

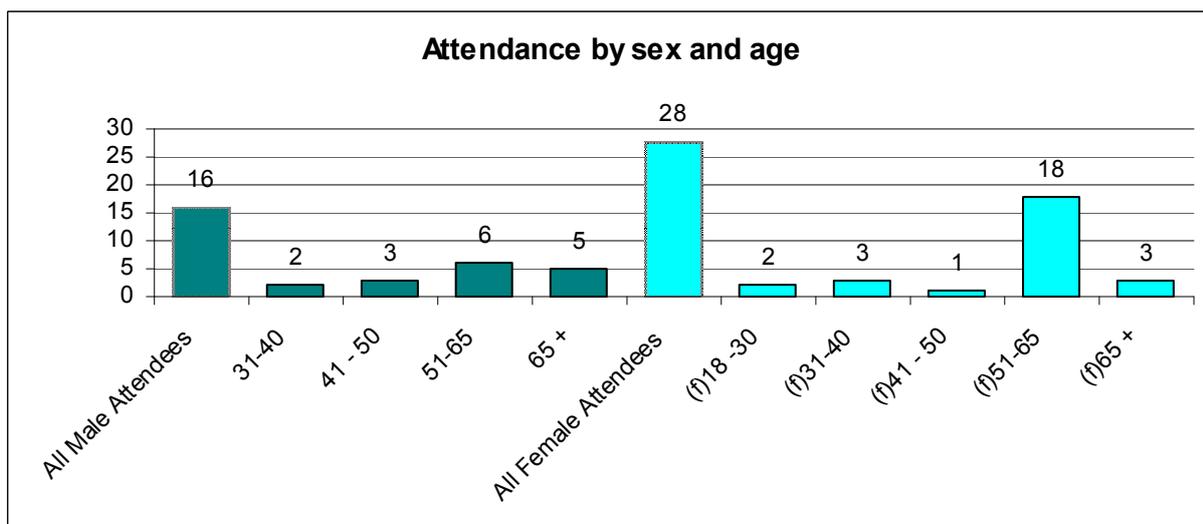
Community Conversations Report: New Mills

Introduction

The purpose of the Community Conversation was to provide an opportunity for New Mills residents to inform the High Peak Borough Council about what they liked and disliked about their area and what their hopes were for the future of their town up to 2026. This discussion was set against the background of previous Core Strategy consultations which had suggested that there could be some growth within New Mills with the extent and siting of any proposal open for discussion. Given the change in government policy on regional plans the High Peak Borough Council saw this is an opportunity to get a better understanding of the views of New Mills residents. A booklet was produced that outlined the key issues facing the borough with regard to increasing population figures whilst summarising the key attributes of New Mills. This was intended to inform the debate on the night and more generally within the community.

The session format was deliberately interactive and used group discussions around simple, open questions to elicit a debate about the future of New Mills. It also included the use of a large base map with attendees encouraged to identify areas that were special to them and areas where there could be change. 50 people attended 44 of whom completed a form to tell us their age and economic status. The figures below show the age and working status of those people. 28 women and 16 men completed the forms, 3 of them had children under 18; 50% of them were retired and over 51.

Figure 1. Attendees



There is clearly an issue about the extent to which this was a conversation with the whole community given the lack of representation from younger people, no delegates (with the exception of a toddler) were under 18 and only 2 out of 43 (6%) were under 30.

Format of Community Conversation

The format for each of the Community Conversations was the same, each having four distinct parts:

Part 1 – Introduction & Presentation

Part 2 – Residents Likes & Dislikes

Part 3 – Put it on the Map

Part 4 – Final Questions

New Mills Part 1 & Part 2

The session began with a brief presentation pulling out key points in the booklet to ensure everyone had the same knowledge about why this consultation was being held (i.e. informing the draft core strategy by identifying people’s priorities for the future development of the area). The focus of the evening was however, ensuring that local people had their say about what they thought about their area.

The following questions were asked:

What do you like about New Mills?

What do you dislike about New Mills?

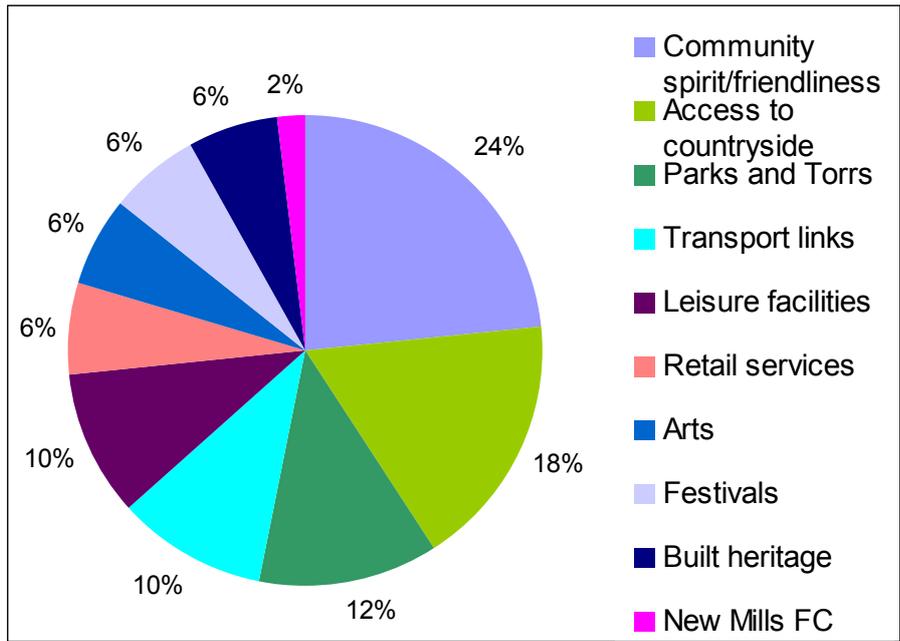
What needs to change?

What needs protecting?

How do you see your area in the future?

Attendees were given time to discuss these questions in groups then all comments were recorded on post it notes, put on sheets and displayed. The results for the questions were as follows:

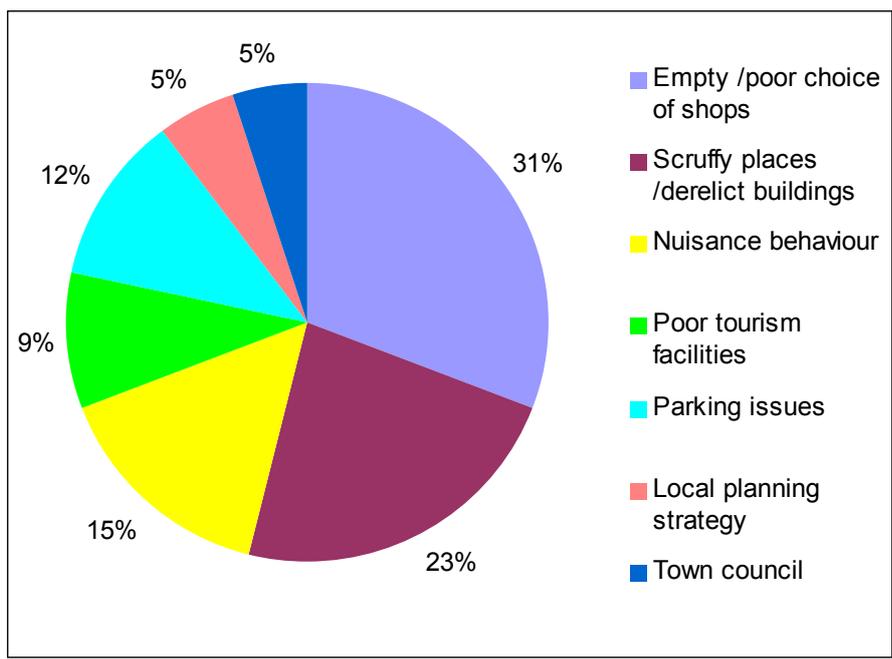
Figure 2: What do you like about New Mills?



Summary

There is a lot to like about New Mills; people at the Community Conversation supplied over 130 responses to this question. As Figure 1 illustrates, the friendly and supportive community score very highly, closely followed by their appreciation of the countryside around New Mills and open spaces within the town. The Torrs are specifically mentioned 11 times. The arts culture is also specifically mentioned in 6% of responses, while Leisure Services attract 10%. Typical comments; “A beautiful place, lovely countryside”, “ good leisure and sports facilities”, “The Torrs, a mixture of natural and man made beauty”, “New Mills Arts scene and festivals”. Other comments celebrate the voluntary sector contribution to community life, and the quality of the buildings in the town centre.

Figure 3: What do you dislike about New Mills?

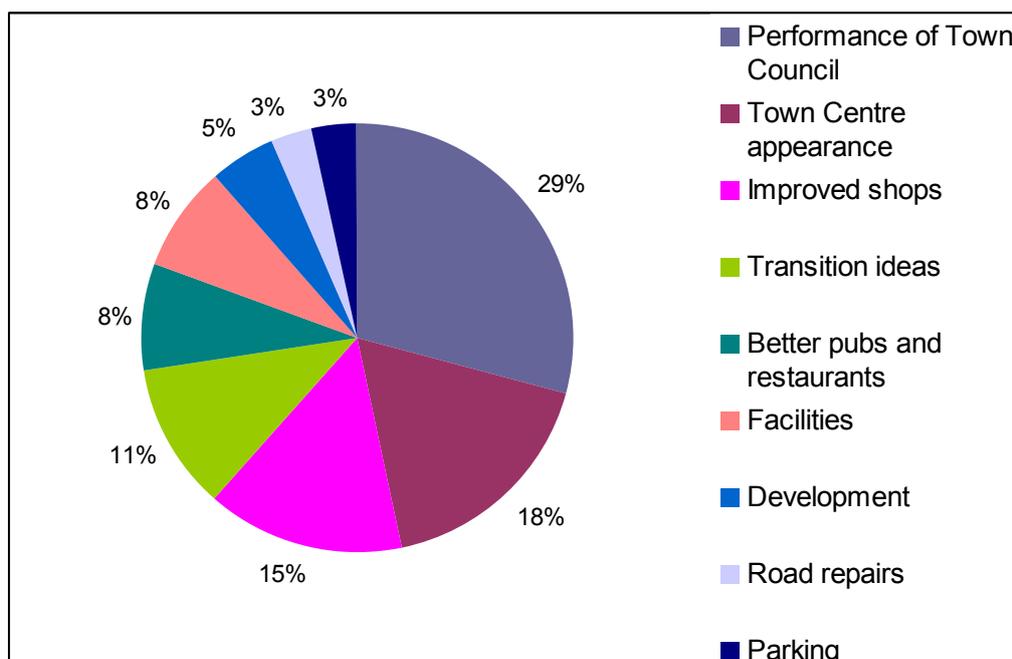


Summary

As Figure 3 suggests, the range and condition of shops in the town are a source of discontent, and this along with the 'scruffy' state of parts of the town and some of its buildings builds a picture of disappointment in the town centre, set against the potential of the built heritage remarked upon in answers to Q1. Comments include; "The old church next to the Town Hall is shabby", "Swizzells - a blight on the landscape, drags down Albion Rd". Nuisance behaviour is the next most frequently commented upon category with litter, "smoking outside pubs", "drinking on the streets", and "petty vandalism" all commented upon. However these particular comments represent only 15% of responses which is fewer than might be expected in many towns. Problems with car parking attract 12% of the responses. eg "lack of parking at the Doctors, used by walkers etc", "Dangerous parking on Hyde Bank Rd".

A small group of comments relate to the performance of the Town Council, and governance; a subject that reappears in answers to later questions, and will be covered in the analysis below.

Figure 4: What needs to change?

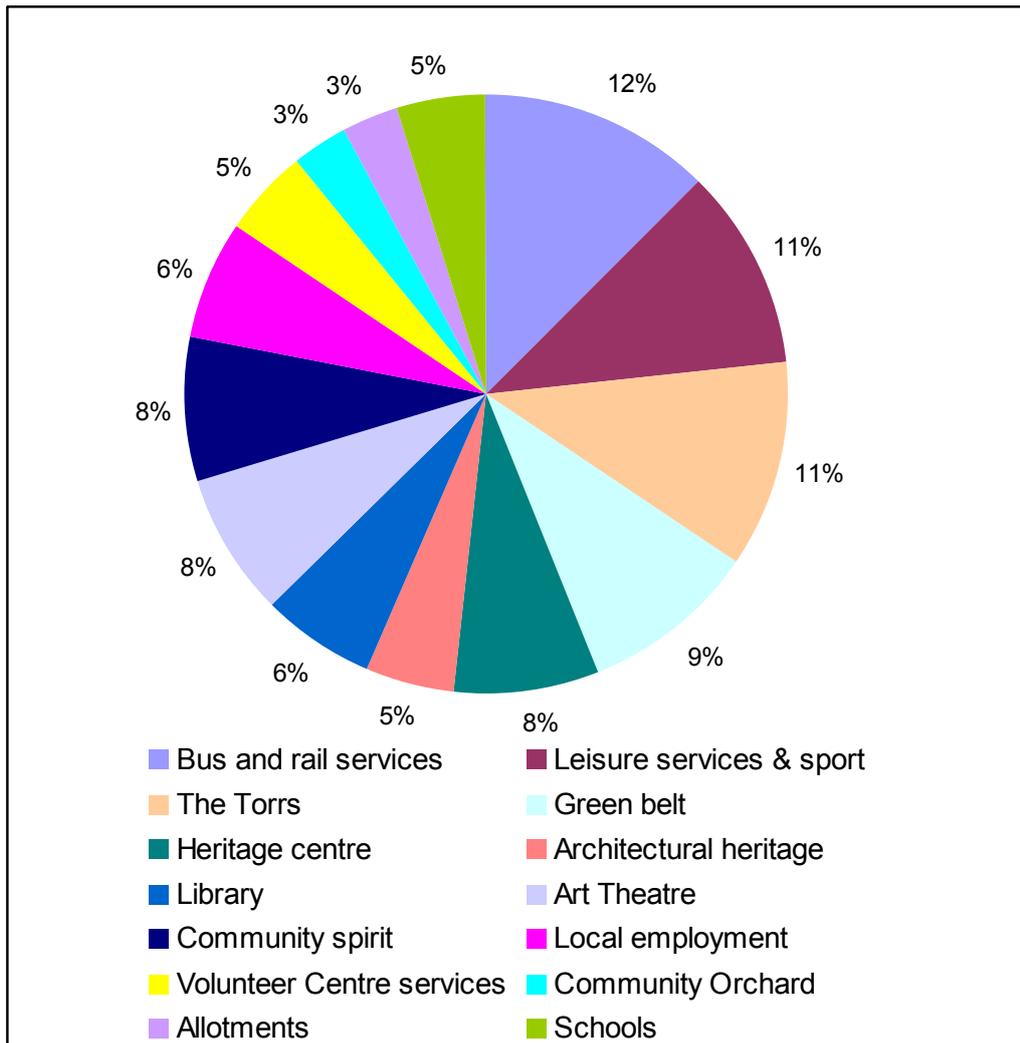


Summary

Over a quarter of the responses to this question address the governance of the town and in particular the role of the Town Council. Several people made a plea for better communication and more involvement of local people in decision making, while others criticise the town council for "squabbling amongst themselves" and "looking after their own interests". One suggestion for better leadership; "a Town Mayor?" and "Town Council do not have leadership" all these comments illustrate a sense that the Town Council is not meeting residents' expectations.

The next most popular topic is physical aesthetic improvements to the town centre, with some buildings mentioned several times eg. Swizzells and the redundant church next to the Town Hall.

Figure 5: What needs protecting?



Summary

As noted earlier; there is a lot to like about New Mills, reflected in the range of community facilities and services, landscape and built heritage that appear in the responses to this question. Most numerous are the public transport services, road and rail, The Torrs, the green belt and the Heritage Centre. Many other individual features and services collect 3 – 5 comments each as seen above.

Q5 - What is your vision for New Mills up to 2026?

The responses are reproduced below (*my headings*):

Housing

- Cheaper, decent housing with better ‘green’ eco credentials
- Brownfield sites (Old Mills at Newtown and canal area and derelict church site) used for housing
- Protect the green belt
- Houses for living in not for profit
- More mixed housing

Stay compact, don't sprawl
Contain development – no sprawl
Heritage buildings restored

Parking and public transport

Free parking in the centre for residents
Parking for both train stations
Free public transport

Shops and shopping

Local shops serving local people to remain
A vibrant shopping centre
Re-vitalise the High Street through encouraging a wide range of good value/decent quality local shops and services run by local businesses

Community

Build on positives
Maintenance of the community
More integrated community
Good mix in community

Planning

A vibrant centre for heritage conservation and townscape development
Integrated internet info flow
Prioritise areas of deprivation, e.g. Children's Centre only used by middle class people, no infrastructure in east New Mills, only one shop and a chip shop
Give planning development and control the teeth to deal with infringements
Support for local schools, stop migration x 2
&
That the town will have a full accessible dentist

Transition ideas

More sustainable local energy, food production
Transition towns
LETS scheme
Twinning with developing countries

Develop tourism

More tourism
Green tourism developed further
A tourist centre for promotion of High Peak
Develop tourism plan 'Walker Welcome' campsite, Hostel (old Job Centre?)
A tourist destination – Swizzels Visitor Centre – better marketing in guide books
New Mills will have developed itself as a tourist area with its own usp

Summary

As may be seen above, there are ambitions for New Mills to become a greener, smarter and more vibrant town and tourist destination. Ideas on housing and development are clear;

Final Questions

Focusing on housing, transport and employment; the last activity considered the future of New Mills on a topic basis. Attendees were encouraged to move to marked tables to comment freely on the following topics; Housing, Transport, Employment and Free-thinking (other comments). The responses are transcribed below.

Housing

- Affordable housing!
- Leave green field site alone
- Keep the green belt
- Concerned about green belt land being used for housing (off Hayfield Road) due to the environmental impact and visual amenity and also the access onto a road that is already busy
- Only use brown field sites for new buildings
- Still quite a lot of buildings that can be turned into modest housing – but do people want them/can they afford them?
- Starter flats for single people, warden assisted homes for older people
- Site suggestions shown on planning map are preventing people from selling their property. FACT!!
- Can we plan for mixed housing - social amongst privately owned, family next to adapted for disabled
- Housing for local people – provide assistance
- Look at all the other strategies first – who will want to live in New Mills if we haven't got our entire act together?

Housing Summary

There are ideas expressed about the purpose of housing; starter flats, and sheltered housing, but the majority of the comments concern siting. The evidence from the base map, and these comments demonstrate a clear preference for sparing the open fields around the town in favour of developing brownfield sites nearer the centre.

Transport

- Make the bus station more user friendly – dangerous when several buses are there
- The TM Travel bus service Chesterfield-Tideswell, Tideswell to Manchester should be kept, there are only 2 a day!
- New bus service to Manchester now the 67 has died
- Improve bus routes for pupils to come to New Mills School, it's easier for A6 pupils to go to Chapel!
- Bring back bus services (e.g. 361) from Glossop to Stockport via the A6
- 199 bus to come to centre and not just at 6 am
- 199 should always call at New Mills Heritage Bus Station x 2
- Need the 199 bus service to come into centre of New Mills x 2
- New Mills town service bus needs protecting and extending
- Need a town bus service along Spring Bank
- Protect the bus pass x 3

- Develop park and ride at New Mills Newtown Station (more car parking needed at this train station) x 3
- Cheaper fares
- Removal of Derbyshire concession by Northern Rail is poor
- Poor rolling stock on Northern Rail
- Protect the half fare on trains with Gold Card
- Keep the Derbyshire train book – it is very useful!
- Need half hour train service on both lines
- More trains and cheaper fares for those who work in Stockport, Manchester etc, especially times 7.30-9 am and 4.30-6 pm
- Sort out the chaos and waste of parking places below Central Station – don't shirk this one
- Car parking should be FREE in New Mills (at least for 2 hours)

Transport Summary

The most frequent comments are about particular bus and train services, highly valued but still with room for improvement. Parking in town is also an issue expressed here. On the whole the message is that people are appreciative of the town's public transport connections, but taken along with answers to earlier questions, there is an issue about coordinating the various services, particularly the train timetables for the two stations.

Employment

- There is a need to try and attract new businesses to the area
- Another area where need a vision and co-ordination – units vacant (Garrison Works, etc)
- Need to develop (subsidised?) starter units for new small businesses
- Local initiatives to promote internships – role of Town Council?
- Need a decent 6th form – not a rapidly declining one
- Stimulate growth of social enterprises for local services
- Young school age pupils going out of town for their education – fosters out-of-town thinking for employment/careers
- Courses for practical courses (plumbing, brick laying, etc) to build up key skills
- 6th form is excellent, lack of pupil numbers causes decline!
- Look at setting up craft areas
- Encouragement of skills/....., skills banks, volunteering
- Create initiatives to stimulate investment, e.g. shops – people will shop even in a recession!
- Bring back local careers guidance/job centre services
- More encouragement for young people to volunteer and develop their CVs

Employment Summary

There are some ideas here for developing new businesses, but they are not linked especially to the recurrent theme of developing and marketing New Mills as centre for tourism, nor to the ideas expressed on renewable energy and the green economy.

Free Thinking

- Pubs not on the map, Swizzels, no café in High Lea Park

- Involve young people in developing the vision so they can take forward as they grow
- Survey why people leave New Mills and what would keep them here
- Find ways to celebrate indigenous (hp) population, most of us here tonight appear to be immigrants
- Plan for older people with loud voices!
- Swizzels visitor centre
- High speed IT communication network
- Support community enterprise, in particular an excellent pub/restaurant
- Market New Mills to Manchester commuters – raise its reputation
- Development of water power
- New Mills needs a thought through vision as to how it can develop its potential as a green tourism destination
- Lift local image of town to encourage aspiration, innovation and investment
- Young people need to be treated with respect and more service provision to cater for their needs, they are currently disenfranchised and behave accordingly
- There is an opportunity to consider and support the development of New Mills as a walking town destination – www.walkersarewelcome.org.uk
- National Lottery Funding to capital fund High Lea Hall full refurb' and set up long term enterprises to fund café, crèche, restaurant, etc
- New Mills to be a transition town (currently a nascent group)

Free Thinking Summary

Some of the ideas in this section are recapped elsewhere, but taken as a whole they articulate a vision of sorts; “enterprise, aspiration, innovation, investment”.

Concluding Remarks

The evening was well attended, lively and generated a great many responses. Those attending took the opportunity to express their views in a fair and open forum. The major messages from the community conversation are;

People in New Mills are proud of their town and appreciate its architectural heritage and setting on the fringes of the Peak District. The more recent developments in the Torrs are also a source of pride. The town has good sports & leisure facilities, parks and also a developing tradition of arts and festivals. There is a strong sense of community.

However there is also a sense of a decline in the shops and the employment opportunities, and a desire for a 'spring clean' of the town centre, which is perceived as scruffy in parts, and a more general feeling that the town is projecting a down at heel image. This feeds into the ambitions people express for a more vibrant and attractive town with a tourist appeal.

The people attending did not feel well led or represented by the Town Council.

There are some clear messages on housing and development; the greenfield land around New Mills should not be built upon, especially as there are many brownfield sites within the town envelope that are in need of development.

One group promoted the concept of a transition town with more emphasis on localism - local food, local energy and local shops.

New Mills has good transport links but they are not always coordinated, there is some frustration at the timetables of bus and rail links which make connections difficult.

One quote perhaps captures some of the mood of the evening and a key message:
"New Mills needs a thought through vision as to how it can develop its potential as a green tourism destination"

Joe Dugdale
Rural Action Derbyshire
August 2011.

Appendix 1.

Photographs from the Community Conversation at New Mills



