**2014 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 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.
* In total there were 94 responses, 51 of which were completed online and 43 paper based surveys returned.

**Results summary**

Section A

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

There were 94 responses to this question. Of those 94 people, 29% visit Richmond most often, 21% Twickenham, 15% Teddington and 14% Whitton. These four centres were clearly the most visited with around 79% 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 94 responses to this question. Of those 94 people, 52% 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 93 responses to this question. Each respondent was able to select as many options as they liked. Of those 93 people, 91% go to a town centre to shop, 57% visit to eat out and 38% 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, 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 92 responses to this question. Each respondent was able to select three options. Of those 92 people, 65% feel that retail options are most important, 63% good transport links, 45% feeling safe and 42% attractiveness. A sense of community was seen as being important to 33% of people however 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 and easy parking.

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

There were 91 responses to this question. Each respondent was able to select as many options as they liked. Of those 91 people, 55% would like to see a better variety of shops making it the clear suggestion for improvement. There are 7 suggested improvements that were selected by 20% or more of respondents with parking improvements being selected by 30% of people, 29% support of local businesses, 28% shop frontage appearance, 28% transport, 25% pavements, 25% street furniture and 20% feeling safe.

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 90 respondents and a maximum of 94. If a positive experience is taken to be ‘satisfactory’ or better then transport options and safety have 87% and 86% positive ratings respectively. However culture & leisure options and community events have 65% and 62% positive ratings respectively, indicating a notable difference in opinion. However it is 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 17% rating it ‘poor’ and 10% ‘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 94 responses to this question. Of those 94 people, 22% live closest to Twickenham, 21% Richmond, 14% Whitton and 12% Teddington. In total 69% of respondents live closest to one of these four centres whilst earlier data shows us that 79% of respondents visited one of these four centres most regularly. Richmond appears to show the greatest deviation in data with 21% of respondents living closest to it but 29% visiting it most regularly.

How often do you visit your local centre?

There were 93 responses to this question. Of those 93 people, 39% visit 2-3 times a week and 32% 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 39% here compared with 52% previously. There is also a rise in the more infrequent visits (once a month or less) 16% here compared to 5% previously.

What stops you visiting your local centre more frequently?

There were 77 responses to this question. Each respondent was able to select as many options as they liked. Over half (52%) of respondents stated that a lack of appropriate shops and facilities were a factor in them not visiting their local centre. Public transport issues were seen as a deterrent for 25% of people, 23% felt parking was a problem, 21% use a local supermarket or convenience store instead, 20% see empty shops as an issue and 18% were put off visiting by a lack of seating.

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 89% of people giving an overall rating of satisfactory, good or excellent. However it should be noted that only 1% of respondents think that the town centres in the borough are excellent and 10% view them as poor hence there is room for improvement.

Other Comments

There were 46 additional comments provided by respondents. There were some reoccurring comments to note as follows:

* The half an hour free parking whilst useful is not really long enough to get much done.
* Parking is expensive.
* Changes to bus stop sitings have not been improvements in some cases.
* The need for a greater variety of shops.
* Requirement for more public toilets.
* More public seating would be good.
* Additional provision for cyclists to improve their safety.

Respondent Profiles

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

There were 93 responses to this question. The gender ratio of those that responded was 58% women and 42% men.

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

There were 91 responses to this question. In total 85% of respondents considered themselves not to have a disability where as 15% felt that they did. 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 93 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 however the majority of responses are from those aged 55+ which constitute 78% with the largest group of respondents being the 65-74 age group with 40% of respondents fitting within this group.

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

There were 89 responses to this question. The majority of respondents were of a White or a White British ethnic background at 93%, 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.

Conclusion

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 (29%) and Twickenham (21%) are the two town centres which respondents visit most often whilst Teddington (15%) and Whitton (14%) are also popular. These centres are arguably the largest in the borough hence it is unsurprising that they are also the most visited. Respondents indicated that they go to their most visited town centre on a regular basis with 52% of people going 2-3 times per week and 28% going every day. An overwhelming majority of people (91%) stated that one of the reasons they visit is for shopping, this was by far the most popular reason, with eating out (57%) the second most popular. Retail options (65%) and good transport links (63%) were clearly stated as the most important things for respondents although it is worth noting that the desire to feel safe (45%) and enjoy attractive surroundings (42%) were seen as being important. Respondents were asked what improvements could be made to increase their enjoyment of the town centre they visit most often: 55% of people felt that a better variety of shops would increase their enjoyment which was easily the most popular answer with a total of 7 different answers receiving between 20-30%. 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. Transport links and safety obtained the most positive ratings with 87% and 86% respectively. Although 4 out of 7 factors were rated as ‘poor’ or worse by over 20% of people with culture and leisure options receiving the most (27%). Interestingly, although a 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% answering that they were satisfied or better.

Section B identifies that Twickenham (22%), Richmond (21%), Whitton (14%) and Teddington (12%) are the closest centres to respondents homes. These were also the top 4 centres that were visited most often, though it is notable that 29% of people said that they visited Richmond most often, whilst 21% live closest to it. This shows that Richmond is effective at attracting people in from different areas of the borough. Many people appear to visit their local centre regularly with 71% visiting either every day or 2-3 times a week however the proportion of people that visit less frequently (16% visiting once a month or less) is much 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 52% as being the reason that they don’t visit more often with 25% and 23% advising that public transport issues and parking issues respectively, were problems that stopped them from visiting. A total of 88% of respondents viewed the boroughs town centres as either ‘satisfactory’ (46%) or ‘good’ (42%). Whilst the vast majority of respondents feel that the town centres are at least satisfactory overall the concern must be that only 1% see them as being excellent.

We have also been undertaking a review of the Town Centre Opportunities Fund 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. Work will be progressed through further discussion with Town Centre Managers and Traders' groups. Additionally, this work will be shared with other areas of the Council such as Public Health and Village Planning to explore future joint working opportunities.