

# Royal Tunbridge Wells

# CIVIC COMPLEX



# Consultation Report

Produced on behalf of  
Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company  
by M&N Communications Ltd



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**1.0**

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## 1.1 Approach to consultation

This report is produced as a conclusion to the consultation programme which M&N Communications (M&N) was instructed by the Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company (TWRC) to carry out on the future of the civic complex in Royal Tunbridge Wells.

M&N's brief was to “to develop and implement a structured programme of public/ stakeholder consultation to test and explore the potential for strategic redevelopment of the civic complex as well as raise the profile of TWRC...this will require a range of methods to be adopted including the use of social media, public meetings, press releases, exhibitions and partners' involvement to ensure everyone gets an opportunity to respond to the issues being discussed.”

## 1.2 Strategy, methodology and programme

M&N faced a number of major challenges upon appointment in November 2010 including:

- Widespread misunderstanding about the extent of progress made on 'plans' for the civic complex i.e. many people mistakenly believed that proposals had already been drawn up;
- Misunderstanding that M&N's consultation would be presenting specific redevelopment proposals for consideration (stages 1 & 2\*);
- Lack of understanding that M&N's consultation would be helping to inform the decision as to whether to explore redevelopment further; and
- Lack of understanding about TWRC.

\*TWRC's Shareholder Agreement sets out two stages by which any proposals for a particular site are developed: an initial viability stage which seeks to ensure that a proposed project is financially viable and satisfies the Council's economic, social and environmental well-being objectives and a more detailed set of proposals. M&N's consultation was undertaken in stage 1, which meant that no decisions had been made about whether redevelopment would happen or not. The purpose of consultation was therefore to gauge public opinion as to whether there was an appetite to explore redevelopment options by moving to stage 2.

The consultation therefore had a number of objectives:

- Correct misinformation about the 'plans', the nature of TWRC and what M&N would be consulting on;
- Draw out useful feedback from a wide variety of people and groups to help inform the Council's decision on whether stage 2 should be explored;

- Gauge opinion and feeling about the current uses on the civic complex and within the town centre – whether these were good and bad;
- Allow the public to explore and suggest ideas for potential new uses for the town centre – that the civic complex could host if redevelopment were to go ahead.

M&N's approach to the successful delivery of the consultation's objectives was three fold:

- Ensure the consultation exercise was borough-wide
- Ensure a variety of ways for people to get involved
- Use a methodology to provide both qualitative & quantitative feedback

To assess views on the current and future vitality of the town centre and the civic complex's contribution to this, M&N structured these services and facilities into five subject areas or 'uses':

- Culture: theatre, music, dance, art, history, culture, film;
- Public services: police, council services advice services, adult education;
- Leisure: dining, socialising, gym;
- Civic: council meeting rooms, open spaces, war memorial;
- Retail: high street, independents, convenience, food, services.

Throughout the consultation, the focus was on whether facilities/uses need to be enhanced and if so how; how the civic complex functions within the wider town centre area; and peoples' aspirations for the future of the town.

Consultation activity included, but was not limited to, the following:

- 4 public 'drop in sessions'
- 6 public workshops
- 2 x 48,000 Borough-wide newsletters and questionnaires (6,000+ returned)
- 13 stakeholder meetings/presentations
- 1 schools' workshop involving three schools
- 2 youth vox pop sessions
- 1 focus group
- 3 online tools; website, Facebook and Twitter
- Consultation hotline/email address for any enquiries

After its appointment, M&N spent some time considering and preparing a consultation programme which could be easily understood and communicated to all stakeholders. The consultation programme was broken down into three stages:

- Stage 1: Promotion and information provision (Nov/Dec 2010)
- Stage 2: Consultation activity (December 2010 – February 2011)
- Stage 3: Report writing and feeding back (March – April 2011)

### 1.3 Feedback analysis summary

The consultation generated a huge amount of information and data with 6,000+ questionnaire responses plus minutes etc from all the additional activities. All feedback has been considered and a summary analysis of responses provided.

#### CULTURE

Overall the cultural offer in the town centre, and in particular on the civic complex, is one which people appreciate and are proud of; there is a general consensus that it is a good thing to have in the town centre.

However, there is also a general view that the offer as a whole, and the constituent parts, are in need of improvement and investment. Apart from identifying a need to provide more and accessible space for the library, museum and art gallery, the consensus does not stretch to how or what should be done to address this. There was also a strong feeling that the town centre needed a new cinema.

#### CIVIC

Of the three topics that are covered under civic uses, public open space was the one where there was a strong agreement that they are an important part of the town centre. There was also a repeated suggestion that a new town square or similar might add to the quality of the town centre.

There were mixed views on where the council chamber and committee rooms should be located and there was only a limited mention of the war memorial; however with the latter this does not imply that the subject matter was not important to respondents, just that it was only raised by certain groups.

#### PUBLIC SERVICES

There is very strong support for providing public services where most people can access them, which most people consider to be the town centre. There is little direction however that this provision has to be in any particular building.

## LEISURE

The views on the leisure offer in the town centre were varied and it was difficult to establish an agreed position. The only main area of agreement appeared to be that most respondents and groups seemed to think there was a need for more leisure focused facilities for young people and families.

There were more respondents in favour of a multitude of new leisure uses in the town centre (restaurants, cafes, pubs or gyms) than those that stated no more leisure uses were needed. However, there was no consensus on exactly what the new facilities should be (and for a number of uses that respondents stated a desire for more of, there was often a counter view that there were too many).

## RETAIL

There was recognition that the town's shops were suffering and that there were a number of vacant and closed units.

An overwhelming number of respondents used Royal Victoria Place the most, however, most people seemed to value independent shops most and there was a consistent refrain that people did not want RTW to become a 'clone town'; respondents felt that RTW had a unique character that needed to be retained.

When discussing the potential for new retail, the views were mixed. Some people thought that the offer was good and no new retail was needed; others thought that new retail was not just needed but could be a real positive for the town centre, as long as it did not affect the balance of the town centre. A significant number of questionnaire responses stated that both more independent retailers and a new department store would encourage them to shop in the town centre more than they do now.

## TRANSPORT

The subject of transport and access was recurring throughout the consultation and people felt that any redevelopment of the civic complex or indeed any other site in the town centre must take the transport, parking and traffic issue into account to ensure the situation was not exacerbated.

## ARCHITECTURE

In terms of the design approach to take if redevelopment was pursued, everyone agreed that the architecture had to be of the highest quality; to do justice to the town and its historic nature and to do justice to the prominence and importance of the civic complex in the town.

- The Pantiles and Calverley Park Crescent were the two areas most people wanted to be referenced in any new design, with the Town Hall generating support and indifference in equal measure.



- A significant number of people stated that any new design should be about fresh ideas, and this was supported by others across the consultation who wanted to avoid a “pastiche” approach.
- Also that it should be sensitive to its context and the surrounding town centre.

### Questionnaire Responses

Age structure	% of total respondents	Profile of borough population (%)	% of comparable population (under 16s removed)
0 – 15*	-	21%	-
16 – 24	4%	9%	11%
25 – 39	12%	18%	23%
40 – 59	34%	29%	36%
60 – 74	32%	15%	19%
75+	11%	8%	11%
Unanswered	7%		

\*Under 15s were not included in the consultation.

Based on this, M&N considers the level of response from across all age groups and locations, to be a considerable achievement on a consultation primarily about ideas. However, it must be noted that in certain age groups, the disparity between the demographic figures and questionnaire responses was significant. In particular, the 16-24 year olds were under-represented by over 50% and the 60-75 years old were over-represented by a third.

## 1.4 Concluding remarks

The next stage is for TWRC and the Council to consider the feedback and decide on what to do next. It is certainly clear that the many thousands of people who got involved in the consultation do not agree on many subjects; apart from perhaps that Royal Tunbridge Wells is a place to be proud of and a place worth protecting.

In the range of views expressed many respondents expressed a desire for improved facilities (but without significant change); many wanted the town to perform better economically (but not at the expense of the town’s character). Overall many wanted the town to stay the same but more people wanted to see improvement (even if they could not agree on what the improvements should be).

What is clear is that more people wanted to see change and improvement in the civic complex and town centre as a whole, than did not want anything at all to change.

**2.0**

**APPROACH TO  
CONSULTATION**

## 2.1 M&N's brief

Specialist community relations consultant, M&N Communications Ltd (M&N), was appointed by Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company (TWRC) in November 2010 to undertake community consultation on the future of the civic complex in Royal Tunbridge Wells.

The appointment to undertake consultation on the civic complex came from the Council's stated position as follows:

*The Assembly Hall Theatre, museum, adult education centre, art gallery and library are well used, but were all built some time ago when customer needs were very different. The police station is only partially used and the museum only has space to display a fraction of its artefacts and is not accessible to the disabled or those with pushchairs. In addition, the town centre does not have a cinema or a full service department store. Not all of the buildings are within the Council's ownership and all public services are likely to be entering a period of significant change and retrenchment associated with the significant cuts in public expenditure. Better, more flexible use of public assets is a key strand of both local and national strategies for dealing with these cuts.*

M&N's brief from TWRC was to *"to develop and implement a structured programme of public/stakeholder consultation **to test and explore the potential for strategic redevelopment of the civic complex** as well as raise the profile of TWRC...this will require a range of methods to be adopted including the use of social media, public meetings, press releases, exhibitions and partners' involvement to ensure everyone gets an opportunity to respond to the issues being discussed."* M&N's brief is provided in full in appendix 1.0.

TWRC's brief also requested that the consultation should deliver the following outputs:

- *"Use a range of consultation methods which demonstrates and delivers a clear, open and constructive dialogue; and captures structured feedback from all consultees;*
- *"Deliver and analyse a participant questionnaire and other consultation tools, to provide an open, transparent and auditable narration of participants' views;*
- *"Ensure a range of stakeholders including local businesses, partners and young people are identified and engaged in the consultation to ensure a wide response from across the borough is achieved."*

M&N's methodology, set out in section 3.0 of this report, was devised to deliver each of these required outputs.

The brief also recognised the five commitments made by the Council on the future of the civic complex to help inform the consultation exercise.

## 2.2 M&N's approach to consultation

To ensure that all the objectives (as outlined 3.1.1) could be met, the following approach was taken:

- Preparation of an overall strategy – to establish what was being consulted on and the scope of consultation
- Preparation of a consultation programme – to provide a clear methodology and timeframe that could be easily communicated to, and understood by, all stakeholders and members of the public
- Delivery of the programme in adherence to a number of consultation principles as set out below

### Consultation principles

1. Communicate and inform early - set out the programme, the constraints, when and how people can engage and what the anticipated outcomes may be;
2. Consult widely and deeply - work to ensure that all those who wish to be involved are able to;
3. Report back the outcome of any consultation activities to the community in a timely manner;
4. Consider the feedback and seek to address and explore issues raised where appropriate and feasible;
5. Communicate how feedback has influenced thinking; and where it has not, why not;
6. Communicate conclusions and next stages so everyone is in no doubt of what has taken place and what happens next.

In the case of the civic complex, this consultation took place at an early stage before any draft proposals had been prepared. If TWRC is instructed to consider options for the civic complex, further consultation, again based on the above principles, would be undertaken.

M&N also seeks to abide by the principles of consultation laid down in the Consultation Institute's Consultation Charter to ensure Best Practice. These principles are available on the Consultation Institute's website at [www.consultationinstitute.org](http://www.consultationinstitute.org)

## 2.3 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's SCI and planning background

Whilst at this stage there were no draft proposals for the public to comment specifically upon, M&N sought to uphold the principles of community involvement and engagement as enshrined in Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

Section 6.0 of the Council's SCI contains the following advice to developers about consultation:

*"Where developers are proposing a major development, the Borough Council will encourage them to involve the local community at an early stage... The Borough Council's objectives are to give local people an opportunity to be involved in the planning process at an early stage."*

Significant consultation has taken place within the borough in relation to development of the town centres, and in particular Royal Tunbridge Wells. Initial consultation was undertaken in relation to the adopted Core Strategy where the growth of Royal Tunbridge Wells was promoted. The adopted Core Strategy includes reference to the future Town Centres Area Action Plan (TCAAP), a plan that would promote the enhancement of the four town centres in the Borough, including Royal Tunbridge Wells.

An initial Issues and Options consultation has been undertaken by the Local Planning Authority. The authority has also procured research into the functioning of the town centre and this will form part of the evidence base that will underlie any decision made by the LPA in taking any opportunities forward.

Should any firm development proposals be advanced in relation to the civic complex either via a planning application or LDF document, this report will form part of the evidence base.

**3.0**

**STRATEGY,  
METHODOLOGY &  
PROGRAMME**

## 3.1 Strategy

### 3.1.1 (Strategy) Challenges and objectives

M&N faced a number of major challenges upon appointment in November 2010 including:

- Widespread misunderstanding about the extent of progress made on 'plans' for the civic complex i.e. many people mistakenly believed proposals had already been drawn up;
- Misunderstanding that M&N's consultation would be presenting specific redevelopment proposals for consideration (stages 1 & 2\*);
- Lack of understanding that M&N's consultation would be helping to inform the decision as to whether to explore redevelopment further; and
- Lack of understanding about the Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company.

\*TWRC's Shareholder Agreement sets out two stages by which any proposals for a particular site are developed: an initial viability stage which seeks to ensure that a proposed project is financially viable and satisfies the Council's economic, social and environmental well-being objectives and a more detailed set of proposals. M&N's consultation was undertaken in stage 1, which meant that no decisions had been made about whether redevelopment would happen or not. The purpose of consultation was therefore to gauge public opinion as to whether there was an appetite to explore redevelopment options by moving to stage 2.

On that basis, the consultation had a number of objectives:

- Correct misinformation about the 'plans', the nature of TWRC and what M&N would be consulting on;
- Draw out useful feedback from a wide variety of people and groups to help inform the Council's decision on whether stage 2 should be explored;
- Gauge opinion and feeling about the current uses on the civic complex and within the town centre – whether these were good and bad;
- Allow the public to explore and suggest ideas for potential new uses for the town centre – that the civic complex could host if redevelopment were to go ahead.

To meet the brief, address the challenges above, and adhere to the consultation principles outlined above, M&N's approach to the delivery of the consultation was three fold:

- Ensure the consultation exercise was borough-wide to ensure all residents, businesses, users and regular visitors (to include non residents) to the town centre were aware of how they could get involved and had the opportunity to provide feedback.

- Ensure a variety of ways for people to get involved so that all age groups and backgrounds had the ability to get involved in the consultation via a means they were comfortable with.
- Use a methodology to provide both qualitative & quantitative feedback - allowing assessment of how people use facilities (quantitative) and how they value facilities (qualitative). NB – M&N's brief was not to undertake market research; the Council has commissioned BMG to undertake market research, as part of a broader borough-wide survey. M&N's approach was designed to allow as many people as possible the opportunity to get involved; market research is of a limited number of people, typically around 1,000, chosen to match the demographics of the target area.

### 3.1.2 (Strategy) Consultation topics

To understand whether or not there was an appetite to explore redevelopment options, it was important to gauge how people view the current uses on the civic complex and within the town centre generally. The consultation included reference to Royal Tunbridge Wells generally as the civic complex contributes to the overall success of the town centre and it was important to understand this relationship with the wider area, including the retail and leisure offer at North Farm.

Any town centre contains many different services and facilities. To assess views on the current and future vitality of the town centre and the civic complex's contribution to this, M&N structured these services and facilities into five subject areas or 'uses':

- Culture: theatre, music, dance, art, history, culture, film;
- Public services: police, council services advice services, adult education;
- Leisure: dining, socialising, gym;
- Civic: council meeting rooms, open spaces, war memorial;
- Retail: high street, independents, convenience, food, services.

During the consultation, a number of respondents suggested we also include commercial office as a use as well, and this was discussed in the workshops and other sessions.

Throughout the consultation, the focus was on whether facilities/uses need to be enhanced and if so how, how the complex functions within the wider town centre area, and peoples' aspirations for the future of the town.

The above structure was used as the basis for all the consultation activities, as described in 3.2.1.



## 3.2 Methodology

### 3.2.1 (Methodology) Consultation activities

In order to fulfil the objective of engaging as many people from across the borough as possible, as well as those who visit the town from outside the borough, M&N employed a variety of different consultation techniques to generate not only a high volume of quantitative feedback, but also qualitative responses on a number of different issues. Consultation activity included, but was not limited to, the following:

- 4 public 'drop in' sessions
- 6 public workshops
- 50,000 Borough-wide newsletter and questionnaire
- 13 stakeholder meetings/presentations
- 1 schools' workshop involving three schools
- 2 youth vox pop sessions
- 1 focus group
- 3 online tools; website, Facebook and Twitter
- Consultation hotline/email address for any enquiries

All activities were well promoted as outlined in 3.3.1.

### 3.2.2 (Methodology) Questions about the methodology

During the consultation there were some criticisms of M&N's methodology and approach, which is usual for this type and scale of programme. M&N firmly believes that the level of response, combined with the high quality of most of the responses and the mixed demographic make-up (based on age/gender), demonstrates that these criticisms were unfounded.

As the consultation progressed, and there were some problems with the initial delivery of the newsletter and questionnaire (during the coldest period of the year, when Tunbridge Wells was particularly badly effected), it became apparent that the debate about the project in 2010 had unfortunately led to high levels of mistrust surrounding the project, the Council's intentions, the nature of the TWRC and therefore the process. M&N has provided a response to all the key issues raised in appendix 2.0.

### 3.2.3 (Methodology) Validation of responses

During the consultation, the concern was raised about the potential for the result to be rigged by local activists – through the duplication of both electronic and paper copies.

M&N always undertakes consultation with the anticipation of a certain level of trust between the client, the community and M&N. M&N also has checks in place but was surprised by the level of community distrust evident in Tunbridge Wells and disappointed by the level of debate that a small minority of people chose to enter into which included obscenities and offensive responses which regrettably had to be received by the M&N team. Those who responded in an offensive and obscene manner did nothing to progress sensible and open debate in the borough and did not represent the town positively.

With the above in mind, M&N undertook a number of checks and a minimal number of responses were rejected (invalidated) for these reasons:

- Non provision of postcode – this was a required field and clearly stated criteria
- Suspected multiple entries from one person (based on review of entries)
- Obscenities or offensive language

A database of rejected entries is provided, in appendix 2.1 (electronic version only).

### 3.3 Consultation programme

After its appointment, M&N spent some time considering and preparing a consultation programme which could be easily understood and communicated to all stakeholders. The consultation programme was broken down into three stages:

#### **Stage 1: Promotion and information giving (November/December 2010)**

Introduce M&N to the people of Tunbridge Wells, address misinformation plus promotion of the consultation exercise and upcoming events via a number of different channels and methods.

#### **Stage 2: Consultation activity (December 2010 – February 2011)**

Consult widely and deeply with people across the Borough of Tunbridge Wells to gain qualitative and quantitative feedback on the future of the civic complex.

#### **Stage 3: Report writing and feeding back (March – April 2011)**

Consolidating the results of the consultation exercise and feeding back the findings to TWRC and the public.

Overall, from the beginning of December until mid-February, the consultation stretched over two and a half months. M&N has set out the activities which took place at each stage below.

#### **3.3.1 (Consultation programme) Stage 1 – Promotion**

M&N sought to promote the consultation exercise across the Borough through a variety of different tools to reach as wide an audience as possible.

Before any M&N promotional material was made public, an article on the consultation appeared in the Council's 'Local' magazine which is distributed to all residents in the borough. This article (provided in appendix 3.0) provided M&N contact details along with the dedicated website address.

### **3.3.1.1 (Stage 1 - promotion) Newspaper editorial and advertising**

Shortly after its appointment, M&N held media briefings with the Tunbridge Wells Courier and Kent on Saturday/Sunday (now 'Your Tunbridge Wells') to introduce M&N, explain the context of the consultation and outline the programme and timetable. The briefings generated significant media coverage on the consultation process – copies of which are contained within appendix 3.1.

A press release was issued to both publications above and to the wider media on 26 November 2010 to launch the consultation exercise and to promote the drop-in sessions to the community (details in section 3.2.2.1). This press release was issued to the following media titles; a copy of the release is contained in appendix 3.2:

- Tunbridge Wells Courier
- Kent on Saturday
- BBC Radio Kent
- BBC South East
- Kent Messenger
- ITV Meridian

In addition, newspaper advertising was also undertaken to promote the four drop-in sessions and provide information on how to contact M&N along with the project website, Twitter and Facebook addresses. Full colour quarter page advertisements appeared in the Kent and Sussex Courier on 3 December 2010 and 7 January 2011. The Courier has a circulation of approximately 34,000 people, with a readership of 98,000. A copy of the artwork used in the advertising is available in appendix 3.3.

M&N continued to use the media as a key tool to communicate with the public throughout the consultation process. Subsequent press releases were issued to promote the workshops M&N undertook as part of the programme and the extension of the deadline for the return of questionnaires. Copies of these press releases are included in appendices 3.4 and 3.5.

### **3.3.1.2 (Stage 1: promotion) Drop in sessions**

Four public drop-in sessions were held in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre to publicise the consultation exercise, distribute copies of consultation materials and to answer questions from the general public.

More detail on these drop-in sessions is available in section 3.3.2.1 of this report.

### 3.3.1.3 (Stage 1: promotion) Website

A project website was created on behalf of TWRC at [www.tunbridgewellsregenerationco.org](http://www.tunbridgewellsregenerationco.org) to serve both as a promotional tool and a means by which people could engage in the consultation process and complete an online version of the consultation questionnaire. The site also included a background page and frequently asked questions and answers section to help explain and clarify some of the issues relating to the project.

The website was regularly updated to provide details of forthcoming events and to confirm changes to the deadline for receipt of completed questionnaires.



### 3.3.1.4 (Stage 1: promotion) Social media

In conjunction with the project website, accounts were created on both Twitter and Facebook to promote the consultation exercise to existing users, and also to serve as another channel by which feedback could be gained. Both the Twitter account (@TWRRegenCo) and Facebook page (TWRRegenCo) were regularly updated with details of upcoming consultation events and served as a useful means to respond to issues/questions received from members of the public. At the time of writing this report, 86 people follow TWRRegenCo on Twitter along with 26 users on Facebook. The comments and feedback received via both channels is considered in section 5.4.1.



### 3.3.1.5 (Stage 1: promotion) Letters and email bulletins

Upon its appointment, M&N created a database which included the contact details for the Borough councillors; existing amenity and stakeholder groups in the town centre; the Clerks of 15 Parish Councils in the Borough and details of large employers in Royal Tunbridge Wells. Using this database, M&N issued an initial letter on 16/17 November 2010 introducing M&N, setting out the timeframes for the consultation programme and providing M&N's contact details. The Council also issued a copy of this letter to all internal Council staff and hand delivered copies to the properties immediately neighbouring the civic complex. The Council also provided an email to be sent to all registered theatre and museum users and placed flyers on the seats in the theatre.

Copies of the letters issued are contained in appendices 3.6 and 3.7.

In response to the promotional activity being undertaken, M&N started to receive a number of enquiry emails and phone calls. Where the person supplied details, M&N added them to a database to receive future information on the project either in the form of an update email bulletin or via letter. To date, 102 people have registered for information and two update bulletins have been issued:

- Bulletin One (30 November 2010): launch of consultation exercise and promotion of drop-in sessions
- Bulletin Two (21 December 2010): announcement of consultation workshop dates
- Bulletin Three (20 May 2011): confirmation of consultation report publication and next stages

Copies of these bulletins are available in appendix 3.8.

### 3.3.1.6 (Stage 1: promotion) Flyers and posters

M&N distributed two sets of flyers and posters promoting the consultation exercise, the first set advertising the dates of the drop in sessions and the second promoting the public workshops.

Both sets went to the key community venues in Royal Tunbridge Wells as follows:

- TWBC Gateway
- Tunbridge Wells Museum
- Tunbridge Wells Art Gallery
- Tunbridge Wells Library
- The Assembly Hall
- Adult Education Centre

In addition and in response to specific requests, additional venues (including local libraries and community venues in the rural areas of the borough as well as the town) were provided with posters and flyers.

A list of all venues which received copies of the drop in session posters/flyers and a list of those in receipt of the public workshop posters/flyers are provided in appendix 3.9.

Copies of both sets of flyers/poster artwork are included in appendices 3.10 and 3.11.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council also carried out its own awareness raising of the consultation exercise including posters displayed on its notice boards across the town centre, flyers placed in Council venues and a link on the home page of its website.

### 3.3.2 (Consultation programme) Stage 2 – Consultation activities

#### 3.3.2.1 (Stage 2: activities) Drop in sessions

M&N held four drop-in sessions in order to promote the consultation exercise, hand out copies of the consultation newsletter and questionnaire and answer any questions from members of the public. These drop-in sessions took place across a range of times and venues to ensure that as many people had the opportunity to attend as possible:

Date	Time	Venue
Saturday 11 December	9.30am-12.00pm	Vacant unit at the Pantiles
Friday 17 December	11.30am-2.30pm	Exhibition trailer outside Royal Victoria Place
Saturday 8 January	8.30am-1.00pm	Exhibition trailer at Farmers Market, outside Town Hall
Friday 14 January	11.30am-2.30pm	Exhibition trailer on High Street, outside Christ Church



All the drop-in sessions were manned by a minimum of two M&N personnel, with a representative of TWRC also in attendance whenever possible. In total 415 people attended the drop in sessions and spoke to the team.

### 3.3.2.2 (Stage 2: activities) Consultation newsletter and questionnaire

In order to support the principle of consulting as widely as possible with people from across the Borough, it was deemed appropriate to issue all households in Tunbridge Wells with a newsletter that provided background information and a consultation questionnaire in order to gain as much quantitative and qualitative feedback as possible.

A four-page A4 newsletter was produced setting out the background to the consultation, the Council's five commitments, what M&N was consulting on and how people could get involved. A copy of this newsletter is included in appendix 3.12.

M&N also produced a questionnaire designed to gain both qualitative and quantitative feedback from the public on the five town centre uses outlined. A copy of the questionnaire is included in appendix 3.13.

M&N employed a third-party specialist distribution company to hand deliver copies of the newsletter and questionnaire. The company was briefed to deliver of the newsletter and questionnaire to the full borough, around 48,000 households\*. The distribution



was scheduled to take place by the first weekend of December but due to inclement weather conditions, the delivery was reported as completed by 8 December.

\* M&N was informed by TWBC that Council tax records show there are approximately 47,375 households within the borough of Tunbridge Wells.

M&N also posted out copies of the newsletter and questionnaire to anyone who requested them, and in addition copies were also made available in the key town centre community venues (as listed previously) – including large format versions for Gateway.

M&N also agreed with the following parish community venues that they would make consultation materials accessible and visible to the public and multiple copies were issued to each.

**Outlying villages/parishes:**

- Cranbrook - Queen's Hall Theatre,
- Benenden - Benenden Post Office
- Brenchley - Brenchley Post Office
- Capel - Premiere Village Stores
- Hawkenbury - Hawkenbury Post Office
- Sissinghurst - Spar Stores (Post Office)
- Bittenden - The Bell & Jorrocks (former Post Office)
- Horsmonden - Horsmonden Post office
- Lamberhurst - Victoria House Stores
- Paddock Wood - Community Partnership (Council Offices)
- Southborough - Southborough Library
- Paddock Wood – Library
- Sandhurst - Post Office
- Speldhurst - Village Store
- Goudhurst - Local Store, High Street
- Bidborough – The Hare & Hounds

By Christmas it was apparent that the success rate of the newsletter and questionnaire delivery was not as high as M&N would have expected. On that basis, a second print run and re-delivery took place in January 2011 using a different delivery company, which includes GPS tracking in its checking procedures. This distribution commenced on 19 January 2011 and was completed approximately five days later. M&N correspondingly extended the deadline for receipt of completed questionnaires from the original date of 31 January to 14 February 2011. In reality, M&N continued to accept questionnaires up to and including those received on 28 February.

M&N elected to carry out distribution through a third party distributor rather than through Royal Mail on the basis of the timeframe available and the budget. It is important to note that even with Royal Mail's delivery service (which has a considerably longer lead-in period), they cannot guarantee a higher success rate for delivery than a hand delivery distribution company, which is around 80% penetration.

Throughout January and February 2011, M&N continued to investigate any reported claims of non-delivery and, when requested, posted out separate copies of the consultation newsletter and questionnaire.

### 3.3.2.3 (Stage 2: activities) Stakeholder meetings/presentations

Royal Tunbridge Wells contains a large number of stakeholder and amenity groups, and other groups which use the current facilities on the civic complex. Consultation with these groups therefore formed a crucial part of the consultation exercise to enable M&N to gain a detailed understanding of how each group uses and views the current complex.

M&N was supplied with a large list of community and stakeholder groups by the Council which M&N then supplemented with its own research. Through discussions with key local interest groups and as other representatives emerged through early stages of the consultation, a number of groups were identified as key stakeholders for engagement.

All identified primary stakeholder groups were called or emailed and offered the opportunity of attending a meeting with M&N to discuss the civic complex.

The majority of the groups responded and M&N held meetings between November and February 2011 with the following groups to gain their qualitative input into the consultation. Minutes of these meetings are available in appendix 3.14 and the feedback received is considered in section 5.3.2. NB – all minutes have been signed off by those in attendance or the group representative.

Meetings or group presentations were held with:

- Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society
- Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum
- Friends of Tunbridge Wells Library, Art Gallery and Museum
- Tunbridge Wells Disability Access Group
- Tunbridge Wells Chamber of Commerce
- Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Business Forum
- Tunbridge Wells Over 50s Forum
- Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society
- Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra
- Camden Road Education, Arts and Theatre Enterprises (CREATE)
- Tunbridge Wells Hotels Group
- Tunbridge Wells Twinning & Friendship Association
- Chairs of Tunbridge Wells Parish Councils

Groups who were offered a meeting but who did not respond included:

- Tunbridge Wells Operatic and Dramatic Society (TWODS) – who submitted a representation by letter
- Trinity Youth Theatre Company – who submitted a representation by letter
- Soroptomists International
- Military groups
- Independent traders’ associations – out of 12 chairs, only 3 responded who were then involved in other meetings as above

**3.3.2.4 (Stage 2: activities) Consultation workshops**

In order to give the residents of the Tunbridge Wells the opportunity to contribute further ideas and give more in-depth feedback on the civic complex, M&N held a series of public workshops in January and February 2011. These workshops took place in the Calverley House Business Centre in central Royal Tunbridge Wells on the following times/dates:

Workshop 1: Saturday 15 January	10.00am – 12.00pm
Workshop 2: Saturday 15 January	2.30pm – 4.40pm*
Workshop 2: Thursday 20 January	2.30pm – 4.30pm
Workshop 3: Thursday 20 January	7.00pm – 9.00pm
Workshop 4: Tuesday 25 January	2.30pm – 4.30pm
Workshop 5: Tuesday 25 January	7.00pm – 9.00pm
Workshop 6: Saturday 5 February	10.00am – 12.00pm

*\*NB. Due to a low take-up rate workshop 2 on 15 January was merged with workshop 1 and replaced with Workshop 6*



The workshops were advertised via the promotional activities outlined in section 3.3.1 (i.e. via the M&N newsletter, at drop in sessions, through media advertisements, on posters/flyers and on-line). Attendees were required to register in advance places were allocated on a first come, first served basis and in total 130 people attended the workshops. Notes from each workshop session are included in appendix 3.15 and the feedback received analysed in section 5.3.3.

### 3.3.2.5 (Stage 2: activities) Focus Group

Although M&N sought to gain a cross-section of views via all its consultation activities, the decision was taken to hold a specialist focus group to represent the demographic make-up of Tunbridge Wells. M&N employed a focus group recruitment specialist Droy Fieldwork Research and a focus group facilitator expert (Evans Communications Ltd) to ensure best practice within industry guidelines.



The focus group was held on Tuesday 8th February 2011 between 7.00pm and 9.15pm at Calverley House Business Centre. The attendees had to be resident within the Borough and were recruited to provide a cross section of residents as close to the socio-economic make-up of the Borough as possible. The key recruitment criteria were as follows:

- Resident of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells
- Residential status - homeowner, renting, with parents etc
- Age
- Gender
- Household income
- Relationship and parent status (married, single, children of school age etc)

People involved in the following areas were ruled out to ensure the group was made up of people without any possible 'expert' knowledge either of the focus group or the process itself.

- Marketing / market research / advertising
- Journalism / media / PR
- Borough/ county / district council employee
- Councillor
- Political organisation

A full report detailing the format of the focus group is included in appendix 3.16 and the feedback received considered in section 5.3.4.

### **3.3.2.6 (Stage: 2 activities) Schools' engagement**

Young people were specifically mentioned within M&N's brief as a group who should be engaged with as part of the consultation process. M&N therefore facilitated a schools' workshop specifically to gain the views of teenagers on the civic complex and their aspirations for the future of their town centre.

The following secondary schools within Royal Tunbridge Wells were identified and contacted to invite them to nominate pupils to attend the workshop:

Beechwood Sacred Heart School  
Bennett Memorial Diocesan School  
Kent College Prep and Senior School  
St. Gregory's Catholic Comprehensive School  
Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School  
Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys  
The Skinners' School  
Skinners' Academy

Three schools agreed to participate in the workshop: Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School; Bennett Memorial Diocesan School; and St. Gregory's Catholic Comprehensive School.

The workshop took place on Thursday 3 February between 4-6pm in the Sixth Form Lecture Theatre at St Gregory's. 11 pupils attended and the five uses within the town centre were discussed and debated. Minutes of the workshop are included in appendix 3.17.

Through our engagement with educational contacts, Kent College Pembury, Skinner's Academy, Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School and St. Gregory's Catholic Comprehensive School all requested copies of the consultation materials for their students to complete in their tutorial groups. Across the four schools, we received around 400 completed questionnaires.

### 3.3.2.7 (Stage 2: activities) Youth Vox Pops

In addition to the schools' workshop, in order to ascertain the views of young adults (a traditionally 'hard to reach' group) on the civic complex and their aspirations for the future of Royal Tunbridge Wells, M&N arranged to undertake 'vox pops' (recorded audio interviews) with students of K College, a Higher Education College with campuses in Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and several other locations across Kent.

Two representatives of M&N visited the Tonbridge campus on Thursday 16 December 2010 and spent two hours talking to students in the college's cafeteria. Students were chosen at random, with the qualifying criteria being that they lived, worked or were a fairly regular visitor to Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre.

M&N spoke to 21 students over the course of the session. A transcription of the interviews is included in appendix 3.18.

On the evening of Thursday 3 February, M&N also visited the youth café at the Number One Community Centre, which serves the residents of the Showfields and Ramslye estates in Royal Tunbridge Wells. M&N talked to 8 young people about their aspirations for the future of the town centre. Notes of the conversations are provided in appendix 3.19 and the feedback from both vox pop sessions are considered in section 5.3.6.

### 3.3.2.8 (Stage 2: activities) Written and verbal feedback

Throughout the consultation process M&N received a number of letters, emails and phone calls from members of the public contributing to the consultation process. For the purposes of this report, M&N has split these representations into two groups:

1. Questions, queries or requests for information about how to get involved in the consultation process or to request a copy of the consultation questionnaire.
2. Comments or feedback on the civic complex and town centre,

M&N sought to engage and respond to all enquiries and questions raised (i.e. under point 1) and where relevant referred emails to the Council. All letters and emails have been formally logged and are included in appendix 3.20 with the consultation feedback considered in section 5.4.2.

A log of all verbal comments received (where a specific request was made for M&N to log these) is included in appendix 3.21 with feedback considered in section 5.4.3.

### **3.3.3 (Consultation programme) Stage 3 – Reporting back**

Reporting back the results is crucial to any consultation exercise. M&N will therefore use many of the same channels used to promote the consultation exercise to publicise the publication of this report, to ensure everyone who took part in the consultation exercise is aware of the outcome.

#### **3.3.3.1 (Stage 3: reporting back) Website**

A digital copy of the full report will be made available to download on the TWRC project website, which will set out the potential next steps for the project.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will also have a clearly (civic complex consultation) branded link to the report from its homepage.

#### **3.3.3.2 (Stage 3: reporting back) Local magazine**

An update on the consultation and the report will be provided in Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's magazine, 'Local' which will be distributed to every house in the Borough. This will include the report's Executive Summary', set out the next steps and give people information on how they can access a copy of the full report.

#### **3.3.3.3 (Stage 3: reporting back) Social media**

The TWRC Twitter and Facebook presence will be updated to reflect the report's publication and linked back to the project website where people will be able to access the full report.

#### **3.3.3.4 (Stage 3: reporting back) Newspaper editorial**

Upon the report's publication, M&N will carry out media briefings with the following titles to ensure that the findings are promoted widely throughout the Borough:

Tunbridge Wells Courier  
Your Tunbridge Wells (formerly Kent on Saturday/Sunday)

A press release will also be issued to the wider Kent media, including the following outlets:

BBC Radio Kent  
BBC South East  
Kent Messenger  
ITV Meridian

### 3.3.3.5 (Stage 3: reporting back) Letters/email bulletins

Using the comprehensive database of contact details which has been built up during the consultation exercise, M&N or Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will issue letters/ email bulletins to the following groups and individuals informing them of the report's publication, the key outcomes and what happens next:

- Tunbridge Wells Borough Councillors
- Chairs of the Parish Councils in the Borough
- Representatives of the stakeholder groups M&N has met
- Large employers within the town centre
- Individuals who have registered with M&N to receive further information



**4.0**

**FEEDBACK ANALYSIS  
SUMMARY**

## 4.1 Feedback analysis introduction

The consultation has generated a huge amount of information and data; the following sections provide some detail and a summary of the feedback received across all consultation activities undertaken.

In this section, the (qualitative and quantitative) data from all the following sections are analysed with a focus on the main consultation topics: culture; civic; public services; leisure and retail; with additional summaries provided for other high level issues and themes raised.

All feedback has been considered and this section provides a summary analysis of responses, in the context of M&N's original brief: to ascertain whether there was an appetite in Tunbridge Wells for the Council to instruct TWRC to explore options for the redevelopment of the civic complex, and if so, what sort of options should be considered.

## 4.2 Cultural uses - introduction

Of the cultural offer provided for on the civic complex, including the Assembly Hall theatre, the library, the museum and the art gallery, two of these uses come out of the consultation as being both the most popular and the most valued by the largest section of respondents; the library is by far the most used and the Assembly Hall is the most known about and valued. The other two uses have a much lower level of recognition, value and use for respondents.

### 4.2.1 (Cultural uses) The Library

The library plays an interesting role in the respondents' lives. If respondents use the library, they use it a lot but there are very large numbers of respondents who do not use it all, either because they use their local libraries around the Borough or because they do not use any.

Across all the means of consultation feedback, there is a consistent view that the library would benefit from some improvements and in particular more space, be it to provide more books or services or to allow more space for young people and families. Access was also raised as a major issue for those with disabilities and families with small children.

### 4.2.2 (Cultural uses) The Assembly Hall Theatre

The consultation feedback demonstrated that the Assembly Hall is both well liked and well used by respondents, although many people in the questionnaire commented that

they would use it more if the offer was more to their taste. Once again though, across all means of feedback, there was a general consensus that improvements would not just be beneficial, they were required. When it came to the users of the theatre, the overriding issues were of continuity during any development or refurbishment and the re-provision of a central theatre. There was also a desire for this provision to continue to complement the offer of Trinity Theatre.

#### **4.2.3 (Cultural uses) The Art Gallery and Museum**

According to the consultation feedback, these two uses seem to suffer from a lower profile in the borough than the library and theatre and this is blamed on a combination of poor promotion, poor offerings and little space to make things enticing. The youth in particular showed little interest or awareness of the current facilities.

#### **4.2.4 (Cultural uses) Potential cinema**

Whilst there was a specific question in the leisure section on the prospect of a new cinema in the town centre, it also came up repeatedly across all forms of feedback in relation to culture.

There was a strong feeling that the town centre needed a new cinema as although there is a multiplex at North Farm, many respondents, particularly young people and those with young families, would prefer to see one in the town centre again.

#### **4.2.5 (Cultural uses) Cultural uses - overall**

As one would expect, overall the cultural offer in the town centre and in particular on the civic complex is one which people appreciate and are also proud of; there is a general consensus that they are a good thing to have in the town centre.

However, there is also general agreement that the offer as a whole, and the constituent parts, are in need of improvement and investment. Apart from identifying a need to provide more and accessible space to the library, museum and art gallery, the overall consensus for general improvements does not stretch to how or what should be done to address this.

### **4.3 Civic uses - introduction**

Of the three topics that are covered under civic uses, public open space was the one where there was a strong consensus that an important part of the town centre. There were mixed views on where the council chamber and committee rooms should be located and there was only a limited mention of the war memorial; however this does not imply with the latter that the subject matter was not important to respondents, just that it was only raised by certain groups.

### 4.3.1 (Civic uses) Public open spaces

The majority of respondents agreed that public open space was very important to a town centre but that open spaces could come in many shapes and sizes; there was also no firm position on whether the current spaces were adequate or whether new ones were required. Certainly there was a repeated suggestion that a new town square/plaza/piazza might add to the quality of the town centre, either by making more of existing space or by creating a new one. It was felt that this could support more community cohesion as well as being an opportunity to promote café culture and the local cultural offer.

### 4.3.2 (Civic uses) Civic chamber and committee rooms

The view of the civic presence in the town centre was not clear-cut in terms of whether there needed to be a presence in the town centre or what that presence should be.

The responses were equally split between those who did not think the civic function was important in the town centre or had no opinion and those who thought it important or very important. A large number of groups and individuals who engaged in the consultation process felt that the Council should not just retain a presence in Royal Tunbridge Wells but that it should be the focus of the town centre. On that basis, a number of those groups and individuals thought that the current Town Hall performed that function well (although some would want to see public access to the Town Hall and the ability to hire the chamber and committee rooms reinstated).

However, even amongst those who wanted to see the Town Hall and civic function retained in the town centre, there was an understanding that the council chamber itself could be improved. There was also a recurring question about whether parts of the Council's back office function could be moved elsewhere. Regardless of the view about physical location, there was a keen sense that the Council needed to embrace transparency, accessibility and visibility.

It is interesting to note that the civic use did not feature in any of the feedback which focused solely on young people, including the vox-pops and schools' workshop.

### 4.3.3 (Civic uses) War memorial

Where discussed, the importance of the war memorial was stressed and unanimously agreed upon. However, there was generally an equal split between those who felt that it would be disrespectful to move the memorial and those who felt that its location by the bus stops on the main road through town was not the most appropriate place; some felt that a better place could be provided for the war memorial to allow quiet contemplation.

## 4.4 Public services - introduction

There is no doubt that the view of public services, including council frontline services such as those provided through Gateway, Adult Education and the police, is that they need to be in the town centre, primarily related to the accessibility of the location.

### 4.4.1 (Public services) Council frontline services

There was an almost unanimous view that the frontline services provided by the Council should be provided in the most accessible location possible. For most people this meant the town centre, however, there was a significant number of people who felt accessibility was more important than location.

How exactly these services are provided was the subject of a little more disagreement, with Gateway generally being considered to be accessible and easy to use, but with another view also expressed that the services provided by Gateway should be returned to the Town Hall, despite its access issues.

### 4.4.2 (Public services) Adult education

Again there was a strong sense that this should be in the most accessible location in the borough and to most that meant the town centre. However, there was also a significant group that felt that this would be better provided through an outreach programme using existing infrastructure such as schools.

In addition, there was another view expressed by some that these services helped to engender a sense of community spirit which meant that they needed to be visible as well as accessible.

### 4.4.3 (Public services) Police

There was a consensus that a police presence in the centre of town was important. Along with this was a general recognition however that this did not need to be a full station or anything like the current station, as long as the provision was visible and accessible.

### 4.4.4 (Public services) Public services - overall

There is very strong support for providing public services where most people can access them, which most people consider to be the town centre. There is little direction however that this provision has to be in any particular building (although there is a group who would like to see Council frontline services provided from the Town Hall again).

## 4.5 Leisure

The views on the leisure offer in the town centre were much more varied and it was difficult to identify an agreed position. The only main area of agreement appeared to be that most respondents and groups seemed to think there was a need for more leisure focused facilities for young people and families.

On the whole, there were more respondents in favour of a multitude of new leisure uses than those that stated no more restaurants, cafes, pubs or gyms in the town centre were needed. However, there was no consensus on what the new facilities should be (and for a number of uses that respondents stated a desire for more of, there was often a counter view that there were too many).

Through the majority of feedback mechanisms, the need for more facilities for young people, and (to a lesser extent) families, was noted. In addition, in the questionnaire feedback, there was a common view expressed that the town would benefit from more facilities for all ages i.e. activities for families, small children and teenagers right through to those for the middle-aged and pensioners. Whilst to an extent the nature of the leisure offer would be determined by operators, as an example, jazz at The Pantiles was raised by both the young and the old as an inclusive and successful provision.

## 4.6 Retail

From trends on where people shopped, how respondents used the town centre, what they liked about the town and what aspirations they had, views on retail were mixed across feedback mechanisms. However, some themes did emerge.

Overall, Royal Victoria Place (RVP) was by far the most significant retail draw in the town, based on respondents' outlined usage. RVP came out as the number one used centre by a significant margin in the questionnaire which was also supported by feedback from the younger groups through the vox-pops and the schools workshop. However, there was also recognition from both those younger groups and others that the town does not have the offer for younger people, and that they therefore will probably always go to Bluewater and other centres for the different retail offer and experience.

In terms of linkages with other shopping areas, the responses were also mixed; many people stated that they did make joint trips to a number of areas. However there was also a view commonly expressed that the town was too long and fragmented and that shoppers did not necessarily visit more than one retail area per visit.

The Pantiles was generally well liked by respondents but considered by almost all groups as being more of a tourist attraction or place to relax rather than somewhere to shop. North Farm was relatively well used by respondents but also not well liked, primarily for its access problems. Of the 'other' shopping areas identified by respondents (both in the questionnaire and through other consultation events), Camden

Road was by far the most mentioned and most valued, primarily for its range of independent shops.

In terms of aspirations for the future, there was recognition that the town's shops were suffering and that there were a number of vacant and closed units, over and above, but also including, the old cinema site; the majority of attendees in the focus group considered the town to be in decline in this respect.

Despite the overwhelming number of respondents who used RVP the most, most people seemed to value independent shops and there was a consistent refrain that people did not want RTW to become a 'clone town'; respondents felt that RTW had a unique character that needed to be retained.

When discussing the potential for new retail, again the views were mixed. Some people thought that the offer was good and no new retail was needed; others thought that new retail was not just needed but could be a real positive for the town centre, as long as it did not affect the balance of the town centre. Certainly a significant number of questionnaire responses stated that both more independent retailers and a new department store would encourage them to shop in the town centre more than they do now.

## 4.7 Other topics – transport and access

The consultation did not specifically ask about transport and access infrastructure (as one of the topic areas) as we understood that was part of a separate series of studies by TWBC. However it was a recurring theme throughout all of the feedback options and therefore it was felt that this warranted a separate section in the analysis chapter.

The subject of transport and access was recurring throughout consultation as were most of the comments and opinions, as follows:

- People felt that there were existing problems with the town centre's transport infrastructure;
- People felt that any redevelopment of the civic complex or indeed any other site in the town centre must take the issue into account to ensure it was not exacerbated;
- People had issues with the parking in the town, including a desire to see cheaper parking, more convenient charging options, more parking and no further loss of parking; and
- People had concerns about the impact of North Farm on the traffic and infrastructure in the northern part of the town.

In addition there were some suggestions for improvement, the most popular of which was for a Park & Ride scheme to be introduced.

## 4.8 Other topics – views on the buildings (refurbishments or redevelopment)

As already outlined, the consultation deliberately did not seek to answer the question about whether people wanted redevelopment or not. However, the issue was raised in many of the feedback options, with a considerable amount of consistency.

One theme which came out strongly across the board was the need for improvement of the facilities on the civic complex; however there was a mix of views about how this should be achieved. In part this was related to the specific uses, for example the need to improve the museum etc, but in part it related to the view of the buildings themselves and how any improvements could be delivered.

In relation to the buildings, rather than the uses, there were a number of views expressed roughly equally across all mechanisms:

- Some respondents would like to see completely new facilities provided behind the existing facades;
- Some would welcome change and modernisation within the existing buildings;
- Some would leave the buildings as they were, with some minor improvements to the facilities within; and
- There was a minority view by some who would be happy to see complete redevelopment of the buildings on the site.

In terms of the views of the buildings themselves, many people were keen to see them remain, but equally there was a significant number who did not think they were of particular merit and so could be replaced.

There was some concern about the need to include some form of commercial development, with people understanding that it would be required to fund any development. However, respondents were keen that any commercial development would not dominate the site and eclipse the cultural and civic uses they deemed important.

There was also a consistent concern about redevelopment relating to the need for the phasing to be carefully planned to allow continuity for all the uses during development. This was in order to avoid losing any of the cultural uses through temporary closure, which some thought might ultimately lead to permanent closure.

## 4.9 Other topics - general

It was considered that two further themes that arose during the consultation also deserved analysis in this section: whether the civic complex was the right priority; and what design approach should be taken if redevelopment were to happen.



#### **4.9.1 (Other topics) Is the civic complex the right priority for the Council?**

There was consistent reference throughout consultation to the need for a holistic and strategic approach to the town centre. This was in terms of 1) the impact any development may have on facilities like the Trinity Theatre and Camden Road and 2) in terms of whether the civic complex should be considered for redevelopment before the old cinema site and other derelict sites in the town centre.

Consistently the question was asked why the Council was considering redevelopment of the civic complex when the old cinema site across the road had been derelict for a decade; in particular people were concerned that the focus on the civic complex could lead to further delays to redevelopment of the old cinema site. In addition, there was concern about the cumulative impact of the two developments on the town centre and the transport infrastructure.

This was also supported by the widely held view that the Council should be taking a strategic approach to the whole town centre.

#### **4.9.2 (Other topics) If development were to go ahead, what design approach should be followed?**

In addition to the specific question in the questionnaire on design reference, there was a wide variety of opinion offered on the design approach that should be undertaken if redevelopment were to go ahead.

What everyone agreed was that the architecture had to be of the highest quality to do justice to the town and its historic nature and also to do justice to the prominence and importance of the civic complex in the town.

The Pantiles and Calverley Park Crescent were the two areas most people wanted to be referenced in any new design, with the Town Hall generating support and indifference in equal measure.

However, although not provided as an option, a significant number of people stated that any new design should be about fresh ideas, and this was supported by others across the consultation who wanted to avoid a pastiche approach.

Whatever approach was taken, there was agreement not just that the architecture should be of the highest quality, but also that it should be sensitive to its context and the surrounding town centre.

**5.0**

**CONSULTATION  
FEEDBACK**

## 5.1 Feedback mechanisms

M&N sought to ensure that as many people as possible could get involved in the consultation and feed back their thoughts in whatever means they felt comfortable with.

On that basis, feedback, from groups or individuals, could be provided to M&N in a number of ways as follows:

- Through consultation sessions – all sessions\* were minuted
- Through the questionnaire – validated questionnaires recorded on a database
- By writing or emailing general comments/ideas – all correspondence recorded
- Social media posts – all posts recorded
- Verbally, over the phone or in person – comments were recorded as requested

\*Except the promotional drop in sessions – see 5.3.1

The consultation programme and feedback mechanisms were designed to draw out both qualitative feedback (meaning and experience) and quantitative feedback (numbers and frequencies).

For the purposes of this report, this section, 5.1, provides a summary of the main themes drawn out of the various consultation activities: 1) questionnaire feedback; 2) event feedback; and 3) other representations (including letters and emails etc). All full reports and representations made are provided in full as appendices and summary analysis of feedback is provided in section 4.0.

## 5.2 Questionnaire feedback

As explained in section 3.2.3, M&N went through a validation process with all completed questionnaires received within the consultation period and up to the deadline.

All questionnaire feedback is included in the appendices. Paper questionnaire feedback is included in appendix 4.0; electronic questionnaire feedback is included from appendices 4.1.1 to 4.1.3; and a master feedback database covering both is included in appendix 4.2.

The below provides a summary of all the questionnaire feedback from the 6,137 validated questionnaires.

M&N has reviewed all the comments made on the questionnaires as well as on supplementary sheets. Provided below is the following:

- Graphs showing the totals from each question (quantitative data)

- Summaries of the most popular answers and themes from the comments sections/questions (qualitative data)
- An overall summary for each question – looking at both the quantitative and qualitative data together

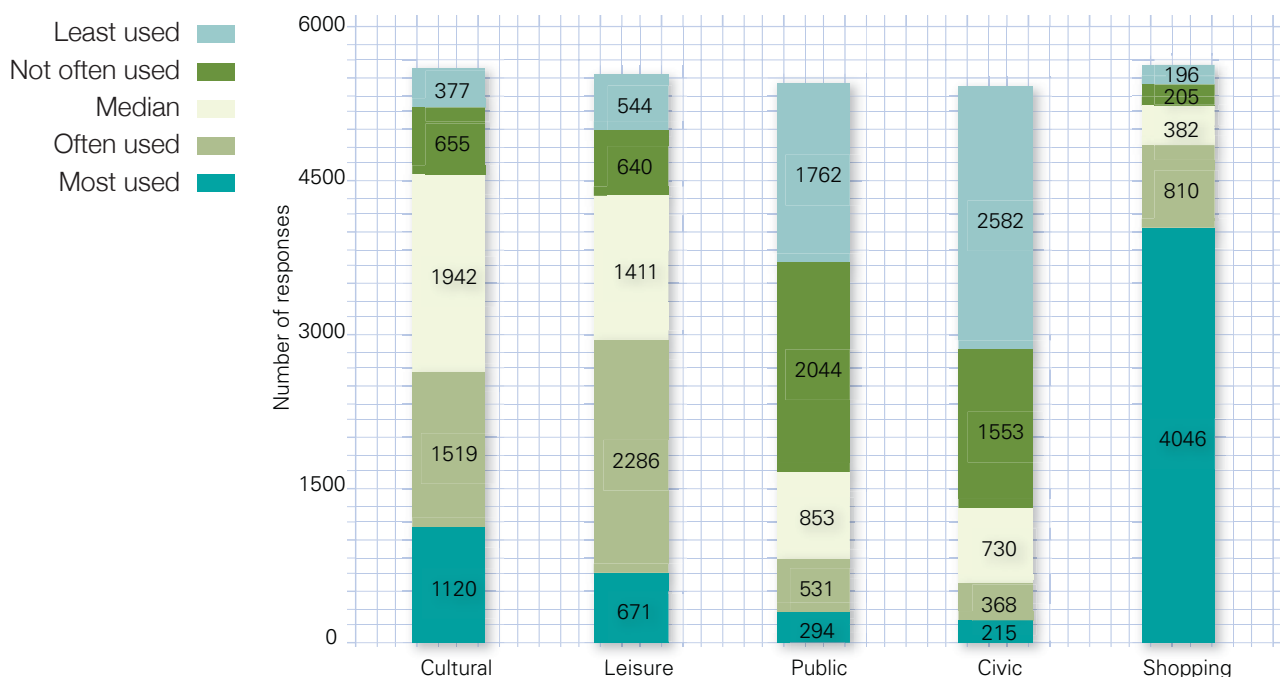
\* Electronic data from the online questionnaire is provided in full separately as this was generated automatically from questionnaire software. The master database contains only the total numbers from the electronic database.

## Question 1. Using the town centre

There are many services and facilities in the town centre. Put in order those that you most use, with 1 being the most and 5 the least:

- Cultural, including the theatre, art gallery, museum
- Leisure, including restaurants, bars, cafes and gyms
- Public services, including police, adult education, the Gateway
- Civic, including the council chamber and committee rooms, the open spaces
- Shopping, including high street, food & convenience and services including banks & agents

### Using the town centre



### Please add any other services and facilities used:

A number of people provided comments unrelated to the specific instruction above which are also included in this summary. The section set out below covers the issues raised in order of priority i.e. those with the most comments first.

1. The most popular comment by far was mention of the library with around 315 people raising this use.
2. The next most popular comment, made by approximately 120 people, was open spaces and parks.
3. There was then a cluster of comments made by between approximately 30 to 65 people, fewer than half the number of people who noted (2) above. These comments included (in descending order of popularity):
  - Cinema (as an additional use that would be visited if it was there)
  - Trinity Theatre
  - Poor parking and transport infrastructure (as a general comment)
  - Railway station
  - Church/clubs/societies
  - Farmers' Market
  - Assembly Hall
  - Car parks
  - Medical services

Please note that further comments made by approximately 10-30 people can be seen in appendix 5.0.

### Summary analysis of Q1 – USING THE TOWN CENTRE:

This question was asked so that an understanding could be gained about what the draw was to the town centre as a whole and how respondents used it. The question was not about what respondents thought was important for the town centre or what they might want to see in the future; rather it sets the context for the remainder of the questionnaire.

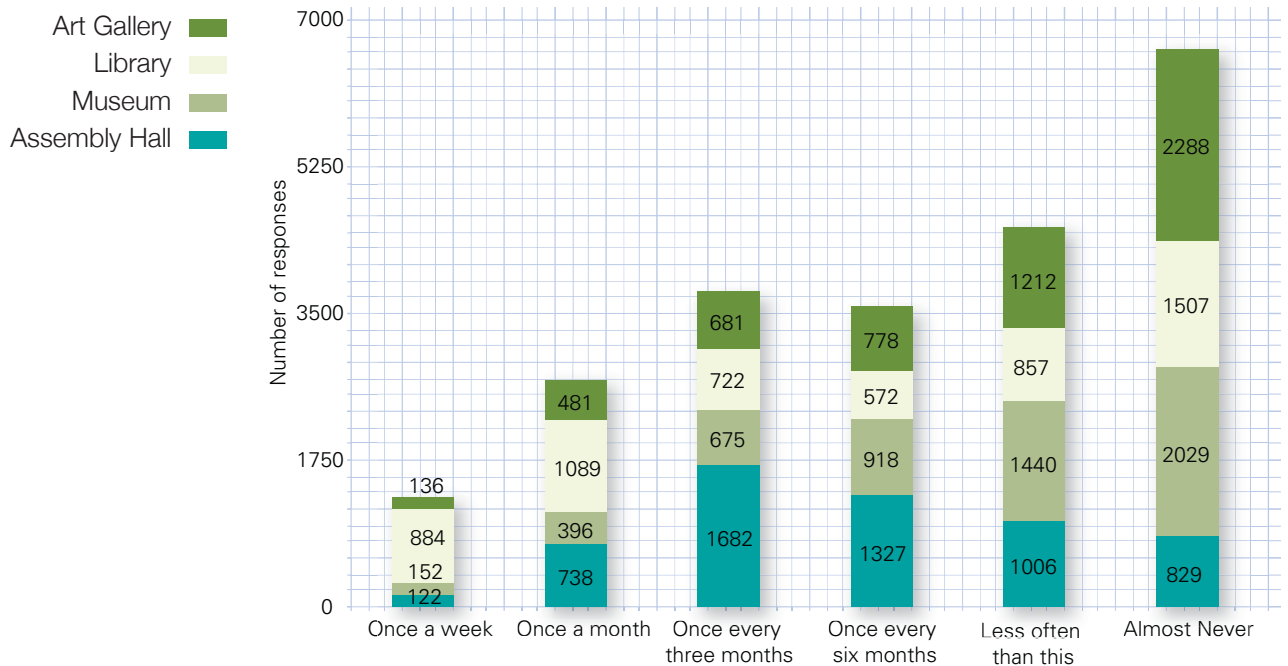
Shopping was by far the most frequent use in the town centre (peaking at 1 – the most). Civic uses (peaking at 5 – the least) and public services (peaking at 4) were used the least often by a considerable margin.

In addition however, it was clear that whilst shopping was the number one most frequent use, it was complemented by cultural and leisure uses which peaked at the higher end of the graphs (i.e. frequency 2 and 3). This was supported by the comments where the most popular 'other' was library, although it should be noted that this was only approximately 315 people which was about the same number as some of the lowest uses in the graph.

## Question 2. Culture

### 2.1 How often have you visited each of the below in the last 12 months?

- 1 – Once a week
- 2 – Once a month
- 3 – Once every three months
- 4 – Once every six months
- 5 – Less often than this
- 6 – Almost never



### 2.2 In your own words, explain if there is anything that would make you visit any of the above MORE or LESS often.

Respondents provided specific answers related to MORE or LESS but also made more general comments which have also been logged. All comments noted below are provided in descending order of popularity.

1. The top four answers overall (all 'MORE' comments) were each made by between approximately 400 to 480 people:
  - 'More things to my taste' relating to the Assembly Hall
  - Better facilities/ more space for the museum and art gallery

- Better promotion of either all cultural facilities or individually, the museum, the art gallery and the Assembly Hall
  - Better transport/parking for all cultural uses
2. The fifth most popular answer provided by approximately 320 people was: ‘If relocated out of town’ as a generic ‘LESS’ comment (*NB – the top answer for LESS*).
3. The next four answers (all ‘MORE’ comments) were much closer in range, being made by between approximately 200 to 250 people:
- Better exhibitions relating to art gallery and museum
  - Better access/disabled access for all cultural facilities
  - More space, books and facilities for the library
  - Improved facilities/modernised/improved performance space for Assembly Hall
4. The final group of significant comments made in terms of numbers (mid to late 100s), were both ‘MORE’ comments:
- ‘If improved on site’ a generic comment relating to all facilities
  - ‘Different lifestyle/more leisure time/changed personal situation’
  - After these comments, the numbers of people responding to each issue dropped considerably.
5. There were then a large number of comments, each made by fewer than 100 people. The main comments, made by between 50 and 100 people are shown below. There were no comments in this frequency bracket that would make respondents visit the town less.

Number of people raising each topic	Make people visit MORE
c.76 – 100	Cinema If all of it was redeveloped
c.51 – 75	If public space/café provided

In addition, a number of people simply referenced uses in either a positive or a negative light, i.e. liked or did not like. In the 50-100 frequency bracket, there were no uses mentioned negatively.

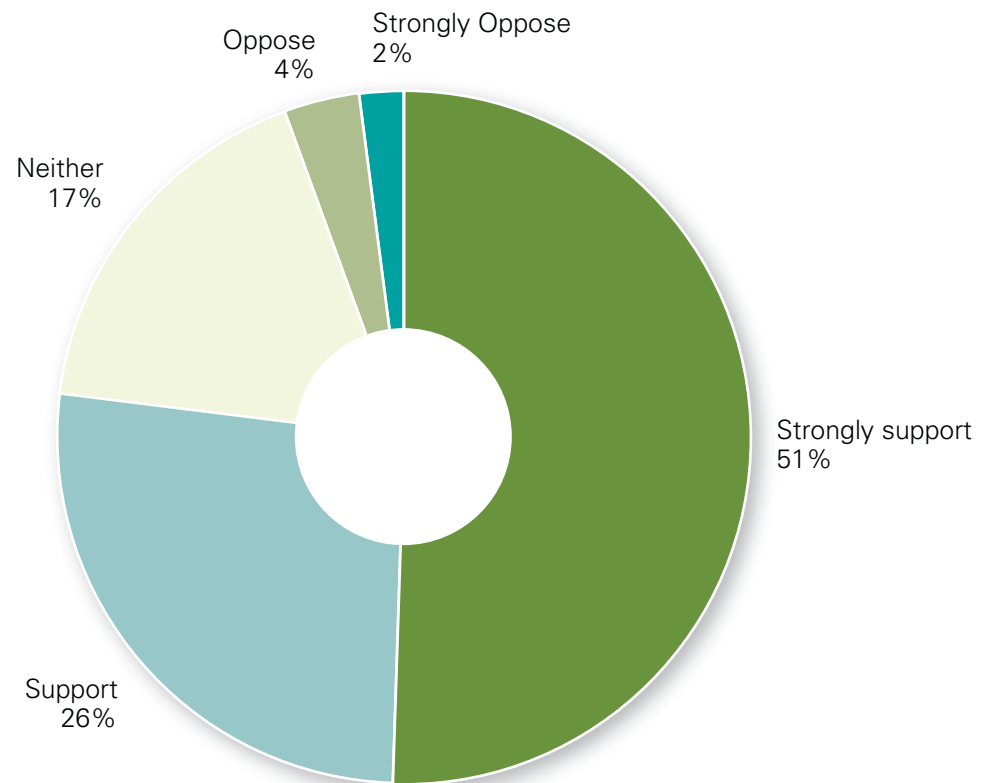
Number of people raising each topic	Uses mentioned positively
c.76 – 100	All of it (cultural facilities) Assembly
c.51 – 75	Library

Please note that further comments made by approximately 10-50 people can be seen in appendix 5.1.

### 2.3 If a redevelopment goes ahead, it may be possible to provide a cinema. Would you:

- 1 - Strongly support this
- 2 - Support this
- 3 - Neither support nor oppose this
- 4 - Oppose this
- 5 - Strongly oppose this

#### Would you support a cinema?



#### Summary analysis of Q2 - CULTURE:

These questions were asked so that an understanding could be gained about the frequency and relative use of the cultural facilities. It was also designed to gain an understanding of what could make people use these facilities more or what might discourage them from using them; this was to consider how these uses could be enhanced and safeguarded in the future.



It is worth stating here that there is an appreciation that cultural uses are not, for most, an everyday activity. Therefore information on the frequency of visits alone does not provide an indication of values attached to those uses; with this in mind, the graph is supported by Q2.2 which allows people to provide comments on what they think and feel about those uses. This helps to provide more of an idea about the value attached to each use i.e. anything which might affect their use of cultural facilities. Whilst the number of comments made was significantly fewer than those who filled in Q2.1, it is worth noting that there were considerably more comments made about things which would encourage people to visit the town centre MORE than comments made about things which would make them visit LESS. The main LESS comment, made by approximately 320 respondents, was related to cultural facilities being moved out of town

Looking at the high frequency end of the 2.1 graph (bars in row 1) the library is (and supported by comments in Q1) the most frequently used facility by far compared to the art gallery, museum and Assembly Hall in terms of weekly usage. However, conversely, significantly more people (approx. 1,500) 'almost never' use this facility than use it once a week (approx. 900). A relatively small number (approx. 220) clarified their thoughts on the library within Q2.2 by suggesting that more space, books and facilities for the library would make them use it more with a similar number also suggesting improved accessibility (disabled and families) would make them visit it more.

In terms of the less well frequented cultural uses, it is very clear from Q2.1 that a significant number of respondents 'almost never' visit the art gallery (approx. 2,300 people) or museum (approx. 2,000 people). Comments made in Q2.2 provide some insight into why some things are not well visited; between approx. 400 to 450 suggested that better facilities, more space and better promotion of these facilities, along with better exhibitions, would make them visit more.

The frequency of visits to the Assembly Hall peaks at medium frequency 3 on the graph (once every three months); this maximum rate applied to approximately 1,700 respondents. The frequency of use of the Assembly Hall for the remaining respondents was split. More than double the number (approx 1,800 respondents) visited the Assembly Hall with a low frequency 5 or 6 (less often than every six months or almost never) than the number of respondents (approx. 860) with a high frequency 1 or 2 (once a week or once a month). Although that would not be unexpected due to the nature of theatre usage, some respondents (the top answer for Q2.2 with 480 respondents) stated that they would visit the Assembly Hall more if it had more things to their taste. Other comments made by fewer respondents (each by approx. 200 to 250 respondents) stated that better promotion and improved/modernised facilities and performance space would make them visit the Assembly Hall more.

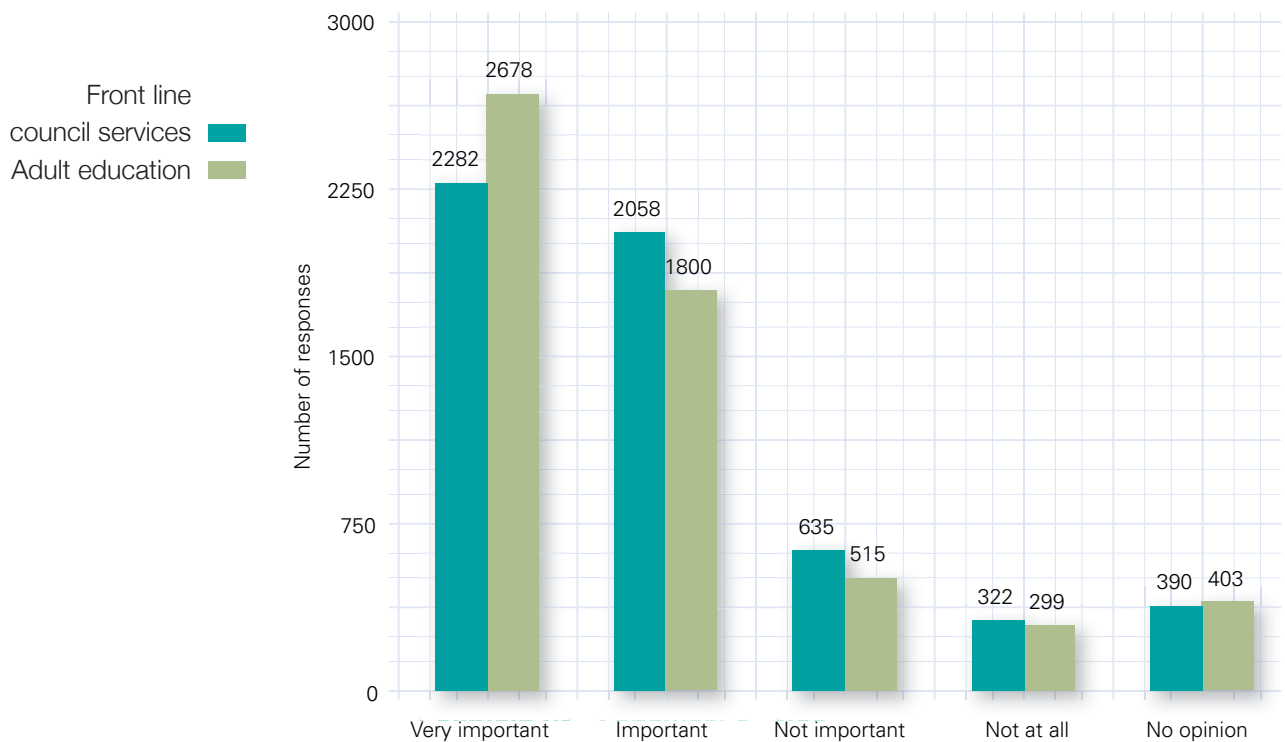
There was very strong support for the re-introduction of a cinema in the town centre with more than ten times the number (approx. 4,390) supporting or strongly supporting the idea compared to the number of respondents (approx. 320) opposing or strongly opposing it. Just under approximately 1,000 respondents were neutral about the idea.

## Question 3. Public services

### 3.1 Which of the following are important to have in the town centre?

- 1 – Very important
- 2 – Important
- 3 – Not important
- 4 – Not at all important
- 5 – No opinion

#### Which of these are important to have in the town centre?



Comments made have been considered and logged as frontline services only (FS), Adult Education only (AE) or covering both (BOTH). All comments noted below are provided in descending order of popularity.

1. The top answer by a long way was raised by just over 1,400 respondents (covering BOTH): 'They should be in the town centre because it is the most accessible place and many of those who use them do not have a car.'
2. The second answer, with fewer than half the number of people (approximately 570 people) commenting, was: 'accessibility is more important than location', covering BOTH.
3. The next three most popular comments were all made by similar numbers of people (between approx. 230 to 270 people):

- The town needs a mix of uses and the mix of uses allows people to do more than one thing on each trip (BOTH)
  - Frontline services are important and should be accessible (FS)
  - Adult Education is important and should be accessible (AE)
4. The next five comments were made by relatively similar numbers of people (between approx. 100 to 160 people):
- AE could be provided in a different location, for example in schools etc but must still be accessible (AE)
  - Do not use frontline services (FS)
  - Do not use adult education (AE)
  - Both make an important contribution to the sense of community spirit and social cohesion (BOTH)
  - Do not need to be in the town centre, as most services are provided over the phone or online (FS)
5. There were further comments each made by between 50 and 100 people as follows:

Number of people raising each topic	Comments/general comments made
c.76 – 100	They need to be in a prominent location so people know about them and how to find them (BOTH) Needs to be available in town to help re-train in current economic climate (AE)
c.51 – 75	Council does not need to occupy such an important site

Please note that all the remaining comments made by approximately 10-50 people can be seen in appendix 5.2.

### Summary analysis of Q3 – PUBLIC SERVICES

From the answers to Q3.1, it is clear that frontline services and adult education are considered to be important to have in the town centre. The responses to this question demonstrate that whilst respondents do not necessarily use public services as much as they might other uses in the town centre (as per Q1 results), it was important to a significant number of respondents – approx. 4,480 for frontline services and approx. 4,340 for Adult Education across 1, ‘very important’ and 2, ‘important’ – to have these in the town centre.

In the comments section, the reasons for this response become clear; approx. 2,700 comments were related to accessibility. Approx. 1,400 respondents stated that public services should be in the town centre ‘because it is the most accessible place and

many people who use them don't have a car'. Approx. 570 respondents stated that 'accessibility is more important than location'.

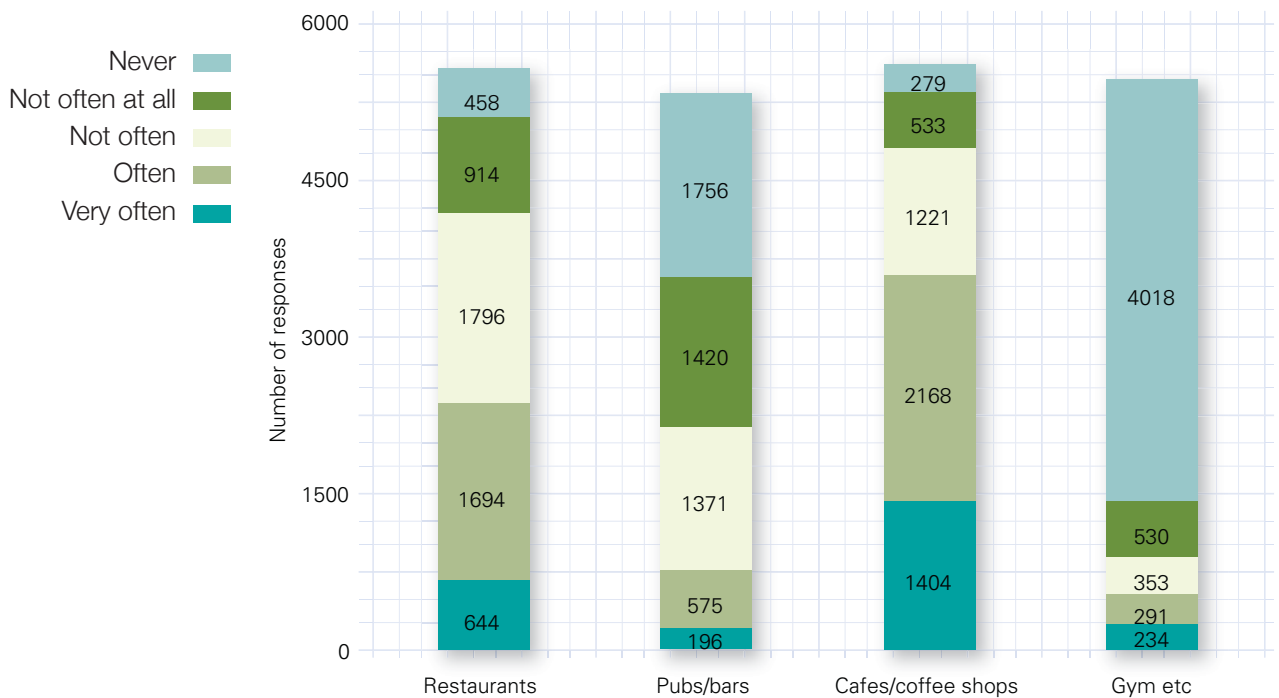
Some respondents, though this was only raised by a relatively small number, approx. 270, commented that generally the town needed a mix of uses to allow people to do more than one thing on each trip.

## Question 4. Leisure

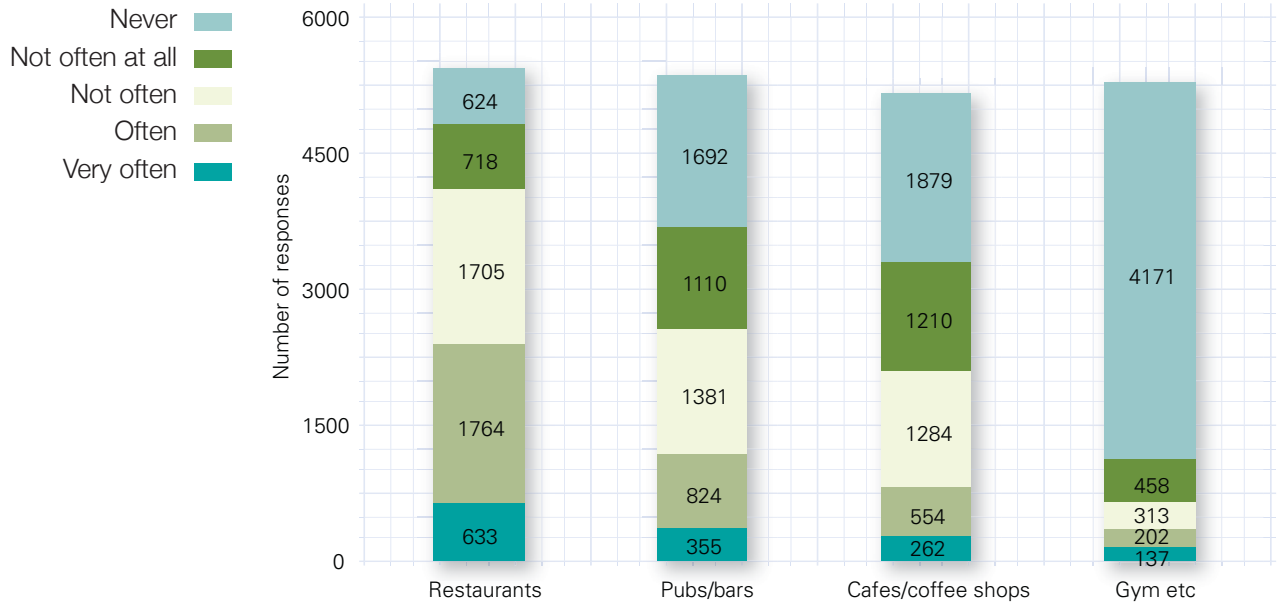
### 4.1 How often do you use the below in the town centre – in the daytime or in the evening?

- 1 – Very often
- 2 – Often
- 3 – Not very often
- 4 – Not often at all
- 5 – Never

#### Daytime leisure usage



### Evening leisure usage



### 4.2 Which, if any, of the above would you like to see a wider range of?

In comments relating to this question, respondents outlined a number of facilities/ services that they would like to see but also those which they felt were in over supply. There were also a number of general comments made which have been logged. All comments noted below are provided in descending order of popularity.

1. There were approx. 1,800 comments about facilities and services that people would like to see a wider range of and approx. 1,350 comments from people who thought that no more of anything was needed.
2. Out of all the suggested wider ranges of facilities respondents said they would like to see, the most popular answer (just over 330 people) was restaurants.
3. The three next most popular choices (with around 230 to 250 people) were gyms and wine bars and pubs including those for older age groups and traditional pubs and cafes/coffee shops including ones that stay open in the evening.
4. The next five comments were each made by around 100 to 185 people and relate to a desire to see more of certain facilities, an improvement of existing ones and comment regarding too many types of facilities:

Wider range of	Live entertainment venues Cafes/coffee shops Leisure complex (incl. pool/ice rink) Independent restaurants/cafes
To be improved	Restaurant choice needs to be improved
Too many	Restaurants (specifically chain and Italian)

There were a large number of comments, each made by fewer than 100 people, as follows:

Number of people raising each topic	Comments made
c.76 – 100	Facilities for young people
c.51 – 75	Child/ family friendly

Please note that all the remaining comments made by approximately 10-50 people can be seen in appendix 5.3.

### Summary analysis of Q4 - LEISURE

These questions were asked to provide an understanding of what leisure uses people use now and what, if any, leisure uses respondents would like to see a wider range of. Again, the graph does not provide any information about how people value these uses, just the frequency of use.

From the answers to Q4.1, it is clear that the gym is the least used leisure facility by far across both daytime and night time use.

The two graphs show that daytime leisure is characterised by café use with restaurants not far behind; the reverse is the case in the evening, however restaurant use is fairly consistent across both daytime and evening.

In terms of pubs and bars, respondents do not seem to use these very much in the daytime or evening with both graphs showing a peak at 5 'never use', sloping fairly evenly down to a relatively small few who use these 'very often'.

On the whole, the answers to Q4.1 suggest that either respondents do not use the town centre very much in the evening or that there is very little evening activity to use. This may relate to the demographics of respondents (see Q9 for age group breakdown) or the nature of the provision.

To clarify respondents' thoughts on leisure uses in addition to their use of them, responses to Q4.2 resulted in approx. 1,800 comments about facilities people would like to see more of, compared to approx. 1,350 comments that 'no more of anything' was needed; this represents a mix of opinions from those who answered the question, with more respondents looking for more facilities in the town centre than those who do not.

When one breaks down the uses that people would like to see more of, there was a wide variety of answers, with similar numbers of comments. More restaurants was the top answer with approx. 330 respondents stating they would like to see more – which fits with the consistent use of these in the daytime and evening. However nearly half as many people (approx.155) thought there were too many. Other top suggestions (made by approx. 230 to 250 people) were gyms and bars/traditional pubs (for different ages) and more of an evening café culture.

Other uses suggested demonstrate a wide range of ideas but one theme that emerged across a number of comments was the desire for leisure uses to be for all ages, from small children, teenagers and families through to activities for the middle aged and elderly.

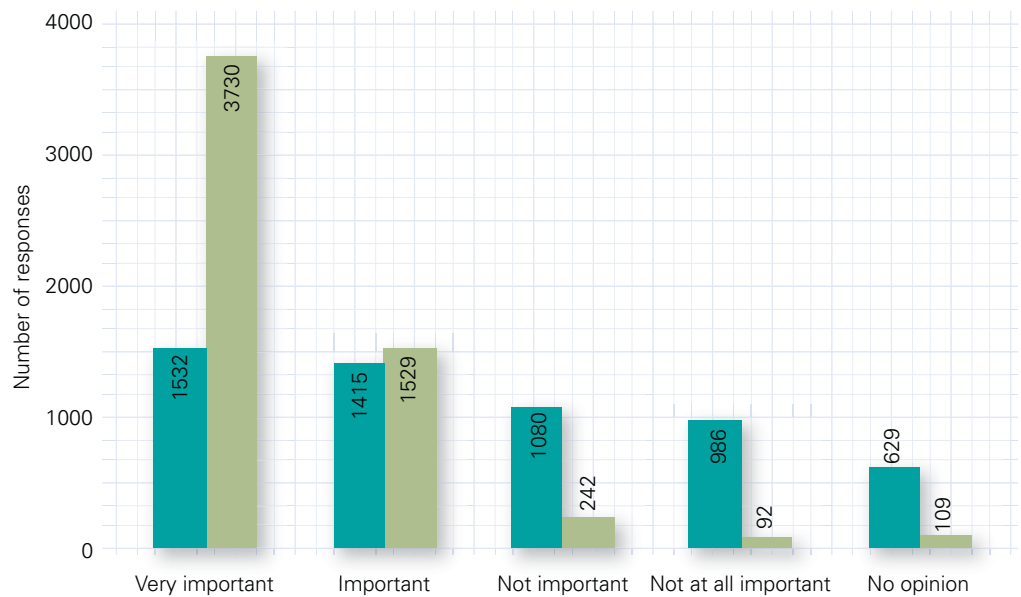
## Question 5. Civic

### 5.1 Which of the following are important to have in the town centre?

- 1 – Very important
- 2 – Important
- 3 – Not important
- 4 – Not important at all
- 5 – No opinion

#### Which of these are important to have in the town centre?

Council chamber and committee rooms ■  
Public open spaces ■



### 5.2 Please explain your answer/ choice.

Comments made have been considered and logged as council chamber and committee rooms only (CCC), public open spaces only (POS) or covering both (BOTH). All comments noted below are provided in descending order of popularity.

1. The most popular choice with approx. 860 respondents providing the comment was: **Both (Council Chamber/ committee rooms and public open spaces) should be together in one space centrally** (BOTH) to promote community spirit and social cohesion.
2. The second most popular choice (approx. 780 respondents) was: **Open spaces are important to promote community spirit/ social cohesion.** (POS)

3. The third most popular comment was made by significantly less people (approx. 450 people): **Both should be accessible to the elderly and young families.** (BOTH)
4. The next five most popular comments were all made by relatively similar numbers of people (approx. 300 to 370 people):
  - **The Council should be (/in) the heart of the community** (CCC)
  - **Move council facilities outside the town centre, keep open areas accessible to public** (BOTH)
  - **Public open spaces are a distinctive feature of Tunbridge Wells** (POS)
  - **Open spaces are good for all, especially family and youth activities, therefore should be central and in walking distance.** (POS)
  - **Access to public open spaces is an advantage to residents, workers and visitors of the town.** (POS)
5. The next four most popular comments were all made by relatively similar numbers of people (approx. 200 to 260 people):
  - **There is no need for council chamber to be located in the town centre** (CCC)
  - **Civic centre is focal point of TW, needs to be retained** (CCC)
  - **Park adds beauty to the town centre** (POS)
  - **Public need easy access to council meetings and public open spaces enhance the town** (BOTH)
6. The final cluster of responses included comments each made by approx. 100 – 170 respondents:
  - **Council chambers mainly used by members, not public** (CCC)
  - **Council being in town centre promotes community spirit/ important for social cohesion** (CCC)
  - **All council services, not just council chambers should be sited where they are accessible to all** (CCC)
7. There were a number of comments, each made by fewer than 100 people, as follows:

Number of people raising each topic	Comments made
c.76 – 100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council facilities should be moved into outskirts of town centre but still accessible (CCC)</li> <li>• Don't use the services (CCC)</li> </ul>
c.51 – 75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should not have to rely on transport to enjoy open areas (POS)</li> </ul>

Please note that all the remaining comments made by approximately 10 - 50 people can be seen in appendix 5.4.



## Summary analysis of Q5 - CIVIC

Whilst Q1 demonstrated that civic uses were not as well used as some others within the town centre, these questions were asked to help provide an understanding about how respondents viewed the importance of access to civic uses. In particular, the focus was on places where civic/public interaction takes place, or should take place, to consider what factors respondents valued as important with regards to their location.

In terms of public open spaces, the graph demonstrates that civic public open spaces (as they are or as they should be) are very important to have in the town centre. Comments in Q5.2 made by approx. 780 respondents clarify this by stating that a town centre location promotes social cohesion and community spirit. Accessibility was also a key factor for respondents.

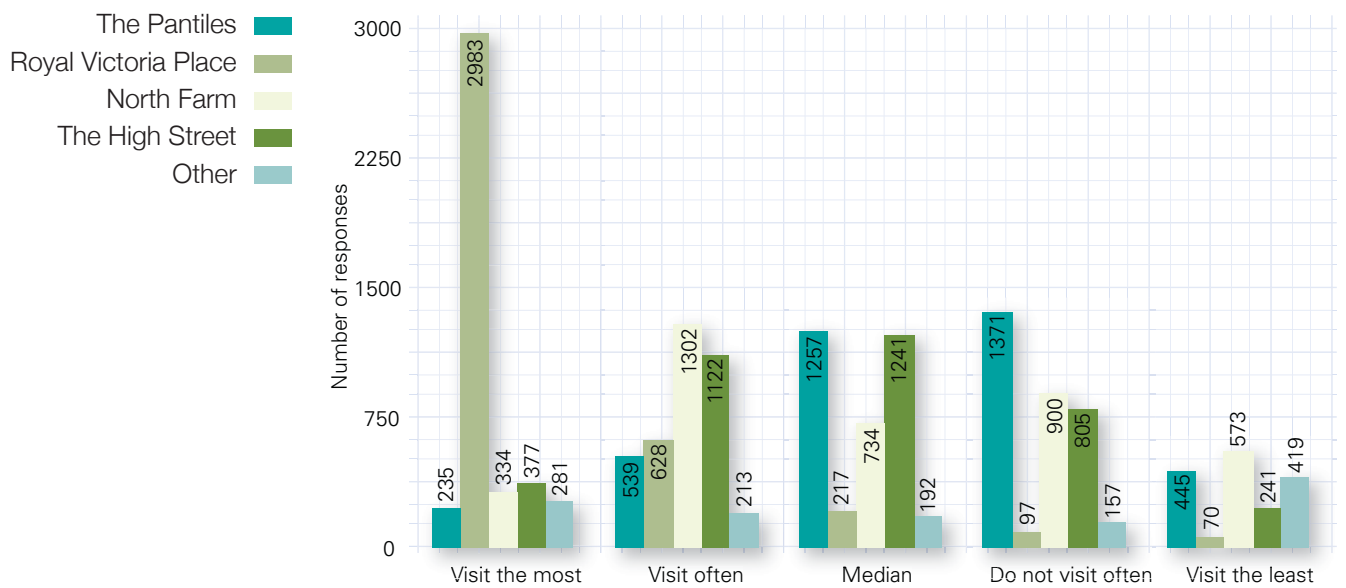
In terms of the council chamber and committee rooms being in the town centre, responses to this were not as clear cut. More respondents considered that they should be central but there were strong responses on both sides: approx. 2,950 respondents stated it to be 'very important/ important' and approx. 2,070 considered that a town centre location was 'not important/not important at all'. Alongside these figures, a further approx. 630 respondents had no opinion on the subject so opinion seemed to be divided. Again, reasons stated for the council chamber and committee rooms being in the town centre were predominantly due to the promotion of social cohesion and community spirit and accessibility.

## Question 6. Shopping

6.1 Royal Tunbridge Wells has a wide variety of shops and shopping areas in the centre.

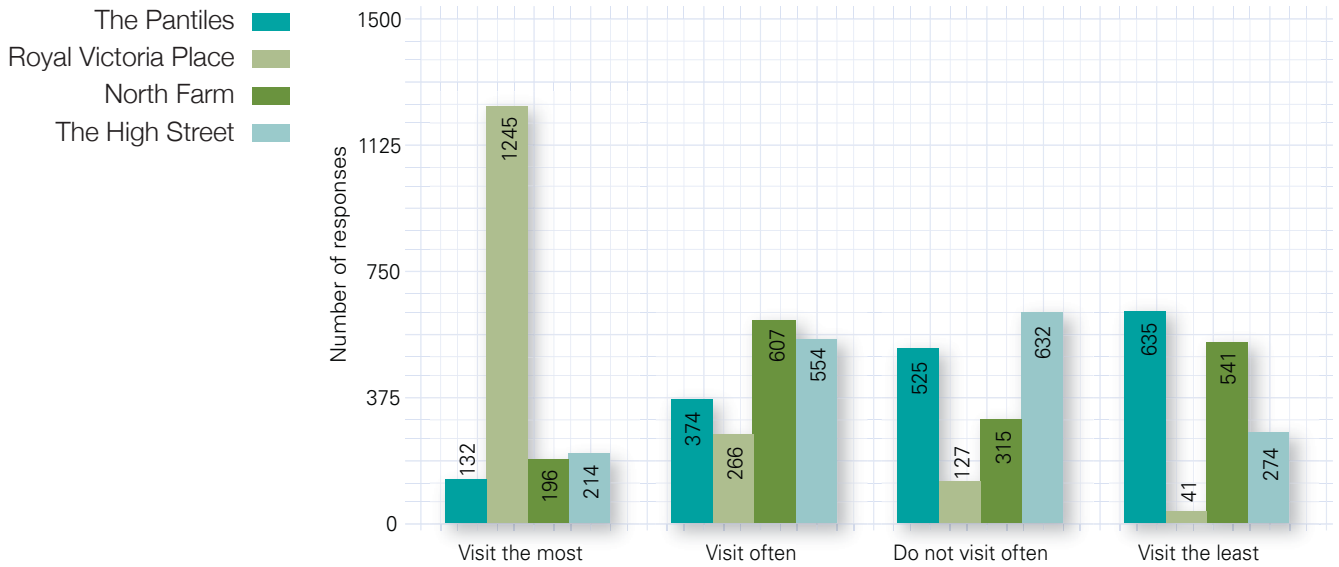
Which do you use? (mark in order of use, 1 being the most used and 5 the least).

### Ranking shopping areas in order of use



NB – Due to ranking issues with the online questionnaire, results are split into separate charts with ‘other’ not included as a ranking in the online version. ‘Other’ is however represented in written feedback.

### Ranking shopping areas in order of use (online)



### Summary of ‘other’ options provided for Q6.1 above:

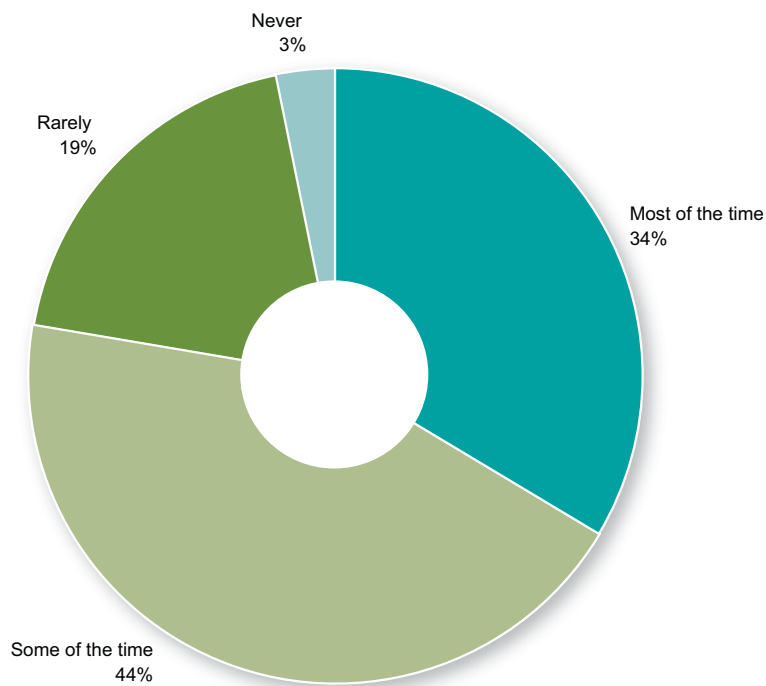
All ‘other’ comments, whether ranked or not, were counted and there were three clear groups of responses: one clear favourite; five second choices all with similar numbers of comments; and a remaining cluster with relatively minimal difference in the number of comments between each.

1. The clear first choice listed under ‘other’ was **Camden Road** with approx. 590 comments. (Please note that the second most frequent comment to appear was ‘not valid’ with approx. 290 comments.)
2. The next five shopping areas within ‘other’, listed in order of preference, were very similar in terms of the number of comments made (between approx. 140 and 180 comments): **Mount Pleasant; Sainsbury’s; Monson Road; out of town; and Calverley.**
3. The remaining answers within ‘other’ had little difference in between the number of comments for each shopping area (ranging between approx. 20 to 80 comments): **St. Johns, Grosvenor; top of the town around RVP; Tesco; Farmers’ Market; West Station’ Mount Ephraim; and Chapel Place.**

## 6.2 When visiting one of the shopping areas in 6.1, how often do you also visit one of the other areas?

Most of the time  
Some of the time  
Rarely  
Never

### How often do you visit other shopping areas?



### Please explain your answer/choice:

All comments made have been considered and logged under subject areas as below. The most popular subject areas were as follows – provided in descending order of common topics raised:

- Relationships between the different shopping areas and parts of town**
  - Approx. 1,300 comments
  - i.e. comments on the layout and linear nature of town, how the different shopping areas relate to each other and how this affects their shopping experience (or not).
  - Within this subject area, there were two main sub-topics which had almost equal numbers of comments:
    1. The most popular comment (approx. 580 comments) was that **respondents did not visit more than one place in each visit** due to the layout of the town

2. A very close second in terms of most popular comment (with approx. 550 comments) was that **respondents did visit the top and bottom of town in one visit** or visited several areas in one trip.

## 2. Shopping habits

- Approx. 1,200 comments
- i.e. how respondents shop i.e. behaviour towards the town centre.
- There were four summary sub-topics with one main popular topic and a cluster of three topics with fairly even numbers of comments:
  1. The most popular topic (approx. 730 comments) was in relation to **targeted shopping** with respondents stating that all areas offered different things so their ('in and out') trips were specific and planned depending on what they needed.
  2. The next three topics, in fairly even numbers (approx. 210), covered respondents' usual shopping trips as: a) **a longer shopping experience** with browsing and combining errands and potentially a full day's visit around town; b) a **restricted visit** due to time restrictions, personal barriers (e.g. age/disability) and shopping as purely a necessity and; c) **non-town centre** i.e. localised to where they worked or lived, out of town or internet preference.

## 3. North Farm

- Approx. 970 comments
- I.e. whether respondents use it or don't use it and why, along with issues about the shopping provision there.
- There were two very clear sub-topics within this subject area:
  1. The most popular response (approx. 700 comments) was a negative comment about North Farm i.e. that respondents did not visit it or **did not like it due to traffic and access** which they would like to see improved.
  2. The second most popular response (approx. 325 comments) was more positive with respondents stating that they **did visit North Farm** either in a separate trip, as a frequent preference or only for specific items.

## 4. Access, traffic and parking

- Approx. 800 comments
- Issues raised on parking, public transport, roads, park and ride and pedestrian links.
- Within this subject area, there were three clear sub-topics relating to comments made as follows:
  1. The most popular response (approx. 590 comments) related to **negative issues** with parking and comments about poor public transport, access, and traffic congestion.

2. A number of comments (approx. 175 comments) then related to **suggestions for improvement** ranging from (in order of popularity): better transport links in the town centre; cheaper parking; park and ride and 'pay at end' parking.
  3. The least popular response was a view that **all areas were easy to access** (approx. 30 comments).
5. **Royal Victoria Place (RVP)**
    - Approx. 350 comments
    - General views expressed on the provision
    - Compared to other areas, there were considerably less comments raised on RVP and the two main sub-topics were clear:
      1. The majority of the comments (approx. 300 comments) related to respondents finding **RVP convenient and shopping there regularly**
      2. There were considerably less comments (approx. 60 comments) from respondents who specifically said that they **did not like RVP** or that they thought **shopping at RVP was more of a necessity** than a choice.
  6. **The Pantiles/High Street/independents**
    - Approx. 300 comments
    - General views expressed about these multiple shopping areas
    - Comments on this subject area were often grouped together on respondents' questionnaires hence the grouping here. Comments considered were **all positive** with respondents stating that they liked The Pantiles, the High Street and independent shops along with the Farmers' Market.
  7. **Frequency of visits**
    - Approx. 120 comments
    - Comments on frequency of usage of the shopping areas
    - Comments relating to this subject area were minimal with the majority of comments (approx 80) relating to respondents **visiting all shopping areas equally**, followed by those who did not shop much (approx. 30 comments).
  8. **Generate statements**
    - Approx. 110 comments
    - Miscellaneous statements regarding outcomes they would like to see and relating to the question itself
    - All sub-topics raised under this subject area each received fewer than 100 comments as follows:
      1. **Querying the nature of the question** (approx. 85 comments).
      2. **Stated desire for redevelopment of the town** (approx. 10 comments).
      3. **Stated desire for no more shops** (approx. 10 comments).

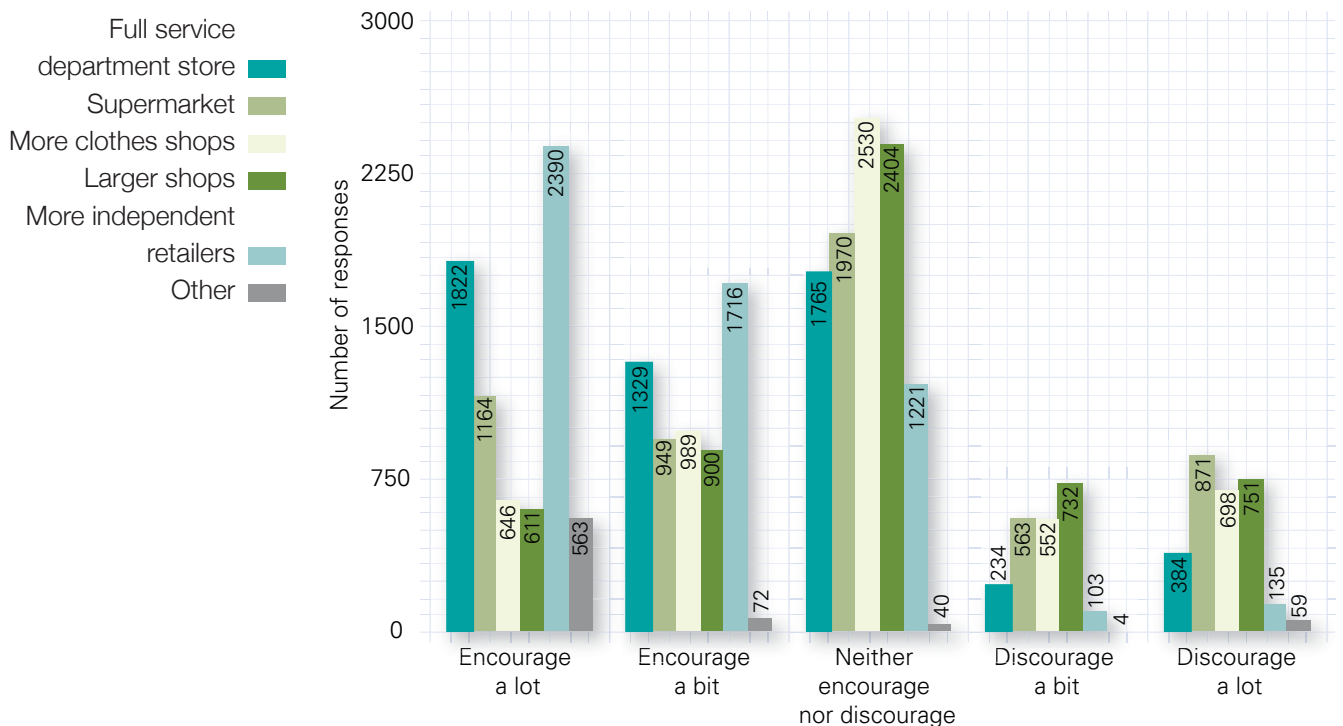
9. **Department store/supermarket**

- Approx. 65 comments
- Preferences for a department store or supermarket
- There were minimal numbers of comments made on this subject but there were two key sub-topics:
  1. Respondents (approx. 40 comments) **wanting more supermarket options** in town.
  2. Respondents (approx. 30 comments) **wanting to see a department store** in the town centre (John Lewis was mentioned).

**6.3 Would any of the following ENCOURAGE or DISCOURAGE you to visit Royal Tunbridge Wells?**

- 1 – Encourage a lot
- 2 – Encourage a bit
- 3 – Neither encourage nor discourage
- 4 – Discourage a bit
- 5 – Discourage a lot

**Which would encourage or discourage you to visit the town centre**



### Other, please specify:

In terms of comments made under 'other', the majority of comments (approx. 910 out of a total of approx. 970 valid comments\*) were either 'encourage a lot' or 'encourage'. Only approx. 50 comments were in relation to things which would 'discourage a lot' or 'discourage' people from visiting Royal Tunbridge Wells. Only approx. 10 comments made up 'neither encourage or discourage', the neutral position.

A **cinema (under 'encourage a lot'/'encourage')** was the most popular **comment** overall (with approx. 90 comments) but there was not a significant difference between this and the other comments.

All comments made have been collated under subject areas; the breakdown of these is as follows:

1. **Retail** was the most commonly raised sub-topic with a total of approx. 490 comments:
  - Approx. 450 of the comments related to 'encourage a lot'/'encourage'; approx. 40 of the comments related to 'discourage a lot'/'discourage'
  - The most popular retail sub-topic overall (under 'encourage a lot'/'encourage'), with approx. 190 comments, was more **specialist shops** including: DIY/hardware/homeware; food retail; hobbies/crafts/toys; and bookshops.
  - There was very little difference between the remaining retail sub-topics under 'encourage a lot'/'encourage' in terms of the number of comments raised (between approx. 10 and 70): **supermarket; cheaper shops (Primark/Wilkinson's/Pound Shop etc); department store; clothes shops/general retail; permanent market; and covered market.**
  - There were only two main sub-topics under 'discourage a lot'/'discourage', both with under approx. 20 comments: **clothes shops/general retail and department store.**

'Leisure and culture' and 'transport and access' (below) were very similar in terms of the number of comments made with approx. 230 comments for the former and 225 for the latter.

2. Under 'leisure and culture', the following comments were made by a relatively small number of respondents.
  - Leisure and culture included the most popular sub-topic overall (under 'encourage a lot'/'encourage') which was **cinema** with approx. 90 comments.
  - The second most popular comment was **cultural centre/open spaces** with approx. 50 comments.
  - There were very few other sub-topics (each with between approx. 10 and 20 comments) and these were for **more cafes/restaurants, leisure activities, sport/leisure centre and ice rink** (under 'encourage a lot'/'encourage').
3. There were approximately 225 comments for **transport and access**:



- Approx. 220 of the comments related to 'encourage a lot'/'encourage'.
- Popular sub-topics raised under 'encourage a lot'/'encourage' (in order of popularity from between approx. 20 to 50 comments) included: **cheaper parking; better parking; reduced traffic; more parking; improved public transport; and free parking.**

Just over ten comments were also made (under 'encourage a lot'/'encourage') about **activities for children/teenagers.**

*\*Approximately 290 comments could not be included as respondents did not rank their 'other' comment or provide any indication of whether it would encourage or discourage them so their response was unclear. Approximately 100 respondents marked 'other' but either did not provide any comments to clarify what the 'other' was, or provided comments unrelated to the question.*

## Summary analysis of Q6 - SHOPPING

There were a number of questions asked about retail to understand respondents' use of retail areas in and around the town centre, shopping behaviour and future aspirations for shopping in the town centre.

In answer to Q6.1, Royal Victoria Place (RVP) is clearly the most used shopping area (approx. 4,230 respondents ranked this as 1, 'most used'). In terms of the other shopping areas, use of The Pantiles peaked towards the medium to lower frequency end. North Farm and the High Street had a similar level of use by respondents, with the former used slightly more, but both again showed a medium to low frequency of use. The highest usage of all three was around or under half the use of RVP.

In terms of 'other', there is a fairly low representation of this in the rankings for the paper questionnaires with the highest peak on the graph being on 5, 'the least'. However, it seems that whilst usage of 'other' areas may be low, the value attached to Camden Road is important to note as this was the top answer (approx. 590 comments) of 'other' in the comments. Other shopping areas listed had significantly fewer comments made (fewer than approx. 180 comments per area) but there were a number of different areas listed.

With RVP as the most visited shopping area, most of the respondents who answered Q6.2 said that they only visited more than one area 'some of the time' (approx. 2,450 respondents). However, the second most popular response (with approx. 1,870 respondents) was 'most of the time' which was higher than 'rarely' (approx. 1,070 respondents) or 'never' (approx. 180 respondents).

To qualify the answer to Q6.2, the most popular subject area overall in the comments section was the relationship between the different shopping areas with approx. 1,300 comments relating to this. The comments reflected the answer to 6.2 with more comments (approx. 580 comments) relating to respondents NOT visiting more than one place each visit compared to comments from respondents (approx. 550 comments)

who said they DID visit more than one place in each visit. Whilst (in both the graph and the comments) the trend was towards respondents not visiting more than one place, opinion was mixed.

Also supporting this was the most popular sub-topic overall (within the second most popular subject area of 'shopping habits') which related to targeted shopping trips i.e. respondents stating that they visited different areas for different things at different times.

The third most referred-to subject area in comments (after relationships between areas and shopping habits) was North Farm (with approx. 970 comments). North Farm had medium to low frequency of use but comments were mostly negative relating to traffic and access. It would suggest that respondents who commented either use it but do not like it very much or do not use it because of traffic. Either way, negative comments about North Farm provoked the second highest number of comments overall for a sub-topic (approx.700 comments).

Following on from North Farm comments, general access, traffic and parking was the next most popular subject area raised in comments in the retail section. Approx. 800 comments related to issues of parking, public transport and access with approx. 590 of those relating to the specific issues and approx.180 suggestions for improvements.

In terms of types of retail that would encourage or discourage respondents to visit the town centre more often, the following came out of Q6.3:

**Larger shops** – respondents felt that the impact of more larger shops on their use of the town centre would be neutral. The most popular answer (2,300) said that more larger shops would neither encourage or discourage them; with around the same number of respondents (1,500) saying that more larger shops would discourage them from using the town centre, as those who said that more would encourage them to visit the town.

**Clothes shops** – the responses about clothes shops was almost the same as for larger shop except slightly more respondents, (around 1,500) said more clothes shops would encourage them to visit more compared to around 1,200 who said more clothes shops would discourage them. Around 2,500 respondents said more clothes shops would neither encourage nor discourage them to use the town centre.

**Supermarket** – slightly more respondents again said that a supermarket would encourage them to visit to the town rather than discourage them; around 2,100 people said one would encourage them from visiting the town centre, just under 2,000 were neutral, whilst around 1,500 respondents said it would discourage them from using the town centre.

**Department store** – the impact of a full service department store on use of the town was most likely to encourage people; only 600 people said that a new one would discourage them to visit the town centre. 1,800 said it would have no impact on their use of the town centre and around 3,000 said a department store would have a positive impact on their use of the town centre - the majority of those 3,000 (around 1,800) said it would encourage them a lot.

**Independent retailers** – very few (only around 240) said more independent retailers would discourage them from visiting the town centre. By far the highest number of people, around 4,100, said that more independents would encourage them, with around 2,400 of those saying it would encourage them a lot to visit the town more. The neutral response (around 1,200) was only a third of the number of those that would be encouraged to visit more often.

Overall, the results seem to suggest that more independent retailers and a department store would have a positive impact on respondents' use of the town centre, while more clothes shops and a supermarket would have a slightly positive effect, and more larger shops would not have much effect on use of the town centre either way.

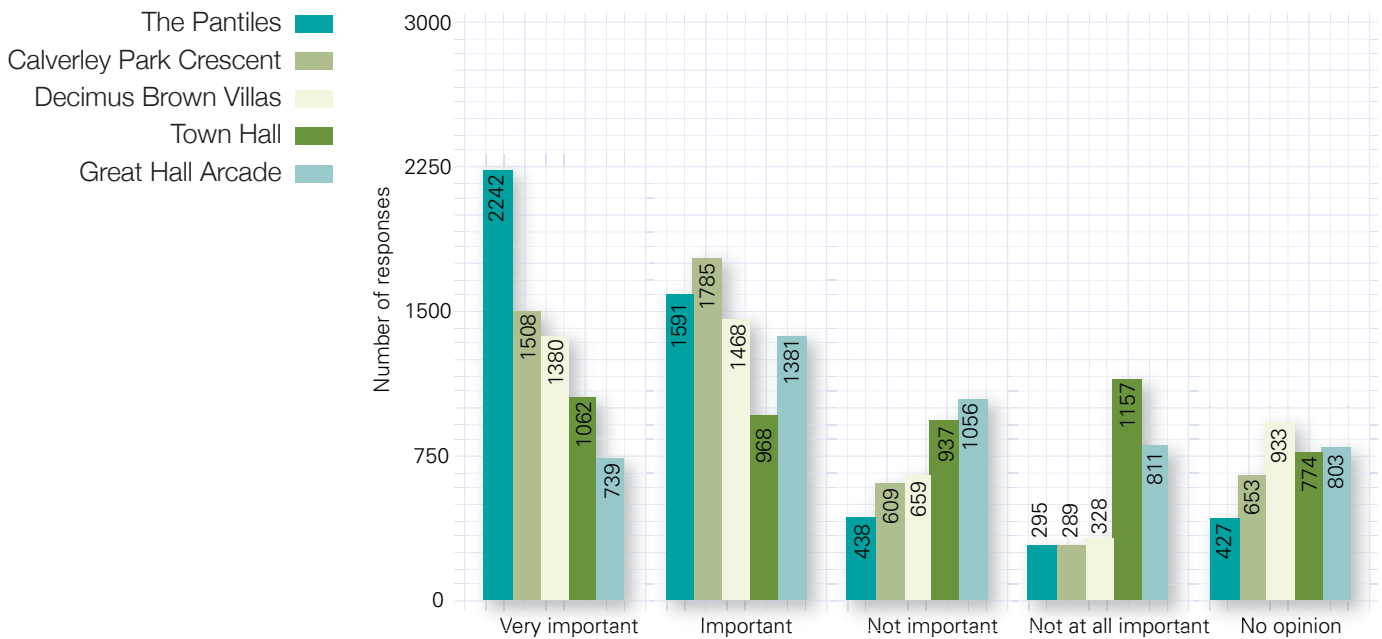
Finally, it is worth noting that there were more comments about things which would encourage respondents to visit the town centre more (approx. 920 comments) rather than discourage them (approx. 50 comments).

## Question 7. Design approach

### 7.1 If the decision is taken to explore further the redevelopment of the civic complex, which parts of the town centre have features that the design team should look to for inspiration?

- 1 – Very important  
 2 – Important  
 3 – Not important  
 4 – Not at all important  
 5 – No opinion

#### Which design should be looked to for inspiration?



#### Please explain/ add any others

- The first most popular comment was approx. 550 people stating: **None of the above/ fresh ideas needed.**
- The second favourite comment was with approx. 420 people saying: **Provide a design scheme that incorporates all design features of the above so it harmonises with Tunbridge Well's character and history.**
- The next three most popular comments were all made by very similar numbers of people (approx. 220 to 240 people):
  - Modern buildings needed/ historic look outdated**
  - Town Hall building is an eyesore. Do not base design ideas on it**
  - The Pantiles is the most famous asset of Tunbridge Wells - need more designs like this**

4. There was then a cluster of answers where relatively similar numbers of people (approx. 130-200 people) had provided comments as follows:
- **Would like improvements to already existing buildings, no redevelopment**
  - **Keep Town Hall and modernise internally**
  - **Maintain historical heritage exterior but with modern facilities**
  - **Positive references made to various sites in London including St Paul's and St Pancras international station**
  - **Do not make a replica of The Pantiles; base design on original ideas**
  - **Maintain heritage but with a modern appeal**
  - **Retain the historic look/nothing modern**
5. There were further of comments, made by between 50 and 100 people, as follows:

Number of people raising each topic	Comments made
c.76 – 100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decimus Burton's villa - good example to base design ideas on</li> <li>• Town Hall is the key focus of the complex therefore design style must be retained</li> <li>• Calverley Park Crescent - Would be ideal as not too cramped with plenty of trees</li> <li>• Take inspiration from Georgian era buildings</li> <li>• Querying the nature of the question</li> </ul>
c.51 – 75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid using all glass exterior</li> </ul>

Please note that all the remaining comments made by approx. 10-50 people can be seen in appendix 5.5.

## Summary analysis of Q7 – DESIGN APPROACH

This question was asked to seek an understanding of respondents' views towards the look of local buildings and their design preferences. This question was not asked to provide any indication about whether respondents felt these buildings should be redeveloped or not. It was asked to help draw out an idea of the value that respondents attached to local architecture that could inspire future redevelopment IF TWBC decided to explore options.

From the answer to Q7.1, the main architectural design which respondents thought should be considered as inspirational for any future design was The Pantiles; approx. 3,830 respondents stated this as either 'very important' or 'important'. Not far behind The Pantiles was both Calverley Park Crescent (approx. 3,290 respondents for 'very important'/'important') and Decimus Burton Villas (approx. 2,850 respondents for 'very important'/'important').

In terms of the Great Hall Arcade and the Town Hall, opinion on how important it would be to consider these two as inspiration for any future design was mixed. For the Town Hall, 'not at all important' was the highest response (with approx. 1,160 respondents) but the number of respondents who placed this as 'very important' to consider was similar (approx. 1,060 respondents). The number of respondents placing the Town Hall as 'important' or 'not important' and even 'no opinion' were all very similar showing a real mix of opinion towards its design being used as inspiration. More people thought the Great Hall Arcade design was 'important' to consider than 'not important' but again, this was close. The remaining responses for Grand Arcade were fairly evenly spread across 1, 4 and 5.

Some of the comments made (although not a large number) could help to explain the difference of opinion on this question as the top comment (made by approx. 550 people) was that 'none of the above should be considered...fresh ideas are needed' followed by the second most popular comment: 'all design features of the above should be considered so that [future design] harmonises with Tunbridge Well's character and history'.

Unsurprisingly, as design is a subjective matter, a definitive response was not provided; around the same number of respondents (the third top answers) made the following different comments: Modern buildings are needed/historic look outdated; Town Hall building is an eyesore. Do not base design ideas on it; The Pantiles is the most famous asset of Tunbridge Wells - need more designs like this.

However, the responses to this question clearly show there is value attached to the design of some of the historic buildings particularly The Pantiles, Calverley Park Crescent and Decimus Burton Villas but that the view about whether the Town Hall should be used as inspiration for any future design is mixed.

## Question 8. General comments

Overall, the most popular and defined subject areas raised in Q8 (between approx. 800 and 1,120 comments), in descending order of most frequently raised, were as follows: traffic and parking issues; the need for other sites (cinema/Safeway) to be regenerated as a priority; comments on cultural uses/provision; comments on retail.

In terms of sub-topics, each sub-topic raised was made by a comparatively low number of respondents in comparison to the quantitative data in the questionnaire. All sub-topics listed below are in descending order with the most frequently made comments at the top of each numbered section.

1. The most popular two sub-topics (made by between approx. 340 to 460 respondents) related to other sites with 'concern over the cinema site' expressed generally along with comments that 'the civic complex should not be regenerated until the other derelict sites are'.
2. The next most popular sub-topics (made by between approx. 200 to 260 respondents) were:
  - Generic - traffic and parking need considering
  - Cinema - would welcome
  - Stated personal generic 'against' redevelopment (approx. 80 respondents stated generic 'support' for redevelopment)
  - Distrust in Council/unhappiness/disillusionment
  - Cost - concerns over viability
  - Concerns about questionnaire
  - Refurbishment not demolition (heritage preservation)
3. There were a fairly large number of sub-topics raised by approx. 100 to 200 respondents as follows:
  - No change needed at all - leave it as is
  - Traffic plan needed for town
  - North Farm traffic issues
  - There are enough shops
  - Concern over other derelict sites
  - Want activities for all ages
  - Improvements needed for public transport
  - Leave the Assembly Hall as it is - do not demolish
  - Concern over framing of questions – decision already made
  - Want a supermarket like Waitrose
  - Lots of empty shops of no more retail
  - Don't want TW to turn into a clone town

4. There were further comments, each made by between 50 and 100 people, as follows:

Number of people raising each topic	Comments made
c.76 – 100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disappearing car parks - more car parks needed</li> <li>• Car parking charges - reduction would be good</li> <li>• Poorly worded questions on questionnaire</li> <li>• Architecture is key for any new development</li> <li>• Stated personal generic 'support' for redevelopment</li> </ul>
c.51 – 75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generic no demolition of civic complex buildings</li> <li>• Park and ride to replace multi storey</li> <li>• Free Shuttle Bus linking town's shopping areas</li> <li>• Department store wanted</li> <li>• Memorial to remain central or on civic complex</li> <li>• Don't want clone retail, will kill independents; encourage independents</li> <li>• Need improved/better/theatre (no specifics)</li> <li>• Town hall frontage should be maintained - build behind</li> <li>• Cultural centre keep all together</li> <li>• Would like/not mind demolition - buildings are ugly</li> <li>• Ice rink wanted</li> <li>• Preservation of character is important</li> <li>• Transitional - cannot do without facilities during build</li> <li>• Cultural provision needs to remain on civic complex</li> <li>• Pedestrianise high street (or other parts)</li> <li>• Want new shops</li> <li>• Back office staff could be elsewhere or share</li> <li>• Leisure centre/sports complex/gym wanted</li> </ul>

Please note that all the remaining comments made by approximately 10 - 50 people can be seen in appendix 5.6.



## Summary analysis of Q8 – GENERAL COMMENTS

This question was asked to allow respondents the opportunity to make any further comments on topics that had not already been covered by other questions or to summarise their thoughts. It was hoped that this would help further to identify any trends in opinion. Some respondents submitted detailed responses to this question and these were considered and all issues and topics logged.

As could be anticipated with the nature of 'general' comments, the responses in this section were extremely varied and therefore most comments were made by relatively few respondents compared to the feedback in other sections.

Except for concern about the reuse of the cinema site and other derelict sites being a priority, there were no strong themes which stood out in this section; often where there were comments on a particular issue, there were also comments giving a counter view. This was particularly in relation to opposing views about retail and leisure along with opinions on the aesthetics of current buildings. Where common ground seemed to be shared by respondents who answered this question was concern about traffic issues and support for a cinema in the town centre (see below).

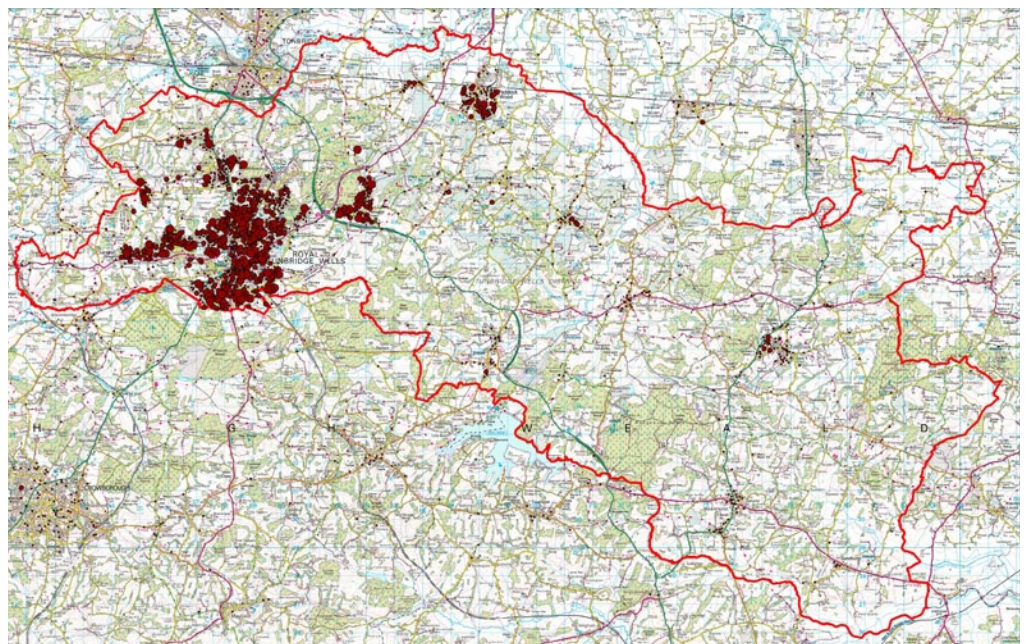
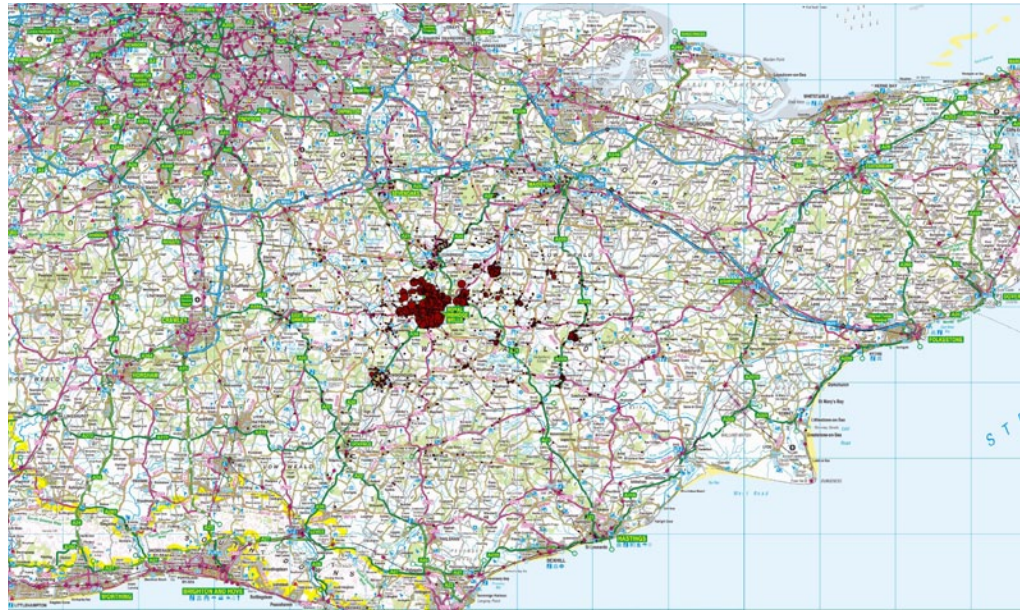
Secondary sub-topics made by relatively few people (between approx. 200 to 260 respondents) related to concerns over traffic issues, support for a new cinema and comments relating to the cost of any new development. As with consultation issues identified in section 3.1.1, some respondents (approx. 210 respondents) wished to state their generic opposition to the idea of redevelopment - however approx 80 respondents also stated their generic support. To add further to the mix, secondary comments also included some comments (from approx. 200 respondents) about a preference for refurbishment rather than wholesale redevelopment.

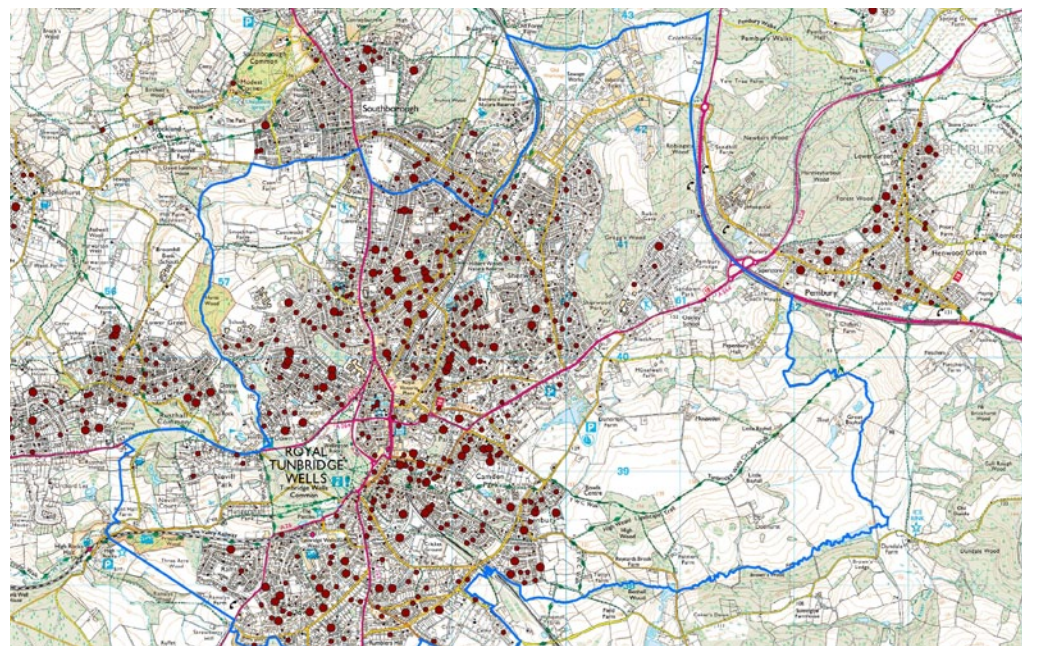
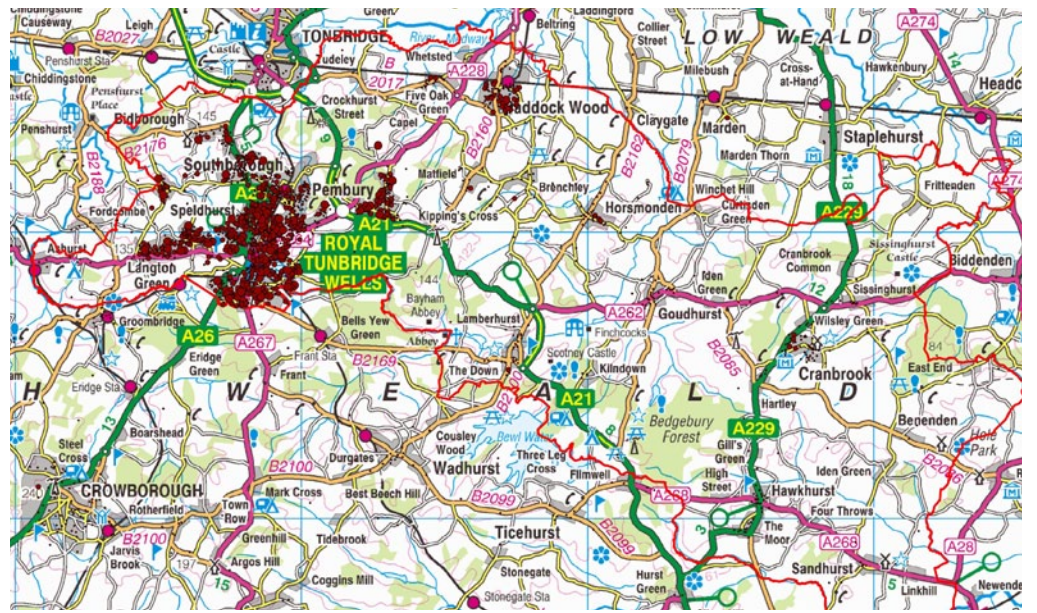
Overall, a relatively small number of respondents also used the general comments to outline their concerns about perceived Council conduct and the consultation process itself. These respondents expressed their distrust about the process on the basis of a perceived lack of communication in the period leading up to the consultation. As recognised and addressed in section 3.1.1, it is important to recognise these concerns as it provides an understanding of the position from which some people got involved in the consultation process.

## Question 9. Demographic information

Please note that only postcode was a required field and a large number of people did not wish to provide other information.

### 9.1 Postcode – Not analysed herein.





## 9.2 Gender

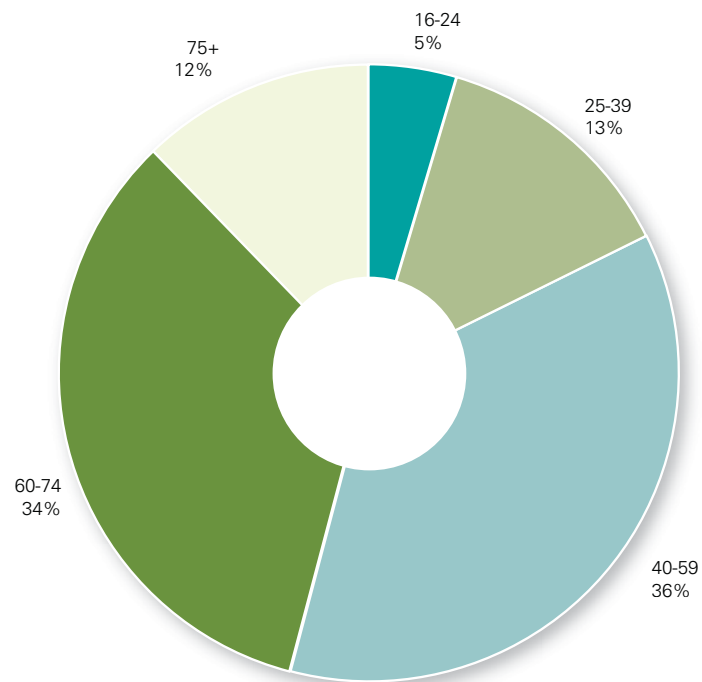
Male – 2,377

Female – 3,440

Unanswered – 323

## 9.3 Age group

### Age



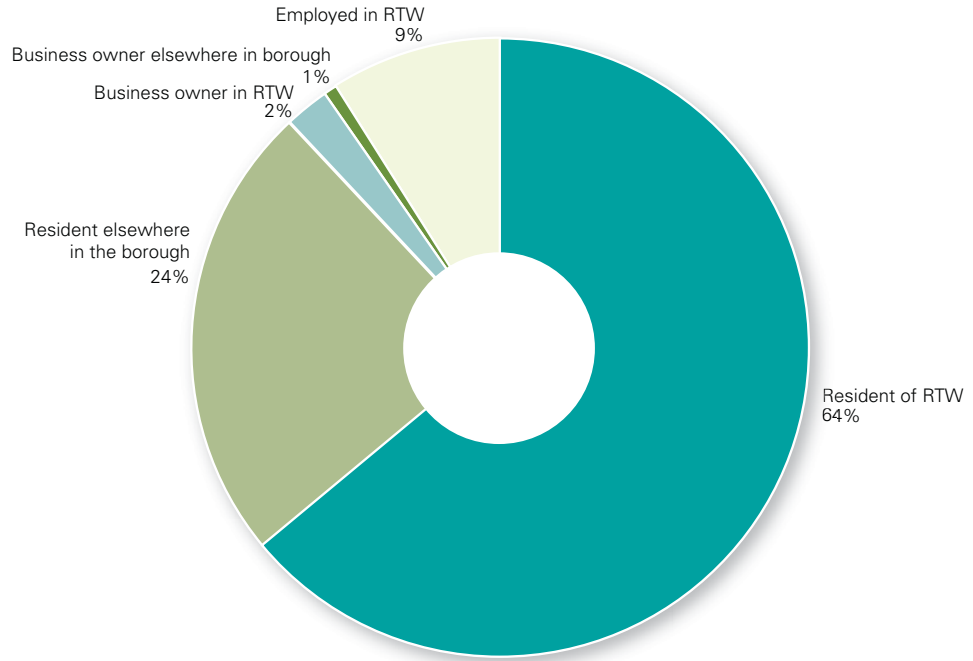
## 9.4 Do you have a long standing illness, disability or infirmity?

Yes – 73

No – 268

### 9.5 Reason for interest

#### Reason for interest



#### Summary analysis of Q9 – DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Below is provided a comparison of the demographic makeup of respondents (who answered the questions in this section) compared to the demographic profile of the borough.

Gender	Number	% of total respondents	Profile of borough population (number)	Profile of borough population (%)
Male	2375	39%	52100	48%
Female	3439	56%	55500	52%
Not answered	323	5%		
Total	6137	100%	107600	100%

Source: 2009 mid year population estimates, Office for National Statistics (Crown Copyright) cited in '2009 mid year population pyramids', KCC Research & Intelligence

Age structure	Number	% of total respondents	Profile of borough population (number)	Profile of borough population (%)	% of comparable population (under 16s removed)
0 – 15*	-	-	22500	21%	-
16 – 24	263	4%	9400	9%	11%
25 – 39	751	12%	19600	18%	23%
40 – 59	2091	34%	30800	29%	36%
<b>60 – 74</b>	<b>1930</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>16200</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>19%</b>
75+	700	11%	9100	8%	11%
Unanswered	402	7%			
Total	6137	100%	107600	100%	100%

\*Under 16s were not included in the consultation.

Source: 2009 mid year population estimates, Office for National Statistics (Crown Copyright) cited in '2009 mid year population pyramids', KCC Research & Intelligence

Research suggests that normally only a very limited section of the community normally gets involved in consultation on spatial planning exercises. Indeed, a report for the Scottish Executive on public involvement in planning applications (the part of planning that has the most direct impact on people's lives) found:

"... that those who volunteered views to the local authority came from a particular cross-section of the community dominated by the middle aged and the elderly. People under 35 are largely absent from the process. Retired people dominate the responses. White Caucasians dominated the responses to all three planning applications." *Planning and Community Involvement in Scotland*, Scottish Executive Social Research 2004

Based on this, M&N considers the level of response from across all age groups and locations, to be a considerable achievement on a consultation primarily about ideas. However, it must be noted that in certain age groups, the disparity between the demographic figures and questionnaire responses was significant. In particular, the 16-24 year olds were under-represented by 50% and the 60-75 years old were over-represented by a third.

The graph in 9.5 shows that more than double the number of respondents who completed the questionnaire were residents of Royal Tunbridge Wells than residents in the wider borough.

## 5.3 Event feedback

### 5.3.1 (Event feedback) Drop in sessions

M&N held four drop in sessions (see 3.3.2.1) to promote the consultation programme, answer any questions about the process or context and provide consultation materials. As these early introductory events were more about promotion than specific consultation, these sessions were not minuted. However, verbal comments were recorded on request and these are summarised in 5.4.3 and included in full in appendix 6.0.

### 5.3.2 (Event feedback) Stakeholder meetings

M&N held 13 stakeholder meetings (see 3.3.2.3) with primary stakeholder groups. Full minutes from the stakeholder meetings can be found in appendix 3.14.

The main themes and sub-themes which arose are summarised below:

#### 5.3.2.1 (Feedback: Stakeholder meetings) Culture

##### **General**

Six of the 13 groups felt the civic complex was part of the town's identity, served as a focal point and should remain a cultural quarter, particularly as it was in a central/accessible location. Other groups felt it was an undeveloped resource but there was huge potential to improve cultural facilities and add new facilities, such as leisure - one of the groups stated that Tunbridge Wells is known as a leisure destination but when you get there, there is nothing to do. It was suggested other sites in the town could possibly accommodate some cultural uses, such as museum artefacts displayed at The Pantiles or elsewhere.

##### **Assembly Hall Theatre**

There was general agreement across the groups that a theatre use should be retained and that the Assembly Hall was well used, with one group suggesting one of its key strengths was its visibility/town centre location.

Five of the groups (including key users such as the RTW Symphony Orchestra and Choral Society) felt the theatre either should be improved, by making it more modern and more flexible or that there should be a new facility. However, one group said it should be kept as it was and only required a little exterior upgrading. One group favoured refurbishment of the existing facility to ensure a shorter closure period and therefore their group's survival which they were concerned would not be possible if there was a long period of closure for redevelopment. The concern of services closing as a result of redevelopment was also voiced by members of groups who visited or used the theatre. The RTW Symphony Orchestra and Choral Society expressed concern over interim period/transitional arrangements and the potential loss of its audience.

The Symphony Orchestra stated that the Council's pledge regarding the theatre needed to mean as 'big' as the current provision (not just as 'good') and centrally located, but if their other issues could be addressed, they welcomed the prospect of new facilities.

### ***Library, Art Gallery & Museum***

Three groups stated the library, gallery and museum facilities should remain in the town centre and four groups said the facilities needed modernising and required both additional and more flexible space.

The Friends of the Library, Art Gallery and Museum suggested the three facilities could benefit from being integrated, with some central communal space, to encourage cross-visiting and the ability to share additional services (cafe, toilets etc).

The Friends also said that whilst they felt the library and museum were well used, this was by a core of people and they lacked visits from teenagers and tourists.

The majority of groups commented that the museum was very small, does not display much of its collection and so would benefit from flexible, permanent and centrally located space. Similarly, it was commented that there was no space to mount a proper art exhibition, which would attract visitors.

Disabled access to the library and museum was seen as a long term issue which made the premises unfit for purpose as they are not accessible to all. The Friends said TWRC needed to consider that KCC had just allocated a sum of £344,000 to refurbish the library. Also there was a bequest and a failed Heritage Lottery Bid that TWRC should examine to see if there was a viable means of re-providing the facilities within the existing building.

### ***Community space***

Three of the groups suggested there was a lack of multi-purpose/flexible space for community uses/arts/training/youth available for hire in the town centre. Generally it was felt that activities for young people were very limited.

### ***Conference centre***

A need for a good conference centre/exhibition facility was also expressed by four of the groups.

#### **5.3.2.2 (Feedback: stakeholder meetings) Civic**

### ***General***

Three of the groups said that the Town Hall and civic functions should be in the town centre, with some at the Business Forum claiming the civic complex was 'a crown jewel' and any redevelopment had to be about more than profit. However three groups, and a number of individuals in other groups questioned whether a more efficient use of space would be to consider moving back office staff elsewhere. (See below 5.3.2.3).



**Public open space**

A couple of the groups suggested a need for a town square/recognised public space to meet, such as outside the Town Hall and that the civic complex was a pivotal site that could support that. They felt that civic/public open spaces were important and cited the War Memorial, street performers, public art and sculpture as examples of where public spaces could support cultural uses more.

Three of the groups expressed a need for public open space in the town centre where people could sit/relax.

**Town Hall**

Two of the groups said the Town Hall should not have been closed to the public, with one suggesting civic rooms should be available for use by local groups.

**War memorial**

Only two of the stakeholder groups mentioned the War Memorial – CREATE (Camden Road Education, Arts and Theatre Enterprises) and the Over 50s Forum. However, whilst both highlighted its importance their views differed on the location of the Memorial. Attendees at CREATE felt its current position was crowded and hidden behind the bus stop, therefore not doing it justice, whereas the Over 50s Forum said they would 'hate to see it moved'. CREATE suggested a memorial garden in a quieter place could be considered.

**5.3.2.3 (Feedback: stakeholder meetings) Public services****Council services**

There were mixed views about the Gateway, with the Disability Access Group saying it worked well and the Over 50s Forum suggesting services should be moved back into the Town Hall.

The Business Forum, Parish Chairs and Hotels Group suggested it was not necessary for all Council staff to be in the town centre (and could be more economically efficient for back office staff to be elsewhere), as long as frontline services remained there.

**Police**

CREATE and the Business Forum said that a police presence in the town centre was required.

**Adult education**

Adult education provision was not mentioned by any of the Stakeholder groups.

**5.3.2.4 (Feedback: stakeholder meetings) Leisure****General**

Some members of The Town Forum said RTW needed to provide an original leisure offering so as not to compete with other towns. The Hotels group felt there were too few leisure facilities in the town.

### ***Suggested facilities***

Five of the groups suggested there were too few leisure activities for young people in the town centre. Five groups stated strong opinions that a town centre cinema, to complement Trinity, was needed as the North Farm Odeon was inaccessible.

Other suggestions for leisure facilities included: a multi-purpose community space (e.g. to include cafe, youth/performance space or a temporary ice rink); more sports facilities (rather than more pubs/restaurants); public swimming pool; outdoor lido; and spa facilities.

The jazz concerts held at The Pantiles were cited by members of two groups as a good event.

The Hotels group felt there were enough restaurants in the town (and that more retail would be preferable instead) and the Business Forum expressed that there would be some security concerns from shopkeepers if a night-time economy was to be developed; this would have to be considered very carefully so as to avoid anti-social behaviour.

### ***5.3.2.5 (Feedback: stakeholder meetings) Retail***

#### ***Provision***

Overall there were mixed views on the potential provision of retail on the site.

Four of the groups (CREATE, Friends of the Library, Art Gallery & Museum, Disability Access group and Town Forum) said they did not want any more retail either because they wanted to protect independent retailers, they felt there were enough shops already (and empty units in the town) or they wanted to maintain the balance of/protect cultural uses. Three groups, including the Chamber of Commerce, questioned the need for more retail in the town/retail on this site (again due to empty units) and asked what evidence there was that retailers wanted to come to Tunbridge Wells, and which specific retailers these were.

However, the Hotels group felt more retail provision would be better than more restaurants and felt the young were not really catered for in retail terms; in particular they welcomed a full service department store and upmarket supermarket like Waitrose. Members of the Town Forum also suggested that for the town to remain viable it had to remain competitive i.e. with a range of shops. Some members of the Town Forum also acknowledged shops and restaurants would have to be included to fund the enhancement of the facilities but stated that these should not dilute or be detrimental to the cultural and civic offer.

The Tunbridge Wells Twinning & Friendship Association stated the town had a unique character and that there would need to be care taken to prevent Royal Tunbridge Wells from becoming a clone town and these sentiments were echoed by CREATE and the Business Forum who raised concerns that more retail on the site could take trade away from other areas of the town centre.

### ***Independents***

About half of the groups raised the topic of independent businesses, suggesting specialist shops are important for attracting tourists and visitors from further afield. The Business Forum added Camden Road traders and young designers should be supported through small start-up retail units. CREATE in particular mentioned that they often felt that the town centre turned its back on their independent traders and that they felt dislocated – they would not wish for any redevelopment of the civic complex to increase this.

### ***Department store***

CREATE and the Hotels groups expressed the possible need for a large anchor tenant/ department store such as House of Fraser; it was felt in the latter group that the town needed opening up to different shoppers as many of the smaller shops were not relevant to all ages and in particular, younger people. Opinions in other groups were divided; at The Chamber of Commerce, it was stated that Hoopers was a 'jewel in the crown', but there were also comments in support of a new department store. It was also raised at the Chamber meeting that there seemed to be a class divide between RVP and the rest of the town.

### ***Supermarket***

The Chamber of Commerce and Hotels group suggested the need for a high-end supermarket and Waitrose was suggested as a desirable alternative to Tesco and Sainsburys as it would have a positive knock on affect for other businesses in the town.

### ***Retail-led vs. Culturally-led project***

There was debate amongst members of the Town Forum as to whether a potential scheme should be culturally led or retail led, with some members suggesting the former was not viable. CREATE questioned whether retail development on some of the other 37 sites could be looked at by TWRC to fund a culturally led or purely leisure/cultural development on the civic complex.

## **5.3.2.6 (Feedback: stakeholder meetings) General – Civic Complex**

### ***For/against***

Opinions were mixed as to whether there was an appetite to explore redevelopment of the civic complex as it was unclear as to what the scale of any change or redevelopment might look like.

A large number of the groups were keen, tentatively, to see improvements and change – though the scale of this was not agreed. Assembly Hall users such as the RTW Symphony Orchestra and Choral Society were in favour of significant improvements to cultural uses if continuity of provision could be maintained and as-good/ better facilities could be provided. The Friends of the Tunbridge Wells Library, Art Gallery & Museum wanted modernisation and expansion (and said it was a unique opportunity to promote Royal Tunbridge Wells if done sensitively) and all the three business groups were, on the whole, keen to look at options for redevelopment of the civic complex to

support business growth in the future – though again the scale of this was not agreed. The Tunbridge Wells Twinning & Friendship Association thought this was a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ opportunity, but needed to be well thought out.

Some members of the Civic Society and Over 50s Forum stated the area should be kept as it is although other members of the Civic Society felt facilities could be improved and some Over 50s Forum members said they did not mind change, but did not support wholesale redevelopment, and it would need to be carefully managed. CREATE too had concerns over more retail and protection of their independent traders along with the listed buildings status but did discuss looking at maintaining facades and building behind them.

### ***Redevelopment or refurbishment***

As a follow on to the above section, five of the groups queried how the listings of the buildings would be considered / overcome.

Five groups stated the existing buildings on the civic complex should be retained and modernised and /or extended (rather than wholesale demolition) or that new facilities should be provided within the art deco shell/facade.

### ***Uses/mixes of development***

There were mixed views on the potential of other uses or mix of development; the Hotels group expressed the need for the presence of corporate companies along with more shops and more of everything (except hotels and restaurants) in balance, with something to bring it all together, which they felt would improve the town. However most of those at the Civic Society meeting, though not everyone, agreed that the existing facilities on the civic complex could simply be improved. There was an assumption across a number of the groups that commercial uses would have to be included to pay for culture/leisure facilities. There were discussions about a cultural versus retail lead scheme (as per section 5.3.2.5) above.

The Business Forum asked if redevelopment would lead to the building of more house and flats and said that there was a need for more affordable housing in the town.

Phasing and the continuity of provision in general were raised as concerns by the Disability Access Group.

### ***Linkages***

Views were mixed on how the civic complex linked to other parts of the town. The Chamber of Commerce and Over 50s Forum suggested it was a blockage and should be used to link the other parts of the town; however, the Town Forum did not perceive it as a blockage. The Tunbridge Wells Twinning & Friendship Association highlighted the civic complex as one of the main, and very important, gateways into the town but said it was too disjointed and was an undeveloped resource but that it had huge potential.

***Impact on other areas/roads***

CREATE was concerned that any redevelopment of the civic complex should not lead to further isolation of Camden Road, and the Town Forum said Camden Road and Trinity would need to be protected if any redevelopment happened.

***Other sites***

Over half of the groups questioned how the cinema site fitted into the process and there was concern the civic complex site may also lay vacant for a long time.

The Civic Society and CREATE asked if the other TWRC 37 sites could accommodate some of the facilities that were being discussed.

Queries were raised by the groups about other keys sites in the town (the former Morrisons/Safeways store, hospital, train station) and the Town Forum felt The Pantiles needed to be 'put in order' before the civic site was considered.

**5.3.2.7 (Feedback: stakeholder meetings) Other comments**

A number of other comments were made but the other principal themes that came out of the meetings were:

***Traffic, access and parking***

Nine of the groups highlighted that consideration was required regarding the impact of development upon road infrastructure, public transport and car parking.

The Business Forum, Chamber of Commerce and Choral Society cited the cost and reduction of car parking across the town centre as a concern.

One group suggested a pedestrian area extension to The Pantiles to encourage a café culture.

The Disability Access Group suggested TWRC referred to the Town Forum's 'Getting around Tunbridge Wells' survey.

***The Council***

Six groups expressed feelings of distrust, disillusionment and unhappiness with the Council and it was also suggested the Council's previous communication had been poor.

***TWRC***

There was a lack of understanding about TWRC and its role expressed by four groups and there were questions about the nature of TWRC in almost all of the stakeholder meetings.

***Viability***

Four groups had concerns about the economic viability/funding of the project in light of budget cuts and the economic climate.

### ***Design/Architecture***

In whatever changes might happen, all groups agreed that sensitive and high quality design was crucial to promoting the town's heritage and maintaining its individuality but the preferences for design differed even within the groups; some thought that design should be low key and mirror surrounding buildings whilst others felt that design should avoid pastiche and have a stronger, modern feel to reflect the twenty-first century.

### ***Tourism***

The importance of tourism was discussed at many of the meetings, highlighting the importance of attracting tourists by providing good facilities and a welcoming ambience. The Over 50s Forum questioned why the Tourist Information Centre was not in the town hall. The Hotels Group felt that as a number of the hotels were surrounding the town centre, the civic complex could be a good hub to feed the hotels and the tourism industry.

### ***Graduates/young people***

The Business Forum and Civic Society highlighted the need to attract good quality graduates back to Tunbridge Wells and keep young people in the Borough.

### ***Decline of town centre***

The Business Forum felt there were signs of 'genteel decline' in Tunbridge Wells and physical deterioration.

## **5.3.3 (Event feedback) Public workshops**

M&N held six public workshops in December, January and February. Full minutes from each of these sessions can be found in appendix 3.15.

The public workshops were structured into discussions on the following topics:

- Culture and leisure
- Retail (and commercial)
- Civic and public services

A summary of the main points raised under each of the consultation headings above, over the six workshop sessions, are summarised below:

### **5.3.3.1 (Feedback: public workshops) Culture and Leisure**

- There was general agreement that the **cultural facilities were popular** and well used and should be retained in the town centre. In one group it was largely agreed that **investing in the town centre was preferable** to investing further afield.
- There was a **mix of opinion as to whether the facilities should be provided in one location** or had the potential to be spread across the town centre. A number of groups noted the museum could be relocated, with the police station being nominated on several occasions as a potential home for cultural facilities.

- There was overall **consensus on the need for existing facilities within the library, museum, art gallery and Assembly Hall to be improved** with specific reference to increasing capacity, updating/upgrading of facilities and improving access. There was a mix of opinion as to whether delivering improved facilities should be undertaken as a refurbishment project or as part of any new development/redevelopment. Attendees at several workshops stated that any enhancement of facilities should not result in increased prices.
- It was suggested at a number of workshops that improvements could be provided by **retaining the existing facades with extension work taking place behind or above** the shell.
- The **maintenance of continuity of cultural services/facilities** was highlighted across the board as something that would have to be assured if redevelopment were to happen.
- The potential for a **multi-use performance space** was discussed in several groups, with further agreement that there might be merit in considering whether this might work better; one workshop focused on the need for the Assembly Hall to determine a strategy for its future role.
- The majority view across the workshops was that a **cinema in the town centre would be beneficial** but its offer should not conflict with, or detract from, Trinity Theatre.
- The need for **rentable space for community /group meetings** was highlighted by several workshops with substantial agreement on the **need for more youth facilities**. One group emphasised that the provision of additional youth facilities should be provided through promotion of a café culture rather than more bars and clubs.
- **Improved public space** was mentioned in several groups with regards to using this to enhance the cultural offer with external spill out of cultural uses to help promote them; it was also mentioned in relation to supporting the Farmers' Market.
- **General infrastructure concerns** ranged from the need for increased pedestrianisation, improved parking and public transport and alleviation of traffic congestion.

### 5.3.3.2 (Feedback: public workshops) Retail

- Generally the current retail offer in Royal Tunbridge Wells was considered good and it was largely agreed that the **eclectic retail offer in the town centre was what made the town centre unique**; the independent retailers were valued highly and it was agreed that **maintaining this balance and individual character of retail was very important**. There was an opinion expressed by many groups that they did not want the town centre to become a clone town or, if redevelopment were to happen, for it to have a negative impact on existing retailers.
- A number of the groups agreed that a **new supermarket in the town centre** should be explored and Waitrose was identified as a positive option by one workshop group. Other groups had doubts about another supermarket which were largely

based on traffic and parking concerns and suggested that perhaps a peripheral site might be better to keep traffic out of the centre.

- A number of the groups **questioned the need for more retail in the light of empty shop units** in the town centre. Other groups asked whether, if retail were required, this could not be on the cinema, former Morrisons or hospital site.
- **Street markets**, including the Farmers' Market, were considered an asset for the town centre that could be further enhanced to add to the attraction of the town centre. A **central market square/ public space** was discussed by a number of groups as it was felt that the space outside the Town Hall was not as good a space as it could be. It was also suggested that public spaces in between retail areas could be improved.
- There was a significant level of **concern over the fragmentation of retail areas** in the town centre and the **lack of linkage between shopping areas**. A number of suggestions were made that this situation could be improved by the civic complex, a greater level of pedestrianised areas, and increased public transport services.
- The **balance of cultural uses versus retail provision** on the civic complex was discussed by a number of groups. Whilst some suggested new retail could be a draw to the town centre, make it more competitive and would pay for improved cultural uses on the site, others expressed concern that they did not want to see retail development introduced at the expense of cultural facilities on the civic complex; however one group suggested that the proximity of shops to facilities could be beneficial as it could encourage people to 'cross visit.' In one workshop session of three groups, Horsham, Bath and Gabriel's Wharf were listed as examples of successful places where creative/cultural facilities mixed with retail.
- Participants in the majority of workshops commented on the **need for a whole town centre approach, rather than site specific**, with regard to any new retail development. This was to address the need to improve the existing town centre infrastructure that struggled with insufficient parking, traffic congestion and inadequate public transport. Two groups suggested that a **Park and Ride scheme** would be beneficial in order to improve access to the town centre and attract more people into Royal Tunbridge Wells.
- With regard to the civic complex site, it was felt that **any new retail provision should be considered as part of the overall town centre offer**, supported by a strategic study of retail need/demand. Some questioned whether the cinema site should be used for retail use. There were a mix of views about the town's need for an anchor tenant and whether the civic site was the best location for a department store.
- A number of participants felt that **commercial space should also be addressed**. Several groups voiced the need for increased office development, in order to **attract new forward thinking organisations** and increase the number of office workers in the town centre which would further boost the town centre economy. In one session, the groups largely agreed that the more functions a town centre could provide, the more prosperous it would be.



### 5.3.3.3 (Feedback: public workshops) Civic and Public Services

- There was general consensus that a **council presence should be maintained in the town centre** to promote visibility, transparency, access and minimise any levels of distrust and accusations of secrecy. The majority of groups questioned whether all council services needed to be centrally located; **it was suggested that front line service staff should remain central and accessible**, including the planning department, but a number of the groups stated that **technology could enable the relocation of some 'back of office' staff to different premises – as long as these too were accessible**. It was questioned whether cost savings could be achieved through any such relocation strategy.
- There was a level of agreement that the **Adult Education Centre should also be kept within a town centre location**, though not necessarily on the civic complex. There was also **division on whether committee rooms needed to be centrally sited**. The Decimus Burton building (Calverley Terrace) and the police station were cited as possible new premises for council staff.
- There was general agreement that **Gateway should remain in the town centre with debate on whether it should be moved back into the Town Hall**, which some felt might resolve some current issues, or located elsewhere. A number of groups agreed that **Gateway was not the most appropriate site for the Tourist Information Office**.
- General opinion was that the **Council Chamber had limitations** due to a small public gallery and could be improved. The committee rooms and Council Chamber were **not easily accessible** which exacerbated engagement and transparency concerns.
- Half of the groups agreed there was a need for a **central multi- functional space** together with a requirement (since provision had been removed) for **dedicated space for public/civic group use** which could be hired, thereby generating a new income stream for the council. This would further reduce mistrust and increase openness and transparency.
- Some commented that there might be a benefit from a more effective use of the area in front of the town hall, with a **well designed public square** being mooted.
- Half of the groups stated that the **war memorial** was important to them, that it should be **protected and given even more prominence** than it currently had – though not everyone agreed that moving this was appropriate.
- A **police presence in the town centre was considered important** though not necessarily provided from a large centrally located facility.
- Access, parking, public transport and the provision of a **Park and Ride scheme** were concerns shared by the significant majority of participants.
- There was **mixed opinion regarding the physical merits of the Town Hall**, with some stating it was suitable for its setting, further enhancing the existing levels of civic pride and sense of heritage with its listed status. Others felt it was too formal, imposing, uninviting and ugly and should be demolished. Further opinion was somewhere in between those two sides with a view that perhaps a mix of old and

new could be what is required – the idea of extending above or behind the façade was again discussed. If any changes were to happen, it was agreed that there should be an open, holistic, collaborative approach to design. Whatever strategy was adopted, there was a noted desire that the Royal Tunbridge Wells **civic complex should remain the ‘jewel in the crown’** within the town centre.

#### 5.3.4 (Event feedback) Focus group

A focus group, lead by an external facilitator, was held to draw out opinions about the civic complex and the town centre from a demographically representative group. Details about the focus group are provided in 3.3.2.5 with the full report provided in appendix 3.16.

The focus group provided a variety of clear indicators about how attendees viewed the civic complex and the wider town centre now and in the future. The clarity of some of the points the group members made indicated a good degree of agreement amongst them.

The key points raised were as follows:

- Overall the group believed that the town centre was on the decline, mainly due to the impression left by the number of empty buildings and shops rather than anything in particular related to the civic complex.
- The group felt strongly about the status of the ABC cinema site and it appeared to be the key indicator of how well the town was developing. The majority of the group, though not everyone, felt that this site was of a higher priority than the civic complex.
- There was a sense of confusion about the various parts of town and where the town centre actually was and a feeling that little had been done to stitch the various parts of the town together. There was strong interest in considering public spaces and creating a ‘piazza/square’ or a hub to bring a focus to the town.
- In terms of the civic complex itself, the group favoured the modernisation of the buildings and the better use of the existing space rather than wholesale demolition. However there did appear to be some interest in the middle- ground suggestion by one attendee which was the retaining of the facades and extension of the buildings behind or above.
- Some members of the group (though not all) liked the buildings and uses but all wanted an improvement in what was on offer, particularly with regards to activities for younger people and families.
- The Gateway was seen as a positive facility which should be kept in the centre of town, but attendees felt there was no reason why the Council’s back office staff should not be moved to a different location.

- They considered that nothing should be seen in isolation but rather as part of a wider plan. They indicated that the Council/TWRC should take a wider view of the town to demonstrate how the redevelopment of the civic complex related to the town as a whole and the current vacant sites such as the ABC cinema and other centres such as The Pantiles. In short the group wanted to see a strategic approach to gain confidence that plans for the civic complex fitted in with a wider approach to Tunbridge Wells.

### **5.3.5 (Event feedback) Schools' workshop**

M&N held a schools' workshop (see 3.3.2.6) with pupils from St. Gregory's School, Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School and Bennett Memorial School. Full minutes from the session can be found in appendix 3.17.

As the pupils had no experience or comments about civic or public services, the key areas discussed were retail, leisure and culture. They also made a handful of comments about architecture and some further general points. A summary of the main points from each of those discussions is provided below.

#### **5.3.5.1 (Feedback: schools' workshop) Retail**

Pupils were regular users of the town centre due to its accessibility, and they mainly went there to meet friends and shop. Their preferred destination was RVP, as they consider it to have a good range of high street retailers. They did also occasionally go to The Pantiles although the length of the town meant that they did not often do this on the same trip. They did not think that the buses in the town centre helped in addressing the distance between the two. In addition to RTW they also went to Bluewater for the much bigger range of shops and the whole experience, which they felt would always be the case.

#### **5.3.5.2 (Feedback: schools' workshop) Leisure**

Along with shopping, most pupils also went for lunch or to a coffee shop with friends on visits to RTW but all thought that there were now too many cafes and restaurants and they would not want to see any more. They felt that the Forum was well used but there was a lack of things for them to do and some said they often had to travel to Maidstone for leisure facilities. They thought that a community space for hobbies i.e. dance or band practice would be good and felt strongly about having a cinema in the town centre as North Farm was almost impossible to get to without a car.

#### **5.3.5.3 (Feedback: schools' workshop) Culture**

The pupils did not know there was an art gallery in RTW but felt that it would not be for their age group; they suggested that exhibitions by younger people or masterclasses might help in attracting younger people. They did not consider a museum was important for RTW as they would prefer to go to London where they were larger, interactive and more exciting. The library too was only used by one member of the group as they used the schools' libraries but they felt better facilities or visiting authors might make it more exciting and enticing. On the whole, they felt that the Assembly Hall was good but expensive and that perhaps a hireable community space would be good.

#### **5.3.5.4 (Feedback: schools' workshop) Architecture**

If redevelopment were to go ahead, pupils wanted to see architecture that they could be proud of. They felt that building should be a statement rather than bland architecture but sensitive and non-'gimmicky'. They said they would be keen to see modern design rather than 'fake' pastiche of what is there now.

#### **5.3.5.5 (Feedback: schools' workshop) Other general points**

They felt that the War Memorial was in a good place as it was near a bus stop and on a main road where everyone could see it. They felt that a police presence in the centre was important and had to be visible and accessible

### **5.3.6 (Event feedback) Vox pop interviews**

There were two vox pop sessions undertaken as outlined in 3.3.2.7. The notes from both the sessions are provided in appendix 3.18.

The main themes and trends which arose are summarised below:

#### **5.3.6.1 (Feedback: Vox pops) Retail**

Almost all those interviewed said that they mainly visited the town centre to meet up with friends for shopping and coffee in Royal Victoria Place. Some of the students said they occasionally went to The Pantiles but, unlike RVP, which had a good range of shops, they felt that The Pantiles was expensive and the shops were aimed at the older generation.

Whilst a couple of students thought that nothing was missing from the town centre in terms of shops, the majority felt that the shopping experience was not aimed at young people. Independent shops were considered a desirable thing but it was felt that in the town centre (i.e. The Pantiles or Camden Road), these, did not cater for young people.

On the subject of cost, this issue came up frequently with a number of students saying they thought the town centre missed shops for their age group and price range – like Primark and H&M (i.e. clothes) – which they had to go to Bluewater, Maidstone or London for.

#### **5.3.6.2 (Feedback: Vox pops) Leisure**

Coffee shops seemed to be the most popular place to meet for those interviewed and it was mentioned by some that there were now lots of these in the town centre.

The other main topic discussed was a cinema in the town centre which almost all students said they desired as North Farm was difficult to get to without parents.

On the whole, the students thought that there was not enough for under-18s to do, particularly in the evening. Whilst some mentioned bars in The Pantiles and the Forum (a live music venue) as possible places to go, others thought that the latter had a bad reputation and was not a desirable place to go.

Outdoor jazz in the summer at The Pantiles was praised as a good thing by a few of

the students.

A couple of students suggested that a cheaper gym would be good for the town centre as the nearest leisure centre is out of town and LA Fitness is too expensive.

#### **5.3.6.3 (Feedback: Vox pops) Culture**

The overwhelming message that came out of the interviews was that most of the students did not even know there was an art gallery or museum or those that did, had never visited them and had no idea what was in them; poor promotion was suggested as one possible cause along with the perception of these facilities as old, unexciting and 'not for them'.

There was a general consensus by those that were interested in art that a more inclusive community arts facility, where young people could display art or get involved, would open up the provision and interest in their age group. One student questioned the need for an art gallery in the town and suggested that they would go to London instead.

On the whole students interviewed thought that the Assembly Hall was 'ok enough' but they considered improvements and modernisation were required. A couple of those interviewed had performed there but again, the issue of cost arose and a number of them considered it was too expensive to go very often. Around half of those interviewed suggested that the programme was not really that appealing to their age group.

For those that had used the library for college work, opinion was mixed. Some felt that it had everything they needed whilst others felt it fell short when they had gone there to do college work. One student stated that they did not need to use the library as they had internet access at home whilst another went in to use the printers.

#### **5.3.6.4 (Feedback: Vox pops) General comments**

A number of other general comments were made but the principal other themes which came out were:

- 1) The Pantiles was considered as a pleasant looking place in the town centre i.e. somewhere "nice to be" in aesthetic terms – traditional looking parts of the town were appreciated
- 2) The cinema site was a concern to many of the students as being run down, it made the town look bad
- 3) Feeling safe in the town was an issue for some (but not others) and the presence of the police in the town centre would be appreciated
- 4) Interviewees were mixed about whether they would want to live here after university, or later in life if they had the choice. Some said they would but others said they would not want to. Reasons for this varied from considering the town dull, too expensive or not family orientated and therefore not somewhere they would consider raising a family.

## 5.4 Other representations

The public was encouraged to submit comments in whatever form they wished. All feedback provided to M&N that fell outside of the standard consultation activities (i.e. events or questionnaires) has been recorded and is summarised below with representations provided in full in the appendices.

This feedback should be considered as qualitative not quantitative feedback as numbers of representations (except for group representations) are often low.

### 5.4.1 (Other representations) Social media posts

M&N's approach to social media is outlined in 3.3.1.4. There were a number of followers on Facebook and Twitter and M&N posted 16 updates from the end of November until mid February to promote events and respond to any queries. Seven people posted 12 comments on Facebook and two people posted five comments on Twitter. All posts can be seen in appendices 7.0 and 7.1.

The main use of postings on both sites was people asking about the consultation itself either in terms of the delivery of consultation materials, issues with the content of consultation materials, promoting specific events or simply asking for an update. Around half of the posts cover these issues.

The remaining entries were all predominantly based on singular issues with a couple of common issues debated between two or three followers, with no consensus reached on the issues.

#### 5.4.1.1 (Other reps.: social media) Debated or shared themes (Shared by 2 or 3 followers)

- The war memorial – differing views on whether this should not, under any circumstances, be moved or whether it might be worth exploring a more appropriate location.
- Adequacy of existing buildings – differing views on whether the 'iconic' building/s 'does the job' or is not 'currently fit for purpose'.
- Focus on wider town – concern that the wider town should not be ignored if the focus for redevelopment (and funds spent) is solely the civic complex; desire for the site to be considered in the context of other sites and areas.
- Civic complex redevelopment – differing views on whether the civic complex should be considered at all for redevelopment versus the view that debate/consultation is essential to consider opportunities to improve the town centre.
- Infrastructure – concerns about existing traffic issues

#### 5.4.1.2 (Other reps.: social media) Singular themes

- Desire for a cinema in the town centre and a skate park
- Concern that retail will not provide the answers for the town centre
- Question as to whether the overall facade of the buildings could be maintained
- Suggestion that the Crescent Road car park could be rebuilt to double capacity

#### 5.4.2 (Other representations) Written representations

Aside from the questionnaire and the formal consultation events, M&N received written correspondence over three months from December 2010 up to February 2011 both from individuals and from groups or group representatives.

For the purposes of recording and considering correspondence and presenting feedback for this report, representations received have been considered as follows:

- 1) **Logistics correspondence:** regarding consultation events and distribution of consultation materials
- 2) **Detailed questions:** which M&N provided responses to
- 3) **Feedback/comments:** about the civic complex or the consultation process i.e. individual or groups' responses to the consultation

The above three types of correspondence have been recorded as follows:

- 1) Distribution enquiries (for the January door drop) have been logged, investigated with the distribution company and responded to. Details of enquiries, and how they have been responded to, are provided in appendix 7.2\*.
- 2) Copies of all detailed questions sent to (groups and individuals) M&N along with M&N responses are provided in appendix 3.20 for information.
- 3) All comments received (from both individuals and groups/group representatives) are provided in appendix 3.20.

*\* Please note that general correspondence providing logistical information about events (set up, timings, locations etc) has not been recorded within this report.*

This section (5.4.2) provides a summary of correspondence received under point 3 (feedback/ comments) and, where relevant, point 2 above, both in letter and email form. This covers representations from groups, including an interest group alternative questionnaire (see 5.4.2.2), and individuals.

#### 5.4.2.1 (Other reps: written) Groups/organisations

During the course of the consultation programme, M&N received written representations (falling within point 3 as outlined in 5.4.2) from the following groups:

- 1) Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra x 3 letters (RTWSO)\*
- 2) Tunbridge Wells Operatic and Dramatic Society (TWODS)
- 3) Trinity Theatre Group
- 4) The Access Group
- 5) Pembury Parish Council\*\*
- 6) Brenchley Parish Council\*\*
- 7) Goudhurst Parish Council \*\*

*\*M&N also held a stakeholder meeting with RTWSO where further information was provided about the group's specific needs. Minutes from that meeting can be found in appendix 3.14. The group also provided a set of questions to M&N which were responded to and are provided in appendix 7.3.*

*\*\* Chairs from both parish councils attended an M&N presentation and minutes from that meeting are also provided in appendix 3.14.*

All letters can be read in full in appendix 3.20 but a summary of the main themes raised are provided below with numbers signifying contributions from the numbered groups above.

Pembury Parish Council, Brenchley Parish Council, the Access Group, and particularly the RTWSO, raised issues with the consultation process or the questionnaire. M&N has addressed specific issues with the consultation process in 3.3.2 so this is not covered in this section. Goudhurst Parish Council "welcomed the opportunity to pause and reflect but agreed that the centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells was in urgent need of regeneration."

##### 5.4.2.1.1 (Other reps. – written: groups) Cultural provision (2, 3, 6 & 7)

#### Theatre

Both TWODS and Trinity provided a summary of their use of, and association with, the Assembly Hall and requested that the details of this involvement be reviewed if any new theatre provision on the civic complex were to be considered. The key concern for Trinity was that any new facility on the civic complex would not encroach on its audience or programme or "upset the current delicate balance between the two artistic offerings".

Trinity, TWODS and Goudhurst Parish Council stated the importance of the Assembly Hall theatre in the centre of town with TWODS stating very clearly that it was the only facility capable of taking the size of show that they put on. (Goudhurst wondered if there could be a larger auditorium). TWODS stated that such shows as were performed in the theatre (by TWODS and RTWSO) would not be financially viable in any other venue in the area. For TWODS, they stated that their group would have to change dramatically if there was no large theatre available for use and this would significantly affect their support of local charities.



On the basis of “differing views within the membership” TWODS did not wish to state a preference either way for redevelopment options to be explored but stated instead a desire: “to ensure that either the Assembly Hall Theatre is retained as a centre of cultural excellence in Tunbridge Wells or it is replaced with a theatre of comparable size.”

Trinity went further to raise some issues with the current Assembly Hall theatre which they felt had “technical limitations with limited wing and flying space”. They felt that its shape and size meant its programming faced two contrasting difficulties: it was attractive neither as a smaller playhouse nor as a large venue to producers of the major touring musicals. They outlined three potential options which could be investigated further but stated their view was that the best option would be to expand the theatre’s size to attract big musicals to make the facility viable. They also raised the issue of lack of community rehearsal facilities in the town centre.

#### **Film/cinema**

Brenchley Parish Council stated their support for a cinema as they felt it would “significantly enhance the cultural and recreational offer of the town centre”. However, they would wish to see plans that made the case for or against a cinema and “well evidenced arguments” to ensure the end result was viable. Another suggestion by the Parish Council, if a cinema was not viable, was to provide a shared-use facility that might include an opportunity for a cultural entrepreneur to provide a film club or similar resource.

Trinity stated that their cinema, as “the only screen in town”, was a major profit centre for the group and that any new town centre cinema provision should not replicate their provision. On that basis they felt that a small cinema showing first release films (similar to the Stag and Sevenoaks) would be a compatible fit.

Goudhurst Parish Council suggested that a cinema [if provided] should be central.

#### **Library/museum/art gallery**

The Access Group stated very clearly that these buildings required lifts and accessible toilets and that they would not allow any uncertainty around potential redevelopment of the building to cause delay on this.

Goudhurst Parish Council suggested these facilities should be provided centrally adjacent to the Town Hall.

#### **5.4.2.1.2 (Other reps. – written: groups) Retail and commercial (3, 4 & 7)**

Goudhurst Parish Council suggested that “attractive, good quality shops or stores were needed but not necessarily run-of-the-mill large stores”. They also stated that “good quality office space was needed and could be important to the economics of the overall scheme”.

Trinity stated that they believed “the new complex would bring significant commercial stimulus to the benefit of the town” and they felt that “a major retail space could offer commercial benefit and increased footfall to the benefit of the town’s economy”. The Access Group stated concern that the town had a number of empty shops and

building blight and they considered it would be better for funding to be spent on attracting business back to the town centre than “spend it on buildings that will remain empty for several years”.

#### **5.4.2.1.3 (Other reps. – written: groups) Civic (6 & 7)**

The Access Group and Brenchley Parish Council felt that it was important for the Council’s key civic functions to remain in Royal Tunbridge Wells with the latter stating: “wherever the ‘back-office’ functions of the council are located it will be essential that the Gateway facility remains in the town centre” and suggesting Gateway could also be expanded. Goudhurst Parish Council stated that its members “were divided on the retention of the Town Hall and its appendages in the present form” but generally agreed that a Town Hall should be in the centre of the Town.

The Access Group stated that as all new premises had to be totally independently accessible to all groups of disabled people, costs per new build would rise by £1.2m and therefore they felt that it would be cheaper and more prudent to improve existing civic buildings rather than redevelop the site.

Brenchley Parish Council also wished to see proposals for how any development would seek to encourage greater use of Royal Tunbridge Wells by people from the rural areas.

Goudhurst Parish Council thought that the Police Station did not necessarily have to be central.

#### **5.4.2.1.4 (Other reps. – written: groups) Design aspirations (4, 6 & 7)**

Brenchley Parish Council stated a desire to see design inspiration from all the suggestions made on the M&N questionnaire but wanted to avoid pastiche and a “slavish imitation to that sensibility”. A further suggestion was to consider rural influences such as hop growing, the Wealden iron industry and fruit farming within architectural design. Goudhurst Parish Council also wanted to see any future development delivered to a high standard of architecture and sympathetic to “treasures” such as the Decimus Burton villas, former opera house and Lloyds bank building; they felt architecture should reflect the “stature, heritage and high reputation of the town.”

Both Brenchley Parish Council and the Access Group stated a strong desire to avoid becoming a clone town with the latter pointing out that the SE and English Tourist Boards promote the town as a historic tourist area. They were keen that businesses that relied on tourism did not lose out and the Access Group said its members did not want to see the “unique historic architecture of the town” replaced with “unsightly modernity”.

#### **5.4.2.1.5 (Other reps. – written: groups) Access and transport issues (4 & 7)**

Goudhurst Parish Council felt that radical thinking was needed to address traffic congestion and that adequate parking was a necessity.

The Access Group stated that “developments and improvements to the town centre should include robust, affordable and sustainable public transport provision, accessible

car-parking facilities, attractive, safe thoroughfares (particularly the links between the upper and lower parts of the town centre), and the design of facilities and public spaces that make it possible for everyone to use them in ways that meet their specific needs.” They also confirmed that the ‘shared space’ model is not helpful for those with disabilities and as such had been banned in the area.

**5.4.2.2 (Other reps: written) Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra (RTWSO) questionnaires**

To gauge opinion of its members towards the future of the civic complex, the RTWSO compiled a questionnaire of its own and distributed this widely with M&N’s FREEPOST address. M&N received 182 completed RTWSO questionnaires and the database of all results can be seen in appendix 7.4. Nine questionnaires did not provide postcodes but all questionnaires have been included in the data analysis below.

It should be noted that neither M&N, TWBC or TWRC were involved in the preparation of this questionnaire nor its distribution.

A summary of the results is as follows:

- 90% of respondents (179 people) wanted to see the **civic complex preserved with necessary upgrading**.
- (4% ‘no’, 3% ‘no opinion’, 3% no answer).
- Respondents wanting to see **replacements** at least as good as the existing ones provided **before the existing ones are closed**:
 

Assembly Hall	94% (186 people)	(2% ‘no’, 3% ‘no opinion’, 1% no answer)
Museum	69% (137 people)	(7% ‘no’, 17% ‘no opinion’, 7% no answer)
Library	91% (180 people)	(2% ‘no’, 3.5% ‘no opinion’, 3.5% no answer)
Art gallery	69% (137 people)	(6% ‘no’, 17% ‘no opinion’, 8% no answer)
- 85% of respondents (168 people) wanted to see the Town Hall retained as council offices and the centre of civic functions with public access.
- (5% ‘no’, 9% ‘no opinion’, 1% no answer).
- 86% of respondents (171 people) thought that if redevelopment of the civic complex were to include shops, **existing parking facilities would not be adequate**.  
(4% ‘yes’, 7% ‘no opinion’, 3% no answer).

55% of respondents were female and 41% were male (4% undisclosed).

The majority of respondents, 77.5%, were over 60 years of age:

60-74	45.0%
75+	34.0%
40-59	14.0%
25-39	1.5%
16-24	0.5%
<i>Undisclosed</i>	5.0%

### 5.4.2.3 (Other reps: written) Individuals

In the introduction in 5.4.2, an outline is provided as to the different types of written correspondence received by M&N. This section provides a summary of representations received by individuals in response to the consultation process (point 3 in 5.4.2).

M&N received over 80 letters and emails specifically relating to consultation topics, all of which are provided in appendix 3.20; this is considered as qualitative not quantitative feedback.

#### 5.4.2.3.1 (Other reps. – written: individuals) Overarching topics

A large number of points were raised in the letters and not every point made by each individual can be summarised in this section although these are available for review in the appendices. For this reason, predominantly only the main themes, raised in multiple representations, are summarised in this section.

Regardless of the opinions raised in relation to each topic, the following were the most popular areas of discussion i.e. where most comments were made (1 being the heading under which most comments were made, 13 the least):

1. **Culture:** comments about the Museum/library/art gallery, Assembly Hall and general cultural provision. (Around 55 comments)
2. **Traffic and parking:** views on current traffic and parking issues, park and ride, pedestrianisation and long-term plans for infrastructure. (Around 55 comments)
3. **Retail:** opinions on how respondents felt about the potential for new shops, department store and supermarket along with existing provision i.e. Farmers' Market, shopping centres, independent retailers, empty shops, town layout and clone towns. (Around 50 comments)
4. **Other sites in the town centre:** specifically concerns about the former cinema and Morrisons sites. (Around 40 comments)
5. **Redevelopment or refurbishment:** expressed views on demolition (for and against), refurbishment and continuity of facilities. (Around 35 comments)
6. **Civic, public services and public spaces:** views about the long-term location of frontline services and back office staff; comments about the police, war memorial, adult education; views about public spaces and venues for civic and community occasions. (Around 30 comments)
7. **Consultation issues:** general concerns about the process or issues with the questionnaire i.e. questions asked or not asked. (Around 30 comments)
8. **Leisure:** views about a new cinema in the town centre, current and future provision of cafes, bars and restaurants, activities for all ages and night time culture. (Around 30 comments)
9. **Stated support or opposition for redevelopment:** where people have expressly stated support or opposition to the idea of redevelopment. (Around 25 comments)

10. **Mix of development:** comments about 'fitting' all cultural uses on the civic complex; economics of the mix; office and residential development. (Around 20 comments)
11. **Architecture and design:** comments about the current civic complex and suggestions for inspiration for future design should next stage options be developed. (Around 20 comments)
12. **Issues with the Council:** concerns over handling of the subject to date i.e. perceived lack communication and transparency; lack of trust. (Around 15 comments)
13. **Comments about the Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company:** the nature of the arrangement with the Council and the scope of work. (Around 10 comments)

#### **5.4.2.3.2 (Other reps. – written: individuals) Summary of topic areas**

Within the subject areas 1-13 above, there were a number of opinions voiced and we have summarised those below in order of popularity i.e. those comments that were raised most frequently are addressed first, with others comments in descending order.

This section should be considered as qualitative and not quantitative as the majority of comments summarised below were made by around or fewer than ten respondents with the exception of comments over the cinema site (made by just over twenty people).

#### **(Other reps. – written: individuals) 1) Culture**

The three most popular comments made about culture were: that there was a need for an improved/better/modernised library and museum; that cultural provision needed to remain on the civic complex; and that there was a need for an improved/better/modernised theatre. In terms of the improved facilities mentioned, those contributors were not specific about how this should be achieved.

The next most popular theme was the suggestion that a physical link could be created between the town hall and the library/museum/art gallery building and some very specific details were provided on what this might look like. A few people went further to suggest another physical link from the library/museum/art gallery building to the Adult Education building to allow expansion of the facilities at the back.

Other topics on which a handful of comments were received were: desire to leave the Assembly Hall as it is; desire for a more flexible theatre space; need for toilets and a lift in the library/museum/art gallery building.

Remaining topics raised by a couple of people include suggestions that: the museum could expand into the vacated police station; there is a need for a new arts space supported by joint initiatives and community innovation partnerships; and that there is a need for a brand new theatre, a bigger theatre or certainly a facility no smaller.

#### **(Other reps. – written: individuals) 2) Traffic and parking**

The generic issue of traffic and parking was raised by a fifth of people who wrote into M&N with people providing detail on where they thought problems existed or how they could be resolved. The three main subjects which appeared most and equally were 1) desire to see Park and Ride considered to remove some cars from the town centre; 2)

concerns over the redevelopment of car parks meaning car parks were disappearing at a time when more cars were likely to be coming to the town centre if new development were brought forward; and 3) concerns over increased gridlock on the roads in the event of more development – North Farm was given as an example; Some people also seemed keen for pedestrianisation (of the town centre and Camden Road) to be considered. Other singular issues raised were: desire for reduced car parking charges to encourage visitors to town; suggestion of underground parking to maximise space; and a free shuttle bus linking the different areas of town.

### ***(Other reps. – written: individuals) 3) Retail***

There were a number of comments about retail and these were mixed. The most popular comment (made by fewer than 20 respondents) was that they did not wish to see any more shops in Royal Tunbridge Wells or on the civic complex with almost half of those people stating existing empty shops as the reason for their opinion.

The next three most popular comments were:

- Clone towns - with people concerned that more retail would mean losing the character and unique identity of the town centre; they did not want to compete with Maidstone or Bluewater and they wanted to protect the independent traders in the town.
- Wanting more retail - alternative comments by people stating that they did want to see new shops
- Department stores - specifically respondents wanted to see a department store like John Lewis or House of Fraser.

In the letters and emails from individuals, equal numbers of people stated a preference for a supermarket (like Waitrose) as those that opposed one.

Other comments made by a couple of people were: desire to see a guaranteed central space for the Farmers' Market, possibly a market place or square; and desire for Camden Road to be reinstated as a designated shopping street by the Council (though the latter is not a matter for this consultation).

### ***(Other reps. – written: individuals) 4) Other (derelict) sites in the town centre***

This subject is not a consultation topic but it is one that was raised by a considerable number of people. They were concerned about other derelict sites they felt needed attention, some thought, before the civic complex is considered for redevelopment. There were around 40 comments on the cinema site with others stating concerns about the former Morrisons site as well. Those who wrote about these sites wanted to see change as a matter of urgency and some did not understand why they Council had not resolved this.

### ***(Other reps. – written: individuals) 5) Redevelopment or refurbishment***

The most popular comment within this section was that either respondents would rather see refurbishment of the civic complex rather than wholesale demolition or they stated simply a generic 'no' to demolition. It was also suggested by a number of people that the building facades could be maintained with redevelopment behind or above.

However, there were also some people (half as many who preferred refurbishment) who said they would like, or not mind, demolition. The final other comment of note was that people wanted to be reassured about continuity of community services and facilities if redevelopment were to happen. They were concerned that community groups could disappear, or facilities never reappear if they were removed before new ones could be built.

***(Other reps. – written: individuals) 6) Civic, public services and public spaces***

The most popular comment made under this heading related to public spaces with a handful of people wanting to see a piazza/plaza style public square. The reasons for this were: to provide a focal point for the town, link the two halves of town and provide better pedestrian links; to encourage the arts and showcase cultural services and programmes; to provide more of a community feel and meeting place for all ages.

The next most popular topic (though only commented on by a tenth of writers) was the location of Council frontline services and back office staff with fairly equal views on whether these should be all together on the civic complex or whether back office staff could be relocated elsewhere. Although slightly more people suggested back office staff could be relocated, comments were very clear that technical and public facing staff should be central and easily accessible. Some people were concerned that relocation of frontline services out of town would be extremely unhelpful to those most in need of them i.e. the elderly, those with disabilities, families etc.

The subject of a police presence was also raised with people stating that they wished to see a police presence, even if only small, on the civic complex or somewhere central and visible in the town centre.

Another few issues which were raised by a handful of people were: the desire for the war memorial to stay where it is; comments about Gateway being unsatisfactory and tourist information being in the wrong place; desire for the Adult Education building not to be knocked down (though one person thought it should be); better signage/trails to support arts/cultural provision, trades and heritage; and better street furniture/public realm improvements.

***(Other reps. – written: individuals) 7) Consultation issues***

This subject is not a consultation topic; queries about the process are referred to in section 3.2.2 and addressed in full in appendix 2.0. Comments on this subject predominantly centred on the nature of the questionnaire i.e. concerns that the questions were framed in a particular way or that certain questions were not asked. There were also comments about M&N's independence and more generally about the process.

***(Other reps. – written: individuals) 8) Leisure***

Under the issue of leisure, the most popular comment was in relation to a new cinema in the town centre but this was raised by fewer than ten people who said they thought this was missing. Alongside that, the second most popular comment was the desire to see more activities for people of all ages, especially young people. Comments on the subject of restaurants, cafes or bars were mixed with some people wanting more but others not.

***(Other reps. – written: individuals) 9) Stated support or opposition for redevelopment***

M&N specifically did not ask the question: “do you want to see redevelopment or not” in any consultation material because, as there as were no plans on the table for comparison with the current civic complex, this question was deemed inappropriate. Out of the circa 80 letters received which included consultation comments, just under 25 of these included a request for stated generic opposition or support to be recorded. Of those 25 letters, representations on both sides were roughly equal 1) for opposition to the idea of redevelopment as a whole and 2) in support of redevelopment of the civic complex or for exploring options at the next stage.

***(Other reps. – written: individuals) 10) Mix of development***

Within these comments, the main issue raised (fewer than one in ten people) was cost and the economics of any potential new scheme for the civic complex. The individuals were concerned about funding for the scheme and how the mix of uses would be balanced to provide all the improved cultural uses alongside commercial uses to pay for the scheme. The next popular topic was office development on the civic complex with a handful of people suggesting this would be a good idea though a couple of people disagreed. Singular topics raised were perceived lack of hotels in the town centre and residential on the civic complex; the latter covered suggestions for expensive residential, housing association accommodation or no residential for the site.

***(Other reps. – written: individuals) 11) Architecture and design***

There were a number of singular comments made about 1) architecture and design in terms of design aspirations that could be considered if redevelopment options were to be drawn up at the next stage and 2) thoughts on current buildings. As would be expected with such a subjective subject, there was no consensus that emerged except for a strong sense that excellent architecture for the site (whether through the retaining of listed buildings, creation of new architecture, or a mix of both) was crucial to maintaining the unique identity of the town. It was clear that heritage reference would have to play a central role in any new design (without being faux or pastiche) but also that new architecture had to be both strong and sensitive.

***(Other reps. – written: individuals) 12) Issues with the Council***

This subject is not a consultation topic; however, it provides an insight into the context within which some people responded to the consultation. On that basis M&N considered it important to include a summary of the main issues raised in individuals’ written representations. Fewer than 15 people of the 80 representations received raised those concerns.

The general comments made in letters on this subject were in relation to the handling of the potential redevelopment of the civic complex by individual councillors. Issues raised related to: perceived lack of transparency and resulting frustration; a belief that the decision to redevelop had already been made; confusion as to whether there were plans on the table or not; when consultation was going to start and what people would be consulted on.



### **(Other reps. – written: individuals) 13) Comments about the Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company (TWRC)**

This is not a consultation topic; however, it provides an insight into the context within which some people responded to the consultation. Only a handful of people raised the subject of TWRC and its relationship with the Council in the letters. Some people had a lack of understanding about how TWRC worked and were concerned about the financial arrangements and how the taxpayer would benefit. Again a perceived lack of transparency was raised about TWRC and questions about how much control the Council would have in deciding whether to redevelop or not.

#### **5.4.3 (Other representations) Verbal feedback**

M&N recorded comments from 13 people either at consultation events or on the telephone. A full list of the comments is available in appendix 3.21.

Just over a quarter of people making verbal contributions made comments or suggestions about the consultation process i.e. groups that should be consulted and questions which were not asked. A couple of people commented that they were disillusioned or had trust issues with the Council and the Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company and had requested copies of pertinent studies.

In addition the following themes were raised:

##### **5.4.3.1 (Other reps.: verbal) Issue of redevelopment (Out of 13 comments recorded)**

Over half of those who made verbal comments thought that buildings should be retained and not demolished with some commenting that other sites would benefit more from redevelopment. However a couple of other people thought that it would be worth exploring the retaining of the facades and building behind with another person suggesting modernisation rather than redevelopment. It was stated by a couple of people that if redevelopment were to happen, architecture would need to be sensitive and of a high standard.

##### **5.4.3.2 (Other reps.: verbal) Services, uses and facilities (Out of 13 comments recorded)**

Over a quarter of verbal contributors thought that all future services and facilities should be user friendly and made more accessible and attractive to both the young and old and especially disabled people. Just over a quarter of verbal feedback recorded was about retail; views stated were that there was no need, or no preference, for more shops and an opinion that they would not improve the character of the town. A couple of people commented that the civic function should be retained on the civic complex. Singular comments made were a desire for: no more pubs but a café culture instead; an improved library; a new cinema whilst protecting Trinity; flats to complement other uses; and a multi-use theatre.

##### **5.4.3.3 (Other reps.: verbal) General (Out of 13 comments recorded)**

Other comments by just under a third of verbal contributors were about derelict sites and concerns that the town had deteriorated.

**6.0**

**CONCLUDING  
REMARKS**

## 6.0 Concluding remarks

M&N was instructed to deliver a comprehensive and far reaching consultation to help inform TWRC's decision making on the civic complex.

The consultation started following a period of intense speculation and controversy about the future of the area and the town centre as a whole, and the atmosphere at the start was one of mistrust and cynicism.

Our objective was therefore two fold; first to reassure the people of the borough that the process was robust and that the results would be transparent to encourage them to get involved; and second to gather people's views on the civic complex and its future.

As we publish the report for the public to digest and no doubt scrutinise, M&N is confident that it has achieved both of these aims.

Firstly, throughout the consultation, as we were able to explain the objectives of the exercise and develop relationships, the mood of the discussions at meetings and at events such as the workshops would move from distrust to active engagement. We would consistently come away enthused and encouraged by the people of Tunbridge Wells' civic pride and willingness to participate.

Secondly, we received 6,000+ questionnaires and engaged with hundreds of people directly over the course of the programme. Whilst we did not quite match the demographic breakdown of the population in the questionnaire response, we made good progress towards it. At the same time we had always anticipated a low level of engagement from the young and addressed this through a schools' workshop, a presence on social networking sites and vox-pops at local colleges and in the town centre.

The next stage is for the TWRC and the Council to consider the feedback and decide on what to do next. It is certainly clear that the many thousands of people who got involved in the consultation do not agree on many subjects, apart from perhaps that Royal Tunbridge Wells is a place to be proud of and a place worth protecting.

In the range of views expressed many respondents expressed a desire for improved facilities but without significant change; many wanted the town to perform better economically but not at the expense of the town's character; many wanted the town to stay the same but more people wanted to see improvement (even if they could not agree on what the improvements should be).

What is clear is that as many people wanted to see change and improvement in the civic complex and town centre as a whole, as did not want anything at all to change.

Finally we want to thank all the people who took the time to engage in the process and who have ensured that we can provide such a comprehensive report.

**7.0**

# **APPENDICES**

All appendices referred to in this document can be found in a separate document: 'Report Appendices'.



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