BMG Research Report

Leicestershire Town and Village Centres Survey:
Blaby
2006

Prepared for:
Leicestershire County Council & Leicester Shire Economic Partnership

Prepared by:
BMG Research

Because people matter.

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1 Introduction

Leicestershire County Council and the Leicester Shire Economic Partnership commissioned BMG to conduct a customer satisfaction survey in 17 town and village centres across Leicestershire, to inform the establishment of baselines to support Local Area Agreement (LAA) work. The intention of the survey has been to understand the issues specific to each settlement with a view to developing action plans for intervention. This report summarises the findings from Blaby.

Report contents

Section 2 of this report looks at why respondents visited Blaby, frequency of visits, attractions and events and what, if anything, would encourage more people to visit the centre on a regular basis. Section 3 examines the attitudes of respondents to the different aspects of Blaby, considering whether the centre is a good place to shop, work and live as well as discussing the various services available in the area and the surrounding environment. Section 4 looks at how respondents in Blaby perceived crime and safety, and which issues were seen as big problem areas, whilst Section 5 summarises the key findings from the survey. Finally, section 6 concludes the main findings and provides recommendations.

Sampling methodology

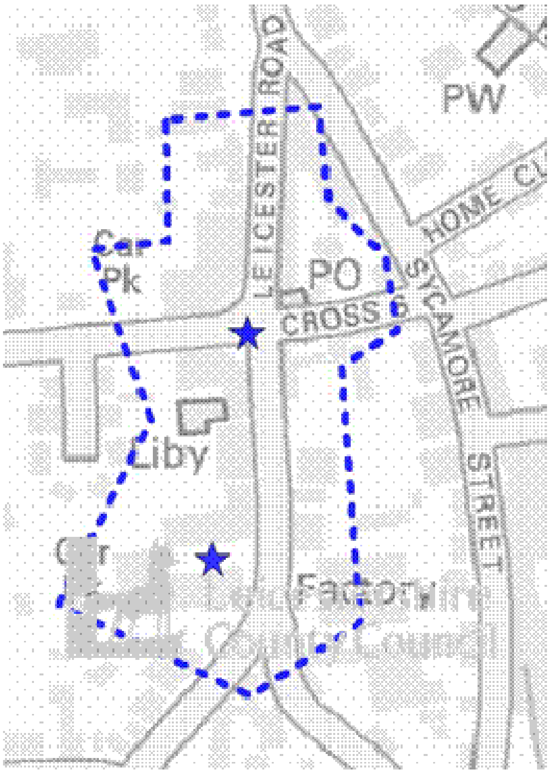
In total, 3000 interviews were planned across the 17 settlements. The sample structure called for a minimum of 100 interviews per settlement, with the remaining 1300 interviews distributed pro-rata on the basis of population size, meaning that the target for some of the villages was only a little over 100 in total, whilst for Loughborough it was over 300. Within the total sample, and for each centre, quotas were also established to control for:

- Age group;
- Ethnicity (white and non-white respondents);
- Gender;
- Interviews conducted on weekdays and Saturdays;
- Interviews conducted during the daytime and evening (after 5.30);
- Interviews conducted on market days and non-market days (where centres had a market).

The client identified a number of locations in the centre of each settlement where interviews took place – these were typically within the main shopping areas, often in or around the main market squares or retail developments. Interviews took place over a six week period through July and August 2006, following a pilot in Loughborough and Shepshed which indicated no problems in delivering the questionnaire.

Below is a map of the sampling points:

Figure 1



Source: Leicestershire County Council

Respondent Profile

Within Blaby, 131 interviews were achieved. Of the sample, the majority of respondents were female (57%). 11% of respondents in Blaby were aged 16-24, 32% were aged 25-44, 45% were aged 45-64, with the remaining 14% being of retirement age (65+).

The vast majority of respondents in Blaby (99%) described themselves as white British, with just 1% of respondents of other Asian origin.

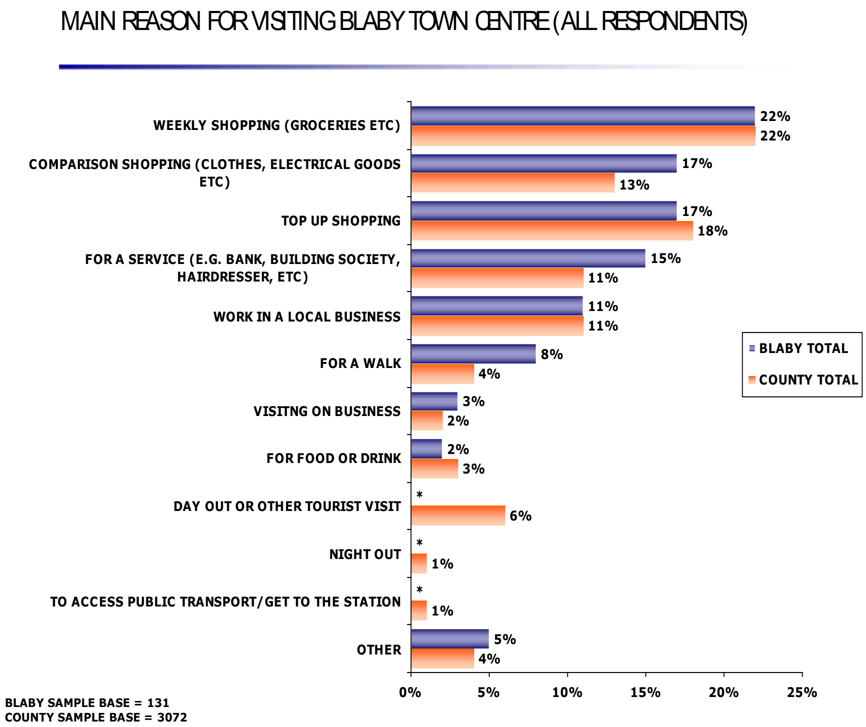
By economic status, 62% of respondents in Blaby were in work (57% employed and 5% self-employed). The largest proportion of those respondents not in work were retired (21% of the total Blaby sample). 8% of respondents were not in work because they were looking after children or other dependents or the home. 7% of respondents were claiming benefits, whilst 2% were not in work due to an illness or disability. Only 1% of respondents were in education or training.

2 Visiting the Town Centre

Visits

This section looks at the reasons why people visited Blaby, their mode of transport used to get to the centre, the frequency of visits as well as attractions and events.

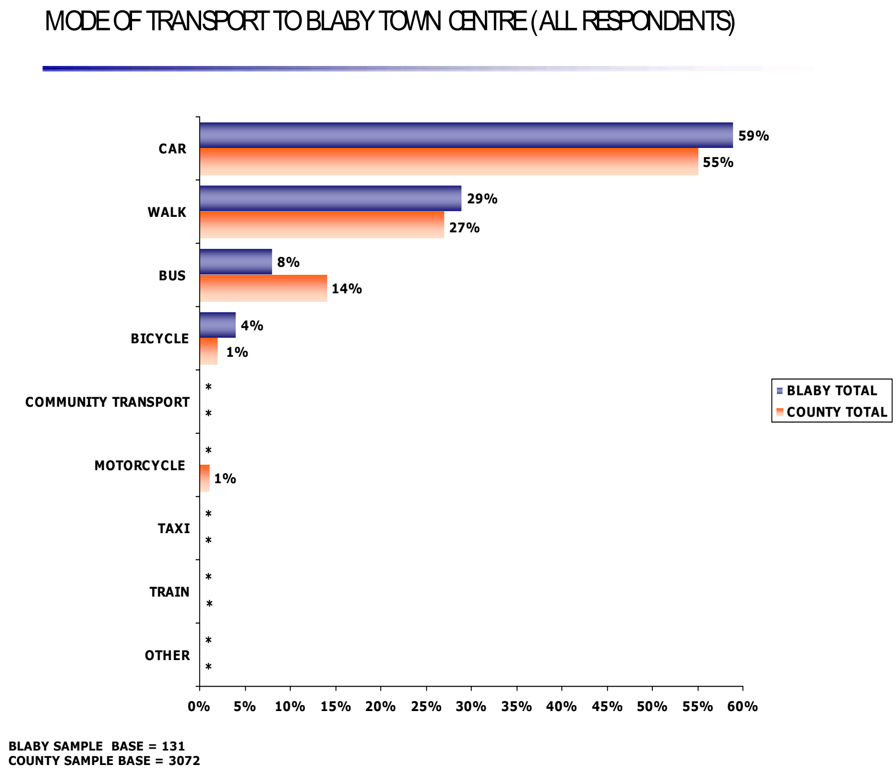
Figure 2



The intention of the survey was to speak to a cross-section of people present in the centres of the towns and villages, who may have been present for a whole range of purposes. Shopping trips of various sorts accounted for just over half of visits to Blaby (56%), which was slightly higher than the total county figure (53%). 15% of respondents in Blaby were visiting the centre for services such as banking compared to 11% in the county. Just over one in ten were present because they worked in the centre whilst 8% of respondents said that they were out for a walk.

Mode of transport used to get into the centre of town

Figure 3

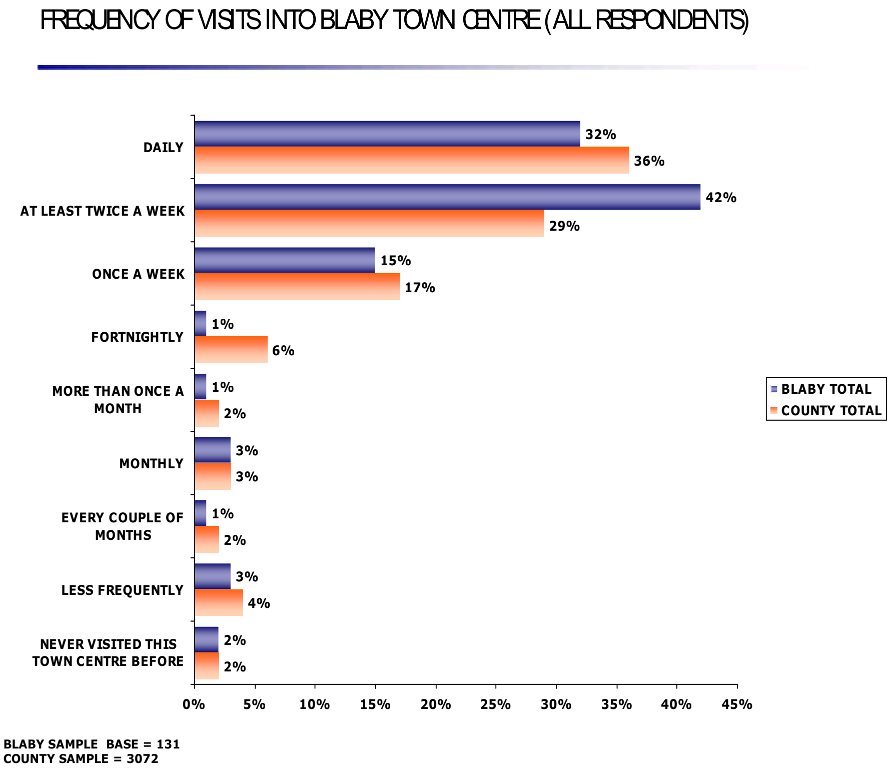


Nearly three-fifths of trips into the centre by respondents on the day of the survey were made by car. It was particularly notable, however, that over a quarter of respondents walked into the centre (29%) – whilst this will no doubt be due to the timing of the survey in the middle of the summer, it does also indicate the extent to which the small size of Blaby may be encouraging access on foot. This figure was slightly higher than the county total of 27% who walked into the centre. 8% arrived by bus (compared to the county total of 14%) and 4% arrived by bicycle, which was higher than the county total of 1%.

Frequency of visits

As illustrated in the graph below, just over two-fifths of respondents reported that they visited the centre at least twice a week (42%), whilst nearly a third visited daily (32%) and 15% visited once a week. 2% of those in Blaby were visiting for the first time, which was the same figure for the county as a whole.

Figure 4



Just over three-fifths of respondents visited Blaby both at weekends and on weekdays (61%). A third of respondents visited on a weekday whilst 6% only visited at weekends.

The majority of respondents (56%) visited Blaby during the day (before 5.30pm), with 6% visiting the centre in the evening (after 5.30pm). 37% of respondents visited the town centre both during the daytime and evening.

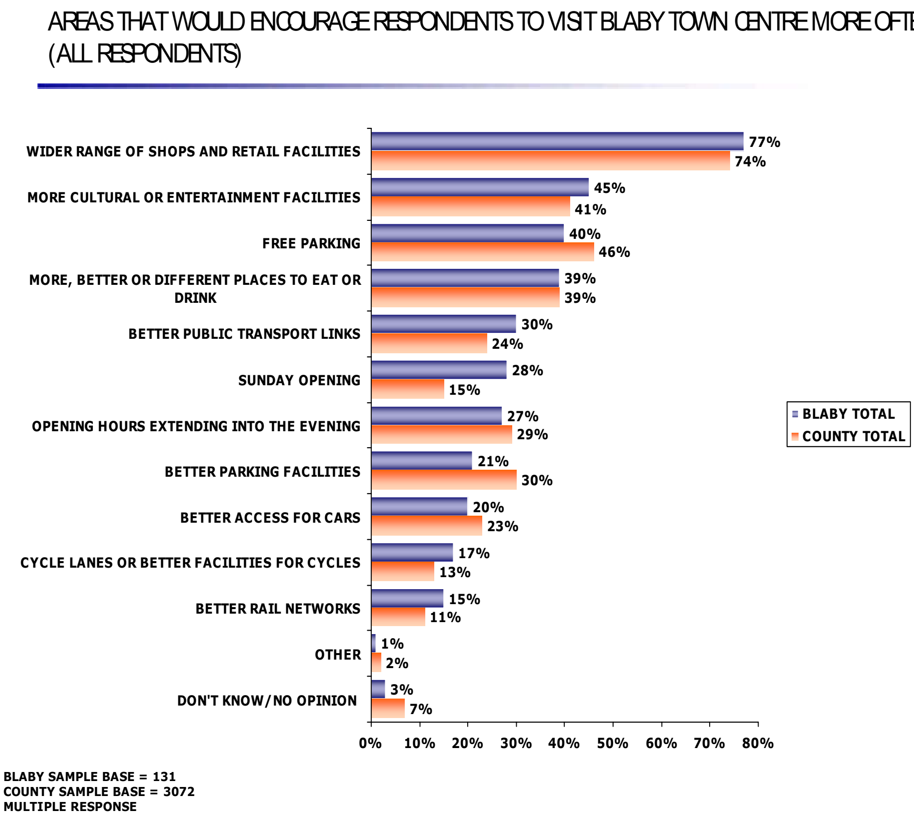
Of those people visiting the town centre in the only in the evening, 17% visited Blaby town centre once a week, 14% visited at least twice a week, whilst 11% of respondents visited less frequently. Just over a quarter of respondents visited mainly on a Friday evening (26%) whereas 12% of respondents visited on a Saturday or Sunday evening.

Encouraging more people to visit the centre

Respondents were asked to identify those issues which would encourage them to visit Blaby more often. They were able to cite more than one issue. Having a wider range of shops and retail facilities (77%) and more cultural or entertainment facilities (45%) were cited as two areas that would encourage respondents to visit Blaby more often. 40% of respondents cited free parking as being a way of encouraging more visits.

Improvements in having better places for food and drink and better public transport links were also very important to some respondents. Sunday opening and extension of opening hours, particularly evening opening, were also significant for some visitors.

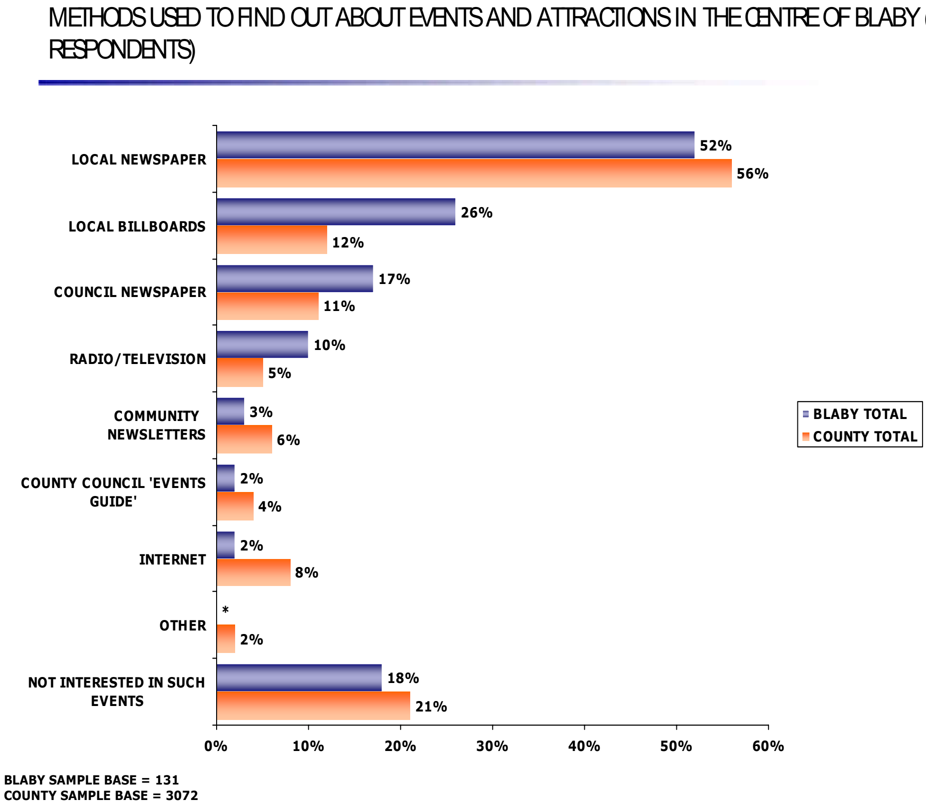
Figure 5



Attractions and events

As is clear from Figure 6 below, local newspapers were overwhelmingly the most likely source of information about local events and attractions taking place in Blaby, with other sources only modest in their importance by comparison. Notably, local billboards were also a popular method of finding out about events and attractions in Blaby compared to the rest of the county (26% Blaby, 12% county total). This was followed by the council newspaper (17%) and radio or television (10%). The County Council's events guide and the internet were the least used methods to find out about events and attractions in the centre of Blaby.

Figure 6



When respondents were questioned about whether they had attended any events in the town centre recently, 19% said that they had compared to the county figure of 12%. Of these 19%, ten people said they had attended the farmers market, four people had attended the Jurassic Park or Dinosaur event, three people had attended the fair and one person had attended the turning on of the Christmas lights. six people said that they had attended another event in Blaby.

Respondents were asked what made the centre unique, different or special in Blaby. 6% of respondents said that they were born in Blaby or lived in Blaby, 5% of respondents said it was a safe area and had low crime levels, 4% of respondents said the appearance of Blaby was attractive and pleasant. However 66% of people said that they did not know and 6% that there were no unique features. Other notable responses included:

- The size (3%);
- Quiet and peaceful (2%);
- Cleanliness (2%);
- The history and heritage (2%);
- The layout (2%);
- The market (2%);
- Architecture and buildings (1%); and
- Shops or shopping centre (1%).

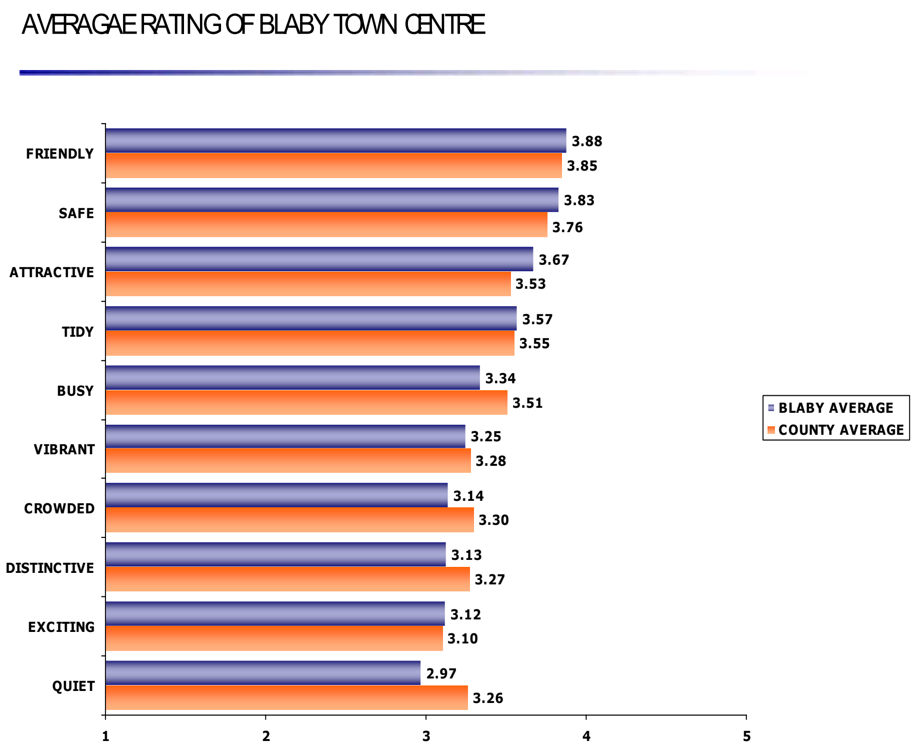
3 Attitude towards the centre

This section examines the attitudes of respondents to the different aspects of Blaby, considering whether the centre is a good place to shop, work and live as well as discussing the different services available in the area.

Description and attitudes towards the centre

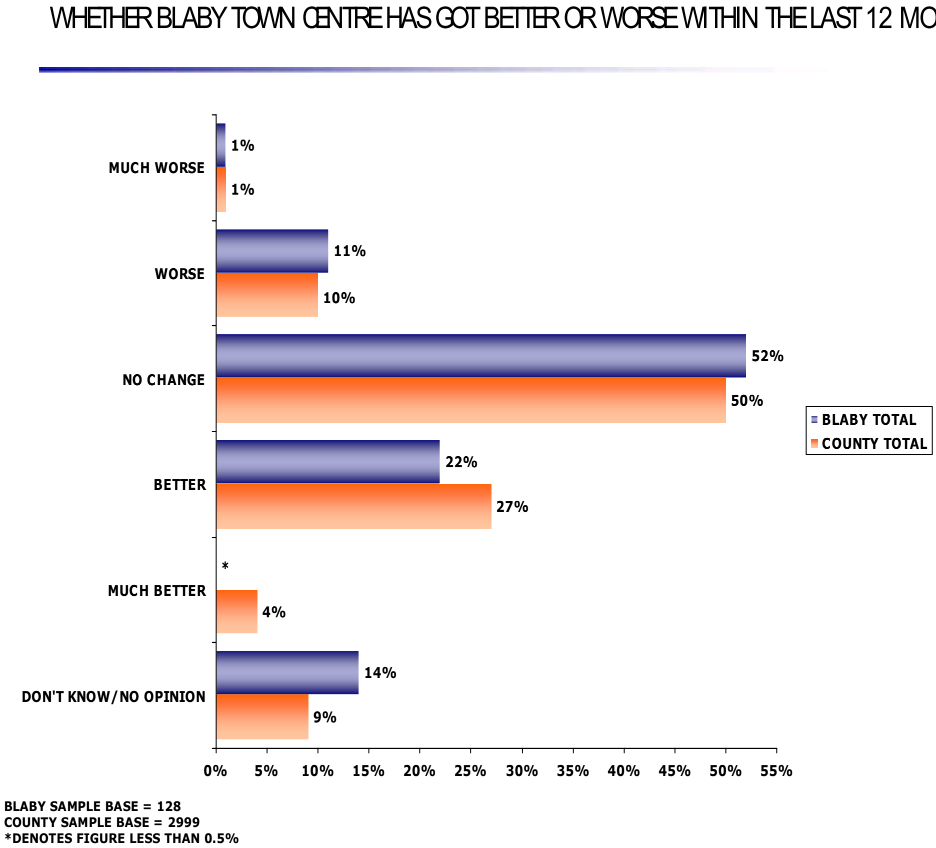
Respondents were asked to say to what extent they agreed with a series of words to describe Blaby on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree Overall, Blaby was most likely to be described as 'friendly', 'safe', 'attractive' and 'tidy'. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Blaby was least likely to be described as 'quiet' and 'exciting'.

Figure 7



Whilst 52% of respondents didn't report any overall change in Blaby, just over one in five believed that it had improved, compared to just over one in ten who thought it had got worse or much worse, as shown below:

Figure 8



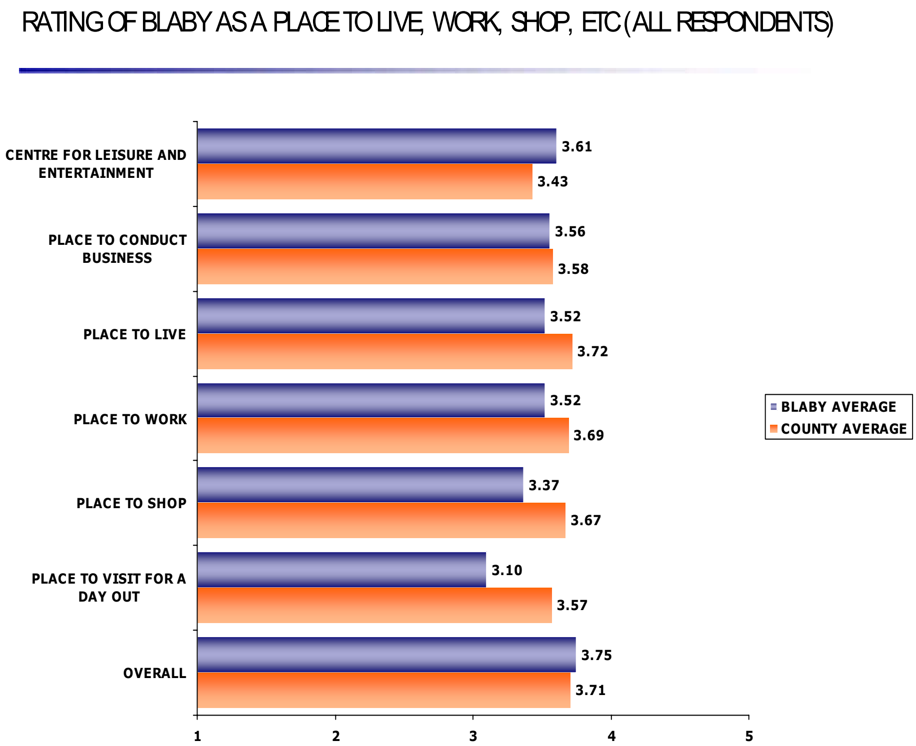
All respondents were asked for their views on how well Blaby served different groups in the population. The results for each of these groups are shown in Table 1 below. Respondents tended to think that the best served groups were visitors, families and shoppers. However, it is clear there is greater concern about how the centre serves young people than for any other group. 17% of respondents thought the centre was very poor or poor for young people, and this is followed by 7% of respondents who thought that the centre was very poor or poor for disabled people.

Table 1

RATING OF BLABY FOR VARIOUS GROUPS							
	Very poor	Poor	Neither good nor poor	Good	Very good	DK/no opinion	Mean score
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Families	0	2	34	51	9	4	3.71
Visitors	0	6	29	52	10	3	3.68
Elderly people	1	2	38	41	12	7	3.66
People with disabilities	3	4	30	45	8	9	3.58
Shoppers	2	3	37	50	6	2	3.58
Young people	2	15	31	38	4	11	3.31
SAMPLE BASE 131							

How good are the centres as places for particular activities?

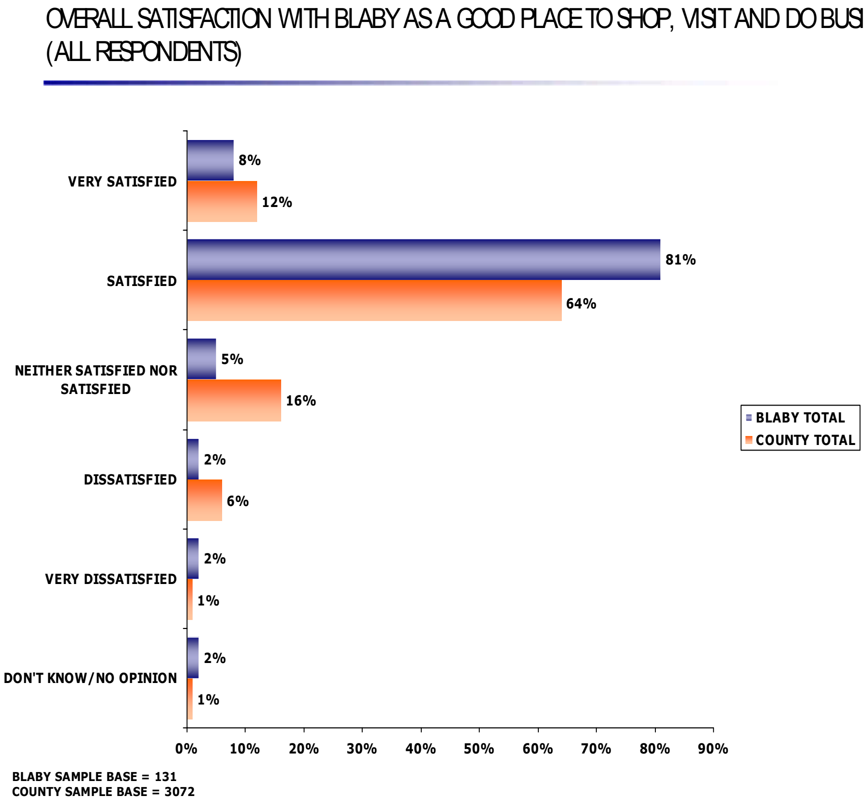
Figure 9



Overall, on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is the most positive score, Blaby was rated 3.75 which was similar to the overall figure for the county average (3.71). Blaby was considered a good centre for leisure and entertainment (3.61). However, Blaby did not score so high as a good place to visit for a day out (3.10) compared to the rest of the county (3.57) and as a good place to shop (3.37 Blaby average, 3.67 county average).

Overall, satisfaction was very high amongst respondents as they considered Blaby a good place to shop, visit and to do business. The graph below demonstrates that the overall level of satisfaction for Blaby was higher than the total for the county.

Figure 10

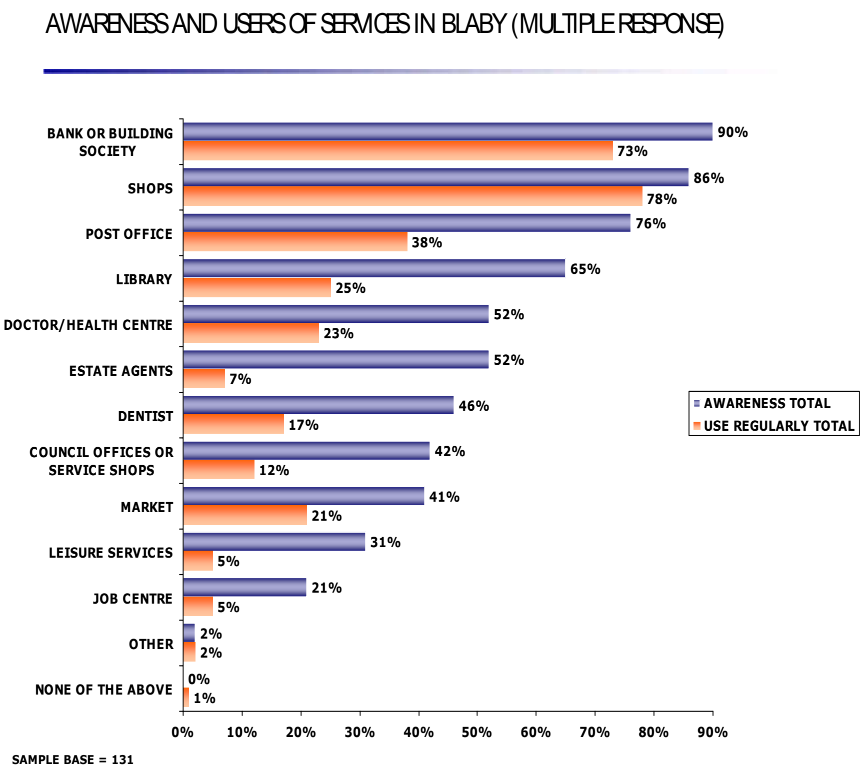


Services available in the centre

Services available in the centre of Blaby were rated on the basis of awareness and on how often respondents used them.

As shown below respondents were more likely to be aware of services such as banks & building societies and shops and these were the services which were also most regularly used. However, there were some services that people were aware of but were less likely to use regularly. For example 76% of respondents were aware of a post office in Blaby but only 38% used the service. Furthermore, respondents were aware of health services within the centre of Blaby but less people used them on a regular basis - 52% of respondents were aware of a doctor's or health centre in Blaby, but 23% of respondents were regular users whilst 46% of respondents were aware that there was a dentist in Blaby whilst only 17% were regular users.

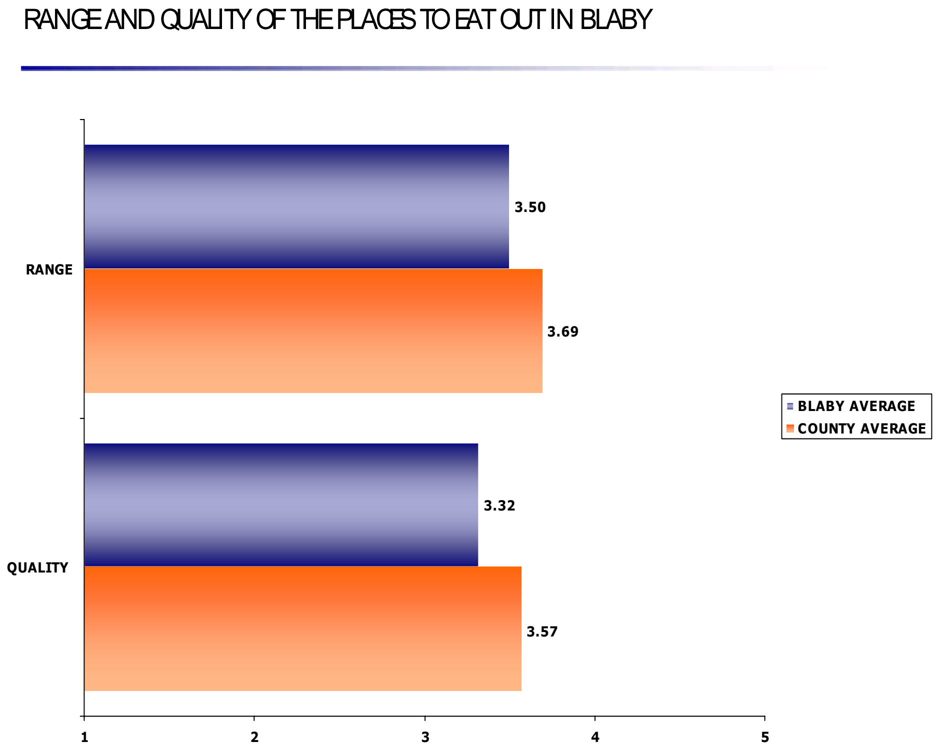
Figure 11



Respondents were questioned as to whether the retail outlets in Blaby met their shopping needs. Just over half of respondents said that the variety of the retail outlets and shops in the centre met their needs very well or quite well (53%). Almost a quarter of respondents reported that the variety of retail outlets and shops in the centre was adequate whilst just under one in five respondents said it did not meet their needs.

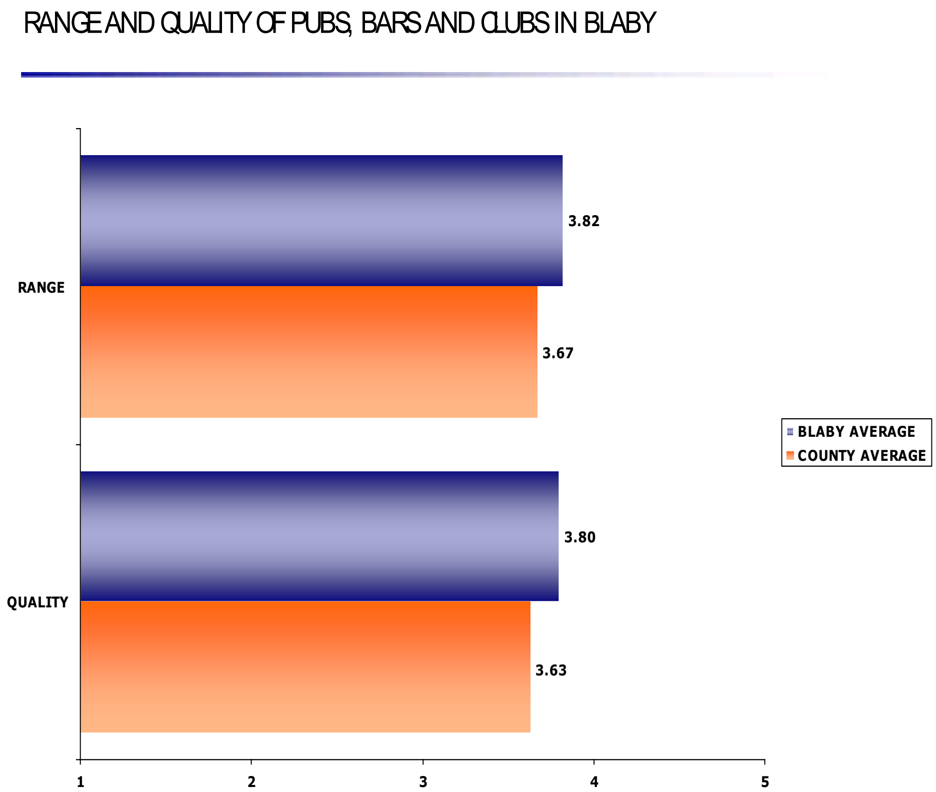
Respondents were asked to rate the quality of places to eat out in Blaby on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was very poor and 5 was very good. Respondents were slightly more positive about the quality than the range as shown in figure 12, a pattern which reflected the position across the county as a whole.

Figure 12



Respondents were then asked to rate the quality and range of pubs, bars and clubs in Blaby on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was very poor and 5 was very good. Respondents were slightly more positive about the range than the quality of pubs, bars and clubs in Blaby, as shown below. This was the same position on a county-wide level.

Figure 13



Town Centre Environment

Respondents were given a series of statements about the environment of the town centre and asked whether they agreed or disagreed with them.

Table 2

WHETHER RESPONDENTS AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT THE CENTRE OF BLABY	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Agree strongly	Mean score
	%	%	%	%	%	
Pavements and walkways are clean and tidy	0	18	18	51	13	3.60
Pavements and walkways are safe and well maintained	4	5	32	45	14	3.60
Shop fronts are well maintained	2	17	24	47	12	3.50
There are enough public toilets	4	11	21	44	9	3.50
The parks are well maintained	6	15	19	35	18	3.47
There are enough baby changing facilities	3	12	19	18	14	3.41
Pedestrian signage is relevant, clear and easy to understand	3	18	24	45	9	3.40
The design and layout of the centre is attractive	3	23	21	37	16	3.40
Street lighting is good	4	18	24	47	6	3.34
The public toilets are clean and tidy	2	15	28	31	8	3.33
The baby changing facilities provided are clean and tidy	2	12	21	26	5	3.31
There is sufficient seating in and around the centre	2	28	15	50	4	3.25
The centre is well planted in summertime	8	19	28	32	12	3.22
Seating in and around shopping areas is well maintained	21	10	22	34	12	3.05
SAMPLE BASE: 131						

Note: Percentage no replies not shown

Overall, respondents had positive views about the environment and facilities available in the centre of Blaby. Respondents felt that the pavements and walkways were clean and tidy (64% agreed or agreed strongly) as well as being safe and well maintained (59% agreed or agreed strongly) and that the shop fronts were well maintained (59% agreed or agreed strongly). Respondents were less positive about seating, 31% disagreed that seating in and around the shopping areas was well maintained, 30% felt that there was insufficient seating in and around the centre. 27% disagreed or disagreed strongly that the centre was well planted in summertime.

Respondents were then asked to respond to a series of statements about aspects in and around the centre of Blaby and asked whether they agreed or disagreed with them.

Table 3

WHETHER RESPONDENTS AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT ASPECTS IN AND AROUND THE CENTRE OF BLABY

	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Agree strongly	Mean score
	%	%	%	%	%	
The centre could do with more high street chain stores	4	15	13	34	34	3.81
Pedestrians can walk around the centre without feeling threatened by traffic	2	13	19	46	19	3.67
Roads in the centre are well maintained	4	12	17	52	16	3.65
The centre needs more local, independent shops	2	12	25	40	20	3.63
The road network provides easy access into the centre	0	12	31	39	16	3.60
The centre is accessible for disabled people and older people	5	5	31	43	16	3.60
It is easy for drivers to find the car parks around the centre	3	10	26	48	12	3.57
Road signs make it easy for cars to access the centre	5	8	31	46	9	3.47
The level of service in shops is of a high standard	3	11	42	28	17	3.44
There is enough car parking available	5	20	13	51	8	3.38
Roads in the centre are congested	12	16	24	34	13	3.20
There is too much traffic noise in the centre	9	26	27	22	16	3.10
There is too much other noise (music, pubs and clubs) in the centre	18	37	13	24	8	2.69
Car parking costs too much	18	41	16	17	2	2.39
SAMPLE BASE: 131						

As demonstrated in the above table 68% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the roads in the centre were well maintained and a further 68% agreed or strongly agreed that Blaby could do with more high street chain stores. In descending order of agreement, this was followed by pedestrians could walk around the centre without feeling threatened by traffic (65%), drivers found it easy to find car parks around the centre (60%) and that the centre needed more local, independent shops (60%). Nearly three-fifths of respondents (59%) disagreed with the statement that the car parking costs were too much.

Respondents were given a list of options and asked to say which issues they thought needed the most attention in Blaby. The most frequently cited responses were a greater range of shops (57%), the cleanliness and tidiness of the centre (47%) and more specialist shops (47%). When asked to prioritise their *top three* areas of improvement, respondents cited a greater range of shops (51%), more specialist shops (30%) and the cleanliness and tidiness of the centre (28%).

4 Crime and safety

This section looks at how respondents in Blaby perceived crime and safety, and which issues were seen as big problem areas. As shown in the table below, of a series of issues on which the opinion of respondents was sought, rubbish and litter lying around was seen as a big problem by the largest proportion of respondents in Blaby (28% considered this to be a very big problem or a big problem). This was followed by groups of people hanging around the street (23%) and street canvassers (19%). Areas that were seen as less of a problem include racial harassment (83% considered this either not a problem, or only a small problem), people not treating each other with respect and consideration (81%) and verbal abuse or other aggressive behaviour (79%).

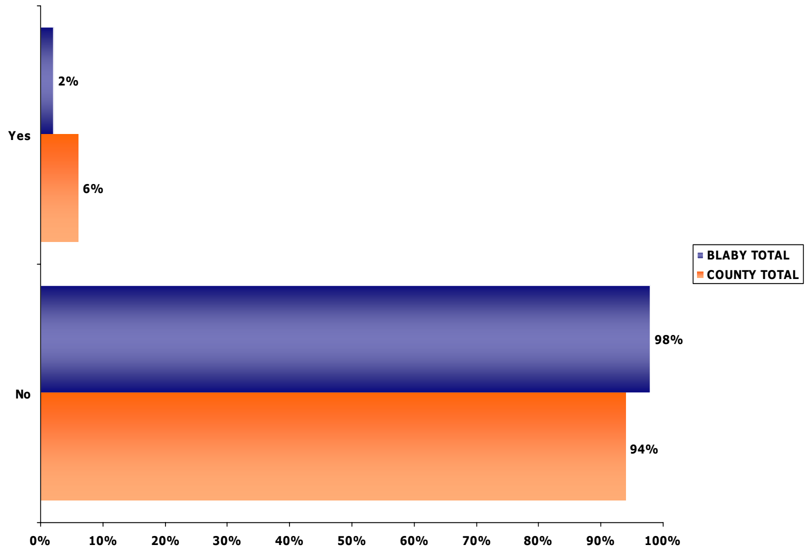
Table 4

AREAS THAT ARE SEEN AS PROBLEMS IN THE CENTRE OF BLABY						
	Very big problem	**Big Problem**	**Neither big nor small**	**Small Problem**	**Not a problem at all**	**Mean score**
	%	%	%	%	%	
Groups of people hanging round the streets	11	12	23	32	20	3.39
Rubbish and litter lying around	2	26	21	32	19	3.41
Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property or vehicles	3	12	20	44	21	3.68
Dirty pavements and chewing gum	2	10	28	30	31	3.78
Vehicles being stolen	2	15	12	31	39	3.91
Street canvassers	2	17	17	17	47	3.92
People being drunk or rowdy in public spaces	1	7	18	41	30	3.95
Road safety or speeding	2	9	17	36	35	3.95
Personal theft (pick pocketing)	2	14	12	26	45	3.98
Property being stolen from a vehicle	3	9	16	26	44	4.01
People using or dealing drugs	1	14	12	16	44	4.02
Assaults and other violent crime (personal robbery, mugging)	3	5	18	29	44	4.07
Aggressive begging	2	13	19	19	37	4.09
Fly tipping	5	5	15	24	50	4.13
Verbal abuse or other aggressive behaviour	1	11	9	31	48	4.15
Racial harassment	2	5	10	31	52	4.26
People not treating each other with respect and consideration	1	8	10	21	60	4.32
SAMPLE BASE: 131						

Respondents were questioned about whether they had ever felt worried about being assaulted or harassed in Blaby within the last 12 months, 98% of respondents said that they had not felt worried compared to the county total of 94%.

Figure 14

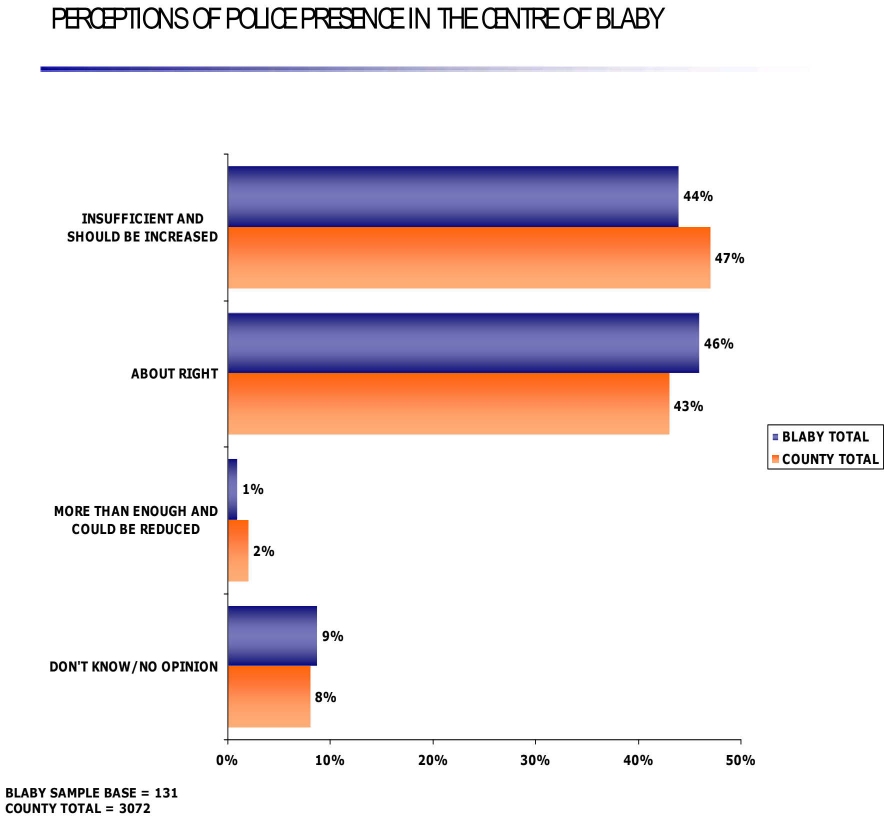
WHETHER RESPONDENTS HAVE EVER FELT WORRIED ABOUT BEING ASSAULTED OR HARASSED WHILST IN BLABY WITHIN THE LAST 12 MONTHS



BLABY SAMPLE BASE = 128
COUNTY SAMPLE BASE = 2999

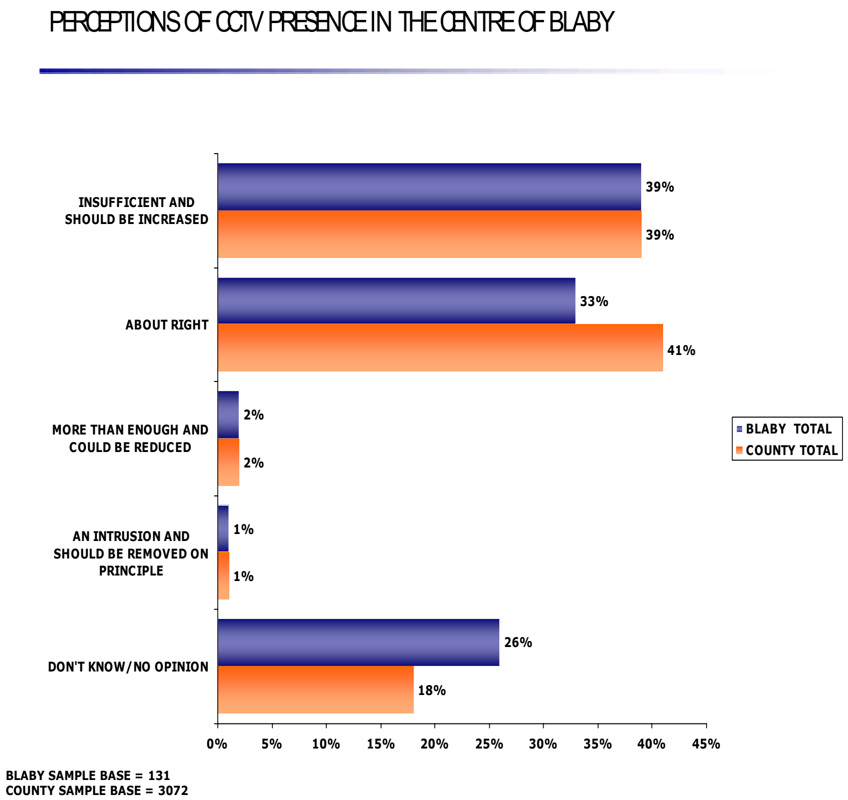
Respondents were then questioned about their perceptions of police presence within Blaby. 46% of respondents felt the police presence in the centre was about right whilst 44% felt that the police presence was insufficient and should be increased.

Figure 15



When questioned about the presence of CCTV in Blaby, 39% of respondents felt it was insufficient and should be increased, which was the same figure as the county total. A third of respondents said the presence of CCTV was about right.

Figure 16



5 Summary

Visiting the town centre

- Shopping trips accounted for just over half the trips to Blaby.
- 15% of respondents used a service in Blaby whilst 11% of respondents worked in a local business.
- The majority of visitors arrived in Blaby by car, with the second most common method being on foot and the third being by bus.
- Just over two-fifths of respondents visited the centre at least twice a week.
- A wider range of shops and retail facilities, more cultural or entertainment facilities and free parking were the improvements most likely to encourage more people to come to Blaby more often.

Attractions and events

- The local newspaper was identified as the most widely used method of finding out about attractions and events in the centre, whilst the least used methods were the County Council's events guide and the Internet.
- Nearly one in five respondents had attended an event in the centre.

Attitudes towards the centre

- Overall, Blaby was most likely to be described as 'friendly', 'safe', 'attractive' and 'tidy'.
- Just over half of respondents reported no change in the centre of Blaby within the last 12 months, whilst just over one in five reported the centre had got better and just over one in ten said it had got worse.
- Respondents felt that the centre catered better for visitors, families and shoppers than it did for young people and disabled people.

Services available in the centre

- Banks & building societies and shops were the top two services that respondents were most aware of and were most likely to use on a regular basis in Blaby.
- Just over half of respondents in Blaby said the variety of retail outlets and shops in the centre met their needs very well or quite well.

Town centre environment

- Overall, respondents were positive about the environment and facilities in and around the centre.

- Respondents felt that pavements and walkways were clean and tidy, as well as being safe and well maintained and that shop fronts were also well maintained.

- Having a greater range of shops and more specialist shops were seen as the areas that needed the most attention within Blaby.

Crime and safety

- Rubbish and litter lying around, groups of people hanging around the street and street canvassers were seen as the most significant problems in Blaby.

- Nearly all respondents said that they had not felt worried about being assaulted or harassed whilst in the town centre within the last 12 months.

- There were mixed views on the level of police presence in Blaby, with 46% of respondents claiming it was just about right, whereas 44% felt that it was insufficient and should be increased.

- 39% of respondents felt the presence of CCTV was insufficient and should be increased, whilst 33% of respondents said it was about right.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

- Overall, respondents were positive about Blaby. 89% of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with Blaby as a place to shop, visit and to do business. Moreover, although the majority of respondents reported no change within the last 12 months, just over one-fifth felt that Blaby had got better.

- Many respondents were aware of and users of services such as the bank or building society and shops in Blaby.

- Findings indicated that Blaby catered better for visitors, families and shoppers than it did for young people and disabled people. This shows how the centre serves different groups of people.

- A wider range of shops and retail facilities, more cultural or entertainment facilities and free parking were the improvements most likely to encourage more people to come to Blaby more often.

- Seating in and around the centre and shopping areas and summer planting in the centre were identified as aspects of the town centre with the most scope for improvement, although most respondents were satisfied with the existing provision of these facilities.

- Respondents felt more attention should be given to having a greater range of shops, more independent shops as well as the cleanliness and tidiness of the centre.

- In terms of crime and safety issues, rubbish and litter lying around, groups of people hanging around the street and street canvassers were seen as the most significant issues.