

BASILDON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to: Regeneration and Economic Development Committee
18 November 2021

WICKFORD TOWN CENTRE CONSULTATION

Report by: Director of Growth

Enquiries to: Caroline Saunders – Acting Head of Regeneration on 07595 414901
or caroline.saunders@basildon.gov.uk

Enclosures: Enclosure No.1 – Consultation analysis

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The purpose of this report is to review the outcome of the recent public consultation exercise undertaken in connection with the future regeneration of Wickford Town Centre.

CORPORATE PLAN AMBITIONS

- Place
- Prosperity

WARD(S):

Wickford Castledon
Wickford North
Wickford Park

RECOMMENDATION:

That Committee notes the outcome of the Wickford Town Centre public consultation exercise.

BACKGROUND

The regeneration of Wickford Town Centre remains a key priority for the council. There is a need to continue to rejuvenate and improve the vibrancy of this town centre. Wickford has a growing population and it is important that the town centre is revitalised to encourage inward investment to accommodate this growth and to ensure that Wickford is sustainable as a retail and leisure location.

In September 2021, Regeneration and Economic Development Committee approved to commence a public consultation exercise to understand public aspiration for Wickford Town Centre (Minute No. 2021/494).

Town Centre Consultation

Following approval at Regeneration and Economic Development Committee (Minute No. 2021/494) the consultation was launched on the Council's website on 20 September 2021. It was publicised as set out in the communications strategy, which included promotion on the Council's website, social media channels and through local publications. It ran for 4 weeks and closed on 18 October 2021. The consultation received 1,672 responses and a brief summary based on an initial review is set out below (final analysis of data will be published on the website):

- The results showed that the majority of respondents visit the Town Centre at least once per week.
- The most popular shopping destinations visited by respondents were Chelmsford Lakeside and Basildon.
- When respondents visit Wickford Town Centre the majority either walk or travel by car.
- When asked about redesigning the Town Centre the majority would like to improve the retail offer, with the least popular option being to build more homes.
- Respondents would like to see an improved evening economy.
- A large number of respondents visit the market at least 1-2 times per month.
- A large number would visit the market more often if it was increased in size with more stalls.
- When considering new homes being built in the town centre, the greatest priority was given to supporting infrastructure, with the least priority given to optimising the number available.
- High priority was given to green space and enhancing the design and appearance of the town centre.
- The majority of respondents think the Saturday road closure has been successful, and think it should become a permanent feature.

Full results can be found in **Enclosure No. 1** and are still being analysed. Final results will be published to the website.

LEGISLATION/POLICY

There was no statutory duty to undertake the consultation exercise. However, a duty to consult can arise from the common law duty to act fairly, for example because of the potential impact on residents and/or because of past practice in consulting.

Lawful consultation needs to be undertaken at a formative stage when proposals are being developed. With regard to the timeframe for consultation, the requirement is for this to be reasonable and this is ultimately a matter for the Council to determine, taking into

account such factors as the complexity of proposals and how long it will take residents to consider and respond to proposals.

Effective consultation will need to include information on why changes are being proposed, details of the proposals, the criteria that will be used to develop a recommendation(s) and the design of any future services.

The outcome of the consultation must be conscientiously considered as part of any decision-making process to inform the recommendation(s) for change.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Corporate Plan Ambitions

Place – the consultation has provided public opinion on residential design and housing priorities within the town centre. It can be used to inform future regeneration plans for the town centre.

Prosperity – the consultation has enabled local people and businesses to be heard, understanding their views on how to increase footfall providing an improved local economy. It can help to strengthen Wickford's position as a vibrant market town. It can also encourage inward investment into the town.

Financial Implications

Any further regeneration schemes identified as part of the town centre consultation will be subject to option appraisals including assessment of financial viability and development of funding strategies.

Risk Management Implications

No risk implications are set out as Committee are not being asked to make a decision.

Diversity and Inclusion Implications

Service Impact Assessments will be undertaken if individual projects progress.

Other Relevant Considerations

None.

Background Papers

None.