Wycombe District Council

Community Governance Review

Report of findings

by Opinion Research Services

December 2019

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Opinion Research Services

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1. Executive Summary

Summary of main findings

The commission

1.1 Wycombe District Council commissioned Opinion Research Services (ORS) to consult the town's residents, businesses, surrounding Town and Parish Councils and other interested organisations on how best to represent the interests of High Wycombe under the new unitary local government system to be introduced in 2020.

1.2 Opinion Research Services is a spin-out company from Swansea University with a UK-wide reputation for social research and major statutory consultations. It was appointed by Wycombe District Council to advise on and independently manage and report the consultation programme.

The consultation

1.3 The formal consultation period started on 5th August 2019 and ended on 30th September 2019. During this time, residents, businesses, surrounding Town and Parish Councils and other interested organisations were invited to provide feedback via:

> A consultation questionnaire: this was available for any interested party to complete, and attracted 681 responses;

> A telephone survey: this comprised 803 interviews and provides an accurate profile of opinions of the general population of High Wycombe Town;

> Three focus groups with representative members of the public across High Wycombe town: 23 participants attended these; and

> Written submissions: stakeholders were invited to provide their views in writing to Wycombe District Council or ORS. Six submissions from members of the public and organisations were received.

1.4 It should be noted here that the two quantitative strands of the consultation differ in methodology. The self-completion consultation questionnaire is intentionally made widely available for anyone with an interest in the future governance of High Wycombe and therefore tends to attract participation from those with particularly strong views. The interviewer-administered telephone (residents) survey, on the other hand, is intended to target a broad cross-section of the general public to obtain results that are representative of residents of High Wycombe town. Therefore, the two strands cannot simply be amalgamated, but rather ought to be considered side-by-side in these contexts.

Nature of consultation and accountability

1.5   The key good practice requirements for consultation programmes are that they should: be conducted at a formative stage, before decisions are taken; allow sufficient time for people to participate and respond; provide the public and stakeholders with enough background information to allow them to consider the issues and any proposals intelligently and critically; and be properly taken into consideration before decisions are finally taken. The consultation reported here meets all these requirements.

1.6   Accountability means that public authorities should give an account of their plans and take into account public views. They should conduct fair and accessible engagement whilst reporting the outcomes openly and considering them fully.

1.7   This does not mean that the majority views should automatically decide public policy; and the popularity or unpopularity of draft proposals should not displace professional and political judgement about what is the right or best decision in the circumstances. The levels of, and reasons for, public support or opposition are very important, but are considerations to be taken into account, not as factors that necessarily determine authorities' decisions. Above all, public bodies have to consider the relevance and cogency of the arguments put forward during public engagement processes, not just counting the number of people.

The report

1.8   ORS does not endorse any opinions reported here but seeks only to portray them accurately and clearly. Whilst offering guidance on the consultation methodology and its interpretation, we seek to profile the opinions and arguments of those who have responded; but we make no recommendations on the decisions to be taken by Wycombe District Council.

Main Findings

Many respondents / residents feel attached to High Wycombe – but the 'deterioration' of the town affects the level to which some feel pride in it

Consultation questionnaire

1.9   More than four fifths (89%) of consultation questionnaire respondents identify strongly with High Wycombe town, whereas just under one eighth (11%) do not identify with High Wycombe. Respondents from Totteridge are significantly more likely to strongly identify with High Wycombe than those from other wards.

Telephone survey

1.10   More than four fifths (86%) of residents identify strongly with High Wycombe town, whereas just over one eighth (14%) do not identify with High Wycombe. Micklefield residents are significantly more likely to identify strongly with High Wycombe than those from all other wards.

Public focus groups

1.11 Many participants said they felt attached to High Wycombe, simply due to their long-standing individual and family ties to the area. However, there was widespread agreement (particularly in the first group for residents of Booker & Cressex, Sands, Oakridge and Castlefield Wards) that the town has deteriorated in many aspects over recent years – and that this has affected both the way people perceive it, and the extent to which they feel pride in living there.

Some respondents/residents identify with other areas of Buckinghamshire

Consultation questionnaire

1.12 Nearly one third (31%) of consultation questionnaire respondents feel attached to other areas of Buckinghamshire.

1.13 Of the nine Micklefield respondents who feel attached to other areas within Buckinghamshire, four stated their own area of Micklefield, with a further one each stating Aylesbury and Amersham.

1.14 Of the 50 Sands respondents who feel attached to other areas within Buckinghamshire, 44% feel attached to their own area of Sands, whereas more than one eighth each stated Marlow (16%) and West Wycombe (14%).

1.15 Of the six Totteridge respondents who feel attached to other areas within Buckinghamshire, two stated Beaconsfield, with a further one each stating Totteridge, Penn and Micklefield.

Telephone survey

1.16 More than one fifth (21%) of residents of High Wycombe town feel attached to other areas of Buckinghamshire.

1.17 Of the 23 Micklefield respondents who feel attached to other areas within Buckinghamshire, four stated Beaconsfield, three each stated Penn and Marlow and a further two stated their own area of Micklefield.

1.18 Of the 36 Sands respondents who feel attached to other areas within Buckinghamshire, 12 stated Marlow, three each stated Chiltern and Sands and a further two stated Chesham.

1.19 Of the 30 Totteridge respondents who feel attached to other areas within Buckinghamshire, seven stated Marlow, six stated Aylesbury, five stated Amersham and three stated Chesham.

The principle of a Town Council or Parish Councils is generally supported

Consultation questionnaire

1.20 Consultation questionnaire respondents feel it is important to have either a Town Council in High Wycombe or Parish Councils in some areas of High Wycombe that: promotes the interests of the town (92%); preserves the town or area's identity and heritage (92%); has democratically elected local representatives (91%); and delivers some local services (88%).

Telephone survey

1.21 The results above are echoed in the telephone survey. Residents feel it is important to have either a Town Council in High Wycombe or Parish Councils in some areas of High Wycombe that: delivers some local services (95%).promotes the interests of the town (95%); preserves the town or area's identity and heritage (91%); has democratically elected local representatives (91%).

Public focus groups

1.22   Participants across all three groups generally agreed that a Town Council or Parish Councils would be important within a more remote unitary local government structure in representing residents and giving them a voice on a local level, as well as protecting High Wycombe's identity and considerable history and heritage.

1.23   It was also suggested that a new Town Council would mitigate against the fear that as other areas of Buckinghamshire already have their own, High Wycombe may not have as strong a voice as they will have within the new unitary structure. Indeed, for a couple of people in Group 1 (residents of Booker & Cressex, Sands, Oakridge and Castlefield Wards), this was their only reason for supporting the introduction of an additional layer of local government in High Wycombe.

1.24   Participants also commented on the need to regenerate and improve the town centre and the potential that this could be a focus for a Town Council - as well as the need to retain a focus on important local services (the organisation of community events for example) that may not be a priority for a unitary authority.

1.25   Only a couple of people were expressly opposed to the creation of a new Town Council or Parish Councils on the basis of unnecessary duplication and that influence at a unitary level would be minimal. There was also some concern around affordability (particularly in the context of potential inefficiencies and likely council tax rises following unitarisation), but most said they would be prepared to pay an extra precept for an efficient, value for money and fully accountable new Town Council or Parish Councils.

Opinion on the options is mixed – but there is most support for creating a new Town Council for High Wycombe

Consultation questionnaire

1.26   As seen in

1.27   Figure 1, nearly three quarters (73%) of consultation questionnaire respondents supported the creation of a Town Council for High Wycombe. 10% preferred the option of no town council, and more than one eighth (17%) wanted an alternative option. Sands residents formed a significant proportion of those supporting an alternative.

Figure 1: Which Option do you prefer? (Consultation Questionnaire)
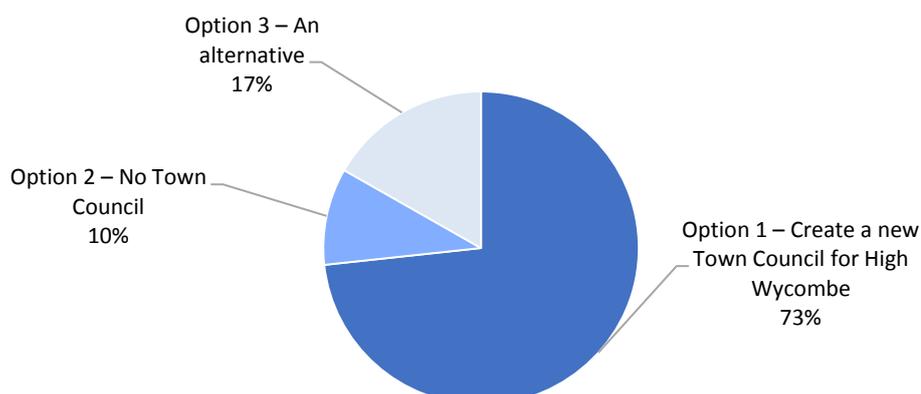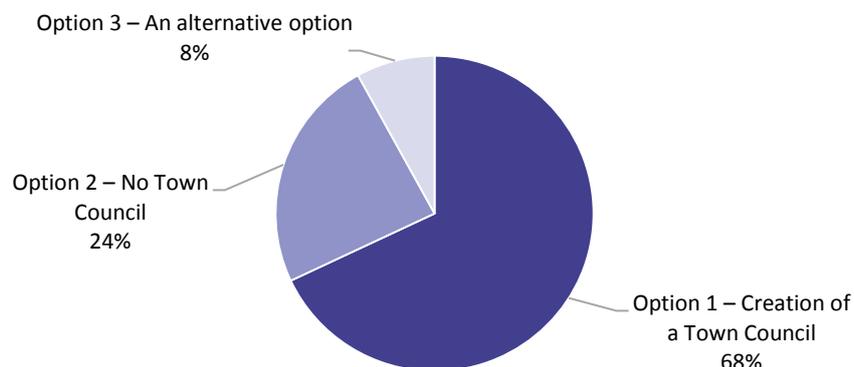

Base: 640 (excluding 'don't know')

1.28 Almost half (47%) of people who supported the creation of a Town Council (73%) for High Wycombe did so because they wanted to see more local decision-making, or they wanted their area's local needs to be taken into account.

1.29 The most common concerns of those who rejected the idea of a Town Council typically related to: financial inefficiency and the feeling that the Buckinghamshire unitary only would be more cost-effective (33%); council tax precept rises (17%); and too much bureaucracy and/or regulation (13%).

1.30 Of the 17% of respondents who chose an alternative option, typical responses included having:

- A Parish Council for every ward;

- A Parish Council for Sands, with a Town Council for the rest of High Wycombe;

- A Parish Council for Micklefield and/or Totteridge only; and

- A separate Parish Council for those wards that petitioned for one, with a Town Council covering those wards that do not wish to have Parish Councils.

1.31 Of the respondents who chose an alternative option, one quarter (25%) did so because they wanted to see more local decision-making.

1.32 When looking at support for the creation of a separate Parish Council for the three petitioned wards (if a Town Council were not created):

- More than four fifths (81%) of Micklefield respondents support having a Parish Council for Micklefield, compared to only just over half (57%) of all consultation questionnaire respondents;

- 90% of Sands respondents support having a separate Parish Council for Sands, compared to 59% of questionnaire respondents overall; and

- Four fifths (80%) of Totteridge respondents support having a separate Parish Council for their own ward, compared to only just over half (57%) of all questionnaire respondents.

Consultation questionnaire (organisations)

1.33 Of the eight organisations responding to the consultation questionnaire, six preferred the option of creating a new Town Council for High Wycombe, whereas one preferred an alternative option and one did not state a preference.

1.34 Those supporting a Town Council felt it would: ensure High Wycombe retains influence and is not 'forgotten about' within the new unitary structure; safeguard the equity of service provision across the town; and maintain local representation, democracy and decision-making.

1.35 Only one organisation offered a specific alternative: a Town Council for the inner, unparished areas of High Wycombe, with Parish Councils for those areas that had petitioned for one. The same organisation also sought more information on the possible future cost and arrangement of a new Town Council.

Telephone survey

1.36 When residents were asked which option they would prefer for High Wycombe town, Figure 2 on the following page shows that a majority of more than two thirds (68%) supported the creation of a Town Council. Just under a quarter (24%) did not want a Town Council, and less than one in ten (8%) supported an alternative option.

Figure 2: Which Option do you prefer? (Telephone Survey)

Option 3 – An alternative option
8%

Option 2 – No Town
Council
24%

Option 1 – Creation of
a Town Council
68%

Base: 757 (All responses excluding 'don't know')

1.37 The most common reasons for residents preferring a Town Council (68%) were related to local decision-making and representation, which half (50%) of residents preferring Option 1 stated.

1.38 Reasons for just under one quarter (24%) of residents rejecting a Town Council were mostly around rising council tax (22%) and a feeling that extra councils are a 'waste of money' (20%).

1.39 Typical examples of suggested alternatives included:

- Parish Councils for every ward in High Wycombe; and

- Parish Councils for the three petitioned wards of Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge, with a Town Council for the rest of High Wycombe.

1.40 The most common reasons given for supporting an alternative option were borne of concerns around council tax rises (35%), and that very local needs must be taken into account (35%).

1.41 When looking at support for the creation of a separate Parish Council for the three petitioned wards (if a Town Council were not created):

- Exactly three quarters (75%) of Micklefield residents support having a Parish Council for Micklefield, compared to less than two thirds (61%) of all residents of High Wycombe town;

- Almost three quarters (74%) of Sands residents support the creation of a Parish Council for Sands, compared to 61% of residents overall; and

- More than two thirds (69%) of Totteridge residents support the creation of a Parish Council for Totteridge, compared to 62% of residents overall

Public focus groups

1.42 Opinion in Group 2 (for residents of Abbey, Terriers & Amersham Hill and Disraeli Wards) was unanimously in favour of a Town Council for the whole of High Wycombe - chiefly for reasons of unity, simplicity and because participants considered the alternative (Parish Councils for Micklefield and/or Sands and/or Totteridge wards) to be unfair in leaving a still significant area of the town unparished.

1.43 In Group 3 (for residents of Bowerdean, Totteridge, Micklefield and Ryemead Wards), four of the seven participants were in favour of a Town Council for the whole of High Wycombe, again for reasons of fairness; one preferred Parish Councils for Micklefield and/or Sands and/or Totteridge wards only (because of the "closer links" it would achieve between council and community); and the remaining two opted for no Town Council or Parish Councils.

1.44 Opinion was most divided in Group 1 (for residents of Booker & Cressex, Sands, Oakridge and Castlefield Wards):

- Three of the ten participants favoured a Town Council for the whole of High Wycombe for a similar main reason as reported above: representation and fairness;

- Another four (including all participants from Sands and Booker & Cressex) said that they would prefer what they considered more 'local' and 'accessible' Parish Councils, ideally for all High Wycombe ten wards. Of these four, two said they would support a Town Council if it did not prove possible to parish the whole of the town, but the remaining two chose Parish Councils for Micklefield and/or Sands and/or Totteridge wards only as their next best option, reasoning that this might prove a catalyst for other wards to establish their own local councils; and

- Of the three remaining participants, two felt unable to make a firm decision at the end of the session and thus chose to be recorded as 'don't knows' - and the third did not consider it necessary to establish any kind of local council, but had been somewhat persuaded by the views of others that they could 'live with' a Town Council for the whole of High Wycombe town.

Submissions

1.45 West Wycombe Parish Council strongly supports a localised tier of government for High Wycombe, so it is not left as the only major unparished town in Buckinghamshire.

1.46 The Pimms Action Group does not believe there should be a further layer of bureaucracy in the form of Parish Councils, which, in its view, would lead to a fragmented High Wycombe. Instead, the group supports a 'unified' Town Council that would be in a better position to deal with the more contentious issues that might affect the town.

1.47 Cllr. Brian Pearce (Booker & Cressex Ward) strongly supports the creation of a Town Council in order to negate the influence other towns would have over High Wycombe. For Councillor Pearce, a Town Council would have the influence, ability and finances to implement decisions, and would also avoid the fragmentation of High Wycombe.

1.48 Councillor Darren Hayday is in favour of a Parish Council for Sands. He believes Parish Councils are more able to give communities the resources they need to flourish.

1.49 Downley Parish Council objects to any change to current ward boundaries and responsibilities, as this would impact Disraeli disproportionately.

1.50 A resident expressed had queries about possible council tax increases, the responsibilities of any new TC, the status of assets or archives belonging to, or held by, Wycombe DC & the Town Committee, and the dissolution of the Charter Trustees

The future role of the Mayor and Charter Trustees within any new Town Council should be considered

Public focus groups

1.51 On a final note, residents in the first focus group (for residents of Booker & Cressex, Sands, Oakridge and Castlefield Wards) debated the merits of retaining the Mayor and Charter Trustees if it is decided to establish a new Town Council for High Wycombe. It was ultimately agreed that the Mayor should be retained providing they perform a role that is more than ceremonial (as Leader of the Council for example) – as should the Charter Trustees, providing they communicate the work they do and the benefits they offer more widely.

2. The Consultation Process

Background to the Community Governance Review

2.1   Like many other parts of England, Buckinghamshire currently has two main tiers of local government: Buckinghamshire County Council and four district councils (Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks, and Wycombe). This situation is due to change in April 2020, when the current two-tier system will be abolished and replaced by a new single-tier Unitary Council that will be responsible for all local government services across the whole of Buckinghamshire. The new unitary Buckinghamshire Council is already in place, as a 'shadow' authority alongside the current two-tier system and in April 2020 it will take over completely.

2.2   Many areas of Buckinghamshire and England also have another local government tier consisting of either town or parish councils (with democratically elected councillors) that are 'statutory consultees' – entitled to be consulted by their district or unitary councils on planning and decisions. Many town and parish councils are responsible for some local services and charge a council tax precept in addition to those of the county and district councils and the police and fire services.

2.3   Until now, the ten wards of High Wycombe have not had a town or parish council(s) because they were represented by Wycombe District Council (WDC) and the High Wycombe Town Committee. However, the three Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge wards have petitioned to have their own separate parish councils; and residents of other wards have petitioned for a town council. Those four petitions, and the local government changes coming in 2020, have led WDC to consider whether the local representation of all ten High Wycombe wards should be enhanced through the creation of a town council or up to three parish councils.

The Commission

2.4   WDC commissioned Opinion Research Services (ORS) to manage, report and present (to the Regulatory and Appeals Committee) a multi-strand consultation to seek the views of the High Wycombe residents, businesses, surrounding town and Parish Councils and other interested organisations on how best to represent the interests of the town under the new unitary local government system that will be introduced in 2020.

Methodology

2.5   The study involved using four consultation methods: an open consultation questionnaire, a residents' survey conducted by telephone, resident focus groups and written submissions.

2.6   For the consultation questionnaire, residents were able to submit a questionnaire response via an online questionnaire readily available via a link on Wycombe District Council's website. A paper version of the consultation questionnaire was provided, which Wycombe District Council subsequently printed 1,000 copies of, and distributed across the High Wycombe area in order to demonstrate that the consultation questionnaire was available to all (for residents and businesses – including libraries – who may not use the internet).

2.7   The residents' survey was completed using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) methodology, which was conducted from ORS's social research call centre, where 803 interviews were made between 16th August and 22nd September 2019. A short summary of the proposals was included to be 'read out' within the survey for the benefit of respondents who had not had the opportunity to read the consultation document or to otherwise find out about the proposals.

2.8   The focus groups were recruited and facilitated by ORS, and were designed to be attended by a representative cross section of residents of High Wycombe town by age, gender, social grade, ethnicity, limiting illness/disability and ward. There were 3 separate focus groups with a total of 23 participants, each lasted about two hours. All participants were recompensed for their time and expenses in attending the meetings.

2.9   During the formal consultation process, any stakeholder was able to provide written submissions in the form of a letter or an email to Wycombe District Council, outlining who they were or the organisation they represented, and explaining the reasons for their preferred (or an alternative) option in Wycombe District Council's Community Governance proposals.

Weighting

2.10   A telephone survey is designed to provide an estimate of the views one would obtain if it were possible to survey all residents in the relevant population (in this case, the 10 wards of High Wycombe). However, this relies on achieving a sample that properly reflects the population. In practice, due to imperfections in the practical application of any survey and sometimes by the design of the sample, there are usually a number of inherent biases that need to be addressed and corrections that need to be made to the sample design.

2.11   For this survey a decision was made that the sample should be designed so that the target number of interviews for the 3 petitioning wards should be large enough to allow for a reasonably robust comparison of views (approx. 150 interviews in each). In the remaining 7 wards, it was decided that wards with 2 elected members should seek to achieve around 40 interviews, and wards with 3 elected members to seek to achieve around 60 interviews. The final achieved sample was subsequently adjusted according to the adult population of each ward in order for the responses in each ward to have the appropriate amount of influence on the overall results, as can be seen in Table 1.

2.12   Subsequently, the demographic characteristics of the respondents were compared with data for the whole adult (18+) population. Statistical weighting was applied in order to identify and correct any under (or over) representation of any particular demographic groups due to 'response bias'. The statistical weighting was applied to the results using data from the 2011 census for the profile groups Working Status and Ethnic Group, and 2017 Population Estimates, for Gender, Age and Ward populations.

2.13   After taking account of the weighting process, one can be 95% confident that the telephone survey results (at overall level) will be within +/− 4.6 percentage points (depending on the exact sample sizes and opinion splits on particular questions).

2.14   The results in the consultation questionnaire remain unweighted as it is not a random sample survey of a given population. Consequently, they cannot normally be expected to be representative of the general population, as they indicate the views of those who choose to respond, rather than acting as a statistically reliable guide to the general population's views.

Table 1: Breakdown of target interviews and achieved number of interviews by ward (count and %)

Ward	Target number of interviews	Achieved number of interviews		Population (18+)		Weighted sample
		Count	%	Count	%	
Abbey	60	66	8	8,188	15	15
Booker and Cressex	40	43	5	3,934	7	7
Bowerdean	40	43	5	4,067	7	7
Disraeli	40	41	5	4,702	8	8
Micklefield	150	144	18	4,136	7	7
Oakridge and Castlefield	60	65	8	6,903	12	12
Ryemead	40	41	5	6,237	11	11
Sands	150	146	18	5,261	9	9
Terriers and Amersham Hill	60	63	8	7,449	13	13
Totteridge	150	151	19	5,264	9	9
Total	**330**	**803**	**100**	**56,141**	**100**	**100**

Quantitative engagement

2.15 A consultation document outlining the issues and proposals under consideration was produced by WDC. Using this as a basis, ORS and WDC designed two questionnaires tailored toward different groups of people: an open consultation questionnaire and a telephone survey. Each questionnaire included the same core questions, as well as sections inviting respondents to make further comments and demographic profiling questions.

Consultation questionnaire

2.16 The first form of quantitative engagement was the open consultation questionnaire which, in principle, was available for anyone to complete - either via the dedicated consultation page on WDC's website or paper versions that could be requested from ORS by email or via a freephone telephone number.

2.17 Open questionnaires are not random sample surveys of a given population, therefore they cannot normally be expected to be representative of the general balance of opinion. For example, the more motivated groups are typically over-represented compared with others. However, they are extremely important forms of engagement in being inclusive and in giving people an opportunity to express their views.

2.18 The total number of consultation questionnaire responses received was 681, of which eight were submitted on behalf of an organisation.

Telephone survey

2.19   The second form of quantitative engagement was the telephone survey, undertaken with residents aged 18 and over. The purpose of the survey was to achieve a representative profile of opinions across High Wycombe using broadly the same core questions as in the consultation questionnaire.

2.20   ORS staff undertook 803 structured telephone interviews over a period of nearly seven weeks beginning on 5th August 2019, using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing ('CATI') technology. The survey was conducted using a quota-controlled sampling approach, to ensure a broadly representative sample of residents aged 18 or over across High Wycombe. After taking account of the weighting process, one can be 95% confident that the survey results (at overall level) will be within 4.6% points of the views of the population the sample represents.

Qualitative engagement

2.21   A series of three two-hour focus groups sessions were held in September 2019 with a representative cross-section of High Wycombe residents covering the 10 wards in the town. Two of the groups were held in the town centre, and one in the south east of the town.

2.22   ORS' Social Research Call Centre contacted participants who had completed the telephone survey and agreed to take part in further research. Once the participants been initially contacted by phone, all participants were then written to - to confirm the invitation and the arrangements; and those who agreed to come then received telephone or written reminders shortly before each meeting. Such recruitment by telephone is an effective way of ensuring that the participants are independent and broadly representative of the wider community.

2.23   In the recruitment, care was taken to ensure that no potential participants were disqualified or disadvantaged by disabilities or any other factors, and the venues at which the focus groups met were readily accessible. The random telephone recruitment process was monitored to ensure social diversity in terms of a wide range of criteria – including, for example: gender; age; ethnicity; social grade; and disability/limiting long- term illness (LLTI). Overall, there were 23 participants who represented a broad cross-section of residents, and they were recompensed for their time and efforts in travelling and taking part.

Written submissions

2.24   During the formal consultation process, six organisations and individuals provided written submissions. ORS has read all the written submissions carefully and summarised them in the full report. The contributors were:

- Downley Parish Council
- West Wycombe Parish Council
- Councillor Brian Pearce (town ward member, Booker & Cressex)
- Councillor Darren Hayday (for West Wycombe, including Sands)
- Tony Garner (Chairman of the Pimms Action Group)
- A resident of High Wycombe

Nature of consultation

2.25   Accountability means that public authorities should give an account of their plans and to take the public's into consideration. This should involve fair and accessible engagement whilst reporting the outcomes openly and considering them fully. This does not mean that the majority views should automatically decide policy; and that the popularity or unpopularity of draft proposals should not displace professional and political judgement about what is the correct decision in the circumstances. The levels of, and reasons for, public support or opposition are of high importance, but are as considerations to be taken into account, as opposed to factors that necessarily determine authorities' decisions.

2.26   Above all, public bodies have to consider the relevance and cogency of the arguments put forward during public engagement processes; and not only count the numbers of people. In this context, it was helpful that the consultation programme included both 'open' and deliberative elements, to allow many people to take part via the open questionnaire, and whilst promoting informed engagement through the deliberative focus groups and telephone survey.

Interpreting the outcomes

2.27   Importantly, the different consultation methods cannot just be combined to yield a single point of view on the future governance of High Wycombe, which reconciles everyone's differences. There are two main reasons why this is not possible. First, the engagement methods differ in type: they are qualitatively different, and their outcomes cannot be just aggregated into a single result. Second, different areas and sub-groups will inevitably have different perspectives on the proposals, and that there is no formula in the consultation process that can reconcile everyone's differences in a single way.

2.28   It is also important to recognise that the outcomes of the consultation process will need to be considered alongside other available information. Whilst the process highlights aspects of this information that stakeholders consider to be important, appropriate emphasis should be placed on each element.

2.29   Furthermore, the level of response to any consultation questionnaire always depends on many factors, such as how widely it was publicised, and how strongly stakeholders feel about the proposals. In this sense there can be no single 'right' interpretation of all the consultation elements and other information in the decision-making process.

The report

2.30   This report summarises the feedback on WDC's proposals for the future governance of High Wycombe town. In order to differentiate verbatim quotations from other information, they are indented italics. ORS does not endorse any opinions, but seeks only to portray them accurately and clearly.

2.31   ORS is clear that its role is to analyse and explain the opinions and arguments of the many different interests participating in the consultation, but not to 'make a case' for any proposal. In this report, we seek to profile the opinions, views and arguments of those who have responded to the consultation, but not to make any recommendations as to how the reported results should be used. Whilst this report brings together a wide range of evidence for the Council to consider, decisions must be taken based on all the evidence available.

3. Consultation Questionnaire

Introduction

3.1   A consultation document outlining the issues under consideration was produced by Wycombe District Council, who also worked with ORS to develop a consultation questionnaire with questions intended to capture views on the various aspects of the proposals. Additional sections allowed respondents to make any further comments, and captured information about the type of response being submitted and, where relevant, respondents' demographic information.

Duplicate and Co-ordinated Responses

3.2   It is important that engagement questionnaires are open and accessible to all, while being alert to the possibility of multiple completions (by the same people) distorting the analysis. Therefore, while making it easy to complete the questionnaire online, ORS monitors the IP addresses through which questionnaires are completed. A similar analysis of "cookies" was also undertaken – where responses originated from users on the same computer using the same browser and the same credentials (e.g. user account). Some submissions were received with duplicate cookies, and after careful study of these responses, eight were considered to be identical responses and were excluded from the results. However, no physical copies of questionnaires returned to ORS were considered to be duplicated responses.

3.3   The consultation documents and open questionnaire were available online via a dedicated council webpage between 5th August and 30th September 2019, and respondents could also request a paper copy by contacting ORS, of which 3 were submitted between 22nd and 27th August. In total, 681 responses were received.

Respondent profile

3.4 The full breakdown of responses by respondent type is provided below.

Table 2: Consultation questionnaire responses (unweighted) by gender (Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

Gender	Number of respondents (unweighted count)	% of respondents (unweighted valid)
Male	318	56
Female	250	44
Not Known	*113*	-
Total	**681**	**100**

Table 3: Consultation questionnaire responses (unweighted) by age (Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

Age	Number of respondents (unweighted count)	% of respondents (unweighted valid)
Under 35	65	11
35-44	105	18
45-54	135	23
55-64	143	24
65-74	106	18
75+	35	6
Not Known	*92*	-
Total	**681**	**100**

Table 4: Consultation questionnaire responses (unweighted) by ethnic group (Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

Ethnic Group	Number of respondents (unweighted count)	% of respondents (unweighted valid)
White	476	89
Asian	43	8
Black, mixed & other	18	3
Not known	*144*	-
Total	**681**	**100**

Table 5: Consultation questionnaire responses (unweighted) by ward (Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

| Ward	Number of respondents (unweighted count)	% of respondents (unweighted valid)
Abbey	63	11
Booker and Cressex	21	4
Bowerdean	27	5
Disraeli	36	6
Micklefield	39	7
Oakridge and Castlefield	26	5
Ryemead	75	13
Sands	117	21
Terriers and Amersham Hill	79	14
Totteridge	33	6
Other ward	49	9
Not Known	*116*	-
Total	**681**	**100**

Organisations in the consultation questionnaire

3.5   The following eight organisations (including businesses) identified themselves as part of their responses to the questionnaire:

- The local BCC Cllr for West Wycombe, including Sands
- Brands Hill Residents Association
- Hazlemere Parish Council
- Hughenden Parish Council
- Sands Residents Association
- A small independent restaurant based in High Wycombe town centre
- Wooburn and Bourne End Parish Council
- Wycombe Labour Party

Interpretation of the data

3.6   As with the telephone survey, results are presented in a largely graphical format, whilst colours used on the charts have been standardised with a 'traffic light' system in which:

Green shades represent positive responses that (e.g. 'tend to identify or 'strongly identify')
Red shades represent negative responses that (e.g. 'tend not to identify or 'definitely do not identify')

3.7   The numbers on charts are percentages indicating the proportions of residents who gave a particular response on a given question.

3.8   The number of valid responses recorded for each question (base size) are reported throughout. As not all respondents answered every question, the number of valid responses varies between questions ('don't know' responses have been treated as invalid).

3.9   In cases where the base size is less than 50, an unweighted count has been used to show the number of responses, rather than a percentage, in order to avoid a misleading interpretation.

3.10   In the profile tables, the 'weighted valid' percentage of 'Not known' respondents is left blank, as these are considered invalid responses to the weighting process.

## Identification and feeling attached with High Wycombe town

Figure 3: How strongly, if at all, do you identify with High Wycombe as a town you feel attached to?
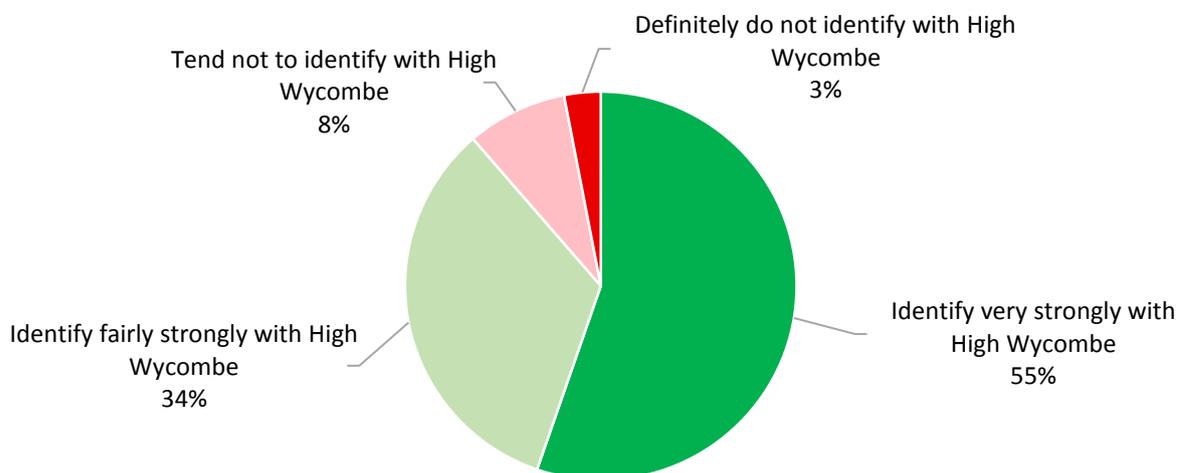
Base: 662 (All respondents indicating that they live in High Wycombe)

3.12   Figure 3 shows that more than four fifths (89%) identify strongly with High Wycombe town – with more than half identifying very strongly – whereas only around a tenth (11%) do not identify with High Wycombe.

Figure 4: How strongly, if at all, do you identify with High Wycombe as a town you feel attached to? (By ward and grouped)

% of Respondents

■ Identify strongly with High Wycombe ■ Do not identify with High Wycombe
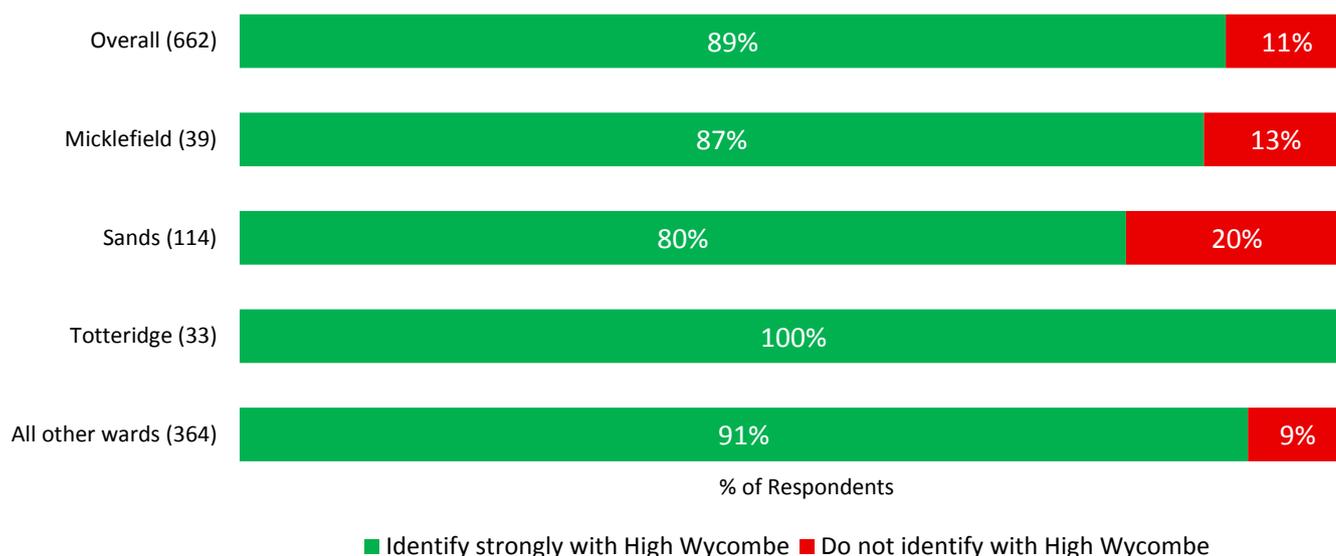
Base: (Numbers shown in brackets)

3.13   Looking at Figure 4, high proportions strongly identify with High Wycombe across the various wards. All thirty-three respondents in Totteridge indicated that they strongly identify with High Wycombe, when compared to other wards.

Identification and feeling attached to other areas in Buckinghamshire

Figure 5: Do you identify with and feel attached to any other area within Buckinghamshire? (Residents of Micklefield)

| Yes 31%	No 69%
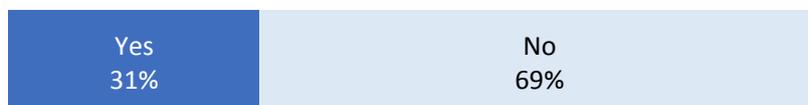
Base: 660 (All respondents who said they identify with another area of Buckinghamshire)

3.14   In Figure 5, almost one third (31%) of respondents feel attached to other areas of Buckinghamshire (i.e. other than High Wycombe), whereas just over two thirds (69%) do not.

Residents of Micklefield

Figure 6 : What other areas do you identify with and feel attached to within Buckinghamshire?

| Area	Respondent Count
Micklefield	4
Aylesbury	1
Amersham	1

Respondent Count (Unweighted)
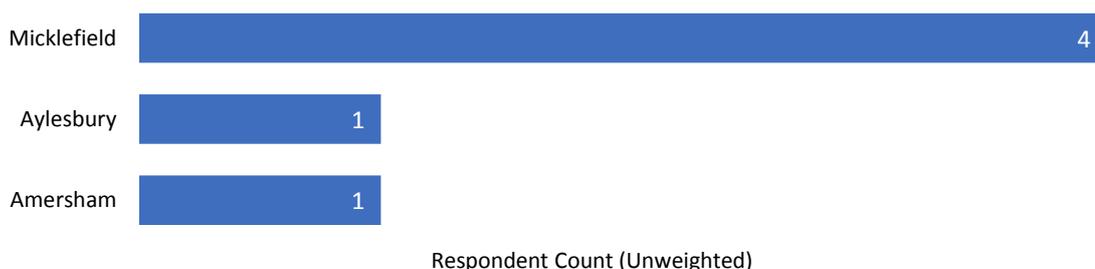
Base: 9 (Respondents of Micklefield who feel attached another area of Buckinghamshire)

3.15   When looking at which other areas within Buckinghamshire residents of Micklefield feel attached to, 4 respondents stated their own area of Micklefield, with 1 other stating Aylesbury another stating Amersham.

Residents of Sands

Figure 7: Which other area within Buckinghamshire do you identify with and feel attached to?

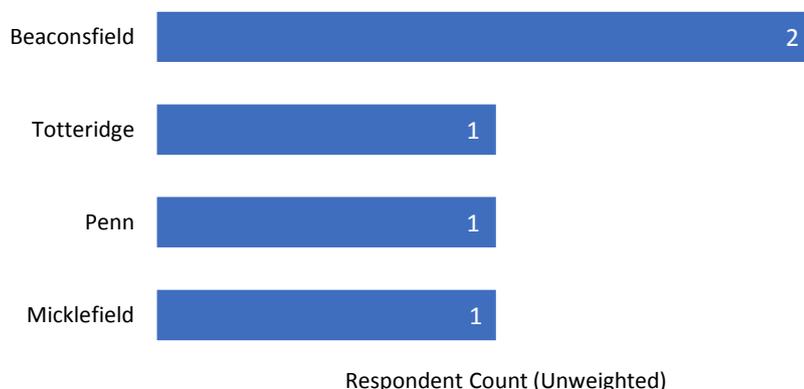| Area	Respondent %
Sands	44%
Marlow	16%
West Wycombe	14%

Respondent % (Unweighted)
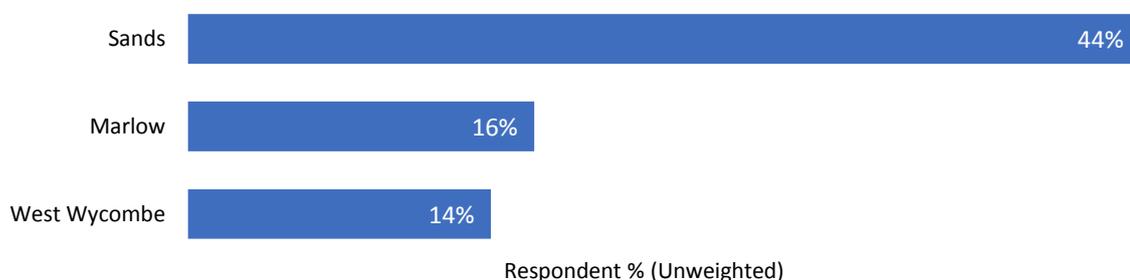
Base: 50 (Respondents of Sands who said they identify with another area of Buckinghamshire)

3.16   In Figure 7, it can be seen that over two fifths (44%) of respondents of Sands feel attached to their own area of Sands. More than one eighth stated Marlow (16%) and West Wycombe (14%), respectively.

Residents of Totteridge

Figure 8: Which other area within Buckinghamshire do you identify with and feel attached to?
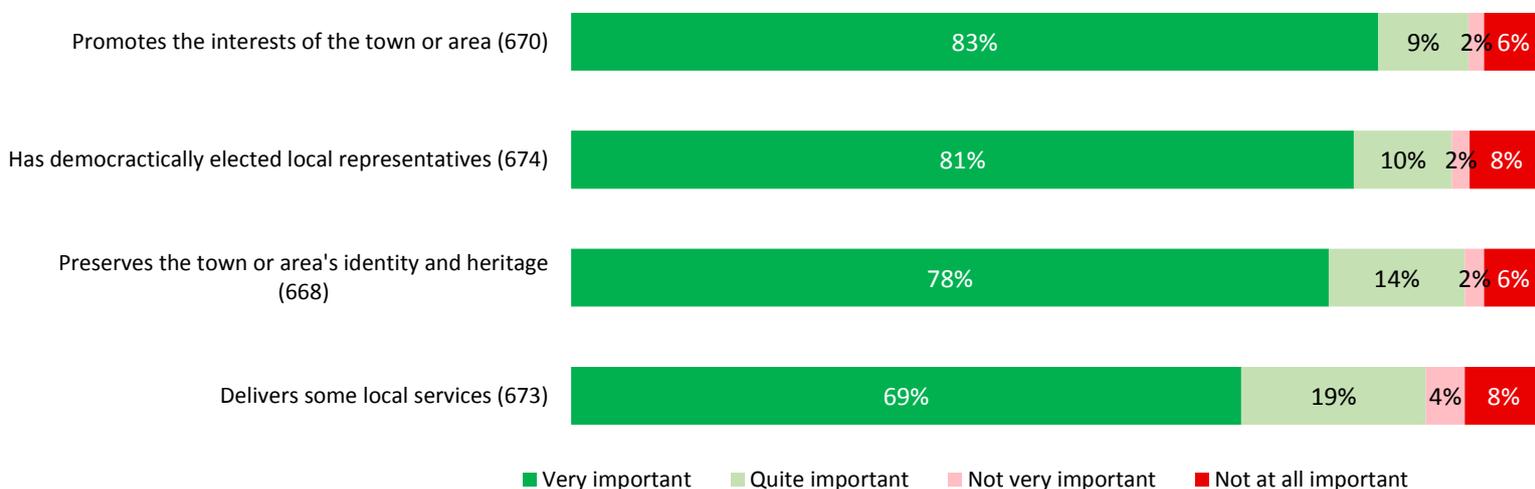
Area	Respondent Count (Unweighted)
Beaconsfield	2
Totteridge	1
Penn	1
Micklefield	1

Respondent Count (Unweighted)

Base: 6 (Respondents of Totteridge who said they identify with another area of Buckinghamshire)

3.17   In Figure 8, it can be seen that two respondents of Totteridge identified Beaconsfield as another area in Buckinghamshire that they feel attached to; 1 stated their own ward of Totteridge.

The importance of what a Town or Parish Council does

Figure 9: How important or unimportant is it to have either a Town Council in High Wycombe, or a Parish Council in some areas of High Wycombe that …?

	Very important	Quite important	Not very important	Not at all important
Promotes the interests of the town or area (670)	83%	9%	2%	6%
Has democractically elected local representatives (674)	81%	10%	2%	8%
Preserves the town or area's identity and heritage (668)	78%	14%	2%	6%
Delivers some local services (673)	69%	19%	4%	8%

■ Very important   ■ Quite important   ■ Not very important   ■ Not at all important
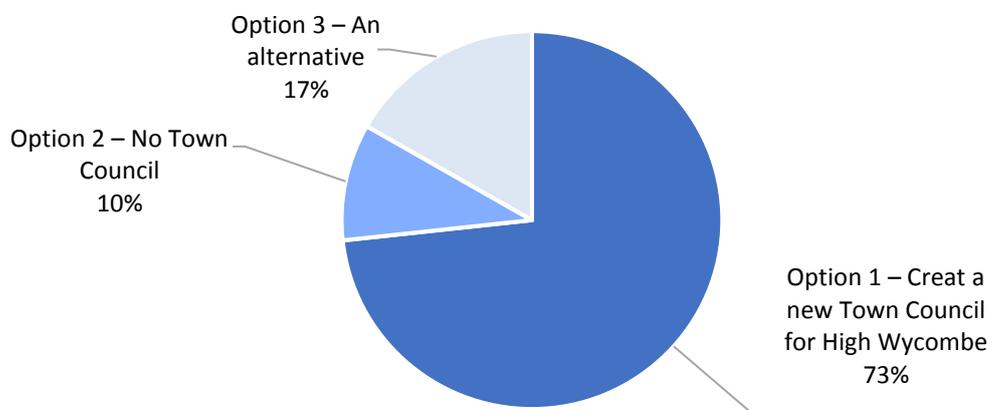
Base: (Numbers shown in brackets)

3.18   Looking at Figure 9, it can be seen that 92% of residents feel it is important to that is promotes the interests of the town; 91% feel it is important that it has democratically elected local representatives; 92% feel it is important to have a town or Parish Council that preserves the town or area's identity and heritage; and 88% of residents feel it is important that either a Town or Parish Council should deliver some local services.

Preferred options

Figure 10: Which option would you prefer?

Option 3 – An alternative 17%

Option 2 – No Town Council 10%

Option 1 – Creat a new Town Council for High Wycombe 73%

Base: 640 (Excluding 'don't know')

3.19   Looking at Figure 10, almost three quarters (73%) of respondents in High Wycombe would prefer the creation of a Town Council. One in ten respondents would prefer the option of having no Town Council, and slightly more (17%) want an alternative option.

3.20   When looking at the breakdown of responses by area in Table 6, we can see that many preferences for an alternative option come from respondents in Sands.

Responses by Area

Table 6: Option responses (unweighted) by ward (Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)
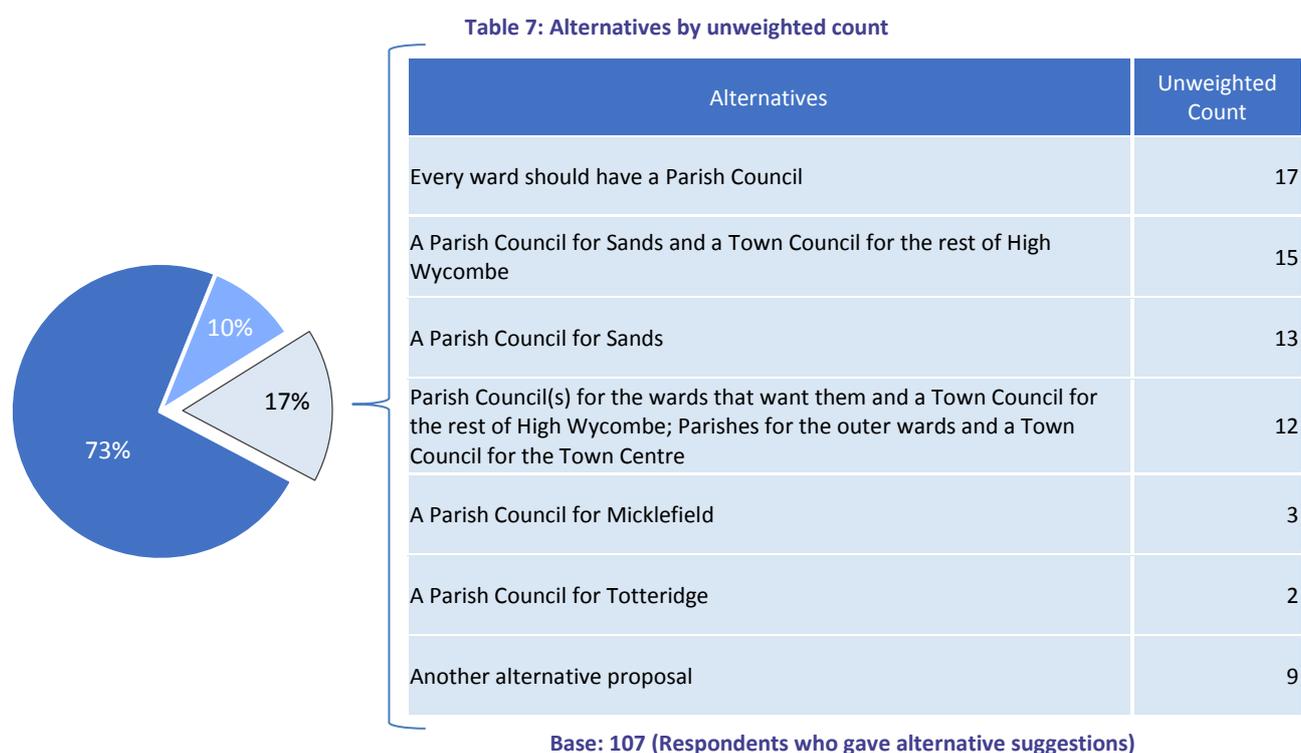
Option	Micklefield (39)	Sands (115)	Totteridge (33)	Other areas (375)
Option 1: A new Town Council for High Wycombe	69%	43%	76%	83%
Option 2: No Town Council	10%	6%	12%	10%
Option 3: An alternative option	21%	51%	12%	6%

Base: (Numbers shown in brackets)

Option 3 – An Alternative

3.21 Of the comments that respondents made, it is important to note that many did not identify actual alternatives, but rather gave a general view expressing either acceptance of the proposals or opposition to them. For example, respondents suggested retaining two-tier governance, or to abandon the idea of having a new Buckinghamshire Unitary Council altogether.

3.22 Table 7 below sets out the actual alternatives specified by respondents:

Table 7: Alternatives by unweighted count

Alternatives	Unweighted Count
Every ward should have a Parish Council	17
A Parish Council for Sands and a Town Council for the rest of High Wycombe	15
A Parish Council for Sands	13
Parish Council(s) for the wards that want them and a Town Council for the rest of High Wycombe; Parishes for the outer wards and a Town Council for the Town Centre	12
A Parish Council for Micklefield	3
A Parish Council for Totteridge	2
Another alternative proposal	9

Base: 107 (Respondents who gave alternative suggestions)

3.23 Below are quotes from some of the alternatives that were stated in Table 7, in order to give some context:

- Parishes for non-petitioned wards

> *"I understand Sands, Totteridge and Micklefield have submitted petitions for Parish Councils, but other parts of the unparished areas, like Wycombe marsh, where I live, have not. I, and I am sure many others, throughout the unparished areas were unaware that there was a possibility of a Parish Council."*

- A Parish Council for just Sands, along with a Town Council for the rest of High Wycombe

> *"I prefer a Parish Council for Sands and a Town Council for High Wycombe to keep Sands [from] being overlooked as an area in its own right – with local people voting for and representing local issues with a degree of local knowledge, and experience of current and historical issues, geography, needs and preferences."*

- A Town Council for only the Town Centre

> *"A Town council for only the centre of High Wycombe (should the residents choose that) but allow suburban/countryside wards to form their own Parish Councils."*

- A Town Council for some parts of High Wycombe, but Parish Councils for those wards that want them

> *"A separate Parish Council for those wards that have identified themselves as wanting a parish, plus a Town Council for those wards that don't wish to be a parish."*
>
> *"I think High Wycombe as a town needs a Town Council; I think the other areas need a Parish Council. Disraeli should be part of Downley Parish Council and cannot understand why it isn't. Otherwise Disraeli needs its own Parish Council. We need both and Disraeli needs to be represented properly as currently very little investment."*

3.24 Of the 'other alternative' proposals, most suggestions reflected similar suggestions to those above. However, one respondent also suggested the continuation of a High Wycombe Town Committee, which at present exists within Wycombe District Council; another suggested the inclusion of a board of town stakeholders, including representatives of businesses.

Reasons for preferred options

3.25 As previously mentioned, it is important to note that when the respondents outlined their reasons for wanting a particular option, many did not give specific reasons, but rather gave a general view of either acceptance of the proposals or opposition to them. As result of this, they do not appear in the tables below.

Option 1 – The Creation of a Town Council

Table 8: Reasons for wanting a Town Council

Reasons for wanting a Town Council	Unweighted Count
Local decision making/local representation/local needs taken into account	220
Local identity/heritage/different areas have different needs	70
Better services provided/easier to report and deal with problems	31
High Wycombe will be forgotten about/not enough influence	28
High Wycombe has a high population	27
Disagree with creation of any individual Parish Councils	26
Buckinghamshire is too big for only a Unitary Council	21
Accountability	17
Dissatisfaction with the District Council	16
Access to council services/due to distance/travel times etc./need local services	14
Better value for money if Bucks unitary devolved responsibilities to a new Town Council	5
Too much duplication/too much bureaucracy/red tape (non specific)	5
Extra councils are a waste of money/Buckinghamshire is the cheaper option	4
We need to improve the area i.e. tackling drugs/ASB/fly tipping/homelessness etc.	4
Services would be better provided	3
Better communication between areas	2
Town Council is a preferable choice, but more information is needed on the cost and services provided	2
We need to improve local services i.e. more police, closer NHS facilities etc.	2

Base: 466 (Option 1 responses)

3.26 As seen in Table 8, the most common reason for respondents wanting a Town Council was in order to have local decision-making or to have local needs taken into account:

> *"Having a local council representation ensures that local people are listened to and considered, rather than being thought of as a 'distant' situation that can be ignored."*
>
> *"We need a local forum for residents to debate and agree the issues that affect them and the town."*

3.27 The second most common reason was that it would help preserve the heritage or local identity of High Wycombe:

> *"Each year it (Wycombe) holds a ceremony unique in the world – the weighing in of the mayor and councillors, and again they are all weighed after their year in office. All these historic facts are our heritage and must be preserved and built upon for future generations."*

3.28 Other reasons for wanting a Town Council related to respondents wanting to have better services provided at a local level, for High Wycombe to not be forgotten and to retain influence, and to simply oppose the creation of any Parish Councils:

> *"If organisations become greater as a sum of their parts and diminished by their division, I contend that our town will grow and develop better with wards working together towards common agreed goals rather than individually."*

Option 2 – No Town Council

Table 9: Reasons for not wanting a Town Council (option 2)

Reasons for not wanting a Town Council	Unweighted Count
Extra councils are a waste of money/Buckinghamshire is the cheaper option	21
Council Tax rising as a result of the changes/council tax already expensive	11
Too much duplication/bureaucracy/red tape (non-specific)	8
Decision making and representation/local needs should be taken into account at a local Parish Council level instead	6
Town Council would lack of power and cost too much	4
Generally prefer the creation of individual Parish Councils	2
The services provided would be worse	2
Dissatisfaction with Town Councils generally	2
Bucks unitary will more likely protect local identity/heritage than a Town Council would	1
Every ward should have a Parish Council instead	1
Concerns about the cost and lack of good candidates for elections	1

Base: 64 (All Option 2 responses)

3.30 For those respondents who did not want a Town Council, Table 9 shows that the most common reasons were related to concerns over wasting money, a rise in council tax and concerns over too much bureaucracy or regulation. For example:

> *"Extra layers of governance are expensive, and economies of scale increasingly decide the best option for service delivery."*
>
> *"Town councils are expensive and a poor use of taxpayers money […] Any change will only cost the residents of Wycombe more money and offer an inferior service."*
>
> *"[It] would deliver […] greater saving to taxpayers by eliminating repetition of bureaucracies and allow a larger regional body to have a greater buying power for services and supplies."*

Reasons for respondents wanting an alternative

3.31 Of the alternatives that respondents stated, the reasons behind them can be seen in the Table 10:

Table 10: Reasons for wanting an alternative option

Reasons for wanting an alternative	Unweighted Count
Local decision making/representation/local needs	28
Local identity/heritage/different areas have different needs	11
Accountability	3
Better communication between areas	3
Need more information on the costs of the other options	3
Dissatisfaction with the District Council	3
Buckinghamshire is too big for a Unitary Council	2
Council Tax rising as a result of the changes/council tax already expensive	2
Concerns about additional layers of bureaucracy	1
High Wycombe will be forgotten about/not enough influence	1
High Wycombe has a high population	1
We need to improve local services (i.e. more police and closer NHS facilities)	1

Base: 107 (Respondents who gave an alternative)

3.32 Table 10 shows that the most common reasons behind residents wanting an alternative option were in order to have more local decision-making and that High Wycombe has a local identify. For example, as one respondent stated:

> *"Without doubt I feel that the unparished areas of High Wycombe need some form of grass roots, local representation so that local people have a voice in how their local area is run and managed. There is a real danger that areas will [...] not feel in control of, or have a voice in any decision making. and that High Wycombe has a local identity and has different needs.*

3.33 Other reasons, but with fewer responses, referred to accountability and to have better communication between areas in High Wycombe:

> *"I believe a parish council governance for the wards would give a greater ability to tackle the important local issues with far more effectiveness and clarity due to the shorter lines of communication between the residents affected by such issues and their elected representatives."*

Support for having Parish Councils

Support for having a separate Parish Council for Micklefield

Figure 11: Do you support having a separate Parish Council for Micklefield (if a Town Council is not created)?
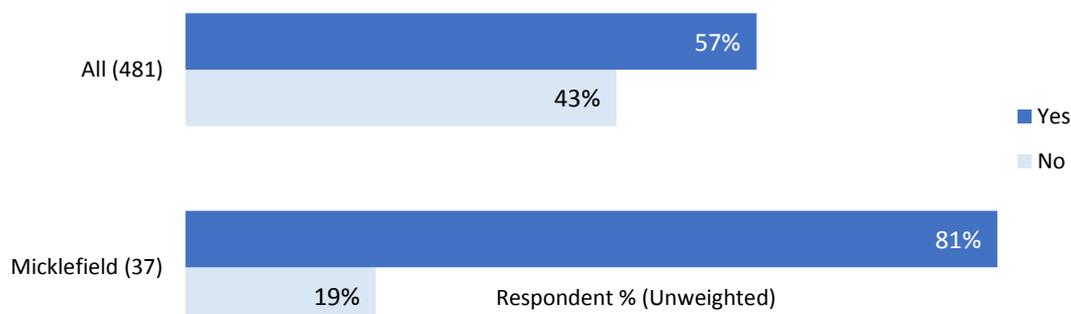

3.34 Under three fifths (57%) of all respondents support the creation of a Parish Council for Micklefield, however, this rises considerably to 81% when only looking at responses from residents of Micklefield.

Base: (Numbers shown in brackets)

Support for having a separate Parish Council for Sands

Figure 12: Do you support having a separate Parish Council for Sands (if a Town Council is not created)?
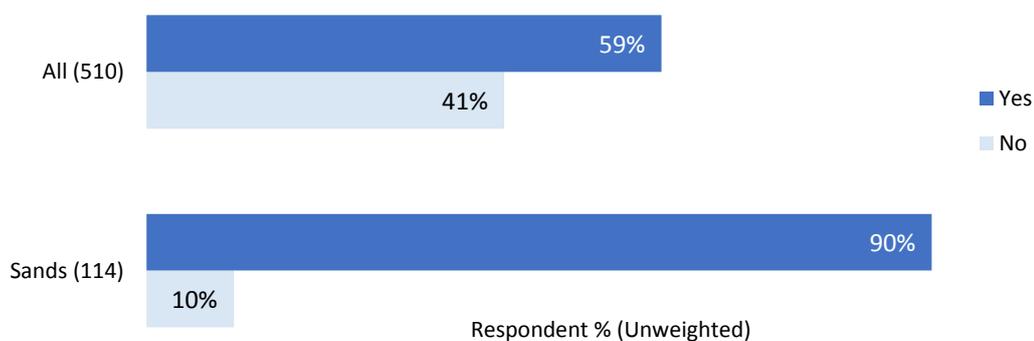
Base: (Numbers shown in brackets)

3.35 Figure 12 show that those respondents who are residents of Sands are considerably more favour of a Parish Council in Sands (90%), when compared to all respondents (59%).

Support for having a separate Parish Council for Totteridge

Figure 13: Do you support having a separate Parish Council for Totteridge (if a Town Council is not created)?

Respondent % (Unweighted)
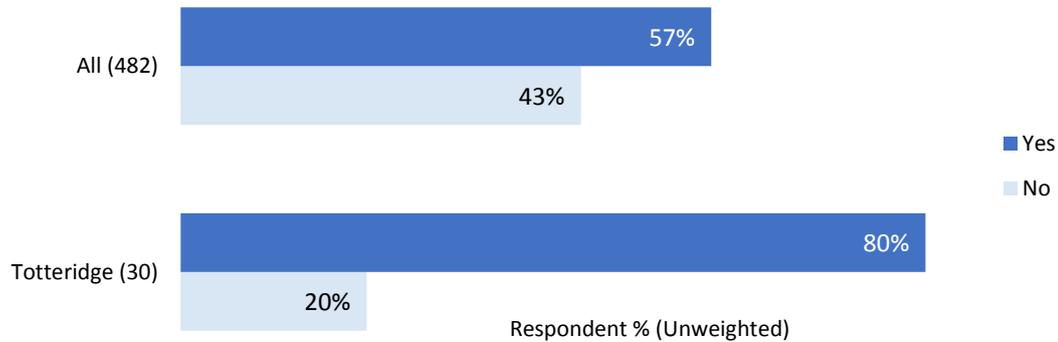
Base: (Numbers shown in brackets)

3.36 In Figure 13, it can be seen that, similarly to the other two petitioned wards of Micklefield and Sands, respondents living in Totteridge are considerably more in favour of a separate Parish Council for their area (80%), in comparison to all respondents (57%).

Organisations in the consultation questionnaire

3.37 Of the eight organisations that responded to the consultation questionnaire, 6 were in favour of the creation of a new Town Council, and 2 favoured an alternative option.

Figure 14: Which option do you prefer?

| 6 | 2 |

■ Option 1 - Creation of a new Town Council for High Wycombe
■ Option 3 - An alternative option
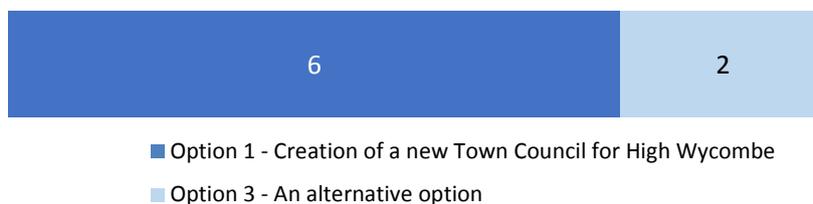
Base: 8 (Count of all organisations)

Reasons for wanting a Town Council

3.38 Of the organisations that responded, the following are specific reasons with quotes in order to give context as to why the respondents preferred a Town Council:

- High Wycombe retaining influence and to not be forgotten about:

> *"I feel a Unitary Council will lose interest in High Wycombe and forget the town just as it's starting to move towards fulfilling its potential. High Wycombe should have a dedicated team focused on creating the town a success as it has come close to failing and does not need to move backwards or stagnate now. I feel very strongly about this as a local business owner and will not be looking to make further investment in the town unless I see it moving forward."*

- For services to be equal across High Wycombe, as well as concerns about the viability of Parish Councils:

> *"By creating one Town Council to serve the town and all unparished areas, this would mean that levels of service across all areas would be the same. It may also be difficult to get enough representatives to stand in individual parishes and to make a meaningful impact on the local issues."*

- To maintain local representation and local democracy:

> *"The formation of a local Council for the unparished area of High Wycombe is very important to maintain democracy and efficiency and to maintain appropriate governance of the growth and expansion of High Wycombe to the borders of Hazlemere."*

- Decisions need to be made at a more local level:

> *"These areas again have their own identities and own issues that need to have focused representatives working on. I feel the biggest issue people have with councils are the frustrations with trying to contact someone who can actual do what you need and is able to get back to you in a reasonable time. Distancing councils; removal of parishes further away can only cause less interest, more delays and removal of services. Those making decisions should be able to see how those decisions directly affects the area whether positively or negatively and be accountable either way."*

Examples of alternatives

3.39 Of the 2 organisations that stated an alternative (option 3), only one gave an actual example, which was having a Town Council for the inner (unparished) areas of High Wycombe, along with a Parish Council for those people who want one in the areas that had petitioned for them. The other simply expressed concerns about the lack of information and how well the new arrangement proposed by the Councillors would work.

Reasons for wanting an alternative:

- Lack of information:

> *"It is not possible to give an answer. We do not know what the extra costs of a Town Council would be. Nor do we know how well the arrangement proposed by our Councillors - just the new Buckinghamshire Council with a Town Committee - will work."*

3.40 7 organisations feel that it is important to have a Town or Parish Council in High Wycombe that either preserves the identity and heritage, promotes the interest of the area, should have democratically elected local representatives, and delivers local services.

Figure 15: If a single new Town Council in High Wycombe is not created, do you think that a separate Parish Council should be created in any or all of the following wards?

Respondent Count (Unweighted)
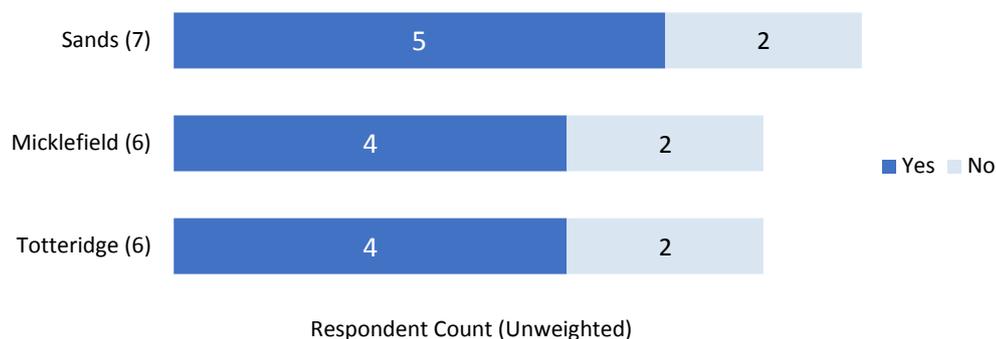
Base: (Numbers shown in brackets)

3.41 If a single new Town Council in High Wycombe were not created, it can be seen in Figure 15 that the majority of organisations think that Parish Councils in Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge should be created.

Figure 16: Examples of reasons for supporting a Parish Council in Micklefield, Sands or Totteridge (multi-response)

Respondent Count (Unweighted)
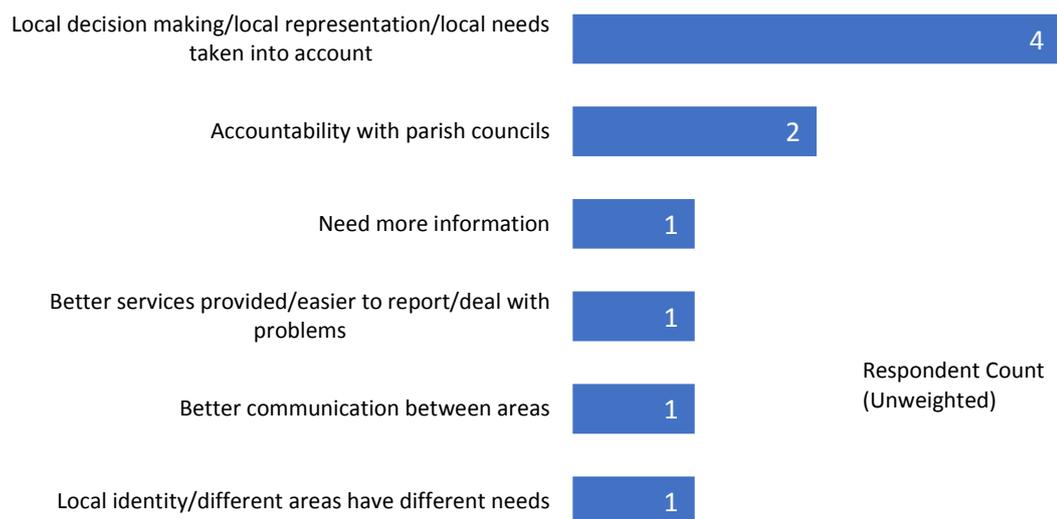
Base: 11 (Organisations that gave reasons for supporting a Parish Council in Micklefield, Sands and/or Totteridge)

3.42 Of those organisations that are in favour of a Parish Council for either Sands, Micklefield or Totteridge, the majority (4) said this would be due to wanting more local decision-making and local needs to be taken into account, with others citing accountability for Parish Councils, better services being provided, and different areas having different needs.

4. Telephone Survey

Introduction

4.1   The purpose of the telephone survey is to achieve a broadly representative sample of telephone interviews with residents of High Wycombe aged 18 and over. The survey was conducted using a quota sampling approach with targets set on the numbers of interviews required by age, gender, working status and ward.

4.2   In total, ORS conducted 803 interviews with residents between 16th August and 22nd September 2019, using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) methodology, with interviews conducted from ORS's social research call centre. A short summary of the proposals was included to be 'read out' within the survey, for the benefit of respondents who had not had the opportunity to read the consultation document or to otherwise find out about the proposals.

Respondent profile

4.3   The extent to which results can be generalised from a sample depends on how well the sample represents the population from which it is drawn, as different types of people may be more or less likely to take part. As previously mentioned, such 'response bias' is corrected by statistical weighting based on a comparison of the demographic characteristics of the respondents with data for the whole population.

4.4   Once weighted, the survey results are broadly representative of the overall population of the ten wards that make up the town of High Wycombe, and they provide a statistically reliable guide to opinions on the proposals to within around +/- 4.6 percentage points (depending on the exact sample sizes and opinion splits on particular questions).

4.5   Tables on the following page show the weighted and unweighted profiles of respondents to the survey.

**Table 11: Telephone survey responses (unweighted and weighted) and resident population by age
(Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)**

| Age	Number of respondents (unweighted count)	% of respondents (unweighted valid)	% of respondents (weighted valid)
18-34	147	18	32
35-44	117	15	21
45-54	191	24	17
55-64	163	20	13
65-74	107	13	9
75+	78	10	8
Total	**803**	**100**	**100**

**Table 12: Telephone survey responses (unweighted and weighted) and resident population by gender
(Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)**

Gender	Number of respondents (unweighted count)	% of respondents (unweighted valid)	% of respondents (weighted valid)
Male	368	46	48
Female	435	54	52
Total	**803**	**100**	**100**

**Table 13: Telephone responses (unweighted and weighted) and resident population by working status
(Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)**

Working Status (Broad)	Number of respondents (unweighted count)	% of respondents (unweighted valid)	% of respondents (weighted valid)
Working	490	61	61
Wholly retired from work	184	23	16
Doing something else	129	16	23
Total	**803**	**100**	**100**

Table 14: Telephone survey responses (unweighted and weighted) and resident population by ward (Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

Ward	Number of respondents (unweighted count)	% of respondents (unweighted valid)	% of respondents (weighted valid)
Abbey	66	8	15
Booker and Cressex	43	5	7
Bowerdean	43	5	7
Disraeli	41	5	8
Micklefield	144	18	7
Oakridge and Castlefield	65	8	12
Ryemead	41	5	11
Sands	146	18	9
Terriers and Amersham Hill	63	8	13
Totteridge	151	19	9
Total	**803**	**100**	**100**

Findings in a graphical format

4.6 Similarly to the Consultation Questionnaire, for simplicity and ease of access, the results of the telephone survey are presented in a largely graphical format. Where possible, the colours used on the charts have been standardised with a 'traffic light' system in which:

Green shades represent positive responses (e.g. 'tend to identify or 'strongly identify)
Red shades represent negative responses (e.g. 'tend to not identify or 'definitely do not identify')

4.7 The numbers on charts are percentages indicating the proportions of residents or respondents who gave a particular response on a given question.

4.8 The number of valid responses recorded for each question (base size) are reported throughout. As not all respondents answered every question, the valid responses vary between questions. 'Don't know' responses have been treated as invalid when calculating percentages. However, large numbers of 'don't knows' in response to particular questions have been indicated.

4.9 In cases where the base size is less than 50, an unweighted count has been used to show the number of responses, rather than a percentage.

Identification and feeling attached with High Wycombe town

Figure 17: How strongly, if at all, do you identify with High Wycombe as a town you feel attached to?
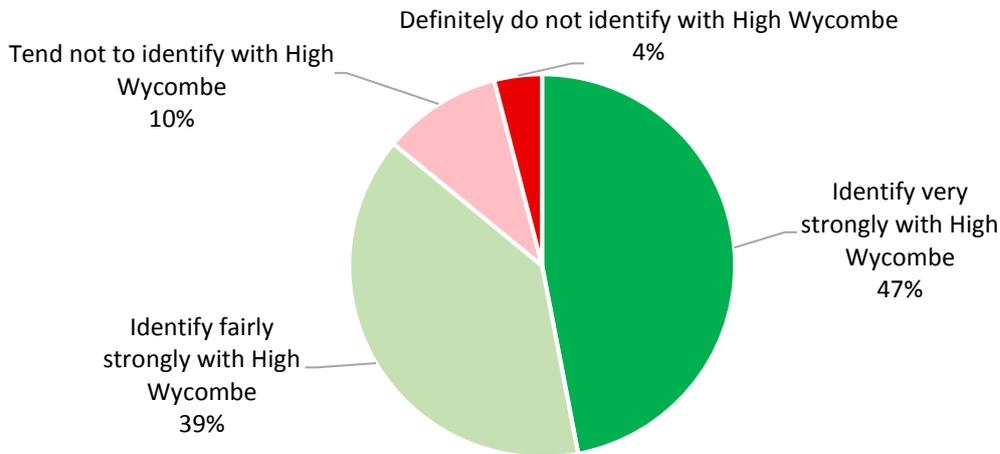
Base: 801 (All residents 801)

4.10 It can be seen in Figure 17 that more than four fifths (86%) identify strongly with High Wycombe town, whereas just over one eighth (14%) do not identify with High Wycombe. Residents who are working or are from an Asian ethnic background, are significantly more likely to identify strongly with High Wycombe, whereas as residents who are of a white ethnic group, are significantly less likely to identify with High Wycombe.

Figure 18: How strongly, if at all, do you identify with High Wycombe as a town you feel attached to (grouped)?
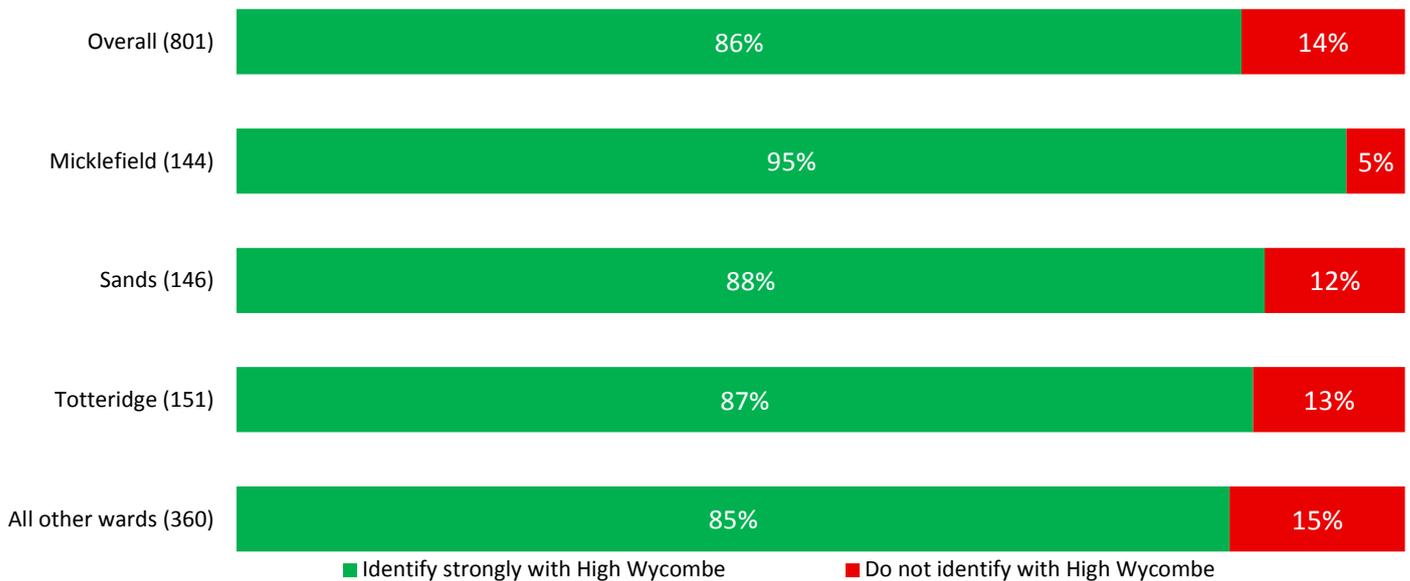
Base: 801 (All residents)

4.11 It can be seen in Figure 18, more than four fifths of the residents in the three petitioned wards (of Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge) also strongly identify with High Wycombe, with residents in Micklefield being significantly more likely to strongly identify with High Wycombe, when compared to other wards.

Identification and feeling attached to other areas in Buckinghamshire

Figure 19: Do you identify with and feel attached to any other area within Buckinghamshire?

Yes 21%	No 79%

Base: 801 (All residents)

4.12 It can be seen in Figure 19 that just over one fifth (21%) of residents of High Wycombe feel attached to other areas of Buckinghamshire, whereas nearly four fifths (79%) do not.

Residents of Micklefield

Figure 20: What other areas do you identify with and feel attached to within Buckinghamshire?

Area	Resident Count (Unweighted)
Beaconsfield	4
Penn	3
Marlow	3
Micklefield	2

Resident Count (Unweighted)
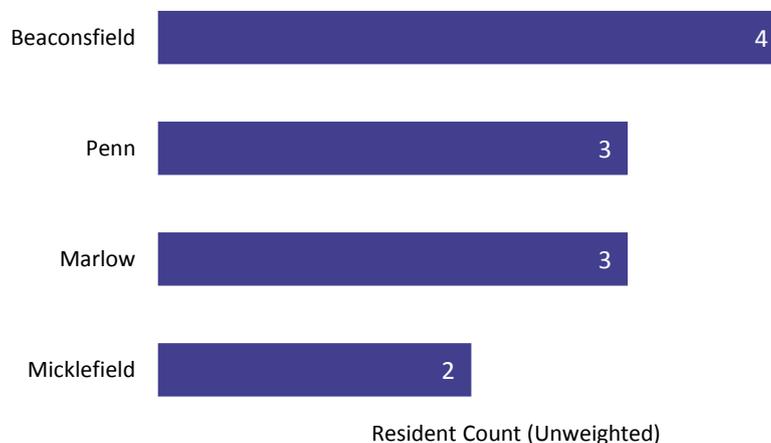
Base: 23 (Residents of Micklefield who feel attached to another area)

4.13 Of those residents in Micklefield who feel attached to other areas of Buckinghamshire, only two stated their own area of Micklefield.

Residents of Sands

Figure 21: What other areas do you identify with and feel attached to within Buckinghamshire?
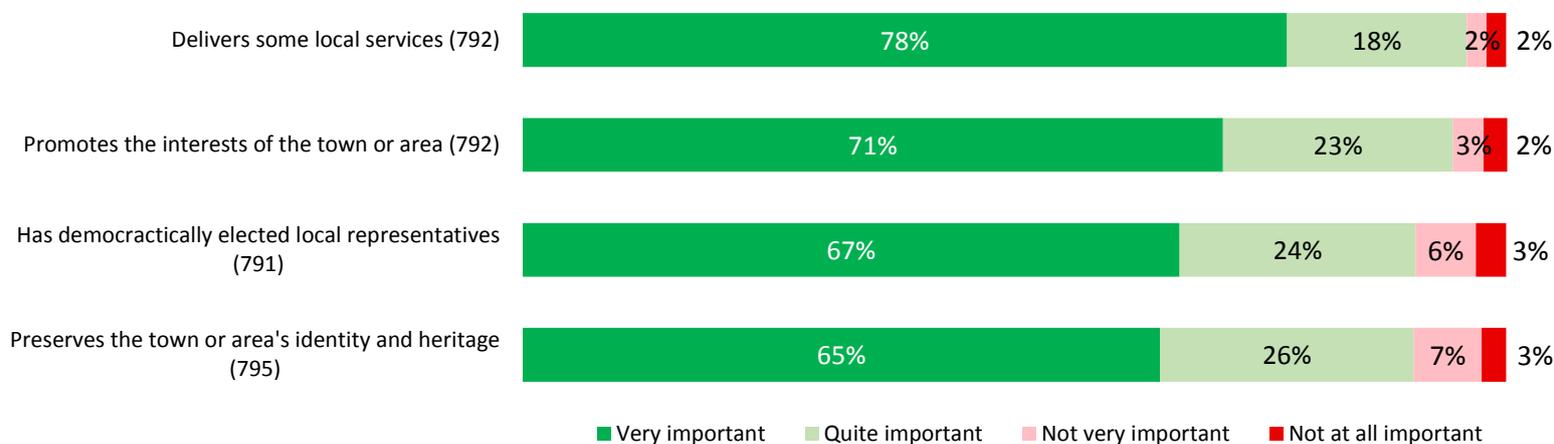

Resident Count (Unweighted)
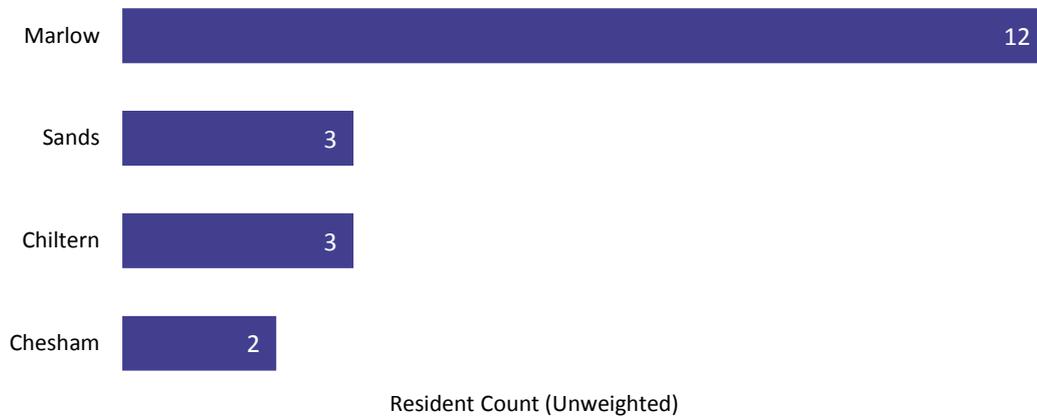
Base: 36 (Residents of Sands who feel attached to another area)

4.14 Of those residents in Sands who said that they feel attached to other areas of Buckinghamshire, 12 said Marlow, whereas only 3 people said their own area of Sands.

Residents of Totteridge

Figure 22: What other areas do you identify with and feel attached to within Buckinghamshire?

Resident Count (Unweighted)
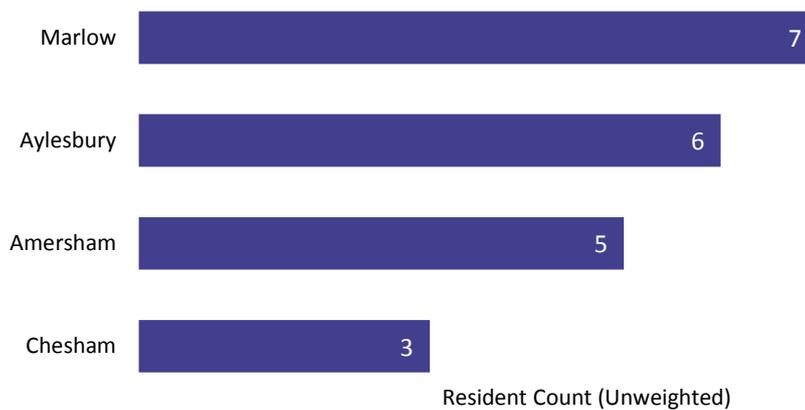
Base: 30 (Residents of Totteridge who feel attached to another area)

4.15 Of those residents in Totteridge who stated that they feel attached to other areas of Buckinghamshire, 7 people said Marlow, with 6 mentioning Aylesbury and none stating Totteridge as an area they felt attached to.

The importance of what a Town or Parish Council does

Figure 23: How important or unimportant is it to have either a Town Council in High Wycombe, or a Parish Council in some areas of High Wycombe that ...?

Question	Very important	Quite important	Not very important	Not at all important
Delivers some local services (792)	78%	18%	2%	2%
Promotes the interests of the town or area (792)	71%	23%	3%	2%
Has democractically elected local representatives (791)	67%	24%	6%	3%
Preserves the town or area's identity and heritage (795)	65%	26%	7%	3%

■ Very important ■ Quite important ■ Not very important ■ Not at all important

Base: (Numbers shown in brackets)

4.16 It can be seen in Figure 23 that more than 95% of residents feel it is important that either a Town or Parish Council should deliver some local services; 95% of residents feel it is important that it promotes the interests of the town; 91% feel it is important that it has democratically elected local representatives; and 91% also feel it is important to have a Town or Parish Council that preserves the town or area's identity and heritage.

Preferred options

Figure 24: Which option would you prefer?
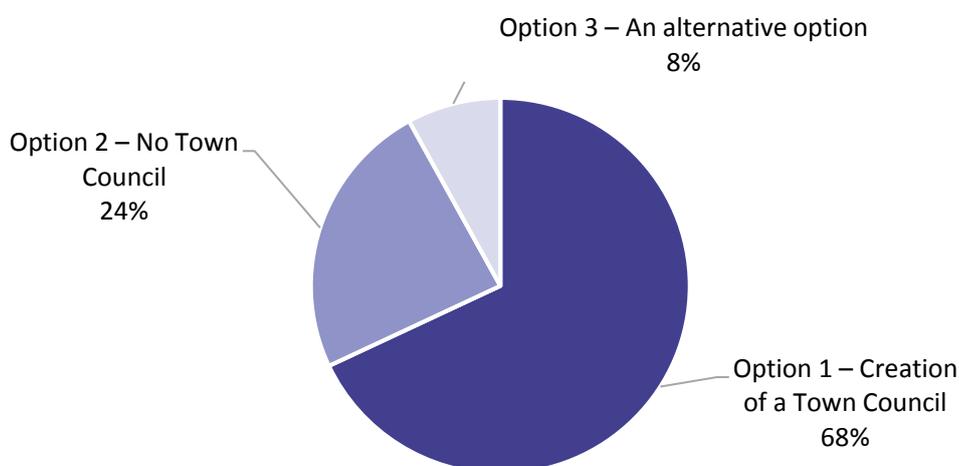
Base: 757 (All residents)

4.17   Looking at Figure 24, the majority (68%) of residents in High Wycombe prefer the creation of a Town Council. Just under one quarter (24%) prefer the option of having no Town Council, and less than one in ten (8%) want an alternative option.

Responses by Area

Table 15: Option responses (weighted) by ward (Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Option	Micklefield (128)	Sands (141)	Totteridge (140)	Other areas (348)
Option 1: A new Town Council for High Wycombe	58%	65%	81%	68%
Option 2: No Town Council	34%	24%	15%	24%
Option 3: An alternative option	8%	11%	5%	8%

Base: (Numbers are in brackets)

4.18   Furthermore, residents in Micklefield are significantly more likely to prefer the option of no Town Council in comparison to other wards; residents in Totteridge are significantly more likely to prefer the option of a Town Council in comparison to other wards.

Alternative options

4.19 Similarly to the Consultation Questionnaire, of the comments that respondents made, it is important to note that many were not actual alternatives. For example, respondents suggested retaining two-tier governance, or to abandon the idea of having a new Buckinghamshire Unitary Council altogether.

4.20 Table 15 below sets out the actual alternatives specified by residents of High Wycombe:

Table 16: Residents who chose Option 3 (an alternative option)

Alternatives	Unweighted Count
Support the creation of individual Parish Councils (non-specific area), as opposed to Town Council	10
Non-specific alternative proposal (including a voluntary run council)	5
Every ward should have a Parish Council	4
Parish Councils/all individual wards should have Parish Councils	3
Parish Council for Sands and a Town Council for the rest of High Wycombe	1

Base 55 (Residents who gave an alternative)

4.21 Below are quotes from some of the alternatives that were stated in Table 15, in order to give some context:

- Support the creation of individual Parish Councils (non-specific area), as opposed to Town Council:

"To have a Parish council [...] Every area has their own specific needs [...] Some things that would work for one area would not work for others. [...] There will be a better sense of community."

- Every ward to have its own Parish Council:

"For each ward to have its own Parish council. I think it would be closer to the people and be run more efficiently. People from each area can phone their local council. It will make the council tenants feel like they are being listened to. If there is one council for the whole of the town, it can be a bit distant. Whereas, if there is one in the local area, people feel like they are doing something for the community. For the three petitioned wards to have a Parish Council, along with a Town Council for the rest of High Wycombe."

"I would like to have Parish Councils for each ward. I hope that if this were the case, a person would have a more personal interest in what is going on and what affects us in that area. It would depend on what [the] charge would be on our council tax bill, as it is expensive now."

- A middle ground:

> *"Where we retain the Mayor and the charter trustees and the building so we do not lose control of the areas of the town and pay a small amount on our tax bill to make that possible if that had to be the case rather than a bigger charge than option 1."*

- A form of local representation, but with no extra cost:

> *"I do want local representation but without the extra charge as we are already paying a very high council tax."*

- Non-specific alternative proposal (including a voluntary run Council):

> *"Why can't we have local representation but in voluntary capacity as we are already running their youth clubs for them."*

Reasons for preferred options

Option 1 – The Creation of Town Council

4.22 Similarly to the consultation questionnaire responses, it is important to note that those comments that simply reflected either general support or concern for the proposals are not included in the table below, as these were not considered actual reasons.

Table 17: Reasons for wanting a Town Council

Reasons for wanting a Town Council	Unweighted Count
Local decision making/local representation/local needs taken into account	280
Local identity/heritage/different areas have different needs	43
Better to have some services provided locally/easier to report/deal with problems	42
Otherwise High Wycombe will be forgotten about/not have enough influence	37
Better Access to local council services/due to distance/travel times etc./need local services	25
Area being too big/too big for just a single Unitary Council	25
More local accountability	12
High Wycombe has a large population so it needs representing	11
Dissatisfaction with the District Council	9
Better communication with a smaller local council	7
If no there is Town Council, worse services will be provided	5
We need to improve local services (i.e. more police, have loser NHS facilities etc.)	1
Disagree with/concerned about the creation of any individual Parish Councils	1
Other: Depends on the cost/don't want to pay more	5
Other: Would like more information on the cost/ still have concerns about the cost	6

Base: 530 (All option 1 responses)

4.23 When looking at the reasons behind why people would prefer the creation of Town Council, it can be seen in Table 16 that the majority found it was because they wanted to have a form of local decision making or local representation:

> *"We need to ensure that there are local services and representation at that council level for High Wycombe. They would be accountable to the people of High Wycombe, as they would be elected by local people and we would be paying for the service."*

4.24 Other reasons for wanting a Town Council were related to keeping a local identity and heritage, and that it would be better to have some services provided locally, as opposed to the Unitary Council.

Option 2 – No Town Council

Table 18: Reasons for not wanting a Town Council

Reasons for not wanting a Town Council	Unweighted Count
Concerns about Council Tax rising as a result/council tax already expensive	40
Extra councils are a waste of money/Buckinghamshire is the cheaper option	27
Disagree with the need for an extra level of local government/any town or Parish Councils	8
Too much duplication/too much bureaucracy/red tape (non specific)	7
Need more information about the costs of a Town Council	6
Dissatisfaction with the District Council and concerns this would translate to a Town Council	6
Easier to manage services/ issues more efficiently in one place (Unitary Council)	5
Support the creation of individual Parish Councils as opposed to Town Council	5
Easier to manage communication with single Unitary Council	3
Prefer a Parish Council for Sands/separate Parish Councils	3
Prefer to wait and see	2
Possible conflict between any new Town Council and the Unitary Council	1

Base: 163 (Option 2 responses)

4.25 It can be seen in Table 18 that the most common reasons for not wanting a Town Council were related to concerns over council tax rising as a result of changes, and that council tax is already expensive; or extra councils are a waste of money and that just having the single unitary for Buckinghamshire is the cheaper option.

4.26 Other reasons with fewer responses included: problems would be easier to deal with if there were no Town Council and that more information is needed to make a decision.

Option 3 –Reasons for an alternative

Table 19: Reasons for wanting an alternative option

Reasons for wanting an alternative option	Unweighted Count
Local decision-making/local representation	19
Council Tax rising as a result of the changes/council tax already expensive	13
Dissatisfaction with the District Council	4
Disagree with having a Town Council for High Wycombe	3
Local identity/heritage/different areas have different needs	3
Better services provided/easier to report/deal with problems	3
Need more information regarding the cost/potential council increase	3
Access to council services/due to distance/travel times etc./need local services	1
Better communication between areas	1
Concerns over too much bureaucracy	1
High Wycombe will otherwise be forgotten about/not enough influence	1
We need to improve road network i.e. maintenance/planning/parking/traffic etc.	1

Base: 55 (Alternative/option 3 responses)

4.27 Table 19 it can be seen that the most common reasons were related to wanting decision-making at a local level and a concern about a rise in council tax as a results of changes.

4.28 Other reasons for wanting an alternative with fewer responses included: simply having dissatisfaction with the current District Council, and that different areas have different needs.

Support for having Parish Councils

Support for having a separate Parish Council for Micklefield

Figure 25: Do you support having a separate Parish Council for Micklefield (if a Town Council is not created)?
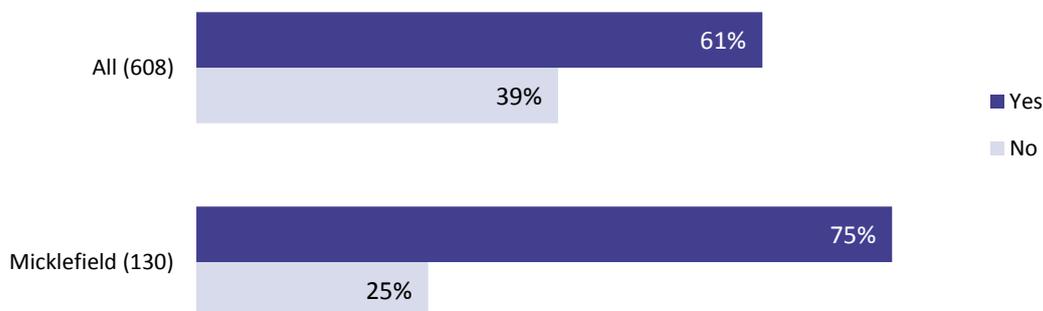
Base: (Numbers shown in brackets)

4.29 When looking at the overall views on whether there should be a Parish Council for Micklefield, it can be seen that under two thirds (61%) are in favour of it. However, this rises to three-quarters when just looking at residents of Micklefield.

Support for having a separate Parish Council for Sands

Figure 26: Do you support having a separate Parish Council for Sands (if a Town Council is not created)?
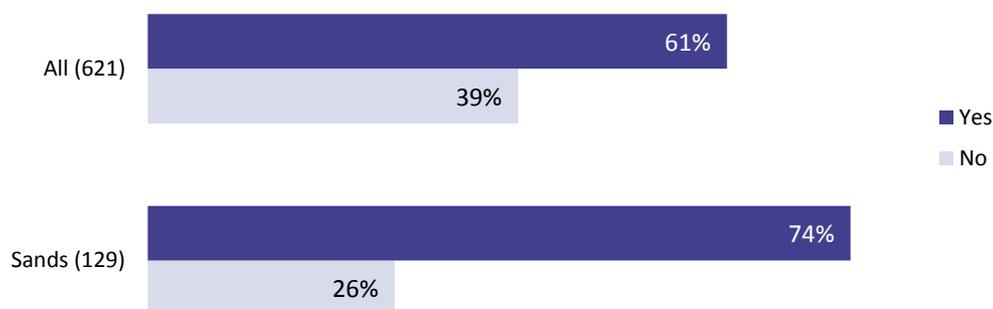
Base: (Numbers shown in brackets)

4.30 Similarly, support for a Parish Council in Sands increases from less than two thirds (61%) when looking all residents, to almost three quarters (74%) when looking at responses from only those who are residents of Sands.

Support for having a separate Parish Council for Totteridge

Figure 27: Do you support having a separate Parish Council for Totteridge (if a Town Council is not created)?
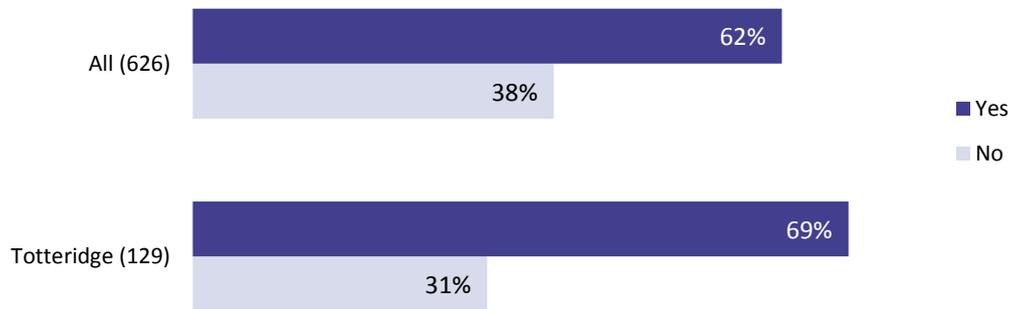
Base: (Numbers shown in brackets)

4.31 When looking at the levels of support for a Parish Council in Totteridge, it can be seen in Figure 27 that, although support is greater from residents of Totteridge (69%) when compared to all residents (62%), the difference is at least 5 percentage points smaller than the other two wards of Micklefield and Sands.

5. Public Focus Groups

Introduction

5.1   This chapter reports the views from the three focus groups, which were held and attended as follows:

Table 20: Break-down of the focus groups

Date and Time	Wards Covered	Number of Attendees
6:30pm – 8:30pm 10th September 2019	Booker & Cressex, Sands, Oakridge and Castlefield	10
6:30pm – 8:30pm 11th September 2019	Abbey, Terriers & Amersham Hill and Disraeli	6
6:30pm – 8:30pm 16th September 2019	Bowerdean, Totteridge, Micklefield and Ryemead	7

5.2   The focus groups were recruited and facilitated by ORS and were designed to be attended by a representative cross section of High Wycombe residents by age, gender, social grade, ethnicity, limiting illness/disability and ward. Participants were recompensed for their time and expenses in attending the meetings, which lasted about two hours.

5.3   Each meeting was framed around a presentation outlining the context and background to the Community Governance Review, which was interspersed with a series of discussions around:

- The extent to which people feel 'attached' to High Wycombe town;

- The importance of Town or Parish Councils in principle; and

- The options for local governance (and any suggested alternatives).

5.4   Participants were encouraged to express their opinions freely and to ask questions throughout, and all three meetings were successful in stimulating wide-ranging and informed debate on the issues under consideration.

Main Findings from the Focus Groups

People feel attached to High Wycombe, but the 'deterioration' of the town affects the level to which they feel pride in it

5.5 Many participants across all three groups said they felt attached to High Wycombe, simply due to their long-standing individual and family ties to the area.

> *"I actually do enjoy living in High Wycombe and I do feel quite attached to it… For us it's been an area that has given a lot to our family… I stay a lot with my aunty* [abroad]*…and on the whole, I always enjoy coming back here; I actually enjoy living here"* (Group 1)
>
> *"All my family lives in High Wycombe; we do enjoy it here… It is a good town"* (Group 1)
>
> *"If you live in an area for a certain amount of time you build up relationships, friends and you have children. It's those ties…which keep people rooted"* (Group 2)
>
> *"All my family have left but I still feel that for me it's very comfortable… I'm very attached to Wycombe…"* (Group 2)
>
> *"I'm very attached; I've lived here all my life. I'm very passionate and proud about the place"* (Group 3)

5.6 However, there was widespread agreement (particularly in the first group for residents of Booker & Cressex, Sands, Oakridge and Castlefield Wards) that the town has deteriorated in many aspects over recent years – and that this has affected both the way people perceive it, and the extent to which they feel pride in living there. Some typical comments were:

> *"I don't feel attached to my hometown any more at all…if I had the money I'd move out…I have older teenagers and I worry for them every day…for their safety"* (Group 1)
>
> *"High Wycombe has got a lot rougher in the last, say, 12 years"* (Group 1)
>
> *"I used to be quite proud to live here. It used to be attractive. I came here in 1995, I didn't plan to stop but there was all the lights on; it looked lovely. Then the next day was a Saturday morning and I went into town: they had a whole marketplace that was buzzing, there were all those little stores. All kind of things you could get… There weren't places to let…there was loads to do. You'd go round and think, 'oh this looks nice'. It felt like people were making money. It was a thriving town. But now everything has been cut back"* (Group 1)
>
> *"I used to enjoy living in High Wycombe…in the last three or four years, I've become less satisfied. I don't like that the way housing is being built in the town. I think it's bad for the future. I think children should have gardens and I think that's increased the density of population… I think it's not as clean as it used to be; not as tidy… I think there are some social tensions in High Wycombe…and I'm looking to move to South Oxfordshire; to the countryside"* (Group 2)
>
> *"I think High Wycombe has gone down significantly in the time I've been here…"* (Group 2)
>
> *"The town is looked down on a bit by the rest of the county. It seems a poor people's town"* (Group 3)

The principle of a Town Council or Parish Councils is generally supported

5.7   Participants across all three groups generally agreed that a Town Council or Parish Councils would be important within a more remote unitary local government structure in:

Representing residents and giving them a voice on a local level

> *"A Parish Council is essential for the future…a voice, locally to raise issues"* (Group 1)
>
> *"I do think it's important having someone look after the area… It's important to have a voice to represent us"* (Group 1)
>
> *"I think it's important to have local representation. Simple as that. Having been very involved with our local* [district] *councillor over a number of matters they have been extremely transparent, brutally honest and have actually really fought…and I feel if that's removed, then our opinions are lost"* (Group 2)
>
> *"I think it's that there's a level of understanding when you're talking to someone about a particular area or problem. Because they're local, they already know… Just having that level of understanding and knowledge of the area and the people and the community is important in making those decisions"* (Group 2)
>
> *"Who are you in a bigger picture, when they're not getting just the Wycombe calls…but they're dealing with a multitude of problems from multiple districts? Where will Wycombe fit in the pecking order?"* (Group 2)
>
> *"Will the one unitary authority have too much power? You need local inputs"* (Group 3)
>
> *"The Town Council will be lobbyists to the unitary authority and unitary authority area committee"* (Group 3)

Protecting High Wycombe's identity and considerable history and heritage

> *"History and heritage, they are all the things that make you proud… It's incredibly important to have something that makes High Wycombe stand out as a local town"* (Group 2)
>
> *"I think Wycombe has a distinct identity and it should be preserved"* (Group 2)
>
> *"I'd like to protect the heritage of the town and protect the nice areas"* (Group 3)

5.8   It was also suggested that a new Town Council would mitigate against the fear that as other areas of Buckinghamshire already have their own, High Wycombe may not have as strong a voice as they will have within the proposed new unitary structure - and this was considered particularly important in light of the perception that Parish and Town Councils can have significant influence over decision-makers within their principal councils.

> *"Every other big town in Buckinghamshire has got a Town Council. Wycombe doesn't. Who's going to speak up for Wycombe? There won't be a voice. So as much as it's an additional expense we need someone to speak up for us"* (Group 1)
>
> *"We don't want to be the only unrepresented area in Bucks"* (Group 3)
>
> *"Do the other towns all have Town Councils? If yes, we need to be on an equal footing"* (Group 3)

5.9 Indeed, for a couple of people in Group 1, this was their only reason for supporting the introduction of a second layer of local government in High Wycombe.

> *"I don't think we have a choice. To have a voice we need one. I think it's something we've been rather forced into"* (Group 1)

5.10 Participants also commented on the need to regenerate and improve the town centre and the potential that this could be a focus for an overarching Town Council particularly - as well as the need to retain a focus on important local services (the organisation of community events for example) that may not be a priority for a unitary authority.

> *"We need to raise the profile of the town and regenerate the areas with local priorities in mind… A Town Council could do regeneration of the town centre"* (Group 3)
>
> *"If you could almost retain what we all love about it which is why we are all still here…so if it can clear up the town, have a better market, more community events"* (Group 2)
>
> *"What people want to see is a general improvement in the environment, appearance, safety; all those issues that are important to <u>you</u>…"* (Group 2)
>
> *"There are far less public events to go to… I think Wycombe is trying with that. They recently had the Desborough Carnival. They are trying to bring the community together… I think that's Wycombe District, so it is important to have a representation following re-organisation"* (Group 2)

5.11 Only a couple of people were expressly opposed to the creation of a new Town Council or Parish Councils on the basis that:

> *"Our councillors will still represent us at the unitary authority level so you can talk to your UA ward councillors" (Group 3)*
>
> *"We have very little influence whatever system we have at the local town level"* (Group 3)

There are concerns around costs, but most would be prepared to pay more providing a new council demonstrates value for money and accountability

5.12 Though some residents had worries around affordability (particularly in the context of potential inefficiencies and likely council tax rises following unitarisation), most said they would be prepared to pay an extra precept for an efficient, value for money and fully accountable new Town Council or Parish Councils.

> *"I am worried about the extra cost, which we don't know, because the total council tax will go up"* (Group 3)
>
> *"My only experience in dealing with local Parish Councillors in my job is that they are not great…they can be very passionate and biased and just focus on one thing, on whatever the hot topic is. My concern is the cost impact because they're the most inefficient, bureaucratic individuals I've ever worked with"* (Group 1)
>
> *"I think what we're all collectively saying is that we would like to get better value for money…"* (Group 1)

> *"I'm quite happy to pay more money providing I'm getting a return that I want"* (Group 2)
>
> *"There has to be complete accountability and transparency. I'm happy to pay if I can see the benefit and I can see it's been accounted for properly. If it gets lost in some governance review after governance review of how to govern, then I'm not interested in paying for it. But we are happy to pay more if there is better lighting; if there is better cleanliness…"* (Group 2)
>
> *"A town council could cost only about £60 a year…but it all depends on how efficient it is"* (Group 3)

5.13 Indeed, the general feeling was that:

> *"It has to be accountable so if nothing is good in two years, then get lost! Because it's public money…if they don't stand up to it, it's like any job. You're on probation and you get fired if you don't do it. You're out"* (Group 2)

There are some concerns around duplication and people's availability and willingness to act as Town Councillors

5.14 A couple of participants were of the view that creating a new Town Council or Parish Councils could result in duplication, representing the unnecessary replacement of one layer of local government with another. The availability (or lack thereof) of enough high-calibre people willing to stand as Town or Parish Councillors was also concern for some:

> *"I'm worried about the potential cost and lack of obvious benefit when we'll still have Area Offices"* (Group 3)
>
> *"In a Unitary Council you still vote for councillors in your area. I would still be talking to them about my local issues anyway. So if there's a Town Council, would that be another layer of people that we're voting for?"* (Group 2)
>
> *"The councillors don't get paid more than minimum expenses…and we don't have a lot of people who want to stand for a lot of these positions…do we end up getting the quality of people representing us that we deserve?"* (Group 2)

There are mixed views on the consultation options

5.15 Opinion in Group 2 (for residents of Abbey, Terriers & Amersham Hill and Disraeli Wards) was unanimously in favour of a Town Council for the whole of High Wycombe - chiefly for reasons of unity, simplicity and because participants considered the alternative (Parish Councils for Micklefield and/or Sands and/or Totteridge Wards) to be unfair in leaving a still significant area of the town unparished.

> *"I feel quite strongly that every parish should have representation and that there should be some channel that allows the local people to have a voice. Why anyone would think that it's right to give that to three and not to the rest; it's bonkers?!"* (Group 2)
>
> *"I'm not in favour of small Parish Councils because I think they encourage clique-ism and minority interests…people with an axe to grind…so if we're going to do it I think we should do it on a town-wide basis"* (Group 2)
>
> *"I'm all for 'let's keep things simple'. Having three parishes doesn't make any sense. It has to be one"* (Group 2)

> *"You should not overcomplicate governance; you should not do it this way in one area and this way in another…keep it simple, keep it direct, keep it transparent"* (Group 2)

5.16 Views were more mixed in Group 1 (for residents of Booker & Cressex, Sands, Oakridge and Castlefield Wards) and Group 3 (for residents of Bowerdean, Totteridge, Micklefield and Ryemead Wards).

5.17 In Group 3, four of the seven participants were in favour of a Town Council for the whole of High Wycombe, again for reasons of fairness; one preferred Parish Councils for Micklefield and/or Sands and/or Totteridge wards only (because of the "closer links" it would achieve between council and community); and the remaining two opted for no Town Council or Parish Councils.

> *"I don't want to be left out and left on the side without a Town Council in High Wycombe"* (Group 3)
>
> *"Parish Councils have closer links with local communities"* (Group 3)

5.18 Opinion was most divided in Group 1, though. When presented with the consultation options, three of the ten participants favoured a Town Council for the whole of High Wycombe for a similar main reason as reported above: representation and fairness.

> *"I do want a Town Council because there'll be representation for all Wycombe and not just those three wards"* (Group 1)
>
> *"I think it might be a good idea, the larger Town Council, because then at least you'll have someone to represent each area"* (Group 1)

5.19 Another four (including all participants from Sands and Booker & Cressex) said that they would prefer what they considered more 'local' and 'accessible' Parish Councils, ideally for all ten High Wycombe wards.

> *"I wouldn't be pleased with a Town Council at all. I mean, if you've got issues in your local area…you've got no one who is going to take it up. Believe you me, you'll want a Parish Council for someone to go to and get it sorted"* (Group 1)
>
> *"I'm going to go with parish. I like the idea of knowing that someone I want to talk to or need to talk to could be within walking distance"* (Group 1)
>
> *"I'm strongly in favour of having Parish Councils for every ward because then we will know who to contact to get things done"* (Group 1)
>
> *"You haven't there the option that I want. I want someone that would look after Booker specifically. I don't want the Town Council making laws for me where I am because they don't have any understanding"* (Group 1)
>
> *"I strongly think that local people should be in charge of their area… The local people know what is going on and what is best for their area; if you put them in a room they tell you a hundred things that not everyone in the town hall would be interested in. I'm strongly in favour of a Parish Council…people will regret it in the future because if you vote for a town, your parishes have gone. If you vote for three parishes you can always try to increase it in the future to different places but if you dismiss them now you'll never get them back"* (Group 1)

5.20   Of these four, two said they would support a Town Council if it did not prove possible to parish the whole of the town.

> *"My wish would be for a Parish Council but a Town Council if that's the only option…"*   (Group 1)
>
> *"I would say the lesser of the evils is the Town Council. We need that voice. In an ideal world I would probably go for a Parish Council for every parish but up to three? It's all or nothing"* (Group 1)

5.21   The remaining two, though, chose Parish Councils for Micklefield and/or Sands and/or Totteridge wards only as their next best option, reasoning that this might prove a catalyst for other wards to establish their own local councils.

> *"I think a Parish Council for every parish but if not three is better than nothing…perhaps there would be a knock-on effect and Booker & Cressex might get a Parish Council as well"* (Group 1)

5.22   Of the three remaining participants, two felt unable to make a firm decision at the end of the session and thus chose to be recorded as 'don't knows' - and the third did not consider it necessary to establish any kind of local council, but had been somewhat persuaded by the views of others that they could 'live with' a Town Council for the whole of High Wycombe.

> *"I would go for the third option, zero change. But I think after hearing today I would also consider the Town Council…anything more than that is over kill and just bureaucracy and red tape"* (Group 1)

The role of the Mayor and Charter Trustees within any new Town or Parish Council structure should be considered

5.23   On a final note, residents in the first group (for residents of Booker & Cressex, Sands, Oakridge and Castlefield Wards) debated the merits of retaining the Mayor and Charter Trustees if it is decided to establish a new Town Council for High Wycombe. It was ultimately agreed that the Mayor should be retained providing they perform a role that is more than ceremonial (as Leader of the Council for example) – as should the Charter Trustees, providing they communicate the work they do and the benefits they offer more widely.

> *"I grew up in a town* [where] *we had a Town Council as well as a District Council. The Leader of the Town Council was the mayor which is more traditional. Then you think they're doing something"* (Group 1)
>
> *"I agree with that because they're more responsible for what they do"* (Group 1)
>
> *"The problem is because the mayor himself doesn't really have power like mayors do elsewhere, it's seen as a bit of a fat cats pay off for someone"* (Group 1)
>
> *"I think maybe they should do more in terms of comms and communicating what benefit they do. I do know they are good representatives and understand the town's values. Previously, there was an old community centre where a lot of the older generation went to and that was going to be closed down. They were doing a lot to bring investment in to actually save it and they actually succeeded"* (Group 1)

6. Written Submissions

Introduction

6.1 During the formal consultation process, six organisations and individuals provided written submissions. The contributors were:

- Downley Parish Council

- West Wycombe Parish Council

- Councillor Brian Pearce (town ward member, Booker & Cressex)

- Councillor Darren Hayday (for West Wycombe, including Sands)

- Tony Garner (Chairman of the Pimms Action Group)

- A resident of High Wycombe

6.2 ORS has read all the written submissions and summarised them in this chapter.

Submissions from local authorities

Downley Parish Council

6.3 It is the unanimous view of Downley Parish Council that Downey's boundaries should remain unchanged and as an unexpanded parish. Downley is a discrete village with definite boundaries that are defined, not just by the Conservation Area & Common, but also other tangible assets such as the Downley School. To combine Downley with another ward would dilute that institution and cause confusion locally. Downley Parish would rather wait until there is a full Boundary Commission review. Downley Parish Council also believes the financial impact of a precept would impact Disraeli disproportionately. It is Downley Parish Council's firm view that there should be no change in the current boundaries or responsibilities.

West Wycombe Parish Council

6.4 West Wycombe Parish believes in having a tier of democracy below that of District and County Councils, and that the value of Parishes or Town Council should increase when Buckinghamshire becomes a Unitary Authority in April 2020. High Wycombe is alone amongst the major towns in the new Buckinghamshire Council area in not having a Town or a series of Parish Councils. As a result, West Wycombe Parish is 'wholeheartedly' in support of the establishment of a localised tier of government for the unparished area of High Wycombe.

Submissions from Councillors

Councillor Brian Pearce (Booker & Cressex Ward)

6.5   Councillor Brian Pearce feels very strongly that High Wycombe should have a Town Council providing a voice for local affairs. He believes that a Town Council would have the influence, the technical ability and the money to get things done throughout the town, and particularly in the centre. He believes that it would be ludicrous for people from Buckingham, Burnham and Bourne End to be able to influence what happens in the town of High Wycombe. Mr Pearce strongly believes a Town Council would be much more beneficial and more advantageous than individual parishes as the latter have no real influence, and may fragment High Wycombe into smaller units. It also concerns him where the boundaries would be set for a Parish Council. In conclusion, Councillor Pearce would like to see a High Wycombe Town Council for the whole of the town and no parishes.

Councillor Darren Hayday

6.6   Councillor Hayday believes that High Wycombe has lacked investment and care over the last 16 years, mainly because it has lacked a Town Council or because many of its areas within High Wycombe remaining many have remained unparished. He believes Parish Councils are more able to give communities the resources they need to flourish; and that although there is already a Residents Association, there should also be a Parish Council in Sands.

Submissions from other representatives / membership bodies

Pimms Action Group

6.7   Pimms Action Group does not believe there should be any further layers of bureaucracy in the form of Parish Councils. It believes this would defeat the objective of the proposed implementation of the new Unitary Council to streamline and reduce councillor numbers and administration costs. A Town Council would create a more unified representative body of experienced, elected councillors with more experience of dealing with contentious issues – and would be elected by all Wycombe residents, in contrast to small, fragmented Parish Councils.

Resident Submissions

6.8   A resident had a number of queries and concerns: First, whether any assets belonging to the current Wycombe District Council and High Wycombe Town Committee, such as the Charter Trustees, would be kept for the benefit of Wycombe when the new Buckinghamshire Council comes into existence in 2020. Second, whether residents of High Wycombe will be paying more in council tax as a result of any new Town or Parish Councils in High Wycombe. Third, that any archival records relating to the history of the Mayoralty and the Charter of Trustees should remain in High Wycombe and not transfer to the new Buckinghamshire Council offices. Fourth, the length of time it will take to specify the responsibilities of a Town Council or Parish Councils. Furthermore, the resident questions why the Charter Trustees must be dissolved if a new Town Council is created in High Wycombe.

7. Conclusions

7.1   The vast majority of residents and respondents identify strongly with High Wycombe as a town they feel attached to, and also consider it important to have a Town Council for High Wycombe or Parish Councils for parts of High Wycombe that:

- Promotes the interests of the town;

- Delivers some local services;

- Has democratically elected local representatives; and

- Preserves the town or area's identity and heritage.

7.2   When asked, a majority of respondents and residents said they would prefer a Town Council for the whole of High Wycombe, primarily for greater local decision-making and better local representation. However, a sizable minority did not support the creation of a Town Council, disagreeing with the need for an additional tier of local government and expressing concern about financial inefficiency and rising council tax.

7.3   Many alternatives were proposed, often involving a combination of a Town Council for High Wycombe covering a few central wards together with Parish Councils for other wards that want one, or individual Parish Councils for all 10 wards.

7.4   Support for the creation of Parish Councils in the petitioned wards of Sands, Micklefield and Totteridge was notably larger from residents and respondents living in those wards than overall.

7.5   In the focus groups, residents generally agreed that a form of local government such as a Town Council or Parish Councils was desirable. There were again some concerns around cost and affordability, though most would be prepared to pay an extra precept for a new Town Council (or series of Parish Councils) that is fully accountable and offers value for money.

7.6   Only one focus groups was unanimous in wanting a Town Council: some residents in the other two groups were more in favour of Parish Councils for Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge at the least, and ideally for all ten High Wycombe Wards. This, they felt, would provide even 'closer links' between council and community.

7.7   Finally, it is worth noting that, despite strong efforts by WDC to raise awareness of the consultation, the level of response, though respectable, is not huge - particularly to the consultation questionnaire. This may give some indication that the public does not consider the creation of a new Town Council for High Wycombe or Parish Councils for parts of High Wycombe to be of utmost priority.

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