Draft Scoping Exercise*

Application of the Place Standard Tool to Peebles

www.placestandard.scot/questions

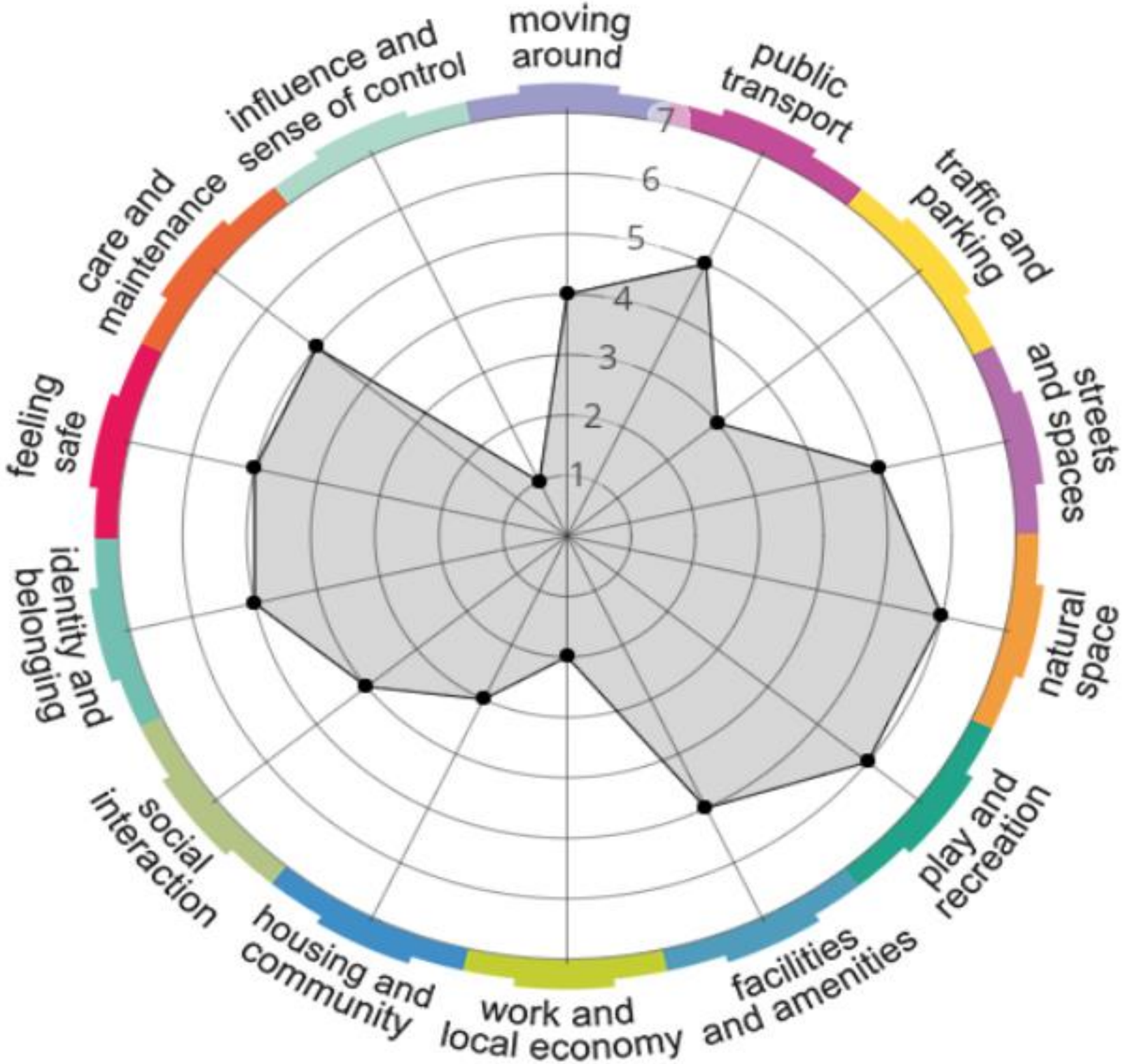
* filled in on the basis of the responses from the Nov 2021 Open Forum, and previous public consultation

The Place Standard Tool

- The Place Standard is a way of assessing places. Whether the place is well-established, undergoing change, or is still being planned, the tool can help you.
- The Place Standard tool provides a simple framework to structure conversations about place. It allows you to think about the physical elements of a place (for example its open spaces and transport links) as well as the social aspects (for example whether people feel they have a say in decision making). Research shows that the way places function, look and feel can influence our health and wellbeing.
- The tool provides prompts for discussions, allowing you to consider all the elements of a place in a methodical way. The tool pinpoints the assets of a place, as well as areas where a place could improve.

Scoring

rate the following characteristics of your town on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means there is a lot of room for improvement and 7 means there is very little room for improvement.


moving around
public transport
traffic and parking
streets and spaces
natural space
play and recreation
facilities and amenities
work and local economy
housing and community
social interaction
identity and belonging
feeling safe
care and maintenance
influence and sense of control
1
2
3
4
5
6
7

Moving around

Walking and cycling are good for our health and the environment. Pleasant and safe routes can encourage walking and cycling.

— *Are there enough routes for walking and cycling?*

— *Are walking and cycling given priority over cars and other traffic as much as possible?*

— *Do routes provide obvious and direct links with the places that people want to go, such as schools, shops, parks and public transport?*

— *Are routes good quality, attractive and pleasant to use?*

— *Do routes meet the needs of everyone, whatever their age or mobility, and is there seating for those who need it?*

— *Do routes feel safe to use all year round and at different times of the day?*

Can I easily walk and cycle around using good-quality routes?

4

- Walking, cycling and wheeling are not prioritised in the town. While it is possible to walk, cycle and wheel between key places, this is neither straightforward nor comfortable. Peebles is only moderately good for walking, relatively poor for cycling, and difficult for wheeling – there is much room for improvement
- That said, Peebles is 18 months into an holistic whole town review of active travel routes, standards and opportunities, which has highlighted problem areas, suggested a range of remedial measures (physical, routing, signage, nudges towards changed behaviour), and scoped out and costed infrastructure modifications, designs and extensions with indications of necessary investment. Consultation on design options continues.
- Peebles is located some two miles west of the internationally recognised mountain biking centre of Glentress, and has multi-use paths extending to both the east and north of Peebles which are a stimulus to active travel. The town also lies at the centre of a well-developed network of core paths incorporating drove roads, former railways lines, rive paths, etc.
- Routes between town centre and residential areas can be attractive often involving burnside paths along the Eddleston Water (the Cuddy) or the Tweed river and over stream bridges. The paths are adequately maintained and feel safe to use. There can be occasional and unavoidable issues with flooding. There could be increased provision of seats for those with age and mobility issues.

Public transport

Does public transport meet my needs?

Access to an affordable, reliable and well-connected public transport service is important for all communities. Good public transport encourages people to get around in ways that are better for the environment.

— *Are public transport services frequent and reliable?*

— *Do they take people to where they want to go?*

— *Is public transport safe and easy to access, whatever their age or mobility?*

— *Are bus stops and train stations in convenient places and within walking distance of people's homes and is there seating for those who need it?*

— *Do bus and train stations have what is needed, for example, toilets, secure parking and cycle storage?*

— *Can everyone afford public transport services?*

— *Are facilities and vehicles of good quality and well maintained?*

- Border Buses services to Galashiels and Edinburgh are every half hour, accessible and reliable. Local in-town services are considered to be OK, but serve a relatively narrow but important constituency.
- Public transport to the region's principal hospital (Borders General Hospital) is cumbersome and arguably poor.
- Two taxi services operate in town, and a community transport system is available for community groups.
- There is congestion at the Peebles bus stop at the Eastgate and out of service buses are parked up at three out of four of the town's main car parks. Given its rural status, many school pupils are bused to school and this puts additional pressure on public transport - with many vehicles only used for the school run and parked up for much of the day. The logistics of school bus runs not optimised, with congestion around the schools. There is an unreasonable expectation (by the Council) that pupils will be dropped to the school front door.
- Commuter traffic to Edinburgh often makes use of free-of-charge town car parks to leave their vehicles all day while they use shared or public transport to Edinburgh. This puts pressure on parking spaces especially on the weekly market day.
- There are currently no accessible toilet facilities in the town for those using public transport.
- Bus fares can be significant, especially for regular commuters – although some reduced fare options are available: there are pensioner bus passes and free travel for under-22s and those with Young Scots cards, including those in early years of work experience and attending college.

Traffic and parking

Do traffic and parking arrangements allow people to move around safely and meet the community's needs?

3

Too much traffic can cause problems for people who live in, work in, or visit an area. Traffic and parking arrangements that allow people to move around safely can help people to get the most out of a place.

— *Do people take priority over cars and other traffic?*

— *What impact does traffic have on health and wellbeing in the place (you might want to think about access, noise and air quality)?*

— *Is parking in a safe and secure location?*

— *Are traffic-calming measure used effectively to benefit the community?*

— *Are there too many cars and too much traffic in the area?*

- Priority is given to cars throughout the town - a situation we are trying to change.
- Whilst there are four main public car parks across the town, many local car owners use street side parking, and most drivers visiting the centre of town (the High St, Northgate, and Old Town) favour kerbside parking, frequently disregarding double and single line restrictions and disabled spaces. The High Street is something of a free-for-all. There are no traffic wardens and the police have insufficient resources to take on the role. The Council says traffic wardens are not cost-effective under current budgetary constraints.
- For such a small town (9,000+), there is a disproportionately large number of complaints about traffic jams on the High Street, mainly associated with combinations of school run and commuting.
- Parking is basically secure, but every few months there is evidence of anti-social behaviour, such as key-scratching cars and knocking off side mirrors, and thefts of mountain bikes from backs or tops of cars, and sometimes lockups.
- Traffic calming measures could be extended and are included in the active travel study proposals. The introduction of a pilot 20mph limit during Covid emergency was a significant success, despite some non-compliance, and has a positive impact on pedestrian comfort and safety.
- There is a major problem in facilitating the east-west movement of vehicular traffic across the town in both directions. Traffic generally needs to go along the High Street of the town both to and from the north.
- The footprint of the town was largely developed in a pre-motor car era. Some residential street have become access roads to new housing estates and are now effectively one-way thoroughfares. A general lack of vehicular permeability presents ongoing problems.

Streets and spaces

Do buildings, streets and public spaces create an attractive place that is easy to get around?

5

Buildings, landmarks, greenery, views and natural landscape can all help to create an attractive, distinctive place that people enjoy. These features can also help people to find their way around.

— *Do the buildings or public spaces make being in or passing through the area a pleasant experience?*

— *Are there positive features such as local landmarks, historic buildings, public squares or natural features that make the place look attractive?*

— *Do poor aspects such as derelict buildings, vacant land or excessive noise reduce the effect that these positive features have?*

— *Do features and routes help people find their way around?*

— *Is it much harder to enjoy the place at night, in different seasons, or during bad weather?*

- The centre of town is an attractive historic Borders mixed landscape of largely Victorian properties and older heritage buildings, and includes extensive parkland. The town is located across the great River Tweed and its tributary the Eddleston Water (the Cuddy), in a secluded basin surrounded by rolling hills with farming on its lower slopes and heather moorland higher up.
- The town centre contrasts markedly with an ever-expanding footprint of post-war and modern estates. There has been a 37% increase in the built area of the settlement since 2000.
- There are many local landmarks, historic buildings, public spaces and natural features in and surrounding the town that make the place look attractive, although there is limited evidence in the newer parts of the town.
- Signage to town features and car parks is not as good as it could be, with impacts on the visitor/tourism experience.
- The centre of town at night is pleasant and can be lively but feels generally safe. There are nine pubs and as many eating establishments in the town centre, plus a small theatre. But this contrasts with the almost complete absence of retail and hospitality establishments beyond the three main town centre streets: there is only one corner shop in the estates to the north and south of the town, plus the Hydro Hotel and the Golf Club on the outskirts.
- The town hosts cycling events quite frequently, and there are periodic funfair and other public events. While these occasionally invoke complaints – too many people, too much noise, High Street closed off – they form a vibrant element of the full calendar of events across the year.

Natural space

Can I regularly experience good-quality natural space?

6

Natural space includes parks and woodlands, fields, streams and rivers, green space alongside paths and roads, and tree-lined streets. These can be good for wildlife, improve air quality and benefit our health and wellbeing.

— *Is there a variety of natural spaces that are available to people?*

— *Are there opportunities for people to experience and have contact with nature?*

— *Is the natural space attractive and well maintained and is there seating for those who need it?*

— *Is the natural space affected by negative features such as excessive noise or poor air quality?*

— *Is a range of natural space accessible to everyone, whatever their age, mobility, disability, sex, ethnic group, religious belief or sexuality?*

- The town has evolved at the centre of a handsome landscape setting within an upland basin through which the River Tweed and its tributary the Eddleston Water flow. Open countryside is accessible on foot (within no more than 15 minutes from all parts of the town), by bicycle, by bus and by car. A wide range of natural spaces and habitats can be accessed in this way.
- Access is via a range of core, secondary and open country paths – the former managed and maintained, the latter less so. Whilst more seating/rest spots could be made available, general provision is in keeping with the nature of open countryside.
- The experience of the countryside is unaffected by negative features, noise or air pollution (other than periodic – e.g. every few years – tree felling/forestry maintenance).
- Accessibility for everyone is encouraged, with considerable provision, most notably in the town parks (though not all) and the multi-use paths running to the east and north of the town. A recently established Cycling for All Ages project operates in the town: two rickshaw cycles at this early stage in the project, where a registered "driver" can take one or two people with limited mobility through age or disability on tours of the town and surrounding countryside.

Play and recreation

Can I access a range of space with opportunities for play and recreation?

6

Good places encourage children to play and allow adults to enjoy leisure and sporting activities. Opportunities for play and recreation can improve the quality of our lives and our health.

— *What are the opportunities to take part in play and recreation? (You may want to think about specific groups such as teenagers, older people, children with disabilities and so on.)*

— *Are the spaces and facilities to support play and recreation of good quality, well maintained and used to their full potential?*

— *Are the spaces and facilities accessible and can everyone afford to use them?*

— *Are children able to challenge themselves and build their confidence while playing?*

— *Does the community welcome children playing outdoors?*

— *Is access to, or the feeling of safety within, spaces and facilities affected by the time of day or year?*

- The town has a good provision of organised sports and sports facilities (The Gytes, the High School, halls – tennis, football, rugby, cricket, swimming, badminton), plus the internationally recognised Glentress mountain biking just down the road, Go Ape (high wire/zip wire). There are also multi-use paths to the east and north of the town, and wide open spaces and right to roam on the outskirts.
- There are a number of playparks around the town, but the Council decided to focus investment on one big play park in the centre of the town, leaving perhaps half a dozen small neighbourhood playparks to fend for themselves, to atrophy, or to be dismantled – which has been frowned upon by much of the public.
- There are plenty of activities available for people of all ages and abilities, which are accessible, affordable and enjoyable. That said, if organised sports, climbing frames and group activities are not your thing, then places to hang out, and other things to do are arguably in shorter supply. Young people complain that there are not enough places where they can congregate, and not enough opportunity to use hang-out time productively / enjoyably – particularly in the evenings and on weekends.
- On balance there are high participation levels in play and recreation, but there is a significant proportion of the community, particularly of young people, that feel that their needs are not, or are only partially, supported.

Facilities and amenities

Do facilities and amenities meet my needs?

5

Facilities and amenities are the things that we need to live and enjoy life. This can include shops, schools, nurseries, libraries, GP surgeries and places to eat, drink and meet friends. Access to facilities and amenities is important to support healthy, fulfilling lives.

— *Does a range of facilities and amenities meet a variety of different needs (for learning, health, shopping, relaxation, and so on?)*

— *Can everyone use the facilities and amenities, whatever their age, sex, ethnic group, disability, religious belief or sexuality?*

— *Are the facilities and amenities within a reasonable distance and easily accessible?*

— *Are they of good quality and well maintained?*

— *Are the facilities and amenities being used to their full potential to help to support a healthy lifestyle?*

- There is a wide range of facilities and amenities available to all in and around town – particularly in terms of sports and the outdoors, and places to eat, drink and meet friends. There is one theatre/cinema/arts centre.
- There are three primary schools and one large secondary school, a medical centre served by two GP practices of up to 14 GPs, plus a small medical facility (Hay Lodge Hospital), three dental practices, three nurseries and a library. There is a wide range of additional health and wellbeing services available – such as yoga, meditation, hypnotherapy, wellness, counselling, spa treatments – but all at a cost that is not within the budget of everybody, though these do contribute to a wide and mixed offer and experience.
- Shopping is limited to the centre of town, with a focus on providing for day visitors. There are two supermarkets, one food local store, and four "corner stores" (two outside the town centre). Overall this is pretty good provision, but is not sufficient for everyone. Shopping choice is limited, with the nearest wider retail opportunities in Edinburgh 25 miles to the north, and Galashiels 20 miles to the east. Many households do their larger food shops in these out of town areas.
- Accessibility to facilities and amenities for those with disabilities is not as good as it could be, but in general accessibility to all is good.
- It is generally felt that more could be made of both the small medical facility and the services offered by the GP practices. It is not that they are under-performing, but greater integration could serve the community better. Care services, care in the community, and care homes, and provision for the elderly could be better integrated. The small medical facility at Hay Lodge is under-utilised, which is of particular concern given that the nearest A&E and general hospital is some 25 miles away. In addition, the limited local provision of managed care and old people's facilities means that many local households have old or infirm relatives who are in care many miles away from home – and often ill-served by public transport.

Work and local economy

Is there an active local economy and the opportunity to access good-quality work?

2

Good-quality work offers important benefits through income, activity, social contact, sense of identity and job satisfaction. A thriving local economy can provide work opportunities and help create lively places where people want to spend time.

— *Is there an active local economy that helps to create different kinds of jobs?*

— *Are there opportunities for people to gain skills for work, such as education, training and volunteering?*

— *Can local people access job opportunities, whatever their age, sex, ethnic group, religious belief, sexuality or disability?*

— *Do local services such as jobcentres, recruitment agencies and affordable childcare help people to find and keep work?*

— *Are there opportunities and spaces for local businesses to start up and grow?*

- Peebles used to be the county town for Peeblesshire and a market town for an agricultural and rural economy, with its dominant in-town economy centred on the tweed textile industry. From the 1970s to the 2000s the town went from two thirds of its working population in work in Peebles to two thirds of its working population commuting ten or more kilometres to work (much of it in high earning professional, academic and managerial work in Edinburgh and surrounds).
- Today the local economy is dominated by low-paid retail and hospitality work, and many people who work in Peebles cannot afford to live here. A significant number of people operate one and two-man building trades businesses working from homes in the town, and a range of others run small home-based businesses producing and/or selling a range of consumer products, or offering (often natural resource) consultancy services to national and international public sector clients.
- There are limited local work opportunities, and still fewer that have clear career progression. Local training and skills development opportunities are limited, though such opportunities are on offer 20 to 30 miles distant – in the Central Belt and through establishments based in Galashiels, Hawick, etc.. The logistics of accessing these distant provisions are complex and expensive. Local volunteering opportunities are available through a range of community organisations, but could be better organised and coordinated.
- Local job opportunities are few, regardless of age, ethnicity, etc.. Some community based efforts assist the disadvantaged and otherwise gain work experience, but there is no real graduation route to long-term or independently sustainable employment.
- Local child care provision is varied and expensive.
- There are few opportunities or spaces for local business to start up and grow.

Housing and community

Do the homes in my area support the needs of the community?

3

The homes that are available locally will affect who lives in an area and how a place looks and feels. Good places have a mix of quality homes for families and people of different ages and incomes.

— *Is housing a positive feature of the area?*

— *Is there a range of good-quality housing available for different sizes of household?*

— *Is there a range of housing tenancies (rented, privately owned, and so on) to meet different needs of people, whatever their income?*

— *Do the different housing types work well with one another?*

— *Does a variety of housing allow people to stay in the area as their needs change, or they grow older?*

- Peebles is a rural settlement comprising some 4,300 buildings, most of which are residential. The core of this settlement is a network of Victorian era terraces and villas, with mill worker accommodation added between the two world wars and up to the 1960s. More recently, construction has been largely modern housing estates. Overall this provides a mixed range of housing types and qualities that accommodate families of different sizes.
- The town centre architecture is distinctive. The Victorian and earlier properties throughout the town are of heritage value and are generally well constructed and present a particular regional, heritage and vernacular character to the settlement that is valued by residents and by visitors. But they fall well short of the energy and efficiency standards of modern housing and policies that aim to manage a fair transition to net zero. Post Victorian era property is of more limited design and heritage value, and much less distinctive.
- The qualities and characteristics of the town's housing stock have been studied in some detail in the recently completed Change Works for Peebles project.
- There are pockets of social housing, old people's homes, and care facilities, and some provision of affordable housing, but all fail to meet local demand. As a result, many people who work in Peebles cannot afford to live here and local families have elderly relatives placed in care facilities many miles away from Peebles.
- There are many, particularly older, properties under single or double occupancy that is out of kilter with space and amenity needs – in part reflecting the lack of locally available property that would allow households to downsize.
- Planning policies require that a minimum 25% of new houses should be "affordable" homes. This is largely upheld by the local Council. But what is built is sold or rented at rates that are far beyond what most locals would consider affordable, and does not allow many families to both live and work in Peebles.

Social contact

Feeling isolated can be damaging to our health and wellbeing. Good places provide a variety of spaces to meet and spend time with others.

— *Which spaces provide opportunities for people to meet?*

— *Is there a range of different spaces (indoor, outdoor, purpose-built and more informal) where people can meet?*

— *Can these spaces be used at different times of the day, throughout the year, and in different types of weather?*

— *Do people from across the whole community and from different backgrounds mix together and get to know each other?*

Is there a range of spaces and opportunities to meet people?

4

- Peebles is a bustling small town, with plenty of community and church halls, open spaces and hospitality venues – which are generally well used by a wide range of community organisations and events. But a significant proportion of the population does not regularly make use of these amenities/facilities. Most of those who miss out are younger and older age groups and those on low income or otherwise identified as disadvantaged within the metrics of the Scottish index of multiple deprivation (SIMD). These particular demographic groups are relatively poorly catered for in the town, and this effectively limits social contact, and can result in significant loneliness and isolation.
- Children of primary and secondary school age often complain of limited spaces (indoor and outdoor) where they can congregate and socialise, particularly in the evenings, when groups are regularly required to disperse for fear of or because of actual anti-social behaviour. Facilities for older age groups to congregate and socialise are also limited and have reduced in recent years (in part due to council budget cuts).
- School premises (three primary schools and one large secondary school) are rarely available for use outside weekday day-time schedules and during holidays. This is a much under-utilised resource.
- The community's response to the recent Covid emergency was quick and adaptive, and covered not only the town but rural populations out to a radius of 10 miles or more. The calls on community support revealed a significant number of households that were disadvantaged in one form or another – with vulnerable and/or isolated residents, where existing care and support infrastructures struggled to meet their needs. In addition, a variety of exercises directly or indirectly targeting fuel poverty identified a significant rump of households clearly suffering long-term fuel poverty.

Identity and belonging

Does this place have a positive identity and do I feel I belong?

5

How a place looks, its history and what other people think of the place can affect how we feel. A strong local identity can help us feel pride in our place, our community and in ourselves as a result.

— *Do people view the place positively?*

— *Are the history, heritage and culture of the place known and celebrated?*

— *Do local groups and networks help people feel involved positively in their community?*

— *Can people feel connected to their neighbours and community, whatever their background?*

— *Does everyone feel like they belong, whatever their age, sex, ethnic group, religious beliefs, sexuality or disability?*

- Residents and visitors are very positive about the town. Residents, whether Gutterbluids (born in the town) or Stoorifoots (incomers), have a strong affinity with the town and its traditions. This rapport is enhanced by a calendar of traditional events such as the Peebles March Riding and Beltane Queen Festival, the Christmas Lights and Market, the Agricultural Show and Highland Games. The town's positive identity is re-enforced by institutions, including the Guildry Corporation, Community Council, Rugby Club, Callants, etc., and by its landmarks. These include the Mercat Cross, Veitch's Corner, the Chambers Institution, the Parish Church, Tweed Bridge, the River Tweed itself, Hay Lodge Park and Victoria Park, Venlaw and the Hydro, the Eastgate Theatre, and Neidpath Castle.
- Local groups and networks help people get involved with the town and the schools play an important role. But the traditions and institutions of the town are not easily available or presented in a packaged and accessible form, and are not immediately accessible to newcomers, who sometimes struggle in the first months and years to pick things up.
- Good neighbourliness is generally present, but people can be stand-offish and don't encourage inquisitiveness. It is relatively unusual for neighbours to have more than a nodding acquaintance with their neighbours. The main route to knowing your neighbours is through children. Peebles Resilience Group explicitly seeks to encourage good neighbourliness and identify those who might need extra help in emergencies, most commonly flood and ice, but also during the Covid-19 pandemic and power outages.
- Peebles would assess itself as having no overt discrimination or prejudices, but anyone a bit different tends to stand out in this predominantly traditional, conservative, white Christian community, and they may not feel as comfortable within the community as we might assume or profess. The last decade or so has seen an influx of workers from eastern Europe, and residents of south Asian and Far Eastern heritage, some of whom run and staff a number of takeaways in town. Some individuals may not be as well integrated into town affairs as others.

Feeling safe

Do I feel safe here?

How safe a place feels can affect people's wellbeing and how they spend their time in the place. Well-designed places can help make places feel safer and reduce crime and antisocial behaviour.

— *Are routes safe and well used at different times of the day and throughout the year?*

— *Are spaces overlooked by buildings that are well used, adding to a feeling of safety?*

— *Is the area free of empty or derelict property, crime and antisocial behaviour?*

— *Do people feel safe both at home and when out and about?*

— *Is the area safe for everyone, whatever their age, sex, ethnic group, religious beliefs, sexuality or disability?*

- In general terms the town is very safe and people feel comfortable moving around the town at any time of the day or night.
- But youngsters in particular can feel insecure. In the town centre during the evening or night, and when traversing unfamiliar parts of the town some distance from where they live. These issues can relate to being unsure of things when in the vicinity of adults who have been drinking or taking or having taken drugs. They can also be associated with groups of youngsters picking on lone kids or other groups of young people.
- Similarly, some adults can be wary of areas during dusk or night-time where lighting is poor.
- Older adults can be intimidated by groups of young people congregating in the centre of town or in open spaces and parks – particularly where they are rowdy, drinking or boisterous.
- There are periodic outbreaks of vandalism, such as tipping things over, scratching cars, breaking bottles and so on, usually associated with a particular group of kids getting together regularly for a matter of weeks or a few months and causing a nuisance. Older kids also congregate around play parks in the evenings and at night, when drinking and drug taking can get badly out of hand. But vandalism can also be associated with younger adults, particularly when pubs and late night parties empty out onto the streets.
- There are next to no derelict buildings in or around town, and few problems associated with such sites.

Care and maintenance

Are buildings and spaces well cared for?

5

Places that are well cared for can make us feel positive, while those that are not looked after properly can have the opposite effect. Proper maintenance arrangements allow people to feel supported and more positive about where they live.

— *Are facilities such as parks, public spaces or public properties well maintained in general?*

— *Are there any specific problems in the area, such as litter, vandalism, or dog mess?*

— *Are there good facilities for recycling and refuse storage and is collection well organised?*

— *Do local authorities, housing associations, landlords and residents know their responsibilities and take action when necessary?*

— *Is there an effective local residents' association?*

- In general public spaces and properties are well cared for and look good.
- But there are problems with litter, vandalism and dog mess, although the culprits are a small minority of residents and visitors.
- Streets are regularly cleaned and garbage collection is well organised. A recycling centre is located just outside town, and is well-used and supported.
- Road surfaces are poorly maintained, with potholes evident along most roads and pavements. A local authority town team service is tasked with dealing quickly with problems, but repairs seem to be low on the Council's priorities (and the service is known to be effected by persistent budget cuts).
- The local authority, local housing associations, landlords and residents are vigilant and responsive to care and maintenance issues.
- In some developments there are local residents' associations, but it is not known how effective these are. In some parts of town where area maintenance contracts are held by third parties problems have arisen in the past.

Influence and sense of control

People's views about their local area should be heard. Having a voice in decision making and feeling able to make changes can help to build stronger communities and better places. Having a sense of control can make people feel positive about their lives.

— *Are people able to contribute to decisions that affect them?*

— *Is everyone able to contribute, whatever their age, sex, ethnic group, religious belief, sexuality or disability?*

— *Do local community services or groups allow people to get involved?*

— *Do organisations such as local authorities, health services or housing associations actively work with the community to understand their needs?*

— *Do local people feel listened to? Do people know how to be listened to?*

Do I feel able to take part in decisions and help change things for the better?

1

- There are few institutional obstacles to participation in the process of decision making, but residents rarely take part – for multiple reasons that include structural constraints.
- Scottish Borders Council consistently seeks local opinions through surveys and consultations but we suspect that only a small number of people take part, and it tends to be the same ones that do. Most people have little understanding of local government processes and limited interest. But they are quick to criticise decisions that they disagree with, whether or not they have made an effort to inform themselves. The workings of the Council are held in low esteem, as are the processes of local government generally, and these attitudes extend to council officers and elected councillors. Typically, people express the opinion that the Council never listens to the views of locals or simply dismisses them. Where people do contact Councillors on personal issues they are usually complimentary about the response.
- The creation of the Local Development Plan (LDP) is the most common point of interaction between people and local government, alongside planning applications, and access to medical and care facilities. Input to the LDP is largely considered a waste of time, since such views would almost be always dismissed. Few people are familiar with the planning system, but often criticise decisions and decision-making. Opinions of the social care system are also less than complimentary, although those with a closer interaction with care services tend to be more supportive. Overall, this points to a general distrust of the Council and its representatives, albeit based on limited knowledge and understanding of how the authority operates, and little interest in learning more.
- There are in Peebles significant exceptions to these generalisations. Local organisations such as the Community Council, the Civic Society, the Peebles Community Trust do actively contribute to decisions that affect the town. But while membership is open to all, active involvement is limited, as illustrated by lack of volunteers for seats on the decision-making boards. That said, the Community Council is one of the largest in the Borders, the Civic Society had a pre-pandemic membership of more than 200 and Peebles Community has 900+ members. But there is little direct community engagement with these organisations, and most households have other priorities, including working and raising families. There remains little sense of community empowerment or confidence in the systems of local democracy, and a common view that the Council has become distanced from the locality through successive local government reorganisations.

Priorities for action

What are the main issues and priorities for change that you have identified?

1. Increase the role of local opinion in Council decision-making. Support bottom-up planning, Community Led Local Development, building and strengthening community capacity to fulfil these roles, and a significant change in the attitude of the Council and council officers – a shift away from the public view that council officers operate on the basis that they know best: they may be the professionals, but they need to acknowledge that communities feel disempowered.

2. More emphasis needs to be placed in making adequate space and facilities available in Peebles for economic activity, whether through industrial or business estates, or working from home, or from offices / workshops scattered around the town and surrounds. Working patterns and approaches to work are changing and there needs to be support for this with programmes to encourage entrepreneurship, bring in inward investment, encourage businesses to relocate to Peebles, and enable more of the skilled and ambitious people living in Peebles to work in Peebles.

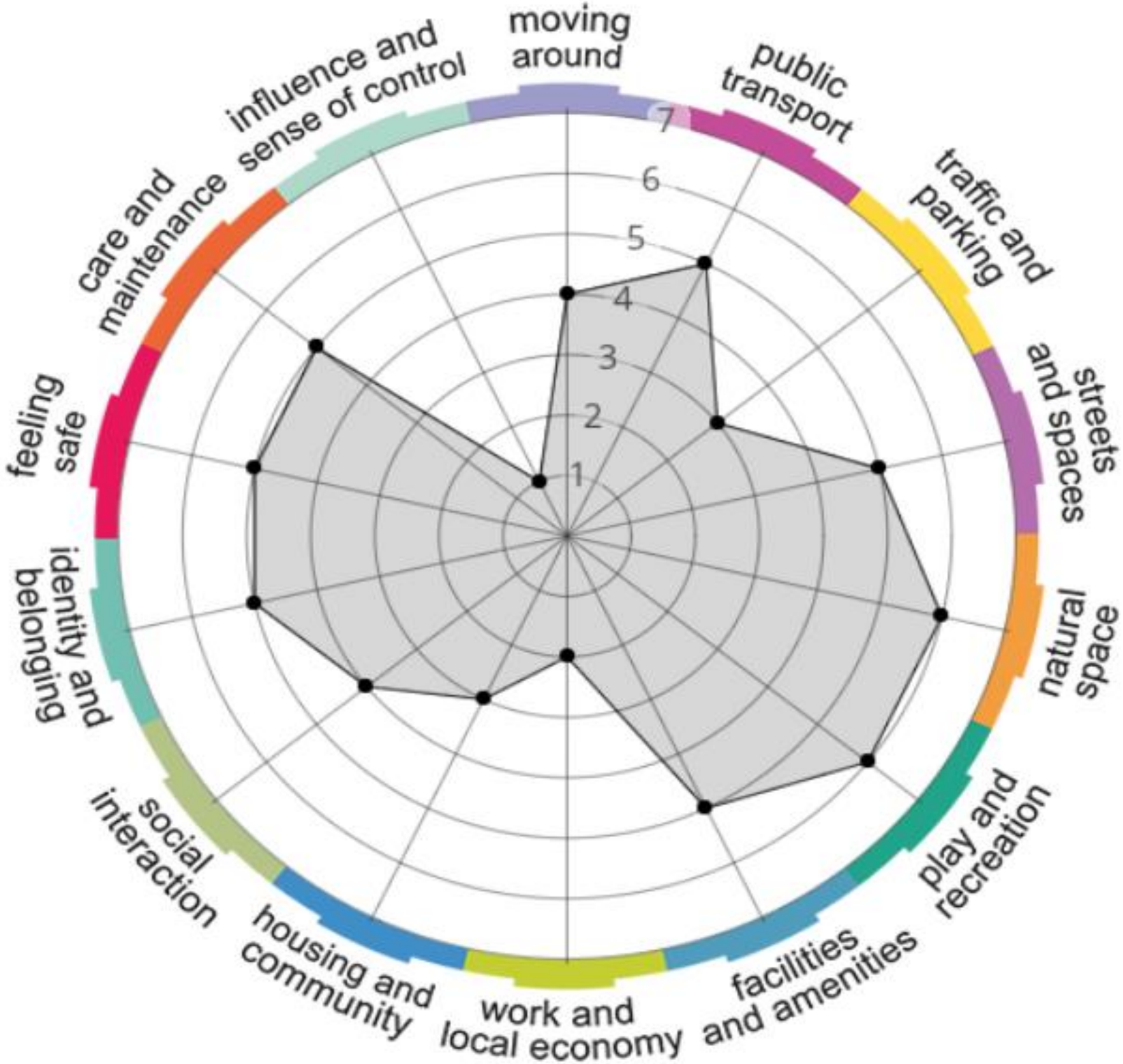
3. Take a more radical look at how to create and support a resilient and sustainable community. The emphasis should be on embedding more affordable housing within the fabric of the town – not just more lower cost flats and houses, but placing them better within the social, economic and physical fabric of the community, and providing rewarding job opportunities in and around the settlement with long-term career progression and prospects.

4. Increase the provision of managed care facilities and better service the social, welfare and mental health needs of the aged and infirm, and by the same token young people in the town. Integrate the provision of medical, health and wellbeing services.

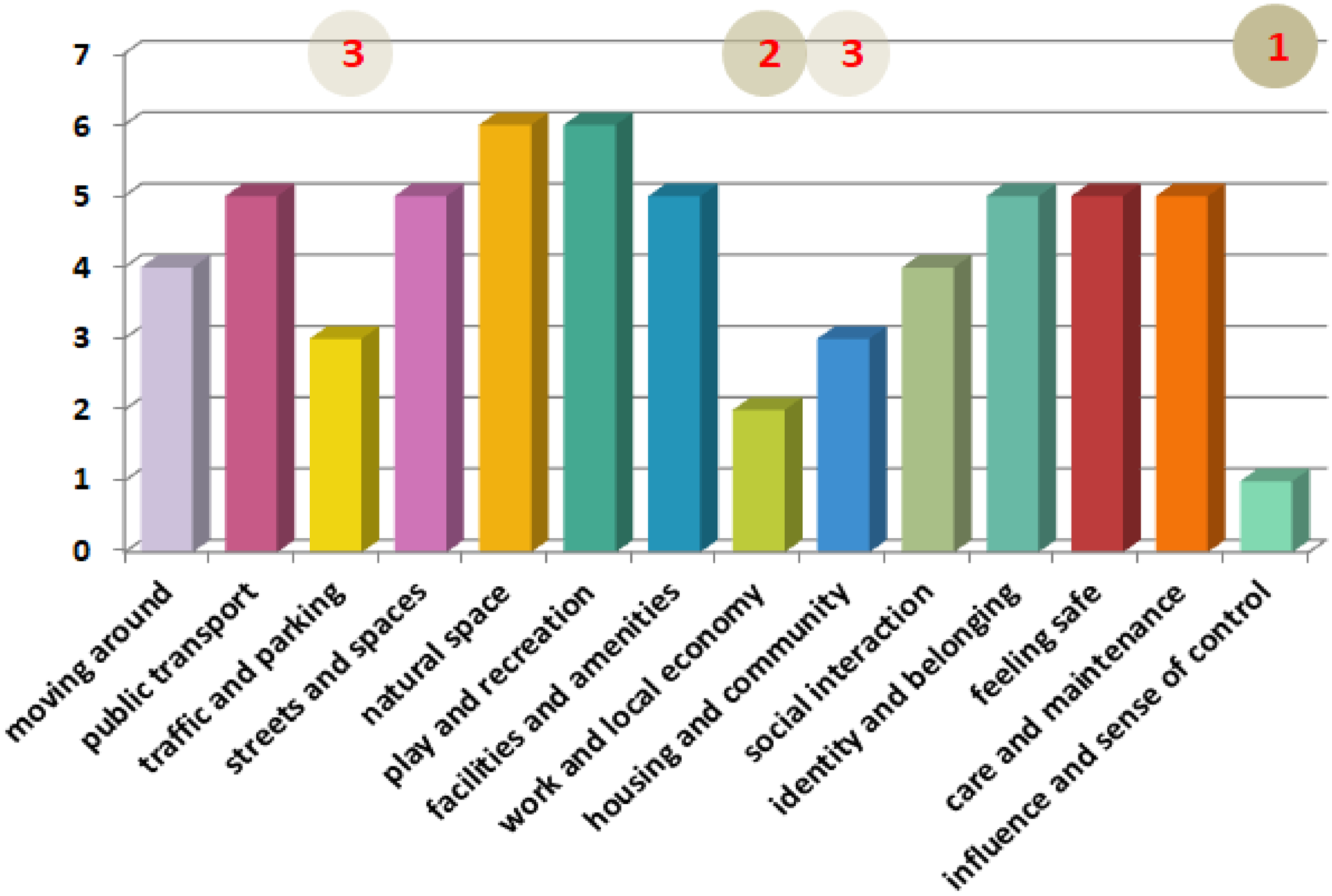
Priorities for action

What actions could be taken to deal with these?

1. Ensure through tangible evidence that local democracy works, that the voice of the community does register and impact on decisions made in local government, care provision, health services and education.
2. Support for and investment in the local economy. Every bit of spare space seems to become new houses. Develop additional space and facilities in order to attract new companies to Peebles including higher salaried manufacturing and service businesses.
3. Re-balance the settlement. Two-thirds of workers commute to jobs outside Peebles; many jobs in Peebles are low paid and filled by workers who cannot afford to live here. Create a more resilient and sustainable community by enabling people to both live and work in Peebles.
4. Do more to care for the aged, infirm and disadvantaged, and increase support for young people outside school hours.


moving around
public transport
traffic and parking
streets and spaces
natural space
play and recreation
facilities and amenities
work and local economy
housing and community
social interaction
identity and belonging
feeling safe
care and maintenance
influence and sense of control
1
2
3
4
5
6
7

Place Standard Tool scores for Peebles



Red numbers in roundels indicate those areas which should be prioritised for action