

Lowestoft Town Hall Project



Public Consultation – Survey Findings

Version 1.1

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Section 1: Executive Summary

A Town Hall Survey was launched in mid-December 2020; its aim was to gather the views of the people of Lowestoft (and beyond) on the Town Hall's future use, and also to gauge their interest and participation in heritage. The survey was open online for 45 days until the end of January 2021.

A separate supply of paper copies was made available in shops in the High Street during this period. Promotion was via social media, on street posters, the Council's website and the local press, including a paid promotion.

A total of 999 responses was received, 955 online and 44 on paper. 88% of respondents completed the entire survey. In addition to responding to fixed questions, a further 1,069 free format comments were given. These are analysed in Section 3.

Analysis of the data reliability and the confidence levels achieved is provided in Section 4, and a copy of the questionnaire is in Section 5.

The key findings are as follow:

LTC's use of the Town Hall

There is overall support of the Town Council moving into the Town Hall (64% in favour) although younger people (18-34) were against the proposal. We recommend, however, that the Council should progress a move into the building, and that a communications programme is developed to explain the rationale behind this move.

Top uses for the Town Hall

The most used facility within the Town Hall would be a café, with almost half the poll saying they would use it frequently; as a key revenue generator, this is reassuring. A recurring theme in the comments was that the café should be a 'community café', although many stressed that quality must not be impacted as a consequence.

There was a similar level of support for a museum/heritage hub. Further, in the free-format recommendations, a museum garnered 30% more recommendations than use as a Town Hall, and double that of the third choice (indoor market). Emergence of an indoor 'foodie' market as a strong preference from the public requires further investigation to establish its viability, whether in the Town Hall or elsewhere.

Support for both a gallery and a wedding/event venue were strong, but interest in meeting rooms to hire was weak, with over 60% of working age adults saying they would never use them. Our overall recommendation for 'meeting' space is that it should be flexible and multi-use, not dedicated space, to reduce risk. This also has implications for the business plan, as income from meeting room hire is likely to be significantly lower than previously anticipated.

Community uses of the Town Hall

The most popular community use was a space for events, sales, parties and fairs etc – in other words, the type of facilities a community hall might offer. Given that almost 57% of respondents live in the NR32 postcode area, this implies that regular local use could be relied upon. Use by the community also chimes with the free-format comments, where a recurring theme was that this building must be open for all. However, many also recognised that commercial activity will be required to prevent the Town Hall from being a financial burden on residents.

“It is a great building - our heritage.

So many places are now regretting letting these building go to ruin, while those that have maintained them are reaping rewards with more visitors to the various town, locals getting together and of course revenue.”

Arts and crafting activities should do well within the Town Hall, especially for older people and those who identified as having a disability. This was the second most popular community use, and again, comments within the free-format sections support this. There was also a strong interest in the creative space question (see below) for people to run workshops on arts & crafts, so it would appear there is also a supply of experts to meet this demand.

Social/recreational and wellbeing services were moderately popular, but both sports/fitness and educational services were not, with almost half of all respondents saying they would never use them. Age is relevant here, with those over 45 driving the high negative response to sports/fitness use, and those over 55 for education. This suggests that some casual use may arise and be popular with users, but bespoke facilities should not be developed for these purposes.

Across all community uses, support from disabled people was higher; 62% of those recording a disability live in the NR32 postcode and the provision of fully-accessible local facilities would be welcomed.

Offices and creative space to rent

Interest in offices and creative/workshop space was mixed, with a much higher interest in creative space. The vast majority of people had no interest in either, but this is not surprising, as there would always be a relatively small cohort of individuals looking to rent space longer term.

Use of office space was evenly split between those seeking traditional business space/shops, and those who wanted regular access to hot desk space. This latter could well be an emergent post-Covid development of interest in ‘hybrid working’ and should be explored further.

Creative space was also split between long term use (40% of those providing details were creative businesses looking for somewhere from where to work and, potentially, sell) and those who wanted pop-up/casual use space for creative activities, including running workshops.

Lower-income individuals were significantly more likely to be seeking creative space (temporary or long term), which in part may reflect the relatively low income of those in the creative world. However, it has implications for rental rates: affordability will be key.

Heritage

Turning to heritage, there is strong interest in Lowestoft’s history across most groups, with the notable exception of ‘Midults’ (18-34 group). This comes across even more strongly in the

comments sections, where there is a clear sense of pride about Lowestoft's heritage and a desire to see a celebration of it and a return to the success of Lowestoft in previous eras.

Fishing and the beach village, buildings, people and, encouragingly, the Town Hall itself and the High Street were top topics across the survey, although younger people were less interested in these, and more interested in witches & the supernatural, and the World Wars.

The Maritime Museum and Lowestoft Museum topped the list of venues visited in 2019 for all groups. However, half of all Adults had visited no museums or heritage events in that year. This is not unusual nationally and creates an opportunity for engagement with this harder-to-reach group through the activity plan.

In terms of barriers to access, all groupings highlighted a lack of time (40%) and a lack of information (39%). Whilst little can be done about a lack of time, it is clear from the comments that people are unaware of what Lowestoft's museums have to offer, and indeed, many commented that they had not heard of several of the destinations listed. This clearly evidences the need for a heritage hub at the Town Hall that 'signposts' people to other heritage venues and events in the town.

Comments

The free-format comment sections provided a wide range of views about the Town Hall. However, several themes emerged. Encouragingly there is overwhelming support for the project to repurpose the Town Hall, with many respondents citing specific features of the building, or memories of its previous use.

However, there is also appreciation that the building will be expensive to run, and a desire both to see as much green technology as possible included to minimise its environmental impact, and commercial use injected into the building to offset the costs and minimise the burden on taxpayers.

A sizeable minority feel that the cost of bringing the building back into full use will be prohibitive, and that therefore it should not be taken on. This indicates that careful communication will be essential to explain how the capital project would be funded and give clarity around the sustainability of its future use.

A strong practical message came back from a number of respondents about the need for adequate parking nearby, to allow people easy access to the building and events, and also a potential requirement for improved transport to the area.

Confusion about the differing councils (Waveney District Council, East Suffolk Council and Lowestoft Town Council) came through strongly, with each being blamed for perceived failings of others. It is clear that ongoing communications about the differing roles and responsibilities of the two extant bodies would help in general (rather than for this project alone). However, quite a few respondents also specifically thanked the Council for their ambition in driving this project forward.

"The town hall building offers a great opportunity for creating a community asset and catalyst for the immediate area and High Street. This is a great project, and the council should be applauded for taking the project forward. Well done to all involved."

Conclusion

That 999 people took the time to complete the survey demonstrates the level of interest and engagement in the project. From the data gathered, there are some clear messages about the future uses of the Town Hall that residents in particular would like to see. But there are also important differences across the population, from young to old, those who are disabled or not, those living in relatively low income, and so on that will need to be incorporated as the Town Hall and its facilities are developed, so that maximum benefit can be delivered across the community.

business activities looked past feel lit events something kept start really site help long
housing stay nice museums preserved stained glass window history part town become
years centre lot great Parking town council spent much etc public rather s
demolish Please historic high street see move make rooms people
Whatever Lowestoft project Town Hall local used
living building interest town bring needs many area
time good beautiful building think never council enough
High Street developed place love heritage hub will benefit important left
community space go old High Street open sell restored outside work one meeting
Must know features Visit around now create offices lost part hope also attractive well still

Section 2: Findings

This section analyses the answers to the main questions asked. We also investigate which factors, such as age, gender, location etc result in a statistically significant difference. This is important for audience planning purposes, but also provides useful context for some of the responses.

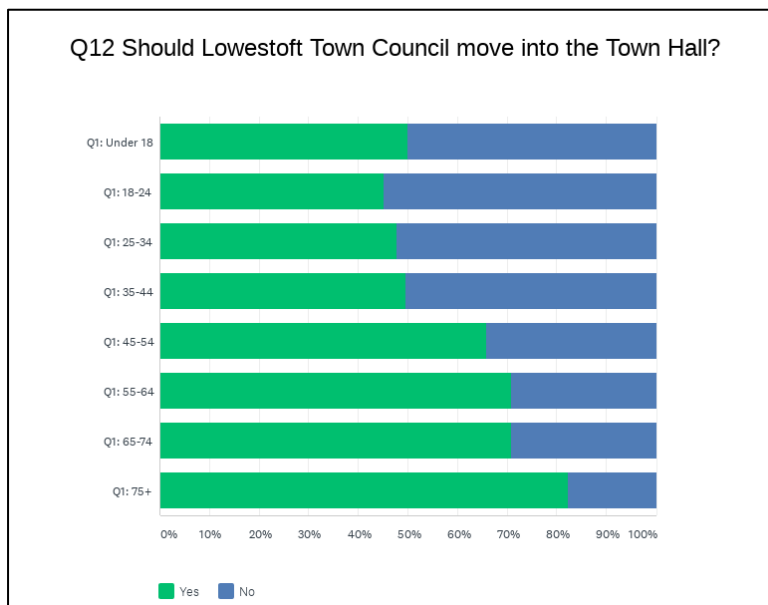
The first section of the survey, which established the demographic profile of the respondent, was compulsory. Thereafter, respondents not only had the option to skip questions but also to partially respond to a list of options within a question. Where one or more elements can be skipped, it is helpful to look at absolute numbers in addition to the percentages of those who responded. Of course, we can make no assumptions about the views of those who chose not to answer.

Note also that, to avoid skewed results in multiple option questions where items further down the list are less likely to be voted upon, these questions were presented with a randomly generated order of options, thus avoid 'fatigue' scoring¹. This means that we can rely on relative popularities as being a genuine response, not one driven by decreasing interest.

Should the Town Council move into the Town Hall?

Respondents were asked whether the Town Council should move into the Town Hall and were given a yes/no response option only. No explanation of exactly how this might work was provided.

Across all respondents, 64% believe the LTC should move into the building, and we recommend that this should be progressed (for several reasons, not simply popularity). This was further backed up by the free format responses later in the survey, when LTC's use of the Town Hall emerged as the second most popular suggested use for the building.



¹ As people go through a long list there is a tendency that they will become less interested as they progress, and either give the same response for all questions, or drop out, if that option exists. Randomising how the options appear to each individual balances out the risk of lower items receiving lower votes.

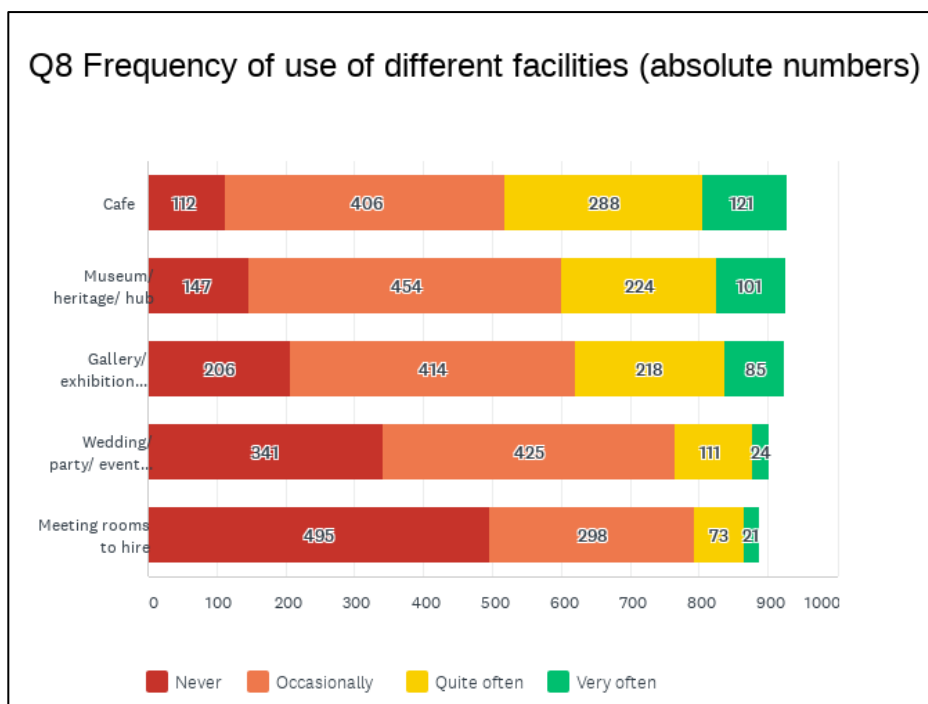
However, when analysed by age, there is a different picture, with approval of the proposal increasing by age – those under 44 are undecided or marginally against the proposal, whereas 82% of over 75s are in favour. This may reflect a lesser relevance given to the Council by younger people or that older people hark back to the old days when Council offices were there (albeit a different council). It may also be that many respondents did not consider that this could be in addition to other uses; the question did not make this clear.

The overall rating is encouraging, but it may be appropriate to undertake some communications/PR work in future, targeted at younger people, to explain the decision.

“Use it! Give the Town’s people a focus building and reasons to visit it . Why aren’t the Town council based there? There should be an information/enquiries desk at least to make it easier for local people to contact and speak to the council and councillors.

The ‘top’ uses for the Town Hall

Respondents were asked to identify how frequently (or not) they would use a range of facilities at the Town Hall (café, museum/heritage hub, gallery, party/event space, meeting rooms to hire). No explanation was given of exactly what these would offer, so there is a possibility of differing understandings of what each facility might entail. Just under 7% skipped this question entirely.



The most popular facility across all age groups was a **café**, with just 112 people stating they would never use it (12% of those who answered this question). 409 people (44.1%) would use the café frequently (a combination of ‘quite often’ and ‘very often’) and 406 (43.8%) would use it occasionally. Those aged between 25 and 54 were least likely to use the café very often. It is reasonable to assume this is partly linked to their working lives, as over half of those in this age band are employed full-time; in all cases at least a third expect to use a café ‘quite often’.

As a potential key revenue generator, this level of support for the café is reassuring.

In the free format comments, a strong theme emerged that the café should be either a community café, or something where all could feel welcome, although many took the opportunity to comment that it must also be a really good quality café that brings people to the High Street (the implication being that some respondents see community cafés as lower in quality than commercial ones).

The second most popular facility is a **museum/heritage hub**, with 224 people (24.2%) expecting to use it quite often, and 454 (49%) occasionally. Just 10.9% would use it very often, but this is still 101 people, and it should be observed that such regular use of any museum or heritage hub would be unusual. However, there is an age-related difference: almost 85% of 25–34-year-olds say they would never, or only occasionally, use a museum/heritage hub. This is key information to feed into audience planning with this group as a target 'harder to reach' group.

In a later open question about uses for the Town Hall, a museum was the most popular use, more than double any other use except as a location for the Town Council.

Gallery and exhibition space was slightly less popular, with almost a quarter stating they would never use it, and 79% of 25–34-year-olds and 83% of 35–44-year-olds saying they would never or only occasionally use it. Although there is some argument that this is in line with the nature of the facility, and to be expected of these age groups it remains a concern. However, a third of all people expect to use it frequently.

An **event/party/wedding venue** was less likely to be used, with 341 people (37.8%) never intending to use it; again, this is reflective of the type of use of such a facility, which would normally be irregular, and therefore it is perhaps surprising that 24 people (2.7%) expect to use it very often. Such a response may be driven more by an expectation that it would be *in use* frequently, as opposed to the individual intending to do so, but clearly, we cannot know for sure.

Gender is important here: 47% of men said they would never use an event/party venue, which could be said to fit a gender stereotype. There was also a noticeable drop in the number of people in lower income groups who would use the facilities for parties etc; this is almost certainly a direct result of lower spending capacity and is to be expected.

In contrast – almost contradiction – in the free-format comments, use as a wedding venue was in the top ten recommended uses, with many recognising that a good venue could contribute a strong income stream to support the building.

As a professional singer that travels around the country, it's sad that Lowestoft doesn't have one good wedding venue. The Town Hall would be amazing. Build an urban garden at the back and it would be ideal

Meeting rooms to hire received relatively low support/interest and therefore to have extensive dedicated space for this purpose could be risky. Just over 10% expect to be frequent users of meeting rooms, with more than half having no intention of using them. Over 60% of adults aged between 25 and 54 expect never to use a meeting room. This adds to concerns about demand for meeting rooms to hire for business/commercial purposes, as this age group would potentially be

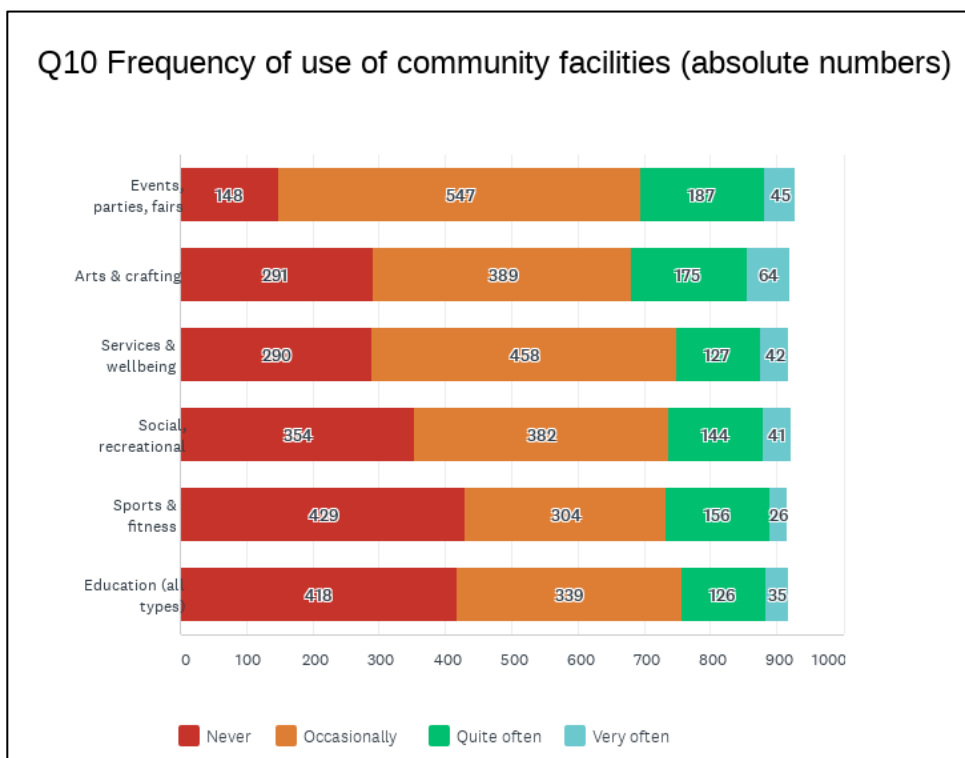
key users². However, meeting rooms tend to have regular/repeat users, and therefore widespread demand is not essential to justify their existence in some form.

A prudent approach may be to have spaces that are flexible and can be subdivided into meeting rooms but have alternative uses.

The 'top' community uses for the Town Hall

Respondents were asked to identify how frequently (or not) they would use a range of community facilities at the Town Hall (ie space for events, fairs, parties; sports & fitness activities; education of all types; arts & crafting; social & recreational; services & wellbeing). Some examples were provided under each heading (eg social & recreational: men's shed, youth club, lunch clubs for the elderly etc). Just under 7% skipped this question entirely.

Again, as not all people responded, it is better to look at absolute numbers.



The most popular facility was one for **events, parties, fairs and sales** – in other words, the type of activities that might traditionally be expected in a **community hall**. A quarter of respondents (232 people) would expect to use this frequently with 148 people (16%) expecting never to use them. There are no statistically significant differences when comparing different age groups' responses for this option., but noticeably, only 7% of those who said they had a **disability** thought they would never use this facility, and a greater number (33%) thought they would make frequent use of it.

² The 2019 Feasibility Study allocated 72m² to meeting space over 4 dedicated rooms, each being booked for 700 sessions p/a, ie 9 sessions per day across all 4 rooms; it is possible that in the (Covid) interim, attitudes have changed as virtual meetings have become commonplace.

Arts & crafting is also popular, with 239 people (26%) expecting to use these frequently. This option scored the highest 'very often' of all the community facilities, by some margin (64 people, 7%). The dominant demand for this facility is from people aged 55 – 74, although there is also, in percentage terms at least, good interest from both 25-34 and 45-54. Again, those with a disability were more likely to use arts & crafting frequently (33% of all disabled people).

For both **social/recreational** and **services/wellbeing**, support is reasonably evenly balanced, with about a third of respondents saying they would never use these facilities, and about a fifth expecting to use the services frequently (quite/very often). Once more, disabled people registered that they were more likely to frequently use these services than those without a disability. The low score for 'never' is important, as it means that the majority expect to use such services at some point.

Sports and fitness facilities were divisive. Although frequent use was cited by 20% (182 people), almost half of all respondents said they would never use such facilities. Drilling down, we can see that age is pertinent here: the high 'never' score is driven predominantly by older people (50% of respondents between 45-64, and an average of 60% of those 65 and over) although it should be noted that almost 60% of the small number of under-18s who responded also thought they would never use them, but this is probably because they have plenty of options at school.

It would appear that some form of sports or fitness activity run in the Town Hall could attract a younger contingent, although not in huge numbers, but it does not bode well for any general fitness/health-related activities targeted at older people. The latter may arise from a view that the Town Hall is not appropriate for such activity; this is partly supported from the freeform written contents (analysed later).

For **education facilities**, which was stated to include adult education, pre-school etc, 18% were potential frequent users (161 respondents), but again, almost half surveyed said they would never use these facilities. Looking at age-related responses, although more people in the 55-74 age range responded to this option, (almost 400 in total), at least half did so to state they would never use the option. This is particularly relevant for adult education, whose typical audience would fall into this age range; it may be that demand for AdEd is already satisfied elsewhere in town. The figures for the disabled are slightly higher in that 23% expect to use education facilities frequently.

Gender plays a part in this question too. Across all bar the social/recreational option, females are much more likely to use community facilities than are males.³ This is particularly apparent for arts & crafting, where 77% of females expect to make some use (occasional, often, very often) against 46% of men who would never use the facility.

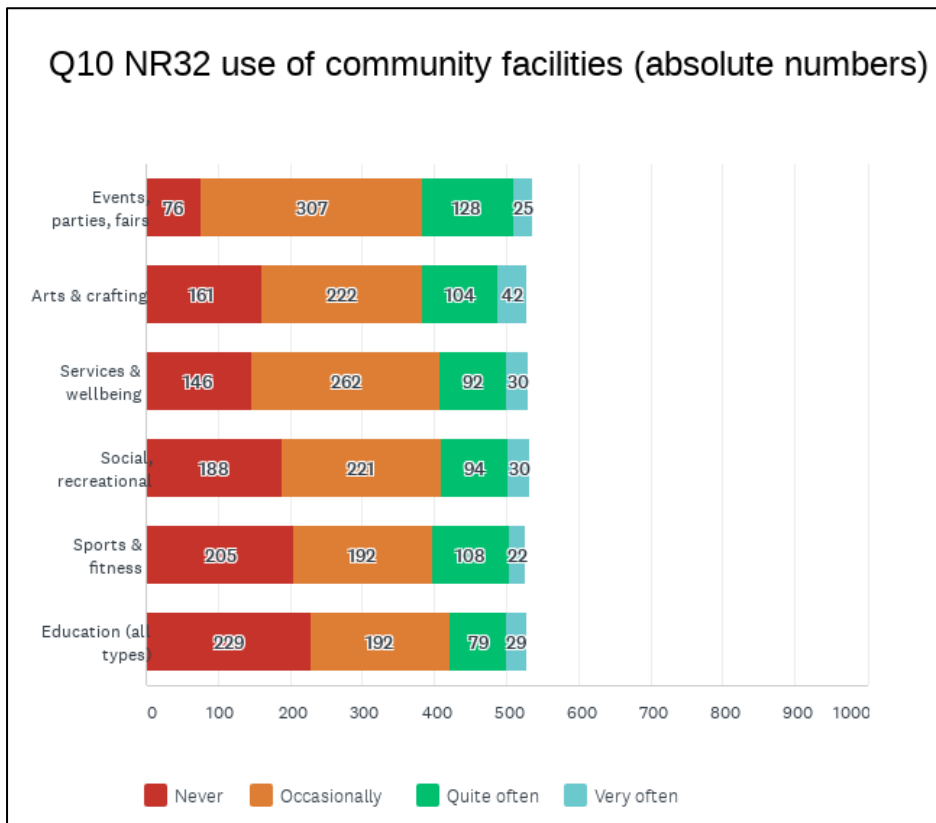
The **location** of individuals who might use community services is important: the nearer they are, the more likely they are to be regular visitors, except of course where something unique to the town as a whole is on offer.

Filtering only the N32 postcode dwellers shows the same popularity rankings as the whole survey, with **events & fairs**, **arts & crafting** and **services/wellbeing** in the top three positions.

³ This is analysed by percentages to address the disproportionate representation of women v men (see Section XX on data reliability).

The negative response to **sports & fitness** has reduced to 39% (205 out of 541 respondents) with **education** in the bottom position, with 229 people (43%) having no interest.

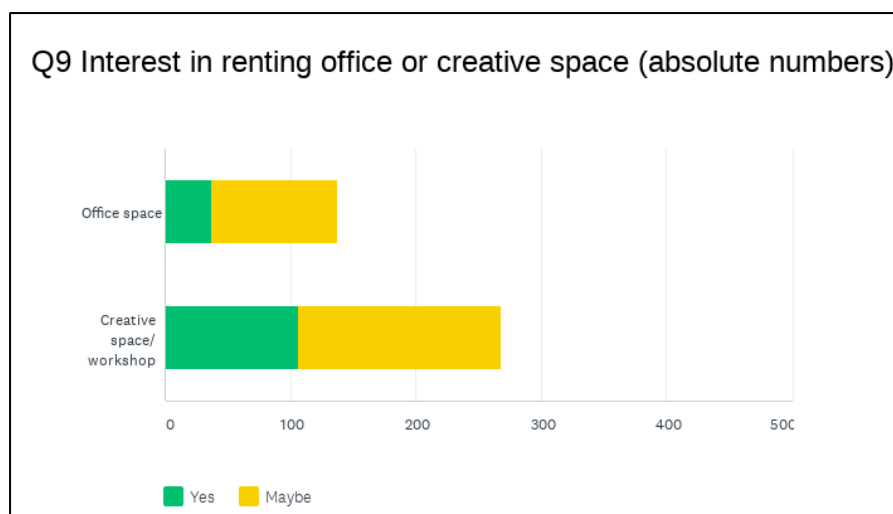
Disability does show statistically significant differences in this question, which is to be expected to some degree if disabled people are less able to travel longer distances – 62% of those recording a disability were in the N32 postcode. Although 38% of those who said they had a disability are over the age of 65, the responses from this group do not match perfectly with their age cohort across the board.



Interest in office/creative space in the Town Hall

Participants were asked whether they would be interested in renting office and/or creative space within the Town Hall. This differs from the use of meeting rooms, as the former would be hired on a per session basis, and these would be for longer rental.

Again, this is a question that respondents could skip, so we have looked at absolute numbers as well as overall percentages. 929 people in total responded, with, once more, 7% skipping it.



We can see that there is significantly more interest in **creative/workshop** space than in office space, and that the vast majority of respondents have no interest in either (85% did not want office space, and 70% were uninterested in creative).

However, a total of 138 people *could* be interested (yes/maybe) in an **office**. The freeform responses suggest that this use is evenly split between small businesses looking for traditional office and even retail premises, and individuals looking for hot desk or temporary office facilities away from home and/or their main office. This last may reflect an emergent post-Covid trend for hybrid remote-office working and will be explored further.

Turning to **creative/workshop space**, there is more interest, with 268 people stating 'yes' or 'maybe', of whom 106 returned a 'yes' response. Again, looking at the additional comments, we can see that there is a blend of people looking for maker spaces and studios, with potential to sell (65 creative businesses), and those who are looking for somewhere to run workshops, with a dominance of shorter-term hire uses (98). Six of those looking for space intended to run shops, which, if not accommodated in the Town Hall, could be suitable for vacant properties in the High Street.

Top uses for creative workshops included crafting and textiles, health & wellbeing (as distinct from beauty), photography and general 'arts'.

A significant proportion (39%) of those who said 'yes' to renting creative spaces are **in relative low income** and it must be assumed that their capacity to pay 'market' rates for such space could be limited; this does not preclude their inclusion in the Town Hall but does set parameters for income generation.

"Workshops teaching textile craft skills, upcycling fabrics and repurposing furniture. All skills that will reduce waste, inspire creativity and very definitely improve mental health. Using volunteer crafters to run the workshops could enable the sessions to be free for those on benefits."

For both options, interest levels decrease with age, which is to be expected; Midults (18-34) have the highest level of interest in creative space, whilst 25-34 and 45-54 age groups lead the way for office space. Almost 50% more women were definitely interested in creative space, but there is no significant gender difference for office space.

Disabled people were more likely to be interested in use of creative spaces/workshops than the survey as a whole – 37% of those who are disabled said they would possibly be interested (split evenly between yes/maybe). An alternative way to look at this is that 13.4% of those interested

in a creative/workshop space are disabled, whereas 9.7% of the overall survey indicated they had a disability.

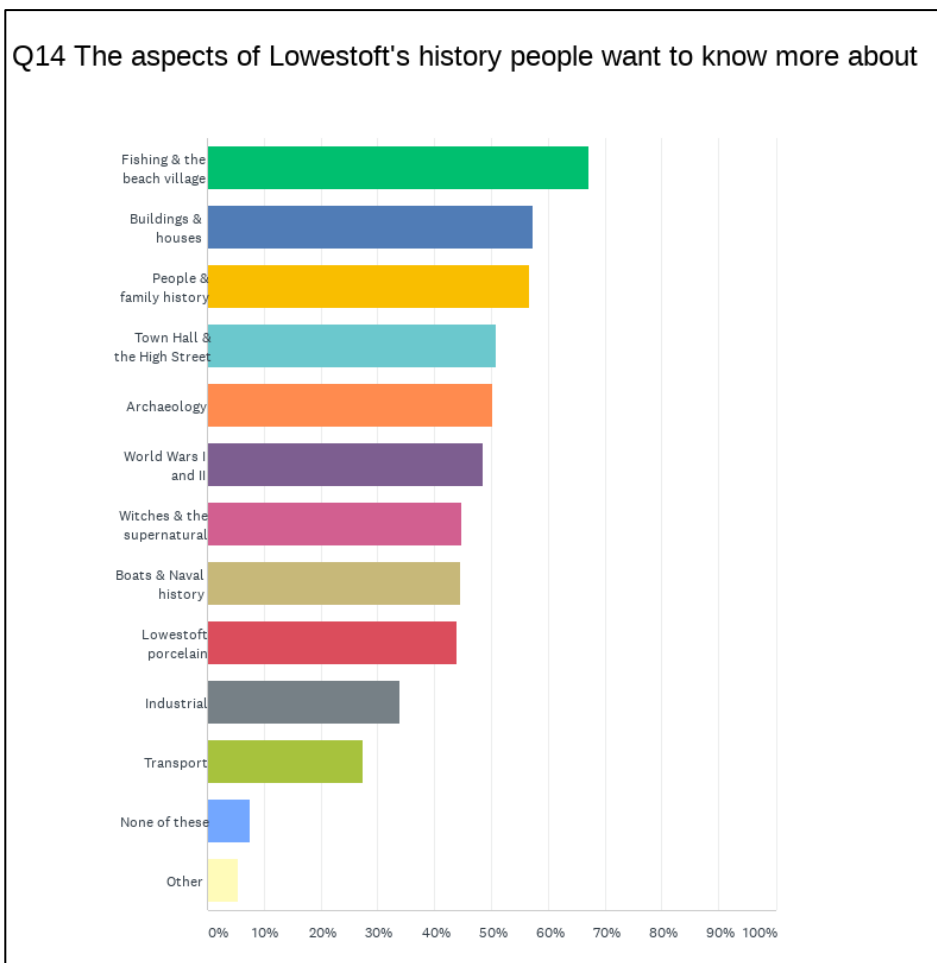
Knowledge of Lowestoft's history

Respondents were asked to use a sliding scale to estimate their overall knowledge of Lowestoft's history; the average overall is 55%. There is no correlation between age and knowledge, with every age group providing a wide range of responses.

It is possible that the responses here are driven partially by level of interest – those who are disinterested could be more likely to return a low answer. However, there is probably little value in analysing this too far, and instead take a 55% knowledge level as a measure to show there is more to be learnt. This is supported by a strong response rate to the following question, which asked what aspects of Lowestoft's history people wished to know more about. With an 87% response rate, this indicates that there is both an interest in increasing knowledge *and* capacity for knowledge to increase.

The most interesting aspects of Lowestoft's history

Respondents were asked to tick which aspects of Lowestoft's history they would like to know more about. There was no limit to the number of options which could be selected, and no requirement to rank them. The option to select none of these or provide other details (freeform) was also given. Despite this being an optional question, 87% responded.



Overall, the history of **fishing and the beach village** was the top choice, with 578 respondents selecting it (67%). Encouragingly, the **Town Hall & the High Street**, as well as **buildings & people** ranked highly too, with more than half the respondents expressing interest in these. Surprisingly, **Lowestoft porcelain** was one of the lower rated topics, with 378 'votes'. **People & family history** ranked third, with 489 people selecting it, suggesting why there has been such an outcry at the removal of records to the Hold; however, this also indicates a potential opportunity to meet this demand with Suffolk Records Office undertaking outreach work in the Town Hall.

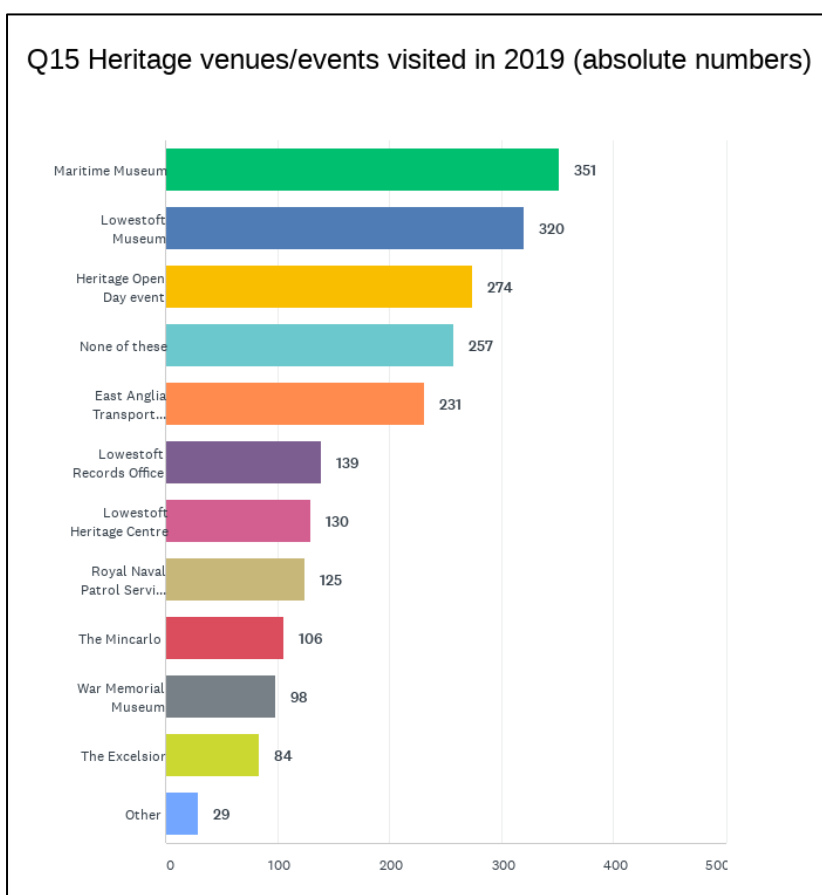
When examined by age, the picture changes. **Fishing & the beach village, industrial, Lowestoft porcelain** and **boats & Naval history** all are low ranked by younger people, with interest increasing directly with age, older groups rating these amongst the top. Exactly the opposite is the case for **witches & the supernatural**, and to a lesser extent **World Wars I and II**, although in this category the contrast of top (60%) to bottom (49%) is less significant.

Looking at gender, rather stereotypically we can see that men are almost twice as likely to be interested in **industrial, boats & Naval history** and **transport** than women; conversely, women are much more interested in **people & family history**, and **witches & the supernatural**.

There were no significant differences in interests according to income, location or household structure.

Heritage venues visited in 2019

The survey asked people to indicate, from a list of options, which heritage venues and/or events (eg Heritage Open Days) they had visited in 2019 (2020, for Covid reasons, was discounted). In total, 854 people responded, 85% of the total.



The top venue visited was the **Maritime Museum**, with 41% of respondents having visited it. Although it charges an entrance fee, this is low (~£2), and does not appear to present a barrier. The most expensive venue is the **East Anglia Transport Museum** (£9 per adult), and in this survey at least, its figures are lower for 'Lowestoft people'. Encouragingly, given its current stewardship of the Lowestoft Collection, the **Lowestoft Museum** polled 2nd highest, with 37.5% of the survey having visited in 2019.

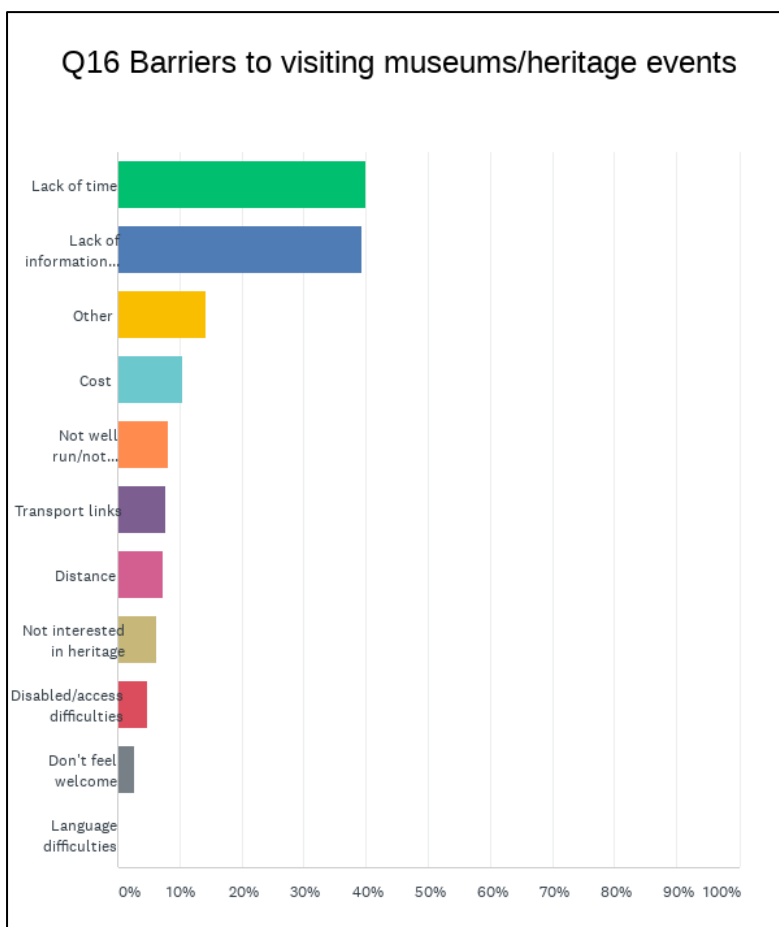
The popularity of **Heritage Open Days**, an acknowledged success in Lowestoft, is reflected by its performance in this survey, with a third of all respondents having attended at least one event.

In total 29 people cited other events, in which First Light and an exhibition at the Parcels Office are prominent. More analysis will be undertaken on this shortly.

There were no significant differences in age or gender, with the exception, again, of Midults (18 – 34), where just under half the respondents (49.3%) had been to none of the above. This reflects a national disinterest in heritage for this age group, and there is work underway at East Suffolk Council to try to understand the issues (see barriers below for some insight). Clearly, engagement with this group is an important target for the Town Hall project.

Barriers to visiting museums & heritage events

The survey asked people to choose from a list of options any reasons that prevented them from visiting museums or heritage events; included in the options was 'not interested in heritage'. Respondents could choose as many as they wished. 800 people (80%) answered this question.



The top two barriers identified in the survey overall were **lack of time**, and **lack of information about them**, with 40% and 39.4% respectively citing these as issues. The dominance of a lack of information in the list of barriers provides very strong evidence for the potential value of a heritage hub at the Town Hall, delivering better information and driving footfall to the wealth of heritage venues and events in the town.

In the comments provided under 'Other' in an indication that **lack of information** is an even greater issue than the above suggests. Restricted opening hours and closure during the winter season were also cited, but as mostly volunteer-led venues, it would be difficult (and possibly not worthwhile) extending opening hours. This could change if there was greater footfall in the town and a higher demand from tourists.

“They could benefit from improved interpretation - the standards similar to Time and Tide and regular themed exhibitions, where there are galleries that are refreshed with something new to see each time.”

Several people also noted that they had 'already visited in the past', with some stating their perception that there is little that changes in the museums over time. This underlines the need for the Town Hall to refresh its interpretation and stage new temporary exhibitions (well promoted!) as regularly as possible, to attract repeat footfall.

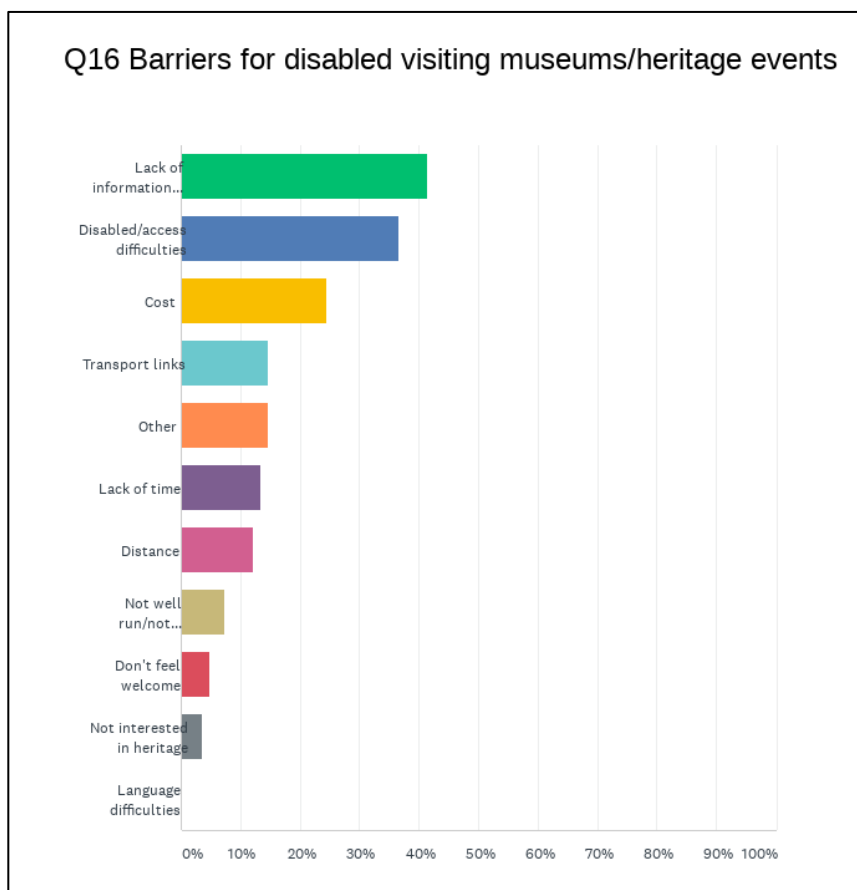
For the Midult group, the top two barriers were identical to those cited across the survey: **lack of time** (47%) and a **lack of information** (42%) about what is available/on. Perhaps surprisingly, just 12% said they were not interested in heritage at all; this supports aspirations to engage with this currently disengaged group, as there is no significant disinterest in history itself.

There were no gender or other age-related differences. However, people on relative low income are more likely to cite both **cost** (18% v 10%) and **transport** (12% v 8%) as barriers to access. This segment does not see **lack of time** as such a barrier (29% v 40%), probably reflecting their employment status (15% in full time employment v 34% overall).

Note that, whilst no respondents cited language difficulties as a barrier, it must be acknowledged that people who might have language difficulties would be unlikely to be completing a written survey of this nature, and therefore in the longer term further research should be done to identify whether this is an issue or not.

For those with a disability, access difficulties are a major barrier— this ranked second top for this grouping (37%), although again the lead barrier was a lack of information (42%). Below the top two, the disabled grouping continued to have a different profile of barriers to all others. For example, 24% cite cost as a barrier and 15% transport links (9% and 7% respectively for non-disabled respondents). Note too that these barriers are greater for the disabled than even for those on low income (see below).

Clearly, access difficulties are inevitable in some of the heritage venues and events in Lowestoft because of the nature of the buildings in which they are sited, and it goes without saying that access barriers will not be accepted in the Town Hall (with the obvious exception of the access into the clock tower).



What difference does income make to people's views?

We asked people to give an indication of their combined household income. One-fifth preferred not to say.

For those on relative low income⁴ - a total of 263 respondents - 31% are employed full or part-time. Almost 21% said they had a disability but only 5.6% were unable to work because of it; 64% are female (but note that this is broadly in line with the gender split for the whole survey response).

Just over 24% of those with relative low income are aged between 55 and 64, and a further 26% are 65 – 74. Retired people account for 42.5% overall, which could mean that a good number of the 55-64 age group are already retired. Two-thirds of those in relative low income households live in the NR32 postcode, ie they are part of the local community (a further 29% were in NR33).

So does low income change people's views? In most aspects, there is no great difference. Facilities were ranked in the same order of popularity as in the survey overall, as were community facilities. However, there was a marginally higher indication of use (+4%) in both the café and museum, and similarly there was higher interest across all of the community uses. This probably reflects the proximity for local people, and the fact that over 40% of people in this segment are

⁴ Relative low income, as defined by the UK government, is <60% of the national median wage. National median wage in 2019 £30.4k, meaning relative low income would have been below £18,250. Our two lowest bands fall into this category.

retired, 8% are not employed and a further 16% work part time. This is supported by the fact that 'lack of time' was a less prominent barrier to accessing heritage venues for this grouping (29% v 40% overall).

People in this segment are less likely to use the Town Hall for parties and weddings, which is almost certainly a direct consequence of lower income.

The most important difference for this lower income segment is the interest in creative workspace. Just over 36% of respondents said they would be interested in creative workspace (yes/maybe), compared to 18% in the overall survey. This has implications for how such space might be charged: a significant proportion (39%) of those interested in using creative spaces are in relative low income.

People on low income are just as likely to visit heritage venues in Lowestoft as those on higher income; this will partly be down to the fact that the majority of venues are free, or charge a nominal entry fee. Not unexpectedly, cost is stated as a greater barrier to visiting heritage venues in general (18% v 10% overall) as is transport (12% v 8%).

Section 3: Comments and Feedback

There were two opportunities to make open, freeform comments, the first specifically asking what the Town Hall could be used for, and the second at the end of the survey, asking for any other comments in general.

What suggestions did people make for uses of the Town Hall?

In total, 689 responses were made, which included 640 recommendations for uses or functions to be included in the Town Hall.

Within the top ten recommendations were the expected or previously indicated uses, such as a museum, use by Lowestoft Town Council, a gallery/exhibition centre and a café. However, in third place, with 41 recommendations, was an indoor market, including food. About half of respondents were specific: this should be a covered, regular 'foodie' market showcasing local produce, aimed at bringing local and visiting customers to support local businesses. About a third also linked this to the perceived failings of the Triangle Market.

A museum was by far the most frequently cited, with 87 people mentioning this use. For the majority, this should be a museum about Lowestoft, although a minority felt that the Lowestoft Porcelain collection – or, in a few cases, Lowestoft Museum in its entirety – should be relocated to the Town Hall.

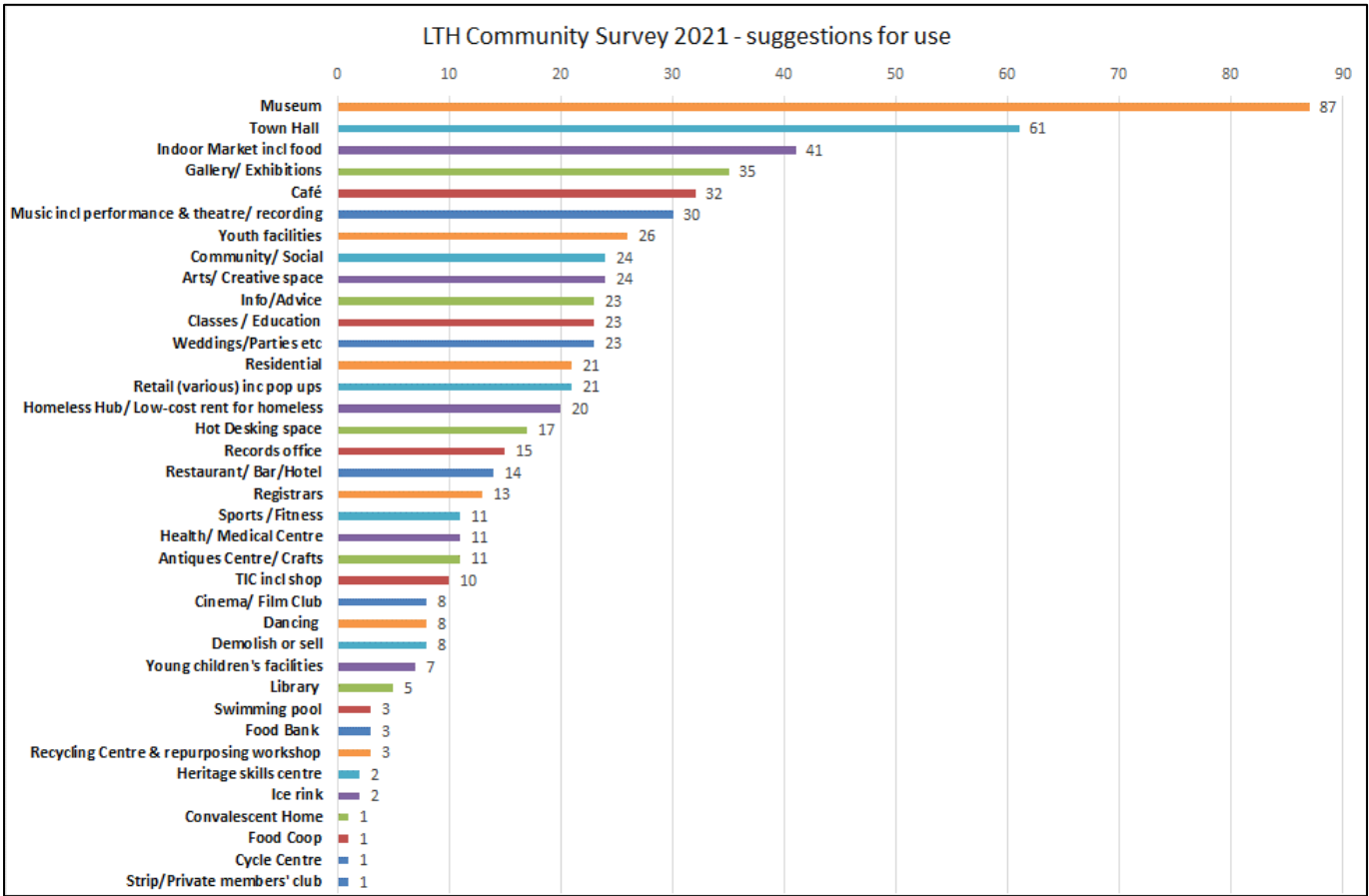
Youth facilities of varying sorts were also popular; this was often accompanied by a comment that there was a lot for young children to do, but very little for youth/teens. This is probably reflected in the lower ranking of young children's facilities, with only seven people suggesting this.

Two social services stand out in the recommendations: a health/medical centre (for some, specifically a walk-in centre with medical and dental services); a homeless hub providing support and care for homeless people, including, for some, provision of cheap accommodation.

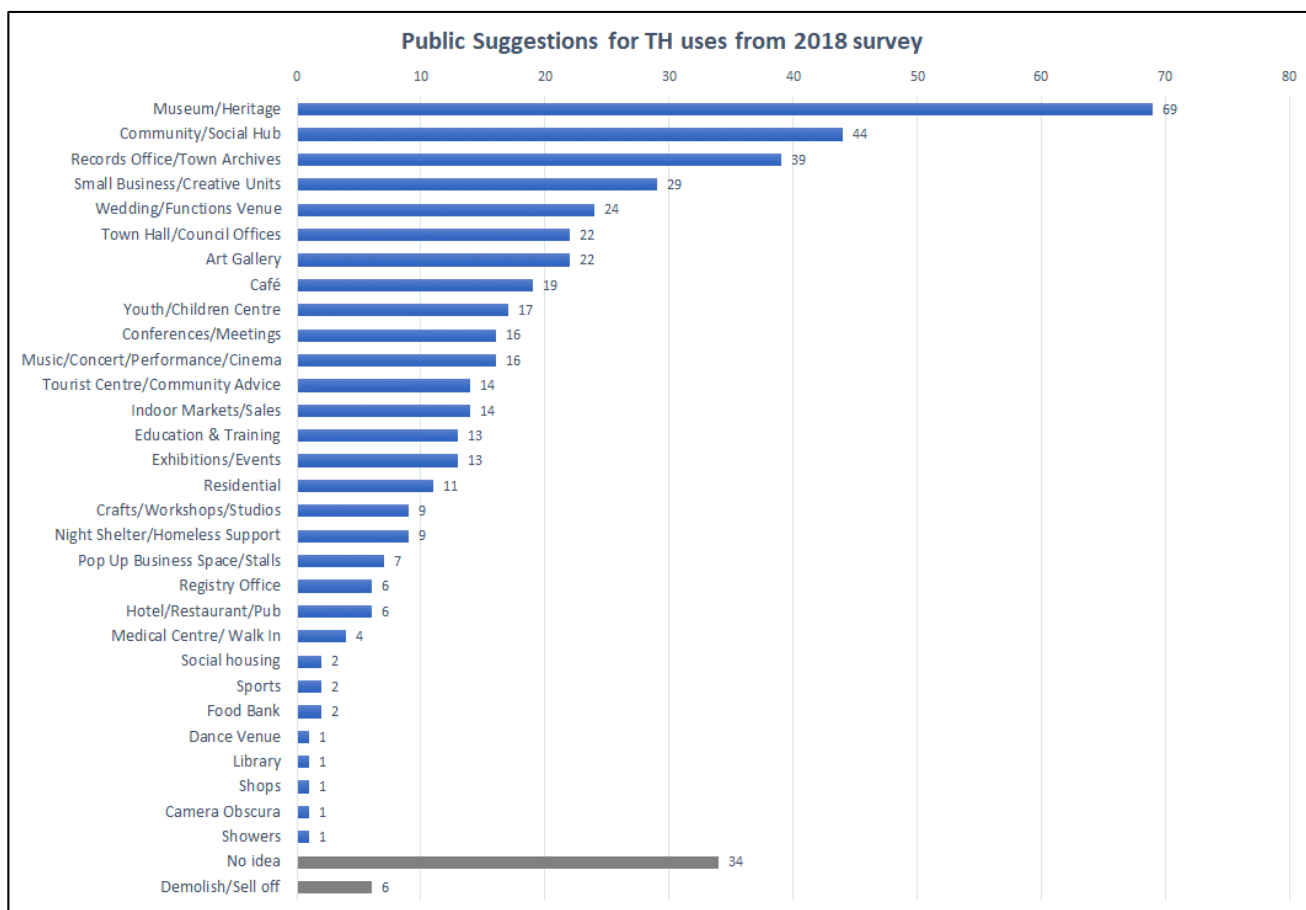
Hot-desking (including office space to be rented by the hour/day and for start-ups) was raised by 17 people (and by a further 7 in the office/creative space section). Notably, there was only one suggestion for an office for longer-term hire, perhaps because of the availability of space elsewhere in the town, or because offices were specifically included previously in the survey itself.

It is fair to say that several of the recommendations, including some mentioned above, reflect actual needs or perceived gaps in local provision. Clearly, some are not suitable for the Town Hall, and some which could be suitable for the space may not be deliverable for other reasons.

Few people recommended selling or demolition of the building – just 8 in total (and this was balanced by the same number requesting 'don't demolish'). In general, most people want to see the building retained and repurposed. However, note that it would be less likely for someone to take the time to fill out the entire questionnaire if loss of the Town Hall was their preference.



When compared to the public survey of 2018 (chart below), when residents were asked about their suggestions for uses for the Town Hall, some shifts in views can be seen. It’s important to look not at numbers but at rankings, not least because the sample sizes are significantly different (2021 is approximately four times larger than those who responded to this question in 2018). The Museum remains the top use, but perhaps more interestingly, the relative importance of an indoor market has moved up the rankings significantly, and at the same time, the Records Office has slid down. This latter is no doubt due to the time that has passed since the Hold project was implemented.



What other feedback did people give?

Almost 50% of all comments including general remarks, as well as giving specific recommendations for use. Overwhelmingly⁵, these were supportive, with many people commenting on the impressive appearance of the façade, their memories of it in the past, and of specific features such as the Morton Peto stained glass windows, and the Curfew Bell. There was also a recurring demand for the building to be brought back into use for the people to see and use. It is clear that for the vast majority, the Town Hall is a much-loved landmark that they wish to see take on a new life.

One theme (about 25 comments) was the desire for the building to be environmentally sustainable, using as much green technology as possible, and ensuring that its negative impact on the environment is minimised.

About 8% of respondents commented that the building must be sustainable financially, and a few mentioned that it must not be a burden on taxpayers in the future. This led several to make recommendations for use, such as market residential, which they felt would achieve this objective.

⁵ Overwhelming support is not entirely surprising in a survey about the future of the Town Hall – there is an implicit bias in a survey asking for people to go through a range of future uses, and it is fair to say that a good number of those who do not support the Town Hall having a future would not take the time to do the survey simply in order to demand that it be demolished.

Comments also revealed that a surprising number of residents do not understand the difference between Lowestoft Town Council and Waveney District Council/East Suffolk Council. A number of those 'voting' for the town council to return to the building commented that they should never have left and/or that the money should not have been spent on Riverside. It's likely that some of this arises from the name change of WDC to ESC in the same period that Lowestoft Town Council was formed, but some communications to differentiate between the bodies may be helpful, not just for this project but in the wider arena.

The need for improved parking, to support a renovated Town Hall, was raised by 24 people, with the majority also mentioning that a revived High Street will also need more parking in the area. Public transport to the area was also recorded (by a smaller number), along with comments that this has reduced in recent years thus contributing to a drop in footfall. A few recommended the reinstatement of the tram service.

A general theme of 'get on with it' was also observable, with some expressing frustration at the length of time that has elapsed since the building was vacated, and others that another consultation is underway. Given the constraints of funding timescales and processes, and the likely duration of the capital works, it would be appropriate to set expectations in communications to the residents of Lowestoft.

It should also be noted that a small number of people went on to praise the Council (whichever one they were referring to!) for taking on this project and continuing to strive to deliver a new life for this historic building.

Section 4: How good is the data?

How many responses were submitted?

In total, 999 responses were received, of which 955 were submitted online, and 44 on paper. Not unexpectedly, the ages of those who responded on paper were on average higher than online. More surprisingly, the percentage of male v female was reversed when on paper (37% v 62% for online; 60% v 40% for paper); however, the numbers involved are small, and there is no conclusion that could be safely drawn from this.

How much confidence can we have?

We aimed to collect sufficient responses to have a confidence level of 95% with an error margin of ± 5 ⁶. To achieve this, we required 382 responses, which we have exceeded. This means that we can retain a confidence level of 95% and decrease the margin close to ± 3 .

How representative is the data of Lowestoft overall?

Just over 90% of respondents come from NR32 and NR33 postcode areas, which include all of the Lowestoft area defined in the Town Investment Plan. However, both postcodes extend out into the countryside beyond – NR33 for example includes Kessingland and Gisleham whilst NR32 extends to Somerleyton. By sampling the postcode data, however, we can estimate that over 94% of respondents from each of these postcodes is within the Town plan defined area (which of course is to be expected given the topic of the survey). This means that it is safe to use the data to represent the views of Lowestoft residents.

Looking at specific postcodes, the NR32 postcode (ie the area that surrounds the Town Hall, and extends north to Corton and west to Somerleyton) represents 56.5% of all responses. As some of the survey is focused on community uses, and there is a reported tendency in Lowestoft to stay on one's own side of the river, this should mean that the data about community usage can be relied upon.

How well does the data represent people outside Lowestoft?

With only 10% of respondents living outside Lowestoft, we can be informed by their comments, but it would be risky to make any major decisions based on this information alone.

However, over one third of the people outside Lowestoft live in the NR34 postcode or are within 10 miles of the town. This means that it is safe to include their data in the overall opinions about the Town Hall.

How accurately are disabled people represented?

In 2018/19, a national study by Scope found 14.1m (20% of the population) recording that they had a disability⁷ which is markedly higher than in our survey (9.7%). This may be due to the

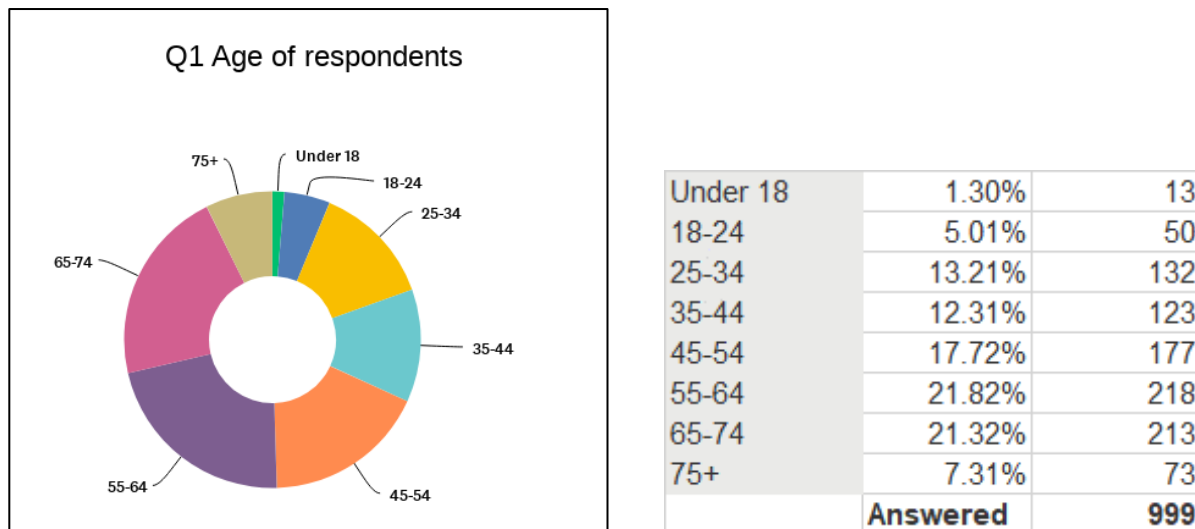
⁶ To explain how confidence levels and margins work: with a margin of error of ± 5 , if in a survey 60% of people pick a particular answer, we can be sure that if we asked the *whole* population, we would find 55% - 65% would pick the same answer. The confidence level tells us just how sure we can be of this, ie how often the answer should lie within the range. In our case, this is 95%, the research norm.

⁷ Family Resources Survey 2018-19 (published Mar 2020), Scope

interpretation of 'disability', as the Scope study found a large proportion were (correctly) reporting mental health issues as a disability.⁸ It is likely that in our survey individuals have had a narrower definition, quite possibly leaning towards mobility issues, or indeed disability as defined by owning a Blue Badge (4.1%). However, just under 10% of all respondents represents a sizeable minority and is directly aligned with the findings in the Lowestoft Town Funds Area profile developed by East Suffolk Council, which identified 10% of residents whose day-to-day activity was limited 'a lot' by long term health or disability issues. Follow-up discussions with disabled group coordinators locally may help to flesh out this section further.

Is the age mix representative?

There is a good age spread of respondents, although, as is expected of surveys of this nature, there is a significant under-representation of young people under 18 (1.3%), and a slight over-representation of people 65+ (28.6% in the survey against overall population share of 24.8%⁹). There is an encouraging level of response from 'Midults', ie those aged 18 – 34, with over 180 responses in total (18.2%), comparing to a Lowestoft population share estimated at just under 18% for this segment¹⁰.



Are genders balanced?

37% of recipients are male, against 62% female, which means that we have a disproportionately high representation of women. To address this, we have compared the responses by gender, to identify where there are statistically significant differences. These are covered in the individual questions in Section 2.

When combining age and gender, we find that Midult (18-34) females were almost three times more likely to complete the survey than males. In the 35-44 age group, females were twice as likely to participate. Only in the under-18s and over-75s do males outnumber females. Again, to

⁸ A person is considered to have a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment that has 'substantial' and 'long term' negative effects on their ability to do normal daily activities. This is the core definition of disability in the Equality Act 2010.

⁹ Figures from the Lowestoft Town Investment Plan, based on ONS 2017 mid-year estimate.

¹⁰ The Town Investment Plan does not identify this particular segment.

understand if there is any significant skewing of responses, we have compared the groups by age and gender. These are covered in section 2.

How accurately is economic activity reflected?

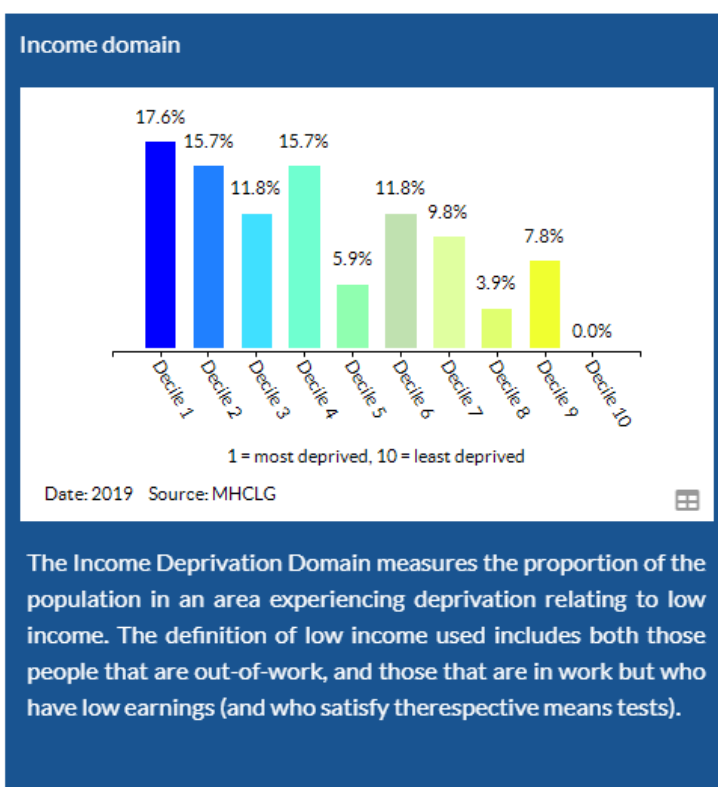
In our survey, 34.3% of respondents were in full time employment against 39% in the Lowestoft Town Funds demographic data. A similar shortfall occurs for part time employment (16.1% v 20%) and for self employed (4.35% v 9%). In contrast (and to a degree, in explanation) 32.2% of those surveyed are retired against the Town Funds demographic data of 23%. This is a direct reflection on the proportion of older people completing our survey.

To overcome the 'skewing' that this has created, we have filtered the survey data for those who are working (in any capacity) to compare their responses against those who are not and identified any statistically significant differences. These are recorded where relevant in the main report.

40% of those who identified as disabled are retired, with a further 23.7% unable to work. Just under 30% were employed in some respect (full, part-time, self-employed). There is no comparable demographic data for these statistics.

Are people on low incomes adequately represented?

A total of 263 respondents would be categorised as coming from households in relative low income, ie 26.3% of the overall survey. This is a high percentage, especially as 20% of respondents preferred not to disclose their household income, and it must be assumed that some



of these would also fall into the low income bracket. There is no direct demographic data available for this, but looking at the deprivation data for Lowestoft for income (left), it would appear that the numbers of respondents on relative low income is not out of line for the town¹¹. Furthermore, the 2016 data shows 20% of children in relative low income households¹².

¹¹ Source: MHCLG 2019 via Suffolk Observatory.

¹² HM Revenue and Customs - Personal Tax Credits: Children in low-income families local measure 2016.

Section 5: Questionnaire



Lowestoft Town Hall - Community Survey

Welcome to this survey about the Town Hall's future

Lowestoft Town Council has commissioned the development of a business plan for the Town Hall, looking at how it should be used in future. As part of this work, we'd like to know what *you* think, what services and facilities you'd like to see in there.

We've looked at previous surveys and research, and taken that into account. But now we want to go a step further. The answers you provide will help us determine how the building should be restored and developed, how it should be run, and what it will do for the town once it's completed.

Please take a few minutes to answer the questions on the following pages. We'll be asking a little about you, your views on the Town Hall and your interest in heritage.

Thank you!

Please return this survey by **31 January** at the latest. You can drop it off at Waveney News or Uncle Sid's Zero Waste Store, in the High Street. If you prefer to post it back to us, the address is on the last page.

Questions marked with an asterisk * are required on the online survey. We'd be really grateful if you would give an answer to these as it will help us analyse all the data consistently.

All data is anonymous - we cannot identify individuals from the questions asked.



Lowestoft Town Hall - Community Survey

About you

We need to understand a little bit about you, so we can properly analyse the survey responses. You will remain anonymous, and we will not be able to identify you from your responses.

* 1. What age are you?

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Under 18 | <input type="radio"/> 45-54 |
| <input type="radio"/> 18-24 | <input type="radio"/> 55-64 |
| <input type="radio"/> 25-34 | <input type="radio"/> 65-74 |
| <input type="radio"/> 35-44 | <input type="radio"/> 75+ |

* 2. What gender are you?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 3. Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

* 4. Which of the following best describes your employment status?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Employed part-time | <input type="radio"/> Retired |
| <input type="radio"/> Employed full-time | <input type="radio"/> Disabled, unable to work |
| <input type="radio"/> Not employed | <input type="radio"/> Student |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) | |

* 5. What is your approximate annual household income?

This should be the combined income of all members of your household.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Below £10,000 | <input type="radio"/> £30,000 - £40,000 |
| <input type="radio"/> £10,000 - £19,000 | <input type="radio"/> Above £40,000 |
| <input type="radio"/> £20,000 - £29,000 | <input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say |

* 6. How many people live in your household, including yourself.

Fill in the numbers in each box:

Pre-school children	<input type="text"/>
Children aged 5-17	<input type="text"/>
Adults 18-64	<input type="text"/>
Adults 65+	<input type="text"/>

* 7. What is your postcode?

We need to know approximately where you live, so we can analyse your later answers. We cannot identify you from this information.

Lowestoft Town Hall - Community Survey

Town Hall - Facilities and Services

We want to know the sorts of services, facilities and activities you would like to see in a restored Town Hall. We have reviewed previous surveys and used their responses to create lists of options, but you also will have the opportunity later to suggest something new or different.

* 8. How much would you use the following if they were included? *These were the most popular ideas put forward in Lowestoft Town Council's 2018 community survey.*

	Never	Occasionally	Quite often	Very often
Museum/heritage/cultural hub	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gallery and/or exhibition and display space	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wedding/party/event venue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meeting rooms to hire	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Café	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. We could include offices and/or creative spaces in the Town Hall. Would you be interested in renting one?

	Yes	No	Maybe
Office space	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creative space/workshop	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you've replied yes/maybe to the above, what would you use it for (eg type of business, or creative activity)? Tell us more in the space below:

* 10. Looking at community/social use, how much would you use the Town Hall for the following?

	Never	Occasionally	Quite often	Very often
Celebrations & events (eg parties, public meetings, fairs, sales)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports & fitness (eg exercise classes, table tennis etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Education (eg adults, pre school etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Arts & crafting activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social or recreational (eg men's shed, youth club, lunch clubs for elderly etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Services & wellbeing (outreach, slimming clubs, public information etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Is there anything else you think the Town Hall should be used for, or should be included in the restored building?

Use the blank space at the bottom of this page if you need more room!

* 12. Should Lowestoft Town Council move into the Town Hall?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Lowestoft Town Hall - Community Survey

Heritage & Culture

The Town Hall is an important building on the historic High Street, which is a Historic England Heritage Action Zone. We are keen to strengthen the Town Hall's heritage links to the town.

Your answers here will help us understand more about what interests you, and what we could do to increase heritage participation.

13. How much do you know about Lowestoft's history?

On a scale of 0 - 100, where 0 = no knowledge and 100 = expert, what score would you give yourself?

14. Lowestoft has a unique maritime, social and natural heritage. Which aspects would you like to know more about? *Tick **all** that apply*

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fishing & the beach village | <input type="checkbox"/> Buildings & houses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boats & Naval history | <input type="checkbox"/> People & family history |
| <input type="checkbox"/> World Wars I and II | <input type="checkbox"/> Town Hall & the High Street |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial | <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lowestoft porcelain | <input type="checkbox"/> Transport |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Witches & the supernatural | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

☐ None of the above

15. Thinking back to 2019, did you visit any of these local museums, heritage organisations or events?

Tick **all** that apply

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lowestoft Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> The <i>Mincarlo</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maritime Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> The <i>Excelsior</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lowestoft Heritage Centre | <input type="checkbox"/> Lowestoft Records Office |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Royal Naval Patrol Service Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Heritage Open Day event |
| <input type="checkbox"/> War Memorial Museum | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> East Anglia Transport Museum | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

☐ None of the above

16. What stops you visiting museums or heritage attractions/events?

Tick **all** that apply

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cost | <input type="checkbox"/> Language difficulties |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of time | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't feel welcome |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distance | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of information about them |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transport links | <input type="checkbox"/> Not well run/not enjoyable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disabled/access difficulties | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

☐ Not interested in heritage

17. Your views are really important to us. Is there anything else about the Town Hall that you'd like to tell us?