

Listening to Birstall



Listening to Birstall - 16th September to 4th October 2019

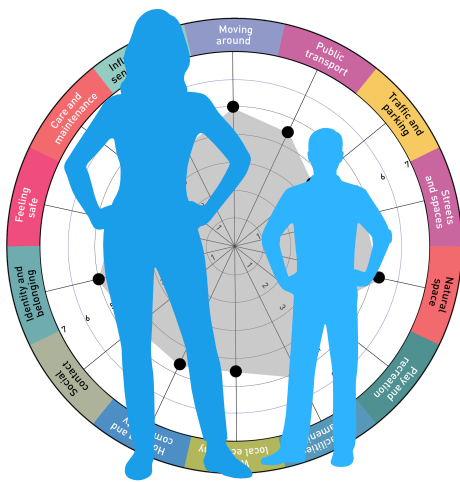
What we did

Staff from local organisations including Kirklees Council and volunteers from the community talked to local people about what life is like in Birstall, Fieldhead, Cambridge Road and Nova. We used a tool called the “Place Standard”. This is a way of helping to get conversations going about any place (it could be your street, neighbourhood or town), by using some simple questions. Councillors, volunteers and staff will use what we learn to help create an action plan, including ideas for how to improve the local area.

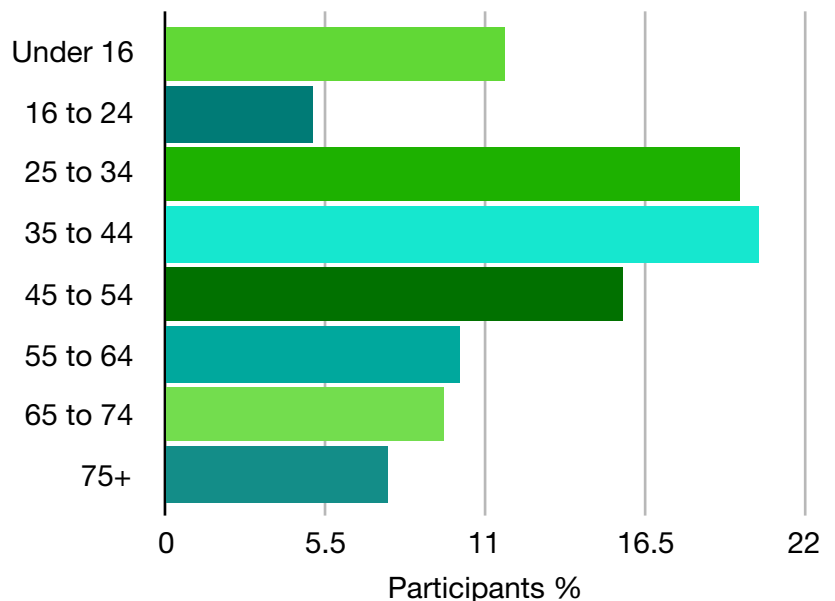
Who participated?

A team of 25 volunteers talked with people in many local places, including Birstall Library, Birstall Methodist Church, St Peter’s Church, Fieldhead Primary Academy and Birstall and Howden Clough Community Centres. We talked with local groups such as Age UK, Slimming World, Knit and Natter and the Job Club. We also had conversations at cafes, bus stops, shops and local businesses, and on doorsteps. 62 people participated online.

- 230** citizens took part in the conversations
- 197** Place Standard assessments were completed

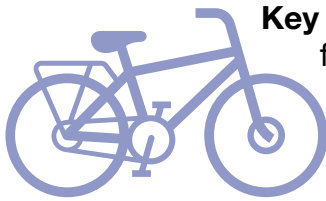


Female 64% **Male 21.3%**
Other / unknown 14.7%



What participants said

Moving around



Key issues: Participants talked about there being a village feel, and said that places are easy to get to. They generally feel safe. Parking was probably the most commented on, with issues including cars parked on kerbs, double parking, not enough parking and parking outside schools. Participants also want to see

the pavements and footpaths around Birstall being improved. Issues include overgrown footpaths, poor lighting, nuisance bikes, wheelie bins left on pathways and wheelchair access. Some improvements have been made to pavements in the area, but people are concerned about this work not being of good quality. People would like pedestrian crossings in various places. Potholes and poor road surfaces are a common concern. The roads are busy, too many people are ‘cutting through’ the estates and the town centre on an evening and there are some issues with dangerous driving. There are also a lack of safe cycle routes. The cycle route that heads towards Batley is difficult to get to and then requires cycling on a dangerous and busy road to get into Batley.



Suggestions from participants: There should be work done on the route to the school at the top of Nova Lane. Adjustments to cobbles and more dropped kerbs are needed as it's difficult for wheelchair users and for buggies. Traffic management, including traffic lights by Shirley Avenue and a crossing from the Market Place to the pharmacy. More good quality cycle routes for travel around (or to and from) Birstall.

86 people commented on this theme.

Public transport



Key issues: Participants gave mixed feedback about buses, with some saying the service is excellent and “does everything I need” and others saying the service is poor and doesn't meet local needs. The

frequency of buses onto the estates has declined and this has had an impact on people. There has been an improvement in buses on weekends and buses to Leeds have increased. But people are concerned about changes to (or withdrawal of) the 229 and 282 and having no buses to Dewsbury Hospital. Many participants said buses are often late and there's a lack of service on an evening. Some shared concerns about the lack of safety when in Birstall on an evening. The nearest rail stations are a 30 minute bus ride away in Morley or Batley, with no cycle routes to them.



Suggestions from participants: More covered bus stops. More regular bus services to Bradford. The massive lack of cycle or rail links needs addressing.

83 people commented on this theme.

“There's no train station and no quick route to any of the nearest stations.”

“The streets are fine and well kept, but there are very few walkways and cycling paths.”

“It's very difficult to get anywhere reasonably local. For example, Batley, Dewsbury or Heckmondwike.”

"Birstall is a pretty village with lovely old architectural features."

"If it was not for Birstall in Bloom and Birstall Chamber of Trade there would be nothing attractive about Birstall."

"Fieldhead Lane has become a cut through from the A650 to places such as Gomersal, Liversedge, Cleckheaton and Heckmondwike."

Traffic and parking



Key issues: Participants commented on rat running between Junction 27 and Birstall town centre and through from the bypass at Dridlington. People are also unhappy about HGV vehicles in Fieldhead, Dark Lane and Birstall town centre. Changes in road markings at the junction of Lowood Lane and Briarmains Road have caused traffic issues, with drivers not realising the right of way or not slowing for the junction due to confusion between road markings and the curvature of the road. Church Lane needs a traffic light system. There are issues with school parking - St-Patrick's School, St Peter's School, Upper Batley Lane and Windmill Lane are all congested at school times. Participants raised lots of other issues with parking, particularly on Withens Road, Lowood Lane (which is very difficult for emergency services), Raikes Lane, Old Lane and generally around Birstall town centre. People do not come to the market stalls for fear of getting a parking ticket.



Suggestions from participants: Speed restrictions through Birstall and on Bradford Road (just outside of Birstall). Traffic calming needed St Peter's School, with speed reduction in certain areas. Proper traffic lights or crossing lights for safety. The residential roads in the town centre should be for parking permit holders only. Relax parking restrictions on market days to encourage greater crowds for market sellers. Reduce, slow or better control the traffic in the village centre, including parking on the roads blocking junctions. Maybe make the village a 20 mph zone.

113 people commented on this theme.

Streets and spaces



Key issues: Participants said that some shops look atrocious, with broken windows, and the covered billboard looks "a complete eyesore". Some buildings make the town less inviting for those passing through, with derelict buildings being "imposing and unattractive". However, there was a lot of feedback regarding the positive work of

Birstall in Bloom. Out of the town centre, people thought things may not be particularly attractive, but that the area is generally neat and tidy. There are some issues with winter gritting. The public houses, social clubs and late night take-aways encourage a different clientele to come into Birstall at night, who tend to be rowdy and care less about residents. Fieldhead is bad for fly tipping.



Suggestions from participants: Paths could do with upgrading and the snickets are currently quite dangerous. Need to spend more on cleaning the streets. Need public toilets, especially for elderly and disabled residents. Improve the issues with parking, lighting and pot holes.

80 people commented on this theme.

Natural space



Key issues: Participants appreciate the natural spaces such as Oakwell Hall Country Park, Batley Park, the cemetery and church at Kirkgate and the golf club area on Fieldhead, the Greenway, recreation grounds and fields for kids to play.

However, participants from Fieldhead commented about the lack of a park or playground for children. There are some access issues to the field at the top of Fieldhead estate and the MUGA (mixed use games area). Some said that schools have taken away the natural space. Birstall Beck and the fish pond are a nice place to walk around, but the water is stagnant. Dog fouling is a common problem on several local green spaces, bins need emptying more, and there are issues with vandalism, motorbikes and antisocial behaviour. The fields at the top of Victoria Street get a lot of rubbish left on them. People recognise the good work that local volunteers are doing looking after natural spaces.



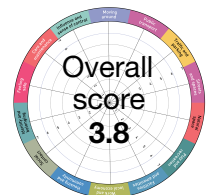
Suggestions from participants: Natural spaces for those who have mobility challenges and for older people. A barrier to stop parking on the big green is needed. Could do with benches so people can take a rest on the estate. More litter bins (eco-friendly). More litter picks. More awareness of looking after dogs and not littering, including posters. Clean up spray paint.

86 people commented on this theme.

Play and recreation



Key issues: Participants commented about the lack of local, good quality play areas and said that there is very little to occupy youngsters. People are also concerned about antisocial behaviour and about children playing in unsafe spaces due to a lack of access to better spaces for play. Some said they don't like their children playing out as it is "not safe on the streets", which can be a rat run for traffic. The games area is fenced off, so children cannot use it. There isn't enough for teenagers to do and the cost of activities can be a barrier. People would like more local community activities and groups. There is lots of support for the library and community centre.



Suggestions from participants: A simple Skate Park or something to encourage more teenagers to enjoy outdoor sports. The ball court should be unlocked. The council need to consider more play spaces. There could be a better play area at Cambridge Road. A play area for Fieldhead. Spaces around Birstall and at the Co-location Centre could be used more. The park near St Patrick's needs repairs or replacement equipment. A gaming shop. More promotion of what's available.

101 people commented on this theme.

"Activities happen in Birstall centre but information doesn't seem to be circulating to let people know of this."

"Wilton Park and Oakwell aren't too far but there aren't many natural spaces in Birstall town."

"Most kids play on the street.. nowhere else to go."

Facilities and amenities



Key issues: There is a general consensus from our participants that Birstall has most things, whilst the wider areas lack community resources. Issues raised include services and schools being oversubscribed, access to doctors, lack of public toilets and limited access for wheelchair users. Junction 27 received positive comments. Some participants feel there are too many hairdressers, beauty places and cafes.



Suggestions from participants: Public toilets. The library and community centre need protecting. Having somewhere positive for youths to go on an evening, so they are not hanging around the town. Maybe let young people do some work for older people, or have a youth club. B&M would be good at Junction 27. Need extra capacity on local routes, in schools and in GP practices.

86 people commented on this theme.

Work and local economy



Key issues: Participants said there are good links to work places at Junction 27 and in Birstall and good employment opportunities in the surrounding area. Leyland paint / PPG provides a number of jobs in the local community. It's close to major hubs such as Leeds and Bradford. However, there are limited opportunities and spaces for local businesses to start up and grow. Work done by local groups and volunteers is recognised and appreciated. Birstall Chamber of Trade do a lot working together to encourage community spirit and to encourage people to the town. Volunteer groups seem to be the most active.

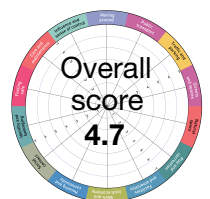


Suggestions from participants: Estate newsletter or what's happening guide. Advertising for Birstall Town - lampposts like in Mirfield Town Centre to encourage more visitors to Birstall. Decisions need to be made at a local level by the people of this area - for example, terminating a bus route, potential closure of the library, reopening of public footpaths. Infrastructure is a priority. **91 people** commented on this theme.

Housing and community



Key issues: Participants gave quite a lot of feedback about housing, following similar themes. Regeneration has helped, but there's still a need for more family homes (3 or 4 bedroom). There's a huge mix of housing in the centre - luxury apartments and conversions, big 5 bedroom detached houses and little 1-up-1-down cottages. Some families still struggle within inappropriate housing that doesn't meet their needs, with comments including: "I don't like seeing families of 5 in a flat with no direct access to gardens" and "Families don't have enough bedrooms."



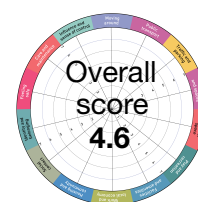
Participants asked for specific housing for older people. Carr Street is now accommodating people of all ages, which is causing some distress to older residents. Some feel that family homes near bungalows are not a good idea. Participants also asked for more social housing, saying that people are currently sofa surfing and young people can't get a mortgage. One participant commented that "I feel that the social housing on Cambridge Road means that there is a great deal of transience in the area."

Suggestions from participants: Need better quality housing which is affordable (prices are too high, and the ones which are cheap are in poor repair). More age restrictions.
59 people commented on this theme

Social contact

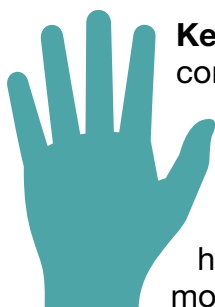


Key issues: Some participants said there are no good sources of support or community contact on the Fieldhead estate. Others said there are activities, but you have to know where to find them. Opportunities to meet new people are lacking: "If there is I haven't seen them." Many highlighted Birstall Library as the main place for social contact, with lots of activities there including groups and regular coffee mornings. Activities at the community centre and churches are also welcomed. Oakwell Hall brings in crowds and is good for new mothers and families. Some people asked for more local activities, including more for young people.



Suggestions from participants: The Co-location Centre is sitting there mostly unused - could this be used more as a community centre to get the community together and involved again? Support from the council in promoting what is available in Birstall would help - more communication and information on activities. More and different types of groups would be appreciated. Mental health support.
81 people commented on this theme.

Identity and belonging



Key issues: Our participants often had both positive and negative comments together about this theme. Birstall is trying hard to have a positive identity. One participant said: "I feel good about Fieldhead. It used to have a rough reputation, but not now, it has changed." Those who are proud of the area often acknowledge the role of Birstall in Bloom and Birstall Library in helping people feel positive about the area. Participants feel that more could be done to support local volunteers: "I love Birstall but I do feel that Kirklees Council don't do enough." Some people currently don't feel very proud of where they live - for example: "It used to be so much better when there was a community centre and groups or classes arranged and when the children's centre was open and functioning." Others said it seems like the older generation and younger generations have drifted very far apart and "don't respect each other"



Suggestions from participants: More community uniting initiatives. Promote diversity.
81 people commented on this theme.

"The library is vital in Birstall as it is the only place where people can go freely and not feel isolated."

"People look out for me."

"Birstall is trying hard to have a positive identity after the recent events over the past few years."

"Birstall in bloom is making the village look beautiful."

Feeling safe



Key issues: A number of participants commented about antisocial behaviour and nuisances, with issues including motorbikes and quad bikes speeding through the village and vandalism. Some are

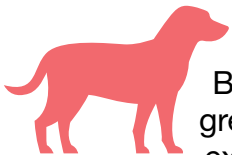
concerned that they have reported antisocial behaviour repeatedly and nothing happens: "same idiots on quads bikes and now some in cars, there is going to be a fatality before too long unless something is done." People generally feel safe, although moving towards night time this changes, and some don't feel that Birstall is as safe as it used to be. Participants would like the police and community support officers to be much more visible "It's not enough to drive around - they need to be on foot sometimes so people can stop and engage with them."



Suggestions: We need proactive policing not reactive policing ("where all they care about is giving a crime number"). More police on foot patrols. Visibility of Community Police in all areas of Birstall to tackle antisocial behaviour.

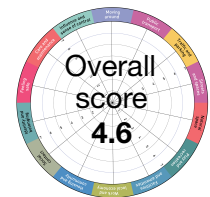
93 people commented on this theme.

Care and maintenance



Key issues: Lots of our participants are supportive of Birstall in Bloom and the Chamber of Trade, saying they do great work for the village. Some of the new housing, for example at St Patricks Court and along Bradford Road,

looks lovely. However, there are issues, including loose paving stones, dog dirt, small gas canisters and broken glass about, and buildings looking uncared for. Some commented that local residents don't maintain their homes, and that flats and outdoor spaces in Fieldhead are not well cared for. Others would like to see the shops looked after properly, as some currently have weeds outside. One participant said: "There is a gentleman Kirklees Street Sweeper who come weekly and does a superb job of ensuring the car park at Tesco and surrounding areas looks tip-top. He could do to get an award!"



Suggestions from participants: Some areas for improvement - paving is uneven or potholed in places, barriers on footpaths between blocks of housing (for example, on Lowood Lane to Branwell Avenue), roads and paths in bad condition along Raikes Lane. The Greenway should be monitored for quad bike and motorbikes.

78 people commented on this theme.

Influence and sense of control



Key issues: People in the area are generally interested in taking part and having a community voice: “The new TRA (Tenants and Residents Association) should help improve this, providing people want to get involved.” Unfortunately people say that they never heard anything about the old TRA until it was falling apart and seeking new members, so there was no real outlet to have a say or encourage change.



Participants gave positive feedback about Listening to Birstall, and say that it should hopefully “make people feel like we're finally being listened to.” People feel that they are often overlooked (“most info I receive in email from Kirklees Together focuses on the Huddersfield area and most of the interesting public events and courses”). Some said that whether or not they have the opportunity to take part “depends on outcome of these questions.”

The potential threat of closure for Birstall Library upset local residents. Some participants say that this is at the heart of why the community do not feel supported or listened to.

Suggestions: When a councillor is having an event at the library, could this be better advertised so people know about it? Have community meetings at different times so that more people can take part.

85 people commented on this theme.

“I feel that no one cares about my opinion. Everyone has a voice and everyone wants to be heard.”

“I think initiatives like this are good and perhaps we need more such opportunities - Kirklees Council [should] do much more.”

“I'm not very involved in leading the community. Though I would like to be.”

This is the first time I have seen a forum where I can share my views on where I live.”

Listening to Birstall score sheet

How people in Birstall, Fieldhead, Cambridge Road and Nova scored their place, on a scale of 1 to 7, whilst talking about 14 different themes:

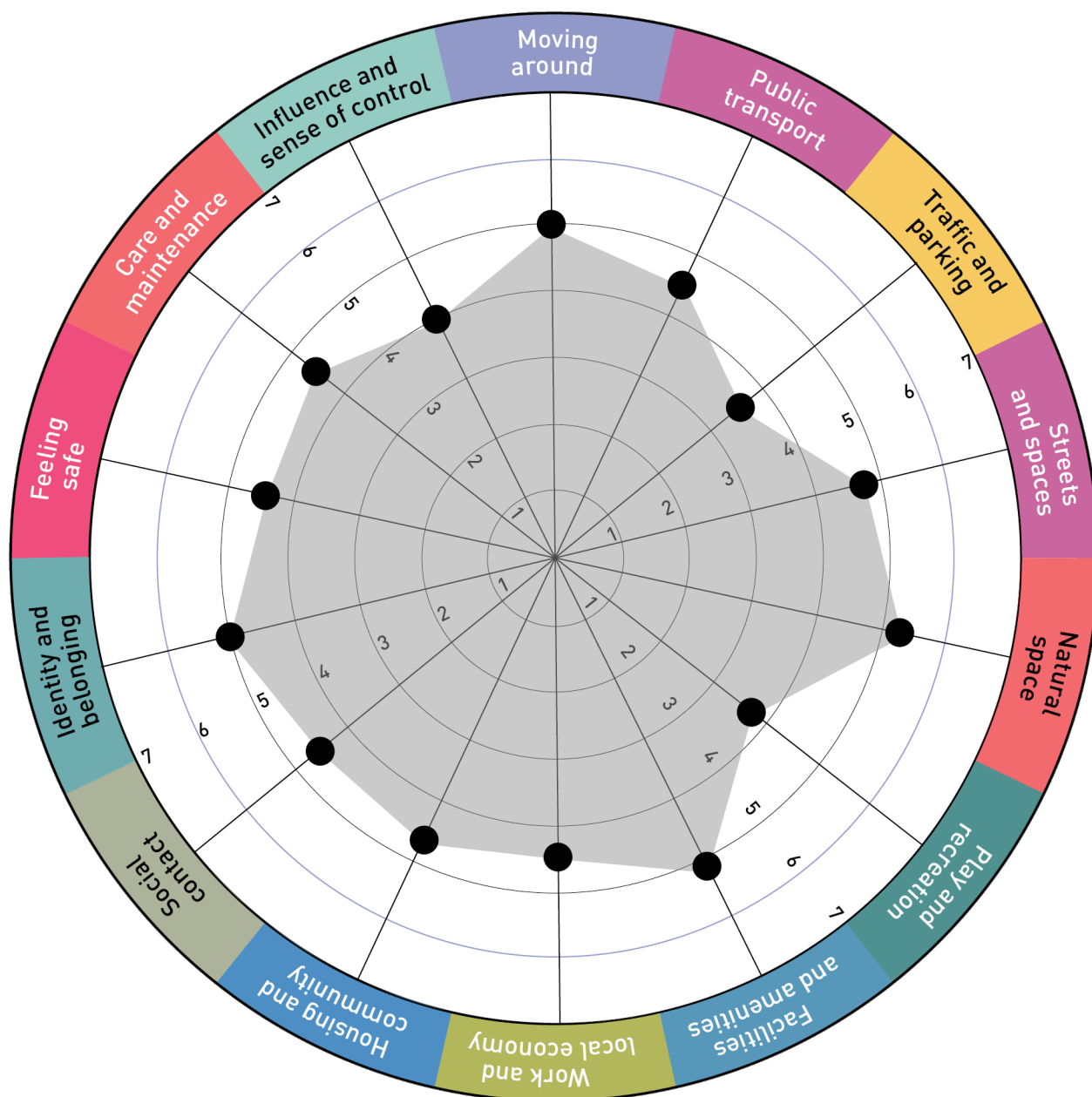
	Birstall overall	Birstall area	Fieldhead area	Under 16s	Age 35 to 44	Age 65 to 74	Female	Male
Moving around	5	4.7	5.1	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.8	5.3
Public transport	4.5	4.7	4.2	5.9	3.9	5.2	4.2	5.1
Traffic and parking	3.6	3.7	3.9	3	3.6	3.5	3.6	4
Streets and spaces	4.8	4.9	4.6	4.9	4.9	4.6	4.7	5
Natural space	5.2	5.4	4.8	5.4	5.2	5.2	5.2	5
Play and recreation	3.8	4.6	2.9	3.7	3.9	4.4	3.7	4.1
Facilities and amenities	5.1	5.2	5	6	5.2	5.3	5.1	5
Work and local economy	4.4	4	4.7	4.4	4.6	4.4	4.6	4.3
Housing and community	4.7	4.4	4.8	4.7	4.9	4.7	4.6	5
Social contact	4.6	5	4.2	4.9	4.3	4.8	4.5	4.8
Identity and belonging	5	5.3	4.6	5.1	4.9	6.4	5	5.1
Feeling safe	4.4	4.2	4.5	4.9	4.5	4.3	4.3	4.9
Care and maintenance	4.6	4.9	4.2	3.9	4.7	4.4	4.6	4.6
Influence and sense of control	4	3.9	4	5.3	3.9	4.3	3.9	4.4

230 people participated in the Ask Meltham conversations, completing **197** assessments.

The overall scores are the **Mean average** of the 197 assessments.

Note: 187 participants chose a sub-area when taking part. 87 people chose Birstall, 89 people chose Fieldhead, 3 people chose Cambridge Road and 8 people chose Nova. 10 participants did not identify a sub-area. We have included figures for the larger two of these sub-areas (where there were enough participants to show a meaningful average figure for that particular area).

Overall scores for Listening to Birstall



Natural space	5.2
Facilities and amenities	5.1
Identity and belonging	5
Moving around	5
Streets and spaces	4.8
Housing and community	4.7
Social contact	4.6

Care and maintenance	4.6
Public transport	4.5
Feeling safe	4.4
Work and local economy	4.4
Influence and sense of control	4
Play and recreation	3.8
Traffic and parking	3.6

Full data is available at:

www.HowGoodIsOurPlace.org.uk