

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS BUILDING?

Consulting On The Future Of Newport Guildhall

Arc Consulting, June 2022





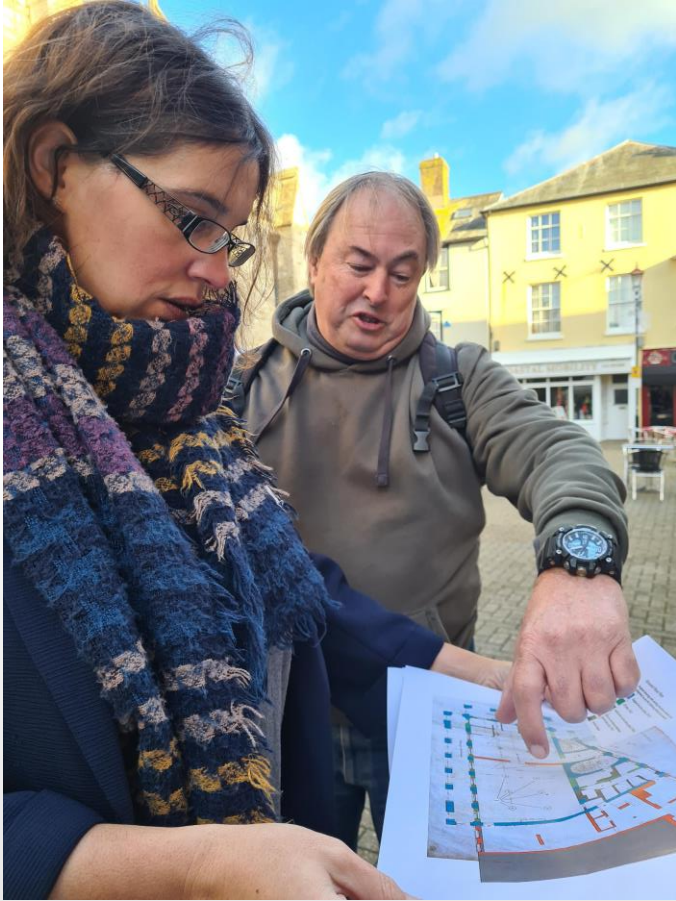
HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE



Arc has been commissioned by the [Newport High Street Heritage Action Zone](#) to undertake public and community consultation with regard to options and possibilities for the revival and future use of the Guildhall, perhaps the most locally distinctive building in the county town.

Feedback and comment from this work has been combined with responses to an online questionnaire managed by Newport-based building design consultants ERMC and will be used to inform the decisions to be made by the Isle of Wight Council, owners of the Guildhall.

The consultation comprised outdoor and indoor drop-in sessions in the town together with email and phone contact with the Community Council, business association, local business owners and tenants, IWC officers and members with a particular focus on the Isle of Wight Heritage Service which manages the Guildhall museum.



4 public consultation sessions,
indoor + outdoor:

- Christmas Market Day, St Thomas's Square
- Spring Market Day, St Thomas's Square
- Independent Arts, High Street
- Lord Louis Library, Orchard Street

Response:

- 55 people completed paper surveys
- 135 people completed online surveys
- 63 people commented face-to-face
- 253 respondents in total

- 8 local stakeholder organizations consulted in addition.

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS BUILDING?



COMMUNITY CONSULTATION
HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF NEWPORT GUILDHALL!
SATURDAY 12TH MARCH - ALL DAY
ST THOMAS MARKET, NEWPORT



HIGH STREETS
HERITAGE
ACTION ZONE



THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE BUILDING?
- DO YOU THINK THE GUILDHALL IS AN IMPORTANT BUILDING? WHY?
- WHAT JOB DO YOU THINK THE GUILDHALL SHOULD DO FOR NEWPORT?



WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT
NEWPORT GUILDHALL?

What do you think about Newport Guildhall?

Beautiful,
wasted, grand,
unused

Important, should be central
to the appearance, promotion
and ambitions of Newport &
IOW... but its significance is
not promoted, so it looks tired
and unloved... and under
threat. So a great venue
opportunity.

A lovely-looking
historic building.

An iconic building for
Newport. A key
Victorian structure
that should be
retained.

Difficult access,
disabilities, nexus for
visitors/TIC

Important to the
Isle of Wight

It's in the centre -
museum was good,
showed my children.

It is a beautiful
building that needs
extensive investment
for improvement.

Tall tower with a
tunnel!
Handsome building -
historic

Never entered the
building but no need
to change its image,
just take care, regular
maintenance.

It's an important building
to tourists and residents of
Newport and historical,
looks great at Christmas
with lights and decorations
every year.

Lovely building and
could be a beautiful
meeting place,
indoor market.

Beautiful building

A landmark

What do you think about Newport Guildhall?

Architecturally significant (Nash). Clock!

As a visitor we were a bit disappointed that there was no information to explain what the Guildhall is and when it is open.

It's a focal point. I would miss the clock.

I like it. It is part of the IOW's history and heritage.

Beautiful with a bit of a revamp - would be nice to see some events taking place.

Very striking, would like to know more about it.

Nice looking. DON'T KNOCK IT DOWN!

Nice looking building, but I don't know what it's used for.

Beautiful building - Islanders easily recognise it as a Newport building.

Lovely part of our History and Heritage. Needs to expand museum.

Spectacular.

Beautiful iconic landmark

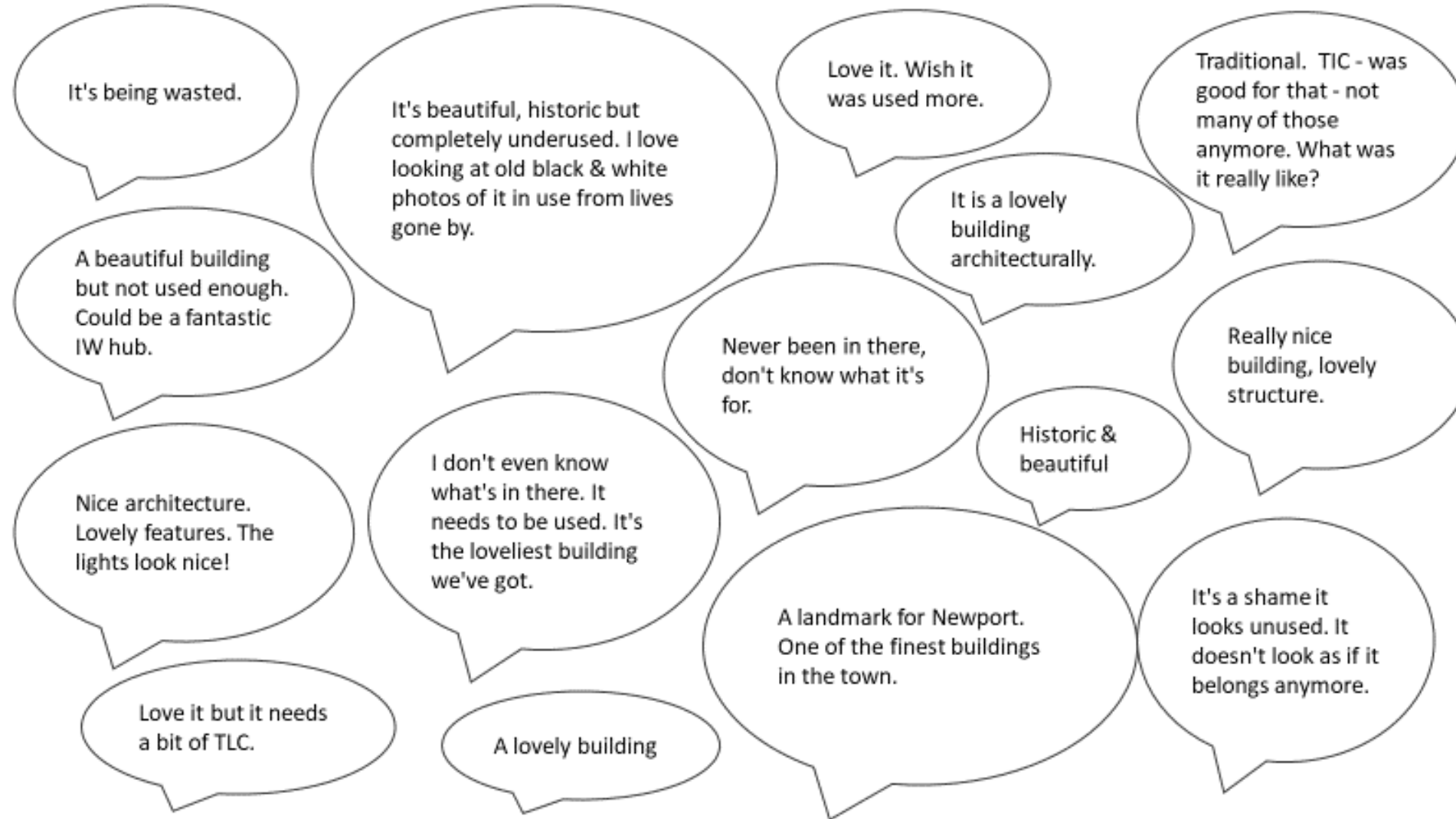
Old. It has a lot of potential. Could be really good.

Part of Newport's history. Just needs people to come.

From a history point of view, as there is toilet [Victorian toilet] and 5-6 holding cells, and it was a court.

Very aesthetic, great frontage - not clear what's in there.

What do you think about Newport Guildhall?



What do you think about Newport Guildhall?

It's in a great location, it's a shame it isn't more utilised or advertised

Our family are new to the Island and think it's a shame it's closed - would like to visit inside.

It's large and impressive but doesn't seem to do much.

Rarely even thought about it to be honest.

Lovely looking building but under-used.

Love it! And historical

It's very shabby and needs a facelift.

I'm not sure it's used for anything?

Needs to be something - anything - never know what it does/ is!

I've never really thought about it before - apart from the fact that it's a beautiful old building.

It's a very big museum and looks quite fancy (child's view). The tower looks out of place

Part of the history of Newport.

Nice building



VICTORIA

vision express

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W
BOOKS

+

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claire's

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ESPASS

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HN11 L 3

GU05 HVO

DO YOU THINK THE GUILDHALL
IS AN IMPORTANT BUILDING?
WHY?

Do you think the Guildhall is an important building? Why?

Yes- a landmark. Make it more appealing to the public – it's not obvious to tourists that they can go in. It is cut off from the main part of town. Lights might attract more people - you don't realise that it's there.

Yes. It's a building that has Newport character.

Should have a financially sustainable use.

Yes of course! It should be a public event space, a museum, art gallery and café.

Yes - part of Newport's history.

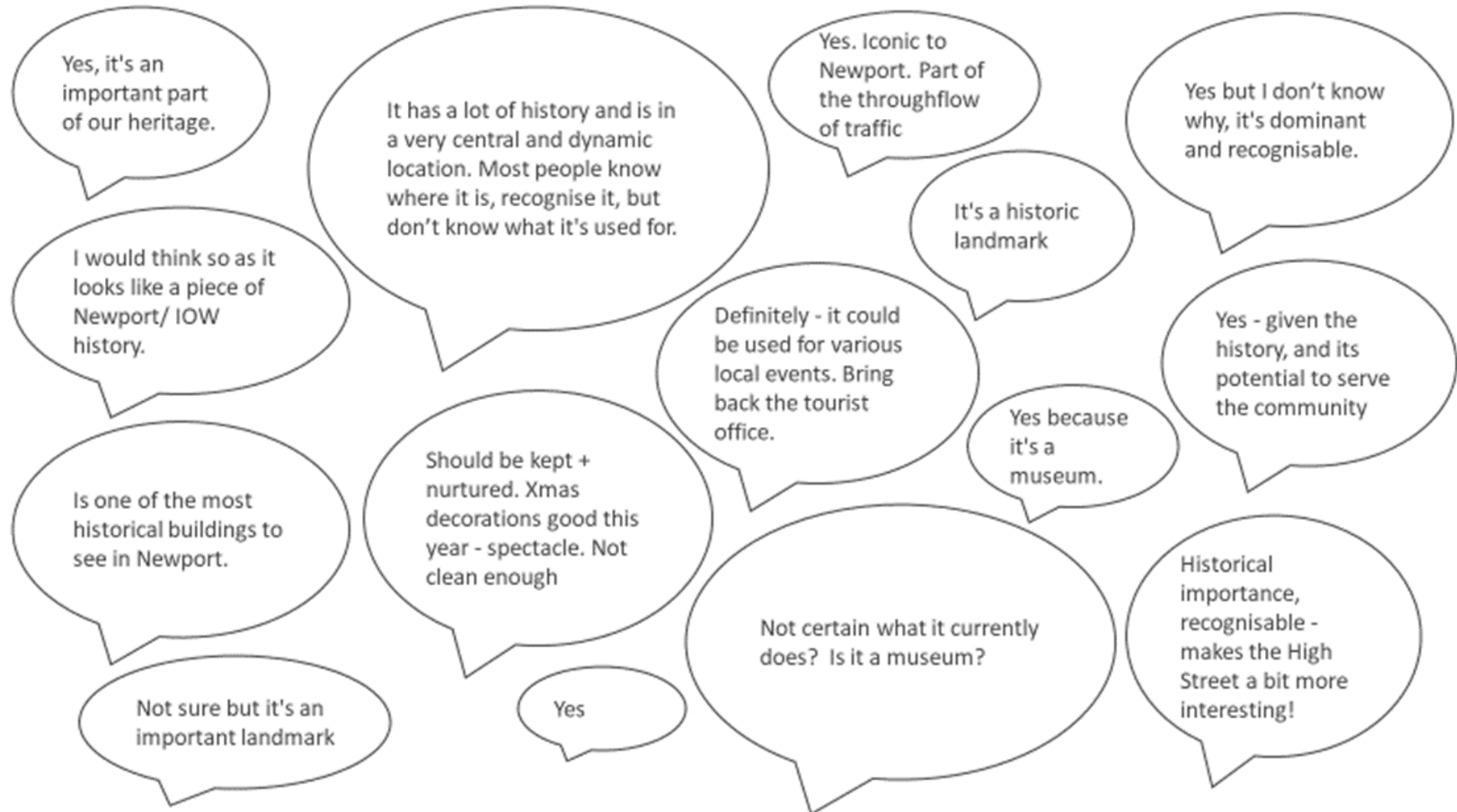
Important, significant architect and a striking example of civic architecture in a prominent position. A central focus, or 'hub' for Newport is unclear: the current spread of council offices does not do this job (and architecturally, could never have the positional status of the Guildhall). An 'Arts Hub' might be considered to be Quay Arts but that is underwhelming and appears unambitious. St Thomas' Square has religious & commercial focus – so a different, ambitious, flexible venue would be useful.

Be turned into a museum and gallery of history for the IOW.

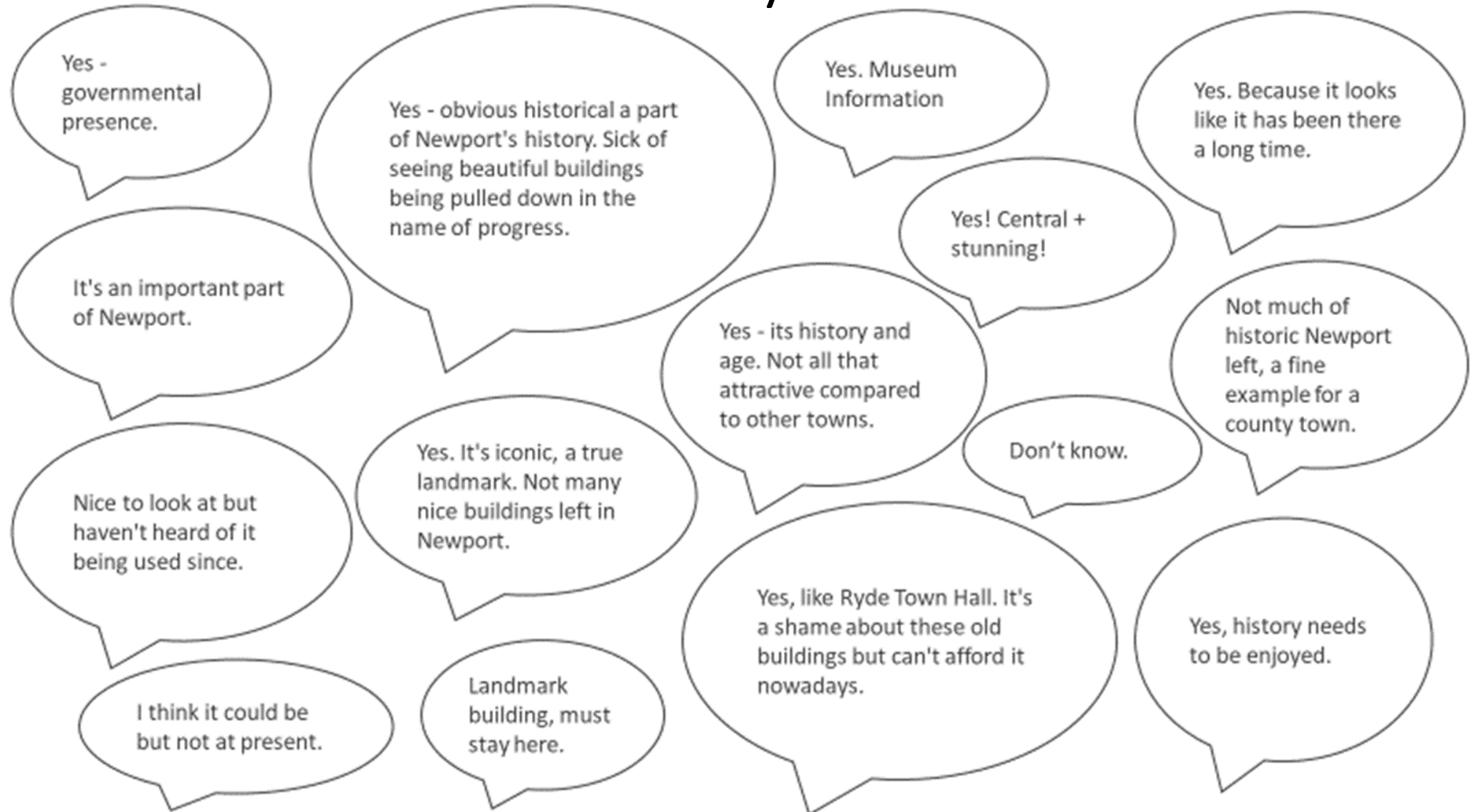
It can be a hub or stretch the museum and other stuff.

There are not many Nash buildings and as such, it should be used and celebrated.

Do you think the Guildhall is an important building? Why?



Do you think the Guildhall is an important building? Why?



Do you think the Guildhall is an important building? Why?





Saint Thomas's Square



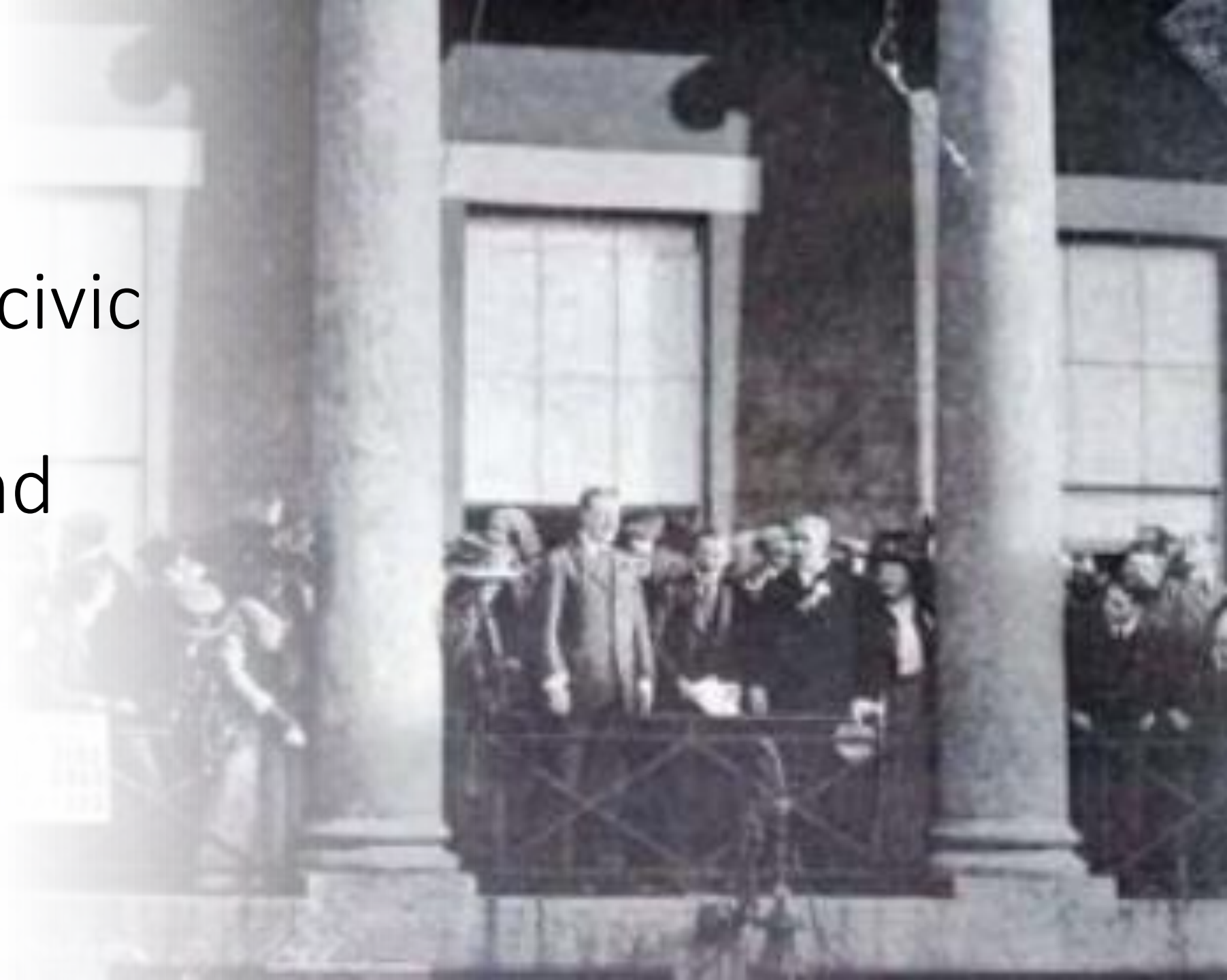
THE GUILD HALL

MUSEUM & VISITOR CENTRE

WHAT JOB DO YOU THINK THE
GUILDHALL SHOULD DO FOR
NEWPORT?

1.

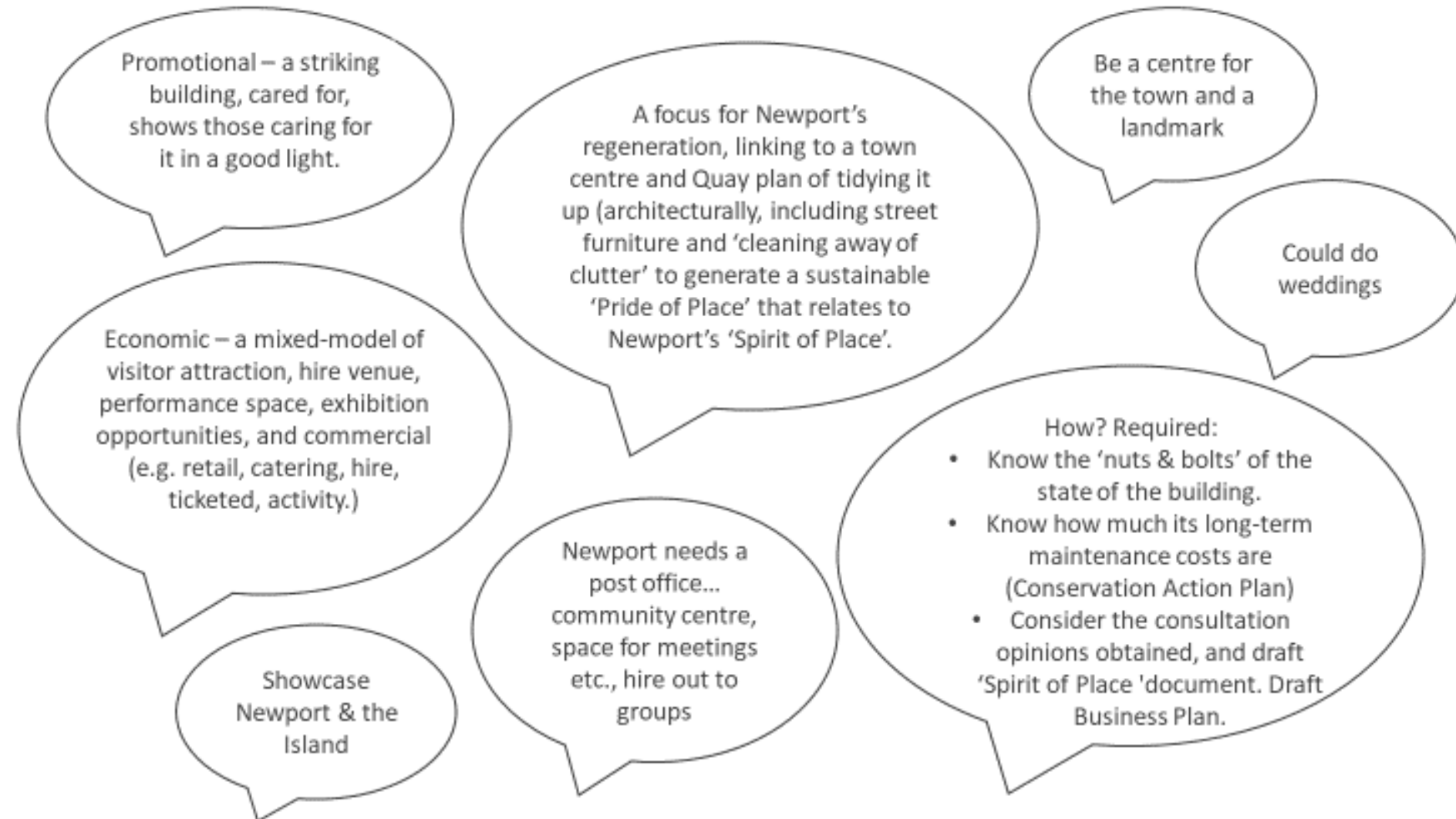
Answers
proposing civic
role, focal
point, Island
landmark



1. Civic role, focal point, Island landmark



1. Civic role, focal point, Island landmark



1. Civic role, focal point, Island landmark



2.
Answers proposing
Heritage and
Tourism, Museum
of Island History,
Visitor Information
Centre



2. Heritage & Tourism, Museum of Island History, Visitor Information Centre



2. Heritage & Tourism, Museum of Island History, Visitor Information Centre



2. Heritage & Tourism, Museum of Island History, Visitor Information Centre



3.
Answers
proposing
Community
Space and
Venue, Market
or Shops,
Music,
Events and
Activities



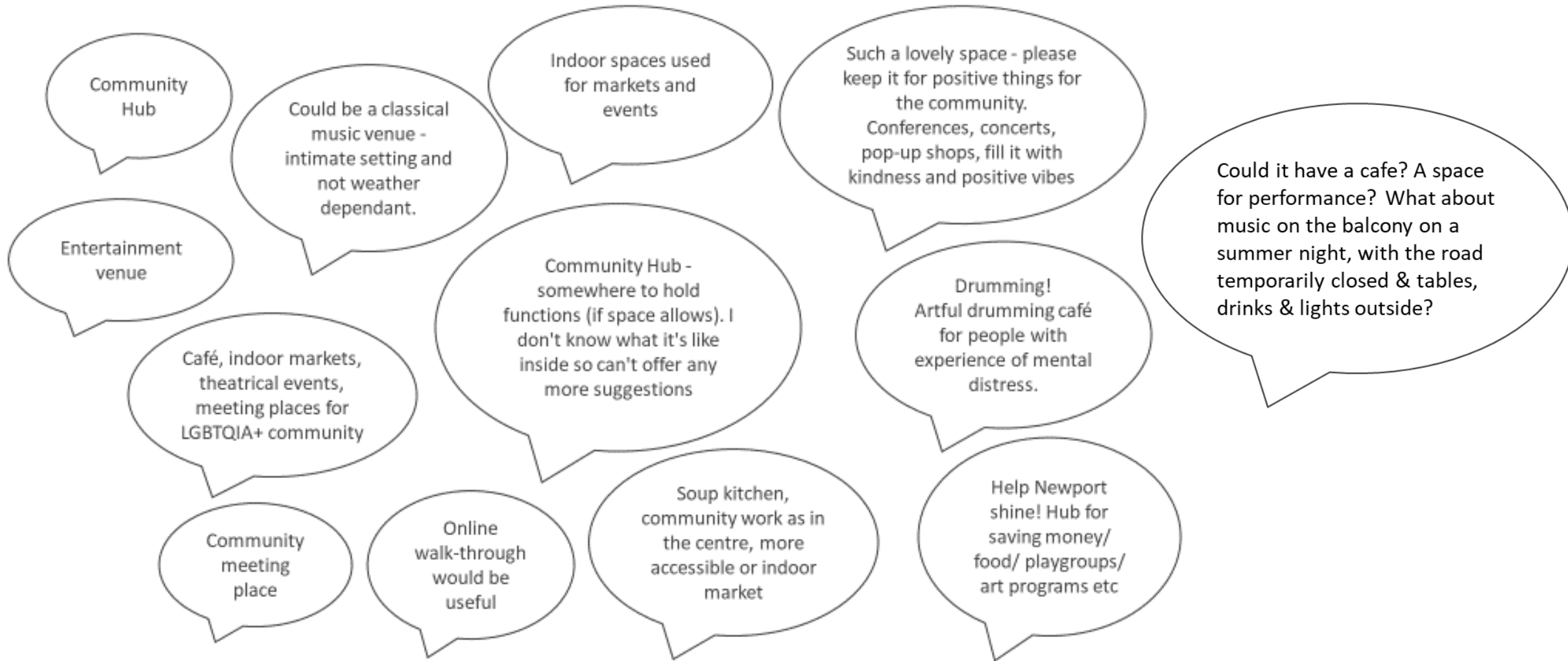
3. Community Space and Venue, Market, Shops, Music, Events and Activities



3. Community Space and Venue, Market, Shops, Music, Events and Activities



3. Community Space and Venue, Market, Shops, Music, Events and Activities



4.
Answers
proposing Co-
Working
Shared Office
Space



4. Co-Working Shared Office Space

I think it should be a largely public space, such as a museum/gallery, or public co-working space etc.

Lots of remote working now – it's a nice airy space. I'm currently using the library as a workspace.

Possibly office space downstairs - the upper room could be used for council meetings - Weddings?

Support small business

Co-working spaces. Business intelligence data is essential if you're going to re-start the Guildhall as an enterprise. Where does the money flow in Newport?

It could be a community workspace for people who WFH. It could also be a great space for community outreach, recreational activities and groups.

General Comments

It urgently needs restoration and could be improved by becoming a more welcoming, inclusive space where local people and visitors can come together on a daily basis and special occasions. A space to share and celebrate all that is special and unique about Newport and the Island.

Much more could be made of its setting and character to enhance people's experience of being in and visiting Newport. Could make an ideal archive centre for local and family historians, a meeting space or music/art/culture venue, internet access point and tea room? Mixed use as commercial and historic/exhibition/community space. Worth looking at what other councils have done successfully with town halls (but definitely NOT Ryde!!)

The entrance area is ideal as an Island visitor information centre. The Museum of Island History should be retained, but updated, and inter-actives kept in full working order. The cell(s) should also be open to visitors. The former court room upstairs should be available for weddings and function hire. Get the MP involved in a campaign to transform the whole building using Heritage Lottery money, and any other public and private financial sources. Run it as charitable trust at arm's length from the Council and appoint highly skilled people from across the community, with appropriate professional experience, onto the Board and staff team.

I know its been used for various uses in the past but it deserves to have a permanent use for the people of the Island & visitors alike. No entry fees though just donations.

think
ne
all

WELCOME TO ARC
PLEASE
SPRITZ HERE
& HELP KEEP THE
EVERYBODY COVID-FREE!
THANKS!
By order of the Management
[Signatures]

How might
this important
building
be better used?



Commission? ...
own welcome Bulk Fund
the building exterior +
steps + interior + maintain
could still beautiful energy
the balcony for example.

ordinary
belows wide
breast.

NEWPORT GUKDHALL

HALL
ing Newport!

Use the
balcony!
inc. additional
with - high quality
position.

also known as the TOPICAL HALL

Available/industrial
for But... more pos +
"make it more pos, dance,
public - museum, dance,
small shop on roof."

It a weekend
... and they should be
pre-ordered.

Wedding
Hall.

CONCEPT NAME

Architecture
multiple - 18

Questionnaire responses – paper

- 100% know where Newport Guildhall is
- 81% expressed positive opinion of Newport Guildhall
- 89% think that Newport Guildhall is an important building
- 72% make reference to Newport Guildhall's heritage, history and architecture, as an icon or landmark
- 38% believe that the building is under-used, under-promoted and expressed concern about the building's appearance
- 30% made reference to the Guildhall Museum - its importance or as a future use
- 13% don't know what Newport Guildhall is used for or what is inside

Questionnaire responses – online

- 100% know where Newport Guildhall is
- 94% expressed positive opinion of Newport Guildhall
- 96% think that Newport Guildhall is an important building
- 93% make reference to Newport Guildhall's heritage, history and architecture, as an icon or landmark
- 52% believe that the building is under-used, under-promoted and expressed concern about the building's appearance
- 39% made reference to the Guildhall Museum - its importance or as a future use
- 15% don't know what Newport Guildhall is used for or what is inside

Questionnaire responses – total

- 100% know where Newport Guildhall is
- 91% expressed positive opinion of Newport Guildhall
- 94% think that Newport Guildhall is an important building
- 87% make reference to Newport Guildhall's heritage, history and architecture, as an icon or landmark
- 48% believe that the building is under-used, under-promoted and expressed concern about the building's appearance
- 36% made reference to the Guildhall Museum - its importance or as a future use
- 14% don't know what Newport Guildhall is used for or what is inside

Overall Comment Frequencies

Guildhall as local landmark, beautiful and architecturally significant	174
Public affection for the building and a desire to see it brought to life	174
Museum – awareness of museum, desire to see it expanded, better resourced or promoted	97
Appearance/condition - concern or disappointment and/or suggestions for improvement	95
Events venue, music, theatre, performance, cultural use	56
Community hub or space (inc. day care, LGBTQ, CAB, youth)	47
Co-working space, business, seminar space, meeting rooms, internet access point	28
Arts Gallery, Crafts, Exhibitions, Arts Quarter	27
Tourist Information Centre	27
Indoor market, food market, pop-up shops	26
Café, restaurant	25
Civic Centre – interest in seeing Guildhall reprise civic function (incl. registry office)	23
Education	4
Cinema space	2

Other suggestions for use: Tours, Yoga, drumming space, education, research, aquarium, alternative health centre, Wax Works

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS BUILDING?

Conclusions and Recommendations



The consultation responses are wide ranging and varied, but there are a number of key messages and themes that appear consistent throughout and can be used to inform recommendations for the Guildhall project:

- There is strong public affection for the building and a desire to see it well looked after.
- The local landmark quality of the Guildhall is important to people whether or not they have ever been inside. The prominence and architectural style mark it out as a significant feature in the built environment of the county town and there is a strong sense that it must be historically important even though the specifics of its history are not generally known.
- The combination of public affection and community appreciation leads naturally to concern and disappointment that the façade of the Guildhall is in poor and declining condition. People want to see it cleaned and made presentable.

- The importance of the external look and 'presence' of the building, accessible to all, is reflected in comments wanting to see the building lit at night (in addition to 'just Christmas'), especially the front entrance and the arcade section, perhaps even internal room lights on to suggest a life inside. There is a clear message here around the need to bring the visible façade and accessible external spaces of the Guildhall more to life, more engaged in the life of the town.



- Responses to questions about use and purpose strongly indicate a preference for multi-function options with a clear social and community value. There is much support for the existing small museum and a will to see this service expanded alongside a wider offer as a cultural venue encompassing arts, heritage and environment.
- A role for the Guildhall in supporting and fostering small business development in Newport is also a prominent theme, from indoor market to co-working spaces.
- There is a desire to see the Guildhall used to celebrate significant personal and community ceremonial events and occasions.



Summary of Consultation Response

Newport Guildhall is valued for what it is, one of the most recognisable and significant buildings in the County Town. The community affection in which it is held is at the root of a general disappointment and dissatisfaction in its dormant state and neglected public appearance. A tangible civic pride in the Guildhall's historic status and landmark presence in the town remains and there is little evidence of support for an 'anything will do' fix. There is instead a desire to see the existing museum function improved as part of a renewed focus on Newport's heritage, and an expectation that the Guildhall can and should provide space for multiple public services, ceremonial, administrative, recreational and enterprising.



Picture and design courtesy of ERMC

6 Foundation Recommendations to assist the next steps in decision-making for the Guildhall, its function and management:

1. Look for a mixed use, multi-purpose solution with room to flex and evolve around the needs of the town and its community of residents, visitors, businesses and organizations, accommodating trial uses as well as consolidating established ones. This approach will need to be more a curated project than a conventional rental model, promoting the reuse of the Guildhall, with all of its quirks and inconveniences, as an enterprise shared between a new club of like-minded collaborators. This might mean establishing a non-profit anchor tenancy (to reduce the business rate burden) that can then manage the process of collecting together the new Guildhall tenant community and facilitate the revitalisation of the building's internal life, and its relationship with the town.
2. Respect the building, inside and out, avoid use options that require large-scale stripping-out of internal room arrangements and instead allow the building itself guide proposals according to its own character and idiosyncrasy. This proposal follows from the general affection, and indeed pride, felt for the Guildhall and its place in the life and times of Newport. It is a reasonable case to make that by retaining the operational character of the building's office space, a more authentic and resilient regeneration (i.e. more than façade, or tribute) of its civic and commercial value, identity and function will be achieved.
3. Prioritise the cleaning and painting of the exterior walls, fixtures and fittings with particular focus on the museum entrance. These works may need to be phased over a number of years to be completed affordably, but even a small start, undertaken soon, will demonstrate a will to revive the Guildhall's appearance. Newport's bid for city status might prompt early works if successful, but the town's rank as capital of the Isle of Wight and the UNESCO World Biosphere and the trajectory of steady town centre improvement established by the HAZ investment is sufficient reason.

4. Combine cleaning work with new lighting projects, especially around the museum entrance and the arcaded street frontage. The Guildhall sits at the junction of 5 roads and paths, approached in 5 different ways, as significant a landmark in each case. Inexpensive, well-designed lighting can maximise the impact of these viewpoints, from a distance and in close contact, as a rapid response to public concerns and preferences, while longer term phases of cleaning proceed.
5. Consider the existing broad stratification of use in the building as the template for revival work i.e. museum and cultural experience and public information on the ground floor; ceremonial space on the first floor; curated office and small business space on the second floor. An overall theming strategy will help with the curation of new tenancy arrangements, building identity within the building and maximising its influence on the town itself. One way of thinking about this would be to consider each floor of the Guildhall as home to a different but distinctive 'guild' of artisan work, as appropriate to social enterprise as it is to heritage experience.
6. Bring the Guildhall more actively and usefully into the work of the HAZ and Shaping Newport. There is so much that is emblematic about the present and future treatment of the building in this regard, there is a sense in which it stands as a totem for the cultural regeneration of the County Town, to the extent that the success of revival initiatives in the High Street and town centre cannot really sustain without the revival of the Guildhall.

Consulting On The Future Of Newport Guildhall

Produced by Arc Consulting for Newport High Street Heritage Action Zone

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