

**AGENDA NO 778/21**  
**The Future of the Market Place**  
**Consultation 2022**

**Rationale:**

**Guildhall & Market Place Consultation (v1)**

During the summer of 2019 as part of the overall NHLF bid for the improvements of the Guildhall & Market Place, Thetford Town Council presented and delivered a consultation questionnaire to gather residents' views and ideas on how they would like to see the Guildhall and Market Place used in the future.

Four key questions were presented, but in terms of the future use of the Market Place, question 4 in that questionnaire asked:

***Q4. The new access ramp for the Guildhall will mean changes to the layout of the market place? How would you like the marketplace to be developed in the future?***

The question was supported with 4 options for the respondent to choose, the result of that question is provided in red as a percentage of those replies received.

1. That the marketplace does not change and be kept with unrestricted use. **23.27%**
2. That the marketplace car parking has 2 hour paid parking for shopping, and unpaid for disabled parking. (To increase footfall in the shops). **6.93%**
3. That the marketplace becomes a pedestrianised space with more permanent affordable stalls (like Norwich Market). **31.68%**
4. That the marketplace becomes a flexible pedestrianised area for seating, events and pop-up markets. **38.12%**

The internal and external improvements to the Guildhall were completed in the early autumn of 2021, with delays in supplies chains for contractors materials being seriously affected by the Covid pandemic, however the installation of the new entrance steps and access ramp has made an impact on the numbers of parking bays on offer, as we knew it would, therefore the numbers of parking bays have been reduced to 18 (including 2 disabled bays).

However, more encouragingly the improved access has meant that more visitors than ever have been to the Guildhall with those numbers in the first three months monitored and recorded at 10,066 by Christmas closure on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2021. This period would have included the Sikh event on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> September and the Christmas Lights switch on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2021, but nevertheless a full and diverse programme of Guildhall events and outdoor markets and plays has also contributed to these statistics which have been shared to the NHLF. Therefore, the demand and support for additional activity within the Guildhall

and Market Place is very evident and can be further exploited going forward outside the Covid restrictions.

### **Market Place Working Group**

A working group was set up by the ALP committee but restricted not just to Councillors sitting on that Committee, to review the results of the Guildhall & Market Place Consultation. The conclusion of the committee was to repurpose the Market Place as a space that would integrate with the Guildhall more seamlessly with the Market Place and utilise the space as a pedestrianised area to enjoy events whilst retaining the weekly markets and development of additional specialist markets. It was also envisaged that the Guildhall Tea Room, which opened late September 2021, as part of the overall planning would have a designated outdoor seating area and the whole area would be reviewed in terms of further green planting and benches to create further spaces to sit relax and enjoy the space.

The working group brought back a number of proposals to explore and cost, however it was felt that Full Council should agree to the closure of the Market Place for the use of a car park in order that the proposals could be developed further.

It was discussed at Full Council meeting on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2021, the decision below was agreed.

#### 481/21 MARKET PLACE CAR PARK

The Chair asked Councillor S Wright as Chair of the Thetford Market Place Steering Group to open the debate on 2 recommended options for the Market Place car park by the Venues and Communication Committee as well as to consider any other options identified by Councillors.

There followed a discussion when Councillors made the following points:

- A consultation had voted in favour on the car park being replaced by the marketplace pedestrianised area.
- The car park should be time limited for two hours so residents can use it on their shopping trips. Now the car park fills up at 8.00 am by retail workers who park there all day.
- The car park should be used for disabled spaces only.
- Residents and out of town users want the car park to return.
- There should be a final consultation – both online and face to face that is well promoted and well engaged by residents.
- The space currently used by Wetherspoons on a temporary basis be returned to the car park.
- The Council should not use the marketplace as a carpark, it should be the town centre.

Councillor J James proposed and Councillor R Brame seconded:

#### **RESOLVED: That Thetford Town Council:**

- That a final consultation on the Marketplace should be carried out as soon as possible. This would be on-line and in person, well promoted and well engaged.

- The car park should be reopened as soon as practical whilst this consultation is being held with the relevant H&S checks being carried out. Wetherspoons should be asked to remove their temporary outside space in the car park.

### **Subsequent Action Timeline:**

#### **Working Group 2:**

The original working group was stood down and a new working group formed to consider the format and delivery of a second Market Place consultation – Membership of that group were:

1. Mike Brindle
2. Brenda Canham
3. Chris Harvey
4. Ken Parker
5. Mark Robinson
6. Stuart Wright

The Working group discussed and presented the 3 options to be included in the Consultation questionnaire and an information pre-amble that would provide the respondent with a brief outline of what the various options may include.

The three options were:

- 1. The marketplace is used as a car park, with possible restrictions highlighted above.**
- 2. The marketplace becomes a pedestrian only area to be developed as the vision outlines above.**
- 3. The marketplace becomes a pedestrian area closest to the Guildhall and a limited amount of disabled parking is provided nearest the war memorial.**

#### **Reopening of Car Park during consultation:**

As directed by Full Council the Car Park was reopened after the Remembrance Sunday Parade on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

#### **Market Place Consultation v2.**

As directed by Full Council the Market Place questionnaire format was agreed and launched on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December with a closure date Friday 11 February and was promoted through online engagement and through public access to paper copies, supported with two Councillor led public events on the Market Place.

#### **Promotion of the Consultation document.**

- ✓ The Consultation document was published online through the Thetford Town Council website.
- ✓ Published and shared to TTC social media and subsequently through other local social media groups.

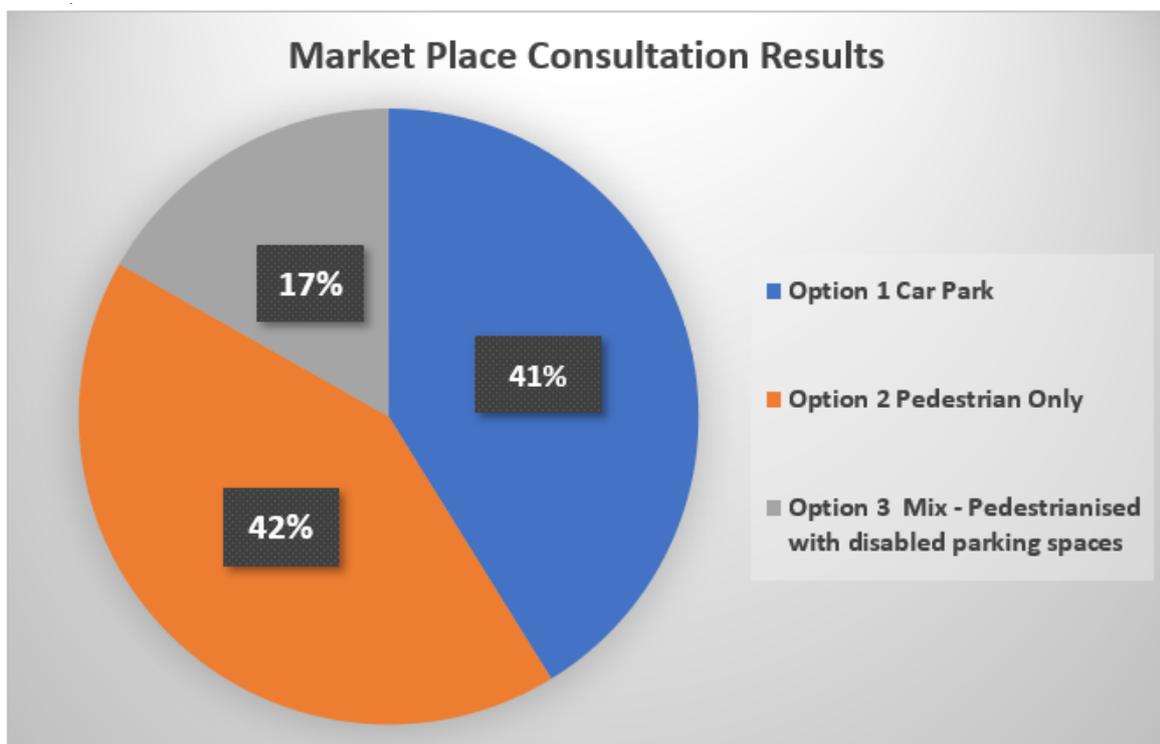
- ✓ Advertised in the January issue of the About Thetford magazine, which is delivered to every household in the town. The February issue of the About Thetford also covered an article explaining about the consultation and featured town councillors.
- ✓ Story covered in Thetford & Brandon Times & Bury Free Press – both included links to online consultation.
- ✓ Public Consultation on the Market Place at the Tuesday Market 1<sup>st</sup> February & Saturday Market 5<sup>th</sup> February – attended by Cllrs. C. Harvey & T Jermy (both consultation dates) and Cllr. M. Brindle (Sat 5<sup>th</sup> February).
- ✓ Hard copies of the Consultation document were available at the Reception Desk, Carnegie and The Guildhall Tea Room during opening hours.
- ✓ Several Councillors also took and distributed paper copies of the consultation document to other community centres and groups.

### **Future of the Market Place consultation results:**

The Future of the Market Place Consultation questionnaire drew a total of 364 respondents which is an increase on the 258 replies received in the Guildhall & Market Place Consultation presented in 2019.

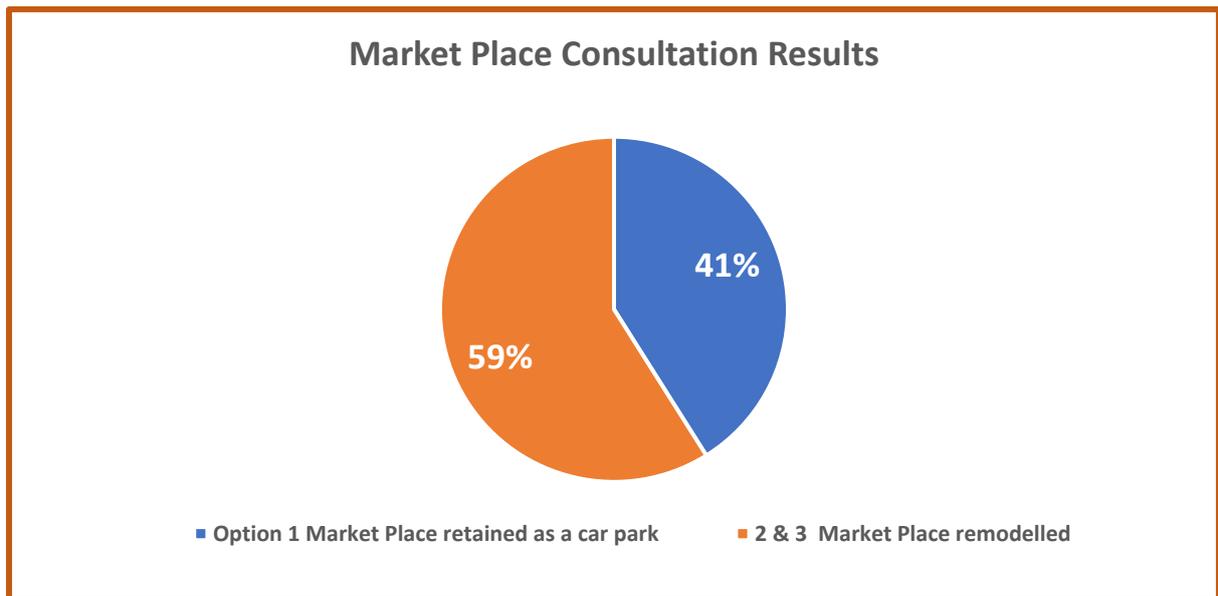
A summary of those choices received are outlined below.

They include both online responses and those received as paper copy submissions.



The result between the majority choices received were options 1 and 2 – retention of car park 41% and closure of car park and creation of pedestrianised area 42% - but Councillors should also understand that option 3 was also to change the status quo and albeit retain some disabled parking it also favoured the closure of the Market Place as a general car park.

The combined percentages of 2 & 3 -v- 1 is shown in the chart below.



It should also be noted that since re-opening the Market Place car park there has been a resurgence of poor parking, some have caused a serious Health & Safety issues and damage to street furniture and the surface, as the photographs show below, therefore in the event of the car park being retained this would need to be addressed as a matter of priority. A safe and clear pedestrian route to the Guildhall entrance steps and ramp is essential and an outside seating area for the Guildhall Tea Room will also need to be provided.



## **Conclusion:**

We have had two public consultations, albeit only a small number of respondents took part, we have promoted widely, offered both online and public engagement opportunities and given clear outline information of options offered.

The first consultation was a wider questionnaire that required respondents to make choices on how they would also like to see the Guildhall used, it did also ask how the respondents would like to see the Market Place used and the results showed a majority of those that completed the questionnaire 69.8% called for the space to be used as a pedestrianised area for a mix of pop up markets, events and extended and improved seating areas, and the result of this supported the NHLF bid to for the Guildhall access improvements.

The second consultation was more specific with its choices and asked for responses to 3 options

1. **Retain a car park but with some restrictions** – the supporting information outlined that there had been constant misuse of parking, with regular vehicle owners parking outside the designated bays, and some leaving their cars for extended periods that prohibit constant turn over means that the car park is a less valuable asset for shoppers visiting the Town Centre. The need for the policing of any restriction will need to be considered.
2. **The Market Place be closed as a car park and create a pedestrianised space outlined in the information provided.** This spoke of retaining the weekly markets, delivering additional and more regular events and activities, improving the space in terms of 'green' areas and seating, with seating also being allocated to the Guildhall Tea Room and other tenants located on the Market Place.
3. **The marketplace becomes a pedestrian area closest to the Guildhall and a limited amount of disabled parking is provided nearest the war memorial.** It had been suggested in the previous questionnaire that it was important to retain some disabled parking, there are currently two bays inside the perimeter of the Market Place, and there are a further two bays that are located by St. Cuthbert's Church/Post Office in Well Street. There are also two bays located outside Roy's in Guildhall Street.

## **Decision Required:**

Thetford Town Council have initiated and delivered two consultations to gather the views of those residents who wish to engage in the consultation process and the agenda item 778/21 requires the decision outlined to implement the next phase of the action plan for whatever option is approved.

### **MARKET PLACE CONSULTATION**

**To receive the results of the market consultation and to decide on the future use of the Market Place.**

**Decision required: To approve a proposed future use of the Market Place and to agree a plan for the implementation thereof.**

**Lead: Councillor Stuart Wright.**