

Rebuilding Hastings Castle into a 'must see' attraction

Local Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement Technical Paper 2

November 2021



in partnership with



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1. Local Consultation

As part of our study, we have carried out a module of primary research among local residents and visitors.

A survey was set up online and promoted via the Council's communications channels as well as providing hard copies at key visitor 'hubs' in the vicinity including the VIC, Smugglers' Adventure and Hastings Museum and Art Gallery.

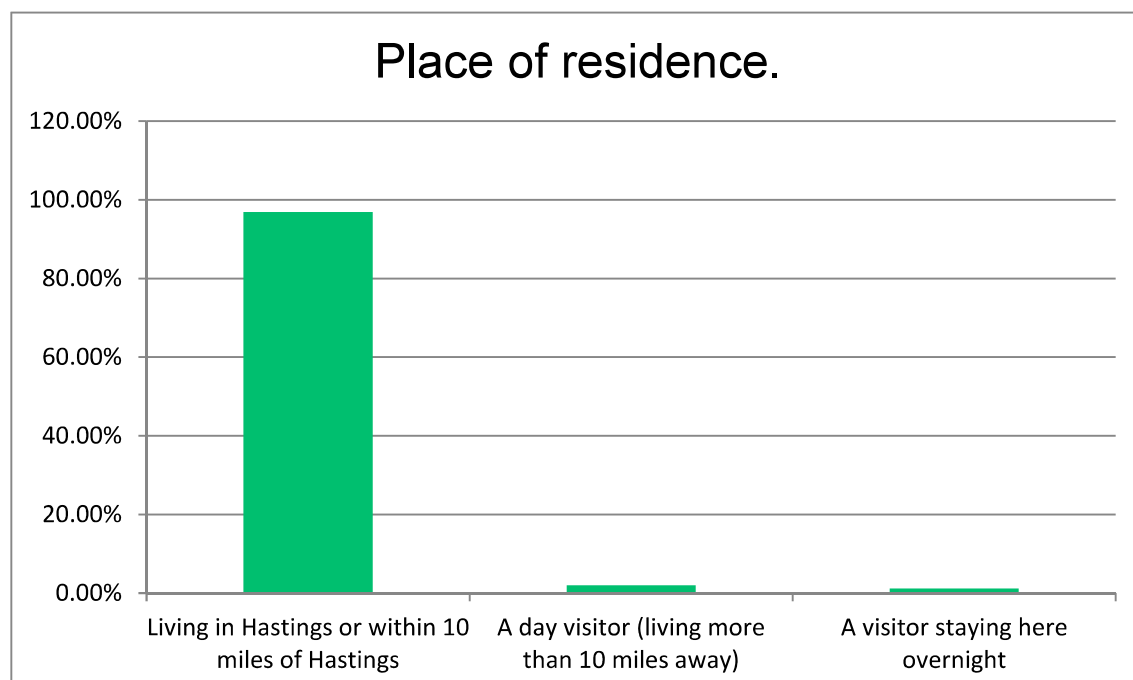
The survey ran through October and November 2021 (including the Autumn half term holiday) and generated just under 1,000 completed responses (981), which represents a strong sample base.

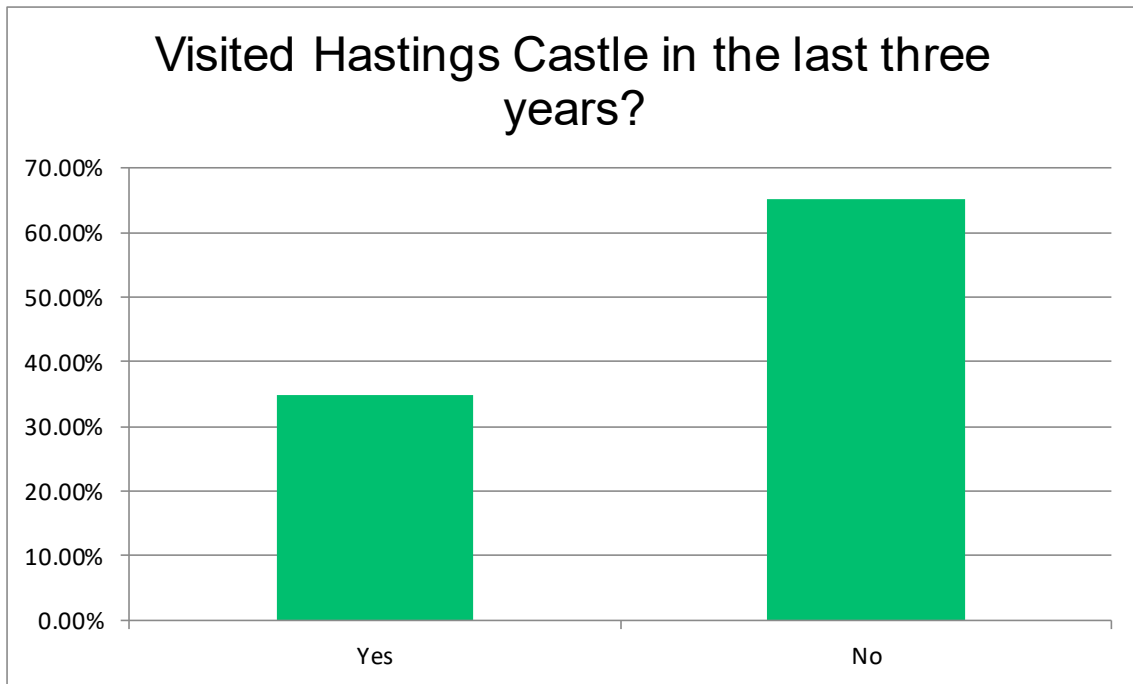
The lead findings from the survey are shown below and the questionnaire is attached as Appendix 1.

Summary of survey response

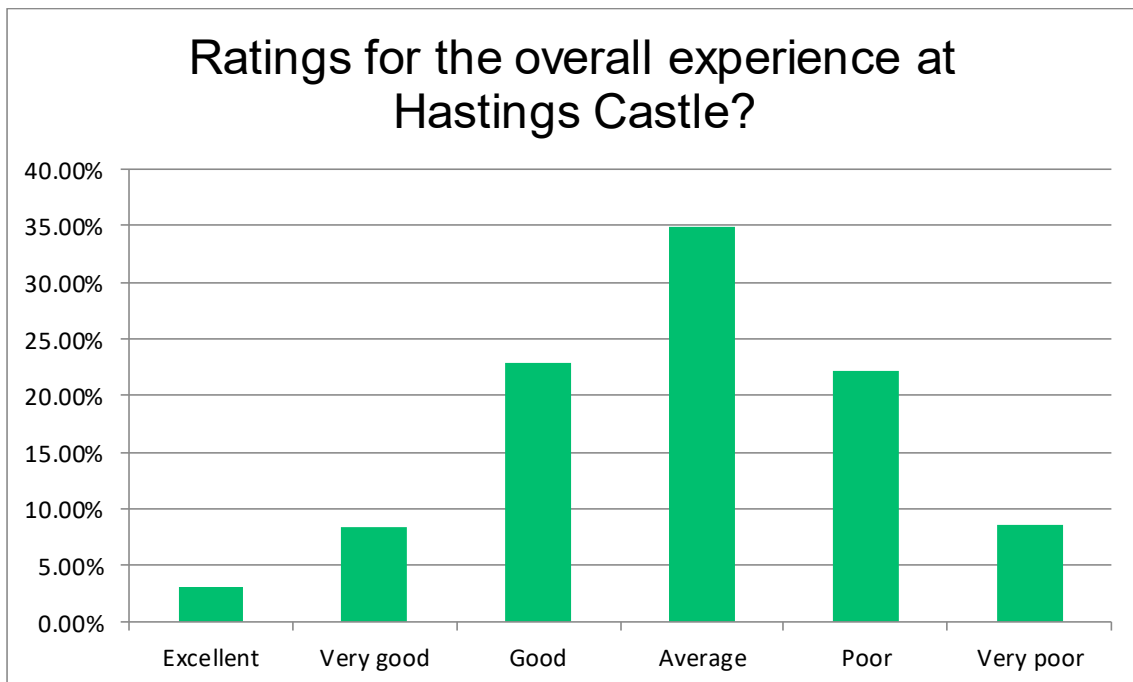
Characteristics of respondents

A high proportion of respondents to the survey are living in Hastings or within 10 miles, which reflects the season the survey was taken and the current uncertainty around the visitor market in light of the Covid 19 pandemic. Only 40 respondents, or just over 3%, were day visitors or staying visitors to the town.

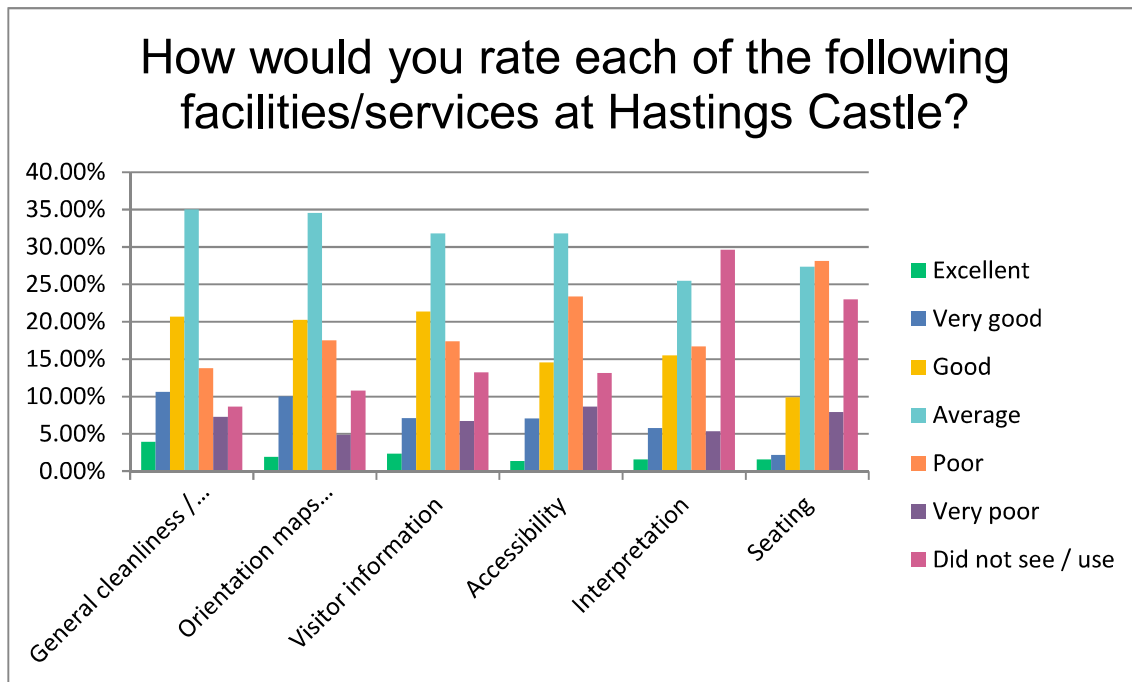




Despite the high ratio of local people some two thirds of respondents have not visited the Castle within the past three years, showing it is not currently a 'feature' in the lives of many residents.



It is acknowledged that Hastings Castle is in need of enhancement to improve the visitor experience and quality of the overall offer. Only 3% consider the attraction to be excellent and a further 8% to be very good which represent very low levels of approval ratings. There is a strong bias in the responses towards average and poor ratings as answered by more than half of respondents (58%).

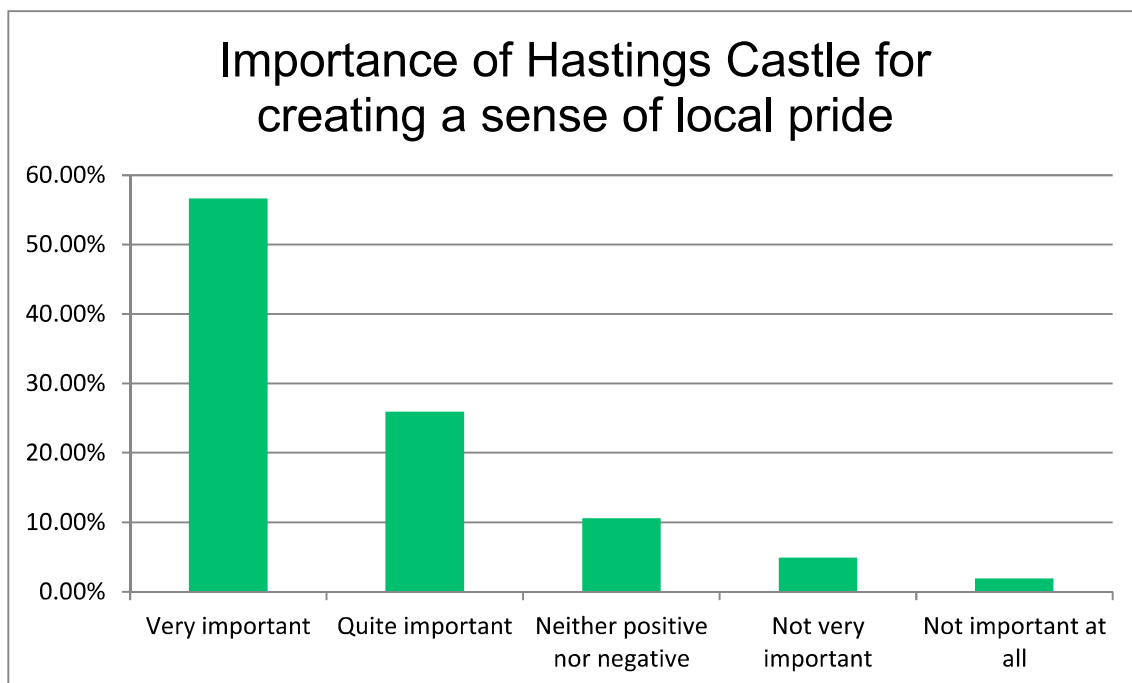
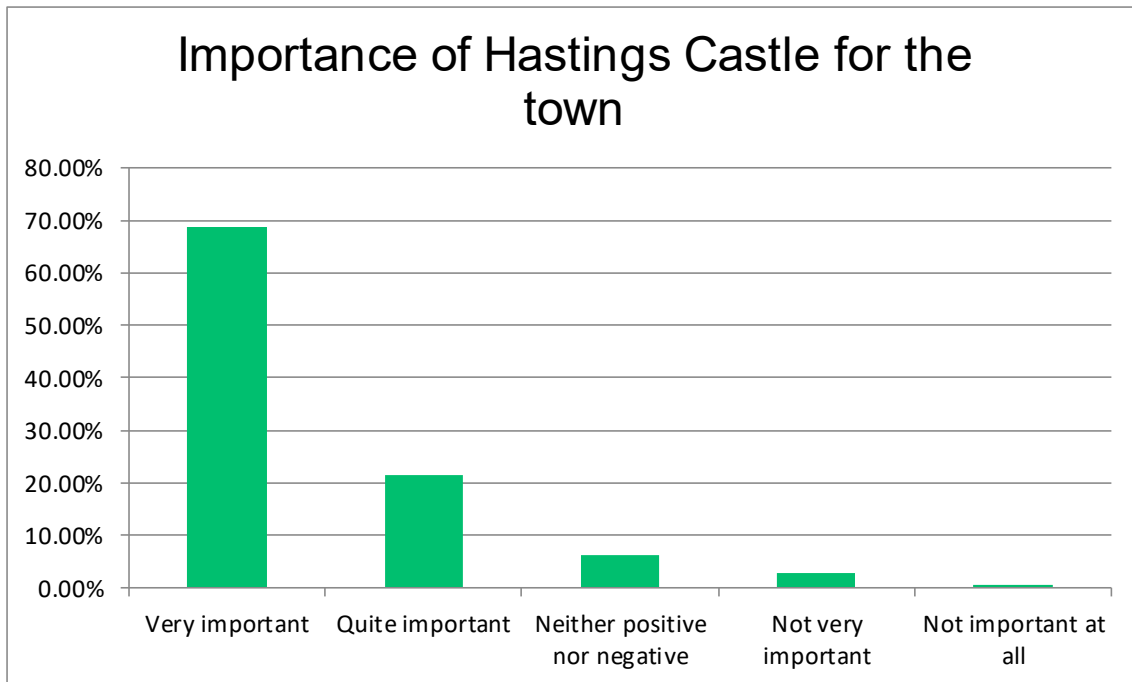


In a similar vein to the overall experience ratings, the individual facilities and services achieve relatively low levels of approval. General cleanliness receives the highest proportion of responses of excellent or very good, but still only aggregates to just below 15% of all the surveys completed. This demonstrates a strong need to develop and build on the product, service and overall experience.

Placemaking and sense of community

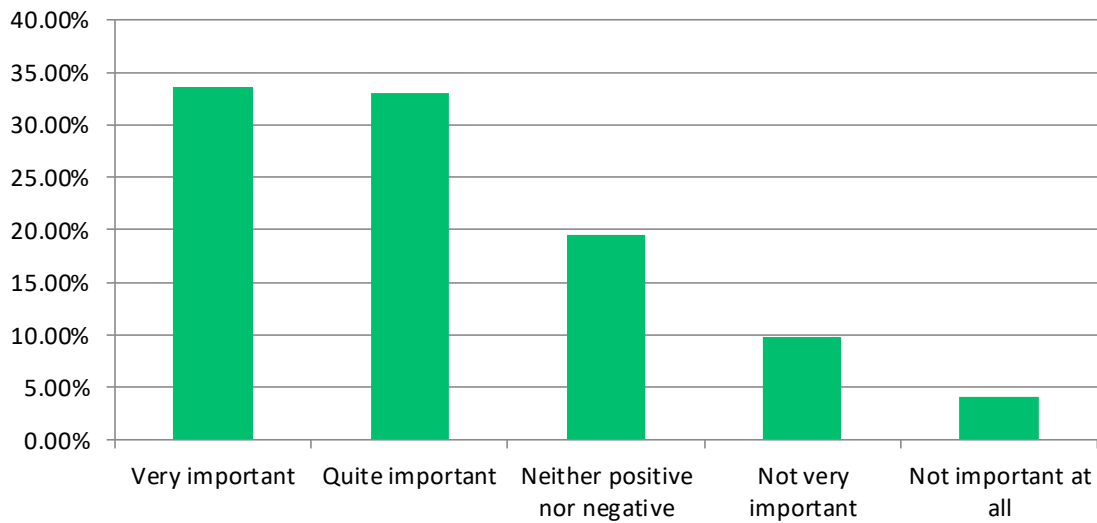
The survey sought feedback on people's views to understand how important the Castle is for the town and in terms of placemaking, sense of local pride and sense of community. In all these respects, Hastings Castle gains a strong endorsement. In terms of its importance for the town, more than two thirds believe the Castle is very important and more than 90% state that it is either very or quite important.

The importance for local pride scores slightly lower but nevertheless more than half consider the Castle to be very important and overall some 83% state that it is either very or quite important.

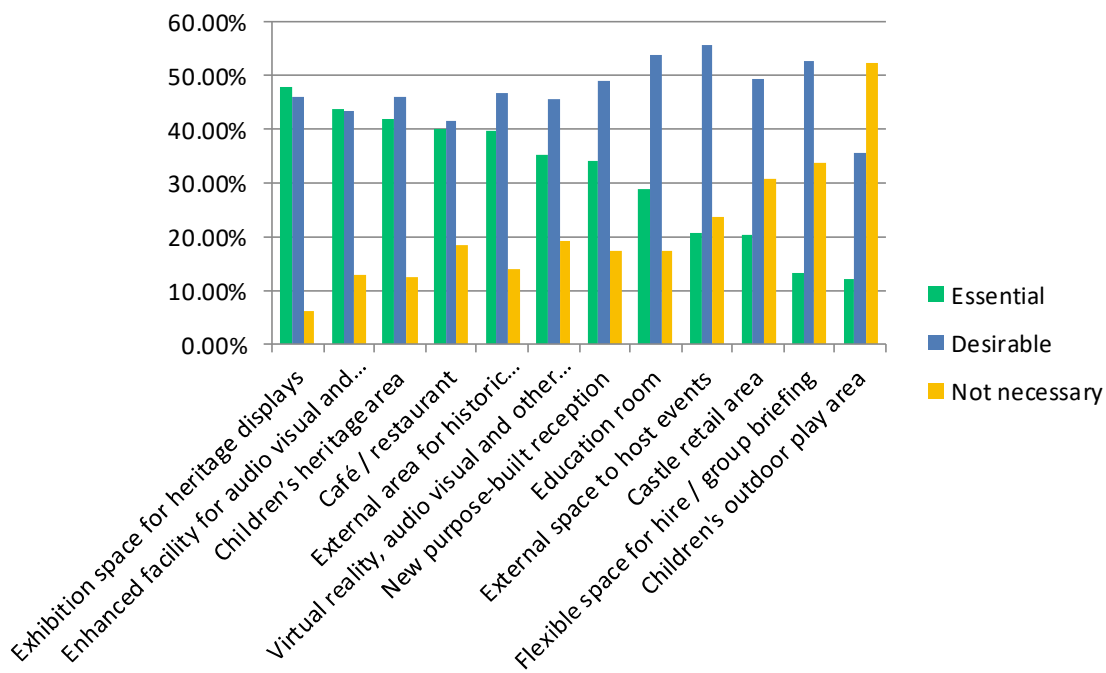


The importance of the Castle for creating a sense of community receives lower levels of highest approval than for the town and local pride and this is perhaps as a consequence of the limited level of community-based facilities / amenities currently available at the attraction and wider site. Nevertheless, the importance for the community is still considered as quite or very important by 66% (combined). This shows the strength of the heritage site and its potential to become a lead asset and hub for local engagement and wellbeing and 'more of a focus' for the town.

Importance of Hastings Castle for creating a sense of community



Levels of support for potential initiatives to be included in the Castle development?



Enhancing the offer at Hastings Castle

In terms of the most important areas for enhancing the offer at the castle, respondents saw the need to improve the exhibition space and varying forms of interpretive media as the most pressing and important need with almost half (47%) believing it to be essential and a

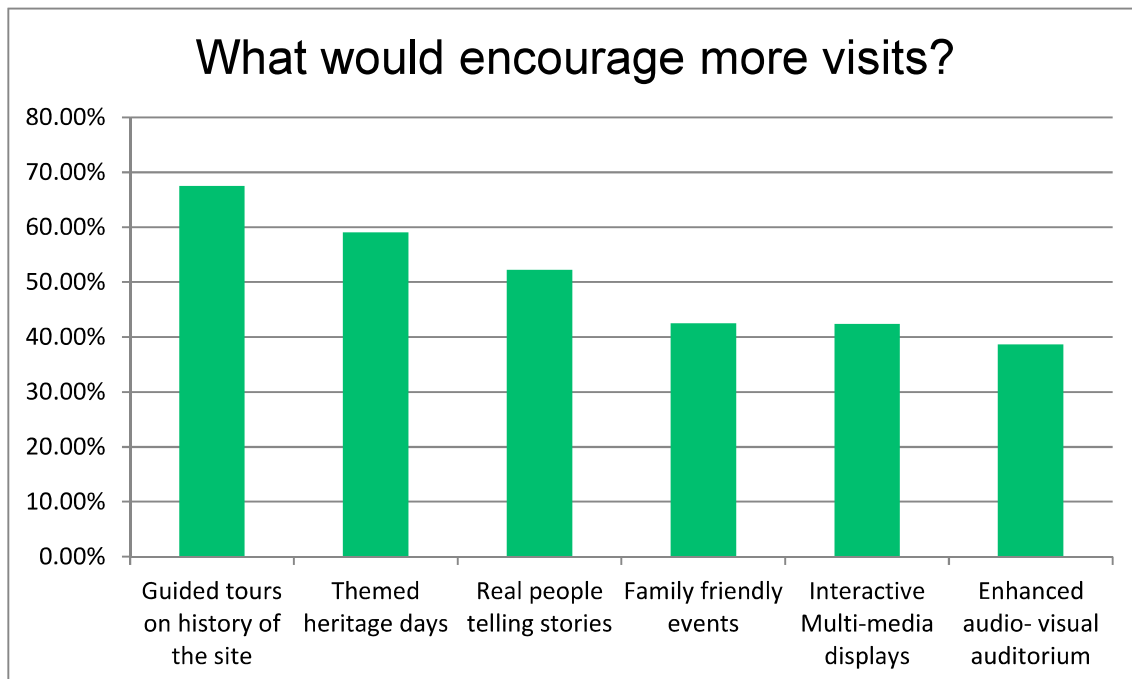
further 44% as desirable. In terms of essential elements, a children's heritage area and a high-quality catering offer are the next highest scoring elements.

Interestingly there is a low level of respondents who consider the introduction of children's play as essential or high priority.

Not surprisingly, the most important areas for enhancing the castle experience also feature in the respondents feedback on the single most important element to address (ie exhibition space, improved interpretive media (including virtual reality) and catering. In addition, there is significant support for a new purpose-built reception facility as well as for an education / multi-media room of some form.

There is also some support expressed for lighting up the castle at night and generally to improve accessibility. The current interpretation building is considered unsightly and as it can be seen from the beach, anything in its place must fit into the space in an unobtrusive way.

In terms of encouraging more visits it is interesting to note the strong desire for person to person interpretation, including specialist guide-led tours in particular as well as themed heritage days and 'live' storytelling.



- The current status and appeal of the Castle is poor quality and generates relatively poor ratings
- The town fosters considerable goodwill and attachment among residents which currently is couched with feelings of an underutilised asset in a poor state of repair and the visitor experience does not do justice to its siting and heritage importance
- Improvements to the exhibition and interpretive media are considered the highest priorities but there is broad support for a wide 'package' of interventions
- There is a positive level of support for incorporating virtual reality technology mechanisms as part of the visitor experience offer, preferably alongside 'live person to person guided tours

2. Visioning Workshop

An important component of the consultation programme was a facilitated visioning workshop with stakeholders representing the heritage sector in the town and the wider sub-region. The workshop took place on 16th November at Hastings Museum.

The attendees of the session are included in Appendix 1.

This workshop was led by Rubicon Regeneration and Hastings Borough Council and covered a number of areas as part of the plans to transform Hastings Castle into a leading heritage destination including:

- Presentation of the developing plans for Hastings Castle
- Early feedback from community consultation
- General discussion on the vision and development plan and identifying the core ingredients for a must-see heritage attraction

Feedback on development plan

The presentation outlined the context and 5 core components of the castle project:

All-access West Hill Cliff Railway

Signature heritage hub

Iconic new footbridge gateway

All-weather visitor facility

World class story-telling and interpretation

The key comments and observations on each of the component are summarised below.

All-access West Hill Cliff Railway

- General agreement that at least one of the West Hill Cliff Railway carriages should be adapted to accommodate people with a physical disability (i.e. wheelchair) and should be promoted / reinforced as the main pedestrian route to the castle from the town centre (alongside a hydraulic moving platform to overcome the need to use the steps);
- However, there was agreement that alternative routes to the castle needed to be identified to cater for any technical issues which meant the lift was not in operation for a period and also address potential congestion at peak times;
- A range of alternative routes were suggested included the potential for a shuttle bus (during peak times) to take people from the town centre to the castle;
- It was felt that additional interpretation could be included at the lift to enhance the story (and history) of this unique facility;

- Pricing needs to be carefully considered as currently school groups appear to avoid the lift due to added cost for education visit beyond available budgets;
- It was also stressed that the project needed to include a comprehensive programme of wayfinding and orientation to ensure that the castle is visible and accessible and a core part of the town's 'narrative' and visitor offer.

Signature heritage hub

- The West Cliff café is seen as being a disappointing 'gateway' and visitor facility;
- There was overwhelming enthusiasm to redevelop the site as a flagship facility offering a better catering and retail offer as well as included some heritage interpretation to 'start' the journey to the castle;
- The option to include more interpretation at the West Cliff café is seen as being positive, which is likely to gain favour with Historic England;
- Further thought is needed regarding the relationship off-site and on-site interpretation, e.g. the AV in the castle grounds with the need to remove / replace the portacabins which is unsightly and in very poor repair;
- Improvements are needed to make the path from the café to the castle more accessible.

Iconic new footbridge gateway

- General support on the proposal to create a new access route across Ladies' Parlour to the East Gate, which would become the main entrance to the castle;
- The proposal to create a new bridge over the dry moat was supported;
- The enhanced pedestrian access across the Ladies' Parlour would need to take into consideration the sensitive nature of the site;
- Additional concerns included security and access and ticketing (which area would be defined as the pay zone).

All-weather visitor facility

- The provision of an all-weather structure within the castle grounds was seen as being the most contentious component of the overall project;
- It was generally recognised that the current AV building was not fit-for-purpose but any future structure within the SAM would need to be sensitively planned and designed (and meet Historic England's requirements);
- The option for re-purposing the ruins of the Collegiate Church was seen as offering potential (with a modern covered facility, possibly using steel and glass materials); however, attendees were keen that other site options within the castle were also explored (e.g. the current entrance).

World class story-telling and interpretation

- Heritage is one of the main reasons people come to this town and wider 1066 area
- Despite some investment in new interpretation boards, it was agreed that current interpretation was poor and needed to be improved;

- There was some debate as to what the focus of the heritage 'story' should be; it was stressed that the focus needed to be on the castle and the Norman heritage of the town but these needed to complement other heritage 'assets' within 1066 country, specifically Battle Abbey;
- New interpretation would need to incorporate the latest technology to provide world-class story-telling and interpretation.
- Important to cater for families as well as education visits and groups

Other Comments

It is also important to recognise and acknowledge the importance of the castle in terms of its **'place in the landscape'** for Hastings and the fact that it could be portrayed more as a start point for visits to the town as the 'castle with exceptional panoramic views'.

A number of points were raised in terms of 'critical success factors' and 'must-have's' for a successful heritage attraction (further information is presented in Technical Report 1). These included:

- The importance of engaging and involving heritage and tourism experts in developing the project and bringing the vision to reality;
- Generating community buy-in to the project (particularly as there is a level of scepticism regarding the council's ability to deliver and manage a successful operation);
- Addressing aspects of uniqueness and differentiation; an issue raised was the need to ensure that the evolving product complements and adds value to existing heritage experiences in the region (e.g. Battle Abbey);
- Sufficient resources need to be diverted to interpretation planning and delivery; interpretation and story-telling is a central part of the visitor experience and requires knowledge about the heritage being presented;
- An effective marketing strategy will be needed.

Appendix 1



Re-imagining Hastings Castle

We need your input Complete our questionnaire and enter a prize draw to win a £50 voucher of your choice

Hastings has recently been awarded over £24m from the Government's Town Fund to kickstart the re-set button for the town and its regeneration ambitions. Transforming Hastings Castle is the flagship project for the town. The project been allocated £3.2 million, subject to the development of a successful business case.

For more information on the Hastings Castle project visit:

www.visit1066country.com

This is your opportunity to say what you think and we would be grateful if you could answer a few questions to help shape the future of this project.

Please complete this online survey.

We will select one winner from people who complete the questionnaire and they will receive a £50 voucher as a prize.

Hard copies of the questionnaire are available at Hastings Museum & Art Gallery (John's Place, Bohemia Rd) Smugglers Adventure and the VIC). If you have any questions about our work please do not hesitate to contact: Kevin Boorman at kboorman@hastings.gov.uk

Thank you for your time and help.

Survey

1. Do you (tick one only)

Live in Hastings or within 10 miles of Hastings?....

A day visitor (living more than 10 miles away)

A visitor staying here overnight

2. Where do you live (town or village, no need to give your address)

.....

3. Have you visited Hastings Castle in the last three years?

Yes

No

If no, please go to Q6

4. How would you rate the overall experience at Hastings Castle?

Excellent, Very good, Good, Average, Poor, Very poor

5. How would you rate each of the following facilities at Hastings Castle?

(Matrix box with choice of answers Excellent, Very good, Good, Average, Poor, Very poor)

Visitor information

Orientation maps /signposting / signage

Accessibility

Interpretation

Seating

General cleanliness / appearance

6. How important do you think Hastings Castle is for the town?

Very important, Quite important, Neither positive or negative, Not very important, Not important at all

7. How important is Hastings Castle for creating a sense of community in town?

Very important, Quite important, Neither positive or negative, Not very important, Not important at all

8. How important is Hastings Castle for creating a sense of local pride in the town?

Very important, Quite important, Neither positive or negative, Not very important, Not important at all

1. What would you like to be included in the Castle development?

| Facility | Essential | Desirable | Not Necessary |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|
| New purpose-built reception | | | |
| Castle retail area | | | |
| Café / restaurant | | | |
| Enhanced facility for audio visual and other shows | | | |
| Exhibition space for heritage displays | | | |
| Virtual reality, audio visual and other multimedia interpretation | | | |
| Children’s heritage area | | | |
| Flexible space for hire / group briefing | | | |
| Education room | | | |
| External area for historical interpretation of the Castle | | | |
| Children’s outdoor play area | | | |
| External space to host events | | | |
| Other ideas for Hastings Castle? | | | |
| | | | |

10. What do you think is the single most important feature needed at the Castle from the list above?

.....

11. Please tell us more about what you would like to see at Hastings Castle, and what would directly encourage you to visit?

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Interactive Multi-media displays | <input type="checkbox"/> | Family friendly events..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Enhanced audio- visual auditorium | <input type="checkbox"/> | Themed heritage days | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Real people telling stories | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Guided tours on history of the site..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

ABOUT YOU

12. Are you? (Please tick one)

- | | | | |
|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Male | <input type="checkbox"/> | Female..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Non binary | <input type="checkbox"/> | Prefer not to say | <input type="checkbox"/> |

13. Your age group (Please tick one)

- | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Under 16 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 45-54 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 55-64..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 25-34..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Over 65s..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 35-44..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

Appendix 2:

Transforming Hastings Castle into a must-see heritage attraction:

Meeting with 1066 Heritage Attractions

Hastings Museum and Art Gallery, 16th November 2021 @ 10am

| | Organisation | Name | |
|----|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| 1. | Hastings history house | Anne Scott | |
| 2. | British tea museum | Rebecca Gildea | |
| 3. | Alistair Fairley | Alistair Fairley | |
| 4. | Guide | Francoise Haslam-Dodo | |
| 5. | Guide | Wilf Jackson | |
| 6. | Hastings Area Archaeological Research Group | Lynn and Kevin Cornwell | |
| 7. | Hastings Chronicle | Steve Peak | |
| 8. | friends of Edith statue | Ian Jarman / Jenni | |
| 9. | Battle abbey | Natasha Williams | |
| | | | |
| | Rubicon Regeneration | David Howells | |
| | Planning Solutions | Kevin Brown | |
| | Hastings Borough Council | Kevin Boorman | |