

The Future of Whitchurch Civic Centre

Survey Report

July 2024



1 Background and Methods

Background Information:

In 2023, specialist engineers found that RAAC (reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete) exists across the majority of the Whitchurch Civic Centre complex, and that it has major structural issues. They recommended that it is not safe to reopen the building. As a result, the building is now closed (with the exception of the sports/market hall).

A working group made up of local Shropshire Council and Whitchurch Town Council councillors and officers, has begun meeting every month to consider six possible future options for the centre. These options are as follows:

1. Do nothing and close the building permanently.
2. RAAC to remain in place and mitigated through internal structural framework, repairs to spalled concrete and full replacement of roof membranes.
3. Replacement of structural roof and associated essential items.
4. Demolition and clearing of site.
5. Demolition and rebuild as existing facilities provision.
6. Demolition and redevelopment of the site.

In May 2024, the working group launched a public survey to ask people which options they like, and which they don't. The survey also asked people about their usage of the Civic Centre in the past and at present, and which facilities and services they think should be available at the site in the future. The analysis of the survey results provided in this report will inform the group as it makes recommendations to Shropshire Council's Cabinet on the future plans for the centre.

The survey was open from 29th April to 11th June 2024 and was publicised widely in Whitchurch and the surrounding area. Members of Whitchurch Town Council in particular promoted the survey, with in-person volunteers distributing hard copies at the market hall and encouraging people to take the survey online. Additionally, Shropshire Council encouraged survey uptake through newsroom press releases and social media posts.

Responses to the hard copies of the survey were added to the online responses, so that all are considered in most questions. One question, however, around ranking the options, was not completed correctly by around 45% of hard copy survey respondents, and so a different methodology was employed for analysing this question, which is explained in more detail below.

Quantitative survey data was analysed using MS Excel and results are presented visually where possible as Figures. Qualitative responses were read and analysed for themes. These are presented in Tables where appropriate and anonymised examples of comments representing common themes are provided.

This report proceeds in five sections:

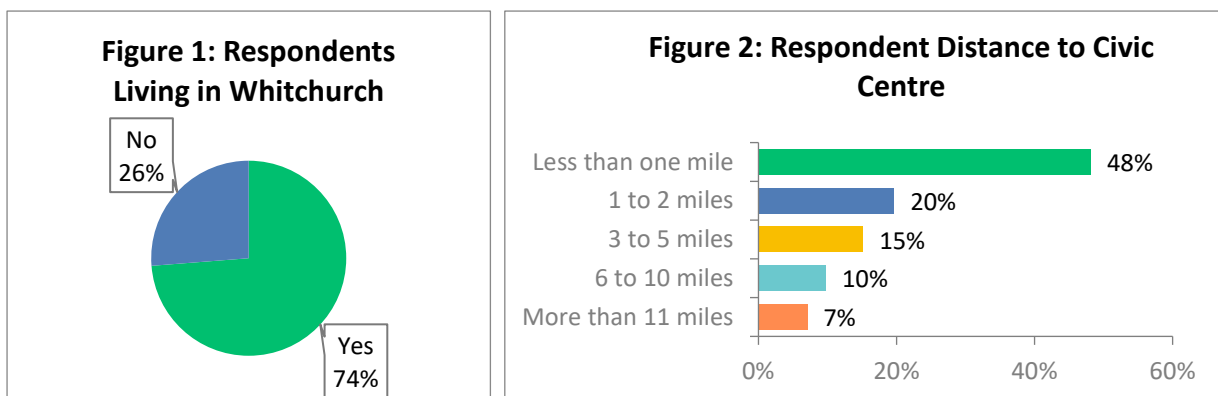
- **Section 1: Background and Methods** (this current section) provides an overview of the context for the consultation and how feedback was gathered and analysed.

- **Section 2: Respondents** presents demographic statistics on survey respondents.
- **Section 3: Civic Centre Use** looks at how respondents used the Civic Centre both before and after the discovery of RAAC.
- **Section 4: Future of the Civic Centre** discusses how survey respondents would like the future plans of the Civic Centre to look.
- **Section 5: Summary and Conclusion** provides a brief summary of the report's key findings and offers some conclusions based on the evidence.

2 Respondents

In total, 1,130 respondents completed the survey; 807 completed online surveys, and 323 returned paper responses. This number represents over 10% of the actual population of Whitchurch.¹ This is unusual for Shropshire Council consultations in two ways. First, it is a higher percentage of a targeted population than typically responds to consultations. Second, this is an extremely high percentage of paper copies completed. Both phenomena are likely due to a mobilization effort by local town councillors and officers, who made copies of the paper survey and had volunteers handing them out for residents to complete. Such a high response rate is notable and these methods of encouraging survey uptake should be noted for future consultations.

Interestingly, around a quarter of the survey respondents do not actually live in Whitchurch (see **Figure 1**). This suggests that there is a considerable population in villages surrounding the town for whom the past and future use of the Civic Centre is also highly salient.



This theory is further supported by **Figure 2**, which shows that around 32% of respondents report living three or more miles away from the Civic Centre.

Also consistent with the findings in **Figure 2** are those shown in **Figure 3 (below)**, which demonstrate that the most common methods of travel to the centre are on foot and by car. Very few respondents (52) indicated that they use public transport (bus) to get to the centre. This means that those travelling from the outskirts of the town or outside Whitchurch are most commonly doing so by car.

¹ According to [a 2021 Whitchurch Profile report produced by Shropshire Council](#), the town's population is around 10,500.

Respondents to the surveys were largely of an older population. 51% of respondents identified themselves as being over 60 (see Figure 4). There was also a considerable population responding from age groups that are likely to have children and/or to be in work (46% identified as being between 20 and 59 years of age). Young people's views are notably absent from this consultation. This not likely to be due to their lack of interest in the Civic Centre, but rather because they were not targeted in a similarly effective way to engage with the survey. Future engagement with young people in Whitchurch should consider working with schools and/or youth clubs to ensure greater input from children and young people.

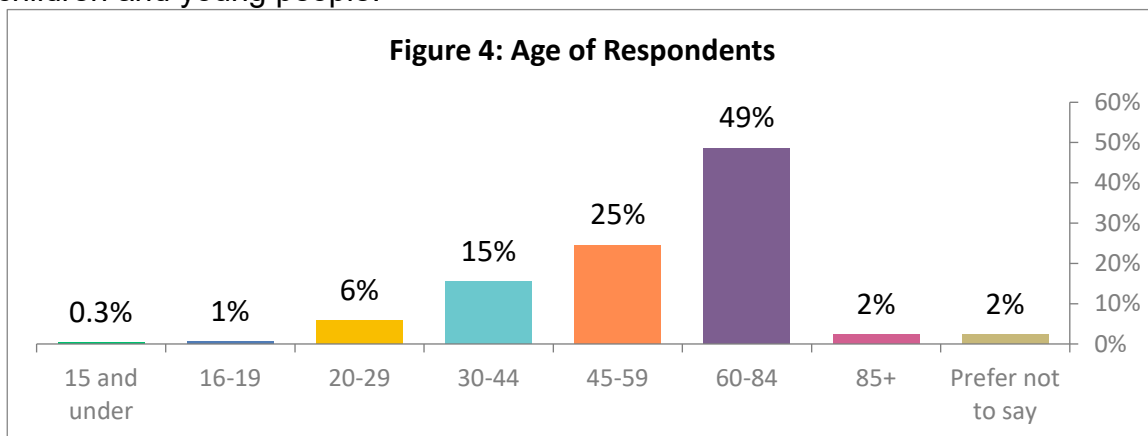
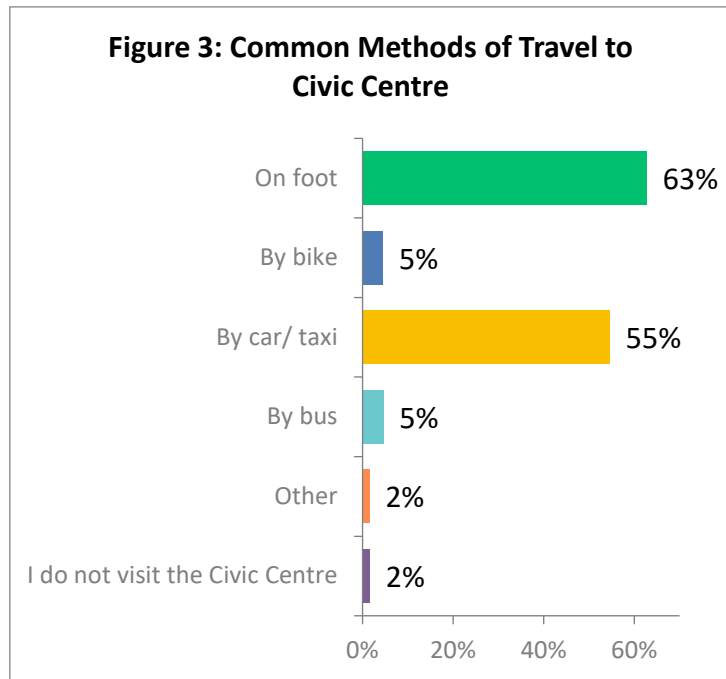
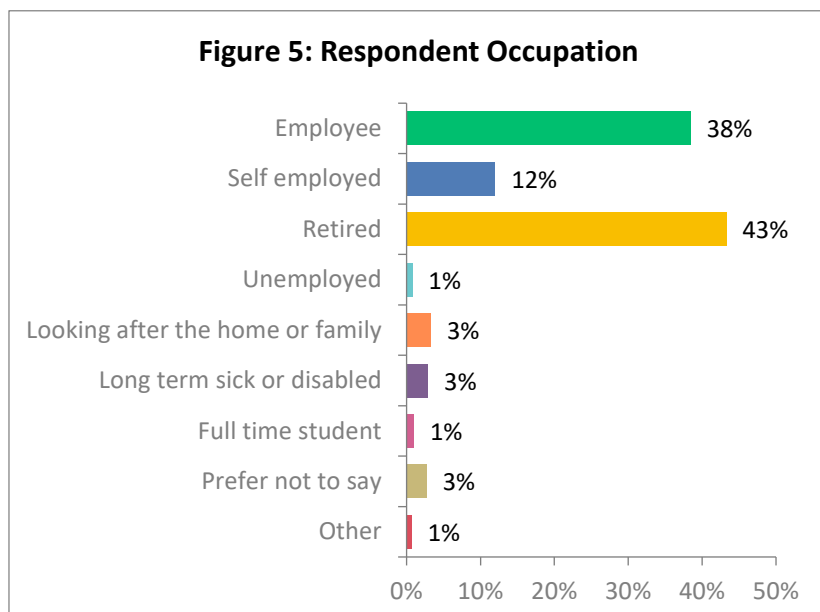


Figure 5, which depicts respondents' reported occupations, reflects the expectations set up by the ages of respondents. Most are either employed or self-employed, and a large percentage (43%) are retired.

While some respondents may have other occupations, it is recognised that they



may also be working as an unpaid or informal carer in addition to their “regular” occupation, so this question is also asked separately. 10% of respondents answering this question (94 individuals) said that they also support a friend or family member who needs support as an informal or unpaid carer.

In order to gauge whether the consultation was capturing the voices of those with disabilities, it included

questions about whether respondents suffer from disabilities or illnesses that limit their daily activity. **Around 15% of respondents reported that they have a disability or illness that limits their daily activity.**

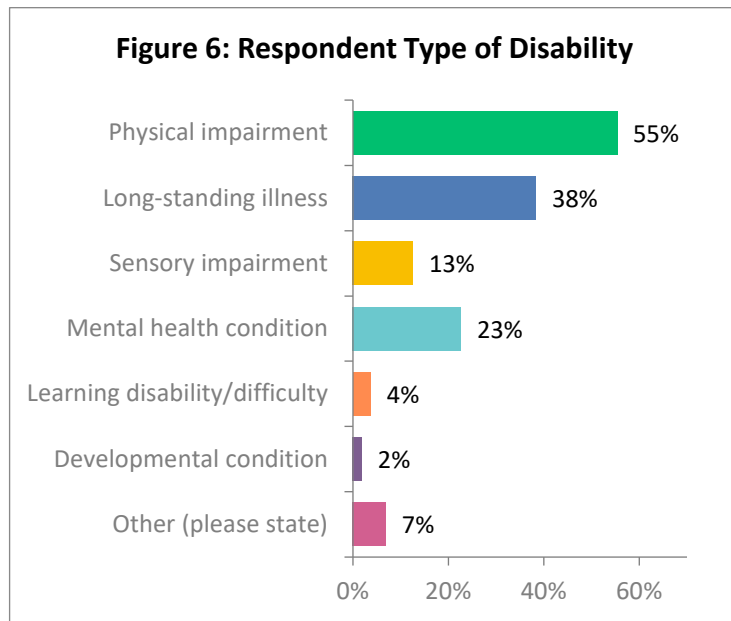


Figure 6 (above) gives a fuller picture of the types of limitations that respondents face. Of the 15% of survey respondents with a disability or illness (159 individuals), most suffer from physical impairments (88), though those with long-standing illness were also well represented (61).

The survey also asked respondents to provide their ethnic background, so that it is possible to determine whether a representative sample of ethnic minorities in the town had responded to the survey. **Table 1** displays these responses, which are consistent with Whitchurch’s ethnic profile, as 98.7% White (British; Irish; Welsh).²

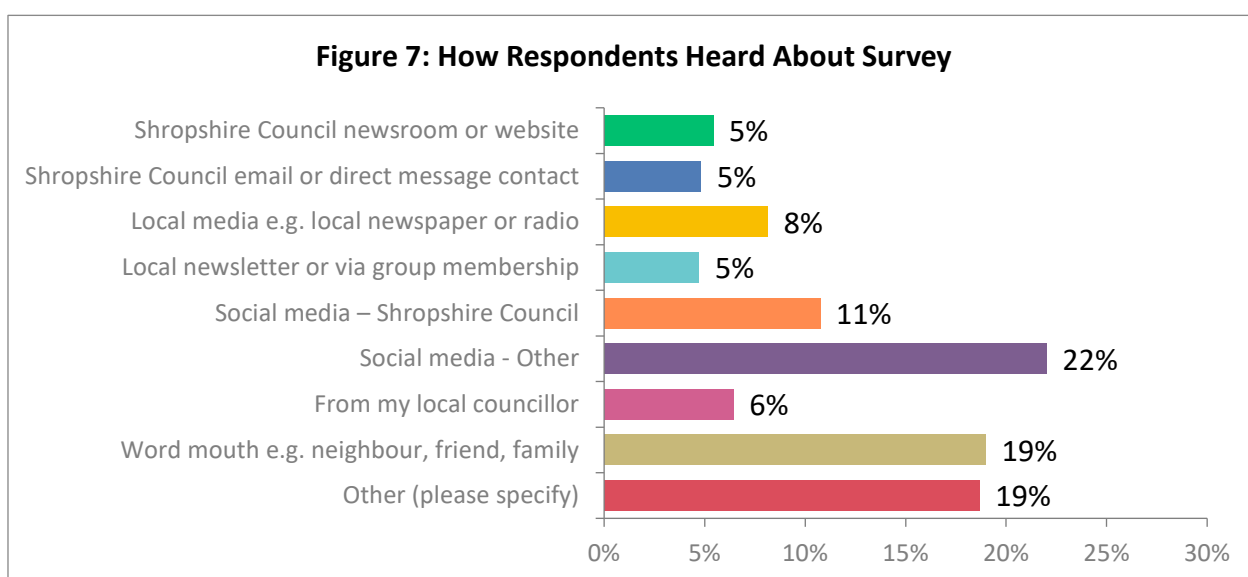
Table 1: Respondent Ethnic Background	Count
White (British; Irish; Welsh)	936
White (Gypsy, Roma or Irish traveler)	2
Other white background e.g. Bulgarian, French, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, White South African, etc.	10
Asian (Asian British; Bangladeshi Chinese; Indian; Japanese; Pakistani; any other Asian background).	3
Black (Black African; Black British; Black Caribbean; any other Black background).	2
Mixed (White and Asian; White and Black African; White and Black Caribbean; any other mixed background)	1
Arab	1

² [Ibid.](#)

Other Ethnic Group	3
Prefer not to say or don't know	33

Finally, as part of the series of questions that respondents were asked to answer about themselves, respondents were also asked to identify where they found out about the survey. **Figure 7** displays the overall responses to this question, while **Table 2** summarises the themes from those 19% of respondents saying they found out about the survey from “other” sources.

Interestingly, the results in **Figure 7** provide further evidence that the response to this survey was driven by strong community interest in the Centre itself and in the consultation about its future. Word of mouth and social media that was not directed by the council were the largest sources of information, alongside “other” sources.



As **Table 2** demonstrates, the local MP as well as active community groups, businesses, and library staff were key to getting the message out as well among many respondents. Generating engagement in the survey was clearly a true community effort.

Theme – “Other” Sources of Hearing About the Survey	Count	%
Local MP	52	29%
Local protest group / handed out on street / in town centre	32	18%
Library staff / In the library	24	13%
From a stall holder/ in the market /local business	20	11%
From a group that uses the facility (e.g. Slimming World)	14	8%
Social media	12	7%
Promotion at local events (e.g. Party in the Park)	8	4%
Whitchurch Town Council	7	4%
Local newspaper / local radio / posters	6	3%
Other	4	2%

Examples of comments under “other” included:

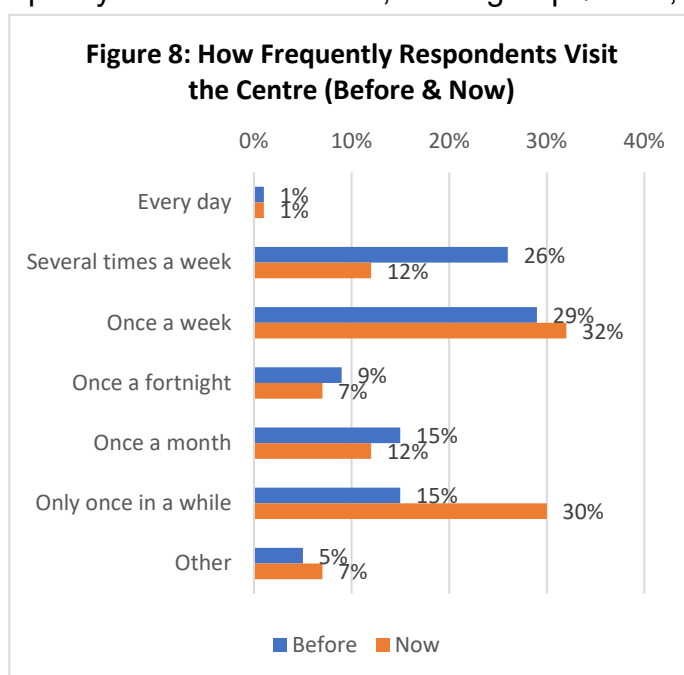
- “Canvasser at the 'Whitchurch party at the park.’”
- “From Helen Morgan our local MP.”
- “Through the Save our Civic WhatsApp group.”
- “A member of our club through an email from councillor.”
- “Slimming world group meeting.”
- “Given by librarian in the market hall.”
- “At the market.”
- “Available at a local coffee shop.”
- “Man on the street.”
- “Saw a picture on the notice board outside the heritage centre.”
- “Whitchurch farmers’ market.”
- “Whitchurch Town Council.”

3 Civic Centre Use

The next set of questions was aimed at gauging how respondents used the Civic Centre before the RAAC was discovered, and how respondents make use of the very limited facilities and services that are currently still operating from the market/sports hall; the only feature of the site that has remained open. Services still operating at a reduced or limited capacity include the market, some groups/clubs, a library service, and a polling station.

Figure 8 displays the results of two questions about how frequently respondents visited the Civic Centre site before and after the discovery of RAAC and partial closure.

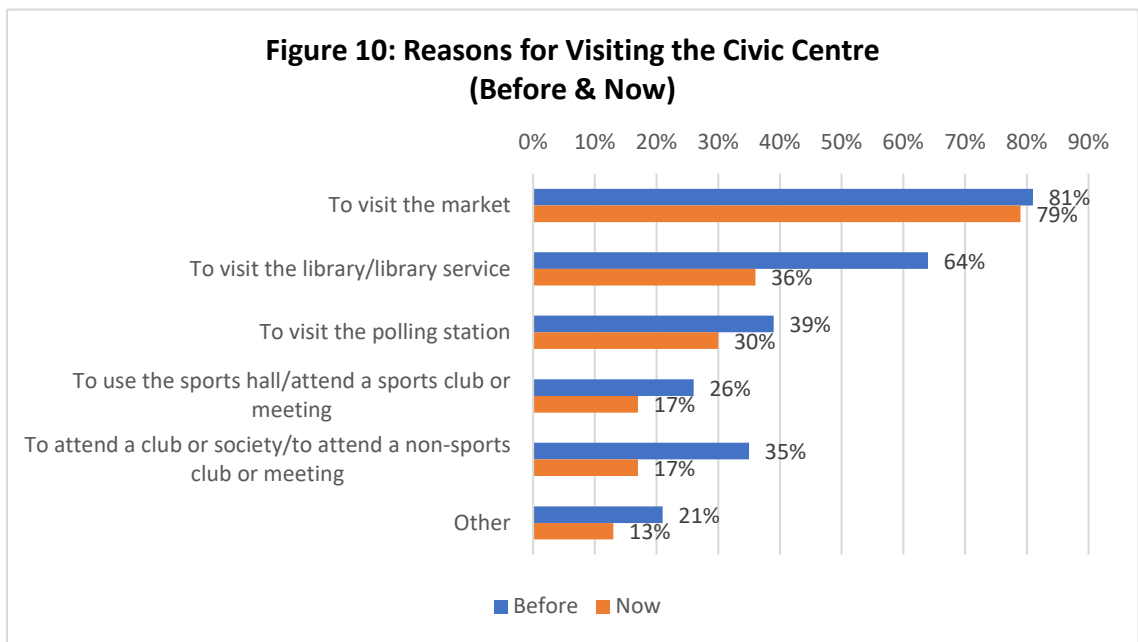
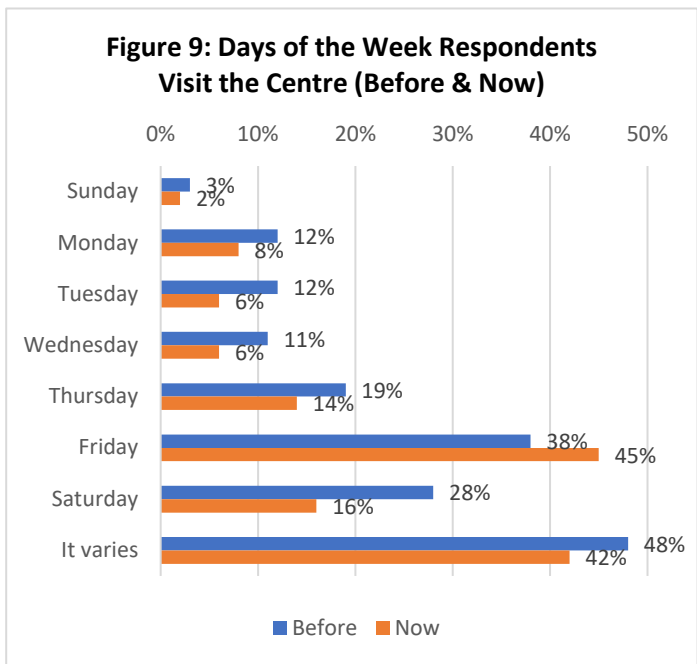
Perhaps a better way of understanding what the results in **Figure 8** mean is that 643 survey respondents reported that they used to come once a week or more to the Civic Centre. Since the RAAC discovery, 472 respondents said that they visit what remains open at the centre once a week or more – a difference of 36%.



It is also important to consider whether certain days of the week have seen changes in the percentage of respondents visiting the services at the Civic Centre site. **Figure 9** shows the results of two questions about the most common days of the week for respondents to visit the Civic Centre before and after the discovery of RAAC and partial closure.

Figure 9 shows that visits are down for every day of the week since the partial closure, with the exception of Fridays. Visits on Saturdays, in particular, seem to have dropped considerably.

Figures 10 and 11 display the results to two questions about why respondents visited the centre – both before the discovery of RAAC and partial closure, and now. Since some of the services and activities are still available at the centre in a limited way, it is possible to compare respondents’ continued use of the market hall for some of these activities and services.



As **Figure 10** demonstrates, respondents’ visits to the remaining space at the market hall for what activities continue there is down across all reasons for visiting. Visiting the more limited library service, as opposed to the full library when it was open, has the biggest drop in respondents’ visits, with 64% saying they visited the Civic Centre before the closure to use the library, and only 36% saying they visit the market hall now to make use of the library service available there.

Some of the services and facilities that were previously accessible in the Civic Centre have completely moved or are not currently available. **Figure 11** portrays the percentages of respondents who used to attend the Civic Centre for several reasons that are no longer available to them.

Private functions, for example, were quite common reasons for respondents to visit the centre, as were plays and films.

As **Figure 10** shows, there were 21% of respondents saying that they visited the Civic Centre before the partial closure for “other” reasons. These reasons are rich and varied, and the most common ones are displayed in **Table 3 (below)**.³

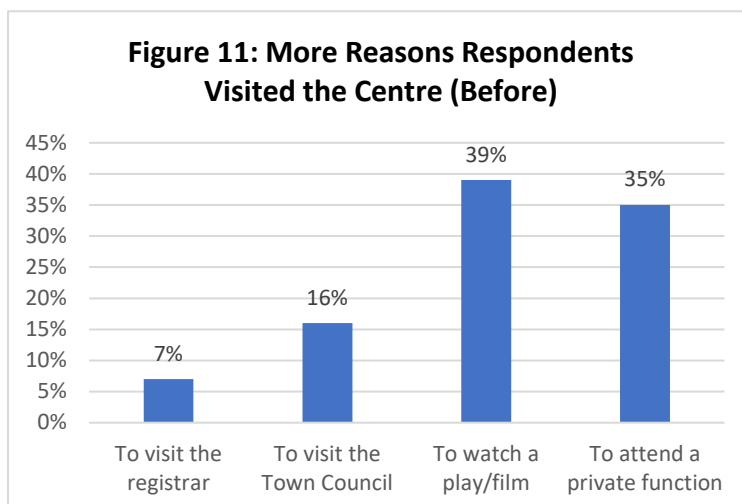


Table 3. “Other” Reasons for Visiting the Civic Centre Before RAAC Discovery	Count	%
Concert, show, or gig	74	30%
Toilets	42	17%
Coffee morning (including "church") or social meet up	36	15%
Information desk/board/tourist information	25	10%
Festival, fair, craft market, or other special market	23	9%
Citizens' Advice or other advice service	11	4%
Other specific club or group meeting (e.g. slimming world)	10	4%
For work	10	4%
Specific event (e.g. wedding, birthday party, school event, exhibition)	5	2%
I don't use the centre	4	2%
Other	7	3%

Many of these respondents (74) said that **concerts, shows and gigs** were something they attended before the partial closure of the centre. A surprisingly large number also said that **toilets** at the Civic Centre were a big attraction for them. However, one comment here suggests that this was a vital public resource:

- “To use the toilet. The only one in Whitchurch.”

Coffee mornings and other **local events and social activities** were also commonly referenced here. For example:

- “Local events e.g. coffee morning, BlackBerry fair, local art displays.”
- “Attend regular fundraising coffee mornings, organise displays to publicise local clubs.”

Another very important function of the Civic Centre seems to have been as a source of **information and advice**. Citizens’ Advice held regular clinics there, and there was a reception desk and notice boards with information on everything from local events and activities to transport and tourist information. For example:

³ 13% of respondents said that they currently visit the civic centre for “other” reasons, but some of the reasons provided suggested that respondents were referring to activities that were available at the centre before its partial closure. Therefore, these “other” results were determined to be unreliable statements of *current* activity and have not been summarised in the report.

- “Collect leaflet information...ask questions of person on reception desk, find out what’s on.”
- “Four tourist / transport information.”

Finally, it is worth noting in this section on Civic Centre use that respondents in **Figures 10 & 11** are indicating drops in their attendance at the Civic Centre for these various activities. It is possible – even likely – that these respondents’ decreased attendance at the Civic Centre also means a decrease in visits to the town centre, and thus has an impact on business revenues within the market and surrounding area. However, this report can only speculate on the impacts of this lack of Civic Centre attendance on businesses, as full data on business revenues for the time period covering the centre’s partial closure is not available as part of this analysis.

4 Future of the Civic Centre

Respondents were asked to provide feedback to a series of questions on the possible options that Shropshire Council is considering, as well as what they might like to see for the future of the Civic Centre.

First, the survey detailed all six possibilities for that the council is considering for the building. These are listed in **Table 4**. Respondents were then asked to put these options in order of their preference, with their most preferred option at the top (ranked as “1”) and their least preferred option at the bottom (ranked as “6”). Respondents rankings were averaged, and those averages were ordered in the effective ranking that is displayed in **Table 4**. This represents the preferred order of the options by respondents to the consultation.⁴

Table 4: Options In Order of Preference Ranked by Respondents	Effective Ranking	Average Ranking
Replacement of structural roof and associated essential items.	1	2.03
RAAC to remain in place and mitigated through internal structural framework, repairs to spalled concrete and full replacement of roof membranes.	2	2.43
Demolition and rebuild as existing facilities provision.	3	2.51
Demolition and redevelopment of the site.	4	3.99
Demolition and clearing of site.	5	4.69
Do nothing and close the building permanently.	6	5.36

The preferred option, ranked lowest (and thus most preferred, as it is closest to “1”) among respondents is the **replacement of the structural roof and associated essential items**. Also fairly popular were the option that **RAAC remains in place**

⁴ The ranking in Table 4 only reflects 983 responses. 147 respondents who completed paper surveys did not rank their preferred options in the same way as the other respondents in the consultation, and so these results were collated separately, only tallying options that respondents would consider (those that had a “tick” or some other indication of consideration beside them). In this analysis, the same three options emerge as the top three to be considered as those ranked among the top three in Table 4.

and mitigated through internal structural framework, followed by the **demolition and rebuild as existing facilities**.

The most unacceptable option for most was to **do nothing and close the building**, followed closely by **demolition and clearing of the site**. **Demolition and redevelopment** was also unpopular among survey respondents, and many provided comments to the effect that any redevelopment would need to contain most or all of the previous facilities.

When asked whether they had “anything else” to say about the preferred options, 362 respondents provided comments here. These comments were read and the most common themes identified. These themes are displayed in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Themes – “Anything Else” To Say About Options	Count	%
The civic centre is needed/vital to the community	197	47%
Modernisation / sympathetic development	39	9%
Replace all previous facilities	35	8%
Particular facility is important (e.g. library, toilets)	32	8%
Need more information/transparency important	27	6%
Particular option(s) good	24	6%
Consider new facilities and use of the building	19	5%
Do not demolish centre	16	4%
Particular option(s) bad	16	4%
Other	11	3%

Almost half of respondents made the clear point in these comments that the civic centre is **vital to the community** and is needed in Whitchurch. For example:

- “It’s a great facility that needs to be saved for the whole community.”
- “It’s a well loved and used site. It was a factor in us moving to Whitchurch. A small market town with its own Civic Hall and the amenities it offers.”
- “Our town needs and deserves this important facility, to lose it would be terrible as it is used by so many agencies and is essential to our community.”

The next most common theme was considerably less popular, but still mentioned by 39 respondents, and that was that the **building should be modernised**, or that any development should be **sympathetic to the context** in which it is being carried out. Some even suggested holding a design competition for any development. Examples include:

- “A building more in keeping to conservation area.”
- “It would be very nice if the building could have a facade more in keeping with the rest of the buildings in High Street.”
- “Building should be modernised and promoted as a place for various community events to pay for itself.”
- “Can the old town hall facade be replicated from the Victorian era.”
- “Cost effectiveness and longevity of the building must be a consideration.”

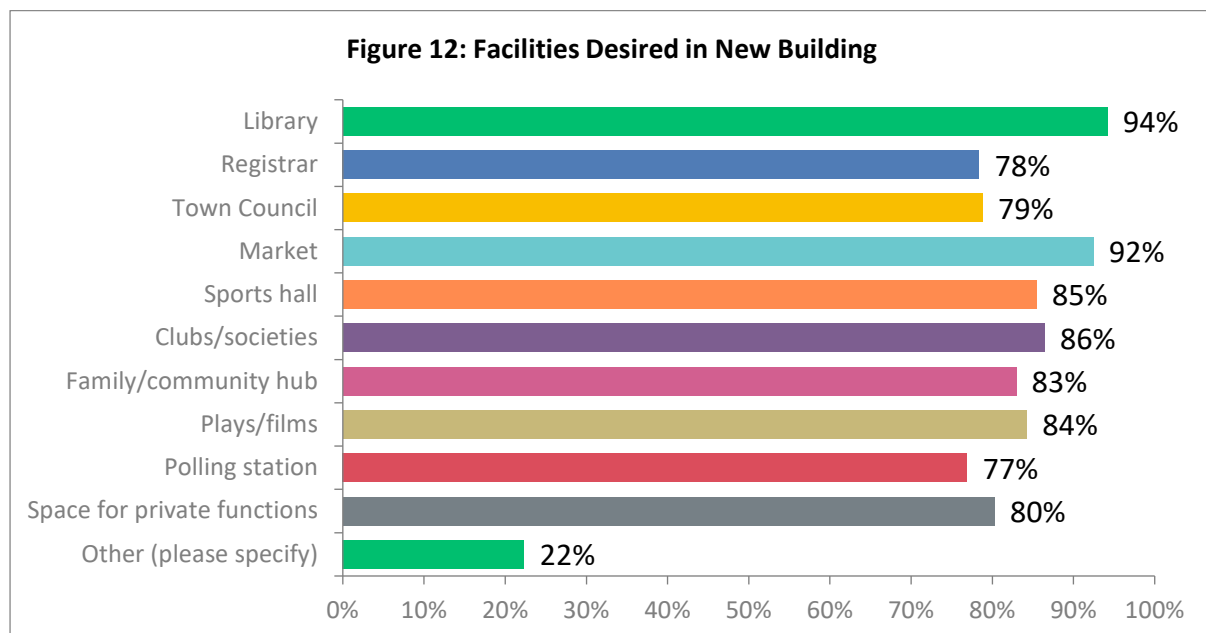
- “Design it so there is no wasted space.”
- “I believe there is an excellent opportunity to update the Civic Centre... we should be looking to improve and enhance what we have.”

Another 8% said clearly that all of the **previous facilities had to be replaced**, with a further 8% naming **one facility in particular**.

While a smaller theme, one worth mentioning in more detail here is that 27 respondents (6%) sharing **more information and transparency** on the decisions and steps moving forward on this project will be important. Some respondents commented on a lack of information about the costs of the various options. Other commented on the general need for transparency. These comments highlight that communication with the public at all stages of the process will be key. For example:

- “If redevelopment is considered (either to replace existing building, or other); full consultation with residents/users on any future proposals.”
- “Don't know anything about costs which is crucial.”
- “It would be helpful to know the costs associated with each option as then we can make an informed choice.”
- “Need more information on what redevelopment would involve and what facilities new site would provide.”
- “Please keep residents informed at each stage and share all rationale on future decision making.”

Respondents were next asked to select from list of facilities which they would want to see included in the new building. Respondents could choose as many as they wished, and the results are displayed in **Figure 12**.



Replacing the library and the market to their full functionality appear to be the facilities respondents most desire in a new building. However, **Figure 12** really demonstrates that all of the facilities previously available in the Civic Centre are

highly valued and the vast majority of residents would like to see them return to any improved building.

22% of respondents said they wanted to see “other” facilities as part of the new building as well. These were provided as comments, with 225 respondents offering ideas. These were read for common themes, and these themes are presented in **Table 6 (below)**.

Table 6. “Other” Facilities Desired in New Building	Count	%
Concert space/Cinema/Events	52	21%
DVLA centre	43	17%
Toilets	30	12%
Community / Information Hub	29	12%
Public and VCS sector utilisation (Police, NHS, Citizens advice etc)	26	10%
Update/retain what was there before	25	10%
Café/catering facilities/coffee mornings	20	8%
Housing or retail	12	5%
Bank	8	3%
Other	6	2%

Several respondents (21%) said that they would like to see **facilities for concerts and events**, as well as a big screen for showing films. Some of these suggestions seemed to be asking for previous facilities to be included, and others seemed to ask for an update or improvement to previous facilities. For example, several respondents said they wanted a “cinema” while others said things like “exhibitions of local artists, crafts etc., live music.” A cinema was not included in the old building, but exhibitions, events and live music were a regular feature. Whether as new facilities or as replacements for the old one, however, it is clear that several respondents want to see the Civic Centre continue to be used as an event space.

17% of respondents specifically suggested the inclusion of a **driving test centre**. Prior to the closure of the Civic Centre, efforts had been underway to bring a test centre back to the town and locate it in the centre.⁵

10% of respondents wanted to see more of a **presence of the public sector and/or the voluntary sector** in the building in the future. Services such as the Citizens’ Advice drop-in that had previously been present at the centre, for example, were mentioned, but so were suggestions that there was more of a police, NHS, or Shropshire Council presence. For example:

- “Citizens advice... vaccinations (rather than having to go to Chester, Shrewsbury or Wem) & free health checks.”
- “Citizens Advice centre, police advisory desk.”

As was evidenced in **Table 3** (above), **toilets** (12%) and an **information hub** (12%) as well as a **café** (8%) were also listed by numerous respondents as important

⁵ <https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/local-hubs/north-shropshire/whitchurch/2023/11/16/whitchurch-civic-centre-closure-puts-the-brakes-on-driving-test-site/>

specific facilities to include in any new build. Though these respondents are mentioning specific facilities, they are also closely aligned with the 10% of respondents who simply stated that they wanted to **retain what was there before** (though some did suggest updating some of the facilities that were there).

A few respondents suggested facilities that had not yet been mentioned previously in other comments. 5% of respondents suggested including **housing or retail** in a rebuild. For example:

- “Housing in car park.”
- “Flexible space and reduced in scale. To change this building could bring so much more to the high street, look at St Marys arcade. More mixed use options in terms of business and retail.”

3% of respondents specifically mentioned that the presence of a **bank** and the ability to do in person banking at the centre would be appreciated.

Respondents were then asked an open-ended question about whether there was “anything else” they would like to say about the specific facilities that should be included in a new building. 276 respondents left comments, and these responses were grouped thematically. They are presented in **Table 6** and examples of some of the comments appear below.

Table 6. Themes – “Anything Else” About Facilities	Count	%
Previous facilities/activities need to return/be retained	46	17%
The civic centre is needed/vital to the community	43	16%
Concert space/stage/cinema/theatre	37	13%
Changing Places Toilet/Baby changing facilities/toilets	29	11%
Information/advice services (e.g. Citizens' Advice, noticeboards)	23	8%
More /new activities	23	8%
More disabled access	21	8%
Public services (e.g. DVLA, library, bank)	19	7%
Need for plan to be carried out quickly/efficiently/sympathetically	17	6%
Better bar/café	11	4%
Other	6	2%

Many of the themes that have appeared in earlier comments reappear here, such as that respondents want **previous facilities returned/retained** (17%), and that the **centre is vital to the community** (16%). Specific facilities that have been mentioned previously are also present in **Table 6**, for example, **concert space/stage/theatre** (13%), the inclusion of **information/advice services** (8%), and the continued inclusion of **public services** such as the library, and services that were not there before, such as a bank or driving test centre. 4% of respondents wanted to see the continued inclusion of a **café**, but many suggested updates or improvements so that there is an improved bar area for functions.

One theme that has been present before was the suggestion to include **toilets** in the new building. Several respondents added comments about how the toilets are an important facility, specifically for visitors to the town. However, many respondents

expanded on this suggestion and discussed how these toilets might be made more inclusive when included in a new building, with more facilities for those with disabilities or baby changing. For example:

- “Toilets disabled lift.”
- “Great Toilets/ accessible with hoist.”
- “Baby change facilities.”
- “A changing places toilet provision.”

Relatedly, 8% of respondents raised a fairly new theme here around the need for a new building to have **more disabled access**. For example:

- “Disabled access enhancement.”
- “Ensure facilities are adapted for all abilities.”
- “External lift for disabled and wheelchair users.”
- “It would be wonderful if as many of the faculties as possible have full disabled access.”

Another theme not really touched upon as much elsewhere was that 8% of respondents would like to see **more/new activities** that were not present at the centre before. Often suggestions for new activities were offered as ideas for bringing more inclusiveness to the centre in the future. Several specific ideas were suggested, including:

- “A regular series of lunchtime and evening concerts featuring all genres of music for young people especially.”
- “As a parent of young children it would be great to see breastfeeding groups, affordable playgroups, kids gym sessions.”
- “Exhibition space for art. Opportunities for pop up businesses.”
- “If the town council stay at the police station then perhaps the civic could be more focussed on getting people to use the building and have lots of workshops on. It needs to be somewhere young people may actually want to go with their families in town. A play space and cafe would be fab.”
- “More facilities for older children/young adults.”
- “Sports for the elderly during the day - why do you have to travel outside the town to play sports i.e. table tennis, badminton, walking football/netball?”
- “Venue for parent groups and workshops e.g. Sleep Tight clinic, Understanding your child, Shropshire parenting team, Empathy for Special Children. Clubs and opportunities for our children, including those with SEND and their families.”
- “Youth facilities.”

A further 6% of respondents used this space to make the point that whatever facilities are included, the plan for rebuilding the centre must **get underway quickly**.

Finally, respondents were asked one last open-ended question to ascertain whether they had any other comments to make relating to the civic centre. 353 respondents answered this question, and the themes that emerged are displayed in **Table 7**.

Table 7. Themes – “Other Comments” About the Civic Centre	Count	%
The civic centre is needed/vital to the community/well used/don't lose it	238	64%
Closure has impacts (local villages, businesses, events etc.)	27	7%
Whitchurch is growing	26	7%
Comments about appearance of the building/redevelopment	22	6%
Plea for other specific aspects of the facility	14	4%
Invest in Whitchurch (not Shrewsbury)	12	3%
Plea for library	11	3%
Concerns about costs	8	2%
Need more information/ensure transparency and good communication	7	2%
Need for plan to be carried out quickly	6	2%

Overwhelmingly, the point that most respondents wanted to make in this space was that the **civic centre is vital to the community of Whitchurch**. If there is one message that clearly reverberates throughout the comments left by respondents in this survey, it is this. Examples of these include:

- “It is very important to maintain a civic centre in a market town 20 miles from large towns. It is a focal point for all sorts of community events and Whitchurch will be a much poorer place. Even Wem and Ellesmere which are smaller have town halls. Whitchurch is rapidly expanding. We should be encouraging people to do things in their communities and not travel by car to places.”
- “It needs saving.”
- “It's a lifeline to so many - All life to come together to combat isolation which is a big problem. Groups for the young to give a perspective to life outside their own home in a safe place.”
- “It's the hub of Whitchurch nowhere else can hold the amount of people for private and public functions it isn't a building that stands empty it is used every day.”
- “The Town needs this Centre. It is vital that we keep it and not to make it into flats!”

A less common, though novel theme that shows up in 7% of responses to this question is that **closure of the centre has significant impacts**, whether on local businesses, the environment, or local villages. For example:

- “There are no adequate venues in the town that can replace the Civic Centre. This would mean extensive travelling to other localities incurring travel expense and adding to the pollution. This would appear to fly in the face of the Council's policies on green travel and sustainability.”
- “Events at the Civic support other local businesses, please consider the health of the High Street as a whole.”
- “I work in a shop on the high street and speak to locals most days about the loss of the civic/market space. It's already having an effect on footfall to businesses on the high street in less than a year.”

- “Plays, concerts and films are currently relocating. Evening events often go to SJT, which can be difficult to get to for those with mobility problems and no transport. Some daytime events are relocating out of Whitchurch, causing lack of 'footfall' which must be having a detrimental effect on local businesses.”

Another theme to emerge in this question for the first time in a significant way is that 7% of respondents made the point that **Whitchurch is growing** as a town. This was often an important aspect of these respondents' comments on the importance of the centre being reopened. For example:

- “Every effort should be made to provide existing community services, for the expanding population.”
- “The town desperately needs ALL the facilities that the Civic Centre has provided in the past, especially with the expansion of the town with many new housing developments in the process of being built.”

Another interesting theme to emerge here relates to the theme in **Table 5** where 9% of respondents made comments about the building needing to be modernised or rebuilt with sympathy for the surrounding architectural context. Here, 6% of respondents made comments about **the appearance of the building**. For example:

- “The front could be more in keeping with the conservation area.”
- “Personally, I think it is an ugly building and would like it to be replaced by something that is more in keeping with the character of Whitchurch.”

Some respondents used this space to make a **plea for specific facilities** to be included in any rebuild. 3% of these requests were **specific to the library reopening** in the building, while 4% of such comments were for other facilities of various kinds.

3% of respondents raised **concerns about costs** involved in any future plans. Cost details were not included as part of the consultation on the options, as noted previously by some respondents, and again 2% of respondents raised **concerns about transparency and communication** about the future plans. Relatedly, 3% of respondents made the point that Shropshire Council should **invest in Whitchurch**, as there is a perception among these respondents that too much is invested in Shrewsbury, and not enough in their town.

While these related concerns are being raised by smaller numbers of respondents, they are concerns that Shropshire Council should take seriously going forward. As more specific plans for the building's future are developed, transparency around the financial aspects of the project should be a key aspect of the communications strategy.

Finally, 2% of respondents reiterated the theme first seen in **Table 6** that **plans should be carried out quickly**.

5 Summary and Conclusion

Summary of Key Findings

Before its partial closure after the discovery of RAAC, the Whitchurch Civic Centre was clearly a vital and well-used feature of the town, both by residents of the town and nearby villages. 10% of the population of Whitchurch responded, demonstrating the high salience of the building's future among residents, and sources of information about the consultation point to a wide variety of engagement among residents, community groups, public officials and businesses.

The key findings of this report can be summarised as follows:

- “Replacement of structural roof and associated essential items” is the clear preferred option among survey respondents for the building's future.
- While the library and the market are the most popular features of the Civic Centre, the building was clearly used as a focal point for many other community activities, including concerts, events, meetings and more.
- Overall, citizens want all previous facilities returned, but would also welcome some improvements.
- Some residents suggested that a rebuild might be a good opportunity to improve the look of the building or to update or add features, such as better disabled access or more inclusive activities. Better use by public sector service providers, such a driving test centre, NHS services, or police would also be welcomed.
- The survey captures many key demographics in the town, but the voices of young people and children are absent from the surveys. Nevertheless, some respondents suggest that improvements to the centre might include more activities to attract children and young people.
- Respondents' visits to and use of the centre have decreased due to the partial closure, even for those key activities that are the most used, such as the market. The use of the library service has particularly suffered, despite the service still being available in some form.
- Respondents report that impacts of the building's partial closure are already being felt by residents, in particular local businesses, and there are calls in the responses for plans to be carried out to restore the facilities without delay.
- Some respondents are concerned that they have a lack of information about the costs of any options and call for transparency and clear communication with residents on future plans.

Conclusions

Many of the key findings in the report point to residents clearly wanting a replacement of the facilities they enjoyed at the Civic Centre before its partial closure

as soon as possible. The most emphatic message from the survey is that residents feel that the centre is vital to their community. Concerns about the impacts of the closure are certain to increase the longer that the building remains closed.

Many respondents see this as an opportunity to improve on the vitality of the centre, and offered excellent suggestions for improving on the facilities and activities that were once available at the centre. Design plans should incorporate this feedback and seek further insight from residents about how improvements might be made.

The high salience of this issue, coupled with some concerns expressed by respondents about the cost of the project, the perceived lack of investment by Shropshire Council outside of Shrewsbury, and about transparency more generally, suggest that Shropshire Council should take care to communicate clearly and often about any future plans about the building with the residents of Whitchurch.

Many thanks are extended to the residents of Whitchurch and the surrounding area that took the time to respond to this survey and offer their detailed and thoughtful feedback. The results of the survey will be used to help determine which of the six options should be further considered, including having detailed business cases prepared.

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