



# Hackney Central Conversation Consultation Report 2021



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# Introduction

Hackney Council launched the Hackney Central Conversation in July 2019 so local people could tell us what they love about Hackney Central, the challenges they experience, and what changes they would like to see the council make in the area. The approach for the project was about early, ongoing and honest dialogue with those who live, work and visit the area so that they can influence change in their community.

The Conversation focused on two streams of work: Moving around Hackney Central and community mapping exercise.

## Moving around Hackney Central

The Council was previously awarded £10m of funding from Transport for London through the Liveable Neighbourhood Scheme to transform Hackney Central by reducing traffic in the area and redesigning its three dangerous junctions – Pembury Circus, Mare Street/Graham Road and Mare Street/Morning Lane – to make them safer for cyclists, pedestrians and public transport users.

Before the Council formally consulted on the Liveable Neighbourhood scheme, officers wanted to hear residents' experiences of walking, cycling and accessing public transport in the area to feed into how we design the scheme.

Although this funding stream has been paused by Transport for London as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, we have already undertaken work to look at how these measures can now be introduced.

With new funding becoming available, we are reviewing these plans to see how the improvements can be delivered and will engage with residents on these plans. Feedback and analysis of the Moving around Hackney Central engagement will be used to inform this.

## Community Mapping

The community mapping project ran for a total of seven months from July 2019 until February 2020. Over 2000 people visited the commonplace website, and shared over 2,000 comments or added agreements or likes to these. This platform provided a key way to collect information, giving us a better understanding of the place and how it is perceived by the local community.

This online engagement was supplemented through workshops, community meetings, and stalls on the Narrow Way and at Hackney Carnival.

This report details the feedback and analysis of the online and engagement work for the mapping exercise only.

# Section 1: Starting the Conversation

## Project background

Hackney Central is where our borough meets: it's our civic centre, home to the stunning Town Hall, historic Hackney Empire and a cinema, library and other essential services; it's where London Overground lines, bus routes and walking and cycling routes come together; and it's a growing town centre with more shoppers, businesses and places to go out.

It's already seen change – like the Hackney Walk fashion district, new bars and breweries in Bohemia Place and the pedestrianisation of the Narrow Way to support local traders, shoppers and cyclists. We know local people are proud of what makes the area great, but we also know it is becoming more attractive to new residents, businesses and developers, and we need to act now to ensure we protect our town centre for the long term.

We also know there are huge opportunities to improve the area – radically reducing the traffic that dominates it, transforming dangerous and heavily polluted junctions, and making it easier for more people to walk and cycle. We are London's leading council for tackling poor air quality, and we're determined to reclaim our streets for people, not cars.

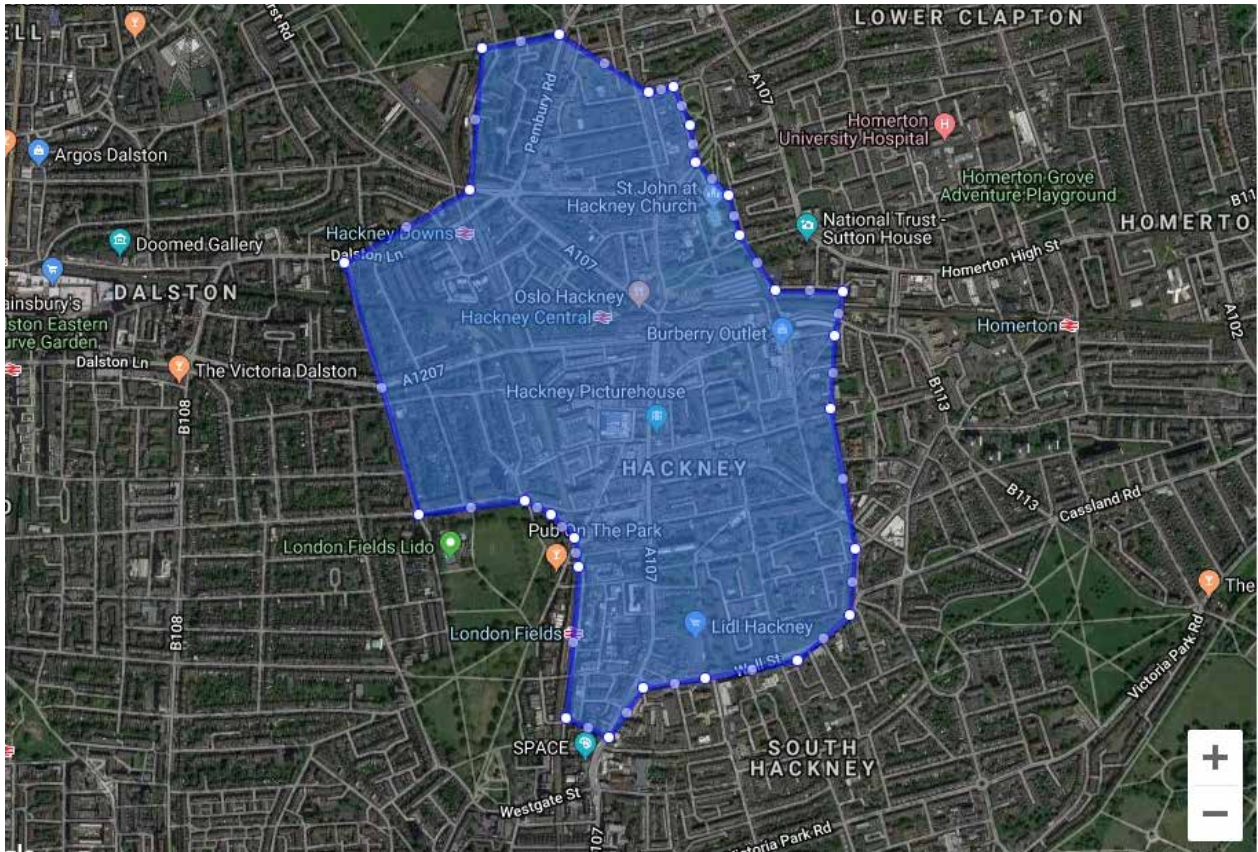
The Hackney Central Conversation was launched to map out and collect ideas and evidence on how we can manage these challenges in the area so that we can manage change for residents and businesses.

## Consultation approach

The Hackney Central town centre area straddles two wards - Hackney Central and Homerton. The area designated for the engagement exercise incorporated the whole of Hackney Central and the western side of Homerton wards. A small section of London Fields ward was also added to the consultation area in acknowledgement that the town centre impacts on the area.

The Conversation was launched on 17 July 2019. The consultation ran for a period of eight months (July 2019 until March 2020) to allow information to be shared with the area and allow a long lead in time for participants to respond. A total of 455 individuals made 1329 contributions to the site.

A5 flyers were distributed to c. 9,000 residential and commercial properties to the consultation area below. In addition to this, the council issued tweets and the project featured in articles and consultation notices in Hackney Today in July 2019.



Consultation A5 leaflet distribution area



## Advertisements

As a part of advertising the Conversation, advertisements were taken out on Facebook and Instagram. These were issued on a weekly basis for one month and targeted at residents, businesses or those who had logged onto local wifi networks or had tagged themselves in the locality.

## How to read this report

When reading this report, there are a number of things to take into consideration:

- Not every participant provided a response to every question on the platform. This means that figures will not always add up to the total amount of respondents (455).
- Some responses contained multiple comments, identifying a number of issues. This also affects the overall total of issues raised in comments.
- How respondents have answered each question varies from one word answers to long prose or lists. Reviewing this information involves the layered analysis of individual responses which have been clustered into themes to help provide a more coherent narrative.
- Each question has been analysed differently. Some sections have been amalgamated (what are you commenting on and Do you have any comments) as these are largely needed to be read together.
- Where relevant, 'likes' to comments are highlighted as a means of indicating where respondents think a comment is important.
- The questions 'What are you commenting on' and 'why do you feel this way' have been amalgamated as they are directly related to each other and to make for an easier read. Similarly, the analysis for the question 'What do you like/love about Hackney Central?' and 'What is your favourite place?'
- Quotes have been provided to give context to the analysis.
- The number of mentions of an issue, venue/location or concept in the comments is reported in brackets ie The largest respondent age group were 35-44 (21).

## Section 2: Data Collection Methodology

### Data collection

The primary method of collecting data was through the on-line platform, Commonplace [hcc.commonplace.is](http://hcc.commonplace.is). There are two main ways participants have contributed to the platform.

The first is to add a comment about the Hackney Central area. The participant drops the pin on the map on either an area where they want to raise an issue. In order for a comment to appear on the site, the participant has to verify that they made the comment via a confirmation email.

Once participants had identified either a location or issue they want to raise, they were asked the following open text questions:

What are you commenting on?  
What do you like/love about Hackney Central  
What is your favourite space/place in Hackney Central?  
Do you have any other comments?

They were also asked to qualify their comments 'How does it make you feel?' based on a likert scale.

The second is to add an agreement to an existing comment on the platform. Respondents can add one agreement to any comment other than their own. Unless a person is already logged in, they are asked to provide an email address. If the person chooses not to provide their email address, they are treated as anonymous and their comments are collected in the database but not displayed publicly.

Throughout the report, those who have added comments have been recorded as participants or respondents.

### Verifying comments

Those who provide their email address are sent an email with a verification link. Until they click this link, they are treated as pending and their comments are collected in the database but not displayed publicly. If the link is not clicked within three days, a reminder email is sent out. Once they click the link, a person becomes confirmed and all their comments become publicly visible. People interviewed by a team member at an event have their comments displayed publicly automatically, and their comments are marked as survey comments.

83 % (286) of the total comments were verified by participants and further 9 % (31) unverified/anonymous comments. An additional 28 were entered via the survey form function. We have counted unverified comments, although they do not appear on the public site.

## Face-to-face engagement

We recognise that Hackney Central is a diverse community and that we need to use a range of data collection methods, as no one single engagement method was sufficient to capture and understand the complexity of residents, businesses and visitors' opinions and views. The project team attended or arranged events, workshops, market stalls or community meetings in Hackney Central.

These events included:

### Workshops

- Moving Around Hackney Central Workshop
- Cultural Stakeholders Workshop
- Young Persons Workshop: Cardinal Pole Secondary School
- Young Persons Workshop: Urswick Secondary School

### Other Community Events

- Mare Street/Narrow Way Business Survey
- Presentation to Hackney Central and London Fields Pubwatch
- Presentation to Hackney Cycle Campaign
- Market stall on the Narrow Way x2
- Stall at Hackney Carnival, outside the Town Hall
- Hackney Central Ward Forum: presentation of the project

Throughout the report feedback from these events have been added to give further insights and provide more detailed context to the data.

## Analysing your comments and interpreting the data

A total of 902 comments were made on the site across the four questions, identifying key local issues, places people like to visit, concerns about change and their aspirations for the area. These comments have been posted in open-ended questions in prose format as qualitative data. Officers have read every comment on the platform and used a number of qualitative analysis techniques to analyse these.

It should be noted that respondents are self selecting, therefore, all results are subject to tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant. Where percentages have been used, they may not sum to 100. This may be due to rounding, the exclusion of "don't know" categories, or multiple comments in the responses to the questions.

Officers have 'coded' the data in order to identify and cluster concepts and themes together. This has allowed us to explore and analyse patterns in participants' contributions as well as bring to the fore what people think is important. The data was reviewed in the first instance and a loose structure of initial themes were identified. These were later refined and, where necessary, amalgamated to be applicable across all the data sets. Officers then applied these themes to each response. Multiple codes can appear in one comment from a participant.



## Key themes identified in the data



### **Sense of Place**

This theme identifies the feelings the community has towards each other and their physical environments.



### **Local economy**

This identifies the retail offer of Hackney Central such as shopping, cultural institutions and businesses as well the night time economy, including bars and restaurants.



### **Transport**

This theme incorporates transport issues such as cars, buses, the overground, cycling and as well as moving around the area on foot.



### **Greenspaces**

This theme covers green infrastructure such as trees and planting, pocket gardens and formal and informal greenspaces such parks and community gardens.



### **Streetscene and public realm design**

In this report this theme relates to the state and design of public spaces such as streets, roads and junctions.



### **Community safety**

This theme looks at the general sense of public safety, anti-social behaviour such as street-drinkers, drug taking and crime in the Hackney Central area.



### **Buildings & development**

This theme relates to existing and new buildings and development in the area including the quality of architecture and heritage issues.

For issues of data protection, we have been unable to cross reference certain demographics such as sexuality, religion or disability.

We have used word frequency analysis (WFA) to examine repetition of words and terms. This is represented or visualised through content or word clouds which help to cluster the frequency of responses by depicting the words that appear most in larger or darker type within the cloud. The word clouds have not been represented in every section of the report.

## Section 3: Respondent analysis

The below provides an overview of the demographic profile of respondents including gender, age, ethnicity and other markers such as their connection to the area and postcodes. This has been collected for equalities monitoring and cross referencing purposes.

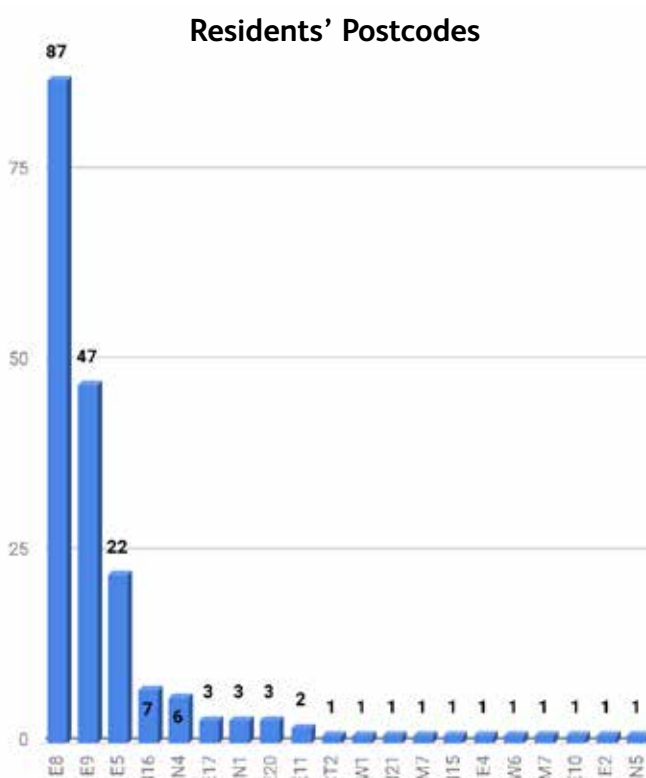
### Demographics

Respondents were asked to provide the following information about themselves. All fields were optional, and the fields marked with an asterisk below allowed respondents to select multiple answers. The demographic data represent those who left comments on the platform, not those who 'liked' comments.

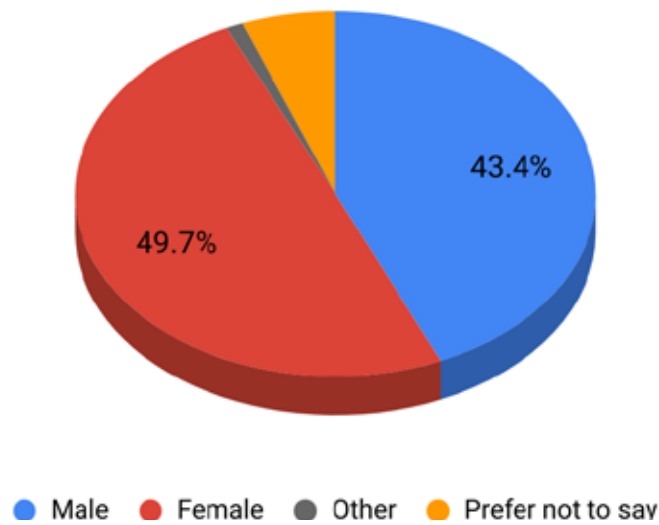
- Postcode
- Connection to the area
- Age group
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Sexuality
- Religion
- Disability

### Postcode analysis

The postcode identify question was optional as a part of the demographics section of the survey. This data is captured to allow the project team to monitor where respondents live and what relationships exist between issues and those who live in particular postcode areas. A total of 191 (55%) respondents provided a postcode. Just under half of responses came from the immediate Hackney Central area E8 (87) or the neighbouring postcode areas E9 (47) and E5 (22). Others included N15 (7), N4 (6).

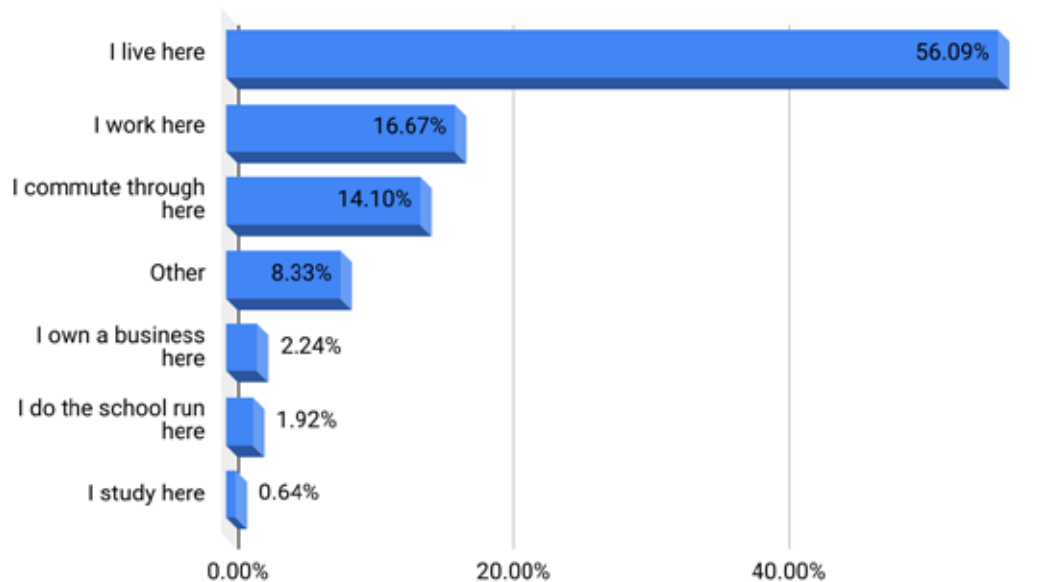


## Gender of Participants



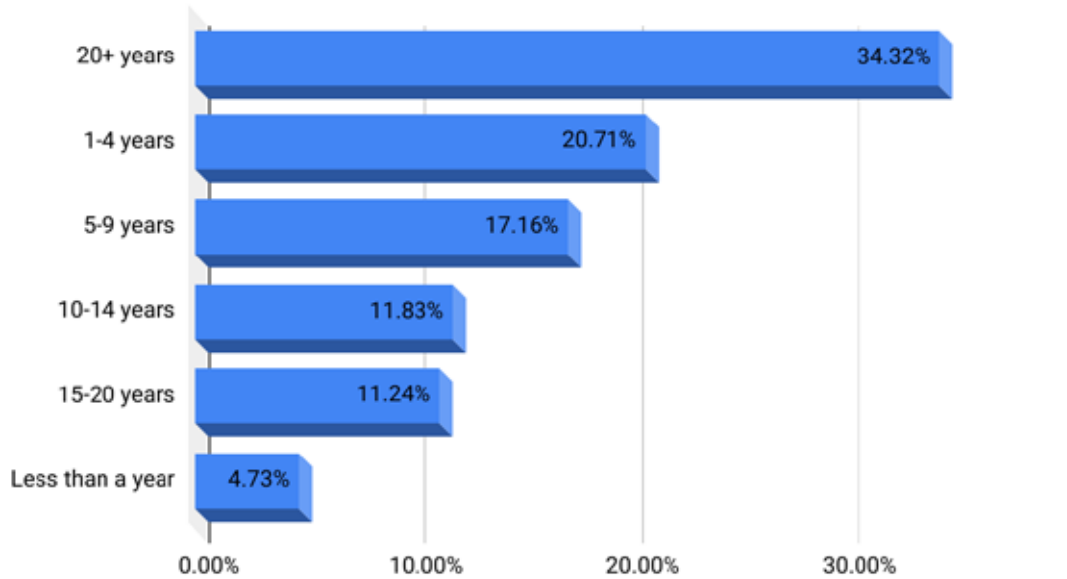
52 % of respondents (178) provided their gender. Slightly more females (94) responded to the consultation than males (82), 6 % (11) did not state their gender.

## Respondents connection to the area



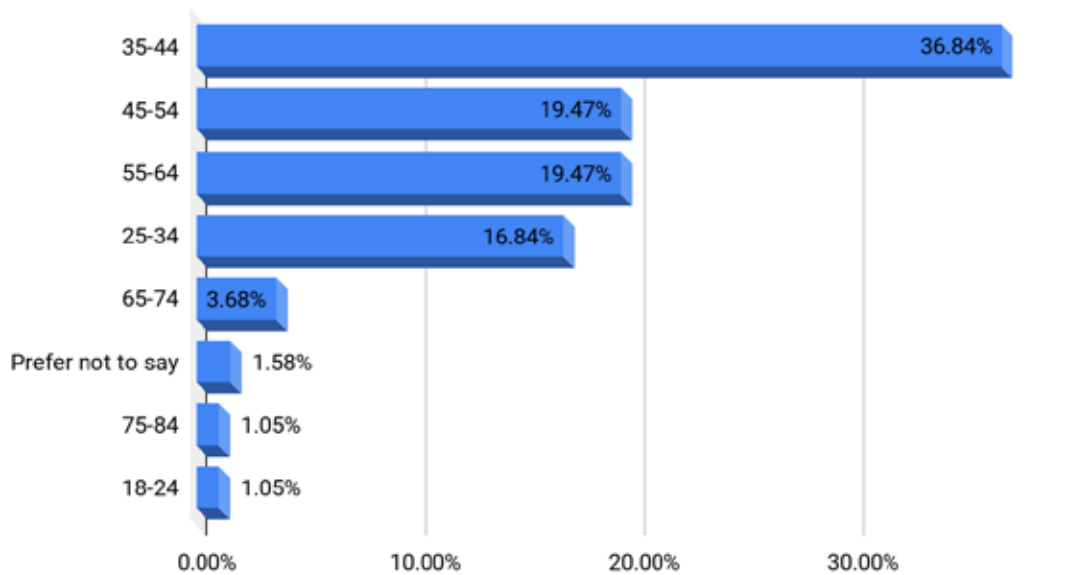
Over 90 % (312) of respondents provided details of their connection to the Hackney Central area. Those who live in the area (175) made up the largest respondent groups, followed by work in the area (52), Commute (44), other (26), own a business (7), and do the school run in the area (6). It should be noted that respondents were able to choose a number to the categories to describe their connection to the area.

### How long have respondents lived in the area?



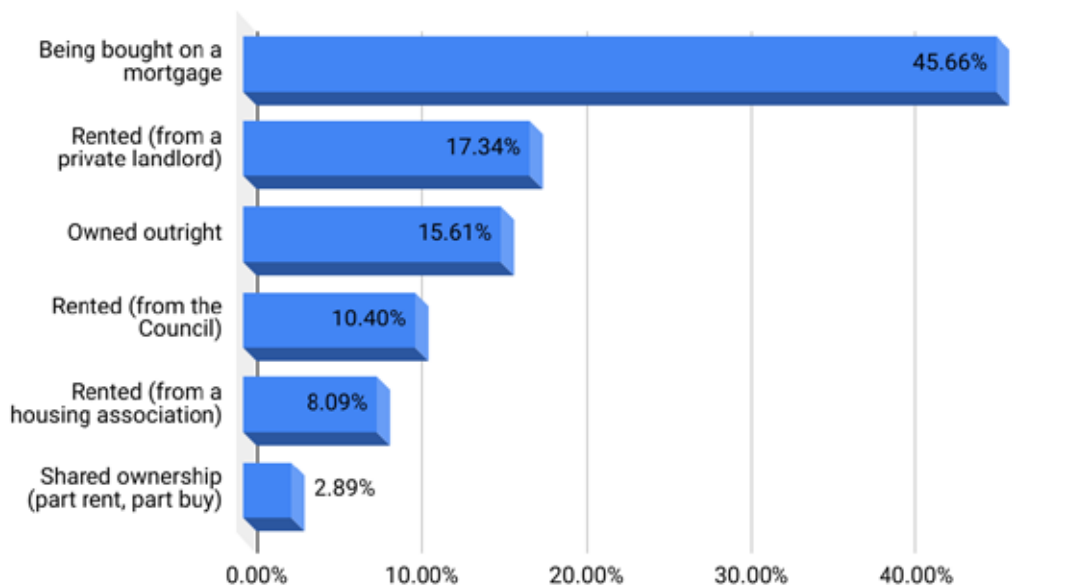
A large proportion of respondents did not specify how long they have lived in the area. The largest respondent group was 20+ years (58), 1-4 year (35) and 5-9 years (29), followed by 10-14 years (20), 15-20 (19) and less than a year (8).

### Age of participants



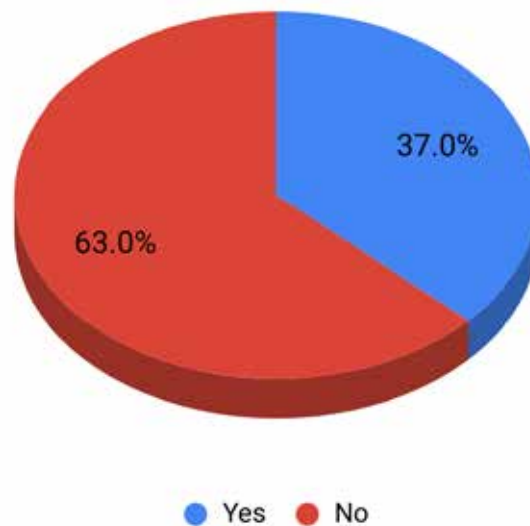
The largest respondent age groups were 35-44 (70) followed by 45-55 (37) and the 55-64 (37).

## Respondents' home ownership



173 respondents provided details about their home ownership. 45 % of the respondents (79) are mortgaged property owners while 17 % (30) rent from a private landlord. Fewer than 20 % of respondents were from council properties or housing associations.

## Community membership



Just under 30 % of respondents were members of local community groups, including TRAs such as Wayman Court and Valette House; Cordwainers Community Garden; Eleanor Road facebook Community Group; Action Clapton Environment Group; community garden projects such as the Extinction Rebellion Community Garden; Feline Friends; and Hackney Winter Night Shelter.

## Section 4: Insights Analysis

In this section, we look at the comments respondents contributed to the map and the sentiments represented as shades of red, orange or green.

The questions were:

- What are you commenting on?
- What do you like/ about Hackney Central?
- What is your favourite place in Hackney Central
- Do you have any other comments

### Sentiments

An element of the platform gives participants the opportunity to grade their comments into positive, negative and neutral sentiments. This provides a scale of the respondents perception of the issue they are posting or the area in general and other respondents can give weight to this by adding 'likes'. On the platform, sentiments appear as colour markers on the map and 'smiley' faces/likert scale on the survey.

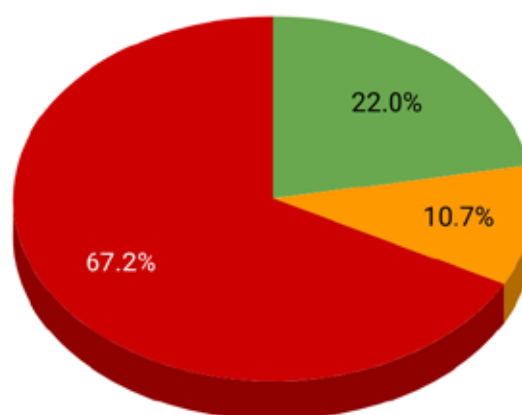
It should be noted that some contributors chose to mark negative sentiments but on review these comments were not identifying negative issues, just that there was negative feeling about what they were discussing.

It should be noted that towards the end of the project, fewer comments were being generated but instead participants were choosing to add their agreements to previously left comments. Agreements to the comments add weight. In total, 984 agreements were added to the comments on site:

### Participants' sentiments

67 % (232) of comments posted on the site were classified as negative, compared to 22 % (76) positive and a further 10 % (37) neutral.

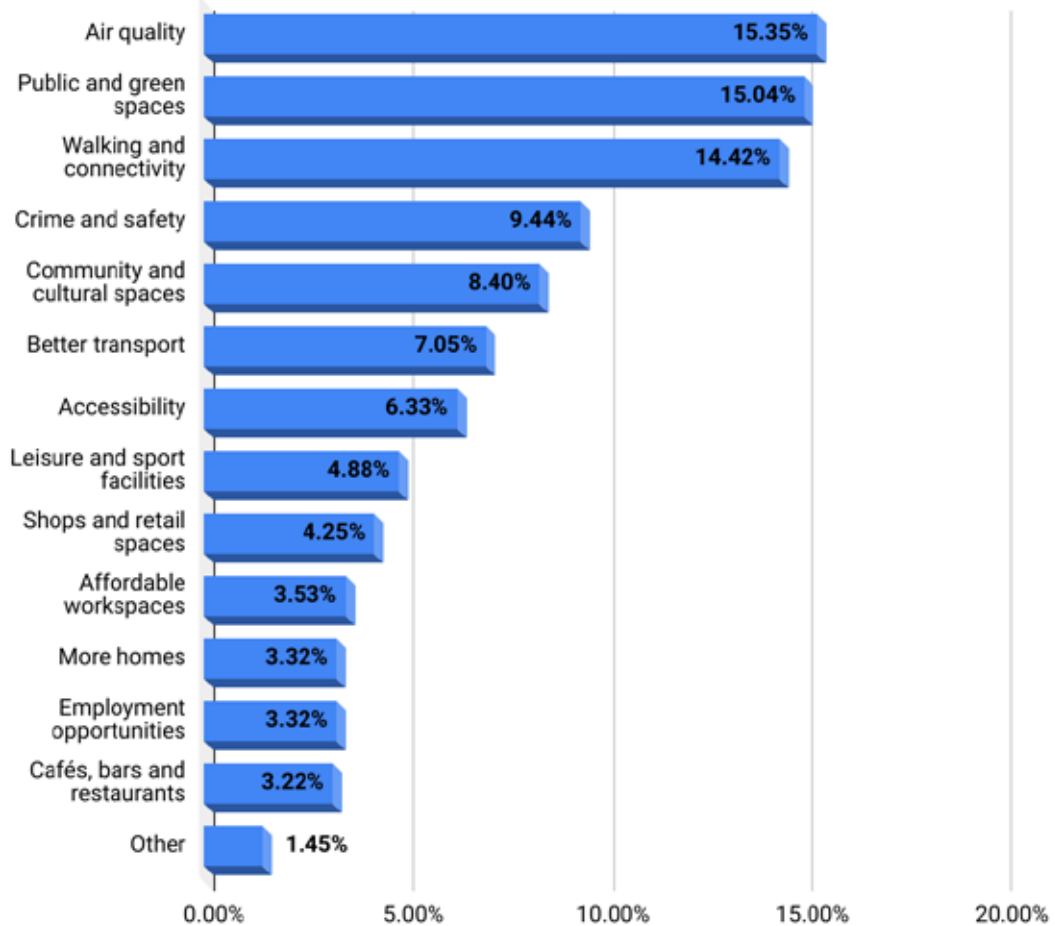
76 % of agreements were for negative comments, while 14 % were for neutral comments and only 8 % were for positive comments.





## What would you like to see improved in Hackney Central?

We asked respondents a quick poll question to gain a better insight into local needs and priorities for the area. 72% (247) of respondents provide a total of 964 votes. Respondents were able to provide multiple votes.



Air quality (149) topped the poll as something participants wanted improved in the area, closely followed by improvements to public and greenspaces (145), walking and connectivity (139) and crime and safety (91).

## Section 5: What are you commenting on?

This section explores issues participants highlighted on the site or during our face to face conversations. The section incorporates the “what are you commenting on?” and the “other comments” section as these are directly related in content.

This section outlines:

- What issues are most important to respondents
- Why they are raising this issue(s)

In total, there were 328 responses to the question “what are you commenting on?” and a further 201 responses for “do you have any other comments”.

These comments have been coded into themes for analysis purposes. It should be noted that there is considerable crossover between the different themes coded which provide a complex picture of participants ideas, challenges and suggestions for Hackney Central. For example, issues of transport such as vehicular or cycling traffic were usually accompanied by comments on streetscene and public realm as well as air quality. Similarly, issues such introducing more greening in the area were coupled with streetscene and public realm design.

It should be noted that comments were a mix of positive and negative according to the likert scale identified by the participant, depending on the identified location and issues related to it. As outlined in the sentiments section above, not all comments identified as negative were negative reflections per se of the area.

## Identified issues

We have drawn out the different issues and challenges which have been identified by participants across the two questions.

### **Community safety**

Comments/mentions included:

- Drug dealing/taking
- Public urination
- Other anti-social behaviour such as playing loud music, littering
- Street drinkers

### **Housing and development**

Comments/mentions included:

- Housing, including affordable housing
- General development
- Poor quality of the built environment/maintaining heritage assets

### **Local economy**

Comments/mentions included:

- Cultural activities
- Shopping and retail offer
- The night time economy

### **Streetscene & public realm design**

Comments/mentions included:

- Dangerous junctions
- Pedestrian crossings

### **Transport**

Comments/mentions included:

- Buses
- Cycling, incl. cycling infrastructure such as parking, dedicated cycles lanes
- Dangerous driving and speeding on local roads
- General traffic and air quality

### **Greening**

Comments/mentions included:

- Green spaces
- Trees and planting

## Transport

Transport was a major focus for participants on the platform (297). These comments have segmented into different modes of transport to provide more granular detail into private vehicles (including delivery vans)(91), cycling (87), buses (7) and trains (37). The issue of traffic generated a number of responses but it should be noted that the notion of 'traffic' was usually implicit within the comments. Explicit mentions of traffic have been counted (75).

The use of private and commercial vehicles such as delivery vans are noted as one of the major challenges for Hackney Central, both in terms of physical impacts on the surrounding environment, but also on its impact on the feel of the area. Comments highlighted how Hackney Central is bisected by a major traffic thoroughfares (A107 and A1207) which are the sources of the heavy vehicular traffic in the area. It is along these arterial roads that participants highlight the greatest concentration of congestion and the knock on effect of rat-running along residential streets to avoid the Hackney Central area. Key traffic points noted by respondents include Graham Road, Morning Lane, Amhurst Road and Mare Street. Other roads with listed traffic problems include Richmond Road and through-routes such as Navarino and Greenwood Roads.

A key issue on the platform is dangerous driving (15) which is mentioned in relation to other road users such as pedestrians or cyclists. A number of participants identify dangerous driving such as speeding, carelessness or aggressive behaviour is exacerbated by the design or poor configuration of public realm such as junctions and at points where different road users are sharing spaces. This is identified in specific hotspots at Pembury Circus and along Mare Street at the Graham Road Junction. A number of participants used this section to call for road closures to help reduce traffic on residential roads.

## Comments from residents

“Speeding cars, dangerous long stretches of road. The pedestrian islands provided and signs of speed is not an effective way to control speeding cars and motorbikes.”

**(Resident about Amhurst Road)**

“The pedestrian crossings here always seem to take forever and people run across the roads at whatever chance they have. Cyclists also don’t really respect the red lights either so it makes it doubly difficult. It feels quite dangerous here.”

**(Resident about the Pembury Junction)**

“This intersection is extremely dangerous, and would benefit from being more pedestrian-friendly with wider pavements, as well as making the beginning of the Laneway towards Tesco fully step-free, increasing the amount of space for pedestrians. The right turn from Mare St onto Bohemia Place and the pedestrianised street needs to be made a lot safer for cyclists.”

**(Resident about the Narrow Way)**

“These two streets are rat run by cars 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Let’s give residents a break and move towards a liveable neighbourhood by filtering them. This would also create a peaceful route for the many people who use the roads to cycle or walk between London Fields and Dalston, which the moment is only accessible by bike for those who are willing to face down oncoming traffic, or be tailgated by traffic that’s going in the same direction.”

**(Resident about the Greenwood Road)**

While the area is a major hub for transport connectivity, public transport such as trains (37) or buses (7) overall received fewer comments. Bus services were mostly framed around the issue of traffic, bus stacking and poor junction design and its impact on other road users. As with private vehicles, pinch points were identified at Pembury Circus and along Mare Street at the Graham Road Junction.

There was a focus on Hackney Central station and a need for physical improvements to its entrances to deal with overcrowding at peak times and calling for increased capacity and accessibility. In addition to this, these comments also noted any future improvements at the station which should incorporate the community garden that was (at the time of the consultation) occupying the vacant site on Graham Road.

A number of participants commented on the lack of disabled access at Hackney Down Station.

“Hackney Central Station is too small for the amount of people that use it. When two trains arrive at the same time, it’s a nightmare and a very unpleasant experience. Can’t the old station building (currently OSLO) be brought back into use? It would be larger and more comfortable than the current station and also create a better impression for visitors to the borough. If Hackney Wick can get a new station, then why can’t Hackney Central?”

“Hackney Central station (or at least the approach to it) needs drastically improving to welcome visitors from outside the area. It would also greatly improve the experience for commuters and make HC a more viable place to work long-term.”

32 separate comments directly identified the issue of air quality in Hackney Central. This was related to junctions and the impact of high levels of traffic in the area and how this degrades ambient air quality. The comments point to the issue of recurring congestion in general as well as at specific junctions or areas at certain times as noted above. A number of comments relate air quality and the deployment of green infrastructure such as street-side tree planting or informal or pocket gardens as a means of reducing or mitigating pollution impacts.

“Very poor air quality and lots of motorway maintenance heavy lorries. Air quality so poor really should do something. Perhaps a change of emphasis from parking controls and fines to vehicle emission testing and fines. Love Clean Hackney also needs a dirty vehicle reporting section.”



## Green spaces

Respondents stated that greenspaces help to establish the character of a place, encourage walking and social interaction and improve the overall built environment. While many respondents highlighted that Hackney Central benefited from being situated between London Fields and Hackney Downs, the comments (81) largely focused on the value of small scale green infrastructure across the area. These comments point to a more strategic use of greening interventions such as tree-lined streets and pocket parks to not only improve the overall aesthetics of Hackney Central but also to mitigate pollution impacts.

Over half of the responses that noted traffic/congestion (75) and poor air quality (32) coupled their comments with the need to deliver more green spaces, highlighting the accumulative direct and indirect benefits of natural environment exposure to the area and people's psychology and physical health.

“The area generally needs more trees/plants and green spaces around (and less cars) to clean the air, increase biodiversity, give people spaces to rest and connect with nature and each other respectively.”

Respondents identified specific locations in the area that provide important greenspaces or 'stop offs' such as the community garden on Graham Road (37) and St John's Church Yard Gardens (33). A significant amount of attention was given to support the Graham Road Garden which is only on the site temporarily, receiving 36 likes to support these.

These comments were supported by calls for more small scale interventions such as retaining or replicating the garden on Graham Road (14) and the introduction of a new pocket park or green space on Marvin Road (25) through the removal of on-street parking. Additionally, comments state that further opportunities should be looked at on any new development sites, such as Tesco, to increase greenspace/public provision.

“The XR Guerilla garden is an amazing project which proves self-organised grassroots groups can improve the spaces around them without heavy government/council involvement. Projects like these need to be tolerated and supported, and it would send a great message if Hackney Council allowed the garden to stay, and either incorporated the new Hackney Central station entrance into it, or better yet, built the entrance further up Graham Rd.”

“We think Marvin Street could be transformed into a beautiful small park, or grove, integrated at the Graham Road end with the bus stop and with bicycle storage facilities and an electric vehicle charger at the Sylvester Road end. An innovative natural space with trees and seating. It might help redress the traffic pollution and could be London’s most beautiful bus stop. It could eventually connect with a new, similarly landscaped southern entrance to Hackney Central Station.”

In addition to this, a few comments noted the need for more play spaces for children and young people in the area.

## Streetscene and public realm design

As noted in other sections, comments about streetscene and public realm design (226) are framed around reducing the impact of traffic on the area, improving the overall conditions and quality of the built environment, and providing more greening to support social habitation of the town centre. This is seen by many as a way to improve the area as a destination point and an important character asset for the town centre.

Seen in this light, improving arrival points into the town centre are critical in changing people’s perceptions and attracting visitors. Participants noted that the general public realm around Hackney Central Station is poor and is a negative reflection of the overall character of the area for visitors or people returning home. Participants highlight that the stations form an important part of how they experience Hackney Central and support the need for alternative routes such as Graham Road.

“Mare street can be a bit messy - lots of things on the pavements, tripping hazards, people. The area would benefit from a clean up. Feels crowded and squeezed in- which can be good - but this is from things like cars and other vehicles.”

The presence of vehicular traffic - both private and public - and the poor design of the streetscapes are listed as having a severance effect on Hackney Central with some referring to the area as disjointed. This is particularly focused around roads such as the Narrow Way leading onto the box junction/Amhurst Road/under the railway where the pedestrianised spaces lead onto congested roads and then onto the small entrance to the station.

Related to this is the focus on the issue of junction design and its impact on road users. Over 80 comments focused on how many junctions in the area are poorly designed and dangerous for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians, and appear to be the cause of traffic jams as users compete for space.

“The Junction at Amhurst Road is really bad. I’ve seen two major accidents - one fatal - in the last 3 months. The pedestrian crossing is poorly timed and there isn’t enough visibility for people to cross safely.”

“This whole Graham Road / Mare Street junction is a nightmare for pedestrians. Not enough room for pedestrians and the bus stop. Not enough space to queue or easily get on and off the bus, especially if you have mobility problems.”

“Narrow pavements and guardrailing make it horrible for walking around this junction. Crossings are complex and it takes ages to cross more than one arm of the junction.”

Pembury Circus is highlighted as suffering from an overly complicated lay out which causes confusion for road users, is cluttered with railings and traffic islands, and the narrow pavements make it difficult for pedestrians to navigate safely. Similarly, respondents point to the Graham Road/Mare Street and Morning Lane/Mare Street and Amhurst Road/the Narrow Way intersections as areas that are poorly designed, are unable to deal with current traffic capacity and need improving. At these junctions, filtering and the right of way for cyclists and cars in shared spaces is also a major problem. Pedestrians experienced feeling unsafe in the area when crossing these junctions.

For cyclists, concerns about Mare Street focus on the lack of cycling infrastructure to help facilitate cycling through the area. Problems for cyclists are noted as the lack of clearly identified spaces such as segregated or demarcated cycling spaces. That said, ‘aggressive’ cycling along the Narrow Way or on pavements is noted by pedestrians who call for improved cycling provision such as separate cycling lanes or improving existing cycling routes to mitigate these problems.

“Mare Street has a very, very wide road and there is lots of space for protected cycle lanes. I am baffled as to why there isn’t one at present. Hackney has too many people making ridiculously short journeys by car. Creating protected cycle lanes would give these people a realistic alternative to driving everywhere. And Mare Street would be a good place to start.”

“The main cycle route is sent down the super-narrow Churchwell Path and then emerges onto something that \*looks\* like a parallel crossing where cycling has priority—but with signage saying ‘wait here’ suggesting cycling does not have priority. Either it does have priority or it doesn’t! If it doesn’t, it should not look like a parallel crossing. If cycling does have priority, it should say so. If giving cycling priority, or using traffic lights, causes delays to private motor traffic—tough.”

The issue of signage in shared spaces along the narrow way is also noted as causing difficulty for some groups, notably the elderly.

## Local economy

The local economy generated 49 comments across the two questions. The liveliness of Hackney Central is drawn from its high street, based along the north section of Mare Street and the Narrow Way which function as a destination for convenience shopping and cultural and social activities. Participants’ reference the importance of shops in the area that cater for a broad range of shoppers and attract visitors to the area, but these businesses need support to thrive.

Linked to this are comments where respondents identify the importance of ‘attactor stores’ such as Marks & Spencer and Tesco and the need for the retail offer to be diversified to ensure that shoppers stay local and do not shop elsewhere such as stratford. Similarly, others used the platform to celebrate the existing local or independent shops and the importance of varying high street retail and food offers with differing price ranges to cater for Hackney’s diverse communities. There were also mentions about the need to retain a larger Tesco shopping store offer for affordability reasons i.e. not a Tesco Metro or Tesco Local.

“It would be good to have a better range of shops in Hackney Central. Even the M&S has a really small range of children’s clothing. Occasionally I have to buy things for my children and it is really very difficult. Generally I end up having to detour through Stratford Westfield Centre because it is so difficult to get anything from Hackney!”

“nice mix of shops - utility stuff (card shop, Primark, M&S) plus newer cafes and restaurants. I do fear that the more utility stuff will be pushed out as the area gentrifies - already it’s got hard to pick up DIY supplies locally for example, and the carpet/fabric shop is having to close due to rents going up.”

“We need more good food places - a range of eateries which are reasonably priced because many can't afford high end prices. Permanent traders as part of the narrow way generally.”

A challenge presented by participants focuses on how different commercial offers - be it retail, food, bars - can work together to achieve the critical mass to energise the high street. Some comments have called for more bars as the area is less residential along the high street and could accommodate more, quoting the recent emergence of Bohemia Place as a night time destination. This related to positive comments about Hackney Central's role as a cultural hub which is focused on the theatre, the cinema and small scale music venues such as Oslo Bar and The Paper Dress. That said, some respondents were fearful of allowing more late night venues, stating that they negatively impact on areas.

“It would be good to have more bars as there are not many residential buildings around Hackney Central so it could be a place to have late night entertainment without bothering anyone. But mainly separated cycle lanes, as that would benefit everyone.”

“Too many night clubs or noisy music gigs without a licence in this area make our lives difficult - people have to move out or not move in though there are empty buildings that can be easily turned into houses. Note that the noise pollution team works very well though.”

Respondents identified the negative impact of the numerous betting shops on the area as focal points for persistent and historic anti-social behaviour and called for them to be removed. As noted throughout the comments on the site, anti-social behaviour such as the presence of street drinkers or excessive begging as well as poor urban design elements are key dimensions that frame how participants' experience and perceive of the area. A number of contributors noted that the presence of anti-social behaviour around betting shops impacts the local economy as people are not always willing to stay in the area.

A few comments drew attention to Hackney Walk and the fashion hub. Participants highlighted that a number of the shops are expensive and are not used by the local community. Participants used this as an example of how any changes in Hackney Central's retail offer needs to reflect the community's wants and needs. There are also a number of comments relating to the empty units along the railway arches.

## Mare Street Business engagement

As a part of our face to face engagement work with the community we conducted a series of door-to-door surveys with businesses along Mare Street and Narrow Way. For these local businesses, key issues include:

### Key findings:

- **The impact of anti-social behaviour:** A perceived lack of enforcement and anti-social behaviour impacts on their businesses, although it was noted that this had improved with the closure of Coral Betting formerly based in the Old Hackney Town Hall.
- **Diverse shopping experience:** Key stores such as Marks & Spencer are vital to attracting customers to the area with many smaller businesses benefit from their presence. The loss of shops such as Clark's Shoe shop was also noted as a 'loss' to the high street offer.
- **Pedestrianisation:** Pedestrianisation of the Narrow Way has impacted some businesses' footfall, although others state that it has had a positive effect on the overall look and feel of the area.
- **Temporary uses:** There were mixed feelings about the presence of a market on the Narrow Way as this created further competition, especially for those selling perishable goods.
- **Cultural events:** Some businesses would like to see the Narrow Way be activated with cultural activities through the year.

## The importance of the cultural sector

Hackney Central is the civic hub of the borough and hosts a number of key cultural and community organisations and venues such as the Hackney Museum, The Hackney Empire, The Round Chapel, St John's Church, Sutton House, Hackney Picture House and a number of music venues. We held a workshop with a number of these to discuss the challenges, aspirations and needs for their organisation:

### Key Findings:

- **Recognition:** Recognise the social value of local cultural institutions
- **Called for closer relationships** between organisations locally to support the cultural offer
- **Knowing where to go:** Better sign post organisation such as the Hackney Museum and the Round Chapel
- **Capacity to grow:** Help grassroot venues to share the benefits of growth in the area through support/collaboration from larger institutions



- The high street isn't just for shopping: The need to meet future demands and understanding that commercial retail should not be the only priority going forward in Hackney Central
- Workspaces: Several responses to the post-it exercise outlined the need for more affordable workspaces (with a cultural and business focus)
- Workspaces for young people: participants identified a lack of workspace provision specifically for young people
- Enhance existing spaces: enhance the spaces and other cultural assets in Hackney Central such as the space outside the Old Town Hall and the Narrow Way, and the existing Town Hall Square.

## Buildings and developments

Relatively fewer comments were posted (27) by participants about buildings and development. One location on the Narrow Way that received a number of comments was the Old Hackney Town Hall. Respondents noted that it should be used for alternative use other than a betting shop. Comments stated this could be used as a place of community value but noted it as a part of the local heritage:

“The Old Town Hall on the Narrow Way is now vacant - fantastic that the betting shop has left. Buy it back and return this historic building into a community asset.”

The future of the Tesco site attracted a number of comments (30) on the impact of development on the local area and the loss of a larger supermarket. If redevelopment does take place, comments called for more green space and the provision of affordable housing, to ensure high architectural quality of the project and that it does not negatively impact on the heritage of the area. A number of comments were against any proposals for tall buildings/towers on the site and the visual impacts these will have on the surrounding area such as St Augustine’s Tower; possible impact of over-development on the site; and the impact of development on transport provision. These comments acknowledged the need for more housing but disagreed with this being delivered in tower blocks. There were mixed comments about the loss of the car park, although there was an acknowledgement that it was the only large parking provision in the area.

“St Augustine Tower and St John’s Churchyard and the Narrow Way pedestrian area create a fantastic oasis of peace, but it is under threat from inappropriate over-development of ‘Tesco Car Park Site’ - which is actually owned by the Council. Please don’t ruin the best bit of historic Hackney - Grade I listed medieval tower deserves more consideration. It doesn’t have to be this way - for a good example look at ‘Scout Hut Site’ development on the other side of St John’s Churchyard which has sensitive scale and design, appropriate materials etc.”

Conversations with local cultural organisations such as the Hackney Museum, the Picture House and the Hackney Empire reinforces comments on the site that the Town Hall square as an undervalued place for people to linger, sit or enjoy the space as it is blighted by heavy traffic, anti-social behaviour and needs to be upgraded.

Also noted is the empty units in Hackney Walk and the effect this has on the overall character of the area.

Housing provision received fewer comments (5) on the site, although this was focused on the lack of affordable housing or the cost of private housing.

## Sense of place

Participants highlighted the need to physically reconnect to the town centre as a whole to nurture a sense of belonging to place. Comments listed the 'buzz' or 'feel' of the area, including issues such as diversity and multiculturalism.

A key way participants alluded to their sense of place related to the effect of issues such as traffic congestion, public realm design or anti-social behaviour on the overall character of the area. This is explored in other sections above, but participants note that dealing with these issues are vital to ensuring that the local community feels safe, welcome and wants to occupy the spaces in the area.

"Large groups of people who congregate on the benches in St John's gardens, drinking, drug-taking and leaving piles of litter day after day, night after night. It is unpleasant and intimidating to walk through St John's gardens because of these people".

Responses relating to respondents' psychological impressions of the neighbourhood included mentions of emotions such as 'unsafe' or related language such as 'not for us' or 'overcrowded'. In terms of positive and negative impressions of places, there were far more negative comments than positive ones, but it should be borne in mind that the questions 'What are you commenting on' and 'Other comments' were more skewed towards this whereas 'What is your favourite place?' and 'What do you like/love?' were largely more positive. See below for further details.

A few mentions about homelessness in the area were also generated on the site and how there should be greater provision to house these groups.

"Homelessness is a big problem in Hackney and the betting shops don't help, how many do we need on the Narrow Lane? I would like to see a green space on Marvin St, think it's a great idea. I would like to see affordable accommodation for homeless people and incentives into work, for them, and local employers. I would also like to see youth centres/sport centres for local young people. Occupied young people are less likely to get themselves into trouble."

"Hackney's history integrates wonderfully into the modern environment. I love that Elizabethan buildings and 13th Century ruins sit side by side with a McDonalds and a nightclub. The signage in the churchyard gives a great overview of the area's past and I regularly see people reading it there. I love in the centre of Hackney and I'm always surprised how much my neighbours already know about the history of the area - It's something that really binds this community together."

## Young People Workshop: Cardinal Pole Secondary School & Urswick Secondary School

### Key findings

- Students recognised that the area is a hub for transport links, and discussed the many different transport routes available. Overground services to Stratford are a useful element of the area because it made it easy for people to go to Westfield to shop.
- Most students said that the shops they used most were food and drinks retailers including McDonald's and Greggs. The students highlighted that these shops were spaces in which they could relax and socialise, but said that security staff often moved them on before they had eaten
- Students pinpointed libraries, especially Homerton Library, as important facilities in the area for young people
- Green spaces were marked out as a positive feature with the area where students had had positive experiences, although some noted that the areas would benefit from more equipment, including open gyms, play parks and sheltered areas, and several students noted that anti-social behaviour had made them feel unsafe and discouraged them from using green spaces more
- In general, students were concerned about the presence of antisocial behaviour and drinking alcohol in public. Particular hotspots were parks and the graveyard around St Augustine's tower
- While the group mostly agreed that they would ideally like to relax in a cafe or food outlet, they suggested that if there were more youth centres and facilities locally they would be able to relax with their friends without being made to feel like a nuisance.

### Key assumptions

- While Hackney Central was seen as a well-connected place, students didn't feel that it was in itself a destination
- The presence of street drinkers and anti-social behaviour has contributed to a negative image of the area which makes it unappealing to young people
- There are some issues with safety in the area that discourage young people from using green spaces at certain times of day and the year
- Young people generally feel that the area doesn't cater for their needs - there are few places to socialise where young people will not be disturbed or made to feel unwelcome.

## Proposals outlined in the comments

Throughout the comments posted on the site, a number of participants either directly suggested or alluded to ideas or proposals to support Hackney Central. As with the above section, these interventions have been categorised into the main themes of the report

### Local Economy

#### **Retail Offer**

##### **Intervention:**

- Support smaller and independent businesses to remain on the high street
- Establish a policy to ensure a broader range of shops locally that caters for the whole community
- Reduce the number of betting shops
- Safeguard/retain shops in the area such as Marks & Spencers and Tesco

#### **Cultural institutions**

##### **Intervention:**

- Deliver affordable workspaces with a cultural and business focus
- Cultural heritage should play a role in inclusive growth
- Support collaboration between larger institutions and independent venues so that the sector can grow
- Support Hackney Central as a cultural hub for the borough

#### **Night time economy**

##### **Intervention:**

- Create a balanced retail/commercial/night time economy offer

#### **Other**

##### **Intervention:**

- Support young people into work

## Streetscene & public realm design

### **The high street**

#### **Intervention:**

- Remove unnecessary public realm clutter such as railings
- Widen pavements at pinch points along Mare Street and Pembury Circus
- Improve new public realm design to improve the town centre experience including the Town Hall Square
- Improve the public realm/streetscape at the stations
- Improve signage about shared spaces on the Narrow Way

### **Crossings**

#### **Intervention:**

- Improve the junction design at Pembury Circus for road users and pedestrians
- Improve the crossing at Graham Road/Mare Street and Morning Lane/Mare Street
- Initiate road closures to stop rat-running along residential road

### **Other**

#### **Intervention:**

- Introduce more playspaces

## Buildings and development

### **Affordable housing**

#### **Intervention:**

- Include more affordable housing in new developments

### **New developments**

#### **Intervention:**

- Ensure high quality architecture of any new development to enhance the character of the area
- Protect heritage assets from tall buildings
- Ensure that new developments provide adequate green and public space

## Transport

### **Transport**

#### **Intervention:**

- Improve cycling infrastructure in the area including cycle parking and cycle lanes
- Reduce car usage in the area to improve air quality and town centre experience

### **Train Station**

#### **Intervention:**

- Improve capacity at Hackney Central Station
- Install disabled access at Hackney Downs

## Community safety

### **Anti-social behaviour**

#### **Intervention:**

- Put in place measures to deal with anti-social behaviour on the Narrow Way

## Greening

### **Anti-social behaviour**

#### **Intervention:**

- Introduce green infrastructure such as trees and planting to mitigate poor air quality
- Introduce more greenspaces to improve the town centre experience/or at specific locations
- Maintain or replace elsewhere the community garden on Graham Road

## Section 6: The places and spaces that make Hackney Central

This section of the report looks at the places and spaces that participants identified on the site or during our face to face conversations that make Hackney Central. We posed two questions to get a better understanding of participants' evaluation of the area's defining characteristics and explore what is important to them.

- What is your favourite place in Hackney Central?
- What do you like / love about the Hackney Central area?

From these comments, there is an overall narrative in response data which celebrates difference, vibrancy and diversity from which conclusions can be drawn on what creates the sense of community and place that appears to be so important respondents. These comments also give an idea of what participants think the council should protect or enhance.

A total of 373 responses identified the places and people that make Hackney Central, highlighting their sense of belonging and identification, personal and emotional investment in the area. These have been mapped out below as well in a word cloud below and listed.



Word cloud of terms used by participants to describe what do you love/like about the area?

The top ten terms or words used to describe or reference the area focus on Hackney Central's character, people and the community. These include people (42), shops (36), community (29), the general area (27), diversity (25). These were often stand alone comments, although a number co-occurred with other terms.





Within the comments a number of trends, as identified throughout the data sets, came to the fore. These have been categorised into three general categories below.

## Community and place

- Hackney Central's local feel is vital to the success of the area.
- The institutions, venues and spaces that create community bonds should be supported and enhanced.
- While there is a sense of character and distinctiveness about the area, this needs improving while also needs to be safeguarded.
- Cultural, civic and open spaces are important arenas for social interactions and play an important role in how the area is perceived by locals and visitors.

## Importance of greenspaces and good design in the public realm

- Quality of life and social connectivity should be supported and enhanced by the public realm.
- The success of a particular public space relies on people adopting, using and managing the space – people make places, more than places make people, so residents should be involved in designing these spaces.
- Preservation of architectural heritage is important to maintain the character of the area.
- Participants want to see the preservation of existing greenspaces such as the garden on Graham Road but also want to see more open and green spaces.
- Public spaces were noted as a particular and distinct resource for young people looking to socialise with others.

## The role of local businesses

- Local businesses, especially small and specialist businesses, serve a broad range of the community, and should be safeguarded.
- Hackney Central's cultural scene is not only important for the local economy but also contributes to the sense of place and its heritage
- Beyond economic value, local businesses connect the wider community and, in turn, generate social value.
- The lack of chains in the area is perceived as a positive and is what contributes to the sense of place. That said, there was a recognition that the existing chain stores in the area had an important function in the town centre.

## Next Steps

Based on feedback from the Hackney Central Conversation, the Council is setting out clear commitments to help shape change in Hackney Central in line with the priorities identified by the local community, both now and in the long-term.

This includes establishing a new community panel to continue the conversation and support forthcoming changes taking place in Hackney Central.

To find out more and stay involved:

visit:  [hackney.gov.uk/regeneration-hackney-central](https://hackney.gov.uk/regeneration-hackney-central)