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| Kingston Town Centre Workshop Findings |
| A Draft Report by Hatch Regeneris |
| 1 February 2019 |

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| www.hatchregeneris.com |

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Appendix A - Workshop material

# Introduction

##### Hatch Regeneris was commissioned by Royal Borough of Kingston (RBK) to facilitate a Vision Workshop for Kingston Town Centre (KTC). This workshop formed an early stage stakeholder engagement session for the development of a new Vision for the Kingston Town Centre.

##### The workshop was held on 24th January 2019, 10am-12pm at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel, 1 Skerne Road, Kingston Upon Thames.

### Proceedings

##### The workshop was attended by 39 stakeholders.

##### Following a presentation by Hatch Regeneris, attendees were asked to discuss the following core questions (see Appendix 1 for workshop material):

###### What **places** is Kingston **in competition with** (if any)?

###### What makes Kinston **distinctive and unique** from these locations?

###### How could the area be **more competitive**?

###### What is your **vision** for Kingston in **ten years’ time**?

###### **Outcomes**: How will we define this success?

###### What specific **projects, actions or practices** could make a difference? What have partners seen elsewhere?

# Competitiveness of Kingston Town Centre

### Kingston’s competitors

##### Kingston’s **nearby town centres** are perceived as key competitors to KTC. With its high level of activity and accessibility, and its relative proximity to Kingston, Croydon Town Centre was highlighted by three of the four groups as a notable competitor. Wimbledon and Richmond Town Centres were also mentioned by more than one group, the former for its strong high street offer and recent investments, and the latter described as “independent” with a “quirky reputation”, with better leveraging of its river and natural assets.

##### Other retail forms were also discussed. **Online retailers** were seen as a threat, as well as the contained, **‘Westfield’** shopping offer. The better facilities and no-cost parking offered by other places were also mentioned.

##### In terms of leisure activities, the **West End** was perceived to provide a wider and more diverse offer. One participant commented that, for young people, Kingston did not provide an attractive offer.

###  Kingston’s unique strengths

##### **Kingston’s river and riverside** were most often cited as a key strength and opportunity area, along with its **heritage character and historic buildings**, and the town’s **market square**. The full list of contributors to Kingston’s distinctiveness and uniqueness identified by participants is provided in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Assets | Activities & uses |
| * The river, water and riverside
* Heritage and historic buildings
* Market Square
* Canbury Gardens
* Good transport links
* University/art college
* Car parks
* First class hospital
 | * Opportunity to dwell
* It’s *not* a Westfield
* Recognised live music scene (with links to the river)
* Combination of retail and entertainment
* Independent retail eg. Banquet Records
* Department stores with status/resilience eg. Bentall Centre
* More sophisticated evening economy
* Restaurants
* Muybridge
* Christmas Market
* Hotels
* The BID
* Theatre
 |
| Urban design & planning  | People |
| * Pedestrian-friendly
* Accessibility
* Traffic free zones
* Concentrated centre
* Street layout
 | * Young people/students
* Diverse population
* Committed local population
* Highly educated population, highly skilled
* Proximity to wide catchment area eg. Surrey/London
 |

### Enhancing Kingston’s competitiveness

##### Participants contributed a range of suggestions to leverage KTC’s strengths and secure its future resilience and success.

#### Diversification

##### **Diversification of activities, uses and spaces** was a recurrent theme, with many participants suggesting that the town centre should offer a broad mix of functions, without a sole focus on retail. The need for a cohesive and better leisure offer was identified, with suggestions that attracting residents and visitors into the town centre for cultural and leisure purposes would result in induced retail and hospitality spend. The need to enhance and widen the town’s hospitality offer was also cited, including the need for more independent and quality food and beverage establishments, and fast and attractive lunch outlets to capture worker spend. The potential to better utilise existing buildings and spaces, including the conversion of eyesore locations with ceased uses, was also mentioned.

##### Broadening KTC’s **evening and night time economy** offer was also highlighted as an opportunity area, particularly in attracting diverse groups into the town centre and promoting 24 hour activity.

#### The river and heritage

##### The **opportunity presented by the river and riverfront** was also a common theme. There were a number of suggestions to better recognise the river and improve links to it, as well as opening it up to public, retail and hospitality use.

##### Similar proposals were also made around the town’s heritage and historical buildings, with participants suggesting that this aspect of KTC should be better promoted and made accessible.

#### Businesses and investors

##### There was a wide call for **upgraded office stock** to meet modern market needs. This would include a high grade offer, and also affordably accommodate entrepreneurial activity coming out of the university. The benefits of a WeWork office model were cited more than once.

##### The need to **increase developer confidence** in the area, as well as securing ‘buy in’ from business and developers, was also cited.

##### There was a keenness to **de-risk independence and innovation amongst small retailers** – a reduction or holiday in business rates was one way of doing this.

#### Public realm and urban design

##### Several participants also mentioned the need to improve elements of KTC’s **public realm and urban design**. Suggestions included increasing awareness of the location of activity hotspots and attractions (eg. waterfront, historic buildings, cafes and shops) and adopting formal wayfinding strategies to lead visitors along particular paths. There were also calls for greater investment in the public realm generally, and the development of plans to improve the disjointedness of KTC and create a more cohesive town centre. One participant mentioned the need for more covered outdoor public spaces to facilitate more events in KTC.

#### Young people

##### One group had a focused discussion on cultivating activities and spaces for Kingston’s youth and millennial population. Concerns that the town’s student population often sought out other areas to spend their leisure time highlighted a need to **appeal to, attract and retain young people** (and talent) in Kingston. Themes of use diversification were again invoked, including the need for affordable and/or non-food and beverage related activities, and broadening notions of culture beyond traditionally “middle aged and middle class” activities.

##### The need to also cater to Kingston’s substantial **young family cohort** was also recognised. Some noted the importance of allocating spaces for children’s activities in KTC.

#### Transport connections

##### While KTC’s transport infrastructure and connectivity were recognised as very good, some participants saw a need to promote these connections, and others to further improve connectivity. Transport into the town centre was seen as a challenge, with some proposing a multi-modal transport approach, including park + ride. A desire to reduced car dependency was also noted.

#### Broader strategic thinking

##### There were some suggestions for broader strategic thinking around KTC, to interrogate and coordinate **needs and assets beyond the KTC boundary** to develop solutions, and develop a network wide approach.

##### Partners identified the need to link other stations (Norbury and Surbiton) to the town centre. The concept of a Greater Kingston area was brought up.

# Aspirations and vision

### Vision

##### A number of different themes and ideas were identified to embody the Vision for KTC’s future. Some of these are listed below.

|  |
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| Vision for KTC’s future |
| * “Hub for start-ups”
* “Creative quarter”
* “Civic, education, cultural spaces”
* “Live/work/sell”
* “Tech”
* “Identity”
* “Continued strength of civil society”
* “All of London in one place – stay unique”
* “Retail”
* “A more diverse offer of workspace – flexible, co-working, uni”
* “A broader cultural mix”
* “More diverse”
* “Ensuring the best new developments”
* “Universal buy-in: one vision – civic, private & third sectors”
* “Bring together resident and business communities”
* “Current level of liveability should be maintained”
 |

### Outcomes

##### The following indicators were identified to measure success against the Vision for KTC:

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| Key performance indicators |
| * Revealing Business start-ups
* Population
* Knowledge transfer
* Student retention after graduation
* Perceptions
* Number of cultural spaces
* Businesses
* Use mix in town centre
* Leveraging of heritage
 |

### Proposed actions

##### Participants’ proposals for action fell into seven key themes, as presented below.

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| Activation and tourism |
| * Revealing stories of the place
* Multiple uses, reusing venues, adding cultural uses
* Curated series of events, plan of events
* Cable car from Surbiton to Kingston
* Water taxi from London to Kingston
 |
| Marketing |
| * Cultivating a flexible and innovative identity
* A social platform
 |
| Urban realm improvements |
| * Public realm – signage and lighting
* Seats and infrastructure
* Improvements along particular streets
 |
| Governance and planning |
| * Accelerate 3 ‘big’ investments
* Create new community structures around priorities
* Themes – education, health, community
* Business and start-up incubation
 |
| Community and collaboration |
| * Coordination of and collaboration between partners
* Community consultation (similar to Wimbledon but more concise), whole of community involvement
 |
| Transport |
| * N. Kingston – transport
* Car sharing app
 |
| Further research and learning from case studies |
| * Research into successful retail and town centre models
* Smart city concepts
* Folkestone – live/work/sell
* Co-living? High amenity – similar to Tolworth
* Intermediate graduate housing
* Lambeth Build Studios
* Pop Brixton – moveable, quirky
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1. Workshop material





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