

“Your Town, Your Choice”

Crewe Town Centre Consultation

Overview of findings

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background, methodology and level of engagement

During July 2015, Cheshire East Council conducted the Crewe: Your Town, Your Choice consultation. The purpose was to consult with all interested stakeholders on initial proposals about the regeneration of Crewe town centre, including the Council's draft Regeneration Delivery Framework (RDF) for Crewe town centre, as well as questions regarding car parking, the bus station and markets. The consultation began on 3rd July, and closed on 2nd August 2015.

Public engagement with the consultation was extremely high, with 1,167 people completing either a long or a short version of a consultation survey, and 106 people attending a public consultation event. Furthermore there were a number of other consultation responses received, as well as 218 social media 'impressions' about the consultation.

1.2 Consultation effectiveness

The way the "Your Town, Your Choice - Crewe Town Consultation" has been organised and conducted has to be considered a success, for a number of reasons:

- Combining several separate consultations into one has saved much time and money
- The joined-up nature of the consultation has meant stakeholders have been engaged on a much more holistic level than would otherwise have been possible
- The widespread promotion of the consultation has meant that engagement in the consultation has been extensive.

The consultation has served as an excellent blueprint for future "Your Town, Your Choice" consultations in Cheshire East, and much credit has to go to those involved in its delivery, particularly the Regeneration team at Cheshire East Council.

2.0 Overall summary

2.1 Support for Regeneration in Crewe

Generally speaking, proposals for the regeneration of Crewe as specified in the Council's Regeneration Delivery Framework (RDF) for Crewe town centre have been well received:

- An extremely high proportion of respondents, 94%, supported plans for more investment and regeneration in Crewe
- Another large proportion of respondents, 79%, agreed with the vision of the Regeneration Framework.

2.2 Top three key priorities for regeneration

Throughout the consultation a fairly clear picture evolved of what respondents felt the main priorities for regeneration are. In responses to questions regarding the RDF's seven objectives, respondents identified three main priorities for regeneration, above all others, and these are summarised below.

The wording of the objectives below is taken directly from the RDF, although some respondents felt that language used throughout the RDF could be clearer.

#1 - Objective 1: Stimulate new investment in the town centre including retail, leisure, residential and business use by bringing vacant sites back into use, intensifying the use of underperforming sites and utilising Cheshire East Council's assets.

Investment in key town centre sites is the clear priority objective for respondents, including for those that responded through the surveys and that attended consultation events. Analysis of related questions indicated that:

- an improved retail offer would be most likely to encourage them to use the town centre more.
- retail was the most frequently mentioned choice in reference to the identified regeneration sites, including the Royal Arcade site.
- there is a desire that vacant shops are filled as an immediate priority, for example by encouraging landlords to charge more affordable rents.
- residents want more, and a better range of shops – including a mix of national retailers and independent shops.
- there is demand for more / better cafes, eateries and markets.
- there is a need to increase the focus on leisure uses – specifically, improving the night-time economy with restaurants / cafes, art space and fitness provision.

Respondents also identified the negative impact Grand Junction Retail Park has had on footfall levels in the town centre. The retail park was the second most frequently used shopping area in Crewe (38% of respondents use it at least weekly), and furthermore, the types of respondents

using it were more likely to be affluent than those using the other shopping areas. The main reason suggested for the success of Grand Junction Retail Park was free car parking, something borne out by the fact that car users were more likely to go to Grand Junction Retail Park than to other shopping areas in Crewe

#2 – Objective 4: To make it easier to get into and around the town centre by foot, bicycle, bus and car.

Accessibility and connectivity into and around the town centre ranked joint second in importance as an RDF objective, but it also came across very strongly in consultation events, with the point made that regeneration can only succeed in the town centre if the fundamental issue of accessibility and movement is addressed. This applies to all modes of transport, not just car.

Overall, respondents wanted better access to town, traffic reducing, and better connectivity between the “disparate” shopping areas in the town centre. Respondents listed a number of routes where they felt traffic was worst, a number of approaches which they felt made access difficult, and a number of areas which they felt needed connecting more effectively..

Vehicular accessibility: The worst of the traffic is perceived be to the East / South-East of the town centre, and focuses around the two main bridges over the railway, as well as along Earle Street. Long term, it is considered essential to alleviate traffic congestion through these areas. Those attending consultation events recognised the difficulty in overcoming these issues, and a number of suggestions have been made, e.g. one-way systems around the town, a ‘park & ride’ scheme, more bridges over the railway, removal of zebra crossings, better public transport, and better signage as ways of improving accessibility.

Pedestrian connectivity: There were two main places which respondents felt needed to be linked better to the town centre for pedestrians: Grand Junction Retail Park, and the train station. Respondents suggested improving connectivity between these areas by having ‘golden links’ between these three areas (such as in Sheffield), by having foot bridges between them (where feasible), or by having shuttle buses. They also highlighted other areas which needed to be better joined to the town centre, and to each other: Retail and Leisure parks around the town centre (Phoenix Leisure Park, Eagle Bridge; Vernon way); the Lifestyle Centre; Nantwich Road; as well as between different car parks.

Car parking: Respondents indicated a desire for more and free / cheaper car parking, highlighting the success of Grand Junction Retail Park, and free parking trial periods at Christmas. In relation to specific car parking questions, 52% of car user respondents prioritised the availability of parking spaces and charges for visits of 1-3 hours, closely followed by spaces / charges aimed at shorter visits. There is also a strong desire for easier arrangements and better facilities for parking, with some indicating that there needs to be consolidation of car parking whilst also increasing the number of spaces (e.g. multi-storey car parks), while others suggest some desire for ‘park & ride’ schemes.

#3 - Objective 3: Transform perceptions of Crewe town centre

The perceptions of Crewe town centre ranked joint second as a RDF objective, which was broadly reflected in responses to other questions and comments at consultation events. These overlapped to some extent with issues related to other objectives (e.g. retail offer / occupancy and accessibility) but also to other matters, such as the appearance and cleanliness of buildings /

surfaces, and the provision of seating and planting in the town centre. Comments were also made in relation to the town's identity, particularly in relation to its rail heritage, and how this could be better reflected in the town centre, and to avoid Crewe becoming a 'clone town'.

2.3 Planning Policy

The RDF sets out a proposed new boundary for the town centre and the consultation sought views on six key statements related to this and other planning elements linked to viability and future uses in the town centre. In the survey responses there was broad agreement with each of these, with:

- 83% agreeing that there should be flexibility for different uses within the town centre;
- 82% agreeing that Grand Junction Retail park should be recognised as an out of centre location, but should be better connected to the town centre,
- 76% agreeing that Nantwich Road should be recognised as a strategic location for investment
- 66% agreeing that the identified Macon Way site should be allocated to provide a suitable location for retailers who do not thrive in the town centre;
- 58% agreeing that revisions should be made to the town centre boundary; and
- 57% agreeing that it is appropriate to re-allocate the Mill Street site to residential use

2.4 Other priorities for regeneration

Alongside the three main priorities for regeneration, respondents suggested several other less significant priorities for regeneration, and these are listed below. It should be noted that these are not listed necessarily in order of priority:

Nightlife: 76% of respondents stated that "more / better places to eat / socialise" would encourage them to use the town centre more, with respondents suggesting better restaurants, bars, pubs and music venues as ways of increasing the night time economy.

Better markets: 73% of respondents felt that "more / better quality markets" would encourage them to use the town centre more, and over half, 59%, stated that if the Indoor Market on Earle Street were to be improved, they would use it more. Comments were also made regarding the current location of the outdoor market and that this would be better located at Lyceum Square, adjacent to the indoor market. Respondents suggested ways of improving the Indoor Market such as improving the variety and quality of produce and better marketing of it.

Public realm: 54% of respondents stated that "more / better public realm" would encourage them to use the town centre more. Respondents stated they wanted more / better public spaces / green spaces and a better built environment.

Leisure facilities: 54% of respondents stated that "more / better leisure facilities" would encourage them to use the town centre more, with leisure facilities 3rd overall for site usage. Generally, respondents, particularly younger ones, wanted the town centre to be a more enjoyable place to be, with more activities on the high street.

Bus station and facilities: Bus services are used by a select number of town centre visitors, with 9% of respondents using the bus to get to Crewe. However, 44% of all respondents felt “a better bus station” would encourage them to use the town centre more. Support for a new bus station on the Royal Arcade site was also high, with 61% of respondents stating that it should feature a new, better bus interchange. When asked what features bus users would like to see in a new bus interchange, bus users indicated that the priorities are a covered waiting area with seating, and a bus station within 5 minutes walking distance of the town centre / within the vicinity of Delamere Street.

2.5 Using the town centre

On average, 75% of respondents visited Crewe town centre at least weekly, with 67% spending under 2 hours there each time they went. The average amount of time spent by each respondent in Crewe town centre was 135 hours per year.

Some respondents spent more time in Crewe each year than others, including: Those under 35 years old; those travelling in by bike; and those living in the most deprived areas. This suggests that to increase dwell time, encouraging accessibility by bike would be beneficial.

Respondents aged 55 plus, and more affluent visitors, spent less time on average in the town centre than other respondents. Car users also used the town centre for less time on average than respondents that travelled in by bike, bus and on foot. This suggests that the town centre is broadly less attractive for the more elderly and affluent, and for those more likely to access the centre by car, than it is to other types of visitors.

2.6 The most popular shopping areas

The most frequently visited areas in Crewe were the following shopping areas: the pedestrianised area (Queensway); Grand Junction Retail Park; and Market Street shopping centre. Areas that were not visited as frequently included Nantwich Road; the markets; Lyceum Theatre; and for activities available on Phoenix Leisure Park.

Different types of respondents also visited the different shopping areas more frequently than others. Car users were more likely to visit Grand Junction Retail Park than others, while bus users were more likely to use the shopping areas situated in the town centre. This could highlight the importance of free car parking, and suggest issues with a lack of connectivity between the town centre and Grand Junction Retail Park.

3.0 Overall conclusions

Overall this has been an extremely successful consultation – widespread engagement has been achieved; the level of response is unprecedented for Cheshire East Council. It is clear that the level of feeling about Crewe runs high – stakeholders desperately want Crewe to maximise its potential. Given the town’s location (‘gateway to the North’), heritage and the prospects for HS2, this potential is high.

Consultation feedback has suggested many ways for regeneration of the town to proceed, with much detail being provided as to how that might be achieved. It is encouraging that respondents strongly support regeneration, and agree with the vision for regeneration. It is also encouraging that the Regeneration Framework objectives broadly contain the three main priorities for regeneration as identified by respondents.

The findings of the consultation will be used to inform the Council’s plans and policies for Crewe including, most immediately, the final version of its Regeneration Delivery Framework.