



Northumberland  
County Council

# Consultation report 2024



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# Selective Licensing consultation response summary

## Housing Act 2004

- Proposal to implement a selective licensing scheme in the Croft and Cowpen Quay area (shown on map below).



- The selective licensing draft proposal 2023 detailed the background evidence to support a selective licensing scheme in Blyth, Croft/Cowpen quay. It includes the proposed details for the scheme and how it would work in practice.
- The document considered neighbourhood and local data to identify a scheme focused on improving conditions. A number of streets were identified within Croft/Cowpen Quay. There are 47 streets included, with 1372 properties, 524 of which would be subject to selective licensing.
- In November 2021, cabinet members approved the planning stages for selective licensing. This was followed by the research, planning and data collection stage which detailed a draft proposal as to how the scheme would be implemented. This draft proposal was used as a guide for the consultation starting in August 2023.

## Consultation methodology 2023

- The 11 week consultation programme for the proposal started on the 14<sup>th</sup> August 2023 until 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023. This was to obtain the views of tenants, residents, landlords, letting/managing agents and stakeholder/representative organisations of the area.
- This summary collates and considers the responses received during the consultation exercise and where appropriate responds to comments submitted.
- The result of this consultation will offer recommendations for amendments to the scheme which will be put up for approval to council members in May 2024.
- Before the consultation began, the full selective licensing proposal was detailed on the council's website with a full copy of the consultation documentation and surveys.
- Two online questionnaires were created to gather opinions and feedback on the selective licensing proposal in the area proposed for the scheme to be implemented. The questionnaires were anonymous and enabled the respondent to indicate which area they resided in or if they owned property in the area.
- The surveys were available both online and a hard copy could be obtained. Both questionnaires were made available online on the private sector housing area of the website and hard copies were available on request. A dedicated email address was set up to enable online responses to be sent as an alternative to the completion of the questionnaires and an address as well as prepaid envelopes for responses was also made widely available.
- A mail out was completed to all residents in the area, advising of the proposal and asking for feedback. In addition to this all landlords and property owners were written to advising of the scheme and asking for feedback. Social media and online advertising were used to update landlords and tenants as well as key dates of events.
- Face to face consultation events were held where tenants and landlords could come along to find out more information and give their views. Along with community events, council meetings and the landlord development forum where an update was given, and feedback welcomed.
- The table below details all events and communication methods that were used for the consultation process.

Date	Event
W/C 7 <sup>th</sup> August	<p>Advertisement begins.</p> <p>Letters posted out to residents, landlords and businesses in the area– with link to the proposal and the survey. 1500 in total. This was to notify of the proposed scheme and the planned consultation period.</p> <p>Letters or emails were sent to key stakeholders including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Letting/management agents</li> <li>• Landlord organisations including NRLA</li> <li>• Housing associations</li> <li>• Town council.</li> </ul> <p>Link to consultation citizen space to enable people to comment on the scheme during the consultation.</p> <p>Advertisements on Facebook/twitter - council Facebook page, heart of Blyth page, ICCQ page - this will be notification of the SL scheme and the planned consultation period.</p> <p>Update council website – planned consultation date and SL scheme – link to surveys and proposal</p>
14 <sup>th</sup> August	<p>Official Public consultation begins. Survey went live on this date</p> <p>Weekly advertising of SL scheme and consultation on social media</p> <p>Every Monday</p> <p>Advert in Private Sector Team newsletter regarding SL scheme and consultation events/surveys.</p> <p>Email to all landlords on Private sector team mailing list to advertise scheme and planned consultation.</p> <p>Email to other services with link to enable people to comment on the SL scheme during the consultation period.</p>
24/08/2023	Public event, Blyth Civic Centre, (1pm) – presentation regarding selective licensing allowing for questions and answers from the public.
07/09/2023	Blyth together housing meeting – SL presentation and update
7/09/2023	Public event, Blyth Civic Centre, (5pm) - presentation regarding selective licensing allowing for questions and answers from the public.
19/09/2023	NEL event
21/09/2023	Northumberland County wide forum Blyth Town Football club. Presentation on SL and info about consultation
23/09/2023	Residents event at local church in conjunction with local harvest festival.
2/10/2023	Letters sent to landlords who own property in the area’s home addresses. 257 Letters sent.
5/10/2023	Public event, (1pm) Blyth Civic Centre- presentation regarding selective licensing allowing for questions and answers from the public.
19/10/2023	Public event, (5pm) Blyth Civic Centre- presentation regarding selective licensing allowing for questions and answers from the public.
24/10/2023	Keel row event – drop in for residents
26/10/2023	Public event, (5pm) Blyth Civic Centre- presentation regarding selective licensing allowing for questions and answers from the public.
31 <sup>st</sup> October	Public consultation ends.
Prior to and during consultation period	Advertisements and press releases within the local paper
Throughout consultation period	Promotion via social media- Twitter and Facebook

## Consultation responses

Following the consultation period, a total of 30 responses were received from the online survey, this included both residents and landlords/property owners.

There was a total of 5 face to face consultation events held with around 20 landlords attending in total. From these events the opinions of landlords varied.

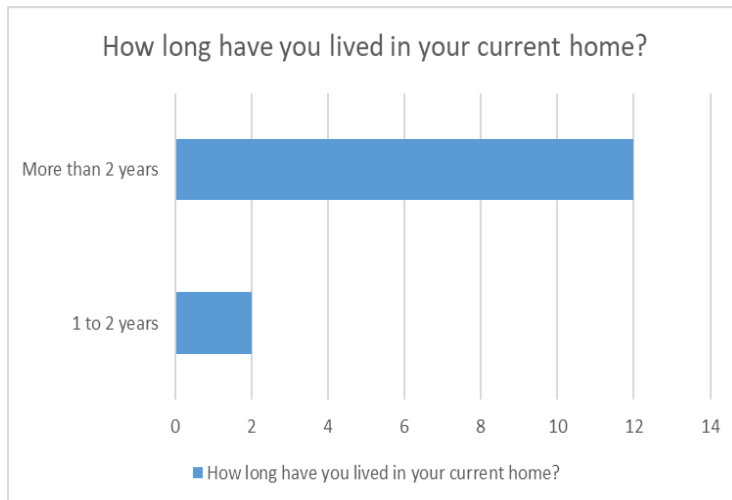
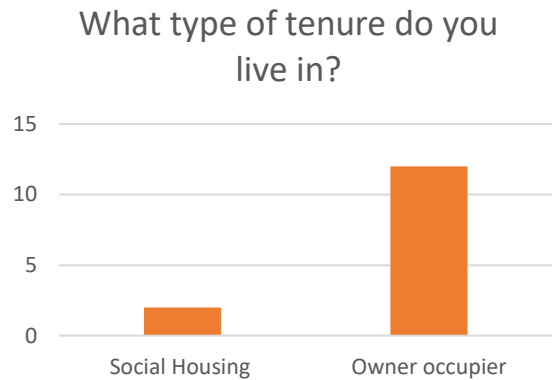
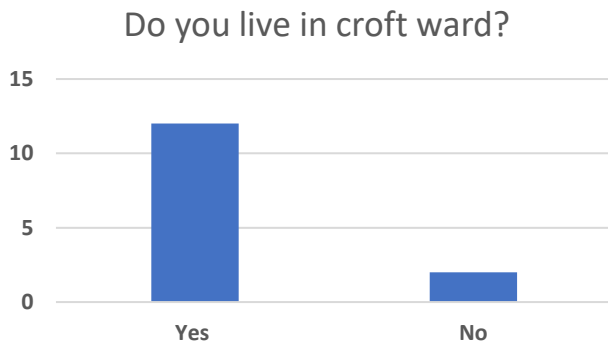
Information was also presented at the annual landlord's development forum held in October, where around 80 landlords were in attendance. This explained the proposal and the reasoning around the proposal.

# Residents' responses

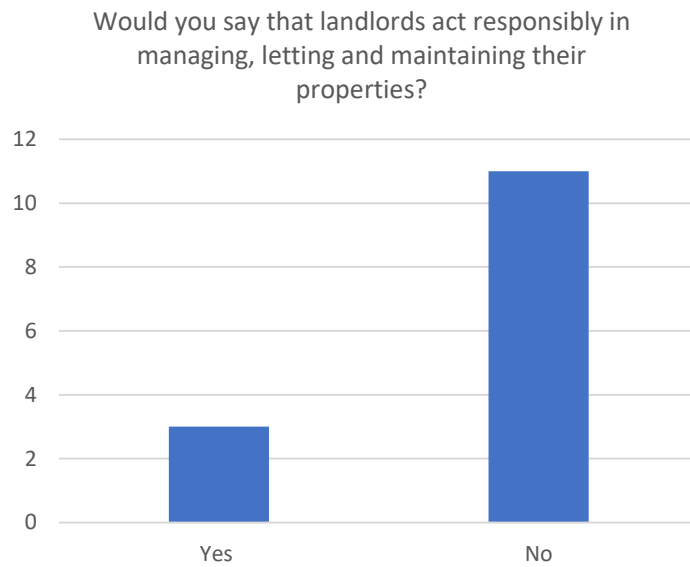
## Where do you live?

A total of 14 residents responded to the consultation survey. 85% of who lived in the proposed selective licensing area.

Out of these, 85% lived in owned homes and had lived there for more than 2 years.



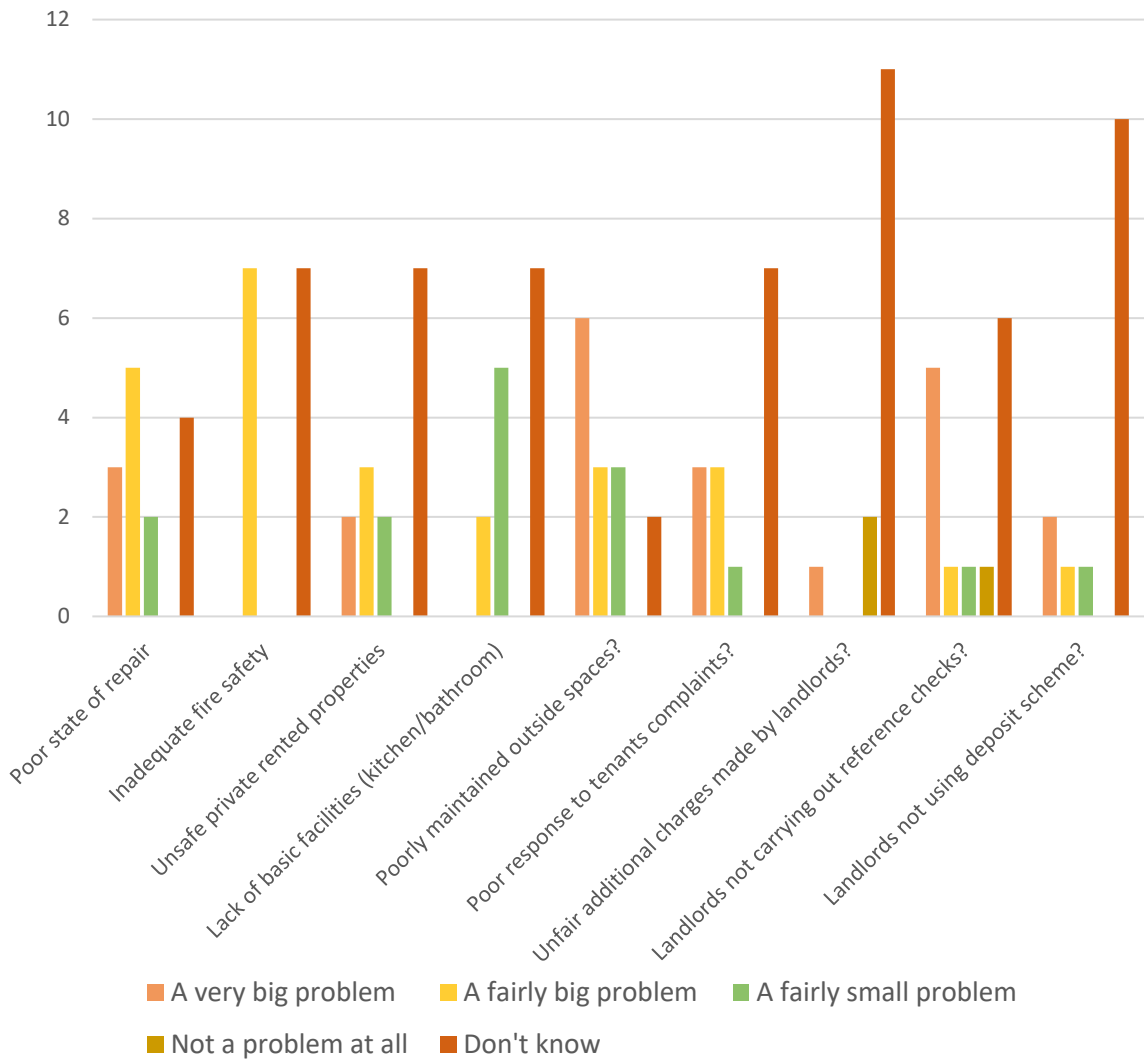
## What are you overall views on properties in the area?



The majority of residents, 72% believed that landlords did not act responsible in managing, letting and maintaining their properties.



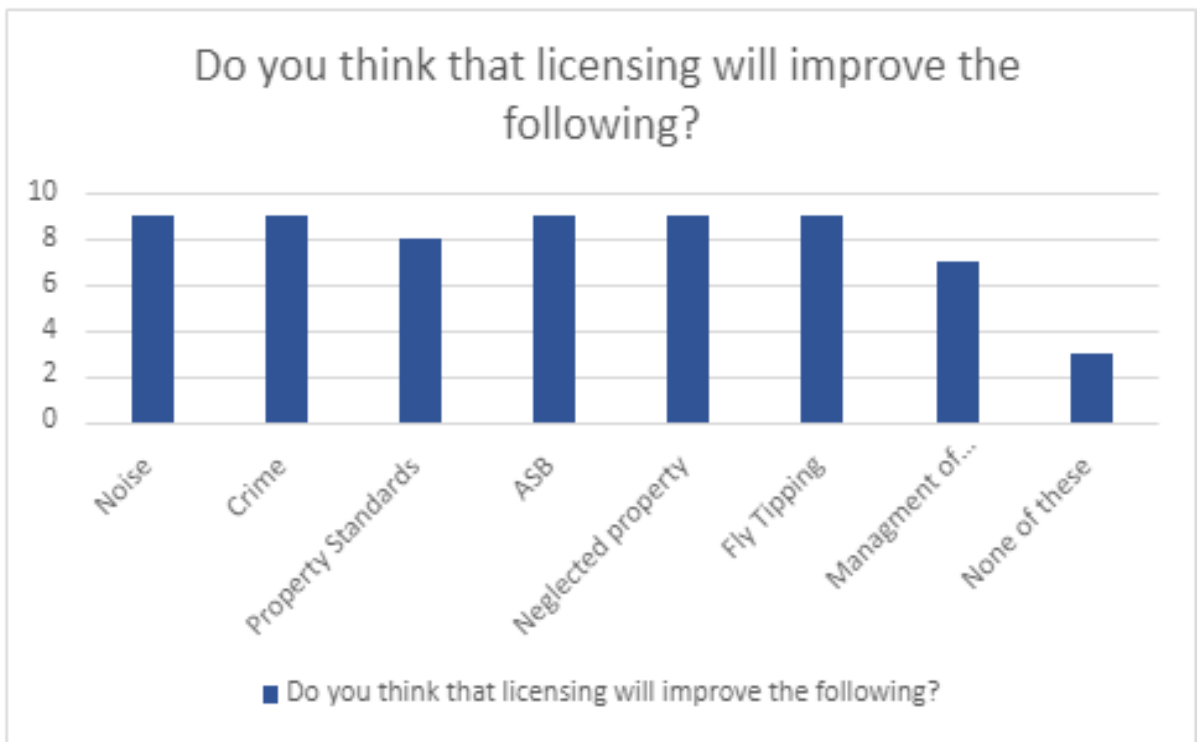
## What is your view on Property standards in the rented properties?



When it came to property standards and tenancy procedures, the majority of residents believed there that there was a problem regarding PRS properties being in a poor state of repair.

Some detailed that they were conscious of issues relating to fire safety, lack of basic facilities. The rest were unsure, when it came to areas outside being poorly maintained most residents answered it was a fairly big problem.

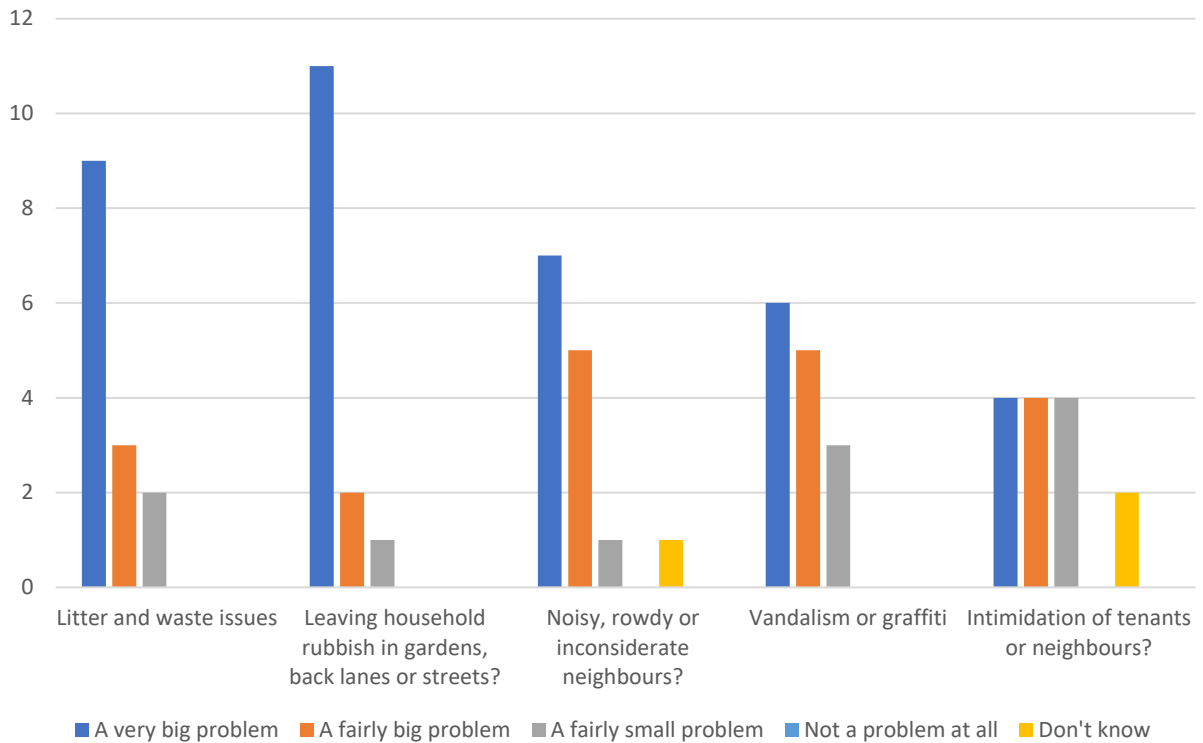
## Your views on selective licensing



Residents seem very supportive of the scheme and answered that it could make improvements to the area. With 60% of respondents agreeing that selective licensing could have a positive impact on issues such as poor property standards, anti-social behavior, crime and noise.

# What is your view on anti-social behaviour in the area?

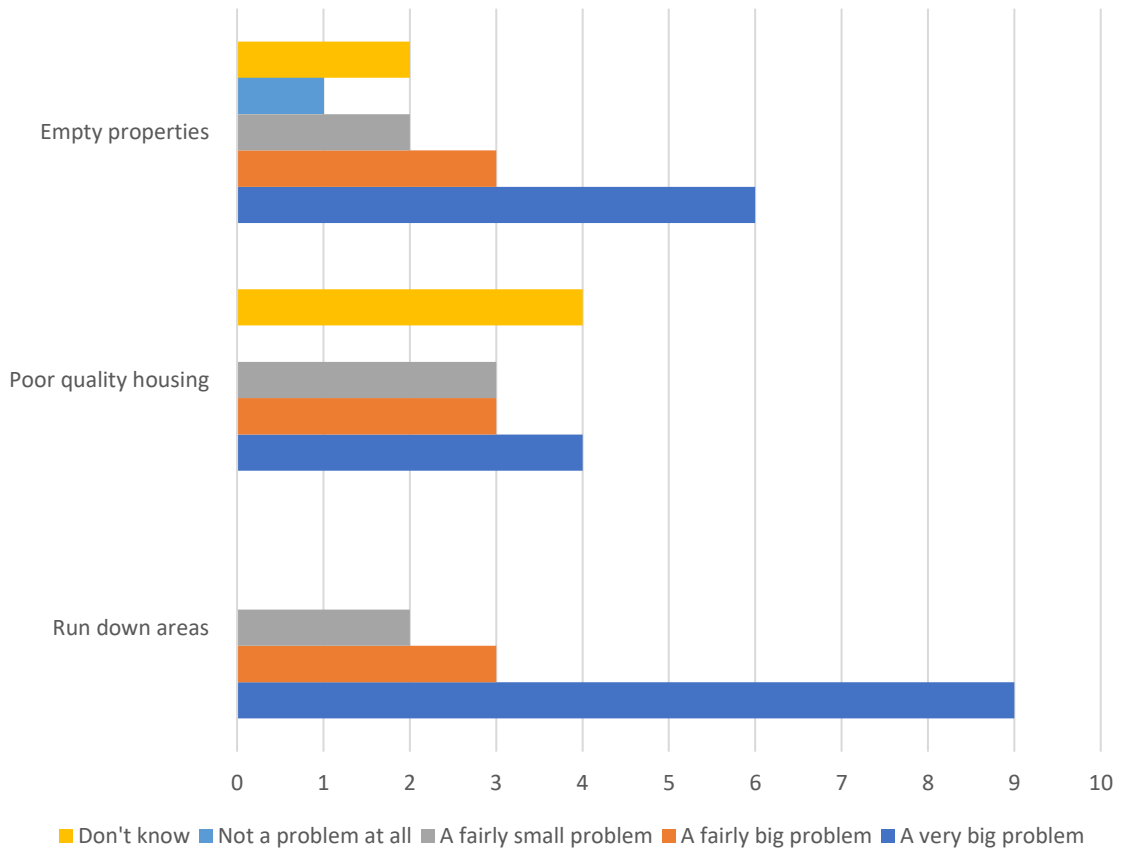
What is your view on the following ASB issues.



Throughout the area, residents who answered, believed there was a very big problem regarding Litter and waste, household rubbish being left in gardens as well as noisy and inconsiderate neighbours.

A majority also believed there are significant issues relating to vandalism or graffiti as well as intimidation of tenants or neighbours.

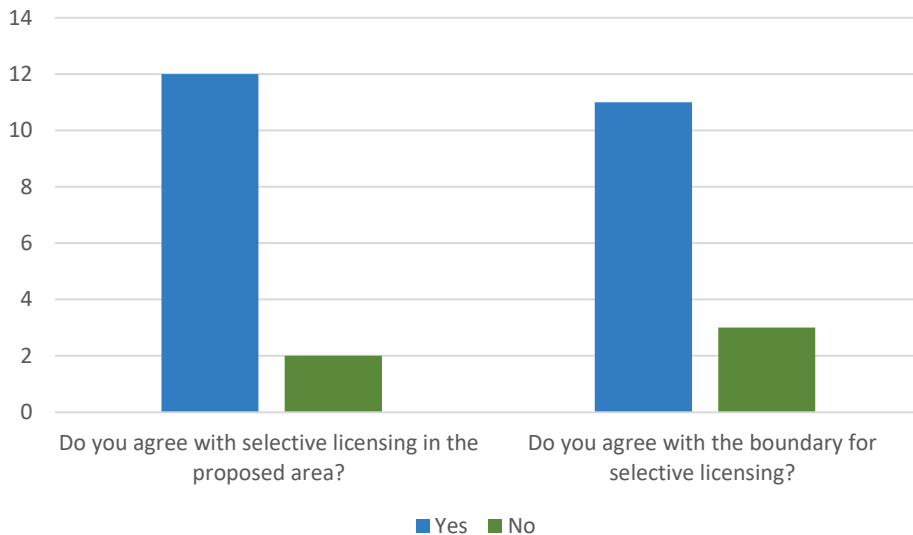
What are your views on deprivation in the area?  
Do you think the following issues are problem?



Residents in the area answered that they believed that there was a significant problem with areas being run down.

The majority also indicated that within the proposed selective licensing area poor quality housing was an issue and highlighted a very big problem with empty properties.

## What are your thoughts on the licensing area and boundary?



As shown the majority of residents (85%) agreed with the selective licensing scheme. Whilst 78 % agreed with the selective licensing boundaries, we asked for residents to provide comments as to why they did not agree with the selective licensing boundary.

Some of the comments we received were:

“It should also include from the top of Waterloo Road up to St Wilfred's, including Lynn St etc. There is a massive problem with anti social behaviour there also.”

“This scheme should not have boundaries it should be enforced everywhere”

“The licence is causing landlords who have managed properties well and to a good standard to sell their properties causing less available rental properties and in turn a housing crisis with a lack of properties generally and an increase in rents to cover these costs which means more unaffordable housing for tenants. I disagree with the councils' proposals to implement these licences, and would not agree that they have the ability to manage the issues better than the majority of good and responsible landlords can for their own properties.”

**We also asked residents, do you have any other comments on the impact of the management and condition of the privately rented properties?**

Some of the responses were:

“Private landlords don't seem care about what the state of their property is as long as the rent is paid. They don't seem to make regular visits to see what the tenant is looking after their investment. It lowers the tone of the neighbourhood and makes it look unsightly.”

“I would welcome the Licencing with open arms if it makes Croft ward a better place to live.”

“The impacts of these licences are high and ultimately impact the tenants for whom they are to serve. In areas where the licences have been introduced, the result is less available properties and higher rents causing less affordable housing.”

**As well as, do you have any suggestions of alternatives or improvements to the scheme?**

Some of the responses were:

“Make it compulsory not voluntary if they refuse to sign take there properties off them”

“Increase the penalties for the landlords who do not manage their properties well and responsibly, as the majority of landlords that work hard to ensure they are upholding their responsibilities are penalised for the few who do not.”

“Stringent policing of the scheme, It shouldn't be a "tick box" scheme and needs regular public information acted upon. Asking tenants to fill in a questionnaire. A number to ring if the tenant feels under pressure by the landlord. Checking if the landlords other properties are being well maintained”

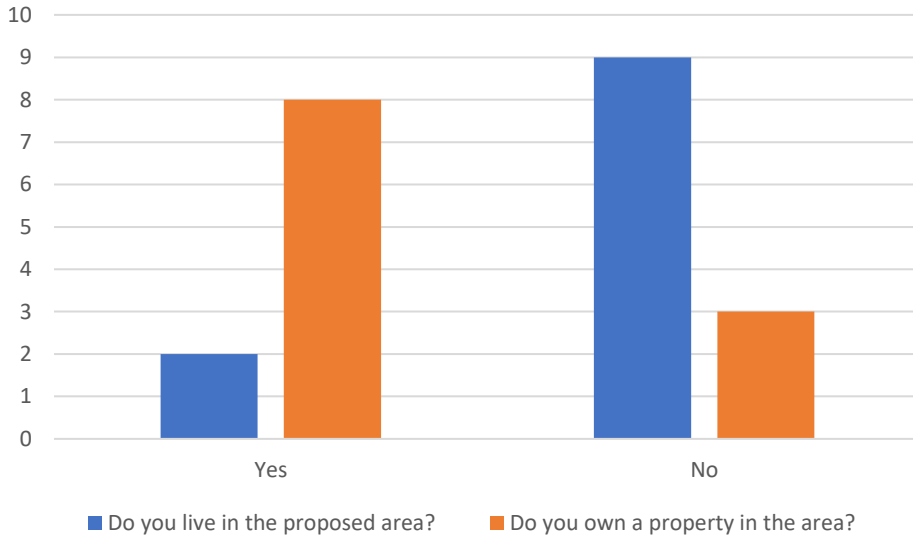
The majority of tenants were supportive of the proposed scheme, living within the proposed scheme area they highlighted several issues to do with management and property standards and felt like these would be improved by a selective licensing scheme.

Residents in the area advised they had seen a deterioration in the area over the last several years and they felt there were significant issues to do with litter and ASB.

Some of the feedback that we received from residents opined that they would like for the whole of Blyth to be covered by selective licensing and that it should be a requirement in order to be a landlord.

## Landlords responses

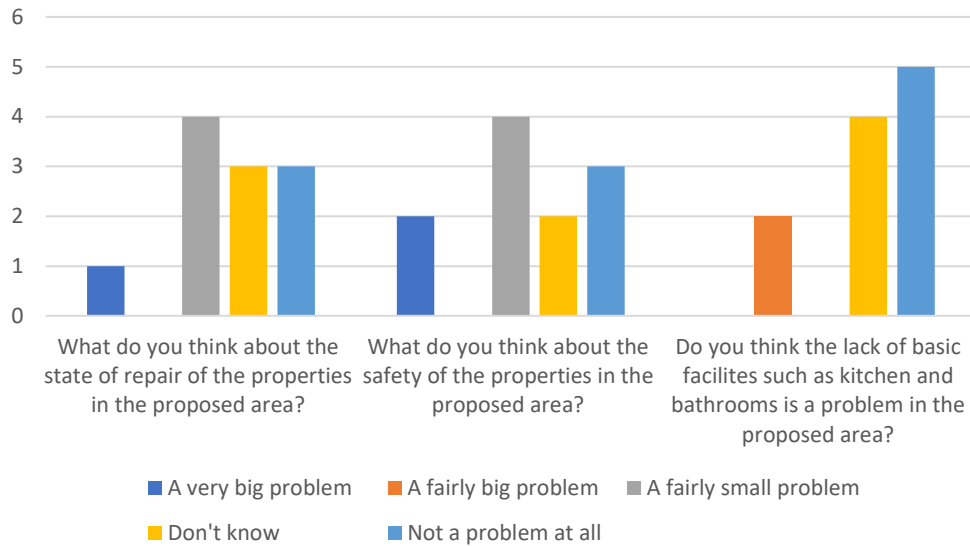
A total of 11 landlords responded to the consultation survey.



Out of the consultant responses, 18% lived in the proposed selective licensing area whilst 72% owned property within the area.



## What are your views of the property standards?

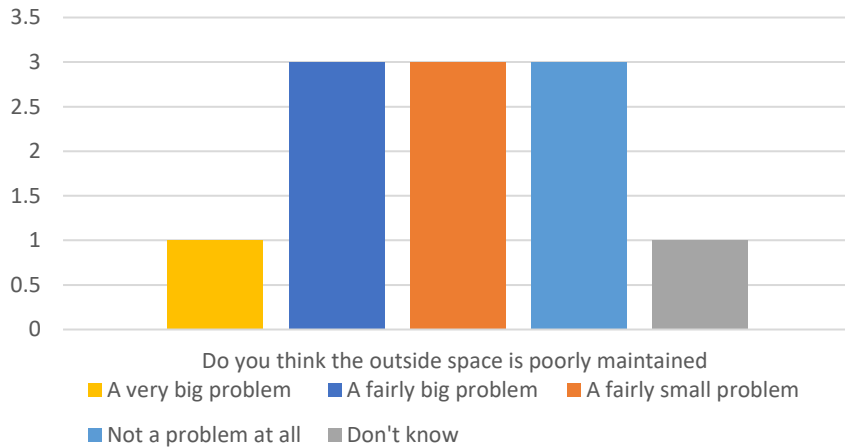


We asked landlords what their views on the condition of properties in the proposed area were.

The majority of landlords answered that they did not identify a problem, or there was a very small problem when it came to fire safety and the state of repair of properties.

A small portion of landlords identified an issue to do with lack of basic facilities whilst the rest answered they did not see a problem or were unsure.

When it came to looking at the outside space of properties, the majority of landlords identified a problem with poor maintenance.



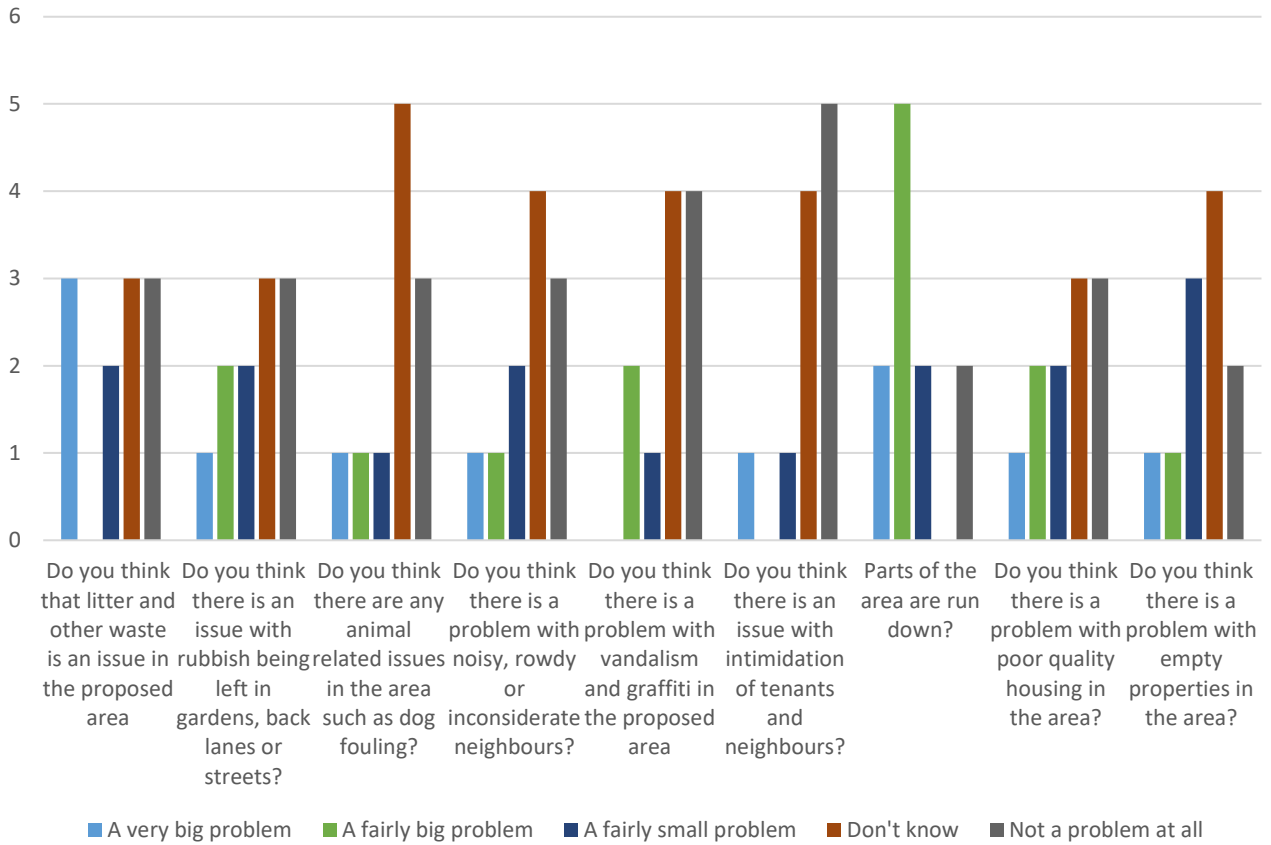
We asked for comments on this topic, some of the comments we received were:

“Many properties are run down. Rubbish in front and back gardens/yard. Rubbish dumped in the lanes weekly. Boarded up houses. Just no respect for the area or the people that own and keep their homes nice.”

“Mainly good although some people don’t care due to no help/encouragement/support from local council in general council has run the area down on purpose this leads to neglect by residents”

“We do not have a problem with the property standards in the area. We own many properties in the area and feel all are of appropriate standards and well managed. We do not have any current active complaints raised by tenants in the area regarding property state of theirs or neighbouring properties”

# What are your views regarding the local environment and anti-social behaviour?



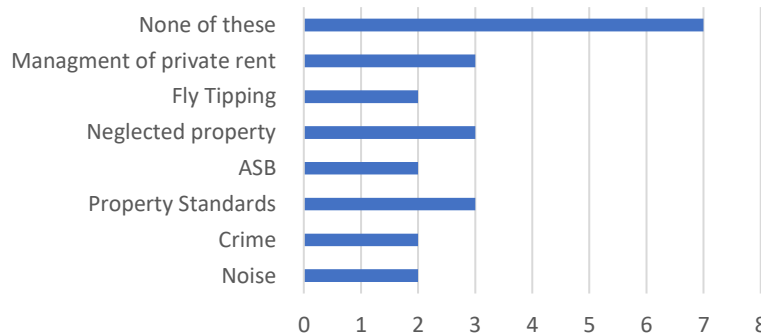
The majority of landlords were unsure of issues relating to local environment as well as ASB.

Those that did answer were split evenly between there being a large problem and there being no problem with litter and rubbish being left in gardens. The majority of landlords answered that there was no issue to do with vandalism, noisy or rowdy neighbours or intimidation of tenants.

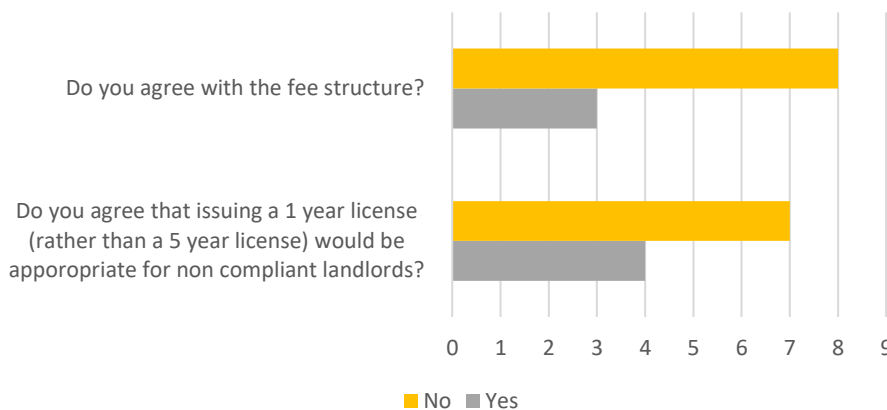
They did however identify a problem with parts of the are being run down, when it came to poor quality housing and empty properties the majority identified a problem.

# Do you agree that licensing will improve the area?

Do you agree that licensing will improve the following?



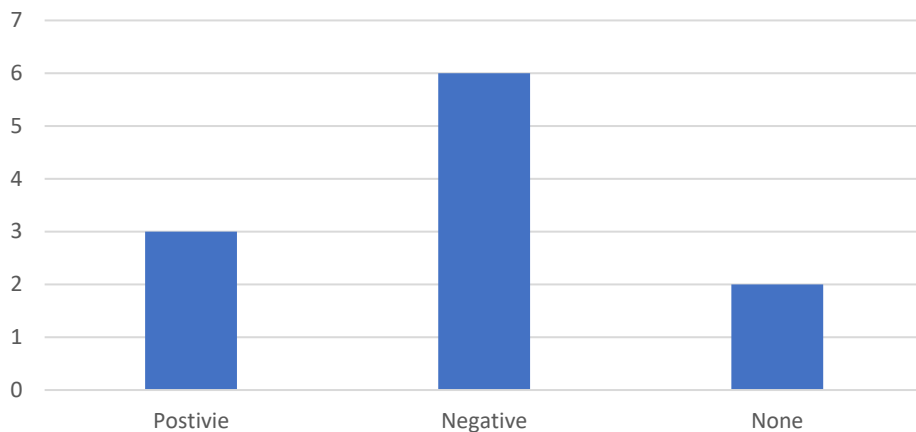
When looking at whether or not selective licensing would improve the area, 64% of landlords who responded believed selective licensing would not have a positive impact on the area. Some landlords answered that it would support in the reduction of fly tipping, neglected properties, crime, property standards, ASB and noise.



73% of landlords who own properties in the area do not agree with the fee structure, 64% of landlords did not agree with the issuing of a one year license.

From further comments and discussions believe that the pricing of the license will impact on the tenants as they will have to increase rents to pay for the license. It was suggested that a reduced fee for accredited landlords or further discounts could be proposed.

## Do you think the Scheme will have a positive or negative effect on your business?



The majority of landlords, 54%, thought that the licensing scheme would have a negative impact on their business. Where as 27% thought it would have a positive impact.

Do you have any other comments on the impact of licensing on the management and condition of private rented properties?

Some of the comments were:

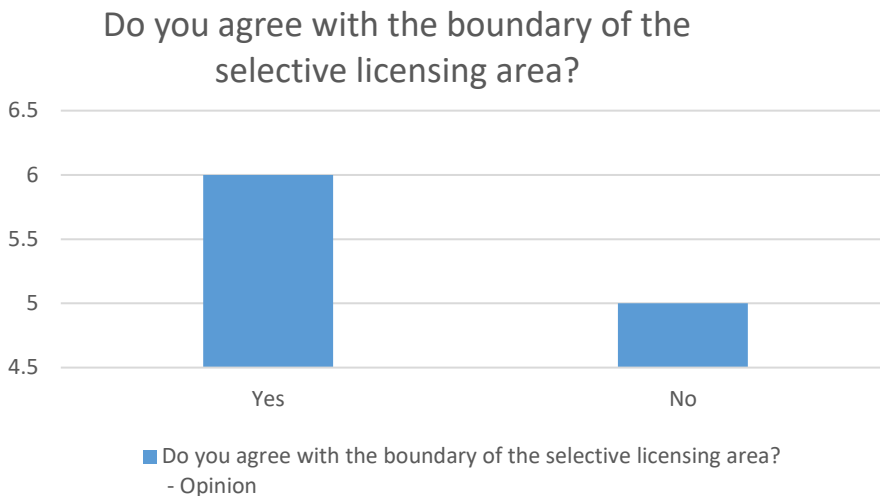
“Selective licensing will reduce the quality of housing as the financial cost will reduce funds available pay for works needed on the property.”

“Landlords are buying properties that they may have only ever viewed online, then rent them out to anyone. As long as they get a rent payment they don't care who rents from them. I have lived in this area for 45 Yr along with my parents, uncles and cousins. As a child this was a good area, now I worry about my children walking around the corner.”

“Long overdue”

## Do you agree with the proposed licensing area?

When looking at the boundary for the proposed selective licensing scheme, 54% agreed with the boundary.



### **We asked landlords, if you do not agree with the proposed boundary, please tell us why.**

Some of the comments were:

“If selective licensing in Blyth is required then the whole of Blyth should be covered as the whole of Blyth can be a problem”

“You are targeting the wrong area”

“There are lot of properties housing 3 and 4 individuals outside this area, we would prefer all landlords offering one room be licensed.”

### **Do you have any suggestions of alternatives or improvements to the scheme?**

Some of the comments were:

“The council already have environmental enforcement who’s job is to enforce fitness for human habitation act and other related regulations”

“Force the slum landlords to sell”

“Inspect the properties which are being rented to make an educated decision of who should be charged for maintenance of their neglected properties & leave those of us just trying to get by, with carrying on how things are.”

“Reductions in fees for applying early also known as "early bird fee" are found to be beneficial and encourage landlords to apply straight away.”

The feedback from landlords was mainly negative with the majority being concerned about the fees and what the implications would be for the tenants. There was some positive feedback from a landlord who already has properties in a licensing area, advising that it has made improvements to the area and increased the value of his property.

There was feedback to indicate that in principle landlords can understand the reason for licensing but feel landlords are already penalized enough and see this as another cost to hit landlords, meaning that they will not be able to sustain their business, resulting in several landlords contemplating selling their properties.

Further feedback was given about the lack of discount offered to 'good' landlords and in the current proposal only a £25 discount is offered to accredited landlords.

Other comments suggested the council should be tackling the bad landlords and not penalizing the good landlords. Reference was made to specific empty properties in the area and what the council would be doing to ensure these properties would be improved.

Several landlords also commented that this is simply a money-making exercise for the council and the license is simply to fund the council. Believing that the council would look to extend the area to include more properties to make more money.

There were concerns raised by landlords around the cleanliness of the areas, due to large amounts of flytipping and littering, that the licensing scheme would not make a difference to this. This is something that council has been working on as a separate project, there have been a number of cameras installed in the area to target hotspots in the area. These cameras have been operational for a number of months and have led to a decline in fly tipping in the area.

There were also concerns raised regarding the number of empty properties in the area and that licensing would increase these.

Question or Comment (Questions on a similar theme have been condensed together)	Response
Landlords will sell up if a scheme is imposed	<p>During the development of the scheme and as part of the requirements, we have carried out extensive research, which has also included talking to numerous other local authorities operating similar schemes; there is little evidence to suggest that landlords have left the such areas as a result of a selective licensing schemes. Additionally, the 2019 MHCLG review of selective licensing also supported this view, the data has shown that it is most likely rogue landlords that would be forced out of the area or change their practices.</p>
<p>Rents are likely to increase due to licensing schemes this will lead to tenants being unable to pay. – leading to more homelessness.</p>	<p>As per legislation, the fee for licensing must only cover the costs of running the proposed scheme. This should be kept as low as possible to ensure that the scheme is cost neutral but also to minimise costs to landlords. The proposed fee is also tax deductible, and discounts have been proposed and consulted upon.</p> <p>The council has taken into consideration the increased risk of homelessness but due to the requirements of the scheme and the costs that are associated, it is not considered that there will be an increased risk of homelessness.</p> <p>This has been further evidenced here:  <a href="https://metastreet.co.uk/files/Core_Cities_UK_Metastreet_licensing_report_Oct_2018.pdf">https://metastreet.co.uk/files/Core_Cities_UK_Metastreet_licensing_report_Oct_2018.pdf</a></p>
Why penalise good landlords for the shortcomings of the minority?	<p>As selective licensing is an area-based intervention, a council may designate their whole district or a number of areas within the district as a selective licensing area. Here, the council are only proposing to implement selective licensing in a specific area, with an aim to target the landlords who do not comply with the scheme.</p>
Most landlords are responsible and professional. Can good landlords be exempted from the scheme?	<p>The Council recognises that there are good landlords in the proposed neighbourhoods that offer good and well managed accommodation.</p> <p>However, unfortunately there are also badly managed properties which licensing aims to address. The council cannot exempt specific landlords from the scheme, although we are looking to offer a discount for landlords who are already accredited with the Council.</p>



Question or Comment (Questions on a similar theme have been condensed together)	Response
Why was social housing not included in the scheme?	<p>Section 79(3) of the Housing Act 2004 exempts socially let properties (both Local Authority and Housing Association tenancies) from the scheme.</p> <p>Selective Licensing only applies to private rented properties.</p>
All landlords need to be licensed.	<p>The legislation currently does not allow for this, licensing can only be introduced if certain criteria is satisfied e.g., high levels of private rentals, with poor housing conditions, ASB, deprivation etc. and only in places with high concentration of the private rented sector.</p>
Some of the respondents were not convinced that houses occupied by single families need to be licensed as they believed that these types of occupation do not lead to anti-social behaviour instead, they believe that ASB is attributed to HMOs.	<p>The HMOs in the area are covered by separate mandatory licensing.</p> <p>The proposed neighbourhoods have been identified as having high levels of deprivation (including poor housing conditions), ASB and crime, with a high percentage of private rentals. This is one of the most deprived areas in the county.</p>
How will landlords who do not licence be identified	<p>The Council recognises that it will be challenging to determine exact the number of landlords who do not apply for a licence for their properties.</p> <p>However, the scheme applies to a relatively small area of the County, so it should be easier to identify those properties that are not licensed.</p> <p>Additionally, occupiers, residents or other landlords and agents will be encouraged to contact the Council in confidence to report properties (or landlords) they feel may be operating poorly managed properties or may be unlicensed.</p>
Why can the Council not enforce standards under its existing powers? Why choose licensing over enforcement action?	<p>Licensing powers are detailed within the Housing Act 2004, Parts 2 and 3. These allow LHA's to take a more proactive approach to monitoring the management and standards of properties. Enforcement of housing standards under Part 1 of the 2004 Act can be proactive, but routinely relies on receiving formal complaints, which is then a reactive intervention and does not consider or address wider community issues relating to housing. It can also take a significant period of time to follow the steps involved in the enforcement process. When utilising licensing our Part 2 and Part 3 powers, the council does not need to receive a complaint to inspect the property and landlords must meet the minimum standards set by<sup>25</sup> the council to be licensed or face enforcement action.</p>

Question or Comment (Questions on a similar theme have been condensed together)	Response
<p>Make better use of existing enforcement powers to deal with disrepair and ASB</p>	<p>Enforcement powers are dependent on the physical standards of a property. Whilst this is important and although there is some overlap with selective licensing, the use of licensing conditions enables the council to impose responsibilities on landlords that may be otherwise unenforceable.</p> <p>This means that selective licensing can help lead to more efficient resolutions relating to housing problems, in particular where there are management issues leading to antisocial behaviour and wider community issues making it an effective means of promoting good management standards, better housing conditions leading to wider regeneration in the area</p>
<p>Selective Licensing does not work</p>	<p>There are recent reports on the effectiveness of licensing schemes which can be found online; CIEH Review; <a href="https://www.cieh.org/news/blog/2019/how-effective-is-selective-licensing/">https://www.cieh.org/news/blog/2019/how-effective-is-selective-licensing/</a> MHCLG Review; <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/selective-licensing-review">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/selective-licensing-review</a></p>
<p>Some objected to certain roads being part of the designation. Why are some streets with known problems not included while streets with no problems are?</p>	<p>Legislation around licensing does not allow for a distinction between individual streets and the designation is often applied over entire neighbourhoods or wards. Lower Layer Super Output (LSOA) data was used in the development of the scheme boundaries. This is seen as the best way to treat problem areas, allowing for more focus on problem areas. This does mean, however, that at times streets with lower-level issues are included. It is believed that the positive impacts of selective licensing affect the wider area, meaning that all streets in an area will benefit.</p>
<p>Online application and payment only – what if I cannot do this?</p>	<p>Managing agents and landlords would need to apply through the council's website and to pay the 2-part fee for a license. This would be done at the point of application and upon granting of a license. We do appreciate that this may not be possible for all. However, adjustments will be put in place should this not be possible in line with the Equality Act.</p>
<p>Do we have enough resources? Selective Licensing is only good if enforced.</p>	<p>The council has done extensive research in developing this scheme, including liaising with other local authorities who are extremely experienced in management of a selective licensing scheme. Should a scheme go ahead, a new team will be created within private sector housing which will be dedicated only in the management and enforcement of the selective licensing scheme.</p>

Question or Comment (Questions on a similar theme have been condensed together)	Response
<p>There were a great number of positive comments, particularly from residents with respect to the Selective Licensing Proposals, and the opportunity to reduce the deprivation affecting residents and the wider community. There were also some specific requests for stringent landlord vetting, public registers, and a borough-wide scope for Selective Licensing.</p>	<p>The Council appreciates the level of support for Selective Licensing from across a wide cross-section of the community and other stakeholders.</p> <p>Should the designation be granted, then any prospective Selective Licence Holder would need to pass a ‘fit and proper person’ test, which would take into account their past behaviour and any significant unspent criminal convictions. The Council is aware that some of private sector landlords with properties within the proposed designation may not pass the fit and proper person test. In this case they will be left with a choice of making an arrangement with a letting agent, or another person to be the Selective Licence holder for their property/properties. Whilst this is likely to boost business for letting agents in such cases, letting agents will need to be mindful of the risk of whether their new clients will comply with the Selective Licensing legal requirements. The Council has no plans for making a borough-wide designation it agrees with the government’s intention that Selective Licensing should be selective and only used where it is needed, rather than borough-wide.</p>
<p>Would this be money making scheme for the council?</p>	<p>No. The Council is only allowed to charge a fee which would cover the costs to administer and run the scheme so no extra profit can be gained from operating the scheme and the proposed fees will be reviewed annually to ensure that the scheme remains cost neutral.</p>
<p>More expenses for owners mean less supply of property and pressure to put up rents both due to shortage and costs</p>	<p>There is no evidence to support this, the number of rental properties and rents continue to rise suggesting other economic factors are driving the market. Indeed, the costs associated with the sale of a property and any capital gain tax dues far exceeds the cost of the proposed licence fee over 5 years.</p>

Question or Comment (Questions on a similar theme have been condensed together)	Response
How effective is Selective Licensing ?	<p>CIH (Chartered Institute of Housing) research confirmed that Selective Licensing is effective in improving conditions and local outcomes found that Selective licensing is not a ‘quick win’ and it may be several years before tangible outcomes are achieved.</p> <p>Nevertheless, many of the schemes we looked at are delivering significant benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selective licensing schemes lead to a more proactive approach to housing inspections and sometimes to a better understanding of the local housing market for the local authority.</li> <li>• Some schemes appear to have encouraged greater joint working, with many areas reporting joint inspections with the police and the sharing of various data sources to identify unlicensed landlords.</li> <li>• Some councils are also able to provide clear evidence of reduction in anti-social behaviour but the main outcomes to be demonstrated are to do with improving housing conditions.</li> <li>• Licensing fees vary from scheme to scheme and do not always reflect the true cost of scheme administration. In some cases, the cost of running the scheme has to be met via existing staff resources, drawn from the general housing enforcement fund.</li> </ul> <p>There is also more benefits of the Selective Licensing as per research by the MHCLG review of Selective Licensing 2019 confirming that benefits of Selective Licensing.</p>
The landlords in the area are not the problem, It is tenants who are causing the issues	<p>Part of a landlord’s responsibility is to ensure that all tenants are fully vetted before a tenancy is created, landlords must also deal appropriately with ASB and serve any relevant notices should this become a problem. Part of the requirements for licensing will be to ensure that this is fully carried out and that tenants are checked adequately.</p>
Fly-tipping and dumping of rubbish is not going to be solved by licensing	<p>Part of the requirement will be to ensure that adequate refuse facilities are available and that landlords are inspecting their properties during the length of a tenancy and when they end. Alongside this, the council has acquired a number of CCTV cameras in the area specifically for targeting those who are fly tipping. This has led to a significant reduction in the number of fly tippers in the area.</p>

Question or Comment (Questions on a similar theme have been condensed together)	Response
There are already several empty homes in Blyth, selective licensing will make this worse.	Whilst selective licensing may lead to an increase in the number of empty homes, information we have received from other councils shows this is not necessarily the case. However, to mitigate this, alongside selective licensing we have received funding for a targeted empty homes team that will operate specifically in Blyth.