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Babergh & Mid Suffolk cultural, heritage and visitor economy strategy

Engagement Phase

Insights Report

January 2023

Contents

Quotes included in this report are verbatim comments from the interview consultations and workshops to date.

A1. Project introduction

A1.1 Why consult?

Do we just want to be seen to have listened to stakeholders before we produce a Strategy? Or do we really want to (in fact need to) engage as part of a longer-term collaborative way of working?

Our approach is the latter and it is as critical hyper-locally as it is regionally. Babergh & Mid Suffolk does not and cannot act in isolation – especially in tourism, but also across culture and heritage. The importance of Suffolk and East of England plans, positioning and collaboration is likely to become ever more important to Babergh & Mid Suffolk. The Strategy development process will support the Councils on their shared journey as it builds understanding of the current landscape, its challenges and opportunities. In other words, what you are dealing with and how the role of improved creative identity can benefit, e.g. community wellbeing on one hand, and visitors and inward investment on the other.

A1.1.1 Our approach

Step 1 – Scoping and researching – defining the scale and scope of the development project.
Step 2 – Engaging and testing – exploring issues and building engagement through consultation and critical thinking; test the pillars of the Strategy – its themes and strategic priorities;
Step 3 – Prioritising and defining – developing the aspirations and values into a Strategy and action plan; taking ownership by creating a route map.

This allows the Strategy development process to be open and flexible, factoring in influencing factors that may not have been present when the original brief was created, e.g. cost-of-living crisis, further changes in government (policy), post-pandemic funding, other major local authority strategies to align with, and so on.

Within the budget and timeframe the public, e.g. participants, visitors, attenders, volunteers, and those less engaged will fall outside the scope of the engagement phase of Strategy development. A consultation version of the Strategy can of course be a start point to bring the residents of Babergh & Mid Suffolk's communities into the process, and connect to the ongoing community engagement of the cultural, heritage and tourism sectors.

A1.1.2 Important note on findings

These reports seek out critical commentary. The process does not seek to create a 'place hagiography' for Babergh & Mid Suffolk or select easy plus-points to focus on. In asking people's opinion of 'their' Babergh & Mid Suffolk, and what is important to them, engagement asks what can be better more than what is already good (although that is explored as well to identity strengths to build upon).

This results in delivering a collective voice that is weighted to the critical – which can make for occasionally tough reading. This should not be read as indicative of relative / competitive disadvantage or poor performance.

A2. Engagement approach and profile

A2.1 Scale and scope

This Insight Report presents findings from a series of 1:1 interviews, desk research, a visitor survey, mini-workshop activity and a series of stakeholder engagement workshops. The purpose of the report is to secure a mandate for the direction of strategy development – areas of focus, critical themes, level of ambition etc. This report provides a view of what the engagement phase has revealed, leading to early themes and priorities for the Strategy.

The research, consultation and analysis that has informed this interim report has been conducted between October and December 2022.

One-to-one consultations were conducted with representatives from a variety of culture, creative, tourism and other sectors. The table below sets out who has responded to consulting approaches to date, from a larger database of over 150 contacts, which also served the workshops.

Some of those consulted also participated in the in-person workshops taking place across Babergh & Mid Suffolk. A number of outstanding consult targets may also be re-approached at a later date, subject to need. Previous consultees may also be re-contacted to conduct follow-up interviews to explore key issues in more detail.

Name	Role	Organisation
Pete Waters	Executive Director	Visit East of England
James Allen	Innovation and Sectors Manager	New Anglia LEP
Alex Casey	Co-Director	Suffolk Art Link
Alex Till	Chief Executive	MENTA
Jayne Knight	Arts Development Manager	Suffolk County Council
Prof. Gurpreet Jagpal	Pro Vice-Chancellor, Business and Entrepreneurship	University of Suffolk
Jim Horsfield	Operations & Business Development Manager	Screen Suffolk
Lucy Bayliss	Head of Creative Programmes	Dance East
Iain Dunnett	Growing Places Fund Senior Coordinator	New Anglia LEP
Jenny Cousins	Director	The Food Museum
Mark Bills	Director	Gainsborough's House
Arabella McKessar	Development Officer	Gainsborough's House
David Marsh	Events & Theatre Manager	The Regal Theatre and Cinema
Anna Fielding	Manager	Wingfield Barns
Allison Burke	Development Officer	St. Peter's Church / Arts Venue
Ruth Philo	Project Founder, Painter	Pasture Place
Edward Tollemache		Helmingham Hall & Gardens
Simon Peachey	Manager	Flatford Mill
Oliver Paul	Co-Owner	Suffolk Food Hall / Shotley Tourism Action Group

Paula Booth	VE Strategic Lead, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Officer	Suffolk County Council
Richard Hunt	Strategic Lead for the Visitor Economy	Suffolk Growth Partnership
Helen Cutting	Brand Manager	Visit Suffolk
Peter Brooke	Chair	The Bank, Eye
Debbie Ball	Founder, CEO, Strategic Management Coordinator	Kinetic Science
Sara Holman	Head of Engagement	Suffolk Wildlife Trust
Judith Thompson		Stowmarket Stories
Holly White	Administrative Officer	High Tide
Miles Barry	Author	Easterly Artists, Suffolk Open Studios
Hayley Field	Co-Director	Suffolk Artlink
Emily Walden	Marketing and Digital Communications Officer	Eastern Angles
Rebecca Marshall-Potter	Director	Folk East
Jayne Austin	Secretary	Association for Suffolk Museums
Bruce Leeke	CEO	Suffolk Libraries
Louise Hardwick	Head of Primary Care Partnerships; Deputy Director of Partnerships and Alliance Delivery	East Suffolk CCG; Ipswich and East Suffolk Alliance
Tom Beese	Arts, Libraries & Museums Project Officer	Suffolk Culture Network, Suffolk County Council

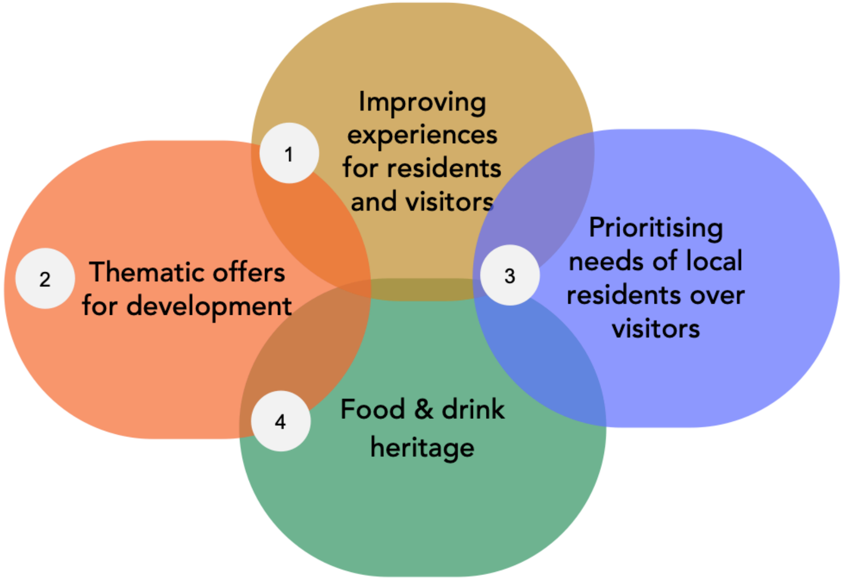
A series of stakeholder engagement workshops were held at The Bank, Eye, Jimmy's Farm & Wildlife Park, Wherstead, Gainsborough's House, Sudbury and The John Peel Centre for the Arts, Stowmarket in November 2022. These workshops tested some early and emerging themes developed from the desk research and one-to-one consultations already undertaken, through use of stimulus questions and facilitated discussions. Attendees included community, cultural, heritage, sport and voluntary groups and organisations; businesses; creative practitioners; and Council officers, with representatives from the following organisations:

Organisation
All About Ipswich
Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils
Churches Conservation Trust
De Vere House Accommodation
Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Dream On CIC & Blossom Charity
EA Festival
East Anglian Festival Network
East Bergholt Parish Council
Eye Heritage Group
Eye Magazine
Eye Town Council
Eyes Open Community Interest Company
Footprints Theatre Company
Freelancers
Frinfings
Gainsborough's House
Hadleigh Town Council
Haughley Park Ltd
Heat Design
Hintlesham Hall Hotel
Jimmy's Farm & Wildlife Park
John Peel Centre for Creative Arts
Little Hall Museum, Lavenham
MENTA
New Anglia LEP

Oakmere Solutions Ltd
Orchestras Live
Rattlesden River Valley Network
Rectory Manor Hotel
River Stour Festival
SCC1
Screen Suffolk
Stow Stories
Stowmarket Town Council
Sudbury Common Lands Charity
Sudbury Museum Trust
Sudbury Town Council
Suffolk Artlink
Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
Suffolk County Council
Suffolk Growth Partnership
Suffolk Libraries
The Banks Arts Centre
The Bridge Project
The ERD Connection
The Food Museum
The Hotel Folk
The Kinetic Science Foundation
The Offshoot Foundation
The Old Rectory, Kettlebaston
The Pin Mill Studio
The Quay Theatre
Thomas Gainsborough School
Visit Hadleigh
Wingfield Barns

Additionally, extensive desk research has been undertaken to build the picture of existing documents, strategies, data and evidence relating to Babergh & Mid Suffolk Councils-led past and current initiatives and other relevant agencies and organisations. This has built a picture of Babergh & Mid Suffolk's strengths and needs in a local, county and regional context.

A dynamic online map of cultural and creative assets is available to continue to be populated at (see screengrab two pages below): https://bit.ly/3WQvB8M. With over 300 categorised entries, it includes theatres, museums, heritage assets, arts centres, visitor attractions, creative infrastructure and supply chain, cinemas, events and music venues, public art, community hubs, visitor attractions and active lifestyle offer. Stimulus sheets (see below) were used to help workshop participants to explore the issues around one of four thematic topics, framed from the responses of earlier 1:1 consultations:



1

Improving experiences for residents and visitors

"What is the main selling point for those that live and work and visit? I don't know."

Visitor number pressures in certain areas, especially around Stour Valley, Dedham Vale.

Need for data and insight to better understand audiences and their behaviours.

Need to broaden audience / visitor demographics.

Issues with visibility of offer for residents and visitors.

"Some people don't want more people to come, but I'd like it to be more vibrant."

"A lot of people who have lived there their whole life – so lack of comparison to other places. They're making comparisons to the past rather than other places."

"If you support creative industries then it will pay back for the long term and will generate ancillary spend."

"As a resident I've always thought that there isn't enough promotion of existing assets on our doorstep."

"We have too many visitors, so we want to improve experience and engagement rather than attract higher numbers. Capacity is an issue."

How can the visitor experience be more localised?

What are local residents proud of? Where do they take their friends and relatives when visiting the area?

How can the local offer be more visible – to residents and to visitors?

What cultural & heritage assets could be used as hooks for hotspots and itineraries?

What does the 'off season' offer in B&MS look like, for residents and visitors?

What infrastructure is needed to improve visitor experiences?

Which demographics are not attending culture / heritage / tourism attractions?

What barriers are there to them attending currently? How can those barriers be overcome?

How can we be more joined-up across the culture, heritage and tourism sector? Why?

Who is managing audiences / visitors – and their experiences – well?

Where is the sector leadership in B&MS?

How could B&MS disperse visitors from honeypot areas?

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3

Prioritising needs of local residents over visitors

Suffolk has an ambition to be the 'greenest' county in the UK (greensuffolk.org) but Mid Suffolk is the 4th worst local authority in England for access to public green space.*

Lack of opportunities for culture / heritage / tourism pathways, study, work experience, paid early career work – young people move away to gain this.

NHS Suffolk & North East Essex ICP is a national leader in social prescribing.

"There are loads of special arts societies (for middle class, retired people), but they're not tapping into everyday people, children and families"

Rural communities and transport challenges make a hyperlocal cultural offer more important

Suffolk Libraries are national leaders in cultural projects.

"People are a lot more aware of benefits of spending time outdoors in green and blue spaces and for health and wellbeing, recharging, time out to do simple things. Access to countryside exists across the district but have to try harder to find it."

"Those small interactions provide structure to the week and reduce isolation. Local regular things are just as vital as bigger venues."

"Mid Suffolk lacks heart because it doesn't make culture part of people's everyday lives."

"The area is becoming increasingly attractive, to new residents and tourists. Local pride needs to be generated to help both – and help not to neglect existing communities."

How can the sector reach and resonate more with residents?

What venues can be utilised for better access to cultural participation?

How can more opportunities for creativity in the outdoors be developed?

What skills development and early career opportunities could be developed for young people?

How can creative engagement be better utilised for promoting improved health and wellbeing?

What partnerships are needed to help tackle rural isolation?

What does being 'the greenest' place mean for the culture, heritage and tourism sector?

Are cultural opportunities evenly distributed, visible, shared? What could or should change in order to rebalance this?

* ONS – Access to public parks and green spaces dataset 2020 - an average distance of 689.33m to access public green space. Babergh is 40th with 533.15m.

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2

Thematic offers for development

"Babergh and Mid Suffolk is clunky, it doesn't have a cohesive identity"

Visual arts heritage

Prioritising outdoor pursuits / water-based activities

Emphasising B&MS' unspoilt quietness as a place to get away from it all and recharge

"Babergh and Mid Suffolk is clunky, it doesn't have a cohesive identity."

"There is an artistic heritage worth celebrating."

"Culture needs punk people not cabinet meetings."

"Many artists and writers have lived and worked here over time, but they are seen as individuals, but not as a cluster or movement. We should be championing the region as a centre of landscape to abstraction art."

"Babergh & Mid Suffolk is a Cinderella place – it has good opportunities but it's in the shadow of Bury, Newmarket and Ipswich."

"Unspoilt, quiet, get away from it all, recharge, cosy, pastoral, soft, beautiful, quaint, pretty, charming, 'twee but attractive'."

"There is a personal appeal, a soul to events here. Not WOW moments but we like to be small, be personal, intimate. Mid Suffolk is not grand or overpowering, it's about individual character."

B&MS has an 'unspoilt quietness' is a place 'to get away from it all and recharge.' Is this the right message? If so, how could this be emphasised? If not, how could it be changed?

How can B&MS make the most of its artistic heritage? What partners are needed to make this successful? What infrastructure needs to be developed or improved?

Growing interest in outdoor pursuits has caused some friction between visitors and residents. Is it better to be on the front foot and better manage outdoor pursuits, or to try and dissuade visitors? Why? How could this be implemented?

What does this mean for residents? What projects and programmes are needed to help residents better engage with these themes?

What's missing from this list? Are there any opportunity areas we have overlooked? What are they?

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4

Food & drink heritage

A growing wine production industry in B&MS.

Links with the environment, sustainability and biodiversity

Existing food-related attractions such as Jimmy's Farm & Suffolk Food Hall.

The Food Museum has the potential to grow national significance.

Two Food Enterprise Zones in Stowmarket and Wherstead.

"There are lots of food attractions developing quickly. It's very encouraging."

"Connecting with food, nature and the environment should be exciting. We want to take away the drudgery of preparing food and make it inspiring"

"Culture-led development is the only game in town. Retail is not the future. Experiences are."

"You don't get big collaborative ideas between heritage sector, never joined up offer."

"Huge number of visitors have expectations about sustainable visit – currently a niche market"

Is this 'the joined-up offer' to prioritise? Does it adequately reflect B&MS' unique identity?

Does this theme balance the needs of residents and visitors? How? (If not, why not?)

How can the sector develop local understanding of B&MS' agricultural heritage? How can the connection with and pride in this heritage grow?

Sharing food is a way to build relationships – how can the local food culture be used to tackle local social issues?

How could this theme explore issues around climate change, biodiversity and appreciation of Suffolk's unique environment?

What partnerships and resources are needed to make the most of this theme?

How can the tourism sector capitalise more on local food heritage and contemporary production?

B&MS could be a sustainable tourism area. What would enable this to grow?

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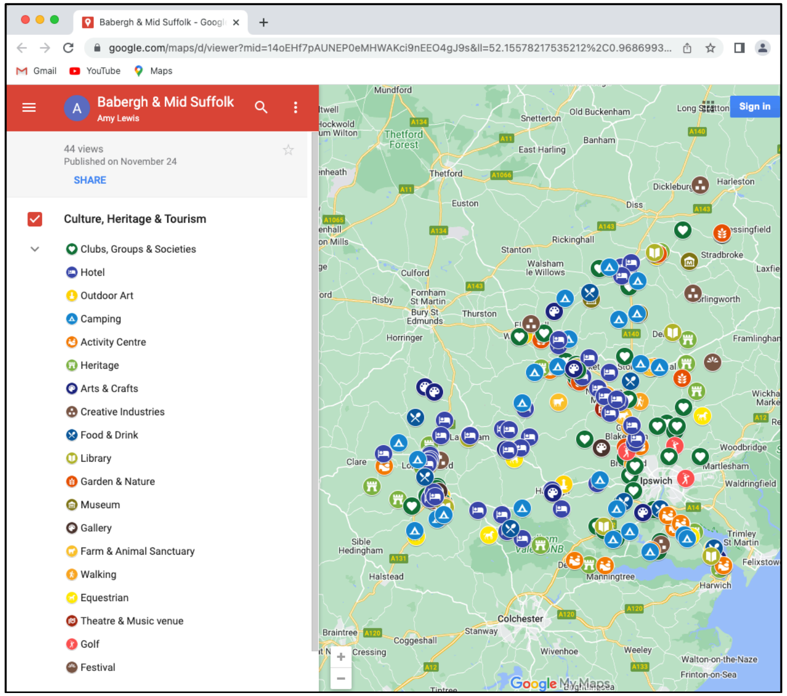
A2.2 Local Context

"Suffolk is the poor cousin of East Anglia and Mid Suffolk is the poor cousin of Suffolk"
Stakeholder

Babergh & Mid Suffolk's cultural, heritage and visitor economy sectors are notable in its structure, variety and distribution.

What do we mean by these three generic titles, and where are the interdependencies?

We are referring to a wide range of diverse, dispersed organisations, businesses, programmes and groups, all of which impact on creative participation and visitor experience and sense of identity for Babergh & Mid Suffolk's residents and visitors. How these layers connect and collaborate in order to realise collective ambitions is key to the success of the area's potential – as is the physical cultural geography; its places and spaces which connect physically, thematically and through shared heritage and identity.



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B1. SWOT analysis

The SWOT analysis is a tried and tested tool, but has lost none of its usefulness over the years. By contextualising the internal issues with those external issues that the Council has less influence over, practical routes forward can be derived.

Strengths & Weaknesses assess skills, resources, culture, historical factors, management, communications and so on – internal factors which are within the control and influence of the Council.

Opportunities & Threats cover governmental matters, wider funding issues, other organisations' behaviour and priorities and so on. These factors are external and normally beyond the scope of direct management and influence.

The chart addresses only issues directly relating to arts & culture, and some elements will be related to wider policy and management issues, e.g. post-pandemic policy, masterplanning etc. Many smaller issues have arisen, but have not been included here in order to focus on the main topics.

Strengths	Weaknesses
– Landscape, environmental heritage; culture as foundation of local life – Contemporary heritage – visual arts, food & drink production, literature – Councils role and relationships within Suffolk and region – 'Naturally' campaign, sustainable tourism, outdoor pursuits – Sense of place – relaxing, tranquil, soft, a place to (re)discover – Demonstrably strong stories and themes, e.g. food, ancient heritage, landscape, nature and pace of living – Accessibility to large domestic visitor markets – Investment in ambitious, nationally significant cultural assets e.g. Gainsborough's House, Food Museum	– A lack of cultural capital (e.g. skills, education, knowledge) within resident populations (who lack cultural entitlement / confidence) – Rural isolation and cultural poverty – Public transport and road networks slow / inhibit movement – Data collection and market insight; data-driven market and product development – Historic infrastructure for attractions to network, collaborate, share (between each other and for residents / visitors) – Lack of developed (bookable) experiences – Food and drink heritage flawed if field to table offer not fully realised, e.g. artisan food, markets, dining offer etc.
Opportunities	**Threats**
– Clear appetite to build cultural capital with resident populations – Change in resident audience and visitor expectations post-pandemic	– Lack of collaboration across regional political boundaries, especially within Suffolk, e.g. Explore Suffolk – Lack of cross-sector working if not continually supported centrally

"Covid has provided a fresh canvas. Audiences are behaving differently. It's time to try new things." – Development of a strong, structured regional destination management model – Development of a strong, structured sub-brand for Babergh & Mid Suffolk destination – Year round offer, winter offer, shoulder season and linking with residents – Contributing to managing regional over-tourism – Valley Ridge: potential game-changing development – Valley Ridge: place / destination positioning / image impact – Tap into spirit of piloting and managed risk taking, e.g. visiteering packages – Emerging locally-driven infrastructure for attractions to network, collaborate, share – Regional visitor markets (e.g. Essex, London), promoting key themes (e.g. outdoors, cultural heritage, food[1]) and new investments – Potential role of culture in place ambassadors programme – Case-making and demonstrable enabling of residents and communities to benefit from visitors, not just absorb the negative impacts (traffic, parking issues, litter, impact of seasonal fluctuations) – a civic pride approach – Screen tourism	(e.g. by Councils) *"Collaboration is not a strength of Suffolk"* *"There's a long tradition of not working together"* – Cost of living crisis and securing a sustainable economic and funding model (even for non-chargeable offer) – National funding focus in other regions – Local destination competitiveness and lack of joint branding, marketing, use of data etc. – Low-wage economy across tourism and hospitality – Access to green space not being proactively incorporated into new developments, from towns – Continued challenges of local provision caused by rurality, e.g. lack of public transport and infrastructure, digital poverty, cultural poverty, social and rural isolation, lack of opportunities for young people etc. – Imbalance between resident and visitor needs

[1] http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/62072

B2. PESTLE analysis

PESTLE is an analytical tool most often in marketing planning. As a tool it can be used to provide an overview and track the environment that a place / organisation is operating in, which can be especially useful when a new plan or product / service is in development.

Political	
Babergh & Mid Suffolk Council	Local elections / leadership – stability of long-term policy commitments. Pockets of deprivation can be hidden by overall level of relative affluence in UK terms.
Revenues	Funding implications from local settlements and strategic priorities / plans.
Regional – County Council, LEP, ACE, East of England	Regional partnerships and policy imperatives – whether that is the national Let's Create arts strategy or rural regeneration plans, Babergh & Mid Suffolk needs to connect in to these visions with local and regional partnerships.
National	National government policy and influence on funding and investment, e.g. Levelling Up, Towns Fund, Shared Prosperity Fund.
Economic	
Post-pandemic	Responses[2] have included a new innovation network, key towns programme, identifying cultural regeneration as a key driver[3], grant schemes (notably for SMEs), Virtual High Street programme, Innovation Local (retail).
Development & investment	Regeneration – active and pipeline projects, including visitor attraction / culture venue / heritage site investment, town centre masterplanning and major private sector projects. Local powerhouses – environment, outdoor, food, tourism and visitor experience.
Work	Employment levels show marked differences across the two districts, and when set against regional averages. Key sectors and growth areas – Freeport East, Valley Ridge and food production are highlighted alongside culture / creative / digital and media, and leisure and hospitality. But the creative and tourism industries are lacking the investment and support necessary to grow. The cost-of-living crisis is impacting on households' ability to access paid / ticketed cultural provision – in Suffolk and elsewhere.
Social	
General	Schools – quality and diversity is generally good, and appealing to households with / planning families Health & wellbeing, especially mental health, post-pandemic – rural isolation as an exacerbating factor.
Trends	Post-pandemic lifestyle and consumer behaviour trends – a continued reluctance to attend cultural venues and ticketed events, magnified again by the cost-of-living crisis.

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[2] https://www.babergh.gov.uk/assets/Communications/Recovery-Plan-2022.pdf
[3] https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Culture-led%20regeneration%20achieving%20inclusive%20and%20sustainable%20growth.pdf

	Hyper-localism – the potential benefit of a polycentric borough of towns and villages to respond to cultural appetites on a more local level.
Technological	
People	Skills and talent development – there is a focus on the areas noted in the Economic section. Flexible working and impacts on local services. This is an emerging factor / opportunity, and one that an urban / suburban / rural district needs to address carefully.
Digital	Data capture and management – whether plugging into regional 'Big Data' projects or more local and/or culture-led. Media and communication infrastructure (hardware and software) – usage, attitudes etc., understanding how the districts engage, its hotspots and preferred channels.
Legal	
Data	GDPR and data protection – the role of the Councils and key (districts, East of England) agencies in managing and using resident data.
Planning & development	Culture sector and provision status – as discretionary provision of local government. Local exemplars of creative and cultural investment and regeneration, e.g. Food Museum, Food Enterprise Zones, Mill Lane Stowmarket; and devolvement e.g. Vision Programme (Eye, Hadleigh, Needham Market, Stowmarket, Sudbury). Local policy and management – the planning, health & safety, licensing and cross-functional approach to supporting proposals, programmes and operational activity.
Environmental	
	Carbon neutral agenda – the priorities and relevance of the Environment and Climate Change Task Force for Babergh & Mid Suffolk, connected to wider regional and national strategies and funded programmes. Heritage and conservation – the relationship between culture and heritage through venues, conservation areas, biodiversity and access. Natural environment conservation – the relationship between culture and heritage through venues, conservation areas, biodiversity and access.

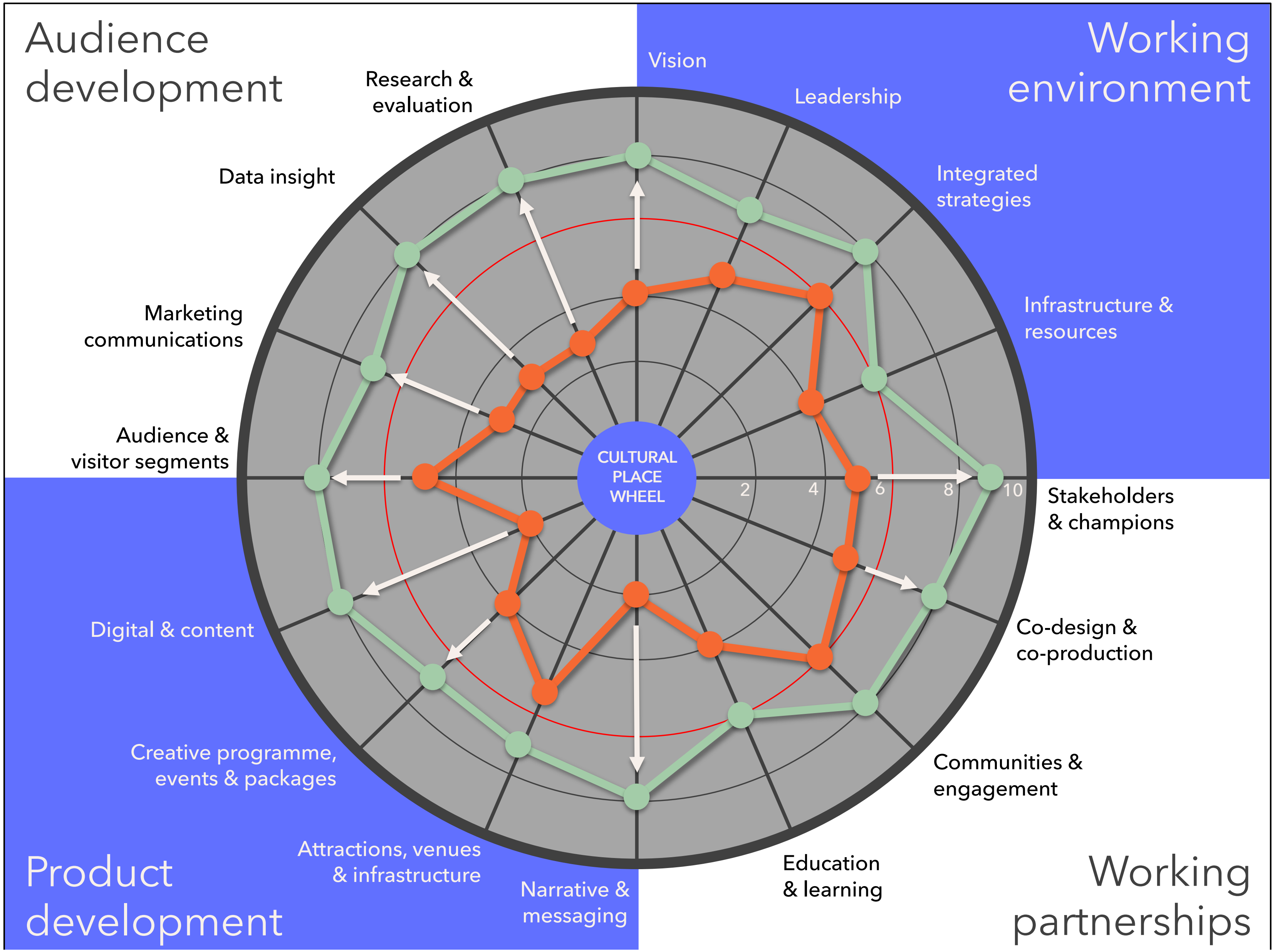
B3. Culture place wheel®

This wheel was populated at the end of the initial consultation phase, presenting a consultancy team view. Whilst subjective and indicative, it presents an assessment of where Babergh & Mid Suffolk is currently (allowing for variances including the pandemic) and where changes could be made and the impacts they could have with current plans and programmes in mind. This is very informative when looking at investment priorities, as well as the audience development potential – by volume, by motivation, by typology.

Some supporting annotation follows, but the wheel sets out a rating for a number of audience-focused criteria (0-10, where 0 is extremely poor and 10 is perfection).

The green line represents the current level of performance and the orange line presents the possible uplift from a successful development cycle in c.5 years' time post-investment or shift in approach – e.g. a new cultural strategy. The white arrows highlight where marked changes – more transformational – are seen as achievable targets within the current plans.

This is a districts-wide analysis. Clearly some programmes, venues and plans have a notable influence, but the (subjective) ratings seek to present a balanced view.



Audience development
Research & evaluation
Data insight
Marketing communications
Audience & visitor segments
Vision
Leadership
Working environment
Integrated strategies
Infrastructure & resources
CULTURAL PLACE WHEEL
2
4
6
8
10
Stakeholders & champions
Co-design & co-production
Communities & engagement
Education & learning
Working partnerships
Digital & content
Creative programme, events & packages
Attractions, venues & infrastructure
Narrative & messaging
Product development

Element	Commentary
Working environment	
Vision	There is no current unifying vision for culture, heritage and tourism – which of course the new strategy will help with. Previous individual plans and strategies have been individual, e.g. visitor economy only.
Leadership	Having a twin-local authority model provides no shortage of leaders. The challenge is to engineer an effective and efficient strategic leadership, building on strong officer-level engagement and operational leadership.
Integrated strategies	The portfolio of strategies across Babergh & Mid Suffolk demonstrate a clear set of cross-cutting priorities that this Strategy can connect with.
Infrastructure & resources	A largely rural geography inevitably creates challenges for connectivity – of transport, online and wider service provision. However, cluster activity mitigates this alongside District-wide and County programmes. There is relevant infrastructure for transport, libraries and outdoor – but these assets are not always fully exploited, especially from a cultural heritage perspective.
Working partnerships	
Stakeholders & champions	Some existing strong voices exist at local and regional level, but more are needed. More critically, they need to have coherence and consistency, in messaging, targeting and timing. The emergence of a new destination management organisation for East of England is an example of a sector recognising a weakness and seeking to mitigate it collectively.
Co-design & co-production	Limited due to lack of resource and networks to deliver this. Its importance is understood in principle, but it has proved harder to deliver in practice. Not all responses need to be large-scale or regional, and the cultural heritage distinctiveness of market towns and villages can be an effective 'place platform', as can be seen in Stowmarket and now Sudbury (Vision bodies and Culture Groups). As this strategy suggests, working across traditional sectors (like culture, heritage and the visitor economy) can create more funding and development opportunities.
Communities & engagement	There are lots of grassroots organisations (funded and voluntary) delivering community-based work and lots of opportunities to work with them, and encourage their ongoing programmes and development. The fragmented geography makes this a potential priority focus within the Strategy.
Education & learning	A strong education sector delivering formal cultural learning is present, but with the omission of a LCEP (present in West Suffolk, East Suffolk, Ipswich, Lowestoft for example).
Product development	
Narrative & messaging	In 'place' terms, Babergh & Mid Suffolk has a problem. It doesn't really exist on the map (the one that the world uses anyway). As such it is not, and cannot become a destination (or at least it cannot without massive and unnecessary investment). The place narrative already exists around the Districts – at regional, county, and local levels. There are times when using 'Babergh & Mid Suffolk' makes sense, e.g. when a strong, committed local

	authority partner is essential. This includes regeneration, general economic development and inward investment. This is essentially messaging in a business-to-business context, and should not be blurred with consumer-facing messaging, as for tourism or community engagement with culture. Mixing these together will confuse audiences, investors and stakeholders. In tourism, the Heart of Suffolk destination brand has been used (with some impact) in the past, although it has been unsurprisingly overshadowed by the Norfolk / Suffolk coast narrative. This does not mean it cannot be effective, and indeed draw on the strengths of the coastal visitor offer to its own advantage. Once a narrative is defined (whilst being open to working across geo-political boundaries where the market dictates) the messaging can be developed, connecting culture, heritage and the visitor offer. This is currently lacking in terms of structure and management of a place brand positioning, and therefore in promotional terms for the culture and/or heritage and/or visitor offer that you can expect to enjoy in Babergh and Mid Suffolk. As already noted, there are encouraging collaborations beginning in some market towns, but it is early days. The Strategy process will help to shape and define this – for the districts, for Councils, and for key venues and themed (artform, hospitality etc.) place-based consortia and networks. A more positive assessment can be in part based on connecting with existing messages around a common (but not constraining) set of brand values.
Attractions, venues & infrastructure	There are plenty of quality cultural, heritage and attraction venues of most types and sizes and for all audiences and group types. A national museum, confidently rebranding. Perhaps the most famous farm park in the country. And yet… this has awareness with existing visitors but perhaps less so for potential markets. The heritage of the region is diverse, but perhaps leading themes – food for example – can facilitate more joined-upness in presenting, and developing the offer for local and tourist audiences.
Creative programme, events & packages	The Districts deliver a distinct and diverse offer, working within constraints of funding, infrastructure and so on. But it does not always match up to the quality expected by visitors and audiences, or tap into local collective creative talent.
Digital & content	There is a lack of coordinated approach, which needs to be addressed via a common vision and narrative, as well as investment in infrastructure, capacity and skills.
Audience development	
Audience & visitor segments	There are strong and active base of cultural attenders across the districts, and pockets of strong visitor activity, but they are consuming culture in particular elsewhere more often than inside (the coast, Norwich, Ipswich,

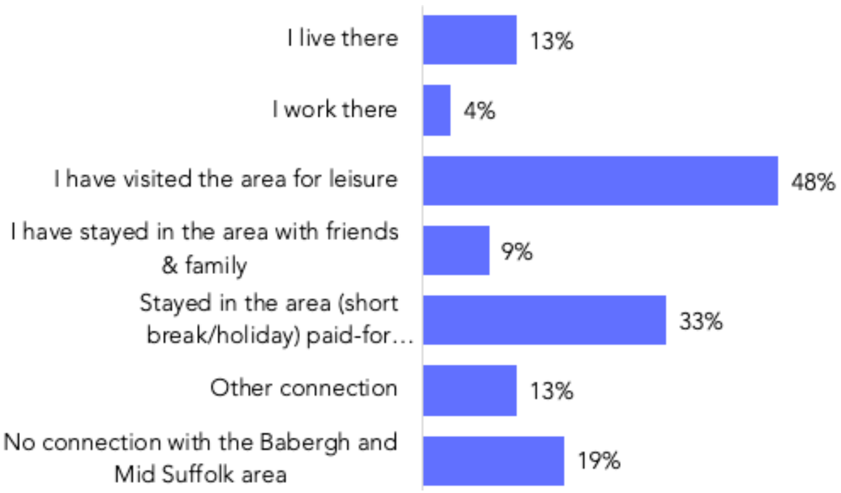
	Bury St Edmunds etc. are notable 'pulls'). The demographic that heads for the coast in large numbers is also receptive to the inland offer (and has to pass through it).
Marketing communications	The vision and narrative development will shape marketing planning and campaign delivery and help convert local audiences to consume culture more locally, and encourage visitors to take a closer look at Babergh & Mid Suffolk.
Data insight	No detailed data has been provided but it would be easy to begin monitoring this in a simple, structured way. The opportunity to overlay data and forward plans from the key cultural, heritage and visitor attraction organisations would create additional insight to develop local programmes and audiences. Furthermore, hospitality and accommodation (and related transport) is very fragmented, leaving broad regional surveys and anecdotal evidence as main sources of market insight.
Research & evaluation	Cultural planning as districts can be limited by a lack of data, but this should be easy to address with coordination and modest investment.

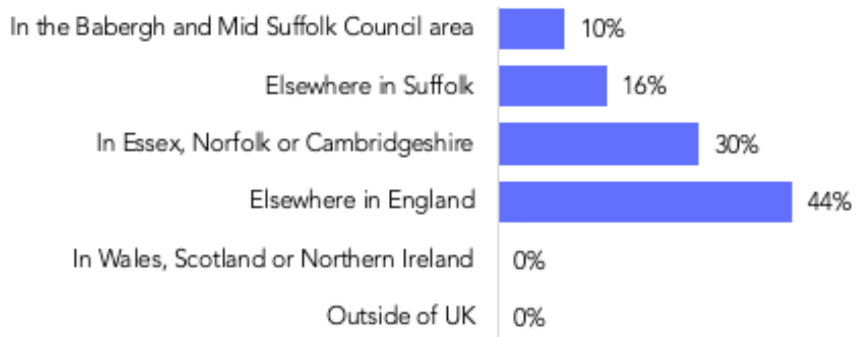
B4. Visitor survey

B4.1 Overview

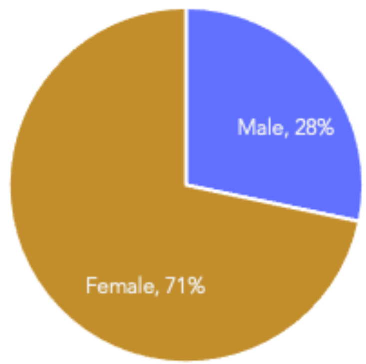
A total of 86 online responses were generated in the first wave, with a further two-week promotional push from 30 December expected to bring further responses. This summary is based on the initial 80 received by 30 November 2022, following survey launch on the evening of 24 November.

The sample showed a skew to older female respondents. As expected from the source database (a visitor database held by the Council), a good proportion have visited the area previously. Of those 26% have visited in the last couple of months, 34% in Summer 2022 and the rest in 2021 or before.

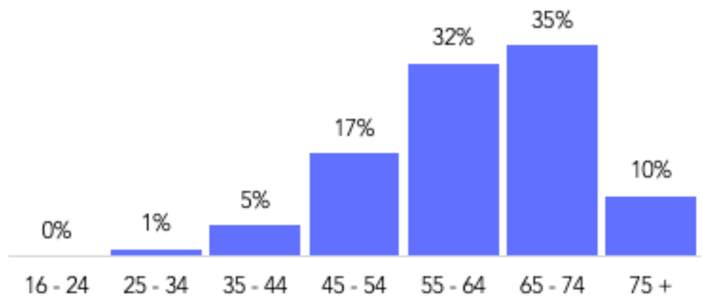




A good spread of locals and non-locals were represented.

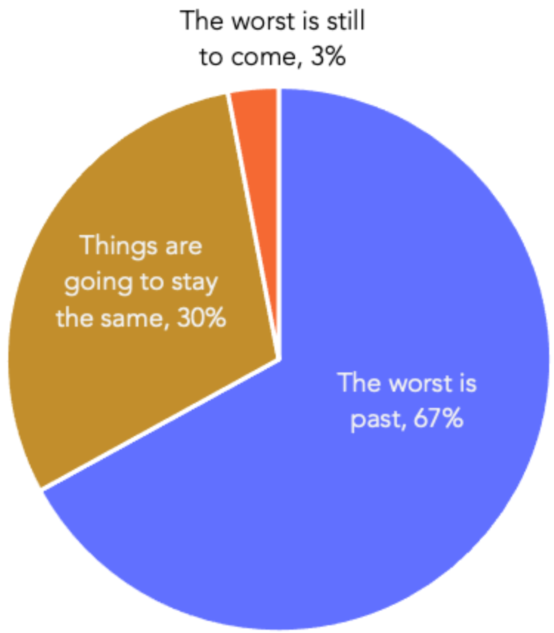


71% do not have children in their household, and 51% are retired, reflecting the older-than-average demographic.

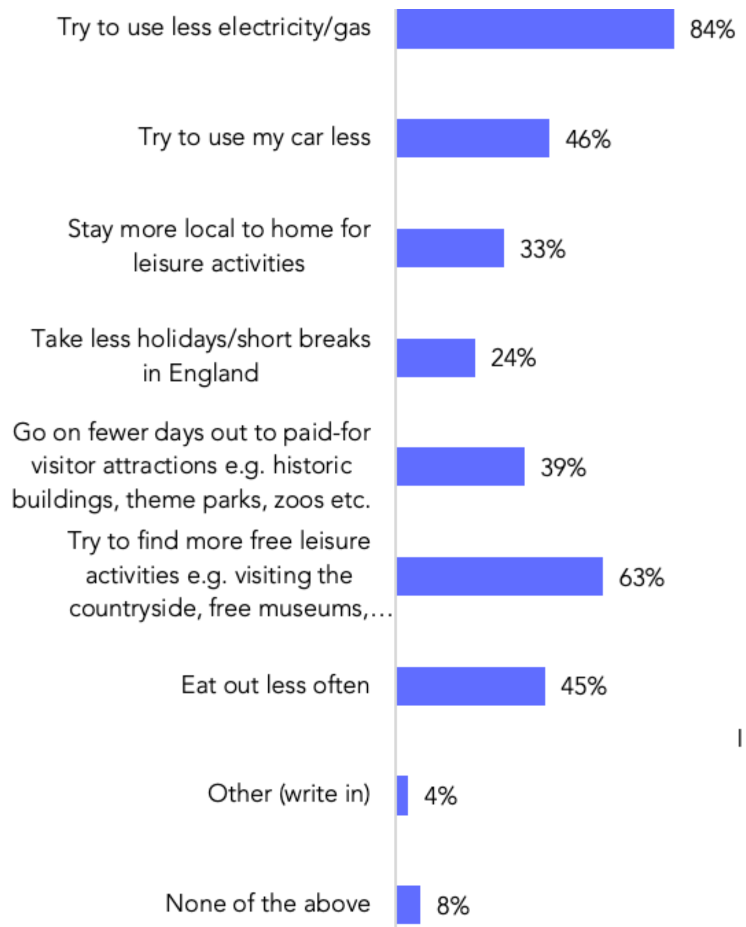


B4.2 Profiles – confidence and financial stability

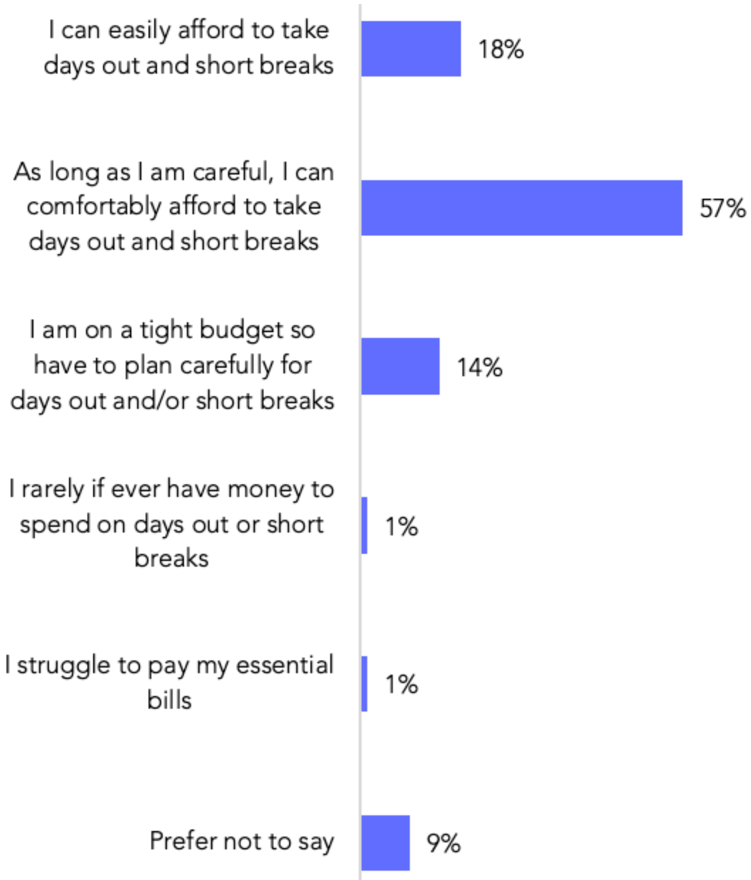
Some caution still surrounds Covid – understandable, even before considering the older profile. A survey has a reasonably affluent group of respondents, though budget management a growing challenge, with many cutting back on leisure spend. Younger people and those with kids are most financially concerned.



Regarding the situation of Coronavirus in the UK and the way it is going to change in the coming months, which of the following best describes your opinion?



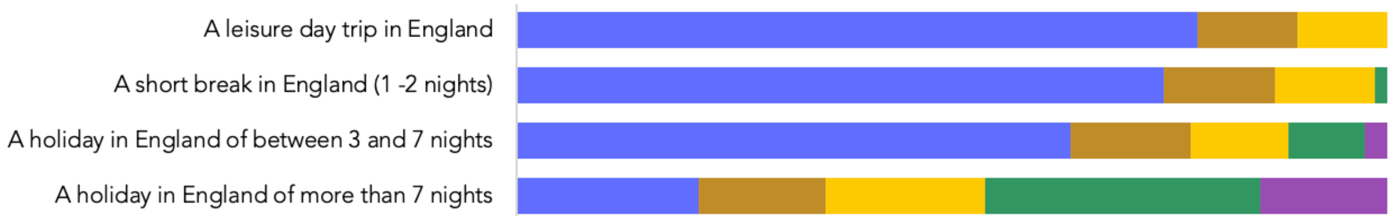
Regarding the 'cost of living' crisis in the UK, and the way it is going to change over the coming months, which, if any, of the following are you likely to do in response to the current economic situation?



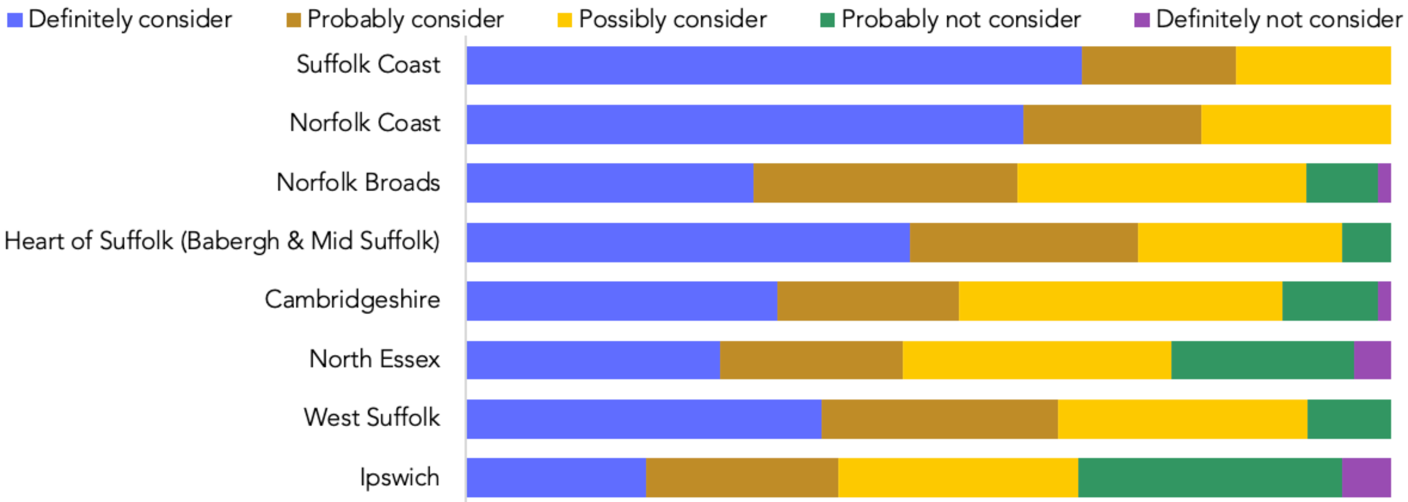
How would you describe your financial situation currently?

B4.3 Profiles – travel habits

Day trips and short breaks are still definitely planned for the next year, longer stays less so. This engaged audience are likely to consider trips to Babergh & Mid Suffolk, though the coast (Norfolk and Suffolk) remain more popular options.



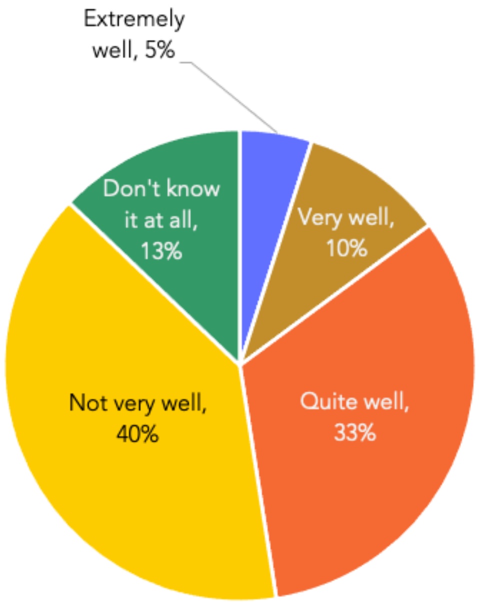
How likely are you to consider doing each of the following in the next 12 months?



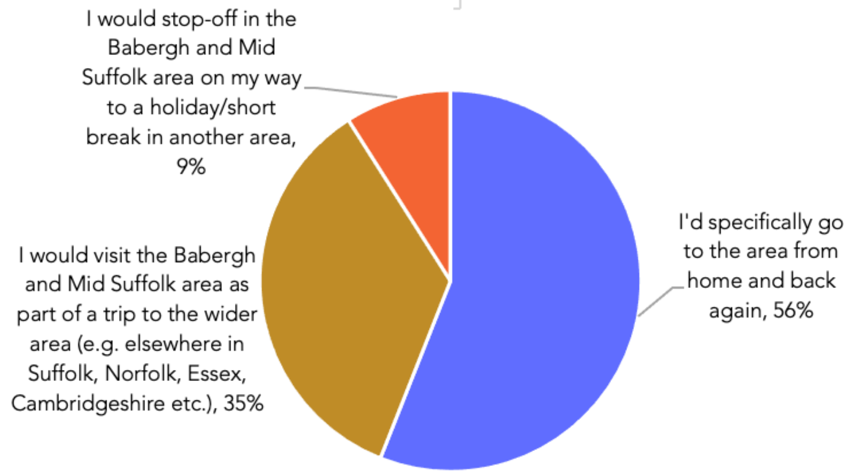
How likely are you to consider visiting each of these places for a day trip or short break in the next year or so?

B4.4 Profiles – travel habits

Knowledge of the area is quite limited. Most likely visits are day trips or short breaks in paid-for accommodation. Just over half would visit the area specially and a third would visit as part of a wider trip to the area.



How well do you know the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Area?



Which, if any of the following might you consider doing in the Babergh and Mid Suffolk area in the next 12 months?

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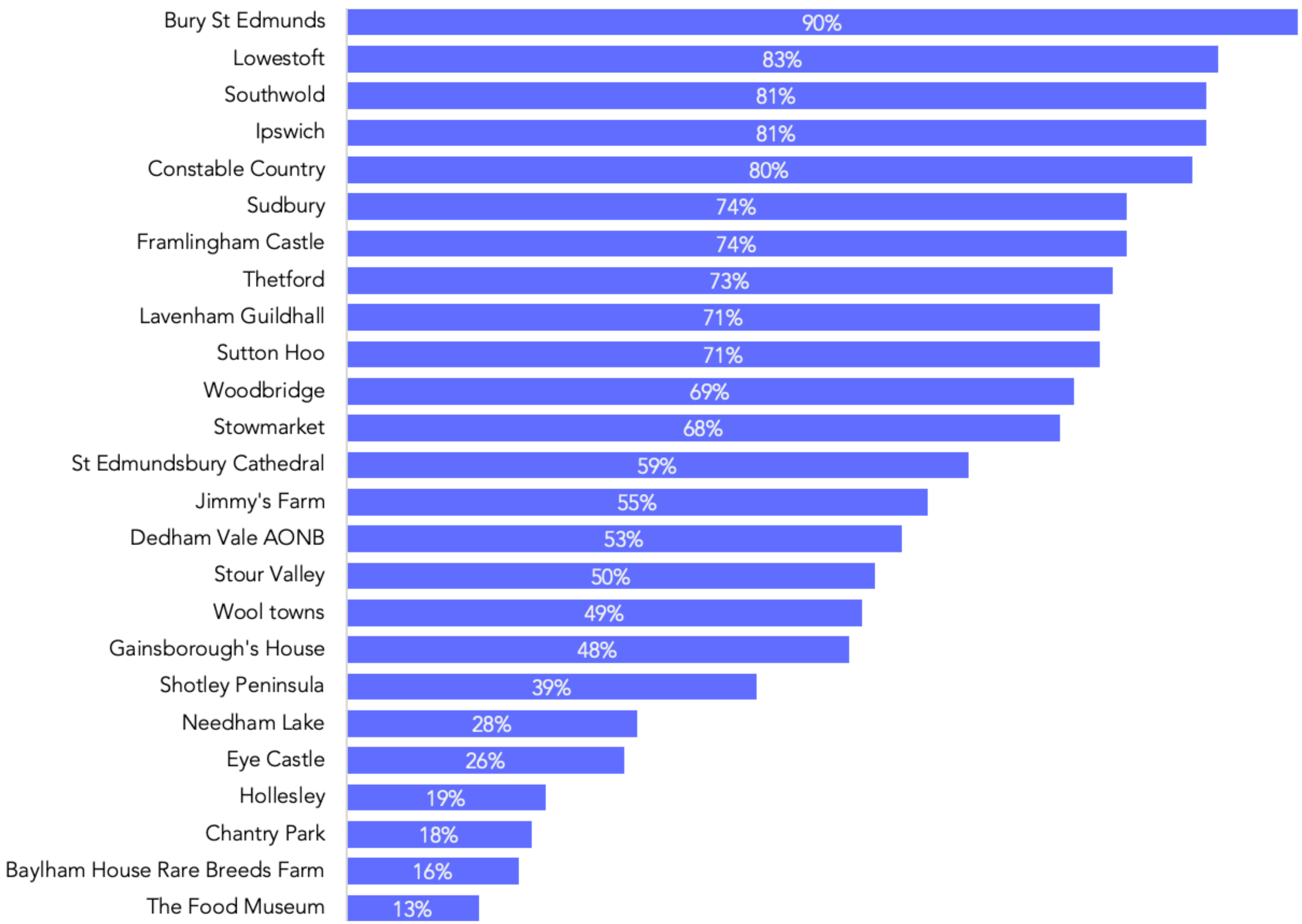
B4.5 Place and attraction – awareness

There is strong awareness of main towns, Constable Country and several of the major attractions.



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B4.6 Describing Babergh and Mid Suffolk

Descriptors are predominantly linked to countryside and rural themes. Some potential misattribution are present, as a few mentions are made of the coast. This is not unexpected, as the area will be conflated with Suffolk as a whole for some.

"Beautiful towns and villages, full of character and charm. Full of history – so much to do and see – something for everyone."

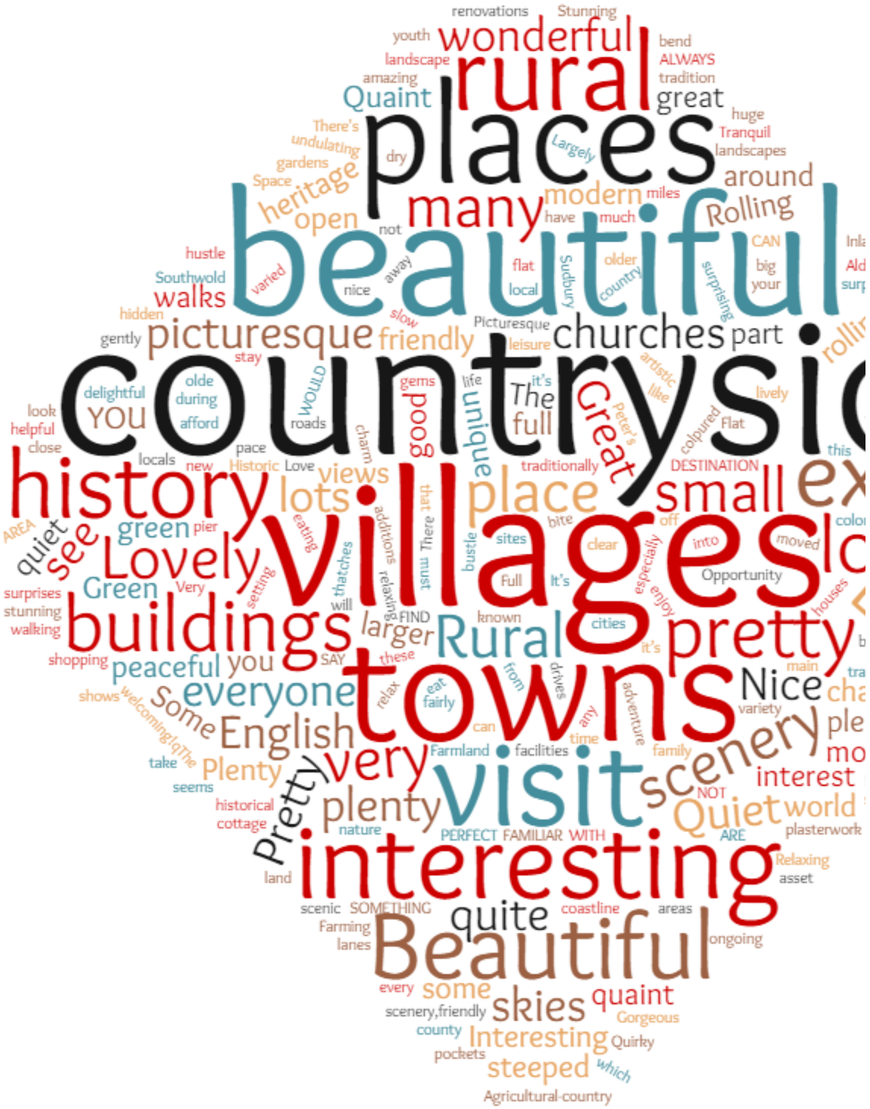
"Lots of beautiful and historic towns and villages, and lovely green countryside."

"An area that is steeped in tradition, with modern additions. Picturesque views and buildings, with modern shopping facilities in the larger towns and cities. Plenty of unique places to visit and explore."

"A rural quite traditionally English area with many olde world villages to explore. Some have many beautiful buildings and churches to enjoy walking around in the peace and quiet these places afford away from the hustle and bustle of larger busier towns."

"Quintessentially English, thatches, cottage gardens, coloured plasterwork, peaceful."

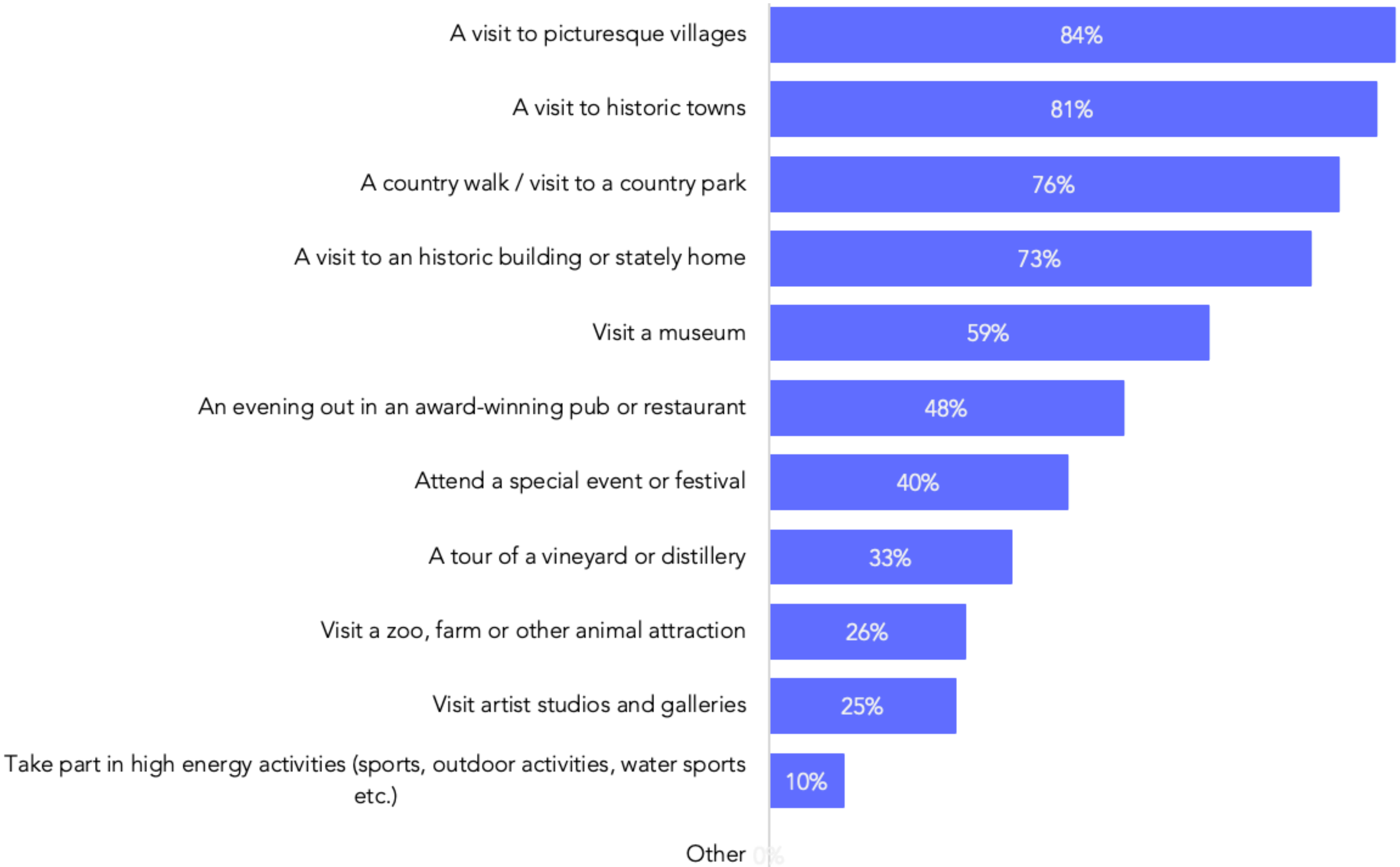
How might you describe the Babergh and Mid Suffolk area to other people (if you aren't familiar with it, please say how you imagine it might be)? (selected verbatim quotes)



How might you describe the Babergh and Mid Suffolk area to other people (if you aren't familiar with it, please say how you imagine it might be)? (word cloud of keyword responses)

B4.6 Leisure activities and attractions

This focus on rural / countryside leads to the most likely activities being relaxing, mainly outdoor activities.

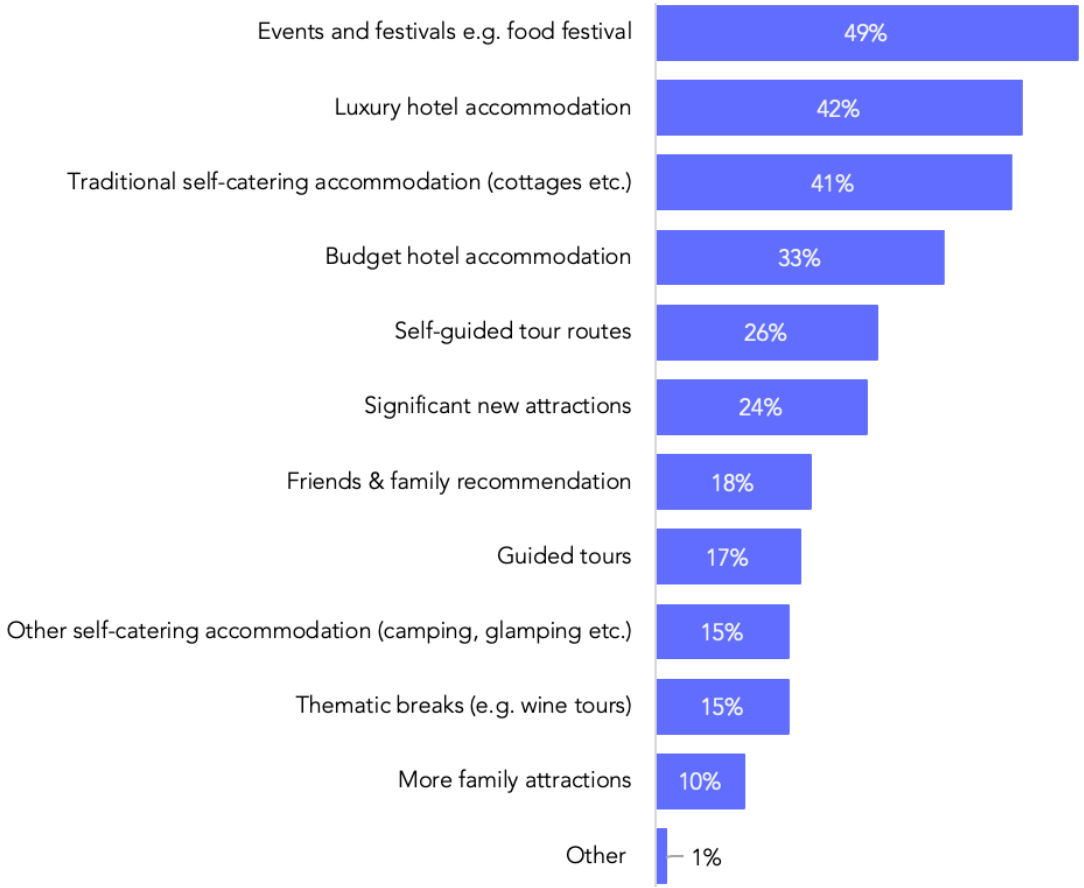


Which of these activities might you anticipate doing in the Babergh and Mid Suffolk area?

B4.7 Encouraging visits

Events and festivals are recognised as something that would trigger a visit, with the virtue of creating a time-sensitive reason to visit that can overcome procrastination ('*it'll still be there next year*'). New attractions more generally are also of interest, so showcasing where new attractions / offers exist or are 'coming soon' is a key for promotional activity.

Accommodation choices are vital for optimising visitor volumes – from luxury to affordable options.



What would encourage you to consider visiting the Babergh and Mid Suffolk area?

B4.8 What they love, and want to improve

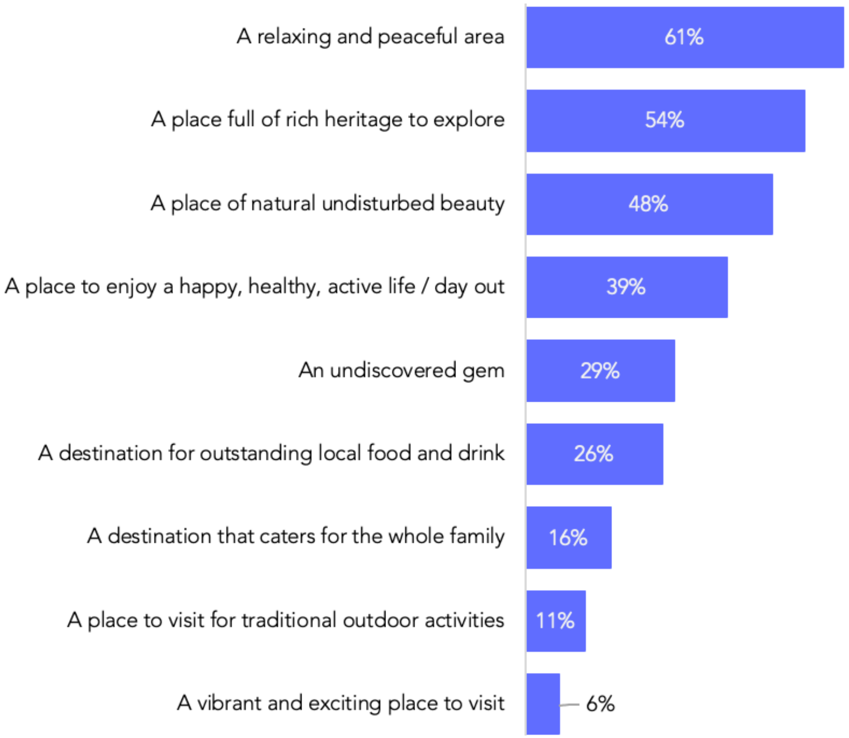
Again, countryside and rural themes dominate the positives. There are few active negatives mentioned – with improvements mainly around affordability (accommodation) and a few mentions of public transport, cycle routes and advertised / marked walking routes.

What do you love best and why, about Babergh and Mid Suffolk?

What, if anything, would make Babergh and Mid Suffolk more appealing as a leisure destination for you?

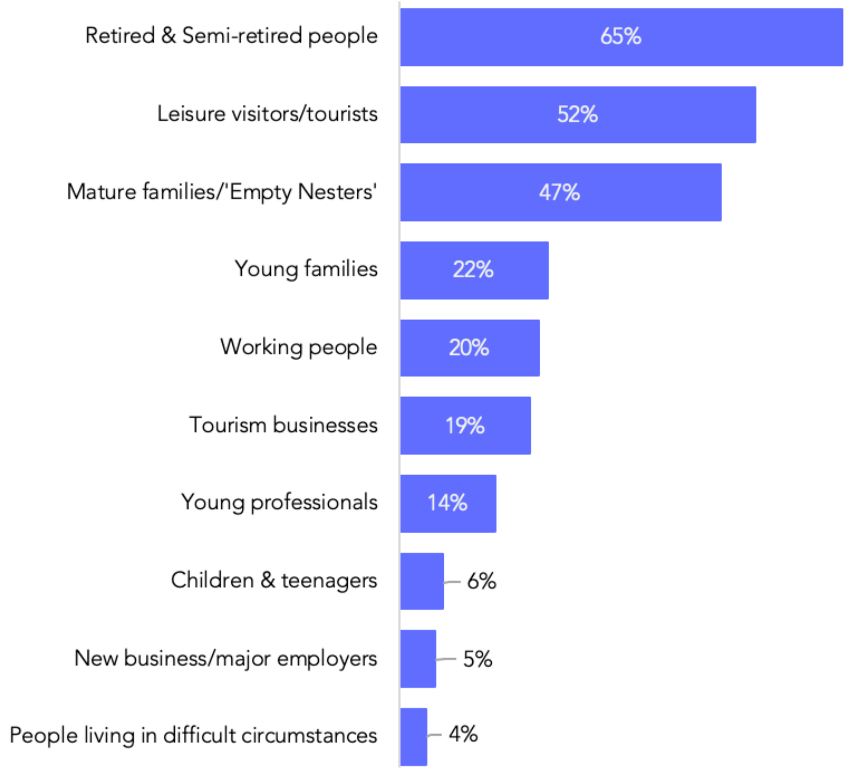
B4.9 Descriptors

Descriptors again centre on calm and peaceful images of countryside and heritage.



Please select up to 3 of these statements which you think most likely to apply to the Babergh and Mid Suffolk area?

The target audience is, for the most part, 'people like me' taking part in the survey i.e. older people without children.



C1. Looking Ahead

A number of key insights have emerged as this process has progressed. They will all feed directly into the next stage of development for the Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy Strategy.

There is much to build on. There is a diverse cultural and creative ecology across Babergh & Mid Suffolk – which is bigger and broader than many realise. Whilst it is fragmented and (often) fragile, the work of the sector players and partners has a straightforward connection into wider programmes, including masterplanning and public realm, place-making and place-based working.

Consequently, the opportunity to deliver to a consensus around local visions and values will help to leverage more collaborative working across key agencies and communities in Babergh & Mid Suffolk.

The resulting impact on collective visibility, engagement and partnership will help to build a more resilient and strategically-focused network of cultural, heritage and tourism partners. Looking at how the Strategy might now be envisioned, the opportunities to demonstrate how it can work in practice can start to emerge.

Emerging areas of focus for the Strategy therefore include:

1. The creation of a powerful, **shared narrative vision** for the cultural heritage and visitor offer. One that can be used to champion the many strengths of the sectors together, but also make the case for investment to ensure they can respond to the evident needs and opportunities within the wider community and markets.
2. Work within Babergh & Mid Suffolk and at a regional level to redefine a **positioning for the heartland of Suffolk**, built on environment, food, culture and heritage – developing reasons to visit and stay for tourists, and opportunities to participate and develop public spaces and programmes locally.
3. Defining how the Councils will supply the **leadership and drive** for districts-wide cultural engagement – drawing on its existing good operational practices and networks to date. The nature of the role of local authorities in driving this agenda forward – as a leader, a partner, a convenor – will be critical. This is alongside how this Strategy will contribute to Councils priority agendas, regeneration and responsibilities for ensuring a virtuous **balance between the needs of residents and visitors**, e.g. over-tourism, local services.
4. Locally-based elements of the strategy need to explicitly embed the principles and practice of EDI – **Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity** – to mitigate historic inequities of opportunity and representation.
5. Establishing **cross-sector collaborative practice** at a local level (e.g. Shotley Peninsula, Eye), within and across the Councils and also drawing in county and regional partner contributions – bringing strategic partners to the table to respond to shared agendas, e.g. transport, town centres, health & wellbeing; inclusion and cost of living; education & skills; regeneration & inward investment; leisure & tourism economy and enterprise (including tourist dispersal and itineraries); environment; digital.
6. Scoping an appropriate (and manageable) set of **networks, hubs and clusters** that will enable better and stronger:
    i. *Collaboration* (e.g. strategic interventions and

development programmes, events, cross-sector partnerships);

ii. *Coordination* (e.g. marketing communications, programming);

iii. *Capability & Capacity building* (e.g. skills development, data capture, shared learning, resources).

These will need to consider how they can work for different localities across Babergh & Mid Suffolk, as well as district-wide clusters and networks given the wide range of needs to respond to. This is likely to include fresh thinking and consideration of roles for local government officers in how they connect to key partners like East of England DMO, the LEP and County Council; and for hubs in the town centre localities such as Stowmarket Culture Group – in order to create an effective layered network.

7. **Digital transformation** – including infrastructure, programmes and upskilling re: the capture and use of data, and how to harness to drive better intelligence & insight; digital engagement and communications activity; commerciality & income generation.
8. Further activation of the strong (but often overshadowed by the coast) and distinctive **blue & green assets** as 'connective' spaces for cultural heritage and visitor activity and engagement (drawing on food, heritage and climate as sub-themes) – and similarly, activation of the towns and village centres and high streets as spaces for cultural and event activity and engagement in partnership with BIDS, developers, accommodation providers, producers, schools, and diverse community groups.
9. A 'collective' response to the **cost of living crisis**. Identifying what this could mean in terms of access to provision; the opportunity to engage with harder-to-reach attenders by promoting cultural venues and heritage experiences as creative 'warm' spaces; to embed ways of working with the volunteer and community hubs network; how to mitigate the financial impact on cultural enterprises and small businesses (publicly funded or otherwise).
10. Establishing clear **pathways for young people** in Babergh & Mid Suffolk to access thematic, creative and cultural activities (for skills, talent and career development, enterprise or 'just' life-enrichment) beyond Key Stage 4 / 5 and also outside of the formal education environment. A bespoke 'LCEP'-style approach[4] to cultural education which specifically responds to local needs (which may change dramatically as local families reassess spending during the cost-of-living crisis). Coupled with strategic partnerships including the further education sector, cultural education could be delivered via an innovative and blended model, building on existing strengths in sports and leisure education.

The Strategy vision and aims will be developed from these ten pillars to set the level of scale and scope and level of ambition. In other words, setting out, in challenging times, what will success look like in 5-10 years if this strategy is effective?

The next opportunity for the client team to fully engage with and challenge the strategic direction that we will be recommending will be the supply of the draft vision, aims and objectives. We will also be following up with some specific 1:1 conversations with select stakeholders and officers to expand on some of the development thinking for the strategic objectives and priorities, ahead of full drafting of the Strategy. This should include members of the leadership team, to ensure the right balance across culture, heritage and tourism within the strategy.

[4] LCEPs are established in almost every other part of Suffolk.

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