



“What is it like living in and around Didcot in 2020?”

April 2021

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Executive Summary

146 people shared their opinions of living in the Didcot area and experiences of accessing health, social care and community services between September and December 2020.

Key findings

Overall people are positive about living in the area and being able to find information on how to access services.

Issues about living in Didcot and surrounding areas included:

- Almost a quarter of respondents complained about access to GP practices and health service appointments
- GP access due to COVID-19 showed that almost a third of people said that the impact had been positive reporting how much better it was to be able to use telephone/video/e-consult as an option
- 54.2% of people were registered with an NHS dentist - many travelling out of area due to lack of NHS provision in Didcot
- 35% (n17) people using NHS dentistry said that since the COVID-19 outbreak there had been “No appointments available since March” and highlighted the issue of “dentists not allowing any checks ups and will only see you in an emergency”
- 42% of people reported that **traffic and poor road conditions** were a negative factor regarding traffic jams and air quality
- 15% of people cited lack of provision and facilities for young people and families as a problem in the town
- Anti-social behaviour was raised by over 15% of respondents
- Crime was an issue raised by over 15% of respondents.

Concerns expressed included:

- The impact of online/remote access on access to healthcare on those who do not/cannot use these services (internet/mobile phones)
- Inequity of access to dentistry services between those who can afford to pay for private care and those who cannot and are reliant on NHS dentistry services¹
- Impact of housing growth on infrastructure and health services.

¹ This was highlighted in our report ‘Filling the Gaps - Dentistry Services in Oxfordshire 2018’

<https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/our-work/research-reports/>



Call to action

Those public bodies and partnerships responsible for planning and delivering services to the Didcot communities must work together with their local communities to ensure that the planned population growth in the Didcot area is sustainable and supported with adequate infrastructure. Working with local communities in a coordinated way that incorporates the views of residents builds on healthy place shaping principles advocated by the county. These bodies include:

- NHS England and NHI Improvement as commissioners of dentistry and Oxfordshire Public Health as commissioner of community dental services
- Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group as commissioners of healthcare services
- Oxfordshire County Council
- Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board and Oxfordshire Growth Board with responsibilities for the wellbeing of their communities
- South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of the White Horse District Council
- Voluntary and community organisation, residents, and faith groups active in the Didcot area.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire will call together these stakeholders under the umbrella of Oxfordshire Wellbeing Network (OWN) in June 2021 to build on existing discussions and develop relationships. This meeting will follow on from the stakeholder meeting held in December 2020 to discuss the development of healthcare facilities in Didcot town.

Background

Healthwatch Oxfordshire has been conducting research projects in towns across Oxfordshire over the past few years. Due to the extraordinary growth in Didcot town between 2006 and 2016 and continued planned growth in the area we decided to focus on Didcot and surrounding areas to hear from residents about their experiences of living and accessing services in the area. Taking a ‘wellbeing’ approach to this study we inquired about accessing information, support and services covering health, social, community, infrastructure, and wellbeing.

Didcot is a rural market town in South Oxfordshire with a population of 36,419 in 2018. The town has a predicted population growth of 11,123 equating to 31% increase between 2018 and 2028². The percentage increase is similar across all age ranges but the greatest increase in number of people is predicted in the 18-64-year-old age range. The town serves a wider community providing access to schools and health services. These communities and proposed housing developments are based in both Vale of White Horse District Council and South Oxfordshire District Council areas so the impact on health, care and other services and infrastructure will be greater than the population growth predicted for Didcot town.

Didcot is well connected with a railway station, with express links to London, Bristol, Cheltenham and Swansea, and local links to Oxford, Reading and Banbury. Didcot is close to the A34, which forms part of the major trunk road from Southampton to Oxford, Birmingham, and Manchester.


The town is close to two large science and technology parks: Milton Park and Harwell Campus.

Methodology

Through a combination of online and paper questionnaires, and face-to-face discussions we heard from 146 people between September and December 2020.

The online questionnaire, available in paper copy with a freepost return envelope, was promoted via Healthwatch Oxfordshire news briefing, shared digitally on social

² Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Oxfordshire housing-led population forecasts (interim) 2018 - 2028 September 2020 <http://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/oxfordshire-housing-led-population-forecasts-interim-2018-2028>



media and to local community groups. Didcot Town Council, South Oxfordshire Housing Association and Didcot Train also shared the survey with their networks.

We carried out three physical outreach visits between October and December 2020 at:

1. Didcot Community Larder
2. East Hagbourne Village Hall, which was timed to coincide with school pick-ups to reach parents arriving to collect their children from the primary school opposite
3. Great Western Park shopping centre - a large housing development.

We paused outreach activity during the November COVID-19 lockdown period.

We held a virtual drop-in on Zoom that we advertised through our social media networks and through the local press and radio.

Who we heard from

The following section is an analysis of the completed questionnaires. It should be noted that not all respondents answered all questions.

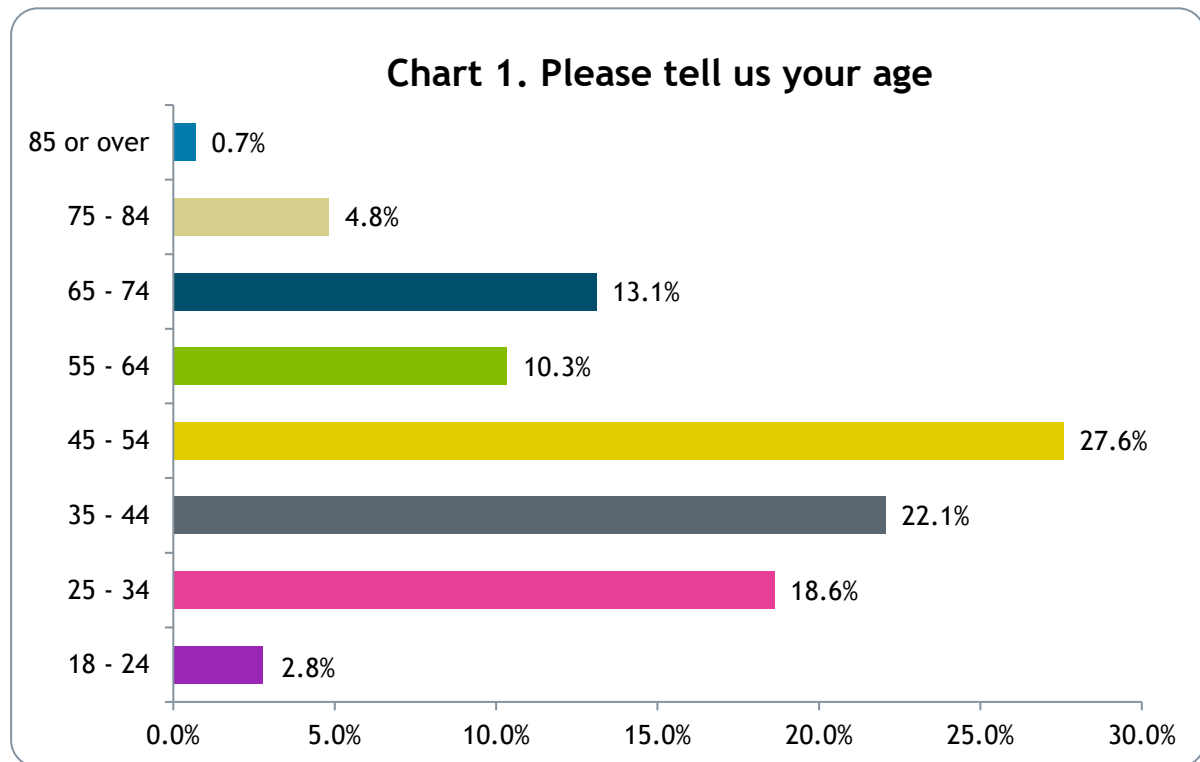
Age and gender

Gender

Of the 146 people who answered the question about gender:

- 81.5% (119) said they identify as female
- 16.4% (24) identify as male
- 2.1% (3) chose not to say.

We heard from a broad range of people across all age groups. Almost 70% of the people who responded to the survey were aged between 25 and 54, with another 23% falling into the 55-74 age bracket (see Chart 1 below).

Chart 1 - Age of respondents

Ethnicity

In terms of ethnicity:

- 88% of the people who responded said they were British
- 4.9% said they were from 'any other white background'
- 1.4% of people said they were 'any other mixed or multiple ethnic background', 1.4% saying that they were 'any other Asian background'
- 0.7% of people stated that they were Indian
- 0.7% of people stating they were Irish.

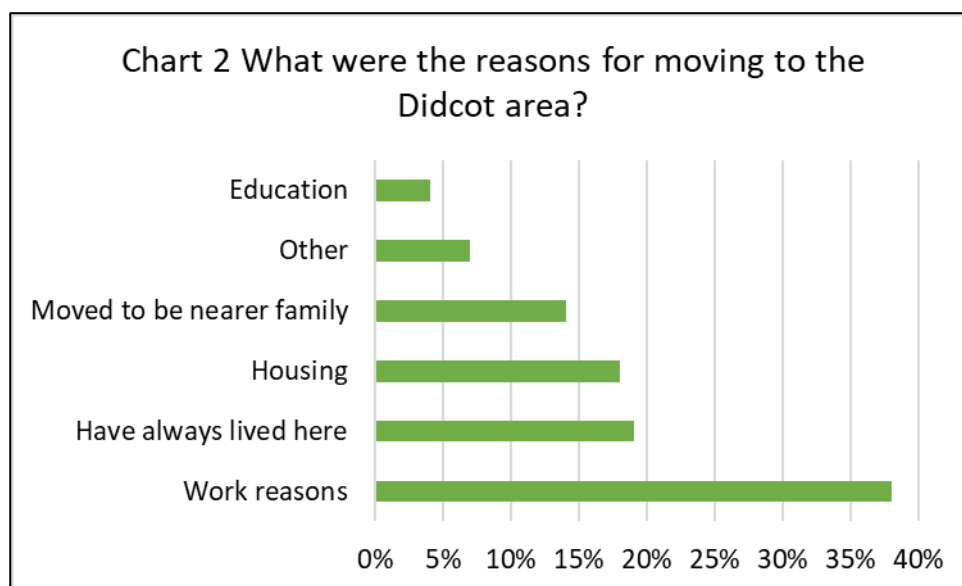
Living in the Didcot area

We asked people to tell us if they have always lived in the Didcot area, and if not, what the reasons were for moving there (see Chart 2 below).

- 38% moved to Didcot for work
- 19% have always lived there
- 18% moved to the area for mainly affordable (rent and buy) housing
- 14% to be nearer family
- 4% moved to the area for education

- An analysis of ‘other’ reasons (7% of respondents) shows that people moved to the area for local amenities, live in more rural area, and links to RAF Benson.

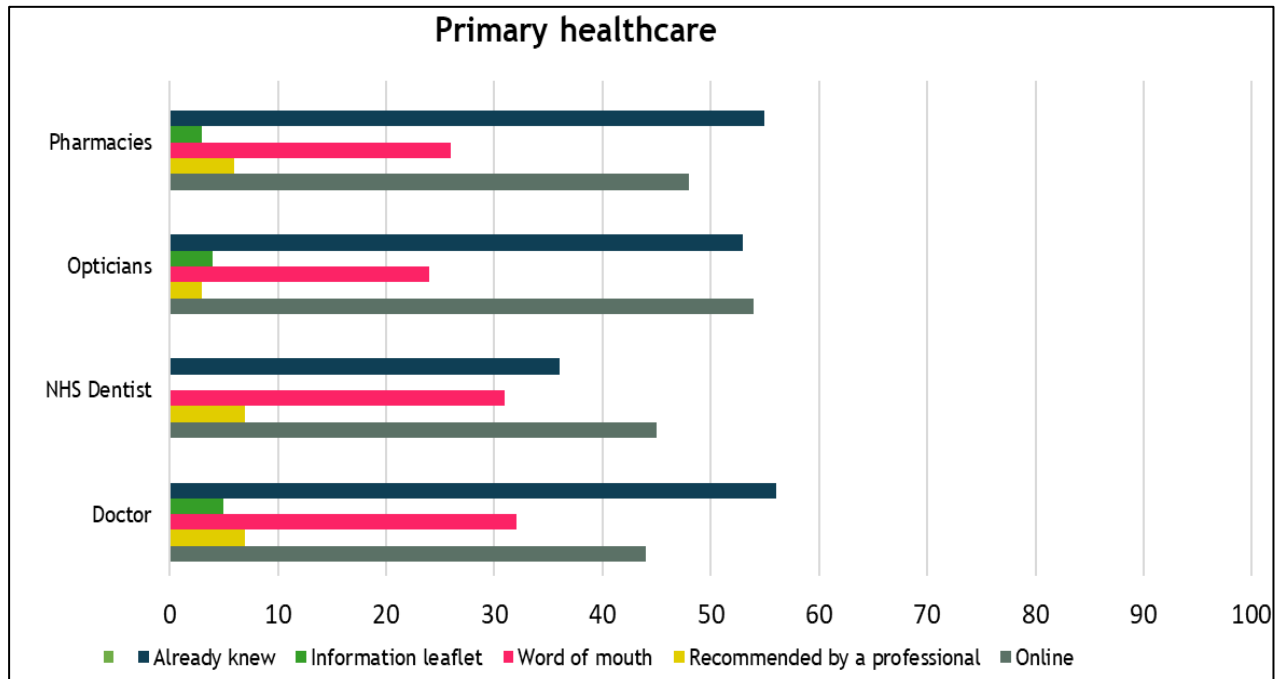
Chart 2 - Reasons for moving to the Didcot area.



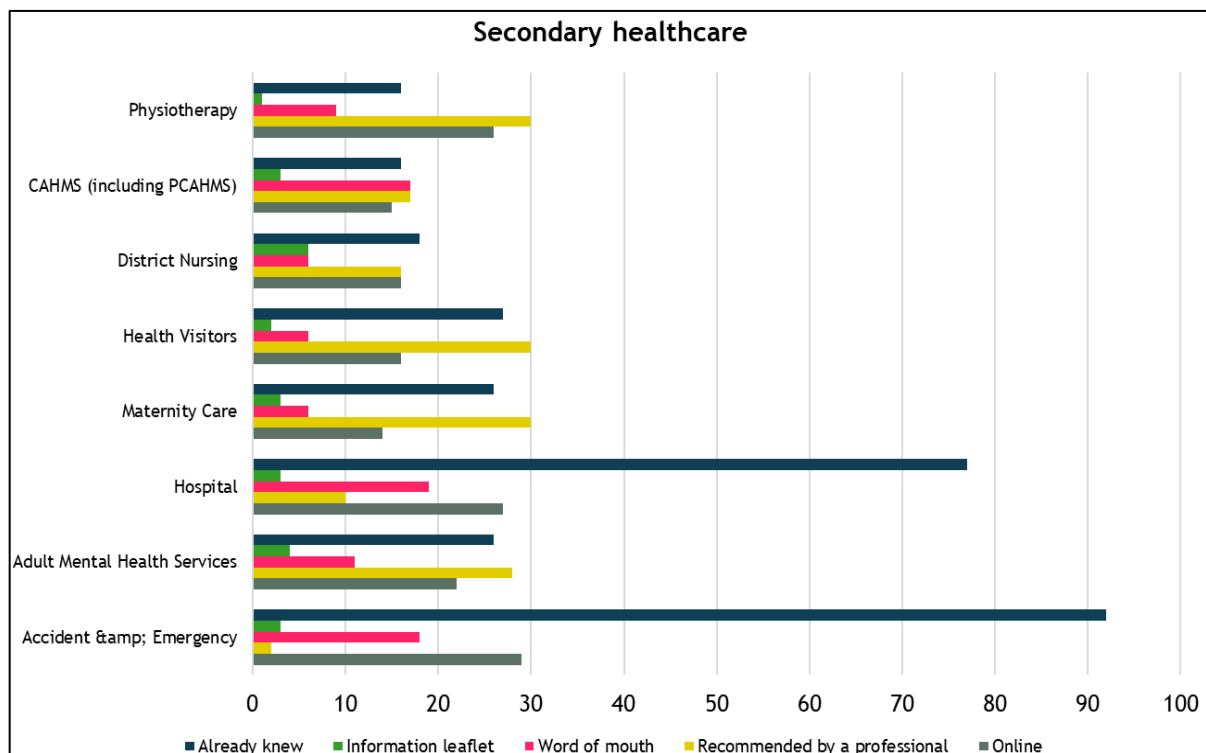
How people find out about services

We then explored how people found out about health, social care, and community services in the area.

People generally said they already had information about primary healthcare, or they found out online (see Chart 3 below).

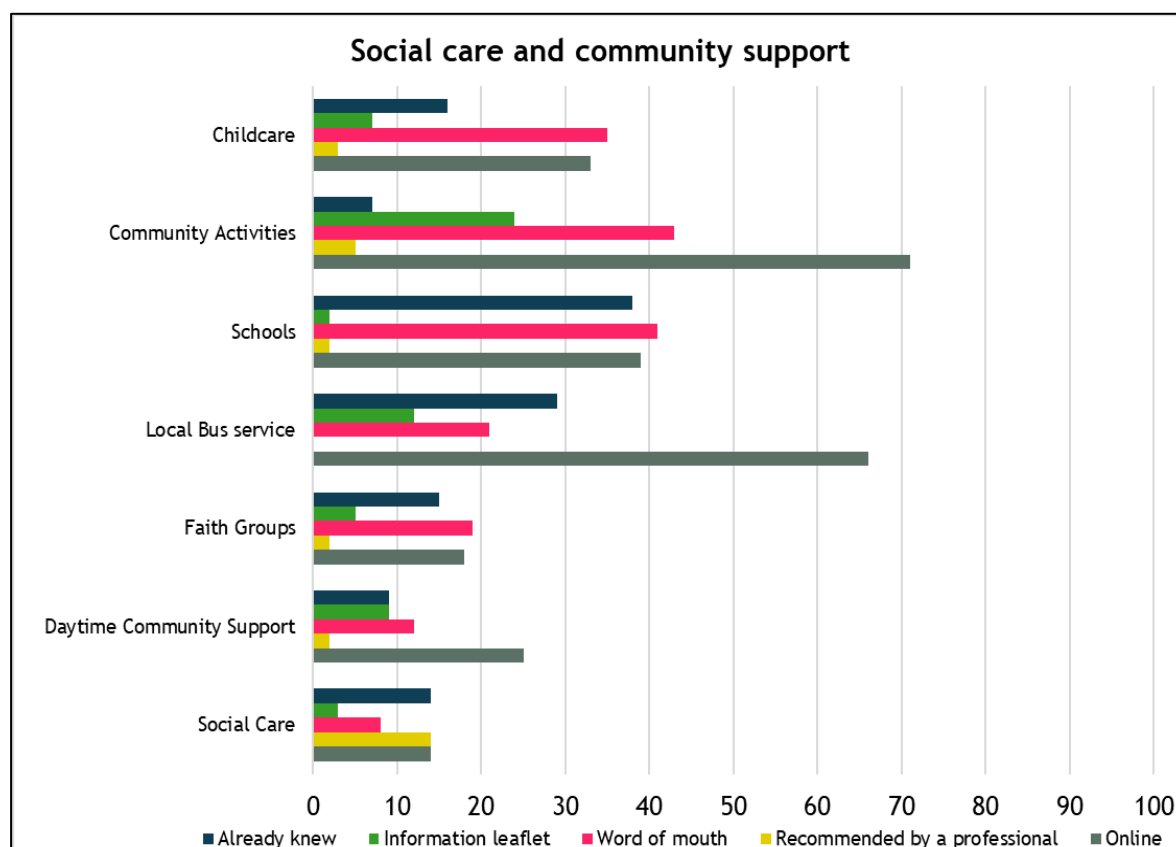
Chart 3 Information sources about Primary Care Services

In contrast for secondary or specialist healthcare, more people said they had been recommended to by a professional. The hospital and A&E department proved to be an exception as again most people said they already knew about these services (see Chart 4 below).

Chart 4 Information sources for other healthcare services

The final area we asked people about awareness of social care and community services/groups (see Chart 5 below). While some people said that they already knew or had found out online, a lot more people answered ‘word of mouth’ for childcare, community activities and schools, with very few people saying they had information about social care or faith groups. This could be due to whether they had needed, or wanted, to know or could indicate a lack of available information.

Chart 5 Information sources for social care and community support



A number of respondents said that they did not have any information at all, and/or that the information was hard to find and should be collated into one place so that people could easily access information when they needed it.

Services accessed in the past two years

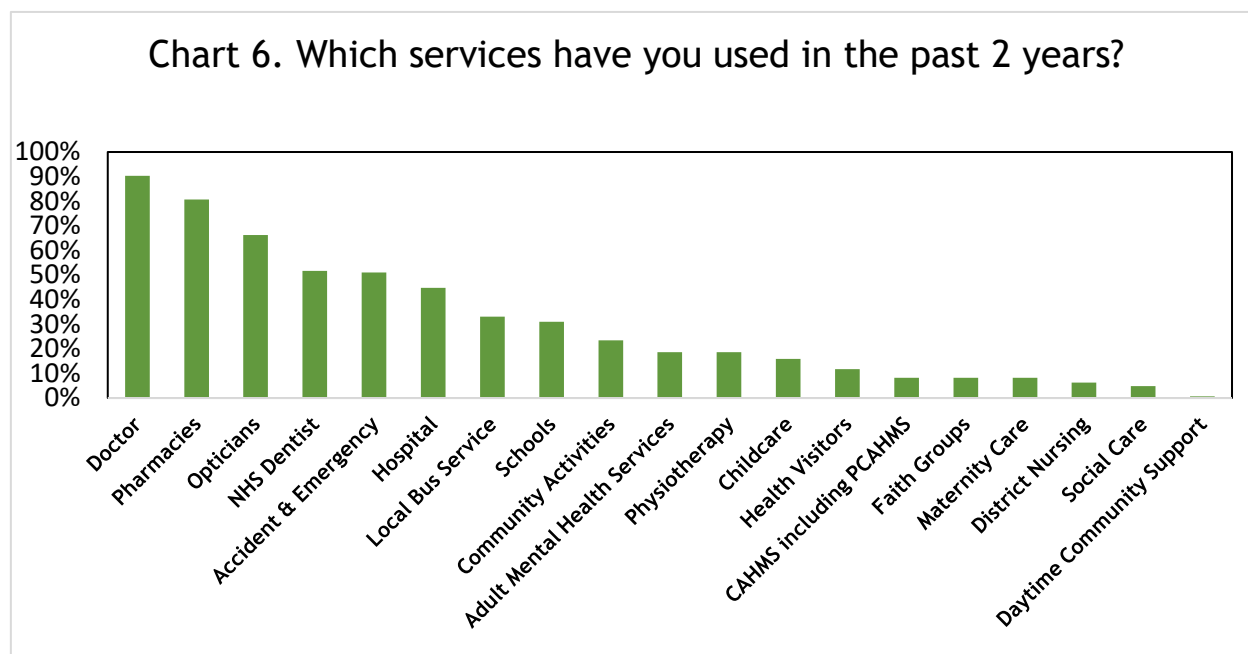
We then focused on which services people had accessed in the past two years. 90% of respondents had visited their GP, followed closely by their pharmacists and opticians (see Chart 6 below).

Respondents were asked if they would like to tell us more about these services, five people lamented a lack of capacity at the service, while similarly four people said that services and infrastructure were not keeping up with growth of the town.

Four people expressed frustration at not being able to register with an NHS dentist in the town, and the same number of people stated that having healthcare centralised in Oxford is problematic for people living in Didcot.

Waiting times and loss of services came up as an issue from a small number of respondents.

Chart 6 - Services used in the past 2 years



Bringing up a family in the Didcot area

57 people who took part in our survey stated that they are a parent of a child of children under the age of 18 and 55 people responded to the question - **‘What are the main concerns facing parents in Oxfordshire?’**.

Chart 7 below details the main concerns facing parents in Oxfordshire and shows that the three main concerns were COVID-19, education worries, and mental health and wellbeing of children.

Over half of parents said that **Covid-19 was one of their main concerns**, followed closely by their **child’s mental health and well-being**, and worries about **education**.

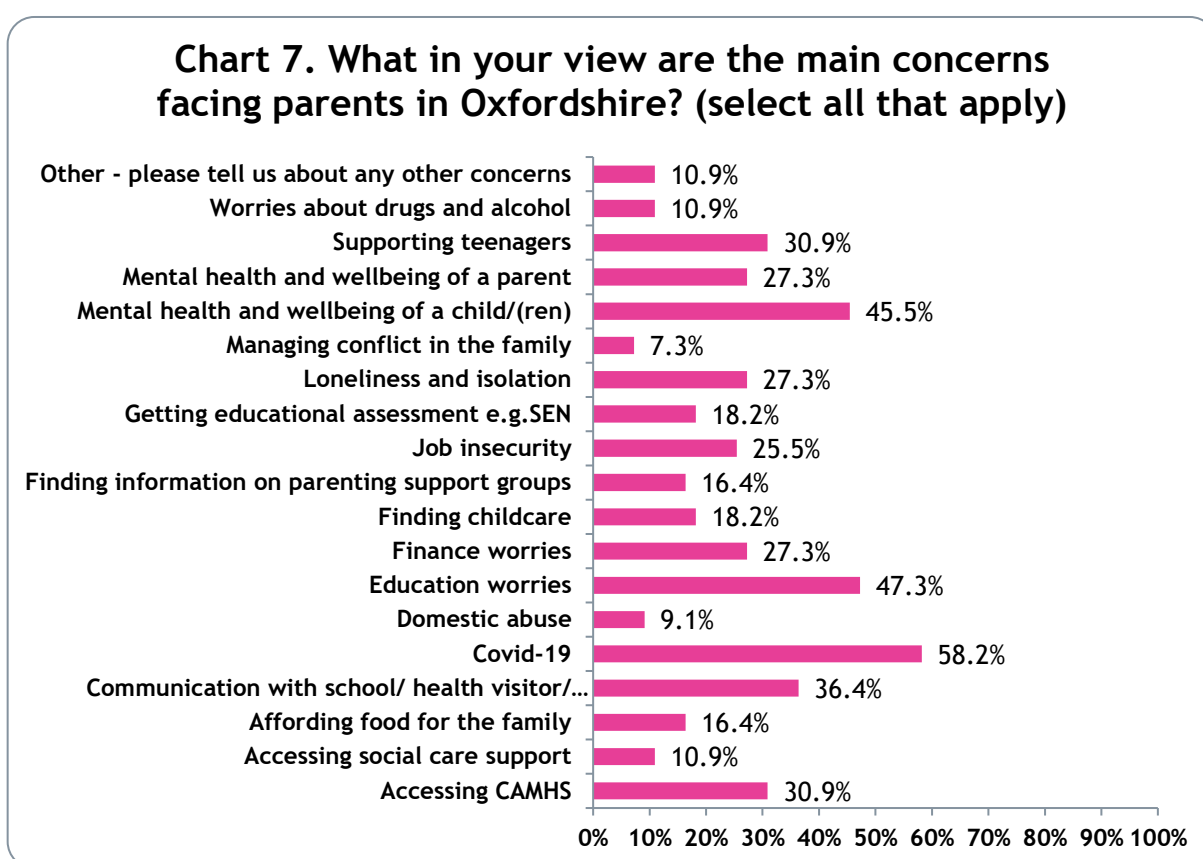
Close to a third of parents cited supporting teenagers, communication with a school/health visitor or GP, and accessing CAMHS support as a main concern for their family.

Around a quarter are concerned about the mental health and wellbeing of a parent, loneliness and isolation, job insecurity and financial worries. These all link into pressures on the adults in the family.

Between 15% and 20% are concerned about getting Special Educational Needs (SEN) assessments, finding information, finding childcare and being able to afford food for the family, while around 10% are worried about drugs and alcohol, domestic abuse and accessing social care support.

Managing conflict in the family was the least noted concern, but it was still raised by around 7% of respondents.

Chart 7 Main concerns facing parents in Oxfordshire



Where respondents chose 'Other', points raised were an extension of the above. Of the six comments, four were about the social impact on their children during lockdown - *"lack of interaction with other children, lack of facilities open"*, and *"our toddler is missing out on social interaction"* - with one person feeling very worried about schools having opened in September: *"I hate having no choice about whether my child attends school during this pandemic I fear for our lives"*.

One of the comments extended concerns about managing family conflict, and one other said that only some, and not all, of the communication with CAMHS/GP/School/Health visitor and so on, had been a challenge.

We also asked about parents' experience of **registering with local schools**. Of 40 responses, 36 people said that their experience had been positive: *"Easy and not a problem"*, and *"Registering is straight forward and self-explanatory"* were two quotes that reflect the general sentiment.

Four respondents commented that there were not enough spaces to register at their preferred or closest school - this is perceived as a particular problem on new developments, and with recent growth in the town *"There are nowhere near enough reception places in Didcot schools to match the population levels"*.

"Couldn't get a school place on Great Western Park" was a similar response, as was *"My kids were allocated 2 different schools because there's no space in any of the schools close to the house.... This is very stressful for my kids as we just moved to a new town and have no support"*

The best thing about living in the Didcot area

We asked people what they think the best thing is about living in Didcot.


Overwhelmingly people stated that **local amenities, shops, and facilities** are very convenient, in that *"Everything that you need is here in terms of shops, groceries, Dentist, Doctor etc"* and that *"...Facilities have improved a lot in last few years."* Many people mentioned how accessible everything is, summed up by the quote that Didcot is ***"very convenient for all aspects of life"***.

Following closely in second place was the presence of a **train station** in town. 30% of respondents said they really enjoy the *"rapid transport links to other cities"* and that the town has *"a great train station to anywhere in the country"*. The location of the town and road transport links to other places both rated highly too - in that *"the location is ideal for commuting"*, *"convenient to all areas"* and in a *"Central position in the country - relatively easy to travel to work"*. 10% of people value Didcot's bus services - particularly that *"it has a really good value town bus service"*.

Access to green spaces and the great outdoors are very clearly linked to the people's sense of wellbeing. *"The local environment"*, *"The current and future promised green spaces and parks"* and *"Living so close to a beautiful countryside"* are just some of the many comments we received about this aspect.

Social connections are also important. *"Our friends we have in Didcot"*, *"being close to family"*, and a *"great sense of community"* were sentiments shared by over 10% of respondents, with 5% of respondents noting that the *"friendliness of people"* is something that means a lot to them.

Other aspects of living in Didcot that were mentioned were local amenities like the Cornerstone Arts Centre, plenty of things to do, active travel routes, affordable housing. The historic value of the town was also important.



Conversely, 5% of respondents said that they did not think there was anything positive about living in and around Didcot or that they did not know.

Challenges to living in the Didcot area

We then asked: Are there any challenging aspects to living in the Didcot area, and what do you think could be done to make it better?

Interestingly, while road transport links and location rated as highly valuable to people, the **traffic and poor road conditions** rated as the highest noted challenge of living in Didcot and impacts on their wellbeing. Of the 122 responses, 48 people (42%) raised this as a challenge. Closely linked to this was **infrastructure not keeping up with growth of the town**; quotes like *“FIX the roads and STOP building houses!”* and *“Too many new homes being built, extra traffic”* summed up the general feeling. Parking and better public transport were also issues raised within this theme.

Almost a quarter of respondents complained about difficulty of access to GP practices and health appointments - both in terms of how it can be *“impossible to get an appointment”* and that *“We need more doctors surgeries especially on Great Western Park”*. In terms of secondary care, 5 people mentioned that Didcot *“Needs a hospital”* with the John Radcliffe being a *“Long way”* and that it *“doesn’t make sense when being asked to use public transport”*.

Anti-social behaviour and crime was an issue raised by over 15% of respondents, and linking into that, the same amount of people cited **lack of provision and facilities for young people and families** as a problem in the town. *“No provision for teenagers just looking for a place to go to meet up and this causes problems elsewhere”* and *“really poor provision of youth services. lots of disadvantaged young people tend to hang out in town with associated anti-social behaviour because so little is there to support them”*.

Eight people mentioned problems with communications with/from the local council, such as *“poor communication with community generally”*, a feeling that the Council were out of touch with local issues, not listening to or heeding complaints, making housing/growth decisions based on *“the environment rather than profit”* and wanting better management when travelling communities visit the town.

Two of the respondents to our survey said that they had experienced **racism** in physical public spaces and online: *“Didcot is very racist and I have experienced unconscious bias on a regular basis. Online the racism is overt, which is demonstrated by Didcot resident groups where people post racist comments regularly.”*

“I have found a number of people in the area to be racist and openly so in public and on social media sites”.

GP surgeries

We asked people about their experiences with their GP practice. Didcot town has three GP practices, with other practices in the surrounding villages.

People who took part in our survey said they were registered with the following surgeries:

Table 1 Where registered with GP

Didcot Health Centre	41.8%
The Oak Tree Medical Centre	24.7%
Woodlands Medical Centre	27.4%
I am registered with a GP elsewhere	3.4%
I am not registered with a GP	0.7%
Other (please specify):	2.1%

Of the 'Other', two respondents are registered at Clifton Hampden Practice, and one at Faringdon Medical Practice.

Map of location of GP surgeries in Didcot



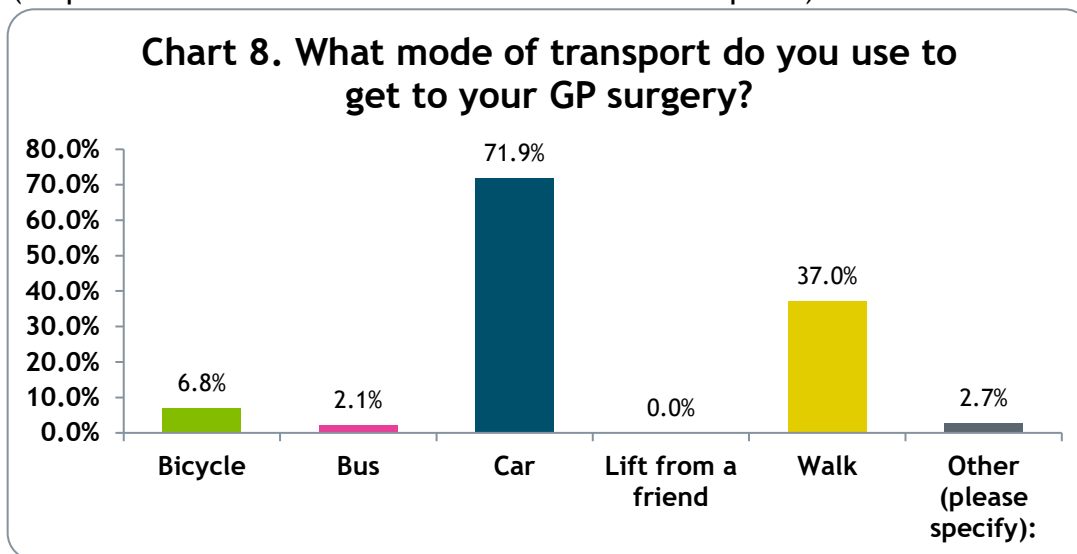
Just over 60% of respondents said that the GP practice they are registered with is the closest one to their home, while almost 35% said that it was not the closest one, and 4% were unsure.

Most people drive to their GP appointment, followed by walking, and

then cycling. Very few people use public transport. (See Chart 8 below).

Chart 8 Travelling to your GP surgery

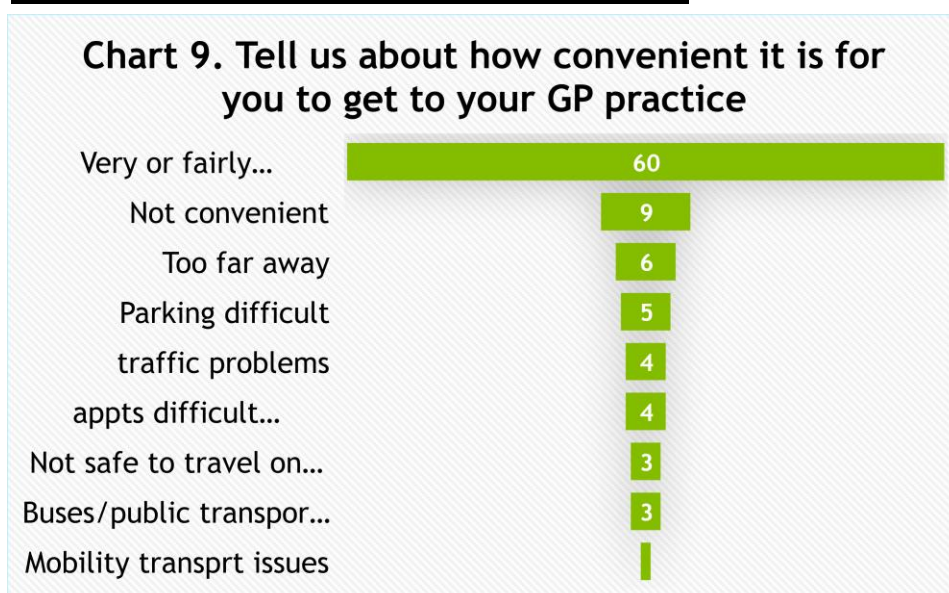
(respondents were able to select more than one option)



Two of those who ticked 'Other' said they use their wheelchair, and one person said their neighbour gives them a lift.

While most people said they found it convenient to get to, some complained at not being able to walk or use public transport.

Chart 9 Convenience of getting to GP surgery



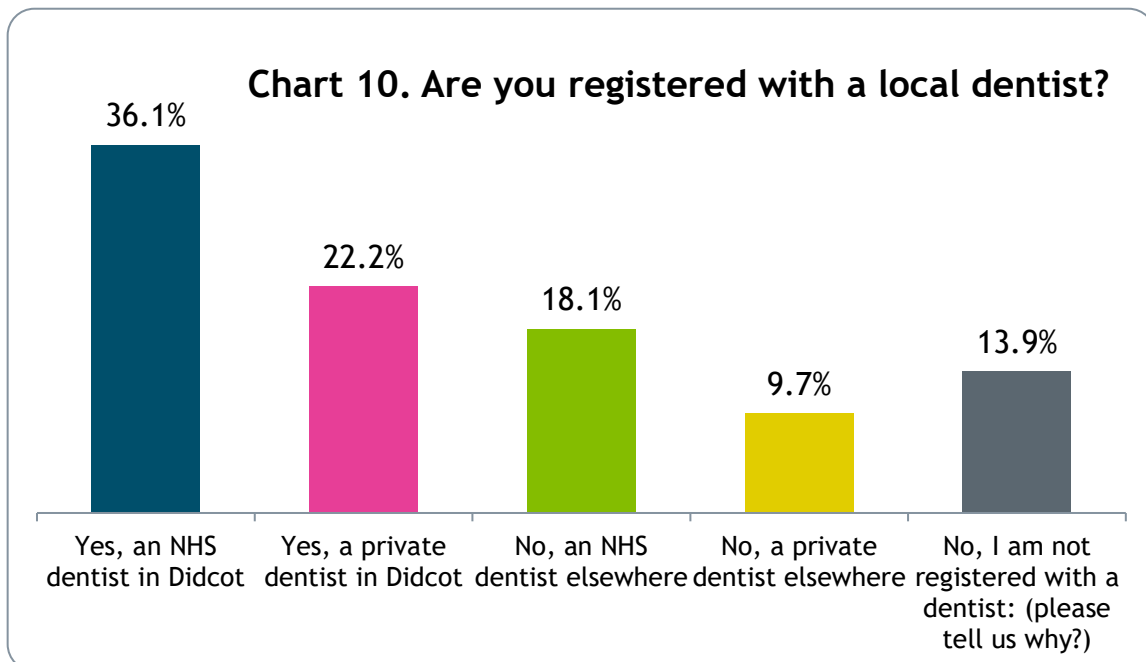
Those people who said it is not convenient largely said it was because they could not use a car to attend, and as their surgery was too far to walk, they found this difficult.

Almost a quarter of respondents complained about access to GP practices and appointments - both in terms of how it can be “*impossible to get an appointment*” and that “*We need more doctors surgeries especially on Great Western Park*”.

Additional information about peoples’ experiences of accessing GP services during the coronavirus pandemic are discussed later in this report.

Dental practices

Chart 10 Registered with dentist



We asked people where they receive their dental healthcare. Just over one third of respondents said they are registered with a local NHS Dentist. Just under 10% of people were not registered with any dentist (see Chart 10 above).

Overall, 54.2% of people were registered with an NHS dentist and 31.9% registered with a private dentist.

- 36.1% of people were registered with an NHS dentist in Didcot
- 22.2% with a private dentist in Didcot
- 27.8% of people were registered with a dentist outside of Didcot - 18.1% with an NHS dentist and 9.7% with a private dentist.

Those that told us why they were not registered with a dentist explained that this was because:

- of a “*phobia*” of going to the dentist

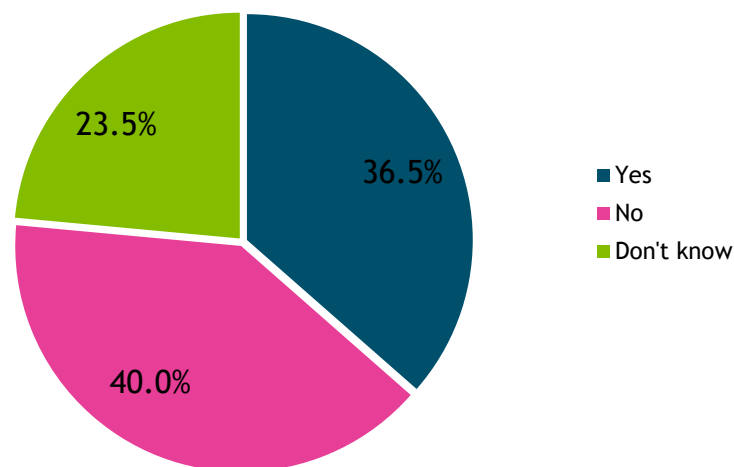
- that they “haven’t gotten round to it yet”
- that private dentists are “too expensive”
- that local “NHS dentists are ‘full up’”.

These reasons were shared equally among those who are not registered. Clearly the lack of access to Didcot-based practices taking on NHS dentists is a barrier for people who otherwise would take the opportunity to access affordable dental healthcare.

Our survey then focused on how close to home a person’s NHS dental practice is and how people make their way to appointments.

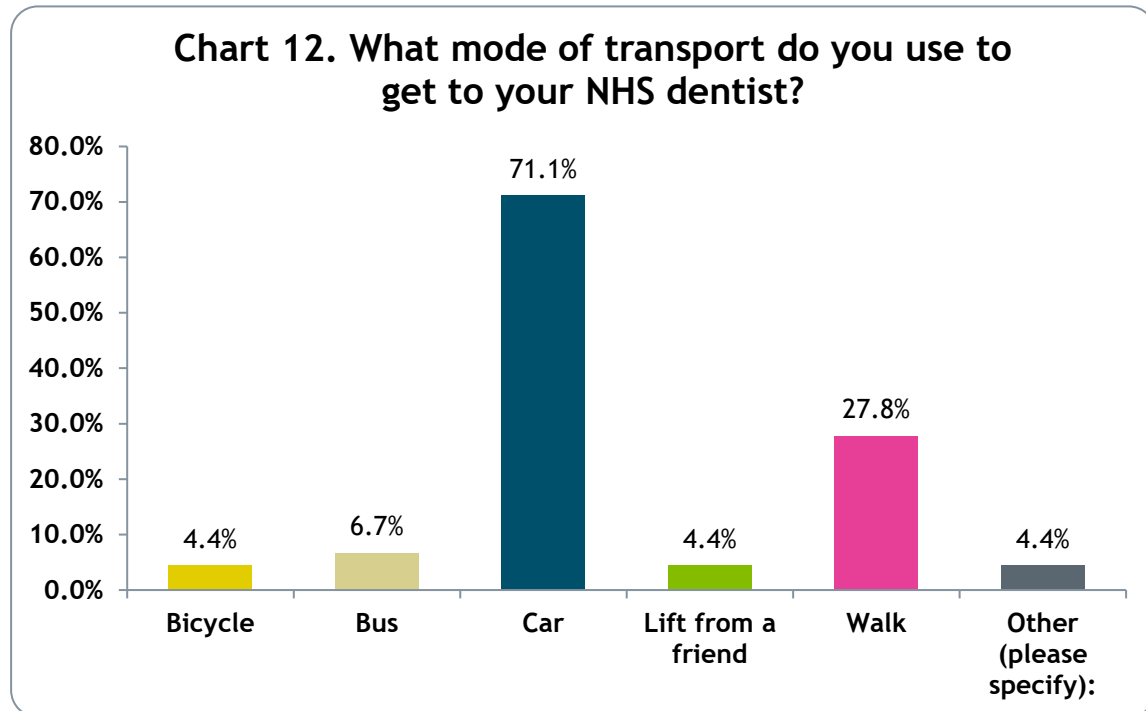
Chart 11 Is your registered dentist nearest one to you?

Chart 11. If you are registered with an NHS dentist, is it the one nearest to where you live?



Respondents who were registered with an NHS dentist were quite evenly split over whether that practice was the closest to their home, with a slim majority answering that it was not.

Chart 12 Mode of transport to NHS dentist (respondents able to select more than one option)



This reflects similarly with people's access to GP surgeries. Of the 'Other' responses, people said they use their wheelchair or the train to get to their dental appointment.

Of the people who told us how they travel to their dental appointment, around half (45) commented on how convenient it is for them at present.

- 21 people said that it was "very convenient" for them
- 21 people said it was "not at all convenient"
- six people highlighted parking issues when arriving by car.

The main reason people claimed travelling to their appointment was inconvenient was due to **not being able to find a local dentist taking on NHS patients meaning they had** to register with a dentist outside of Didcot, or pay to go private:

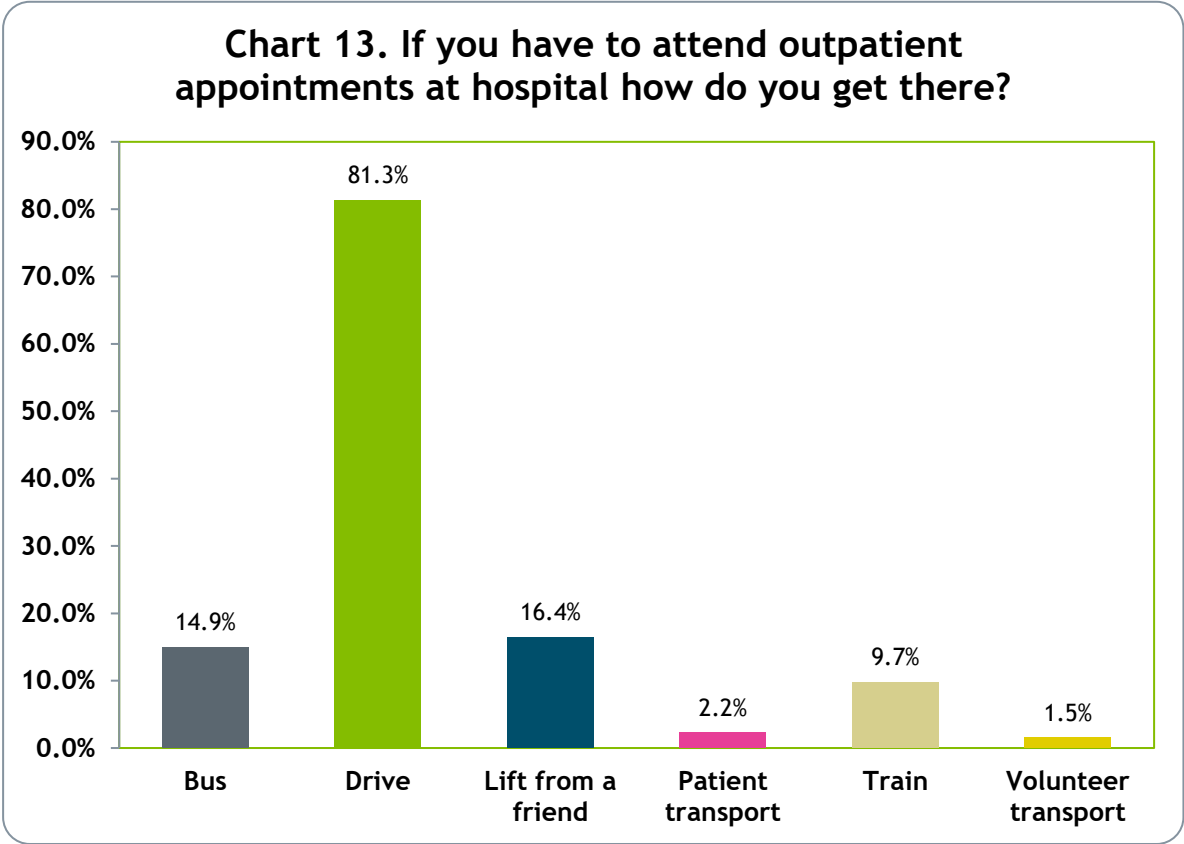
- *Dentist is in Wantage. Can't get a NHS one in Didcot*
- *Fine although quite a distance for us (we go to Faringdon I believe as this was the closest NHS dentist we could register with*
- *Not convenient, but can't register in Didcot for NHS treatment as nowhere is taking patients*
- *Not very have to go to dentist in Reading as there aren't places in Didcot for NHS dentist*
- *The dentist most local to us is a private surgery only.*
- *Takes 50 mins to drive there but at the time I moved into Didcot there were no NHS dentists taking new customers.*

Getting to outpatient appointments

People who live in Didcot would likely need to travel to Oxford for outpatient appointments. We asked people how they get to these appointments, and if this is convenient for them. People were able to tick more than one option. Chart 13 below shows that public transport is infrequently used.

Chart 13 Travel to hospital outpatient appointments

(respondents were able to choose more than one method)



We asked people to tell us more about this. We heard that because public transport takes a long time, it is much easier to drive to the John Radcliffe Hospital despite parking being difficult. A number of people said that they choose to use the local park and ride service, and one person noted that while public transport is wheelchair accessible, the driver was not trained in how to secure their wheelchair which resulted in the wheelchair being broken and the person now choosing to pay for a taxi instead.

Coronavirus pandemic

Access to information and support

We asked people about their experience of receiving information and accessing support and healthcare since the Covid-19 outbreak. We provided a free text box for people to tell us their views.

Of the 116 people that responded to this question, 44 people said that they had **felt well-informed** and had **easy access to the information** that they needed. People cited different sources of information from online resources, such as information that is *“all available on line & via the BBC news”* being able to *“Get all the info I need from news and update from [GP surgery]”*, while another noted that *“Advice from patient organisations has been great”*

There were some concerns raised about digital exclusion, with one person commenting that as *“All information has been from online, I can't imagine how older, less technology focused people have coped.”*

While local information was praised, a few people criticized advice coming from Government, stating that *“information has been awful”*, and that there had been *“confusing mixed messages”*.

18 people said they had not needed any information or access to healthcare, with some people saying they felt relieved they had not had to, with others saying that they had actively avoided doing so.

42 people raised concerns - these were split into the following issues:

- Access to GP appointments (9)
- Access to dental appointment (6)
- Cancelled health visitor appointments (1)
- Cancelled hospital or specialist appointments (5)
- Problems getting prescriptions (1)
- Lack of help with end-of-life care (1)
- Reduced antenatal appointments (1)
- Isolation and loneliness (1)
- Waiting times (4)
- Problems accessing tests (1)
- Disability access (1)

Other comments of general concern included: *“It's not existent, very poor”*, *“Hard. Services are overwhelmed”*, *“not good”* and *“manic”*.

GP practice during Covid-19

We asked if people had been made aware of any changes to their GP practice since the start of Covid-19. Of 133 people who responded:

- 104 said that their GP practice was carrying out consultations over the telephone
- 95 said that they had been initially triaged on the telephone
- 41 were able to have an appointment using E-Consult
- 18 had access to video consultations.
- 45 people said that their practice could only make appointments on the day required.

We delved into the impact of these changes by asking how people had been affected. 90 people answered this question, and almost a third (29) said that the **impact had been positive**, with many praising how much better it was to be able to use telephone/video/e-consult as an option.

- *“Very convenient around work and much better than having to go in person for a simple thing”*
- *“Much easier to get advice hope it continues”*
- *“Using e-consult has worked well and is really convenient for the type of appointment I have required”*
- *“Very convenient around work”*
- *“It’s a great idea. Keeps us all safe and more convenient”.*

However, twenty people complained that **telephone appointments had been difficult or inadequate**, stating that it *“Made getting an appointment to see a GP for fairly serious matters a much slower process”* and *“Can be frustrating, would like to see Dr in person.”* Another explained that *“It takes weeks to get a small thing sorted instead of 5 mins face to face”.*

- Eight people said they were unaware of any changes or hadn’t needed to access an appointment
- Six people said it was difficult to get through on the telephone
- Six said that communication had been absent or problematic
- Three people said that same-day appointments are a problem, in that it is *“Impossible to work full time & get an on the day appointment”* with one stating that *“you have to get up and on the telephone at 8.30am, or you face the following being said to you: ‘Please try again tomorrow, and phone in the morning, as we currently cannot move you forward, as our doctors have full lists for today...’”*
- Two people mentioned feeling isolated while suffering from long Covid, feeling *“forgotten and lost and depressed and anxious”* and *“difficult to get anyone to help, especially when nobody will see me in person”.*

Accessibility during the pandemic was mentioned in two different ways - the first being unable to use the telephone due to a disability and no alternative offered, and another person explaining that being prevented from attending appointments as carer for their husband with dementia created a problem.

NHS dental appointments during Covid-19

We asked people who are registered with an **NHS dentist** to tell us about their experience. 48 people responded to this question:

- 33 of whom said that they had had a **good experience**, with complimentary comments like *“excellent treatment”*, *“excellent care”*, and a *“positive experience”* shared with us
- 17 people said that since the Covid-19 outbreak there had been *“No appointments available since March”* and highlighted the issue of *“dentists not allowing any checks ups and will only see you in an emergency”*.

Some respondents said that despite needing treatment, they still could not be seen, with one person giving as an example; *“My teeth are suffering but if it is not an emergency they won't see you”*.

While we did not ask people who were registered with private practices about their experience, **we did hear that some NHS patients were able to book private appointments to access treatment:**

“I had to go private in order to see a dentist, after had toothache for 6 months”

This does beg the question as to why private practices could offer Covid-19 secure appointments, but it was not possible under the NHS.

To find out more about Healthwatch Oxfordshire please see:
www.healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk

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