4% said 'Not sure' and 6.9% said 'No'.
- 6.12 Young people were asked *"Are there any other opportunities that you think should be thought about?"*, some comments included:
- "This highlights oppurtuities really well"*
- "Improve apperance of bus depot"*
- "shops more toy shops and a primark"*
- "Cinema, Arcade, clothes shop"*
- "I think there could be more job opportunities"*
- 6.13 When asked about the Vision *"To build upon Aberdare's unique heritage and strategic location to create a more vibrant, dynamic and attractive destination for both local residents and visitors to the area"*, 65.5% strongly agreed or agreed. 34.5% neither agreed or disagreed.
- 6.14 The majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the strategic objectives as outlined in the graph below.

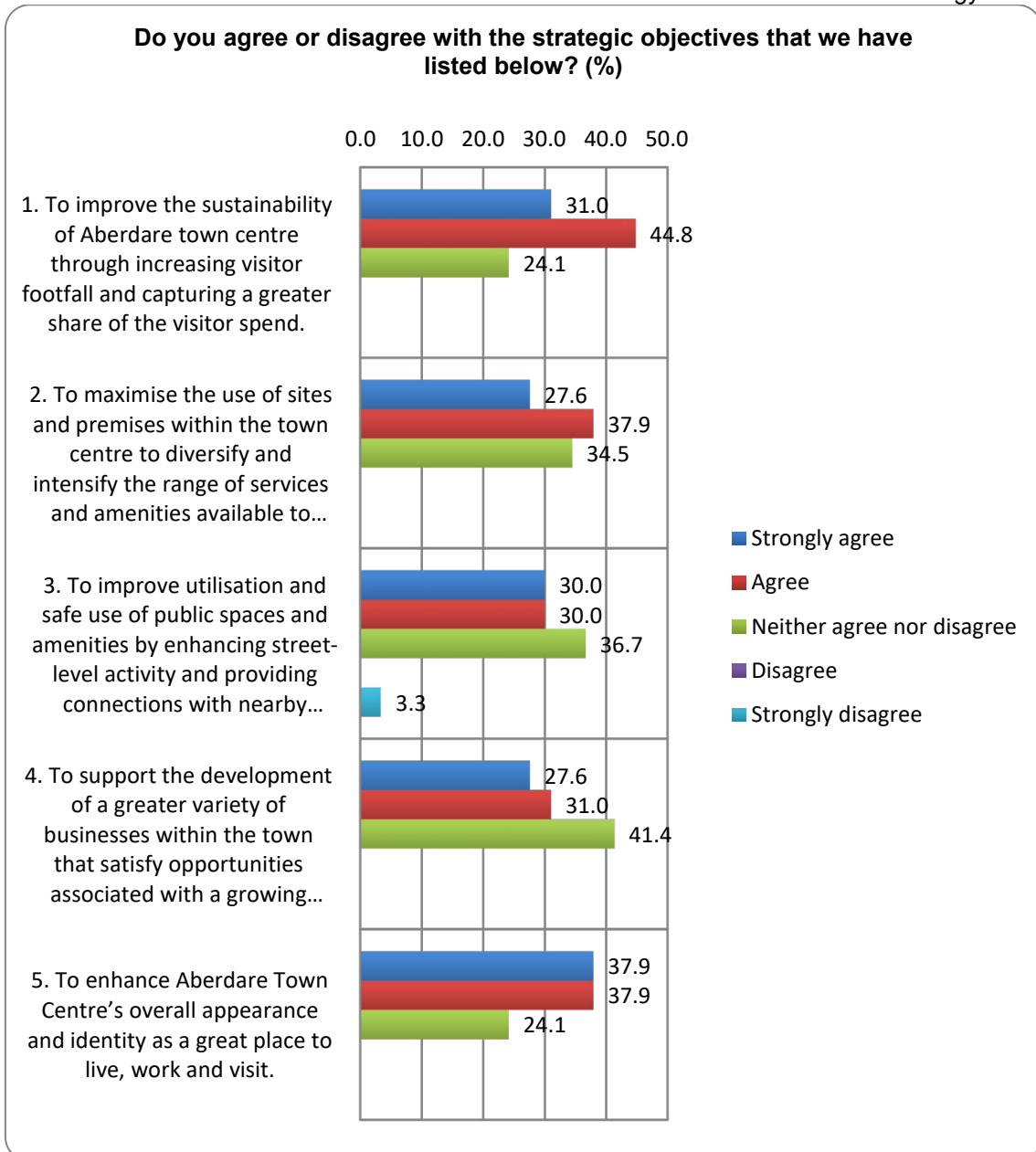


Figure 13 – Young persons' agreement with strategic objectives

- 6.15 Young people were asked whether or not they supported the investment themes.
- 6.16 65.5% of young people responding, strongly supported or supported Theme 1: *The redevelopment and re-use of existing under-utilised, vacant or derelict buildings within the town centre to accommodate high quality restaurants, visitor accommodation, workspaces and a unique retail offering.*
- 6.17 58.6% strongly supported or supported Theme 1 (continued): *Prominent sites, including 'Rock Grounds', provide further opportunities to explore the creation of new high-quality visitor accommodation, dining experiences and cultural/ leisure offerings.*
- 6.18 Only 44.8% strongly supported or supported Theme 2: *Working with Aberdare's local business and the wider community to bring the story of*

Aberdare to life, making the town's heritage more visible and strengthening its Conservation Area. 55.2% were neutral.

- 6.19 57.1% were in support of Theme 3: *Strengthening Aberdare Town Centre's identity as a desirable place to live, work and visit through enhancing the visitor experience, building on the existing and growing tourism offer and enhancing marketing and promotion.*
- 6.20 62.1% were in support of Theme 4: *Improvement and promotion of active travel routes and provision of enhanced wayfinding signage within the town centre and to nearby destinations.*
- 6.21 Theme 5 (*Further enhancement of existing public open space in the town centre, including via landscape improvements*) had support from 58.6% of young people.
- 6.22 58.6% were in support of Theme 6: *Exploration of partnerships between public, private, educational and community actors.*
- 6.23 There has been an overwhelmingly positive response to the contents in the Draft Strategy and strong support for the overall vision, strategic objectives and investment themes.