

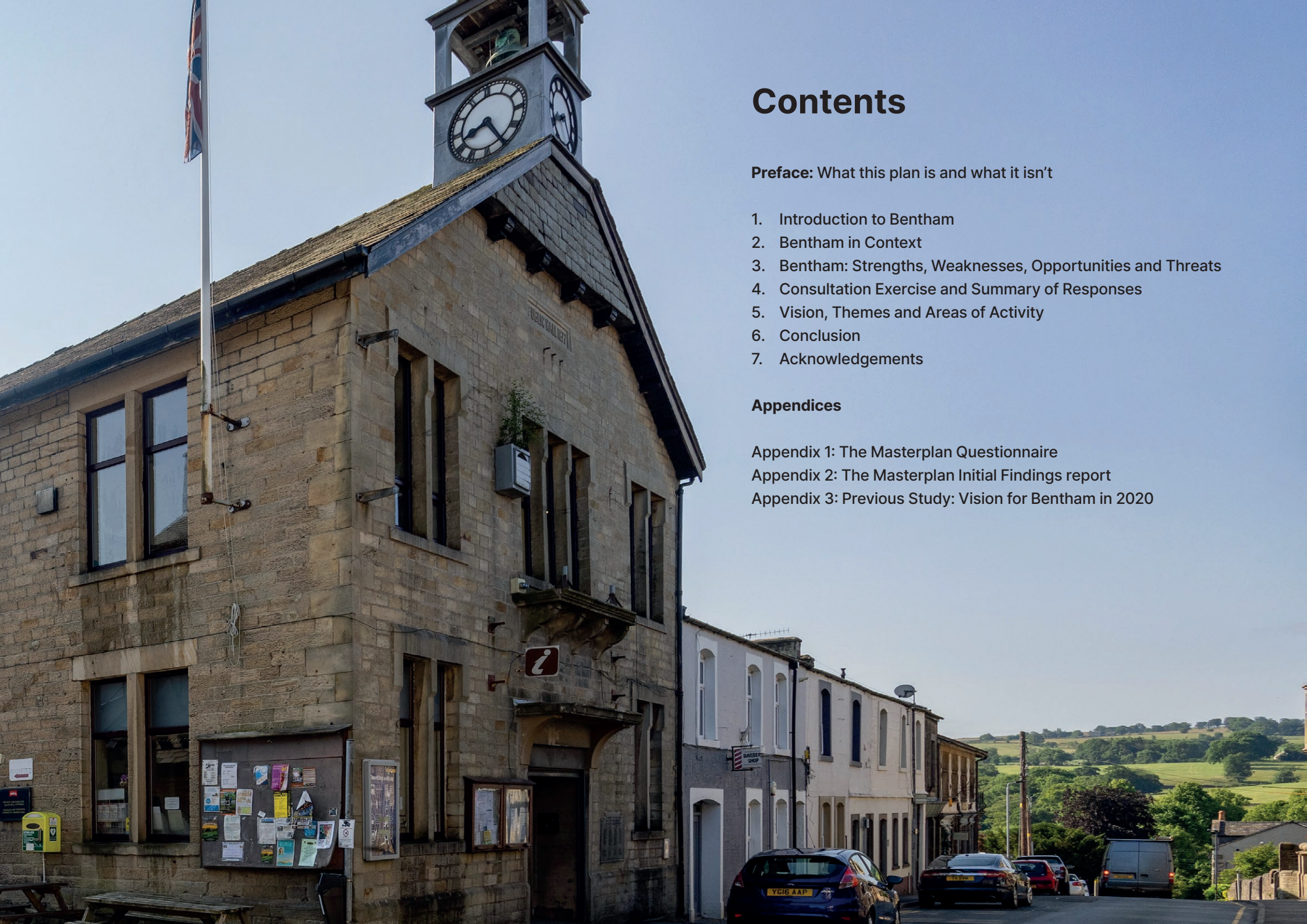


Bentham

MASTERPLAN

Creating a Distinctive Future

March 2024



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Preface:

What this plan is and what it isn't

The Bentham Masterplan was researched, prepared and largely written by a group of volunteer residents of the town with an impressive range of professional backgrounds and with the best interest of the Bentham community as their primary emphasis throughout. The initial impetus had been a Craven District Council attempt to recruit a consultant to undertake the work to devise a plan "For the rejuvenation of the Town Centre and set out a clear vision for the future development of Bentham." As it had not proved possible to find a consultant, we offered to undertake the work on a voluntary basis.

We were determined that the plan should, as far as possible, represent the views and aspirations of local people and we decided to use a survey of local opinions as the foundation for its recommendations. We were rewarded by receiving a very high response rate to our survey and are thus able to confidently state that this plan is based on the views of the Bentham community.

We know that many of our recommendations are not new. Bentham has seen many reports and plans produced over the years supposedly for its benefit. The most recent was a study in 1994 by the Civic Trust Regeneration Unit (Appendix 3) to prepare a regeneration strategy for Bentham, entitled "Vision 2020". Many of the problems and opportunities then were similar to those we still have today.

We are grateful for North Yorkshire officers' help in preparing this final plan in a form which is intended for adoption by both Bentham Town Council and North Yorkshire Council. We hope that they will recognise its distinctive nature and respect it as an accurate representation of the views of the community. It is written with the intention that both authorities will find it useful when planning future services for the town. More importantly, we hope that it will be used by organisations within the town to support their funding bids to other agencies.

This Masterplan is not a neighbourhood plan and so does not include work on spatial planning for housing, recreation or business developments. Nor is it a blueprint for funding. It does not give estimates of costs to achieve its objectives and will not immediately release money from any source. But it is intended to provide an evidence base for those seeking resources from local or central government or other funding agencies to deliver improvements for the town into the future.

We hope all those reading and using this document can accept its limitations and make the most of its recommendations. We are particularly anxious that Bentham people should feel it does represent their hopes for the future development of the town and we are very grateful for all the contributions made by them to assist in its production.

Bentham Masterplan Team

Elizabeth Adlington, Shirley Brown, Phil Gerrie and Jim Munday

1. Introduction to Bentham

Bentham is in the north west of the Craven area of North Yorkshire approximately 37km northwest of Skipton, 25 km north east of Lancaster and 36 km southeast of Kendal. It lies right on the western edge of North Yorkshire, 5km south of the main A65 from Skipton to Kendal and is the nearest North Yorkshire town to the M6.

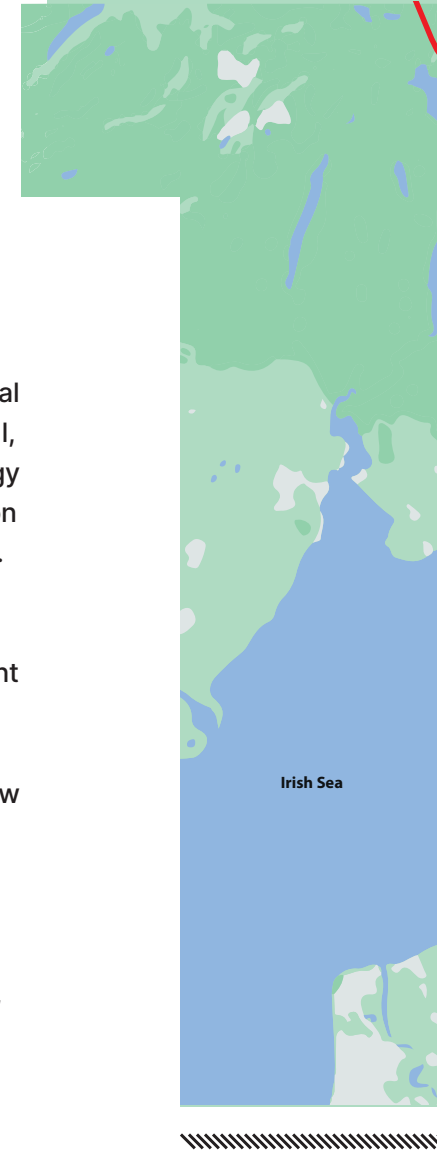
Its separation from the strategic road network, however, means that the town is relatively isolated but, nevertheless, is a Key Service Centre for a wide geographical area across the county boundaries into Lancashire and Westmorland and Furness.

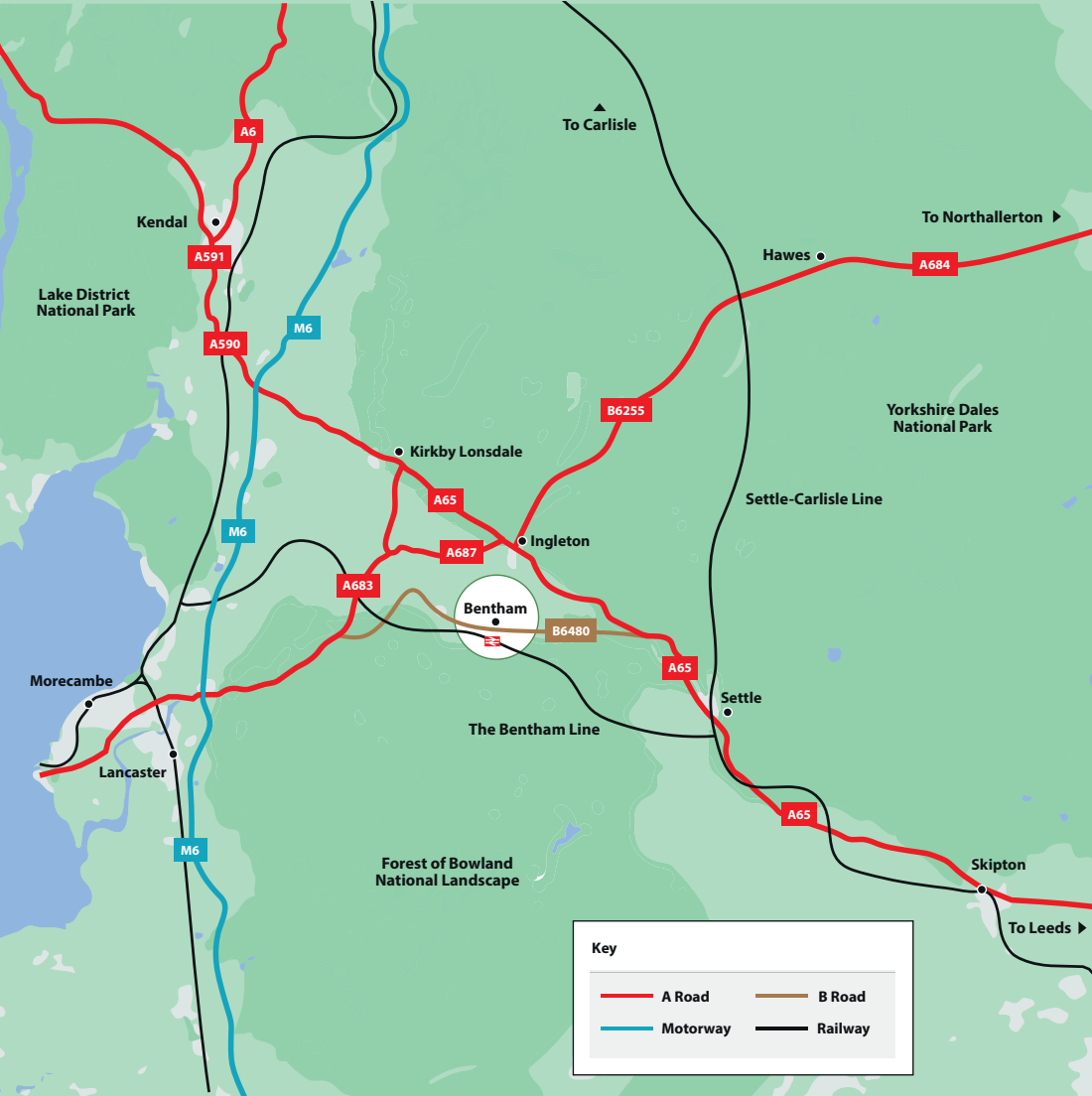
Bentham's population has grown slowly, only doubling over the last 220 years, from 1,487 in the 1801 census to 3,035 at the 2021 census (2,865 in 1991). Despite this slow rate of growth, it remains larger than surrounding settlements – Ingleton 2,186, Settle 2,714 and Kirkby Lonsdale 1,968.

Approximately 57% of the population are of working age and the same percentage are economically active, matching exactly the percentage for those in work across the whole of North Yorkshire.

Bentham has a strong tradition of manufacturing allied to its function as a market town. It continues to service the large local rural economy by providing access to agricultural, professional, maintenance and retail services such as agricultural technology and equipment, vehicle and building supplies. Bentham Auction Mart is one of the largest sheep and cattle markets in England. Angus Fire, a global leader and supplier of fire safety products to a hundred countries worldwide, and Atkinson Vos, a world leader in all-terrain vehicles, are both based in the town. Recent arrivals include Bowland View, a large Extra-Care housing development run by Housing 21 and the office of an In-Home health care provider, Care Legacy. All these businesses are now offering job opportunities in the town as well as successfully providing services for customers and clients.

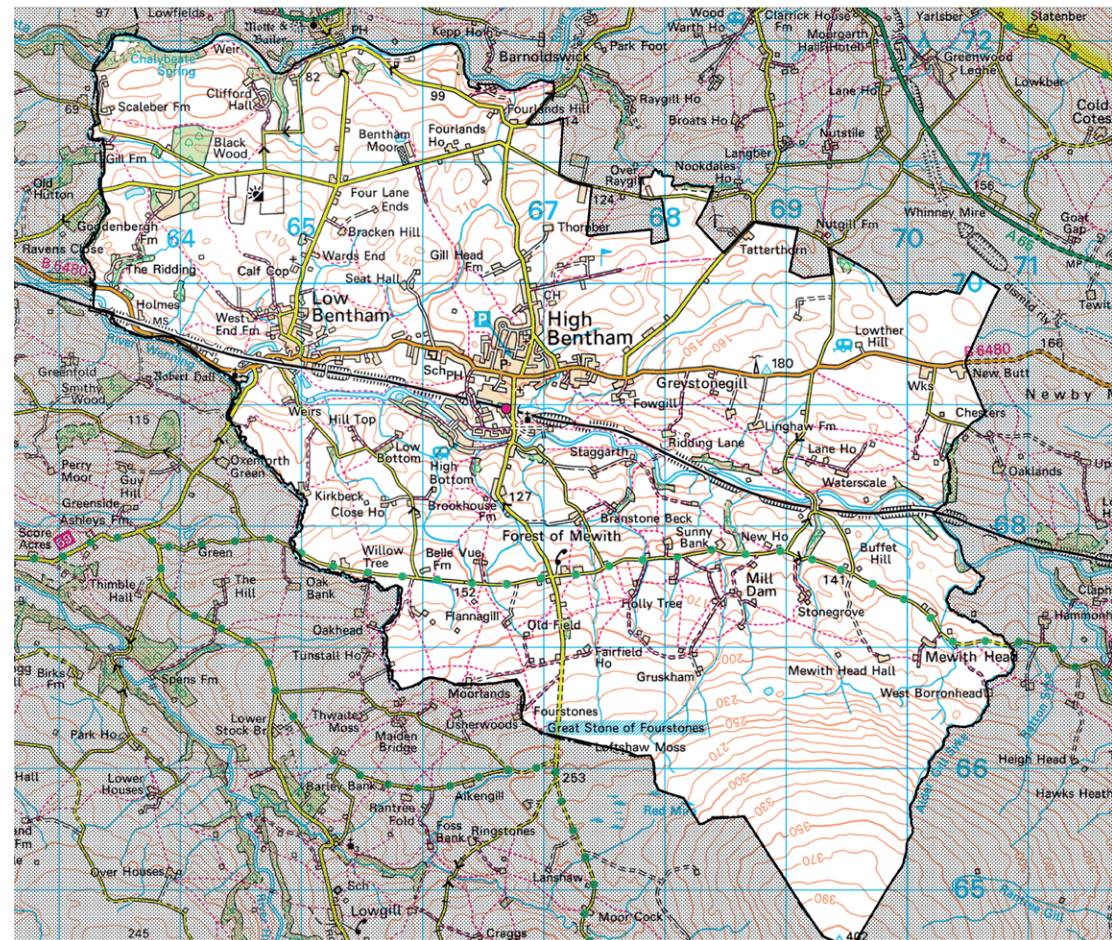
However, much of the economic activity in the town is rooted in the wide range of skilled tradespeople who are based there, significantly more than the average for North Yorkshire as a whole. Similarly, the percentage of small employers and own account workers exceeds that for North Yorkshire. These smaller enterprises also offer a myriad of job opportunities mostly at a local level.





Location of Bentham

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The Bentham Parish

2. Bentham in Context

The Parish of Bentham has many similarities with North Yorkshire when initial data from the 2021 Census for the two regions is compared (as shown opposite) even though Covid-19 may have affected the reliability of some of the data available. The tables show some differences in the age profile of Bentham, such as a slightly older population, and a general trend for greater distances travelled to work and an increased reliance on car usage. Although, unlike most towns in North Yorkshire, Bentham has a railway station, the percentage of those travelling to a workplace by train is similar to the North Yorkshire percentage. In terms of occupation Bentham has an identical employment status distribution to the rest of North Yorkshire, (56% economically active and 41% economically inactive) but with a higher percentage of people employed in skilled trades, caring and leisure occupations than North Yorkshire and with a lesser percentage employed in senior, professional and technical occupations. This pattern is similarly reflected in the socio-economic classification of the Parish. Finally, the levels of educational qualifications of Bentham residents are similar to the North Yorkshire average.

Of topographical and historical interest, the Parish of Bentham is situated in beautiful rolling farmland in the Wenning river valley, moments from the Yorkshire Dales National Park to the north and the Forest of Bowland National Landscape (formally known as an 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty') to the south. The town is the setting of several highly rated caravan and holiday lodge parks, which are popular and bring valuable income into the town.

However, there are, of course, as well as the strengths and opportunities, some weaknesses and threats that may affect the future development of the town.



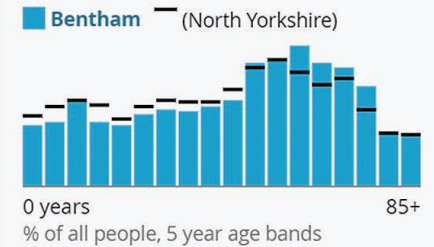
Socio economic profile of Bentham compared to that of North Yorkshire

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

Population
3,000
people

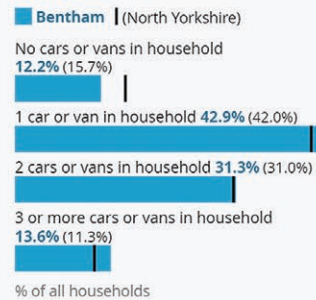
615,500 people in North Yorkshire
Rounded to the nearest 100 people

Age profile

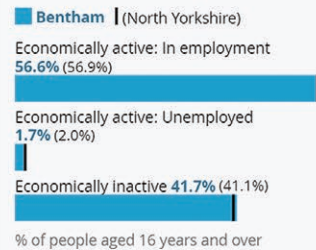


Bentham values indicated as a blue bar.
North Yorkshire value indicated as a vertical or horizontal black line

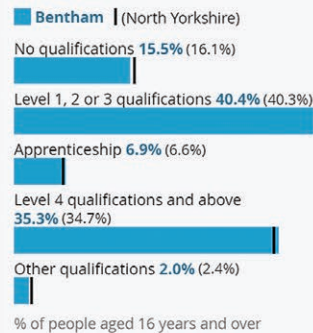
Number of cars or vans



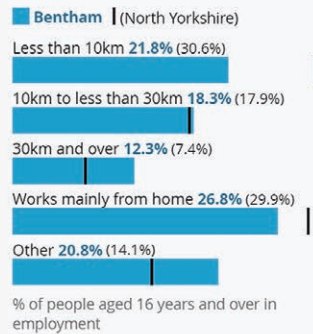
Economic activity status



Highest level of qualification



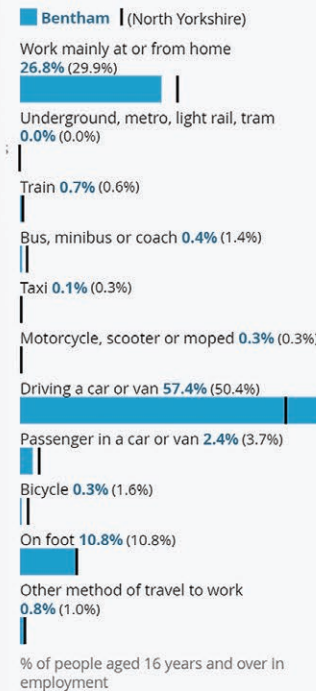
Distance travelled to work



Occupation



Method of travel to workplace



Socio-economic Classification (NS-SeC)



3. Bentham: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Strengths

- Strong, self-sufficient and resilient local identity
- Key Service Centre for a wide agricultural hinterland
- Flexible, skilled local workforce
- Highly rated services, including a large medical centre
- The Bentham Line rail service to Leeds, Lancaster, Morecambe and beyond
- Beautiful countryside
- Good value and increasing housing stock
- Access to good schools
- Large range of community groups and activities
- New businesses locating in the town
- Multiple community spaces for development
- High occupancy levels of existing employment space

Opportunities

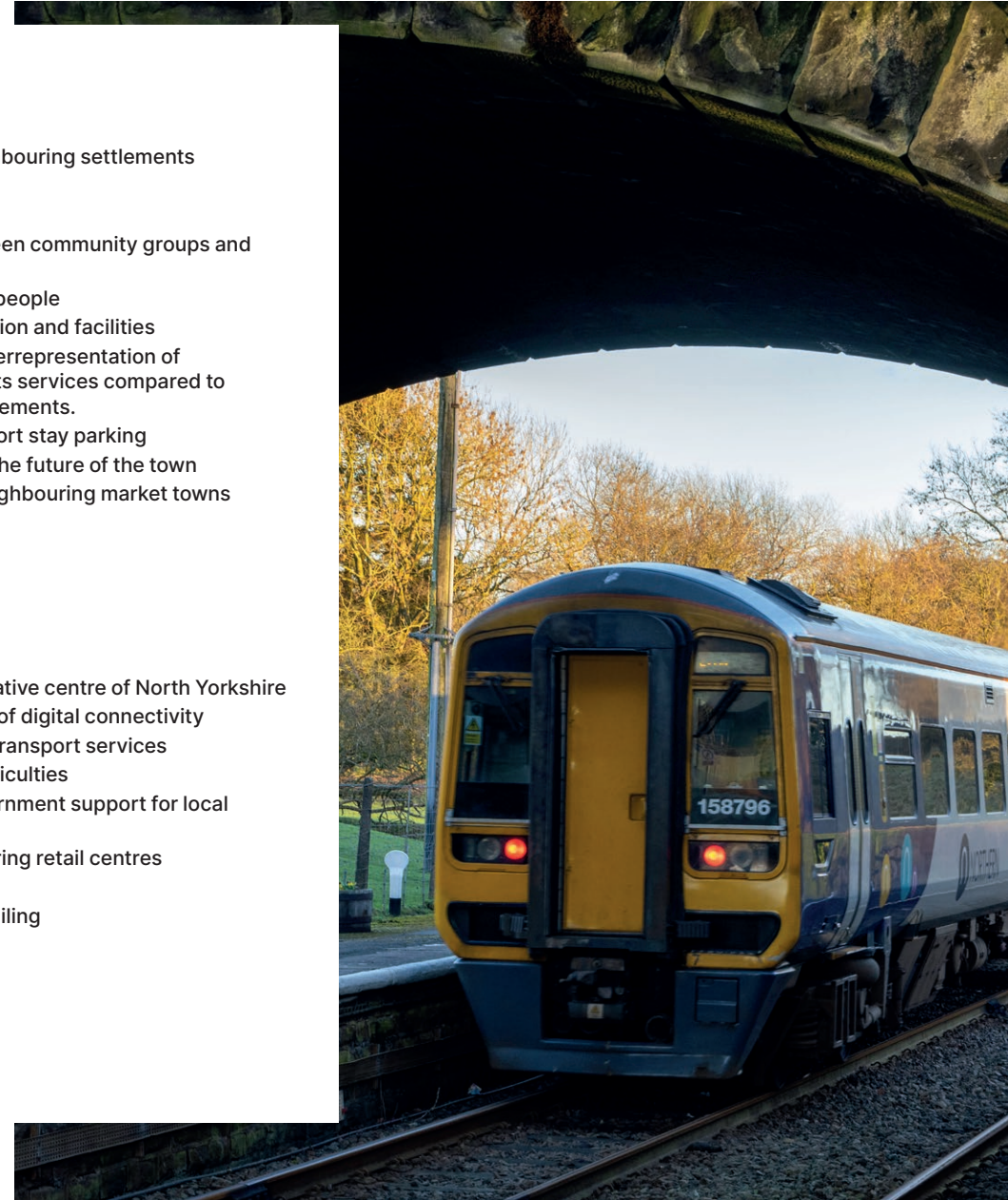
- To increase small business activity
- To increase the extent and frequency of rail and bus services
- To improve links across county boundaries, including with Lancaster University and the Eden Project in Morecambe
- To develop the attractions of the natural environment, heritage and local history.
- To support the development of new and affordable housing
- To improve the provision of support and services for young people.

Weaknesses

- Poor road access
- Poor transport links to neighbouring settlements
- Shabby town centre
- Poor digital connectivity
- Lack of co-ordination between community groups and societies
- Limited activities for young people
- Limited tourist accommodation and facilities
- Poor infrastructure and underrepresentation of hospitality, leisure and sports services compared to other comparable local settlements.
- Lack of easily accessible short stay parking
- Lack of a coherent plan for the future of the town
- Low profile compared to neighbouring market towns

Threats

- Isolation from the administrative centre of North Yorkshire
- Continued lack of provision of digital connectivity
- Further reduction of public transport services
- Unresolved road access difficulties
- Perceived lack of local government support for local initiatives
- Competition from neighbouring retail centres
- Ageing population
- Competition with online retailing



4. Consultation Exercise and Summary of the Responses

The masterplan team were determined that the final plan should accurately reflect the views, aspirations and concerns of Bentham residents, and thus ensure everyone was supportive of its intentions. To get as full a response as possible from local people, a simple questionnaire was drafted for distribution on paper and online.

The questionnaire format was kept short, simple and open, one version for individuals and a slightly varied version for businesses and organisations. Respondents were provided with space to answer the questions as they thought fit and not offered a limited number of responses. They could also leave contact details if they wished to remain involved in the next stages. Copies were distributed to all households in October 2022 in the monthly Bentham News and were available online on its website. Organisations and businesses were contacted separately. Hard copies were also available at several retail outlets in the town. Public notices, press releases and social media were also used to encourage maximum response rates. The survey was closed after two and a half months, before Christmas 2022.

Three hundred and eighty-five completed questionnaires were received from individuals and a further forty from organisations, groups and businesses, including sports clubs, churches, voluntary organisations, service providers and businesses. This represents over 10% of the Bentham population. This could be increased by the responses from groups and organisations, which will include the views of others who did not fill in the questionnaire. Whilst this cannot be said to give a precise picture of the views of the whole town, it is a very good response rate,

(perhaps not far short of 20%) for an untargeted survey, and considerably more than those of a number of other recent audits conducted in the county. The gender distribution from individual respondents was 54% female, 39% male, 6.6% unknown, 0.4% other. Almost 90% were Bentham residents, the others being workers or visitors. Over 40 respondents left contact details so they could remain informed and involved in future action to implement the plan's proposals. Some of these people are already involved in development groups to improve digital connectivity, public transport and the town centre appearance.

The questionnaire returns provided details of what residents and others like and don't like about Bentham but also suggestions of what changes in the short and longer terms they would like to see. The responses were then grouped into a large number of categories so they could be entered into a database under flexible headings, covering, for example such things as public transport, the natural environment, recreation facilities, the town centre appearance etc. This gave a broad picture of what respondents thought and the ability to present the results as pie charts. All the questionnaire returns were saved for further consultation if necessary.

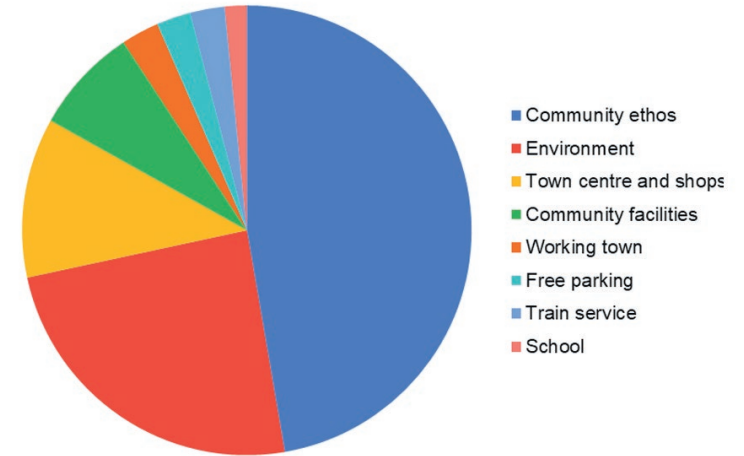
Consultation Responses from Individuals

What is the best thing about Bentham?

The pattern of responses was clear. Almost half of the respondents chose the friendliness and helpfulness of people and a further quarter chose the local natural environment.

These two headings were therefore considered by almost three quarters of the respondents to be the best things about Bentham.

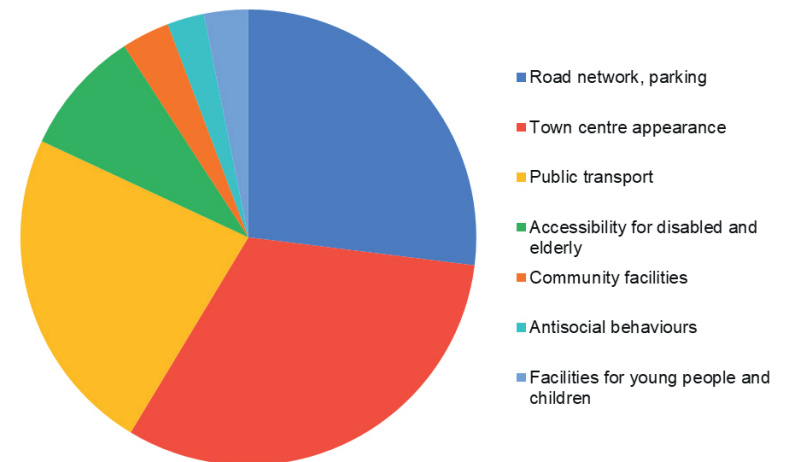
Smaller numbers recommended the facilities available such as the range of shops, specialist interest groups, services and organisations. Others mentioned the benefits of free parking, the good train service and the fact that Bentham retains its status as a solid working town.



What is the worst thing about Bentham?

Again, there was notable agreement, a third chose the dowdy town centre appearance and another third the roads, traffic congestion and parking problems as the worst thing.

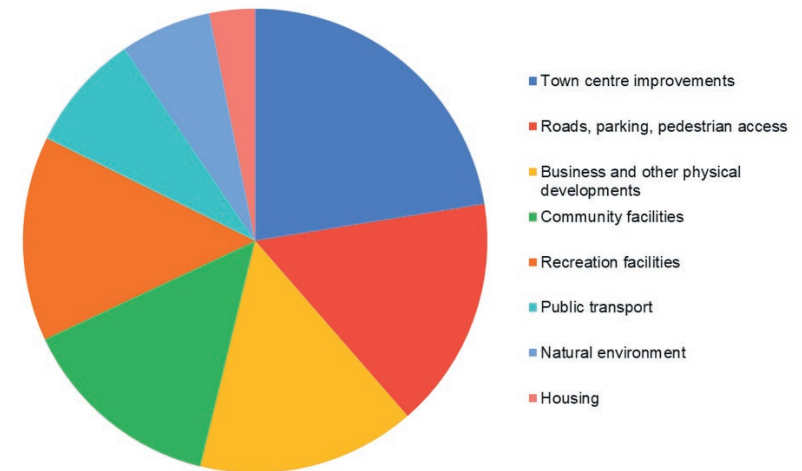
The lack of public transport, difficulties of access both physical and digital and the lack of facilities for young people were all also common complaints.



What small thing would make the centre of Bentham better and what change would you like to see immediately?

Responses to these two questions were broadly similar, though not always 'small things'. More than two thirds desired improvements to the roads, pavements and parking, the appearance of the town centre and better public transport.

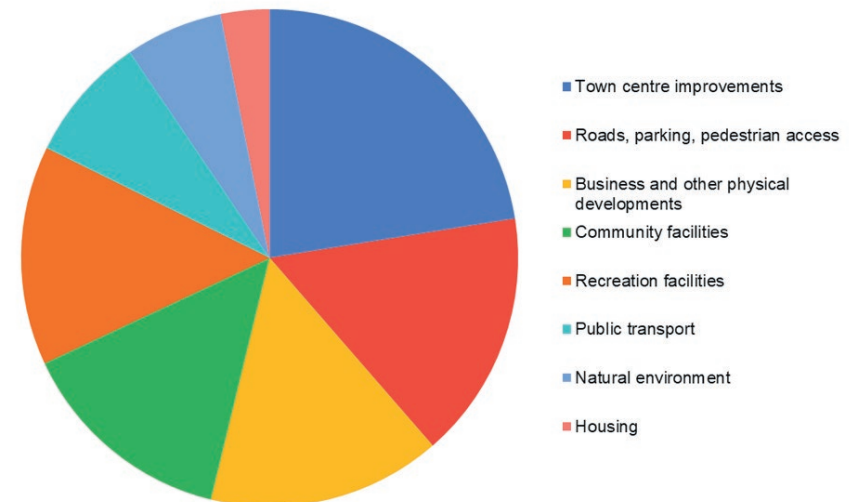
Residents asked for pedestrian crossings, improved access to the car parks; renovation and reuse of empty properties; creating a tidy, attractive and clean Main Street; and the replacement of the bus service to Lancaster which has recently been removed.



What one change would you like to see over the next 10 years?

Longer term aspirations were more varied but similar, including town centre improvement; roads, parking and pedestrian access; business developments; community and recreation facilities; public transport and care for the natural environment.

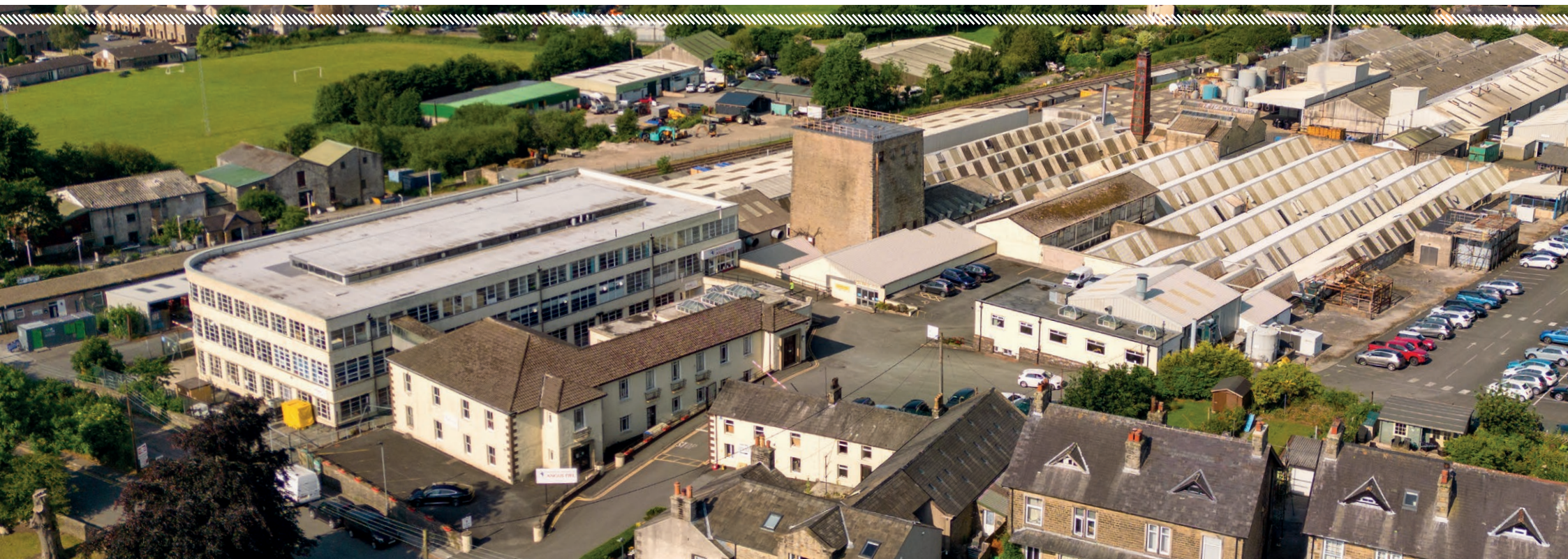
The most common were the first two of these. However, many more specific and precise suggestions were made, and all would be worthy of further consideration.



Consultation Responses from Businesses and Groups

Many of the responses from businesses and voluntary organisations were very specific to the different respondents, often concerning the adequacy and accessibility of their premises and affordable alternatives. However, some consistencies were obvious. They reiterated the general feeling that the best thing about Bentham is the community ethos and its support for local businesses and organisations.

The worst thing about the town was felt by these groups to be the roads and parking, and the uncared-for appearance of the town centre. The most urgent improvements to the centre of the town were felt to be tackling the traffic, roads and parking, especially along Main Street. Bentham Auction Mart said that the most inhibiting factor to their business is the road network leading to the town. The importance of a vibrant, local retail and commercial sector, access to fast Wi-Fi and public transport were also stressed as necessities to ensure businesses and residents do not have to look elsewhere to meet their needs.



Consultation Conclusion

Bentham's distinctiveness lies in its desire to retain its role as a Key Service Centre for its own community and those of neighbouring settlements in the west of North Yorkshire and adjoining counties.

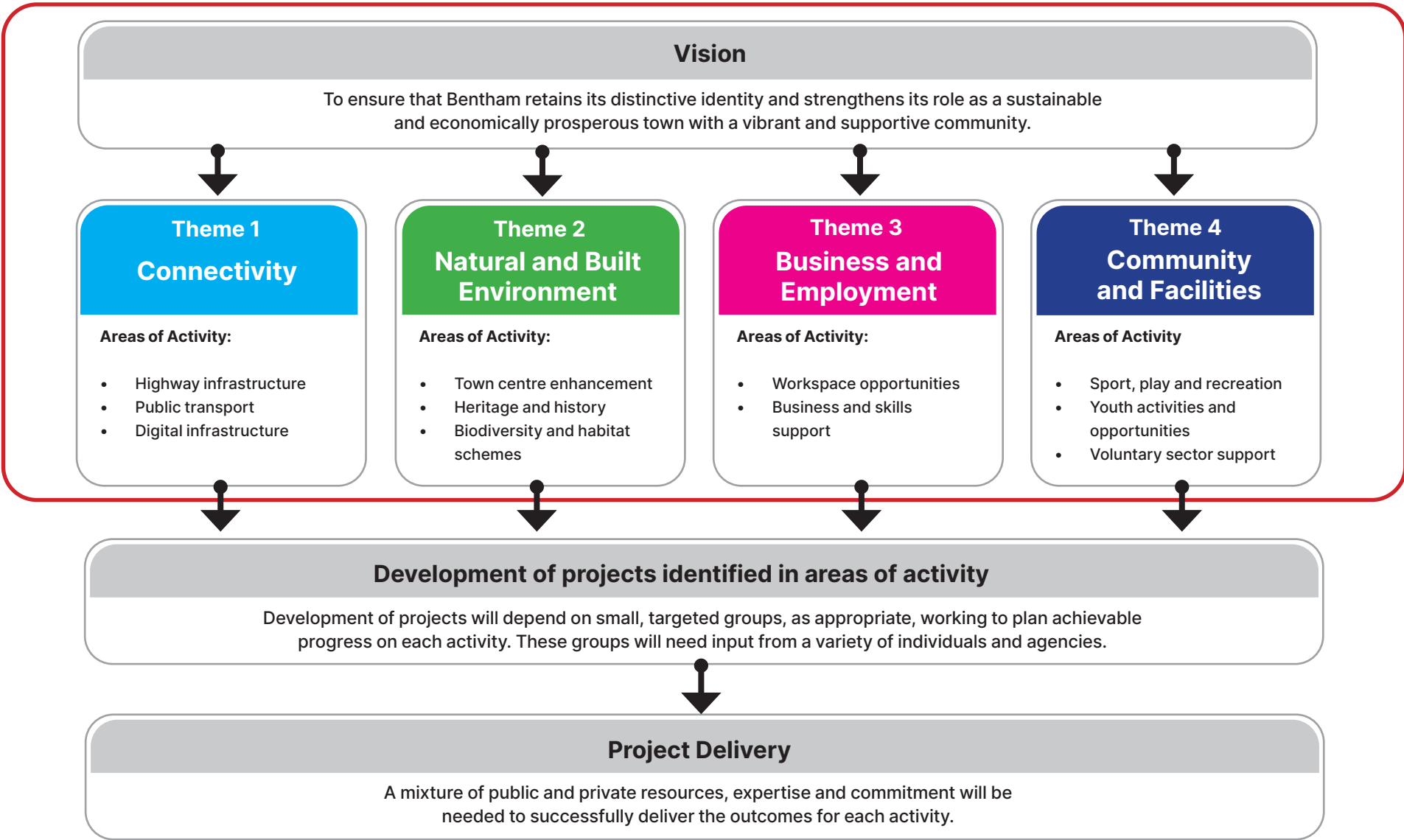
This ambition is bolstered by its determination to deliver the goods, opportunities and services local people and visitors are looking for. Bentham provides much of what its residents, businesses and hinterland need. It is noticeable that the towns' retailers and suppliers are anxious to respond positively and quickly to local demands.

This responsiveness is perhaps only possible in a relatively small community, but it means that the town can meet local, regional, national and international challenges, whether these are economic or social, with unusual speed and resilience. Bentham is successful as a small market town and in areas where services are lacking residents are quick to create voluntary organisations to support and assist their neighbours. There are currently more than 80 voluntary groups operating in the town.

Overall, the image presented by responses to the questionnaire was one of a community anxious and willing to see changes that would improve Bentham as a residential and economically active rural market town. Respondents did not want radical changes but could see that the current infrastructure and town management needs an overhaul to ensure it is able to retain its role as a local hub and Key Service Centre delivering 21st century services and opportunities.



5. Vision, Themes and Areas of Activity



— Extent of The Bentham Plan - activities outside this border are beyond the scope of the core Plan document

Theme 1: Connectivity

Area of Activity	Highway Infrastructure		
Rationale	Outline of Activity	Delivery Approach	Outcomes
<p>The highway network of Bentham within the town centre is served by a number of rural roads, each with their own constraints and issues.</p> <p>Within the historic built environment of the town, the conflict between vehicles and pedestrian access is unavoidable. Access to all town centre facilities including car parks, railway station and shops is continuously hampered, especially for those with a disability or using a pram or buggy.</p> <p>It is recognised that very little can be done quickly or locally to solve these problems, which will need to be considered through the highway scheme prioritisation process, but they are fundamental to improving the aesthetic impression and economic and social viability of the town.</p>	<p>This area of activity will focus on identifying and encouraging opportunities to improve the highway network of Bentham including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with representatives of the Local Highway Authority, Town Council and the Masterplan Group to understand upcoming maintenance works, the reporting and prioritisation process and the possibilities of small-scale improvement works in Bentham town centre. The development of appropriate, easily accessible, well signed routes through and around the town including those for cycling and walking. Input and engagement with longer term, strategic plans to inform the transformational improvement of the highway network in Bentham. 	<p>Likely to be a mixture of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locally led development and implementation where possible. Local authority led schemes and lobbying for improvements. 	<p>A network of new and improved sustainable connectivity routes.</p> <p>Improved condition of the highway and pavements.</p> <p>Improved management of town centre car parks and rationalisation of parking on the streets.</p> <p>Improved access for businesses and services to their premises and supplies.</p>

Theme 1: Connectivity

Area of Activity		Public Transport	
Rationale	Outline of Activity	Delivery Approach	Outcomes
<p>Public transport to and from Bentham is limited to the regular but infrequent railway service and a very infrequent and short local bus service.</p> <p>Residents, visitors and employees lack useful and flexible services to reach work, shops, professional and medical services and the wealth of local recreational opportunities.</p> <p>The paucity of local public transport increases car usage and discriminates against all those lacking private transport.</p>	<p>This area of activity will focus on work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To re-establish a more flexible and regular local bus service. • To improve integration of bus and train services across the region, wherever possible. • To reduce car usage for work and leisure. • To investigate opportunities to fund public transport from new development. • To lobby to improve public transport infrastructure to encourage increased usage. 	<p>Local discussion and activity is already underway and will draw on local authority expertise and assistance as necessary.</p> <p>Working across local authorities and agencies to develop financially viable public transport improvements that meet the needs of the Bentham community.</p>	<p>Better physical connectivity for all – residents, visitors and business people.</p> <p>Easy access to additional work, educational and business opportunities.</p> <p>Access to local recreational facilities for those without private transport.</p> <p>A reduction in car usage and associated pollution.</p>

Theme 1: Connectivity

Area of Activity	Digital Infrastructure		
Rationale	Outline of Activity	Delivery Approach	Outcomes
<p>Digital connectivity is crucial to the rural nature of Bentham, its hinterland, and the rural economy.</p> <p>Ensuring that all residents, businesses, and visitors have access to the best digital connectivity available; whether ultrafast broadband, town centre WiFi or reliable voice and mobile data, these services are vital to support Bentham's business, education, and leisure needs.</p> <p>Within Bentham and the surrounding area there is ongoing investment in connectivity through the private sector, public sector funded initiatives and community led activity. This investment should be seen as an ongoing process with continual improvement necessary to ensure Bentham continues to be an attractive place to live, work, learn and relax.</p>	<p>This area of activity will increase the development, delivery, and support for improved digital infrastructure including ultrafast broadband, WiFi and mobile connectivity including activities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of and support for ultrafast broadband connectivity infrastructure. • Work to establish the options for the deployment of town centre WiFi. • Lobbying to achieve improved mobile telephony coverage. 	<p>Implementation of activities in this section are likely to be promoted and delivered by a range of stakeholders including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locally led development and implementation • Commercial rollout • Local authority led schemes. 	<p>More opportunities for local businesses to increase productivity, improve efficiency and grow through access to new markets.</p> <p>Greater use of broadband connectivity for home and remote working.</p> <p>Mobile access to local services and information.</p>

Theme 2: Natural and Built Environment

Area of Activity	Town Centre Enhancement		
Rationale	Outline of Activity	Delivery Approach	Outcomes
<p>Bentham's Main Street needs cosmetic changes to enhance the experience of everyone; residents, employees, customers and visitors.</p> <p>Roughly a third of the respondents to the Masterplan Survey considered the town centre appearance to be the worst thing about Bentham.</p> <p>The appearance of the town centre reduces the attractiveness of the town as a retail and commercial hub. It limits visitor and customer numbers and inhibits informal socialisation.</p>	<p>Some desirable improvements could be achieved relatively easily including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement and support to businesses, owners and residents to improve the appearance of properties along Main Street. • Regular cleaning and weeding including the removal of litter and dog waste. • The renovation and reuse of some empty properties to provide enhanced services and opportunities. <p>Others will need additional funding and expertise to realise, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of recreational spaces and seating for informal socialisation. • Space for and planting of street trees, flower beds and public art. • Improved availability of public conveniences. • Better signage to local facilities and services. 	<p>A mixture of public and private resources, expertise and commitment will be needed.</p> <p>The population of Bentham will be encouraged to take ownership of the appearance of the town and to improve it where they can. This activity will be supported by the Town Council.</p> <p>Working with North Yorkshire Council and other agencies to find opportunities to enhance the environment of the town centre, creating an inviting public realm which will encourage shoppers, residents and visitors to enjoy all the local amenities the town has to offer.</p>	<p>Bentham Town Centre will become a busy hub accommodating the needs of the local community and an attractive venue for visitors. It will be an interesting, inviting and welcoming place, providing an improved cultural, leisure and retail offering. Success will be assessed by residents' and visitors' satisfaction, footfall, vacancy rates, levels of investment, new business start-ups and stakeholder involvement.</p>

Theme 2: Natural and Built Environment

Area of Activity	History and Heritage		
Rationale	Outline of Activity	Delivery Approach	Outcomes
<p>Bentham has a long history of human settlement and some old and interesting buildings. These range from the parish church to 17th century houses on Main Street and old industrial buildings from the 18th and 19th centuries. The geology of the Craven area surrounding the town is similarly of historical interest. But, at present, the town makes little use of its heritage to contribute to broader objectives such as economic development, tourism, leisure activities or formal and informal education.</p> <p>Ownership and management of local assets is often complicated and coordination to maximise the benefits of the range of heritage assets is difficult to arrange.</p> <p>However, North Yorkshire Council plan to designate Bentham town centre as a conservation area and there is an active local history group, The Ewecross Historical Society, which promotes the study of the local area.</p>	<p>Work with partners will ensure the town identifies opportunities to make more use of its heritage assets for both leisure and economic benefit.</p> <p>These could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An audit of significant buildings and locations and consideration of the 'listing' of those of merit. • A regular assessment of those needing renovation, reuse and/or protection. • A programme of activities in collaboration with local history organisations and educational institutions to encourage residents and visitors to understand and enjoy the town's heritage. • Production of a plan for sustainable development of heritage assets, including possible funding streams. • Building partnerships with other bodies and institutions to assist local groups. 	<p>A number of existing initiatives show that there is interest in the history of the town.</p> <p>The local Ewecross Historical Society meets regularly to hear speakers.</p> <p>There are established heritage walks around the town and out into the neighbouring countryside.</p> <p>The community library holds a paper archive of books and other materials on the history of the town.</p> <p>North Yorkshire are actively considering creating a conservation area in the town.</p> <p>These established resources could be further developed with support from external partners such as Lancaster University's Regional Heritage Centre. The drafting of a Heritage Plan would guide future activities and ensure benefits would accrue for the visitor and commercial sectors.</p>	<p>Bentham will become known for its history and heritage. Local people will have a better understanding of, and pride in, the town's past and aspirations for its future.</p> <p>Regular audits of progress and work to be undertaken will create opportunities for individuals to develop interests, knowledge and skills in heritage work.</p> <p>The visitor experience will be enhanced and, with more short-term accommodation in Bentham, the town can become a central destination for visitors wishing to better understand the deep archaeological, cultural and geological history of this part of Craven.</p>

Theme 2: Natural and Built Environment

Area of Activity	Biodiversity and Habitat Schemes		
Rationale	Outline of Activity	Delivery Approach	Outcomes
<p>A quarter of the respondents to the Masterplan Survey said they considered the local natural environment to be the best thing about Bentham. This appreciation can be used to encourage interventions, research and innovation to enhance and protect the biodiversity and beauty of the area for future generations. Support to and funding for existing groups can ensure that coordinated work, environmental education, community action and participation are promoted to build a sustainable and protected natural environment for the future.</p>	<p>Work will be undertaken to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in relevant policy consultations • Action with partners to survey and improve knowledge of local habitats, species and the threats to them. • Mapping, protection and enhancement of sites, habitats and features of recognised biodiversity value, including designated wildlife sites, and other undesignated areas of ecological interest. • Developing contacts and collaboration to establish ecological networks and routes through the area to enable wildlife to move and flourish. • Continual review of progress, opportunities and developing threats to the natural environment. 	<p>Delivery will depend on establishing partnerships to include local organisations such as BEST, the River Wenning Group and local agricultural interests as well as regional bodies such as North Yorkshire Heritage Services Team, The Three Counties Lune Valley Scheme, and the myriad of other local and regional organisations that promote environmental diversity and protection.</p> <p>Joint working with higher education environment departments will ensure best practice and comparability of projects.</p>	<p>The progress and impact of specific initiatives will be assessed through ongoing monitoring. This evidence-based approach will ensure that action is achieving desired ends. Best practice and successful initiatives can then be adopted more widely, whilst any initiative not delivering the desired results can be adjusted or enhanced. The natural environment in and surrounding Bentham can, with care, become a sustainable model for other areas and communities.</p>

Theme 3: Business and Employment

Area of Activity	Workspace Opportunities		
Rationale	Outline of Activity	Delivery Approach	Outcomes
<p>Access to suitable employment premises and workspace, when combined with appropriate connectivity and support services, is key to retaining employment opportunities within Bentham.</p> <p>With over 25% of those aged 16+ in employment mainly working from home in Bentham, the opportunity to access flexible co-working and complementary facilities, potentially through the extension or reuse of existing facilities, has the potential to retain employment in the town whilst aiding productivity, networking opportunities and vibrancy within the town centre.</p> <p>In addition, although the current Craven Local Plan 2012 – 2032 has not specifically allocated new employment land within the Bentham Parish, Policy EC1 and EC2 supports the retention and development of existing employment land, enabling the opportunity for reuse of underused land, complementary industries and employment growth.</p> <p>Further to this Policy EC3 supports employment and business growth opportunities in the Rural Economy for reuse and repurposing of existing buildings for workspace.</p>	<p>This area of activity will focus on encouraging and facilitating opportunities for business growth by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigation into the need and opportunities for the provision of flexible / co-working facilities and workspace using existing employment or community facilities where possible. Investigation into the demand and feasibility of additional employment units and floorspace that supports and complements the local economy of North Yorkshire and existing employers within Bentham. Assisting local entrepreneurs in finding access to funding, mentorship, and other resources needed to grow their businesses. 	<p>Likely to be a mixture of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private and / or community sector, locally led development and implementation. Local authority led schemes, reports and feasibility studies. 	<p>Self-employed, home working and small businesses with access to flexible workspace opportunities.</p> <p>Greater opportunity for collaborative working.</p> <p>Income opportunities for community facilities within Bentham.</p>

Theme 3: Business and Employment

Area of Activity	Business and Skills Support		
Rationale	Outline of Activity	Delivery Approach	Outcomes
<p>In the responses received from groups, businesses and other organisations the majority of comments relate to physical change or improvement to Bentham.</p> <p>Even so, the importance of developing organisational and individual capacity is critical to ensuring successful businesses with the necessary skills and knowledge required to adapt and change.</p> <p>There is already a strong business support offer in North Yorkshire overseen and delivered through the 'York & North Yorkshire Growth Hub' (YNY Growth Hub) including access to online resources, events, seminars, and one to one business advisors.</p> <p>Although already operating in the North Craven area there are opportunities to increase awareness and access to this and complementary services and, where required, supplement with locality specific activity.</p>	<p>This area of activity will focus on encouraging and facilitating opportunities for business growth by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigation into the need and opportunities for the provision of flexible / co-working facilities and workspace using existing employment or community facilities where possible. • Investigation into the demand and feasibility of additional employment units and floorspace that supports and complements the local economy of North Yorkshire and existing employers within Bentham. • Assisting local entrepreneurs in finding access to funding, mentorship, and other resources needed to grow their businesses. 	<p>Promotion of business support services will be via the York & North Yorkshire Growth Hub and in partnership with the Local Authority and local groups and organisations.</p>	<p>Businesses with increased skills and awareness.</p>

Theme 4: Community and Facilities

Area of Activity	Sport, Play and Recreation		
Rationale	Outline of Activity	Delivery Approach	Outcomes
<p>Whilst Bentham has a large and popular open playing field the existing buildings there are unusable and need to be demolished. The town lacks a suitable facility for the delivery of indoor sporting activities. Some groups, such as badminton and dance, can use other community buildings, but these are generally not ideal.</p> <p>Other outdoor facilities are similarly limited and activity specific.</p> <p>Children’s play provision is outdoors and there are no suitable facilities in winter for young children outside of the primary school.</p> <p>The playgroup has a temporary base in the Town Hall, but it has no outdoor space.</p> <p>The town needs to develop both indoor and outdoor spaces to provide access for all ages and interest groups to a range of sport, play and recreation activities.</p>	<p>Work already underway includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bentham Playing Fields Association (BPFA) are developing plans to replace their existing derelict buildings with a new purpose-built sports and community building on the current site. This would provide an accessible facility to enable sports to expand their range and enhance skills. • Space would also be provided to accommodate play and recreational groups. • Additional multipurpose spaces could offer facilities for a wider range of local groups and interests to develop and prosper. • The building will be as eco-friendly as possible to minimise running costs. 	<p>BPFA is a volunteer led group who hold the lease for the playing fields, which has recently been extended. They provide a range of not-for-profit events for the local community including sports, children’s activities, music and celebratory events.</p> <p>They receive much support from the local population, businesses and the town council and are currently building links with North Yorkshire Council’s community sports department.</p> <p>To succeed in their aspirations, they will require substantial support, both financial and expertise, from regional and national bodies and charities.</p> <p>Partnerships of this kind will allow Bentham to develop sports and recreational facilities to serve other communities and not the town alone.</p>	<p>The Town would have a purpose-built sports and community hub essential if residents and visitors of all ages are able to develop and enjoy their sporting and recreational skills without having to look for appropriate facilities in other towns and villages.</p> <p>It would encourage use for competitive and friendly events from local visiting teams and communities throughout the year.</p> <p>Increased footfall would benefit local businesses and encourage the development of good, localised transport routes.</p> <p>Additional parking space could also potentially free up some of the congestion issues in the town.</p>

Theme 4: Community and Facilities

Area of Activity		Youth Activities and Opportunities	
Rationale	Outline of Activity	Delivery Approach	Outcomes
<p>Over 20% of the population of the Bentham area is under 25 years of age. At present the provision of services for this age group is limited to a part time programme of activities offered when volunteers are available. The junior club, based temporarily in the Town Hall, attracts mainly those under 15. There is no provision for older ages to actively encourage their participation and ownership. There is no Young Farmers Group in Bentham, nor a club linked to the North Yorkshire Youth organisation.</p> <p>Bentham needs to be able to build on the energies and aspirations of its young people to secure its future. At present many feel there is little in the town to help them respond positively to the challenges of modern life.</p>	<p>Activity in this area will involve work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To establish a permanent location that can be used by young people to meet and support one another socially. • To find more secure funding for the employment of a youth worker to support work with young people. • To establish a more secure pattern of volunteering, using the specialist skills and experience of local people. • To understand the needs and aspirations of the young people of Bentham and respond to them appropriately. • To offer a range of learning experiences to enhance the life skills, employment opportunities and leisure interests of local young people. 	<p>Work will be undertaken within the town to establish a dedicated location, open regularly for young people to meet and share their experiences, problems and aspirations with one another.</p> <p>Links will be established with local colleges, countywide youth bodies and the National Youth Agency for support and advice.</p> <p>Links with local specialist agencies will be established to ensure advice and guidance is available to young people where they can access it and when then need it.</p>	<p>Local provision that is both attractive and useful to the young people of the town.</p> <p>A place where young people feel comfortable meeting together.</p> <p>Activities and opportunities that will open routes to further education, training, work and careers that will help them to develop their skills and knowledge to become active citizens able to help to build a fairer and more resilient local community.</p>

Theme 4: Community and Facilities

Area of Activity		Community Facilities	
Rationale	Outline of Activity	Delivery Approach	Outcomes
<p>Although Bentham has a wealth of voluntary sector bodies providing health, sport, charity and other services, these often do not recognise the benefits to be gained from working together. There is no co-ordinating body, leading to duplication of premises and reinvention of both content and management.</p>	<p>Activity in this area will involve work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide information, advice and professional services to existing and new voluntary bodies in the town. • To discover funding opportunities to employ a volunteer co-ordinator. • To provide an overview of premises and equipment available for use by voluntary organisations. • To assist individual residents to find volunteering opportunities at all levels and employment opportunities within the voluntary sector. 	<p>Partnership working with Community First Yorkshire, North Yorkshire Council, The Two Ridings Community Foundation and their successors.</p> <p>At the same time to develop the collaborative approach within the town to fund, retain and develop local voluntary service provisions.</p>	<p>Easier access for voluntary organisations to local and regional information and help.</p> <p>Smooth access to available opportunities, training and vacancies for those wishing to work in or offer time and experience to the voluntary sector.</p>

6. Conclusion

This plan aims to reflect the views of Bentham.

Its aim is to “build upon what is special about the town, to take account of the opportunities it presents and meet the aspirations of local stakeholders”.

Bentham has much to be proud of and many strengths, but there are also challenges and problems that need addressing. The Bentham Masterplan puts these into context and proposes activities necessary to strengthen the town and assist it to address and overcome the challenges of the future. To achieve its aims will require the joint commitment of Bentham people and local, regional and national agencies.

It is hoped that the Masterplan provides ambitious ideas, encouragement and support to all those who wish to ensure that Bentham retains its distinctive character, whilst responding to the demands and opportunities of the changing world.





7. Acknowledgements

Thanks to all those individuals who have voluntarily made their time available to help to produce this plan and to the residents of Bentham for responding in such large numbers to the request for their ideas and thoughts.

- Bentham Town Council for its support and the use of the Town Hall
- North Yorkshire Council (and the former Craven District Council) for their support during the development of the plan
- The children of Bentham Community Primary School for their views and Mrs Amy Duckett for her assistance

Thanks to the following individuals for specialist help with sections of the plan:

- Leonie Pearce – River Wenning Group
- Zoe Clayton – Bentham Playing Fields Association
- John Wilson – Ewecross Historical Society
- Sharon Haslam – Youth facilities and opportunities
- Dr Mark Watson – Lancaster University

- Bentham News – for keeping the community informed with monthly reports about the progress of the Bentham Masterplan and for widespread distribution of the questionnaire
- Jon Brook of 'Bentham Imaging'
- Ian Harrison of 'Creative Theory'
- Emma Greenep of 'EG Business Solutions'
- The Bentham Hub, Bentham Co-op, Duxburys and Low Bentham Victoria Institute for collecting the Masterplan Questionnaires
- Lin Barrington for making available previous plans for the future of Bentham.





Bentham

MASTERPLAN

Appendix 1

The Masterplan Questionnaire

The cover features a central yellow circle with a dark grey border containing the text 'Bentham MASTERPLAN'. The background is a mix of light grey and light yellow, with two large grey question marks on yellow circular shapes. A yellow wavy border is at the bottom.

Bentham
MASTERPLAN

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please let us know what changes you would like to see in Bentham and what you think is good and what is bad now?

Please tick any boxes that apply and add whatever comments you wish.

All information will be kept confidential.

This questionnaire is also available online at www.thebenthamnews.co.uk/masterplan



I live in Bentham

I work in Bentham

I am a visitor to Bentham

I run a business in Bentham

I am an employer in Bentham

I am:

Male

Female

Other

Prefer not to say

Aged:

Under 12 Years

13 to 20 Years

21 to 40 Years

41 to 60 Years

Over 60 Years

Prefer not to say

In your opinion what is the best thing about Bentham?

HAVE YOUR SAY...

In your opinion what is the worst thing about Bentham?

What small thing would make the centre of Bentham better?

What one change would you like to see immediately?

What one change would you like to see over the next 10 years?

Bentham
MASTERPLAN

Bentham
MASTERPLAN

Any other comments?

If you would like to take part in a group discussion on a particular aspect of the Bentham Masterplan add your contact details and we will do our best to include you in any future discussions.

Name:

I am interested in:

Email, preferably:

Phone number:

Please return paper questionnaires to the Bentham Masterplan Boxes or through the letter boxes at:

- The Hub
- The Victoria Institute
- The Co-op
- Bowland View
- Duxburys

by the end of November or before December 16th 2022 at the very latest!

Thank you for getting involved in this important project for Bentham.



Bentham
MASTERPLAN

QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR GROUPS

Please let us know what changes you would like to see in Bentham and what you think is good and what is bad now?

Please tick any boxes that apply and add whatever comments you wish.

All information will be kept confidential.

This questionnaire is also available online at www.thebenthamnews.co.uk/masterplan



I live in Bentham

I run a voluntary group in Bentham

I work in Bentham

I run a business in Bentham

I am an employer in Bentham

How many people work or volunteer for, or are members of, your organisation?

What is the name of your organisation, business or group

In your opinion what is the best thing about Bentham for your organisation or group?

HAVE YOUR SAY...

In your opinion what is the worst thing about Bentham for your organisation or group?

What small thing would make the centre of Bentham better?

What **one** change would you like to see immediately?

What **one** change would you like to see over the next 10 years?

Bentham
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MASTERPLAN

What facilities in the town do you use and are they adequate?

If you would like to take part in a group discussion on a particular aspect of the Bentham Masterplan add your contact details and we will do our best to include you in any future discussions.

Name:

I am interested in:

Email, preferably:

Phone number:

Please return paper questionnaires to the Bentham Masterplan Boxes or through the letter boxes at:

- The Hub
- The Victoria Institute
- The Co-op
- Bowland View
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by the end of November or before December 16th 2022 at the very latest!

Thank you for getting involved in this important project for Bentham.



Bentham

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Appendix 2

The Masterplan Initial Findings Report

Bentham

MASTERPLAN

Initial Findings

February 2023

1. Introduction

1.1 Bentham Masterplan is a joint initiative from Craven District Council in partnership with Bentham Town Council and North Yorkshire County Council.

1.2 Bentham Masterplan aims to produce a plan:

**“For the rejuvenation of the town centre
and to set out a clear vision for the future development of Bentham.”**

1.3 Our aim has been to develop a plan that sets a well-defined path for Bentham to become an economically and environmentally sustainable town. Bentham is a distinctive town. We aim to generate a plan which will build upon what is special about the town. This must meet the aspirations of local stakeholders and be in line with the opportunities available.

A final plan may be able to define a series of projects/interventions – both short-term quick wins and longer-term transformational investments - that can be progressed by local residents with the agreement and support of local authorities and other partners.

Consultation will be essential for the plan to be adopted by the community and businesses so that ultimately, it can succeed. We hope the final plan can be consistent with Craven Plan SP7 Strategy for Bentham and Craven Bentham Preservation Area.

2. Bentham

2.1 Bentham is the second largest settlement in Craven after Skipton. Bentham serves a wide rural hinterland in North Craven, and this elevates its role and function to a Key Service Centre.

Bentham is in the north-west of Craven District, approximately 37km north-west of Skipton and 25km north-east of Lancaster. The town is just over 5km south of the A65. This separation from the strategic road network means that the town is one of the more isolated service centres in North Yorkshire. This has inspired the local often repeated saying:

“All roads lead to Bentham, but there isn’t a good one among them”

The current road network is seriously inhibiting business development in Bentham. The town needs better connectivity to the A65 to the North and to the A683 and the M6 to the West.

- 2.2** Bentham’s population is growing slowly 3,035 (2021 Census) with 57% of the population of working age. Compare this with the populations of some surrounding towns: Ingleton 2,186, Settle 2,714 and Kirkby Lonsdale 1,968. The fact that Bentham’s population is larger than these surrounding towns is not immediately apparent to anyone looking at the town centre as it lacks the retail variety that others have and also feels less inviting.

There has been a significant amount of house building in Bentham in recent years, more than 100 homes were completed in 2020. At the time of writing, planning permission is being decided on over 140 homes across 5 sites around the town. This is attracting new people to the area.

- 2.3** The town lies on the River Wenning, just west of the Yorkshire Dales National Park and on the northern edge of the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Although set in an area of outstanding landscapes, surrounded by well-known visitor areas, Bentham has a low profile and does not have the pull of other nearby market towns; it is seen by residents as “a solid, quiet working town”.

- 2.4** The development of Bentham can be attributed to a strong tradition of manufacturing allied to its function as a market town. Bentham Auction Mart and Angus Fire, manufacturers of fire safety products, play a major part in the economic activity of the town. Bentham Auction Market has a fine reputation; it is “one of the leading livestock markets in the North of England”. The activities of both are hampered by the poor access roads for road transport.

2.5 Like many small towns, Bentham is undergoing pressure from changes in retail practices nationally, internet shopping and the shifting pattern of employment in the area. However, Bentham has a range of strengths and opportunities including:

- Land allocated for housing and employment development within the Craven Local Plan
- Proximity to Lancaster and the M6, including Lancaster University, which creates new opportunities to increase the number of businesses in the knowledge-based and creative sectors
- Positioned between the Yorkshire Dales National Park and the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty provides nearby visitor attractions
- Strong local identity with currently a sound economic base
- The town is served by the Leeds-Skipton-Lancaster/Morecambe railway line (also known as the Bentham Line); the station is within walking distance of the town centre. The Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership (LMCRP) has recently commissioned a study to evaluate the use of the line and its potential development as a trans-Pennine route. In addition, traffic should be greatly enhanced with the opening of a new Eden Project in Morecambe
- High proportion of regular visitors due to three large static caravan/holiday parks and an 18-hole golf course located on the outskirts of the town centre
- There are two Council-owned car parks close to (but relatively inaccessible from) the town centre, providing free short and long-stay parking. In addition, the District Council owns a one-hectare greenfield site on the edge of the study area, which has been identified as having potential to support the development of the town centre.

2.6 However, Bentham is subject to a range of constraints and pressures that are affecting its long-term viability. These include:

- Poor transport links, with travel being car dominated

- Over reliance on two major employers
 - It is relatively unknown outside the immediate vicinity
 - A number of vacant commercial premises within the town centre; these and other premises also need refreshing
 - Retailers still observing half-day closing, including one weekday and Saturday
 - Low level of footfall compared to other comparable settlements with most visits being relatively brief (under one hour)
 - Under-representation of hospitality, leisure and sport services and infrastructure compared to other comparable settlements in Craven District
- 2.7** The effect of increased commuting and a reduction in the number of people being drawn to the town has made its retail sector and function as a local service centre for a wider rural hinterland, vulnerable. Nevertheless, the Bentham Masterplan Team are confident that the character of the town can provide a distinctive offer that will draw people back.

3. Consultation

- 3.1** As Craven District Council were unable to recruit an appropriately qualified outside consultant in Spring 2022, the project stalled. In Autumn 2023 a group of four appropriately qualified local volunteers offered to take the project on (Bentham Masterplan Team). This was agreed in September 2022 by Craven District and Bentham Town Councils.
- 3.2** Local government, Craven District Council, North Yorkshire County Council, or their successor, and Bentham Town Council will need to provide support and specialist help/consultancy to identify the opportunities which can be developed. This will also be needed to support those in the community who have come forward because of the work of the Bentham Masterplan Team and have expressed an interest in helping to bring about change.

The overall objective remains the same

**to set out a clear vision for the future development and rejuvenation of
Bentham.**

3.3 An essential element of the project is to ensure there is extensive, open and inclusive engagement with the local community. Local residents, visitors, local interest groups, existing occupiers, owners and employers together with public sector bodies such as North Yorkshire County Council (the local highway authority) will all need to be included in a well-planned and executed engagement and consultation exercise.

3.4 The consultation with the population of Bentham, visitors, commercial and other interest groups started in October 2022 and ran through until mid-December 2022. It is now complete.

The consultation was achieved by the generation and distribution of two Bentham Masterplan Questionnaires – one for individual responses and a second for groups and businesses.

The **questionnaires for individuals** were distributed as widely as possible to all residents and visitors, using local knowledge and networks to encourage participation.

It was inserted as a flyer in the October issue of Bentham News, which has a circulation of 2,000 and is delivered free to all homes in Bentham.

- Bentham News also gave editorial support with full page features explaining the project and the importance of the questionnaires. This coverage, like the questionnaire itself, featured a QR code for people to complete the questionnaire online if they wished. The QR code linked to Survey Monkey, and this, understandably, was the preferred way of responding for our younger participants.
- Public relations – the Bentham Masterplan team did a Press Release which generated a full-page feature in the Craven Herald and a smaller feature in the Westmorland Gazette both of which included the QR code survey link.
- Public Notices – were displayed throughout the town featuring the QR code to encourage residents and visitors to “Have Your Say”.
- Social Media – Bentham Masterplan and the QR code were featured on a number of Bentham social media sites, specifically Facebook and Instagram.

The **questionnaires for Interest Groups, Clubs, Societies and Faith Groups** were emailed directly to just over 50 organisations – from Age Concern through to Yoga. They were accompanied by an email explaining about the Bentham Masterplan and including the links to the group Survey Monkey site.

Trade and businesses were consulted similarly by email and with the appropriate link to the Survey Monkey site. Twenty-six businesses were consulted in this way.

Local shops and businesses where no email address was available, received a hand-delivered questionnaire with a covering letter. Thirty-two were distributed in this way, from Sweetie Sue's to Audioworks.

For a survey of this kind where a 2% response would have been satisfactory, the results were outstanding. Over 10% of the population replied, underlining the interest Bentham people have in making improvements to their town.

4. Analysis of questionnaire returns

4.1 The method used

The questionnaire returns have provided details of what residents and others like and don't like about Bentham but also suggestions of what changes in the short and longer terms they would like to see. We also know who responded in terms of their gender, age and residence status, whether they live and/or work in the town, are visitors, run businesses and/or are employers.

To make these findings useful as prompts to action the responses have been put into categories to show the pattern of answers to each of the questions asked. As the questionnaire was designed to allow respondents to use their own words this analysis needed replies to be grouped together under common headings, such as

'the town centre appearance', 'the quantity and quality of community facilities', 'problems with the road layout and traffic issues' etc. The headings to be used were based on the answers people gave to the questions asked. All the responses were read as they came in and divided between headings that were adjusted as we went along to try to reflect what people had said. So, headings were added and removed as necessary. As some possible categories such as 'development planning' or 'government funding policy' were rarely if ever mentioned they were not included in the analysis, whereas others, such as 'anti-social behaviours', were added.

To be as accurate as possible without getting overly complicated, all the varied replies had to be placed in a limited number of categories created by grouping issues under inclusive headings. All the individual replies were then entered into a database under these headings, which allowed the following picture to emerge. It should not, however, be assumed that this is anything more than a reasonably accurate depiction of trends and patterns. Using this method of analysis cannot accurately reflect all the differing opinions and views received, but it does give a broad picture based on what respondents wrote. The pie charts are simply intended as an illustrative device to roughly reflect proportions. Where an important issue was raised by only a small number of respondents, we have tried to ensure that headings were flexible enough to include them and where appropriate these will be mentioned in the accompanying text.

4.2 Demographic pattern of respondents

We received 385 completed questionnaires from individuals (4 of whom also replied on the group questionnaire) and a further 40 from organisations, groups and businesses. This represents over 10% of the Bentham population, which is a good response rate for an untargeted survey. However, it does, of course, mean that we cannot be certain that the following analysis precisely reflects the views of the whole population of the town.

4.2.1 Responses from individuals

The individual respondents were 54% female, 39% male, 6.6% unknown. 0.4% other, and the age spread was as follows:

Age group	Percentage
Over 60	47.7%
41 - 60	26.7%
21-40	6.0%
13 -20	2.0%
Under 12	12.1%
Not known	5.5%

4.2.2 Residence pattern

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they lived and/or worked in Bentham or whether they were visitors. The children who kindly responded with the help of staff at the school used the visitor category if they came to the school in Bentham from elsewhere.

Residence etc	Percentage
Live in Bentham	77%
Live and work in Bentham	9%
Work in Bentham	2%
Visitors, including pupils coming from out of town to the school	10%
Not known	2%

Ten of the individual respondents also ran businesses in the town and three were employers.

5. Individual Respondents' views

The following description attempts to record fairly accurately the responses received to each question asked. Inevitably this means there will be some duplication.

Some people considered a particular issue more urgent than did others, so it appears as a response to multiple questions. Some also considered one issue so important that they included it in all their replies and a number chose several concerns in their

response to one question. However, when viewed as a whole we hope it gives a clear picture of the views of all respondents.

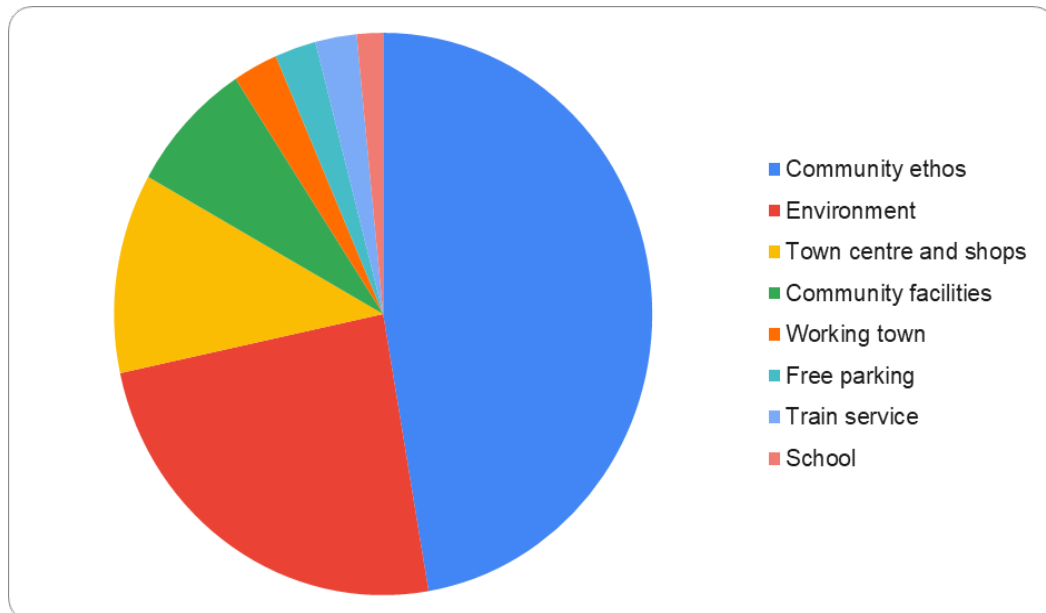
5.1 In your opinion what is the best thing about Bentham?

The pattern of responses was clear.

A significant majority of respondents, almost half, considered that the community ethos, the friendliness and helpfulness of the people was the best thing about Bentham. A further quarter chose the local environment as the best thing. These two headings were therefore considered the best thing by almost three quarters of the respondents.

Smaller numbers recommended the community and town facilities available such as the range of shops, the large number of specialist interest groups, services and organisations. Some of those named included the health centre, library, Pioneer Projects and Bentham News.

Smaller numbers mentioned the benefits of free parking, the good train service and the fact that Bentham remains a working town and has not been taken over by tourism or commuting.



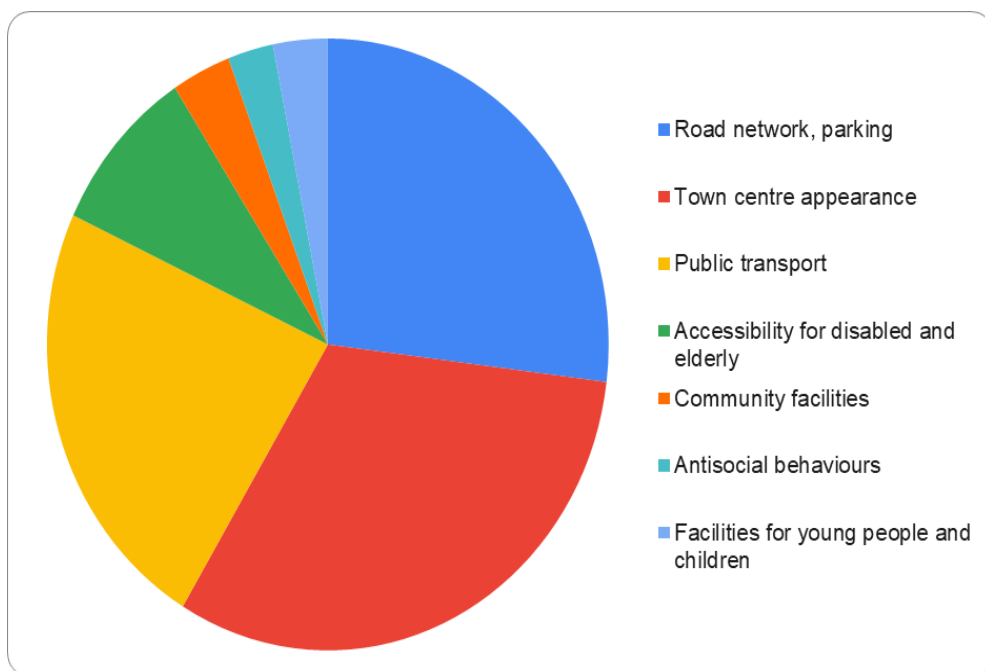
5.2 In your opinion what is the worst thing about Bentham?

Again, there was notable agreement with roughly a third choosing as the worst thing the town centre appearance and another third the roads, traffic congestion and

parking problems. Difficulties with public transport, particularly the lack of a useful bus service, was chosen by another quarter of respondents. Smaller, but still significant numbers, chose

- access issues for those with mobility problems or moving about with babies and children;
- the lack of some essential facilities in the town such as public toilets;
- the poor business environment including the lack of a fast broadband service;
- the lack of facilities for young people and children.

Concern was also expressed about some types of anti-social behaviour, including substance abuse.



5.3. What small thing would make the centre of Bentham better?

Responses grouped around three main suggestions, though not all of them can perhaps really be called 'small'. These were firstly, and not surprisingly perhaps, improvements to the roads, pavements, parking and pedestrian access. Respondents suggested the installation of pedestrian crossings, improving the layout of and access to the car parks, better monitoring and control of speed limits and on-street parking, repair of pavements and traffic calming.

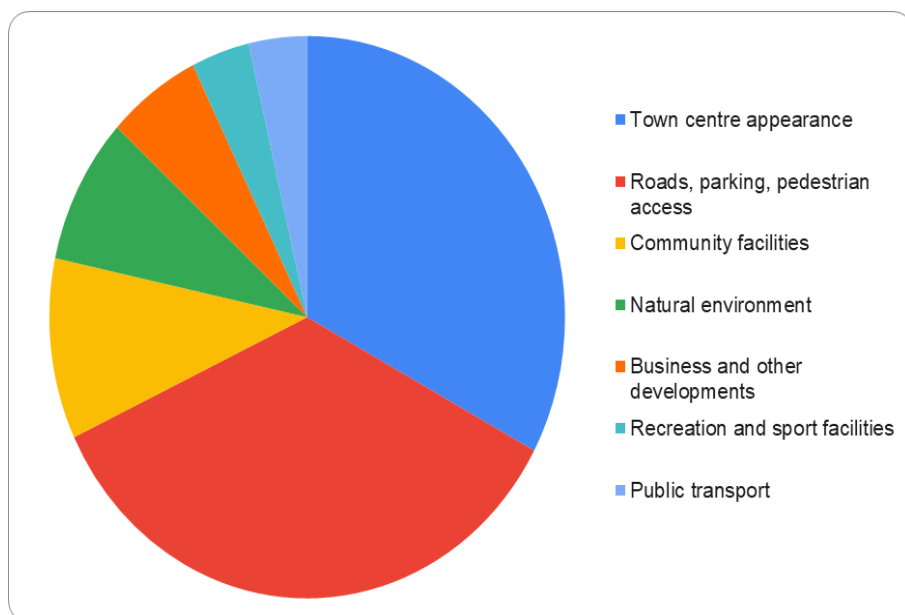
Almost as common were suggestions of improvements to the appearance of the town centre. These included renovation and reuse of empty properties, the revival of a

regular market, support to residents to improve the appearance of houses along Main Street, with the addition of more plants, trees and colour, regular general tidying and removal of litter and dog waste.

The need to replace the bus service to Lancaster was a common concern, including references to the wider impact of the lack of easy access to employment opportunities in local towns and the potential loss of workforce for businesses in Bentham. Already affecting many residents, and frequently mentioned, is the regular need for access to health and other professional services in Lancaster.

The development of new opportunities in new or repurposed buildings was also suggested frequently. This included up-to-date industrial and co-working facilities for the self-employed, free town-wide Wi-Fi, fuller and better use of the Town Hall for events and/or community services and space for arts and crafts enterprises.

Other responses suggested more attention be given to all access issues, especially for people with disabilities and parents and carers accompanied by babies and children where pavements are narrow and uneven. This is seen as especially urgent by many with the recent development of an extra-care facility at Bowland View which houses 100+ new residents in Bentham. Of particular concern also was the need to improve activities and facilities for young people and children, some of which have recently been lost. Regular policing to deter antisocial behaviours of all kinds was also felt to be lacking.



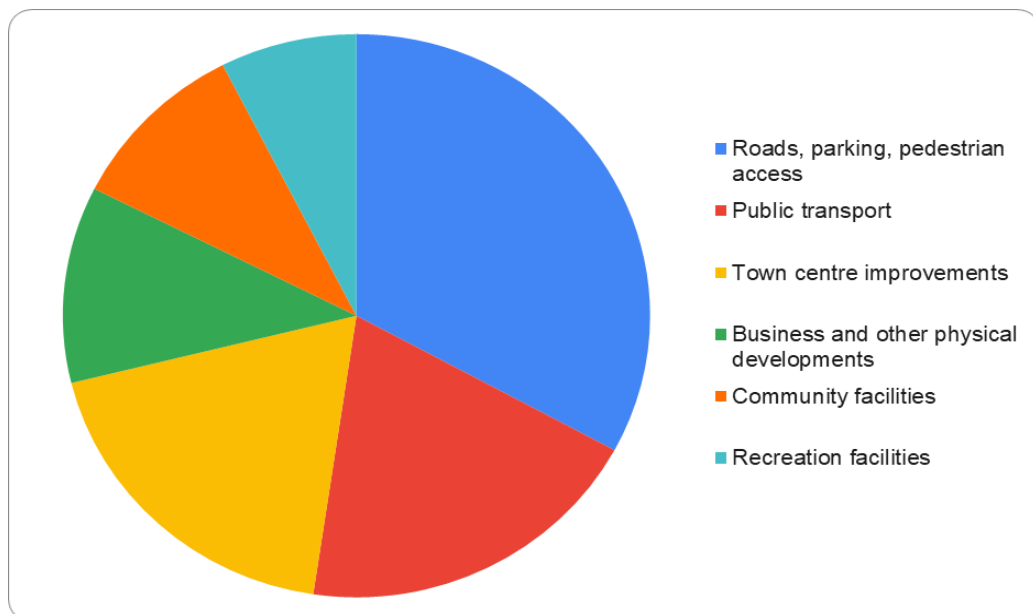
5.4 What one change would you like to see immediately?

The three most frequently selected areas needing immediate improvement are the same as those chosen as 'small improvements'. They are the roads and traffic, the town centre environment and public transport, respondents are clearly aware that these are urgently required.

Many community facilities were thought to need improving or developing. Particularly noted were facilities and activities for children and young people such as after-school clubs, a youth club, better playparks and evening activities for young people. This merged with the requests for more sports facilities, especially a gym and improvements to the playing fields.

Some aspects of the physical infrastructure such as industrial premises, more business and retail premises and the consequent increase in locally based job opportunities was also considered to be urgent. Improving access to the local rural and countryside attractions including better visitor accommodation and facilities, a camp site, visitor information services and notice boards were also highlighted.

Several respondents considered that local government, at all levels, has somewhat neglected Bentham and expressed the hope that this would change quickly, with the Town Council becoming more forward thinking.



5.5 What one change would you like to see over the next 10 years?

Answers to this question were more evenly spread with the most popular being a desire to see the town centre environment improved, followed by improvements to the road network and business environment.

Aspirations in all three areas were many and varied. Hopes for the town centre focussed on improvements to its appearance, an increase in the number and variety of shops and the development of areas for people to congregate and hold town events. Several people mentioned their desire for a town square, more seating and green spaces with plants and trees. More specifically it was hoped that the use of the Town Hall could be widened, to become the community centre, with the suggestion that a manager be appointed to co-ordinate both its use and other areas of the town's development.

It was felt that the traffic problems might be relieved in a variety of ways over the next decade. Suggestions included a partial bypass from the B6480 to opposite Angus Fire, improved access to car parks enabling the banning of parking on Main Street, altering access to the Auction Mart and speed bumps.

Hopes were also expressed for improvements to the business environment including free fast Wi-Fi across the town, encouragement to develop arts and creative industries and co-working space for the self-employed. Making the town more attractive aesthetically was also considered likely to encourage businesses to base themselves in the town.

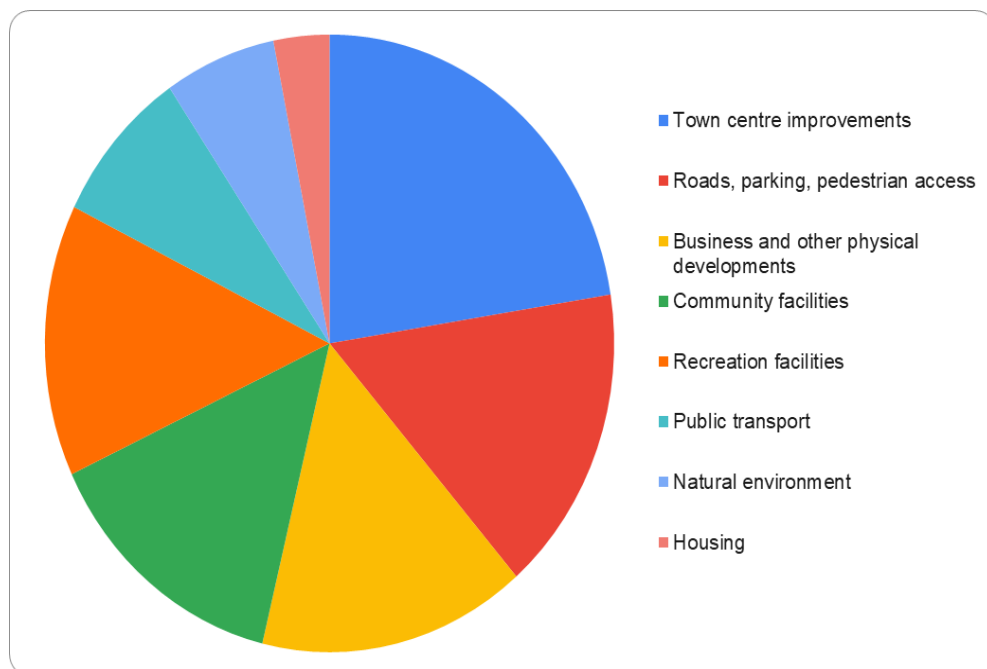
Other respondents wanted to see the development of more sophisticated community facilities such as a sports centre and gym. Also suggested were better public toilets, a youth centre, a museum and a larger and relocated health centre providing more NHS services.

Public transport aspirations focussed on the replacement of the bus service to Lancaster but also included more frequent trains on the Bentham Line and a train 'request halt' at Low Bentham.

Others suggested the town has the capacity to become much more energy self-sufficient with community-controlled electricity generation using the river or wind turbines on the moor.

Many hoped the reliance on the agricultural economy could be maintained at the same time as improving access to the surrounding countryside, encouraged by better mapping and signposting of walking trails, footpaths and cycle routes.

A small but significant number of replies noted hopes for an increase in affordable homes, often combined with a request that further private housing developments be deferred until the basic infrastructure of the town has been improved.



5.6 Any other comments?

Unsurprisingly the comments offered here largely repeated issues raised elsewhere on the questionnaire. In addition, some people offered precise suggestions of the changes they would like to see. All these comments have been recorded and can be accessed but are too numerous to list here. Examples include a cinema, adult

education provision, a meditation space, a digital hub, less dog poo, a pump track and more attention and input from local government authorities at all levels of town, district and county councils.

However, not everyone wanted change and a small number of respondents made comments such as 'I like everything about Bentham' and 'I wouldn't change anything'. One young respondent wrote 'I love Bentham so much I don't think there is anything bad about it'. Hopefully any change brought about because of the Masterplan project will ensure this young person retains this positive view of the town into adulthood.

6 Responses from Groups and Organisations

We received 40 responses from groups and organisations. These included sports clubs, churches, voluntary organisations and public and private service providers and businesses. Many of their answers were very specific to their situation, commenting on the adequacy and accessibility or otherwise of their premises or the availability and cost of alternatives. The total number being small, percentages are less reliable than for the larger number of individual responses. However, some consistencies are obvious.

Responses reiterated the general feeling that the best thing about Bentham is the community ethos, the knowledge that people are mostly willing to help one another and support local businesses and organisations. Several community facilities were especially praised, the library, Pioneer Projects and Bowland View were amongst those named.

The worst thing about the town was felt by these groups to be the roads and parking, and the general sense of dejection in the town centre.

The most urgent improvement to the centre of the town was felt to be tackling the traffic, roads and parking, especially along Main Street. Bentham Auction Mart said that without doubt the most inhibiting factor to their business at the Auction is the road network leading to the town.

Groups and businesses also want to see more shops and other enterprises to provide goods and services locally, so residents do not have to look elsewhere for them, and the town centre would then feel more vibrant. Better access to fast Wi-Fi was also suggested as it would encourage new business developments.

For the longer term the same issues were raised including the need for better public transport and more events and activities in the evenings and weekends.

7 What next?

The questionnaire findings described above show that there are four or five main themes in residents' responses. We now intend to work with Craven/North Yorkshire to refine these. We want to be able to identify two or three issues where work can begin immediately to identify the detail of what needs to be done. This will involve establishing small development groups from amongst those who offered their help in their questionnaire responses. We will be asking them to gather more precise information about what can be achieved quickly and what will need to be deferred for inclusion in the longer, final Masterplan.

We hope and expect that the Town Council will want to offer active participation and forward looking support to this work. We are grateful for the use of the Town Hall for meetings and expect to have more need of this support in the future.

Prepared for further discussions with Craven District Council and Bentham Town Council in February and March 2023 by

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Bentham

MASTERPLAN

Appendix 3 Vision for Bentham in 2020

Previous Study – Vision 2020

In 1994 the Civic Trust Regeneration Unit undertook a study to prepare a regeneration strategy for Bentham. The 107-page study (plus appendices) was titled “Vision 2020”. It set out a regeneration strategy, proposed actions and timescale to achieve various improvements by 2020.

Today, in 2023, many of the problems and opportunities noted then are similar to those we have today. Over the last 30 years, progress was made in areas such as:

- relocation of public toilets from School Yard, though they are no longer operational,
- footpath improvements at Mount Pleasant,
- a community transport business, though it was not long lived,
- Goodenber Play Area
- and expansion of the Golf Course.

However, to the present-day other proposals have achieved little or no results:

- no facelift for Main Street,
- no opening up the Market Square to Main Street
- no direct access to Cleveland Square car park from the Main Street,
- little in the way of business and tourism development.
- These deficiencies remain in 2023.