



BMG Research Report

Leicestershire Town and Village Centres Survey:
Syston
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 Syston.

Report contents

Section 2 of this report looks at why respondents visited Syston, 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 Syston, 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 Syston 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

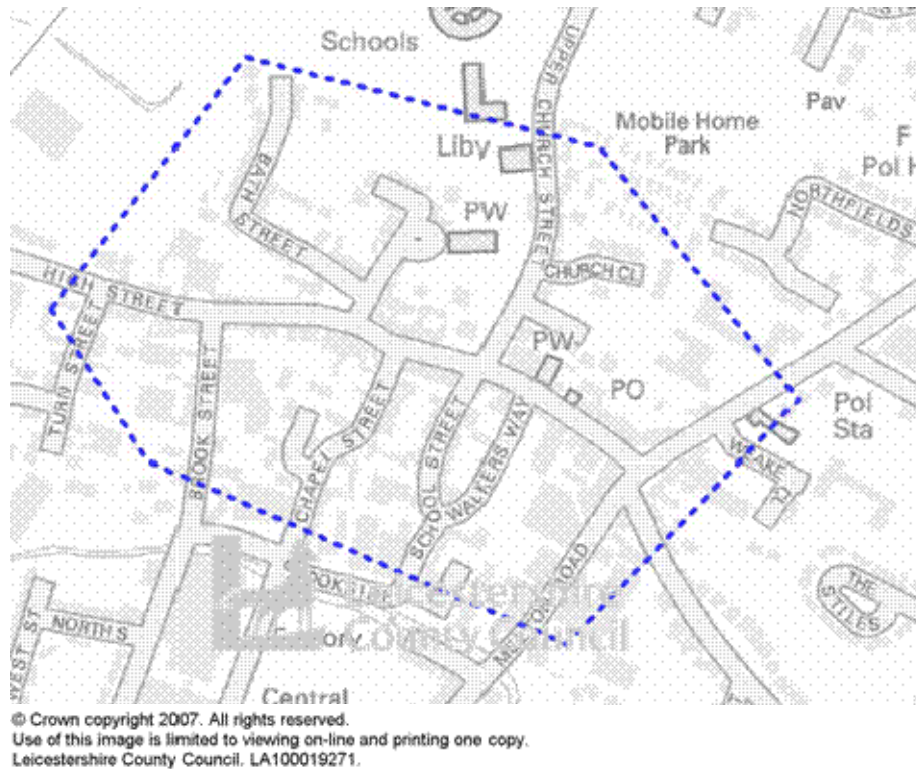
In total, 3000 interviews were planned across the 17 settlements. The sample structure called for a minimum of 100 interviews per settlement, with the remaining 1300 interviews distributed pro-rata on the basis of population size, meaning that the target for some of the villages was only a little over 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 in Syston:

Figure 1



Source: Leicestershire County Council

Respondent Profile

Within Syston 172 interviews were achieved. Of the sample, there were more female respondents than male (65% female, 36% male). 12% of respondents in Syston were aged 16-24, 29% were aged 25-44, and 38% were aged 45-64, with the remaining 19% being of retirement age (65+). As reported by the 2001 Census, within Syston 12% of the population were aged between 16-24, 38% were aged between 25-44, 30% were aged between 45-64 and 19% were aged 65 and over.

The vast majority of respondents in Syston (92%) described themselves as white British and 1% described themselves as Irish. The remaining 8% described themselves as Indian. According to the 2001 Census, 91% of the population of Syston described themselves as white.

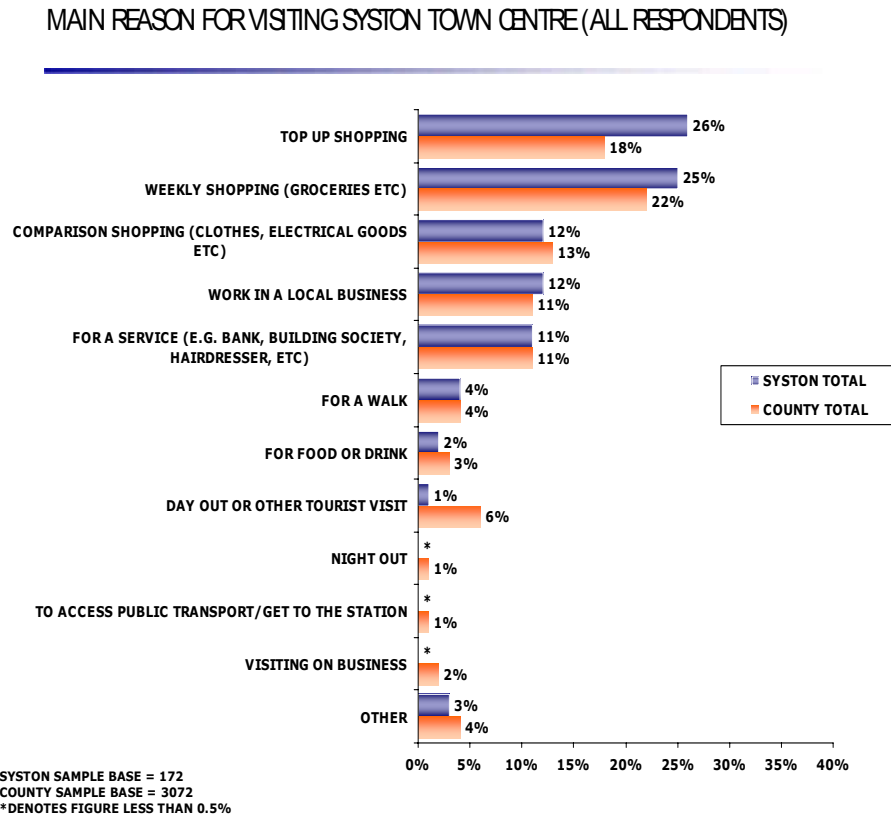
By economic status, 65% of respondents in Syston were in work (61% employed and 4% self-employed). The largest proportion of those respondents not in work were retired (25% of the total Syston sample). 4% of respondents who were not working were in education or training and a further 4% were looking after children or other dependents or the home. 2% were not in work due to an illness or disability whilst 1% were claiming benefits.

2 Visiting the Town Centre

Visits

This section looks at the reasons why people visited Syston, their mode of transport used to get to the centre, frequency of visits as well as if they had visited any attractions and events in the centre.

Figure 2

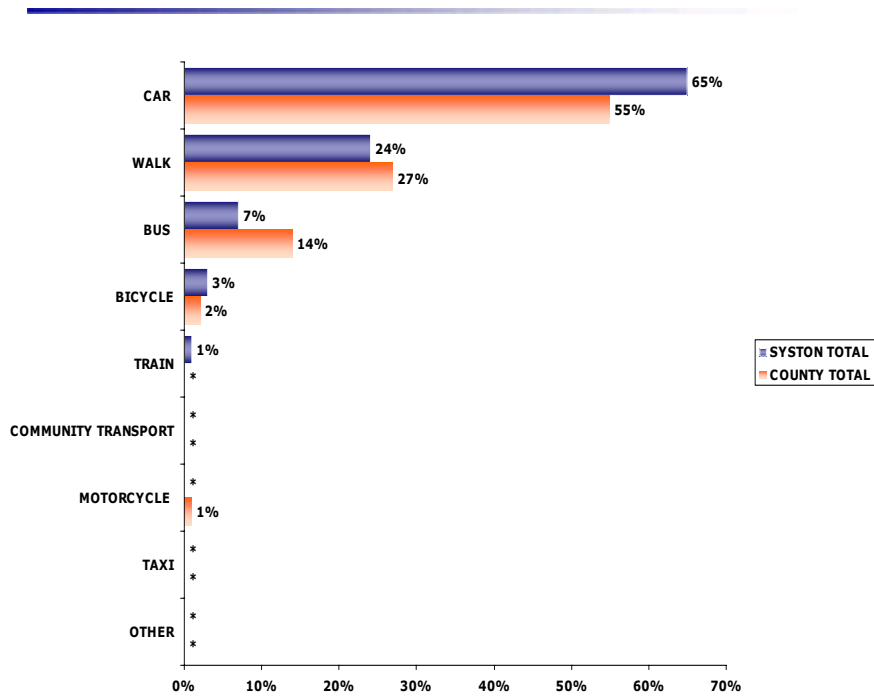


The intention of the survey was to speak to a cross-section of people present in the centres of the towns and villages, who may have been present for a whole range of purposes. Shopping trips of various sorts accounted for just over three-fifths of visits to Syston (63%), which was higher than the county figure (53%). 12% of respondents worked in the centre and 11% of respondents in Syston were visiting the centre for services, which was the same figure as the county total.

Mode of transport used to get into the centre

Figure 3

MODE OF TRANSPORT TO SYSTON TOWN CENTRE (ALL RESPONDENTS)



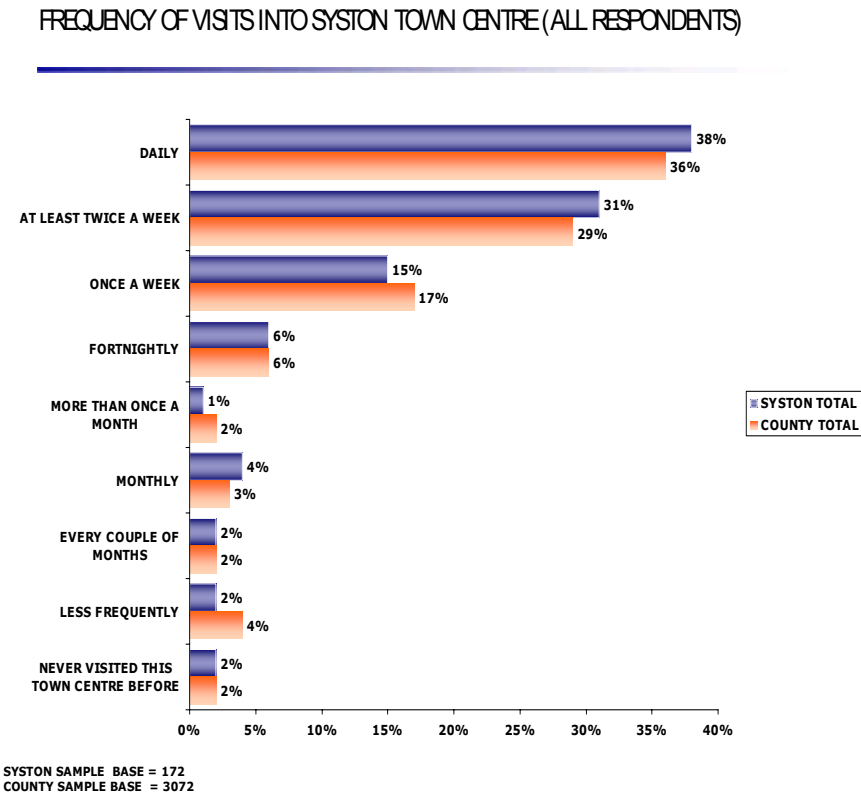
SYSTON SAMPLE BASE = 172
 COUNTY SAMPLE BASE = 3072
 * DENOTES FIGURES LESS THAN 0.5%

Just over two-fifths of trips into the centre by respondents on the day of the survey were made by car whilst almost a quarter of respondents walked into the centre. 7% of respondents arrived by bus (which was lower compared to the county total of 14%) and 3% arrived by bicycle (which was nearly the same as the county figure).

Frequency of visits

As illustrated in the graph below, nearly two-fifths of respondents reported that they visited the centre daily (38%), whilst nearly a third of respondents visited at least twice a week (31%) and 15% visited once a week.

Figure 4



Just over half of respondents visited Syston both on weekdays and at weekends (51%). 40% of respondents visited Syston on a weekday whilst 10% visited at weekends.

The majority of respondents (79%) visited Syston during the daytime (before 5.30pm), whilst 2% visited Syston only during the evening (after 5.30pm) and 18% visited both during the daytime and evening.

Of those respondents who only visited Syston in the evening, 9% of visited Syston centre in the evening fortnightly, whilst 8% visited once a week and 7% of respondents visited monthly. Of the respondents who visited Syston in the evenings, 26% visited mainly on a Friday evening, whilst 21% of respondents visited on a Saturday or Sunday evening.

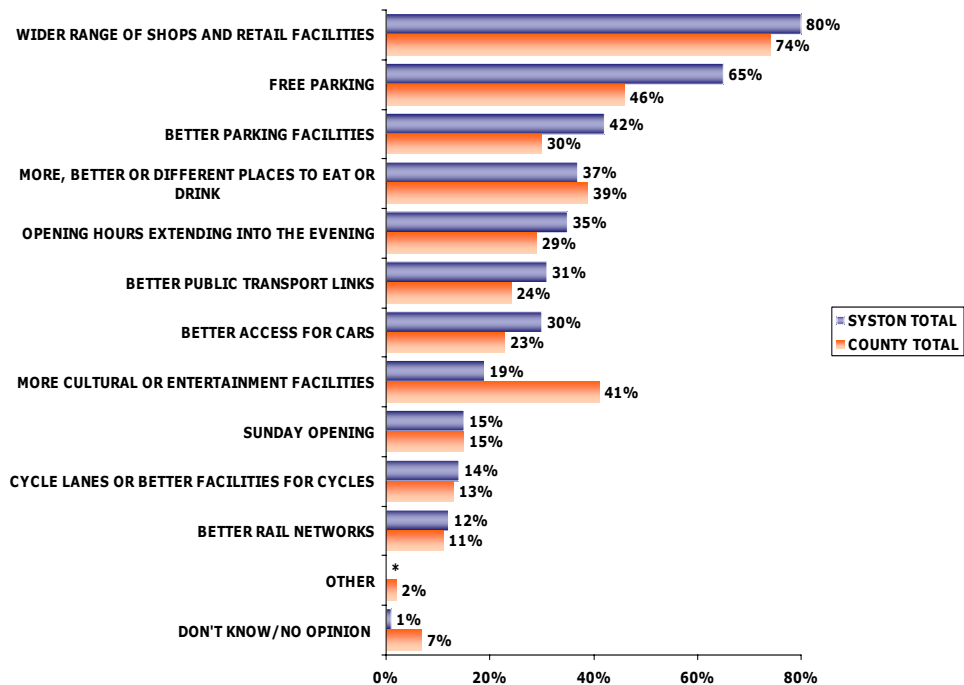
Encouraging more people to visit the centre

Respondents were asked to identify those issues which would encourage them to visit Syston more often. They were able to cite more than one issue. Having a wider range of shops and retail facilities and free parking were the two most commonly cited areas that would encourage respondents to visit Syston more.

Better parking facilities, better places for food and drink as well as the extending opening hours, particularly evening opening, were also important for some visitors.

Figure 5

AREAS THAT WOULD ENCOURAGE RESPONDENTS TO VISIT SYSTON TOWN CENTRE MORE OFTEN (ALL RESPONDENTS)



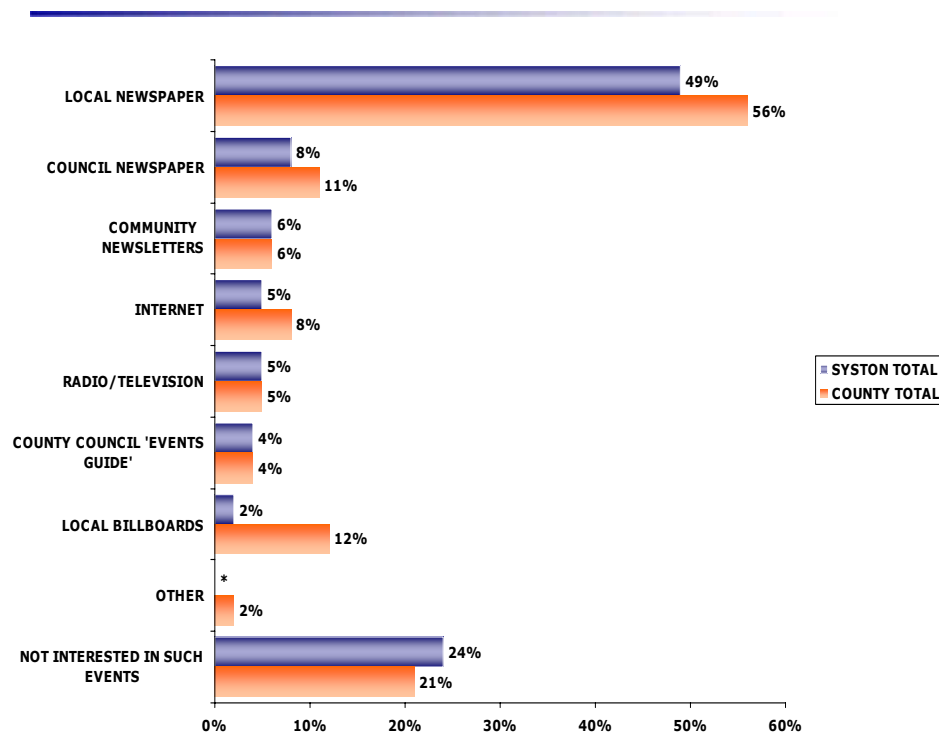
SYSTON SAMPLE BASE = 172
 COUNTY SAMPLE BASE = 3072
 * DENOTES FIGURES LESS THAN 0.5%

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 Syston, with other sources only modest in their importance by comparison. Local billboards and the County Council's events guide were least likely to be used in order to find out about attractions and events in the centre of Syston.

Figure 6

METHODS USED TO FIND OUT ABOUT EVENTS AND ATTRACTIONS IN THE CENTRE OF SYSTON (ALL RESPONDENTS)



SYSTON SAMPLE BASE = 172
 COUNTY SAMPLE BASE = 3072
 * DENOTES FIGURES LESS THAN 0.5%

When respondents were questioned about whether they had attended any events in the centre recently, only 5% said that they had. Of these 5%, 3 people had attended the Jurassic Park or Dinosaur event, 2 people had attended the carnival whilst 3 people said that they had attended another event in Syston.

Respondents were asked about what made the centre unique, different or special in Syston. 10% said it was a safe or low crime area, 4% said the appearance was attractive or pleasant, 3% said the layout and a further 3% said the market. Other notable responses included:

- Born here or live here (2%);
- Friendly people (2%);
- Good atmosphere (2%);

- It's got everything (2%);
- Architecture and buildings (1%);
- Cleanliness (1%);
- Community spirit (1%);
- Flower displays and scenery (1%);
- Shops and shopping centre (1%);
- Small market town or village (1%);
- The size (1%);
- Transport facilities (1%); and
- Traffic-free (1%).

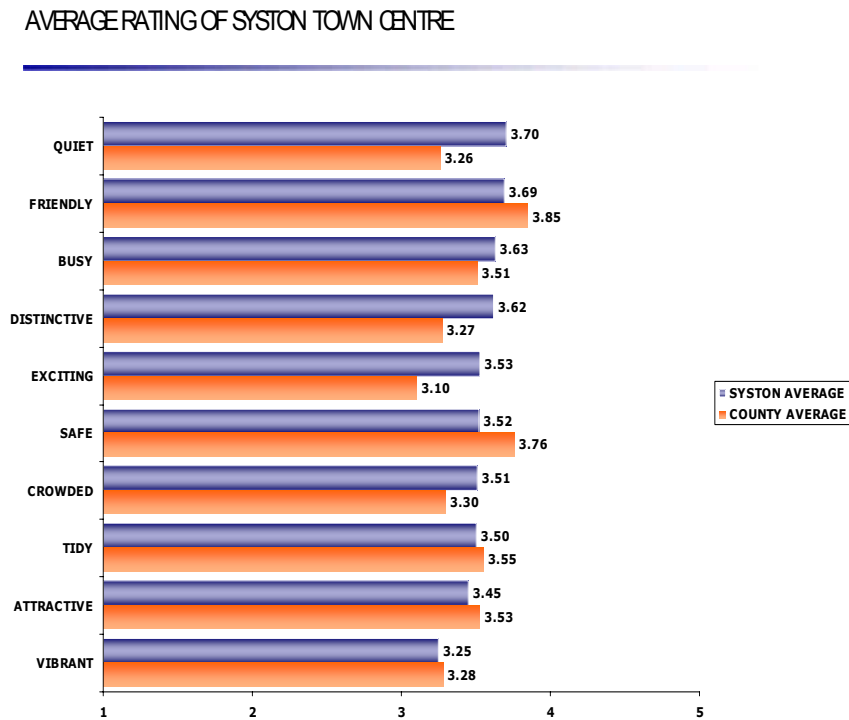
3 Attitude towards the centre

This section examines the attitudes of respondents to the different aspects of Syston, 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 Syston on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree. Overall, Syston was most likely to be described as 'quiet', 'friendly', 'busy' and 'distinctive'. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Syston was least likely to be described as 'vibrant' and 'attractive'.

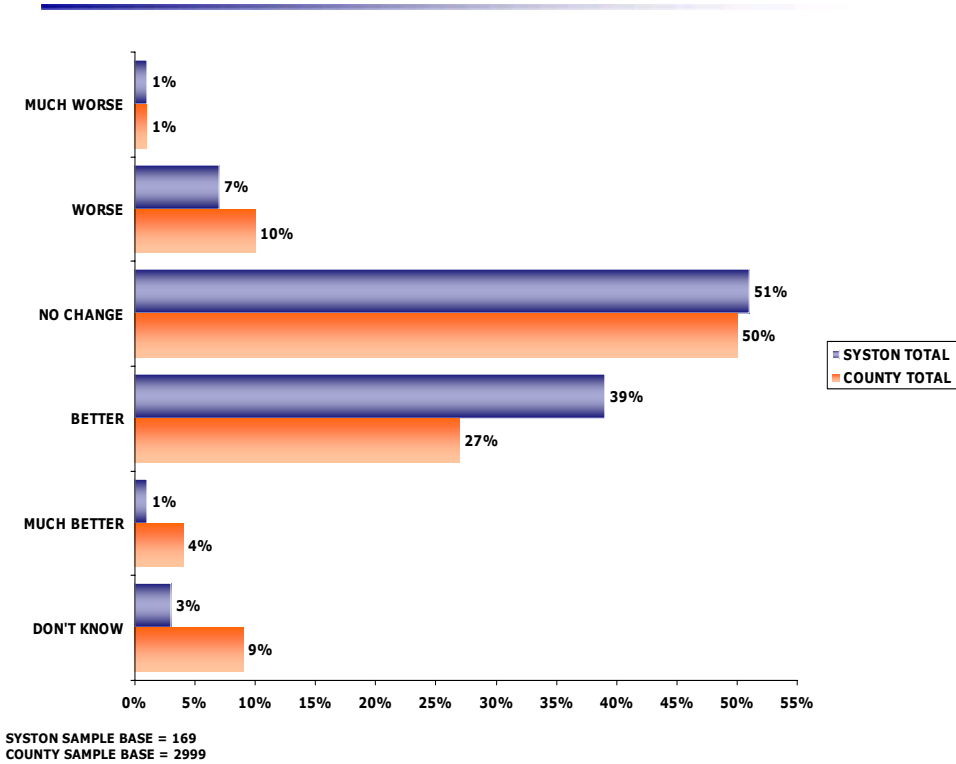
Figure 7



Whilst 51% of respondents did not report any overall change in Syston, 38% believed that it had improved compared to 7% who thought it had got worse as shown below:

Figure 8

WHETHER SYSTON TOWN CENTRE HAS GOT BETTER OR WORSE WITHIN THE LAST 12 MONTHS



All respondents were asked for their view on how well Syston served different groups in the population. The results for each of these groups are shown in Table 1 below. It was clear that respondents in Syston felt that the best served groups were elderly people and families. However, there was concern about how the centre served visitors than for any other group. 18% of respondents thought the centre was very poor or poor for visitors.

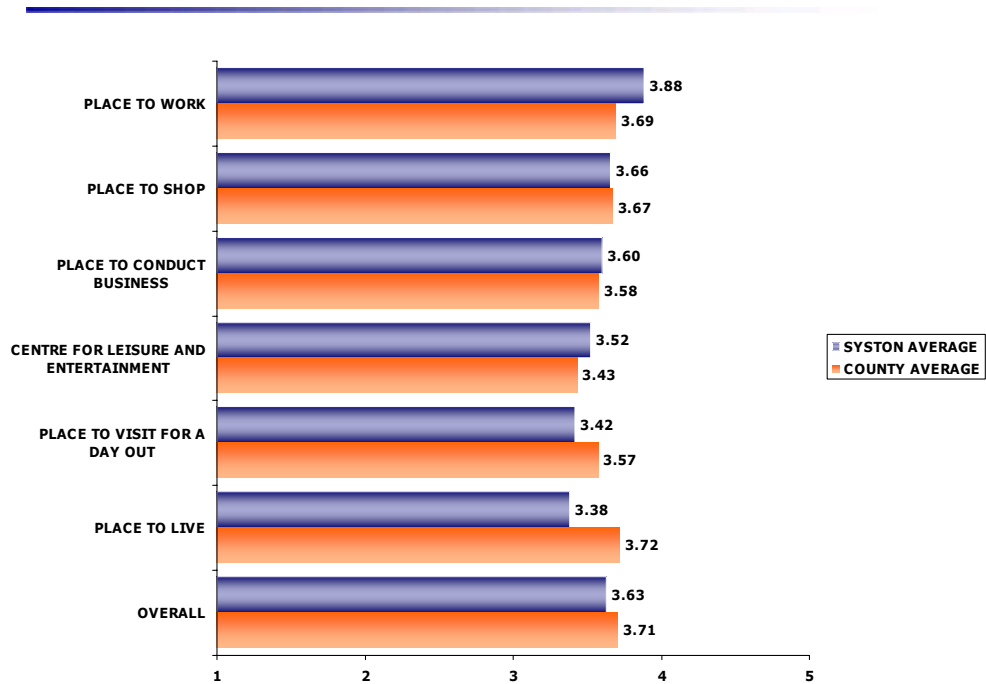
Table 1

RATING OF SYSTON FOR VARIOUS GROUPS							
	Very poor	Poor	Neither good nor poor	Good	Very good	DK/no opinion	Mean score
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Families	0	1	27	52	16	4	3.88
Elderly people	0	4	23	57	13	40	3.82
Shoppers	0	1	34	44	10	12	3.72
Visitors	0	18	51	21	3	6	3.71
People with disabilities	1	2	48	39	8	4	3.53
Young people	0	6	51	27	13	4	3.48
SAMPLE BASE: 172							

How good are the centres as places for particular activities?

Figure 9

RATING OF SYSTON AS A PLACE TO LIVE, WORK, SHOP, ETC (ALL RESPONDENTS)

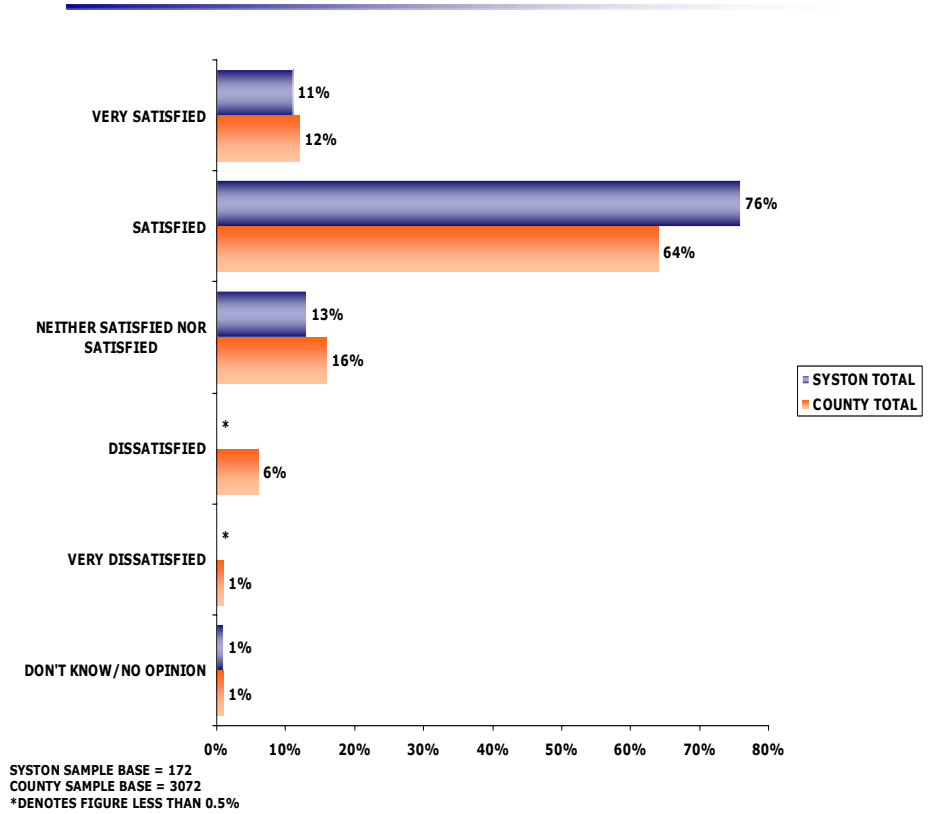


Overall, on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is the most positive score, Syston was rated 3.63 which was slightly lower than the county average of 3.71 - that is, they were considered as well above average, good but not very good. Syston was seen as a good place to work (3.88) compared to the county average of 3.69 as well as a good centre for leisure and entertainment compared to the rest of the county (3.52 Syston, 3.43 county). However, Syston was scored lower compared to the county as a good place to live (3.38 Syston, 3.72 county).

Overall, satisfaction was very high amongst respondents as they considered Syston a good place to shop, visit and to do business. The graph below demonstrates that the overall level of satisfaction for Syston was higher than the county total (87% Syston, 76% county).

Figure 10

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH SYSTON AS A GOOD PLACE TO SHOP, VISIT AND TO DO BUSINESS (ALL RESPONDENTS)

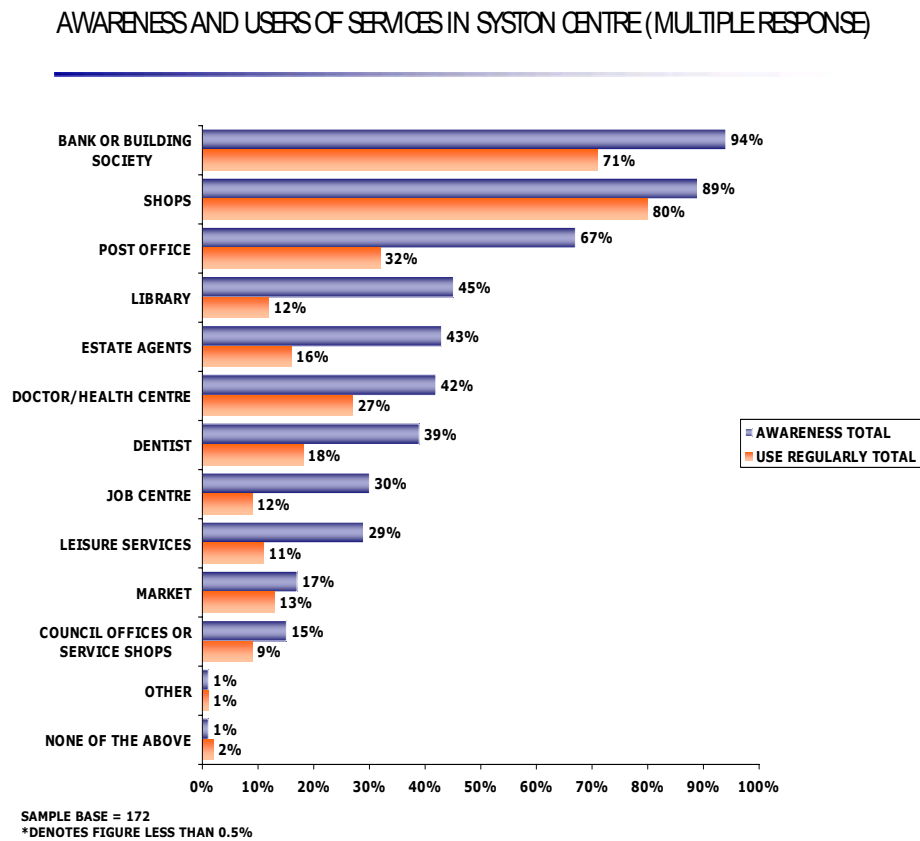


Services available in the centre

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

As shown in the graph below respondents were more likely to be aware of services such as banks & building societies, shops and the post office 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 be regular users. For example, 45% of respondents were aware that there was a library in Syston but only 12% used this service on a regular basis. Furthermore, 39% of respondents were aware of a dentist in Syston but 18% were regular users.

Figure 11

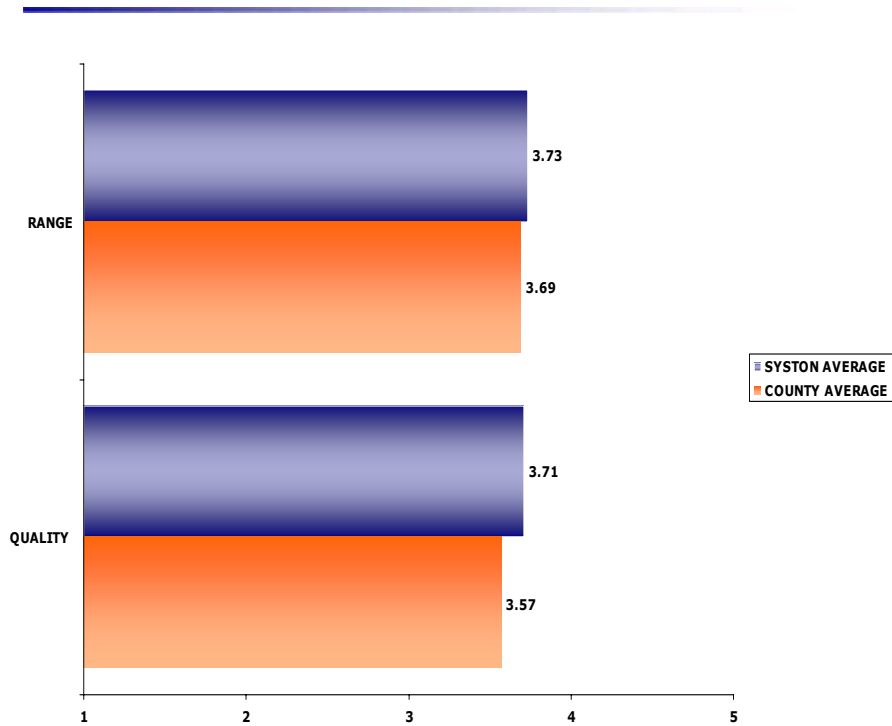


Respondents were questioned about whether or not Syston met their retail needs. 50% of respondents in Syston said that the variety of the retail outlets and shops in the centre met their needs very well or quite well, whilst 42% of respondents said it met their needs adequately and 5% said it did not.

Respondents were asked to rate the quality of places to eat out in Syston 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 as shown in figure 12, a pattern which reflected the position across the county as a whole.

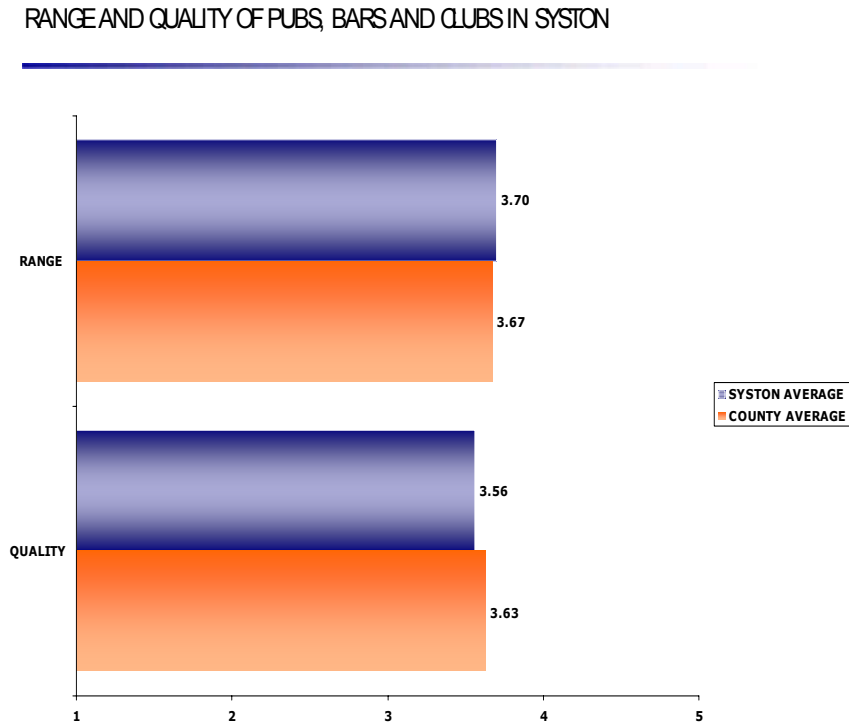
Figure 12

RANGE AND QUALITY OF THE PLACES TO EAT OUT IN SYSTON



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

Figure 13



Town Centre Environment

Respondents were given a series of statements about the environment of the 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 SYSTON						
	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Agree strongly	Mean score
	%	%	%	%	%	
Pavements and walkways are clean and tidy	1	8	36	45	11	3.58
The parks are well maintained	4	11	36	31	16	3.44
The centre is well planted in summertime	5	11	32	38	11	3.41
Street lighting is good	1	3	27	34	13	3.36
Pavements and walkways are safe and well maintained	2	11	42	37	6	3.35
The design and layout of the centre is attractive	2	12	41	32	8	3.35
Shop fronts are well maintained	4	17	37	27	13	3.28
Pedestrian signage is relevant, clear and easy to understand	9	15	28	33	12	3.24
There are enough public toilets	5	15	38	30	9	3.23
The public toilets are clean and tidy	5	13	44	32	5	3.19
The baby changing facilities provided are clean and tidy	6	16	40	30	6	3.16
Seating in and around shopping areas is well maintained	12	10	37	34	6	3.13
There are enough baby changing facilities	2	22	40	27	6	3.13
There is sufficient seating in and around the centre	9	24	42	22	3	2.86
SAMPLE BASE: 172						

Note: Percentage no replies not shown

Overall, respondents had positive views about the environment and facilities available in the centre of Syston. Respondents felt that the pavements and walkways were clean and tidy (56% agreed or agreed strongly), the centre was well planted in summertime (49%), the parks were well maintained (47%) and the street lighting was good (47%). Respondents tended to disagree with the statement there was sufficient seating in and around the centre (33% disagreed or disagreed strongly). This was followed by pedestrian signage was relevant and clear (24%

disagreed or disagreed strongly) and there was enough baby changing facilities (24%).

Respondents were then asked to respond to a series of statements about aspects in and around the centre of Syston 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 SYSTON						
	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Agree strongly	Mean score
	%	%	%	%	%	
Roads in the centre are congested	5	6	26	40	19	3.65
Road signs make it easy for cars to access the centre	2	9	33	37	17	3.60
The road network provides easy access into the centre	0	11	30	53	6	3.54
Roads in the centre are well maintained	2	11	29	45	12	3.54
It is easy for drivers to find the car parks around the centre	3	9	34	38	15	3.53
Pedestrians can walk around the centre without feeling threatened by traffic	4	12	31	34	17	3.49
The centre is accessible for disabled people and older people	4	10	40	39	6	3.49
The centre could do with more high street chain stores	5	12	34	34	12	3.42
The centre needs more local, independent shops	2	12	37	36	15	3.38
There is too much traffic noise in the centre	4	19	27	34	13	3.35
There is too much other noise (music, pubs and clubs) in the centre	8	14	29	35	12	3.35
The level of service in shops is of a high standard	5	10	32	44	9	3.31
There is enough car parking available	5	12	50	23	8	3.19
Car parking costs too much	10	14	44	24	6	3.03
SAMPLE BASE: 172						

Note: Percentage no replies not shown

As demonstrated in the above table 59% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the roads in the centre were congested. In descending order of agreement, the road network provided easy access

into the centre (59%) the roads in the centre were well maintained (57%) and the road signs made it easy for cars to access the centre (54%). 24% of respondents disagreed with the statement that car parking costs too much and a further 24% disagreed that there was too much traffic noise in the centre.

Respondents were given a list of options and asked to say which issues they thought most needed attention in Syston. The most frequently cited responses were the cleanliness and tidiness of the centre (45%), more specialist shops (41%) and a greater range of shops (32%). When asked to prioritise their *top three* areas of improvement the same issues arose again. In descending order, respondents cited the cleanliness and tidiness of the centre (31%), a greater range of shops (23%) and more specialist shops (22%).

4 Crime and safety

This section looks at how respondents in Syston 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, groups of people hanging around the street was seen as a problem in Syston (24% of respondents considered this to be a very big problem or big problem). This was followed by street canvassers (18%) and rubbish and litter lying around (16%). Areas that were seen as less of a problem included verbal abuse or other aggressive behaviour (84% considered this either not a problem or only a small problem), vehicles being stolen (83%) and dirty pavements and chewing gum (71%).

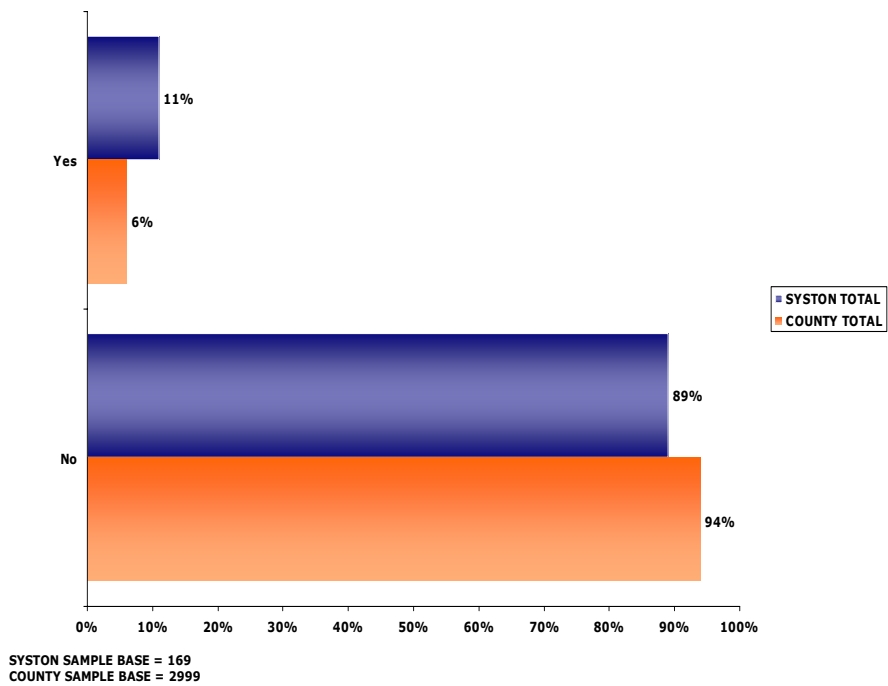
Table 4

AREAS THAT ARE SEEN AS PROBLEMS IN THE CENTRE OF SYSTON						
	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	12	12	23	33	17	3.32
People not treating each other with respect and consideration	5	10	34	34	15	3.44
Street canvassers	6	12	20	33	27	3.63
Rubbish and litter lying around	1	15	27	31	25	3.64
People being drunk or rowdy in public spaces	2	12	22	34	24	3.69
Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property or vehicles	2	7	27	37	19	3.7
Personal theft (pick pocketing)	2	6	31	33	23	3.72
Verbal abuse or other aggressive behaviour	4	9	19	40	24	3.75
Property being stolen from a vehicle	2	6	28	38	23	3.76
People using or dealing drugs	3	11	19	37	26	3.77
Aggressive begging	5	6	19	41	27	3.79
Assaults and other violent crime (personal robbery, mugging)	2	8	24	36	27	3.8
Fly tipping	3	8	22	36	29	3.83
Road safety or speeding	2	5	21	43	27	3.88
Vehicles being stolen	3	4	7	7	76	3.9
Racial harassment	4	6	15	42	29	3.9
Dirty pavements and chewing gum	1	6	20	45	26	3.92
SAMPLE BASE: 172						

Respondents were questioned about whether they ever felt worried about being assaulted or harassed in Syston within the last 12 months. 89% of respondents said that they had not felt worried compared to the county total of 94%.

Figure 14

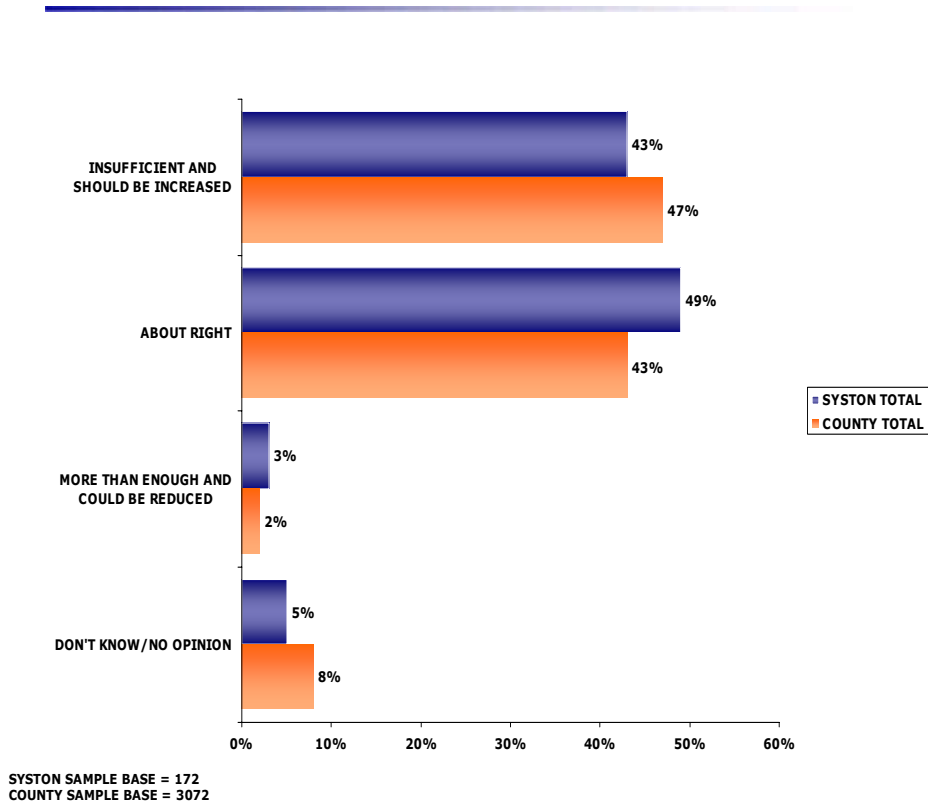
WHETHER RESPONDENTS HAVE EVER FELT WORRIED ABOUT BEING ASSAULTED OR HARASSED WHILST IN THE CENTRE OF SYSTON IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS



When respondents were asked about what they thought about the police presence in Syston, 49% felt it was about right, whilst 43% said it was insufficient and should be increased.

Figure 15

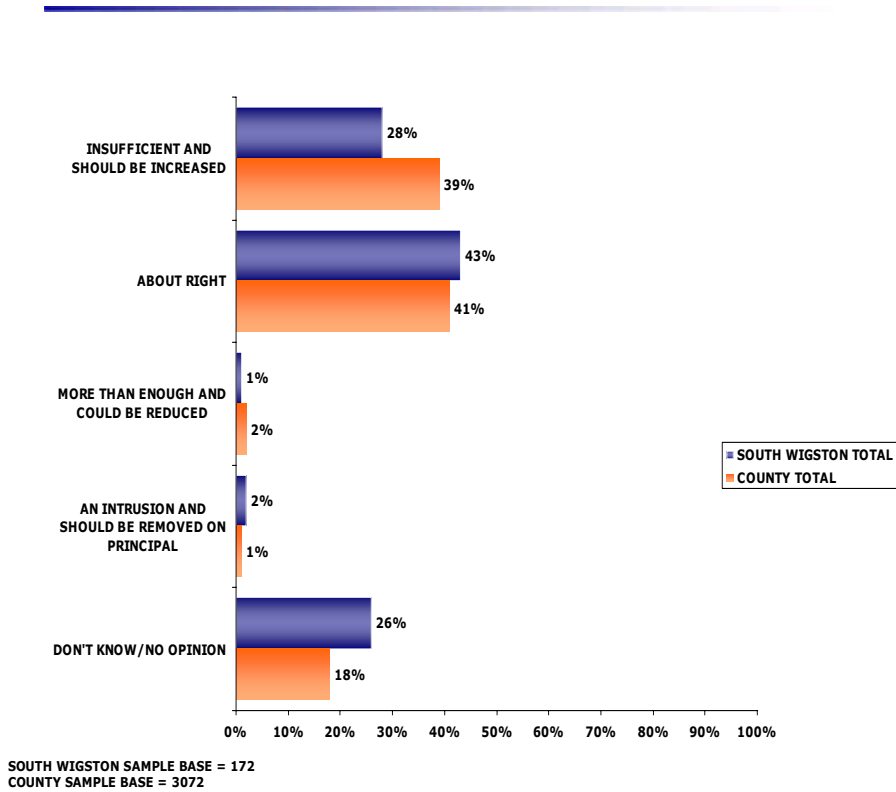
PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE PRESENCE IN THE CENTRE OF SYSTON



When questioned about the presence of CCTV in Syston, 43% of respondents felt it was about right, whilst 28% of respondents said the presence of CCTV was insufficient and should be increased.

Figure 16

PERCEPTIONS OF CCTV PRESENCE IN THE CENTRE OF SYSTON



5 Summary

Visiting the centre

- Shopping trips accounted for 63% of the trips to Syston.
- 12% of respondents worked in a local business whilst 11% of respondents were using a service in Syston.
- The majority of visitors arrived in Syston by car, with the second most common method being on foot and the third being by bus.
- Nearly two-fifths of respondents visited the centre daily.
- A wider range of shops and retail facilities, free parking and better parking facilities were the improvements most likely to encourage more people to come to Syston more often.

Attractions and events

- The local newspaper was identified as the most widely used method for finding out about attractions and events in the centre, whilst the least used methods were local billboards and the County Council's events guide.
- Only 5% of respondents had attended an event in the centre.

Attitudes towards the centre

- Overall, Syston was most likely to be described as 'quiet', 'friendly', 'busy' and 'distinctive'.
- 51% of respondents reported no change in the centre of Syston within the last 12 months, whilst 39% of respondents reported the centre had got better and 7% said it had got worse.
- Respondents felt that the centre catered better for elderly people and families than it did for visitors.

Services available in the centre

- Banks & building societies, shops and the post office were the top three services that respondents were most aware of and were most likely to use on a regular basis in Syston.
- 50% of respondents in Syston 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, the centre was well planted in summertime and the street lighting was good.
- The cleanliness and tidiness of the centre, having a greater range of shops and more specialist shops were seen as the areas that needed the most attention.

Crime and safety

- Groups of people hanging around the street, street canvassers and rubbish and litter lying around and people being drunk and rowdy in public spaces were seen as the most significant problems in Syston.
- Verbal abuse or other aggressive behaviour, vehicles being stolen and dirty pavements and chewing gum were not seen as a problem, or seen only as a small problem
- 89% of respondents said that they had not felt worried about being assaulted or harassed while in the centre within the last 12 months.
- 49% of respondents said policing in Syston was about right whilst 43% said it was insufficient and should be increased.
- 43% of respondents felt that the CCTV presence in Syston was about right whilst 28% said it was insufficient and should be increased.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

- Overall, respondents had positive views about Syston. 87% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with Syston as a place to shop, visit and to do business. Moreover, although the majority of respondents reported no change within the last 12 months, 40% reported that the centre had got better or much better.
- Many respondents were aware of and users of services such as the bank or building society, shops and the post office in Syston.
- Findings indicated that Syston catered better for elderly people and families than it did for young people. This shows how the centre serves different groups of people.
- A wider range of shops and retail facilities, free parking and better parking facilities were the improvements most likely to encourage more people to come to Syston more often.
- Seating, pedestrian signage and baby changing facilities 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 the cleanliness and tidiness of the centre, having a greater range of shops and more specialist shops.
- In terms of crime and safety issues, groups of people hanging around the streets, street canvassers and rubbish and litter lying around, were seen as the biggest issues in Syston.