

I Newtown

Report of findings from a public consultation
in October 2011 on ideas
for developing Newtown, Powys



December 2011

Acknowledgements

Individuals from the I Love Newtown group gave their time voluntarily to attend meetings and staff the exhibition. Doug Hughes Architects generously provided staff time and materials as well as being the original instigator of the whole consultation process. The shop was provided free of charge for the week by Powys County Council. Funding for printing and materials was met by Newtown 2020. Display panels and easels were lent by the Market Hall and Oriel Davies Gallery.

Introduction

The I Love Newtown group is an independent voluntary group of residents and business people who care about the future of Newtown.

For one week between October 17th and 22nd 2011, volunteers from the group staffed an exhibition in an empty shop in the town centre. This included maps, models and display boards featuring nine ideas for developing the town, as well as comments made during an earlier public meeting in July 2011 on the future of Newtown.

Information was collected about the characteristics of those who visited the displays during the week, and all visitors were offered the opportunity of completing a questionnaire to record their views on the displays, and more generally on the kind of development that might be needed in Newtown.

Who took part in the consultation event?

The consultation was very well attended, with approximately 500 people visiting during the week. Every effort was made to record basic demographic details about all those who came, but at times this was not possible when visitors greatly outnumbered volunteers. However demographic information was collected from 415 visitors to the exhibition, and is presented in Appendix 1.

About the people who visited the exhibition

Basic details of age range, length of time living in the Newtown area and location were collected from 229 women and 186 men who visited the exhibition. Most of these people (62%) were aged over 55, (including 12% aged 75 or over) while just under 10% of visitors were aged 34 or under.

Almost 80% of visitors had lived in Newtown or the surrounding area for more than ten years, 63.6% had lived in the area for more than 20 years and 17.6% had lived in the area for more than 50 years. Only 2.2% of visitors had lived in the area for two years or less.

71% of visitors to the exhibition indicated that they lived within Newtown/ Llanllwchaiarn (town centre and estates), and 26% were from outlying villages. 1% of visitors were from Llanfair, Llanidloes or Welshpool, and 2% were from further afield (Llandrindod Wells, Aberystwyth, Shrewsbury etc).

Consultation process

People who came into the shop were asked to look around the displays and then give their views by completing a questionnaire. Basic demographic details were collected from as many as possible, including those who did not complete a questionnaire. Visitors were informed that the objective of the consultation was to let Powys County Council know what the people of Newtown would like to see in their town and that their comments and suggestions would be fed back in a report to Newtown Town Council and Powys County Council.

The exhibition consisted of nine large colour display panels with a variety of pictures and text on each board. Most of these were photomontages and computer generated images produced by Douglas Hughes Architects and these were supplemented with artists impression drawings provided by Geoff Beilby, Landscape Architect.

Questionnaire and consultation materials were prepared by Esta Esslemont, a member of the group with expertise in social and market research. This report presents an analysis of the questionnaire responses, undertaken by Esta Esslemont, and Emeritus Professor June Statham, an independent academic consultant.

Questionnaires completed

321 visitors to the exhibition completed a questionnaire, with many adding extensive comments both on the images presented and in response to a final question asking for other comments or suggestions about what would improve Newtown. The level and quality of information provided indicates a real desire among local residents to have a say in how Newtown should be developed in the future. All of the comments and suggestions made in response to the images on display boards were typed up (44 pages of 11pt type with minimum spacing) and are available as a separate document. The questionnaire with quantitative results is provided in Appendix 2.

Results of the consultation

1. Do we need more housing in Newtown?

Yes	38%	No	43%	Don't know	19%
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Views were mixed, but slightly more of those taking part in the consultation exercise thought that additional housing was **not** needed than thought that it was. Comments indicated strong support for making sure that existing unoccupied premises were used first.

2. If it is decided that we do need more housing, where should this be?

Respondents were also asked where new housing should be situated if it were needed, and given a choice of six options – in the town centre, along the roads to Llanidloes, Welshpool, Tregynon or Dolfor, or ‘somewhere else’. People who expressed a view on where housing should be built most commonly said along the road to Welshpool (57 people), in the town centre (56 people) or along the road towards Llanidloes (54 people). Among suggestions for other places that housing could be built were along the proposed new bypass or in the infill between the town and the bypass. However others felt strongly that housing should not be built up to the bypass, with one person commenting that if this happened, residents would then demand another bypass. Other possible sites put forward included ‘brownfield sites such as the old Boys and Boden land, Canal Road, the old court house, and the Pryce Jones building’ which it was suggested could be turned into apartments. Some respondents mentioned the need for particular types of housing, particularly low cost rental and affordable housing for first-time buyers and housing suitable for older people.

The majority view however was that more housing was not needed in Newtown, and more than ten per cent of respondents specifically indicated that none of the areas listed on the questionnaire should be used for further housing.

Although the results did show that a higher percentage of people considered that additional housing was not needed in Newtown, the difference between numbers ticking the ‘yes’ box and numbers ticking the ‘no’ box was not great (5%), and most of the respondents were in the older age range. The result might have been different had more younger people participated in the consultation. Housing needs, whether recorded on waiting lists, or hidden (young people living at home because they are unable to find separate affordable accommodation) is a possible subject for further investigation following on from this consultation.

3. Do we need more industrial or commercial premises in Newtown?

Yes	30%	No	62%	Don't know	8%
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The majority view (62%) was that more industrial/commercial premises were not needed. Those completing the survey commonly noted that there were plenty of empty existing units already, and the priority should be to fill these.

Following on from this consultation a useful recommendation could be that a baseline survey of sites and buildings is undertaken to establish what disused or underused properties there are in and around Newtown and what potential there is for development in these areas.

4. If it is decided that we do need more industrial/commercial premises, where should this be?

If new commercial units were to be made available, there was a strong preference for these to be on existing business parks or trading estates. 152 of those who answered this question favoured existing sites compared to only seven people favouring 'somewhere else'. Some respondents noted that it was important for such units to be affordable, and that there needed to be incentives to get existing industrial premises back to full usage.

The questionnaire also asked whether we should consider different kinds of arrangements such as live/work units. It is likely that many respondents were unsure what this meant, since a high proportion did not answer the question or ticked 'don't know'. Among those who gave a view, nearly three times as many were in favour compared to those against.

5. What shops do you think are missing in Newtown that would encourage you to shop in the town centre?

This question was answered by a high proportion of those completing the questionnaire (260 people). Some described types of shops, others named specific stores. A very wide variety of shops were mentioned as 'missing' from Newtown, although in some cases the type of shop requested already exists, suggesting a need for better promotion or signage. There were two main and opposing trends: for more 'better quality' clothing and food shops with fewer charity and 'downmarket' outlets on the one hand; and for more low-cost shops (second-hand, recycling, home bargains) on the other. The types of shops that were most likely to be seen as lacking in Newtown were clothing (especially good quality men's clothing, children's clothing and clothes suitable for older people); good quality book, toy and food

shops, antiques, DIY/home store, a town centre supermarket such as the Co-op and good cafe/bars. There was also support for small independent or family-owned specialist shops and sellers of local produce.

Many respondents named specific shops or chains, often those available in larger towns such as Shrewsbury (although one respondent noted the difficulty of persuading larger brands to come to a small catchment area, and suggested going instead down the Machynlleth route of becoming a specialist shopping destination) . The most commonly mentioned ‘missing’ shops are listed in Table 1, with number of people naming this indicated in brackets.

Table 1 Most popular named shops wanted
Marks and Spencer (34)
Wilkinsons (27)
Next (17)
Poundland (9)
B&Q (8)
Primark (6)

A number of comments added to the questionnaires indicated concern about the recent loss of shops in Newtown such as Woolworths, Currys, Focus and Laura Ashley and the decline of the town centre. It was also noted that rents and rates needed to be kept affordable, and that attractive shop frontages were needed.

6. If a wider variety of shops came to Newtown, where should these be?

Some people who did not answer the question about which shops would encourage them to shop in the town centre did nevertheless answer the next question about whether any new shops, if they came, should be situated in the town centre or somewhere else. There was an overwhelming majority in favour of any new shops being in the town centre (281 in favour of this), compared to 19 choosing elsewhere. Forty three people ticked ‘no’ against the possibility of new shops being sited outside of the town centre, and added comments such as ‘shopping out of town kills town centres’ and ‘this would be a disaster’. The minority who said new shops were needed ‘somewhere else’ tended to specify shops such as convenience stores as lacking on the estates, although some also commented that new retail facilities could be sited on industrial estates or on premises on the outskirts of town like the Focus/Do-it-all site, where ample parking existed. A common theme in the comments was that existing vacant shops in the town centre needed to be used before developing any new sites: ‘Fill the sad empty premises in the town first’.

7. Feedback on the pictures displayed

Nine images were displayed on large boards during the consultation. The questionnaire asked for a judgment on these images (Like/ Don't Like/ No strong views on this) and also provided space for comments. It was made clear that the images were simply based on ideas suggested by Newtown residents and did not have the status of definite proposals.

295 people expressed a view on at least one of the picture suggestions and 192 made a total of 1478 comments. All comments and suggestions were typed out and the information extracted to identify common themes under the headings of what people liked about the image/ideas for each panel, and what they did not like or were concerned about. The images also served to stimulate other ideas for how Newtown could be improved.

Picture 1: Transport and movement



Like	48%
Don't like	41%
No strong views	11%

Summary of comments:

This picture showed a new pedestrian bridge across New Road between St David's and the Baptist Church. 280 People responded to this question and 172 comments and suggestions were recorded. As the results above show, marginally more people said they like the idea of a bridge crossing than those saying they dislike it.

Comments showing support for the idea centred around the need for a link between the station and town, that a bridge would provide a clear route to the town centre, and draw the town together for pedestrians, and also that this would provide a safer

crossing. Respondents also mentioned the importance of making sure that the bridge was fully accessible to wheelchair users, buggies and bicycles as well as pedestrians. Several people commented on the design as being modern and up to date, and a good impression for visitors, while others said that they liked the idea but not the design.

One respondent commented: 'I like the idea of a bridge connecting the station to the town centre. Maybe the bridge could go on the other side of the Baptist church and link directly with Ladywell shopping centre where you could have a (town centre supermarket) and small boutiques. This would then lead to a pedestrianized town centre. The whole area leading from the station and through Ladywell needs to be brought into the 21st century and made pleasing to the eye. The bridge should be visually appealing – minimalistic perhaps'.

Many people raised concerns about the idea of a bridge crossing. Although it was stressed that the pictures were simply ideas to stimulate debate rather than definite proposals, the design of the bridge was the single most commented on issue. A considerable number of people said they thought the bridge was 'ugly', too modern or out of place in Newtown, or would detract from the beauty of the grade II listed buildings around it. However, the main concern expressed in various different ways, was that there is no need for a bridge. Some people thought the present traffic light system between the two churches serves pedestrians adequately. Some people said that a better pedestrian route would be more realistic and some suggested that all that is needed is better/clearer signage to direct people to the town centre. Respondents also expressed concern about the cost of a bridge or said they thought it would be a waste of money. Several commented that it would be an 'expensive white elephant'.

Other concerns were that the bridge should be high enough for traffic, that young people might throw things from the bridge onto traffic below and that there would be no need for a bridge once a by-pass is built. Several people suggested other places in Newtown where a bridge was needed more, for example up the Old Kerry Road, by traffic lights on Dolfor Road, by McDonalds, by the Queen's Head, and a walking/cycling bridge from Canal Road to the recreation ground.

Although the snapshot view showed respondents marginally more in favour of the idea of a bridge than against it, comments people made raised more concerns than supported the idea. As one respondent said 'Not enough pedestrians use this route to warrant (this level of) expenditure. Also, a footbridge would detract from and ruin the vista of a beautiful grade II listed Baptist Church and St David's Church –which are already significant signposts'. Another commented 'Agree that the walk from the railway station... is poor and unwelcoming but don't feel that a footbridge would be good value for money. Opening up existing pathways or creating a new one would be OK as long as the pedestrian crossing at the Baptist Church was improved'.

Although there were no questions on the by-pass, this undecided issue was clearly at the back of the minds of many people who took part in the consultation. Had the decision been made either to build or not to build a by-pass, this would be likely to have affected the way people responded to the various ideas put forward.

Picture 2: Townscape – High Street



Like	69%
Don't like	22%
No strong views	9%

Summary of comments:

This picture showed proposal for pedestrianising High Street whilst still allowing essential vehicle access. 288 People responded to this question and 192 comments and suggestions were recorded. As the results above show, more than three times as many people said they like the idea of pedestrianisation than those saying they dislike it.

In addition to ticking the box, many people commented that they like the idea of pedestrianising part or all of Newtown. Some commented that pedestrianising High Street would be better than the original idea of pedestrianising Broad Street. Some suggested that this could be relatively easily tried out by (say) closing streets to cars between set times on market days, and there was one suggestion that as a compromise, there could be shared vehicle/pedestrian surfacing to give priority to pedestrians. 'Should be highest priority. Implement perhaps a couple of days a week as an experiment. Could be done at very little cost'.

What people said they liked about the idea was that it would provide a better, more classy, cosmopolitan look to town with more green space, trees etc. They also said pedestrianisation would make the experience of coming into town more relaxing and

provide spaces for people to meet and mix which would be an improved experience for shoppers and encourage more people into town. 'Pedestrianised area is a good way of making visitors and residents feel safer and spend more time socialising and spending money. (Like the idea of) street trees and seating, modern plantings and space for festivals and exhibitions and information/interpretation'.

The main concerns expressed in responses to this idea, even by those who like the idea of pedestrianisation, were connected with the loss of free short stay parking close to the shops. It was felt by many that there would still have to be some free on street parking or else people would just go to out of town supermarkets where parking is free, and this would mean town centre shops and businesses would suffer more loss of trade. Several people suggested that all town centre parking should be reserved for disabled badge holders only and that able bodied people should use the car parks. It was suggested that some free short stay parking in car parks should be provided to compensate for loss of free on street parking.

People who like this idea and people who didn't, also commented on the need for vehicle access to the town centre – whether for shoppers or traders – and the need to keep traffic circulating in the centre. Another concern was the need to ensure that there would be full disabled access (and parking) and that appropriate surfacing without steps should be used for wheelchair users.

Negative comments were largely to do with parking and vehicle access and the potential for traffic chaos that pedestrianisation might bring. Several people expressed concern that pedestrianisation is not appropriate for Newtown, and that they didn't want Newtown to end up looking just like any other town centre. A few people said they wouldn't want more trees in the town centre because trees would obscure views, the roots and leaves would cause problems and they might be vandalised.

Response to the idea of pedestrianisation was however overwhelmingly positive and some respondents suggested other benefits that would come from this, for example, 'the paved area would link existing areas that need regeneration – Ladywell, the Market Hall, Bear Lanes, could all be linked and would look great when looking through to the town hall'. The views of many were summed up by one respondent who commented 'this is just the kind of thing we need. People would enjoy coming into town and spend more time here if it was a pleasant car free space' but the view was also expressed that 'pedestrianisation alone won't bring in shoppers', that this would be the 'icing on the cake and trade will not come to Newtown just because we have a pretty town'.

Picture 3: Youth – Trehafren Hill



Like	67%
Don't like	11%
No strong views	22%

Summary of comments:

This picture showed ideas for providing facilities and activities for young people on Trehafren Hill. 291 People responded to this question and 143 comments and suggestions were recorded. More than two thirds of respondents said they like the ideas for young people suggested in this picture. When considering response to this question it should be remembered that the majority of people who participated in the consultation were in the older age range, and relatively few younger people took part. If proposals for developing activities and facilities for younger people are taken forward this would clearly require additional consultation into the needs of young people and in relation to what is currently available in Newtown.

Many people commented that young people in Newtown need more things to do and that outdoor activities such as these (dry ski, tobogganing etc) would be good for young people of all ages as well as families, and would also encourage visitors to the town.

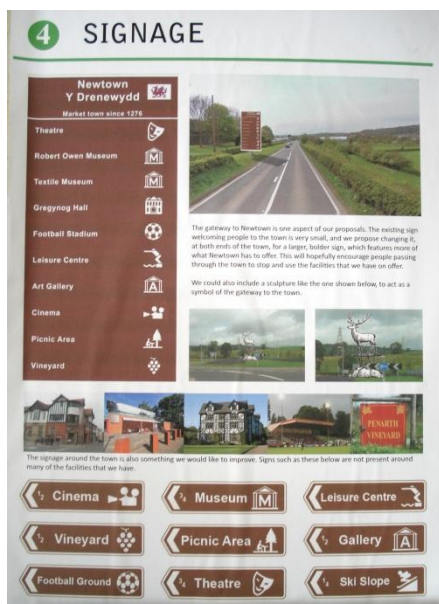
The main concern that was also expressed by some of those who said they liked this idea, was to do with the potential for vandalism and for other anti-social behaviour such as use of drugs and alcohol, gang culture, bullying etc. The need for appropriate supervision was referred to by several respondents and it was suggested that one solution would be to make sure that children and young people as well as youth workers, are engaged at an early stage and involved in the design and running of any such project. Other suggestions for reducing the likelihood of anti-social behaviour were to make sure that the facilities are well maintained, to make use of CCTV, make sure it is well fenced, and have set opening (and closing) hours.

In terms of location, some people commented that Trehafren hill is safe and out of the way of residents as well as being underused, and that the proposals would add a lot to the town, while others thought it would be noisy for residents and too close to housing. The view was also expressed that more leisure areas are needed on other estates and in the town centre and that a facility such as this would be better used if located more centrally in town.

Several people said that any development of the hill should include a natural area for quietness and imaginative play. Some respondents who said they didn't like the ideas represented in the picture, commented that Newtown needs natural open spaces and that this type of development would be detrimental to the landscape. One respondent suggested that we should 'keep the hill as a mainly wild space, perhaps with better signposting to encourage walking'.

Other ideas suggested for young people included a youth café in the centre of town, a town centre youth club, use of agriculture house for youth space, permanent orienteering course, mountain bike track, low level climbing wall, snooker and seats and a shelter for parents/grandparents. It was also pointed out that 'capital works are not everything, and no substitute for a well funded youth service'.

Picture 4: Signage



Like	76%
Don't like	10%
No strong views	14%

Summary of comments:

This picture showed a large brown sign by the road into Newtown with a list of the town's attractions, together with smaller individual signs to specific features and a sculpture of a stag to mark the 'gateway' to the town. 295 people expressed a view on the images and 154 comments and suggestions were made.

Signage was the most popular of all the ideas in the exhibition, with over three quarters saying they liked this and only one in ten against. Many people said that this was much needed or long overdue, that existing signage was poor and that better signs would encourage visitors into the town and ‘put Newtown on the map’. It was seen as a ‘quick win’ that would not cost too much. A typical comment was ‘Like this a lot. A good start to improving the town. Better signage is essential and affordable’.

Concerns were however expressed about the size of the main sign, which was often described as too large or ‘over the top’ with too much information. Some people thought that it risked distracting drivers (‘cars would crash by the time they read it’), although one person commented that ‘you’d have plenty of time to read it queuing up to get into Newtown’. Several people mentioned the bypass in relation to this picture, thinking that signage should wait until the bypass was built as ‘if people have been stuck in traffic for hours they won’t stop – doesn’t matter what signs are up’.

The smaller signs also received positive comments, with suggestions for additional local attractions that could be signposted including the old church, woollen mill, market and theatre. Several people commented that all the signs should be bilingual, and one added ‘have you thought of Braille?’

The idea of a sculpture to mark the entrance to the town received a more mixed reception, and there were a large number of negative comments about the stag in the picture. Even those who thought a sculpture was a good idea said that this was not an appropriate image for Newtown and that any sculpture should have a connection with the town. Alternative ideas put forward included a sheep, Kerry ram, red dragon, red kite, Welsh lion, statue of Robert Owen, a ‘huge oak tree (living sculpture)’, ‘something to do with the woollen industry’ and ‘something to do with the co-op movement, sustainable transport, hydro/renewables’.

Picture 5: Park and river frontage



Like	70%
Don't like	19%
No strong views	11%

Summary of comments:

This image included a bandstand in Dolerw Park and an artist's impression of developments around the river including a beach and lagoon. It is linked to Picture 8 which also showed ideas to make more use of the river. 282 people replied to this question and 181 comments and suggestions were made.

There was widespread agreement with the view that more needs to be made of the river and park, which is currently an under-used asset. One person commented that 'we have this wonderful resource but it's not fully utilised', another that 'if this were another EU country we would have cafes etc all along the river – it's beautiful'. Several people suggested that Newtown could be renamed 'Newtown upon Severn' to emphasise the town's location on the river.

As with other displays in the exhibition, far more people were in favour of the ideas presented than were against them. Some thought that opening up the park and river frontage would improve tourism and that riverside development could create jobs. However, the comments indicated quite polarised views on the specific proposals, with people often feeling very strongly either for or against them. There were many positive comments ('best idea', 'yes yes yes', 'brilliant', 'fab', 'wonderful', 'excellent' 'love it') but also strong feelings against ('stupid idea', 'silly', 'too ambitious').

The proposal for a beach received the largest number of negative comments, mainly on the grounds of it being out of keeping ('it is not a seaside town'), unfeasible and generally a waste of money. There were also positive comments but these were in the minority, for example 'beachside fun would be great for my grandsons when visiting plus enjoyable facility for walks etc'. Views on the bandstand/cinema screen were also split but tended to be more favourable, with people pointing out its potential for bringing people together and increasing community spirit. 'Anything to provide family fun and community spirit is good...will encourage people to socialise'. Others liked the idea but not the design: 'much too angular and harsh for such a small park'. Several people also mentioned the potential for holding local festivals in the park.

Many of the comments on this display were broadly positive, but at the same time expressed concerns or were aware of the challenges involved. These commonly focused on safety and upkeep (for example the likelihood of vandalism, risk of flooding, need for insurance and regular maintenance); the potential loss of car parking space; and perceived impracticality (water levels being too low for boating, lack of the good weather needed to enjoy such facilities, high cost). Whilst some people were clearly excited by the possibilities shown, others wanted more moderation ('improve access to the river but don't overdo it'). Some stated a preference for the park and river to remain as 'open green space', with one person commenting that 'visitors have remarked how nice the river walk is, how calm and peaceful it is to walk along so please leave it alone'. Overall, however, there was definite support for making better use of the river and park.

Picture 6: Arts and culture



Like	72%
Don't like	7%
No strong views	21%

Summary of comments:

This picture showed the Pryce Jones building and some ideas for how it could be used such as an art gallery or craft workshops. 285 People responded to this question and 127 comments and suggestions were recorded. As the results above show, most people said they like the idea of Pryce Jones building and Agriculture House being brought back into use by sensitive development.

Many people commented that this would be a 'good use of space', and perhaps led by the ideas in the picture, respondents liked the idea of using the space for arts and crafts, and particularly if this provides local artists and craftspeople with studio space as well as space for exhibitions and a retail outlet.

The feeling was strongly expressed that Pryce Jones is a beautiful building and a major feature of historical interest to Newtown that is currently 'in a mess' and 'going to waste'. This also applies to Agriculture House, but that building wasn't commented on specifically as frequently as the Pryce Jones building. People said that the buildings should be revitalised and reused, with sensitive development to retain their character. Several people referred to historic buildings that they had seen developed in other places such as Saltaire, Salts Mill, Gloucester Quays, New Lanark and Leominster.

Few negative comments were expressed in relation to this idea. Some people said that the town centre (rather than the station area) should have priority for development and others were concerned about costs and who would pay for the conversion, or that the development might not get much custom either because of the location or because of lack of sufficient need or interest.

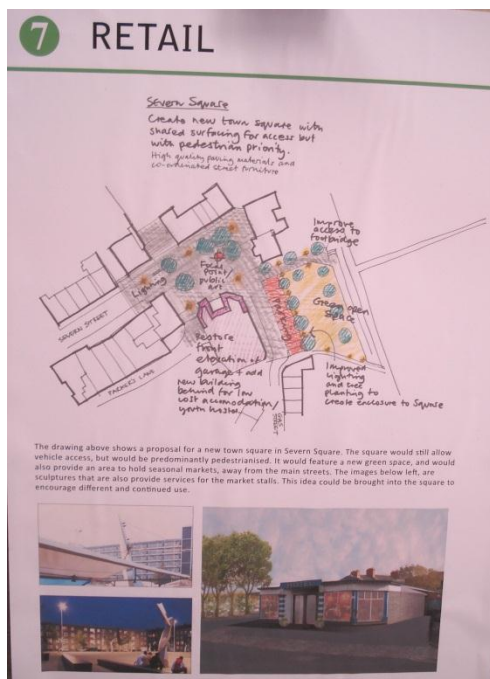
Several people suggested that this type of development could be good for tourism, encouraging visitors into the area for example, as one person commented: ‘the heritage of the town is vital to attract people. Pryce Jones should be at the centre of this wonderful idea. I’m sure most Newtonians don’t appreciate its full history and significance. This could be a UK wide attraction’.

Alternative suggestions for use of these buildings were made by some, including (in no particular order) a good hotel, a leisure complex, space for apartments/housing, a centre for national level events, a small theatre or cinema with café bars and areas for community use, a concert hall and culture centre, conversion to provide specialist/boutique market units, a centre for excellence for stone carving or printmaking, use the building for Coleg Powys, turn the building into a performance arts college/music college separate from Coleg Powys.

Some people suggested that the Pryce Jones building should be transformed back into a department store and used for retail as was the original historical purpose.

Other people suggested that what to do with these buildings is worthy of its own consultation and this could be part of a wider survey of unused and under-used buildings with appropriate feasibility studies to follow.

Picture 7: Retail



Like	63%
Don't like	18%
No strong views	19%

Summary of comments:

This picture was labelled ‘Retail’ but the main image was a sketched plan of Severn Square suggesting the creation of a ‘new town square with shared surfacing for

access but with pedestrian priority', and several respondents remarked that the picture didn't seem to relate to retail. There was overlap between this picture and picture number 9 which also included an image of Severn Square, and similar comments and suggestions were found in responses to both pictures.

268 People responded to this question and 120 comments and suggestions were recorded. As the results above show, most people said they like the idea of Severn Square being developed into a new town square.

Many people made positive comments suggesting that 'this part of town is under appreciated' and that 'it's an attractive part of town' in need of revitalising which if sensitively developed, could increase the size of the town centre and become a good focal point. Respondents liked the idea of additional green space with seating and the potential for a meeting space: 'outdoor seating, food, café/bar, covered market, street entertainment'. People also liked the idea of street markets, particularly a farmers markets and speciality markets such as Christmas markets. Some people commented that the garage façade should be retained and although it was generally felt that it would be good to have low cost accommodation in the town centre, several respondents were not keen on the idea of a youth hostel. One respondent commented 'don't want the garage to stop providing its excellent service – relocate as part of plans'.

The main concerns expressed in relation to these ideas were to do with the reduction in parking, need for disabled parking, and potential traffic problems. Several people commented that the area around Severn Square is already a pleasant part of town and that improving this area should not be a priority. Some people said that empty units and shops should be used first before any new retail areas are developed. Concern was expressed that developing Severn Square would draw market stalls away from High Street and Broad Street and affect other businesses, and it was pointed out that Severn Square is not the centre of Newtown. Despite being told that the images were only for the purpose of displaying and stimulating ideas, several people commented that they didn't like the design of the hotel shown in the picture.

Several of the other ideas suggested by respondents were to do with the need to support and stimulate businesses in Newtown. As one person commented, 'an attractive town square will only be maintained if appropriate retail units are included and businesses can be sustained'. Another comment reflected the views of many, that there was a need to 'bring down rents and rates of shops and offices to keep businesses flowing. The place will come more alive and bring more people to the town'. It was suggested that 'high rent/rates impedes business and start-ups. Impose high costs on proprietors of empty or underused properties as an incentive to lower rents'.

Other suggestions made in relation to this picture were to combine these proposals with river front development; provide bike hire for canal/river trail; build a Travel Lodge here; build a new court house on the gas works site; provide a caravan site close to the town centre; build a museum dedicated to Pryce Jones and a Laura Ashley museum and heritage site.

Picture 8: River



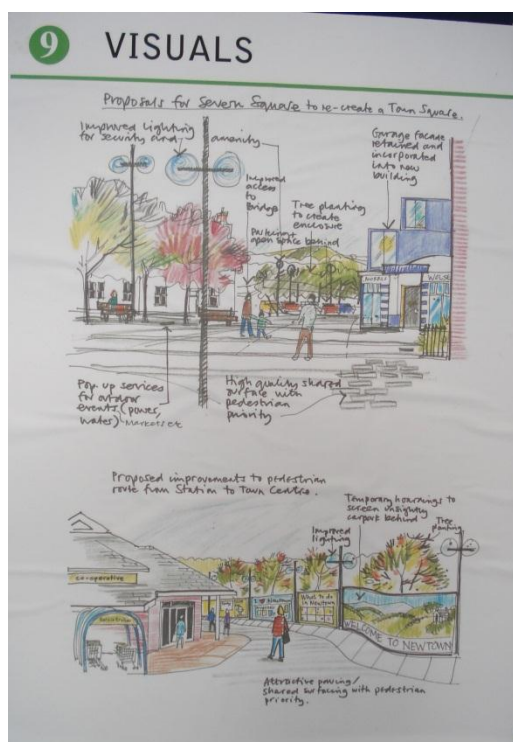
Like	64%
Don't like	26%
No strong views	10%

Summary of comments:

This picture showed a boathouse on the river Severn with people using the river for boating and paddling. 280 People responded to this question and 138 comments and suggestions were recorded. There was overlap between this picture and picture number 5 which also described developments around the river, and some comments specifically linked the two: 'link 5 and 8 and maybe you have something the riverside needs', 'the area developed in picture 5 is fine but areas of the riverbank should be left natural and undeveloped'.

Similar comments were made in response to both pictures, particularly an emphasis on making more of the river through sympathetic development in order both to attract visitors to Newtown and to provide facilities for residents. As with picture 5, concerns were expressed about the feasibility of boating due to the shallowness of the river and about the potential for vandalism. Although the majority of comments were broadly positive, there was strong criticism of the design of the boathouse which was variously described as 'awful', 'ugly', 'very naff', 'horrible', 'too modern', 'a monstrosity' and 'a complete eyesore'. The images were designed to stimulate discussion rather than to reflect concrete proposals, but such responses illustrate the importance of consulting at all stages of a development, from general ideas through to more detailed plans and designs for specific buildings.

Picture 9: Visuals – Severn square and pedestrian route from station



Like	68%
Don't like	16%
No strong views	16%

Summary of comments:

This poster displayed an ‘artist’s impression’ of two separate ideas: one showing developments to Severn Square and the other a pedestrian route from the railway station to the town. Most of the questionnaires asked people to give a single judgement on both images, but comments often referred specifically to one or the other. Overall, 261 people responded to this question and 119 comments and suggestions were made. Over two thirds liked the ideas presented, and the rest were equally divided between those who did not like them and those who had no strong feelings either way.

There was overlap between the top half of this picture and picture number 7, which also showed ideas for what could be done with Severn Square. Taking the Severn Square proposals first, comments were mainly positive. People commented that this area needs improvement or a ‘facelift’ and that it is ‘a good area that needs revitalising’, which is currently too detached from the town centre. It was felt that the ideas suggested would make it more attractive, welcoming and inviting. ‘I walk that way each day so would be great to see an improvement with small cafe’. Others liked the idea of improving the square, but were less keen on specific features shown in the drawing, in particular the youth hostel/hotel.

The smaller number of negative comments about the Severn Square image focused mostly on cost (‘too expensive’, ‘waste of money’, ‘not a priority’) or on concerns that it appeared to involve additional pedestrianisation and reduction in parking. One person was ‘not very keen on town squares’, another thought the proposals in the

drawing looked 'too touristy'. Several people made specific comments about the garage building in the square, either saying that it was 'an eyesore', 'ugly' or 'unsightly' and should be demolished; or that it had a nice facade which should be retained and the garage used perhaps as an arts or workshop space.

A strong theme in comments was the need to retain the individuality of Newtown. It was stressed that any development to areas such as Severn Square should be 'tasteful and sympathetic', 'respect what exists', be 'low key' and not 'take away the personality of Newtown'. Development was 'a good idea so long as it doesn't look like the other clone city centres'.

The second image showing improvements to the pedestrian route from the railway station to the town also received more positive than negative comments, with some people noting that it was a much more sensible idea than the pedestrian bridge shown in image 1. The fact that it could be done very quickly at low cost was a positive point. However, there was also a relatively large number of negative comments about the use of hoardings along the route to screen the Pryce Jones car park, on the grounds that they would look scruffy quickly, be used for fly posting and graffiti, and 'hide the distant landscape'. It was also thought that not enough people used this route from station to town to make it worthwhile. Others agreed with the lack of use but drew a different conclusion. They thought that developments such as this pedestrian route needed to be part of a more coordinated transport system, with bus/rail links, better cycle access and secure cycle parking at the station, and improvements to the station itself.

General comments and suggestions

The exhibition included panels listing suggestions that came from an initial public meeting in July 2011. At the end of the questionnaire, there was space for those attending to mention any of these ideas that they particularly liked or disliked, and to add any other comments or ideas about what would improve Newtown for them.

132 'other' comments or suggestions were received. Some responses were a single sentence, but others filled the box provided on the questionnaire and continued over the whole of the back page. One person added their own drawing of what the town could look like. There was clearly a great deal of interest in making the town a better place to live, and many comments indicated excitement at the ideas presented in the exhibition and appreciation of the opportunity for local people to have their say. 'Inspiring', 'well done', 'brilliant ideas go ahead!', 'thank you for putting on this exhibition and consulting with people'. Some noted that it would be useful to extend the consultation, for example through schools or places where young people congregate, and others felt that the town council could take more responsibility for finding out and acting on local views: 'It is brilliant that volunteers have invested so much energy in this consultation which a more dynamic, imaginative town council surely ought to be responsible for'.

The comments were wide ranging and often reiterated points that have already been made in this report. It is impossible to summarise them all, but the most common comments can be grouped as follows (with the most frequently mentioned at the top):

- Need to sort out the traffic situation/bypass before any other development
- Concerns about impact of developments on parking in the town centre, including disabled parking
- Important that any development is in keeping with the town, takes account of local heritage and maintains Newtown's character as a country/market town ('not some Welsh Milton Keynes')
- Concerns about feasibility of the plans, 'where is the money coming from?'
- Need to move away from the 'pub culture' by introducing family-friendly eating places, internet/community/alcohol-free cafes, things for young people to do apart from drink
- Restore A&E at the hospital
- Revitalise the market hall
- Negative comments about the 'yellow brick road'
- Need to pay attention to the upkeep of any development and to security and insurance: 'it is no good doing anything unless it is properly maintained'
- Priority is to create more jobs (and any new development should use local construction firms)

In addition to these clusters of comments, there were suggestions by individuals for specific things that they would like to see in Newtown. These included more benches (especially by the river), a free weekly newspaper paid for by the county council, an angling club, pool or snooker hall, cycle race track, cultural centre, good hotel and a caravan touring site.

Although a few individuals did not want any development to happen in Newtown and liked it as it is, the majority were keen for improvements to be made. Newtown was described as 'dying on its feet', 'becoming a dying town', or 'dying because it is not providing the environment and facilities that people want – but it could do!' For some there was a sense of urgency: 'please hurry as the town is going to the dogs', 'something must be done or else it will be too late'. This consultation exercise has demonstrated the strength of local people's commitment to our town, which is a resource that could be better utilised to shape future plans.

'I love my town. I hope some of these ideas will happen to ensure the future of our town. Good luck!'

Conclusions

The report and findings were discussed by members of the I Love Newtown group and the following conclusions were agreed:

- Newtown is much loved by its residents but they are concerned about the decline of the town
- Local people have valuable views on how Newtown should develop and want to be involved in making decisions about its future
- People want to see a range of coordinated improvements across the whole of the town centre with a more pedestrian friendly and accessible feel to the town
- People want to see more made of the history and special character of Newtown to encourage visitors and celebrate its historic and cultural past
- The river and the park are beautiful and unique areas that are underused and could be sensitively developed for leisure and commerce/tourism whilst being preserved as publically accessible green spaces
- People want to see better facilities for young people in Newtown
- Better signs are needed to direct visitors into the town and tell them (and locals) what Newtown has to offer

Possible areas for further investigation:

The consultation highlighted some areas that people think it might be useful to investigate further before decisions are made on the future of Newtown:

- Housing needs, whether recorded on waiting lists, or hidden (young people living at home because they are unable to find separate affordable accommodation)
- Baseline survey of sites and buildings to establish what disused or under-used properties there are in and around Newtown and what potential there is for development in these areas. This could include historic buildings such as the Pryce Jones building and Agriculture House.
- Look at and learn from what's been done to sensitively regenerate other places including historic buildings such as Salts Mill in Saltaire, Gloucester Quays and New Lanark.
- Extend the consultation, for example through schools or places where young people congregate

Appendix I

Demographic details

Gender	No.	%
Female	229	55
Male	186	45
Total	415	100

Age range	No.	%
15 or under	10	2.4
16-24	13	3.1
25-34	16	3.8
35-44	48	11.6
45-54	63	15.2
55-64	127	30.6
65-74	82	19.8
75 or over	49	11.8
No response	7	1.7
Total	415	100

Length of time living in the area	No.	%
2 years or less	9	2.2
2-5 years	13	3.1
6-10 years	46	11.1
11-20	66	15.9
21-34	102	24.6
35-49	89	21.4
50 years or more	73	17.6
Visitors	6	1.4
No response	11	2.7
Total	415	100

Location	No.	%
Newtown/Llanllwchaiarn	295	71
Newtown area villages	108	26
Welshpool/Llanfair C./Llanidloes	4	1
Other places	8	2
Total	415	100

Appendix 2

I Love Newtown public consultation 17-22 October 2011

This consultation is organised by the I Love Newtown group, an independent voluntary group of residents and business people who care about the future of Newtown. For one week only, volunteers from the group will staff a display and collect comments and suggestions from the public, which will then be fed back to Newtown Town Council and Powys County Council.

Please look around the displays and let us have your views so that we can let Powys County Council know what the people of Newtown would like to see. Please look at the consultation displays before completing the questionnaire.

Thank you for your time

Questionnaire	Yes	No	Don't know
1) Do you think we need more housing in Newtown?	118	131	59
2) If it is decided that we do need more should this be:			
a) In the town centre?	56	32	6
b) Along the road towards Llanidloes?	54	34	3
c) Along the road towards Welshpool?	57	34	5
d) Along the road towards Tregynon?	26	37	3
e) Along the road towards Dolfor?	35	38	2
f) Somewhere else – please say where you think new housing should be built:	24	4	8
<hr/>			
3) Do you think we need more industrial or commercial premises in Newtown?	87	179	24
4) If it is decided that we do need more, should this be:			
a) On existing business parks/trading estates?	152	10	3
b) Somewhere else – please say where you think new industrial units should be built:	7	18	1
<hr/>			
c) Should we look at a different kind of arrangement such as live/work units?	104	37	42

5) What shops do you think are missing in Newtown that would encourage you to shop in the town centre?

260 answered this question by writing something in the box. Five people said no more shops are needed, and others listed what shops they would like to see

	Yes	No	Don't know
6) If a wider variety of shops came to Newtown should these be:			
a) In the town centre?	281	2	1
b) Somewhere else – please say where you think new shopping areas should be built:	19	43	1

7) This question is to do with town centre sites linked to images displayed here.

These are not definite proposals – they are simply some of the ideas suggested by residents.

Looking at each picture, please say whether you like the idea, don't like the idea or don't know/don't have strong feelings either way (circle your response).

Picture no. 1: (Transport & movement)

Total	Like this	Don't like this	No strong view on this
280	133	115	32

Comments on picture number 1:

172 Comments received

Picture no. 2: (Townscape – High Street)

Total	Like this	Don't like this	No strong view on this
288	199	62	27

Comments on picture number 2:

192 Comments received

Picture no. 3: (Youth – Trehafren Hill)

Total	Like this	Don't like this	No strong view on this
291	196	31	64

Comments on picture number 3:

143 Comments received

Picture no. 4: (Signage)

Total	Like this	Don't like this	No strong view on this
295	225	29	41

Comments on picture number 4:

154 Comments received

Picture no. 5: (Community – park & river frontage)

Total	Like this	Don't like this	No strong view on this
282	197	54	31

Comments on picture number 5:

181 Comments received

Picture no. 6: (Arts & Culture)

Total	Like this	Don't like this	No strong view on this
285	205	21	59

Comments on picture number 6:

127 Comments received

Picture no. 7: (Retail)

Total	Like this	Don't like this	No strong view on this
268	168	49	51

Comments on picture number 7:

120 Comments received

Picture no. 8: (River)

Total	Like this	Don't like this	No strong view on this
280	178	73	29

Comments on picture number 8:

138 Comments received

Picture no. 9: (Visuals: Severn Square & pedestrian route from station)

Total	Like this	Don't like this	No strong view on this
261	176	43	42

Comments on picture number 9:

119 Comments received

Other comments/suggestions:

The exhibition includes a list of suggestions that came from the initial public meeting in July. If there are any ideas that you particularly like or dislike, please mention them here. If you have any other comments or ideas about what would improve Newtown for you, please tell us here or put a suggestion in the suggestion box.

132 'other' comments/suggestions received