

# **SHOPPERS SURVEY**

## **SURVEY RESEARCH FOR RINGWOOD'S NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

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**Date:**

08/11/ 2021

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# SURVEY RESEARCH

## FOR RINGWOOD'S NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

To provide a sound basis for the conclusions and recommendations in this Neighbourhood Plan, we have undertaken an extensive programme of desk and field research. This report covers the findings of the shoppers survey. Here we provide some background information.

Neighbourhood planning is a new way for communities to have a say in the future of the places where they live and work. It gives you the power to produce a plan with real legal weight that directs development in your local area.

*Make a Neighbourhood Plan, UK Govt.*

**Developers** (a survey to determine Ringwood's main pull factors for developers to help the town attract future investment)

Conscious of the Government's determination to increase the country's housing stock, many developers and landlords are tempted, for understandable financial reasons, to allow their retail premises to run down in order to win planning permission to convert their retail premises to residential use.

In some cases this is not a problem, but whenever planning approval is given to convert historic, listed buildings into residential property, thus destroying the town's heritage and creating dead zones for shoppers and visitors, it should be firmly resisted.

**Shopkeepers** (an analysis of 50 personal interviews conducted with 50 Ringwood shopkeepers)

At the time when we were conducting interviews, shopkeepers were positive and largely optimistic about their future in Ringwood. They are opposed to the conversion of any street level retail into residential use in that it impoverishes the shopping centre, but they have no objection to the residential use of properties above retail premises if the property is not needed by the street level occupier for storage or other purposes.

We are going to give more communities a greater say over changes to transport, housing, public services and infrastructure that will benefit their areas and drive local growth.  
*Boris Johnson, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2019 speech at Manchester Science & Industry Museum*

They consider the growth in residential accommodation outside the town centre as positive in that it increases the size of the population to which they can sell. To realise this potential for growth, it will be necessary to create awareness amongst the newcomers of what the town has to offer. The newcomers are generally from outside Ringwood and know little of the town.

In research carried out by the NP Environment Working Group, it was found that 90% of those living in the recently built Beaumont Estate had no previous connection with Ringwood. Many of them made little or no use of Ringwood's town centre, preferring to do their shopping either in the places from which they had come or from shopping centres where they work. **Clearly the town needs to market itself to all newcomers if it is to benefit fully from the potential of a growing population.**

### Residents

*(The rest of this document is a report of the results of the shoppers survey.)*

**NB: Reports on the shopkeepers survey and on a series of depth interviews with the developers will follow. All this research will underpin the Neighbourhood Plan when it is submitted for inspection and approval.**

We have carried out research amongst Ringwood's shoppers, using a questionnaire uploaded onto the Ringwood Town Council/Neighbourhood Plan website and left in shopping centre shops for completion by customers. The objective of the research was to establish how residents see the present and the future of Ringwood. We had 537 completed questionnaires which, given a population of about 14,500, is a sufficiently large sample for us to be confident the results broadly reflect the views of the entire population. **See Technical Appendix for further details.**

The response of the town to the research programme has been universally positive. Shopkeepers, residents and visitors were willing to cooperate and were pleased to be asked for their opinion.

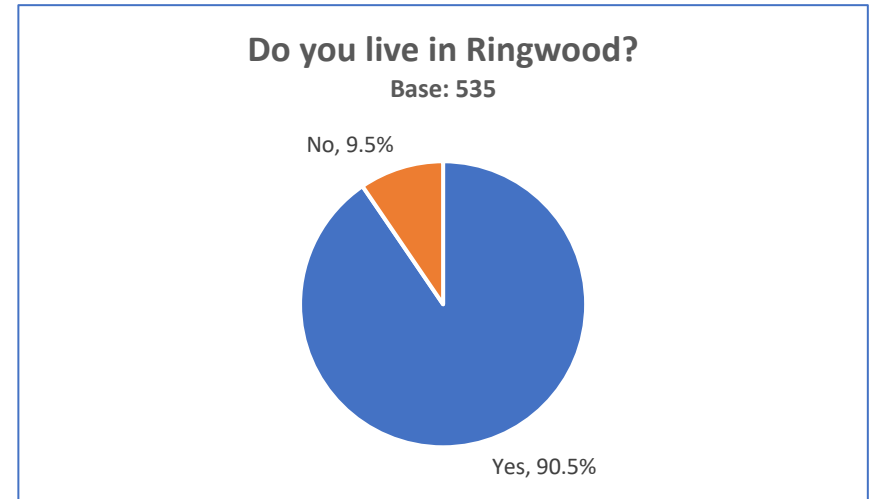
The questionnaire we used, supplied as an Appendix, consists of a series of open and closed questions. The survey was carried out in August. Results were coded for analysis using Excel.

## Q1 Do you live in Ringwood?

90.5% of respondents live in Ringwood.

9.5% live outside Ringwood but in neighbouring districts and use Ringwood as their shopping centre.

Please note that **the base** for percentages will vary for two reasons:  
- not everyone answered every question (the base will be lower than 537)  
- in some cases, respondents gave multiple answers to a question (the base will be higher than 537).



## Q2 How do you travel to the town centre?

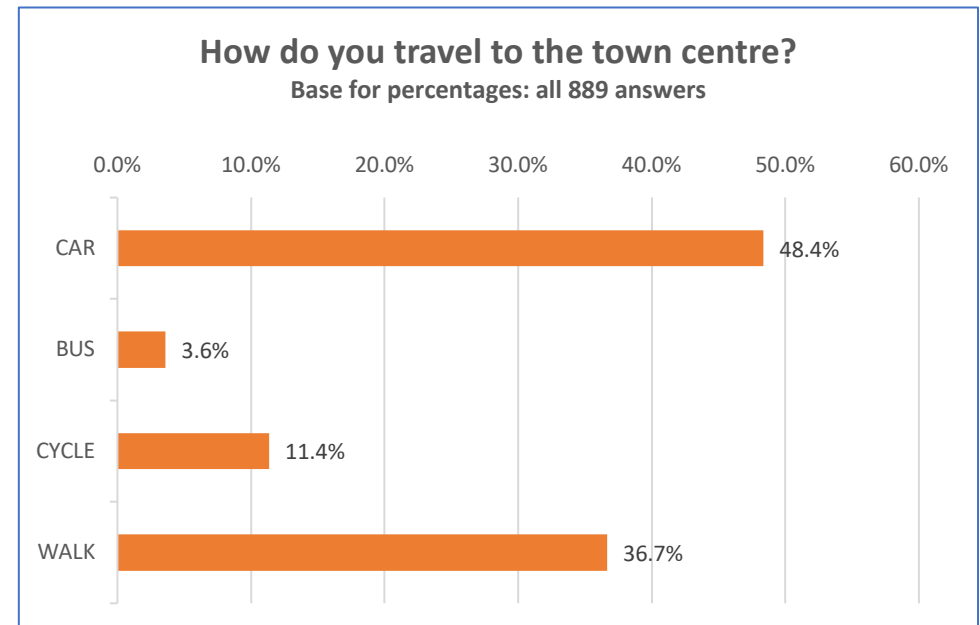
Of the total number of answers (889), almost 50% were journey by car. 36.7% of the journeys were on foot. (This figure includes the many Ringwood residents who live close enough to the town centre to walk.) 11.4% were journeys by cycle (an indication of the growing popularity of cycling for short journeys). 3.6% of the total journeys were by bus, a low figure but not surprising, given the infrequency of the bus service connecting Poulner to Ringwood.

The ONS Census data for 2011 reported that 85.6% of Ringwood Parish residential households had one or more cars.

Given there were only 535 respondents, it will be obvious that many of those answering the question gave more than one answer, indicating they use different means of accessing the town centre on different occasions. (The survey was carried out in summer when walking and cycling are likely to be more popular than in winter.)

We should note that further analysis of the data showed that **80% of those using the town centre come in by car, either some or all of the time.**

In a section on Cycling and Walking, the ONS census for 2011 reported that 81.3% of Ringwood residents were not limited by any form of ill-health in their day to day activities.



### Q3 What is the best thing about shopping in Ringwood?

The range and quality of the shops is the best thing about shopping in Ringwood. Understandably this is what customers are looking for in a shopping centre and Ringwood scores well.

Another positive for Ringwood is a friendly atmosphere, engendered mainly by shopkeepers who are invariably happy to go out of their way to be helpful.

The Furlong is well-managed, well-run and well-marketed but the Furlong is a double-edged sword in that it attracts visitors to Ringwood but can distract attention from Ringwood's High Street and Market Place, both of which lack the drive and management attention of the professionals running the Furlong.

The Government is encouraging the setting up of BID's (Business Improvement Districts). Dorset Council has provided £5,000 to Gillingham to assess the feasibility of such a scheme.



BEST THING	No.	%
Variety, good range of shops and refreshments	150	28.8
Convenience, close to home, local	126	24.2
Independent shops/high quality	123	23.6
Friendly atmosphere, pretty, helpful, dog friendly	91	17.5
Furlong/Waitrose	63	12.1
Food shops (good range: e.g, Pattersons)	45	8.6
Coffee shops/cafes	30	5.6
Parking - good/adequate	23	4.4
Local shops, support for	16	3.1
Restaurants, hospitality, pubs	16	3.1
Charity shops	9	1.7
Farmers' market	8	1.5
Parking free at Waitrose/Furlong	8	1.5
Banks	6	1.2
Pedestrian friendly	6	1.2
Good parking for disabled/children's parking	2	0.3
Outside seating	1	0.2
<b>Base</b>	<b>521</b>	

NB: When we look at the next chart (the worst things about Ringwood) we will see that some features of the town appear on both lists. This simply reflects a healthy divergence of opinion on some issues.

## Q4 What is the worst thing about shopping in Ringwood?

(As we are seeking ways of improving the town centre, this is a key question. We present the results in tabular form on this page and in graphic form, with commentary, on the next.)

Rank		No.	%
1	Traffic problems; traffic problems in High Street; problems getting out of Ringwood; problems with traffic flow in Meeting House Lane; problems with closure of West Street	160	30.7
2	Not enough shops; not enough independent shops; lack of choice	142	27.3
3	Too many expensive shops; especially clothes shops; no mid- or low- price clothes shops	102	19.6
4	Parking problems in general; charges for parking; parking fines	56	10.7
5	Too many charity shops	40	7.7
6	Shops closing; empty shops; boarded up shops; worry of shops turning into housing	32	6.1
7	Litter; rubbish; poor maintenance; rats; lack of greenery	32	6.1
8	Too many coffee shops	31	6.0
9	Market Place unexploited; vacant cinema site	28	5.4
10	Closure of West Street	27	5.2
11	Not enough shops for the young, especially clothes shops	26	5.0
12	Pavement too narrow for wheelchairs/prams; need more room for pedestrians	18	3.5
13	Noisy Lobster closing/Post Office closing	13	2.5
14	Too many estate agents	13	2.5
15	Disjoined town centre; no linkage between Furlong and Market Place/High Street	13	2.5
16	No Post Office/need a Post Office	12	2.3
17	No entertainments; no cinema	6	1.2
18	Lack of restaurants; lack of restaurant variety	5	1.0
19	Cycle parking, not enough in the Car Park	5	1.0
20	Opening and closing hours; not convenient for shoppers	5	1.0
21	Not enough parent/baby parking	3	0.5
22	Limited local transport	1	0.2
23	Poor signage	1	0.2
24	Poor toilets	1	0.2
25	Too much disabled parking	1	0.2
	<b>Base</b>	<b>521</b>	

## Q4 cont. What is the worst thing about shopping in Ringwood?

The top 'worst thing' was traffic/parking. These interviews were conducted before the current roadworks so it is safe to assume discontent with traffic and parking arrangements will be wider and deeper now than it was when respondents were completing their questionnaires. The closure of West Street (10<sup>th</sup> in the list for a specific mention but evidently part of the general discontent with traffic flow in the town centre) and the reversal of traffic flow in Meeting House Lane are highly contentious.

Second in the list is the view that there are not enough independent shops, that there is a lack of choice. There are obvious gaps in Ringwood town centre retail offer (e.g. no Post Office). This criticism not only ranked second overall but is also evidenced in other comments (see complaints 6, 9, 11, 13, 16 and 18 in the numbered list above). There is a strong view (not unanimous but in the majority) that Ringwood needs more shops, restaurants and places of entertainment, not fewer. The conversion of the Noisy Lobster (a former coach house and, until planning was granted, a place for public hospitality) into predominantly residential use was regretted by those who mentioned it (see No.13 in the list).

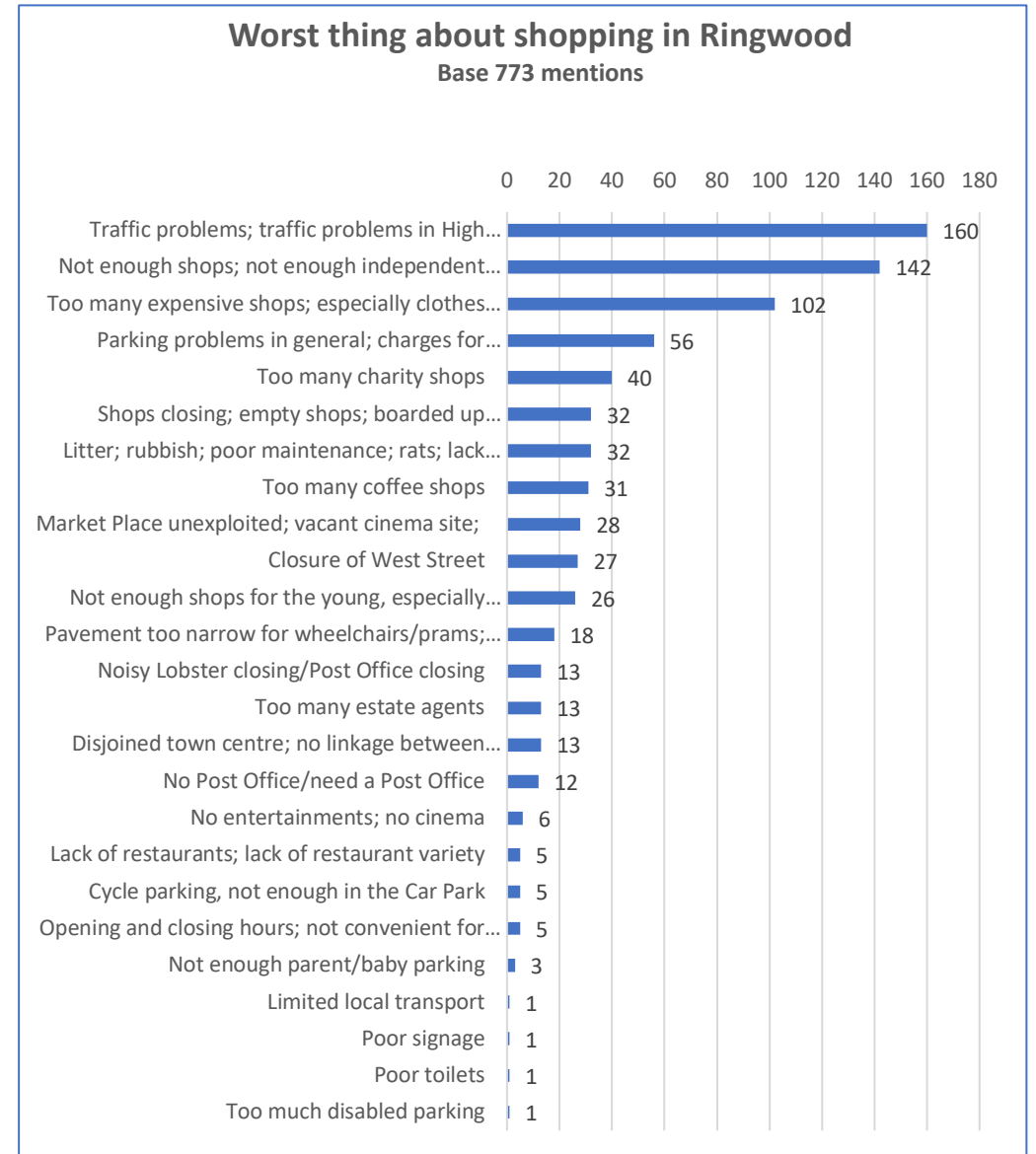
"The Government responded to the Portas Review in 2012, acknowledging that **the closure of just one store could have widespread ramifications for entire towns.**"

**Public Health England report  
Healthy High Streets.**

As part of the wish for more shops, there was the widely expressed view that there were not enough mid-to-low price clothes shops. This is a particular difficulty for parents of young children and young people.

The Market Place, and within it the old cinema, are seen as a serious instance of a failure to exploit obvious opportunities. With the closure of West Street, the very survival of the Market Place as the centre of the town is thought by many to be under threat (see 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, and 15 in the list).

While some of these complaints are difficult or impossible to remedy; the complaint in seventh place on the list is not.



### Q5 Is Ringwood your main shopping centre?

Of all respondents, almost three quarters considered Ringwood their main shopping centre, but more than a quarter used other cities or towns as the place where they spend most of their money. The perceived failure of Ringwood to cater well for sections of the population (lower income people, parents with young children, young people) may be one cause for this result. (See answers to Q7.)

To unleash places' potential, we want local leaders to champion their communities and be confident and flexible in responding to change. Our Great British high streets are at the heart of this country and are the core of what reflects a local area and community.

*Robert Jenrick July 2021*

### Q6 Which other shopping centres do you use?

Bournemouth is the top choice for an alternative shopping centre, with almost 60% of respondents naming it as a shopping centre they use in addition to Ringwood. Apart from Castlepoint, Bournemouth is the closest to Ringwood. It is also a popular seaside resort, with a good range and variety of shops.

In second place is Southampton, a major UK city, with a large, impressive shopping centre at West Quay. More than a third of respondents named Southampton as an alternative shopping centre. Although Southampton is further away (22 miles) it is well connected by road to Ringwood (via the A31, M27 and M271).

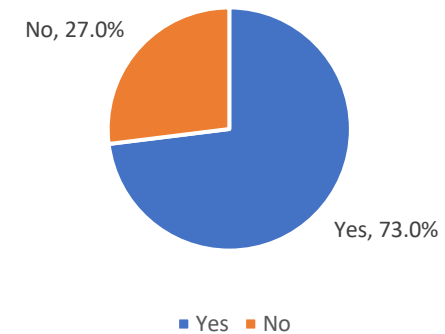
The cathedral city of Salisbury comes third.

Ringwood cannot compete with these shopping centres for major department stores and chains but, with the exception of supermarkets (Waitrose, Sainsburys and Lidl) that is not a retail sector that has ever figured prominently in Ringwood's retail economy.

These figures show that a large amount of Ringwood money is spent outside Ringwood. With more shops and more variety of shops there is very considerable opportunity for Ringwood to increase its shopping revenues.

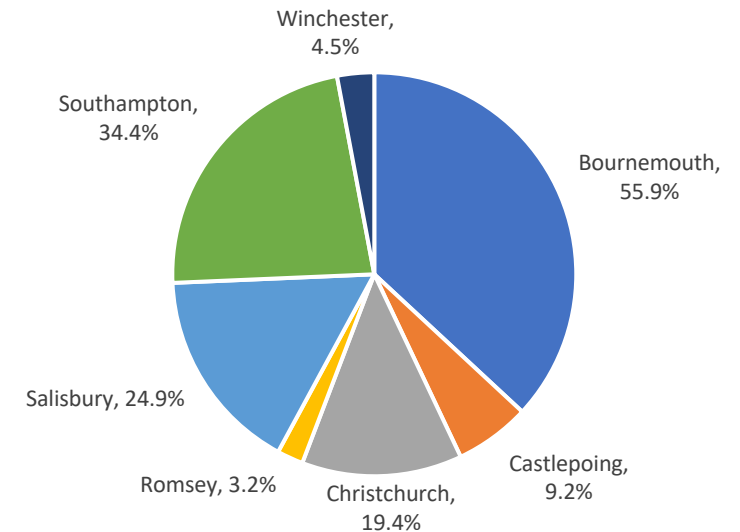
### Is Ringwood your main shopping centre?

Base: 534



### Which other shopping centres do you use?

Base: 535





## Q7 What would lead you to shop more often in Ringwood?

The overwhelming reason for shopping more often in Ringwood is “more independent shops” (385 mentions – 72%). The greater the range of independent shops, the more likely it is that respondents will shop in Ringwood, rather than elsewhere. It follows that any decline in the range of independent shops will deter respondents from continuing to shop in Ringwood. With the expected growth in population, it becomes even more important that every effort is made to increase the retail “offer” to meet the requirements of a larger catchment area.

In second and third place are:

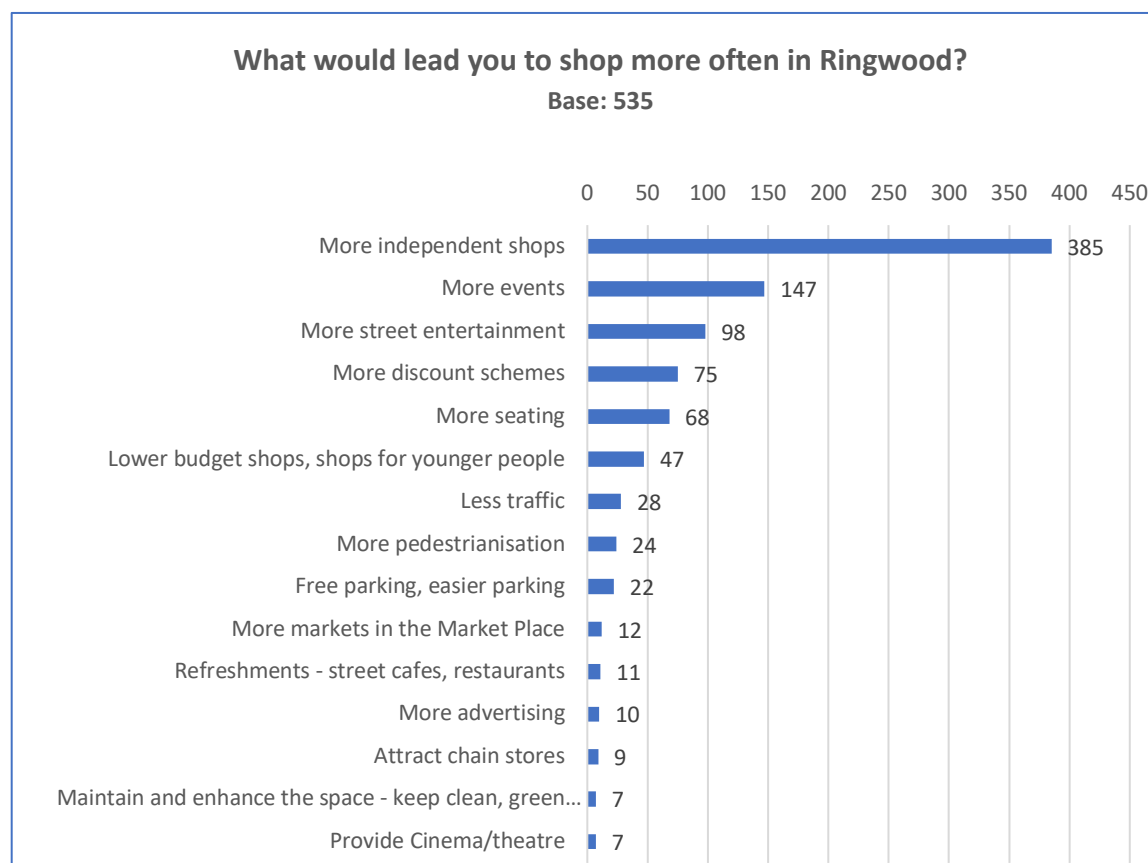
- more events (147 mentions – 27.5%)
- more street entertainment (98 mentions – 15.0%)

The ideal location for more events and more street entertainment would be the Market Place (in particular) and the High Street. Discussions with the holder of the Market Charter have revealed that use of the Market Place for markets and other activities is not in any way limited to Wednesday mornings and that the charter-holder would welcome initiatives for its wider and more frequent use.

	No.	%
More independent shops	385	72.0
More events	147	27.5
More street entertainment	98	15.0
More discount schemes	75	14.0
More seating	68	12.7
Lower budget shops, shops for younger people	47	8.8
Less traffic	28	5.2
More pedestrianisation	24	4.5
Free parking, easier parking	22	4.1
More markets in the Market Place	12	2.2
Refreshments - street cafes, restaurants	11	2.1
More advertising	10	1.9
Attract chain stores	9	1.7
Maintain and enhance the space - keep clean, green space	7	1.3
Provide Cinema/theatre	7	1.3
<b>Base</b>	<b>535</b>	

“Local people with a good understanding of life in the area will be in a good position to identify the elements that together will make a positive difference, and are often well-placed to lead and deliver improvements. They may have greater day-to-day awareness of what is valued locally, of localized issues and possible solutions.”

*.Dept. of Communities and Local Govt report ‘Re-imagining urban space’*



## Q8 On an average visit, how long do you spend in the Ringwood town centre?

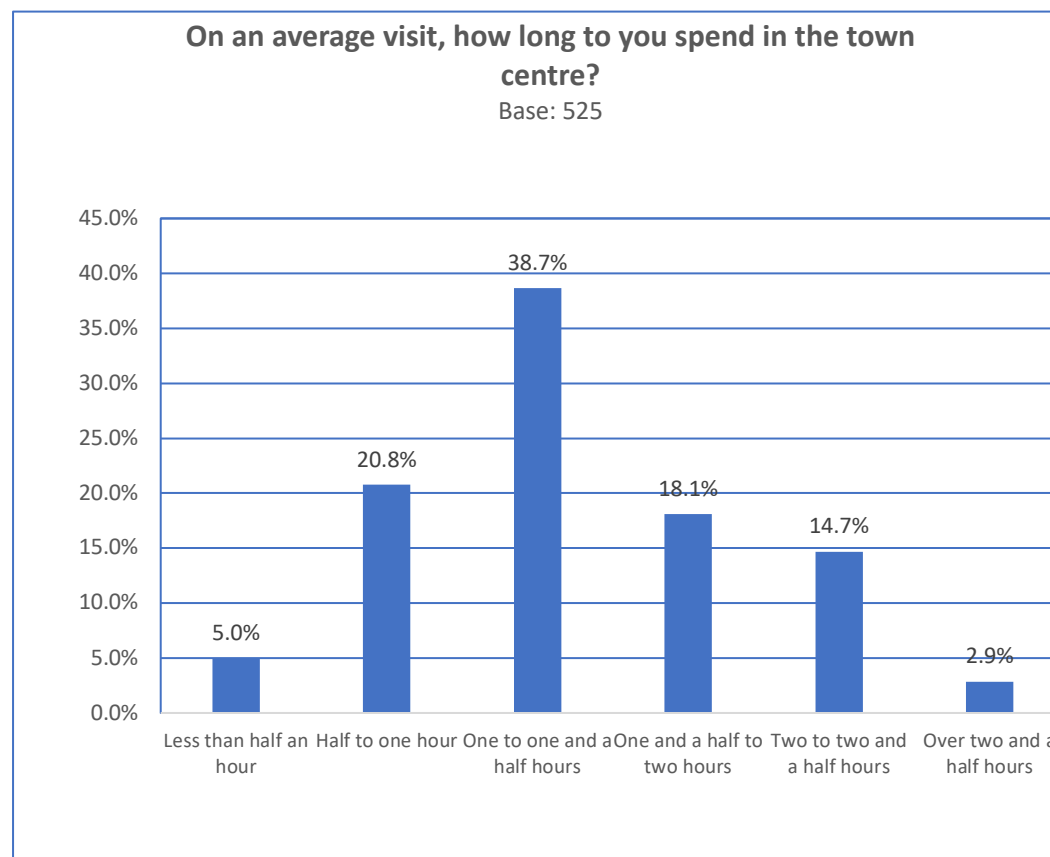
A normal distribution, with almost 80% spending between half an hour and one and a half hours in Ringwood Shopping centre on an average visit.

It is not easy to gather consistent historical statistics on time spent in shopping centres. In 2013, the average time spent by shoppers in a town centre in Great Britain was estimated to be 98 minutes (Source: Statista). Another more recent source (Savills, 2017) calculated average time in shopping centres at 65 minutes. In this respect, Ringwood seems about average.

There is increasing evidence that community shopping places can co-exist more readily with ecommerce than larger comparison shopping retail destinations. This is because local shopping centres can provide a key point of difference in the 'here-and-now' consumer culture we have grown accustomed to, in terms of availability, convenience, accessibility, service and price point.

*Savills 'Consumer Insights', 2017*

If town centres evolve into places where townsfolk gather for the experience of meeting, greeting, shopping, gossiping, entertainment and eating together, we would expect the length of the average visit to increase, especially if the features called for by respondents in Question 7 (e.g. more independent shops, more events, more street entertainment, more seating) come to pass.

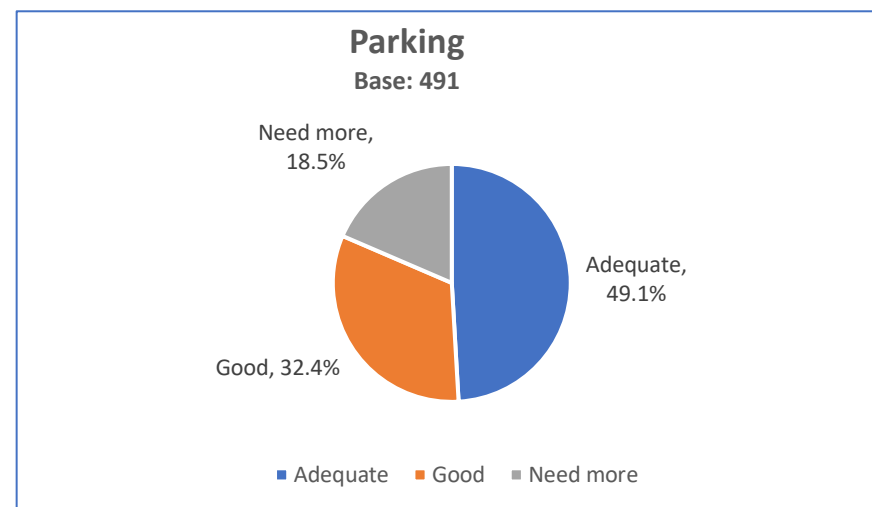


**Q9 Do you think the parking facilities for shoppers in Ringwood are:  
adequate?  
good?  
need more spaces?**

More than 80% thought that the parking facilities were adequate or good.

The only qualification to this high level of satisfaction was the concern, frequently expressed in personal interviews, that if the population increases substantially, as it will when the new houses are built and occupied, the existing capacity may not be sufficient.

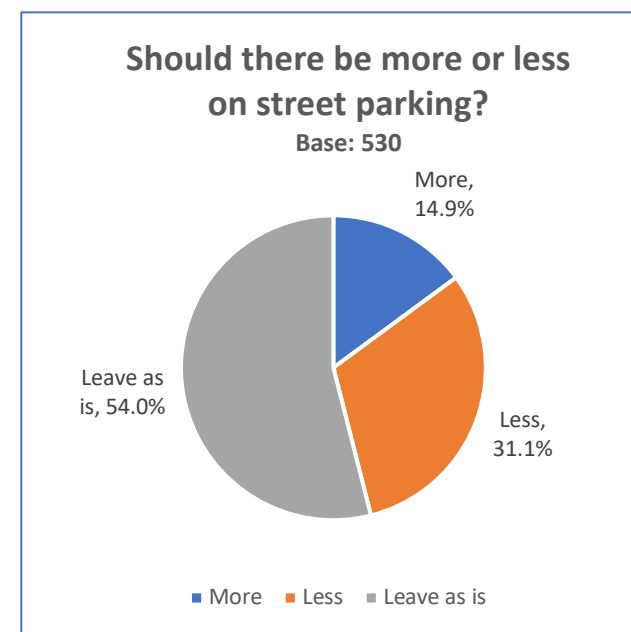
NB: This response is one of several indications that the residents of Ringwood accept the need for more housing and the growth in Ringwood's population. Shopkeepers in particular see population growth as an opportunity.



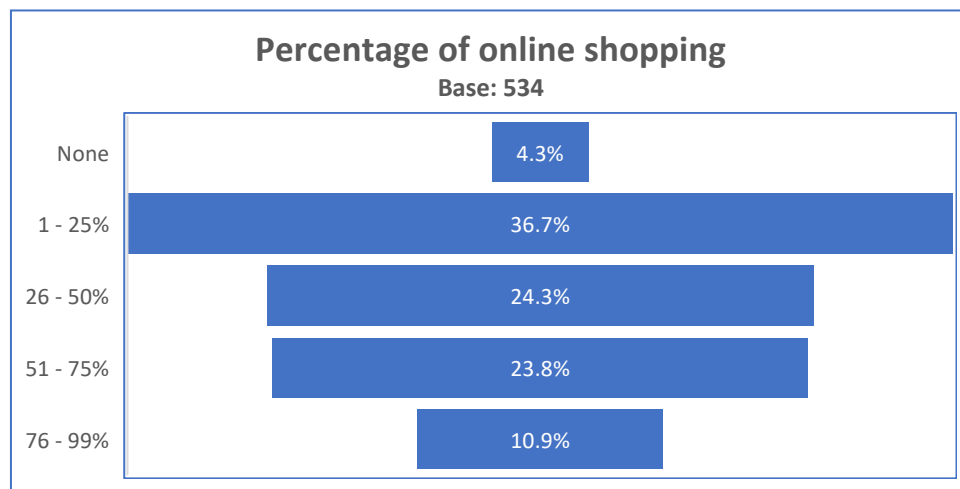
**Q10 Should there be more or less on-street parking?**

Most seem content with the current arrangements but, in so far as respondents held views one way or the other, the balance came down against any increase in on-street parking.

This should come as no surprise. Traffic flow is something about which everyone in Ringwood has an opinion. The only consensual conclusion is that the current traffic flow arrangements need to be improved.



### Q11. Approximately what percentage of your shopping, in terms of money spent, do you do online?



65% still spend half their money in shops (i.e. 4.3%+36.7%+24.3%).

41% spend a at least three quarters of their money in shops (i.e. 4.3%+36.7%).

While it is obvious online shopping has had a massive impact on retail, especially on large department stores in cities and large towns and on chain stores across the country, smaller towns have been less affected. Nevertheless, online is a real threat to shops that sell products. During the Covid pandemic many Ringwood shops strengthened their online presence - an important way of defending existing sales and reaching a much wider catchment area than their own town provides.

There are some signs that online's inexorable inroads into traditional retail may be losing a little pace. See the answers to Question 12.

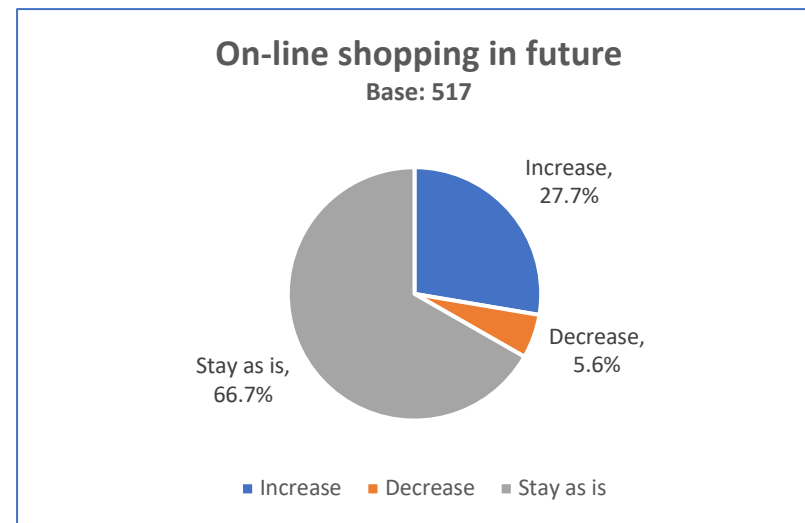
### Q12 In future do you think your online shopping will:

- **increase? decrease? stay the same?**

72.3% expect their online shopping to stay at its current level or decrease in future. Even so, online shopping will increase, albeit perhaps a little slower than in the past. 27.7% thought their online shopping would increase, compared with 5.6% who thought it would decrease.

Clearly shopping centres will have to adapt and evolve. Shops that sell products must "add value" by providing care, advice and technical expertise. Those who provide services (e.g. hairdressers, beauty salons) are less vulnerable at present but even there the internet is a threat.

Nevertheless, shopping centres can offer something online sellers can't - or at least not in the same way. They can offer experiences involving other people – the friends and family whom they meet, the shopkeepers who serve them and the social intercourse that distinguishes a community from a crowd. And Ringwood has another advantage; it is a friendly, welcoming place (see fourth ranked answer to Question 4.)

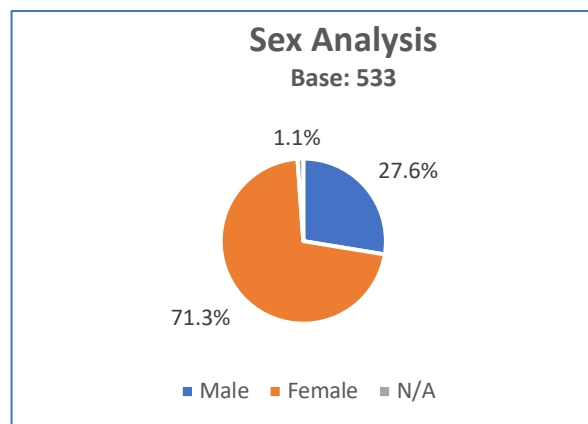


One of the best things about the Ringwood Shopping Centre is the warm and friendly atmosphere that shoppers feel (see Question 3). This is because many of the independent shopkeepers are already 'adding value' to traditional retail services. Many online customers they have found by expanding their online operations during Covid are now visiting their shops in person.

## Q13 Other Comments?

We have more than 50 pages of assorted comments on all the issues raised. In a separate document, we have organised and distilled these comments into sections of pertinent quotes representative of the views of the total sample of respondents. These comments, together with our formal survey research of shoppers, shopkeepers and developers, will constitute a solid evidence base for the TCWG conclusions and recommendations in our section of the Neighbourhood Plan.

## Q14 Sex Analysis



71% of respondents were female. While this might ordinarily seem to be a skewed sample, it in fact corresponds well with reality, the reality that women are responsible for around 80% of shopping expenditure. They are the main users of shopping services.

Women will appreciate and be attracted by features which men often fail even to notice. In some cases, women's preferences differ from those of men. For example, women generally do not like multi-storey car parks. They tend to feel less comfortable in large, unsupervised and often deserted areas.

In Germany, because of the concerns of female drivers, in many multi-storey car parks, part of the ground floor closest to the exit is reserved for women. The area is well-lit, kept clean and regularly patrolled.

Given the preeminent position women occupy in this area of economic and social life, it makes sense that they should be very well represented in any bodies charged with reviewing the future of town centres.

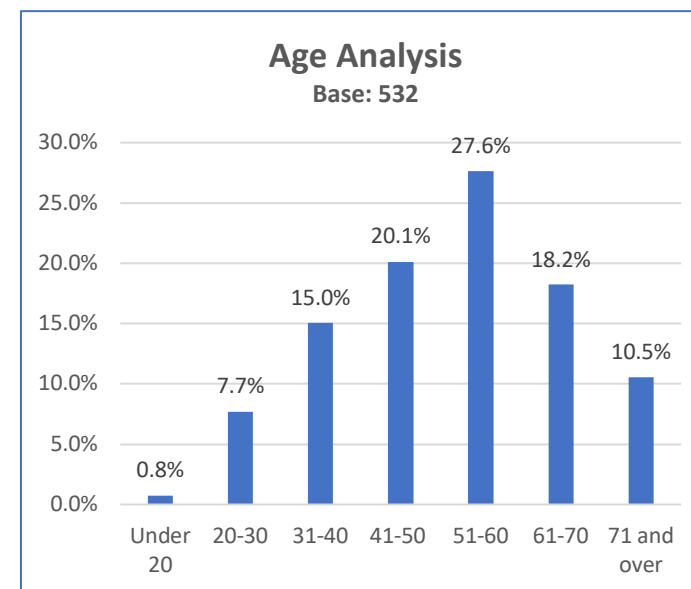
## Q15 Age Analysis

The age distribution is skewed to the elderly.

This is partly the result of increasing longevity (there are more and more elderly people in the population) but it is also the result of the appeal of Ringwood to retiring city-dwellers.

There are obvious advantages to the town in the inflow of better-off retirees spending their retirement and money in Ringwood. On the other hand, a vibrant town requires a balance of young people, young families and those in active employment if it is not to deteriorate into a retreat for the elderly. Currently the children of ordinary working class families in Ringwood have little or no chance of buying a house in their home town. This is a pity as it encourages the fragmentation of families and will tend to undermine the strong social cohesion of this remarkable, historic market town.

In a separate piece of research, we found that Ringwood provides 40% of all care home places in the Avon Valley. If we add Ringwood's private "over 50s" accommodation in and around the town centre (some of which is currently vacant), it is fair to say that the elderly are already quite well catered for. The problem area is suitable accommodation for young people and young families. It is on this sector that housing policy should concentrate.



## Conclusions and Recommendations

SCOPE	Conclusions	Recommendations
<b>1. General Observations</b>	Ringwood is a thriving, vibrant market town, in a great location, with a strong sense of identity and commendable social cohesion, nurtured by the highly regarded Ringwood School/Teaching Academy.	Given good management and barring any unforeseen circumstances the future for Ringwood is bright. Plans for the town's future should be based on this assessment.
	Ringwood has a long history and is proud of its status as a market town. It has more than 100 listed buildings.	This heritage should be cherished in its own right, but also as an asset at the core of the town's brand.
<b>2. Traffic problems</b>	<p>We cannot avoid raising this issue immediately because it has cast its shadow over the whole Neighbourhood Plan exercise. When we began interviewing there was a general spirit of optimism. We were beginning to emerge from the severe restrictions necessitated by Covid and most respondents felt more optimistic than they had for some time.</p> <p>We cannot deny that this earlier optimism has dwindled. The closure of West Street has turned the Market Place into a cul de sac. The reversal of traffic flow in Meeting House Lane has cut off vehicular access from the popular Furlong into the Market Place and the High Street. (There are now three ways out of the town centre, but only one way in.) The impending closure of the slip road from Mansfield roundabout onto the westbound A31 shuts off another route out of the town. The scheduled 11 month-long roadworks on the Mansfield Road could prove too much even for Ringwood's resilient shopkeepers.</p>	<p>How this confluence of negative factors has happened will be widely debated elsewhere.</p> <p>Here we would simply recommend that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a road traffic expert be retained to determine how best to arrange traffic flow in Ringwood, now during the roadworks, and after the roadworks have been completed</li> <li>- some form of compensation should be sought for the economic and social damage this concatenation of misfortune will bring down upon the town in general and the shopkeepers of Ringwood's town centre in particular</li> <li>- whether or not the traffic flow in Meeting House Lane is reversed, the several potholes in the lane should be repaired. In addition, there is some confusion about the name of the lane (some maps call it the Furlong). Currently, there is no street name sign, so we suggest <b><i>it should be renamed Market Place Lane, thus eliminating the confusion and using the name to tell visitors where the lane leads.</i></b></li> </ul>

SCOPE	Conclusions	Recommendations
<b>Survey Results</b>		
<b>3. Travel</b>	<p><b>Cars:</b> Almost half the journeys into the town centre are by car and 80% of those using the town centre come by car some or all of the time. Given the odd topography of the town (cut in half by the A31 and some of the town is hilly), it is not surprising that so many use cars. For many the distance precludes walking, and public transport is not only inadequate but, for many journeys, impractical. (Only 3.6% of the journey into town were by bus.) And, of course, there is no railway station. (Q2)</p>	<p>Ringwood must remain car friendly. We were interviewing Ringwood residents (just over 90% of respondents lived in Ringwood) and yet 80% of them drove into town sometimes or always. If we add visitors from elsewhere and the important tourist trade, it is obvious Ringwood must provide adequate parking and should do its best to make the life of the motorist as easy as possible. Current parking arrangements are generally satisfactory but with 2,000 or more new residents coming to fill 1,000 or so houses, we may well have to extend parking facilities in the near future.</p>
	<p><b>Walking:</b> Walking was listed by 36.7% of respondents (Q2). This figure represents the level of support that those living locally provide for the shops in the town centre.</p> <p>A small minority, 3.5% (Q4), expressed the view that there was not enough room for pedestrians in the High Street, but overall there was general satisfaction with the provision for walkers.</p>	
	<p><b>Cycling:</b> 11.4% of respondents reported they reached the town centre by bicycle (Q2). This is an unexpectedly high figure but the survey was conducted in the summer months.</p>	<p>The Town Council should ensure that there is adequate provision for the safe parking of bicycles, based on further assessment of the number of cyclists visiting the town centre now and an estimate of future numbers.</p>
	<p><b>Buses:</b> There is a bus service from Poulner that enables those without a car, or choosing not to use one, to reach the town centre but, since the service ends at 2.33pm it is of only limited use. (Q2)</p>	<p>The bus service should be extended to at least 5.30 pm Monday to Saturday if this form of public transport is to make a greater contribution to mobility in future.</p>
<b>4. Shops</b>	<p>It will come as no surprise that the main criteria for assessing the value of a shopping centre are the variety and quality of shops.</p> <p>Two of the top three 'best things' about Ringwood shopping centre (Q3) were "Variety. Good range of shops, refreshments" (28.8%) and "Independent shops/high quality shops" (23.6%).</p>	<p>Given that the heart of a town is its town centre, it is the duty of councils and planners to do all within their power to make the town centre a success.</p> <p>Of course, times and shopping habits change, but the desire of the citizens of a town to have a centre where they can walk and talk, where they can meet and greet, where they can discuss and cuss, where they can be amused and enthused and eat drink and be merry is universal.</p>

SCOPE	Conclusions	Recommendations
<p><b>Shops (cont.)</b></p>	<p>And the second worst thing about the Ringwood Town Centre (second only to traffic problems (Q4) was “Not enough shops; not enough independent shops; lack of choice” (27.3%). From these results, it is beyond dispute that the key to the success of Ringwood Town Centre is maintaining and increasing the retail offer (i.e. number and variety of shop) in the High Street and the Market Place.</p> <p>It follows that any reduction in the number or variety of shops will damage the High Street and the Market Place. Any conversion of retail property into residential use creates a blank in the retail landscape, a space only of interest to the few residents and of no interest to the hundreds or thousands of people who visit the town centre in order to shop.</p> <div data-bbox="504 774 1124 914" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: fit-content;"> <p>The Public Health England report “Healthy High Street” observed that that <b>“the closure of just one store could have widespread ramifications for entire towns.”</b></p> </div>	<p>Shops will have to evolve. They will have to offer expertise, innovation, and experiences. They will have to provide services which the internet cannot match. And they may need some help to make the transition. Shopkeepers and planners will have to show imagination. And residents will have to realise they must support the town’s shops if they want them to thrive.</p> <p>But the town centre must survive. Otherwise an historic market town will simply become the middle of a large, formless housing estate without any identity or character.</p> <p>If the owner of retail premises cannot run the business successfully, or find someone else who can, then they always have the option of letting or selling the property as retail premises. According to the main retail property agent, there is no shortage of takers.</p> <div data-bbox="1319 738 1977 959" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: fit-content;"> <p>“If a vacant shop isn’t working for retail, arcane rules shouldn’t stand in the way of it becoming a nursery, or small independent fitness studio. And, given that it rains less in Nottingham than it does in Naples, why shouldn’t café tables spill out onto the pavements of the East Midlands, and indeed the rest of the country?”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Boris Johnson 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021</p> </div>
<p><b>5. Managing the town</b></p>	<p>Ask almost anyone who lives in Ringwood and they will say “Ringwood is a market town”. This is true but many will add that it is a <b>‘declining’</b> market town, a decline which they put down to poor town management. This view is most widely held by those born and bred in Ringwood.</p> <p>There is a strong list of what is best about Ringwood town centre, but the list of the worst things is longer. The list is dominated by traffic/traffic flow problems, complaints that there are no shops for the less well-off and/or younger sections of the community, assets like the Market Place are left unexploited (e.g the old cinema site); no post office, poor signage, and poor maintenance (litter, rubbish, etc.).</p>	



SCOPE	Conclusions	Recommendations
<b>Managing the town (cont.)</b>	Overall, there seems to be a lack of vision and a lack of management.	
	Traffic/traffic flow problems	<b>See 2. In this table</b>
	<b>Lower-income people and younger people not catered for:</b> a significant complaint of a minority. They are right. With the departure of Peacocks from the Furlong, there are few shops that the less-well off can afford to patronise. And some young people have said there is nothing for them to do or buy in Ringwood.	We cannot determine which shops choose to set up in Ringwood but it is not impossible to determine where there are gaps in our retail offer and then advise letting agents of the town's needs. That is how the well-managed Furlong shopping centre operates. Know your markets; then provide them with shops that meet their needs and fulfil their aspirations.
	<b>Unexploited assets:</b> There is general dismay that the old cinema has been left vacant for many years. The building has a long, varied and distinguished history. There is disappointment that no use could be found for it in more than 10 years.	A developer with a design sympathetic to the building, Ringwood's history and Ringwood's current retail needs has come forward. This is a welcome development.
	<b>Poor signage:</b> Ringwood is already furnished with a plethora of well-made, informative signs. Unfortunately, the signs are too small. They are easy to miss and, if noticed at all, are difficult to read. Signage was scarcely mentioned in the survey but this may be because, as several people who have lived in Ringwood for many years have revealed in conversation, they had no idea there were any directional signs until they were pointed out to them.	New signs should be installed – signs that are large, legible and that are not merely informative but have a purpose: i.e to direct shoppers and visitors to the major components of the town centre. If traffic flow in Meeting House Lane is reversed, there should be a large sign at the entrance to the lane, proclaiming that this is the entrance to Ringwood's Market Place and High Street.  At the same time Meeting House Lane should be renamed Market Place Lane because it leads to the Market Place and is not close enough to the Meeting House to be its lane. (Currently it has no street name sign; and is called the Furlong on many maps.)
	<b>Poor maintenance:</b> In general, Ringwood town centre is well-maintained although complaints about litter and other rubbish was 7 <sup>th</sup> in the list of Worst Things about shopping in Ringwood (Q4). One respondent pointed out that rubbish at the bus rank in Meeting House Lane had not been removed for months.	The appearance of the town and its general maintenance are important factors in attracting shoppers and other visitors to a town centre. The hanging of flower baskets in the High Street was an excellent feature of the town some years ago and some consideration might be given to reinstating the practice.

SCOPE	Conclusions	Recommendations
	<p>Our towns are crucial too - we will ensure that they are places that people are proud to live and raise their families, with good schools, vibrant high streets, and access to jobs that give everyone a fair chance to achieve their full potential.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Rishi Sunak 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021</p>	<p>Necessity being the mother of invention, this past year and a half or so has seen towns, cities and villages right across the country rediscover their high streets. We've stayed close to home and shopped local. Turned to small independent retailers who found all kinds of innovative ways to keep us going. And tens of millions of us have realised that there's no reason whatsoever why our continental cousins should have a monopoly on the delights of al fresco dining.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Boris Johnson 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021</p>
<b>Competition</b>	<p>Ringwood is one of 37 towns that are located within the New Forest District Council's domain. As ever, there are limited public resources and there is therefore competition for NFDC's attention and money.</p>	<p>See Marketing below.</p>
<b>Importance of the Town Council as the town's champion</b>	<p>The NFDC cannot possibly be familiar with the precise character, needs and aspirations of each of its towns even with help from town councillors; and even town councillors, all of whom are volunteers, in many cases have not in the past been able to survey the residents of the towns they represent and may not always have been fully cognisant of the views of those most affected by their decisions.</p> <p>That said, it is now possible for town councillors to keep themselves informed of residents' views more easily than ever before. And with that knowledge, it is essential that Town Councillors champion their towns in what is, as noted above, a competitive environment.</p>	<p>With the advent of the internet and social media it is now possible to inform and to research the population of towns as never before. Many town halls now have their own websites. This is progress. But a website is only of use if people visit it. To succeed, websites have to be actively managed with daily news updates and quick replies to emailed enquiries.</p> <p>The social media are also useful in conducting surveys amongst the population to gauge the attitude of the residents to proposed planning initiatives. Such surveys should become a regular component of the Town Hall's outreach programme. With the support of such data, it will be easier for the Town Council to fight their town's corner.</p>
<b>Subsidiarity</b>	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan is an attempt by Government to introduce an element of subsidiarity into the traditional top-down bureaucratic hierarchy. They recognised in the Localism Act of 2011 that too often decisions were taken about the places where people live by levels of government far removed from the people their decisions affected.</p> <p>The premise behind the Neighbourhood Plan is that there should be an effective channel into the planning system for the people who live in and, by their presence, their activities, their rents and rates, make the town what it is.</p>	<p>Given the national government's drive for localism, the Town Council should appoint someone to maintain the Town Hall website in a professional manner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• answering email enquiries on a daily basis</li> <li>• organising regular surveys to ensure Council decisions are informed by the views of the residents and workers of Ringwood</li> <li>• promoting the town by publicising Ringwood's many selling points to those within and outside the town.</li> </ul>

SCOPE	Conclusions	Recommendations
<b>Marketing</b>	<p>The town has some remarkable but, we would argue, under-exploited assets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it is an historic market town</li> <li>• is in a perfect position, adjacent to the New Forest, with Bournemouth and the sea to the south, the Jurassic coast to the west, the cathedral city Salisbury to the north, and the great port of Southampton to the east.</li> <li>• it has a vibrant, dynamic social life and community spirit</li> </ul>	<p>The Town Council should appoint a marketing executive to develop and co-ordinate a Ringwood Town Marketing Plan, liaising with the many organisations within and outside the town which have an interest in seeing Ringwood thrive and prosper.</p> <p>The potential for the town centre that ensues from the building of new housing estates should be fully exploited. The benefits the town has to offer should be actively promoted to all newcomers.</p> <p>If there is no one in the Town Council who has the time or the skills to perform this role, the Town Council should consider recruiting someone with experience to fulfil this function.</p> <p>Such a post could perhaps fit within the duties of the proposed professional webmaster and could perhaps be financed by an application to the NFDC for a subvention from their budget for consultancy services.</p>

## TECHNICAL APPENDIX

<p><b>1.</b> <b>Introduction</b></p>	<p><b>In line with the spirit and the letter of the Localism Act, 2011, the TCWG took it as given that the first stage of the project must be to carry out research amongst the residents of Ringwood, to sound out their ideas on how they would like to see the future of the town and, in particular, the town centre, what improvements they wanted, what developments they would like to see, what opportunities they would wish to see exploited.</b></p>	<p><b>3.</b> <b>Survey Period</b></p>	<p>The survey was conducted between June and October 2021. In total, we received 537 completed and usable questionnaires. The research period was extended to accumulate as many responses as possible. Unfortunately, during the survey period, an issue of traffic flow problems through the town (following the closure of West Street, the reversal of traffic direction in Meeting House Lane and the threat or the reality of various major, year-long roadworks in Mansfield Road), affected the answers to questions as to whether respondents were optimistic about the town's future.</p>
<p><b>2.</b> <b>Selection of research methods</b></p>	<p><b>Internet Survey:</b> In the absence of a budget for the research (the TCWG were entirely dependent on volunteer help), the internet was chosen as the main research medium. A semi-structured questionnaire (combining some open questions with a series of closed questions) was designed. NB: Closed questions are much easier to code but because we wanted completely unprompted answers to some of the key questions, we decided some of the questions had to remain open.</p> <p>In the first batch of questionnaires placed in High Street shops, care was taken to reverse the order of options in closed questions in half the questionnaires to minimise order bias. After analysing the first 30 questionnaires, it was found that the order of the options had little effect on respondents' answers so, for the main part of the survey carried out via the Neighbourhood Plan website, the neutral alphabetical fixed order for questions with multiple options was used.</p> <p>The questionnaire was piloted amongst a small number of respondents; some useful improvements to the wording of some questions were made; and the questionnaire was then finalised (copy attached).</p>	<p><b>4.</b> <b>Note on the composition of the sample</b></p>	<p>Inevitably those who participated in the survey were those who were most interested in the town's future. This was precisely the group which we wished to research.</p> <p>At the same time, we were concerned that the survey might be dominated by small pressure groups exerting a disproportionate amount of influence, but such fears were dissipated by the large numbers who participated in the survey and the wide variety of views expressed.</p> <p>We were also concerned that a minority of residents of Ringwood have no access to the internet. As noted above, we tried to mitigate this lacuna in our sample by leaving questionnaires in most High Street shops.</p>
	<p><b>In Shop Survey:</b> We also placed approximately 80 questionnaires in shops, asking the shopkeepers to invite their customers to complete the questionnaire. Our aim was to broaden the base of our sample, especially for those without access to the internet. This method had some success but too often questionnaires were mislaid or lost because of staff shift problems.</p>	<p><b>5.</b> <b>How representative of the town was the sample?</b></p>	<p>A survey of 537 out of a population of 14,500 is enough for us to be confident that we have a good general indication of the town's views. Statistical calculations of confidence limits require a completely random sample (which we cannot claim) but, given we were seeking the views of those with a keen interest in the future of the town, and that our demographic analysis show a good spread by age and sex, we can at least claim to have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>currently the best available data for assessing the interests of those who use the town centre</b></li> <li>• <b>a measurably better foundation for recommendations than the anecdotal evidence on which many assertions about the opinions in the town are currently based.</b></li> </ul>

## Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan Town Centre Working Group Shoppers' Questionnaire

The Town Council is preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the future of Ringwood. A working group has been set up to canvas the views of the people of Ringwood on how Ringwood should develop. All your answers will be anonymous.

1. Do you live in Ringwood?

Yes  No  Where have you travel from? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How did you get here?

Car  Bus  Cycle  Walk

Tick more than one mode of transport, if necessary.

3. Is Ringwood your main shopping centre?

Yes  No  Which is your main shopping Centre? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Which other Shopping Centres do you use?

Bournemouth  Christchurch  Romsey  Salisbury  Southampton  Winchester

Other: \_\_\_\_\_ Tick as many boxes as necessary.

5. What is the best thing about shopping in Ringwood? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What is the worst thing about shopping in Ringwood? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What would lead you to shop more often in Ringwood?

more advertising  more discount schemes  more events  more independent shops  more seating

more street entertainment  *Tick as many boxes as you like*

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. On an average visit, how long do you spend in the Ringwood Town Centre?

9. Do you think the parking facilities for shoppers in Ringwood are?

Adequate?                       Good ?                       Need more spaces?

10. Should there be more or less on-street parking? More       Less       Leave as it is

11. Approximately what percentage of your shopping, in terms of money spent, do you do **online**?

0%              1%-25%               26%-50%               51%-75%               76%-99%

12. In future, do you think your **online** shopping will: increase?       decrease?       stay the same?

13. Do you have any other comments or suggestions you would like to make about the future of Ringwood Town Centre?

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Classification Data for demographic analysis only: Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Age 20–30    31-40    41-50    51-60    61- 70    71+

Thank you for your help.