

01

SUMMARY FINDINGS

This summarises the key findings ('community priorities') from the first public 'design drop-in' on The Wealdstone Project: the project to design a new civic campus - a replacement for Harrow's current Civic Centre – in Wealdstone town centre. The event took place on Saturday 21 January 2017, from 10am to 5pm at Holy Trinity Wealdstone. A drop-in exhibition ran all day, with more formal presentations and Q&A sessions with the project team, followed by tours of the site, at 11am and 2pm.

Who participated?

- 1. Approximately 177 people attended the event.** Approximately 112 people attended a Q&A session. 107 feedback forms were completed, mostly on the day. All material was made available after the event on the project website www.thewealdstoneproject.com
- 2. 88% of those attending classified themselves as 'local residents'** as opposed to business people or 'other'. 72% of participants live in the HA3 postcode area, 19% in the HA1 area and 4% in the HA2 area.
- 3.** Although turnout was high, demographic information provided suggests, compared to statistics for the borough as a whole, that **those attending were relatively advanced in years (75% were over 45 years old and 29% over 65), and not, as a sample, representative of Harrow's cultural diversity (e.g. ethnicity, religion).** Other aspects of the programme (workshops, meetings and interviews) are seeking to address this and to ensure that we engage with a full cross-section of the local population.

Use of community and civic space locally

- 1. Current civic centre:** 66% of those attending visit or use the Civic Centre, although only 24% of people do so once a month or more.
- 2. Issues with community space:** just over a quarter of participants belong to a group that regularly uses or hires space in the borough. Shortage of space *per se* for activities does not appear to be a major problem, but groups *do* have challenges accessing *appropriate* space.
 - Major barriers are **cost** (room hire rates, including in the Civic Centre, often feel too expensive), and **transport accessibility** (adequate parking space or proximity to good public transport). There are concerns that any theoretical community space provided in the new building may present the same issues i.e. that the Council will charge unaffordable rents, and that there will not be enough parking. (Although Wealdstone has good public transport people do not feel safe using it after dark, and may live in other parts of the borough where they would not feel safe returning home late after an event on public transport.)
 - Particular types of space felt to be lacking include meeting rooms, counselling rooms, music rehearsal, studio and performance spaces, sports spaces, space for parties and flexible space to sit with laptops and coffee to work.

The following priorities emerged from feedback given on the day, via feedback forms and through conversation at Q&A sessions.

Design specific priorities

- 1. A well-designed, attractive, locally-specific and appropriately 'civic' building:** this building sits right in the town centre, is highly visible, and represents Harrow and its people. Although opinions differ with regard to style, whether people prefer something striking and contemporary, or more subtle and traditional, they would like to see a building that (i) has a clear character – a character that carefully responds to and respects the nature of the surrounding architecture, (ii) that does not appear too dull, corporate and blocky (no 'concrete jungles'), and (iii) that feels appropriately 'classy' and civic while also being light, open and 'welcoming'.

2. **Building height:** many people would like the building to be prominent and visible, as a significant civic building, or note that a certain amount of space and services need to be accommodated. There is interest in features such as a clock-tower. However there are concerns regarding the impact on the local skyline and architectural identity of an excessively tall building, and fears regarding loss of privacy and day/sunlight to those living close to the site.
3. **Accessibility and a feeling of welcome:** this relates to the previous point. Many people have stressed to us that it is important to consider accessibility in the broadest sense. This means not just conscientious (and ideally also creative) observation and application of legislation, but also thinking about how the design and character of ground floor spaces and landscaping can draw people in, and feel friendly to people of all ages and backgrounds. At the same time, the different needs of different groups and visitors will need to be considered: some will require discreet, private or calm environments, depending on the service or activity they are accessing.
4. **Sustainability and energy-efficiency:** this is important to people, not just in terms of being 'green', but also in ensuring that the building meets its aims of keeping expenditure low. People have encouraged us to think ambitiously and creatively about use of different energy-saving technologies, as well as biodiversity. They are keen to understand the design team's strategy for this in more detail, to create a real exemplar development.
5. **Trees, greenery and planting:** people would like to see plenty of this in and around the centre, creating a pleasant atmosphere for visitors, enhancing the town centre and bringing ecological benefit.

Priorities requiring action from the Council and other agencies alongside the design team

6. **Making a real 'community' place:** there is some scepticism about how this will work in practice. Building location is one factor, with concerns about the way in which the main building is set back from the High Street behind Premier House, and therefore not that visible or accessible. However, people really like the idea of the new campus of buildings feeling as though it is 'of the people', offering spaces and activities, inside and outside, that local groups need (as long as they can afford to hire them), and that can bring the diverse community together. There is enthusiasm for the ideas of (i) the first two floors of the new building being able to accommodate public uses, and (ii) the Council Chamber being flexible and appropriate for community use. There is a desire that existing community activity on the site (library, Red Brick Café, youth centre) be retained or appropriately relocated.
7. **Clear and realistic parking and traffic management strategies:** people are very concerned about (i) the loss of Peel House car park to town centre shoppers and visitors, (ii) increased pressure on local streets from parking needs and vehicle movements of Civic Centre visitors and staff and (iii) possible increase in demand for resident parking from new families moving into town centre 'car-free' developments. They also want to ensure that those visiting the new centre can travel safely and conveniently to and from activities, and not be forced to use public transport, particularly after dark. They would like to see adequate well-located parking provided, measures taken to minimise congestion, excellent alternatives to parking explored and promoted for staff and visitors (car clubs and shares, taxi drop-off points, good cycle parking, increased bus and train services), and measures explored to mitigate against increased difficulty in parking for local residents (e.g. additional CPZ consultation).
8. **Address crime and anti-social behaviour/ safety and security:** Wealdstone town centre has significant issues. People stress that these need to be taken into account with the design of the building. Measures should be taken to 'design out' crime, and to create safe, open, well-lit spaces (no 'dark alleys'). Management and enforcement will be key to this with Council, police and – where relevant – youth services working together. People do not want this activity simply displaced; they are keen to see positive activity and alternatives provided.
9. **Consideration of existing residents:** many people live and work in the immediate vicinity of the site. They and others – on their behalf – want reassurance that impact on their ability to park, to enjoy privacy, sun/day-light and peace in their homes, will be minimised. This includes careful and well-communicated management during the construction period, and consideration of how any extended opening hours of the new building (at evenings and weekends) are managed.
10. **Bring benefit to Wealdstone as a whole wherever possible:** people are generally supportive of the idea of moving the centre to Wealdstone, and understand the possible regeneration benefits. They would like to see measures taken to ensure that these are delivered (encouraging Centre staff to spend money in the town centre for example, or providing space for local community activity such as markets and festivals/performances, or public toilets), and reassurance that existing local infrastructure can cope with all the incoming people – staff and residents – or that parallel steps are being taken to improve it.