

We
Made
That

Richmond Town Centre Engagement

Findings Report



Acknowledgements

We Made That and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames would like to thank all those individuals and organisations who actively participated in this engagement process.

Additionally, we extend a special appreciation to Alan Benson MBE for his contributions to this project. Sadly, Mr. Benson passed away on December 17, 2023.

Revisions tracker

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-	08-12-23	Draft issue for client review
A	12-01-24	Second draft
B	30-01-24	Final issue

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The voices of Richmond town centre

Richmond town centre has long been an iconic destination, renowned for its rich history, heritage, beautiful green spaces and easy access to the River Thames. However, shifting lifestyles and behaviours, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, have challenged the town centre's ability to meet the evolving needs of its residents, workers, and visitors. This necessitates a thoughtful re-evaluation of its future.

To ensure Richmond's vibrancy and understand priority areas for intervention, this research engaged with a diverse range of stakeholders – residents, visitors, shopkeepers, office workers, students, and more – to gather insights, experiences and ideas. This feedback will inform a future vision for Richmond town centre, empowering the creation of a vibrant and thriving area for generations to come.

Richmond town centre has been a centre of trading, culture and socialising for many centuries. Most people enjoy the busyness of a town centre, the choice and occasional surprise of different activities and the chance to combine practical activities with pleasure.

But like many other town centres, Richmond needs to respond to wide-ranging changes in social habits, retail patterns, transport choices, health agendas, public policy and impacts of the pandemic.

There is an opportunity for pause and reflection around what the priorities should be for the town centre moving forward. Moreover, and most importantly, this is an opportunity to make sure that any vision for Richmond town centre comes from the people who use it most.

Voices of Richmond

This research brings together a diverse range of Richmond's voices - from residents to shopkeepers, and from students to shoppers. It highlights thematic areas and topics that are most important to them and offers insights that will help guide future plans.

Over the course of 12 weeks, 1482 people participated in this engagement work and shared their experiences through workshops, webinars, pop-up events, drop-in sessions, in-depth interviews and conversations and an online survey.



Richmond town centre

Key to this process was also hearing the voices of people who may not usually self-select for engagement processes. Working through local stakeholder groups, community organisations, schools and businesses, this work sought to involve people from all walks of life to gather a diverse range of insight.

Priority areas

Through these conversations, 6 key thematic topics emerged as priority areas for Richmond town centre:

Diversity of use on the high street

Richmond's high street faces a tug-of-war between diverse preferences. Some residents find its existing offer adequate, while others, especially locals, lament the recent shops and would like a greater variety. Closures and the influx of coffee shops have left many dissatisfied with limited options and a desire for greater diversity. Visibility is a key concern, especially for local businesses. There is a potential to rethink the high street offer and ensure that the space is accessible and enjoyable for both residents and visitors.

Movement

There is general consensus that the traffic and congestion in the town centre is an ongoing issue and challenge that needs to be resolved. However, any resolution will require careful consideration and must carefully assess the varying degrees of impact on different groups of individuals.

At present, the experience of moving through the high street is unpleasant for most as the public



Bus stop outside of Richmond train station

realm becomes an unwelcoming place to pause due to noise and safety issues, and there is along-term health impact from pollutants especially for younger and older residents.

Residents have many detailed (and sometimes conflicting) ideas regarding ways forward. But there is broad agreement that there needs to be a sustained focus on reducing barriers to walking, cycling and using public transport, that traffic needs to be reduced, and that practical solutions are in place to support the mobility of people with disabilities.

Heritage and Identity

The identity of Richmond town centre is intricately linked to its rich heritage, with a widespread acknowledgement that safeguarding this historical legacy is integral to sustaining the town's allure for both residents and visitors.

There is a collective eagerness to actively commemorate

Richmond's heritage, whether through tangible interventions or through organising events and activities. Such initiatives not only align with the community's sentiments but also amplify the town centre's overall appeal.

This enthusiasm underscores that Richmond's heritage need not be perceived as a hindrance to change; rather, it presents an opportunity for celebration, adding depth and character to the local identity.

Public Spaces

While some of Richmond's public spaces are well loved and utilised regularly other areas fall short of expectations.

Richmond's green and blue spaces are one of the town centre's key attractors - and their continued positive presence is fundamental to the future success of Richmond town centre. Some areas within the town centre were felt to be below the expected standard set by the town's general environment;

upgrading these areas can support a high quality town centre experiences.

Accessibility and safety are also key issues that must be considered. Many agreed that the lack of places to rest and dwell and the lack of public toilets in the town centre make the area inaccessible for some. By ensuring that public spaces are accessible and safe to spend time in, Richmond town centre can be a place that is welcoming to all.

Spaces for Young People

Young people constitute a significant portion of Richmond's population, making up a quarter of the total demographic. Despite their substantial presence however, the town centre's offerings for them are limited. This finding also emerges as a key insight from concurrent consultations and engagement activities in the borough, such as those conducted for Richmond's Night Time Strategy and youth engagement in parks and open spaces.

This lack of provision has raised concerns among young people



Sign outside Ham Youth Club

and their families, leading to a sense of exclusion amongst some and creating problems for other groups who may feel intimidated or disrupted by large groups of young people.

By offering engaging youth spaces, activities, and events, the town centre can encourage more young people to spend their time in the area in a positive way. Inclusive and welcoming youth spaces that meet the needs and wants of young people can also make the town centre more inclusive, strengthening community cohesion and fostering a sense of shared identity.

Culture, Leisure and Sport

Richmond's cultural, leisure and sports scene plays a crucial role in fostering community, promoting an active lifestyle, and enhancing the town's appeal. With established institutions like the Museum of Richmond and Richmond Theatre, there's a foundation for cultural engagement, but further growth requires tailored support and strengthened partnerships with the Council.

Participation in cultural, leisure and sporting activities not only boosts personal enjoyment but also improves physical and mental well-being. Investing in high-quality facilities that support these sectors use makes the town more attractive and stimulates economic activity, prosperity, and fosters shared identities. These types of offerings can also build cohesive communities, and meet the diverse needs of Richmond's residents.

Building a future for Richmond town centre

Richmond residents cherish their town, its rich history, and its charming riverside location. However, feelings about the town centre are more mixed. While acknowledging its strengths and individual attractions, many express concerns about its upkeep, loss of beloved shops, and difficulties navigating it.

Looking towards the future, the town centre will need to transform into a vibrant and dynamic hub by addressing levels of vacancy, establishing a programme of events and activities, and investing in more collaborative approaches to strengthen cultural and commercial activity. It will also need to be a place that is inclusive and diverse, where everyone feels a sense of belonging and where the high street caters to a range of needs and preferences.

Public spaces, cultural organisations and educational institutions play a vital role in fostering community bonds and individual well-being. The town centre should look to strengthen its social infrastructure by providing opportunities for shared experiences, learning and leisure which cater to the needs of young people, families and older adults. This will require partnership working across the public, private and third sectors.

By prioritising inclusivity, accessibility and a strong social infrastructure, Richmond can continue to be a vibrant place for many years to come.

01

Introduction

Why here? Why now?

Richmond town centre has long been an iconic destination, renowned for its rich history, heritage, and beautiful green spaces. However, the town centre is facing the challenges of shifting lifestyles, including online shopping, home working, impacts of the pandemic and evolving transportation preferences. This necessitates a thoughtful re-evaluation of the town centre's future and its ability to meet the needs of its residents, workers and visitors.

This report summarises the findings of a twelve-week engagement process and outlines the key priorities, themes, and concerns identified by the local community for the future of Richmond town centre.

On behalf of the London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames, We Made That engaged with people who live, work, study, visit or run businesses in Richmond town centre to understand their priorities and concerns for the future of the area.

Over the course of twelve weeks, a series of engagement activities were held across Richmond to give as many people as possible a chance to have their say. Events were held in the town centre and online, in local schools and community centres, at a local foodbank and at a co-working space. Interviews were held with individuals including various local businesses and networks, charity and advocacy groups, sports and cultural institutions. An open online survey gathered 1116 responses. Residents from age 9 to 90 participated and shared their views on a wide range of issues including the use of the high street, the parks and green spaces, preservation of the town's historic character and cultural activities.

The information shared through this engagement process will help the Council determine the next steps needed in creating a vision for the future of Richmond town centre.

Uniquely Richmond

Richmond is typically seen as distinctly different from other places in London. It attracts visitors from across the capital and further afield who enjoy the attractive and characterful town centre and the riverside stretch, often linking with nearby heritage sites such as Richmond Park and Ham House. It has a rich and varied history and is long considered to be "posh".



Richmond Riverside



Richmond Green

Richmond has above average earnings and house prices and low rates of poverty and unemployment compared to other London boroughs.

In our engagement activities we were keen to probe beneath these broad statistics and stereotypes to understand more about the wide variety of experiences of the town centre, understanding both areas of consensus and areas where opinions and preferences differ.

A changing context

Richmond town centre has been a centre of trading, culture and socialising for many centuries. Most people enjoy the busyness of a town centre, the choice and occasional surprise of different activities and the chance to combine practical activities with pleasure.

But like many other town centres, Richmond needs to respond to wide-ranging changes in social habits, retail patterns, transport choices, health agendas, public policy and impacts of the pandemic. Staff no longer come into the office five days a week. Online shopping is increasingly the first choice for many. Climate change has also spurred an awareness of the health impacts of car use on air quality which has led to the introduction of active travel initiatives in the borough, but traffic congestion is still a concern. Home streaming of films and delivery options like Deliveroo shift the options for Friday night relaxing.

People who have lived or run businesses in Richmond for a while notice the impact of these changes on their



Church Court

familiar town centre. They can feel a sense of loss and a sense of vulnerability, especially regarding the retail sector. It's not possible to ignore these changes, or to go 'back to normal'. But it is important to understand both how they are experienced locally, and what possibilities people perceive to be the way forward to improve their quality of life.

“The quality of the town centre has drastically reduced in the 45 years we have lived here. It has lost its independent shops and now feels like a brash tourist attraction with excess bars and restaurants.”

Voices of Richmond

The role of this report is to reflect in one document the varied voices of Richmond, and the range of views and ideas they have about Richmond town centre. The brief was very open, to find out what is important to residents, workers, visitors and business owners, and to curate these in a format that will be genuinely useful in guiding future plans.

“I hope this opportunity is used to make really significant changes. Richmond has so much to offer but is being left behind.”

The report starts by setting out our approach and methods, giving a sense of the reach and depth of engagement.

The second section is the core presentation of 'what we've heard' and 'why it matters', organised thematically into six areas. These themes emerged as key areas of concern and value to the people we met.

The final section provides a summary of cross cutting issues with a focus on 'looking forward'.

02

Engagement Reach and Insight

- Methodology
- Events Overview
- Survey Insights
- Places Most Mentioned

Methodology

A mixed-methods engagement approach including an online survey, workshops, drop-in events and interviews helped to ensure that a cross section of the community was reached and to allow people to feed their thoughts and ideas into the engagement in various ways.

A balanced and inclusive approach

The methodology was designed to enable the opportunity for the full spectrum of Richmond's communities and stakeholders to engage with this work, from light-touch events to more in-depth conversations. The methods used offer this combination of depth, breadth and scale.

The methodology for this engagement work also made concerted efforts to hear under-represented voices and address inequality of experience. Recognising that public consultation is often highly self-selective, the approach prioritised specificity over breadth on occasions, to bring seldom-heard perspectives into broader debate.

Defining 'Richmond town centre' and its population

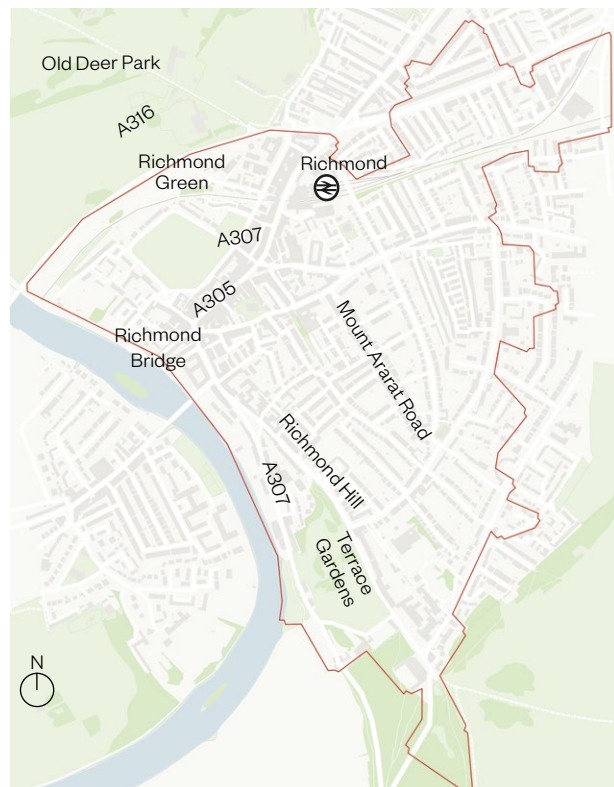
This work acknowledges the multiple ways in which the boundaries of Richmond town centre can be defined and interpreted.

Richmond's Local Plan establishes a working definition of the town centre (see top image opposite), incorporating retail clusters, cultural amenities, and high-density housing, serving as a consistent reference point for the research area. However, in various conversations, individuals described areas beyond this defined boundary as part of the town centre.

Therefore, while the boundaries set by the Local Plan were used as a reference point, openness to diverse perspectives on how people interpreted 'Richmond town centre' was maintained.



Richmond town centre boundary as defined by the Richmond Local Plan



Area used to estimate the town centre's population size defined by LSOA and UK Census Data (2021)

02. Engagement Reach and Insight

Due to discrepancies between the boundaries of the town centre as described by the Local Plan and the scale at which census data is collected, it is not possible to accurately determine the exact population of the town centre area. Nevertheless, a reasonable estimate based on UK Census Data (2021) suggests a population of approximately 5,190 individuals.¹ Taking into account the areas immediately outside the Local Plan boundary to encompass a wider region, the estimated population for the entire area would be 11,585.²

Desk-review of existing data

This work began with a high-level desk review of the spatial, social, and economic characteristics of Richmond town centre. Various data sets and prior reports which outline Richmond's demographic and socioeconomic profile, information relating to the town's transportation, mobility and infrastructure, and land use and planning documents were considered to help build a picture of the town centre (see Appendix B).

Where possible, data from ongoing consultations was also analysed to help triangulate findings and identify opportunities for integration with other Council-led strategies such as the Local Plan, the Richmond Children and Young People's Plan, the Night Time Strategy, the Health and Wellbeing strategy, and the ongoing consultation around youth engagement in parks and open spaces.

This review built a clear picture of the local area, and helped to identify key themes that the engagement process should explore as well as target audiences that should be included.

Engagement process

Between August and October 2023 We Made That held 17 events, 13 one-to-one/one-to-a few interviews and had 366 conversations with those who live, work and visit Richmond town centre. A combination of drop-in-events, workshops, pop-up events and webinars allowed our team to speak to a good cross-section of the population and also ensure that we were

hearing the voices of people who may not usually self-select for engagement processes. We worked through local stakeholder groups, community organisations, schools and businesses to help facilitate these events and conversations.

These events were coupled with an online survey to ensure that a wide-as-possible audience could share their views. Survey questions were designed to ask about various themes from transport to use of space and involved a mixture of question forms including close ended questions, multiple choice and Likert scales. The survey was active online from August - October 2023 and received 1116 responses.

Analysis

The data gathered from the series of conversations, the survey, and the desk-review were brought together to identify the key themes and issues facing Richmond town centre.

The analysis of the data collected painted a clear picture of the key issues and themes emerging for the town centre. This picture is consistent and repetitive, ensuring confidence that this process has captured the most prevalent voices and perspectives.

¹ This is based off of the 2021 UK Census Data for LSOAs Richmond Upon Thames 008B, 006A, and 008A which comprise most of the town centre boundary as described by the Local Plan.

² This is based off of the 2021 UK Census Data for LSOAs Richmond Upon Thames 004C, 004E, 006A, 006B, 008A, 008B, 008C and 008D which comprise the Local Plan town centre boundary area and the immediate surrounding areas.

02. Engagement Reach and Insight



Pop-up event on the High Street (September 2023)



Workshop at the Vineyard School (November 2023)



Drop-in event at Oriiel House (October 2023)

The engagement process at a glance:

12
weeks of engagement from
August - November 2023

1482
total people engaged

1116
online survey responses

366
people engaged through
drop-in events, workshops
and interviews

17
events held including:
6 drop-in sessions
5 workshops
4 pop-up events
2 public webinars

13
one-to-one or one-to-few
interviews conducted with
local organisations

Events Overview

Summary of events:

Public Pop-up events, August - November

Four pop-up events were held in various locations around Richmond town centre. These events aimed to engage residents and visitors with the project.

Public Webinars, September

Two public webinars were held via Zoom to invite those participants to share their views who may not have been able to attend an in person event.

Drop-in sessions, September - November

Six drop-in sessions were strategically held throughout the engagement process to reach a diverse range of stakeholders and ensure inclusive and accessible participation. These sessions aimed to connect with individuals where they are, ensuring that those who might not typically engage in such projects were included. The sessions were held at a youth centre, a community centre, a food bank, an event for elderly residents, a co-working space, and a community college.

Targeted Workshops, September - November

Five workshops were held with various local groups, including two workshops with accessibility advocate groups, one with local businesses and two with local schools.

One-to-one and one-to-a few conversations, September - November

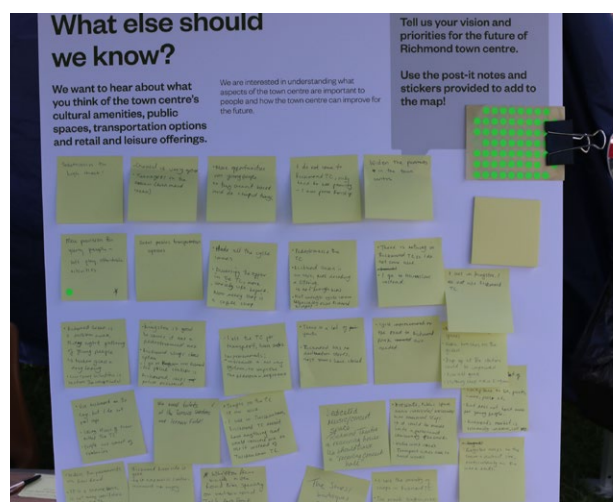
A series of 1-2-1/a few meetings were held in person, online and over the phone, with stakeholders, local businesses, residents and community groups, to identify their experiences and priorities for the town centre.

Online Survey, August - October

We Made That engaged a diverse range of residents, visitors, and businesses through an online public survey. The survey was disseminated via the Council's communications channels, local organisations, and We Made That's social media platforms. 1116 survey submissions were received.



Pop-up at Whittaker Square (September 2023)



Pop-up at MET in the Park (August 2023)



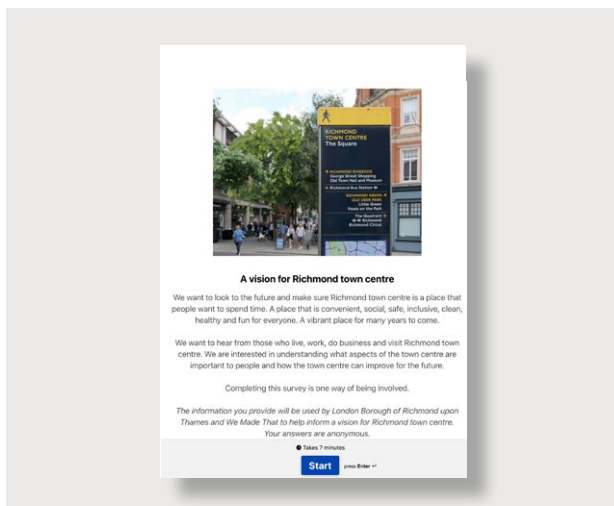
Drop-in at the Cambrian Centre (October 2023)

Survey Insights

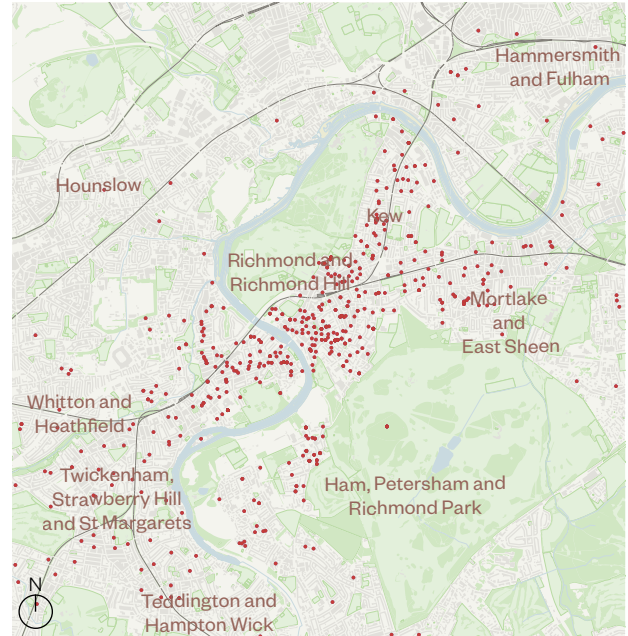
1,116 individuals participated in the online survey, providing a comprehensive understanding of how Richmond town centre is utilised and the priorities for its future development. This report presents the overarching findings, with further insights detailed throughout the document.

Capturing a range of views

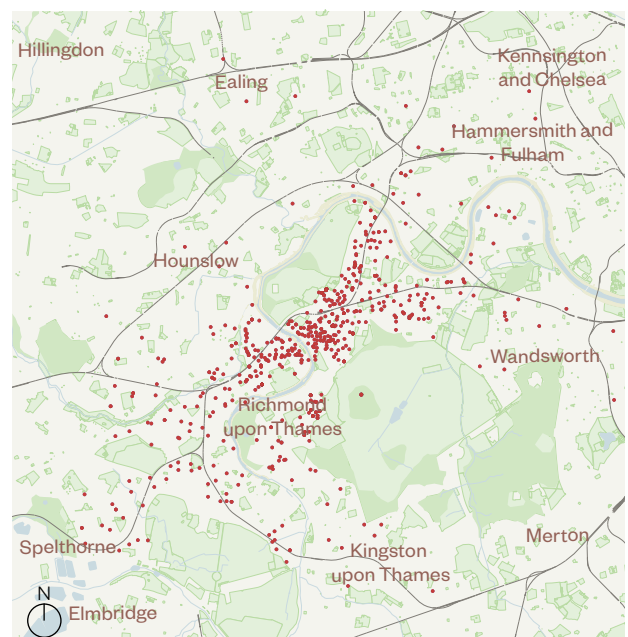
The adjacent images depict the geographical distribution of survey participants, revealing a diverse representation from across the borough, including those residing in and around the town centre, as well as individuals residing in neighbouring communities and beyond. This comprehensive geographic reach facilitated the collection of a wide range of responses, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how various groups utilise Richmond town centre.



The survey was available online from August - October 2023.



Map illustrating the location of survey respondents who live in and around Richmond town centre.



Map illustrating the location of survey respondents who live in or near to Richmond town centre and further afar.

Visiting the town centre

Participants were asked how often they go to the town centre, and what mode of transportation they use to get there. Most people use the town centre a few times a week or even everyday, highlighting the importance of the town centre for people in the area.

The vast majority of respondents indicated that they primarily utilise walking, the bus or cycling as their primary mode of transportation to Richmond town centre, highlighting a strong preference for active and environmentally friendly mobility options.

The proportion of people who walk to the town centre was particularly high amongst those who live in or near the town centre (82%) and for those between the ages of 26-40 (62%). It is notable, though, that the survey data reflects respondents from a wide geography, suggesting that the high proportion of people using active travel applies to a large catchment.

Common reasons included the proximity of their residences to the town centre, the ease and convenience of walking, and the avoidance of traffic and parking difficulties. Many participants emphasised the health benefits of walking, with some mentioning the pleasant walk along the river and through green spaces. A recurring theme was the impracticality of driving due to traffic congestion and limited parking, making walking the quickest, cheapest, and most stress-free option. Some respondents also mentioned the unreliable nature of bus services and the desire to contribute to environmental sustainability by choosing to walk. Overall, the responses reflect a strong inclination towards walking for its accessibility, health benefits, and alignment with the local environment.

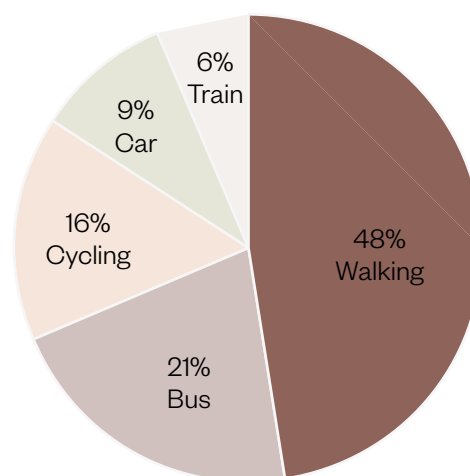
Cycling is most popular for those between the ages of 15-25 with 26% of respondents indicating that this is their main mode of transportation. Cycling is also popular for those who visit the town centre (24%).

Participants cited several reasons for choosing cycling, including its speed, convenience, and the absence of parking issues. Many respondents emphasised the health and environmental benefits of cycling, describing it as a non-polluting, sustainable, and enjoyable mode of transport. The reliability of journey times, particularly in contrast to potential traffic congestion and poor air quality in Richmond town centre, was a significant factor. Participants

also appreciated the exercise component of cycling and the ability to navigate through green spaces like Richmond Park and along the river. Some mentioned the difficulties of parking for cars and the unreliability of public transport as reasons for opting for cycling. Overall, the responses indicate a strong endorsement of cycling for its efficiency, health benefits, and environmental friendliness.

The majority of respondents who indicated that they use the car to travel to Richmond town centre are visitors to the area. The survey responses indicate that people choose to use their cars primarily for reasons of convenience, speed, and flexibility. Many respondents cited the ability to carry heavy shopping bags, travel with young children, and the impracticality of public transport as key factors influencing their choice. Concerns about unreliable and infrequent bus and train services, as well as constant rail works causing disruption and difficulties with mobility, were commonly mentioned. It is notable that at the time the survey was carried out there was significant road work happening at Manor Circus. This was a significant pressure point for many participants as the effect caused borough wide disruptions for motorist and public transport users.

How do you travel to the town centre?

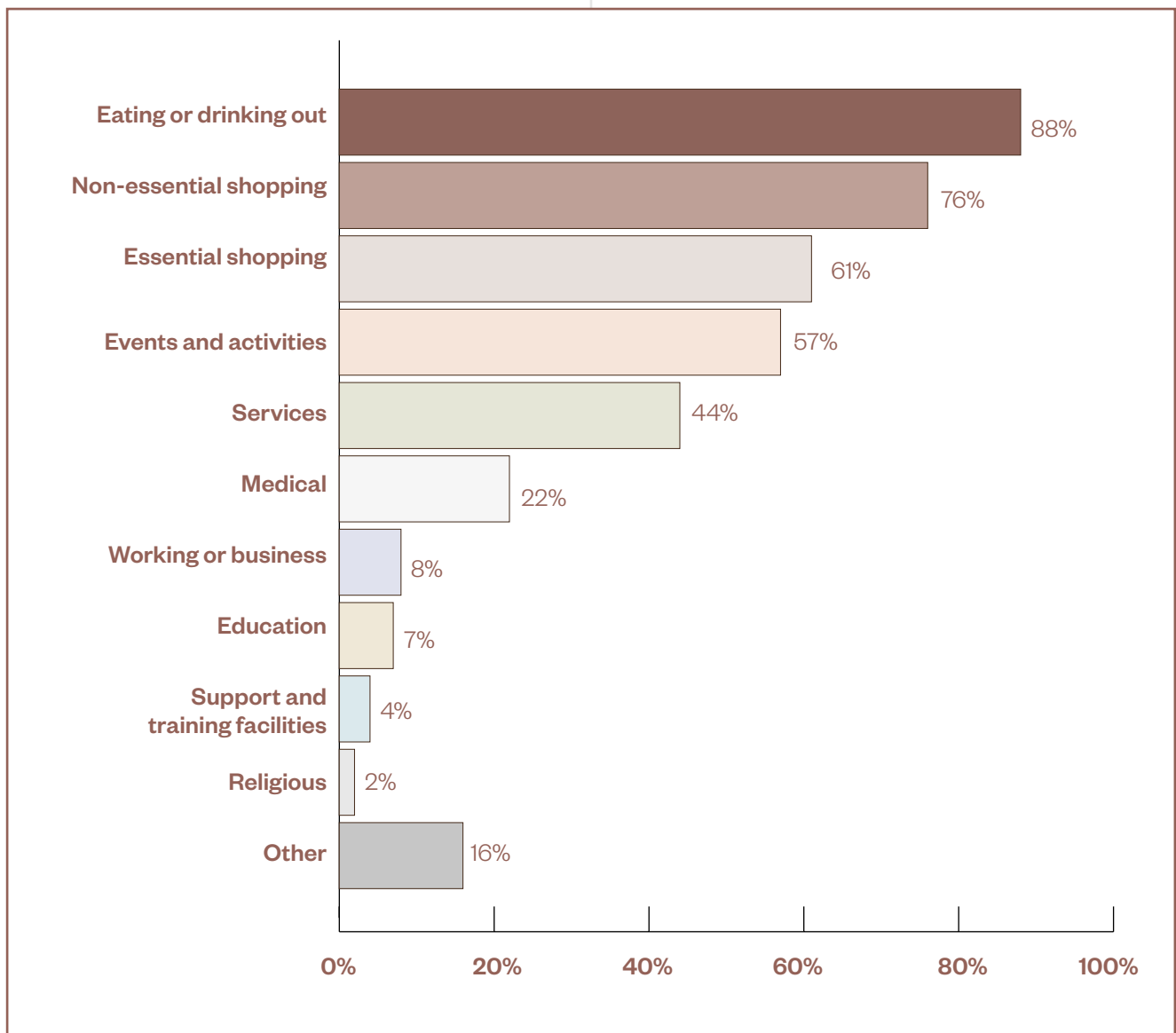


What are the main reasons for visiting the town centre?

The vast majority of people who responded to the survey indicated that they visit the town centre to eat or drink out. This was true for individuals regardless of their residential status (live, work, or visit), as well as for participants across all age groups. While dining and drinking was the top priority for all respondents, the percentage of individuals who reported this as their primary reason varied significantly.

Specifically, 87% of town centre visitors listed dining and drinking as their primary purpose, while only 30% of Richmond residents listed it as their primary reason for visiting the town centre. This suggests that dining and drinking hold greater appeal for non-residents, who may be seeking a more recreational or leisure-focused experience.

In contrast, Richmond residents demonstrated a more balanced distribution of reasons for visiting the town centre. For those who live in Richmond, the spread of uses was more equal between eating and drinking out (30%), essential shopping (28%), non essential shopping (25%) and services (21%). This pattern aligns with the town centre's role as a hub for daily needs and local amenities.



02. Engagement Reach and Insight

The town centre's appeal to visitors is further reinforced by their preference for non-essential shopping (76%) and events and activities (57%), underscoring the town centre's ability to attract visitors seeking a more diverse and dynamic experience beyond everyday necessities.

'Other' sentiments

Respondents who selected 'other' provided additional insights into their motivations for visiting the town centre, encompassing a broad spectrum of activities.

These included engaging in recreational and leisure activities including visiting the green spaces, exploring cultural institutions like the Richmond Library, cinema, and Richmond Theatre, and actively participating in fitness and sporting activities. Others indicated that they visit the town centre for socialising and connecting with friends and family. Additionally, the town centre serves as a practical destination for running daily errands and accessing essential services, with visits to banks and grocery stores being notable examples. Some respondents view their visits as an opportunity for exercise, while others utilise the town centre as part of their commuting routine, involving activities like changing buses, catching trains, or simply cycling through.

A diversity of uses

Overall, the survey results indicate that Richmond town centre serves a variety of purposes for residents, workers, and visitors alike. While dining and drinking is a popular activity for all, the town centre's appeal extends to a range of other needs and interests, including essential shopping, non-essential shopping, services, events, and activities.

Top priorities for Richmond town centre

Participants were tasked with identifying their foremost priorities for Richmond town centre from a predefined list of options, formulated based on insights gathered during the desk-review phase. The survey platform randomised the presentation order of these options, allowing individuals the flexibility to interpret the significance and meaning of each statement in a manner aligned with their own perspectives.

Overall respondents emphasised three key priorities for Richmond town centre: diversifying and expanding retail and leisure offerings (65%), enhancing public spaces (53%), and protecting the natural spaces (49%). Despite a general consensus, there were some notable variations between age groups and residential status.

Young people between the ages of 15 and 25 are particularly interested in active travel, with 33% deeming it a top priority. They also highly value expanding opportunities for young people (27%) and providing more cultural offerings (27%).

Those employed in Richmond town centre placed a high emphasis on supporting people who work there, ranking it third in their priorities. Business owners, placed it fourth.

Visitors to Richmond town centre demonstrated a strong preference for active travel options. A significant 27% of respondents who visit the town centre listed it as a top concern, surpassing the priority given to this issue by Richmond residents (9%), Richmond employees (10%), and Richmond business owners (7%). This highlights the importance of active travel for those who engage with the town centre but don't necessarily live or work there.

13% of overall respondents who responded 'other' highlighted priorities including:

- A resounding call to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality, with many advocating for pedestrianisation strategies.
- Requests for enhanced and more cost-effective parking facilities.
- Concerns regarding the increasing number of vacant store fronts and the types of businesses

02. Engagement Reach and Insight

entering the town centre, suggesting a need for a diversified retail mix.

- Calls for improved maintenance of pavements, streets, and public spaces, including the installation of public toilets
- Expressions for community-focused initiatives, such as repair and share hubs, outdoor dining areas, and activities tailored for children and teenagers
- Rising concerns about safety, particularly the reported increase in anti-social behaviour.



An example of one of the new stores establishing themselves along the high street.



Lower George Street offers a public space for people to rest and relax while visiting the town centre.

What are your top three priorities for Richmond town centre?

65%
Increase/diversify the town's retail and leisure offering

53%
Enhance our public spaces

49%
Protect our natural spaces

This was followed by:

- Improve Safety (33%)
- Provide more cultural offerings (23%)
- Expand opportunities for young people (22%)
- Promote opportunities for active travel (22%)
- Provide opportunities to improve health and well-being (12%)
- Support people who work in Richmond (10%)
- Other (13%)

How do you rate the following aspects of the town centre?

People were asked to rate various aspects of the town centre including the variety of things to do during the day, the traffic and air quality and the quality of the public spaces.

Traffic and air quality emerged as a key concern, with the majority of respondents ranking it very poor or

poor. Experience of walking and cycling in the town centre and the variety of things to do in the city for young people were also ranked poorly.

On the other hand, the quality of the green spaces, parks and rivers were rated as very good and people generally felt positively about the evening and night time offer, the experience of using public transport to get into the city centre, and the quality of the public spaces.

	1 Very poor	2	3	4	5 Very good
Variety of things to do in the town centre during the day (e.g. shops, cafés, cultural offer)	6%	23%	38%	28%	8%
Evening and night time offer in the town centre (e.g. restaurants, bars)	5%	16%	38%	34%	9%
Experience of walking and cycling in the town centre	18%	24%	31%	21%	8%
Experience of using public transport to get into the town centre	8%	15%	32%	32%	15%
Traffic and air quality in the town centre	30%	30%	27%	13%	4%
The quality of the green spaces, parks and rivers	2%	5%	16%	40%	40%
Variety of things to do in the town for young people	20%	34%	35%	9%	4%
The quality of our public spaces (town squares, Richmond riverside, areas in front of the station etc.)	7%	17%	34%	32%	12%

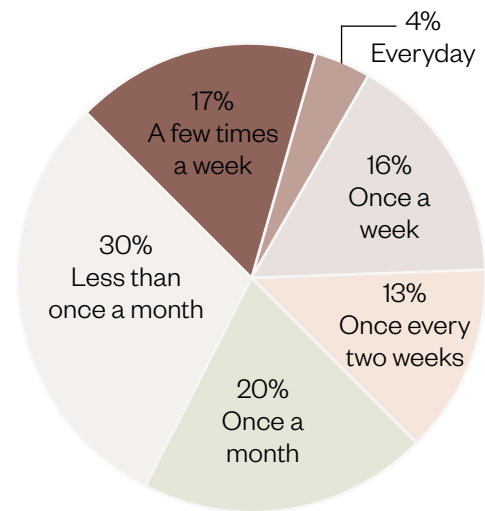
Dynamic with other town centres

We also regularly heard about how people interface with other town centres, including Twickenham and Kingston. This was explicitly asked in the survey, but was also discussed as part of the in-person conversations.

The survey response indicates that most people use other town centres, namely Kingston or Twickenham either less than once a month or once a month and they use these centres for non-essential shopping followed by eating or drinking out.

This was echoed in the conversations that were had as many highlighted the more diverse retail and leisure offer that these spaces provide.

How often do you typically use other town centres (i.e. Kingston or Twickenham)?



What are your main reasons for visiting these other centres?

72% Non-essential shopping

52% Eating or drinking out

38% Essential Shopping

10% Working or business

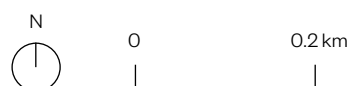
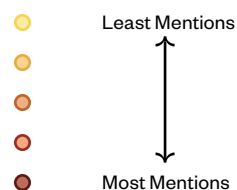
15% Other

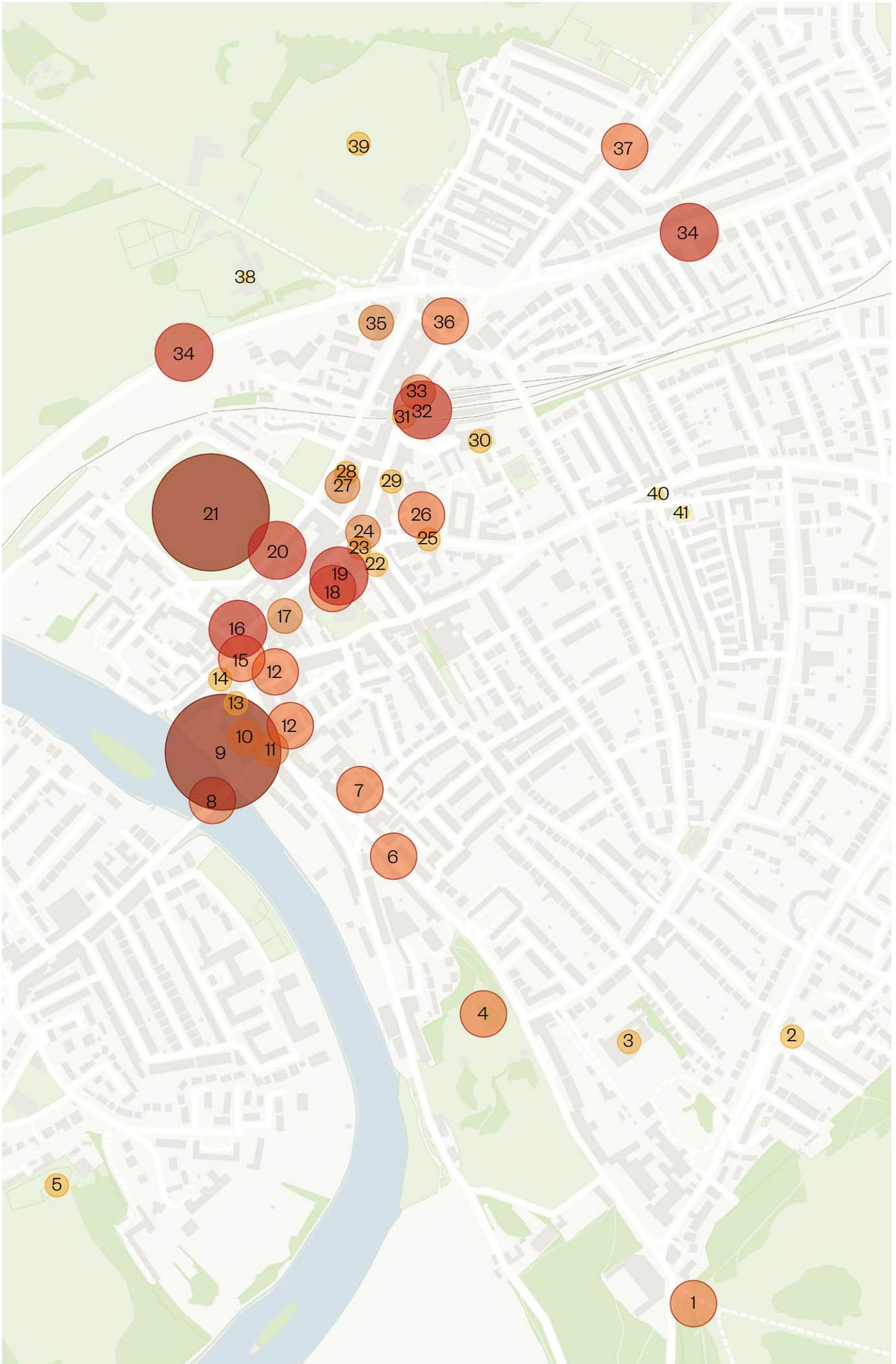
Places Most Mentioned

Our engagement process revealed a recurring pattern of place mentions, suggesting a concentration of interest in specific areas. This map visualises the frequency with which each location was mentioned, highlighting the hotspots of attention.

Key

1. Richmond Park
2. Cambrian Centre
3. The Vineyard School
4. Terrace Gardens
5. Marble Hill
6. Richmond Hill
7. Vineyard Community
8. Richmond Bridge
9. Riverside
10. Heron Square (Duck Pond Market)
11. Roundabout/Crossing Point
12. Odeon
13. Town Hall and Museum of Richmond
14. Curzon
15. Crossing outside Waterstones
16. 80 George Street (former House of Fraser building)
17. Marks and Spencer
18. Church Walk
19. Tesco
20. Parking around Richmond Green
21. Richmond Green
22. Whole Foods
23. Lower George Street
24. The Quadrant crossing
25. Bus station
26. Waitrose
27. Richmond Theatre
28. Library
29. Pick up and Set down parking
30. NCP parking
31. Taxi rank outside the station
32. Richmond Station
33. Bus Stop
34. A316
35. Richmond and Hillcroft Adult Community College
36. Orange Tree Theatre
37. Kew Road
38. Pools on the Park
39. Old Deer Park
40. Small Steps
41. Worples Way Play Area





- Diversity of Use on the High Street
- Movement
- Heritage and Identity
- Public Space
- Space for Young People
- Culture, Leisure and Sport

Diversity of Use on the High Street



Diversity of Use on the High Street

What we have heard

Who is Richmond high street for?

“I shop and have dinner in Richmond all the time, it is great!”

Richmond’s retail is varied, providing a range of offers from grocery stores to boutique retail. These factors have contributed to the town’s attractiveness, some of whom used it frequently as their primary shopping location.

There were others, most notably hyper-local residents, those who live within minutes of the town centre, who expressed general dissatisfaction with the existing retail offer. Many referred to the loss of key places such as the House of Fraser, H&M and HSBC bank as some of the key losses to the existing retail. Others referred to the loss of some of the independent retail stores. Overall, it was felt that Richmond town centre did not provide the services required by the public and did not have any specified offer.

Kingston was regularly raised as a positive reference, and in many cases local people chose to frequent Kingston Town Centre instead of the often shorter journey to Richmond Town Centre. This was due to the variety of offer, presence of popular (and

often affordable) high street retailers and facilities measuring-up to modern accessibility standards.

Another group of people were particularly interested in Richmond’s potential to host a shopping experience that was focused on a independent-boutique offer. Often referencing Wimbledon Village as an exemplary precedent.

Generally, local people requested different focuses for the town centre, often linked to their means. However, the consensus was the high street needed to be focused on a specific target market, rather than providing an offer covering a wider target audience.

Loss of shops

“It would be good if there were a good mix of businesses in Richmond Town Centre - at the moment it’s just coffee shops and shabby vape shops. Much better to encourage small businesses and not so many chains.”

As a result of the closure of several prominent retail stores and the emergence of coffee shops,



Alligators Mouth Bookshop



Lower George Street

03. Key Themes

a significant number of individuals expressed their dissatisfaction with the limited variety of shopping options in Richmond town centre.

While the high concentration of coffee-houses was recognised as a concern by many, it is crucial to acknowledge their popularity. Frequently visited by tourists and individuals in need of workspace, the coffee and ice cream establishments on the high street were seen as complementary to local attractions like Riverside and Richmond Green.

120 people mentioned 'cafe' or 'coffee shop' in their feedback to the online survey.

Some attributed the closures to the burden of high business rates. Additionally, complaints arose regarding the transient nature of numerous store openings, often followed by their unfortunate closure, only to be replaced by similar establishments.

Non-retail uses on the high street

Generally the presence of vacant retail units on Richmond town centre were understood to be



Brewers Lane

negative, however, some viewed it as an opportunity to introduce new, non-retail-focused, uses to the high street.

“A youth centre in the town centre would be sick!”

In response to the lack of youth provision available in Richmond, paired with the high rate of vacancy, several participants mentioned the potential the vacant units could have for hosting youth and/or other community-focused uses on the high street. Suggestions ranged from permanent facilities or temporary pop-up stores and activity stations.

“Richmond misses a trick by not having many larger gathering spaces indoors for families. There are many households with disposable income who could be enticed to Richmond if there were things like a soft play cafe, an open cultural space where people could gather, or a mixed use hospitality space.”

These suggestions were closely linked to the desire for general activation of the high street. Several community members requested public events and community focused festivals. Many felt there was not enough community activity in Richmond town centre.

The absence of local banks and utility service stores on the high street has led to a growing demand for a service centre among the public. Many individuals have voiced concerns regarding the challenges encountered when navigating online platforms and the lack of personalised assistance when dealing with such organisations. These difficulties have compelled individuals who rely on in-person interactions to travel further to access physical support spaces. Additionally, there has been a few suggestions to host council officers within the proposed “service centre” to provide direct in-person assistance.

03. Key Themes

Promotion of offer

“We need a sign directing people to us from the station, Richmond Theatre has a sign, but we have more daily visitors.”

Business owners and managers of local institutions expressed concerns about the potential lack of visibility for their organisations, attributed to the absence of a presence on the high street and limited signage directing people towards them.

This challenge was further exacerbated by the inability to erect signs due to heritage restrictions, making it difficult for visitors to the town centre to locate these establishments.

Working from Richmond

“Richmond has a good food offering for lunch time.”

The impact of the closure of major retailers was also experienced by independent businesses, whom held the sentiment that the smaller stores (such as themselves) played a crucial role in holding Richmond town centre together. Nevertheless, there was a lack of formal support or a mechanism for sustaining a network, apart from direct outreach. Some individuals believed that establishing an independent business support group or forum could be beneficial for the high street.

While Richmond town centre’s Business Improvement District, Be Richmond, and the Richmond Chamber of Commerce offer valuable support for local businesses, it was acknowledged that this support primarily caters to fee-paying businesses. Independent businesses expressed concerns about their limited liquidity, making it challenging to afford regular fees for such organisations. Consequently, there is a consensus that any business support forum should ideally be free of charge, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for all businesses, particularly those operating independently.

Why this is important

Richmond Town Centre caters to a diverse mix of people across various demographics, each with unique needs that support a blend of activities. The town’s varied offerings make it appealing to a wide audience, yet it may also pose limitations for those seeking specific shopping experiences. While identifying a target shopping experience could provide a stronger town identity and attract new shops, it runs the risk of deterring those with different interests.

The issue of vacant units persists in the town centre, presenting an opportunity to reimagine their use beyond retail. Shifting the focus towards community-oriented places, programmes and public events, particularly given that most community activities occur outside the town centre, could infuse vibrancy into the area.

Any initiatives that seek to address town centre vacancy, either through commercial or community uses, will need to work closely with landowners and businesses. As such, dedicated partnership working will be required to address this challenge.

Support for local businesses is crucial, requiring the establishment of support groups and improved advertisement mechanisms, especially for independent businesses who may not be a part of the BID or Chamber of Commerce programmes. Overall, enhancing the clarity and visibility of different areas within the town centre, adapting the use of spaces, and providing comprehensive support could contribute to a more accessible and enjoyable experience for both residents and visitors.

Movement



Movement

What we've heard

Transport offer

The transport offer in Richmond town centre is understood to be one of the town's greatest assets as its connected to several desirable destinations and offered a wide range of transport options including, national rail, overground and bus services.

Additionally, the step-free access at the station makes it a primary station for several users with special mobility requirements. In some cases it is one of the only stations accessible enough for them.

“All of the local railway stations (St Margarets etc.) aren't wheelchair accessible, Richmond Station is.”

Despite its excellent transport links to central London, Richmond's travel infrastructure appears to be falling short, particularly along the traffic-congested high street. This disparity has created a disjointed and unpleasant experience for all users, hindering enjoyment of the town centre.

The tension within Richmond's current travel infrastructure

The debate surrounding Richmond's transportation infrastructure has a long and complex history, reflecting a broader discussion about the balance between environmental sustainability, public health, and individual mobility choices. While there have been various schemes proposed and implemented over the years, there remains a sense of dissatisfaction among many residents, visitors and business owners regarding the current situation.

“Pedestrianisation & cycle schemes must be treated very carefully, and with suspicion - do not waste money on them, the consequences are difficult to predict and are as likely

to harm local businesses; do nothing without small time limited pilots.”

Active travel infrastructure

Options for active travel and the infrastructures needed to support them was a regularly mentioned topic throughout the engagement process.

A prominent finding of the engagement process was the significant variation in cycling infrastructure quality across the borough. While some areas have good cycling provisions, many people feel that the town centre itself does not, leaving cyclists feeling frustrated and unsafe. Members of Richmond Cycling Campaign and other stakeholders and residents repeatedly expressed their concerns about George Street, citing its lack of cycle paths, heavy traffic, and excessive noise and pollution as significant deterrents to cycling. Additionally, there was a strong call for the development of a network of cycle lanes to better connect Richmond's parks, schools, and other key destinations.

“Richmond suffers from too many vehicles and too little pedestrian space. Cyclists have little provision with no cycle lanes or contra-flows.”



Two buses passing along The Quadrant

03. Key Themes

Pavements and walkways also emerged as a frequent topic of discussion. Participants raised concerns about the narrow width of the pavements in all areas of the town centre, which contributes to congestion in pedestrian areas. The issue was particularly acute near bus stops along the Quadrant, where people describe how the walkways become overcrowded, forcing pedestrians to encroach onto the streets.

Participants stressed that better pavements would not only allow a safer and more enjoyable experience for pedestrians but encourage them to frequent the town centre more often.

“The worst aspect about Richmond is the canyon effect of traffic in the town centre. Having wider pavements with alternative through routes would enhance the experience.”

The riverside was another specific area that came up when discussing modes of walking and cycling. We heard how the riverside is widely enjoyed by residents and visitors, particularly for cycling and leisure activities, however its popularity has also resulted in several challenges. The volume of people using the riverside can lead to congestion, particularly during the summer months, which can pose safety concerns and hinder the enjoyment of the space.

Parking

Parking in and around the town centre is a concern for both residents and visitors with the main issues being cost and availability.

In both the survey and in conversations, local residents referenced the Richmond Parking Card which entitles you to 30 minutes of free parking. While many highlighted that this is a nice option to have, there was widespread agreement that the allotted time of 30 minutes was inadequate to allow for a proper shopping experience in the town centre. Those who have experience using the card have expressed that a time of 60 minutes would allow them to accomplish what they need to in the town centre.

Local residents have also expressed frustration with the difficulty of finding parking due to the widespread use of private off-street parking spaces instead of designated public car parks. The limited parking options were one of the reasons stated for people not wanting to visit the town centre.

The lack of adequate cycle parking has also been identified as a significant issue, hindering the use of cycling as a viable mode of transportation.

53 survey respondents independently expressed that additional cycle parking would encourage them to travel and use the town centre more often.

Movement through the high street

Although participants expressed their appreciation for the alleys and shortcuts that connect to the main high street, movement along the high street itself poses a challenge for many users at various points. Despite its seemingly straightforward layout, the combination of traffic, poorly organised and “confused crossings”, and inadequate infrastructure can make navigating the high street an unpleasant experience.

“We actively seek out businesses on those side roads, so we are away from the main drag.”

The current road layout, while offering some improvements through the one-way system, fails to adequately prioritise cyclists, forcing them to mount the pavement with pedestrians. This situation has resulted in increased friction and reportedly anti-social behaviour, particularly from delivery cyclists. However, there was general dissatisfaction with the excessive traffic, which generates excessive noise, safety concerns, and long-term health risks from pollutants, particularly for younger and older residents.

03. Key Themes

Car users, cyclists, and pedestrians alike acknowledged that the current environment is negatively impacted by traffic congestion. Participants offered a multitude of solutions and suggestions to address these issues, including calls for an approach that prioritises pedestrian safety. While some expressed concerns over how such an approach may impact drivers and those who rely on cars as their primary mode of transportation, others emphasised the importance of ensuring a safe and accessible environment for all users of the town centre.

Air Quality

Traffic and air quality in the centre were rated the lowest out of all of the aspects of the town centre with 58% of survey respondents rating this aspect of the town centre as 'very poor' or 'poor'.

While air quality in Richmond Borough has shown signs of improvement, it remains a significant concern for individuals who live, work, and visit the town centre. The elevated levels of pollution stemming from traffic congestion and idling vehicles were consistently raised as a pressing issue. These concerns were particularly pronounced in specific areas along the Quadrant, George Street, and Paradise Road.

Additionally, residents have raised concerns about the mass of parking around the green spaces, notably Richmond Green and Little Green. Participants expressed concerns not only about the noise and congestion when visiting these areas, but also about the potential health risks, particularly for those with asthma who want to use the green spaces as a way to get away from the high street.

Accessibility

The accessibility challenges in Richmond town centre are evident, with heritage paving and steps at the entrances of various shops and public spaces posing

difficulties for wheelchair users. Examples include the artisan marketplace and Franco Manca, both featuring steps at their entrances. The riverfront area is particularly inaccessible due to cobblestones, steps, and steep hills, creating barriers for wheelchair users.

“By the river, the entire area is cobbled, stepped or steep hilled. So, it is completely inaccessible for me (and other wheelchair users). The only way I can get near the river is from Twickenham. I needs to go down Friers Lane (one of the roads off the green), which has level access. In comparison to Water Lane or by the Ivy which are both cobbled.”

Work that took place on resurface the Quadrant and George Street was recognised as a positive step towards creating a more inclusive High Street. The improvements have significantly enhanced accessibility for partially sighted individuals and wheelchair users.



The junction at Hill Street and Red Lion Street

“The repaving on the Quadrant and George Street was money well spent.”

While the resurfacing work was widely praised for enhancing accessibility, some participants expressed concerns about street clutter (notably ‘A board’ signs and bike shares left on pavements) and narrow pavements. Participants also frequently mentioned the scarcity of controlled pedestrian crossings in the town centre and how this impedes accessibility and easy movement.

We also learned how the combination of narrow walkways, advertising boards, and cafés extending their seating onto the sidewalks can pose significant challenges for individuals with visual impairments who rely on building edges for navigation.

Additionally, issues were raised regarding the public space outside the train station. The placement of planters obstructs the ease of movement of visually impaired individuals, hindering their ability to navigate the area. Furthermore, the smaller bus stops often lead to queues of buses that potentially causes visually impaired individuals and wheelchair users waiting at the stops to be overlooked or bypassed.

Why this is important

There was a general consensus that the traffic and congestion in the town centre is an ongoing issue and challenge that needs to be resolved. However, any resolution will require careful consideration and must carefully assess the varying degrees of impact on different groups of individuals.

At present, the experience of moving through the high street is unpleasant for most as the public realm becomes an unwelcoming place to pause due to noise and safety issues, and there is long-term health impact from pollutants especially for younger and older residents.

Residents have many detailed (and sometimes conflicting) ideas regarding ways forward. But there is broad agreement that there needs to be a sustained focus on reducing barriers to walking, cycling and using public transport, that traffic needs to be reduced, and that practical solutions are in place to support the mobility of people with disabilities.

Addressing these issues comprehensively is crucial for creating an inclusive and navigable environment for all members of the community.

Heritage and Identity



Heritage and Identity

What we've heard

In this section, 'heritage' refers to the places and spaces of architectural, cultural and social historic significance in Richmond. This includes built structures such as bridges and buildings, and places of cultural importance such as Richmond Green.

The balance between old and new

Many of the participants raised the importance of Richmond's built history. In most cases this was discussed as an asset which needed to be protected. Protection was often understood to mean the maintenance of the existing historic assets.

However, many also acknowledged the need for improvement and modernisation, but there was a regular request for the design styles to follow the architectural styles and principles of the existing heritage assets in Richmond.

“Richmond town centre needs a style guide for the new shops.”

There were several requests for style guidance for the high street to ensure there was a standard for shop fronts in the town centre. However, others were proud of the variety brought by perceived freedom from style restrictions.

The delicate balance between preserving the town's rich heritage and modernising spaces to accommodate accessibility needs was another concern that resonated with the participants.

“Richmond's heritage is a double edge sword, it is a drawing factor for many but it also means that many of its spaces are inaccessible.”

Mobility challenges were often described as being at odds with the preservation of some historical landmarks. Heritage paving, entrance stairs, and limited access to certain local establishments, such as the Grade II-listed Richmond Odeon Cinema, were cited as barriers to accessibility by wheelchair users.

Celebration of Richmond's heritage

“Secure what makes Richmond special - the greens spaces, the history.”

There was a common consensus that the rich historical significance of Richmond remained inadequately showcased in the public sphere. Given that many regarded Richmond's history as a paramount attribute of the town, there was a collective desire to prominently highlight it. Sites such as the riverside, Richmond Green and Richmond Theatre were some of the places people of all demographics appreciated.

The town's rich heritage and distinctive character have also been a major magnet for tourists. Recently, Richmond has experienced a resurgence in popularity, owing to its portrayal in the TV show, *Ted Lasso*, which was partially filmed in the town near the high street. Scenes from the show showcase the area's parks



Paved Court

03. Key Themes

and riverside walks, charming Georgian townhouses, traditional British pubs, and quaint alleyways adorned with colorful décor. This aesthetic, rooted in the town's historical charm, has drawn tourists from all corners of the globe.

“We watched Ted Lasso, and we wanted to come see if it’s actually that beautiful - it is.”

Celebrating the town centre’s heritage is something that most people agreed upon and several proposals were put forth about how this could happen, including the creation of heritage trails, the implementation of clear navigation aids and signage that guide people towards historically significant buildings, and public art initiatives that commemorate Richmond’s history.



Courtyard in front of Richmond Green
(Image: Groundhopper Guides)

Why this is important

The identity of Richmond town centre is intricately linked to its rich heritage, with a widespread acknowledgement that safeguarding this historical legacy is integral to sustaining the town’s allure for both residents and visitors.

There is a collective eagerness to actively commemorate Richmond’s heritage, whether through tangible interventions or through organising events and activities. Such initiatives not only align with the community’s sentiments but also amplify the town centre’s overall appeal.

This enthusiasm underscores that Richmond’s heritage need not be perceived as a hindrance to change; rather, it presents an opportunity for celebration, adding depth and character to the local identity. Therefore, investment strategies moving forward should prioritise the reinforcement of this heritage, recognising it as an essential and dynamic aspect of the town centre’s identity.

Public Space



Public Space

What we've heard

The concept of "Public Space" in this section is primarily centred on the open areas along the high street, along with the green and water spaces that enhance Richmond's landscape. It also explores the idea of revitalising public buildings as an extension of the public domain.

"Richmond is the greenest London borough and every effort should be made to make sure the green spaces are also the highest quality."

Richmond is often characterised by its generous green and water spaces that provide people with public space to enjoy. The engagement process showed appreciation of this asset but revealed concerns over the public space along the high street.

Lack of quality infrastructure, maintenance, and space to rest and dwell has created a major challenge in terms of accessibility and desire to enjoy the town centre instead of rush through.



Richmond Riverside is an important destination for locals and visitors alike

The engagement also revealed the potential for activation and programming of public space to help create a greater community within the town centre.

Activation of the public realm

Richmond has recently implemented some public space activation strategies into the town centre with good example seen in the brightening up of Church Court, Duck Pond Market, and a redesign of a section of Lower George Street.

There was a general appreciation for these schemes and eagerness for these to be taken further and implemented in more places around the town centre.

Places to rest and dwell

The main sentiment surrounding the topic of resting and dwelling was an appreciation for the space the Riverside, Greens and Parks provide to pause and enjoy. Many comments were made about this being Richmond's best asset and insisted that work should continue to be done to safeguarding, maintain, and enhancing these spaces.

"The Riverside and Green are great place to sit away from the pollution and traffic on the High Street."

Participants offered several suggestions for enhancing the inclusivity and accessibility of Richmond's Riverside, Greens, and Parks, with the most common request being the provision of additional public toilets. The absence of adequate public toilets, not only near the green and water spaces but also throughout the town centre, was perceived as a significant barrier for certain groups, limiting their ability to fully utilise and enjoy these spaces.

Although overall there was a strong positive feeling about the Riverside, some feel it has become over privatised and its perceived catering to a specific demographic. A similar feeling of exclusion was expressed from primary school children who felt Richmond Green lacked activities tailored to their interests and suggested the introduction of designated sports zones.

“I like going to the green on a hot day, but I get a bit bored there’s not much to do.”

When asked about whether the high street provided opportunities for resting and dwelling, participants expressed less enthusiasm. Rather than be a place of leisure and relaxation, many express an ‘in and out’ approach, where they go to the area for a specific need and then leave shortly thereafter. This sentiment stemmed from several factors, with the primary deterrent being the stressful atmosphere created by traffic congestion and pollution as described in the previous chapters.

“I would never go to Richmond to browse ... George Street feels like a tunnel I need to get through.”

Maintenance on the high street

Throughout the engagement process, participants raised concerns about the cleanliness and maintenance of Richmond, highlighting three recurring issues:

1. Negligence by shopkeepers:

Participants observed a lack of responsibility among shop owners in maintaining the cleanliness of their immediate surroundings.

2. Overflowing bins and Litter:

Participants expressed disappointment at the frequent overflowing of street bins, leading to litter spilling onto the pavement and green spaces.

3. Prolonged Scaffolding:

The extended presence of scaffolding along the high street due to ongoing construction projects was a source of frustration. They felt that the scaffolding not only compromised the aesthetics of the streetscape but also created accessibility challenges, particularly for individuals with mobility issues.

“Shops aren’t taking pride over their frontage causing the streetscape to look tatty and uncared for.”

While participants commended the efforts of community groups in maintaining the cleanliness of Richmond Green, they also called for the expansion of these initiatives to other parts of the town centre. Specific requests included more regular bin collection along with more bins, high pressure washing of the streets and stricter littering enforcement.

Residents expressed concern that the “small things” that once gave Richmond its charm and fostered a sense of pride were no longer receiving adequate attention. A feeling of “embarrassment” towards the “rundown version” of its former self was regularly expressed. This sentiment however, was not shared by tourists who generally expressed admiration for the town’s “beauty and attractiveness.”

Street safety

Safety, particularly at night, was a major point of concern for both men and women. The area outside the station was a key source of unease. Additionally, there were some concerns regarding a perceived increase in anti-social behaviour throughout the town centre. Participants often attributed this to the loss of the Police station in 2017 and have felt a significant change in the environment in the town centre since then.



Public space in front of Richmond Station

Why this is important

While some of Richmond's public spaces are well loved and utilised regularly other areas fall short of expectations.

Richmond's green and blue spaces are one of the town centre's key attractors - they encourage people to spend time and money in the town centre as well as support health and wellbeing. Their continued positive presence is fundamental to the future success of Richmond town centre.

Some areas within the town centre were felt to be below the expected standard set by the town's general environment. For example, the areas in front of the station, the Quadrant, and areas of George Street and Paradise Road were all noted as needing improvements. Upgrading these areas can support a high quality town centre experiences.

Accessibility and safety are also key issues that must be considered. By ensuring that public spaces are accessible and safe to spend time in, Richmond town centre can be a place that is welcoming to all.

Spaces for Young People



Spaces for Young People

What we've heard

Existing youth offer in Richmond borough

As a borough, Richmond has a strong youth-offering. However, this offer does not translate in Richmond town centre.

Young people between the ages of 0-19 make up 24.2% of the population of Richmond Upon Thames. Organisations such as Achieving for Children provide a range of youth activities across the borough, from apprenticeships and work opportunities for young people to health and wellbeing hubs and schools holiday programmes. Spaces like Ham Hall, the ETNA centre and PowerStation Youth Centre provide places for young people to gather and socialise.

The borough also provides initiatives to help give young people access to sports and fitness centres and local business offers. The Leisure and Youth Richmond card gives young people access and discounts to sports and fitness centres and local business offers.

Outside of Council initiatives, Richmond-based businesses, organisations and enterprises provide a range of bespoke activities for young people to participate in. Within close proximity to the town centre are facilities like Old Deer Park Sports Ground and Pools on the Park offering opportunities for young people to participate in tennis, rugby, football,



Ham Youth Centre

cricket and swimming among other sporting activities. The Basement Door, Orange Tree Theatre and Arts Richmond, also provide activities for young people in music, theatre and the arts. Local town-centre based businesses like the Alligators Mouth, a local children's bookshop, also provide events for children and their families from ages 0-12 years old.

“I like the Alligator’s Mouth. I go to their events with my family.”

Existing youth offer in Richmond town centre

Despite a diverse range of activities being available throughout the borough, the town centre itself lacks an adequate supply of youth-oriented facilities and activities. The absence of sports facilities, multi-use game areas, and community centres offering free or low-cost activities has left a void for youth engagement and recreation within the town centre itself.

While Ham Hall, ETNA Centre and PowerStation Youth Centre, among others, provide an array of low cost and free activities, they are located outside of the town centre. For some young people and their families who rely on public transport or active travel as their way of getting around, these spaces can be difficult to reach. One young person who we spoke to at Ham Youth Centre explained that he travels an hour each way to reach the centre. Other young people expressed similar sentiments.

Other places in closer proximity to the town centre, such as the Old Deer Park Sporting Ground and Pools on the Park, were rarely mentioned by young people or families. When asked about these places, many explained that they are not easily accessible, especially as these facilities are located just off a dual carriageway with limited pedestrian crossings.

In the absence of dedicated spaces for young people within the town centre, many choose to spend time at Richmond Green or Richmond Riverside. Young people feel safe in these areas due to their proximity to the town centre and the train station, and the presence of foot traffic. They also enjoy the greenery and nature that these spaces provide, and the benches and seating areas offer opportunities for rest and socialisation.

03. Key Themes

However, there have been instances of large gatherings of young people on the Green, with some cases of under-age drinking and antisocial behaviour. These gatherings, referred to by young people as 'motives', are advertised on social media and can attract large numbers of people.

These gatherings have caused frustration amongst some residents and local businesses, especially those who live or work near the green. There were repeated instances in this engagement process of residents and local businesses sharing their concerns about these large gatherings.

Some young people we spoke to explained that they attend these gatherings, or 'motives', because there is not much else for them to do and they are easy to get to because of Richmond Green's proximity to the town centre and the station.

“Kids need to meet and socialise, but many don't have the money (or appetite) for bars/clubs. PLEASE stop ignoring the need for things to do, and safe places to socialise which are free. Lack of provision is shocking and creates problems... but good space (safe for women and girls) will draw people and economic opportunities.

“Richmond sees 'youth' as a problem, not an opportunity - and then wonders why there is ASB.

Young people and parents of young children consistently expressed a desire for more active spaces within the town centre. They specifically highlighted the need for facilities such as a public

basketball court, football pitch, multi-use games area, or a warm indoor space where they could engage in activities with friends. Ideally, these facilities should be conveniently located within walking distance of the train station and the town centre for easy access.

Similarly, children of all ages and parents of young children expressed the need for additional play equipment, as the current lack of nearby playgrounds does not offer sufficient provision. The closest option in Richmond Park requires a significant walk, while access to Old Deer Park from the town centre is difficult on foot. Overall feedback indicates that people of all ages, especially younger participants, believe that the riverside, greens, and parks in Richmond are underutilised and possess significant potential to cater to a diverse range of demographics.

“We'd love a community centre with sports facilities.”

The desire for indoor spaces also highlights the fact that a lot of the activities for young people and families that are provided are very seasonal. Both young people, and their parents often mentioned that it is easy to spend time in the parks and green spaces during the summer, but there are not many indoor activities to do in the winter. This was a particularly strong sentiment for parents of young children who very strongly articulated that they would like to see additional offerings for younger children in the town centre, like soft play.

“Families often have to rely upon going to a pub, or a restaurant with no other activity to entertain younger children.”

The limited space available in Richmond town centre and the high street offerings significantly impact young people's perception of the town's recreational options, leading to a sense of detachment from the area.

The scarcity of spaces in the town centre that cater directly to the interests of young people can restrict their leisure activities and confine them to limited

90% of survey respondents between the ages of 15-25 ranked the variety of things to do in the city for young people as very poor or poor.

options. A recurring theme expressed by young people during this research was the sentiment that "there's nothing to do." The online survey also reflected this.

Some young people have explained that they experience feelings of 'not- belonging' or 'not being welcome' in Richmond Town Centre. This was accompanied by examples of being asked to leave shops because there were 'too many young people' there already or being shouted at in front of the station when hanging out in larger groups.

Needs and preferences of youth people in Richmond

The current selection of shops and offerings on the high street fails to cater to the needs and preferences of young people.

When reflecting on the high street offering, young people regularly described feeling that the high street did not offer any shops that catered to them.

Certain businesses like Greggs, Flying Tiger and Starbucks were mentioned, but more often than not, their experience of the town centre shops was described in terms of what was not there, rather than what is. For example, numerous young people and parents of young teens referred to the recent closing of H&M, with one mother expressing 'We lost the H&M, now what are we going to do [in the town centre].' Others explained that there were no affordable shops for young people like Sports Direct or Primark and no community spaces either.

Due to the limited selection of affordable and appealing shops in Richmond town centre, many young people choose to spend their time and money elsewhere, particularly in Kingston. The main shopping area in Kingston, especially the Bentall Centre, was



Young people at the Vineyard school drew their priorities for the town centre.

Richmond Green

Draw your vision for the Green

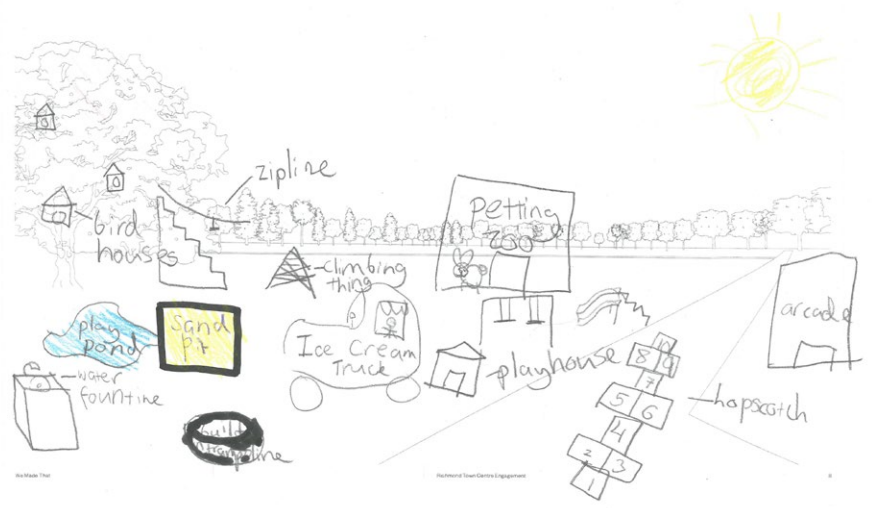


Illustration by a young person about what they would like to see on Richmond Green.

03. Key Themes

repeatedly highlighted as offering a much wider and more enticing array of options including a Primark and a JD Sports. Additionally, the casual food shops in Kingston and Twickenham were preferred over those in Richmond town centre.

Priorities of Richmond's young people

As we look to the future, young people have articulated clear priorities for the development of their town centre. Addressing the climate crisis, expanding and diversifying retail and leisure options, and safeguarding the town's natural green spaces emerged as their top concerns.

Tackling the effects of climate change was perhaps the most pressing issue for young people. They expressed a strong desire to reduce pollution through improved and more sustainable transportation options, including promoting active travel modes like walking and cycling. This concern has been consistently echoed through various Richmond-led engagement efforts, including ongoing consultations with young people as part of the Children and Young People's Plan and through youth engagement initiatives in parks and open spaces.

Expanding and diversifying the town's retail and leisure offerings was another key priority. This sentiment was reflected in the public survey, where 63% of respondents aged 15-25 identified this topic as one of their top three priorities. During the conversations, young people consistently expressed a desire for a wider range of shopping and entertainment options to cater to their diverse interests.

Preserving the town centre's natural green spaces was also a significant priority. A notable 56% of survey respondents aged 15-25 indicated this topic as one of their key concerns. Young people frequently expressed their appreciation for the town's green and blue spaces, highlighting their importance for relaxation, recreation, and social gatherings.

The young people we talked with also demonstrated a genuine desire to create a town centre that is accessible to all. They advocated for providing benches for people of all ages to rest, creating quality outdoor spaces for those without private gardens, and ensuring that streets and public spaces feel safe and welcoming.

Why this is important

Young people constitute a significant portion of Richmond's population, making up a quarter of the total demographic. Despite their substantial presence however, the town centre's offerings for them are limited. This finding also emerges as a key insight from concurrent consultations and engagement activities in the borough, such as those conducted for Richmond's Night Time Strategy and youth engagement in parks and open spaces.

This lack of provision has raised concerns among young people and their families, leading to a sense of exclusion amongst some and creating problems for other groups who may feel intimidated or disrupted by large groups of young people.

By offering engaging youth spaces, activities, and events, the town centre can encourage more young people to spend their time in the area in a positive way. Inclusive and welcoming youth spaces that meet the needs and wants of young people can also make the town centre more inclusive, strengthening community cohesion and fostering a sense of shared identity.

Culture, Leisure and Sport



Culture, Leisure and Sport

What we've heard

Building on a strong cultural offering

There are a range of different venues in or very near to Richmond town centre that contribute to the culture, leisure and sport offering, including, but not limited to:

- The Richmond Lending Library and the Richmond Information and Reference Library
- Richmond Theatre
- Orange Tree Theatre
- Museum of Richmond
- Pools on the Park
- Richmond Canoe Club

London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames has also created a comprehensive vision for culture in Richmond through their *Culture Richmond Strategy*, (2021). Through this strategic plan, the Council will aim to develop an innovative, diverse and accessible cultural offer which seeks to empower, enable and inspire.

This strategy has also identified various opportunities that can be built on over the years to come, including diversifying the current offer, especially for young people, finding ways for culture to support health and well-being in the borough, making buildings more inclusive and accessible, and expanding

cultural education and job opportunities in the cultural and creative sectors. This was echoed by the organisations engaged as part of this engagement work.

Wayfinding and advertisement

Wayfinding is the biggest issue for cultural organisations. In all interviews that were conducted with culture, leisure and sport organisations, wayfinding was brought up as one of the most significant issues. This was also echoed through conversations with residents and visitors alike.

Wayfinding, or the use of signage, colour, and other design elements to help visitors and passers-by navigate a space is an important element in helping people navigate high streets and town centres. Richmond town centre has a few different elements of wayfinding throughout the town centre, but some key cultural organisations have indicated that more can be done to help draw in visitors.

The Museum of Richmond is one of the organisations that highlighted this as a primary concern. Located on the second floor of the Old Town Hall, the Museum faces a challenge drawing in passers-by due to its inconspicuous location and lack of signage. Despite the Museum being an important cultural space, there are no visible signs on the external areas of the building signposting passersby to the building. Many



Entrance to the Old Town Hall which houses the Reference Library and Museum of Richmond



Signage for Megan's Cafe which shares a building with the Museum of Richmond

03. Key Themes

residents we spoke to, even those hyper-local to the area, did not know that there was a museum in the town centre.

“If there was a big sign, like there is for Megan’s, we’d know [the museum] was there!”

When asked about the reason for the lack of signage, one staff member explained, they have been unable to put up a sign due to the listed status of the building that they are in, and as such noted, ‘we are a bit hidden up here’. In an effort to address this issue, a trustee paid out of pocket for a window vinyl sign that was temporarily put up in an empty shop. The staff members interviewed reported that this sign was effective in drawing in visitors who otherwise would not have stopped by.

External talks, programming with schools and other organisations, and community outreach programmes have become the museum’s primary means of attracting people, but the lack of signage and wayfinding remains a key concern. There is an opportunity to also consider alternative locations for the museum that are more public facing to help increase footfall and visitor numbers.

The issue of wayfinding was also highlighted as a key concern for those organisations based at Old Deer Park Sports Ground. One interviewee, who is head of a local Rugby club, explained that many visitors to the Grounds have no idea how to find the space once they exit from the station. Upon exiting the station, there is no form of wayfinding that points people in the direction of the grounds. This is especially problematic on game days which can draw in up to 600 people. Without proper wayfinding, the club receives numerous phone calls of people asking where they are and some fans showing up late to the games because they could not find the location.

“We need some easy signage so they know how to get to us.”

Public programming



Wayfinding sign on Hill Street directing passersby to key areas within the town centre.

The engagement process revealed a desire for wider public programming throughout the town centre. Participants emphasised the need for a more diverse and consistent schedule of community events that actively engage local partners and groups. They suggested that events like Twickenham’s Taste of Twickenham and Kingston’s Christmas market could serve as models for fostering a renewed sense of community in Richmond.

There is an opportunity for culture to be the backbone of these activities and for the key cultural and leisure institutions in the town centre to help facilitate this. Not only would this bring more people together, but it would help increase the visibility of these local organisations.

“We need more free public events to create a sense of community that has been lost since Covid.”

Engaging with Richmond Council

While the existing network and communication between institutions is strong, fostering closer ties with the local council could further enhance communication and facilitate prompt issue resolution.

The participating organisations highlighted the strong

03. Key Themes

connections they have forged among themselves and with other local businesses in the town centre.

However, they expressed a need for improvement in their relationship with the Council and other local landowners particularly regarding wayfinding issues. Several instances were mentioned where these organisations suggested straightforward solutions, such as putting up a poster in the station, or improving the signage guidance on the pedestrian signs, but were unsuccessful in doing so.

Strengthening ties with the Council was also identified as a means to elevate the role of culture, leisure, and sport within the town centre. There was a general consensus that more could be done to support the growth of the town's cultural institutions and the Council has a role in facilitating this. Whether it be through brokering connections between these institutions and other community groups or helping to spread the word of what they do, These organisations are eager to continue building community ties and believe that stronger Council involvement could facilitate this."

“We’d like [the Council] to engage further with what it is that is happening Sometimes I think they forget that coming together in one mass is very important.”



Richmond Library

Why this is important

Richmond's culture, leisure, and sports offer plays a pivotal role in enhancing its appeal, fostering a sense of community, and promoting a healthy and active lifestyle. The town centre already boasts a strong foundation for cultural engagement, with the Museum of Richmond, Richmond Theatre, and multiple sporting grounds nearby.

These established organisations can serve as catalysts for further growth and diversification of cultural offerings, but to achieve this, they require tailored support to enhance their visibility and strengthen their partnership with the Council.

Participation in cultural and sporting activities enhances people's personal enjoyment, development, and fulfilment and improves their physical and mental health and wellbeing. High-quality cultural and sports facilities help to make places more attractive, help to boost economic activity and prosperity, and aid the development of shared identities and increased understanding between different communities.

There is an opportunity in Richmond town centre to use a cultural offer to help build cohesive communities and change the way that the town centre is both used and perceived. As we heard, people would like to see an increase and diversity in how the town centre is used and this could be supported by more proactive and flexible programming and increasing cultural and commercial activity at a range of different scales.

Looking Forward

Richmond residents talk about Richmond as a good place to live, they are proud of its history and care about its future. Many of them have more mixed feelings about the town centre. Though there are many individual reasons to visit, there were a range of frustrations about the centre not representing the best of Richmond.

As outlined in the sections above, these surfaced as concern around the upkeep of the heritage assets and streetscape, as frustration about the loss of favourite shops or as annoyance at the difficulty in getting around.

The engagement process was able to explore some of the detail and nuances around these issues, but also pointed to strengths and hopes. In this section we highlight cross-cutting areas which were voiced as priorities for action.

Special but not exclusive

Many aspects combine to help Richmond feel like a special place to live, and the attractiveness of the town centre and the riverside location are enjoyed by all. Both historically and in the present day, it is a comparatively wealthy borough in terms of the average income level of residents. Clearly statistics do not tell the full story, and people using the town centre have a range of circumstances, preferences and needs.

Looking forward, how can the town centre develop in an inclusive way which supports a shared sense of belonging?

The success of Richmond's retail offer will depend on addressing a diverse set of needs: everyday basics and services, mainstream brands, and bespoke independent options. Different people will prioritise different types of shops, and inevitably complement shopping in Richmond with shopping elsewhere. But the centre as a whole benefits from diverse choices, and crucially, a mix of retail with other leisure opportunities. The coffee shops, though notably numerous, play a role in extending dwell time and increasing the sociability of the town centre visit.

Many people are broadly aware of the current challenges facing high streets, such as vacant shops, and addressing demoralisation is important. Some hoped for more imagination in developing a participatory response to building and public realm use, specifically to increase and diversify the range of community spaces in the town centre. This could be supported by more proactive and flexible programming, increasing cultural and commercial



The Quadrant

04. Reflections



Richmond Riverside

activity at a range of scales. The activation projects led by the BID are a good example of how this could work and could be extended to include more community partners.

Developing a healthier, creative and more resilient town centre is about delivering plans for specific places, but it is also about building trust. In Richmond there was concerns about a lack of connection between different community and civic activities. People often felt uninformed about planning decisions made in the town centre. More positively, many saw opportunities for the council to engage with, learn from and support individual and group place-based initiatives. Collaborative approaches to programming are one example of this, but ideas extended to educational, sports, retail and democratic participation.

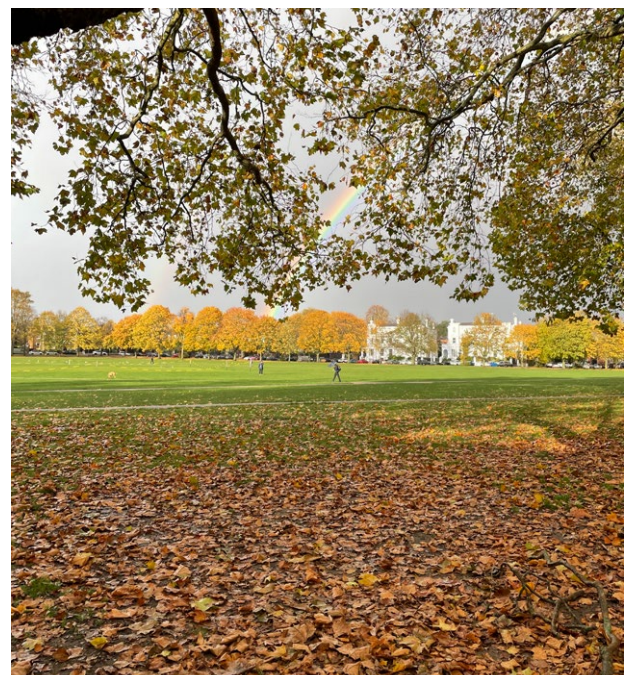
Pleasurable opportunities to explore and spend time

The environment of Richmond Town Centre has been shaped over centuries as a complex and charming network of streets, alleys and public spaces. The variety of historic styles and the presence of the river and riverside activity are a source of local pride and a large part of it is a popular tourist destination. A sense of delight while meandering is fundamental to Richmond's character, but equally raises challenges both for casual visitors and residents. Lack of 'findability' can be a problem for retail footfall and for visitors needing to get to a specific place. Barriers and conflicts while moving around are an everyday stress for many residents.

Looking forward, how can Richmond town centre be a more pleasurable place to move around and stay longer?

Richmond town centre needs to accommodate both curiosity-led exploration and people's need to arrive specific places on time. Cultural and leisure stakeholders are keen to increase the legibility of key buildings and destination facilities for visitors. In terms of commercial viability, it also needs to be easy for shoppers to find the smaller independent shops set back from the main streets. More effective wayfaring is an important step, potentially coupled at key points by improving connectivity through physical adaptations.

The ongoing situation of traffic congestion through Richmond town centre is an entrenched problem which is undesirable for everyone and negatively impacts all forms of travel. The public realm becomes an unwelcoming place to pause due to noise and safety issues, and there is long-term health impact from pollutants especially for younger and older residents. Residents have many detailed (and sometimes conflicting) ideas regarding ways forward. But there is broad agreement that there needs to be a sustained focus on reducing barriers to walking, cycling and using public transport, that traffic needs to be reduced, and that practical solutions are in place to support the mobility of people with disabilities.



Richmond Green

04. Reflections

Richmond town centre needs to be somewhere of value and stress-free to visit for people of all ages. Focusing on the needs of younger people and people in later life is a good measure of inclusion. This means getting the detail right in terms of accessibility, ensuring that there are easy ways to spend time with young children close to essential shops and services, and providing opportunities for teenagers and young adults to socialise and take part in culture and sport.

Richmond town centre also needs to be a place with a strong social infrastructure which is essential for fostering social cohesion, promoting a sense of belonging, and strengthening community bonds. Public spaces, cultural venues, educational institutions, and recreational facilities play a pivotal role in providing residents with opportunities for shared experiences, learning, and leisure. A strong social infrastructure contributes to the overall well-being of individuals by offering spaces for social interactions, cultural enrichment, and community engagement.

The experience of the town centre as welcoming, safe and easy to access is fundamental to supporting everyday life opportunities and health outcomes for people living in, working and visiting Richmond.

- Appendices

- Appendix A:
List of Engagement Activities
- Appendix B:
Documents Reviewed

List of Engagement Activities

Date	Event	Number of people engaged
21 August	Pop Up at MET in the Park	60
4 September	Pop Up at Richmond Station and Lower George Street	60
12 September	Online Webinar	8
16 September	Pop Up at Whittaker Square and Richmond Park	28
19 September	Interview with Local Resident	1
26 September	Accessibility Workshop	4
28 September	Online Webinar	8
5 October	Pop Up at Richmond Green	34
5 October	Drop in at Oriel House	17
5 October	Interview with Richmond Cycling Campaign	1
9 October	Drop in at Vineyard Community Centre	9
10 October	Group Interview with Richmond Society and Friends of Richmond Green	3
10 October	Drop in at Achieving For Children	16
11 October	Drop in at Cambrian Centre	24
11 October	Business Workshop	3
12 October	Interview with Alan Benson	1
12 October	Workshop with RUILs	3
24 October	Interview with Alligator Bookshop	2
26 October	Drop in at Full of Life Event	14

Appendix A

Date	Event	Number of people engaged
6 November	Interview with London Welsh Rugby	1
9 November	Drop in at RHACC	22
9 November	Interview with ETNA Community Centre	1
13 November	Interview with Richmond CVS	1
13 November	Interview with Mums for Lungs	1
13 November	Interview with Richmond Theatre	1
14 November	Interview with Sport Richmond	1
15 November	Group Interview with Museum of Richmond	3
20 November	Workshop at Orleans Park School	16
24 November	Workshop at Vineyard Primary School	16
24 November	Group Interview at Small Steps	7

Documents Reviewed

Several documents were shared by the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, along with other local organisations and community groups to help inform this work. Whenever feasible, data from ongoing consultations was also taken into consideration to assist in identifying emerging themes.

While this was not a town centre appraisal, it was important to understand the character of the town centre, ongoing challenges and key resident, visitor and business groups. Existing documents which profile the borough's demographic and socioeconomic profile, information relating to the town's transportation, mobility and infrastructure, and land use and planning documents were considered to help build a picture of the town centre

Key documents reviewed include, but are not limited to the following:

Arup. (2023). Urban Design Study. Available at: https://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/large/urban_design_study_2023.pdf

Greater London Authority. (2022). Night Surgery: Richmond Upon Thames. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/220518_gla_24hr_nightsurgeries_rmut.pdf

Lichfields. (2021). Retail and Leisure Needs Study Phase 1. Available at: https://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/22987/retail_and_leisure_needs_study_phase_1.pdf

Lichfields. (2023). Retail and Leisure Study Phase 2. Available at: https://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/28086/retail_and_leisure_study_phase_2.pdf

Richmond Borough Council. Conservation Area Statements. Available at: https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/planning/conservation_and_urban_design/conservation_areas/conservation_area_statements

Richmond Borough Council. (2021). Draft Local Plan. Available at: https://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/22984/draft_local_plan_low_resolution.pdf

Richmond Borough Council. (2021). Urban Design Study. Available at: https://www2.richmond.gov.uk/docs/LocalPlan/urban_design_study_december_2021.pdf

Richmond Borough Council. (2021). Town Centre Monitoring Report 2021. Available at: https://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/23932/town_centre_monitoring_report_2021.pdf

Richmond Borough Council. (2022). Richmond Retail Survey.

Richmond Borough Council. (2023). Assessment of Borough Centres. Available at: https://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/ky4hwrsq/assessment_of_borough_centres.pdf

Steer. (2021). Future Vision for Richmond.

Steer. (2019). Richmond Town Centre Traffic Management Study.

Steer. (2019). Richmond Town Centre Traffic Management Options.

Steer. (2021). Richmond Town Centre Clean Air Analysis - Overview.

Steer Davies Gleave. (2017). Richmond Town Centre Feasibility Study: Shortlist of Opportunities.

Steer Davies Gleave. (2017). Richmond Town Centre Feasibility Study: Wayfinding.

Existing strategic documents and ongoing consultations which also helped to inform this work include:

- Richmond Children and Young People's Plan
- Richmond's Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Culture Richmond
- Consultation for Youth Engagement in Parks and Open Spaces
- Consultation for Richmond's Night Time Strategy

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