Wooler Housing Needs Survey
Final Report

February 2018

Introduction

In October 2017, the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan Group commissioned Community Action Northumberland (CAN) to undertake a Local Housing Needs Survey for the Parish. This was designed to provide detailed information which would directly input to the development of the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan and also act as a potential catalyst for possible future development of local affordable homes if need is demonstrated.

Since April 2017, CAN has been contracted by Northumberland County Council to establish a Community-led Housing Hub to act as a support platform for local communities wishing to explore the potential for community-led housing in its various forms and to deliver local affordable homes where they are needed. This hub is called 'Communities CAN.'

This work is initially funded through the Northumberland County Council allocation of the government's Community Housing Fund and seeks to support all stages of development, including the initial identification of housing need.

As part of this work, CAN is funded to undertake Local Housing Needs Surveys where requested to do so by a local community and where there is a realistic prospect of any need identified resulting in the delivery of additional affordable homes. Critical to this work is that the local community is directly involved in both identifying need and in determining any potential response to the information generated.

In undertaking Housing Needs Surveys, CAN follows the principles set out in national guidelines drawn up by the Rural Housing Enablers Network as follows:

1. The goal of all Housing Needs Surveys is to provide an objective evidenced overview of the scale and nature of the full range of housing need in a locality, usually a village or parish.
2. Housing Needs Surveys are independent and balanced and seen to be so.
3. The process for collecting the data is open, fair and transparent.
4. Any secondary data used as a principal source of information or to augment data collected from households is up to date and relevant to the geography of the survey.
5. Data is anonymised and confidentiality and data protection statements are clear and correct.
6. The community, which is wider than just the Parish Council, is informed of the reasons for the survey, invited to participate and able to access the results.
7. The reports are written in plain English with explanations of how the findings and conclusions are drawn, including any caveats and noting sources of data.
8. Housing Needs Survey reports are publicly available once the commissioning body has agreed and signed off the survey.
9. Housing Needs Surveys are a snapshot in time, their 'shelf-life' is stated and a process for updating the data is available.
10. The Housing Needs Survey is only the start of the process. Once it is completed ongoing liaison should be maintained with the community, housing association or other developer, local authority and landowner to take the project forward.

Population profile

At the time of the 2011 Census 1,983 people lived in Wooler parish in 1,095 households. Average household size was 2 people per household. 12.4% of the population was aged 0-15 years (compared to 17% across Northumberland) whilst 30.6% were aged 65 or over (compared to 20.2% across Northumberland).

59.3% of households were owner occupiers compared to 66% across the county, whilst 24% of households were renting from a social landlord (18.7% for Northumberland) and 16.7% rented from a private landlord (13.3% across the county).

37.2% of households contained just one person, 60% of which were 65 years or older. 25.4% of households had no car or van.

The ageing population structure of Northumberland is well documented and this trend is predicted to continue into the future. The graph below shows projections from Northumberland Knowledge with respect to the growing proportion of the population that will be 65 years and older by 2039. It is noteworthy that in Wooler, 30.6% of the population already fell into this age group at the time of the census in 2011. The continued ageing of the population will clearly impact on a range of services and housing needs in the future.
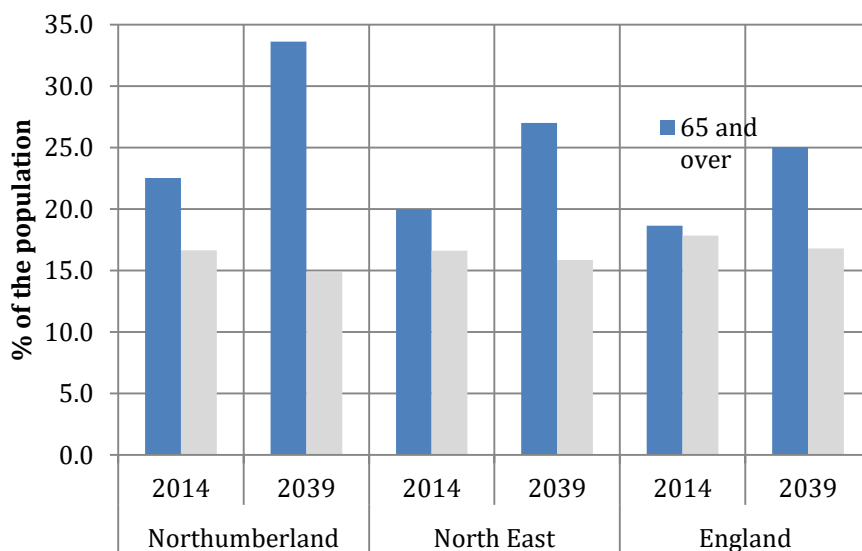
Source: Northumberland Knowledge Age Profiles

Homefinder data

Northumberland County Council, in partnership with a number of social landlords operating in the county, manage the Northumberland Homefinder allocations service. Anyone aged 16 or over can apply to join Northumberland Homefinder, unless they are ineligible. Affordable homes which become available are advertised via this service. Homefinder operates a banding scheme where applicants are placed in one of five bands according to their level of need as follows:

- Priority Band P for those with an urgent and severe housing need.
- Band 1 for those who are in high housing need.
- Band 2 for those who are in medium housing need.
- Band 2R for those in reasonable preference categories but whose priority is reduced.
- Band 3 for those who are adequately housed.

Data is available from this service with respect to properties advertised within Wooler and, therefore, can provide a view with respect to local housing needs. However, the value of this data is limited for a number of reasons including:

- Data can only relate to those properties advertised and to those people who have applied to join Northumberland Homefinder.
- Individual households can make multiple applications to multiple available properties making conclusions with respect to specific numbers very difficult.
- It is widely known that many people do not apply to join Homefinder due to an expectation that properties which meet their needs are either not available or will be prioritised to households with a higher assessed need.

Nevertheless, Northumberland Homefinder does provide a readily accessible source of data to contribute to this report. Data has been kindly supplied by Northumberland County Council for the period from December 2016 to December 2017. This is summarised below.

Priority Banding by bedroom eligibility					
Band	Bedroom Eligibility				Total
	1	2	3	4+	
Band 1	6	0	1	0	7
Band 2	3	1	1	0	5
Band 2R	1	1	1	0	3
Band 3	31	4	4	0	39
Band P	0	0	0	1	1
Total	41	6	7	1	55

This table suggests that 74% of Homefinder applicants living in Wooler require a one bedroom property. 70% of applicants were considered to be adequately housed and not in priority need. The table below shows the current tenure type of applicants

Current tenancy		
Tenancy	Count	%
Private tenant	22	40.0%
Registered Social Landlord tenant	17	30.9%
Living with family and friends	11	20.0%
Owner occupier	5	9.1%
Total	**55**	**100.0%**

The table below shows that in the period from December 2016 to December 2017, there were 23 advertised properties which received 128 bids – an average of 5.6 bids per property. 76% of these bidders (59 out of 78) were from outside the Wooler area. 55% of bidders (43 out of 78) were 55 years old or older.

Homefinder advertised properties (Dec 2016 to Dec 2017)							
Property Type	Bedrooms				Total	Bids count	%
	1	2	3	4+			
Bedsit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%
Bungalow	6	2	0	0	8	67	52.3%
Flat	1	5	0	0	6	26	20.3%
House	0	9	0	0	9	35	27.3%
Maisonette	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%
Sheltered	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%
Total	**7**	**16**	**0**	**0**	**23**	**128**	**100.0%**

Bungalows are clearly demonstrated to be the most popular properties in terms of number of bids received.

The Housing Needs Survey

Our Housing Needs Survey involved the distribution of a questionnaire to all households within Wooler parish. The questionnaire was based on a tried and tested questionnaire utilised elsewhere which was developed and amended through discussion and agreement with the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan Group.

The questionnaire was distributed by hand to all households by the Neighbourhood Plan Group, utilising a number of local volunteers. A freepost envelope was provided to each household for return of completed questionnaires.

The questionnaire included three initial questions to be answered by all households and a further eleven questions which only needed to be answered by those households who had expressed some form of housing need. For respondents planning to divide their current households into two or more households, an additional sheet was included enabling relevant questions to be completed for each of the proposed new households.

A total of 341 completed questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 32.5%. This is an excellent response rate for questionnaires of this nature.

This was a survey of existing residents and, therefore, is an expression of the needs and desires of these residents reflecting the current age profile of the Wooler area.

Research Findings

Connection to Wooler

The overwhelming majority of respondents (99.4%) lived in the Wooler area. This is not surprising given the distribution of the questionnaire to households in the Wooler area only but does mean that the responses provide a good picture of local needs.

Just under half of all respondents (47.5%) also have close family (parents, children or siblings) living in the Wooler area. 34.1% of all respondents had at least one member of their household who worked in the Wooler area.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (96.7%) stated that the Wooler area was their preferred place to live. 195 of the respondents (57.5%) indicated that they have lived in their current property for less than five years. Of these, 32.3% indicated that they lived in either Wooler or the wider area of North Northumberland before moving to their current property. 22% had moved to Wooler from beyond North Northumberland.
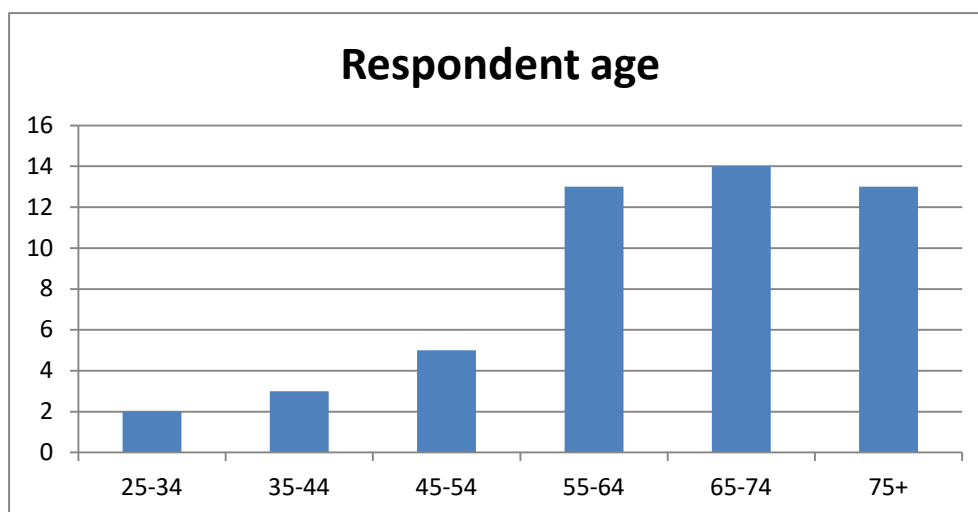
Households in need

A total of 56 households who responded to the questionnaire indicated that their current home was not suitable for their household's needs. The remaining elements of the questionnaire were only to be completed by these 56 households. The Research Findings below relate solely to these respondents.

Household characteristics

A large proportion of respondents (46.2%) were in single person households with a further 36.5% in two person households. A total of 13 respondents (25%) indicated that at least one child lived in their household. This included four of the two person households.
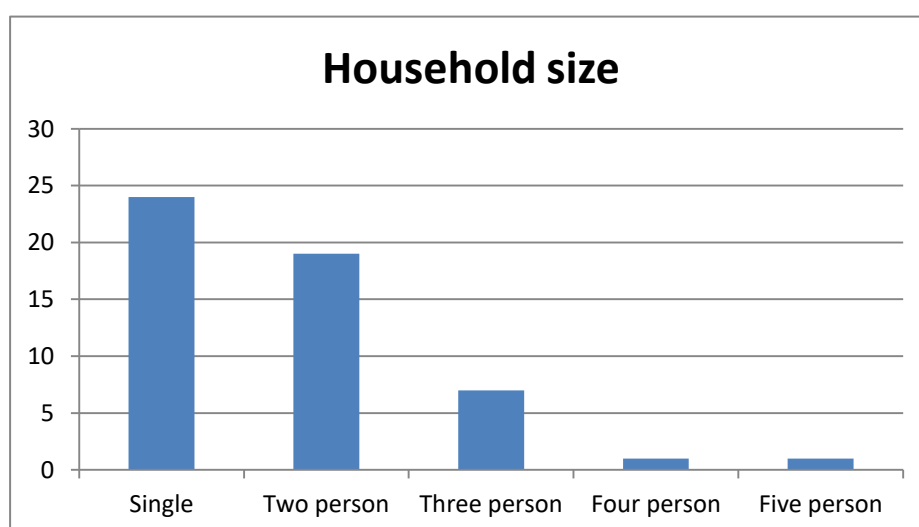
Just over half of all individuals completing the questionnaire were retired whilst 42.6% were employed. The age profile of those completing the questionnaire is shown below.
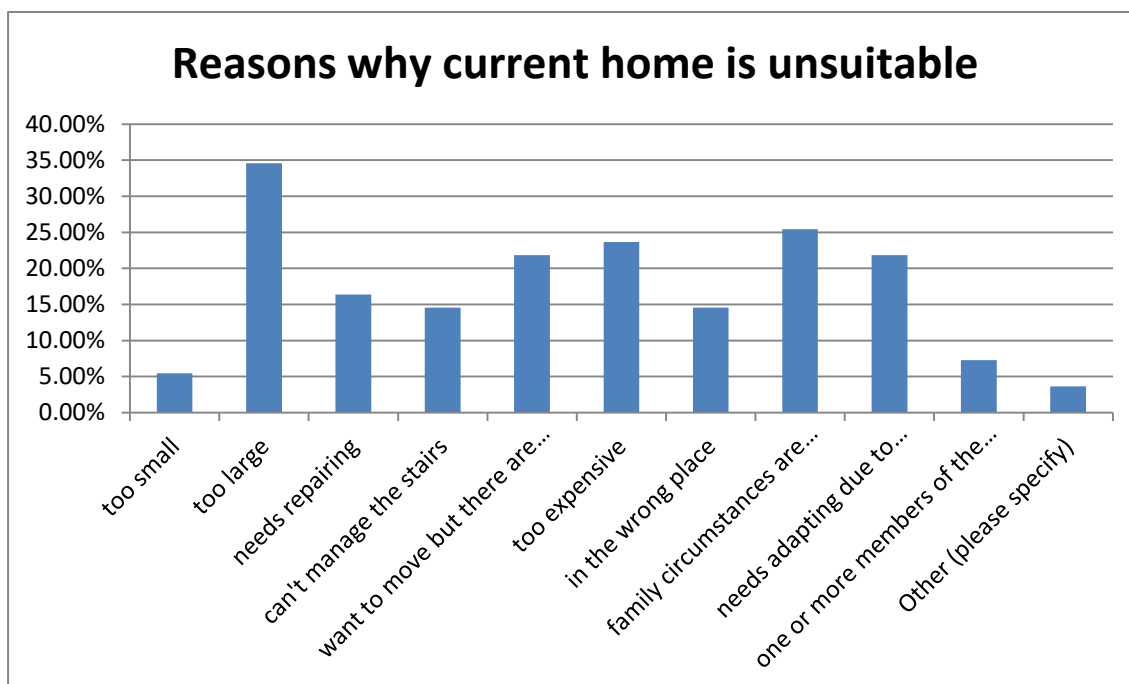
Respondent age

Those households indicating a need were home to a total of 14 people under the age of 25 and 37 people 65 or over. The table below shows the total number of people living in the respondent households by age.

Total household members by age
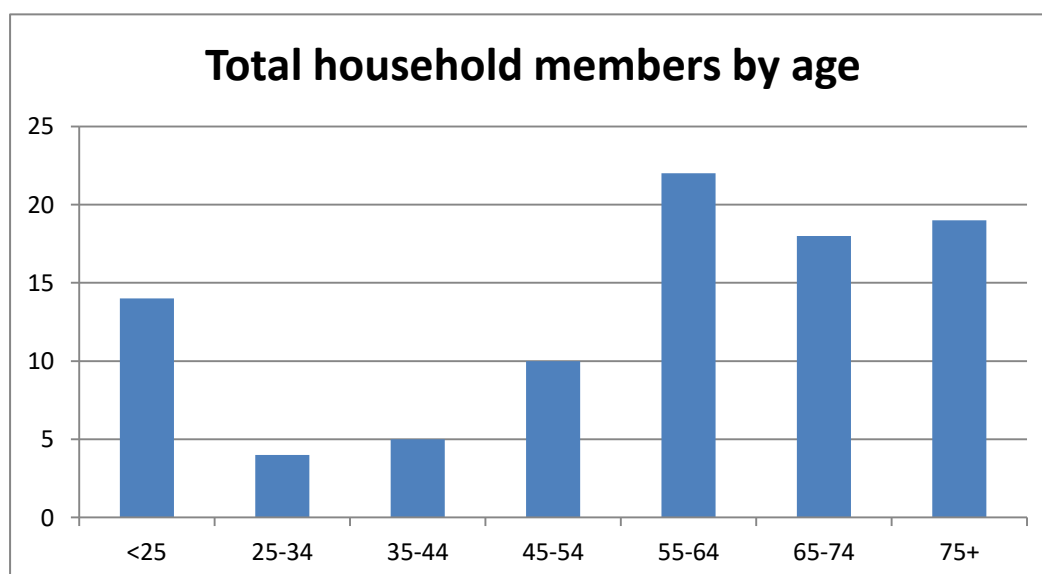
Type of need

The reasons why households indicated that their current home is unsuitable for their needs were varied. The main reasons for housing need were that existing accommodation is too large (18) followed by changing family circumstances (14), too expensive (12), no suitable homes are available locally (11) and the existing property requires adaptation to meet disability/health needs (11). The percentage of respondents indicating each area of need is shown in the table below (NB: respondents could indicate multiple preferences).

Reasons why current home is unsuitable

The survey included an opportunity for respondents to explain their reasons for needing to move in more detail. Responses to this question break down into a range of broad categories shown on the table below.

Response	%
Current property too large	27
Future proofing against old age	24
Mobility and access issues	14
Changing family circumstances (e.g. bereavement of marriage breakdown)	11
Current property requires improvements	8
Son or daughter requires separate accommodation	5
Current property too expensive	5
Current property too small	5

These responses indicate a clear prevalence of issues relating to age with many people looking to downsize to property suitable for them as they get older. The text map below indicates some of the key words used in responses.

Existing tenure and property type

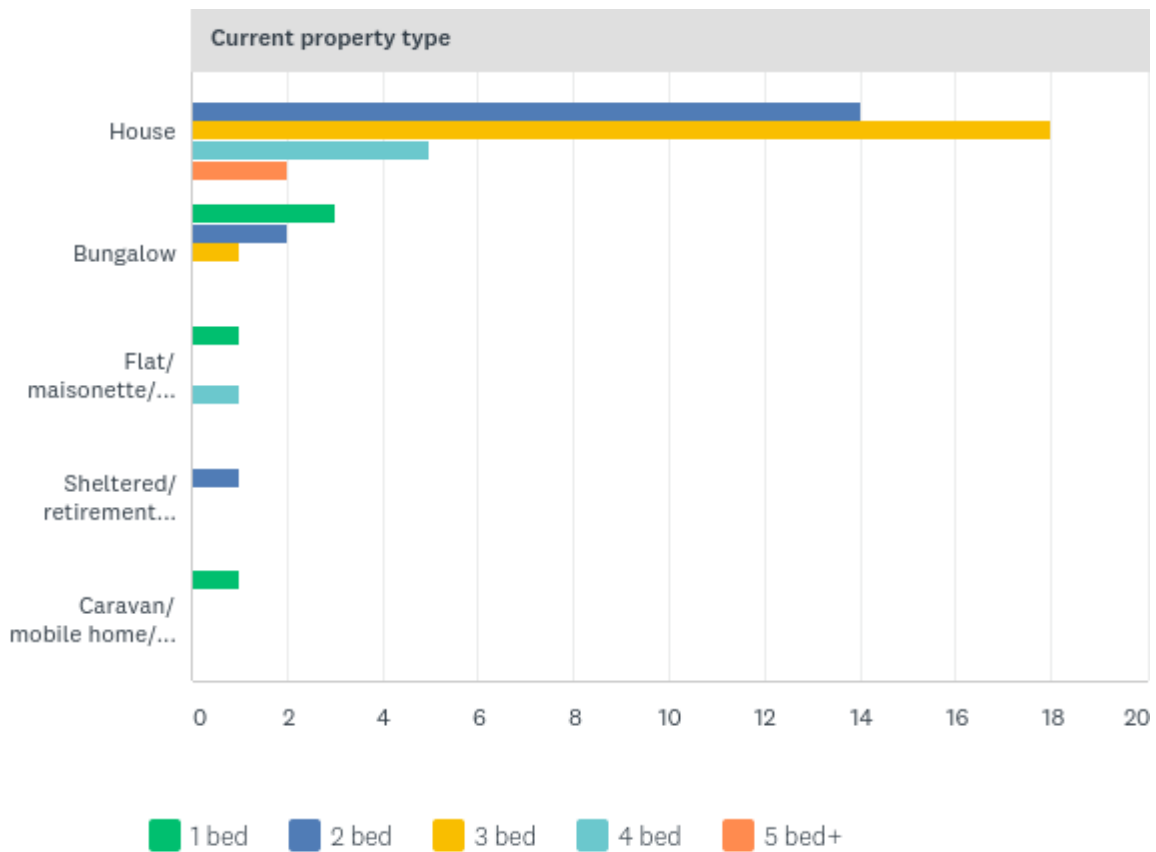Almost half of all respondents (48%), who expressed a housing need, were owner occupiers. 22% rented from a social landlord (6% local authority and 16% housing association) whilst 20% rented from a private landlord. The number of owner occupiers expressing a need reflects the downsizing and future-proofing issues raised by respondents. 62% of these owner occupiers stated that their existing property is too big for them compared to 34% of all those expressing a need.

Current tenure arrangement

Rent from local authority, Rent from Housing Association, Live in Tied Accommodation, Rent from Private Landlord, Shared ownership (part own /..), Own with or without mortgage, Other (please specify)
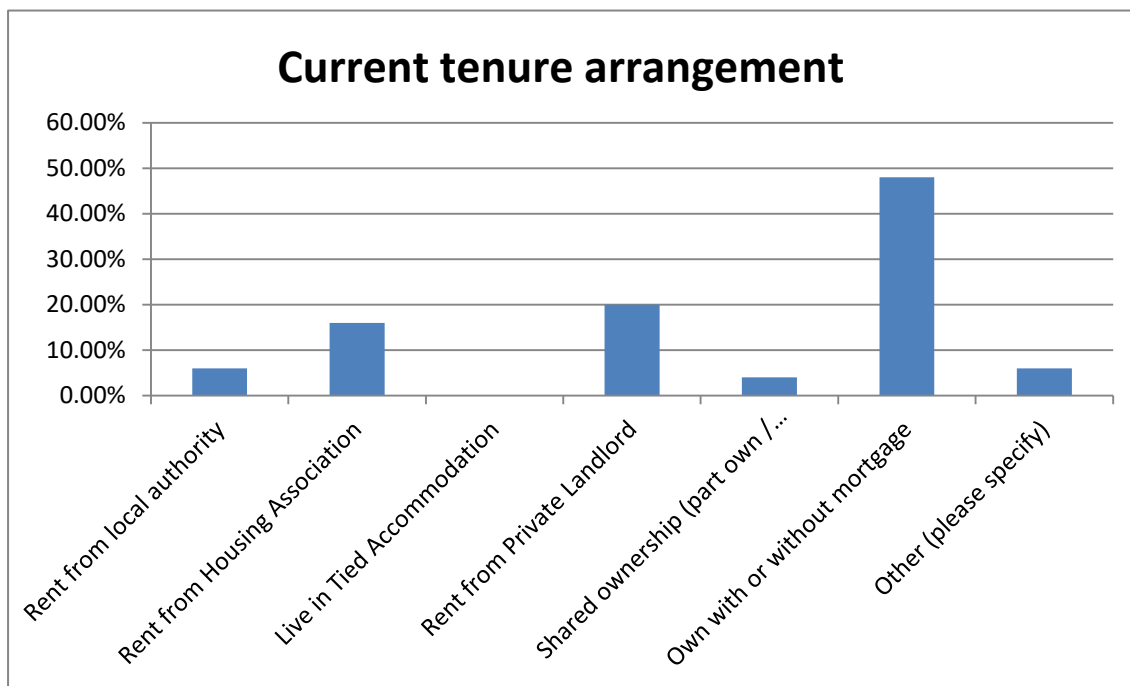
The reasons for the expressed housing need of current renters housing were more mixed. The most popular responses were that their current property was too expensive (33%), in the wrong place (33%) or in need of improvement (28%) or that no suitable homes existed locally (33%).

The vast majority of respondents (79.6%) currently live in a house. Most of these households have either 2 or 3 bedrooms. Current owner occupiers were particularly likely to live in a house (91% overall) with 52% currently living in a 3 bedroom house, 17% 2 bedrooms and 22% 4/5 bedrooms. The property types of current renting households was different with 44% currently living in a 2 bedroom house and the majority of the remainder living in 3 bedroom houses (22%) or 1 bedroom bungalows (17%).

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Current property type

1 bed   2 bed   3 bed   4 bed   5 bed+

Future tenure preferences

Renting was the preferred tenure choice for those households expressing a housing need. Renting from the local authority was the most popular (57.1% which represents 16 households) closely followed by renting from a housing association (53.6%, representing 15 households). 39.3% of respondents expressed a preference for private rental (NB: respondents could indicate multiple preferences).

Future tenure preference

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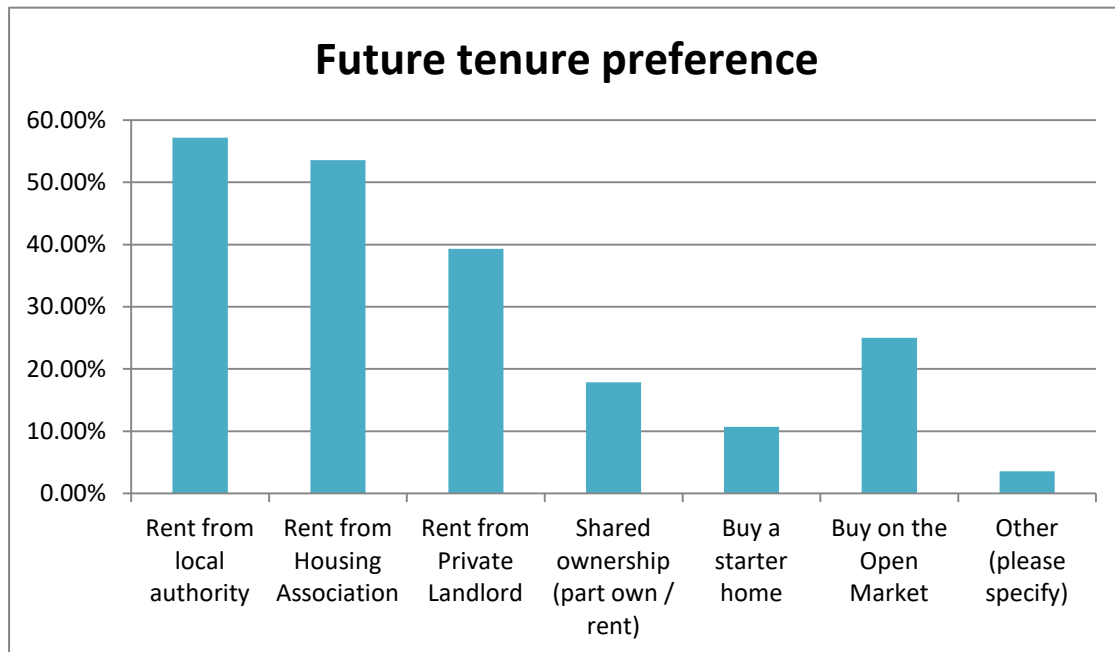
25% of those in need would like to buy on the open market, whilst 17.9% were interested in shared ownership (representing 5 households) and 10.7% in buying a starter home (3 households).

Current owner occupiers were relatively similar in their desires to buy on the open market (7 households), rent from the local authority (6 households), rent from a housing association (6 households) or rent from a private landlord (6 households). For households currently renting their property, however, there was a strong preference to rent their property in the future with 8 keen to rent from the local authority and 6 from a housing association.

Future tenure preference - owner occupiers

Future tenure preference - renters

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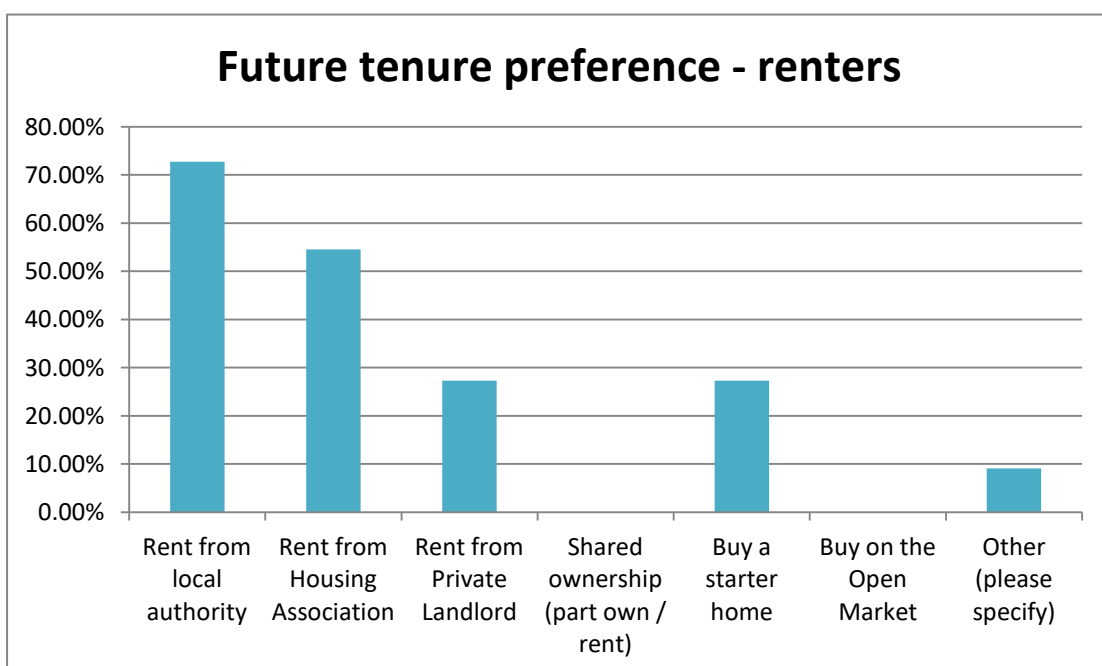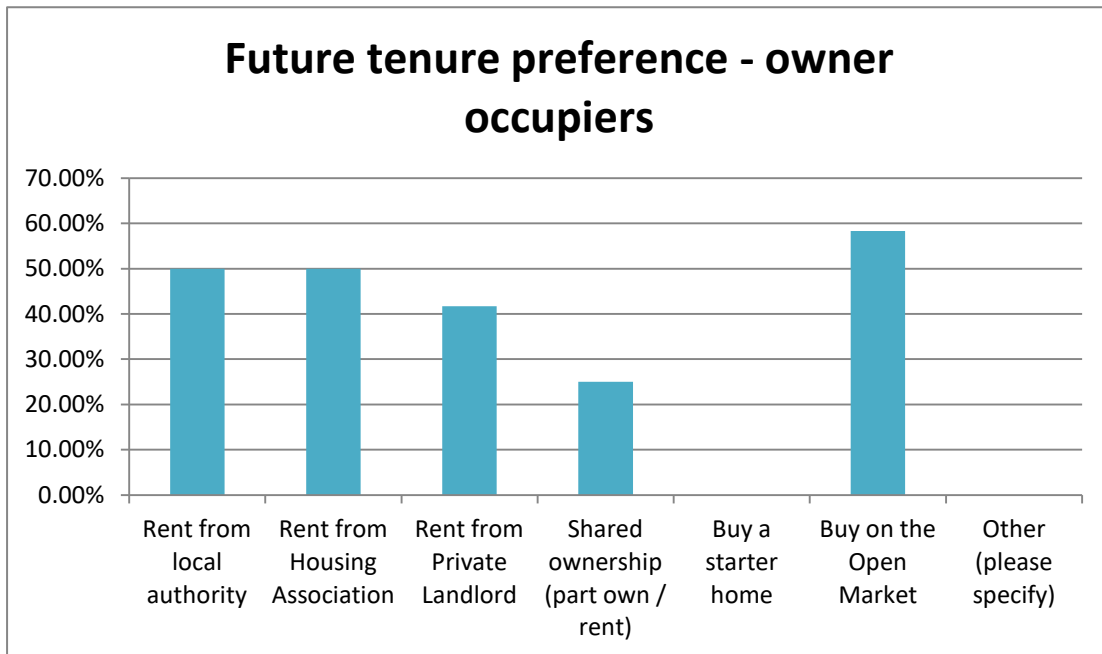
Future property type preferences

The largest demand is for 1/2 bedroom bungalows (22 preferences) and 2 bedroom houses (9 preferences). Some demand also exists for flats/ maisonettes/ apartments (9 preferences in total).
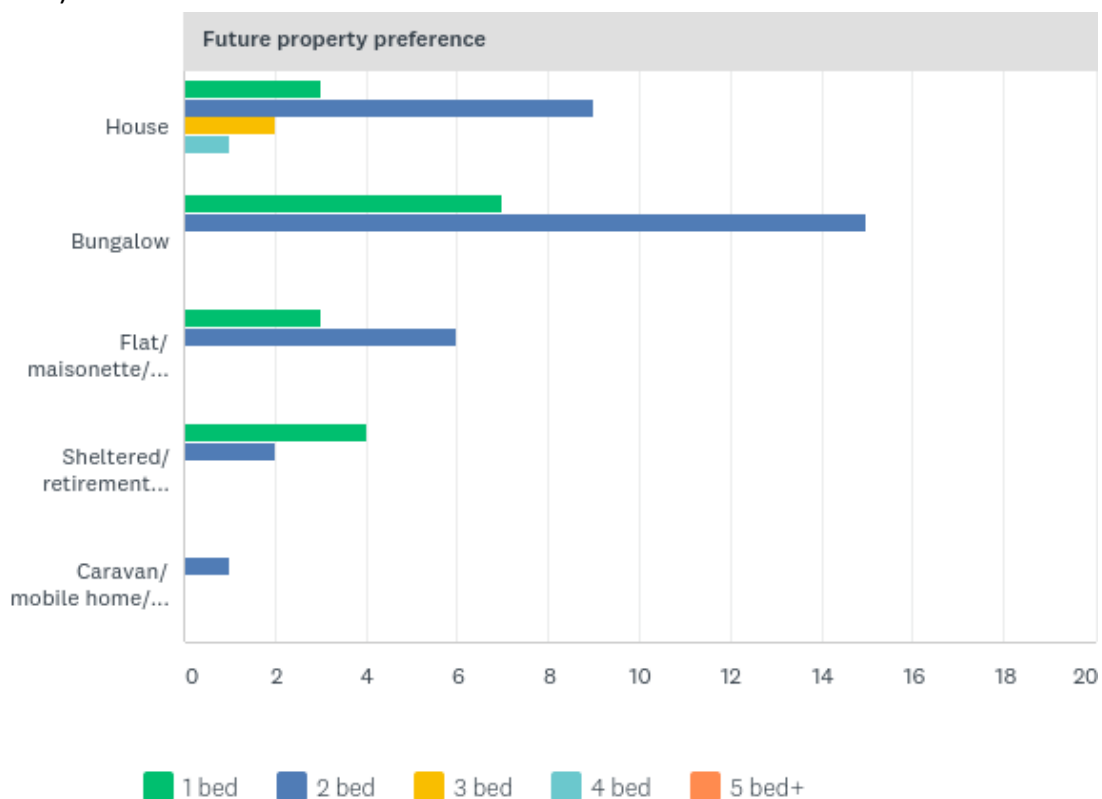
Amongst existing owner occupiers, there was no preference expressed for dwellings with more than 2 bedrooms. All responding owner occupiers wanted 1 or 2 bedrooms. The response breakdown is as follows (NB: respondents could express more than one preference).

Property type preference – owner occupiers	1 Bed	2 Bed
House	1	6
Bungalow	1	6
Flat/maisonette/apartment/bedsit	1	4
Sheltered/retirement housing	2	1

Amongst existing renting households, there was a strong preference for 2 bedrooms and, in particular, for bungalows.

Property type preference - renters	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed
House	0	3	2
Bungalow	3	7	0
Flat/maisonette/apartment/bedsit	1	1	0
Sheltered/retirement housing	0	0	0

Seven respondents expressed a preference to purchase a property on the open market to meet their needs. All these households currently occupy either 3 bedroom or 4 bedroom houses. All these households would prefer a 2 bedroom property. A small number of these households would also consider renting (NB: respondents could express more than one preference).

Property type preference – open market	2 Bed
House	5
Bungalow	5
Flat/maisonette/apartment/bedsit	2
Sheltered/retirement housing	1

## Northumberland Homefinder Register

Only 4 of the households who expressed a housing need were registered with Northumberland Homefinder. No respondents had achieved higher than a Band 3 rating. This confirms the view that data from the register only relates to a small subset of the actual need which exists.

Household income and affordability

55% of respondents, who indicated their household income and expressed a housing need, indicated an annual household income of less than £20,000 (18 households). Only 18% of respondents indicated an annual household income above £30,000 and none above £60,000.

53% of those households with an annual income less than £20,000 stated that they wanted to move but that there are no suitable homes available locally while 33% stated that their family circumstances were changing. 37% of these low income households are currently owner occupiers.

46% of these low income households currently live in a 3 bedroom house, 30% in a 2 bedroom house and 15% in 1 bedroom bungalows. There was a strong preference among current low income households to rent their property in the future with 9 keen to rent from the local authority, 7 from a housing association and 6 from a private landlord (NB: respondents could express more than one preference).

Future tenure preference - low income households
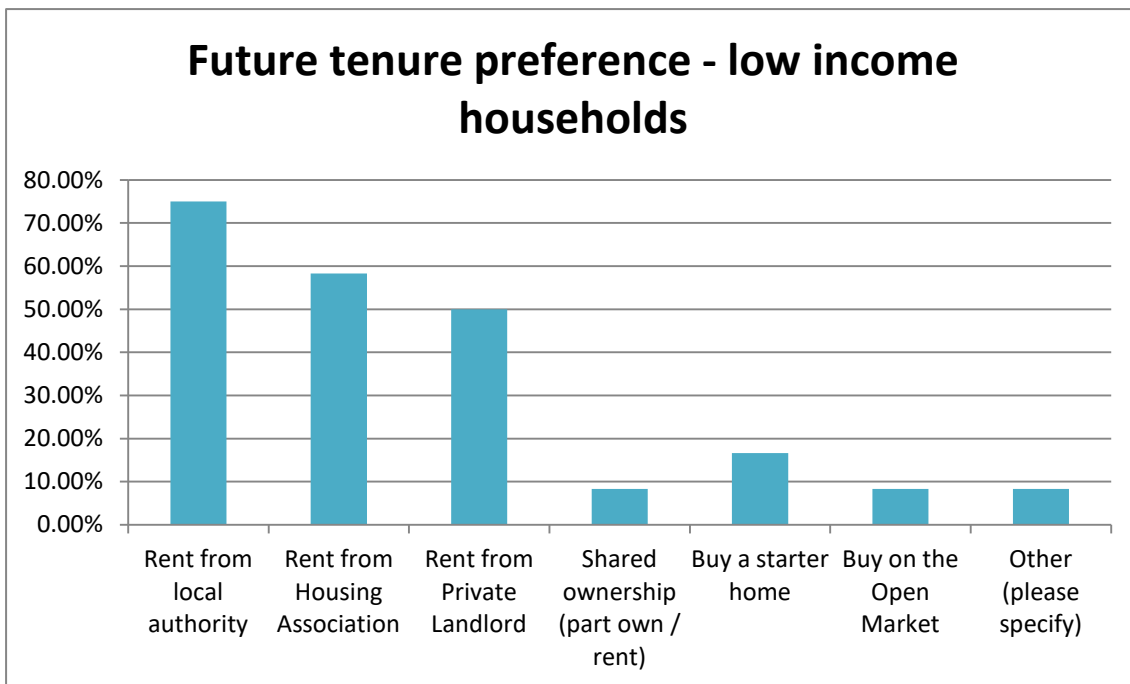
In relation to preferences for types of property, there was a strong preference for 2 and 1 bedroom houses and bungalows (NB: respondents could express more than one preference).

Property type preference – low income households	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed
House	2	4	1
Bungalow	3	6	0
Flat/maisonette/apartment/bedsit	0	3	0
Sheltered/retirement housing	1	2	0

In terms of the amount households could afford to pay for their housing, 73.5% could not afford more than £400 per month. Only one respondent could afford more than £600 per month. 39.3% of respondents (11 households) could afford less than £1000 as a deposit.

Affordability per month

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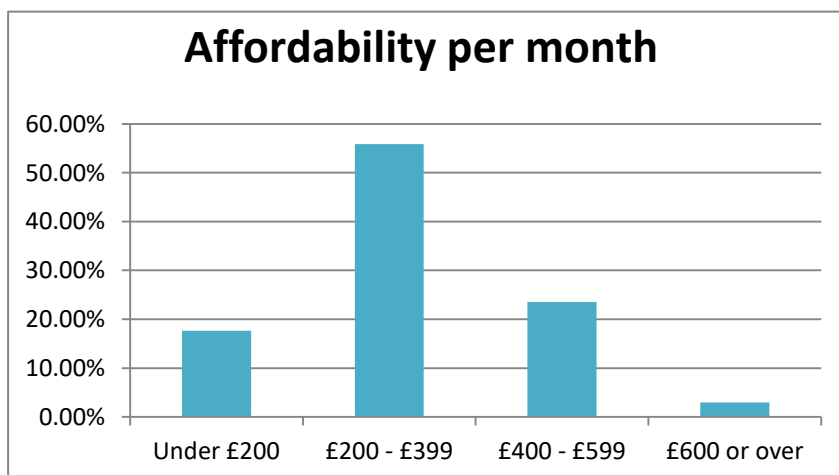
A selection of individual responses

"Anything with no stairs or large garden. I would love a ground floor flat or bungalow. I have chronic lower back pain so don't like stairs."

"Our daughter's preferred location would be Wooler, but works in Alnwick."

"We would be looking to sell our home and rent something more suitable to meet our needs with age and disability to take into account"

"Owing to mobility problems, the location of my house is important - it must be near enough to the High St & Surgery that I can walk to it."

"Heating is over 30 years old and cannot cope with cost of keeping warm"

"House too big and cold. Stairs too steep."

"My son would like his own independence but would like to be able to live in Wooler. He has lived in Wooler for 16 years with me, his Mam. A suitable place in Wooler to rent would be ideal."

"I'm getting too old to have such a large house & garden!"

"I am looking for spacious 2 bedroom flat or chalet bungalow with a small garden. What is available has very small living accommodation. I am not ready to give up my many interests and want to be able to welcome friends & family for meals etc."

"House and garden too big for my needs. May prefer somewhere smaller & easier to manage. Also release some equity as I approach retirement."

"House too large now children have moved away."

"After travelling expenses of partner's job are taken into account, there are limits on what other monthly outgoings we can have."

"Would like to move into a smaller property as I get older - but feel that owning my own home I'm at a disadvantage as I understand I'm not qualified to apply for local authority property."

"The house is too small to have a downstairs bedroom."

"As getting older would want a bungalow down in the hub of Wooler."

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Key messages from the survey

This was a survey of existing residents and, therefore, is an expression of the needs and desires of these residents reflecting the current age profile of the Wooler area. Key messages from the survey include the following:

- There is a clear need for many households to downsize into property which is easier to manage and meets their needs as they grow older. The most popular reason expressed for existing housing need was that the household's existing accommodation was too large (27%) with a further 24% wishing to future proof their accommodation against old age. For current owner occupiers expressing a housing need, 62% stated that their existing accommodation was too large for their needs.

- Renting was the preferred tenure choice for those households expressing a housing need – 57% from the local authority, 54% from a housing association and 39% private rental.

- The largest demand is for 1/2 bedroom bungalows (22 preferences) and 2 bedroom houses (9 preferences), reflecting the fact that the vast majority of households expressing a need contained one or two people. All responding owner occupiers wanted 1 or 2 bedrooms with only 2 preferences across all households for 3 bedrooms.

- As expected, data from the Northumberland Homefinder Register does not reflect local need but does demonstrate robust demand with an average 5.6 bids per available property.

- Low income is a significant issue affecting the amount households can afford to pay for their accommodation – 74% could not afford more than £400 per month.

Credits

Sincere thanks go to the residents of Wooler for their participation in this survey, to the Neighbourhood Plan Group for their clear direction and to the local volunteers who distributed the questionnaires to every household in the Parish. Many thanks one and all.