



15-Minute Neighbourhood: Survey Results

Brenda Boardman and Alison Hill

March 2022

www.cohsat.org.uk
cohsatoxon@gmail.com

1. Executive summary

The CoHSAT online survey identified, from a list of 19 basic amenities, those that a representative sample of 450 Oxfordshire residents said they want to have within walking distance of their home. A 15 minute walk each way was considered by the majority to be a reasonable distance, so we recommend the adoption of the “15-minute neighbourhood” concept for planning in Oxfordshire rather than the alternative 20 minute (10 minutes there and 10 back) sometimes proposed.

The responses show a strong level of consistency across sub-groups in terms of the most frequently selected priority amenities, namely (1) park or other green space; (2) shop selling basics including newspapers; (3) post office; (4) GP surgery/health centre; (5) pharmacy; (6) supermarket. The next most frequently chosen were café/coffee shop; pub; ATM; nursery or primary school.

The data provides good insight at top level and when analysed by type of locality: city/town centre, suburbs, villages. When broken down further by postcode, the numbers are small but can be indicative of where there may be gaps in the provision of key services. However, the survey is not able to answer questions about the calibre of the service provided by existing amenities - for instance, some of the small shops are quite expensive. In Blewbury, the shop is in a garage at the corner of the village, which represents a 35-minute walk for residents in the opposite corner. In all cases, the details of the locality are important in determining the best solutions for the inhabitants.

This report covers the findings of the online survey: a further paper is available from CoHSAT to examine [policy implications](#) and potential solutions. Meanwhile these findings can provide a stimulus, a new pair of glasses for residents to spur them on to take a new look at their village / town / area and hopefully inspire them to develop some new ideas. While recognising the difficulties of getting less advantaged groups involved in the survey discussion, CoHSAT would encourage residents to talk to their local councillors.

2. Background/context

A 15-minute neighbourhood (15MN) exists when essential services are within 15 minutes' walk of people's homes. But what services and should it be 15 minutes? These are the questions we set out to answer with an online survey. So a 15-minute neighbourhood occurs when most people in the area can get to the main amenities they want with a 15-minute walk each way from their house. Little is known about what people consider to be the most important amenities and how this varies with their location: village, small town, city, etc. We believe this is the first survey of

what constitutes a 15-minute neighbourhood for people across the whole range of communities in Oxfordshire, from small hamlets to the centre of Oxford City.

Another factor behind undertaking the survey is the recognition that there are large sectors of society that do not own or have access to a car, perhaps a quarter of all households nationally. This includes those that:

- do not have a driving licence;
- are incapacitated by age, disability or illness and unable to drive;
- are unable to afford the expense.

For these people, getting to distant amenities is restricted and may depend upon expensive, infrequent or non-existent buses.

For existing developments the survey results will provide evidence for residents, planners and commercial enterprises as to what is there now and what is wanted. For new developments, it informs the planners so they can require the provision of basic amenities from the beginning.

3. Objectives and methodology

Objective 1: to understand which amenities are most important for people to have in their own communities, so that if they were provided this would limit the need for residents to get into a car.

Objective 2: to check 15-minute vs 20-minute neighbourhood

Our online survey was conducted in November-December 2021, promoted through local networks and social media in the whole of Oxfordshire.

Respondents were asked a series of multiple-choice questions to establish which amenities are located within a 15-minute walk of their home and invited to select their top six priorities from a list of 19 amenities. They were then asked which amenities they have and want/need/don't need; and which they don't have and want/don't want/need. The survey asked how long, on a sliding scale, people thought was a reasonable length of time in minutes to walk to their chosen amenities. A final raft of questions probed frequency of getting online deliveries, working from home, health conditions and disability as well as demographic information.

An open question at the end of the survey provided an opportunity for comments.

4. The sample

We received 450 responses (after eliminating duplicates) though some questionnaires were incomplete (eg didn't provide some demographic details), giving a good number of Oxfordshire residents to analyse at top level. While the numbers are too small to be statistically significant at sub-group level, the information can be used to gain qualitative insights and to raise questions for further exploration.

The respondents are reasonably representative of the population of Oxfordshire (Table 1) based on statistics published by the [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(JSNA\)](#), though we had somewhat fewer rural residents and more pensioners than would have been expected. Respondents were split 57% female /43% male (so slight female bias)

Table 1 Representativeness of CoHSAT sample, by type of locality

	Oxfordshire JSNA	CoHSAT sample
Live in City / town	60%	67%
Rural	40%	33%
65+ years old, in Oxford City	12%	37%
65+ years old, other 4 District Councils	20%	

According to [Oxfordshire JSNA](#) numbers, in 2017 older people aged 65+ made up 20% of the estimated population of Oxfordshire's four rural districts, compared with 12% of the population of Oxford City. In our survey older people aged 65+ make up 37.4% of respondents, so are over-represented – though note that older age groups are increasing rapidly in Oxfordshire. Very few of our respondents were younger than 25 years old (Table 2).

Table 2 CoHSAT sample, by age

Survey respondents by age	No	%
17 or under	3	0.7
18-24	8	1.8
25-34	25	5.7
35-44	65	14.7
45-54	69	15.6
55-64	100	22.7
65-74	112	25.4
75 or over	53	12.0
Prefer not to say	6	1.4
Total	441	

The Oxfordshire JSNA statistics show that 60% of Oxfordshire's residents are concentrated in Oxford City and the county's main towns, with almost 40% of people living in smaller towns and villages. In our survey, the split is 67% city/town dwellers to 33% village/rural (Table 3). Therefore, in aggregate the data is fairly representative of the county.

Table 3 CoHSAT sample by locality

Survey respondents by locality	No	%
Oxford suburbs	157	35.6
Oxford centre	39	8.9
Town suburbs	65	14.7
Town centre	36	8.2
Large village (Pop >2,000)	52	11.8
Small village (< 2,000)	87	19.7
Hamlet	3	0.7
Other	2	0.4
Total	441	100

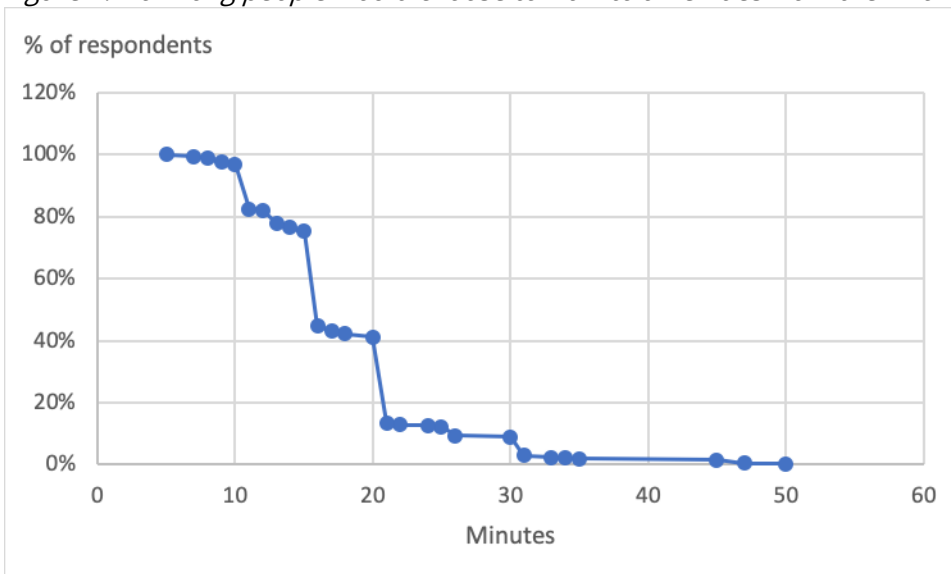
5. How far people are prepared to walk?

We asked people what they thought was a reasonable time to spend getting to these basic amenities, using a sliding scale for the answers. Across the whole sample:

- Walk for up to 10 mins 97%
- Walk for up to 15 mins 75%
- Walk for up to 20 mins 41%

The way this breaks down on a minute-by-minute basis is shown in figure 1 – minutes are along the bottom, x axis, and the y axis shows how the 449 answers break down into percentages. The middle of the distribution comes in the 15-minute category, which tallies with the fact that, overall, 75% of our respondents think this is the right length of walk. The time selected is only indicative of a distance, as people walk at different speeds, but this survey has given a strong answer.

Figure 1: How long people would choose to walk to amenities from their home, one way



This confirms that the 15-minute concept is sound: a clear majority of our respondents are prepared to walk for 15 minutes, which suggests about a mile (1.6km) to their priority amenities – and further than the 10 minutes each way implied by the 20-minute

concept. If an amenity is within a 15-minute walk, it would be quicker to get there on a bike and more facilities would be accessible in 15 minutes. We did not ask about cycling times, as we wanted to maximise the opportunities available to walkers. Within the whole sample, the youngest age groups wanted to walk for the shortest time – no-one under 34 chose to walk for more than 20 minutes. And village residents are happy walking for longer to their amenities than urban residents.

There is a caveat to people's preparedness to walk – they want it to be a pleasant walk, or cycle ride. In many cases, people commented and complained that the roads and pavements are filled with cars, the associated traffic fumes, noise and obstruction, even in small villages and where there is not a choice of routes. Just making the environment around these basic amenities more attractive, so people can walk and cycle in safety, stop and chat in comfort with their neighbours and enjoy the sounds and smells of nature would substantially increase the amount of active travel to those amenities that exist already, independently of any new ones that are implemented.

The focus of the questions was entirely on the amenities that are available or wanted in the locality – the survey did not ask directly about transport options or how to get in and out of the area. However, cycling infrastructure, lack of buses/public transport and accessibility issues attracted many unprompted comments:

I would like better cycling infrastructure to help get people out of cars for short journeys by making cycling a safer, viable alternative

I have based times on walking. It would be good to have the option to cycle safely to these amenities as well. Unfortunately cycling within Banbury is not particularly safe or well planned at present and designated cycle ways are not wide enough or consistent enough.

Living in a rural location (small village) I would appreciate more facilities in the village (walking distance) but equally good cycle and public transport links to other bigger villages and towns.

The idea that cyclists should be given the same preferential treatment as pedestrians is absurd. Absolutely fed up of being told how good cyclists are when in fact many of them are a menace on the local Public Footpaths

You haven't asked about access to public transport. Not all can or choose to walk or cycle. Do you envisage public transport penetrating the 15 min neighbourhood, or do those living in it have to get to it at the boundaries?

There are many elderly people in Jericho who can no longer cycle and for whom walking is difficult; many do not have cars, so it is important that there are good local buses and easy access for taxis.

The council needs to re-instate a regular bus service in the village, not all my neighbours are car drivers/ cyclist and of retirement age, but like me, would be independent for appointments-GP & hospital

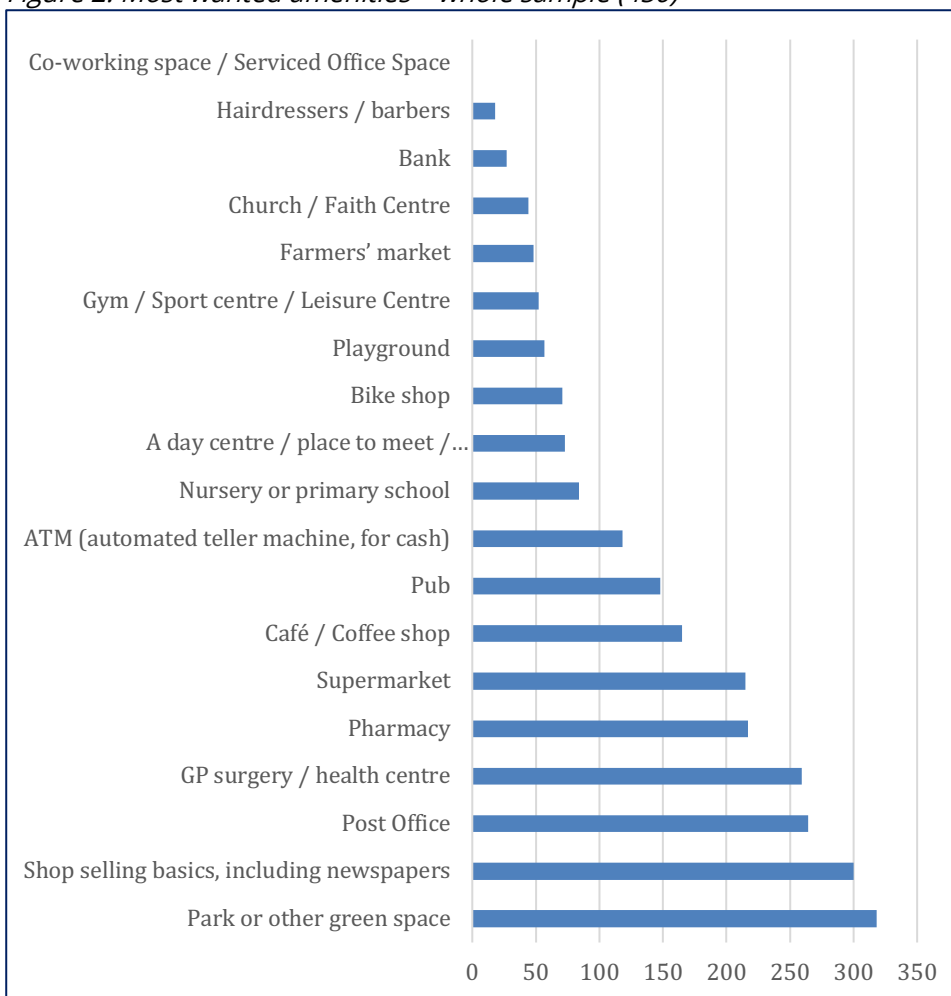
As a wheelchair user, my ability to make use of 15-minute neighbourhoods depends not just on the amenities being there, but those amenities being accessible. It also depends on high quality footpath and pavement infrastructure

It's not just about distance but safety & accessibility -- kids need to be able to walk to school, shops etc., pavements need to be usable (so much of our street is blocked by parked cars that we always end up walking in the road at some point on the way to school/shops).

6. Priority amenities for a 15-minute neighbourhood

We gave people a list of what we assumed to be the 19 basic amenities and asked them to rank their priorities – listed in figure 2. Each respondent was asked to identify those that would be the six most important for them. Separately, we asked people to identify which of these were already present in their 15-minute community and the final question on all of these asked for more details of what they use in comparison with what is present. The number of respondents is shown along the bottom out of the total of 450 that replied to the question.

Figure 2: Most wanted amenities – whole sample (450)



The responses show a remarkable level of consistency across sub-groups in terms of the top six most frequently selected priority amenities, namely (1) park or other green space; (2) shop selling basics including newspapers; (3) post office; (4) GP surgery/health centre; (5) pharmacy; (6) supermarket. The next most frequently chosen were café/coffee shop; pub; ATM; nursery or primary school.

By locality there is some variation in priority order of these amenities (table 4).

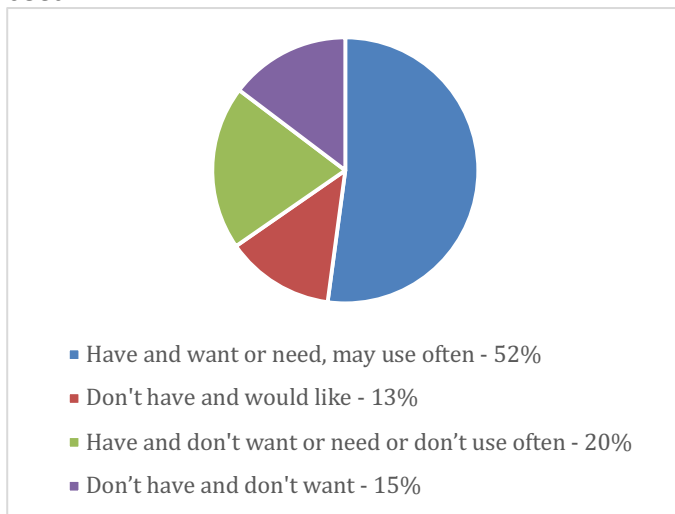
Table 4: Top three priority amenities by locality

Priority	1	2	3
Hamlet	Shop selling basics inc newspaper	Park or other green space	
Small village Pop <2,000	Shop selling basics inc newspaper	Post Office	Park or other green space
Large village Pop >2,000	GP surgery/health centre	Post Office	Shop selling basics inc newspaper / Park or other green space
Oxford centre	Park or other green space	Pharmacy	Post Office
Oxford suburbs	Park or other green space	Shop selling basics inc newspaper	Post Office
Town centre	Park or other green space	GP surgery/health centre	Shop selling basics inc newspaper /Supermarket
Town suburbs	Supermarket	Park or other green space	GP surgery/health centre/ Pharmacy

Figure 3 (below) shows the way respondents view the amenities that are or are not in their area, for all 19 amenities in total. For instance, the 19 amenities are wanted by an average of 52% of respondents who already have them in their locality. There is, of course, considerable variation by individual amenity:

- 97% have and want a green space / park, whereas only 7% have and want a serviced office space, probably as a result of working from home;
- 29% don't have and would like to have a bike shop and 1% voted for a playground, undoubtedly because three-quarters of our respondents had no children living in their family;
- 64% have and don't use a church / faith centre, but only 5% view the PO in the same way;
- 25% don't have and don't want a gym and 3% a pub.

Figure 3: Aggregate responses to amenities overall and whether they are wanted and would be used



What these responses start to question is how many basic amenities are wanted in a community. Of the 19 that we listed, 13 were identified by more than half the respondents as being ones they would like in their area, whether or not they already had them. This is examined a bit more in section 8 below. Our focus on six basic amenities in the survey was fairly arbitrary – we had five in the original Walkability Index, partly because of data availability. We increased this to six for the Oxfordshire survey to reflect the size of the response we expected. It would seem from this research that people are very keen to enhance their local community by making it even more inclusive than we had foreseen. This should be an area of further research.

For the purpose of the analysis that follows, we have taken the view that a shop selling basics and a supermarket both fulfil the same need for essential grocery items, so have combined the scores. Likewise, a coffee shop and a pub can both be viewed as places for meeting socially as well as buying a drink, so also combining their scores produces a top six priority list of:

- Shop for food basics (shop and/or supermarket)
- Park or other green space
- Postal services
- Health services (GP and/or pharmacy)
- Social/hospitality outlets (coffee shop and/or pub)
- Banking services (ATM and/or bank)

These are discussed individually in section 7 below.

7. Top six amenity areas in more detail

7:1 Shopping for (food) basics: 94%

- Only 6% of respondents answering the top six priority question (27/451) put *neither* a shop selling basics *nor* a supermarket in their top six priorities, ie 94% chose at least one type of shop selling food/ basics, and 18% chose both. This puts basic grocery shopping at the top of the priority list.
- Of this 6% who did not select a food/grocery shop as a priority (27/451), 56% say they do a weekly online grocery shop.
- A 'shop selling basics including newspaper' is most frequently put as a top six priority by those living in hamlets and small villages, while those living in town suburbs marginally favoured supermarkets.
- Oxford centre is the only locality where neither 'a shop selling basics' nor 'supermarket' are placed in the top 3 most frequently mentioned priority amenities, dropping into 4th place behind green space, pharmacy and post office. It could be that in the city centre, it's a given that there will be a food shop nearby.
- City dwellers are also more likely to do a regular online grocery shop (table 5).

Table 5: Online shopping activity of CoHSAT sample, by locality

Locality - some people left this blank	No. respondents	Weekly online grocery shop	Monthly online grocery shop	Weekly+monthly as %
Oxford suburbs	152	53	24	51%
Oxford centre/	36	18	1	53%
Town suburbs	65	20	9	43%
Town centre	36	6	4	28%
Large village	52	14	5	37%
Small village/hamlet	90	26	7	29%

Other comments:

Our village shop is community run and doesn't sell newspapers but these are delivered.

We have regular delivery of milk/related items, which is distinct from a larger, occasional grocery delivery.

I think as people move online for the basics, the community spaces to meet become more and more important.

A local supermarket is good but I will always drive to do my main shop. Too many heavy items, and yes, I have tried it on a bike with panniers, etc. Even if the bike could take it, it's too heavy for me to cycle. Yes, I could fork out for an electric bike but as I need a car to give granny lifts, take kids to university, and many other trips, a pedal bike and a car are our chosen modes of transport. Sorry for the rant, but some of these evangelical 'but you can do everything on a

bike' people really annoy me. And yes, we've also used shared cars/car clubs for several years but now have our own again.

7:2 Parks and green space: 71%

The survey was conducted during the pandemic, but outside lockdown. So people were probably very tuned in to the benefits of green spaces for exercise, socialising and mental well-being.

- A 'park or other green space' was chosen by 71% of the total sample (318/451) as one of their top six most important amenities, and 81% said they had one in range.
- This was the most frequently chosen amenity:
 - across the total sample
 - by both females and males
 - by all age groups between 18-75
 - for those living in Oxford centre, Oxford suburbs and town centres.
- For those describing their area as a large or small village, 'park or other green space' was the third most frequently chosen as a top six priority.
- Of the 5 people who 'don't have and want' a park or green space, 3 live in villages, and 1 each in Oxford centre and town suburbs.

Other comments:

I would like large areas of communal grass where I live (Abingdon) to be turned into allotments for people to grow their own food - also possibly huge shared chicken coops(!)

7:3 Postal services: 59%

- 59% of respondents put Post Office in their top six priorities, making it the third most popular choice.
- In small and large villages, a post office was the second most frequently mentioned amenity, and in Oxford centre and suburbs it was third.
- 83% of people who describe themselves as living in the town centre (ie market town outside Oxford) say they 'have and want/use often' a post office, suggesting they are relatively well served with post office services
- The 65 people who 'don't have and want/need/would use' a post office live in villages, Oxford suburbs, town suburbs and Oxford City. 32% of those living in a small village say they don't have a post office within walking distance of home.

Other comments:

Would love a local post office, and a local good beauty/waxing shop that would make so much difference

7:4 Health services: GP/health centre, 57%, pharmacy 48%

- The next most important theme is health as expressed by the desire for a GP surgery/health centre and/or a pharmacy within walking distance. A GP surgery is the 4th most frequently selected priority amenity (57%) followed by a pharmacy (48%) at 5th.
- 46% of all survey respondents say they don't have a GP surgery /health centre within walking distance. Of those who put a GP/health centre as a top six priority, 25% don't have but want one. In our sample, this was 65 people living in small villages (26), Oxford suburbs (20), large villages (7), town suburbs (8), town centres (2), Oxford centre (1), hamlet (1).
- 36% of all survey respondents don't have a pharmacy within walking distance. Of those who put a pharmacy as a top six priority, 11% don't have but want one. In our sample this was 24 people, 10 of whom live in small villages. By postcode: it seems there are no pharmacies in walking distance of addresses in Wolvercote, Farmoor, Northway, Marston.
- 14% of our total respondents don't have either a GP/health centre OR a pharmacy within walking distance but want one.
- The survey did not ask whether a prescription delivery service was available – this may sometimes be provided (eg by a community shop) and should be something that it is relatively easy for the community to organise.

Other comments:

Priority should be given to services that need face to face interaction, such as health, rather than groceries which can be delivered.

I think having a GP surgery within 15-20 mins walk is key and have been shocked ours was allowed to close a few years ago, now a 40+ min walk up hill to Bury Knowle, and no sign of efforts to reinstate one locally. Even the 'temporary' part time appointment rooms at the Marston pharmacy were closed since start of pandemic.

How many people have neither post office nor pharmacy in walking distance? 37

Oxford suburbs: 8 (Northway, Marston village, Wolvercote, Farmoor)

Small village: 22 (Blewbury, Whitecross, Great Bourton, Cumnor, Chesterton, Stratton Audley, Combe, Stanton St John, Bletchingdon, Tetsworth, Towersey...)

Town suburbs : 2 (Bicester, Witney)

Large village: 2 (Harwell and Horton-cum-Studley)

Hamlet: 2 (Forest Hill, Heythrop)

Oxford centre: 1 (Stewart Street, Hinksey Park)

7:5 Social /hospitality outlets: café/coffee shop 37%, pub 33%

Following in priority from provision of basic groceries, park or green space, postal and health services comes coffee shops (37% of total respondents place in their top six) and pubs (33% of total respondents place in their top six). We found in preparing our [Walkability Index](#) for Oxford that they usually go in unison: where there is a pub, there is very often a café nearby.

Assuming that both cafés and pubs fulfil a social role over and above the desire to consume a beverage and are about meeting other people, we have added them together under the 'hospitality' umbrella:

- 43% of all our survey respondents selected at least one of the hospitality options of coffee shop/ café /pub as one of their top six priorities;
- 43% of all our survey respondents put neither pub nor café as a top six priority;
- 14% want BOTH a pub and a café as a priority.

In villages a pub is given a slightly higher priority than a café/coffee shop, and vice versa in Oxford centre and suburbs. This probably reflects the traditional role of the pub as the centre of village life.

While 93% of respondents have a pub within walking distance, 22% don't have a café/coffee shop and 16% 'don't have and want'. Of course, an increasing number of pubs sell coffee, which is part of the solution.

7:6 Banking services

The relative priority of physical banks and cash machines (ATM) reflects the degree to which people have adapted to online banking:

- An ATM is a priority for 26% of our total survey respondents and a bank for 6%. This reflects the change in banking habits over recent years – unsurprisingly, those selecting a bank as a top six priority are likely to be aged 55+.
- While 60% of respondents say they don't have a bank in walking distance, only 18% say they 'don't have and want'.

ATMs on the other hand are available to 75% of respondents, with a further 11% saying they 'don't have and want'. The lack of access to cash can mean that people have to take a bus journey which might be expensive in order to get to somewhere for this cash: a hard trade-off.

8. Other amenities that people would like in their immediate neighbourhood

Section 7 summarised the amenities selected most frequently by our survey respondents as their top six priorities: arguably these are the basic needs of a 15-minute neighbourhood. To make a great 15-minute neighbourhood (and reduce the need for them to hop into their cars or travel afield) some of the less-essential amenities are needed. Table 6 shows those that get the most votes.

Table 6: Other 'want to have' amenities, by number of responses

Number of respondents	Votes in top six	Don't have in total	Of these, don't have and need/ want/would like in walking distance
Nursery/primary school	84	44	9
Day centre/place to meet/community hall	73	67	40
Bike shop	71	206	111
Playground	57	21	3
Gym/sports centre	52	180	81
Farmers market	48	216	130
Church/faith centre	44	25	4
Hairdresser /barbers	18	116	25
Co-working space	0	251	42
Total responses	451		

As table 6 shows, the amenity with the most votes for 'don't have but want' is a farmers' market. This is where people can buy fresh, local produce, that would probably not be sold in either a basic shop or a supermarket. It can be important both for reducing food miles and supporting the local economy. Of the 130 respondents who 'don't have and want':

- 62% are female
- 58% are under the age of 55
- they are split between town and city suburbs (59%), hamlets and villages (39%) (balance is "blank" or "other")
- but only 8 of the 130 put Farmers Market in their top six priorities.

The next most popular of these amenities was a bike shop, with 111 respondents who 'don't have and want':

- 54% are female
- 5% live in Oxford/town centre
- 67% live in Oxford/town suburbs

There were other amenities that we could have asked about, for instance, a library, hardware shop, vet, recycling facilities, broadband, book shop and secondary school, all of which were mentioned by people in their comments.

Comment:

This survey is very middle class orientated. Farmers markets, gyms and cafes when lots of areas of the city are in food poverty and can't easily get to cheap fresh food because of poor buses and ltns [low traffic neighbourhoods]?

9. Conclusion

This CoHSAT survey has demonstrated that wherever they live in Oxfordshire, there is a remarkable similarity in the amenities that our respondents value most. We hope that this analysis will provide both local communities and the planners with the ammunition to require the provision of these basic amenities in new developments and, importantly, to ensure their installation in existing areas where they are absent. This will require both the local population and council representatives to work together. In some cases, the new provision can be funded by the local authorities, the health service or education system. In others, there are opportunities for commercial enterprises and for the community to create their own interventions. In our other [document on policy](#) we list some of the resources available, together with examples of communities that have already taken action.

Our aspiration is that there will be many more well-equipped 15MN in Oxfordshire from now on, so that people do not have to travel out of their community. They can get to the facilities they need without recourse to a car or public transport. This is a substantial shift in perspective and one that brings social, economic and climate justice to the fore.

Further research is needed on the number of amenities desired by a community – we took six as an arbitrary number – but these results demonstrate a desire for a wider spectrum of facilities. The extent to which these amenities would be supported by the community is an associated question. We did not attempt to link the provision of amenities within the locality with the active travel options to external resources. These two issues are linked: could groups of small communities combine, through active travel connections, to have complementary sets of assets, rather than expecting people to travel to the nearest urban conurbation. This survey was undertaken to be indicative and open up the questions on 15-minute neighbourhoods in a variety of localities. We hope others will progress this debate – we shall be watching with interest.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Abena Poku-Awuah, Finn Johnson-Ward and Judy Davis for their help in setting up the survey and analyzing the results, and to all those who responded.

Last but not least, thanks to the Low Carbon Hub for their support of CoHSAT and for funding this project.