

Ashton Hayes and Horton cum Peel Neighbourhood Plan

SURVEY OF SPECIAL HOUSING NEEDS

Summary

This survey was undertaken to assess the local needs for affordable housing, housing for the elderly and other types of special needs housing in the Neighbourhood Plan area of Ashton Hayes and Horton cum Peel. The fieldwork was done in August to November 2013. The needs identified were for 11 affordable homes over the plan period, with the need concentrated in the next 0-5 years, and for 11 homes for the elderly, with the need concentrated in the 5-10 year timeframe. There was also a clear difference in the desired tenure with part-equity or full ownership preferred for affordable housing needs and renting being preferred for elderly accommodation needs. Other qualitative data was obtained which give an indication of the type and design of units required in order to meet local needs accurately.

Introduction

Until now special housing needs, primarily affordable housing needs, have been historically been assessed by the local authority. The methodology employed has not distinguished the Plan Area from much larger council wards, and furthermore, the most recent ward-based survey was based on a sample which was too small to be of value to the Neighbourhood Plan area. Typically questionnaires have been used which do not capture the individual flavour of personal needs and they are of limited value in assessing the type and timing of the needs. Another issue with previous surveys is that they do not capture the strength of the need and the probability that such housing would be taken up if available. The Neighbourhood Planning process offered an opportunity to assess Plan Area needs with more precision and certainty.

The methodology adopted here was based on a two-step process whereby 1) an attempt was made to speak to a representative of every household in the village to assess whether there was a possible interest in special needs housing, and 2) subsequently interviewing each resident with a detailed interview guide aimed at capturing a wide range of detail on the need.

Methodology

Identification of Interested Households

A team of five set out with the aim of knocking on every door in the village, which comprises 408 dwellings. The experience of a first phase where the majority of the main village was visited was that 41% of householders were out. It was then decided to revisit these and to leave a calling leaflet for those that were out both times. The calling leaflet, which had a contact details for those that wanted to talk further, is shown in Appendix 1. In the second phase, where the remainder of the houses were visited, the calling leaflet was used for

those who were out so that these houses were knocked only once. On the doorstep residents were asked if there was anyone in the household or wider family who might have a need for specialist housing (i.e. affordable, elderly accommodation, or other) in the next 15-20 years. The need could be for a relative currently living outside of the Plan Area who wanted to return or otherwise move here to be close to the rest of the family. Rather than have a doorstep conversation, interested residents were then asked if they would take part in a short interview and contact details were taken so that this could be arranged.

Interviewing

The original intention was to hold face-to-face interviews with two interviewers present, but this proved to be too cumbersome and time consuming to organise. In practice, the majority of interviews were conducted by telephone with one interviewer. The preferred approach was to ask open questions but to use the interview guide (see Appendix 2) as a checklist. This approach worked well although respondents were unable to answer many questions. However, two questions were consistently answered which are pertinent to acquiring useful quantitative data. The first is the probability that the housing would be taken up if available: respondents had to choose between “certain”, “likely” and “possible”. These were assigned probabilities of 0.9, 0.6 and 0.2 respectively, but interviewers could record an intermediate value, for example, 0.4 for 40% likely. The second is the envisaged timescale of the need arising: interviewers recorded this in free style but in practice it was easy to subsequently assign these data to three bins, namely 0-5 years, 5-10 years and more than 10 years.

Results

Survey Dimensions

The course of the survey is shown in Table 1.

Total number of houses in Plan Area	408		
Received a knock or calling leaflet	405	99.3%	of all houses
Contacts made	254	62.3%	of all houses
Expressions of interest	46	18.2%	of contacts
Interviews undertaken	24	52.2%	of those interested
Households with affordable need	13	54.2%	of interviews
Households with elderly need	11	45.8%	of interviews

Table 1. Summary of data from the survey, without any adjustments. The attrition from expressions of interest to actual interviews carried out is due to a) no wish for an interview (7), misunderstandings about the purpose of the exercise (6), changes of mind (3) and failure to make contact / moved away (5), giving a total of 21 “non-interviews”.

Adjustments to Raw Data

It was clear from doorstep discussions and interviews that there was a wide difference in the level of need which would have a big impact on the likelihood of a housing opportunity

being taken up. At one extreme there were a few households that were extremely keen and were in little doubt that they would take up such an opportunity immediately if something suitable was available. At the other extreme, were households that thought there was a possibility in some distant future; the most common example of this would be a family with children who thought there was a possibility that maybe they would want to live in the village as adults, but who accepted that they might study further afield and end up living elsewhere. The first adjustment was therefore to multiply the household need by the probability factors discussed above to get a probability-adjusted need. At this point it was convenient also to factor in households that had more than one need, all in the affordable category; hence the probability-adjusted factors also include two households with multiple envisaged housing needs for their children (both had 4 per household with potential needs).

The second adjustment we need to consider is to take account of the fact that, although contact was attempted with every household, for a variety of reasons the probability adjusted data is still based on a sample, albeit one based on a large proportion of houses in the Plan Area. This is necessarily a rather subjective undertaking but it seems reasonable to take into consideration the following:

1. Elderly people who declined an interview may have done so for a variety of understandable reasons, such as timidity, and this should be accounted for. There are 5 such cases and hence the elderly need should be adjusted upwards by 16/11 i.e. by a factor of 1.45.
2. There were no responses arising from the calling leaflets left with those that were out, nor was there any responses to an earlier exercise where expressions of interest were requested in a community newsletter. This implies that contact is essential to identify a need and that there may therefore be some uncovered needs among the 155 households where no contact was made. There is therefore a case for an adjustment factor of 408/253 (1.6) to take this into account. However, it is more likely that there will be needs among those that are at home more of the time and engaged in the community than among those that are absent and perhaps less engaged in the community (more so those who own empty houses). Given also that those 155 had two opportunities from written material and did not respond, a lower factor would seem justified. In this study a factor of 1.2 will be used, but this is a subjective figure and the reader is entitled to use a different figure if desired.
3. One final factor is the failure to make contact and interview all those who expressed an interest. Since failure to respond to a telephone message is perhaps an indication of reduced interest, it is reasonable and simpler not to adjust for this.

Taking factors 1) and 2) into consideration, we obtain a sampling adjustment factor of 1.2 for the data on affordable housing and 1.2×1.45 , i.e. 1.74 for the data on housing for the elderly.

Finally in this study data which is “fully adjusted” takes into account *both* the probability of take up (and multiple needs where applicable) *and* the sample adjustment factors as discussed above.

Housing for the Elderly

The results for the 11 households that expressed a need for accommodation for the elderly is given in Figure 1. Over the plan period it is likely that the need is for 11 units (the fully adjusted figure). We can see that the probability adjustment and the sampling adjustment roughly cancel each other out in this case.

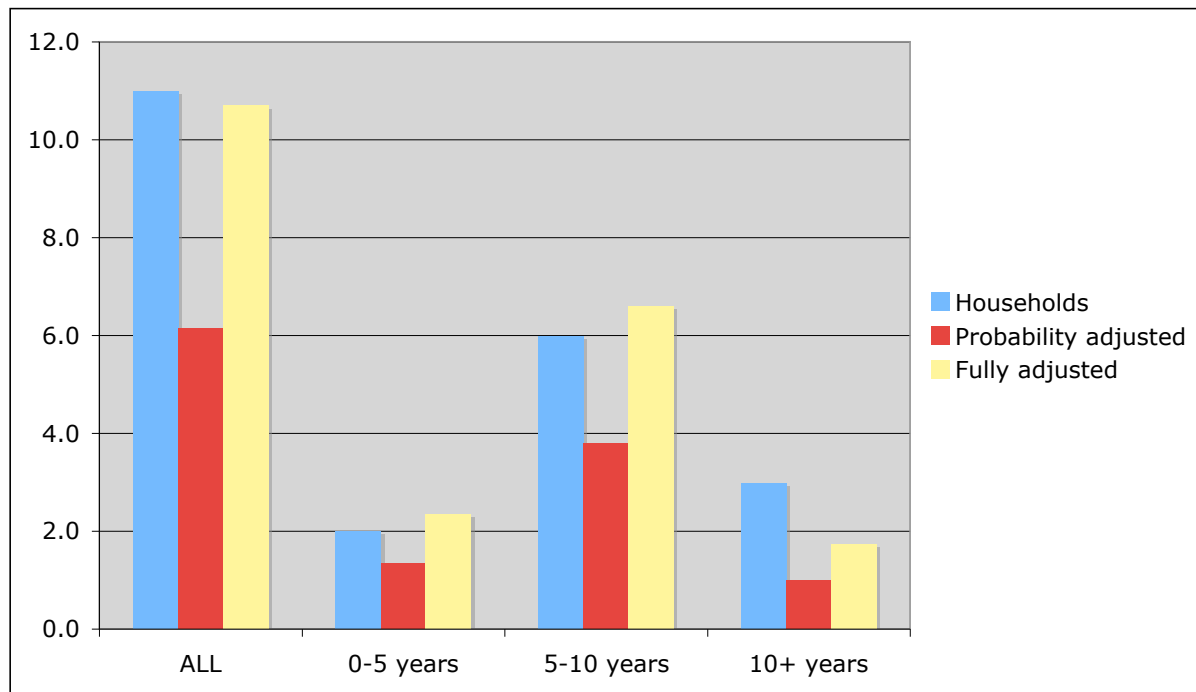


Figure 1. Survey results for households expressing a need for accommodation for the elderly

There is a clear concentration of need in the 5-10 year timeframe where a need for 6-7 units is indicated. Most respondents seemed to be happy where they were for now but envisaged that their home would get too onerous for them in years to come.

Qualitatively, there was a high degree of unanimity in the type of accommodation required. No-one was seeking a nursing home or institutional home accommodation. Likewise no-one was looking for bungalow accommodation of the type that the village has plenty of already. Nearly all were looking for small 1-2 bedroom units (most envisioned bungalows but not necessarily detached) with features such as low maintenance, good accessibility, communal gardens. One need for a 2-3 bedroom bungalow was identified.

Some respondents mentioned warden care but there was an understanding that this is unlikely to be economical in a small development. During the interviews the idea of what amounted to co-housing was raised with shared facilities such as a dining room, lounge, laundry etc. also with communal supply of heating and power (optionally sustainably generated). Such a concept was well-received by those who were asked. Regarding tenure some were looking for rented accommodation, whereas others whose first instinct might be

to buy were attracted by rented accommodation so that they would not be responsible for the maintenance of the property.

No data was gained on the affordability of the desired accommodation but for the most part we were interviewing owner-occupiers who were effectively down-sizing so this was thought to be unlikely to be an issue in most cases, perhaps all cases.

Affordable Housing

The data for affordable housing are shown in Figure 2. In contrast to accommodation for the elderly, most of the need for affordable housing falls in the 0-5 years timeframe. For this timeframe, the probability adjustment is affected by the two families with multiple needs; without this the probability figure is 0.57.

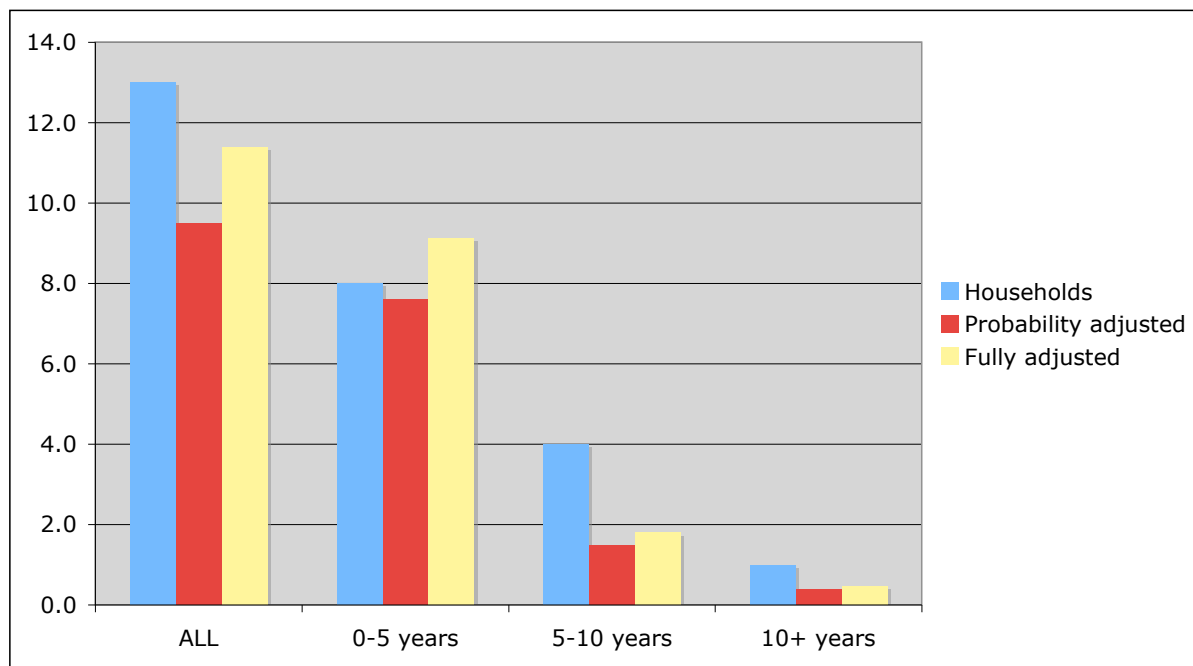


Figure 2. Survey results for households expressing a need for affordable housing

Most respondents preferred part rent / part equity and outright purchase. There was too little firm data on the preferred size of property but 2 bedrooms probably best represents the size that most respondents had in mind, but clearly this depends on price and other factors which are hard to determine in advance.

Other needs

There were three other needs identified (one household per need). Publishing these needs here could lead to the individuals being identified, hence we not disclose these here. However, it was felt two needs could be met by modification rather than new-builds and

that the third need, related to a desire for self-build, could be accommodated within the exemplar “eco-house” elements of the Neighbourhood Plan, or infill build.

Discussion and Conclusions

The most recent survey of affordable housing need was undertaken by Arc4 for Cheshire West and Chester Council. The model used is complex and the final version of the report¹ uses “spatial zones” that are in our area larger than the council ward: Ashton Hayes is in the Rural North area which incorporates Goway ward and extends westwards to Saughall, including also a part of the Wirral. There are no data provided to enable a proportion of the need to be assigned to Ashton, although very roughly, the zone is in the order of 10 times the population based on wards included. The study recommended that in Rural North, the need could be met by the construction of 38 affordable units per annum. This split into 33 for those aged less than 65 and 5 for those older than 65. In our study we did not uncover a need for affordable units for the elderly, so we can only make comparisons for affordable units for those under 65 (all the affordable need we identified). Assuming that Ashton Hayes accounts for about 1/10th of the spatial zone, this equates to about 3 units per annum, about three times the need established in our survey (though it should be emphasised that they do not provide *any* figure for Ashton Hayes *per se*).

The SHMA study is complex and based upon a model which looks incorporates total housing needs, the creation and disappearance of households, affordability and other factors. The model was based on a sample survey in which about one third of households were contacted with a questionnaire and of these 19.6% responded, representing therefore about 7% of West Cheshire households. In contrast, our study made contact with 62% of study area households. Arc4 recognise that there is a non-response bias (for example those with a need are more likely to respond than those without a need) but it is opaque about how this is compensated for. In summary there are so many differences in research methodology that it is not surprising that the results are different.

The advantage of this survey is that the data are related to real people with real needs and are not extrapolated from a sample or based on a multiplicity of assumptions, notably that the Plan Area is the same as the rest of the ward or zone. Our “potential needs register” is a tool which can be updated with a phone call and consulted at any point when design or allocation decisions need to be made.

The main source of uncertainty in this survey relate to the adjustment factors which are necessarily subjective. The probability adjustment factor, which is selected by the respondent with the guidance of the interviewer is purely subjective and captures their assessment at a moment in time. Any major family change – a serious illness, a marriage, a promotion - could change the need dramatically. This is an inherent uncertainty. The sampling correction factor is a property of the study. In the case of affordable housing, this is small (1.2) and any error here is unlikely to make a big impact on the overall need assessment. With the elderly accommodation, the factor is 1.74 , a figure with higher

¹ Strategic Housing Market Assessment, July 2013.

uncertainty. If the correction seems high, then it should be noted that in an ageing population, any over-provision is likely not to last for long.

Concerns about whether the needs are overstated in this survey can be alleviated by the notion that it is not necessary to build all the units all at once; one can take a more cautious, empirical approach, adjusting in the light of experience. Building in just one phase would be anyway highly undesirable since the needs will unfold over the course of the Plan lifetime. Having an overprovision would, out of economic necessity, lead to vacant units being occupied by others from outside of the Plan Area, thus defeating the object of the provision. Ideally each unit should be built as it is needed, but it is uneconomic to do that. Hence it will be necessary to consider appropriate phasing, perhaps 3 to 6 units at a time; it is hoped that this study will help inform such deliberations.

The survey did not deliver data that would be useful in order to look at issues of length of occupancy and the turnover or churn of the needs. That is an ambitious undertaking. But it is worthwhile considering how this might unfold for the case of affordable housing. There are two opposing forces – on the one hand new people are coming into the Plan Area all the time and some of those will have needs in mind for the future. Acting against this trend, the number of people on the “potential needs register” will decrease as needs are met by the village’s provision. There will from time to time new units becoming available as people move on. We have no data to build a model of this (and in the case of elderly accommodation this becomes inappropriate to discuss), but for affordable accommodation we could conclude that, if the churn of the general population is the same as for the affordable homes population, then there will come a point when new needs and recently-released accommodation balance each other out and there is no need for further accommodation. Illustrating this with made-up data, if we have a need for 10 units now, and there is a 10% p.a. churn in the general population, then every year on average, 1 new need will emerge. After ten years, if there is a 10% p.a. churn in the affordable housing provision, we can expect that one unit per year of average will become available. One would of course expect some lumpiness in needs and vacancies, which may need to short term fluctuations of over-provision or under-provision, but over a period of a few years this should balance out. Only if we envisage big differences in churn rate would this simple model not work. The net effect of these considerations is that, if we build over a period of say 10 years, then it may not be necessary to build further units after that. The situation with accommodation for the elderly is different and even harder to model but, given the ageing population, it is likely that further units will be required after ten years and beyond.

It is of interest that the idea of co-housing was well-received by those elderly interviewees consulted on this. Co-housing provides a choice in how independently one can live – where one eats, relaxes, socialises is a choice that can be made day by day. It should be noted that most co-housing projects are not designed for the elderly, but rather for younger or more age-balanced communities. The survey did uncover one active individual who was interested in playing a leadership role in a co-housing role, should one be set up.

In conclusion, this survey provides support for the provision of about 11 affordable units and 11 units for the elderly over the Plan period, with the affordable units focussed in the near term (up to 5 years, 8 units) and the elderly accommodation units focussed in years 5-10

(6-7 units). These should be provided in as many phases as is economically viable to ensure that they meet Plan Area needs, rather than the needs of those from wider afield. As planning for such a provision gathers pace, it will be possible to contact those on the needs register to refine the need further in terms of timing, design, tenure, price and other factors.

Neighbourhood Plan Housing Group

21.11.13

Appendices follow

APPENDIX 1. Calling Leaflet

Ashton Hayes and Horton cum Peel Neighbourhood Plan

You were visited today by the Housing Group of the Neighbourhood Plan. We called to find out whether anyone in your family might have a need for affordable housing or elderly accommodation or any other special need in the next 15 years. We need this information to ensure that the village develops in the future in a way that meets local needs.

If you feel you might have such need please let us know. The next step would be to arrange a short interview so that we get good quality information to help guide the development of the Plan.

Please contact Mike Powers on 01829 752620 or send an email to andrew@qfutures.co.uk

- THANK YOU FROM THE HOUSING GROUP -

APPENDIX 2. Interview Guide.

SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING QUESTIONNAIRE / INTERVIEW RECORD

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Personal Information only to be made available to members of the NP Housing Group and other interviewers (this should be told to the interviewee)

Name:

Address:

Tel. number:

Interview style: Use open questions (“tell me about...”) / don’t stick to the questionnaire but ensure everything is covered by the end / annotate freely with anything that might be valuable to know.

1. Nature of the need (tick and annotate):

- Affordable home
- Elderly small units e.g bungalows
- Elderly sheltered small units
- Elderly residential home / complex
- Other (specify)

2. Reason for local need

- Want to keep family members in the village
- Need to keep family members in village (care, oversight, special needs, support etc.)
- Current house unsuitable
- Other

3. Probability of the need materialising

- Certain [adjustment factor 0.9]. Would take opportunity now if it existed.
- Likely [adjustment factor 0.6]
- Possible [adjustment factor 0.2] (more theoretical than definite)

If borderline, record an appropriate intermediate adjustment factor.

4. What other options are available if the need is not provided for in the village and what are the issues associated with this?

5. Other relevant information on need:

6. When is the need likely to materialise? Record best estimate in terms of number of years from now (2013).

Affordable housing only:

7. What is the likely length of occupation?

- Indefinite – decades or more
- Stepping stone – until next step on housing ladder
- Short term – how many years?

8. What sort of tenure is preferred:

- Rented
- Part rent, part equity
- Purchase
- Can't tell right now

9. What is the upper limit that could be afforded (rent p.m. / purchase price)?

10. What features are sought in an affordable house? (Bear in mind the price that could be afforded and concentrate on a minimum set of requirements.

- No of bedrooms
- Garaging / car parking
- Other features

11. Any other relevant information on affordable homes requirement: