

Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk St George's Guildhall Complex

DRAFT Consultation Analysis

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APPENDICES

1.0 Introduction

The Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk (BCKLWN) required a consultant team to assist them with exploring the potential sustainable uses and requirements of the Guildhall Complex, previously the King's Lynn Arts Centre which closed in late 2015.

The initial consultation process took place between the 9th September and 6th October 2016, and consisted of a consultation event at the Heritage Open Day which attracted a large number of visitors, where they could look at three potential options for the site and fill out a questionnaire. An online questionnaire and two open evenings held by the Council for users of the Guildhall Complex to share their views and ideas also took place.

This report collates the thoughts and opinions of the local community and users in regards to the future use and requirements needed for the Guildhall Complex to be a sustainable part of King's Lynn.

2.0 Marketing and Promotion

The consultation was publicised prior to both the Heritage Open Day event and the open evenings, as well as when the online questionnaire was launched and throughout the full consultation period. Further information about how the consultation was promoted are outlined below.

Website


Details about how the local community could take part in the consultation, as well as further information about the project and its journey up until this point, were published on the Council's website. There was a news article about the consultation event that took place on the Heritage Open Day, as well as a link to the questionnaire to allow those who couldn't make the event to share their views online.

Social Media

In total, 9 tweets were made by the Council to publicise both the online questionnaire and the Heritage Open Day consultation event from their Twitter page, which has 4,452 followers. Tweets were posted from the 9th September 2016 to the 30th September 2016.

From the 9 tweets, there were 9,404 'impressions' (people who had clicked to see the full tweet) and 85 engagements (those who had clicked on the survey link, retweeted or liked). This meant on average there was a 0.9% engagement rate.

A selection of tweets are shown below, along with their impression and engagement figures.

 <p>WestNorfolkBC @WestNorfolkBC · Sep 10 We're holding 2 consultation events on the Guildhall's future - the 1st is tomorrow ow.ly/Sbzh3043JWz pic.twitter.com/JvJKKkJ6wv View Tweet activity</p>	743	21	2.8%
 <p>WestNorfolkBC @WestNorfolkBC · Sep 16 Our consultation on the St George's Guildhall runs until 30 September - have your say ow.ly/piBO304gHEv pic.twitter.com/xB1hnWZM1N View Tweet activity</p>	861	18	2.1%
 <p>WestNorfolkBC @WestNorfolkBC · Sep 29 Our online consultation about the Guildhall's future closes TOMORROW! Have your say now ow.ly/cA9H304ImCN pic.twitter.com/cU3Uo5uBtt View Tweet activity</p>	4,840	6	0.1%

Press Releases

At the beginning of the consultation period on the 9th September, a press release was prepared and circulated to local and regional newspapers which included information about the project and the opportunities for consultation. The story was covered in the following newspapers:

- your local paper
- Lynn News
- Eastern Daily Press.

Throughout the consultation period the project was covered a number of times in the press, through articles providing further information on how the public could get involved in the consultation process as well as the local community expressing their views.

Below are a few examples of newspaper articles covering the project. Additional clippings can be found in Appendix 1.



There was also an announcement made on the local radio, to publicise the project and consultation opportunities available.

3.0 Public Consultation: Online Questionnaire & Heritage Open Day

A questionnaire was created which was targeted at both the general public and at users of the Guildhall Complex. In total, 357 people completed the survey, with responses being collected through the online survey tool, SurveyMonkey, and through on-site consultation at the Heritage Open Day held in King's Lynn on Sunday 11th September. An example of the questionnaire has been appended.

A summary of the main findings are shown in the box below:

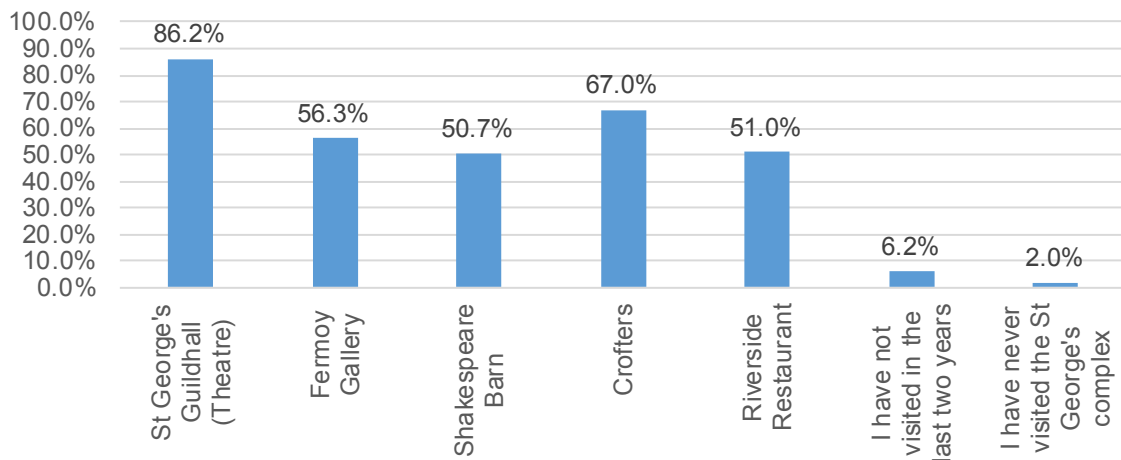
Key Summary Points:

- 86.2% had visited the Guildhall theatre within the past two years, 67% had visited Crofters and 56.3% had visited the Fermoy Gallery
- 87.8% of those surveyed most valued the historic interest, 85.8% the iconic building and 80.1% the events/ exhibitions/ performances
- The main priorities for the future of the building include: a place for entertainment and enjoyment of visual arts (94.1%), and a place for enjoying heritage and culture (87.6%)
- Respondents felt that the most important area in relation to the Guildhall Complex is the conservation of the buildings, both interior and exterior (90.4%)
- Conservation of the heritage buildings on site (83.2%) and increase programme of exhibitions and events through partnership working with arts, festivals and museums (62.3%) were seen as the most important future options for the Complex
- Many additional comments indicated that respondents would like to see the Guildhall remain as a theatre.

3.1 Previous Use

To begin with, respondents were asked about the buildings in the Complex that they have previously visited or used over the past two years. Figure 3.1 demonstrates the results.

Figure 3.1: Which of the following you have visited/ used over the past two years?



Source: Survey Monkey, 2 respondents skipped this question

As is shown in Figure 3.1, the most popular elements of the Complex are the St George's Guildhall with 86.2% of respondents visiting within the past two years, 67% of respondents had visited Crofters and 56.3% had visited the Fermoy Gallery. Only 2% of those surveyed had never visited the Complex, and 6.2% had not visited in the last two years.

For those who had never visited, the following reasons were given:

"I am disabled, parking and access is poor"

"I only recently moved to the area - although I have been to the outside of the building and read extensively about its previous work"

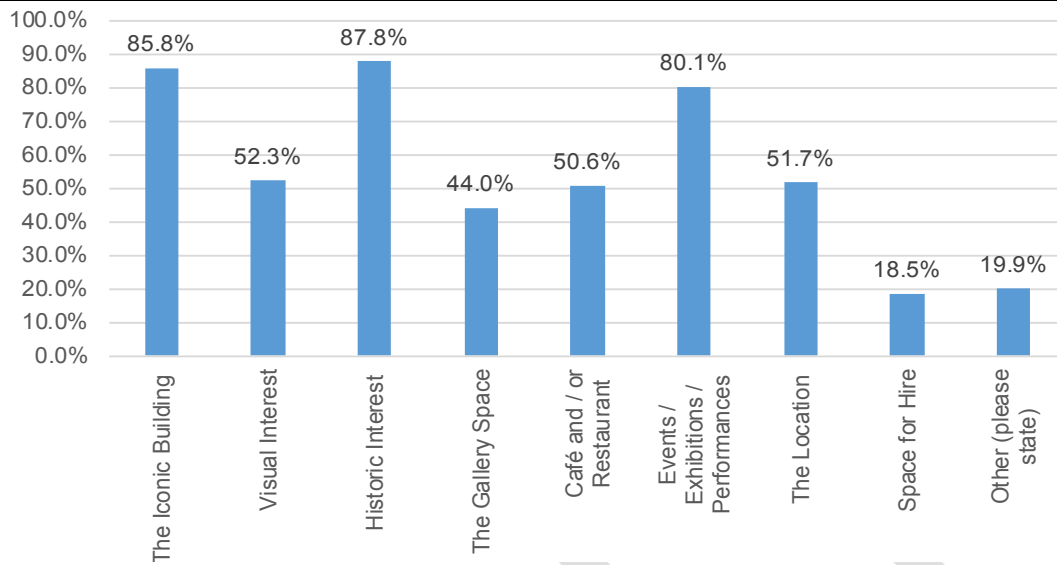
"I am new to the area and have not been aware of its use. I believed it to be office and residential"

"Hadn't been anything there to interest me"

3.2 Value of the Complex and Future Use

Figure 3.2 shows the results of the most valued elements of the St George's Complex by those surveyed, with 87.8% stating the historic interest. 85.8% said the iconic building, with 80.1% stating the events/ exhibitions/ performances were also highly valued. Other comments from respondents about what they valued about the Complex included: The Theatre, the community feel it provides as well as the heritage value that the Complex offers.

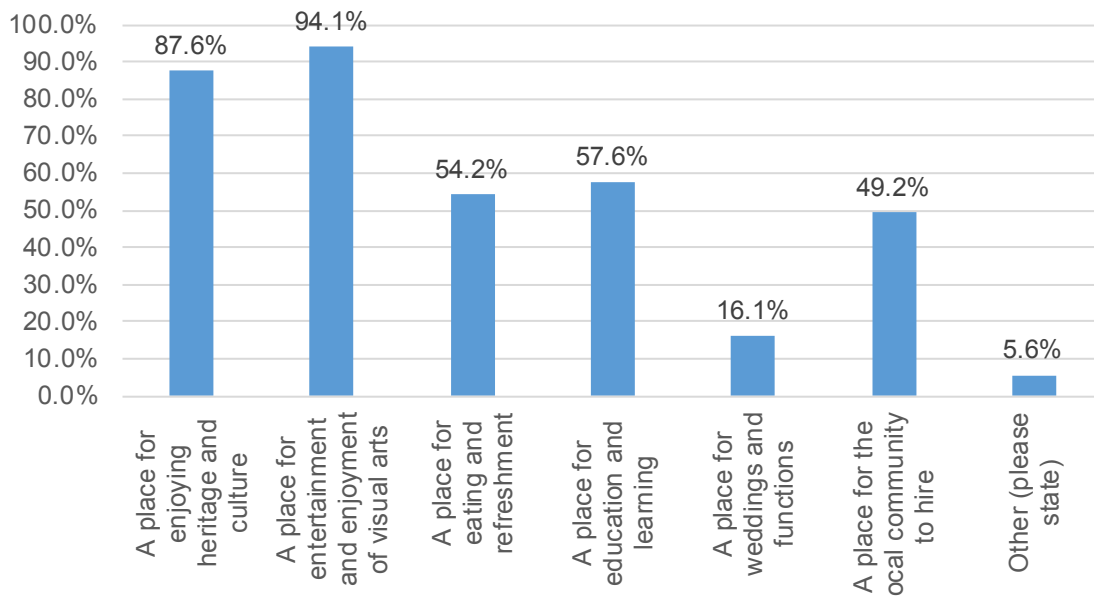
Figure 3.2: Please state what, if anything, you value most about the St George's complex



Source: Survey Monkey, 5 respondents skipped this question

In regards to the future use of the Guildhall Complex, respondents were asked what their priorities for the buildings would be, with the results displayed in Figure 3.3 below.

Figure 3.3: What, for you, are the priorities for the future use of the St George's complex?



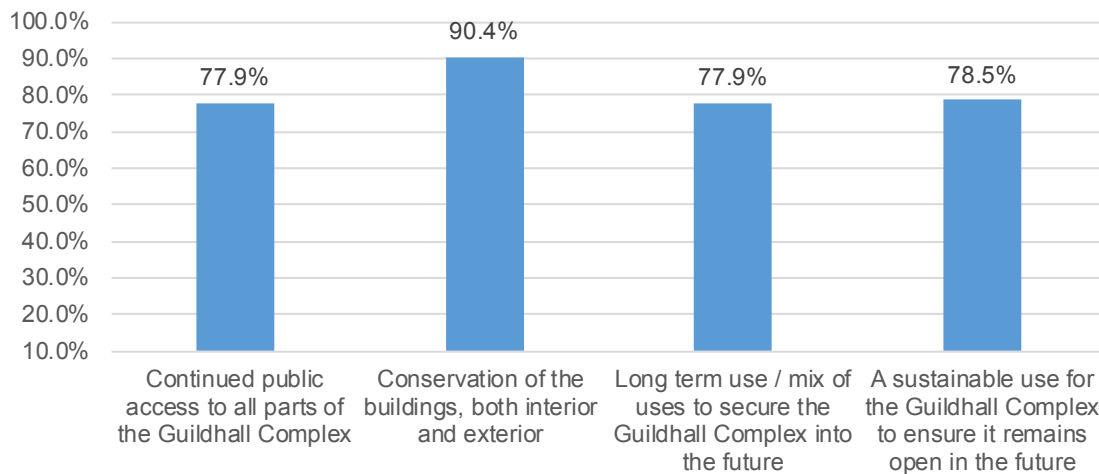
Source: Survey Monkey, 3 respondents skipped this question

The main priority identified by those surveyed was that the Complex should be a place for entertainment and enjoyment of visual arts (94.1%). Ensuring that the Complex is a place for enjoying heritage and culture was also a high priority (87.6%).

Other priorities that were stated by respondents include making better use of the river frontage, a place to show off the heritage to visitors and tourists and a resource around which to build community activity.

Those surveyed were then asked about the key areas that they feel are important in relation to the Guildhall Complex. The results are shown in Figure 3.4, which indicates that respondents thought that all elements were important. However, it is clear that the most important element amongst respondents is the conservation of the buildings, both interior and exterior (90.4%).

Figure 3.4: What do you feel is important?

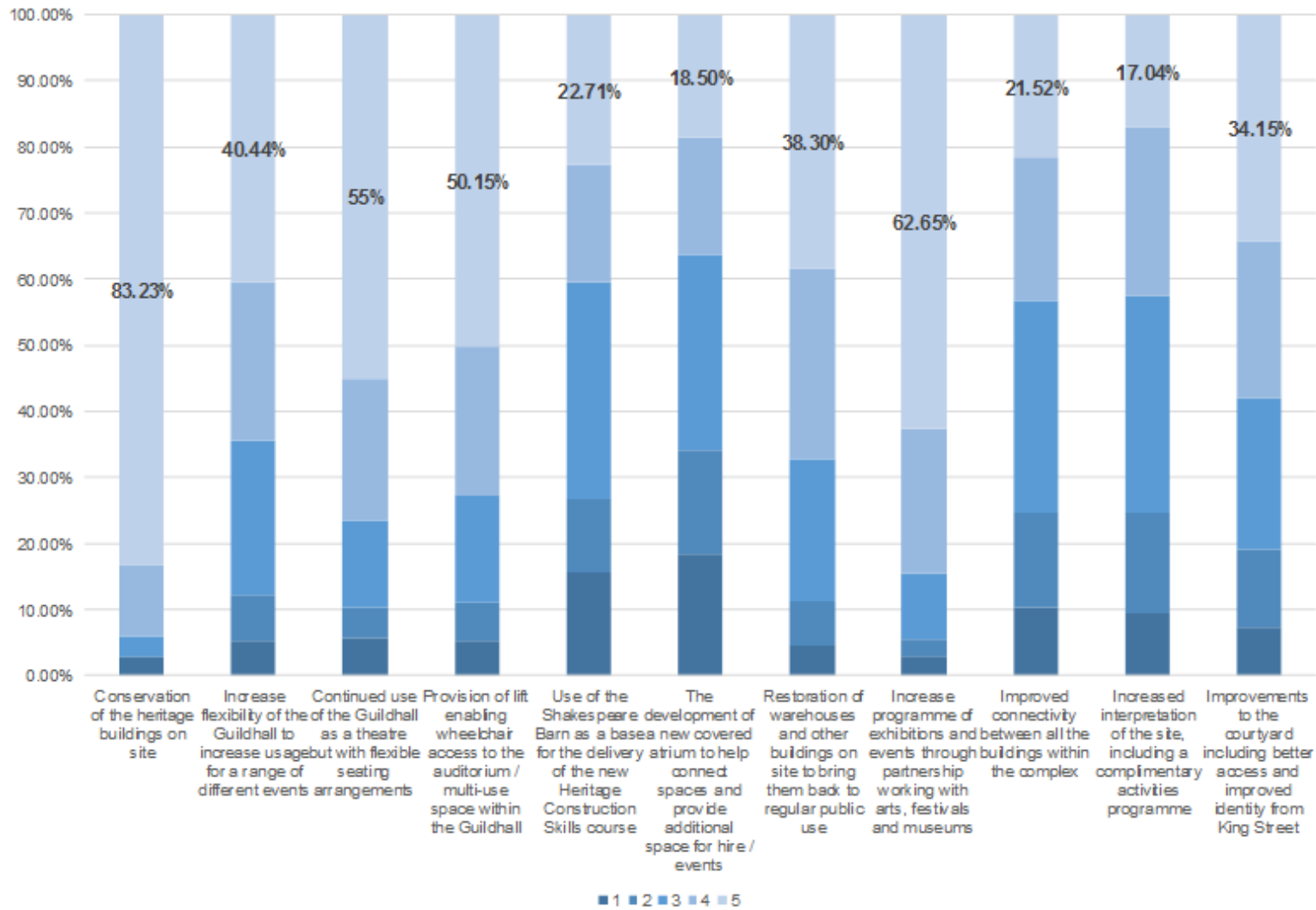


Source: Survey Monkey, 22 respondents skipped this question

3.3 Potential Future Options

Consultees were then presented with a number of potential options being considered for the project, and were asked to rate them from 1 to 5 on how important they thought each element is to the future of the Guildhall Complex, with 1 being not important at all and 5 being very important. The responses to this are presented in Figure 3.5.

Figure 3.5: How important do you think each element is to the future of the Guildhall complex with 1 being not important at all and 5 being very important?



Source: Survey Monkey, 21 respondents skipped this question

From the results, we can see that the elements considered to be the most important by respondents are: conservation of the heritage buildings on site (83.2%), increase programme of exhibitions and events through partnership working with arts, festivals and museums (62.3%), continued use of the Guildhall as a theatre but with flexible seating arrangements (55%) and the provision of a lift enabling wheelchair access to the auditorium/ multi-use space within the Guildhall (50.2%).

Those options that were considered to be the least important included: the development of a new covered atrium to help connect spaces and provide additional space for hire/ events (18.5%), use of the Shakespeare Barn as a base for the delivery of the new Heritage Construction Skills course (15.8%) and improved connectivity between all the buildings within the complex (10.4%).

3.4 Additional Comments

Respondents were then asked if they had any additional comments they would like to make in regards to the proposed project. A selection of these are listed below:

Note: There were a number of comments regarding a lack of consultation with users. However, there was an additional consultation session between the Council and users of the Guildhall Complex, but this was completed after this survey had closed.

"As a recent arrival to the area, I am so impressed with some of the architecture of Kings Lynn. All efforts should be made to enhance, advertise and encourage the use of these wonderful buildings"

"Refurb needs to include access to all visitors/ performers to all areas, including back stage"

"The galleries at the Art Centre have a long history of exhibiting both local and "hired or lent" exhibitions. The Shakespeare Barn has been purposely restored to accommodate large scale art works, and would be wasted as a heritage skills area. There must be many other buildings in Lynn where those skills could be taught and learned, without losing a purpose built Gallery. The idea of a partnership between the Council and the BCCF is good, but another site could be found"

"So important that we keep this venue running whilst making it as sustainable as possible. It can be such a great multi-purpose venue. I feel fortunate to have seen many great performances and continue to support the venue. This is a jewel in the crown for the arts of King's Lynn and we must do our best to keep it that way!"

"The Guildhall complex needs to provide increased flexibility for different functions to remain sustainable, but the primary function of the Guildhall should remain that of a theatre to successfully reflect and interpret the building's history and heritage. It should also be taken into account that any reduction in the amount of seating available would make it increasingly difficult for a profit to be made on some performances or lectures"

"It is vital that small local groups can still use the theatre. Costs are too high at the corn exchange for small groups to pay out. We have plenty other venues around Lynn that can hold wedding receptions. It should remain a theatre and may be modernized seating areas but still have the same number and stage as it is"

"Please delay decisions on the future of the complex in order that more interested parties can participate in discussions to secure a great future for this iconic complex"

"The theatre space needs to be able to seat about 250 to make it viable to put on and cover the costs of theatre events, festival productions etc. There is also a need to improve access for the disabled. There is no need for another wedding venue in King's Lynn. If a larger plan is being considered, then the gallery and other areas for hire can be considered to attract people to this very beautiful site"

"The sloping seating is valuable, so I would like to see at least some of that in the new design. It also should be a continued venue for plays and musicals to be performed"

"Above all I think the Guildhall should be kept as a theatre with as many raised seats as possible. It would be a pity to lose the exhibition space in the Shakespeare Barn, but I appreciate the need to provide a predictable income. I hope it is possible to find a solution with the collaboration of experienced users of the centre and delay the Lottery bid to maximise its chances of success"

"Was so disappointed to lose all that the Arts Centre gave to the community and the town, it's warmth and creativity, this is a very special venue that I hope can continue to bring pleasure to all"

"It is vital that the Guildhall complex remains open to the public as an arts venue. However, it needs to have a coherent and accessible programme of arts events and activities which will bring greater numbers of visitors than has been the case historically. Enabling local groups and artists to hire gallery and workshop space as part of that programme would ensure greater regular use of the buildings."

"It would seem sensible to have full discussions with the Group representing the interested parties before submitting the funding bid"

"The town needs facilities for visual arts workshops for various groups within the community - this aspect of the work of the Arts Centre has been excellent in the past - a pity if we lose this"

"The appeal of the venue needs to be extended. Unfortunately, many residents of the town are unaware of its existence, and many of those that are perceive (wrongly) that events there are 'posh' or

'highbrow'."

"Needs more discussion before applying for grants"

"The seating in the auditorium desperately need an upgrade. There needs to be more space for wheelchair users once a lift has been installed"

"I would urge you to delay the submission by 3 months so that more detailed discussions can take place. I need to find out more about this"

"The River Great Ouse could be a major additional attraction for the site, with its own quay over the riverside wall offering potential for increased footfall throughout the site, including a walkway between Common Staithe Square and the Ouse Sailing Club"

"I support the continued use of the guildhall as a theatre, but do not support the removal of tiered seating"

"This town needs this place, there is nothing else. Please save it"

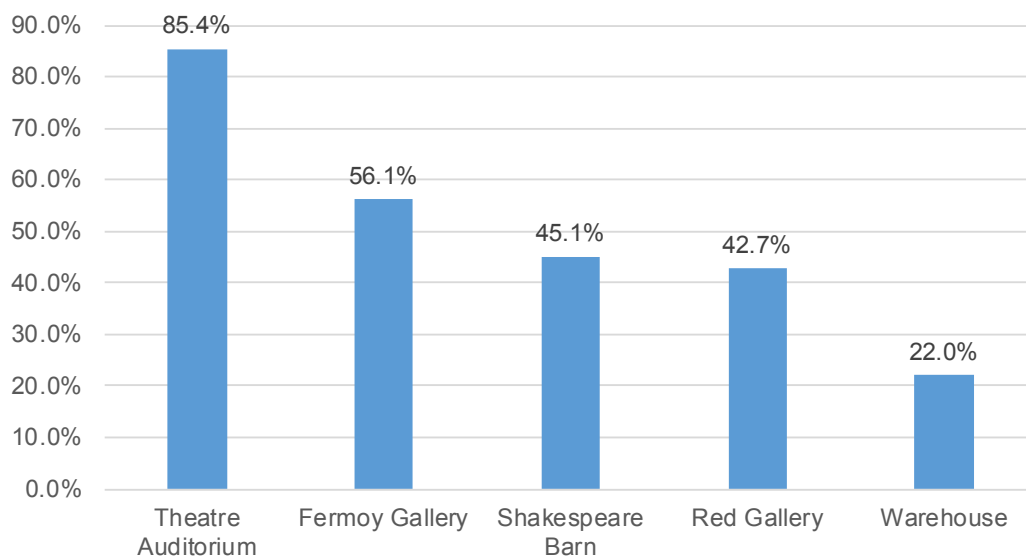
"Better promotion and more performances at the venue would lead to a bigger footfall and an increase in revenue"

"Make a plan and stick to it, so public knows the venue will be reliable and can book with confidence".

3.5 Current Users

For those who were users of the Guildhall Complex, additional questions were asked about their use of the Guildhall Complex. This included the buildings which they used, the frequency of their visits, as well as the number of people who normally attend and any specific requirements they have in regards to their use.

Figure 3.6 summarises the buildings used within the Guildhall Complex by users currently. As is shown, the Theatre Auditorium is the most used building (85.4%), with the Fermoy Gallery the second most used building (56.1%).

Figure 3.6: Which buildings do you use?

Source: Survey Monkey, 275 respondents skipped this question

One respondent added: *“We used the galleries for events in the past but were unable to do so once the Trust had been put in place, we would jump at the chance to use them again”.*

Those who used the Complex did so most regularly at monthly (27.2%) intervals or annually (19.6%). Only 9.8% used it weekly, with 14.1% using it quarterly, and 10.9% bi-annually. 34.8% used it an “other” amount, which included many respondents who visited “as and when”, “not at present” and “infrequently”. Additional comments included:

- *“Often in past - wife now disabled and cannot come”*
- *“We are considering use of the complex for the future as our organisation expands”.*

In regards to the number of people who usually attend the exhibition/ play/ show at the Guildhall Complex, this varied depending on the type of event. For those who were visiting the Complex or attending a show/ exhibition on a personal level, this tended to range from between 1 to 5 visitors. For groups who hire a part of the Complex, their group sizes ranged from 10 to 100+ and included Stroke Survivors, a dance school and school workshops. The exhibitions and shows provided a much broader audience figures, ranging from 100-350 per show, or a combined figure for an exhibition/ show over a period of time, receiving visitor numbers in excess of 1,000.

Finally, respondents were asked whether they had any specific usage requirements when using or hiring space in the Guildhall Complex. A selection of user requirements stated by respondents is listed below:

- *“At least 300 seats in main theatre, and a studio theatre (with low rental costs) of up to 100 would be ideal”*

- *"In theory up to 220 -250 people could attend a screening and disabled access is needed (a lift.) Technical equipment required - a large screen, protector, (preferably digital), a DVD player and good sound system"*
- *"King's Lynn Norfolk Boat Trust has not used the Arts Centre, but we have used the Sailing Club for meetings and fund-raising, and would certainly use the Arts Centre if there was a quay where our restored fishing boat, the 1900 locally-built Baden Powell, could be berthed permanently or as a base to pick up passengers for our sailing trips (from 2017)"*
- *"Lift would be appreciated for the elderly or disabled. The staircase is particularly steep and discourages visitors from attending"*
- *"Max seating capacity. Better disabled access inc backstage. Good quality tech equipment"*
- *"Attractive, well presented galleries, with wall space to show work at its best. Plinths on which to display 3D work. Some help with promotion of the spaces (although most artists promote themselves as well). Better access for the public from the front street. Better signage, so that the public actually know where the galleries are...A partnership with the Corn Exchange to help promote tickets in both directions"*
- *"It is unbelievable that the sites river frontage is not made use of. A walkway from the Crown and Mitre to the sailing club would make an interesting route for pedestrians. A ramp up to the restaurant (and along the south wall of the green square outside the riverside restaurant) would be needed"*
- *"We would ideally like the seating capacity to remain the same. Lynn Academy would not be able to put on our productions without the outside Rooms to accommodate 200 students: i.e.: Shakespeare Barn; Old Warehouse; The Gallery"*
- *"Dressing room space is limited but use of the other adjoining buildings helps. Minor changes to increase the orchestra pit size would be beneficial, as would a disabled chair lift".*

As is demonstrated above, a common requirement by hirers and visitors alike is the need for a lift and better disabled access, to allow everyone to be able to enjoy the Guildhall Complex in the future.

4.0 Site Users

This project has attracted a lot of interest from the public, with many local people feeling very strongly about the Guildhall Complex and its future. This led to some individual consultation being conducted prior to our own questionnaire being circulated, or either of the open evenings taking place. An example of this individual consultation questionnaire has been appended.

The consultation received 9 respondents, and was circulated mostly to local groups who may have previously used the Guildhall Complex. Respondents included: King's Lynn Music Society, West Norfolk Artists Association, Riverside Restaurant and Crofters Coffee House, King's Lynn Town Guides, King's Lynn Players, King's Lynn Town Band, The West Norfolk Gilbert & Sullivan Society, King's Lynn Literature Festivals and King's Lynn Decorative and Fine Arts Society.

4.1 Usage

From the responses, the level of previous usage was established. The Riverside Restaurant and Crofters Coffee House are based within the Guildhall Complex, and so stated that they use the site 365 days a year. 66.6% of respondents had either not used the Guildhall at all or used it for less than 7 days a year, with respondents stating they used the Town Hall for their purposes instead. From those surveyed, the groups which use the Guildhall Complex most frequently throughout the year apart from the Riverside Restaurant and Crofters are King's Lynn Town Guides who responded that they used it *"could be 3 days a week May - Oct plus other occasional visits"* and King's Lynn Players who responded with *"2-3 shows a year. 2-3 weeks per year. Workshop in constant use"*.

Respondents were then asked about the average number of people that attend per day/ occasion, with 33.3% of respondents providing figures. This data is provided below:

- King's Lynn Players, 2-3 shows a year using the theatre for 2-3 weeks per year. Average attendance 150-250 per performance
- Riverside Restaurant and Crofters, open every day. On average they have approximately 100 customers over the 2 places per day
- The West Norfolk Gilbert & Sullivan Society, using the theatre for 6 days per year. Audience of 325 per performance.

With the closure of the Arts Centre in late 2015, the Riverside Restaurant and Crofters Coffee House have noticed that *"We are struggling to run 2 businesses on an empty complex. We have been surrounded with negative publicity since the trust folded... So many people think the Arts Centre is completely closed"*.

These findings suggest that the Guildhall Complex is not being used to its full potential.

4.2 Awareness

Only a few respondents said that they had been briefly consulted with in regards to the Council's plans for the Guildhall Complex, but as previously stated this consultation was conducted before and

independently of the Council's consultation, and so this result is to be expected. Despite this, most respondents were aware of the Borough Council's plans for the Guildhall Complex however.

4.3 Potential Consequences to Users and Other Comments

Those consulted with were then asked about whether the potential plans for the Guildhall Complex would affect their organisation, and whether they have any specific requirements that the Council should take into consideration when developing its future plans.

Concerns raised included needing an alternative venue whilst any work was taking place and that a reduction in seats could impact on income generation. A concern was also raised that this could lead to pricing out local community groups from using the venue. It was also suggested that the Guildhall should be kept open until at least 4pm in the afternoons.

A selection of comments from respondents have been listed below

"The Council's plan of using the Guildhall as a wedding venue to my mind is a very short sighted view. If 'Alive Leisure' were to promote the Guildhall half as much as they do the Corn Exchange, then there would be no need for them to look for further ways of funding as it would be in constant use. I believe that any other council in the country would jump at the chance to have such a fantastic building amongst its portfolio of buildings and promote its use. I understand that the council has to look at ways of making venues pay for themselves and make the best use of the buildings too. The Guildhall is such an historic and unique building and we must try to maintain it for us and future potential users".

"The West Norfolk Gilbert & Sullivan Society would cease to exist. There would not be enough seats to sell. Even with all the current level of seats available, we can just about break even, so any reduction of seats would impact on our income to the extent, we could no longer continue. The Corn Exchange costs are beyond what the West Norfolk G & S Society can afford".

"We have 5 years left on our current lease which we will be looking to renew."

"The KLDFAS would like to increase its involvement with the KL Festival, for example. The theatre is the ideal size for a popular lecture, but if ticket prices went up this plan would fail".