

Engagement Report.

Together We Make Eastleigh

HemingwayDesign urban
movement

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The “Together We Make Eastleigh” initiative represents a significant step in revitalising Eastleigh town centre, addressing the challenges posed by economic shifts, evolving retail trends, and changing community expectations. This report brings together insights from community engagement—including public survey, stakeholder workshops, and discussions—to highlight key themes that can shape Eastleigh’s future.

CORE FINDINGS AND THEMES

Community Identity and Heritage

- Residents of Eastleigh hold deep pride in the town’s history as a Victorian railway hub and its role in WWII-era aviation, particularly Spitfire production. However, there is a clear demand to combine this heritage with a modern, inclusive identity.
- Suggested proposals include public art, heritage trails, and community-driven cultural projects to showcase Eastleigh’s unique character and embracing its diversity.

Retail and Evening Economy

- A vibrant high street is central to community aspirations, with calls for a diverse retail mix that prioritises independent shops, markets, and pop-up opportunities.
- Strengthening the evening economy through more dining, entertainment, and live cultural events is seen as essential to extending the town’s appeal beyond typical shopping hours.

Spaces and Activities for Young People

- Young residents have expressed a strong need for safe, affordable spaces where they can socialise and engage in recreational activities. Suggestions include youth centres, creative workshops, and interactive leisure options like escape rooms and skateparks.
- These initiatives are crucial for retaining younger generations and fostering a sense of community among families.

Movement and Accessibility

- Enhancing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, along with improving public transport connectivity, is a key priority. Residents envision a greener, more walkable town centre that supports active travel and reduces car dependency.
- Specific recommendations include safer cycling routes, additional pedestrian crossings, and better public transport options, particularly for under-served areas.

Cultural and Leisure Opportunities

- There is strong appetite for more dynamic cultural programming, including regular markets, seasonal festivals, and affordable creative workshops. These events not only encourage footfall but also enhance Eastleigh’s cultural identity and sense of community.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The themes identified through community engagement will serve as a foundation for shaping Eastleigh’s value proposition, vision, and future development. Immediate priorities include:

- Developing a cohesive identity that balances historical pride with modern vibrancy.
- Expanding leisure, cultural, and retail offerings to create a dynamic, inclusive environment.
- Implementing public realm enhancements, such as greener spaces, pedestrianisation, and improved accessibility, to encourage sustainable, active travel.
- Addressing safety and cleanliness concerns to foster a family-friendly atmosphere.

NEXT STEPS

The insights gathered from this engagement will directly shape the next stages of the study, including the development of a value proposition, a town centre vision, and an upcoming placemaking trial.

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Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Eastleigh's town centre, originally established as a prosperous Victorian railway hub, holds a rich historical legacy, including its connections to WWII-era Spitfire production. However, like many UK town centres, Eastleigh has experienced substantial shifts in recent decades. The rise of out-of-town retail and online shopping, combined with recent economic challenges, has affected the town centre's vibrancy, an increase in retail vacancies, and a diminished variety of recreational and cultural amenities including the closure of the museum.

Recognising these challenges, Eastleigh Borough Council (EBC) has launched the 'Together We Make Eastleigh' initiative as part of a broader UKSPF-funded strategy aimed at revitalising Eastleigh town centre. This initiative is focused on increasing community engagement, supporting local businesses, enhancing public spaces, and redefining Eastleigh town centre's appeal to both existing residents and potential visitors. EBC's approach is rooted in four priority workstreams outlined in the UKSPF brief

- 1. Understanding Eastleigh:** Establishing an evidence-based understanding of the town centre's catchment, demographic, and market needs to guide strategic decision-making.
- 2. Empowering Businesses and Partners:** Supporting Eastleigh BID and local businesses to better understand and leverage market data to broaden the town's economic appeal.
- 3. Changing Perceptions and Value Proposition:** Developing a cohesive identity and value proposition for Eastleigh that positions the town within the wider region, aligning with EBC's Corporate Plan to foster a vibrant and inclusive place to live, work, and visit.
- 4. Trialling New Approaches:** Implementing experimental public realm interventions, such as strategic pedestrianisation of certain streets, to enhance the town's appeal and utility.

These workstreams are not only designed to stimulate immediate improvements but also to lay a foundation for sustainable, long-term growth by addressing key community needs. This report provides an overview of the engagement efforts undertaken as part of the 'Together We Make Eastleigh' public survey and stakeholder workshops, capturing the community's vision for a revitalised Eastleigh and creating a framework for actionable steps that align with Eastleigh's planning policies and regeneration principles.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE ENGAGEMENT

The 'Together We Make Eastleigh' programme is driven by a set of clear, community-focused objectives designed to guide Eastleigh Borough Council (EBC) and its partners in creating a revitalised town centre that meets the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors alike. These objectives are structured around the four key work-streams of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) project, each aimed at addressing specific challenges while leveraging the town's unique strengths.

Establish a Comprehensive Evidence Base for Decision-Making

One of the primary objectives is to deepen understanding of the town centre's catchment area, including the demographics, behaviours, and needs of both current and potential visitors. EBC seeks to use this engagement to:

- **Map Community Needs and Preferences:** Engage with a wide spectrum of stakeholders to gather qualitative and quantitative data on the town centre's current strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Define Visitor Profiles:** Identify different visitor groups and their preferences, frequency of visits, spending habits, and expectations, creating a basis for tailored town centre offerings.
- **Provide Evidence for Future Funding:** Use the data gathered to support EBC's pursuit of future external funding by demonstrating a clear community-backed case for investment and change.

Empower and Support Local Businesses

Eastleigh Borough Council aims to foster a more resilient, self-sustaining business community within the town centre. To do this, the engagement process seeks to:

- **Identify Opportunities for Business Growth:** Use insights from local businesses and consumers to reveal untapped market opportunities, particularly those that could attract a broader customer base or enhance the existing town centre offerings.
- **Strengthen Local Partnerships:** Encourage collaboration among local businesses, the Eastleigh BID, and key stakeholders to foster a more cohesive town centre experience that reflects the community's collective vision.
- **Support Sustainable Business Practices:** Develop strategies that help businesses optimise their operations, marketing, and engagement with the local community, enabling them to adapt to changing consumer trends and become active contributors to Eastleigh's revitalisation.

Reframe Eastleigh's Identity and Value Proposition

Creating a clear, cohesive identity for Eastleigh town centre.

- **Identify and Promote Unique Selling Points:** Gather insights on what current visitors and residents view as Eastleigh's strengths and distinctive characteristics, such as its heritage, community, and cultural amenities.
- **Address Negative Perceptions:** Use direct community input to understand any barriers or negative perceptions that may discourage visits, such as concerns around safety, and limited retail diversity.
- **Develop a Compelling Narrative:** Based on community feedback, craft a value proposition and brand identity for Eastleigh that highlights its distinctive qualities, creating a consistent message that resonates with residents and potential visitors alike.

Test and Implement Innovative Approaches to Public Realm

Finally, engagement is aimed at gathering public input on potential innovations for the town centre's public realm, specifically around the use of pedestrian-friendly spaces and expanded public amenities. Key aims include:

- **Gauge Community Support for Pedestrianisation:** Collect feedback on proposals to trial temporary road closures or pedestrian-only areas in parts of the town centre, including potential impacts on local businesses and visitor experience.
- **Explore New Uses for Public Spaces:** Identify ideas for re-imagining Eastleigh's public spaces, such as pedestrianisation, expanding outdoor dining, adding green spaces, and creating flexible event areas that can host a variety of cultural and social activities.
- **Monitor and Adapt Based on Community Feedback:** Use feedback from engagement activities and the trial period to assess the success of these innovations, adjusting as needed to enhance their impact on community life and business growth.

2. Engagement: Methodology, Reach, and Insights

Data Analysis

All data gathered from workshops, interviews, the survey, and desk reviews were systematically analysed to identify recurring themes and issues. A mixed-methods analytical approach was used to combine qualitative insights with quantitative findings, building a nuanced understanding of the town's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.

This analysis revealed consistent themes across different demographic groups, reinforcing confidence in the reliability and relevance of the findings. Key themes, such as community pride, transport/movement accessibility, retail diversity, and youth engagement, emerged as primary areas for focus, guiding the subsequent development of actionable recommendations for Eastleigh town centre's revitalisation.

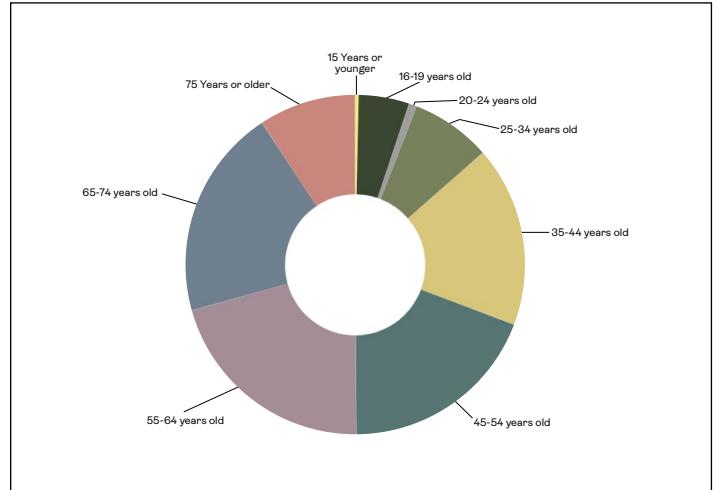


Diagram: Age of Public Survey Respondents

2.2 ENGAGEMENT REACH

- 2422 public survey responses
- 5 focused Stakeholder workshops
- Youth workshop with 39 Barton Peveril leadership students

The public survey was supported by 5 targeted workshops:

- Student Workshop (39 attendees)
- Culture, Community & Heritage Workshop (16 attendees)
- Movement Workshop (7 attendees)
- Retail & Business Workshop (22 attendees)
- Councillor Workshop (9 attendees)

Capturing a Range of Views

The “Together We Make Eastleigh” public survey reached 2422 respondents, capturing a wide range of perspectives from local residents, business owners, visitors, and those who work or study in Eastleigh. The majority of respondents were local residents (83%), which provides a strong foundation of community insight; however, additional perspectives were gained from local business owners and employee’s of local businesses (14%) and visitors (8%). Age demographics skewed towards those aged 45-74, with under-25s comprising approximately 6% of respondents.

These sessions fostered in-depth discussion on specific topics, with facilitators guiding conversations to explore participant concerns, ideas, and priorities for the town centre.

2.3 KEY INSIGHTS

Perceptions of Eastleigh Town Centre

Engagement participants were asked to describe their feelings about Eastleigh town centre. Positive associations centred around community spirit, accessibility, and recreational spaces, highlighting Eastleigh’s role as a social and convenient hub. However, negative perceptions were prominent, with concerns around retail decline, safety, and general upkeep surfacing repeatedly. The responses reflect a community that values the town’s potential but is eager for meaningful improvements to address both functional and aesthetic challenges.

Participants expressed appreciation for several locations within Eastleigh that contribute to its community identity and liveability:

- **Cultural and Leisure Venues:** The Point Theatre, Vue Cinema, and the Swan Centre are popular destinations, appreciated for their role in offering family-friendly entertainment. These venues serve as vital community hubs that bring people together, making Eastleigh a social destination for residents of all ages.

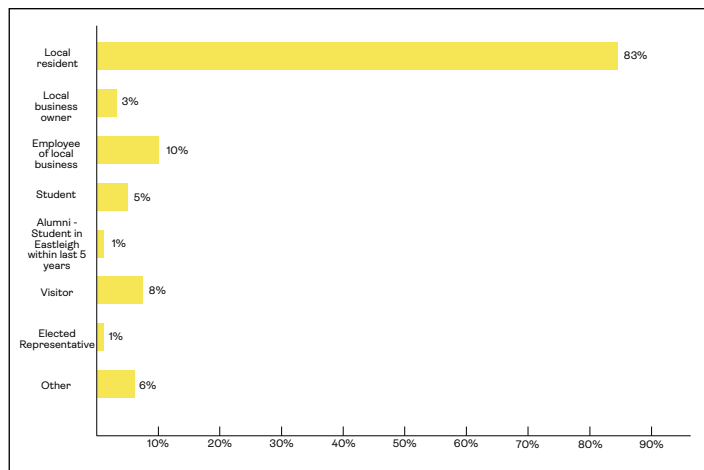


Diagram: Public Survey Respondents relationship with Eastleigh

- **Parks and Green Spaces:** Leigh Road Recreation Ground and other local parks and green spaces were frequently mentioned as favourite spots. These spaces offer valued green areas for leisure and family activities, with respondents highlighting them as essential for Eastleigh’s appeal as a family-friendly town.



Image: Leigh Road Recreation Ground

- **Dining and Social Hubs:** Restaurants and cafés, especially independent options such as Steam Town, are popular for daytime socialising. However, respondents expressed a need for more diverse and high-quality dining options, particularly in the evenings.



Image: Steam Town

- **Events and Festivals:** Events such as the Christmas lights switch-on, summer beach, Eastleigh Unwrapped, Mela, and other free family activities are widely appreciated. Respondents feel these events help foster a sense of community and provide entertainment for local families, particularly for those with young children.



Image: Eastleigh Unwrapped, The Point

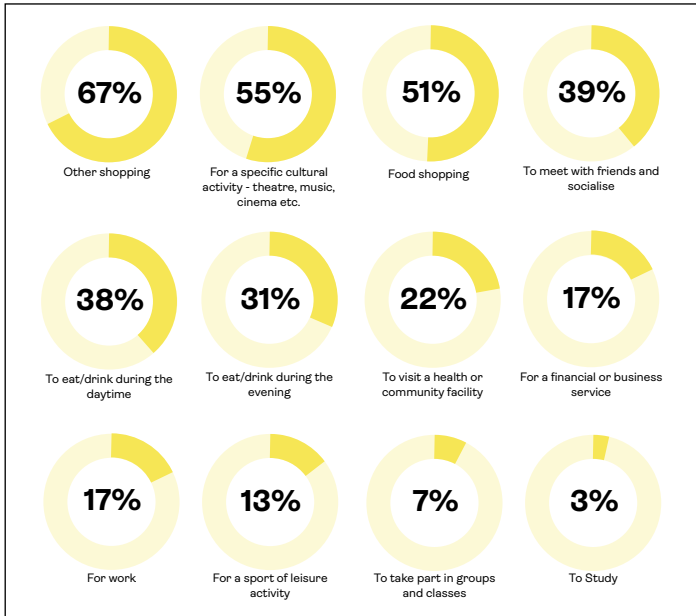
Issues Affecting Eastleigh Town Centre

The survey, workshops and conversations highlighted several key issues that residents and visitors feel impact Eastleigh’s vibrancy and appeal:

- **Retail Decline and Vacant Units:** Many respondents were concerned by the high number of empty retail units and the prevalence of vape shops and fast-food outlets. This retail mix was viewed as diminishing the town’s unique character and discouraging longer visits. Suggestions included incentivising independent businesses and establishing pop-up shops to diversify Eastleigh’s retail offerings.
- **Safety and Cleanliness:** Safety concerns, particularly around antisocial behaviour, were frequently mentioned, with respondents indicating that the town feels “run-down” in some areas. Issues such as graffiti, litter, and a lack of visible policing were cited as factors that reduce Eastleigh’s appeal, especially for families, young people, and elderly residents who may feel unsafe during evening hours.
- **Limited Evening Economy:** The lack of nightlife and evening dining options was a notable concern. Many participants feel that Eastleigh lacks venues for evening socialising beyond a few chain restaurants. A stronger evening economy, potentially with more independent restaurants, pubs, and event spaces, was suggested to enhance Eastleigh’s appeal for all age groups.
- **Transportation and Accessibility Challenges:** While many value Eastleigh’s compact layout, there were calls for improved public transport, pedestrian routes, and cycling facilities. Participants pointed out that narrow pathways, limited crossings, and inconsistent bus services create barriers for non-drivers, particularly those with limited mobility.
- **Competition with Neighbouring Towns:** Many stated they often prefer nearby centres like Southampton and Winchester for shopping and leisure due to their broader retail offerings, attractive atmosphere, cultural offer, and perceived safety. Eastleigh’s current retail mix and ambiance were seen as less competitive.
- **Lack of youth options:** Engagement highlights a gap in amenities for families, teenagers, and young adults, with calls for more free or low-cost activities, youth centres, and family-oriented attractions. Specific suggestions include more and improved playground equipment and creative play areas for young families, and facilities designed specifically for teenagers to socialise and engage in activities.

Visiting Eastleigh Town Centre - Diversity of Uses

Public survey respondents were asked about their primary reasons for visiting Eastleigh town centre, revealing a rich variety of uses:



- Work and Study:** Though fewer survey respondents visit Eastleigh for work (17%) or to study (3%), there was appreciation for facilities like Eastleigh and Barton Peveril Colleges' and the town's convenient public transport connections. Students in particular valued accessible study spaces, yet many expressed a desire for more quiet public areas suited to study and creative activities.



Image: Shops on Market Street



Image: Cafe on Market Street

- Shopping:** Shopping emerged as a primary reason, with 67% of survey respondents indicating they visit for non-essential shopping and 51% for food shopping. However, comments indicated that the existing retail mix lacks diversity and does not fully meet local needs.
- Dining and Socialising:** Approximately 38% of public survey respondents visit the town centre to eat and drink during the day, and 31% in the evening. Cafés, particularly in the Swan Centre and on Market Street, were noted as popular choices. There is, however, a significant desire for more local and independent dining options, particularly in the evening, as well as family-friendly spaces that cater to different age groups.
- Cultural and Recreational Activities:** 55% of public survey respondents indicated that they visit Eastleigh town centre for specific cultural activities, such as visits to The Point Theatre, Vue Cinema, and community events, draw them to Eastleigh. Respondents called for additional venues and more frequent events to enhance the town's cultural appeal, emphasising a gap in cultural options that would help define Eastleigh's unique identity.
- Health and Community Services:** Health and community facilities are also significant destinations, with 22% of survey respondents visiting for services such as the library, community centre, or healthcare facilities. These locations were valued for their accessibility and importance in fostering a sense of community, particularly for families and older residents.



Image: The Point Theatre



Image: Swan Centre Leisure complex



Image: Community Garden

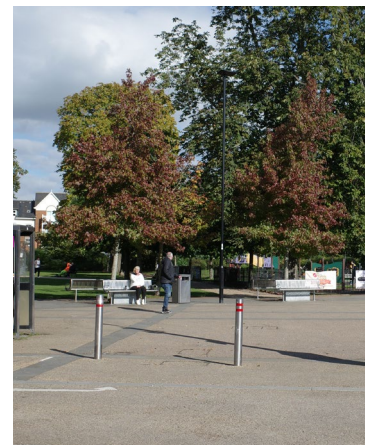


Image: Leigh Road Rec.

Visiting Eastleigh Town Centre - Transport & Movement

The 'Together We Make Eastleigh' survey highlights a range of transport methods used by residents and visitors, with distinct differences in the frequency of visits and engagement with the town centre based on the primary mode of travel.

- Car Travel:** Driving is the most common mode of travel to Eastleigh, with 54% of respondents typically using a car to reach the town centre. This trend is particularly noticeable among residents living further from the centre and those aged 25-64, who rely on the convenience of car travel for various activities such as shopping, dining, and work. However, many drivers indicated that the current traffic congestion, parking fees, and lack of frequent public transport options contribute to a dependence on cars that they would prefer to reduce.

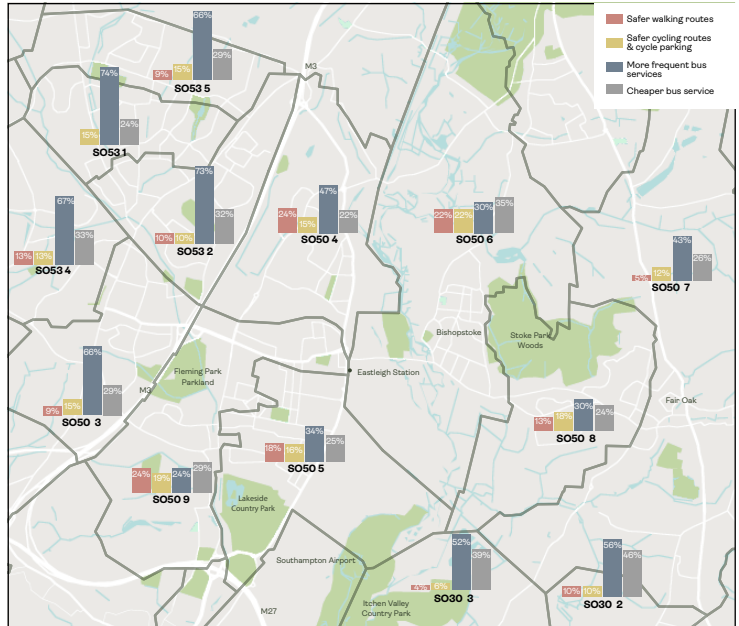


Diagram: Survey Question - What would help you leave your car at home? (Local Respondents that usually drive and park)

Aspirations for a Sustainable, Active Town Centre

Survey responses and workshop discussions reveal a strong interest in reducing Eastleigh's reliance on car travel and enhancing sustainability through improved active travel infrastructure and greener options. The community's aspirations align with Eastleigh Borough Council's goals of creating a sustainable, accessible, and less car-dependent town centre.

- Enhanced Pedestrian and Cycling Infrastructure:** The majority of engagement participants (over 60%) support increased pedestrian areas, particularly on High Street and Market Street. Enhanced pathways, additional crossings, and better lighting were also recommended to improve walkability. For cyclists, safer cycle lanes, secure bike parking, and signage were highlighted as essential to making cycling a viable, safe option for all ages.

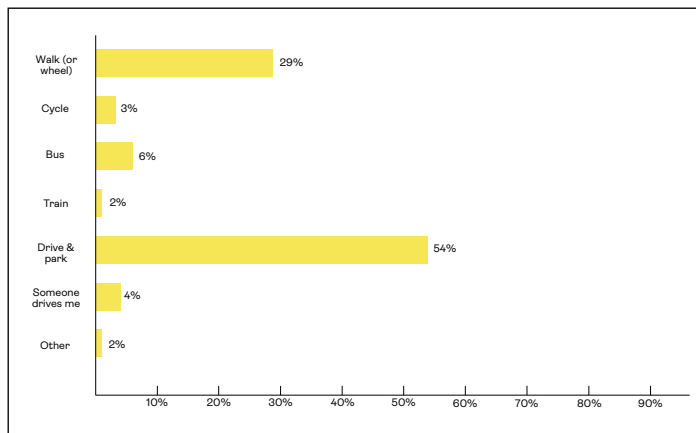


Diagram: Usual mode of travel to Eastleigh town centre

- Walking and Active Travel:** 33% of local respondents reported walking or wheeling to the town centre. Walking/wheeling is more prevalent among those living within or near the town centre, who enjoy the benefits of Eastleigh's compact layout. Active travel options like walking are also associated with higher visit frequency; respondents who walk to the town centre reported visiting almost 2.5 times more frequently than those who drive. Cyclists, although a smaller group at 3%, share a similar pattern of frequent visits. Frequent visits by these groups suggest a strong local connection and reliance on the town centre for regular activities. Walking and cycling also correlate with increased spending in the town centre. On average, these individuals spend approximately double the amount over the course of a month (excluding main food shop) compared to car users, indicating that those travelling actively are more likely to support local businesses with frequent, smaller purchases. This higher engagement reinforces the community's potential to support a vibrant town centre retail and social hub.
- Public Transport:** Public transport are less common, with only 6% of local residents using rail or buses to travel to the town centre. Respondents expressed a desire for more frequent and affordable bus services, particularly from neighbourhoods west of the M3, to make public transport a more attractive alternative.

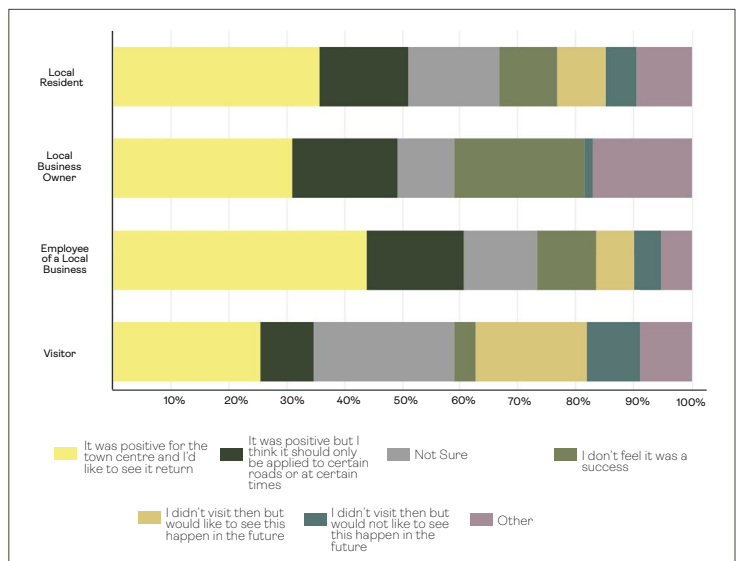


Diagram: Survey Question - What did you think of the previous pedestrianisation of High Street and Market Street during COVID?

- **Public Transport Improvements:** A common sentiment was that more frequent and affordable bus services could encourage residents to leave their cars at home. Participants suggested better connectivity to neighbourhoods such as Chandler's Ford and Fair Oak, noting that improved bus frequency and extended routes would support a shift toward sustainable commuting and reduce the demand for town centre parking.
- **Reducing Car Dependency:** Over 62% of local survey respondents feel there are currently no attractive alternatives to car travel for reaching Eastleigh town centre. To address this, many respondents suggested implementing measures to foster an environment where walking and cycling are prioritised.
- **Environmental Benefits of Active Travel:** Participants expressed enthusiasm for a greener Eastleigh that supports cleaner air and more sustainable urban spaces. Increased greenery in public areas, including tree-lined streets, planters, and pocket parks were highlighted as interventions that would create a more pleasant environment for walking, further promoting active travel and sustainable movement practices.

Barriers to Active Travel and Opportunities for Improvement

While engagement reveals a strong preference for more sustainable travel options, several barriers currently discourage active travel and public transport use:

- **Safety and Infrastructure:** The need for safer walking and cycling routes was a recurring theme, with many survey respondents calling for protected bike lanes, well-maintained footpaths, and secure bike parking. These changes would provide residents with viable alternatives to driving, particularly for short trips and daily errands.
- **Parking and Accessibility Concerns:** Those reliant on cars indicated that accessible parking options remain necessary, particularly for those with mobility issues or families with young children.
- **Public Transport Accessibility:** Limited bus frequency and coverage emerged as key concerns. Residents suggested that improving bus reliability and extending routes to under-served areas would make public transport a more practical option, especially for those who cannot cycle or prefer not to drive.

2.4 KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

Despite challenges raised, participants see considerable potential for enhancing Eastleigh's town centre. Key opportunities identified include:

- **Revitalising the Retail Landscape:** There is strong community support for attracting more independent businesses to reduce vacancies and make Eastleigh's retail landscape more diverse. Suggestions include lower rents, and temporary leases for pop-up shops.
- **Enhancing Green Spaces and Public Realm:** Many participants expressed enthusiasm for making Eastleigh more pedestrian-friendly by increasing green spaces, improving street furniture, and adding public art. The public survey demonstrates support for future pedestrianisation of High Street and Market Street, creating outdoor seating areas, and introducing more planters and greenery.
- **Expanded Cultural and Social Activities:** There was strong support for regular events and more venues dedicated to arts and community gatherings. Many participants, particularly those aged under 25, recommended creating more youth-centred facilities, cultural hubs, and spaces for community and social events, to foster inclusivity and attract a younger demographic.
- **Improving Safety and Cleanliness:** Visible improvements to cleanliness and improved safety measures such as CCTV and police presence, were highlighted as essential for making Eastleigh feel safer and more welcoming. Participants suggested initiatives like anti-litter campaigns, street maintenance, and increased lighting in key areas to address concerns around public safety.

3.

Key Themes & Priority Areas

SPACES AND OFFER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

Young people in Eastleigh (aged 16 - 24 years) have expressed clear views about the current offer in the town centre. While they appreciate certain aspects, such as accessible food outlets and leisure venues, there is a recurring sense that the town lacks sufficient activities, diversity, and spaces tailored to their needs.

- **Social Hubs and Food Outlets:** Many respondents identified food outlets, particularly fast food and casual dining venues such as McDonald's, KFC, and Nando's, as important social spaces. However, they emphasised the need for more affordable and unique options.

"There are lots of food places, but it's all the same stuff."

"We need more third spaces—places where we can hang out without spending money."

- **Entertainment Venues** like the Vue Cinema, Hollywood Bowl, and The Point Theatre were frequently praised, but many young people felt these offerings were limited and insufficient to meet their interests.

"The cinema and bowling are good, but that's about it—there's nothing else for free."



Image: Grantham Green

- **Transport Links:** Eastleigh's strong transport connections are appreciated, especially by students who commute from nearby areas. However, the town centre is often seen as less attractive compared to Southampton or Winchester.

"I mostly come to Eastleigh because it's easy to get to from my college, but there's more to do in Southampton."

WHY THIS MATTERS

A vibrant, youth-friendly town centre can strengthen Eastleigh's appeal, retain younger generations, and encourage them to engage more with their local community. Providing engaging, safe, and affordable spaces for young people will enhance their quality of life and help cultivate a sense of belonging. Without these improvements, young people may continue to seek out larger, neighbouring towns and cities for their leisure and social needs.



Image: Swan Centre Leisure complex

- **Parks and Green Spaces:** Parks such as Leigh Road Recreation Ground were mentioned as valued outdoor areas, but feedback highlighted the need for improvements, including safer and cleaner environments, as well as more facilities like social seating areas and leisure facilities such as skateparks.

- *"The parks are nice, but they could be*

KEY PRIORITIES EXPRESSED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

More Diverse and Inclusive Leisure Activities:

Young people consistently mentioned the lack of diverse leisure opportunities. They expressed interest in affordable leisure facilities targeting young people, such as sports pitches, creative activities, and interactive attractions.

“We need more fun activities like crazy golf or escape rooms that are affordable for us.”

“Another gym that’s not so expensive would be great.”

Improved Social Spaces and “Third Places”:

There is a demand for safe, welcoming spaces where young people can socialise (and study) without financial pressure. Café-style lounges, study areas, and welcoming casual seating areas in green spaces were frequently mentioned.

“We need more places where we can just chill and meet friends without spending money.”

“Better parks and more benches would make the town more inviting.”

Safety and Accessibility Improvements:

Safety concerns were a recurring theme, particularly regarding antisocial behaviour and poor lighting in the evenings. Respondents called for increased security and safe spaces for young people to socialise.

“The town can feel rough in the evenings—we need better lighting and security.”

Expanded Retail and Food Options:

Young people find the retail mix in Eastleigh uninspiring, often describing it as outdated or irrelevant. They also expressed interest in more diverse dining options, such as street food markets and independent cafés.

“There aren’t many shops for young people.”

“Street food festivals would be a great way to make the town more lively.”

Youth-Led Events and Engagement Opportunities:

Young people expressed a desire to contribute to the town’s development through planning forums and community-driven projects. They also want events tailored to their interests, such as music festivals, cultural celebrations, and youth focused markets.

“Let young people help design the events—they know what we want.”

“We need more live music and cultural events—something to bring us all together.”

LOOKING FORWARD: A YOUTH-CENTRIC EASTLEIGH

To better serve its younger population, Eastleigh must reimagine its town centre as a dynamic, inclusive, and engaging place. This includes creating more affordable leisure facilities, safe and vibrant social hubs, and opportunities for young people to shape the town’s future. By addressing these priorities, Eastleigh can cultivate a strong connection with its younger residents and become a destination of choice for the next generation.

A DIVERSE TOWN CENTRE OFFER

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

- **Retail diversity is lacking:** Participants expressed views that town centre is dominated by charity shops, vape stores, and discount retailers, leading to dissatisfaction with its retail mix. (Though charity shops are viewed as an asset amongst some demographics, particularly under 25s)

“We need shops that are unique, not just more of the same.”

- **Eastleigh's Evening economy is underdeveloped:** Engagement highlighted the absence of late-night retail and dining options reduces the town centre's appeal after dark.

“There's nowhere to go after work—it just shuts down.”

- **Limited youth and family-friendly spaces:** There are few interactive, affordable spaces for teenagers and families, leaving gaps in their town centre experience.

“There's nothing for young people—no shops or spaces that feel like they're for us.”

WHY THIS MATTERS

- A vibrant town centre attracts diverse audiences and creates a reason for residents and visitors to spend more time and money in the town centre.
- Improving the evening economy ensures the town is active beyond typical retail hours, contributing to a safer, livelier environment.
- By providing youth- and family-focused spaces, Eastleigh can retain local engagement and cater to intergenerational needs, making the town centre inclusive.

KEY PRIORITIES

More independent shops and fresh retail options:

Participants want independent shops that reflect Eastleigh's community. Respondents emphasised the importance of introducing independent shops, eco-friendly stores, pop-ups, and markets to create excitement and variety.

“We want something different—boutique shops, handmade goods, or vintage stores”

“We need shops that stand out, like independent businesses or unique pop-ups. There's just too much repetition right now.”

Suggestions include:

- Offering reduced and/or flexible rates for small and start-up businesses
- Introducing a regular market with focus on local producers, makers and small businesses.

A livelier evening economy:

People want a lively town centre in the evenings, with more casual dining, live entertainment, and retail that stays open later.

“Live music nights, outdoor markets, and late-night cafés would bring people into town after dark”

“After work, there's not much to do here. More bars, live music, or restaurants could make it worth staying longer.”

Affordable, family- and youth-friendly spaces:

Families and young people have called for more play areas, teen-oriented facilities/attractions, and spaces for younger demographics to spend time without pressure to spend money.

“Shops and spaces aimed at younger people would make the town feel more vibrant.”

“We need more places that feel welcoming for teenagers and families. Maybe a youth zone or interactive spaces that are affordable.”

LOOKING FORWARD

Eastleigh's town centre holds potential to evolve into a vibrant hub that reflects the town's character and community diversity. Prioritising retail and leisure diversity is essential to creating a destination that attracts/increases footfall and meets the varied needs of residents.

The future of the town centre lies in a multi-faceted approach with Eastleigh Borough Council, The BID, and town centre landlords such as The Swan Shopping Centre working collaboratively to:

- **Encourage Independent Retailers:** Explore incentives such as reduced rents, flexible lease terms, and support for start-ups can attract boutique shops, eco-friendly businesses, and local artisans. Pop-up opportunities and regular markets focusing on local producers are key to adding variety and vibrancy to the high street.
- **Revitalise the Evening Economy:** Extending retail and dining hours, alongside live entertainment and events, can establish Eastleigh as an active and welcoming place to visit in the evening. More independent bars and restaurants, street food venues, and cultural programming have the potential to create a lively and inclusive atmosphere.
- **Enhance Inclusivity for Young People and Families:** A high street that caters to all generations is critical, with affordable and interactive spaces for families and teenagers playing an important role. Dedicated areas for young people to socialise, as well as family-friendly attractions, can help ensure the town centre is welcoming and engaging for everyone.
- **Create a Distinctive Identity:** A diverse and distinctive high street can help challenge competition from larger nearby towns. Unique shops, creative uses of public spaces, and a strong cultural offer are vital to establishing the town as a dynamic town centre.

MOVEMENT & PUBLIC REALM

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

The engagement process revealed significant feedback about transportation and the public realm in Eastleigh, highlighting a mix of frustrations with current conditions and aspirations for a more sustainable and pedestrian-friendly town centre.

- **Reliance on Cars:** 54% of survey respondents typically use a car to access the town centre, driven by convenience but frustrated by congestion, parking fees, and limited public transport options.

"It's not that I want to drive, but there just aren't good alternatives—buses are unreliable, and cycling feels unsafe."

- **Support for Pedestrianisation:** A majority of engagement participants supported pedestrianising key areas such as High Street and Market Street, particularly during peak hours, weekends, or events.

"If we pedestrianised properly—with seating, trees, and a café culture—it could transform the atmosphere."

- **Active Travel Challenges:** 33% of local survey respondents reported walking to the town centre, a group that visits 2.5 times more frequently and spends significantly more than car users. Cyclists, though fewer in number (3%), face poor cycling infrastructure and limited secure parking.

"Better cycle lanes and parking would make cycling a real option."

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"Better cycle lanes and parking would make cycling a real option."

- **Safety Concerns:** Safety while walking, particularly at night, was a recurrent concern. Underpasses, the Swan Centre area, and poorly lit pathways were flagged as deterrents to walking.

"Walking home through the underpasses feels unsafe, especially at night."

- **Public Transport Frustrations:** Only 6% of local respondents travel to Eastleigh town centre by bus, citing irregular schedules, lack of direct routes, and high fares.

"We need better buses to connect outlying areas like Fair Oak and Bishopstoke—driving shouldn't be the only option."

WHY THIS MATTERS

- **Economic Vitality:** Walkers and cyclists visit the town centre more frequently and spend more per visit than car users, underlining the economic value of prioritising active travel.
- **Environmental Impact:** Reducing car reliance aligns with goals for sustainability and cleaner air.
- **Inclusivity and Accessibility:** Improved walking and cycling infrastructure ensures the town is welcoming to all, including those without access to cars.
- **Safety and Appeal:** A well-lit, pedestrian-friendly environment fosters a sense of safety and attracts more visitors, particularly families and the evening economy.

KEY PRIORITIES

Enhancing Pedestrian and Cycling Infrastructure:

Engagement participants advocated for protected bike lanes, secure bike parking, and better-maintained footpaths.

"We need proper bike paths and secure places to lock bikes—right now, cycling isn't viable."

"The pavements are uneven and hard to navigate, especially for anyone with mobility challenges."

Suggestions include:

- Installing cycle lanes on arterial roads leading into the town centre.
- Introducing more pedestrian crossings and improving pavements along High Street and Market Street.

Revisit Pedestrianisation:

Many called for a phased reintroduction of pedestrianisation to create vibrant, car-free zones, particularly during weekends or special events.

"When the streets were closed during COVID, it made the town feel more alive and welcoming."

Improve Safety Measures:

Enhanced lighting in poorly lit areas such as routes around the Swan Centre and railway crossings was a frequent request.

“More lighting and visible security would make walking at night much safer.”

Suggestions include:

- Adding CCTV and increasing police presence.
- Incorporating “safe routes” that are well-lit and monitored.

Address Public Transport Barriers:

Feedback highlighted the need for affordable, frequent bus services and better connections to neighbourhoods like Fair Oak and Chandler’s Ford.

“Affordable and reliable buses would be a game-changer for cutting down on car use.”

Suggestions include:

- Creating branded shuttle services connecting Eastleigh College, the Leisure Centre, and residential areas.
- Introducing a discounted, multi-ride bus ticket for town centre travel.

Increase Urban Greening:

Participants emphasised the role of greenery in encouraging walking and creating a more pleasant environment.

“Plant more trees and create green corridors—it’ll make the streets inviting.”

Suggestions include:

- Adding planters and street trees along High Street and Market Street.
- Introducing small green parklets with seating and shade throughout the town centre.

Improved Wayfinding Signage:

Respondents noted a lack of clear signage and wayfinding tools.

“It’s not obvious how to get to some places—better signs would help visitors.”

LOOKING FORWARD

Working with Hampshire County Council, Eastleigh has the opportunity to re-imagine movement and public space by prioritising active travel, pedestrian-friendly streets, and sustainable transport. Investing in infrastructure that supports walking, cycling, and public transport will create a safer, greener, and more vibrant town centre that benefits residents, businesses, and visitors alike. Addressing current barriers while aligning with the community’s aspirations will help Eastleigh evolve into a town that is accessible, sustainable, and economically thriving.

HERITAGE & IDENTITY

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

The feedback emphasised a strong sense of pride in Eastleigh's history and its potential to become a town with a distinctive character. However, respondents frequently expressed that this identity is not currently visible or celebrated within the town centre. They also highlighted the need for Eastleigh to look forward and embrace a more vibrant and inclusive sense of place.

- **Lack of visible identity:** Many residents noted that Eastleigh's railway and aviation history, including its role in Spitfire production, is under-represented.

"We should have visible reminders of our history—plaques, art, or something interactive to teach visitors."

- **Desire for visual vibrancy:** Public art, murals, and creative installations were mentioned as ways to inject personality into the town centre..

"Murals and sculptures would make Eastleigh feel more alive and connected to its story."

- **A unique identity moving forward:** Residents also expressed the need to balance heritage with a forward-looking identity that reflects the diverse and dynamic community Eastleigh is becoming.

"Let's celebrate the town's future too—more focus on its people and creativity."

WHY THIS MATTERS

- **Community pride:** A strong sense of identity helps foster local pride, particularly for long-standing residents who value the town's heritage.
- **Attracting visitors:** A distinct, celebrated identity can position Eastleigh as a destination, drawing tourists and encouraging regional visitors to explore the town.
- **Revitalising the public realm:** Public art and cultural projects not only beautify the town but also provide points of interaction and interest for residents and visitors alike.
- **Reflecting community diversity:** Emphasising inclusivity and creativity ensures that Eastleigh evolves as a town that is welcoming to everyone, celebrating its diverse population and ambitions for the future.

KEY PRIORITIES

Celebrate Eastleigh's Story Through Public Art and Installations:

Frequent suggestions include introducing visual elements that showcase Eastleigh's character and history in creative ways.

"We need sculptures or murals that represent Eastleigh—trains, planes, or even the Spitfire."

"Public art could bring the streets to life. Involve local artists so it feels personal to the community."

Develop a Visionary Town Identity:

Residents want Eastleigh to strike a balance between honouring its history and embracing a forward-looking narrative.

"Eastleigh's identity shouldn't just be about the past. Let's celebrate what makes it vibrant today—its diversity and creativity."

Suggestions include:

- Creating spaces for modern cultural expression, such as community art workshops or design competitions for public projects.
- Hosting events that blend history with contemporary culture, such as a Spitfire-inspired music festival or a modern art trail tied to historical themes.

Introduce Heritage Trails and Interactive Experiences:

There is strong interest in making Eastleigh's history accessible and engaging for all ages.

"A heritage trail with digital guides could teach people about Eastleigh in a fun way."

"Interactive exhibits or AR apps could bring our history to life—imagine walking around and seeing how the town looked years ago."

Suggestions include:

- A digital heritage trail with QR codes linking to videos or AR recreations of historical sites.
- Guided tours or pop-up exhibitions showcasing key moments in Eastleigh's history, such as its role in the railway or aviation industries.

Create Community-Inspired Public Spaces:

Respondents want public spaces that reflect local culture and invite gathering, relaxation, and creativity.

“Design places where people can meet, talk, and enjoy art—it should feel like it’s for the community.”

“Outdoor spaces could have small stages or areas for events to bring people together.”

Suggestions for transforming public spaces include:

- Green areas with seating and art installations where families and friends can gather.
- Open stages for performances, local storytelling, or seasonal events.

Foster Inclusivity and Celebrate Diversity:

Residents called for Eastleigh’s identity to embrace its present-day diversity, with cultural and community-led initiatives that feel inclusive.

“Host events and create art that reflects all of Eastleigh’s people, not just its history.”

Suggestions include:

- Multicultural festivals or food markets showcasing the town’s varied cultures.
- Community art projects involving schools, colleges, and local organisations to create works that reflect Eastleigh’s diversity.
- Additionally, Eastleigh’s Summer 2024 Artist in Residence (Megan Clark-Bagnall) report of findings highlighted that residents wanted to see the Return of Eastleigh Carnival to take creative control and bring people together.

LOOKING FORWARD

Eastleigh’s identity has the potential to be one of its greatest strengths. By celebrating its history while embracing a forward-looking vision, working with local, community groups, creative organisations, and the voluntary sector, Eastleigh can create spaces and experiences that reflect its heritage, creativity, and community spirit. Public art, interactive trails, and inclusive events will not only beautify the town but also create a sense of connection and pride for everyone who lives and works in, or visits, Eastleigh.

LEISURE AND CULTURAL OFFER

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

Engagement feedback highlights a strong desire for a more vibrant and inclusive cultural and leisure offer in Eastleigh. Participants expressed the need for activities and spaces catering to diverse demographics, including young people, families, older residents, and visitors. There was also a significant appetite for events, experiential retail, creative workshops, and more opportunities to engage with arts and culture.

- **Lack of variety in cultural and leisure activities:** While venues like The Point Theatre and Vue Cinema are appreciated, respondents feel these options are limited and expensive for many.

“There’s not much variety—once you’ve been to the cinema or bowling, there’s nothing else to do.”

- **Interest in markets and festivals:** Markets and seasonal events were consistently highlighted as opportunities to bring vibrancy to the town centre.

“A street food festival or a regular artisan market would make Eastleigh worth visiting.”

- **Desire for affordable creative workshops and spaces**

“We’d love creative spaces where people can make things, learn, or just relax.”

“Let’s have festivals and events that celebrate all the cultures and communities in Eastleigh.”

WHY THIS MATTERS

- **Enhances community pride:** Expanding leisure and cultural opportunities fosters a sense of belonging and encourages residents to engage with the town centre.
- **Attracts diverse users:** A robust cultural offer appeals to a range of demographics, encouraging families, young adults, and older residents to spend more time in Eastleigh.
- **Drives economic growth:** Events, experiential retail, and creative workshops generate footfall and support local businesses.
- **Promotes inclusivity and diversity:** Arts and culture can act as a platform for celebrating Eastleigh’s unique community and bringing people together.

KEY PRIORITIES

Develop Regular Markets and Experiential Retail:

Participants highlighted the appeal of street markets and pop-up retail experiences.

“Artisan markets or vintage fairs would add something unique to Eastleigh.”

“Street food events could bring people into the town and create a buzz.”

Suggestions include:

- Monthly themed markets featuring local and regional vendors (e.g., craft, food, vintage clothing).
- Experiential retail concepts like pop-up shops or “try-before-you-buy” spaces for local businesses.
- Collaborating with local producers and entrepreneurs to showcase Eastleigh’s creative talent.

Host More Events and Festivals:

There was strong enthusiasm for a regular calendar of events that appeal to all age groups and interests.

“Why not have a music or film festival that uses multiple venues around the town?”

“Seasonal festivals—like a Christmas market—would make Eastleigh a destination.”

Suggestions include:

- More Family-friendly seasonal festivals (e.g., Christmas markets, summer fairs, or harvest celebrations).
- More cultural celebrations reflecting the diversity of Eastleigh’s population.
- Music and arts festivals incorporating live performances, street theatre, and interactive exhibits.

Create Affordable and Accessible Creative Spaces:

Participants called for spaces where residents can engage with arts, crafts, and creative activities.

“We need places where people can learn skills, like pottery or painting, without it costing too much.”

Suggestions include:

- Multi-purpose venues for creative workshops, such as painting, photography, or music lessons.
- Affordable drop-in studios or maker spaces with access to tools and equipment.
- Hosting regular community art projects or collaborations with local schools and colleges.

Enhance Eastleigh’s Cultural Identity Through Arts and Performance:

Many participants emphasised the value of arts and culture in defining Eastleigh’s identity.

“Public performances and art installations would make the town centre feel more exciting and unique.”

Suggestions include:

- Open-air performance spaces for music, dance, and theatre.
- Rotating public art installations that reflect Eastleigh’s community and history.
- Incorporating arts into public spaces, such as murals, sculptures, or temporary exhibitions.

Expand Leisure Opportunities for Different Demographics:

Feedback highlighted the need for tailored activities to meet the needs of families, young adults, and older residents.

“For families, it’s all about affordable things to do together—play areas, activity zones, or family-friendly events.”

“Older residents need places to relax and socialise, like workshops or book clubs.”

“Teenagers want something fun that isn’t just bowling or the cinema.”

Suggestions include:

- Interactive play areas and outdoor activities for families.
- Events and workshops for older residents, such as craft clubs, community gardening, or storytelling sessions.
- Teen-friendly activities like youth music nights and creative workshops.

LOOKING FORWARD

The feedback emphasises the need for Eastleigh to evolve into a cultural and leisure destination that serves all the community. By fostering a mix of affordable events, activities & workshops for all ages, experiential retail, and inclusive cultural programming, Eastleigh can become a vibrant, engaging town centre that attracts and retains residents of all ages.

4. Next Steps

CONCLUSION/SUMMARY

The “Together We Make Eastleigh” engagement process has revealed a community eager to see its town centre revitalised into a dynamic, inclusive, and thriving hub that serves residents, visitors, and businesses alike. Through the in-depth survey, workshops, and conversations, several core themes have emerged that will shape the value proposition, vision and future placemaking proposals.

Youth-Centric Spaces and Activities

Young people in Eastleigh have voiced a need for safe, welcoming spaces that cater to their social and recreational needs without financial barriers. Prioritising youth-centric spaces, initiatives can enhance Eastleigh’s appeal to younger generations and families.

A Diverse and Vibrant Town Centre

Residents of and visitors to Eastleigh seek a more varied retail mix that reduces reliance on vape shops, fast-food and discount retailers, favouring independent businesses, markets, and experiential retail. A stronger evening economy, driven by diverse dining and live entertainment, is key to extending the town’s vibrancy beyond typical working hours.

An Accessible & Green Town Centre

Enhancing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, improving public transport connectivity, and creating greener, more accessible public spaces are common aspirations. These changes aim to reduce car dependency while fostering sustainability and making the town centre more attractive for active travel.

Community Identity and Heritage

The feedback highlights a strong desire to celebrate Eastleigh’s history, particularly its legacy as a Victorian railway hub and its role in aviation. While there is pride in these roots, there is also a clear demand to combine this heritage with a forward-looking identity that embraces diversity, creativity, and modern cultural expression. Public art, heritage trails, and inclusive festivals are seen as vital tools for strengthening Eastleigh’s sense of place.

Increased Cultural and Leisure Opportunities

There is significant appetite for expanded cultural and leisure options, from pop-up street food markets and festivals to affordable creative activities for all ages. These additions will not only drive footfall but also contribute to the town’s cultural identity and community cohesion.

Improved Safety and Cleanliness

Safety concerns and general upkeep were consistent barriers to engagement with the town centre. Improved lighting, visible policing, and anti-litter campaigns were among the measures proposed to address these issues and make Eastleigh feel more welcoming and family-friendly.

NEXT STEPS

These themes establish a solid foundation for the next stages of the study, particularly in crafting Eastleigh’s value proposition and vision.

The focus will be on leveraging the community’s insights to develop a narrative and action plan that aligns with their needs and aspirations. The upcoming placemaking trial will serve as a tangible framework, showcasing approaches to public realm improvements and community-led initiatives that enhance Eastleigh’s appeal.

By addressing these priorities and fostering collaboration between stakeholders, Eastleigh can transition from its current challenges to becoming a vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive town centre for all.

Engagement Report.

Together We Make Eastleigh

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movement