

# Redditch Towns Deal Community Consultation

Draft Report to North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration

November 2020



*The behaviour  
change people.*

social  
marketing  
gateway

**smg**

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

The Social Marketing Gateway (SMG) was commissioned by North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration to conduct a community consultation with Redditch residents about where investment could be made to make a difference to their lives. The purpose was to inform Redditch's Town Investment Plan, which will be submitted in an application for funding from the Towns Fund to improve Redditch as a place to live and work.

### Methodology

Fieldwork took place between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> November 2020. A mixed method approach, involving a qualitative survey and quantitative in-depth online groups discussions and interviews, was used, and over 650 local residents of Redditch took part.

### Findings

#### [Current feelings about living in Redditch](#)

As a place to live, Redditch is broadly liked, but it is not felt to be a good place to socialise. Despite the borough's assets (the quiet feel, green spaces, and close proximity to other towns and cities) many feel it is lacking in interesting things to see and do. Key areas for improvement should focus on making Redditch a more interesting place to live – particularly for young people.

#### [Current feelings about doing business in Redditch](#)

As a place to do business, there is room for improvement. Business owners generally report Redditch as being just 'ok' as a place to do business. High rent and rate charges are perceived as being a key barrier for businesses getting up and running – particularly local and independent shops who want to be situated in the town centre.

#### [Young people's feelings about their ability to achieve their goals in Redditch](#)

Most young people in the sample felt they could not achieve their goals and ambitions in Redditch at present, although there are some who report that they can do this. A characteristic difference between these two groups seems to be that those who are able to access education relating to their chosen field in the borough feel better supported to achieve their ambitions, whereas those who must travel outwith the borough for this do not feel Redditch supports their goals. To better support all young people, a greater course offering at the local college and more support and advice to pursue local opportunities is desired.

#### [Investment in Urban Regeneration](#)

Urban regeneration is important to the great majority of residents. They want to be able to spend time and money in Redditch and feel proud of their town. Key areas suggested for investment are:

- The town centre - there is a sense that this should be the 'heart' of the community, which it is currently far from. A balance in shops, eating and drinking options, and entertainment offerings would allow residents to feel that Redditch is a town to spend leisure time in as well as live in.
- Providing more for young people to do – young people are perceived as being a group particularly hard hit by the town's lack of offerings. Investing in more for young people will



help Redditch to feel like a 'town for everyone', and potentially improve town centre safety by encouraging fewer young people to loiter.

- Green spaces - adding facilities to existing green spaces would be welcomed to enhance these already important assets. Toilets in all parks, cafes, bars and more outdoor play areas for children will give them an extra boost.
- Making the most of Redditch's cultural assets - this is strongly called for by older residents, who are disappointed that these have been hidden away, and want to see features being made of the town's rich culture. It is hoped making more of these will instil community pride in the town.

### Investment in Skills and Enterprise

Support for small businesses, to help them flourish, and learning, further education and skills development are all areas that residents talked about needing to improve. Redditch is generally seen as a town with untapped potential in terms of enterprise, and additional support in areas like networking, promotion, and setting up new businesses is required. Namely, residents would like to see:

- Support for small businesses through the means of loans, subsidies or support with start-up costs – to help more local, small businesses start up and continue to grow in Redditch, and potentially have a positive impact on the local economy.
- Better support to find apprenticeships and local opportunities - to encourage residents, particularly young people, to find and pursue careers locally. Some suggest that implementing an apprenticeship scheme in conjunction with local businesses could help to support young people to find work at the same time as supporting local businesses with labour.

### Investment in Connectivity

There is a fairly widespread view that Redditch could and should be better connected – both within the borough and with surrounding towns and cities. Citizens want to see improvements in public transport, the town's road network, and attractive active travel options, as well as an improvement to digital connectivity across the borough. Residents call for:

- More frequent, later running and reliable bus services - connecting to more routes within and outwith Redditch, are desired. The present offering is restrictive for residents in terms of commuting, accessing health services, or engaging with Redditch's night-time economy.
- Investment in Redditch Train Station - to make it more inviting, with more warm and dry places for travellers to stand, more seating and the introduction of a café or shop. This would encourage more residents to travel by train, and is to improve visitors' first impressions of Redditch.
- Maintenance of Redditch's expansive network of footpaths and cycle lanes – encouraging more active travel by ensuring these are well lit and well-maintained, making them safer and more attractive.
- Updating Redditch's road network and infrastructure - to account for traffic and parking congestion that has occurred due to Redditch's increased population.
- Good mobile and broadband coverage across all areas of the borough - as inconsistent coverage in the town centre makes it difficult for residents to plan spending time there, and poor coverage in other areas is a challenge for those working from home.

### Current project ideas

Six ideas which have already been put forward as potential areas for investment by Redditch's Town Deal Board were tested with residents to canvas the level of support for each. These six ideas are:

1. Redevelopment in the town centre to create more housing and space for cafes, offices, and retail.
2. Investment in Redditch Railway station to include a second platform and more trains in and out of Redditch.
3. Creation of a new public outdoor space that can be used for events and outdoor dining.
4. Creation of a community hub where multiple public services will be available in the one place
5. Improvement/regeneration of District Centres (e.g. new homes, shopping facilities etc.)
6. Developing a space where businesses can access help and support and network with each other.

The two investment ideas that people said would make the biggest difference to their lives were:

- Investing in a new outdoor space for events and dining
- Improving Redditch Railway Station

The next two most frequently cited investments that would make a difference were:

- District centre improvement
- Town centre regeneration

The two ideas garnering the least enthusiasm were:

- Investing in a community hub
- A space for businesses to network and support each other.

Whilst most did not feel these were necessarily bad ideas, more residents felt that investment in other areas would be more impactful to them.

The following demographic differences relating to the level of support for each idea were also identified through the survey data:

- Whilst town regeneration was attractive to all, those aged 45 to 64 were particularly fond of this idea. 40% of those surveyed that said this would make a real difference to them were in this age category.
- Creation of a new, outdoor space for events and dining was particularly welcomed by those aged between 35 and 54, who made up 60% of those surveyed saying this would be impactful.
- The creation of an outdoor space also strongly appealed to people identifying as non-British White, with 75% of this sample population voicing strong support. Qualitative findings suggest this is perhaps due to many having come from towns and cities with similar open spaces, where these are seen as the heart of the community.
- The community hub idea tended to be favoured more by older ages – 66% of the survey sample feeling this could make a difference to them were over the age of 44.
- The residents who also own a business in Redditch were a little more likely to feel that investing in a business networking space would make a difference to them, although not significantly so. Generally, even those business owners who rated this idea felt other investment ideas should be prioritised.

Specific feedback on each investment idea is as follows:

*Town centre redevelopment*

- Residents support investment to change what is on offer in the town centre but do not just want 'more of the same'. People had a lot to say about the 'right kind' of retail, hospitality and entertainment - more local and independent shops and activities that transform the centre into a busy and vibrant place where people will want to socialise is what is being called for.
- More housing in the town centre did not attract universal support. Many people are concerned about the amount of new housing being built in Redditch, while others can see a case for housing being important to generate footfall and support town centre businesses.
- Similar feelings were expressed about new office space, with many people pointing to the amount of currently unused office space, and asking why these assets cannot be used before more capacity is added.

*Investment in Redditch Railway station*

- Introducing a second platform with the capacity for more trains would make a great difference to residents' lives – particularly to those who commute. An express train to Birmingham would be welcomed to reduce passenger congestion.
- Better facilities at the station, including a bigger ticket office, more shelter when waiting on trains and some eating/drinking options, such as a café with a seating/waiting area, are important to encourage travel by train.
- Improving the attractiveness of the station itself should go hand-in-hand with improving its surrounding area, which is felt to be somewhat derelict and underused.
- In the future, increasing the number of routes out of Redditch would continue to build upon train station investment and further strengthen the town's connectivity.

*A new public outdoor space for events and dining*

- It is important to ensure the right kind of restaurants, bars and entertainment events are hosted in the new space – a balance that people can choose from will attract more residents to use the space.
- For events being hosted, there is a strong call to ensure that there are options for a variety of ages – especially children and young people who are not well serviced by current offerings.
- Some suggested this could be a good opportunity for small and local food businesses to prosper – perhaps by incorporating a street food element that would allow local cafes and restaurants to have pop-ups or stalls.
- Some respondents were generally concerned about the maintenance of the site and are keen to ensure that the site is well maintained and used all year round, not just in the summer season.

*Public services hub*

- Overall, in comparison to the other potential investment ideas, there was less agreement about how important a community hub would be, and most would prioritise investment in other areas.

- Many residents could not see themselves using a facility like this regularly, especially for information they would expect to find online.
- Some linked this idea back to the 'one-stop-shop' services hubs which used to be in the district centres. They liked this model and suggested that service hubs at a district level could be an improvement to the local community, and would be more valuable than having a community hub in the town centre.

#### *District centre regeneration*

- Changes to some district centres – including Woodrow, Matchborough and Winyates – is welcomed. It is felt that some others – including Batchley, Hentend and Crabbs Cross – already serve their purpose well.
- Residents speak highly of the redevelopment of the Church Hill Centre, and would like to see that redevelopment used as the benchmark for investment in other areas.
- Any redevelopment should not come at the expense of knocking down or amalgamating existing district centres. District centres are seen as being at the heart of Redditch's communities, and there is no appetite to see two district centres merged into one.
- Generally, support for redevelopment in these areas came from those who live there and are more likely to use them. However, even those living in areas that they feel could do with redevelopment tended to think that investment to improve the town centre should come first.

#### *Business networking space*

- Some suggested this idea doesn't necessarily require a physical space – they saw it as something which could be achieved remotely through investment in creating an online space or hiring staff to facilitate business networking.
- The addition of night-school classes or similar to teach business skills would also provide networking opportunities and could be a useful way to foster entrepreneurship in Redditch.
- Overall, this is potentially a nice idea, but people doubt its likely effectiveness if it is not offered in conjunction with financial support and or/measure to help lower business operating costs.

#### Residents ongoing involvement in the Towns Deal

Overall there is a desire by residents to be involved as the Towns Deal progresses, although the degree to which they would like to be involved varies. Most of those surveyed (80%) want to be kept up to date on investment in the town, whilst 63% want be able to give feedback on ideas, and 55% would like to be able to contribute their own ideas.

In terms of being kept updated, social media was the most favoured communication channel by far. It was the most popular amongst citizens of all ages between 16 and 64. Those aged 64-75 suggested an online news page would be best, and those aged 75+ would prefer to be updated through a newsletter, in the same vein as the Redditch Advertiser. There is some appetite for direct updates to residents' emails as well.

## Conclusions

The consultation has engaged with a large and broad cross-section of citizens and highlights a range of ways that investment through the Towns Deal fund would make a genuine difference to peoples' lives.

The ideas that are supported by residents for future investment are wide-ranging rather than falling within a narrow set: they concern the regeneration of both the town and its district centres; they concern the many open spaces in the borough; they touch on active travel within the area and the town's connections with other places; and they embrace issues about skills, jobs and enterprise.

It is notable, and really encouraging, that when residents talked about what they would like to see investment being used for to help build a more exciting, vibrant and successful Redditch, there was a very close tie up with the six potential investment areas that have already been identified by the Redditch's Town Deal Board.

While support was shown for all of the Board's investment ideas, residents' priorities were for a new outdoor space for events and dining and improvements to the railway station, closely followed by regeneration of the town and district centres. There is also support for a community hub and a business networking space, but not as widespread as for the other investment ideas.



## 1. Introduction

The Social Marketing Gateway (SMG) was commissioned by North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration to conduct a community consultation with residents of Redditch about where investment could be made to make a difference to their lives. The purpose was to inform Redditch's Town Investment Plan, which will be submitted in an application for funding from the Towns Fund to improve Redditch as a place to live and work.

The Towns Fund is a £3.6 billion government funding scheme. The government has invited 101 towns across the country to develop proposals for a Town Deal. Redditch is one of the towns eligible to bid for up to £25m. The Town Deal will cover the whole of the Redditch borough.

The overarching aim of the Towns Fund is to drive the sustainable economic regeneration of towns to deliver long term economic and productivity growth through:

### **Urban regeneration**

Ensuring towns are thriving places for people to live and work by:

- Increasing density in town centres;
- Strengthening local economic assets, including local cultural assets;
- Site acquisition, preparation, remediation, and/or development; and
- Making full use of planning tools to bring strategic direction and change.

### **Skills and enterprise infrastructure**

- Driving private sector investment and small business development; and
- Ensuring towns have the space to support skills and small business development.

### **Connectivity**

- Developing local transport schemes that complement regional and national networks; and
- Supporting the delivery of improved digital connectivity.

Support from the local community is integral to Town Deal proposals. This public consultation was required as part of Redditch's bid to the Towns Fund to provide a genuine opportunity for citizens to be involved and help define the vision and strategy for the Town Deal investment plan.

## 2. Methodology

We used a mixed-methods approach, involving qualitative and quantitative engagement with over 650 local residents of Redditch. The qualitative engagement, which took the form of 12 focus groups and 12 depth interviews, aimed to gain depth insight into how residents of Redditch feel about it as a place to live, and where they could see opportunities for investment that could make a difference to their lives. The quantitative research involved a structured online survey, used to augment and validate the qualitative insight by extending reach to a greater number of residents.

### **Qualitative engagement**

Qualitative engagement took place using the Zoom online platform between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

Along with gathering current opinions on the town, residents were asked to think about their ideal vision of Redditch, what could be done to move towards this vision, where there are opportunities for investment, and what they think of 6 investment ideas that are currently on the table. The 6 ideas tabled were:

- Redevelopment in the town centre to create more housing and space for cafes, offices, and retail.
- Investment in Redditch Railway station to include a second platform and more trains in and out of Redditch.
- Creation of a new public outdoor space that can be used for events and outdoor dining.
- Creation of a community hub where multiple public services will be available in the one place
- Improvement/regeneration of District Centres (e.g. new homes, shopping facilities etc.)
- Developing a space where businesses can access help and support and network with each other.

To ensure all views were heard, a cross-section of the residents that broadly reflects the overall Redditch population was assembled, including a mix of ages, genders, ethnicities, family set-ups, ward residencies, socio-economic groups, and those with and without disabilities. The final sample consisted of 69 respondents, including:

- 29 males and 40 females
- A mix of ages between 18 and 74 years old
- 48 White British respondents and 21 respondents from a BAME or other ethnic background
- 16 disabled respondents
- A mix of ward residencies across Redditch borough

### **Quantitative engagement**

The online survey was available for residents to complete between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> November 2020. This survey was designed around the same lines of questioning as the qualitative tool, but was fashioned to be short and easy to complete, focusing mainly identifying the key things respondents wanted to see investment being made in, and having them rate the 6 current ideas on the table.

All residents of Redditch aged 16 or older were able to take part. The survey was promoted by the client team through email, social media, the council website, and the Redditch community forum. To encourage participation, a prize draw of £30 for 5 randomly selected respondents was included.

The final sample comprised 622 respondents, including:

- 244 males and 264 females
- 578 White British respondents, and 44 respondents from a BAME or other ethnic background
- 75 respondents with a disability

### **Limitations**

Using a mixed methods approach allowed us to canvass levels of support and opinions broadly by engaging with a large number of residents through the online survey, and also gain depth insight to understand the reasons and motivations behind residents' opinions through the focus groups and

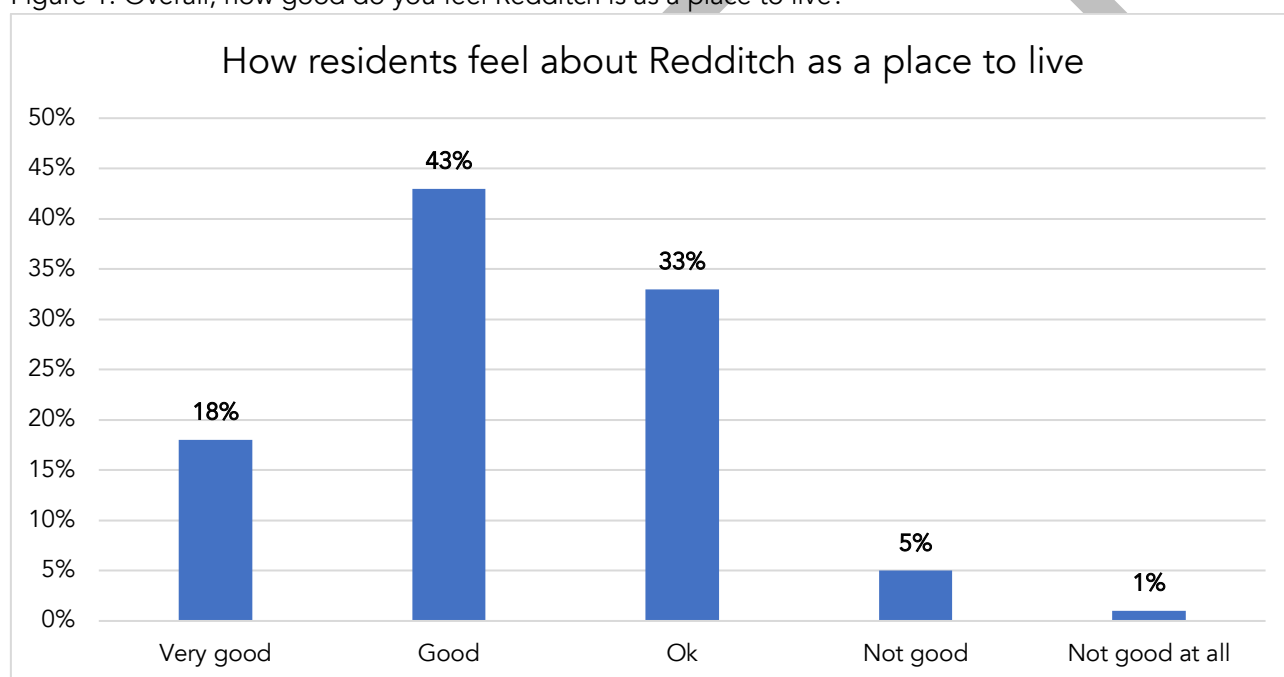
interviews. The two strands of engagement complement each other and provide strong basis for validating the findings, however, it is important to note that this is only a sample of the Redditch population, and on this basis all findings discussed are not wholly representative, and should be taken as indicative only.

### 3. Findings

As the findings from each engagement strand complement each other, qualitative and quantitative findings are presented together in the sections below. Where appropriate, quantitative data is presented first, to give a broad picture of the sample population's feelings about a particular issue, and is followed by supporting qualitative insight to provide further depth and draw out the key insights.

#### 3.1 Residents' feelings about Redditch

Figure 1: Overall, how good do you feel Redditch is as a place to live?



Base: 622

Close two two-thirds of survey sample feel that Redditch is a good place to live, with a further third feel that it is 'OK'. Few residents (6%) registered a negative response.

The best things about Redditch include: it is a quieter and more intimate place to live than bigger cities like Birmingham; it is in a great location and it is easy to travel to other towns and cities; and its large green spaces are very important to residents who feel Redditch has always been – and should remain – a green town. The well-designed footpath system, the schools, and the town's great history and culture are also strong points.

There are some downsides and opportunities for improvement. Redditch is frequently described, particularly by younger aged residents (16-29 years), as being a rather boring place with limited

things to do and no great entertainment draws. Many residents do not socialise here, preferring to travel outside of the town to spend leisure time.

A lack of entertainment for children and young people, limited shopping, and a lack of nice places to eat and drink were often highlighted. For many, poor maintenance of Redditch's assets is also a let-down - older residents in particular feel disappointed that Redditch has gradually lost its vibrancy and been in steady decline for some time. Aspects such as the poor lighting on footpaths, empty shops in the town centre, and many green spaces throughout Redditch being lost to new housing were also lamented.

"I have friends that used to come to Redditch – it used to be that they wanted to get away from Birmingham. Now they just don't do that – there's nothing to come to Redditch for unless you want to go to Wetherspoons." (F, 40, Astwood Bank)

"I love Redditch – I like the one-way systems, it's easy to get around." (F, 40, Greenlands)

"The care that went into Redditch when it was first built – it's just not there anymore." (F, 74, Winyates Green)

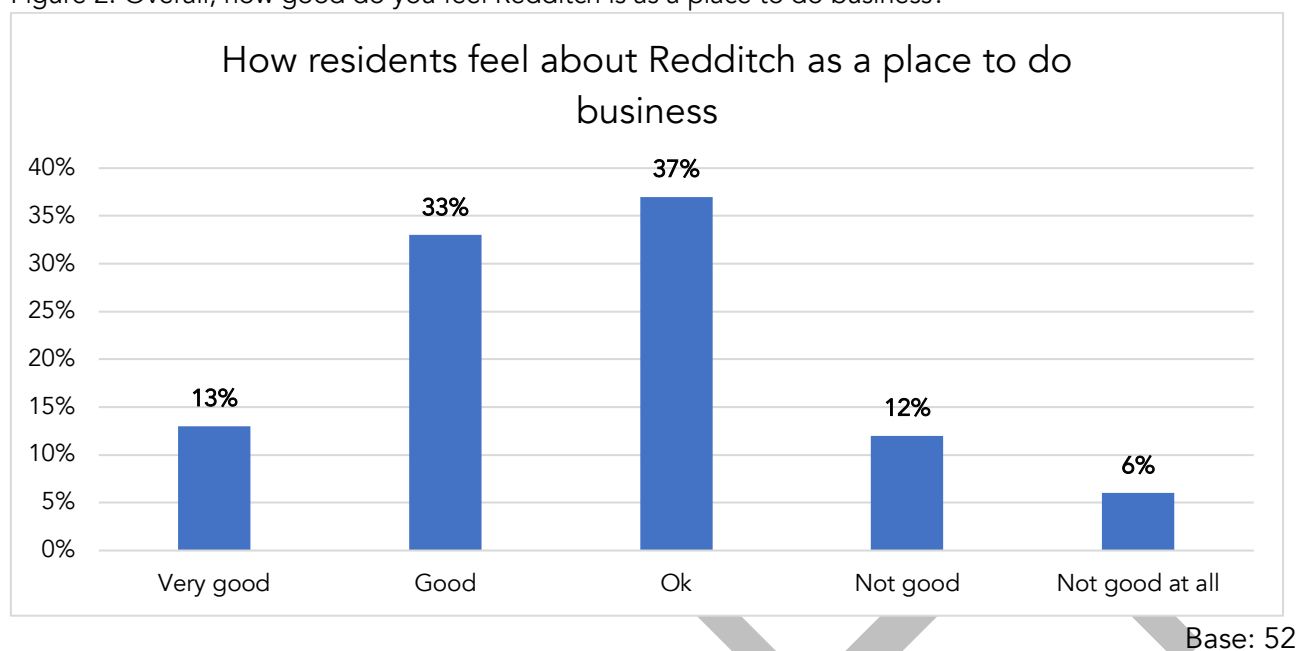
"There are some lovely outdoor areas on your doorstep." (F, 40, Church Hill)

"It's not too bad, but it's not the best. Within the region, probably Bromsgrove is a bit more interesting." (M, 40, Slovakian, Winyates)

#### Key Insights

- ✓ Generally people think Redditch is a good place to live, but it is not felt to be a good place to socialise.
- ✓ Key areas for improvement focus on making Redditch a more interesting place to live – particularly for young people. Better shopping, entertainment and leisure facilities would boost the town's atmosphere and reputation.
- ✓ The green spaces around Redditch are very important to residents, and all are keen to ensure Redditch remains a 'green town'.

Figure 2: Overall, how good do you feel Redditch is as a place to do business?



Views on Redditch as a place to do business were mixed, and are on the whole less positive than peoples' feelings towards Redditch as a place to live. Whereas a third of those who own businesses in the borough and gave feedback through the survey (52 residents) felt it is a good place for business, for nearly two-fifths it is just okay. For almost one-fifth it is not a good place for business.

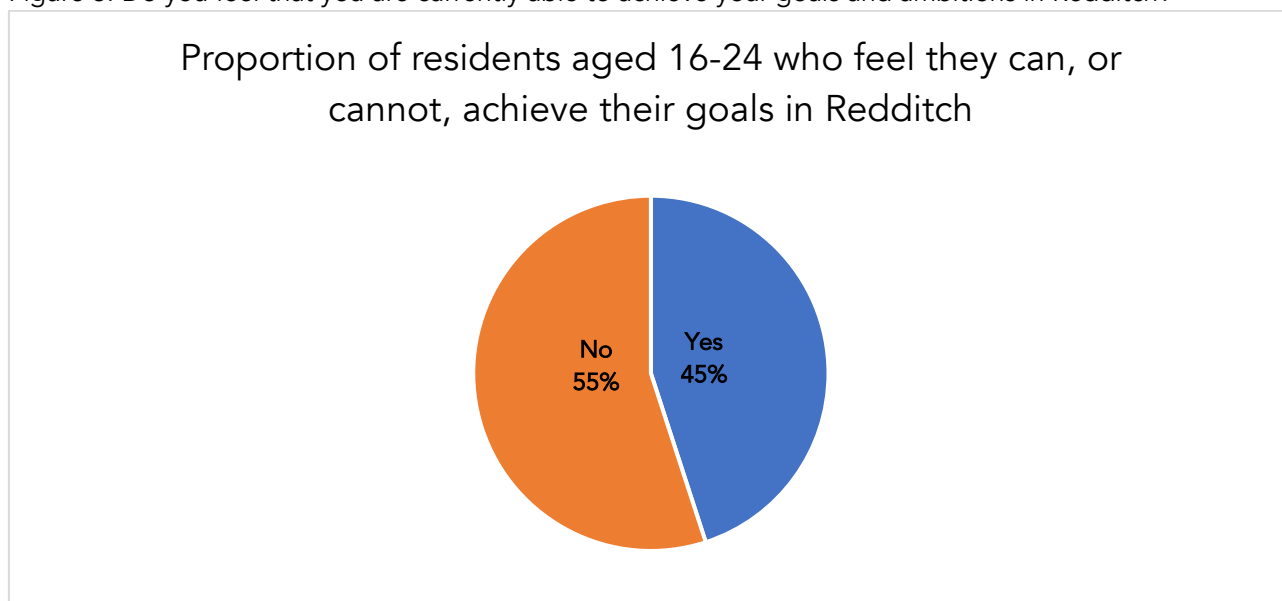
There is a general perception that it is hard to start a business in Redditch, and more support for small businesses starting out would be welcome. Many respondents, including those who do not own businesses, commented on the costs faced by businesses in the town centre: believing that high rent and rate charges is one reason why many local and independent shops struggle to survive.

#### Key Insights

- ✓ Whilst most business owners in Redditch do not feel it is a bad place to do business, largely it is felt to be just 'ok' in this regard, suggesting improvements could be made.
- ✓ High rent and rate charges are felt to be a key barrier to businesses starting – particularly local and independent shops who want to be situated in the town centre.



Figure 3: Do you feel that you are currently able to achieve your goals and ambitions in Redditch?



Base: 56

Over half (55%) of younger residents (16-24 years) responding to the survey feel that, as things stand, they cannot achieve their goals or ambitions in Redditch. Limited opportunities to start and progress a career, access good careers advice, or secure local training and apprenticeships were all perceived as barriers to fulfilling their ambitions.

The limited range of courses on offer at the local college was specifically mentioned as a factor that forces young people to look outside of the borough for further education and training. Overall, this leads to a feeling that Redditch is not a place that places a high priority on encouraging people to grow and learn, or supports them to do so. Young people who described themselves as being ambitious felt they would have to leave Redditch to achieve their goals.

"I know a lot of people who struggled to find an apprenticeship, so they have to travel to Birmingham or Worcester." (M, 18, Lodge Park)

"More job opportunities, better pay, more funding for critical services like NHS and mental health." (F, 16-24)

"I want to study for the video games industry and Redditch doesn't offer any sort of specific course or place I can go for help. I have to go to Bromsgrove for my college course." (F, 16-24)

"More professional advice places and better facilities." (M, 16-24)

The above view is not, however, universal. Many young people do feel they can achieve their goals in Redditch and point to the support they receive from the community, the college and the town's good transport connections. A distinction seems to be that those whose chosen careers begin with courses available at the local college feel that they are well supported to pursue opportunities in the borough, whereas those who cannot access the course they desire in Redditch feel less able to achieve their ambitions there.

"People supporting one another." (F, 16-24)

"Easy travel to places such as Birmingham via rail. Great road connections to and from the town." (M, 16-24, BAME)

"Really good college course available with staff that are supportive and a host of good places to get experience." (F, 16-24)

### Key Insights

- ✓ Whilst most young people do not feel they can achieve their goals in Redditch, a significant proportion feel they can do this. This is due to good support community and college support, and transport links to help them travel elsewhere for education.
- ✓ A characteristic difference between those young people who do and do not feel they can achieve their goals seems to be that those who are able to access education relating to their chosen field in the borough feel better supported to achieve their ambitions, whereas those who must travel outwith the borough for this do not feel Redditch supports their goals.
- ✓ To better support all young people, a greater course offering at the local college and more support and advice to pursue local opportunities is desired.

## 3.2 How citizens would like to see investment used

While Redditch offers its citizens a lot of good things – e.g. access to open, green spaces and close proximity to surrounding towns and cities – people do feel things could be better, and offered a rich mix of suggestions for how investment could improve life for them and their families. Below summarises what citizens would like to see happen under the headings of the Towns Fund's three main categories: urban regeneration, skills and enterprise, and connectivity.

### 3.2.1 Urban Regeneration

People are generally satisfied with Redditch, but there is also disappointment. For older residents, there is a feeling that the town has declined, and important things have been lost. For younger residents (including people who have moved here, some from overseas), Redditch is not the attractive, vibrant town they would ideally like it to be. In terms of urban regeneration, key things that are really important to people and where they would like to see new investment being made are: green spaces, cultural assets, and the town centre.

#### Town Centre

The Town Centre is the first thing most citizens thought of when asked where investment could make a difference to their lives. There is a general feeling that the Town Centre has declined. Empty units, little variety in retail, and a lack of nice bars and restaurants were all evidence of this. Investment in the centre would bring much needed life and vibrancy.

Citizens of all ages called for investment in leisure, entertainment and the night-time economy. Nicer restaurants and bars, things for young people to do, and a better balance of shops – independent and small, local businesses – would give residents more reason to use and socialise in the centre.

People want measures that will find new uses for existing unoccupied spaces which contribute to the centre's 'run-down' feeling, rather than for investment in new premises. Many suspect that high business costs (e.g. rent and rates) contribute to the town centre's difficulties and called for action on this front.

In terms of entertainment, old and young alike want the town centre to offer more options for young people. Bringing in activities such as bowling, escape rooms or entertainment complexes, as well as nice places to eat and drink, would go a long way to making Redditch feel like a town for everyone. Having more options for young people, (thus reducing loitering around the centre) would also improve citizens' sense of safety in the town centre at night.

"We need more nice places to go – to have something to eat, have a drink, have a sit down." (M, 45, Polish, Abbeydale)

"The town used to be wonderful but it's not worth going up now." (F, 74, Winyates Green)

"That's always been a downside of Redditch – the town on a Friday or Saturday night. Because there's not much to do you just gets pubs, clubs...people spilling out drunk. They get a little bit rowdy...if you're just minding your own business it can be quite uncomfortable." (M, 46, Winyates West)

"When they get to 18, it's the pub or nothing, and I don't think this is necessarily the route everyone should have to go down." (F, 40, Astwood Bank)

## Green Spaces

Green spaces are very important to residents. There is a strong appetite for investment in these areas to boost their attractiveness and make them more practical as places for families to go and enjoy time together.

Adding facilities (e.g. toilets, cafes, playparks and other leisure options) to the existing parkland areas drew wide support. For example, many residents want toilet facilities added to Morton Stanley park, where the lack of such puts people off spending more time there. People want to see more of what the Lake has by way of facilities introduced to other green areas. They also want to see these spaces being used for events and festivals to improve the quality of life for existing citizens, attract more people to come and experience Redditch, and generally boost image and pride in the town.

In addition to Morton Stanley and Arrow Valley Parks, people would welcome more green spaces to break up the 'concrete jungle', keep the 'green feel' of the town, and provide local parks for children to play in. This partly reflects concerns that Redditch's identity as a town of greenery and outdoor spaces is being undermined by the amount of new houses being built.

Investing in, and ensuring good maintenance of, the network of footpaths in the Borough was mentioned often. Poor lighting and litter reduces their appeal. Also, many are not felt to be well-known. People are aware of the big parks, but not the many smaller walks available. Creating information and promotional resources was suggested to increase public awareness and use of Redditch's paths and walkways.

"Arrow Valley Park is fabulous, but it needs to be maintained to a high standard, and all of the footpaths and country paths need to be maintained and safe for us as we're getting older."  
(M, 70, Winyates)

"The parks are the best thing about Redditch." (F, 55, Astwood Bank)

### Cultural Assets

Investing in Redditch's history and culture to raise awareness of, and enable and encourage more people to tap into, these valuable assets drew support from many. Enthusiasm was particularly strong amongst older age groups who were aware of how much history and culture the town has to offer and see this as a way instil community pride and enhance the town's image.

People feel that some assets are hidden away that should be featured, including the John Bonham Memorial, the old architecture of the town, and the mural at The Range. And they are keen to see physical spaces around these assets being better utilised to help bring these historical and cultural assets to life. Juxtaposing outdoor dining with older town architecture, for example, is one such suggestion that would create a vibrant environment in historic localities.

The Palace Theatre is in need of refurbishment. Also, many people do not use it because they do not know what is on. Those that have been point to a lack of atmosphere and nowhere to go before or after a show. There was a feeling that if it could be used for a wider range of activities (e.g. in the arts and for young people) then this could help secure its future as an important and appreciated building in the life of the town.

"I didn't know there were any cultural things in Redditch, they aren't really shouted about." (F, 25, Woodrow)

"We could bring back life into Redditch if we make the most of the attractions in Redditch – like putting lighting up on this mural and making the most of the area." (M, 70, Winyates)

Urban regeneration is, therefore, important to the great majority of residents. They want to be able to spend time and money in Redditch and feel proud of their town. A more vibrant town centre, making more of the town's cultural and historical assets, and having more and better quality green spaces around the Borough would all help.

### Key Insights

- ✓ Investment in the town centre would make a significant difference to the lives of residents across the borough. There is a sense that this should be the 'heart' of the community, and its state of decline has a negative impact on how residents perceive the town.
- ✓ A balance in shops in the centre, eating and drinking options, and entertainment offerings would allow residents to feel that is a town to spend leisure time in as well as live in.
- ✓ Providing more for young people to do is strongly called for across all ages, to better service this group and improve town centre safety.
- ✓ Adding facilities to Redditch's green spaces would enhance these already important natural assets. Toilets in all parks, cafes, bars and more outdoor play areas for children will give them an extra boost.
- ✓ Making the most of Redditch's cultural assets will instil community pride by using what the town already has. Older residents are disappointed that these have been hidden away, and want to see features being made of the town's rich culture.

### 3.2.2 Skills and Enterprise

Support for small businesses to help them flourish in the borough, and learning, further education and skills development are all areas that residents talked about needing improvement. Redditch was also generally seen as a town with untapped potential in terms of enterprise, and additional support in areas like networking, promotion, and setting up new businesses is required.

#### Supporting small businesses

Residents want to see support for small businesses. They perceive enterprises as struggling to remain open due to a lack of start up support and high rent costs. People want to see investment that will help local businesses to flourish and contribute to the local economy.

It was very frequent for people to suggest that rent costs in the town centre are too high and affect businesses' ability to remain open. Some form of financial support for small businesses in the town centre was frequently mentioned as a way to encourage local and independent businesses to succeed. Some suggested that providing subsidised rent for the first few months of a business being open would be a way to fill the existing empty units in the town centre, positively impacting the attractiveness of the town.

"I think these high rents and rates are why we see so many empty units. It's the same in both the Kingfisher and on the High Street; the high street is full of bookies and charity shops." (F, 55, Astwood Bank, Data Analyst)

"Offer a month or two free to get them known. If they become popular they'll start making money." (M, 28, Woodrow, Chef)



There was some discussion about using investment to help promote local businesses through events or support with promotional efforts (e.g. social media or outdoor media). This included creating promotional spaces within the existing centre to spotlight local businesses.

"I love the idea of investing in small businesses. Everyone working locally, and promoting each other, can only be of benefit to the local economy. I think these small businesses – providing services for people who live and work in the town - could be complemented by businesses like Amazon coming and providing large amounts of jobs for local people." (M, 57, Headless Cross, Travel business owner)

### Learning and skills development

There is a perception that Redditch does not offer enough variety in learning and training opportunities, especially for young people. Residents saw this as an area where investment could lead to better learning and career opportunities for people of all ages.

Having a local college campus is positive, but (for many) the course offering at Heart of Worcestershire College is disappointing. Residents complained about having to travel outside of Redditch to take up courses in areas such as electrics, plumbing, health and safety, and food preparation due to the lack of these courses at the local campus. The limited range of courses available locally feeds into the perspective that Redditch does not particularly value or encourage learning and skills development for younger members of the workforce.

Investment in adult learning would also be welcomed. Having no evening or adult-only learning classes creates a barrier to older aged residents who want to engage in further learning or training. Those with job or childcare commitments struggle to fit with the class schedules at the College. Also, as some older residents would be uncomfortable attending classes with primarily younger students, evening learning options would be important for them to engage.

"When I had to do health and safety and food prep courses I had to go to Bromsgrove college instead of Redditch college. I understand they don't have the facilities to cater to that course." (M, 28, Woodrow, Chef)

"There's no night classes, there's no adult school, there's no career development. When I wanted to develop myself further education-wise here, I had to go to class with a bunch of kids. I was looking for night school, adult school – there's nothing like that in Redditch." (M, 40, Matchborough East, Nurse).

Limited careers guidance and advice for young people at the end of high school or sixth form college is felt to discourage some from pursuing work in the borough. Investment in this type of service could make young people more aware of opportunities locally, and potentially encourage them to stay in Redditch.

The availability of apprenticeships was commented on: these are seen as hard to get. Many young people have to travel out of Redditch to secure an apprenticeship. Some residents called for an

apprenticeship scheme that would also help small businesses locally – supporting local enterprise to recruit and train more young people.

"I know a lot of people who struggled to find an apprenticeship, so they have to travel to Birmingham or Worcester." (M, 18, Lodge Park, Sales Assistant)

### Key Insights

- ✓ Support for small businesses, largely through loans, subsidies or support with start-up costs, would be strongly welcomed. Helping more local, small businesses to flourish is anticipated to have a positive impact on the local economy and reputation.
- ✓ Lack of support to find apprenticeships through a scheme or otherwise, and limited careers guidance after school, is also a challenge for many looking to pursue a career in the borough. Investing in better support for residents – particularly young people - to find and apply for local opportunities would improve residents' outlook significantly.
- ✓ The limited course offering at Heart of Worcestershire's Redditch Campus is disappointing. This leads many to feel Redditch is not a place that values or encourages further education as they are forced to travel elsewhere. Additionally, having no adult-only learning or night classes contributes to this reputation further, and creates a barrier to many adults gaining extra skills due to scheduling conflicts or discomfort attending classes with younger students.

### 3.2.3 Connectivity

There is a fairly widespread view that Redditch could and should be better connected – both within the borough and with surrounding towns and cities. Citizens want to see improvements in transport infrastructure, including public transport, the town's road network, and attractive active travel options. There is also an appetite to see investment in digital connectivity, especially among those working from home for whom good internet coverage is imperative.

#### Buses

Many called for investment in Redditch's bus network to make it more convenient and frequent. Providing more – particularly later running – services, introducing modern buses, increasing reliability and establishing new practical routes around the borough would improve the service and encourage residents to use the bus more often.

Areas on the outskirts of Redditch are not felt to be well connected with the rest of the town, and bus routes do not easily connect residents with nearby areas (e.g. Worcester and Bromsgrove). An increased number of routes and direct services around the districts of Redditch – and with other local towns – would be welcomed by those who rely on public transport.

A reputation of unreliability – created by the poor-standard of buses and quality of service provided – coupled with the fact that there is only one scheduled bus an hour on many routes, has left many residents feeling that waiting on a bus that may not arrive is not worth the risk. Some who have to travel outside of Redditch to access certain hospital and health services chose not to use the bus and pay for taxis to ensure they get to appointments on time.

The lack of late-running public transport was a recurring gripe. Only having services during daytime hours makes things difficult for those working later shifts. It is also a barrier to Redditch's night-time economy, as those living outside of the town centre need to get a taxi into town at night - as they do if they are going to other towns to access better leisure choices.

Some residents would like to see real-time passenger Information introduced. Being able to see live estimations of when buses are due at stops, rather than relying on timetables, could help instil greater trust in the bus service.

"I believe Redditch needs a better transport infrastructure, my business is on Park farm and we work shifts my staff cannot access public transport to get them to work at 6am and get them home a 10pm when they finish." (M, 65-74, Business Owner)

"[The key thing I'd like to see invested in is] more electric buses and more and meaningful routes with better accessibility and digital route and timetable at all bus stops." (F, 55-64)

"We have been raising [the lack of public transport to hospitals] so much. People really struggle to go...If you want to go to Worcester for an appointment or treatment you can't rely on public transport. And the last bus is 4 o'clock or something, and not on a Sunday." (F, 48, Town Centre, Hospital Worker)

## Trains

Investment in the train station is definitely a priority for many. The lack of facilities makes for an uninviting station environment. Travellers using the train service would like to have a larger indoor area to stand in, a small shop or café to buy food and drinks, and a covered platform. Regenerating the station would also create a better impression of Redditch for people travelling in from other localities.

Additionally, rail options are limited, with trains only running to and from Birmingham, with no options of express trains for commuters from Redditch. More links to other areas would be welcomed.

"The train station could do with a bit of upgrading. The area where you get tickets could have more there - a bar or a café would be nice to sit at and relax when waiting on a train." (F, 55, Astwood Bank)

"In transportation terms, Redditch is not well connected. The railway line finishes at Redditch and goes north only. The station itself is old and unmanned. To get anywhere nearby, like Worcester, it takes two trains which isn't convenient." (M, 69, Winyates)

## Active Travel

Redditch has an extensive network of footpaths and roads, but they are often too busy to safely accommodate both pedestrians/drivers as well as cyclists. Investment in Redditch's cycle network – namely the introduction of more cycle lanes – would be very welcome, inspiring more people to cycle, and more often, around the town.

Investment to ensure Redditch's footpaths and underpasses are maintained and well-lit at night-time would be broadly welcomed. Coupled with investment in cycle routes to take cyclists off the walkways, this would increase feelings of safety amongst the public and ensure that residents can use Redditch's expansive network of footpaths with confidence.

"It is currently difficult and dangerous to cycle or walk along Evesham Road/Mount Pleasant to the town centre because of fast traffic, narrow pavements and no cycle lanes." (M, 55-64)

"It's so dark I don't feel safe going through the underpasses anymore." (F, 74, Winyates)

"We're being encouraged to 'travel green' and to do outdoor fitness. The most basic requirement for this is safe pavements. In recent years, they have fallen into disrepair and things like trimming of adjacent hedge overgrowth and leaf clearing are not being done often enough." (F. 45-54)

## Road Network & Infrastructure

There is a feeling that while new housing has been built around the town, the implications with respect to extra traffic generated on the town's roads have not been fully considered. Investing in strategies to reduce traffic and parking congestion would be welcomed, such as traffic calming initiatives, more school transport, and further roads being added around amenities such as schools. Parking around the borough and in the town centre was also raised as a key issue. Reduction in parking charges or a period of free parking could help to draw footfall into the town. Residents would also like to see investment in charging points for electronic vehicles in order to future-proof the town as e-vehicles become more popular.

New signposting around town would also help people better navigate Redditch's expansive road network. Some residents report it is very easy to get lost.

"In Redditch they just seem to squash in houses wherever they can, without thinking about how much traffic on the road this will generate; I think the roads could be sorted – it'd be good to see some traffic calming measures, especially round the schools." (F, 55, Astwood Bank)

"Parking would be another area for investment – short stay and disabled parking to encourage people to pop up to the centre. If you want to go to the bank, you have to go to the town centre. If you want to go to the town centre, you have to pay to park. You can't do free banking." (M, 65, Oakenshaw)

## Digital Connectivity

Improving digital networks – both phone and internet – especially in the town centre was suggested by a sizeable number of citizens as a possible area for new investment. Several people mentioned the need for improved digital connectivity in the centre, especially public Wi-Fi and a better phone signal in black spots. The current situation is inconvenient and important to find a solution to.

There are also some areas within the borough that still generally struggle with network connectivity, including Astwood Bank, Callowhill and Bromsgrove Road. With so many people now working from home, and with many expecting to continue to do so in the months and years ahead, ensuring good phone and internet network coverage across the borough is particularly important for citizens and businesses alike.

"Internet connectivity is the key to growing businesses and offering services. With COVID companies are working from home. The home has become a place of work and family life. Investment should be on getting the whole of Redditch onto a fibre network." (M, 35-44)

"Digitally, the town centre isn't very well connected, which can make it difficult to go into town with other people if you plan on splitting up. Or you might not go shopping if you think someone is likely to be trying to reach you." (M, 30, Brockhill)

"Down the road in Callowhill is particularly bad; I think that's because it is in a natural dip. It'd be great to see some money spent to sort this." (F, 38, Hunt End)

## Key Insights

- ✓ There is room for improvement in Redditch's public transport systems. More frequent, later running and reliable bus services, connecting to more routes within and outwith Redditch, are desired. The current gaps in services affect many residents in significant ways, such as making it impossible for them to use public transport to get to and from work, contributing to difficulties accessing healthcare, and impacting desirability to spend a night out in Redditch.
- ✓ Investment in Redditch Train Station to make it more inviting, with more warm and dry places for travellers to stand, more seating and the introduction of a café or shop would encourage more residents to use this mode of transport. It is also hoped this would give a better first impression of Redditch to visitors.
- ✓ To encourage more active travel – such as cycling and walking – the maintenance of Redditch's expansive network of footpaths and cycle lanes is imperative. Ensuring these are well lit and well-maintained will make them safer and more attractive.
- ✓ Updating Redditch's road network and infrastructure to be more in line with the increased population would help to make the borough a more appealing place to live. Many feel that traffic and parking congestion has increased as houses are being built and are frustrated that road infrastructure has not been updated to account for this.
- ✓ Ensuring good mobile and broadband coverage across all areas of the borough is vital. Inconsistent coverage in the town centre makes it difficult for residents to plan spending time there. Poor coverage in other areas across the borough is a challenge for those working from home – a significant population in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.



### 3.3 Current project ideas

Six ideas which have already been put forward as areas for investment by Redditch's Town Deal Board were tested with residents to canvas the level of support for each. These six ideas are:

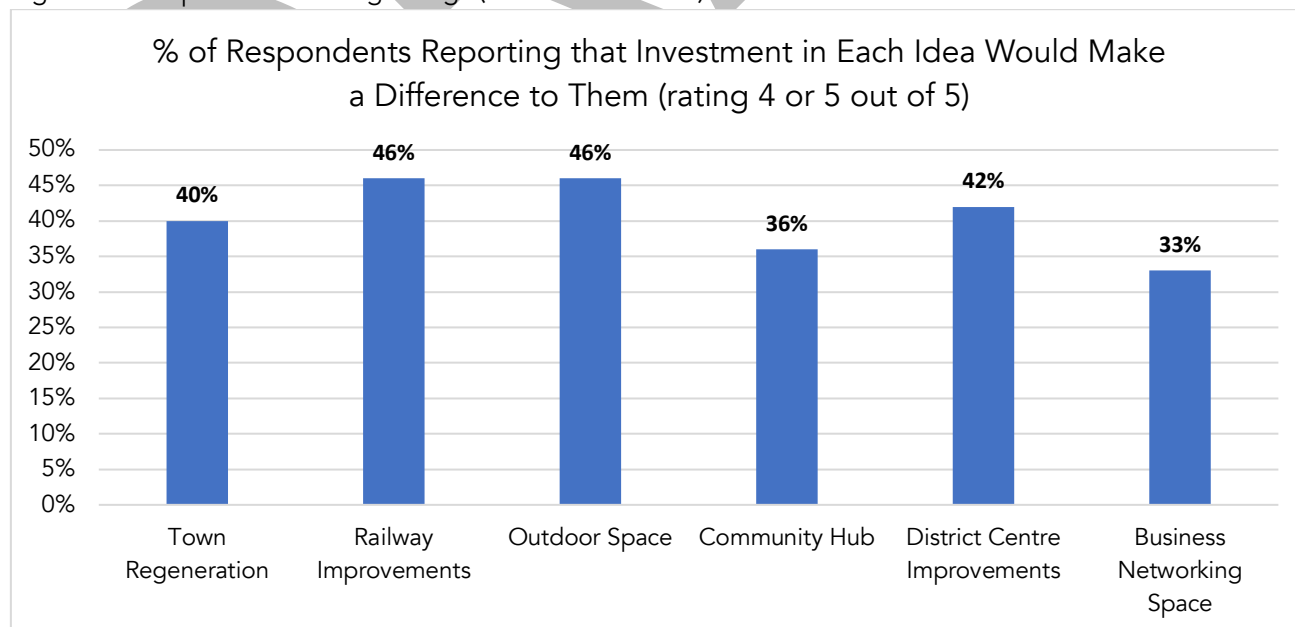
1. Redevelopment in the town centre to create more housing and space for cafes, offices, and retail.
2. Investment in Redditch Railway station to include a second platform and more trains in and out of Redditch.
3. Creation of a new public outdoor space that can be used for events and outdoor dining.
4. Creation of a community hub where multiple public services will be available in the one place.
5. Improvement/regeneration of District Centres (e.g. new homes, shopping facilities etc.)
6. Developing a space where businesses can access help and support and network with each other.

The sections below show the strength of support for each idea. Ratings out of 5 for how much difference each idea would make to residents, gathered through the online survey, show the general level of support for each idea. Discussions with residents through the qualitative engagement provided insight into why, or why not, each idea would make a difference to them. Residents' strength of feeling about all of the ideas is presented first to give an overall comparative view, and is followed by more detailed sections on each individual idea.

#### 3.3.1 Comparing residents' support across the investment ideas

Respondents to the online survey were asked to rate each of the 6 ideas out of 5, where 1 meant that the idea would make no difference to their life, and 5 meant that it would make a big difference to their life. Figure 10 shows the percentage of respondents selecting 4 or 5 for each investment idea – in other words, indicating a difference would be made to them from investment in this.

Figure 4: Comparison of strong ratings (i.e. 4 or 5 out of 5) for each investment idea



Base: 622

The two investment ideas that people said would make the biggest difference to their lives were:

- Investing in a new outdoor space for events and dining
- Improving Redditch Railway Station

In both cases, 46% of the survey respondents claimed this change would make a difference to them.

The next two most frequently cited investments that would make a difference were:

- District centre improvement
- Town centre regeneration

The two ideas garnering the least enthusiasm were:

- Investing in a community hub
- A space for businesses to network and support each other.

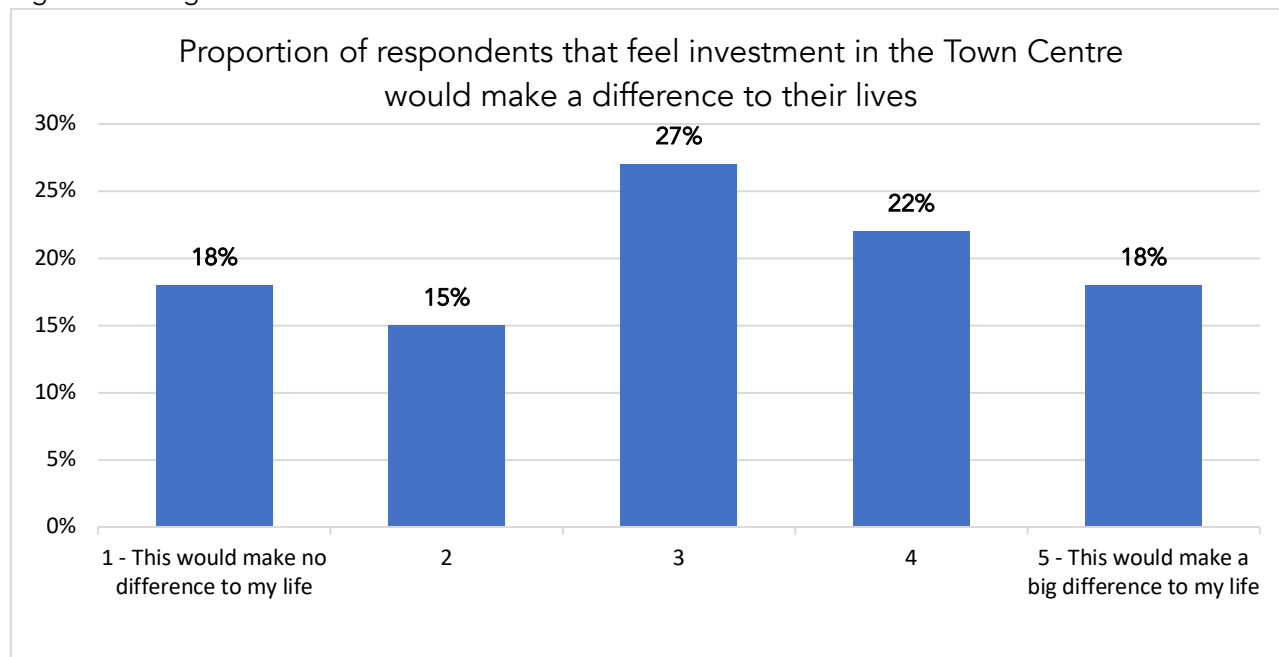
Whilst most did not feel these were necessarily bad ideas, more residents felt that investment in other areas would be more impactful to them.

There were also some interesting demographic differences in peoples' response to the investment ideas that were identified through the survey data:

- Town centre regeneration was attractive to all ages and feedback tells us that no group feels that well catered for by the town centre at present. However, those aged 45 to 64 made up two-fifths of the survey sample who felt this would make a real difference to them, showing this is a group who would strongly like more to draw them to the centre.
- Creation of a new, outdoor space for events and dining, which for many went hand in hand with town centre regeneration, was particularly welcomed by those aged between 35 and 54, who made up 60% of the survey population saying this would make a difference to them. It came across strongly that this group are keen to see new and interesting things to do in Redditch, such as eating and drinking outside, so they can socialise in their own town rather than go elsewhere. This is also a group in which many have children and are looking for family activities, so support here reflects this group's belief that this would be an ideal space to go for family days out.
- The creation of an outdoor space also strongly appealed to people identifying as non-British White, with three-quarters of this sample in the survey voicing strong support. This is perhaps due to many having come from towns and cities with similar open spaces – respondents from Poland or Slovakia suggested that this sounded similar to the town squares from their hometowns, which were vibrant and attractive places to spend time, and in many ways the heart of the community.
- The community hub idea tended to be favoured more by older ages – two-thirds of the survey sample feeling this could make a difference to them were over the age of 44.
- The residents who also own a business in Redditch were a little more likely to feel that investing in a business networking space would make a difference to them, although not significantly so. Generally, even those business owners who rated this idea highly favoured other areas for investment – such as town regeneration, roads and green spaces - more. This suggests this is not a priority for investment from a residents' perspective, even if they are a business owner.

### 3.3.2 Redevelopment in the Town Centre

Figure 5: Ratings of how much of a difference investment in the town centre would make to residents' lives



Base: 622

Views were mixed on what difference town centre regeneration would make to peoples' lives. For two fifths of the survey sample (40%), town regeneration would make a sizeable difference (scoring this 4 or 5). However, a third did not feel that regenerating the town centre would make much of a difference to them (scoring this 1 or 2).

However, as noted above, the town centre was often the first thing that came to mind when residents were asked what could be improved about Redditch. Support for redevelopment reflects a general desire for a stronger and better image as a place to live, work and play. Older residents fondly remember Redditch as having an attractive and thriving centre and would welcome investment to return it to past glories. Improving the town's image would also attract people into the town, boost the economy and make it a livelier place.

People want to see a greater variety of shops and 'nice' places to eat and drink: bars and restaurants for couples and families, as opposed to simply pubs or clubs. Having more opportunities to socialise locally at night, rather than having to travel to nearby cities and towns, is certainly attractive to many.

Families, particularly with children in their teenage years, felt that improving the town centre would make a significant difference to their lives as there is little on offer for young people. Retail and entertainment facilities that young people can enjoy would reinforce the feeling that Redditch is 'a town for everyone.'

Improving safety was an important reason behind support for town centre redevelopment – particularly for older residents who felt they were vulnerable, and among those with young children.

Improving the retail, leisure and hospitality offer in the town centre would make it both a busier and safer place at night.

### Key Insights

- ✓ Residents support investment to change what is on offer in the town centre and attract a variety of new retail and leisure facilities. They do not just want 'more of the same'. People had a lot to say about the 'right kind' of retail, hospitality and entertainment. More local and independent shops and activities that transform the centre into a busy and vibrant place where people will want to socialise is what is being called for.
- ✓ Specific suggestions included: a leisure and entertainment complex with attractions for children and young people; nice bars and restaurants; an improved, and thriving, marketplace; an indoor street food market; and more bistros and cafés where people can sit and have a coffee outside or inside with friends.
- ✓ More housing in the town centre did not attract universal support. Many people are concerned about the amount of new housing being built in Redditch, while others can see a case for housing being important to generate footfall and support town centre businesses.
- ✓ Similar feelings were expressed about new office space, with many people pointing to the amount of currently unused space, and asking why these assets cannot be used before more capacity is added.
- ✓ Hence, in terms of new activities in the town centre, housing and commercial property certainly comes below improving the centre's retail and hospitality offer as the priority for most people

"I only go into the town centre if I have to. I'd love to be able to go for a mooch around." (F, 44, Winyates West)

"We want to see more investment in recreation, less of the housing." (M, 57, Headless Cross)

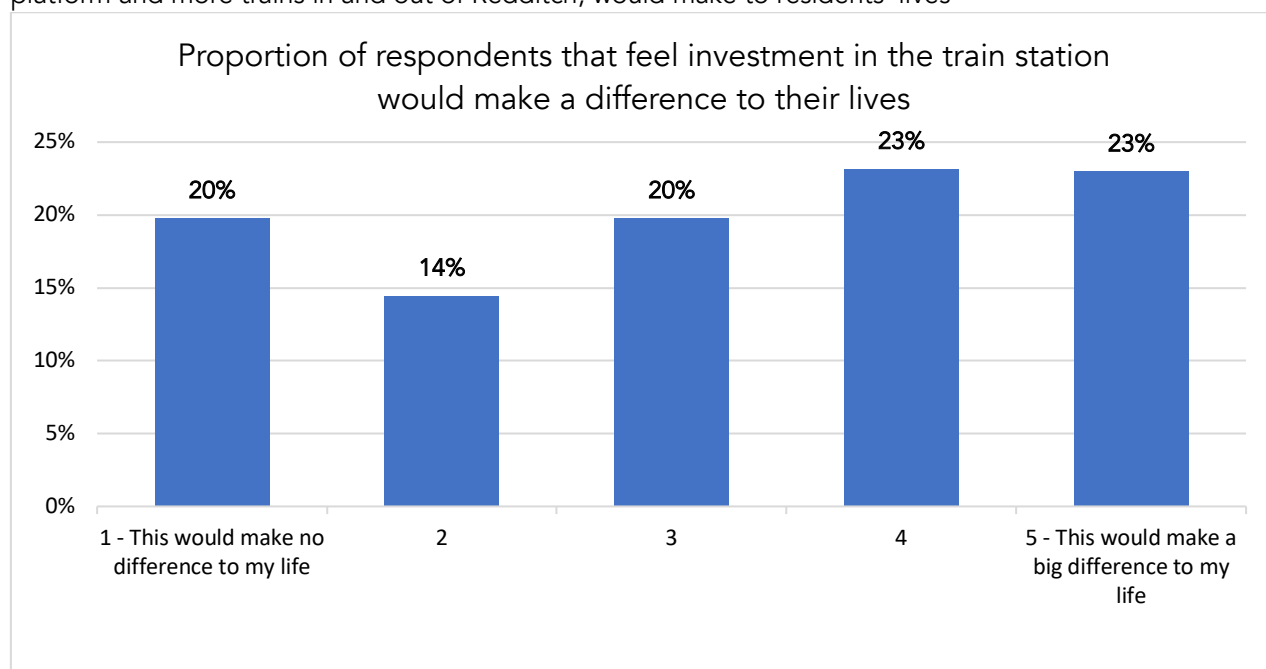
"It would be really great have somewhere for the children. Somewhere to eat, bowling, an arcade. Somewhere so we know where they are and that they're safe. (F, 40, Greenlands)

"I'd like to go on a nice date with my girlfriend in town but there isn't really anywhere I can go for that." (M, 26, Oakenshaw South)

"It's all nails and phones...we seem to have a lot of the same thing, rather than something different. We could do with a bit of a variety. If you want variety you have to venture out to Birmingham or somewhere." (F, 44, BAME, Crabbs Cross)

### 3.3.3 Investment in Redditch Railway Station

Figure 6: Ratings of how much of a difference investment in Redditch Train Station, to add a second platform and more trains in and out of Redditch, would make to residents' lives



Base: 622

There was also a mixed response to this investment idea. For almost half of the survey sample (46%), an updated station with an extra platform and more services running would make a positive difference (scoring this 4 or 5). Just over a third felt that this investment would have little-to-no impact on their lives (scoring this a 1 or 2).

Those who use the train for commuting generally find it convenient. However – due to Redditch being the first stop on the line to Birmingham – trains often become uncomfortably busy at peak times. The capacity to run more services on the line would help, especially if this included running an express train to Birmingham. Residents feel that as more people are moving to Redditch, the need for more and better train services is vital. There was also a desire to see more routes to places other than Birmingham, however residents' appreciated that this is a big project, and may be outwith the realms of the Towns Fund investment.

There is a strong call to improve the railway station itself. Having more welcoming environment, warm and dry areas for travellers to stand, a café or small shop, a bigger ticket office, longer station opening hours, and more seating would significantly improve travellers' journeys. The lack of facilities at the station at present makes train travel off-putting, leading people to travel by car instead.

As well as making train travel more appealing and comfortable, some suggested that investment in the train station is important in conjunction with other ideas to draw footfall into Redditch: the train station is the first thing many visitors will see and improving it could boost the town's image.



### Key Insights

- ✓ Introducing a second platform with the capacity for more trains would make a great difference to residents' lives – particularly to those who commute. An express train to Birmingham would also be welcomed to reduce passenger congestion.
- ✓ Better facilities at the station, including a bigger ticket office, more shelter when waiting on trains and some eating/drinking options, such as a café with a seating/waiting area, are important to encourage travel by train.
- ✓ Improving the attractiveness of the station itself should go hand-in-hand with improving its surrounding area, which is felt to be somewhat derelict and underused.
- ✓ In the future, increasing the number of routes out of Redditch would continue to build upon train station investment and further strengthen the town's connectivity.

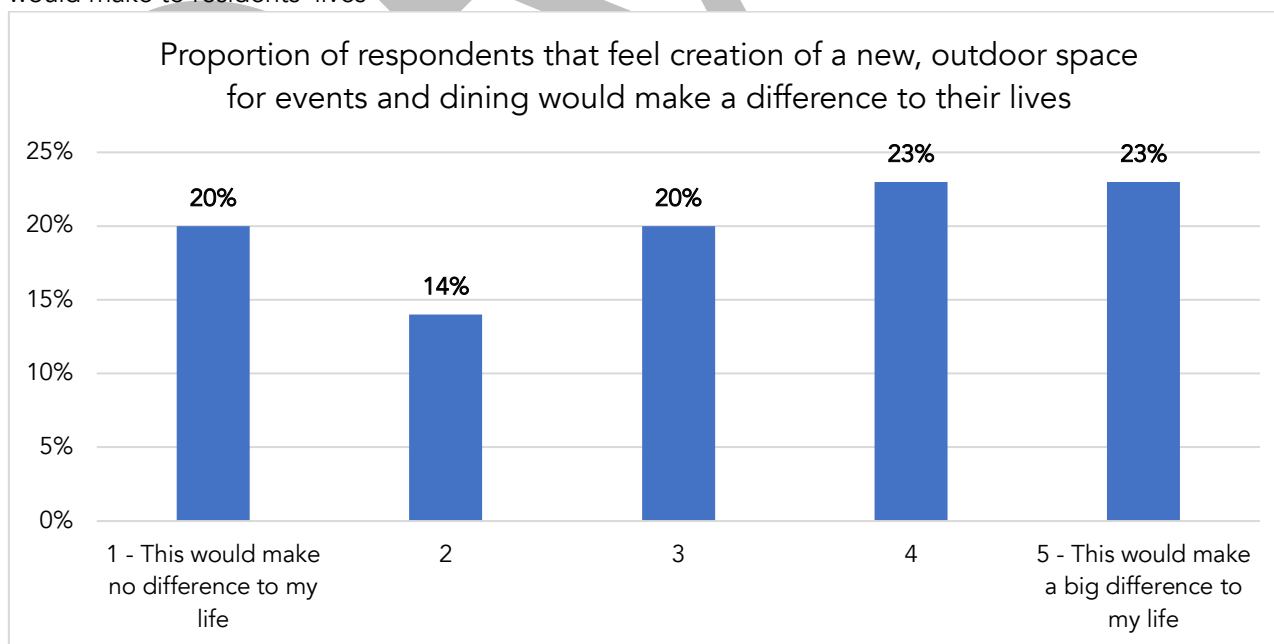
"The station is right next to the Kingfisher Shopping Centre; if that improved, with more trains and better station facilities, it'd give people a reason to come to Redditch for a day out." (M, 56, Oakenshaw)

"The train from Redditch to Birmingham is really handy, and saves you using the car; but the train station could do with a bit of upgrading. The area where you get tickets could have more there – a bar or a café would be nice to sit at and relax when waiting on a train. (F, 55, Astwood Bank)

"I can only see positives with this idea - a bigger and better train link would be of betterment to Redditch. It'd be good to have a café. I'm not saying Redditch Station should be like Birmingham New Street, but it'd be good to see some more facilities." (M, 56, Oakenshaw)

### 3.3.4 New Public Outdoor Space for Events and Dining

Figure 7: Ratings of how much of a difference the creation of a new outdoor space for events and dining would make to residents' lives



Base: 622

Feelings about having a new space for events and outdoor dining were generally more positive than not. Whereas under half (46%) of surveyed residents said it would make a difference to them, only around a third (34%) felt it would not make much of a difference to them.

Before being asked to comment on this idea specifically in group and depth discussions, many residents had already suggested similar things themselves, indicating that new and exciting uses for public outdoor space is actually very relevant to the population and a potential area for improvement that is quite 'front of mind'.

Locating this new space somewhere in or close to the town centre was also felt to go hand-in-hand with reinvigorating central Redditch. Indeed, it encompasses many of the things that people highlighted that they want to see introduced as part and parcel of town centre regeneration, such as more and improved eating and drinking options and entertainment offerings.

Residents envisioned this new space as being a place where people can sit with friends, relax, have a drink, and 'generally watch life of the town go by'. Many also felt this would be an ideal attraction for families. Overall, it is felt to be a good way to encourage much needed additional footfall in the town centre.

Some felt that this would be a valuable asset that would attract more people from outside of the town to come to Redditch to socialise and attend events. Some citizens were very enthusiastic about its potential in this area. They felt it could become one of Redditch's main attractions and help differentiate its offer from other local towns. Placing this in and around the older architecture in the centre would also make a feature of the town's existing beauty.

While there was support for a central location, some people did suggest that this space could also be some distance away town centre. For example, the large outdoor spaces already available in Morton Stanley or Arrow Valley Park could host this investment. Certainly, some citizens favoured concentrating this investment on updating and enhancing existing open spaces. However, in the main, residents generally felt that anything that encouraged more footfall in the town centre and could improve its reputation would be very beneficial.

### Key Insights

- ✓ It is important to ensure the right kind of restaurants, bars and entertainment events are hosted in the new space – residents crave variety, so ensuring there is a balance that people can choose from will attract more residents to use the space.
- ✓ For events being hosted, there is a strong call to ensure that there are options for a variety of ages – especially children and young people who are not well serviced by current offerings.
- ✓ Some suggested this could be a good opportunity for small and local food businesses to prosper – perhaps by incorporating a street food element that would allow local cafes and restaurants to have pop-ups or stalls.
- ✓ Some respondents were concerned about the maintenance of the site – it is important that the site is well maintained, and does not become uncared for or run-down as other aspects of the town centre have.
- ✓ During the winter months, residents are keen to see a space that will still be utilised, and not left unused until the good weather returns.

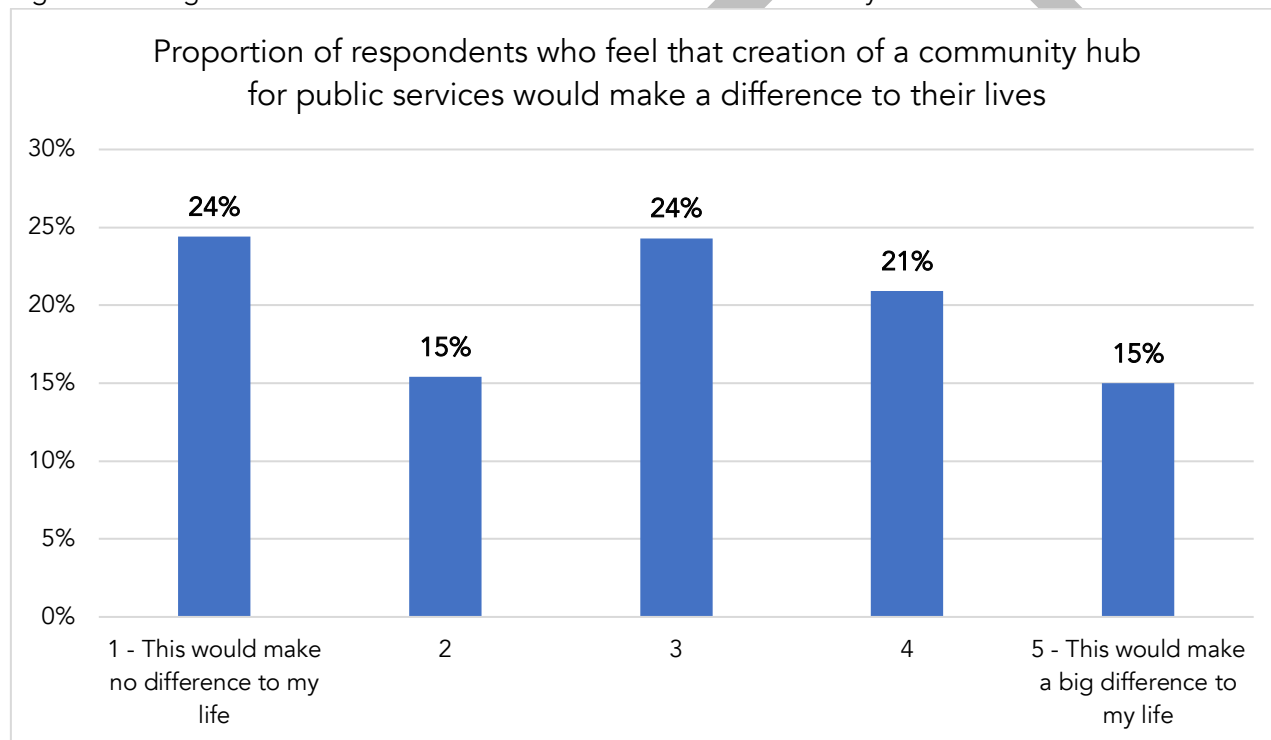
"I think if you put the right things in you would get the nice, quieter people out. It would build morale." (F, 40, Greenlands)

"This would be really good, but would this just be seasonal? They'd have to make sure they used it for something in the winter so it didn't become dilapidated and a waste." (F, 66, Winyates Green)

"I think something like this would be important for Redditch, and bring some much-needed excitement to the area. There's never been anything like that in Redditch, and they've never tried it before – I think it would definitely improve the area." (F, 44, Batchley)

### 3.3.5 Public Services Hub

Figure 8: Ratings of how much of a difference investment in a community hub would make to residents' lives



Base: 622

The idea of creating a community hub with multiple public services was met with varying levels of enthusiasm. About two-fifths of the survey sample (39%) felt that it would not make much difference to them, while just less than this (36%) thought it would.

Residents who liked the idea could appreciate the convenience of having multiple services in one place, and that it could help to foster a sense of community by bringing together groups of people who would not normally meet one another. People for whom investment in youth or children's services was important often linked this to the idea of a services hub, which they saw as an ideal location for youth-oriented services.

However, those who were less enthusiastic tended to feel that a community hub is not required, often believing the services it would provide are already available and easy to access. Additionally,

with many information-based services now accessible online, some could not see themselves making a trip in person for these things (e.g. council information or advice). For others, recent cut-backs in public services leads to concerns that this investment would not be sustainable.

### Key Insights

- ✓ Overall, in comparison to the other potential investment ideas, there was less agreement about how important a community hub would be, and most would prefer to see investment in a different area.
- ✓ Many residents could not see themselves using a facility like this regularly, especially for information they would expect to find online.
- ✓ Some linked this idea back to the 'one-stop-shop' services hubs which used to be in the district centres. They liked this model and suggested that service hubs at a district level could be an improvement to the local community, and would be more valuable than having a community hub in the town centre.

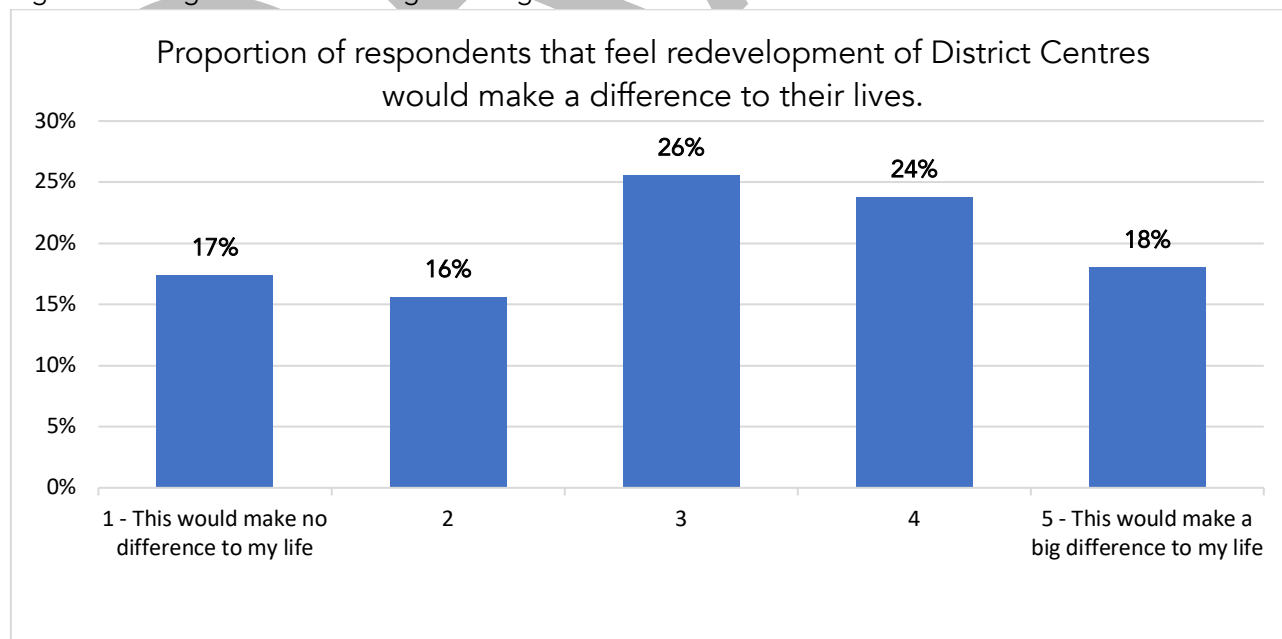
"I found these really useful when I was having my kids because you don't know anyone and I learned a lot and met so many other people who I'm still friends with now. It's good for helping young mums who are isolated. " (F, 38, Woodrow)

"In town we have everything close to each other already, so we don't need that. But maybe in the other places – like Church Hill, Matchborough – it would be useful to be local." (F, 48, Redditch Central)

"I can see the idea in that, there's too many places where you have to visit different buildings." (M, 69, Greenlands)

### 3.3.6 Regeneration of the District Centres

Figure 9: Ratings of how much regenerating the District Centre would make a difference to residents' lives



Base: 622

Whilst few respondents were against the idea of district centre regeneration, many were relatively unenthusiastic about it. Although about two fifths of the survey sample felt this would make a difference to them, a third did not feel this way, and around a quarter scored this in the middle at 3 out of 5. Generally, this idea would make a difference to those who live in the district centres, but is not relevant to those who do not.

Those who do want to see improvement in the district centres feel they have been forgotten about over the years. Often mentioned areas in need of investment were Woodrow, Matchborough and Winyates. Other areas, including Batchley, Huntend and Crabs Cross, are seen by residents who live in them as already serving their purpose well.

Some residents look fondly on the way district centres used to be, with flourishing businesses and atmosphere at the heart of each of Redditch's communities. Investment is hoped to instil a 'village feel' back into each district. A number of people spoke about the redevelopment of the Church Hill Centre, and the positive effect this has had on the local community. In any redevelopment of other District Centres, residents believe that Church Hill could be used as something of a blueprint.

A recurring theme around district centres was their perceived safety, especially amongst the older members of the public who depend on them. Some district centres have a negative image through young people loitering around them, leading to some residents feeling intimidated. Because of this, many feel that as well as an improved centres themselves, work would need to be done to make centres feel like a safe option for that residents reliant on them.

Many of the district centres described as needing improvement appear to be areas with higher levels of deprivation. Residents would like to see district centres improved as part of a wider social effort to tackle inequality in certain communities. Residents would strongly be against any district centres being knocked down or amalgamated to make way for new ones.

### Key Insights

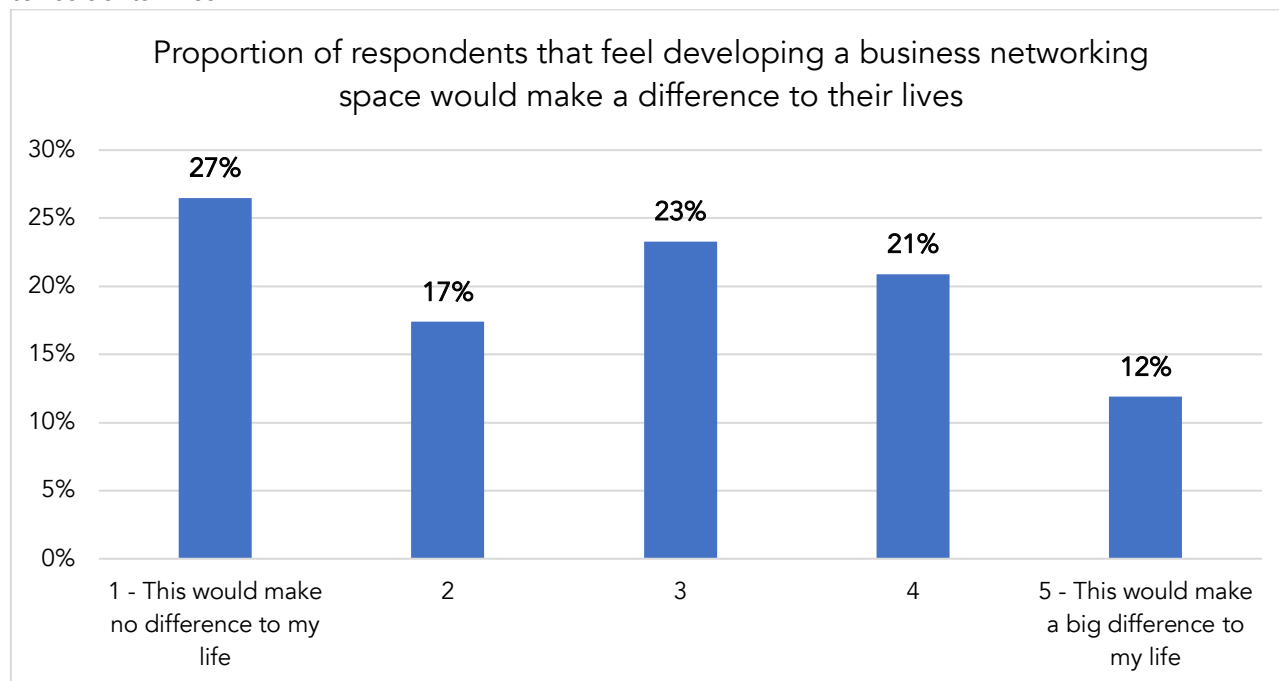
- ✓ Changes to some district centres – including Woodrow, Matchborough and Winyates – is welcomed. It is felt that some others – including Batchley, Huntend and Crabs Cross – already serve their purpose well.
- ✓ Residents speak highly of the redevelopment of the Church Hill Centre, and would like to see that redevelopment used as the benchmark for investment in other areas.
- ✓ Any redevelopment should not come at the expense of knocking down or amalgamating existing district centres. District centres are seen as being at the heart of Redditch's communities, and there is no appetite to see two district centres merged into one.
- ✓ Generally, support for redevelopment in these areas came from those who live there and are more likely to use them. However, even those living in areas that they feel could do with redevelopment tended to think that investment to improve the town centre should come first.

"I think if this came hand-in-hand with helping vulnerable people in specific district areas, then it'd be good." (33, F, Batchley)

"They could do with a tidying up. Some of the buildings have been there for such a long time. It's so dated in some of the areas – it just looks a total mess. It all needs modernising and sorting." (66, F, Winyates)

### 3.3.7 Business Networking Space

Figure 10: Ratings of how much of a difference investment in a space for businesses to network would make to residents' lives



Base: 622

Generally, residents were less enthusiastic about this potential investment area. Whilst one-third of the survey sample felt this had the potential to benefit their lives, over two-fifths (45%) felt this would not make much difference to them.

On the whole, business owners were slightly more likely than the general population to feel this idea would make a difference to them. Some felt this would have helped them when they began their business, as they did not have experience in all elements of starting a business (e.g. accounting), and envisage this as providing the opportunity to draw on others' expertise. However, business owners were not significantly more likely to find this impactful to them than the other Redditch residents, and by and large they preferred other potential investment ideas which would make more difference to Redditch as a whole.

There was general positive feeling for this idea as residents believe this could help small businesses, and overall the population feel quite strongly that small and local businesses need to be supported. Many are disappointed that when new businesses start-up they often close again shortly after, possibly because they cannot find the right support in the early months. Additionally, some pointed out the potential benefits to the local economy of building up a network of business owners who use other's products or services to keep things local.

However, there is a fairly widespread feeling that whilst business support and networking could be beneficial, actual financial support is what is really needed to help local businesses.



### Key Insights

- ✓ Some suggested this idea doesn't necessarily require a physical space – they saw it as something which could be achieved remotely through investment in creating an online space or hiring staff to facilitate business networking.
- ✓ The addition of night-school classes or similar to teach business skills would also provide networking opportunities and could be a useful way to foster entrepreneurship in Redditch.
- ✓ Overall, this is potentially a nice idea, but people doubt its likely effectiveness if it is not offered in conjunction with financial support and or/measure to help lower business operating costs.

"I'm good friends with a guy who owns a coffee shop and a bar in Bromsgrove. Round his little area, there are two other restaurants and a pub and it's a nice place to go. The owners all plan stuff together and it works well." (M, 24, Greenlands)

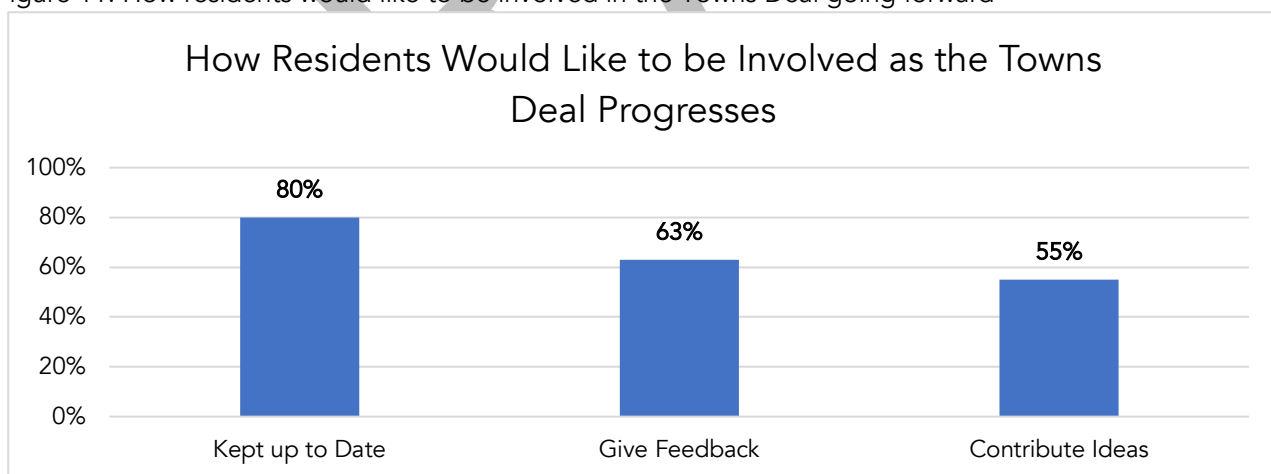
"It's a good concept but it does depend on the willingness of the businesses to participate. Some of them might be too competitive." (F, 25, Woodrow)

"It's nice, but finding vocal support isn't hard. The issue is getting the money to get set up." (M, 40, Matchborough East)

### 3.4 Residents' ongoing involvement in the Towns Deal

As genuine and ongoing engagement from the community is integral to the Towns Deal, the appetite for involvement amongst the sample population was canvassed. Overall there is a desire by residents to be involved as the Towns Deal progresses, although the degree to which they would like to be involved varies.

Figure 11: How residents would like to be involved in the Towns Deal going forward

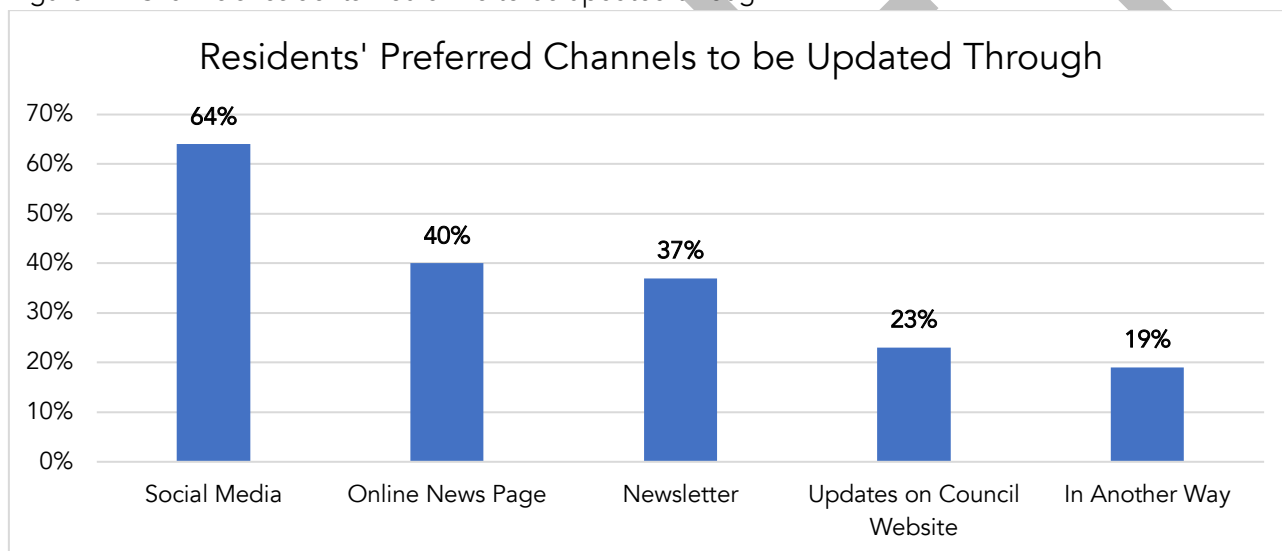


Base: 410<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As respondents were able to select more than one answer for this question, percentages do not add to 100%

- Those aged between 45 and 64 were the most likely to say they want to be involved in some way going forward, although there was some appetite across all age groups.
- Largely, residents want to be involved by being kept up to date on what is happening with investment plans and where this is going to take place in the town.
- Most residents felt they did not have the time to commit to a higher level of involvement - particularly those who have children – but they would be keen to be kept 'in the know'.
- The youngest and oldest ages (e.g. aged 16-24 and 75+) were much more likely to want to be simply kept up to date, rather than to be involved in a more significant way.
- Some did want the opportunity for further involvement, such as giving feedback on ideas in the same way they had the opportunity to do in this consultation.
- However a significant proportion – around 55% - would like the capacity to contribute their own ideas for investment – perhaps as part of a working group.
- Residents aged between 35 and 54 tended to be more likely to want to give feedback or ideas.

Figure 12: Channels residents would like to be updated through



Base: 410<sup>2</sup>

- In terms of being kept updated, social media was the most favoured communication channel by far. It was the most popular amongst citizens of all ages between 16 and 64.
- Those aged 65-74 still wanted to see updates on social media, but had a slight preference for an online news page.
- Residents in the oldest age category, 75 or older, were keener to receive updates in a newsletter than on social media. Many in this group referenced The Redditch Advertiser, feeling it had been a great way to be kept updated on the borough's happenings.
- Nearly all of the residents who wanted to be updated 'in another way' suggested a direct email to their inbox would be best.

<sup>2</sup> As respondents were able to select more than one answer for this question, percentages do not add to 100%

## 4. Conclusions

The consultation has engaged with a large and broad cross-section of citizens and highlights a range of ways that investment through the Towns Deal fund would make a genuine difference to peoples' lives.

The ideas that are supported by residents for future investment are wide-ranging rather than falling within a narrow set: they concern the regeneration of both the town and its district centres; they concern the many open spaces in the borough; they touch on active travel within the area and the town's connections with other places; and they embrace issues about skills, jobs and enterprise.

It is notable, and really encouraging, that when residents talked about what they would like to see investment being used for to help build a more exciting, vibrant and successful Redditch, there was a very close tie up with the six potential investment areas that have already been identified by the Redditch's Town Deal Board.

While support was shown for all of the Board's investment ideas, residents' priorities were for a new outdoor space for events and dining and improvements to the railway station, closely followed by regeneration of the town and district centres. There is also support for a community hub and a business networking space, but not as widespread as for the other investment ideas.



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