

Kingston's Ancient Market Place

Summary of public and stakeholder engagement

Purpose of engagement

Kingston Council engaged the key stakeholders and local communities from 5 April to 19 May 2024, to understand their aspirations for the future of the Market Place. The Market Place is made up of the Market House, the market and the surrounding public realm. This public engagement followed independent meetings with existing market traders in February 2024.

Overall we received 168 responses including via the online response form on Kingston Let's Talk and in-person conversations at the drop-in engagement events held in the Market Place in the town centre.

The insight from this engagement will be used to inform a new operator brief which aims to improve the Market Place and ensure a better experience for traders, residents, visitors and local businesses.

Summary of Findings

The engagement report reveals strong support for various aspirations, including better use of the Market House, enhancing the area's unique heritage, and hosting a varied market. Feedback indicates a desire for improved maintenance, more cultural events, and opportunities for local businesses. Concerns include the need for better accessibility, reopening public toilets, and balancing modern ideas with historical preservation. The report highlights the importance of making the Market Place a vibrant, functional space throughout the day and evening.

Engagement Methodology

The engagement consisted of 12 survey questions, both quantitative and qualitative, to gather insights from the public. The survey was conducted online via the Kingston Let's Talk engagement platform, supplemented by in-person conversations at events in the Market Place and responses from key stakeholders and organisations such as the market traders, Kingston First members (representing over 600 businesses and organisations in Kingston town centre), the Kingston Society, and the Kingston Youth Council.

Headline Findings

The engagement focused on eight draft aspirations for the Market Place. Respondents were asked to select which aspirations were important to them.

- Make better use of the Market House, a historic community asset - 63%
- Make the most of the area's unique heritage and character, making Ancient Market a star attraction in the town centre - 61%
- Host a successful and varied market meeting local needs including seasonal and speciality goods - 61%
- As well as trading throughout the day, explore the potential for some twilight and evening opening creating a welcoming evening environment - 55%
- Improve the cleaning, maintenance, management and servicing of the area - 55%
- Develop a programme of cultural, creative and community events and activities throughout the year which will bring communities together - 46%
- Create opportunities for local start ups, support new, local business development and possibilities for training and apprenticeships - 43%
- Look for ways to improve energy use, waste reduction, re-use and recycling in the Ancient Market Place - 38%

Key issues

- Accessibility: Ensuring the Market House is more accessible is a significant concern.
- Public toilets: There is a strong demand for reopening public toilets.
- Balancing modern initiatives and local heritage: Respondents want to balance modern ideas with historical preservation.

Detailed feedback on the draft aspirations

Better use of the Market House

Respondents emphasised the need for the Market House to be more accessible and to find a long-term future for the building that involves repairs and refurbishment.

Enhancing heritage and character

There is a strong desire to enhance the unique heritage and character of the area, making it a focal point for both local people and visitors.

Hosting a varied and successful market

A successful and varied market is seen as crucial for the vibrancy of the Market Place. Respondents want to see a mix of seasonal produce, local crafts, and diverse food options.

Improved maintenance

Feedback indicates a need for better maintenance, including cleanliness, seating, and general upkeep of the area.

Cultural events

There is a strong desire for more cultural events, which are seen as a way to bring the community together and attract visitors.

Local business opportunities

Respondents want more opportunities for local businesses to thrive in the Market Place, including pop-up shops and market stalls.

Additional feedback

Facilities

Kingston First members highlighted the lack of current facilities such as toilets, changing facilities, and seating, which impacts people's experiences and dwell time.

Shelter, shade, and lighting

Improving the availability of shelter, shade, and lighting was also brought up, including by young people visiting the youth bus.

Fountains

The fountains are popular, and many respondents, including Kingston First members, said these should be retained and possibly expanded.

Signposting and promotion

There is a need for better wayfinding around the town, including to/from the Ancient Market Place. Promoting what is happening in the area and within the Market House was also highlighted.

Operator selection and measuring success

There were comments about the operator brief and how an operator will be selected. Respondents want to understand how success will be monitored and measured, with calls for strong KPIs and measurable objectives.

Conclusion

The engagement exercise on Kingston's Ancient Market Place highlights strong support for the draft aspirations, with a clear desire for better use of the Market House, enhancing the area's heritage, and hosting more cultural events and a varied market. Key concerns include accessibility, public toilets, and balancing new initiatives with the area's heritage. The feedback underscores the importance of making the Market Place a vibrant, functional space throughout the day and into the evening, with improved maintenance, more seating, cultural events, and opportunities for local businesses.