**2014-15 Town Centre Opportunities Survey**

**Aims and Objectives**

* A questionnaire was developed to find out:
1. The views primarily of older residents on how suitable they feel the borough’s town centres are to meet their needs and to identify any issues and opportunities.
2. Improvements that can be made to the trading environment to make it more attractive to visitors.
* This information will be used to:
1. Inform the Town Centre Opportunities Fund and be used in consideration to other available funding such as the High Street Fund and Civic Pride Fund.
2. Provide guidance to Town Centre Managers and Traders Associations.

**Methodology**

* A questionnaire was created to collect opinion from members of the public with a focus primarily on older residents. The questionnaire underwent extensive consultation from the Community Engagement team before being cleared for public consultation.
* The survey was originally opened on the Richmond Council website on 1st October and closed on 22nd October 2014. Paper based copies of the survey were also handed out at the Full of Life Fair on 1st October 2014. This first round returned 94 responses, 51 of which were completed online and 43 paper based surveys returned.
* A second round was conducted in March 2015 with the survey being distributed with the help of local AgeUK office. 93 responses were collected this way, all them online.
* In total, the survey returned 187 responses, out of which 43 were completed on paper and 144 online.

**Results summary**

Section A

Which town centre in Richmond Borough do you visit most often?



There were 187 responses to this question. Of those 187 people, 28% visit Richmond most often, 26% Twickenham, 12% Teddington and 10.5% Whitton. These four centres were clearly the most visited with around 77% of respondents indicating that they visited one of these most often. These four centres are the largest in the borough demonstrating that the majority of people visit the largest centres most often.

How often do you visit that town centre?



There were 186 responses to this question. Of those 186 people, 53% visit 2-3 times a week and 28% every day. This demonstrates that people visit these town centres on a regular basis.

Why do you visit that town centre?



There were 183 responses to this question. Each respondent was able to select as many options as they liked. Of those 183 people, 94% go to a town centre to shop, 50% visit to eat out and 36% to meet friends. The other options were fairly evenly spread demonstrating the variety that people desire in a town centre.

Other responses that were listed included the following: work, dentist, doctor, bank, building society, library, public transport, exercise, health centre, gym and walking the dog.

Which of the following do you consider most important when visiting a town centre?



There were 185 responses to this question. Each respondent was able to select three options. Of those 185 people, 66% think that good transport links are most important, 64% retail options, 48% feeling safe and 43% attractiveness. A sense of community was seen as being important to 33% of people. The other options stated were not seen as being so important by the majority.

Other responses that were listed included the following: wider roads, bike friendliness, clean air, easy parking and independent shops.

What improvement(s) could be made to increase the enjoyment of the town centre that you visit most often?



There were 182 responses to this question. Each respondent was able to select as many options as they liked. Of those 182 people, 56% would like to see a better variety of shops making it the clear suggestion for improvement. There are 6 suggested improvements that were selected by 20% or more of respondents, with support of local businesses being selected by 33% of people, 30% parking improvements, 27 % street furniture, 23% shop frontage appearance, and 22% each transport and pavements.

How would you rate your experience of the following in the town centre you visit most often?

Respondents were asked to rate a number of aspects on a scale of excellent, good, satisfactory, poor, very poor or no view. The following chart displays the experience of respondents in the town centre they have visited most often (ratings have been condensed for ease of analysis).



Each question asked had a minimum of 176 respondents and a maximum of 187. If a positive experience is taken to be ‘satisfactory’ or better then safety and transport options have 92% and 89% positive ratings respectively. On the other end of the spectrum, culture & leisure options and community events have 67% and 62% positive ratings respectively, indicating a notable difference in opinion. However, it must be noted that a much higher percentage of people chose not to give a view on these aspects.

Culture and leisure options received the greatest number of ‘poor’ and below ratings with 18% rating it ‘poor’ and 7% ‘very poor’.

Section B

Please state the town centre closest to your home

Each respondent was asked which town centre was closest to their home. Correlation can be drawn between the results here and those from the town centres visited most often.



There were 184 responses to this question. Of those 184 people, 22% live closest to Twickenham, 20% Richmond, 11% both Whitton and Teddington. In total, 65% of respondents live closest to one of these four centres, whilst earlier data shows that 77% of respondents visited one of these four centres most regularly. Richmond appears to show the greatest deviation in data with 20% of respondents living closest to it but 28% visiting it most regularly.

How often do you visit your local centre?



There were 185 responses to this question. Of those 185 people, 44% visit 2-3 times a week and 28% every day. When compared to previous data asking how frequently respondents visit the town they go to most often, it is evident that there is a drop in the amount of people that attend 2-3 times a week, which is 44% here compared with 53% previously.

What stops you visiting your local centre more frequently?



There were 170 responses to this question. Each respondent was able to select as many options as they liked. 42% of respondents stated that a lack of appropriate shops and facilities were a factor in them not visiting their local centre. Parking issues were seen as a deterrent for 21% of people, 16% use a local supermarket or convenience store instead, the same percentage are discouraged by empty shops, 14% were put off by lack of seating, 13% saw public transport as an issue and 12% lacked time to visit.

Generally, considering all of the town centres in the borough, how would you rate their quality?



The overall consensus from respondents is that the boroughs town centres are satisfactory or better with 91% of people giving an overall rating of satisfactory, good or excellent. However, it should be noted that only 2% of respondents think that the town centres in the borough are excellent, and 8% view them as poor and very poor, so there is room for improvement.

Other Comments

There were 122 additional comments provided by respondents. Some of these were recurring and should be noted. The issues mentioned in these comments were:

* Several respondents referred to changes to bus stop locations which have not been welcomed by some respondents, especially in Twickenham. Respondents express they have to walk further and some say they have been discouraged from visiting the town centre because of this.
* Respondents welcome the half hour free parking but feel it needs to be longer to enable them to get things done. Some feel parking is expensive.
* Insufficient parking exists for bikes in Richmond and Twickenham.
* The need for a greater variety of shops has been expressed.
* Requirement for more public toilets.
* More public seating would be good.
* Additional provision for cyclists to improve their safety.
* Some pavements could be made safer (more even) both for pedestrians and wheelchair users.
* Some respondents referred to wide pavements and narrow streets in some locations, which they feel leads to traffic congestion, noise and poor air quality.

Respondent Profile

The following chart shows the gender of the respondents that completed the survey.



There were 185 responses to this question. The gender ratio of those that responded was 69% women and 31% men.

The chart below shows whether respondents considered themselves to have a disability or not.



There were 181 responses to this question. In total 83% of respondents considered themselves not to have a disability where as 13% felt that they did. 3% chose not to provide an answer to this question. According to the 2011 census, 2% of residents between the ages of 16-74 are considered permanently sick or disabled. This indicates that the survey did very well in reaching residents with disabilities.

The following chart shows the age ranges of the respondents that completed the survey.



There were 186 responses to this question. The survey was focussed on obtaining older residents points of view; however, it was open for anyone to enter through the Consultation Finder on the Richmond Council website. Responses have therefore come from a variety of age groups, but the majority of responses are from those aged 55+. This constitutes 88% with the largest group of respondents being the 65-74 age group: 43% of respondents fitted within this group.

The chart below shows the ethnicity of the respondents that completed the survey.



There were 175 responses to this question, with 12 choosing not to provide a response. The majority of respondents were of a White or a White British ethnic background at 90%, a figure which is above the data from the 2011 census for Richmond upon Thames (86%). However, it should be noted that categories for ethnic backgrounds are not identical on the census and survey.

Conclusions

The survey can be analysed in two parts, section A with regard to the town centre that respondents visit most often and section B for the town centre closest to their home.

Section A indicates that Richmond (28%) and Twickenham (26%) are the two town centres which respondents visit most often whilst Teddington (12%) and Whitton (10.5%) are also popular. These centres are the largest in the borough hence it is unsurprising that they are also most visited. Respondents indicated that they go to their most visited town centre on a regular basis with 53% of people going 2-3 times per week and 28% going every day.

Unsurprisingly, an overwhelming majority of people (94%) stated that one of the reasons they visit is for shopping; this was by far the most popular reason, with eating out (50%) the second most popular. Good transport links (66%) and retail options (64%) were clearly stated as the most important things for respondents, although it is worth noting that the desire to feel safe (48%) and enjoy attractive surroundings (43%) were seen as being important in deciding whether to visit.

Respondents were asked what improvements could be made to increase their enjoyment of the town centre they visit most often. ‘Better variety of shops’ was the most selected option here, with 56% selecting this.

Respondents were asked to rate their experience of a number of factors. If a positive experience is taken to be ‘satisfactory’ or better then each factor rated was seen to be positive by over 60% of people. Safety and transport links obtained the most positive ratings with 92% and 89% respectively. 4 out of 7 factors were rated as ‘poor’ or worse by 20% of people or more, with culture and leisure options receiving the worst score (24% poor or very poor). Interestingly, although a high proportion of people said earlier in the survey that they would like to see a better variety of shops, their overall perception of the retail options available is positive with 78% saying that they were satisfied or better.

Respondents identified Twickenham (22%), Richmond (20%), Whitton (11%) and Teddington (11%) as the closest centres to their homes. These were also the top 4 centres that were visited most often, though it is notable that 28% of people said that they visited Richmond most often, whilst 20% live closest to it. This shows that Richmond effectively attracts people in from different areas of the borough.

Many people appear to visit their local centre regularly with 72% visiting either every day or 2-3 times a week; however, the proportion of people that visit less frequently (12% visiting once a month or less) is higher when compared to the centre they visit most often (5% visiting once a month or less). A lack of appropriate shops/facilities was stipulated by 42% as being the reason that they do not visit more often, with 21% and 16% advising that, respectively, parking issues and preference for a local supermarket or convenience store were main factors contributing to fewer visits.

A total of 89% of respondents viewed the boroughs town centres as either ‘satisfactory’ (39%) or ‘good’ (50%). Whilst the vast majority of respondents feel that the town centres are at least satisfactory, overall the concern must be that only 2% see them as being excellent.

We have also been undertaking a review of the Town Centre Opportunities Fund, which supports local business and retail associations, and have been capturing comments from town centre representatives about the provisions in their centres for elderly residents during interviews with them. This survey was a piece of work to obtain some initial thoughts and stimulate ideas which will provide valuable considerations for our work with town centre groups and other areas of the Council such as Public Health and Village Planning.