

Interim County Plan Consultation

1. Introduction

The County Plan is the key strategic document for the council that provides the current strategic oversight and vision for the county and outlines the Council's ambitions and objectives over the next four years. The plan highlights how those ambitions will be delivered and is used to inform how resources and budgets are prioritised. The plan brings together the Council's objectives across key areas such as the economy, planning, community services, transport, infrastructure, social care and skills. Due to the cross-cutting nature of the County Plan it has strong links and interdependencies with the other key strategic documents that provide direction for specific aspects of the Council's work. These documents include; Big Economic Plan, The Local Plan, Integrated Waste Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Children's Improvement Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Capital Strategy, Carbon Management Plan, Hereford City Masterplan.

Through a series of internal workshops The Cabinet developed a suite of 12 ambition statements that encapsulated the priorities for the next four-year plan. These ambition statements are grouped under three themes:

- **People** - Enable resilient and connected communities to ensure that everyone lives well and has the best start in life
- **Place** - Protect and enhance our environment and keep Herefordshire a great place to live
- **Growth** - Support growth across the county which builds on the county's strengths and resources

The Council were keen to consult with its residents and businesses about the agreed ambitions. It commissioned a series of 23 face-to-face and online consultation events alongside an online survey to encourage broad engagement with the development of the plan. Details of the consultation process are set out in section 3.

A full list of the ambition statements consulted on is provided below.

2. Purpose of the report

This report presents the feedback from the County Plan consultation undertaken with residents, businesses and hard to reach groups. It highlights;

- Areas of consensus and divergence in relation to the ambition statements.
- The relative urgency they attached to each of the ambition statements. Including how the online consultation results compare.
- What consultees felt was missing from the ambitions.

- What consultees thought would have the greatest impact in terms of achieving the ambitions.
- General commentary on the ambitions.
- What residents and businesses would like the County to feel like by the end of the plan's lifespan.
- Reflections on the engagement process.

3. Methodology

To inform the development of the plan, consultation was undertaken with a wide range of businesses and targeted groups within the community, including those considered hard to reach. The purpose of these events was to gather feedback that would help refine and shape the plan.

Consultation started on Friday 8th December 2023 and finished on 21st February 2024. The online survey closed on 18th February. During this period 23 consultation events were undertaken engaging 597 people. 390 responses to the online survey were received resulting in a total engagement figure of 987 people. A full list of all the consultation events is contained as Appendix A.

Through the consultation process the following groups were engaged:

- Low-income families
- Young people (14 – 18)
- Environmental groups
- Parish & Town Councils
- Community & voluntary groups
- Older people
- Businesses
- People with disabilities¹

4. Format of the consultation session

The online and face to face sessions followed a similar pattern and used the same questions. The primary difference was that face-to-face sessions did not have an introduction from a Council representative and discussions were undertaken on a one-to-one basis rather than as a group.

The online session started with an introduction from a Council representative about the County Plan, its purpose and how it links to other Council strategies. Then a series of polls were used to gather votes on when people felt the ambitions should be addressed Now (first 12 months of the plan), Soon (Years 2-3) or Later (Year 4 - final year). Each theme was taken in turn and discussed. Consultees were asked when casting their votes to considering the ambition statements as a set of 14 rather than just within the themes of People, Place and Growth and to think about the interdependencies of the statements.

After the results of the polls for each theme were shared and discussed consultees were asked two additional questions,

¹ This was done via the Making It Real Board

- Is there anything missing that you were expecting to see?
- What do you think would have the biggest impact in achieving this theme?

Prior to closing the session people were asked what three words they would use to describe what they would want Herefordshire to feel like as a resident / business by the end of the plan in 2028.

Adaptations to the workshop format were made based on the time available, the size and nature of the group. The ‘We will...’ statements were produced in an easy read format, large print and a plain English format.

5. We will.... statements

The following table contains the ‘We will’ statements that were the focus of the consultation.

People - Encourage and enable all residents, especially children, young people and families to thrive.
Ensure that residents are enabled to live healthy lives within their communities.
Tackle inequality by focusing on early intervention and prevention activities that support people to live independent and fulfilling lives.
Enable people to support themselves and each other by providing the right support at the right time.
Work closely with partners and communities to build connected and resilient communities.
Ensure people feel safe and respected in their communities.
Place - Protect our environment through innovation and best practice and promote initiatives that address the environmental challenges we face.
Increase recycling rates more and make improvements to the local environment.
Protect the county's biodiversity, value nature and uphold environmental standards.
Champion agricultural practices which minimise pollution and maximise biodiversity.
Support our local culture and heritage and make Herefordshire a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit.
Growth - Invest in the economy and support economic growth.
Expand the transport and infrastructure network to improve access across the county.

Develop employment land to unlock new business opportunities for the county and generate local jobs.
Support market towns to be vibrant hubs through working with residents, grassroots organisations and businesses.
Support residents to access skills development and training opportunities.
Work with partners to provide high quality housing to meet all needs.

6. Key messages about the ‘We will’ statements

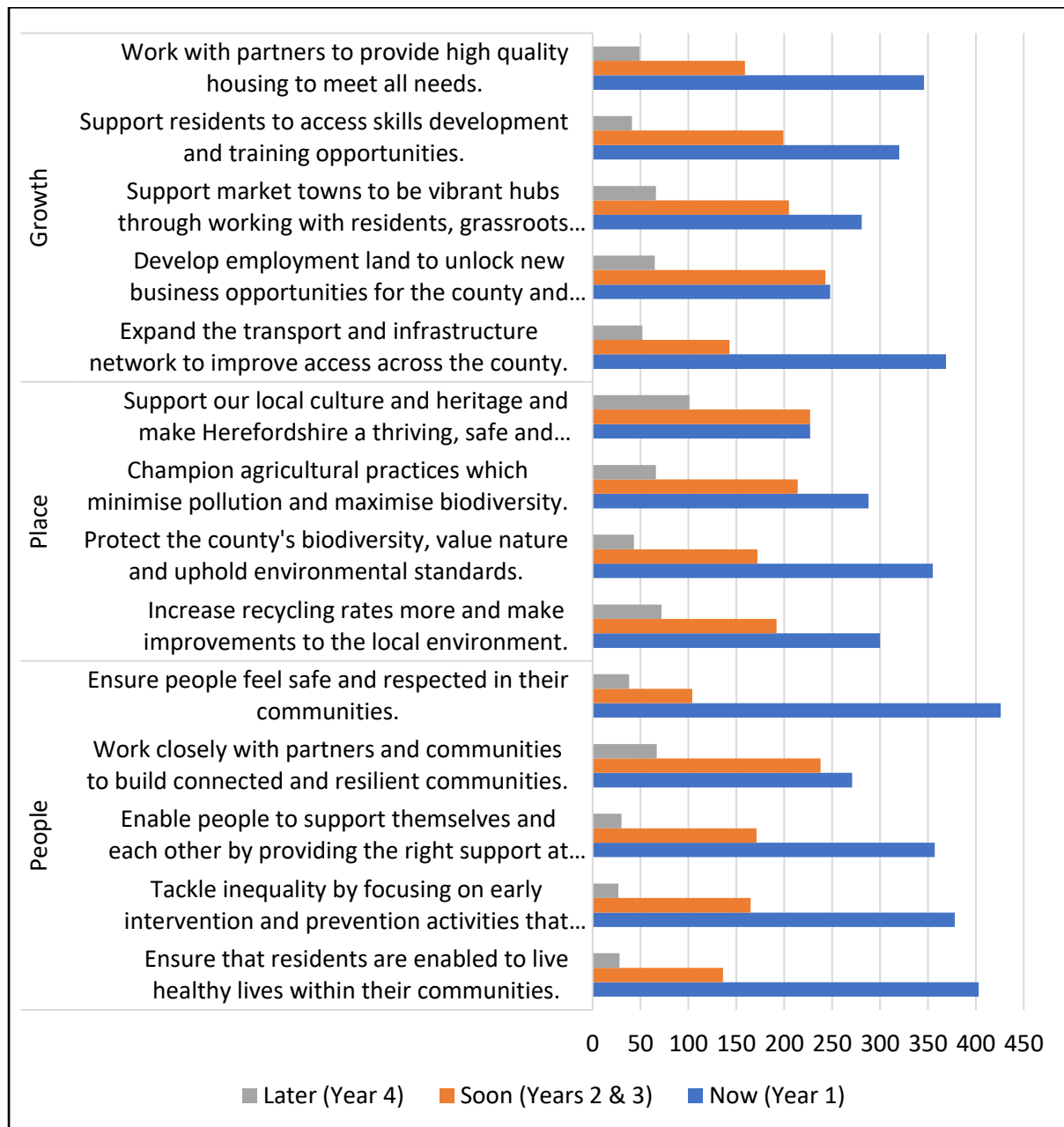
The following key messages are those that were raised consistently throughout the consultation process in relation to the ambition statements.

- There was broad agreement that all the ambitions have merit with many people saying that it is difficult to disagree that they are all important given their fundamental nature.
- There was a strong view that these ambition statements were too generic and broad and that they did not feel specific enough to Herefordshire.
- Many people said that they would like to have been consulted earlier in the development of the statements to enable them to shape and influence them.
- Many people felt the statements were not aspirational enough and that the Council should be striving higher, identifying what it is good at and is doing already and building on this.
- It was felt that there needed to be a much stronger focus on the rurality² of the county throughout the statements.
- There was a feeling amongst many consultees that the language used in many of the statements was not positive enough.
- There is a strong appetite for understanding how the statements will be delivered - e.g. consultation on the deliverables.
- The plan needs to make it clear how these ambitions will be realised given the financial constraints the Council is currently facing.
- People want re-assurance and further clarification about how the County Plan fits with existing strategies and plans that are already in place.
- There is recognition that many of the statements cannot be achieved within the 4-year period but are longer term ambitions for the County.
- Some people felt the period of the plan should be 10 years to have a chance of achieving the ambitions.
- There was a common view that the plan should the plan focus only on the areas that the Council can control / influence and that the Council needs to be clear about its role in some of these ambitions.
- The plan needs to make it clear that some of these ‘ambitions’ are already underway. Statements need to reflect this by using words such as continue, build on and enhance.
- Some of the ambition statements are a mixture of ‘what’ and ‘how’ which is confusing.

² As part of the consultation comments were received from the NFU these are attached as Appendix C.

7. Poll results – All themes

Chart of All responses (987 from face-to-face interactions and online survey) in order of timescale (Now – Year 1)



Top 5 ambition statements

The top 5 ambition statements which received the highest number of Now votes were;

1. Ensure people feel safe and respected in their communities.

2. Ensure that residents are enabled to live healthy lives within their communities.
3. Protect the county's biodiversity, value nature and uphold environmental standards.
4. Tackle inequality by focusing on early intervention and prevention activities that support people to live independent and fulfilling lives.
5. Expand the transport and infrastructure network to improve access across the county.

Bottom 5 ambition statements

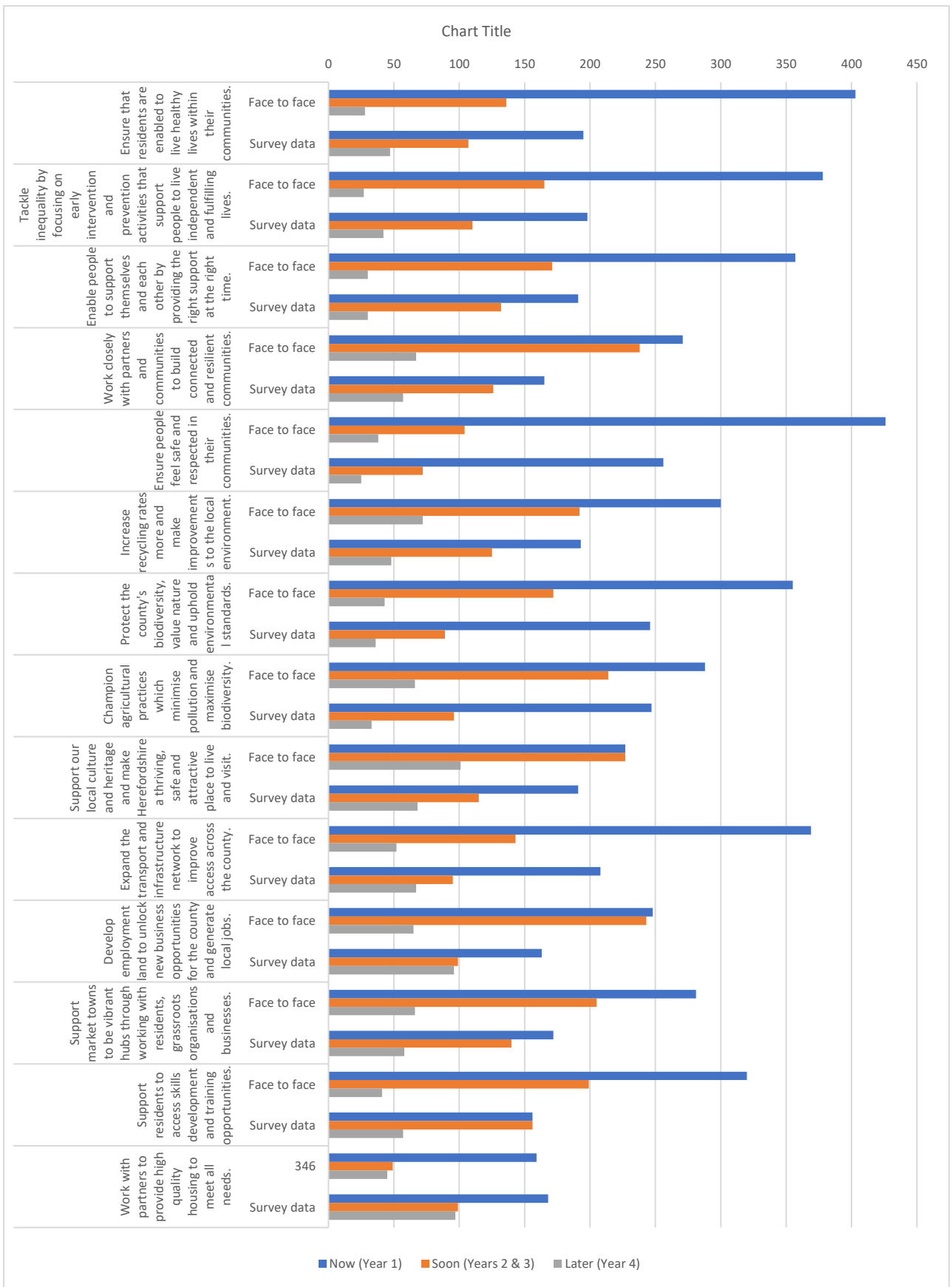
The bottom 5 ambition statements which received the lowest number of Now votes were;

1. Support residents to access skills development and training opportunities.
2. Support market towns to be vibrant hubs through working with residents, grassroots organisations and businesses.
3. Work closely with partners and communities to build connected and resilient communities.
4. Support our local culture and heritage and make Herefordshire a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit.
5. Develop employment land to unlock new business opportunities for the county and generate local jobs.

Other points to note:

- Three of the top 5 and the two most significant priorities are under the People theme.
- All the ambitions received more Now votes than Soon or Later although the comparative degree that they were prioritised varies across the ambitions.
- The ambitions where there appears to be greatest divergence of opinion are support our local culture and heritage and make Herefordshire a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit and develop employment land to unlock new business opportunities for the county and generate local jobs.

6. Comparison with online results



Overall the results of the face-to-face consultation mirrored the results of the online survey with the following notable exceptions.

- Stronger support for culture and heritage being done now in the online survey compared to face-to-face.

- Stronger support for employment land being done now in the online survey compared to face-to-face which had equal amounts of now and soon.
- Stronger support for access to skills and training being done now from the face-to-face groups compared to equal votes for now and soon from the online survey, however this may reflect that the online survey users are obviously skilled enough to complete online surveys.
- Stronger support for championing agricultural practices being done now from the online survey compared to face-to-face groups.
- Being safe and respected received the most votes for being done now from both the online survey and face-to-face groups.

7. Feedback by Theme

People - Key messages

- People raised why children, young people and families were specified in the People objective statement many people felt this should be 'all residents'.
- The ambitions under the People theme were often referred to being 'givens' or 'essentials' rather than ambitions, particularly ambitions 1 and 5.
- People felt these statements were the vaguest and raised concerns about how success in achieving these ambitions would be measured.

People – What's missing?

- Many people were surprised that there was not a stronger focus on vulnerable people.
- Some people felt there should be a stronger focus on young people given that they are the future of the county.
- People frequently highlighted the current state of Children's Services in relation to this theme and the need to acknowledge the improvements needed.

Place - Key messages

- The emphasis should be to improve and enhance what we already have – it was felt this would make this aspect of the plan feel more achievable within the timescales.
- Some people were confused by the use of the word 'rates' in the recycling statement and misinterpreted this as 'charges'.
- Reference to increasing recycling rates was seen to be an anomaly amongst the statements as it is the only specific action included in the statements.
- People wanted to see the environmental and biodiversity statements strengthened replacing the word 'protect' with 'enhance'.
- The most polarised comments received were in relation to the culture and heritage ambition. Whilst many people felt there needed to be a much stronger focus on supporting and encouraging tourism to boost the local economy in the ambitions statements others felt that when considered alongside the other ambitions it was not considered to be such a priority.
- There were mixed views about the statement around championing agricultural practices. Whilst many people felt this was important there was concern over how much influence Herefordshire Council could have over this.

Place – What’s missing?

- Strong feelings that specific reference needs to be made about addressing the pollution of the River Wye.
- Stronger emphasis needs to be placed on the link between culture and heritage and making Hereford a visitor destination of choice.
- A stronger focus on the natural beauty of the county and how this makes Herefordshire an attractive place to live.

Growth - Key messages

- Many people saw the growth ambitions as key enablers to many of the other of ambitions.
- The need to strengthen the theme of sustainability and resilience has been consistently mentioned.
- The need to reference addressing the congestion issues in Hereford town centre e.g. improvement of public transport infrastructure, by-pass (these issues were particularly, but not exclusively, mentioned by businesses).
- Potholes, and the poor condition of Herefordshire’s roads were universally raised across all groups.
- The need to improve the infrastructure before building more housing.
- The Zipper bus was mentioned by numerous people as a good example of more connected public transport however it was felt that the route was limited and would benefit from extension.

Growth – What’s missing?

- The importance of digital connectivity has been frequently mentioned as something that needs to be specifically referenced within the infrastructure ambition.
- Specific reference should be made to increasing wage levels – this was felt to be key to addressing inequalities that exist within the county and predicated some of the other ambitions.
- The need to specifically reference affordable housing and focus on housing needs as opposed to demand.
- Specific reference to investment in the counties roads was seen as an omission.

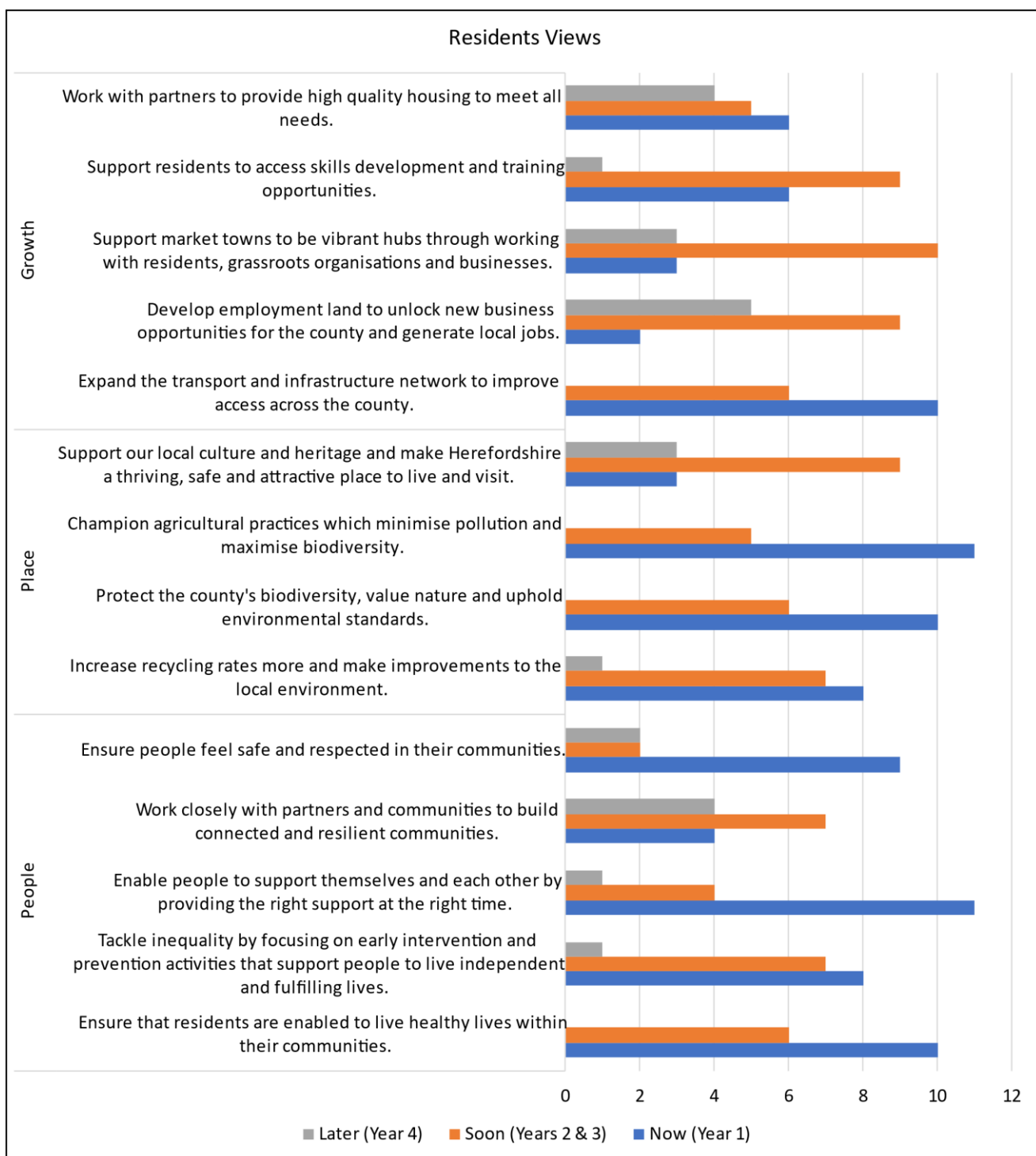
8. What will have the greatest impact in achieving the ambitions?

- Organisations working better together and taking a more joined up approach – there is a perception that many of these ambitions cannot be achieved with the Council working in isolation.
- Investment in the infrastructure i.e. roads, housing, schools, community buildings.
- Building trust between residents, businesses and the Council – more regular engagement, communication and open dialogue with residents.

- Managing expectations about what the Council can achieve given its financial constraints and the limited discretionary funds it has.
- Clarity on the Council's role in achieving these ambitions – is it a provider, a facilitator or an enabler?
- Strengthening the statements and making them more specific.
- Focusing on less but doing it well.
- Making sure success can be clearly measured and evidenced to be able to demonstrate the impact.

9. Overview of key messages from each group.

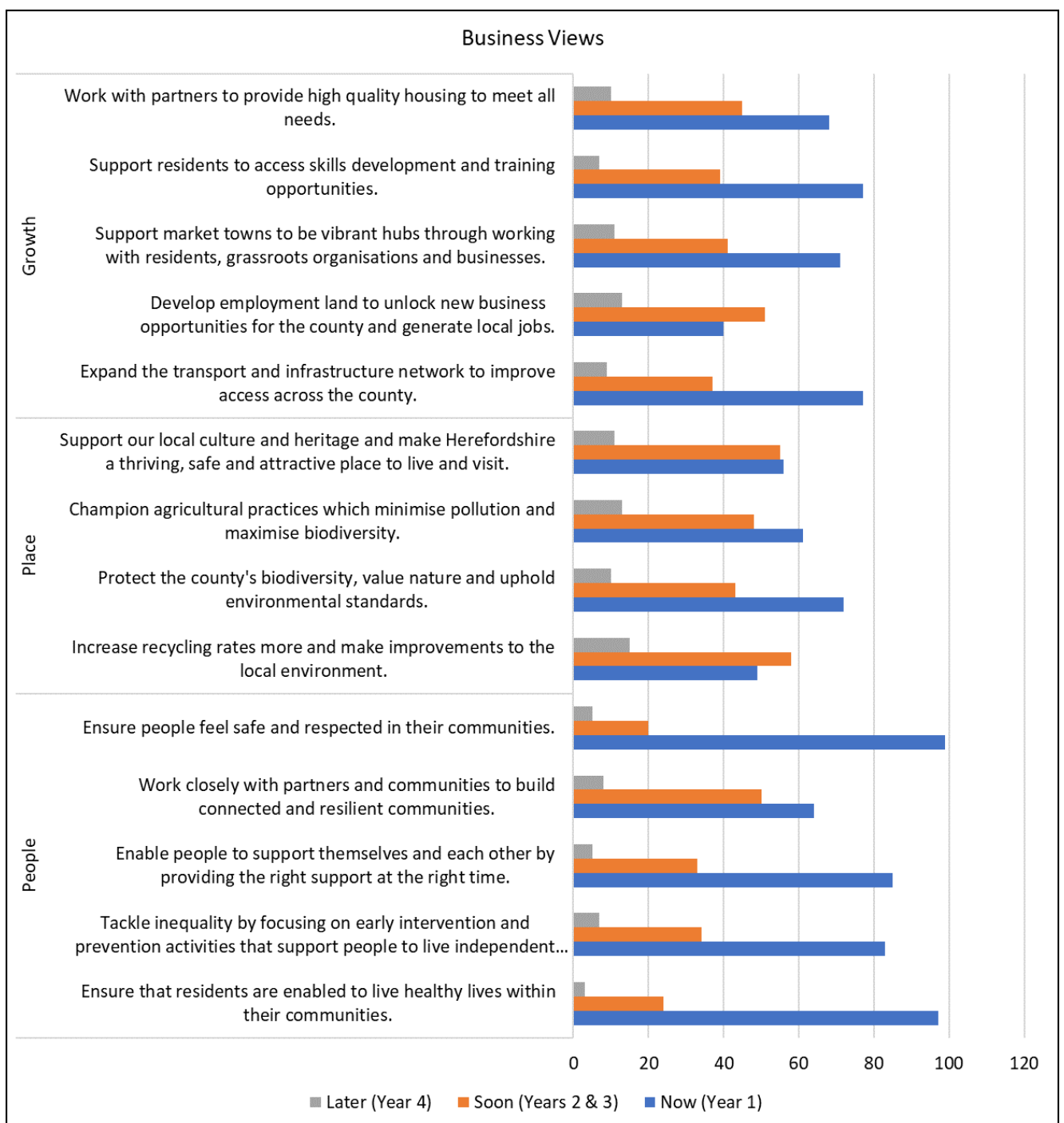
General residents (35)



Noticeable differences in the poll results:

- A more significant focus on championing agricultural practices and people supporting themselves with the right help at the right time.
- Less prioritisation on the growth theme statements apart from the one relating to transport. A stronger leaning towards Soon and Later for the statements relating to employment land, market towns, skills and housing.
- Less support for building resilient communities and culture and heritage statements.

Businesses (127)



Noticeable differences in the poll results:

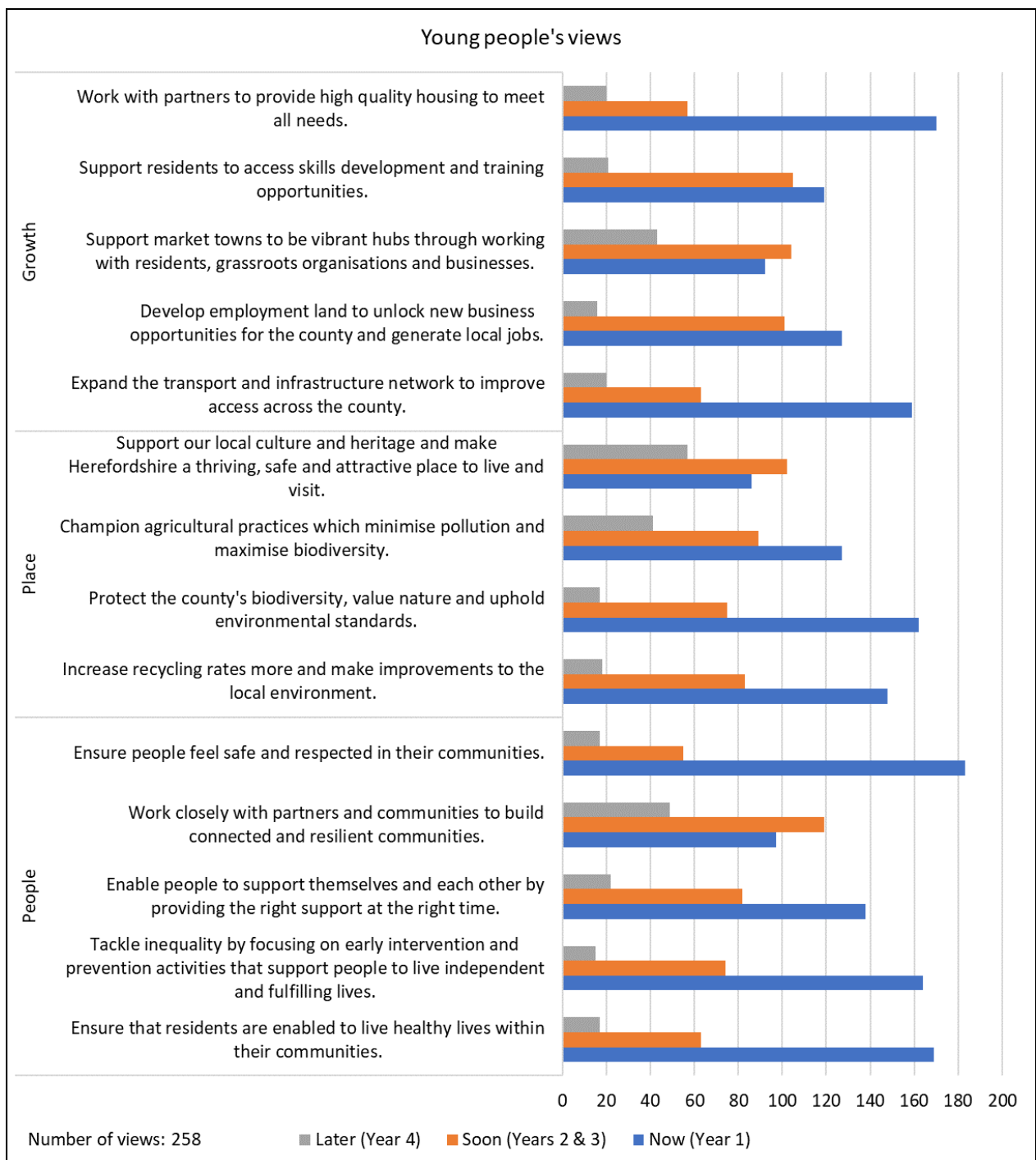
- The most important statements for businesses were residents living healthy lives and people feeling safe and respected.
- Both the developing employment land and increasing recycling rates statements received more votes for Soon than Now.

Businesses were more likely to raise the following points:

- A stronger emphasis on the need to improve the transport infrastructure and address traffic and congestion issues within the city.
- Potholes, and the poor condition of Herefordshire's roads were specifically mentioned in relation to improving transport infrastructure.
- To position the Growth ambitions as key enablers for the other ambitions.
- The need to make specific reference to increasing wage levels.

- Car parking charges were seen as a deterrent to building vibrant city and towns.
- Reference to culture and heritage was specifically linked to the need to invest in the tourism industry.

Young People (258)



Noticeable differences in the poll results:

- Young people were more likely to prioritise transport such as buses, feeling safe, housing, environment and healthy lives.
- The areas that young people saw as less of an urgent priority, were working closely with partners to build resilient communities, supporting local culture

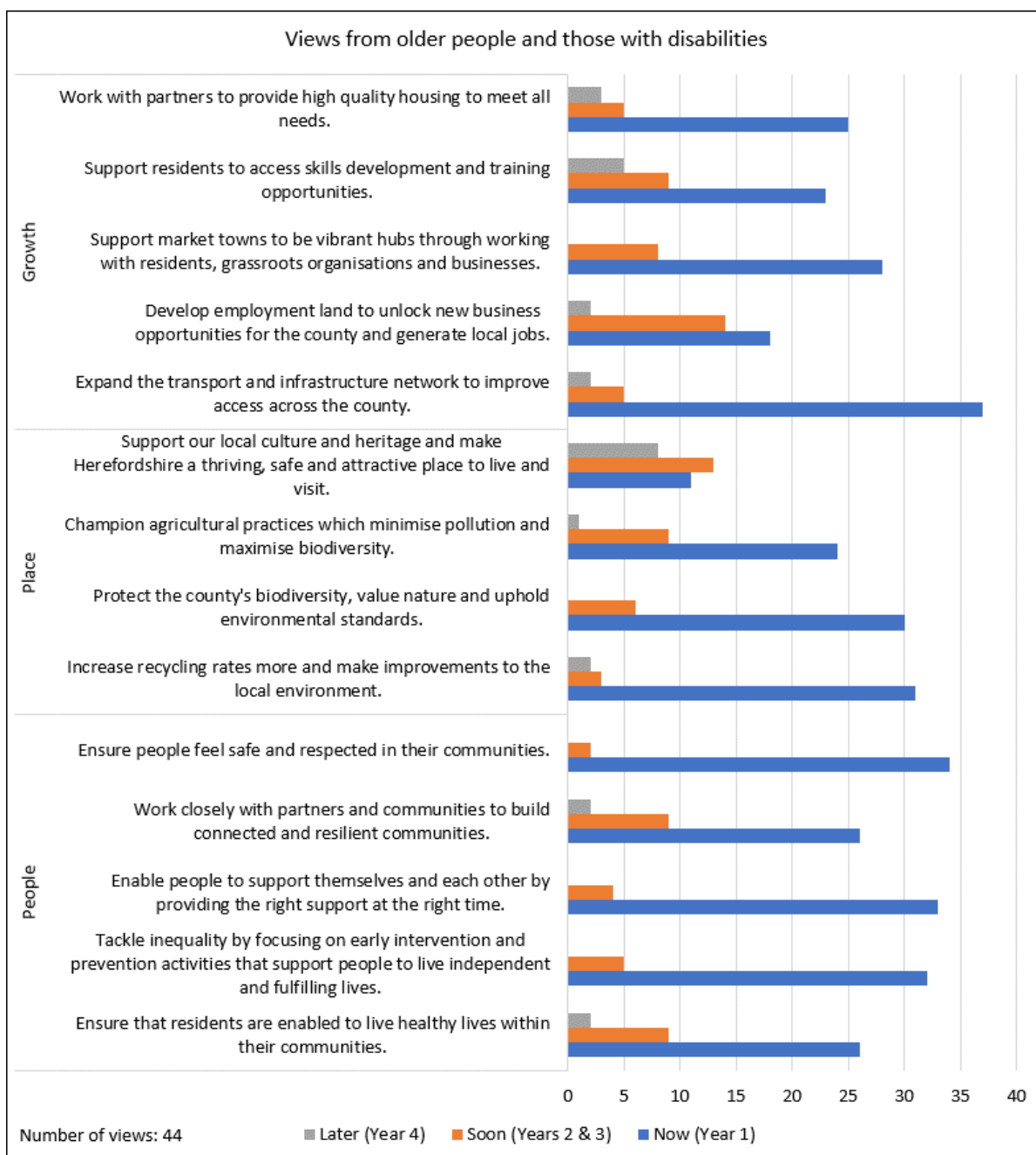
and heritage (things to do and see in Herefordshire) and supporting market towns.

Young people³ were more likely to raise the following points:

- Access to public transport specifically timetabling of buses/trains to ensure they can get to college, work etc and the need for lighting at rural bus stops.
- The importance of feeling safe.
- Access to recreational areas and the cycling infrastructure
- Access to information about what support is available and where to find help.
- Pollution in the River Wye.
- The need to address the traffic congestion in Hereford City.

Older people and those with disabilities (44)

³ This is based on discussions held with Sixth Form College students that were involved in a group discussion.



Noticeable differences in the poll results:

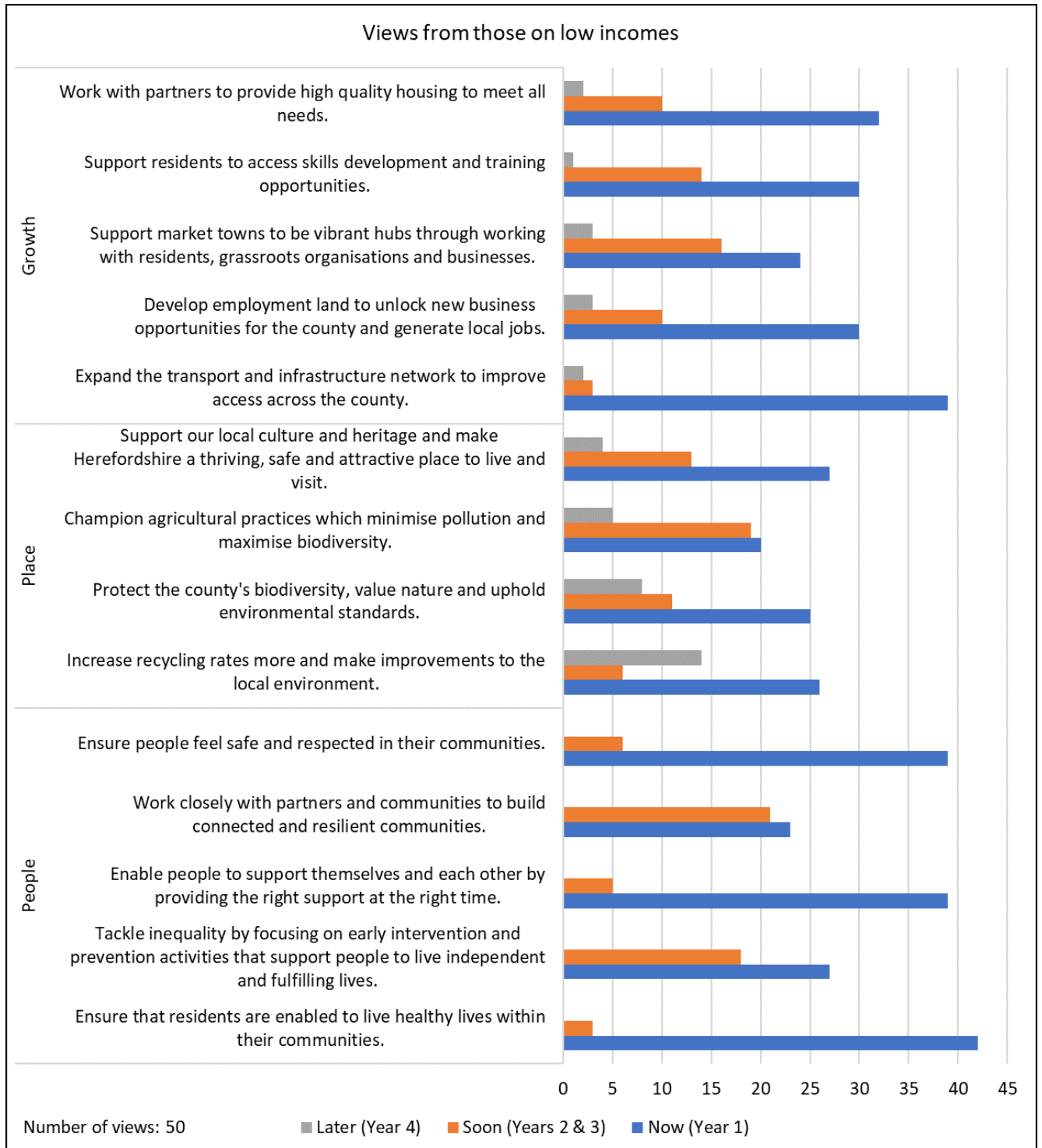
- Older people and those with disabilities were more likely to prioritise transport such as buses, support for market towns, recycling and environmental improvements, and building connected communities.
- The areas that older people and those with disabilities saw as less of an urgent priority, were living healthy lives, supporting local culture and heritage (things to do and see in Herefordshire) and providing high quality housing.

Older people and those with disabilities were more likely to raise the following points:

- Nothing was highlighted to happen later as they were more likely to feel they may not be here to benefit from these changes. (Specific to older people)
- The need for a stronger emphasis on supporting the most vulnerable, those who most need help, e.g. those on very low incomes, refugees etc.

- The need to revitalise the market towns within the county (specifically Bromyard).
- The need to improve the transport network generally with specific reference to transport around Hereford City e.g. the lack of links between the city centre and the out-of-town retail parks, the lack of public transport in the North of the county and the importance of free car parking.

Low Incomes (50)



Noticeable differences in the poll results:

- None of the statements within the People theme received any votes for later, highlighting the important nature of this theme amongst this group.

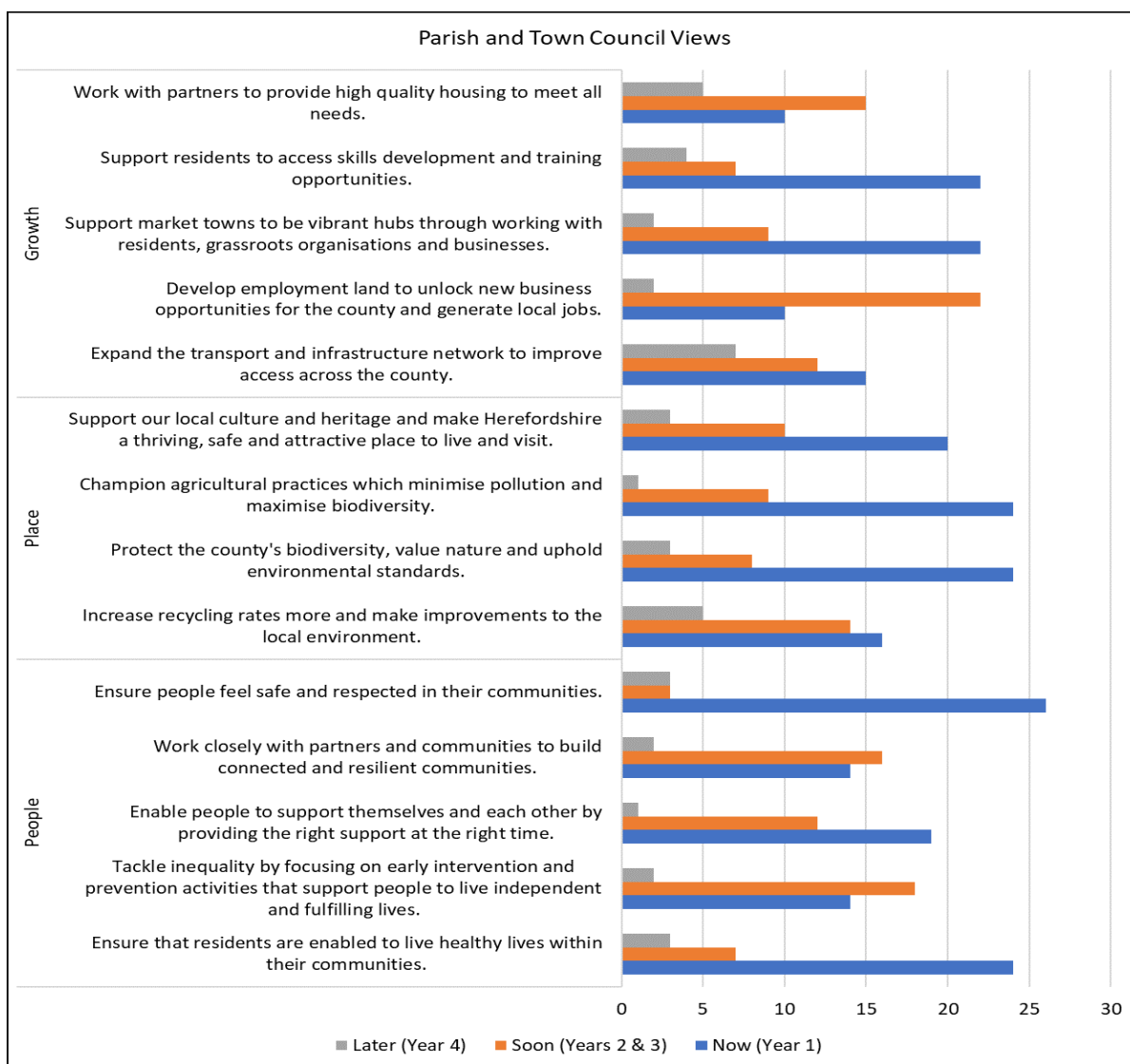
- There was a large amount of support for ensuring residents are healthy, providing the right support at the right time, ensuring people feel safe and respected and improving the transport and infrastructure in the county. These statements were all seen as fundamental.
- The areas where there was less support were around working closely with partners and communities to build connected and resilient communities and champion agricultural practices which minimise pollution and maximise biodiversity.

People on low incomes were more likely to raise the following points:

- The need to take a bottom-up approach with priorities and solutions being driven by communities.
- Traffic congestion and the bypass, specifically the need to reduce air pollution in the city and make it easier to get through Hereford⁴.
- The decline of retail within Hereford and that many people are traveling out of the county to shop which means that money is going out of the county.
- Improve access to fresh healthy food and the need to support community growing initiatives.
- There needs to be a stronger more explicit emphasis on supporting vulnerable people throughout the plan, particularly those with learning disabilities, younger and older people.

Parish and Town Councils (35)

⁴ Both events were attended primarily from those living in South Wye.



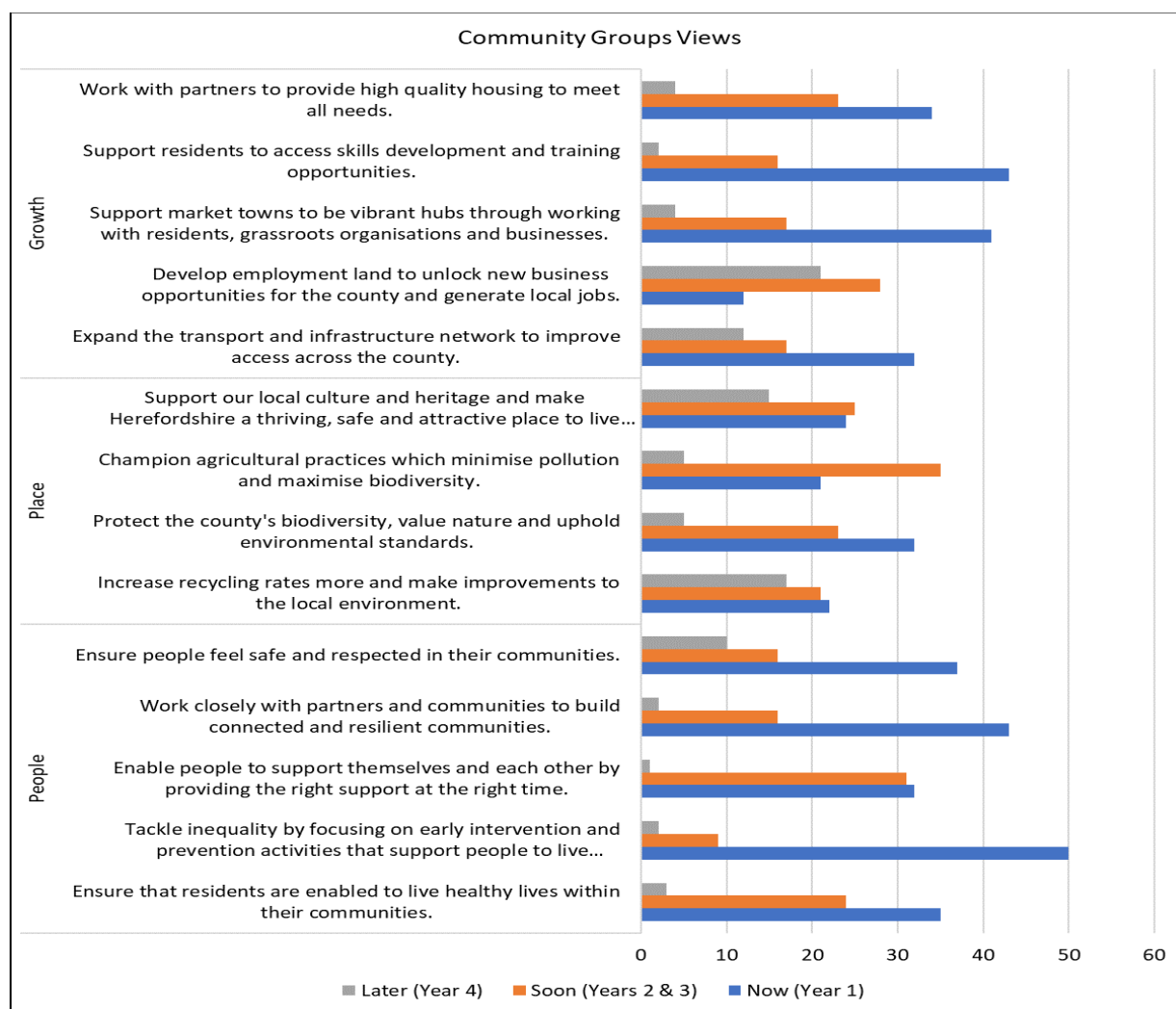
Noticeable differences in the poll results:

- Parish Council's put less focus on employment land, housing, early intervention and resilient communities.
- Feeling safe was a clear priority for this group.

P&TCs were more likely to raise the following points:

- The need for better communication with Herefordshire Council including sharing best practice and looking at what other authorities are doing well.
- The need to have a stronger emphasis on education.
- The need for a more specific statement about supporting the most vulnerable e.g. supporting elderly people to be independent or improving access to mental health support for young people.
- Environmental priorities were felt to be very important.
- Queries over what 'high quality housing' meant and whether there should be a stronger emphasis on affordable sustainable homes.
- Concern around how much of the plan could be achieved within the 4-year period.
- The need to make it clearer that much of what is included in the plan is underway in one form or another.
- The need to specifically reference access to broadband within the statements.

Community Partnership and community groups



Noticeable differences in the poll results:

- They were not as focused on championing agricultural practices and developing employment land.
- They had mixed views about supporting culture and heritage and increasing recycling and making improvements to the local environment.
- They strongly supported immediate action on tackling inequalities through early interventions and building resilient communities.

At the Community Partnership session each table was asked to feedback 3 key messages from their discussions. Below is a summary of those key messages.

- Ambitions are too broad and simplistic.
- There is currently no reference to system change or education.
- The ambitions do not recognise the existing skills and strengths within the county.
- To be achieved the plan needs coordination and joined up thinking.
- Manage expectations not going to be able to achieve all these things in period of the plan.
- Preparation of the younger generation

- Housing ambition should reference affordable housing and needs to be supported by adequate and appropriate infrastructure.
- Stronger focus on employment & skills development
- Greater transparency and openness from the Council
- Requires grassroots engagement
- Needs longer term planning (10 years not 4) and on-going engagement.
- Plans are being recycled needs a new approach and greater innovation
- Stronger emphasis on investment in prevention.
- Requires better partnership working and leadership.
- Statements need connecting not being considered in isolation.
- Need more consistent messaging
- Draw more on lived experience
- Aspirations are vague
- Infrastructure needs to be a priority for everything else to happen.

10. What 3 words...?

At every consultation event people were asked ‘What 3 words would you use to describe what is should feel like to be resident / business in Herefordshire in 2028?’

In terms of the 3 words people would use to describe how is should feel to be a resident in Herefordshire in 2028, **‘Safe’** has been consistently raised by all groups. **‘Healthy’** was the next most commonly used word. These top 2 words mirror the top 2 ambition statements reemphasising the importance that people place on living in a place that feels secure and where they can live healthy lives. **‘Happy’** was the next most used word. This reflects many of the conversations had during the consultation about the need to prioritise activities and services that promote good mental health and wellbeing.

‘Access’ was a popular choice of word this highlights the issues of the lack of physical access that many people raised during the consultation due to the challenges of moving around the county either due to the lack of public transport or congestion in the city. Words such as **‘Connected’**, **‘Communal’** and **‘Valued’** were also commonly chosen reflecting people’s desire to live in a place that values individuals and community, in its broadest sense, and where people feel a sense of belonging. **‘Thriving’**, **‘Hope’** and **‘Lucky’** were also common choices, evidence that people want to live somewhere that feels full of life and opportunity, has a strong mixed economy and where there is a sense of optimism about the future. Given the strong emphasis throughout the consultation and the value that people place on the natural beauty and rurality of the county it is unsurprising to see the words **‘Green’** and **‘Rural’** prominently used.

2. To consider how the Council may engage people in shaping the deliverables in the County Plan if there is scope for them to influence this.
3. To consider how the plan can reflect that these ambitions are long term and are not realisable within the current 4-year period of the plan.
4. To consider extending the timeframe of the plan so it becomes a much longer term (10 year) plan.
5. To put a much stronger emphasis on partnership working and a more joined up approach throughout the plan.
6. To make it clear how these ambitions will be realised given the financial constraints the Council is currently facing.

Appendix B - Simplified wording used at Skills Show and Big Eat.

People - Encourage and enable all residents, especially children, young people and families to thrive.
People living in Herefordshire can live a healthy life.
Supporting people as soon as they need help, so they have equal opportunities and can be independent and happy.
Help people to support themselves and each other by giving them support when it is needed.
Everyone working together to make people feel part of their community.
Make people feel safe and respected in their communities.
Place - Protect our environment through innovation and best practice and promote initiatives that address the environmental challenges we face.
Encourage people to recycle and improve the local environment.
Look after nature and make sure we are not harming the environment.
Support and learn from farmers that are improving our environment and nature.
Make sure there are interesting things to see and do for people living in and visiting Herefordshire.
Growth - Invest in the economy and support economic growth.
Improve public transport and roads to make it easier to get around the county.
Create more jobs for people in Herefordshire.
Help market towns to become thriving and lively places where people want to live, work and visit.
Make getting skills and training easier for people.
Work together to provide a good home for everyone that needs it.

Appendix C – Comments received from the National Farmers Union (NFU)

The following comments were received from the Herefordshire County Adviser on behalf of the NFU.

- Herefordshire Council are supportive of farming projects which deliver technological and/or environmental improvements to our thriving sector in Herefordshire, helping farm businesses to build profitable and environmentally responsible business which are then supported so that they remain in the county. As discussed with the Farming Minister Mark Spencer yesterday, we would like to see more direct collaboration between Herefordshire Council and Defra on the phosphate issue and agricultural planning so that government initiatives which are designed to generate on-farm improvements are backed by the Council
- We would ask the Council to encourage investment in rural communities rather than just focusing on local towns. While we understand your 2023 commitments, the rural areas are a huge part of the county and its economy which need to be included in funding and not forgotten
- Development of a plan to get Herefordshire Council's planning department back on-track so that applications are dealt with in a timely manner. Many applications are taking significantly longer than the eight – thirteen-week timescale stated by the Council, which is having a detrimental impact on businesses and livelihoods. We would also like to see applications which are outside of neighbourhood settlement boundaries fairly assessed
- Development of a plan to improve rural connectivity across Herefordshire
- Collaborative working with other stakeholders to improve grid capacity so that more renewable energy can be utilised. This will be absolutely fundamental if Herefordshire is to achieve its ambitions Net Zero by 2030 target