

Stakeholder Consultation Northampton Town Centre Masterplan Summary of Survey Findings

Prepared for Northampton Borough Council
Analysis conducted by Prevision Research
September 2019



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1. Introduction and objectives

1.1 Objective

The overall aim of the research is to consult with a range of key stakeholders in order to inform the development of the Northampton Town Centre Masterplan.

1.2 Methodology

In May 2019 consultation on a new masterplan for Northampton town centre began. This consultation involved workshops were held at the University of Northampton, Grosvenor Centre and Guildhall to promote interest and help inform the development of a new Town Centre masterplan for Northampton. At these workshops, Northampton Borough Council (NBC) provided information boards, leaflets, brochures and signposted visitors to online information relating to the Masterplan. People were encouraged to fill in a survey questionnaire to outline their thoughts and ideas on the initial proposals.

The survey was also available online, in paper format in the One Stop Shop and printed in the local press to ensure accessibility to as many people as possible. As well as this 10,000 leaflets advertising the consultation were produced and delivered to public buildings around the borough to promote the consultation. The consultation closed on 30 June 2019 and, in total, 656 stakeholders, comprising mainly residents, local businesses, students and landlords responded to the survey.

Analysis and reporting have been carried out by independent consultancy Prevision Research.



previsionresearch.co.uk



2. Research Headlines

2.1 Agreement with proposed changes and priority areas

Among stakeholders there is general agreement with the proposed changes for all areas. Around 50%-60% agree with the proposed changes in each area.

The only two areas in which consultees were unresponsive are the Market Square (26% disagreeing with the proposed changes) and Greyfriars (20% disagreeing), although these are still outnumbered by those supporting the plans.

The three areas that stakeholders would most like to see prioritised for development are the Market Square, Abington Street and Greyfriars

2.2 Features requiring improvement

Northampton has many features that stakeholders are proud of, notably the Guildhall, St. Giles Street and the cultural quarter, historical buildings generally and (to a certain extent) retail outlets.

The spontaneous suggestions most frequently given to improve the town centre relate to cleanliness, the quality & nature of shops, support of homeless people and an increase in places to eat.

The main aspects of the town centre that stakeholders would like to see improved below and on the following pages:

Heritage

The restoration and upkeep of historical buildings and shops (particularly in the Market Square)

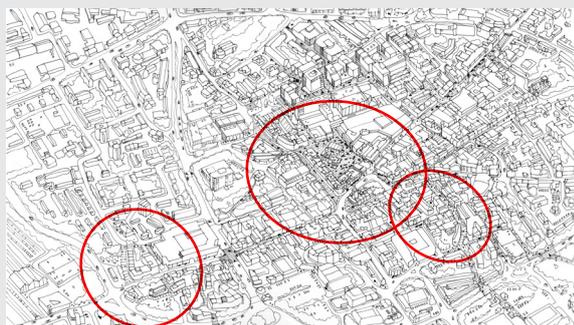


Feedback

- Greater promotion of the town's historical assets
- Upkeep of historic buildings
- More attractive and welcoming spaces
- Improve the quality and appearance of the market

Our Response

- Heritage gateway along Marefair
- Imaginative reuse of historic buildings
- Higher quality shopfronts
- Rejuvenation of key town centre spaces



Retail

Improved quality of shops (both big brands and independents)

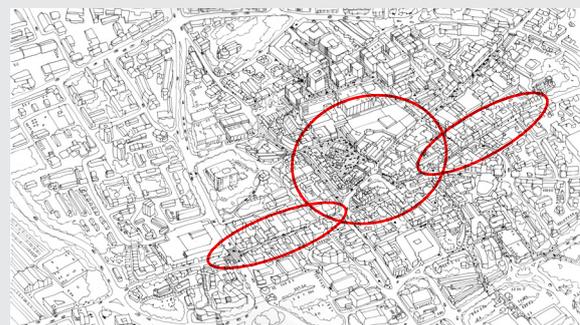


Feedback

- Improve the retail experience
- Reduce vacancy rates
- Speciality markets
- Improve the quality and appearance of retailers
- Independent, bespoke shops as found on St. Giles' Street

Our Response

- Consolidating retail around the retail heart
- Embracing the quality of St. Giles' Street to encourage more independent and experience led retail
- Transformation of market stalls to provide a more attractive and future-proofed platform for independent traders



Food & Beverage

The availability and quality of food and drink

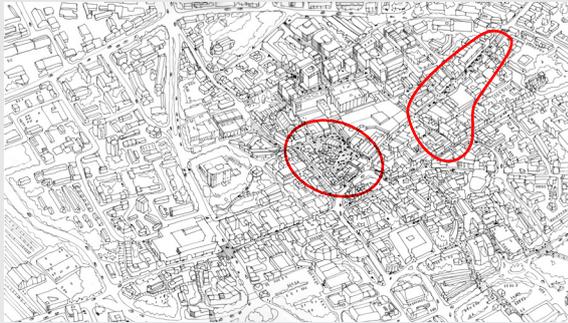


Feedback

- Improve availability and quality
- More restaurants around Market Square

Our Response

- Interest, excitement and variation in the town centre
- Create street-food offering
- Repositioning Market Square as a focus for F&B quality



Appearance

Cleanliness / litter



Feedback

- Address the general cleanliness of the town centre
- Improve shop frontages and signage

Our Response

- High quality public realm and landscape proposals
- Regeneration of vacant sites, including Greyfriars and Castle House
- Renewed shop front and signage design guidance



Community Events

Community uses / event space

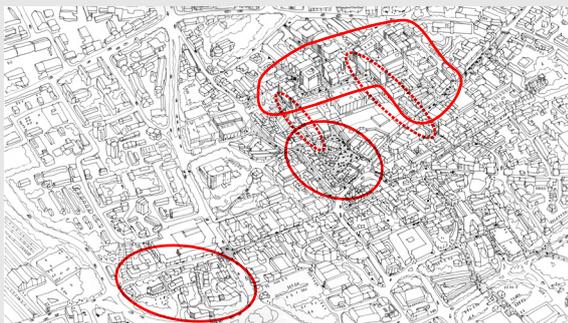


Feedback

- Increased security
- Prevent antisocial behaviour
- More community and seasonal use in Market Square

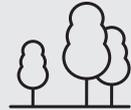
Our Response

- Cohesive movement networks connecting all parts of the town centre
- Promotion of ground floor active frontages
- Increase footfall across the town centre



Green Space

Green space (particularly in Abington Street & Greyfriars)

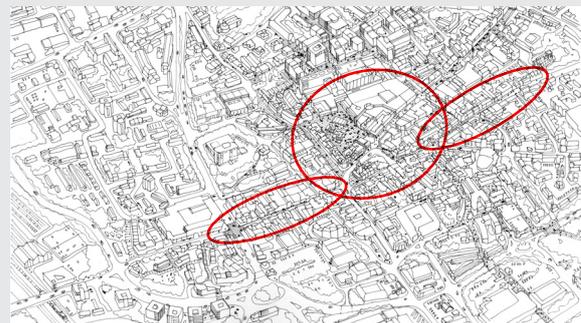


Feedback

- Abington Street green space
- Greyfriars green space
- Town centre parks

Our Response

- Connected neighbourhoods with access to open spaces that promotes active lifestyles and social interaction
- Greyfriars linear park
- Greening of Abington Street



Pedestrianisation

Pedestrianisation (particularly in the Drapery)

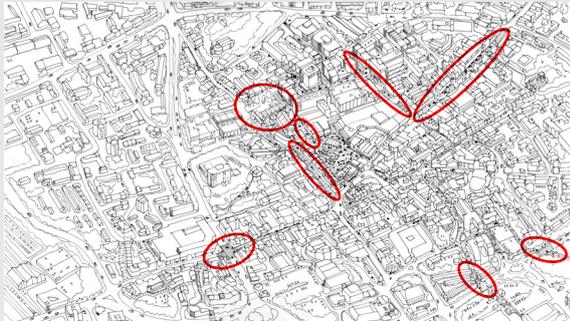


Feedback

- Pedestrianisation of Drapery
- Improve pedestrian links to Greyfriars
- Public transport improvements

Our Response

- Streets designed to be flexible and vibrant with activity
- New pedestrianised routes connecting the town centre with Greyfriars
- Bus stands removed from Drapery and coach and bus interchange proposed for Greyfriars
- Pedestrian priority re-established on Drapery



Leisure

More leisure facilities

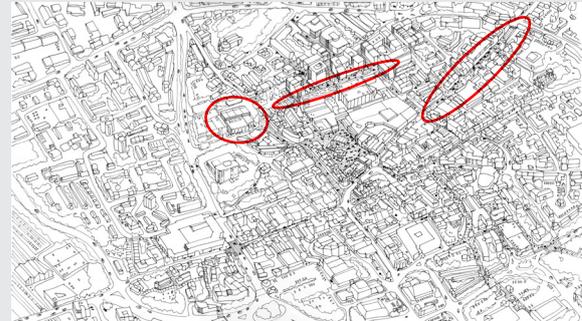


Feedback

- Encourage more leisure uses within the town centre

Our Response

- Interest, excitement and variation in the town centre
- Encourage more socially orientated activity providers into the town centre



Residential

More residential provision in the town centre to support retailers.

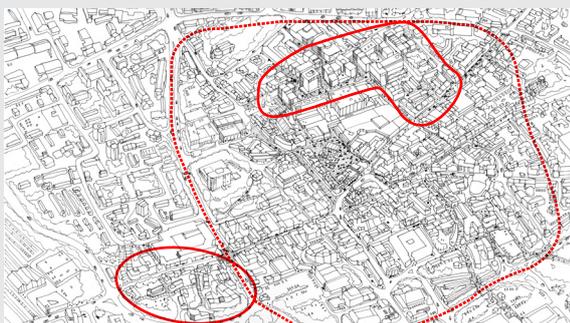


Feedback

- Increase residential use
- Provide housing above shops
- Residential use on Greyfriars

Our Response

- Increased residential population of town centre
- Creation of new residential neighbourhoods
- Range of residential typologies proposed



Just over half of the stakeholders believe that more residential provision in the town centre will help support the existing retail. However, this signifies that almost half of the stakeholders either do not agree that this will assist the retail or are unsure whether it will have a positive impact.

Improving the retail experience is a key theme in the masterplan across the town centre. There is a requirement for a reduction in empty units and an improvement in the appearance and quality of retailers represented in the town centre. The majority of stakeholders believe that some of the retail businesses on the outskirts of the retail area in the town centre, should be encouraged to become part of a smaller retail core in the town centre.

The need for greater provision of the food and drink offer is another theme running through the consultation responses. More than four out of five stakeholders think that food and leisure uses should be encouraged within the town centre. Other requirements outlined within the responses are the cleanliness and tidiness of the town centre.

In the rest of this document the research findings are discussed in greater detail.

3. General views on improving the Town Centre

3.1 What makes stakeholders proud about the Town Centre?

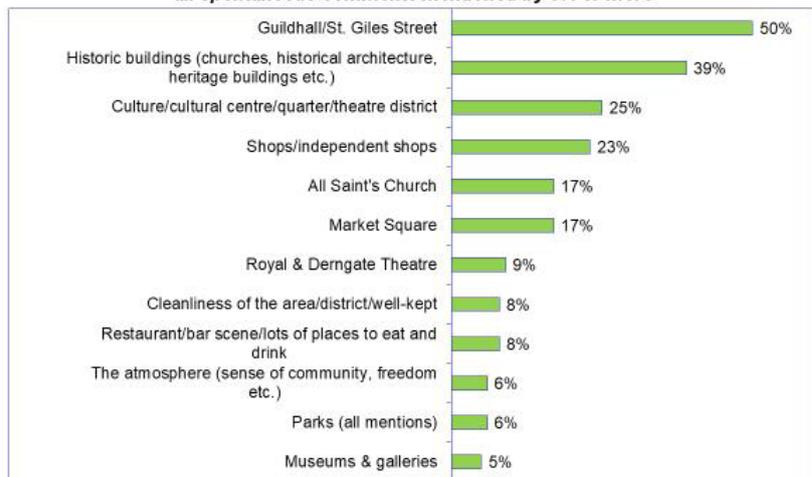
There are many parts of Northampton Town Centre that make stakeholders proud.

The spontaneous examples most frequently given include: the Guildhall, St. Giles Street, historical buildings generally and the cultural quarter and shops. However, there are many other examples opposite.

Specific sites mentioned include All Saints' Church, the Market Square and the Royal & Derngate Theatre.

What makes stakeholders proud? (main mentions)

What parts of the town centre make you proud? (unprompted) – all spontaneous comments mentioned by 5% or more



Base: all answering question (n=632)

3.2 How could the Town Centre be improved?

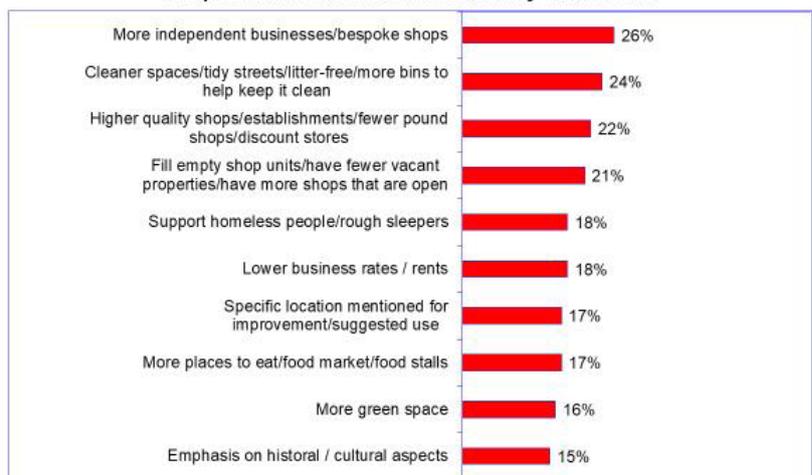
Many suggestions are spontaneously given for improving the town centre. Those most frequently given relate to, overall cleanliness and the cleanliness, appearance and nature of shops.

Stakeholders would like to see empty shop units filled, greater support for homeless people and lower business rates or rents.

The main suggestions given are shown in the following chart.

What would improve the town centre? (main mentions)

What do you think could improve the town centre? (unprompted) – all spontaneous comments mentioned by 15% or more



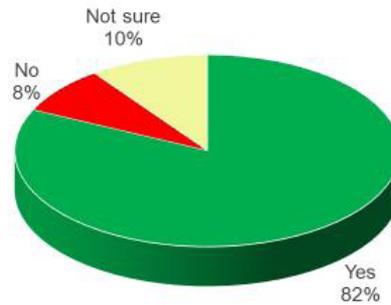
Base: all answering question (n=646)

There are many other suggestions for improving the town centre. Secondary spontaneous suggestions for improving the town centre include: more leisure facilities, improved appearance of shops, improvement of the bus station, increased footfall, and stopping anti-social behaviour.

More than four out of five stakeholders think that more food and leisure offers should be encouraged within the town centre – a clear endorsement of the proposition within the Masterplan to achieve this.

Encouragement of food and leisure uses in the town centre

Do you think that food and leisure uses should be encouraged within the town centre?

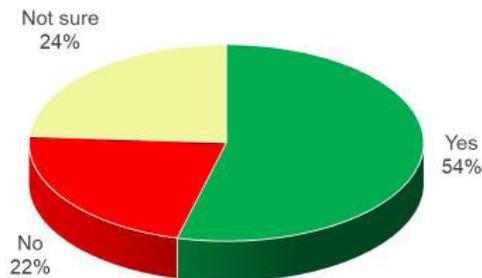


Base: all answering question (n=645)

Just over half, 54% of the stakeholders believe that more residential provision in the town centre will help support retail. Almost half, 46%, either do not believe that this is the case or are unsure, so there is some uncertainty over this proposition:

Whether more residential provision will help support retail

Do you think more residential provision in the town centre will help to support retail?



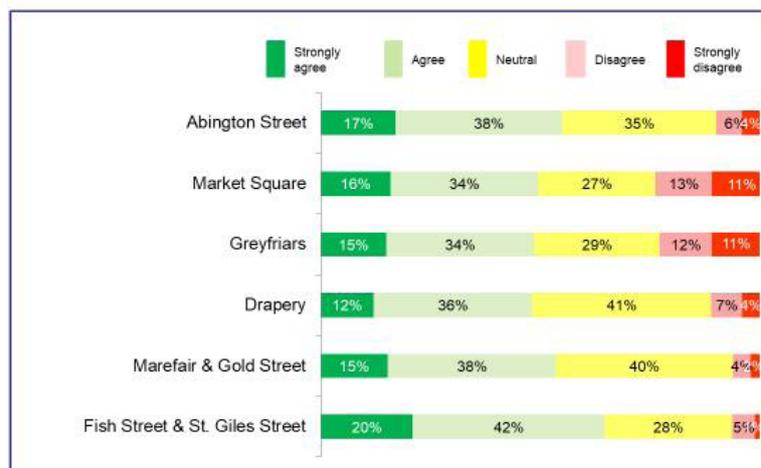
Base: all answering question (n=648)

4. Prioritising Areas

4.1 Overview of prioritisation of areas

Overall, between 50% and 60% of stakeholders agreed with the proposed changes to each area as shown below:

Agreement with proposed changes – in summary



Base: all answering question (n=631)

Inevitably, all of the areas received a level of disagreement and, typically, around a third of stakeholders are neutral about the proposed changes.

The highest level of disagreement received was related to the changes to Market Square (with 24% disagreeing with the proposed changes) and Greyfriars (23% disagreeing with the proposed changes). Although these are still outnumbered by those supporting the plans.

As part of the consultation, the stakeholders were asked to prioritise the areas requiring improvement. The three areas that stakeholders would most like to see prioritised are Abington Street, the Market Square and Greyfriars, as indicated by the following chart.

Priority areas for improvement

Which area of the town centre would be your first priority for improvement? (prompted)



Base: all answering question (n=631)

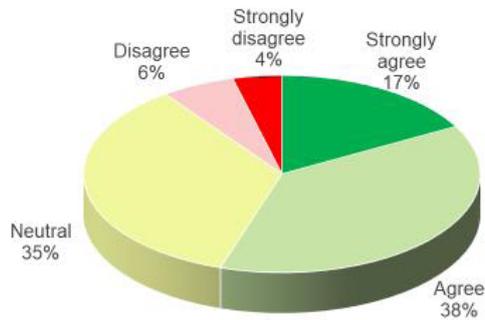
Each of these prioritised areas is discussed in greater detail in the following sections of this report.

4.2 Abington Street

There is broad support for the proposed changes on Abington Street, with over half of stakeholders agreeing with the proposed changes and only 10% explicitly disagreeing.

Agreement with proposed Abington Street changes

To what extent do you agree with the changes proposed on Abington Street?

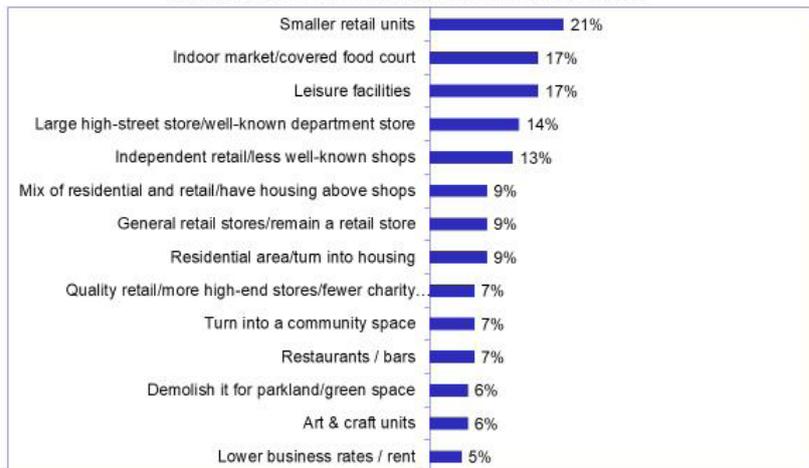


Base: all answering question (n=526)

Regarding the future of the former BHS and M&S units, the improvements most frequently mentioned are: conversion to smaller shops, indoor or covered market, the introduction of a well-known high street shop and leisure facilities. A range of other options are also suggested as outlined below:

What should happen to the former BHS and M&S units?

What would you like to see happen to the former BHS and M&S units? (unprompted) – all spontaneous comments mentioned by 5% or more

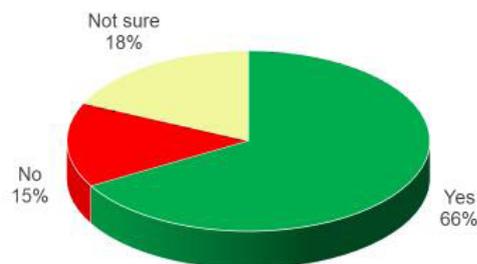


Base: all answering question (n=534)

66% of the stakeholders support the introduction of leisure, residential and community uses into Abington Street, although these were not the spontaneous suggestions most frequently given.

Support for leisure, residential and community uses in Abington Street

Would you support leisure, residential and community uses taking over ground floor units at the top of Abington Street?

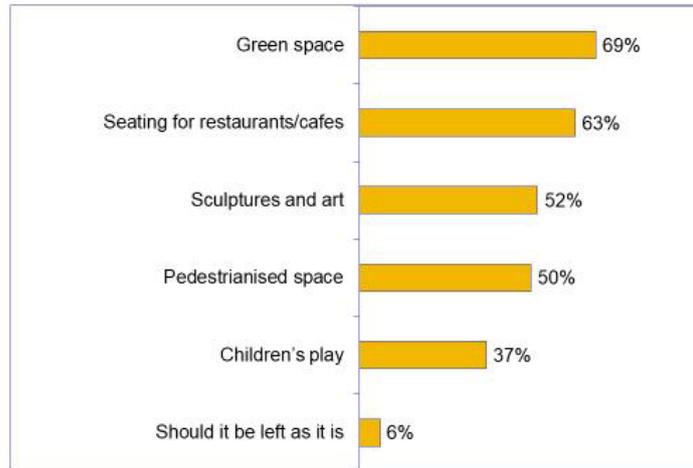


Base: all answering question (n=542)

The most popular responses for uses for public spaces in this area are as green space with 69% of consultees supporting this, seating for restaurants or cafes at 63%, sculpture / art at 52% and pedestrianised space at 50% of consultees.

How should the public spaces in this area be used?

How would you like to see the public spaces in this area used? (prompted)



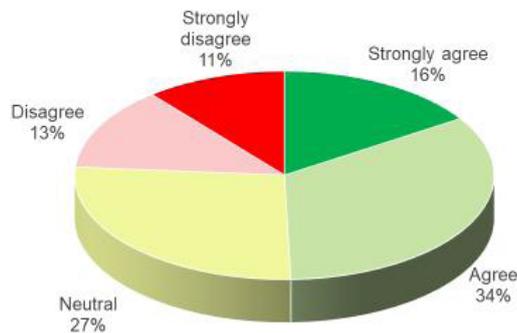
Base: all answering question (n=545)

4.3 Market Square

Half of stakeholders broadly agree with the proposed changes on Market Square. Almost one in four stakeholders disagree with the proposed changes.

Agreement with proposed Market Square changes

To what extent do you agree with the changes proposed on the Market Square?

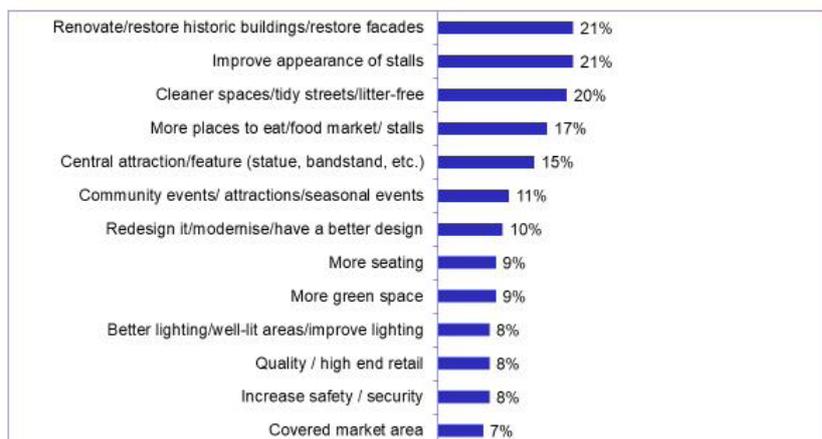


Base: all answering question (n=527)

Suggestions most frequently mentioned for improving the Market Square area tend to relate to the appearance (for example, restoring traditional buildings), cleanliness, places to eat and having a central attraction.

How should the physical appearance of the Market Square be improved?

How would you like to see the physical appearance of the Market Square improved? (unprompted) – all spontaneous comments mentioned by more than 5%

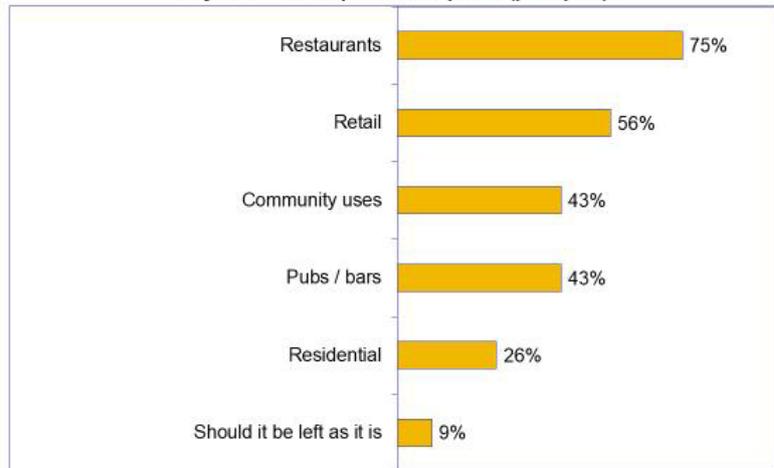


Base: all answering question (n=488)

The most popular proposed uses for the buildings in the Market Square to improve the square's appearance include a majority of restaurants at 75%, retail at 56%, community uses at 43% and pubs and bars also at 43%.

How can buildings improve the Market Square?

There are many attractive buildings surrounding the Market Square - how should they be used to improve the square? (prompted)

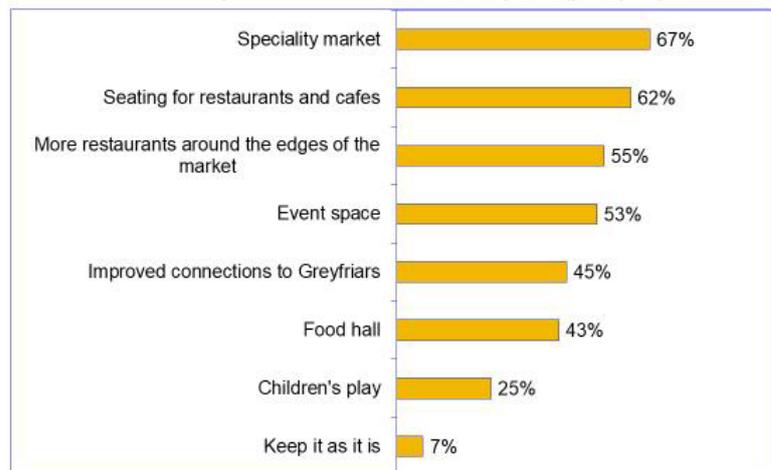


Base: all answering question (n=536)

Stakeholders would like to see a speciality market/s, seating for restaurants and cafes, and event space on the Market Square

What would stakeholders like to see on the Market Square?

What would you like to see on the Market Square? (prompted)

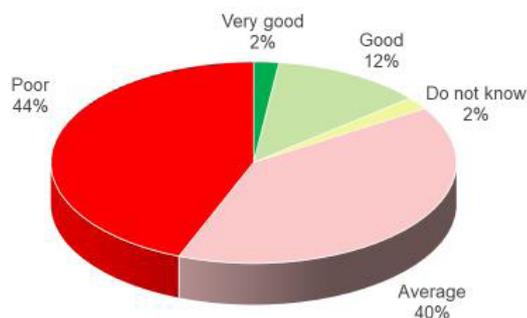


Base: all answering question (n=547)

Currently the market is perceived negatively, with only 2% rating the products and services available as very good (with a further 12% rating them as 'good', 40% considering them average and 44% believing that they are poor.

Views on the current products and services available on the market

What do you think of the current products and services available on the market?



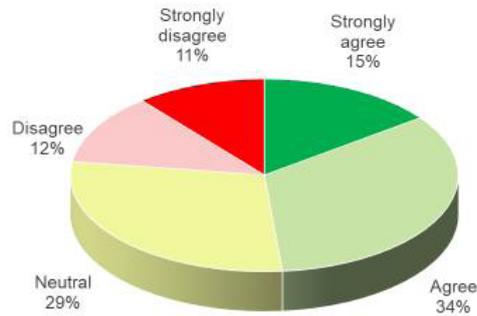
Base: all answering question (n=548)

4.4 Greyfriars

Almost half of stakeholders agree/strongly agree with the proposed changes to Greyfriars, although 23% disagree/strongly agree.

Agreement with proposed Greyfriars changes

To what extent do you agree with the changes proposed at Greyfriars?

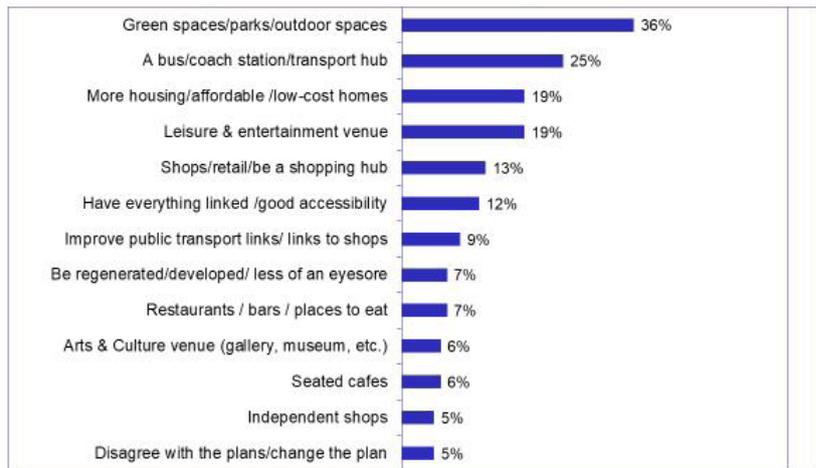


Base: all answering question (n=589)

Suggestions most frequently mentioned of what should happen to Greyfriars relate to outdoor spaces, transport, housing and leisure / entertainment.

What should happen in Greyfriars?

What would you like to see happen in Greyfriars? (unprompted) – all spontaneous comments mentioned by 5% or more

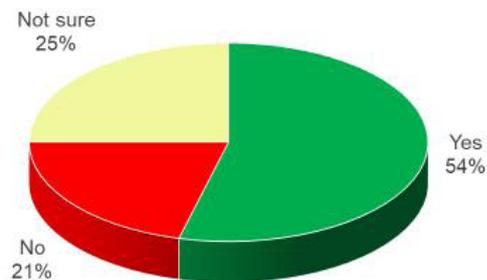


Base: all answering question (n=542)

Just over half of stakeholders support the permanent closure of roads in the Greyfriars area, however around one in five are explicitly against the proposition.

Support for permanent closure of roads in the Greyfriars area

Would you support a permanent closure of roads in the Greyfriars area in order to link the area to the town centre and enable development on this site?



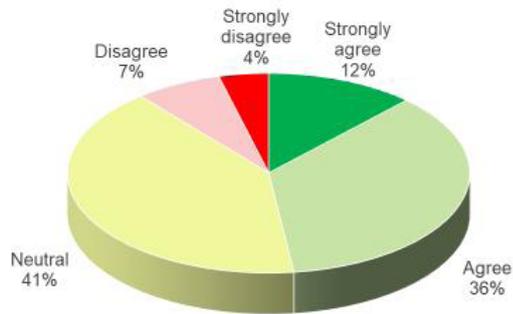
Base: all answering question (n=597)

4.5 The Drapery

Just under half of stakeholders, 48%, agree with the proposed changes to the Drapery, with only 11% disagreeing.

Agreement with proposed Drapery changes

To what extent do you agree with the changes proposed at the Drapery?

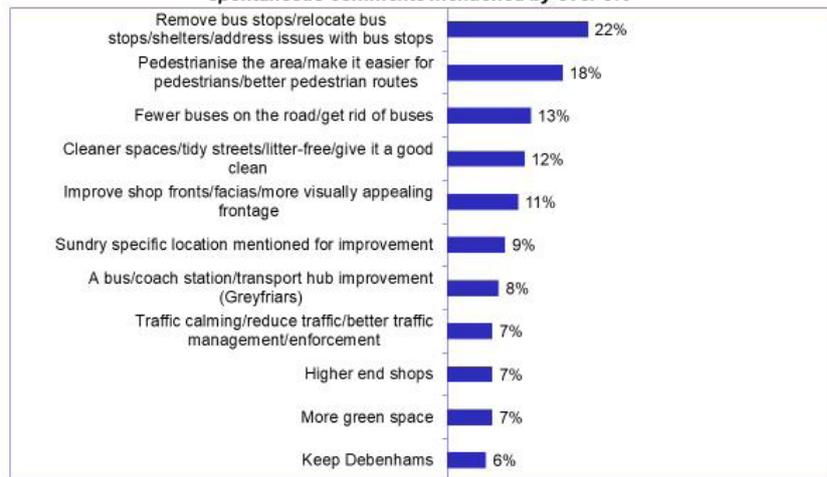


Base: all answering question (n=497)

Key suggestions for improving the Drapery include removing or relocating bus stops and the pedestrianisation of the area.

How should the Drapery be improved?

Do you have any thoughts on what would improve the Drapery? (unprompted) – all spontaneous comments mentioned by over 5%



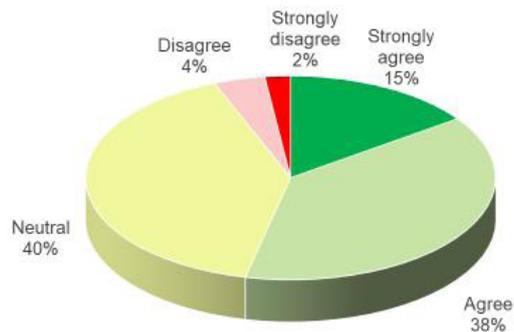
Base: all answering question (n=410)

4.6 Marefair and Gold Street

53% of stakeholders agree with the proposed Marefair and Gold Street changes, with only 6% disagreeing.

Agreement with proposed Marefair and Gold Street changes

To what extent do you agree with the changes proposed at Marefair and Gold Street?

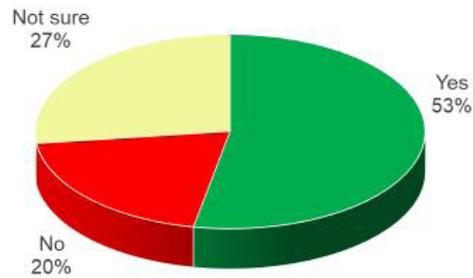


Base: all answering question (n=493)

Just over half of stakeholders support the idea of more residential development on Mayfair. However, one in five does not agree with this proposal.

Is more residential development on Marefair a good idea?

Do you think more residential development on Marefair is a good idea?

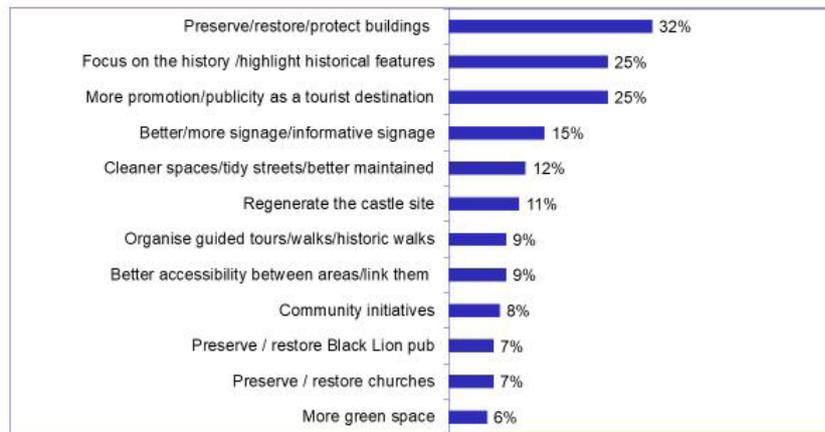


Base: all answering question (n=499)

Stakeholders would like to see the area's heritage assets enhanced through: preservation of buildings, an increased focus on the town's history and greater promotion of the town's historical assets.

How could heritage assets in this area be enhanced?

How would you like to see the heritage assets in this area enhanced? Heritage assets are the former Castle site, St Peter's Church, Black Lion Pub, old building frontages (unprompted) – all spontaneous comments mentioned by over 5%



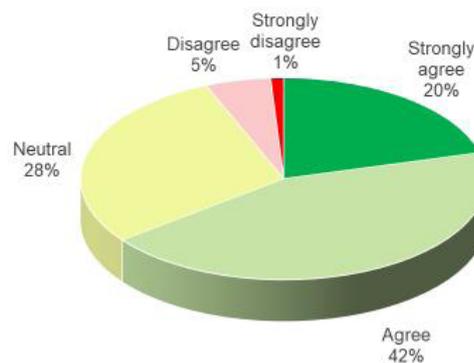
Base: all answering question (n=433)

4.7 Fish Street and St. Giles Street

Almost two-thirds of stakeholders agree with the proposed Fish Street and St. Giles Street changes, with only 6% disagreeing.

Agreement with proposed Fish Street and St. Giles Street changes

To what extent do you agree with the changes proposed in the Fish Street and St. Giles Street area?



Base: all answering question (n=499)

Overwhelmingly, stakeholders believe that businesses, such as those in St. Giles Street and the surrounding streets, should be encouraged to set up in the town centre. Nine out of ten stakeholders support this proposal.

Should independent shops and businesses be encouraged to set up in the town centre?

Do you think that more independent shops and businesses such as those in St Giles Street and the surrounding streets, should be encouraged to set up in the town centre?



Base: all answering question (n=488)

5. Conclusions

Stakeholders are broadly supportive of the proposed changes to Northampton Town Centre.

The areas that stakeholders would most like to see prioritised are Market Square, Abington Street and Greyfriars.

Generally, the improvement areas that stakeholders focus on are:

- Restoration and maintenance of historical buildings
- Cleanliness / tidiness
- Quality of retailers
- More independent businesses
- Less vacant units
- Places to eat
- Green space / pedestrian areas / event space
- More seating in the town centre
- Residential provision to support retailers
- Leisure facilities

Key themes running through the Masterplan area are:

- A need for more residential provision in the town centre to support retail
- Cleanliness / tidiness
- Improving the retail experience (a reduction in empty sites and an improvement in the appearance and quality of retailers represented in the town centre)
- Cleanliness and tidiness
- Greater provision of food and drink

Overwhelmingly stakeholders believe that businesses should be encouraged to set up in the town centre and reduce the size of the retail core.

Northampton **Forward**