

Midhurst Vision

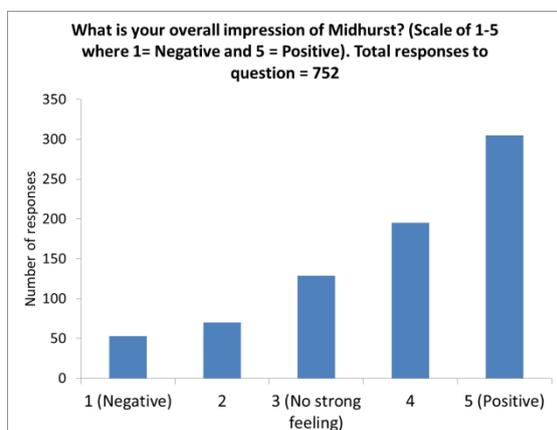
Survey analysis – Perceptions of Midhurst

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This analysis is based on results from the questionnaire carried out by the Midhurst Vision group over the summer of 2019. This was primarily an online survey using the SurveyMonkey website. In the survey respondents were asked to provide a rating for Midhurst using a five point scale, ranging from Positive to Negative. As a follow up respondents were then asked to provide the reasons for their rating in an open-text box. In total 752 respondents provided a rating, with the vast majority providing reasons. The analysis presented in this paper uses the data gathered from these two questions.

What is your overall impression of Midhurst?

Overall result



Rating	Number of respondents	Proportion of respondents
5 (Positive)	305	40.6
4	195	25.9
3 (No strong feeling)	129	17.2
2	70	9.3
1 (Negative)	53	7.0
Total	752	100

The results from the survey revealed that a large proportion of those questioned, some 40.6%, had a positive overall impression of Midhurst, whilst relatively few, just 7.0%, reported having a negative overall impression. Another 25.9% of respondents selected the second highest possible rating. Taken together this would suggest that overall respondents to the survey were likely to have a good impression of the town.

Perception by residential status

Respondents were asked later in the survey to state if they lived in Midhurst, worked in Midhurst, regularly visited Midhurst, or occasionally visited Midhurst – with the option to select all which apply. Of those who had earlier provided a rating 398 people stated that they lived in Midhurst and 134 people stated that they were regular visitors to Midhurst.

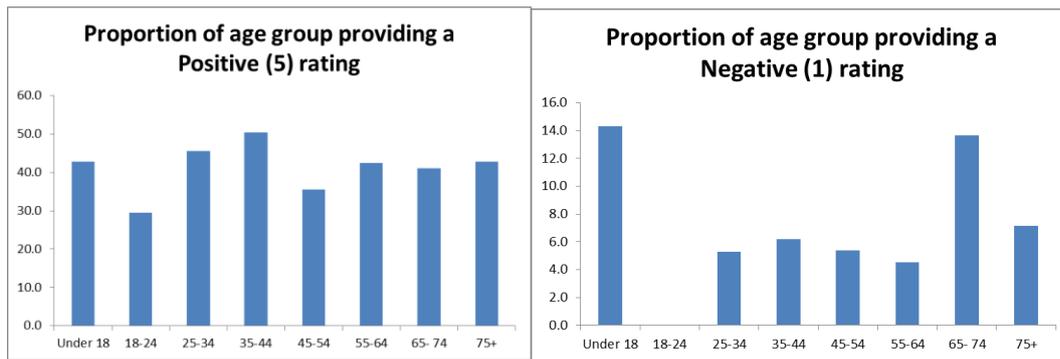
Analysing the ratings provided by those who stated they lived in Midhurst and those who stated they were regular visitors reveals some similarity however, a key point of comparison is that regular visitors were less likely than residents to provide a rating at either extreme of the five point scale.

	Live in Midhurst (n= 398)	Regular visitor (n = 134)
5 Positive	47.2%	41.8%
4	22.6%	25.3%
No strong feeling	15.6%	17.9%
2	7.5%	10.4%
1 Negative	7.0%	1.5%

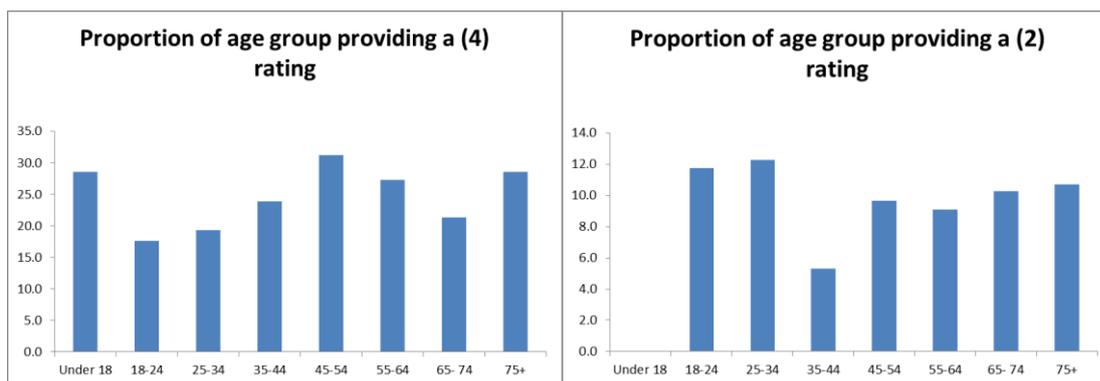
Perception by age group

Later in the survey respondents were also asked to provide their age, by selecting from a range of banded categories: Under 18, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74 and 75+. In total 657 of those who provided a rating also provided an indication of their age group, with the largest single group being the 45-54 age range which accounted for 186 of those who provide a rating for Midhurst. By contrast the under 18 and 18-24 age groups were much lower, accounting for 7 and 17 respondents respectively.

There are a number of differences in the ratings provided by different age groups. Of the 35-44 age group just over half 50.4% of respondents in that age group provided the highest possible rating. This compared to 35.5% for the 45-54 age group and just 29.4% for the 18-24 group – though in this latter group there are only 17 respondents in total so there needs to be a degree of caution exercised.

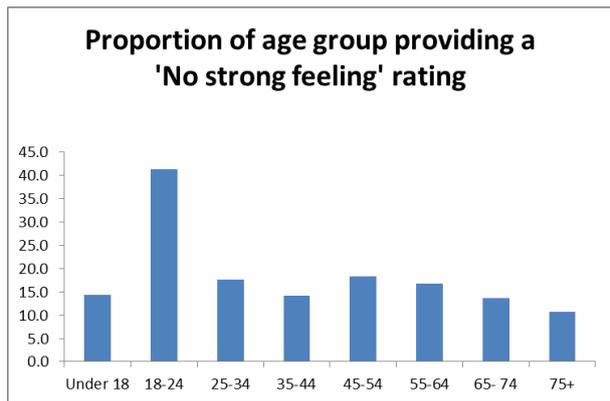


Viewing the other end of the scale it was the under 18 group whose respondents were most likely to select the lowest possible rating of negative (1), accounting for 14.3% of the age group however, again caution should be exercised as this group only consisted of 7 respondents therefore it is hard to draw firm conclusions. Among the other age groups the 65-74 age group, consisting of 117 respondents, saw 13.7% selecting the lowest possible category, whilst the third highest proportion selecting this category could be found among those aged 75+ with 7.1% selecting the negative rating.



Looking at the second highest rating of 4 those in the 45-54 age group were the most likely to provide this rating with 31.2% of that age group choosing this rating. Those age groups at either end of the scale – under 18 and 75+ were also likely to select this option with 28.6% of both groups choosing option 4.

For the second lowest possible rating the profile is slightly different. Under 18's are not represented here at all – though again the low number of respondents in that category makes analysis problematic. Among the other age groups relatively few of those aged 35-44 provided a rating of 2, just 5.3%, whilst their younger cohort, those aged 25-34, had the highest proportion providing the rating of 2 with 12.3% of them selecting this rating.



Among those expressing 'No strong feeling' to the question about their overall impression of Midhurst were 41.2% of the 18-24 age group. This was the highest proportion among any age group, though once again this needs to be treated with caution due to the relatively low number of respondents in that age range. Among the other age groups the proportion reporting they had no strong feeling ranges from a low of 10.7% of the 75+ age category to a figure of 18.3% for the 45-54 age group.

Discussion points

When asked their overall impression of Midhurst using a five-point scale, two thirds of respondents, some 66.5%, selected one of the highest two categories. This suggests that the overall respondents impression of the town is one which is in the main good. However, it should be noted that a not insignificant proportion, 16.3%, selected the bottom two categories with 7.0% choosing the very bottom category and indicating they have a negative overall impression of Midhurst.

Looking beyond this headline figures a number of key differences emerge. Firstly those who reported living in Midhurst were more likely than those who reported they were regular visitors to Midhurst to select either the highest, or lowest categories and in fact only 1.5% of regular visitors opted for the negative response. One possible explanation for this is that those living in the town are more likely to hold a strong opinion due to their level of personal investment in the town and the impact which the town has on their everyday lives and future aspirations.

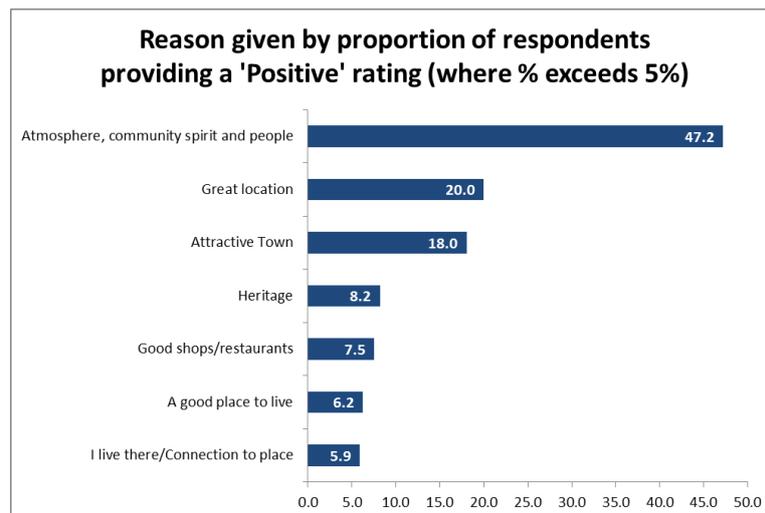
Analysis of differences according to age category also raises some interesting points for discussion. Whilst caution is needed for interpreting any results for the under 18 and 18-24 categories due to the relatively low number of respondents in those groups there is nonetheless the suggestion that there is at least some sort of relationship between responses to the question on overall perception of Midhurst and age-category, with different age cohorts experiencing a different spread of responses to the question. One particularly striking result is that those in the 45-54 age category were far less likely to provide a rating of 'Positive' compared to most other groups, whilst those in the 65-74 age category were

more likely than all other groups – apart from Under 18’s – to select the lowest possible response of ‘Negative’ despite the proportion providing a ‘positive’ response being broadly similar to other age groups. It could also be that in addition to age the ratings are also impacted by factors not considered here such as health, access to transport and socio-economic status.

Reasons for rating

As a follow up to question one respondents were asked ‘What makes you feel this way?’ and provided with an free text box in which they were able to leave whatever comments they wished to explain their choice of rating. A large number of comments were received and these were analysed by coding comments by theme in order to identify common themes among respondents. This process provided an insight into what reasoning and issues had informed respondents thinking.

Positive



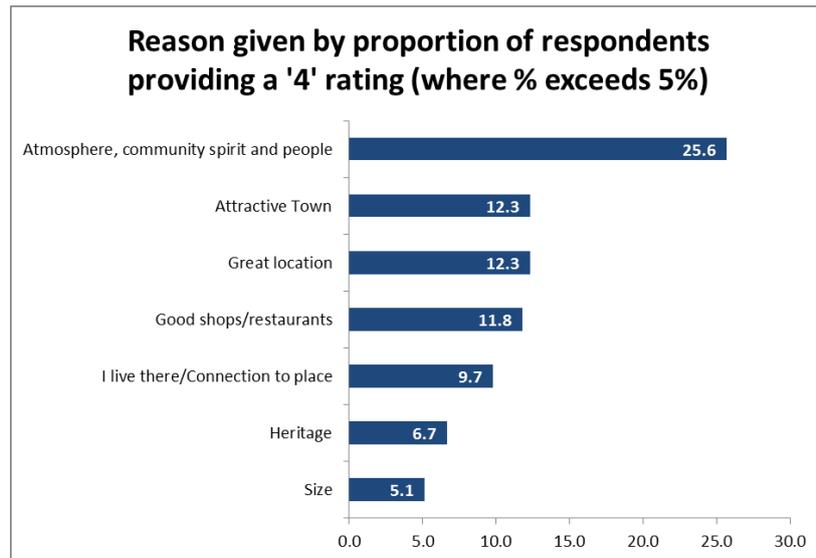
Out of the 305 people respondents who provided a positive rating, just under half, some 144, provided a comment referring to the theme ‘Atmosphere, community spirit and people.’ Among this theme were comments referring to Midhurst as friendly, welcoming, vibrant, or mentioning community spirit of the place.

The second most prevalent theme amongst those providing a positive response was the ‘Great location’ of the town, representing 20.0% of those selecting a positive rating. Many of these comments referred to the town’s location within the South Downs National Park, but a number mentioned the proximity to London, major airports and the coast.

For 18% the appearance of the town itself was cited as a reason for their positive rating. This theme could be seen to be closely related to another notable

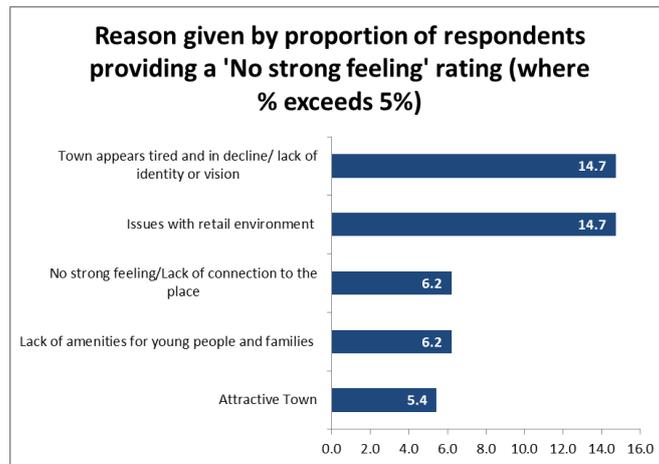
theme around heritage, particularly when it comes to the beauty provided by the rich architectural heritage of the town. Other themes present were 'good shops/restaurants' – with respondents making reference to independent retailers - and a 'good place to live' as well as people who provided the positive response based either upon the fact that they were residents, or else had a connection with the town.

Category '4'



Moving one down the scale to those who provided a rating of 4 the theme 'Atmosphere, community spirit and people' also featured prominently among reasons given with just over a quarter of respondents who provided the rating. In many ways the top themes were relatively similar to those who selected the positive response. A number of respondents also mentioned the size of the town as being a reason for their rating. This could be seen to be linked to the atmosphere as one respondent put it Midhurst is "Small and friendly"

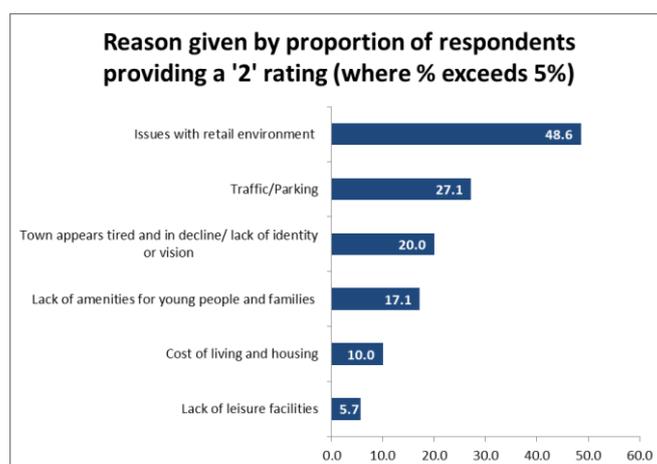
Category 'No strong feeling'



In contrast with the 'Positive' and '4' categories there appeared to be less of a clear consensus among those who expressed 'No strong feeling' when asked their overall impression of Midhurst. The two foremost themes were each mentioned by just 14.7% of respondents who chose the rating. These were 'Town appears tired and in decline/ lack of identity or vision' and 'Issues with retail environment.' In some ways these themes appeared to be closely linked with some respondents referring to the loss of identity, or feeling of decline arising from shops closing, or what they feel is the wrong mix of shops.

The issue of young people and families also featured amongst this group, with the theme 'Lack of amenities for young people and families' being referred to by 6.2% of those in this category.

Category '2'

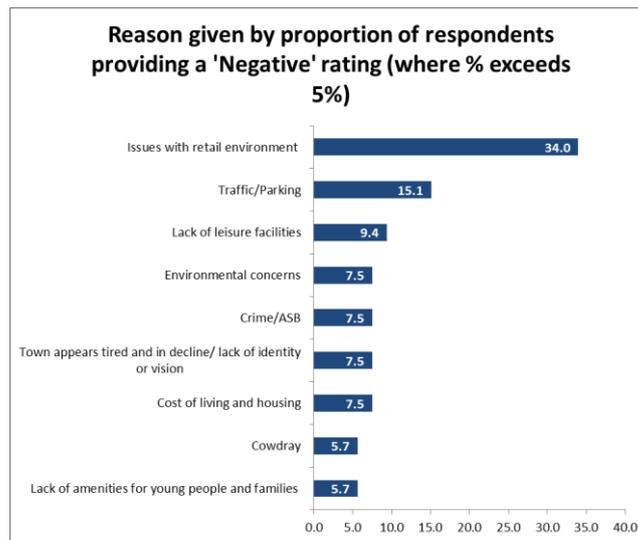


Moving into the lower categories a clear consensus begins to return again. In this category 'Issues with retail environment' was again a prominent theme,

featuring in the comments left by 48.6% of the respondents who had provided a rating. Comments included reference to issues with the type and variety of shops, closures of shops and a number citing the lack of a supermarket.

Issues with traffic and to a lesser extent parking were mentioned by over a quarter of respondents providing this rating, some 27.1%, whilst other themes were a lack of amenities for young people and families as well as the cost of living and housing and a lack of leisure facilities

Category 'Negative'



In the bottom category 'Issues with retail environment' again featured prominently, this time with over a third of respondents who provided a negative rating mentioning this theme. Traffic and parking again featured prominently, accounting for 15.1%. Beyond this a number of issues were cited including the lack of leisure facilities, concerns around the local environment and possible negative impacts on this as well as issues with crime, or anti social behaviour.

Discussion

Taken together the replies given to the question "What makes you feel this way?" provide a good overview of what respondents saw as the positive and negative features of Midhurst, whilst also pointing to both opportunities and challenges.

On the positive side respondents spoke of the atmosphere and the community spirit to be found in a small town. Midhurst is rich in its heritage and its historical architecture as well as the beauty both of the town and the surrounding South Downs. Midhurst also benefits from being within reach of the capital and major infrastructure, historically positioned on a North-South and East-West

crossroads. People felt connected to the place, which they felt was a good place to live whilst for residents and visitors the independent shops and restaurants offer something unique.

Against this however there are a number of challenges. For some the retail mix of shops and restaurants is poor, or in decline and some point to the gap of a supermarket serving the local population. The historic crossroads location which has been of such benefit to the town also poses challenges in the form of the traffic which is commonly cited as a problem whilst some feel the town lacks a distinct identity. Some also raise concerns that there is a lack leisure facilities and a lack of amenities for children and young people as well as a high cost of living and housing. Concerns also include crime and Anti Social Behaviour and concerns over threats to the local natural environment. Finally the relationship with Cowdray also appears to be less than straightforward.

The results suggest several key areas of focus. From both the positive and positive responses it appeared that the retailers in Midhurst provide a core source of identity for the town, contributing greatly to its atmosphere. The high street is also for many residents and visitors a focal point whose visual appearance serves as a proxy for the health and vitality of the town. However, whilst those in the more positive categories for instance referenced the unique and independent retailers, those in the 'No strong feeling', '4' and 'negative' categories were more likely to reference what they felt were deficiencies in this retail environment. This makes it a key area for further work.

Aligned with this another area of further work is the need for a strong identity, drawing on the towns many strengths whilst key areas of focus include the issue of traffic, leisure facilities and amenities for children and young people.

Beyond the headline figures it appeared there were a range of experiences and perspectives of Midhurst. The vision which is developed therefore needs to take a holistic view of the whole community, understanding the needs, challenges and aspirations of different parts of the community.