

Royal Leamington Spa Vision Community Engagement Report (June 2024) – Summary of Key Points

Overview of engagement activity

- This report summarises the community engagement activity undertaken on the draft Vision for Leamington town centre (April-May 2024) and key outcomes. It does not summarise wider engagement activities held during the development of the Vision.
- Ask Warwickshire online survey on draft Vision for Leamington town centre held from **26th April 2024 until 28th May 2024**. Child Friendly version available too. (See Appendix 1 for details of all engagement activities on the Vision.)
- Permanent unmanned exhibition at Leamington library during engagement period.
- 2 x manned drop in events with exhibition boards (Covent Garden market stall (all day) & 1 Mill Street (evening)).
- On the exhibition boards, respondents were encouraged to place dots (red, amber, green to highlight their disagreement/agreement with the vision statements/themes).

Respondent profile

- **447 responses in total** (12 of which were submitted through the child friendly survey)
- **Majority of responses from local residents (71.7%), followed by visitors to Leamington Spa (16.3%).**
- 11 respondents were from local businesses (2.46%)
- 5 respondents submitted a formal response on behalf of a business or organisation (2 of which were local businesses).
- Under 25s were underrepresented in the responses but there were **good levels of engagement from all other age categories, particularly in 25 – 64 age ranges.**
- 10.3% of respondents had a long standing illness/disability.
- **More females than males responded to the survey** (49.7% and 37.8% respectively), with the remainder either not answering or preferring not to say.

Travel choices

- Most common modes of transport used frequently (once a week or more) to travel to Leamington Spa town centre were **walk/run (47.4% respondents) and car or van (40.3%).**
- **Local residents and students were more likely to frequently walk/run to Leamington Spa town centre** (62.5% and 100% respectively compared to 47.4% for all respondents).
- **Those working in or near to Leamington Spa were more likely to frequently use a public bus to travel to Leamington Spa town centre** (13.0% compared to 7.1% for all respondents).
- **A large proportion of respondents travelling to Leamington used time-restricted or shorter stay parking perhaps suggesting short visits to the town centre.** The top three choices for parking in Leamington town centre were: 'on street

free parking in a time restricted area' (165 responses), 'on street using pay and display' (144 responses) and 'in a short stay car park where you are required to pay' (130 responses).

- If all transport options were available to people, when able to select three options, **using a car/van (65.6%) and walk/run (64.9%) were the most popular travel choices** to travel to Leamington town centre, with a **public bus being the third most popular (48.8%)**.

Draft Vision – The People's Spa

- **Overwhelming majority of respondents strongly agreed/agreed with the proposed new Vision (77.7%).**
- **Overwhelming majority of respondents strongly agreed/agreed with the proposed new themes:**
 1. **Healthy People – 81.4%**
 2. **Healthy Place - 83.0%**
 3. **Healthy Planet – 79.2%.**
- **Healthy Place gained the most support overall.**

Issues to be considered

- **The issues of most importance to respondents were:** (selected very important /important)
 1. **Supporting/ encouraging businesses (94.5% of respondents)**
 2. **Conserving historic character of Leamington's buildings and places (89.7%)**
 3. **Air quality/pollution (87.7%)**
- **The issues of least importance to respondents were:** (selected of little importance/not at all important)
 1. **Creating new homes/improving affordability of new housing (25.1%)**
 2. **Reducing the dominance of vehicles in the town centre (20.1%)**
- When asked if there were other issues to be considered by the new vision, the following were the most commonly cited themes/sub-themes (with a quote from the responses highlighted):
 1. **Transport related - Issues with parking and suggestions for a park and ride (n-32 respondents)**

"There are still going to be many instances where people need to drive into the centre and parking is difficult enough as it is so restricting this further may cause frustrations and people opting to visit other towns instead."

2. **Transport related - Improvements to public transport and buses within the town centre (n-23)**

"Public transport in Leamington has considerably declined in frequency and quality in recent years. Bus frequencies have been devastated. Most buses outside the buses used for university services (U1 etc) and the Travel West Midlands 11 service vehicles are old, noisy, rattle and vibrate a great deal and have tired, worn interior decor."

The bus stop situation in central Leamington is also dreadful. The stops at the north of the Parade are congested with too many passengers AND too many buses. This leads to crowding on the pavements and blockages of the road.

3. Pedestrianising the Parade – For pedestrianisation (n-21)

"I lived in an apartment above Regent Court during lockdown. When the parade was shut to traffic, it made the place feel so more alive and welcoming. I really believe this would be a good permanent move allowing cafes to have seating outside and really improve the appeal and earning potential for shops so they can stay afloat. Perhaps have buses still stopping at the bottom and top near holly walk and tesco to aid accessibility but keep the rest pedestrianised, with additional trees etc to aid air quality."

4. Improvements to retail – Increasing the variety of shops in town (n-17)

"Leamington used to be my go to place to shop. It is now a shadow of its former self and very sad to see. An example I wanted to buy a new classic style leather handbag. Not one shop still sells them in Leamington so I had to buy online. I realise that health is important but for Leamington to survive it need to be commercially sound."

5. Improvements to retail - Help for shops and businesses to thrive and survive (n-16)

"Lower rents to enable individually owned shops to have a chance at thriving and creating a vibrant experience for [young] and old. Ability to have pop up shops/food venues. Bringing visitors to the town centre is vital. Lowering rental in the priors to ensure it doesn't become dead space."

- **Respondents were not asked a question about pedestrianising Parade; however, views were made both in support and against doing this. More people expressed support for pedestrianising Parade (n-21 – 3rd most frequently expressed sub-theme) than those against it (n-13 - 6th most frequently expressed sub-theme) in the free text.**
- Other issues cited included: improvements to retail outlets; accessibility for people with disabilities and the elderly; improvements to public transport; increasing the number of indoor spaces and entertainment particularly for young people; improvements to public realm including the state of pavements, litter, and safety; addressing homelessness; and impact of out-of-town developments on the town centre.

What do you like about the new vision?

- 276 respondents to this optional free text question. The most commonly cited themes are reported below – please refer to the full report for all themes.
- A high number of respondents providing **Support for pedestrianisation of the parade or reduction of traffic (n=68)**. This was the most common sub-theme cited to this question.
- Other standout sub-themes were: **General support of the vision (n=42)**, **Support for the climate objectives (n=28)** and respondents highlighting that a **Focus is needed on health (n=47)** and that a **Focus is needed on residents and community (n=32)** with the majority of these last two, praising the vision for demonstrating the need for these.

General support - *"I like the rounded approach. People, Place, Planet seems to cover most bases."*

Support for climate objectives - *"Consideration for the virtuous benefits of a healthy urban environment combined with regeneration and restoration considerations, promoting the need for longer term environmental sustainability goals."*

Focus on health - *"Puts health and welfare and connection at the forefront."*

Focus on community - *"I like that it is very people focused. I want to spend time in the town centre and this vision would encourage me to do that."*

What do you dislike about the new vision?

- 246 respondents to this optional free text question. The most commonly cited themes are reported below – please refer to the full report for all themes.
- The highest occurring subtheme was the **Need for clarity and specific detail of plan (n=69)**, with a frequent number of respondents using the term 'vague' (n=14)

"It misses the point of how to make Leamington specifically thrive, and so becomes pretty generic - ie. could apply to any town in the UK."

- Alongside this, the most prevalent sub-themes were **Don't dislike the vision (n=35)**, with many commenting that they **disliked 'nothing' from the vision (n=28)** and **General criticism or dislike of the vision or document (n=28)**.

Don't dislike the vision - *"Some of the themes are good in themselves and are difficult to disagree with in general, but may have little direct impact on the revitalisation of the town centre."*

General criticism of the vision - *"It is a dream with little substance."*

"Not sure it is relevant at all. It feels very cliché and done to death. It doesn't feel like it is thinking outside of the box in terms of messaging and objective. Every marketing campaign for the last 15 years talks about 'healthy this and that', and I fear that a lot of time and effort could be put into this and it essentially ends up being like marketing wallpaper."

- Also of note is that in response to the overwhelming support for pedestrianisation of the parade or reduction of traffic in the previous question, when asked what they disliked, many respondents used this question to voice their opinion that they **Don't support pedestrianisation of the parade or reduction of traffic (n=19)**.

"Suspect too from LDA's presentation they would recommend closing the Parade and making it a pedestrianised area. It's been tried before. It didn't work."

Is there anything missing from the new vision?

- 254 respondents to this optional free text question. The most commonly cited themes are reported below – please refer to the full report for all themes.

- The most frequent response to this question by some margin was to express that they felt there is a **Need for clarity and specific detail of plan (n=49)**.

"I think it needs to be more specific to Leamington. It would be useful to have some concrete targets or actions for people to look forward to and also to hold Warwickshire County Council accountable for."

- Other sub-themes cited were:

2. **Intervene to support businesses (improve rents and rates) (n=23);**
3. **Support pedestrianisation of the parade or reduction of traffic (n=19);
Need for more shops and retail options (n=19);**
4. **Positives of events and increasing the number and diversity of events and attractions (including day and night life) (n=15);**
5. **Improve the local economy and prosperity and build on current successful industries within Leamington (n=14); Highlight need for accessibility to disabled people (n=14);**
6. **Tackle crime and public safety (n=13).**

- Sample quotes from the responses to the question on what's missing are:

Business support - *"Encouragement and incentives to get start up and established businesses into the town."*

Support for pedestrianisation - *"We really need to pedestrianise the parade. This would be amazing and could be a real selling point - getting known as having done this nationally."*

Need for more shops - *"We've seen a lot of coffee shops, nail salons and barbers opening in the town centre but barely any new shops - independents or bigger brands - (such as clothing shops, gift shops, homeware etc.). A diversity in the shops would bring more people in town as they wouldn't need to go to a shopping park to find what they need."*

Importance of attractions - *"...what do we want to be the distinctive motivation for coming into Leamington rather than any other town? e.g. beautiful architecture, the best array of dining and leisure options, independent and varied shops, free of traffic and pollution, well maintained, beautiful and safe open spaces, easy and inexpensive access."*

Support creative industries - *"There is nothing about recognising and building on the success of the Creative and Games businesses that are the only really significant contributors to powering the local economy."*

Accessibility for all - *"How those who are disabled can access the town more freely and easily? Disabled people are left with no option but to drive to places. Also, maybe have an easily accessible place somewhere in town which hires out mobility scooters to help maintain the independence of those with limited mobility and thus, allowing them to travel all around the town and not be restricted to how far they can walk only!"*

Tackling crime - *"Addressing drug use and crime. Bikes get stolen so cycling is hard."*

Do you have any further comments on the new vision?

- 172 respondents to this optional free text question. The most commonly cited themes are reported below – please refer to the full report for all themes.
- When asked for further comments, respondents again used this question as an opportunity to state they felt a **Need for clarity and specific detail of plan (n=26)**. However, **the most frequent sub-theme arising from this question was support for pedestrianisation of the parade or reduction of traffic (n=32), which was also much higher than the objection to this subject from this question (n=3)**.
- Other issues/quotes submitted in the free text included:

Business/staff car parking - *What I would like to request is that the new vision contains a consideration for giving small, independent businesses the opportunity to purchase parking permits, which would allow them to park in the Permit Holders parking spaces. Even if this was restricted to during business hours only, it would take an additional pressure off the business owners shoulders so they/we can concentrate on running our businesses and keeping the attraction of a variety of independent shops a reason so that more people visit Leamington's new vision and keep the town alive."*

Need for clarity - *"I'm impressed with many positive aspects of this vision, but I want to know in detail a lot more about how the planners actually envision this happening; as some of it seems a little far reaching to be perfectly honest."*

Negativity/scepticism - *"A lack of focus on ensuring the basics are done well. Repairing roads and pavements ensuring landlords are maintaining their properties."*

General support - *"I hope that it is able to drive forward some much needed positive change. I would love to be proud of Leamington and to want to spend time there."*

Heritage - *Leamington is missing a trick with its heritage of a spa town. It lacks any real connection to the waters, wellbeing, leisure and the reasons people originally came to visit. With the popularity of Bridgerton, promenading and the number of independent cafes it is so well poised to attract fans of Georgian and regency heritage. There could be so much more around health and wellbeing and the grandeur that once was."*

Other engagement results: Exhibition boards (dot voting) and comment cards

- Exhibition boards (dot voting): Participants were encouraged to vote using green, yellow, or red dots to show their likes, dislikes and any statements they were not sure about.
- The majority of dots used were green dots, across all themes.
- The statements with the most dots (of all colours) were:
 1. **Create a child-friendly town centre with opportunities for incidental play** (85 dots, 98.8% green, 1.2% yellow)
 2. **Re-purpose vacant shops and vacant space on upper floors** (79 dots, 62.0% green, 30.4% yellow, 7.6% red)
 3. **Improve the physical health and wellbeing for everyone by reducing traffic in the town centre and encouraging more walking and cycling. This will improve physical health, improve air quality and improve safety** (76 dots, 94.7% green, 5.3% yellow)
- The statements with the highest proportion of red dots (indicating some disagreement) were:

1. **Improve town centre safety with more “eyes on the street” and more activity and natural surveillance** (29.4% red)
 2. **Strengthen leisure and its connections to health and wellbeing and culture– more hotels, spas** (29.4% red)
 3. **Improve connections between people and nature** (18.0% red)
 4. **Support flexible workspace and a greater range of workspaces in the town centre** (17.1% red)
- Comment cards were used to collect comments on the proposed Vision for Leamington Spa at the public exhibition at Leamington library and at the two drop-in events.
 - 80 comment cards were submitted. The comments expressed similar themes to the survey responses with **support for pedestrianising Parade/town centre the most frequently cited theme.**
 - Other standout themes included; **suggestions to attract businesses and reduce vacant units; providing more spaces for use by the public/community uses; improving accessibility of development/activities for all.** To a slightly lesser extent, support was expressed for: parks/green spaces; re-establishing a spa; conserving/restoring heritage; repurposing vacant shops and providing more outdoor space for eating/drinking.

Conclusion

- **An overwhelming majority of respondents strongly agreed/agreed with the proposed new Vision (77.7%) and the proposed themes:** Healthy People (81.4%), Healthy Place (83.0%), Healthy Planet (79.2%).
- **The top 3 issues of most importance to respondents were:**
 1. **Supporting/ encouraging businesses** (94.5%)
 2. **Conserving historic character of Leamington’s buildings and places** (89.7%)
 3. **Air quality/pollution** (87.7%)
- **Respondents were not asked a question about pedestrianising Parade; however, views were made both in support and against doing this** throughout the free text responses. Consistently throughout the survey, **more people expressed support for pedestrianising Parade than those against it.**
- When asked what people liked about the new vision, **a high number supported pedestrianisation of Parade/reduction of through traffic and there was support for the vision generally, the climate objectives, the focus on health and residents/community.**
- **The most common dislike of the new vision was its lack of clarity and specific detail of the plan** for Leamington town centre. Some also expressed that they **don’t support pedestrianisation of the parade or reduction of traffic.**
- Apart from a need for clarity/detail and support for pedestrianisation of Parade, other stand out issues suggested for the vision to include were: **tackling issues with car parking; improving public transport/buses; interventions to support businesses; need for more shops; need for more and better diversity of events and attractions, improving the local economy/building upon creative**

industries; highlighting need for accessibility for all particularly disabled people; tackling crime and improving public safety.

- Similar themes were expressed through the comment cards, with the most frequently cited theme **expressing support for pedestrianisation of Parade/town centre.**
- Interestingly, the most popular statement on the exhibition boards (with the most dots) was **Create a child-friendly town centre with opportunities for incidental play** (85 dots).
- Next most popular statements were; **Re-purpose vacant shops and vacant space on upper floors** (79 dots) and **Improve the physical health and wellbeing for everyone by reducing traffic in the town centre and encouraging more walking and cycling.** (76 dots).

Appendix 1: Table of engagement activities on the Vision Refresh

Date	Focus	Event	Type	Attendees
Wednesday, December 20, 2023	Vision	Core Advisory Group (CAG) initial meeting	Online	20
Tuesday, January 30, 2024	Vision	CAG workshop	Face-to-face (F2F)	22
Wednesday, March 6, 2024	Vision	CAG meeting	Online	15
Tuesday, March 12, 2024	Vision	Leamington Annual Town Assembly Meeting	F2F	150
Tuesday, April 9, 2024	Vision	Informal meeting with BID Leamington	Online	2
Tuesday, April 9, 2024	Vision	Informal meeting with Friends of Christchurch Gardens	Online	3
Thursday, April 11, 2024	Vision	Business drop-in session	F2F	45
Thursday, April 11, 2024	Vision	Youth Council session	F2F	15
Sunday, April 28, 2024	Vision	Market stall drop in session	F2F	100
Tuesday, April 30, 2024	Vision	BID members' meeting	F2F	30
Wednesday, May 8, 2024	Vision	Old Town drop-in session @ 1 Mill Street	F2F	30
Tuesday, June 4, 2024	Vision	CAG meeting	F2F	14
26/04/24 - 28/05/24	Vision	Ask Warwickshire survey	Online	435
29/04/24 - 28/05/24	Vision	Child Friendly Ask Warwickshire survey	Online	12
30/04/24 – 21/05/24	Vision	Leamington library exhibition	F2F	25
			TOTAL	918