

Neighbourhood Area Profile, January 2020

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Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 In 2013, Ashwell Parish Council decided to embark on the process of developing a Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.2 To inform the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, it is helpful to prepare a detailed profile of the neighbourhood area. This includes statistical information about the local population, economy, housing and health.
- The profile helps to inform the development of the vision and objectives for the Neighbourhood Plan, which the policies contained in the Neighbourhood Plan will seek to deliver.
- 1.3 Throughout this document, the neighbourhood plan will be referred to as 'the Neighbourhood Plan' or 'the ANP'; and the designated area will be referred to as 'the Area' or 'the Neighbourhood Area'.

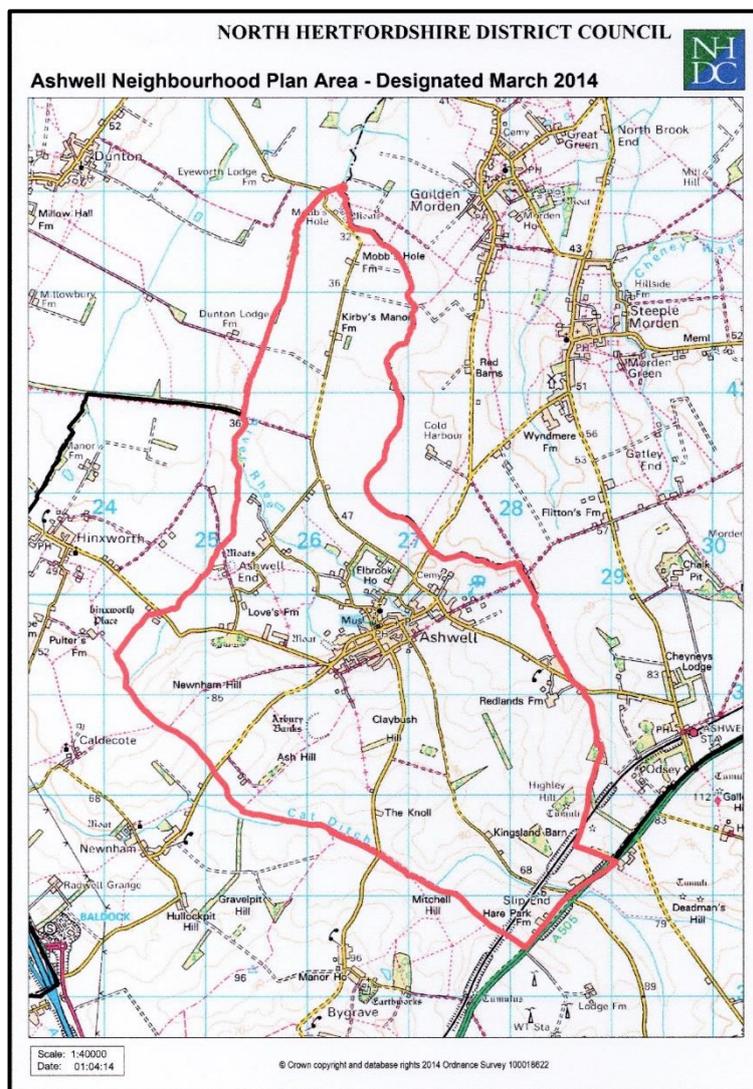


Figure 1.1 Neighbourhood Plan Area

2 Area statistics and trends

Summary

2.1 The key aspects of the profile of the neighbourhood areas, as they relate to the Neighbourhood Plan, are as follows :

- Ashwell parish has an **aging population**, with a high number of those aged over 45 and over 65. These two age brackets grew significantly between 2001 and 2011.
- There are **few adults aged between 25 and 44 years old**, an age bracket that dropped considerably between 2001 and 2011.
- There is a fairly **high number of children (and teenagers)** in the parish when compared to the district as a whole. This is perhaps unsurprising given the attractiveness of the parish and the presence of a Good primary school.
- The parish has **higher than UK average levels of car ownership**, with average of 1.6 cars per household across the area compared to 1.2 at the national level.

This is perhaps unsurprising for a rural settlement, however it means that parking and congestion may cause concern, particularly in the more historic parts of the village, where roads may be narrower and houses may have been built without off-street parking. Higher car ownership is not unexpected in more rural areas, however it will be important to ensure that public transport is adequate for those with limited access, particularly given that **11% of residents have no access to a car**.

- The parish comprises **predominantly larger, detached homes**. The vast majority of homes are owned. There is a trend toward under-occupancy in the parish, which might suggest that there are insufficient numbers of houses to downsize to.
- **Affordability of housing is an issue** locally, where average incomes put even affordable market housing out of reach. **The percentage of social and private rental properties is low** when compared to the district, restricting options for those on modest or median incomes to move to the parish. This imbalance has been somewhat addressed through two developments that have taken place since the 2011 census.
- The nearest railways are a drive away in Baldock and Letchworth Garden City. The parish is **fairly well served by bus links** to several major employment centres, however evening services, and those to the more rural parts are less frequent.
- **Unemployment is low** with **high numbers of people working from home**.
- Whilst a few people work very locally, **the majority travel between 10km and 40km** to work, suggesting high levels of out-commuting. The resident population is very well-qualified and it will be important to consider ways to provide additional higher paid jobs locally or improve links to neighbouring

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settlements that are less reliant on the use of the car. Providing the necessary infrastructure for home-workers is also important.

- 2.2 The following paragraphs set out the detailed statistics and trend data for the parish. Unless stated otherwise, statistics are taken from the 2011 Census.

Population

- 2.3 In 2011, the population of the neighbourhood area was 1,870. Compared to the district and regional averages, the parish had a higher proportion of residents aged over 45, with a significant number in the 65+ age group. The number of younger, working age residents was, in contrast lower, although there was a high proportion of children aged to 15, indicating that the parish is fairly popular with families.

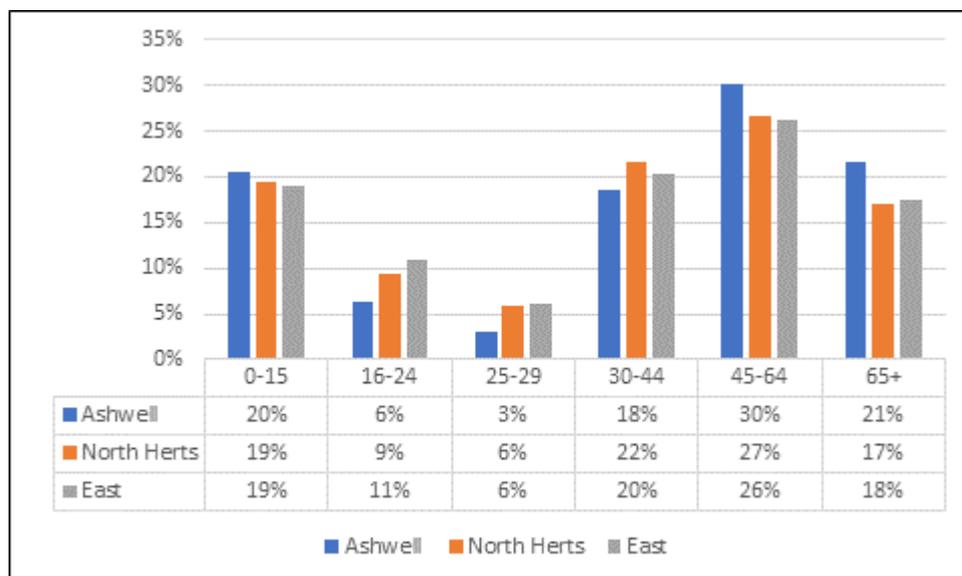


Figure 2.1 Population profile, 2011

- 2.4 Between 2001 and 2011, the population of the Area grew by 2,453 persons, a 12.6% increase (Figure 2.2).

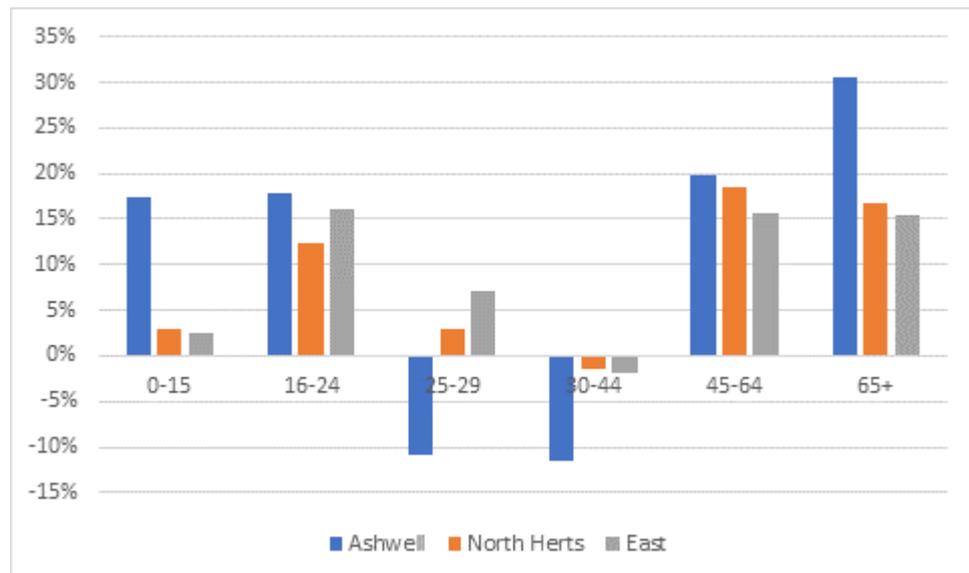


Figure 2.2 Change in population, 2001-2011

2.5 It can be seen that growth has been particularly significant in the older age groups, particularly the 65+ category. In contrast, the number of younger and working age residents has fallen greatly. Interestingly, the number of children in the parish grew significantly in the period between 2001 and 2011. The parish does have a primary school, which has been rated as Good since 2004. This might explain the popularity of the parish with families with younger children.

Housing

2.6 The reason behind the fall in those of (lower) working age might be explained by the lack of affordability of Ashwell in comparison to other areas. Figure 2.3 sets out house prices in the parish in the last year in comparison to neighbouring settlements, revealing that Ashwell is more expensive on the whole.

Settlement	Average house price
Ashwell	£509,878
Baldock	£329,295
Bassingbourne	£410,860
Steeple Morden	£639,100

Figure 2.3 Average House prices, 2019-2020 Source: www.rightmove.co.uk (March 2020)

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- 2.7 This issue of affordability is not a recent phenomenon. House price comparisons between the local area and the North Herts District show Ashwell (Arbury Ward) to be significantly more expensive. To get an indication of affordability, or lack of it, the graph below compares lower quartile (i.e. cheaper) year-on-year house prices for Arbury Ward and the entire District, divided by the annual average national wage.

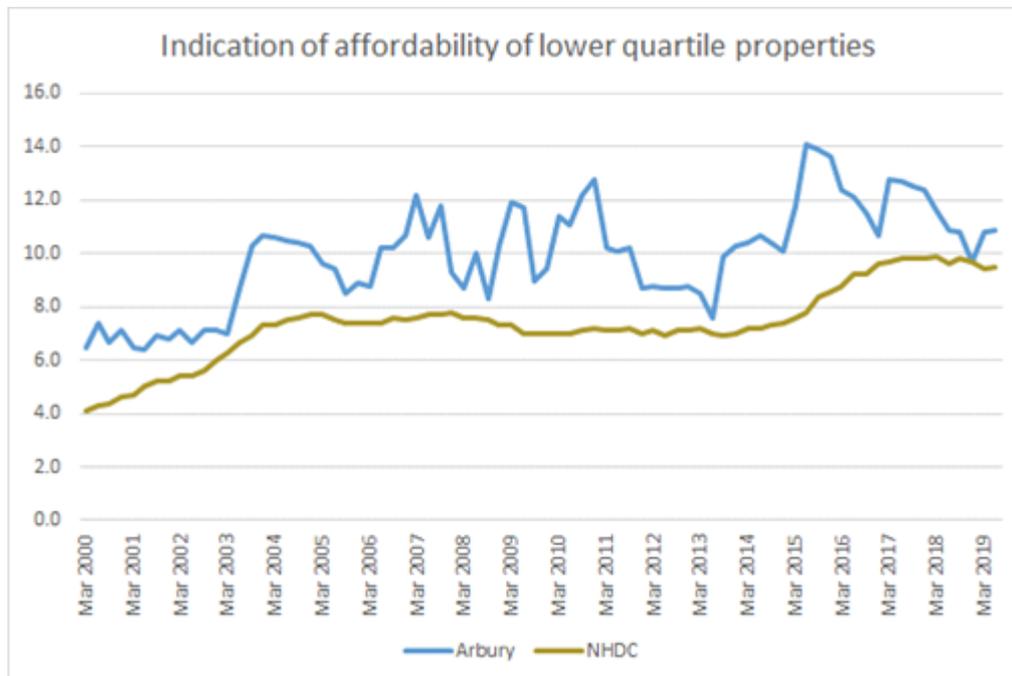


Figure 2.4 Year-on-year average cost of housing in the bottom quarter of the market as a multiple of the average national annual wage. (Source ONS Housing datasets and Employment and Labour Market data)

- 2.8 The Arbury ward values fluctuate more than District wide figures owing to the relatively small size of the dataset, but the message is clear. In Ashwell, price trends generally follow the District pattern rising and falling in a similar way over time, however lower cost housing is significantly and consistently less affordable.
- 2.9 Figure 2.5 shows the types of housing that existed in the parish at 2011. As can be seen, the largest number of homes were detached, at just over a third of all properties in the parish. This is high when compared to the district and region.

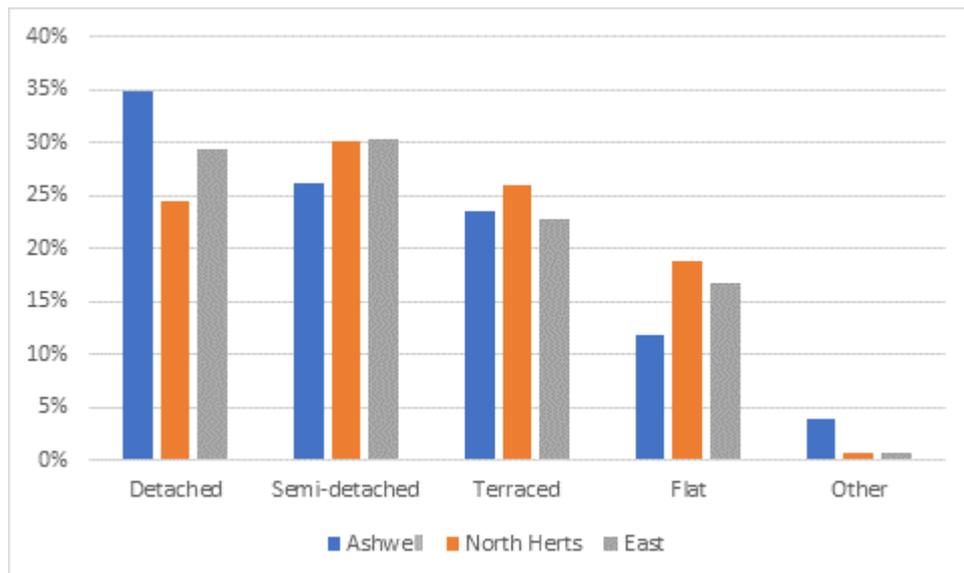


Figure 2.5 Type of housing

2.10 The average number of bedrooms per household was 3.1 and data relating to under-occupancy highlights this as an issue for the parish, where the ability to downsize is prohibited by the available housing stock. Figure 2.6 shows that in Ashwell, 64% of dwellings have two or more rooms above the occupiers' government assessed 'requirement' compared with 54% across the District – 10 percentage points above the average to which it contributes. This skews the data to the extent that all categories below this level are lower in Ashwell than in the District as a whole. The situation is similar for data that looks only at bedrooms.

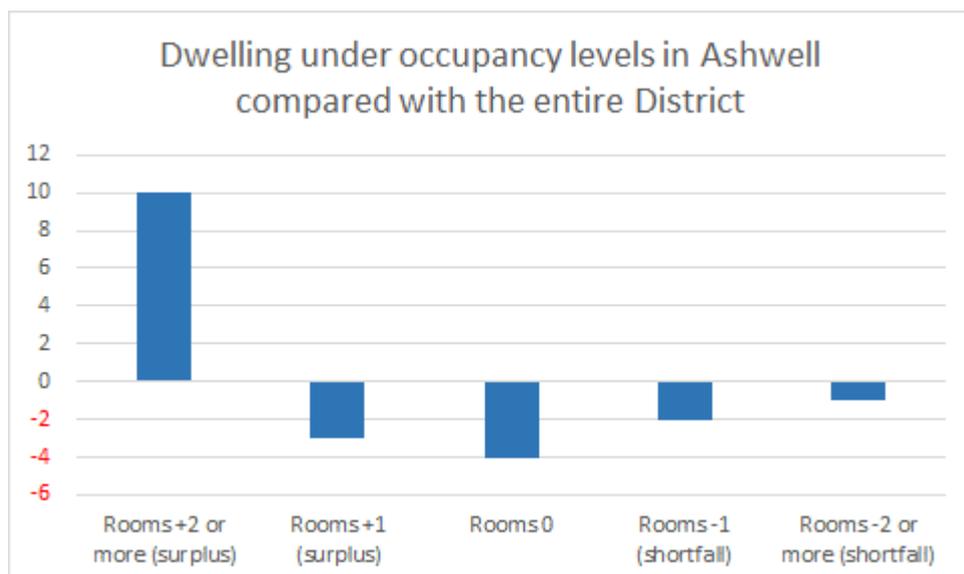


Figure 2.6 Dwelling under occupancy levels in Ashwell

2.11 The tenure of housing is illustrated in Figure 2.7, revealing that the Area largely vastly comprises homes that are owned by their occupants, either outright or with a mortgage.

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The number of social and private rented housing available in the parish was less than that available across the district and wider region.

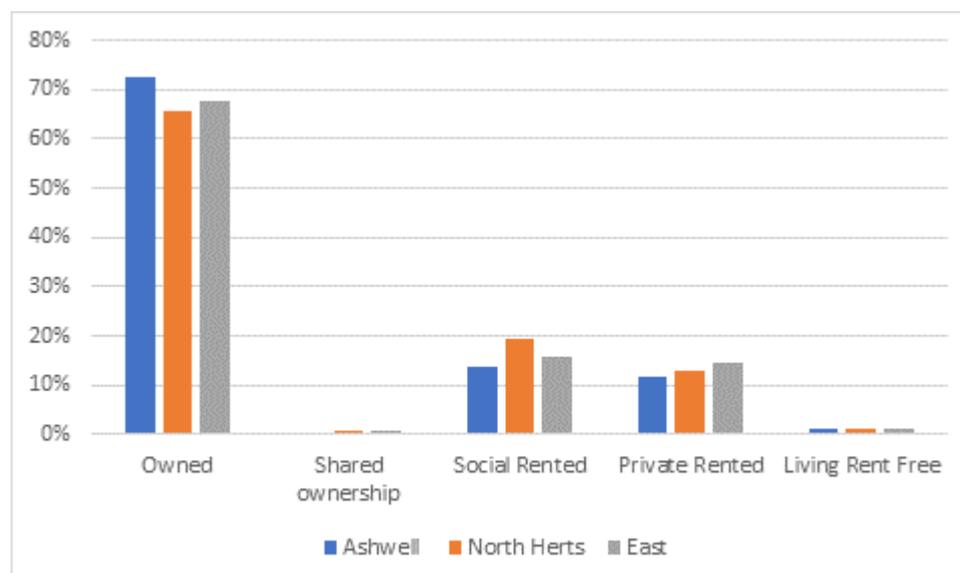


Figure 2.7 Tenure of housing

- 2.12 The predominance of larger, detached market housing has potentially restricted the ability for those on average salaries to be in a position to move to Ashwell. This could help to explain why there was a drop in younger working age residents between 2001 and 2011.
- 2.13 Figure 2.8 shows the amount of housing growth in the parish since 1945. In the period between 2001 and 2011 (coinciding with the census data), just 23 new dwellings were built. Since 2011, a further 116 units have either been delivered. Both the Walkdens development (27 units in 2 phases), and Philosophers Gate development (19 units), both located off Station Road on the East side of Ashwell, have included affordable or starter homes with some rental provision included in the former.

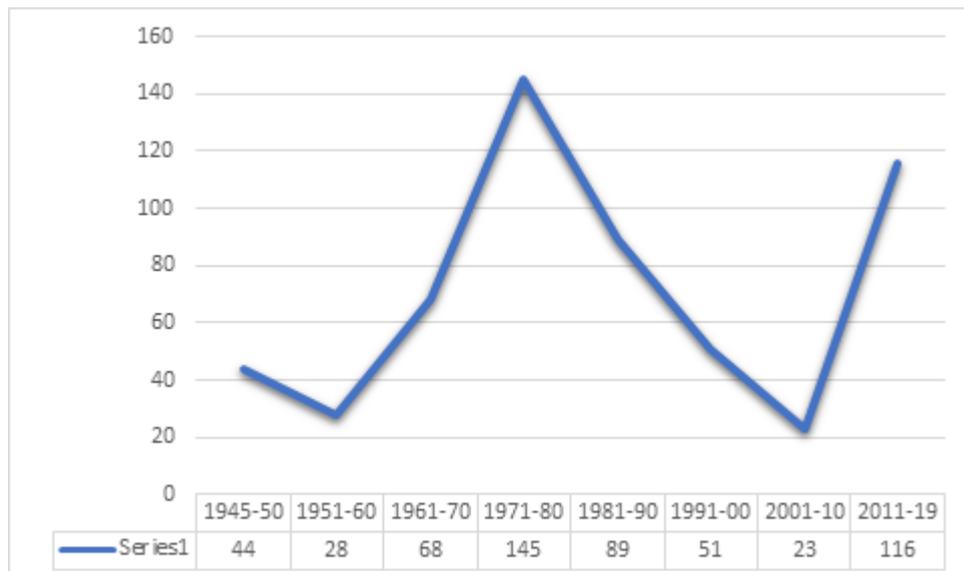


Figure 2.8 Housing growth in Ashwell 1945 to 2019

Work and skills

- 2.14 Figure 2.9 shows that of the 16 to 74 year olds in the parish in 2011, 67% of people were in employment, which was comparable to the figures for the district and wider region. Of those in employment, however, Ashwell had a greater number of self-employed (17% compared with 11% across the district and it will be important to ensure that the Plan makes provision for home-workers, whose needs will differ from those in employment. Unemployment is low and the number of those in retirement reflects the age profile for the parish.

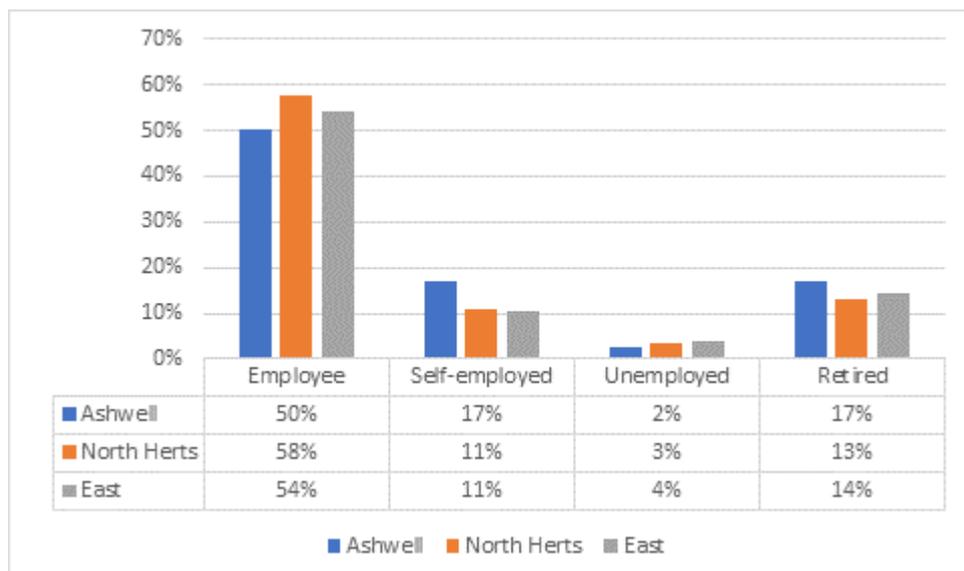


Figure 2.9 Economic activity

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2.15 Understanding how people reach their place of work is helpful when considering the impact on local transport. Figure 2.10 suggests that just under 9% of residents are choosing to work from home, which is higher than across the district, and in line with the greater number of self-employed people, many of whom will likely be home-based. Around 44% of workers are using their car to commute, with 8% taking the train. Bus travel is particularly low, and those walking to work locally is in line with the district. 11% of those living in the parish have no access to a car, highlighting the importance of ensuring that adequate public transport is in place.

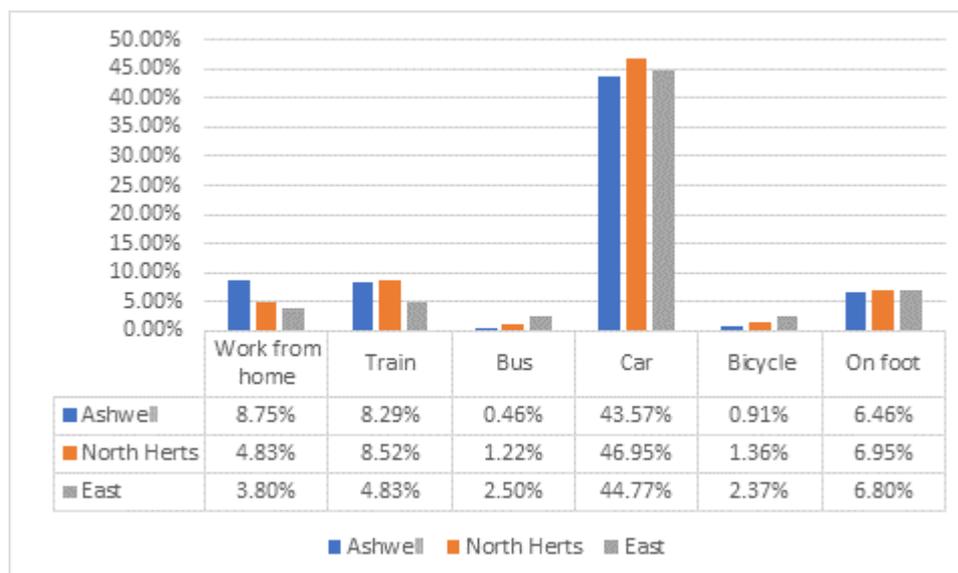


Figure 2.10 Mode of transport to work

2.16 In terms of how far workers are travelling to reach their place of work, the average distance travelled is 28km. Figure 2.11 illustrates this in greater detail, emphasising the predominance of out-commuters in the Area. Approximately 50% of local residents travel at least 10km to reach their place of work, implying that residents are driving (on the whole) to places like Cambridge, Stevenage, Bedford and Luton to access work. A 60km journey would include central London. A small number of residents work in the closer area, and retaining options for local employment will be an important factor for the Plan.

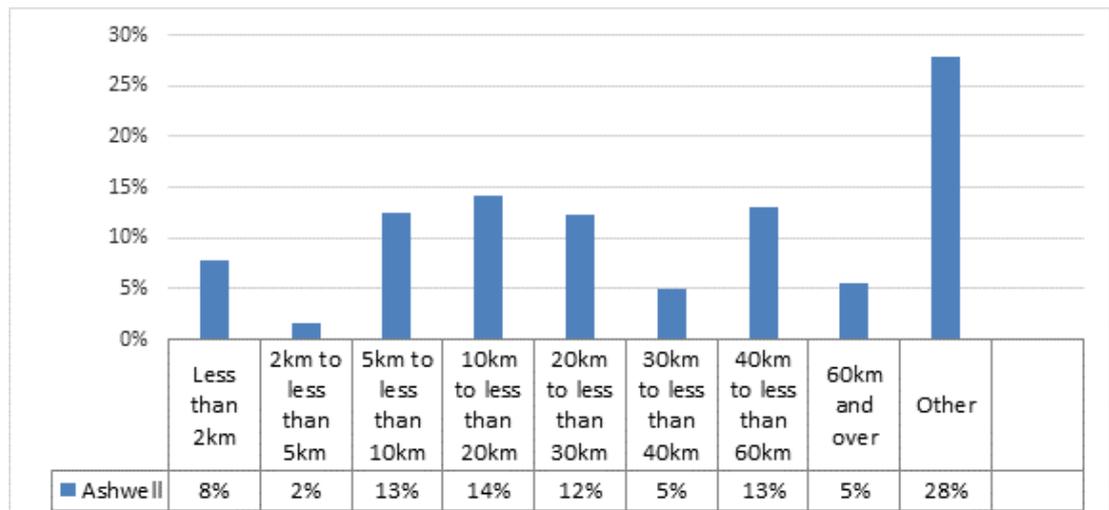


Figure 2.11 Distance travelled to work (Other includes working from home)

2.17 Ashwell has a well-qualified workforce, which perhaps reflects the low level of unemployment in the parish. This is illustrated in Figure 2.12.

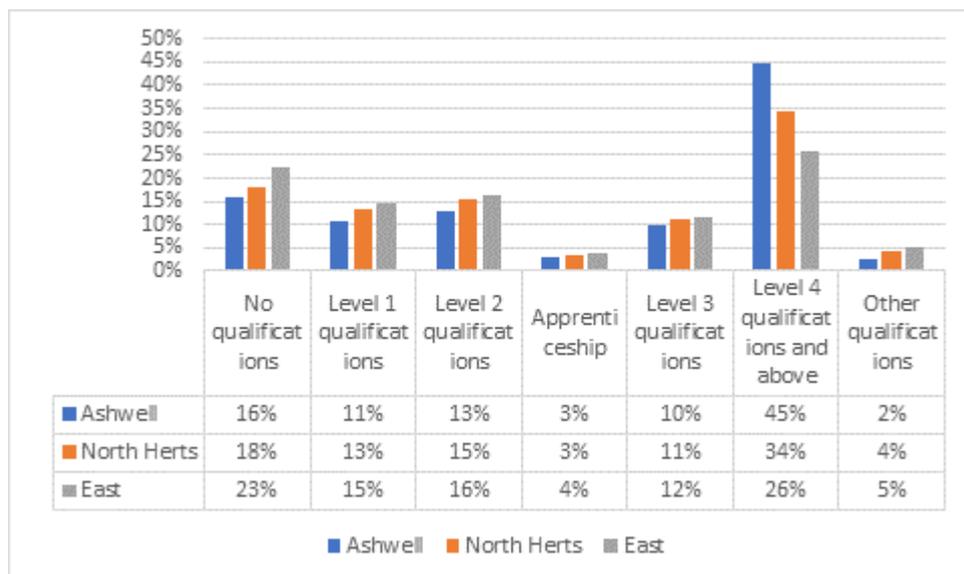


Figure 2.12 Highest level of qualifications

Health

2.18 Residents in the Area enjoy a good level of health, mirroring the district as a whole, as illustrated in Figure 2.13.

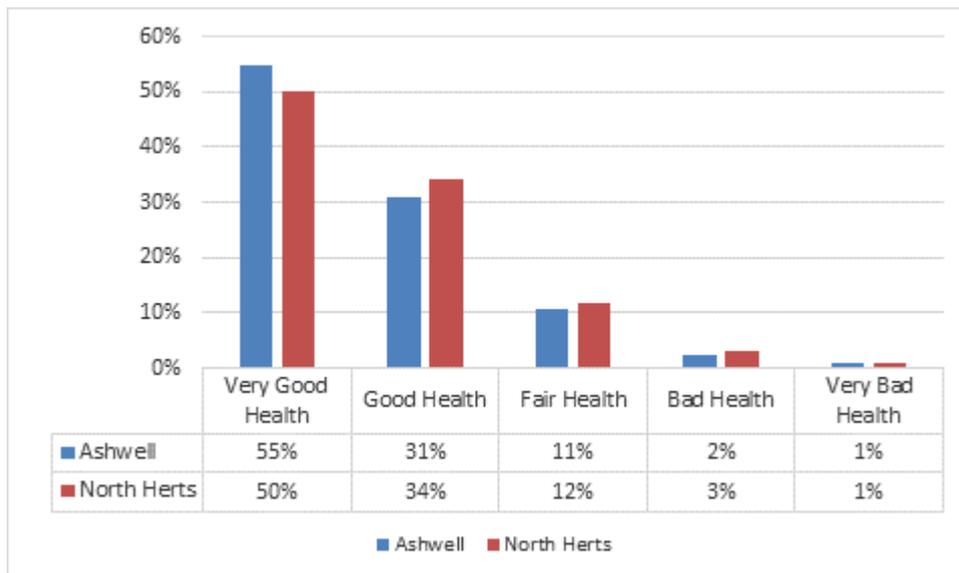


Figure 2.13 Level of health