

**Main conclusions of the TCWG research  
to enable the residents of Ringwood to provide input into the long-range planning process  
for Ringwood**

The Town Centre Working Group (TCWG) has conducted a Shoppers Survey (537 Respondents), a Shopkeepers Survey (50 interviews), and depth interviews/extensive discussions with other stakeholders (community leaders, developers, investors).

Below is a summary of the wishes of the people of Ringwood, as they emerged from the survey research.

1. There was universal agreement that the primary goal should be a thriving and vibrant town centre. (The impact of online shopping on major shopping centres was acknowledged but the evidence shows that smaller shopping centres with a variety of independent shops, particularly in market towns, are much less vulnerable than large shopping centres filled with major chain stores). Overall, 75% of shopping is predicted to remain through shops in streets.
2. When shoppers were asked for their priorities (an open question), the top three results were:
  - a. more independent shop (72%)
  - b. more events (27.5%)
  - c. more street entertainment (15.%)
3. There was strong opposition from shoppers and shopkeepers to the conversion of existing retail premises into residential use on the grounds that :
  - a. there should be more shops, not fewer
  - b. such conversion fracture the “flow” of the retail offer by breaking up the shopping centre with buildings of interest to no one other than the residents.
  - c. the town centre currently fails to meet the needs of some sections of the Ringwood population (no clothes shop for the young or for the less affluent; no post office, inadequate provision for major events). Meeting these requirements (with more not fewer shops) was thought to be a priority

4. There was a general feeling that some of Ringwood's remarkable assets are under exploited. In discussions of this issue, the Market Place became the focus of many of those participating in the surveys. The Market Place, historically the centre of the town, was generally considered underused and undervalued. The Farmers Market and other events prefer to use the Furlong or the space in front of the Gateway, rather than the Market Place, because the footfall in the Market Place is too low and, according to one respondent, because of the high charges for the necessary road closures.

Given the closure of West Street and the conversion of the Market Place into a cul de sac, it was almost inevitable that the possibility of converting the Market Place into “shared space” (i.e. a space mainly for pedestrian use but with limited, controlled access for essential vehicles) attracted widespread support (94% in the Shopkeepers Survey). Although the Wednesday market and several annual events take place in the Market Place, it was generally agreed that the Wednesday markets are ‘not what they used to be’; and that other events held in the Market Place, although successful, still leave the Market Place calendar bare for most of the year.

It was strongly felt that, unless action is taken, a major town asset (one that other towns would give their eye teeth for) would decline. The ‘shared space’ concept would enable the shops, restaurants and cafes in the Market Place to make much better use of the available space. It could provide room to meet the town’s wish for more events and more street entertainment. With the help of the proposed development of the old cinema site, the Market Place could become once again the heart of the town, an essential link between the Furlong and the High Street.

***Copies of the TCWG's***

- ***‘Shoppers Survey’***
- ***‘Shopkeepers Survey’***
- ***‘Shared Space Concept for Ringwood's Market Place’***

***are available on request.***