Grays Town Centre

Consultation with businesses and organisations based in Grays
Report of Findings

March 2013
SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

1. Why do businesses and organisations locate in Grays?
The clear main reason for locating in Grays town centre is access to customers, with 71% of respondents identifying this as their reason for locating in Grays. Other reasons were identified with around 10% identifying town centre facilities, property prices/rental values, support services, and transport links. Respondents were also asked to identify positive reasons for locating in Grays. Access to customers was again the main positive reason. Other reasons featured more strongly with 41% of responses identifying proximity to amenities/services/other organisations and 21% of responses identify transport links.

2. What would Improve Grays?
A wide range of suggestions were made including:
- More police/better security/night time policing/CCTV
- Better parking/free parking/free parking for businesses/better sign posting of parking
- Better road system/improve one way system/traffic flow/deal with congestion/remove bus lanes.
- Wider range of shops and restaurants/cafes /more places to eat/more places for entertainment/big name retailers.
- Wider range of businesses/business centre/affordable business premises/attract blue chip companies
- Improve the appearance and make the town more welcoming/improve facilities such as toilets

3. What should the future role of Grays be?
Respondents generally see a mixed role for Grays in the future. The emphasis is on Grays being a place for entertainment, culture and socialising (60.9% of responses) and a place for markets and events (53.6% of responses). There was also strong support for convenience retail (40.6%). Developing Grays as a place for communities to meet and as a centre for business based around professional office based services and business centre floor space received lower levels of support. But the level of support for these was none the less significant with 34.8% and 23.1% of respondents support respectively in favour of these.

4. How good is the Grays town ‘offer’?
Public transport and ease of access within the town centre are considered to be good or very good by most respondents. Opinions about car parking, and access in to the town were mixed. A large proportion of responses considered these to be poor/very poor but slightly more considered them to be good/very good (36.8% and 42% of respondents respectively).

Opinions about safety in the town were mixed but the balance of opinion (44.9% of responses) considered the town to be poor/very poor in this respect.
Opinions about litter and graffiti were more mixed with similar numbers of responses rating the town as good/very good, average, and poor/very poor. However the balance of opinion (37.7% of responses) was that the town was poor/very poor.

In other respects the majority of respondents identified Grays as being average, poor or very poor. This was particularly the case for a range of issues that respondents see as the basis for the future of Grays; for example selection of shops, leisure and entertainment, cultural facilities, range of events all scored poorly in the survey.

5. **How likely are improvements to encourage people to visit Grays town centre?**
Respondents identified a wide range of potential improvements with the most popular being lower parking charges, wider range of shops, cafes and restaurants, better facilities for visitors and improvements to lighting and signage.

Grays market receives very strong support with over 80% of respondents supporting additional market days and a range of different types of market.
1. INTRODUCTION

Background
The Councils Community Regeneration Strategy and Local Development Framework identify Grays as a growth hub where regeneration activity is to be focussed. A series of surveys have been completed to gather opinions about Grays Town Centre as it is now and about possible futures for the town centre and to develop an understanding of what form the regeneration focus should take.

The Council commissioned Enventure Research to carry out a series of surveys as follows;
   a) Telephone survey of residents in the 5 wards of Grays and the two wards of Chafford Hundred.
   b) Online survey.
   c) Interviews with people using Grays rail station
   d) Questionnaire survey of students at Grays Arts and Media School

The findings from these surveys are contained in a separate report. In total 1444 responses were received to these surveys.

The Council also carried out a questionnaire survey of businesses and organisations based in Grays. This report considers the responses to this survey.

Consultation Aims

The aim of the survey of businesses and organisations was to understand why businesses and organisations have located in Grays town centre, what changes might improve Grays as a location, and what roles should be considered for Grays in the future.

Methodology

270 questionnaires with pre-paid return envelopes were hand delivered to businesses and organisations in and around Grays Town Centre in February 2013. The area of distribution included High Street north and south of the rail line, New Road, Station Approach, Clarence Road, George Street, London Road, Orsett Road, Maidstone Road, Eastern Way, Hogg Lane, Derby Road, Stanley Road and immediate adjoining streets.

69 (25.5%) completed questionnaires were received. The profile at figure 1 shows a broad range of businesses and organisations responding to the survey.
The other businesses were:
- Optometrist
- Estate and Letting agents
- St Lukes
- Charitable organisation
- Clothing alteration shop
- Hairdressers/ beauty/barber
- Church
- Tattoo Studio
- Social enterprise
- Recruitment Agency
- GP surgery
- Dog grooming parlour
- Repair and Maintenance Contractor
- Online retail, ground works supply and installation

5 Businesses included 2 or more of the categories:
- Community Group/Bank
- Charitable organisation /Administration and support service
- Education and training/hairdressing/beauty
- Voluntary Organisation/Business and financial/education and training
- Marketing/Administration and support services
2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Reasons for locating in Grays

Organisations were asked why they had located in Grays. The main reason given by 49 (71%) of respondents was access to customers. About 11% of responses identified town centre facilities and property prices/rental values and 10% of responses identify access to support services and transport links. Three businesses had operated in Grays for over 100 years.

Other reasons were given for example;
- Our business is just outside the town centre, but the accessibility to banks, multi-storey car park and other prospective business which attracts customers to us as well
- Used to be a busy town back 18 years ago
- Its where I live

Organisations were also asked what the most positive aspect of Grays was for locating in the town centre. 53 responses to this question were received; some included more than 1 suggestion. These are summarised in Figure 2, access to customers, amenities, services and other organisations and transport links were the main aspects identified. 7 responses expressed the view that there were no positive reasons for locating in Grays.

Figure 2: Reasons for locating in Grays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clients/customers/footfall</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close to amenities/services/other organisations or businesses</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport Links/road network</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few other similar shops (competitors)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in Grays/no commute</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical links</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other views included;
- “In 1935, Grays was a thriving community with good shops”
- “The new university of Essex planned to open in 2014 will bring more customers to our business”
- “Our retail company fits in well with the area which is the main positive aspect of our location”
- “There are no positive aspects- Grays is a dead duck as a town with poor shops and a ridiculous road system”
• “Opening hours (Community living). At times busy centre”
• “Future growth-hopefully”
• “People can find it-maybe? Apart from the one-way system that means us as a business are/is harder to find. Its like the town centre is designed to keep people out”
• “Access to variety of services needed by people, rich in diversity of businesses, eco-friendly shops, has potential for further developments. Good road networks to town centre”
• “Central point”

What would improve Grays?

Organisations were asked to identity two things that they considered would improve Grays as a location for their type of organisation. 48 responses were received with a range of suggestions. These cover the following broad range of issues;

• More police/better security/night time policing/CCTV
• Better parking/free parking/free parking for businesses/better sign posting of parking
• Better road system/improve one way system/traffic flow/deal with congestion/remove bus lanes.
• Wider range of shops and restaurants/cafes /more places to eat/more places for entertainment/big name retailers and restaurants.
• Wider range of businesses/business centre/affordable business premises/attract blue chip companies
• Advertise/promote Grays/showcase Grays businesses
• Improve the appearance and make the town more welcoming/improve facilities such as toilets
• Improve facilities and meeting places
• Reduce business rates and rents
• Relocate Friday Market
• Improve the market and provide a free bus on market days
• Need retail and leisure for young people

What should the future role of Grays be?

Respondents were asked to identify future roles for Grays from a range of options, 64 responses were received to this question. The majority of responses considered that Grays should focus on providing a place for entertainment, culture and socialising (60.9%) and for markets and events (53.6%). Full summary of responses is in Figure 3;
Figure 3: Future roles for Grays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A place for entertainment, culture and socialising</td>
<td>42(60.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place for markets and events</td>
<td>37(53.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place for convenience shopping (food and household)</td>
<td>28(40.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place for communities and community groups to meet</td>
<td>24(34.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A centre for business</td>
<td>15(23.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14(20.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other comments made include:
- “Lower business rates to encourage a wider mix of shops”
- “Development of the state cinema into a conference centre”
- “Look back into the past- great shops, ease of movement, nothing complicated”
- “Some substantial office development”
- “Costa Coffee, more restaurants not takeaways”
- “Later opening so Grays doesn't become a ghost town after 6pm”
- “A mix of all”
- Professional businesses, White collar businesses, Financial
- “Business centre for marketing, finance and business support. Better quality shops/restaurants”
- “People can't seem to drink in Grays without trouble over the years. No nightclub. Make the town student friendly.”

How good is the Grays town offer?

Respondents were asked to rate Grays on a number of attributes. Findings are summarised in Figure 4, it should be noted that some respondents did not provide an answer to some of the categories. The highest scores in the ‘very good/good’ and the ‘poor/very poor’ categories are highlighted in red.

Figure 4 shows that the only characteristics where the town centre scores well are in relation to the quality of public transport and the ease of access around the town centre once people have arrived with 51 (73.9%) and 39 (56.5%) respondents respectively scoring these as good or very good. For all other attributes responses were mixed or judged the town centre to be poor or very poor.
Opinions about car parking, and access in to the town were mixed. A large proportion of responses considered these to be poor/very poor but slightly more considered them to be good/very good (36.8% and 42% of respondents respectively).

Opinions about safety in the town were mixed but the clear balance of opinion (44.9% of responses) considered the town to be poor/very poor in this respect. Opinions about litter and graffiti were more mixed with similar numbers of responses rating the town as good/very good, average, and poor/very poor. However the balance of opinion (37.7% of responses) was that the town was poor/very poor.

On all other items the town centre scores poorly with high scores in the ‘poor/very poor category’ for leisure and entertainment 56 (81.2%), selection of shops 44 (63.8%), range of public events 43 (62.3%), and cultural facilities 40 (58%). These are illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Ratings for Grays facilities
The ‘preferred future roles’ identified by respondents for the town centre and summarised in Figure 3 focussed on developing the town centre as ‘A place for entertainment, culture and socialising’ and as ‘A place for markets and events’. The tables in figure 5 show that these are currently regarded as being poor.

The attractiveness of the environment of the town centre, as illustrated by responses about litter and graffiti, and about personal safety in the town centre were mixed. Many respondents judged these to be average but a significant proportion, 37.7% and 44.9% respectively judged these to be poor or very poor as illustrated in figure 6.
Poor scores for personal safety will reflect respondents direct experience with these issues and perceptions. Personal safety perhaps illustrates this in that crime rates in Grays are relatively low and the perception of crime can be relatively high.

**How likely are improvements to encourage people to visit the town centre?**

Organisations were asked to rate how likely it was that certain types of improvements would encourage people to visit the town centre. Findings are summarised in Figure 7. The highest scores for ‘likely/very likely’ and ‘not likely/not at all’ are highlighted in red.

**Figure 7: What would encourage people to visit Grays?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>Likely/very likely</th>
<th>Not likely/not at all</th>
<th>No answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved evening offer</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of river-walks</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of river Café/bar/restaurant</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower parking charges</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and entertainment</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>'Likely'</td>
<td>'Very Likely'</td>
<td>'Not Very Likely'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider range of shops</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Space</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities for the young</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities for community groups</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased office space</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved public transport</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better facilities for shoppers (more seats, toilets, crèche etc)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements to street lighting/walls/street signs etc</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the items listed score well in the ‘likely/very likely’ category. Open space and increased office floorspace score relatively poorly. Use of the riverfront for cafes etc, lower parking charges, wider range of shops, better facilities for shoppers and improvements to street lighting etc all scored over 50 (77%) in the likely/very likely category. Lower parking charges and wider range of shops received the highest number of ‘very likely’ scores as is illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8:
Figure 3 summarises the future roles for Grays identified by respondents as ‘a place for entertainment, culture and socialising’ and ‘a place for markets and events’. These preferred future roles are supported by the responses summarised in Figure 9 in relation to improved evening economy, events, culture and entertainment which all have a high score for ‘likely’ and ‘very likely to encourage more people to visit Grays.

**Figure 9:**

- **Improved evening offering (restaurants/bars)**

- **Town centre events**

- **Cultural and entertainment facilities**
Market provision in Grays

82% of respondents support further market provision in Grays. Of those that do not support additional market days, 5 did support different types of markets. Many respondents support a wide range of types of markets as summarised in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Support for Additional Market days

Other markets suggested were antiques, Christmas, French, German, Craft, and men’s clothing markets, and pop ups for small businesses

Additional comments about the market were;

• “Anything to bring people in to the town”
• “Not markets that detract from the established businesses”
• “Improved stalls”
• “Support market but not as it is now”

3. CONCLUSIONS

A study carried out by Roger Tyms and Partners in 2007 to inform planning policy identified the impact that Lakeside has had in Grays town centre, many will recall the closure of outlets such as Marks and Spencer
when Lakeside opened. The study also identified a continuing impact from Lakeside on Grays town centre. One consequence of this identified by that study has been that Grays as had a low representation from major High Street outlets that are typically found in other similar town centres.

Grays, in common with other town centres, has suffered from the wider economic recession. However Grays has not seen such high levels of vacancy as other town centres. In 2007 Grays had about 9% of units vacant compared to a national average of about 6%. In Grays vacancy has remained at about 9% while the national average has risen to over 14%. In part this is because national chains that had not located units in Grays have been particularly badly affected by the recession (e.g. Jessop, HMV etc). However, many have referred to the relatively poor ‘offer’ in Grays and this is reflected in the response to this survey.

It is important to recognise that there are positive aspects to Grays which are reflected in responses to the survey. Many respondents to the survey identify the importance of Grays as a location because it provides access to customers, a range of facilities, services, amenities and other businesses, and has good transport links. Grays Market has strong support and some businesses have indicated that they have their best day’s trade on a Friday, in part as a consequence of the market.

South Essex College will be opening the Thurrock Learning Campus in 2014, which will bring 2000 students and staff in to the town, the Council intends to locate more of its staff in Grays, and in one year 2.8 million passenger movements passed through Grays Rail Station, all of which provide opportunities for the future.

However the survey clearly illustrates that there are important issues that respondents consider need to be addressed.

1. Facilities for socialising
   The response to the survey indicates clear support for developing a future role based around culture, entertainment, cafes and restaurants, events and the market. With the exception of the market, the town centre scores poorly on existing facilities but there is clear support for improving what the town centre has to offer.

2. Retailing and Grays market
   There is clear support for developing a wider range of retail in Grays. This would need to be considered carefully. Lakeside will continue to expand. Furthermore, despite the economic recession there are clear trends in retailing as people continue to choose to drive to large and out of town centres for much of their shopping and one of the few growth areas in retailing is in online and mobile shopping. Opportunities for expansion in retailing may therefore be limited and it would be important to ensure a sustainable approach.
The market has strong support and the majority of respondents would support more market days and a wider range of markets.

3. Grays as a meeting place for communities
   The survey indicates support for developing Grays as a place for communities to meet and for community groups to meet.

4. Grays as a centre for business
   A future role as a centre for business distinct from retail, restaurants etc, received the lowest level of support as a future role for Grays (23.1%). But responses to other questions in the survey indicate broader support for this role with a range of specific responses suggesting a need for pop up markets for business start ups, substantial office development, developing professional businesses, and developing further business centre spaces.

5. Access and Parking
   Public transport and access within the town centre score well in the survey. Ease of access into the town centre received a mixed response with almost as many respondents identifying this as poor/very poor as those identifying it as good/very good. Specific references were made to the need to improve traffic flows and the one way system. Parking received a similarly balanced level of response with specific comments about the need to improve accessibility and signage to parking spaces and a desire for cheap or free parking spaces.

6. Personal Safety
   Views about personal safety were mixed, but there was none the less a clear majority of respondents that consider this to be poor or very poor. The scope of the survey did not enable a distinction to be made between views based on direct experience of crime and views based on perception. However for the purposes of this study the distinction is irrelevant. Both of these will influence peoples decisions about whether to visit the town centre and so this would act as a barrier to developing other aspects of the town centre ‘offer’ particularly those elements based around evening entertainment and socialising. These issues would therefore need to be addressed and specific suggestions were made about improving security in the town centre.

7. ‘Environmental’ issues
   Views about litter and graffiti were mixed with more respondents expressing a view that this was poor or very poor and specific references were made about the need to improve the appearance of the town, and to make the town more welcoming and to improving facilities.
SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

1. Why do businesses and organisations locate in Grays?
The clear main reason for locating in Grays town centre is access to customers, with 71% of respondents identifying this as their reason for locating in Grays. Other reasons were identified with around 10% identifying town centre facilities, property prices/rental values, support services, and transport links. Respondents were also asked to identify positive reasons for locating in Grays. Access to customers was again the main positive reason. Other reasons featured more strongly with 41% of responses identifying proximity to amenities/services/other organisations and 21% of responses identify transport links.

2. What would Improve Grays?
A wide range of suggestions were made including;
- More police/better security/night time policing/CCTV
- Better parking/free parking/free parking for businesses/better sign posting of parking
- Better road system/improve one way system/traffic flow/deal with congestion/remove bus lanes.
- Wider range of shops and restaurants/cafes /more places to eat/more places for entertainment/big name retailers.
- Wider range of businesses/business centre/affordable business premises/attract blue chip companies
- Improve the appearance and make the town more welcoming/improve facilities such as toilets

3. What should the future role of Grays be?
Respondents generally see a mixed role for Grays in the future. The emphasis is on Grays being a place for entertainment, culture and socialising (60.9% of responses) and a place for markets and events (53.6% of responses). There was also strong support for convenience retail (40.6%). Developing Grays as a place for communities to meet and as a centre for business based around professional office based services and business centre floor space received lower levels of support. But the level of support for these was none the less significant with 34.8% and 23.1% of respondents support respectively in favour of these.

4. How good is the Grays town ‘offer’?
Public transport and ease of access within the town centre are considered to be good or very good by most respondents. Opinions about car parking, and access in to the town were mixed. A large proportion of responses considered these to be poor/very poor but slightly more considered them to be good/very good (36.8% and 42% of respondents respectively).

Opinions about safety in the town were mixed but the balance of opinion (44.9% of responses) considered the town to be poor/very poor in this respect.
Opinions about litter and graffiti were more mixed with similar numbers of responses rating the town as good/very good, average, and poor/very poor. However the balance of opinion (37.7% of responses) was that the town was poor/very poor.

In other respects the majority of respondents identified Grays as being average, poor or very poor. This was particularly the case for a range of issues that respondents see as the basis for the future of Grays; for example selection of shops, leisure and entertainment, cultural facilities, range of events all scored poorly in the survey.

5. **How likely are improvements to encourage people to visit Grays town centre?**
Respondents identified a wide range of potential improvements with the most popular being lower parking charges, wider range of shops, cafes and restaurants, better facilities for visitors and improvements to lighting and signage.

Grays market receives very strong support with over 80% of respondents supporting additional market days and a range of different types of market.
1. INTRODUCTION

Background
The Council’s Community Regeneration Strategy and Local Development Framework identify Grays as a growth hub where regeneration activity is to be focussed. A series of surveys have been completed to gather opinions about Grays Town Centre as it is now and about possible futures for the town centre and to develop an understanding of what form the regeneration focus should take.

The Council commissioned Enventure Research to carry out a series of surveys as follows;

a) Telephone survey of residents in the 5 wards of Grays and the two wards of Chafford Hundred.

b) Online survey.

c) Interviews with people using Grays rail station

d) Questionnaire survey of students at Grays Arts and Media School

The findings from these surveys are contained in a separate report. In total 1444 responses were received to these surveys.

The Council also carried out a questionnaire survey of businesses and organisations based in Grays. This report considers the responses to this survey.

Consultation Aims

The aim of the survey of businesses and organisations was to understand why businesses and organisations have located in Grays town centre, what changes might improve Grays as a location, and what roles should be considered for Grays in the future.

Methodology

270 questionnaires with pre-paid return envelopes were hand delivered to businesses and organisations in and around Grays Town Centre in February 2013. The area of distribution included High Street north and south of the rail line, New Road, Station Approach, Clarence Road, George Street, London Road, Orsett Road, Maidstone Road, Eastern Way, Hogg Lane, Derby Road, Stanley Road and immediate adjoining streets.

69 (25.5%) completed questionnaires were received. The profile at figure 1 shows a broad range of businesses and organisations responding to the survey.
The other businesses were;
- Optometrist
- Estate and Letting agents
- St Lukes
- Charitable organisation
- Clothing alteration shop
- Hairdressers/beauty/barber
- Church
- Tattoo Studio
- Social enterprise
- Recruitment Agency
- GP surgery
- Dog grooming parlour
- Repair and Maintenance Contractor
- Online retail, ground works supply and installation

5 Businesses included 2 or more of the categories;
- Community Group/Bank
- Charitable organisation/Administration and support service
- Education and training/hairdressing/beauty
- Voluntary Organisation/Business and financial/education and training
- Marketing/Administration and support services
2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Reasons for locating in Grays

Organisations were asked why they had located in Grays. The main reason given by 49 (71%) of respondents was access to customers. About 11% of responses identified town centre facilities and property prices/rental values and 10% of responses identify access to support services and transport links. Three businesses had operated in Grays for over 100 years.

Other reasons were given for example;
  - Our business is just outside the town centre, but the accessibility to banks, multi-storey car park and other prospective business which attracts customers to us as well
  - Used to be a busy town back 18 years ago
  - Its where I live

Organisations were also asked what the most positive aspect of Grays was for locating in the town centre. 53 responses to this question were received; some included more than 1 suggestion. These are summarised in Figure 2, access to customers, amenities, services and other organisations and transport links were the main aspects identified. 7 responses expressed the view that there were no positive reasons for locating in Grays.

Figure 2: Reasons for locating in Grays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clients/customers/footfall</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close to amenities/services/other organisations or businesses</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport Links/road network</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few other similar shops (competitors)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in Grays/no commute</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical links</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other views included;
  - “In 1935, Grays was a thriving community with good shops”
  - “The new university of Essex planned to open in 2014 will bring more customers to our business”
  - “Our retail company fits in well with the area which is the main positive aspect of our location”
  - “There are no positive aspects- Grays is a dead duck as a town with poor shops and a ridiculous road system”
“Opening hours (Community living). At times busy centre”
“Future growth-hopefully”
“People can find it-maybe? Apart from the one-way system that means us as a business are/is harder to find. Its like the town centre is designed to keep people out”
“Access to variety of services needed by people, rich in diversity of businesses, eco-friendly shops, has potential for further developments. Good road networks to town centre”
“Central point”

What would improve Grays?

Organisations were asked to identify two things that they considered would improve Grays as a location for their type of organisation. 48 responses were received with a range of suggestions. These cover the following broad range of issues;

- More police/better security/night time policing/CCTV
- Better parking/free parking/free parking for businesses/better sign posting of parking
- Better road system/improve one way system/traffic flow/deal with congestion/remove bus lanes.
- Wider range of shops and restaurants/cafes /more places to eat/more places for entertainment/big name retailers and restaurants.
- Wider range of businesses/business centre/affordable business premises/attract blue chip companies
- Advertise/promote Grays/showcase Grays businesses
- Improve the appearance and make the town more welcoming/improve facilities such as toilets
- Improve facilities and meeting places
- Reduce business rates and rents
- Relocate Friday Market
- Improve the market and provide a free bus on market days
- Need retail and leisure for young people

What should the future role of Grays be?

Respondents were asked to identify future roles for Grays from a range of options, 64 responses were received to this question. The majority of responses considered that Grays should focus on providing a place for entertainment, culture and socialising (60.9%) and for markets and events (53.6%). Full summary of responses is in Figure 3;
Figure 3: Future roles for Grays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A place for entertainment, culture and socialising</td>
<td>42(60.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place for markets and events</td>
<td>37(53.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place for convenience shopping (food and household)</td>
<td>28(40.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place for communities and community groups to meet</td>
<td>24(34.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A centre for business</td>
<td>15(23.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14(20.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other comments made include:
- “Lower business rates to encourage a wider mix of shops”
- “Development of the state cinema into a conference centre”
- “Look back into the past- great shops, ease of movement, nothing complicated”
- “Some substantial office development”
- “Costa Coffee, more restaurants not takeaways”
- “Later opening so Grays doesn't become a ghost town after 6pm”
- “A mix of all”
- Professional businesses, White collar businesses, Financial
- “Business centre for marketing, finance and business support. Better quality shops/restaurants”
- “People can't seem to drink in Grays without trouble over the years. No nightclub. Make the town student friendly.”

How good is the Grays town offer?

Respondents were asked to rate Grays on a number of attributes. Findings are summarised in Figure 4, it should be noted that some respondents did not provide an answer to some of the categories. The highest scores in the ‘very good/good’ and the ‘poor/very poor’ categories are highlighted in red.

Figure 4 shows that the only characteristics where the town centre scores well are in relation to the quality of public transport and the ease of access around the town centre once people have arrived with 51 (73.9%) and 39 (56.5%) respondents respectively scoring these as good or very good. For all other attributes responses were mixed or judged the town centre to be poor or very poor.
Opinions about car parking, and access in to the town were mixed. A large proportion of responses considered these to be poor/very poor but slightly more considered them to be good/very good (36.8% and 42% of respondents respectively).

Opinions about safety in the town were mixed but the clear balance of opinion (44.9% of responses) considered the town to be poor/very poor in this respect. Opinions about litter and graffiti were more mixed with similar numbers of responses rating the town as good/very good, average, and poor/very poor. However the balance of opinion (37.7% of responses) was that the town was poor/very poor.

On all other items the town centre scores poorly with high scores in the ‘poor/very poor category’ for leisure and entertainment 56 (81.2%), selection of shops 44 (63.8%), range of public events 43(62.3%), and cultural facilities 40 (58%). These are illustrated in Figure 5.

**Figure 4: Grays Attributes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Good/Good</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Poor/very poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal safety</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litter and graffiti</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Shops</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of cafes and restaurants</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure and entertainment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural facilities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public transport</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car Parking</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of access in to the town centre</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of access around the town centre</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of public events</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5: Ratings for Grays facilities**

![Selection/range of shops](image)
The ‘preferred future roles’ identified by respondents for the town centre and summarised in Figure 3 focussed on developing the town centre as ‘A place for entertainment, culture and socialising’ and as ‘A place for markets and events’. The tables in figure 5 show that these are currently regarded as being poor.

The attractiveness of the environment of the town centre, as illustrated by responses about litter and graffiti, and about personal safety in the town centre were mixed. Many respondents judged these to be average but a significant proportion, 37.7% and 44.9% respectively judged these to be poor or very poor as illustrated in figure 6.
Poor scores for personal safety will reflect respondents' direct experience with these issues and perceptions. Personal safety perhaps illustrates this in that crime rates in Grays are relatively low and the perception of crime can be relatively high.

**How likely are improvements to encourage people to visit the town centre?**

Organisations were asked to rate how likely it was that certain types of improvements would encourage people to visit the town centre. Findings are summarised in Figure 7. The highest scores for 'likely/very likely' and 'not likely/not at all' are highlighted in red.

**Figure 7: What would encourage people to visit Grays?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Likely/very likely</th>
<th>Not likely/not at all</th>
<th>No answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved evening offer</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of river-walks</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of river Café/bar/restaurant</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower parking charges</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and entertainment</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Very Likely</td>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>Not Very Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider range of shops</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Space</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities for the young</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities for community groups</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased office space</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved public transport</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better facilities for shoppers (more seats, toilets, crèche etc)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements to street lighting/walls/street signs etc</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the items listed score well in the ‘likely/very likely’ category. Open space and increased office floorspace score relatively poorly. Use of the riverfront for cafes etc, lower parking charges, wider range of shops, better facilities for shoppers and improvements to street lighting etc all scored over 50 (77%) in the likely/very likely category. Lower parking charges and wider range of shops received the highest number of ‘very likely’ scores as is illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8:
Figure 3 summarises the future roles for Grays identified by respondents as ‘a place for entertainment, culture and socialising’ and ‘a place for markets and events’. These preferred future roles are supported by the responses summarised in Figure 9 in relation to improved evening economy, events, culture and entertainment which all have a high score for ‘likely’ and ‘very likely to encourage more people to visit Grays.

**Figure 9:**

- **Improved evening offering (restaurants/bars)**
- **Town centre events**
- **Cultural and entertainment facilities**
Market provision in Grays

82% of respondents support further market provision in Grays. Of those that do not support additional market days, 5 did support different types of markets. Many respondents support a wide range of types of markets as summarised in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Support for Additional Market days

![Figure 10: Support for Additional Market days](image)

Other markets suggested were antiques, Christmas, French, German, Craft, and men’s clothing markets, and pop ups for small businesses

Additional comments about the market were;
- “Anything to bring people in to the town”
- “Not markets that detract from the established businesses”
- “Improved stalls”
- “Support market but not as it is now”

3. CONCLUSIONS

A study carried out by Roger Tyms and Partners in 2007 to inform planning policy identified the impact that Lakeside has had in Grays town centre, many will recall the closure of outlets such as Marks and Spencer
when Lakeside opened. The study also identified a continuing impact from Lakeside on Grays town centre. One consequence of this identified by that study has been that Grays as had a low representation from major High Street outlets that are typically found in other similar town centres.

Grays, in common with other town centres, has suffered from the wider economic recession. However Grays has not seen such high levels of vacancy as other town centres. In 2007 Grays had about 9% of units vacant compared to a national average of about 6%. In Grays vacancy has remained at about 9% while the national average has risen to over 14%. In part this is because national chains that had not located units in Grays have been particularly badly affected by the recession (e.g. Jessop, HMV etc). However, many have referred to the relatively poor ‘offer’ in Grays and this is reflected in the response to this survey.

It is important to recognise that there are positive aspects to Grays which are reflected in responses to the survey. Many respondents to the survey identify the importance of Grays as a location because it provides access to customers, a range of facilities, services, amenities and other businesses, and has good transport links. Grays Market has strong support and some businesses have indicated that they have their best day’s trade on a Friday, in part as a consequence of the market.

South Essex College will be opening the Thurrock Learning Campus in 2014, which will bring 2000 students and staff in to the town, the Council intends to locate more of its staff in Grays, and in one year 2.8 million passenger movements passed through Grays Rail Station, all of which provide opportunities for the future.

However the survey clearly illustrates that there are important issues that respondents consider need to be addressed.

1. Facilities for socialising
   The response to the survey indicates clear support for developing a future role based around culture, entertainment, cafes and restaurants, events and the market. With the exception of the market, the town centre scores poorly on existing facilities but there is clear support for improving what the town centre has to offer.

2. Retailing and Grays market
   There is clear support for developing a wider range of retail in Grays. This would need to be considered carefully. Lakeside will continue to expand. Furthermore, despite the economic recession there are clear trends in retailing as people continue to choose to drive to large and out of town centres for much of their shopping and one of the few growth areas in retailing is in online and mobile shopping. Opportunities for expansion in retailing may therefore be limited and it would be important to ensure a sustainable approach.
The market has strong support and the majority of respondents would support more market days and a wider range of markets.

3. Grays as a meeting place for communities
   The survey indicates support for developing Grays as a place for communities to meet and for community groups to meet.

4. Grays as a centre for business
   A future role as a centre for business distinct from retail, restaurants etc, received the lowest level of support as a future role for Grays (23.1%). But responses to other questions in the survey indicate broader support for this role with a range of specific responses suggesting a need for pop up markets for business start ups, substantial office development, developing professional businesses, and developing further business centre spaces.

5. Access and Parking
   Public transport and access within the town centre score well in the survey. Ease of access in to the town centre received a mixed response with almost as many respondents identifying this as poor/very poor as those identifying it as good/very good. Specific references were made to the need to improve traffic flows and the one way system. Parking received a similarly balanced level of response with specific comments about the need to improve accessibility and signage to parking spaces and a desire for cheap or free parking spaces.

6. Personal Safety
   Views about personal safety were mixed, but there was none the less a clear majority of respondents that consider this to be poor or very poor. The scope of the survey did not enable a distinction to be made between views based on direct experience of crime and views based on perception. However for the purposes of this study the distinction is irrelevant. Both of these will influence peoples decisions about whether to visit the town centre and so this would act as a barrier to developing other aspects of the town centre ‘offer’ particularly those elements based around evening entertainment and socialising. These issues would therefore need to be addressed and specific suggestions were made about improving security in the town centre.

7. ‘Environmental’ issues
   Views about litter and graffiti were mixed with more respondents expressing a view that this was poor or very poor and specific references were made about the need to improve the appearance of the town, and to make the town more welcoming and to improving facilities.