

Building a bright and bold future for Brandon and the Brecks

An analysis of the Independent Commission on the Future of Brandon's initial online public engagement

June 2025

Building a bright and bold future for Brandon and the Brecks

Survey results and analysis by West Suffolk Council
and Pragmatix Advisory

***Pro bono* analysis and reporting by Pragmatix Advisory.**

Basis of report and disclaimer

This report draws on the results of an online survey conducted by West Suffolk Council under the instruction of the Independent Commission on the Future of Brandon, with analysis by West Suffolk Council and additional analysis and reporting provided by Pragmatix Advisory Limited.

Input from Pragmatix Advisory has been provided on *pro bono* basis for the benefit of the Brandon's residents, businesses and other stakeholders at the request of the chair of the commission.

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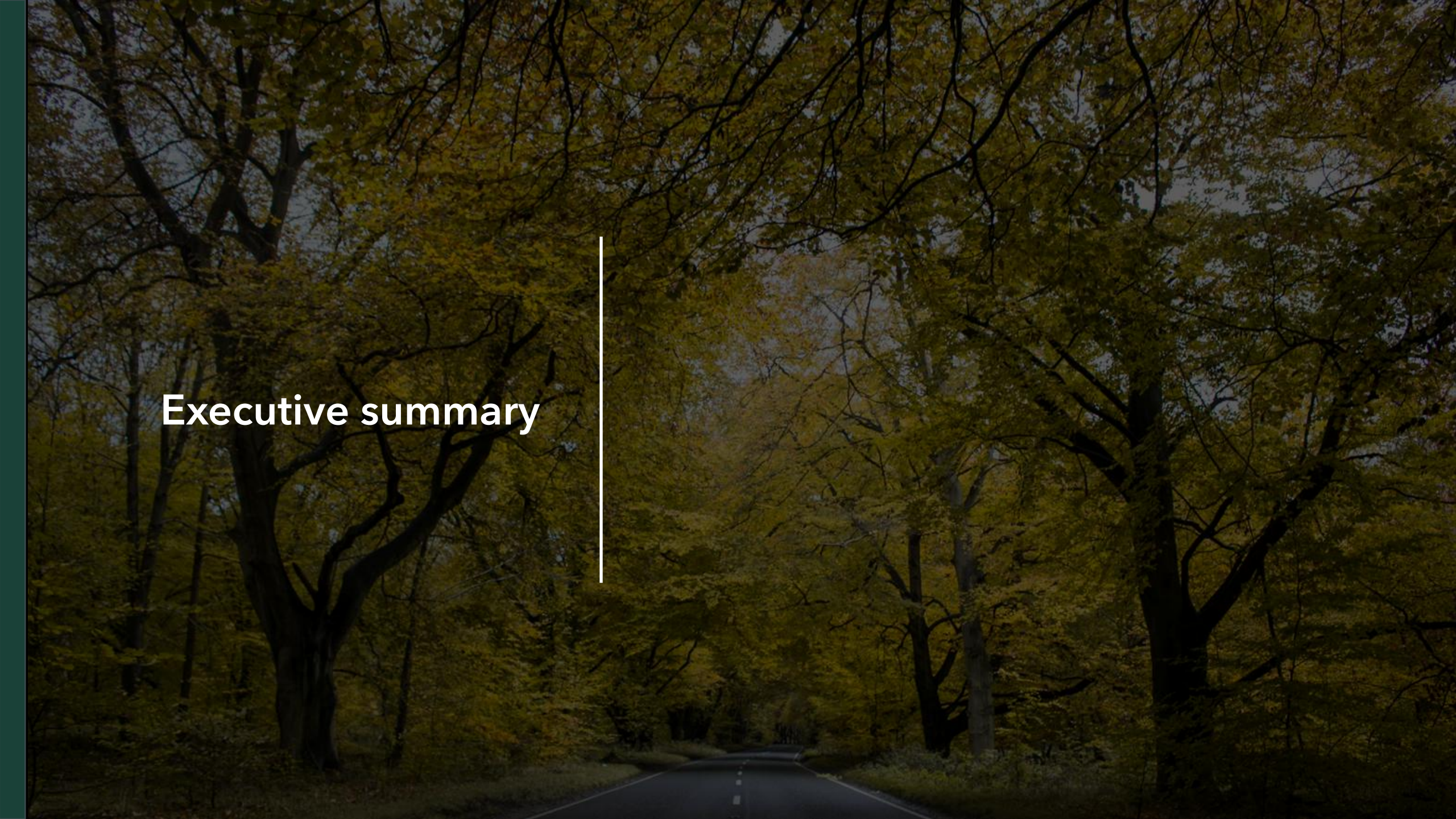
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Executive summary

A survey of Brandon residents revealed positive feedback and areas needing improvement

West Suffolk Council launched a public engagement exercise from 20 March to 13 April 2025 to seek the views of Brandon residents on their local area, what they value and their responses to specific themes.

A total of 201 respondents took part in the survey online, of which approximately 180 were valid or represented the highest number of responses to any single survey question.

The feedback from the survey highlights the sense of pride and friendly, community spirit that exists within Brandon while regular events, market and activities contribute to a safe, family-friendly community in the town. The natural environment, green spaces and diverse wildlife that surrounds the town, are cited as a significant positive to life in Brandon and emphasise why many respondents continue to feel positively about their neighbourhoods.

There is nevertheless a recognition that there are issues affecting Brandon.

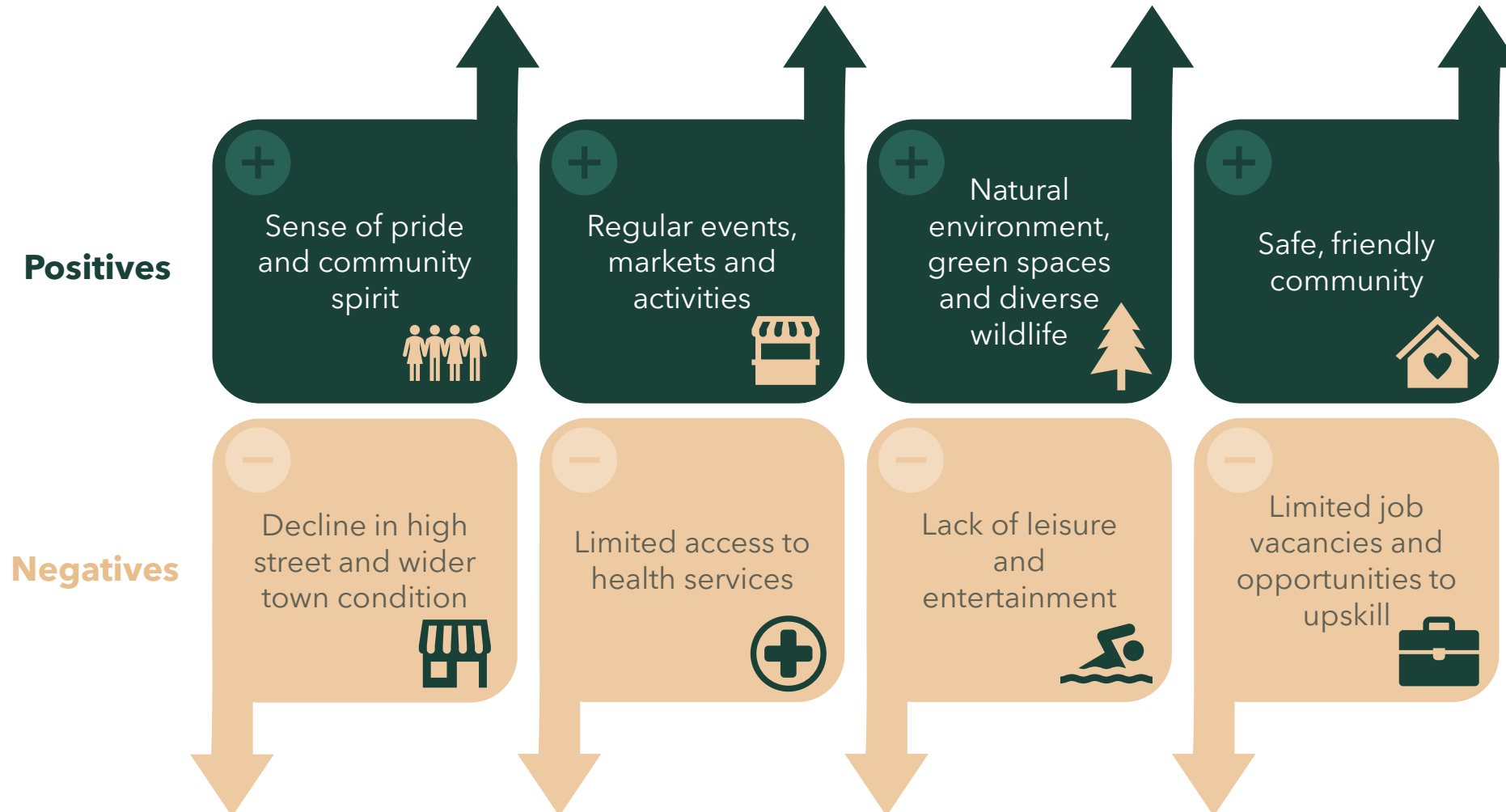
Concerns were raised in the survey about the decline in the condition of the high street and the wider town as well as access to health services and the lack of leisure and

entertainment for adults and children.

Furthermore, long-term economic conditions continue to hamper growth with job vacancies and training for adults to upskill limited. The lack of economic and leisure opportunities has contributed to a feeling among some that Brandon has been left behind and overlooked in recent years.

Overall, pride in place is a key theme emanating within the survey responses. Residents in Brandon have a strong sense of community spirit and where there are areas for improvement within the town, there is a clear desire and motivation to address those issues and enhance the town's image.

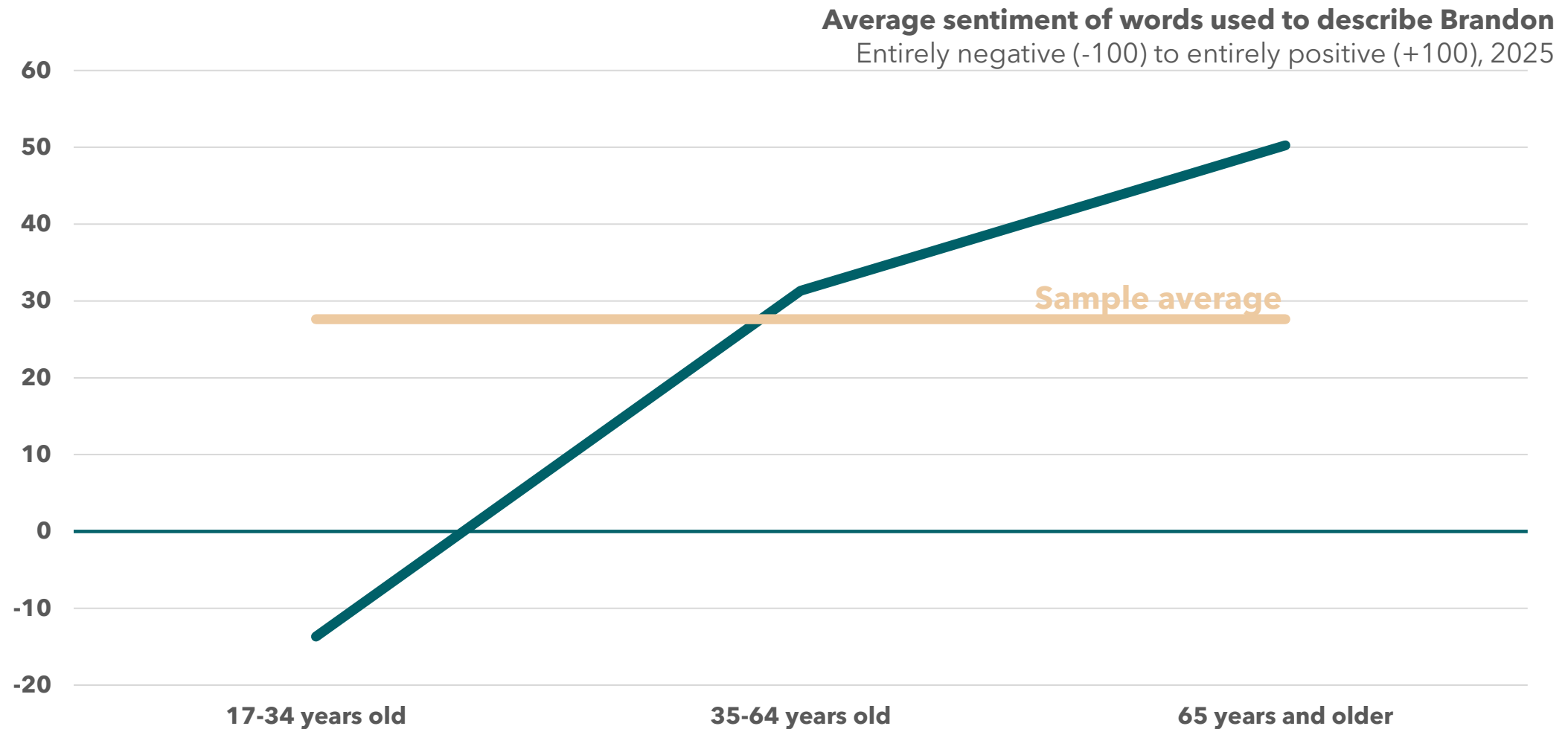
And survey analysis highlighted a consistent set of themes



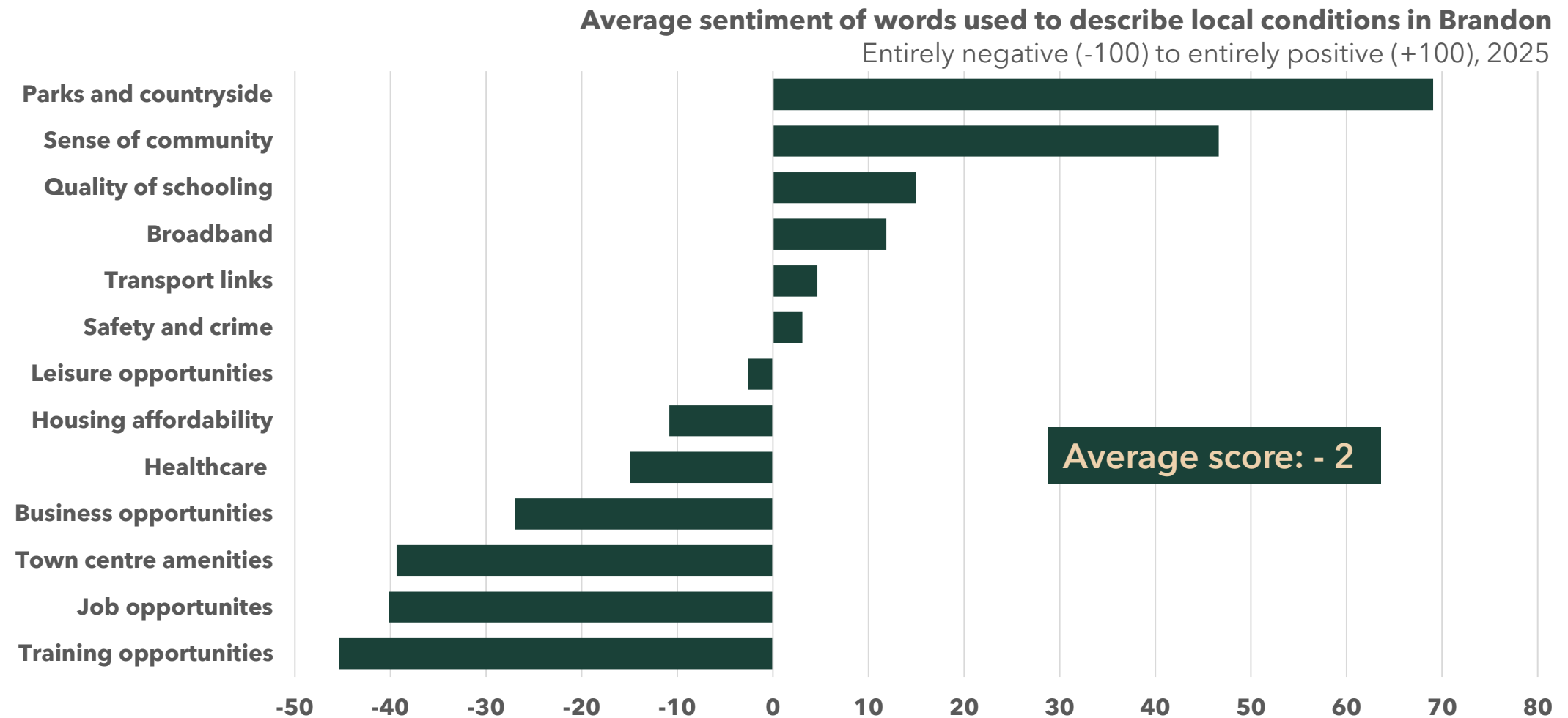
A photograph of a paved road stretching into the distance, flanked by trees with dense yellow and orange autumn foliage. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking down the road. The sky is visible through the canopy of trees.


Sentiment of words
used to describe
Brandon

Overall sentiment toward Brandon is generally positive



Nature and community continue to be viewed positively but job and training opportunities less so



A photograph of a paved road stretching into the distance, flanked by trees with dense yellow and green foliage, suggesting an autumn setting. The image is slightly dark and has a soft, ethereal quality.

What five words best
sum up Brandon?

'Friendly' was used 61 times when describing Brandon, with 'community' used 54 times and 'forest' mentioned 41 times.



What five words best sum up Brandon for you?

Top 100 cited, Brandon Commission survey, April 2025, 178 respondents 12

First word

Forest Quiet Boring
Run down Community
Friendly Small
Traffic Home
Town

Second word

Community Small
Run down Nature
Friendly Traffic
Peaceful Rural
Quiet Forest

Third word

Community Clean Rural
Potential Friendly Traffic
Forgotten Nature
Quiet

Fourth word

Diverse Peaceful
Nature Safe
Potholes Community Walks
River Quiet Friendly

Fifth word

Community Countryside
History Quiet
Forgotten Wildlife Green
Barbers Traffic
Forest

What five words best sum up Brandon for you?

Top 10 words in order of choice, Brandon Commission survey, April 2025, 178 respondents 13

Source: Pragmatix Advisory analysis of Brandon Commission survey

Respondents aged 17-34 years




'Lacking' was used 6 times when describing Brandon, with 'quiet' used 5 times and 'friendly' mentioned 4 times.

What five words best sum up Brandon for you?

Respondents aged 17-34 years, Brandon Commission survey, April 2025, 19 respondents 14

Source: Pragmatix Advisory analysis of Brandon Commission survey

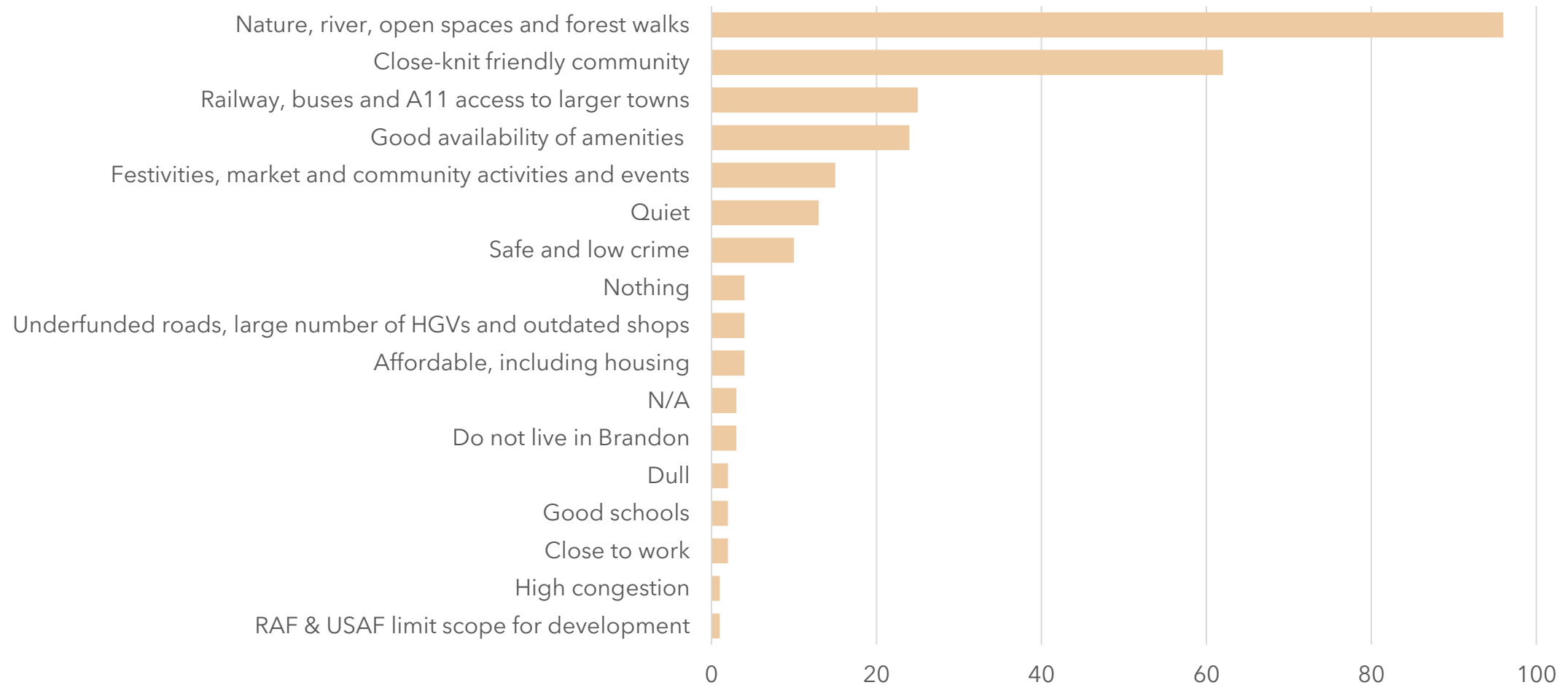
A photograph of a paved road stretching into the distance, flanked by trees with dense, yellow autumn foliage. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking down the road. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Thematic analysis of what residents' value most about living in Brandon

Summary of identified themes by West Suffolk

What do you like most about living in Brandon?

Key identified themes, West Suffolk Council analysis of Brandon Commission survey, April 2025, 180 responses



Source: West Suffolk Council analysis of Brandon Commission survey

Access and being surrounding by nature were mentioned frequently, as was the country park

"Ease of access to the forest and nature"

"The close proximity of the country park and High Lodge."

"..surrounded by the forest with a beautiful country park"

"It's position in the Brecks landscape. Nestled in the little ouse valley amongst the trees."

"The incredible nature on our doorstep. We are fortunate enough to live in a wonderfully, ecologically rich area. People travel from far and wide to visit places such as Thetford Forest, Weeting Reserve, Grimes"

"The surrounding forest and beautiful accessible river."

"Being close to the forest and river makes it convenient to escape busy stressful lifestyles."

"Mostly the nature and the walks, love being around the woodlands and local river."

"Easy access to the forest around me."

What do you most like about living in Brandon?

Selected survey responses, April 2025, 195 responses 17

Source: Brandon Commission survey

And there were occasional mentions of wildlife and rare species, with some indicating they hold significance

"There is a huge community spirit, with rare wildlife attached to a unique mix of heathland forest and the beautiful Little Ouse which gives life to Otters, rare birds and outstanding unspoilt land landscape."

"There are a lot of areas to go for country walks and see the local wildlife, Birds, deer and sometimes bats."

"The peace and quiet of the surroundings, with the forest, waterways and birds."

"Rural location with good access to both river and countryside with its diverse and rare wildlife and plant species."

What do you most like about living in Brandon?

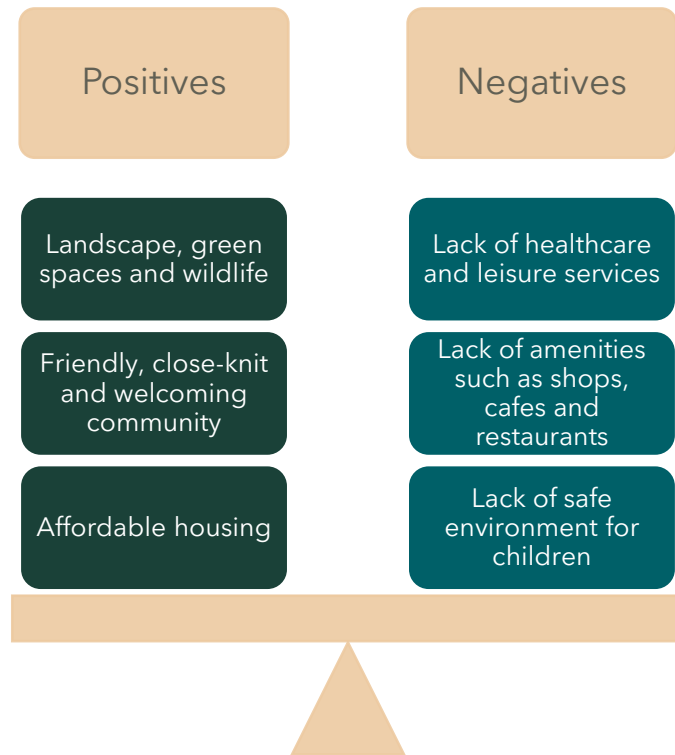
Selected survey responses, April 2025, 195 responses 18

Source: Brandon Commission survey

A photograph of a paved road stretching into the distance, flanked by trees with dense yellow foliage, suggesting an autumn setting. The image is used as a background for a text overlay.

Thematic insights into
how residents feel
about Brandon in
relation to other areas

A strong community and access to nature enhance Brandon's appeal, though service gaps hinder its standing



177 respondents provided free text responses to “Question 4: To what extent do you feel positive about Brandon, in relation to other places?”

When comparing Brandon to other areas, many respondents mentioned the town’s friendly, close-knit and welcoming community spirit as a positive of living in the town. Respondents highlighted the affordability of housing, the picturesque landscape, green spaces and surrounding wildlife as a distinctive feature of Brandon and a desirable place to live. However, when comparing Brandon to others, the town is viewed less favourably.

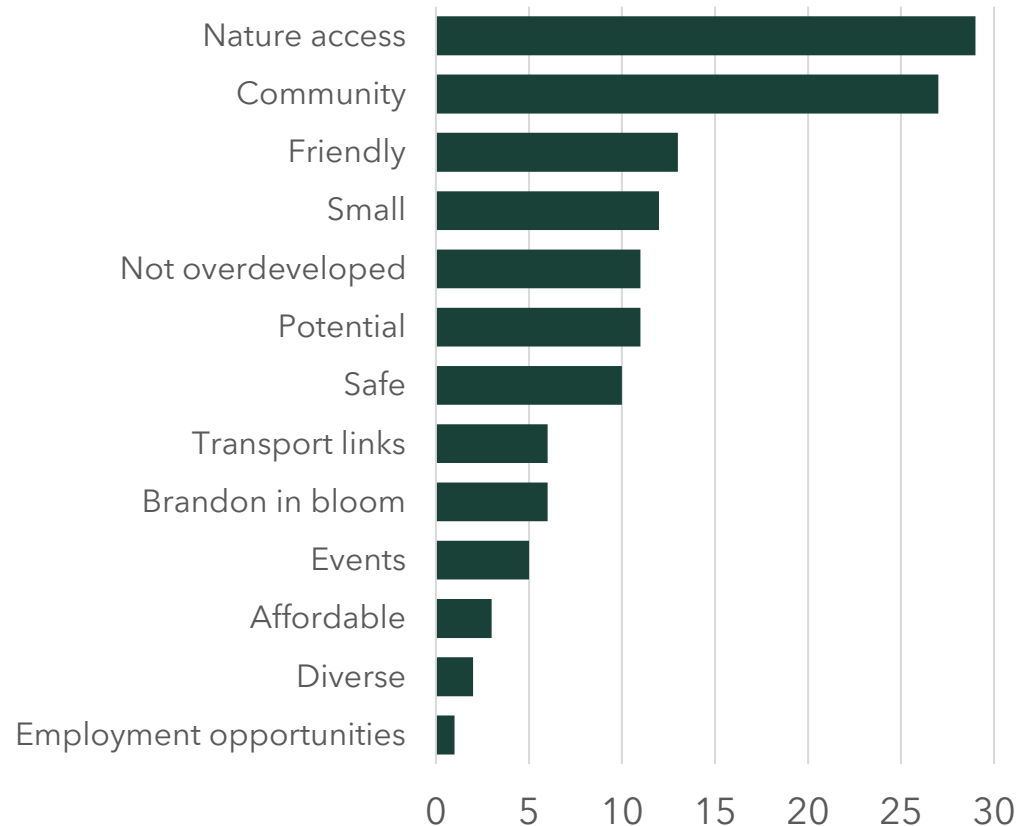
A number of respondents feel the town has limited appeal for both adults and children, with access to services restricted. Respondents cited a lack of health (GP/dentist surgeries) and leisure services, shopping, cafes, restaurants and pubs for adults, while for children, the condition of play areas and the lack of places for grown-up children to socialise in a safe environment is a concern.

The lack of an entertainment offer has left many gravitating to neighbouring areas, which respondents felt had been given the opportunity to develop and enhance their community, while Brandon has been overlooked.

Theme analysis showed that nature sets Brandon apart, but limited amenities and a need for investment bring it down

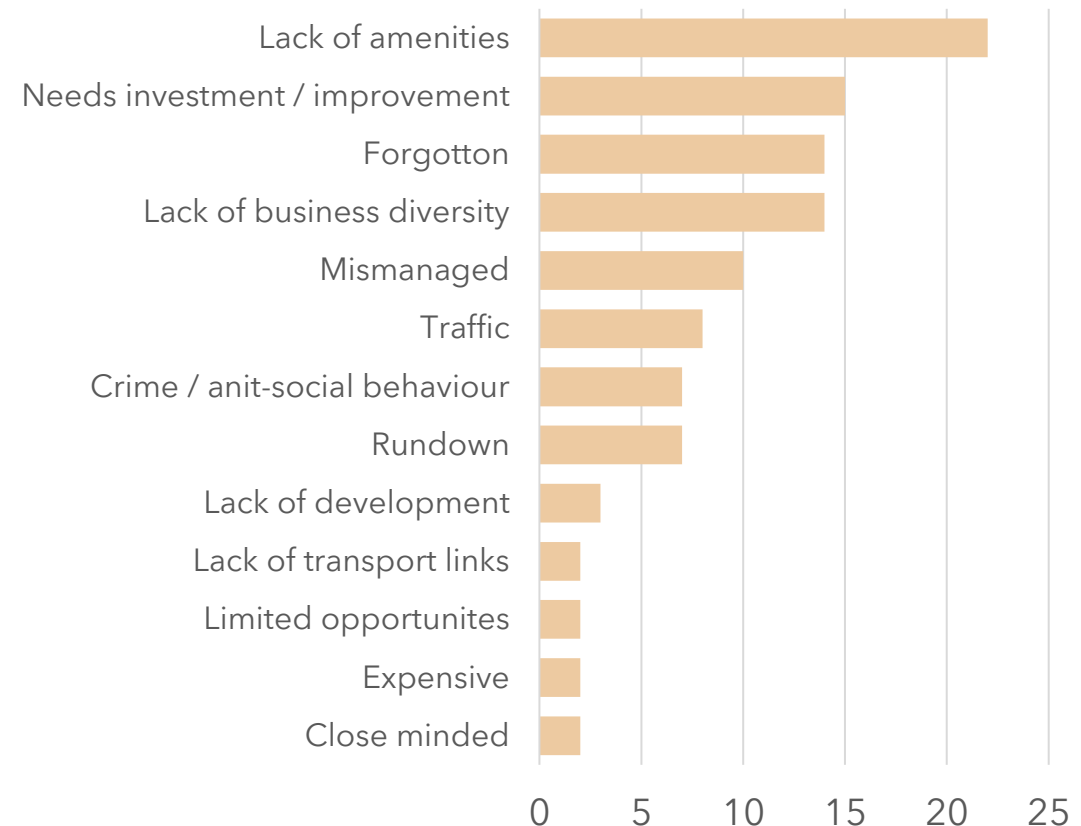
To what extent do you feel positive about Brandon in relation to other places?

Key identified *positive* themes, April 2025



To what extent do you feel positive about Brandon in relation to other places?

Key identified *negative* themes, April 2025

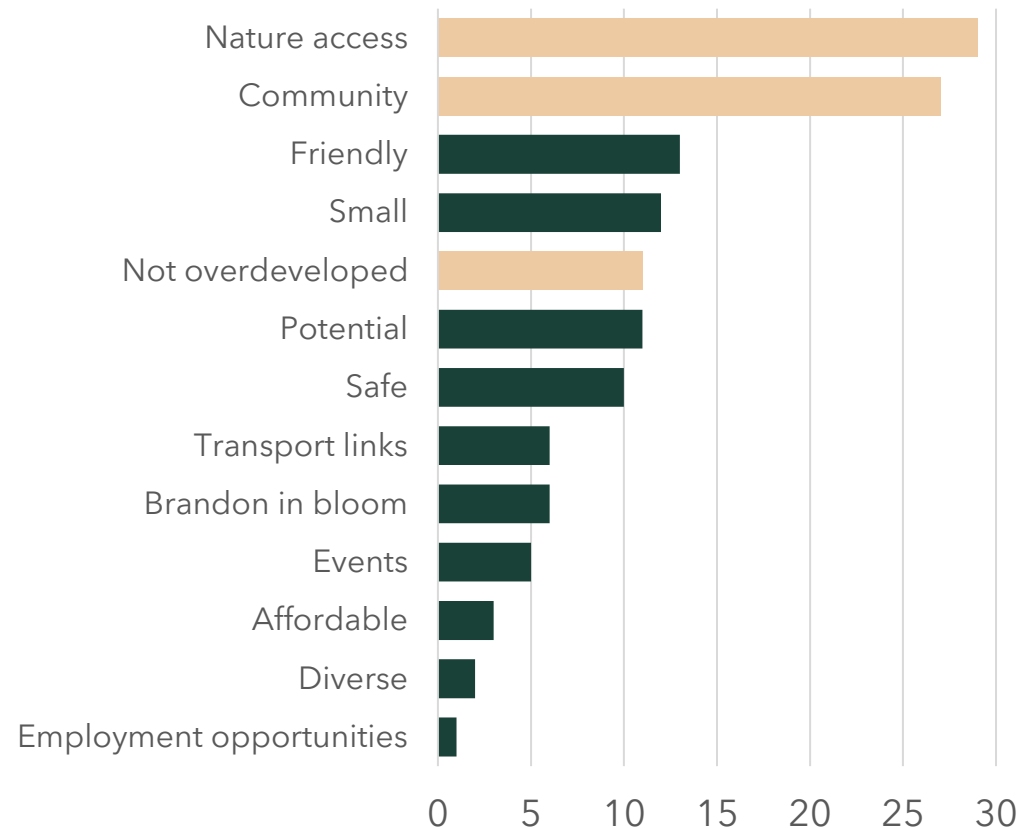


Source: Pragmatix Advisory analysis of Brandon Commission survey

Respondents viewed Brandon's limited development positively, seeing it as an advantage over other towns

To what extent do you feel positive about Brandon in relation to other places?

Key identified *positive* themes, April 2025



"Not ruined by mass development of large estates of housing. Surrounded by Forest and nature. This is the glue that holds community together! In other towns I have experienced this was very much a problem"

"The people make this town, great community spirit. And the nature all around is superb."

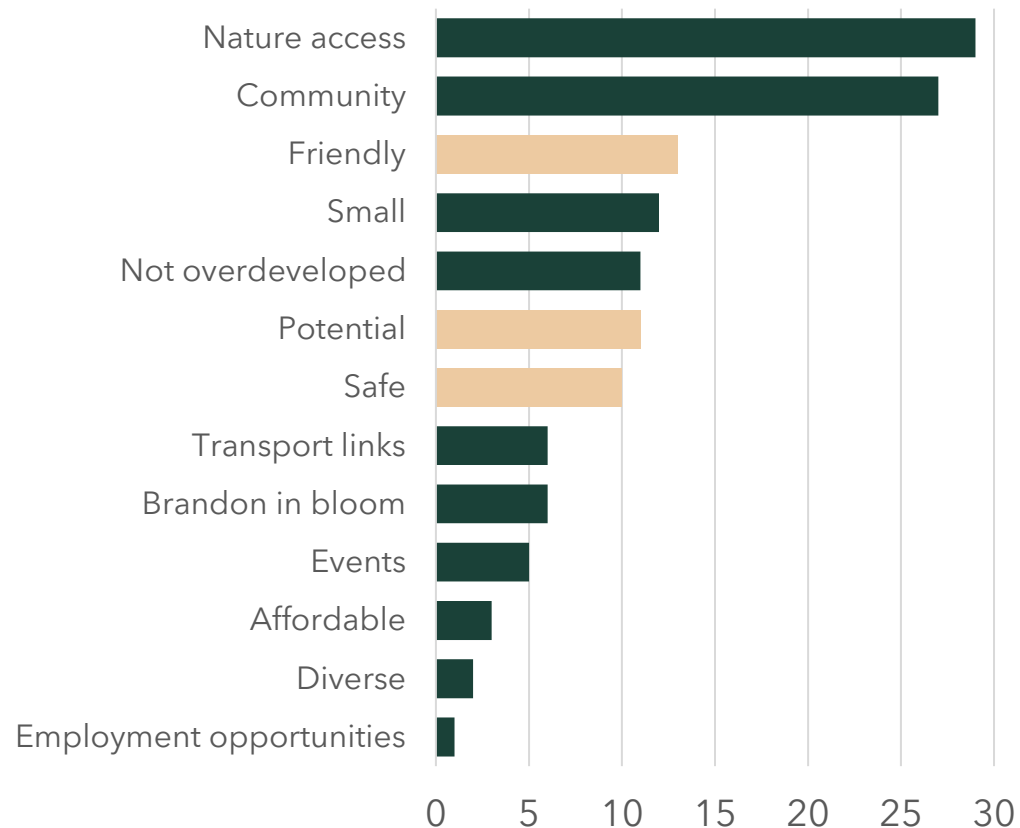
"I chose Brandon for its quaint community vibe and the lovely beautiful forest. The community does a lot to keep our town nice and we all have a passion for keeping the forest and wildlife safe."

"It hasn't been overdeveloped which means the already busy main roads haven't got too much more busy over the years. I like the fact that the natural boundaries of river and forest have contained the town."

And many felt that Brandon was a generally safe and friendly place to live with a lot of potential

To what extent do you feel positive about Brandon in relation to other places?

Key identified *positive* themes, April 2025



"Has the potential to be a hub of Suffolk."

"Most friendly town ever like anywhere you are the only person that can help you but if you reach out even a little bit it will hug you back."

"It is quiet and there is a lot of potential along the high street and in the football field area"

"Small welcoming friendly community"

"It generally feels safe compared to other towns too"

"Love it. Feels safe and caring."

But a lack of amenities, especially business diversity, was seen as one of Brandon's main drawbacks

"..In our time in Brandon we've seen a rapid decline in services, ... and the high street transformed into a fast food highway.."

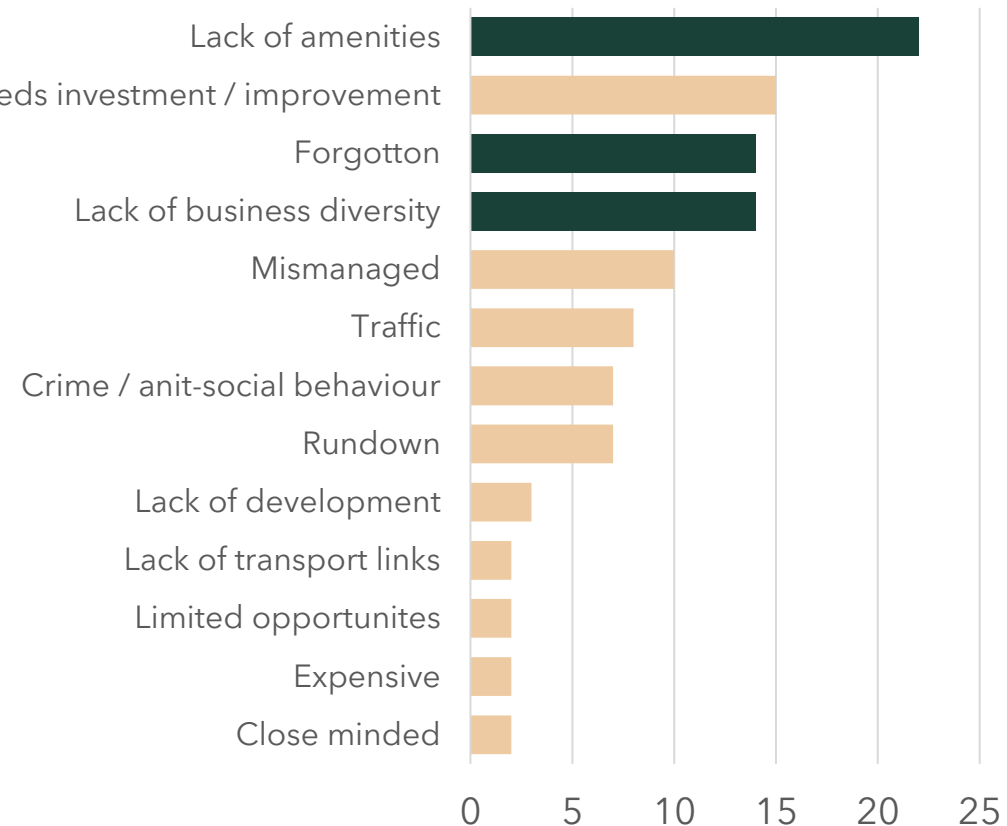
"..it is forgotten about as a backwater when it comes to facilities for the youth, for road care, a lack of any community centre at all, severe lack of social housing, little to do entertainment wise at night, closure of pubs."

"I'd like it to be a more vibrant town with access to more facilities in the way of arts and culture on the doorstep rather than having to travel"

"Not a wide variety of shops so people go elsewhere."

To what extent do you feel positive about Brandon in relation to other places?

Key identified *negative* themes, April 2025



Source: Pragmatix Advisory analysis of Brandon Commission survey

And many felt Brandon suffered from insufficient investment and lacked effective management

"In comparison to other towns I feel envious of their investment levels."

"I feel Brandon is one of the more deprived areas in an area of quite lovely affluent areas. This in my opinion is due to poor council management for decades."

"..needs investment in all areas."

"Other smaller towns/villages often appear to have a purpose/goal. Brandon lacks leadership."

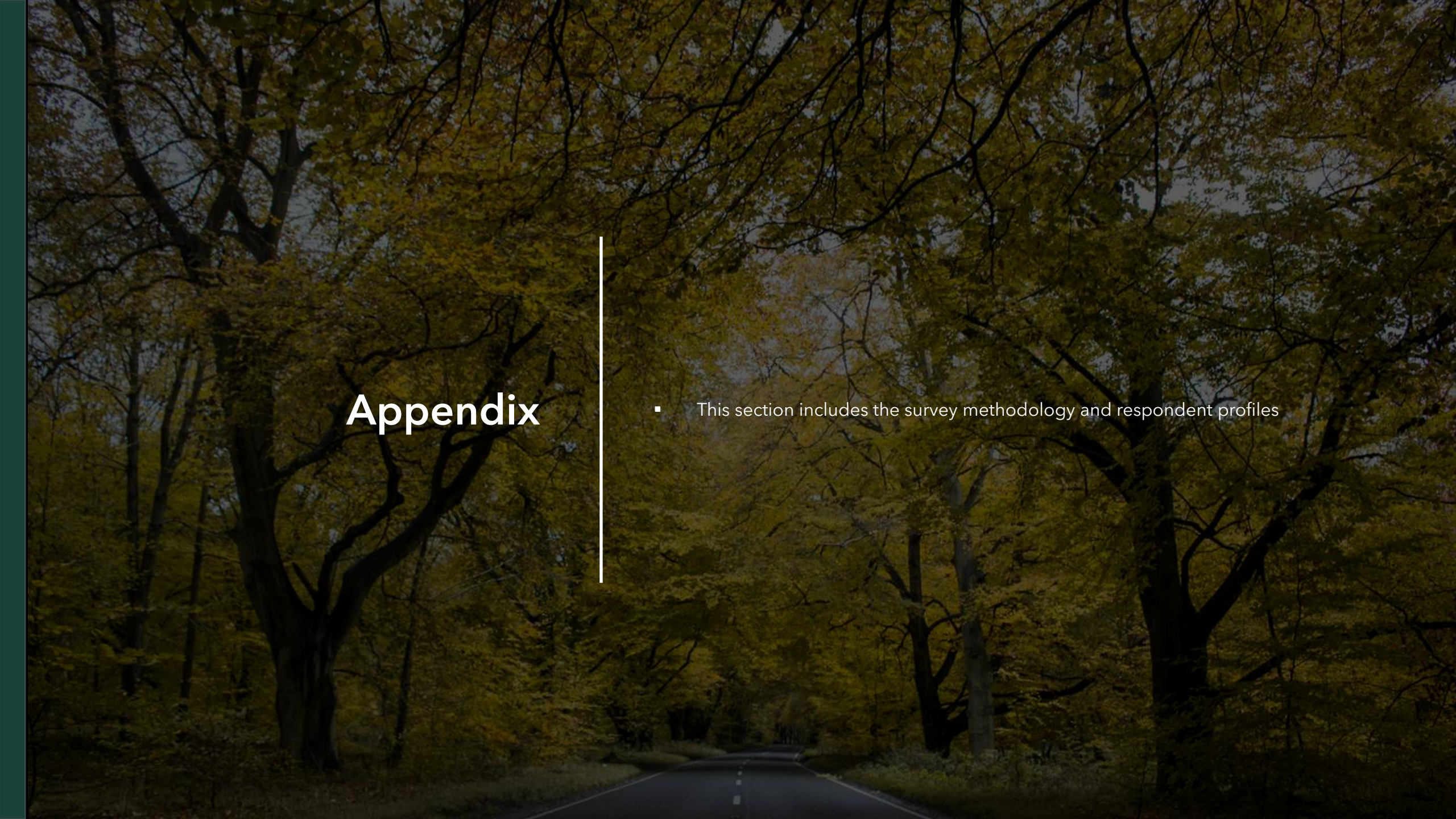
"Most of our council tax seems to be spent in other, larger parts of the county now we fall under the County Council."

To what extent do you feel positive about Brandon in relation to other places?

Key identified *negative* themes, April 2025



Source: Pragmatix Advisory analysis of Brandon Commission survey



Appendix

- This section includes the survey methodology and respondent profiles

Methodology

An online survey was created, and was published through the media, West Suffolk Council website, social media, staff, councillors, and partner organisations. The council also undertook direct engagement with key stakeholders across Brandon, with local residents, community groups, partner agencies and local councillors.

At the time the survey closed, 201 online responses had been submitted, of which approximately 180 were valid or represented the highest number of responses to any single survey question.

Survey responses included identification answers and qualitative feedback from residents. Respondents also provided feedback on their thoughts about Brandon in relation to various topics. No questions in the survey were mandatory for respondents to answer.

A sizeable part of the survey was comprised of free text responses. These were analysed using standard manual techniques for free text analysis to examine respondent information and gauge support, which while highly effective are unable to fully eliminate any degree of judgement or subjectivity. All percentage calculations in relation to qualitative analysis have been rounded to the whole number.

Survey questions had varied response rates

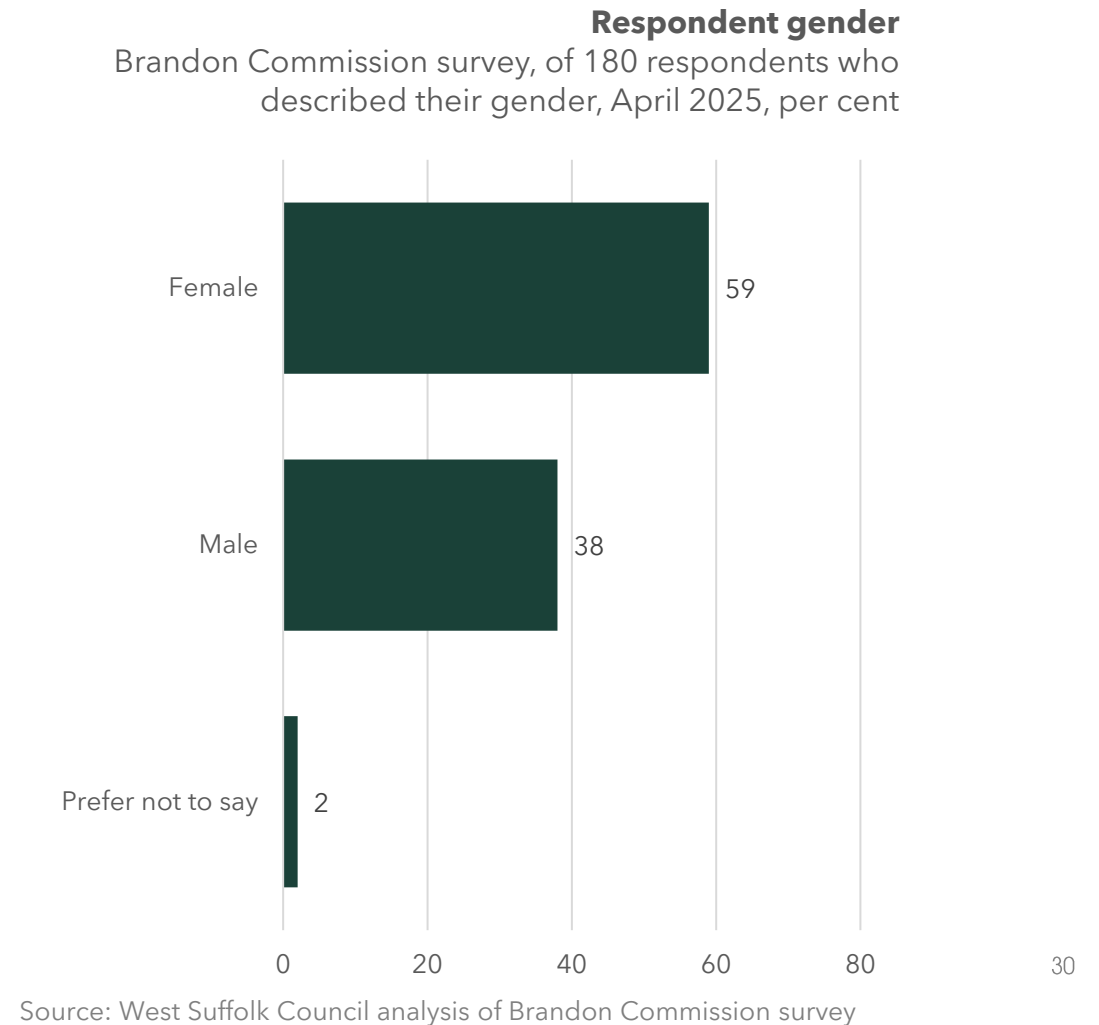
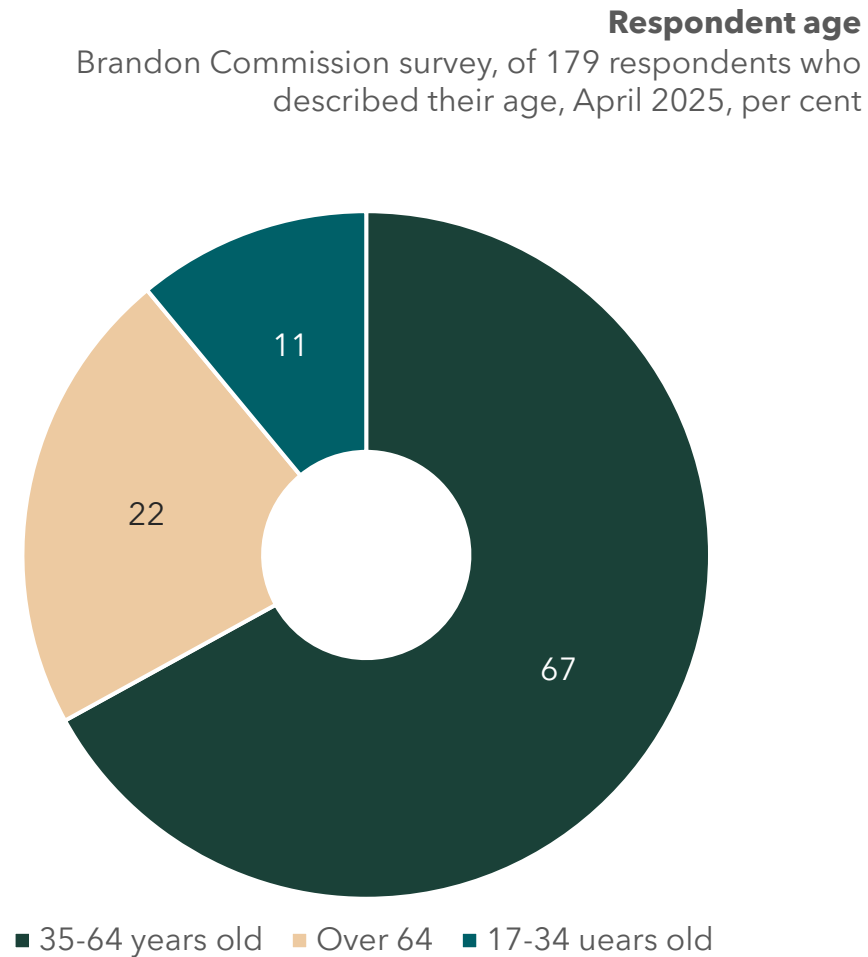
Survey question	Respondents	Survey question	Respondents
Q1: What five words best sum up Brandon for you?	178	Q5: What is your age bracket? - Child or young person (under 17 years old) - Working age (17-34 years old) - Working age (35-64 years old) - Older person (65 years and older)	179
Q2: What do you most like about living in Brandon?	180	Q6: Which of the following best describes how you think of yourself? - Male - Female - In another way (please specify) - Prefer not to say	180
Q3: Please tell us what you think about the following topics in relation to Brandon? - Broadband - Healthcare - Housing – affordability and quality - Job opportunities - Leisure opportunities - Opportunities for adults to upskill or retrain - Opportunities for local businesses - Parks and countryside - Quality of local preschool provision, schools and colleges - Safety and crime - Strength of community relationships and networks - Town centre amenities - Transport links	179 (provided at least one word)	Q7: What best represents your household? - One-person household - Couple without children - Couple with children - Lone-parent household with children - Extended family household (for example, grandparents, parents, children) - Multi-family household	178
Q4: To what extent do you feel positive about Brandon in relation to other places?	177	Q8: Please tell us your postcode - excluding the last two letters	170 (verifiable)

Source: West Suffolk Council analysis of Brandon Commission survey

And included a range of multiple choice and free text response questions

Survey question	Respondents	Survey question	Respondents
Q9: What is your employment status? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employed or self employed - Not in employment - unemployed - Not in employment - student, caring for family, not looking for work - Retired - Other (please specify) 	179	Q12: Where near Brandon do you work?	42
Q10: What sector do you work in? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing - Crop and livestock farming, fishing, hunting, and forestry - Mining - Extraction of minerals, coal, oil, gas, and quarrying - Construction - Residential, non-residential, and specialized trade contractors - Manufacturing - Food, textiles, chemicals, machinery, and various manufactured goods - Transportation, Communications, Electric, Gas, and Sanitary Services - Railroads, trucking, air transportation, telecommunications, utilities - Wholesale Trade - Distribution of durable and non-durable goods - Retail Trade - Grocery stores, clothing stores, car dealerships, restaurants - Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate - Banks, credit institutions, insurance companies, real estate - Services - Hotels, legal services, health care, education, business services - Public Administration - Government agencies, national security, public programs - Other (please specify) 	126	Q13: If you would like to be kept up-to-date on the work of the Brandon Commission, please provide your email address	-
Q11: Where do you work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In Brandon - Near Brandon - Elsewhere 	124		

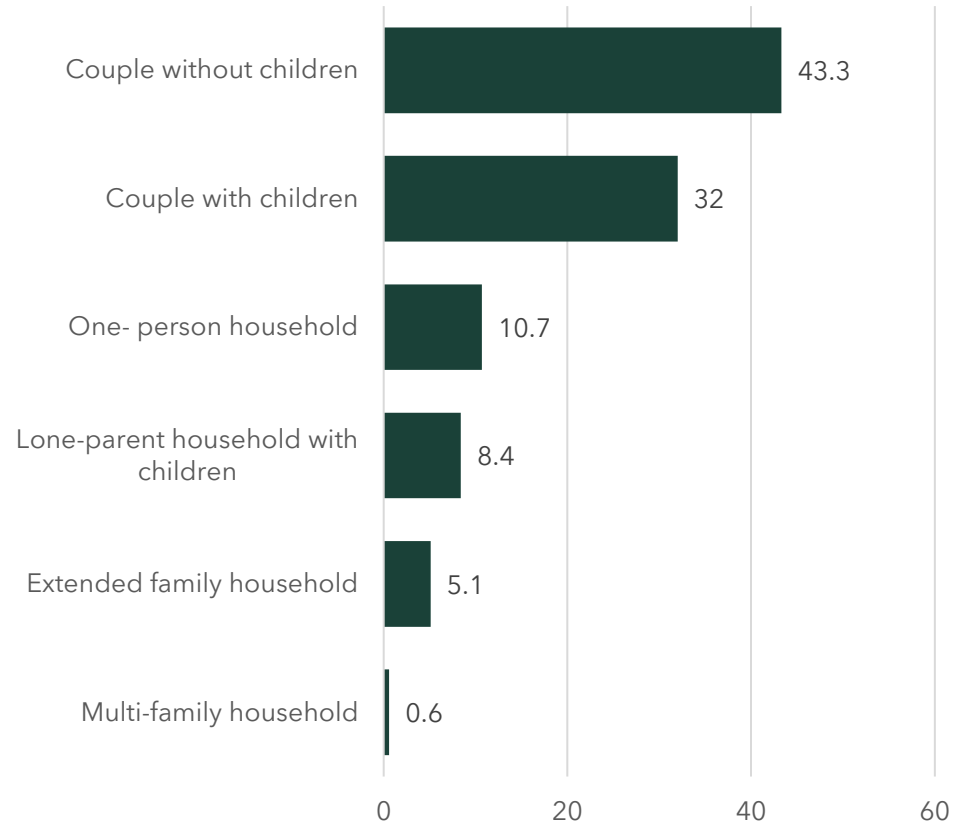
Majority of respondents were female and of working age



84 per cent of respondents had an IP27 postcode

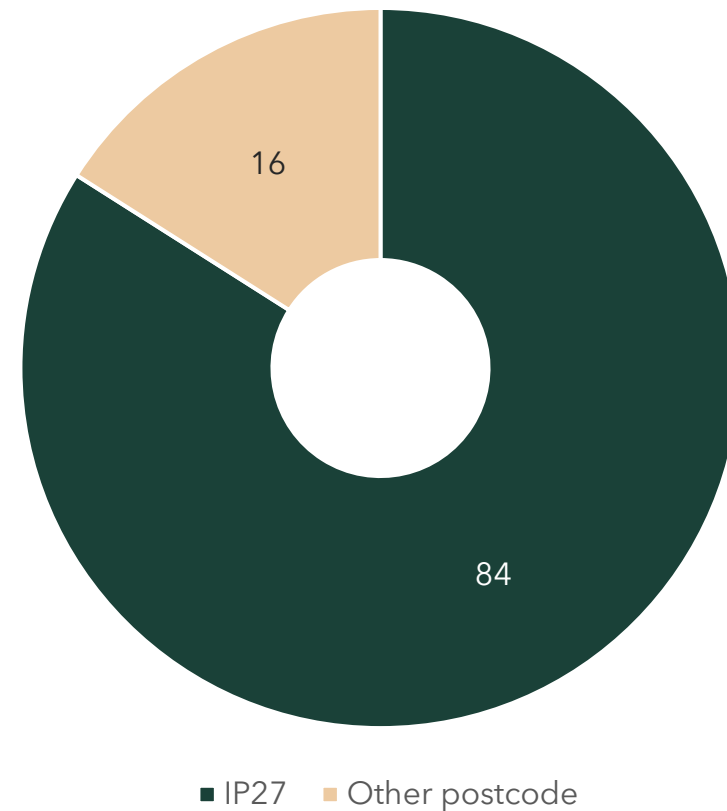
Respondent household composition

Brandon Commission survey, of 178 respondents who described household composition, April 2025, per cent



Respondent location

Brandon Commission survey, of 170 respondents who provided verifiable postcodes, April 2025, per cent

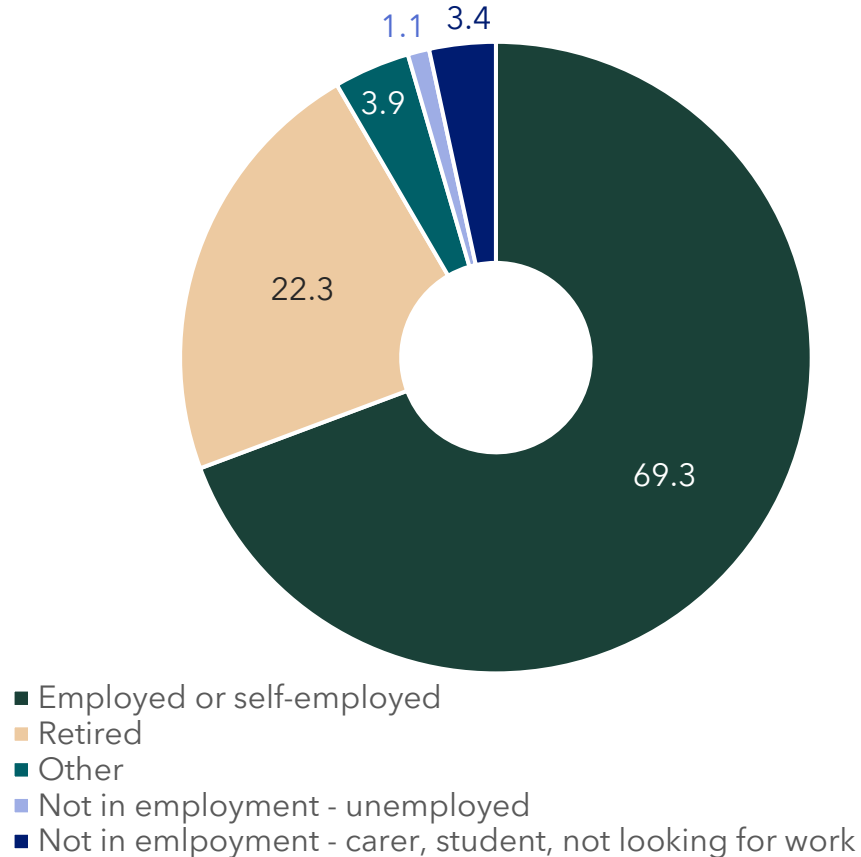


Source: West Suffolk Council analysis of Brandon Commission survey

..and were either employed or self employed

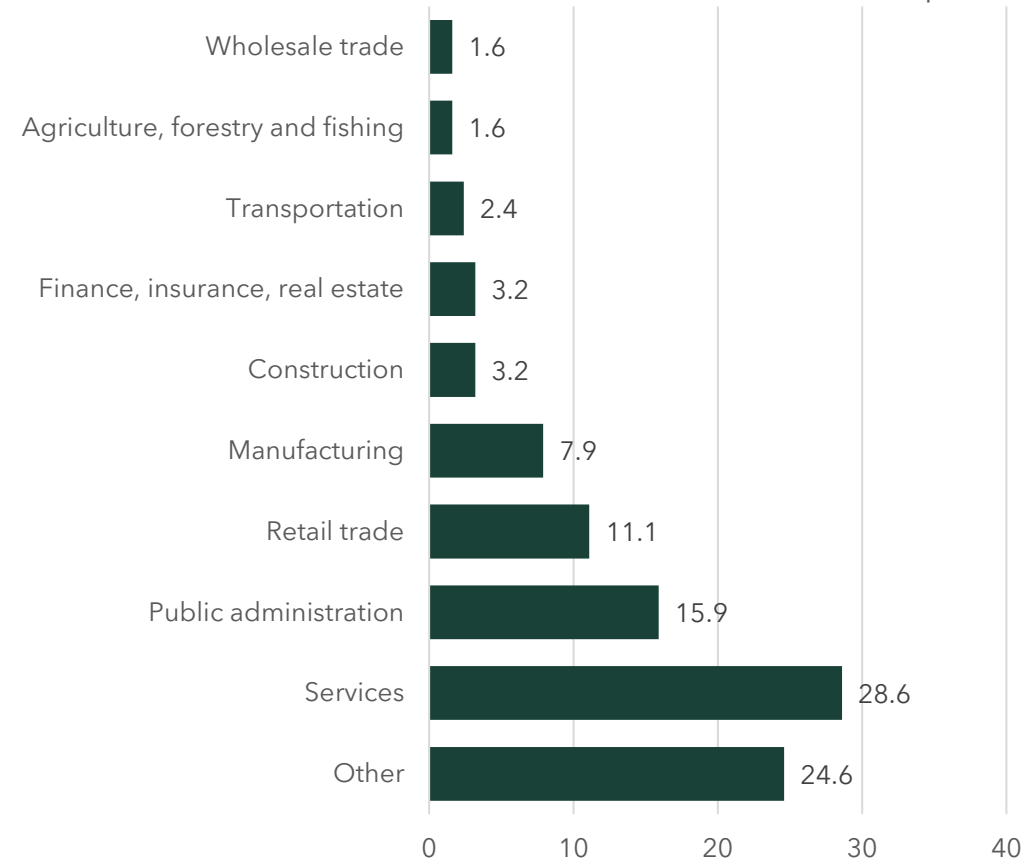
Respondent employment status

Brandon Commission survey, of 179 respondents who identified their employment status, April 2025, per cent



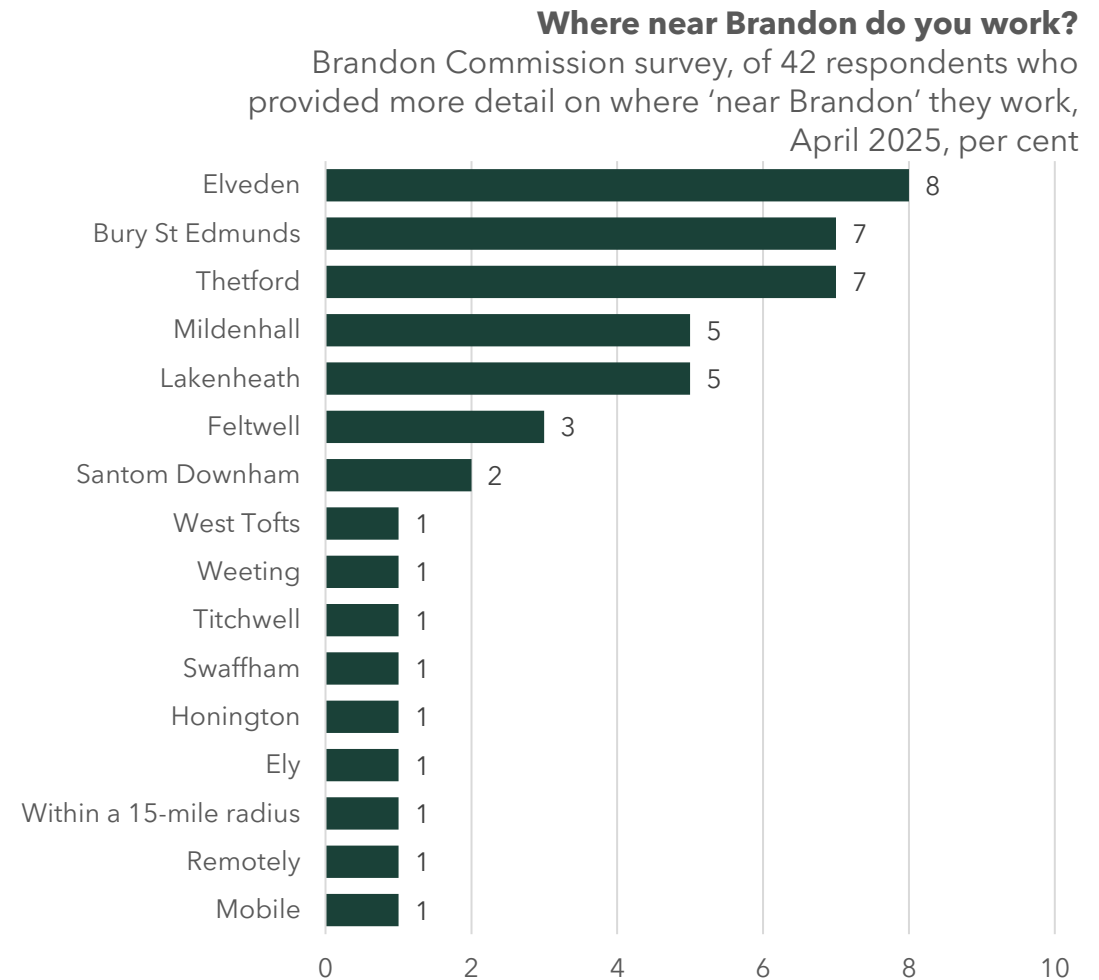
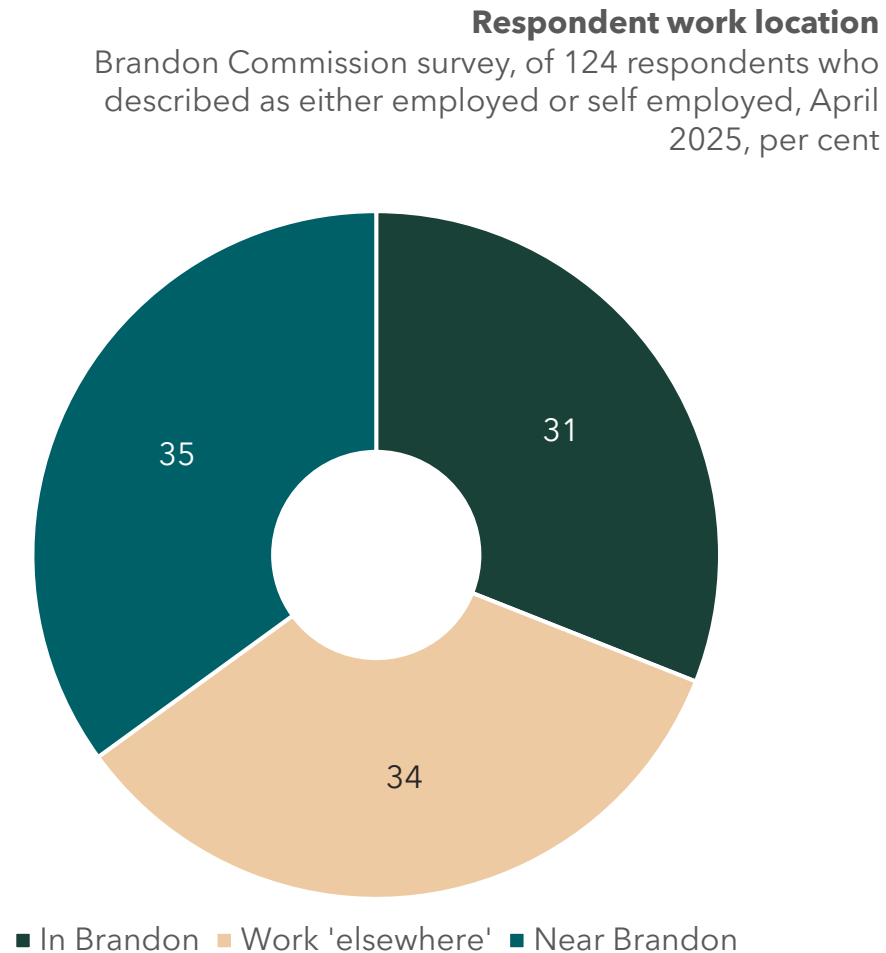
What sector do you work in?

Brandon Commission survey, 126 respondents, April 2025, per cent



Source: West Suffolk Council analysis of Brandon Commission survey

Work locations included sites within Brandon, its vicinity and elsewhere



Source: West Suffolk Council analysis of Brandon Commission survey