

Understanding the public's view

2020–2022



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Executive summary

Context and objectives

- Members of both Houses of Parliament have agreed on the importance of understanding the public's views in relation to the Restoration and Renewal (R&R) of the Palace of Westminster. This requirement is included in the legislation that established the R&R Programme.
- We published our Public Engagement Strategy in December 2020, and have undertaken a range of activities to seek the views of the public to inform our planning for R&R.
- In particular we wanted to find out how people feel about the Palace, what their priorities are for its restoration (outcomes), how we should balance costs against outcomes, and what wider benefits the restoration could bring.
- We used the findings to inform the emerging detailed and costed restoration plan; to help us develop policies on topics such as sustainability and procurement; to gather ideas for future detailed design stages; and to ensure the public are at the centre of our thinking.
- In early 2022 the Commissions of both Houses proposed changes to the overall delivery strategy of R&R, however, the findings of our view seeking activities will remain an important component of R&R.

Our engagement activities

- In total we heard from over 20,000 people from all around the UK.
- The different view-seeking activities were designed to meet the six principles set out in our [Public Engagement Strategy](#): UK-wide, varied, sustained, collaborative, inclusive and meaningful.
- We worked with many different partners to deliver our view-seeking activities, which included in-depth discussion groups, online forums, surveys, school debates, workshops, and quantitative research. We also reviewed previous research.

What we heard

- The findings are broken down into sections covering the six R&R strategic themes (health, safety and security; heritage and sense of history; accessibility and inclusion; sustainability; time and value for money; and functionality and design) as well as a section for findings that are out of scope for R&R.
- Overall, we heard that people strongly value the Palace of Westminster and want it to be restored and protected for future generations. They are concerned about its current condition.
- They assume the project will cost a lot of money, and are concerned about how costs can be managed and value for money achieved. They nonetheless want the restoration work to be done 'properly' to avoid a need for further works in future.
- Their highest priority is ensuring the safety of building users and of the building itself. They also think it should set an example for accessibility (which they define broadly) and sustainability, and there were many specific suggestions for how this could be achieved.
- People value the principle of being able to visit the building, especially for children's education, but don't always expect to visit themselves.
- Although out of scope for the Programme and not something that we proactively asked about, some people think that Parliament should move elsewhere.

A message to the people we heard from

“This report summarises thousands of hours of thinking and discussion, by over 20,000 people all over the UK.

Some of you took just a few moments to fill in a survey or post your thoughts on social media. Others gave up hours of your time – in community halls and classrooms across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and of course online. Whatever your contribution, we are immensely grateful that you shared your views about how we should restore and renew our Parliament building.

The Palace of Westminster is a place of importance for everybody living in the United Kingdom and for future generations. Your voices will continue to be heard as plans are taken forward to protect beautiful building.

On behalf of everybody at the Restoration and Renewal Programme, thank you.”



Sarah Johnson
CEO Restoration and Renewal
Sponsor Body



David Goldstone
CEO Restoration and Renewal
Delivery Authority Ltd.

Context and objectives

Throughout the debates in Parliament about Restoration and Renewal (R&R), both in Committees and on the floors of both Houses, Members stressed the importance of listening to the public as decisions are taken that will shape their Parliament building for generations to come. Subsequently, Members required the R&R Sponsor Body by law to “make arrangements to seek the views of the public” as it sets “strategic objectives” for and takes “strategic decisions” about R&R.

The R&R Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority were established substantively in April 2020. The [Public Engagement Strategy](#) was published in December the same year, setting out how we would seek the views of the public and keep them informed about R&R more broadly. This report sets out the findings of ‘view-seeking’ activities undertaken with the public in 2020 and 2021.

“... R&R will require a more in-depth and proactive approach so that members of the public from all parts of the UK and all walks of life can become involved in shaping our renewed Parliament. The ultimate client in R&R is the public.”

(Joint Committee on the draft Parliamentary Buildings Bill 2019)

Why is Restoration and Renewal needed?

Studies and reports over more than a decade have consistently found that the 150-year-old Palace of Westminster, a Grade 1 listed building and part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, needs urgent and wide-ranging restoration.

Crumbing stonework, cracking ceilings, leaky windows and extensive water damage are the visible problems. There are also hundreds of miles of rusting pipework, obsolete electrical cables and gas pipes, and the giant, inefficient Victorian steam heating, all of which are at high risk of failure and need replacing. The

building is at risk of flood, fire and stonefall, and there is asbestos in 2500 locations. Meanwhile large parts of the building are not accessible to disabled people.

This is no ordinary renovation. The building is enormous and complex – 34 acres and the size of more than 1000 interconnected houses. As well as being one of the UK’s biggest buildings it’s also one of its busiest workplaces with thousands of people on site each day, from catering and procedural staff, to MPs and Peers, to various people keeping the building running.

What we asked, and how we used the information

In this first stage of public view-seeking, we set out to understand:

- How people feel about the Palace of Westminster, as a historic building and the seat of the UK Parliament.
- People’s priorities for the restored and renewed Palace (outcomes).
- People’s views on the right balance between cost and outcomes.
- People’s views on the wider benefits the Programme could bring as we deliver R&R.

We have used the information gathered to build a rich picture of the views of the public, and this has informed objectives and decisions in a number of different ways:

- To inform the development of the detailed and costed restoration plan (see box). In particular, we used our understanding of the public’s views to help with decisions about the level of outcome we should aim for in different design areas.
- To inform the development of the Programme’s emerging policies on topics such as sustainability and procurement.
- To gather specific ideas about features or facilities, which can be used to inform more detailed design stages in the future.
- To provide the Sponsor Board and teams across the Programme with regular updates on findings, and in some cases enable direct observation of activities – so that the public, as the ‘ultimate client’, were at the centre of our thinking and work.

The Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority

These are the two organisations set up by Parliament to deliver R&R. The Sponsor Body has provided overall direction for R&R, setting objectives, scope, budget and timescales, and overseeing the work of the Delivery Authority. The Delivery Authority leads the practical planning and delivery of the works, including design, contractor procurement and project management. Together the two bodies are referred to in this report as ‘the Programme’. Since being established, the Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority have made significant progress in developing detailed plans for R&R, including engaging with members of the public.

In early 2022, the Commissions of the House of Commons and House of Lords agreed to look at how the works can be delivered in a new way, including new sponsorship arrangements and new a new set of parameters for what R&R should aim to achieve.

Whatever decisions Parliament makes about the future governance and scope of R&R, the views of the public will continue to be an important consideration for Members of both Houses, and for Parliamentary authorities.

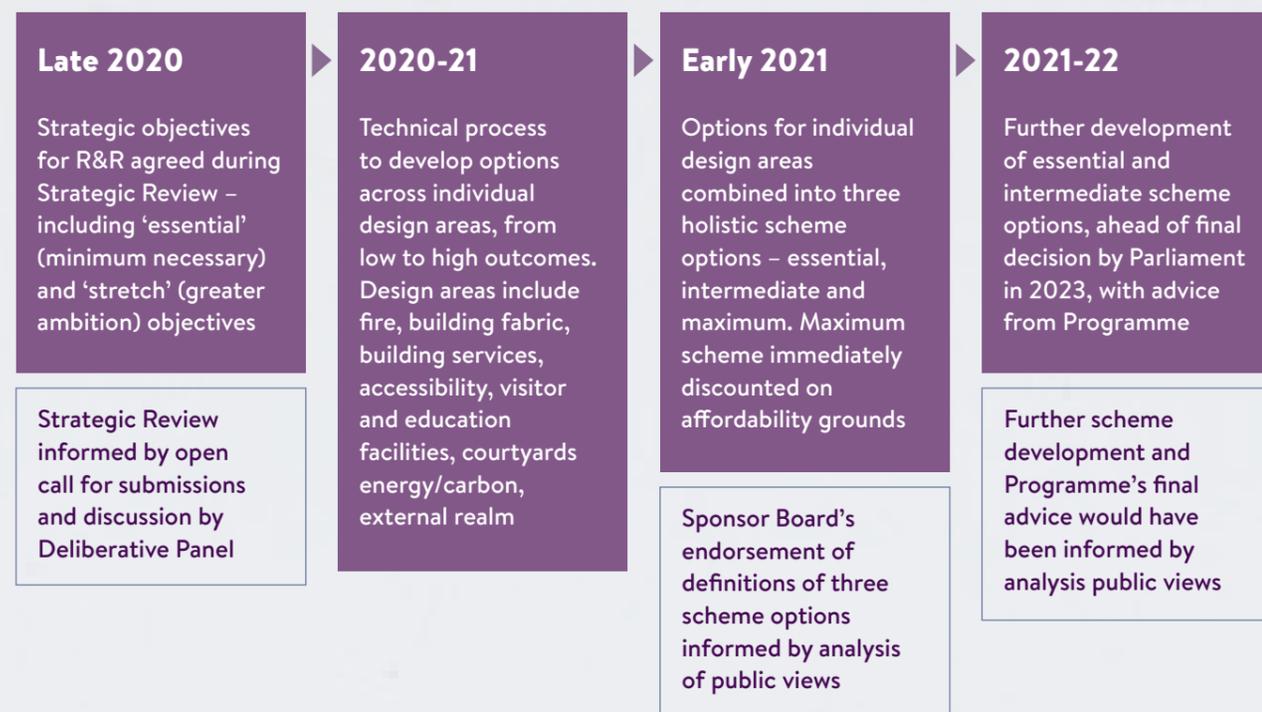
Detailed and costed Restoration and Renewal plan

The detailed and costed restoration plan (also referred to as the Outline Business Case or Programme Business Case) was to be the major milestone in the early years of R&R. Due in early 2023, the plan would have set out for the first time a comprehensive scope for R&R with detailed costs and timescales. Parliament would have needed to approve the plan before the Programme could proceed to more detailed design and then delivery.

The process of developing the plan is shown below. Aside from the views of the public,

other inputs to the plan included feedback from Members and officials of both Houses and a range of other stakeholders.

In early 2022 the Commissions of both Houses decided to look again at the overall objectives and delivery strategy for R&R. Consequently the plan that had been in preparation will no longer be progressed. However, the findings of our view-seeking activities remain useful for informing future planning for R&R under any future approach.



Process for developing the Restoration and Renewal Plan, including how public views informed different stages.

Strategic themes and goals

The strategic themes and goals were developed in the early stages of the Programme to guide objective setting and decision making. Many of the topics covered in public view-seeking activities relate back to one or more of the strategic themes, and they have been used to organise the detailed findings later in this report.

Health, safety and security	Ensure high standards of health, safety, and wellbeing and provide appropriate protection for the building and those in it.
Heritage and sense of history	Conserve and enhance the fabric of the Houses of Parliament and build appreciation of its rich history.
Accessibility and inclusion	Open up the Houses of Parliament, improve access and encourage a wider participation in the work of Parliament.
Sustainability	Deliver a refurbishment programme that minimises but also facilitates future maintenance and improvement, that ensures efficient and responsible resource consumption, and that provides for the development of national construction and craft skills.
Time and value for money	Deliver on time and maintain a relentless focus on delivering value and being on budget through the control of costs.
Functionality and design	Deliver a building which supports Parliament’s core function as a working legislature, both now and in the future using high quality design and technology.

Our engagement activities

The Public Engagement Strategy laid out a series of principles – UK-wide, varied, sustained, collaborative, inclusive, meaningful – for our engagement, and meeting these required the development of a diverse set of view-seeking activities. A traditional consultation approach, for example publishing a document and seeking

responses to a series of questions, would not have delivered against the principles, nor yielded the rich information sought.

Details of the specific activities undertaken are set out on subsequent pages. In one way or another, we heard from over 20,000 people overall.

How we met the six principles



UK-wide

Where it was appropriate to the methodology (eg. Quantitative Research, Deliberative Panel, Community Conversations) we ensured participants were geographically representative of the nations of the UK and the regions of England. Most other activities were open to all, promoted across the UK, and achieved participation from all nations/ regions. Only the Museum Workshops and Disabled People's Tours/ Workshops had a narrower geographical scope owing to the specific locations in which these were held (Manchester and London).



Varied

Despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, activities were a mixture of in-person and online. They included mass participation activities that reached thousands, as well as opportunities for in-depth discussions among smaller groups of people. Most feedback was captured in words or figures, but our Museum Workshops also generated graphical representations.



Sustained

Activities in this phase of engagement covered a 16 month period from August 2020 to November 2021. Further activities would have taken place in 2022, but were put on hold following the decisions by the Commissions of both Houses (see above).



Collaborative

Partners included the UK Parliament Participation Service, a specialist research agency, a national museum, an education specialist, and multiple national and local charities. Working with a broad range of partner organisations ensured we heard from groups of people that we might otherwise struggle to reach, and also enabled us to benefit from partners' skills and experience in research, engagement and analysis.



Inclusive

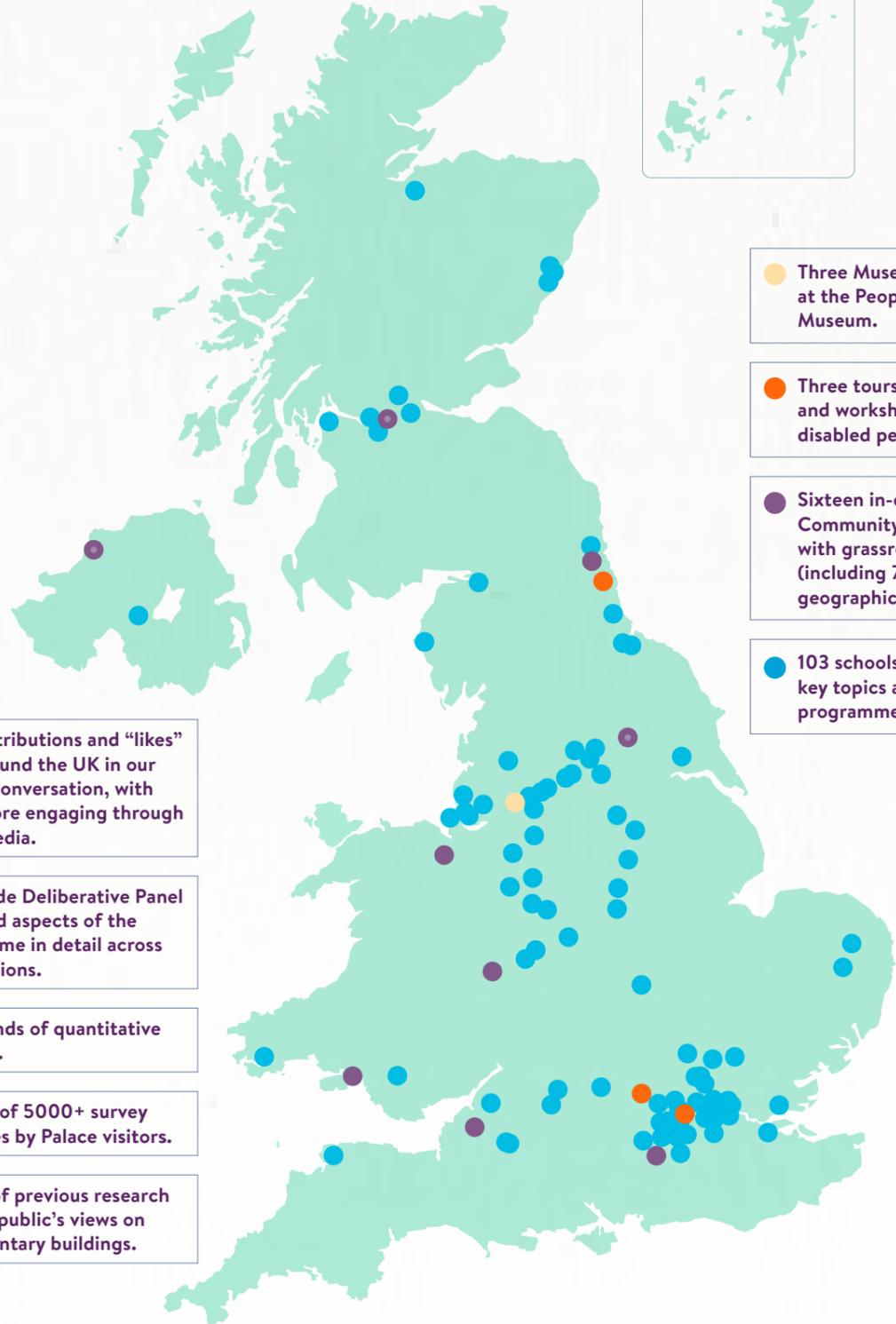
Several activities were designed to be open to anybody who wanted to participate, while others were designed to target particular groups, including children and people from demographics that research shows are less likely to be engaged with politics and the work of Parliament. Others were designed to ensure we heard a representative sample of the public's views overall. We took steps to ensure that activities were as accessible as possible to all, including by providing some materials in alternative formats, captioning videos and providing a postal option for feedback rather than online. All activities were free, and where they required a substantial time commitment (Community Conversations and Deliberative Panel) participants received a small honorarium.



Meaningful

Activities were carefully designed to gather as much useful information as possible on topics where there was scope for public views to inform decisions. Stimulus materials with contextual information to enable informed participation were always provided. The Deliberative Panel topics and questions within the Quantitative Research were explicitly linked to key decision milestones within the development of the detailed and costed plan, while findings from other activities were used to add colour and depth to our understanding of the public's views, and to gather ideas and preferences to inform future stages of detailed design work. Additionally, the open nature of many activities meant there was scope for participants to shape the discussion in a way that was most meaningful for them and tell us things that went beyond the topics covered by our questions.

Our activities around the United Kingdom



- Three Museum Workshops at the People's History Museum.
- Three tours of the Palace and workshops for disabled people.
- Sixteen in-depth Community Conversations with grassroots groups (including 7 non-geographical ones).
- 103 schools debated key topics about the programme.

249 contributions and "likes" from around the UK in our Online Conversation, with many more engaging through social media.

A UK-wide Deliberative Panel discussed aspects of the Programme in detail across four sessions.

Five rounds of quantitative research.

Analysis of 5000+ survey responses by Palace visitors.

Review of previous research into the public's views on Parliamentary buildings.

Community Conversations

Date

August-November 2021

Number of participants

300

Rationale

To ensure we heard from people from demographics which, research shows, are less likely to be engaged with politics and the work of Parliament, with a particular focus on how the building could be more inclusive for people like them. The [House of Commons Library](#) defines these groups as people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, women, disabled people, people in unskilled work, and people in long term unemployment.

Description

16 online or in-person two-hour workshops hosted in all four UK nations by grassroots community organisations (see appendix) that work with one or more of the target demographics. Where possible conversations took place at venues and with participants/facilitators that were familiar to people, to minimise barriers to participation. Local facilitators were provided with stimulus materials and discussion guides, and asked to capture and summarise feedback from their conversations. Our partner Involve analysed and synthesised feedback to generate [overall findings](#).

Key topics covered:

- The different roles of the building (legislature, workplace, heritage site)
- How to make the building a great place to work in or visit
- How to make people feel like they belong in the building
- Wider views/reflections about the building and R&R

Museum Workshops

Date

October 2021

Number of participants

45

Rationale

To engage young people with R&R and understand their ideas for their future Parliament building.

Description

Two workshops for children aged 5-10 (plus carers) plus a workshop with the Wigan and Leigh Youth Cabinet, on a 'takeover' day at the [People's History Museum](#) in Manchester. Children learnt about the history and role of the Palace of Westminster, as well as the restoration challenges, before using pictures and words to express their ideas on a large outline graphic of the Palace.

Key topics covered:

- Various – principally environment, accessibility and inclusion, heritage

Below: During the workshops at the People's History Museum, ideas were collated on a large outline of the Palace



Left: Children learnt about the history of the Palace as part of the workshops at the People's History Museum



Above: Members of the Wigan and Leigh Youth Cabinet discussed their ideas for the future of the Palace

Deliberative Panel

Date

August 2020, November 2020, January 2021 and January 2022 (four phases)

Number of participants

26 in total (19-24 in any one phase)

Rationale

To hold in-depth conversations among a representative group of the public who would accumulate knowledge of the building and Programme over time, to understand views on complex topics that needed extensive background information or that might not be suitable for wider engagement.

Description

Research agency Yonder recruited a broadly geographically and demographically representative group of panellists. Panellists met online in groups of 5-7 people for around 2 hours each phase, with stimulus materials to inform their discussions. Yonder provided impartial facilitation and in phases 2-4 a Programme 'expert' was available to answer questions. Sessions were observed anonymously by Programme staff. Yonder analysed and synthesised the conclusions of each group to generate overall findings.

Key topics covered:

- Phase 1: attitudes to the building and its condition; potential benefits of R&R; requirements for decant accommodation. (To inform the Strategic Review)
- Phase 2: optimum balance of outcome levels against cost/time for fire, accessibility, building services, and energy use/carbon. (To inform the development of the holistic scheme options)
- Phase 3: optimum balance of outcome levels against cost/time for building fabric, education facilities, visitor facilities, courtyards, and external realm. (To inform the development of the holistic scheme options)
- Phase 4: preference between essential and intermediate holistic scheme options; attitudes to continued presence. (To inform further scheme development)

Disabled People's Tours and Workshops

Date

July 2021

Number of participants

Approximately 10 disabled people, plus some companions

Rationale

To understand the experiences disabled people have when visiting the Palace.

Description

Three tours of the Palace for groups of disabled people, using the standard visitor route led by guides from the Parliament's Participation team. These were followed by online/in-person workshops facilitated by Programme staff. Participants were recruited by three local grassroots organisations (see appendix), and had a range of different disabilities.

Key topics covered:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Wider views/reflections about the building and R&R

Below: A group from Harrow Mencap visited the Palace



Online Conversation

Date

June-July 2021

Number of participants

177 registered participants on the main [online platform](#), with around 2,000 further interactions prompted on the Programme's social media channels.

Rationale

To provide a space open to anybody who wanted to tell us what they thought, and gather people's views and ideas on key topics.

Description

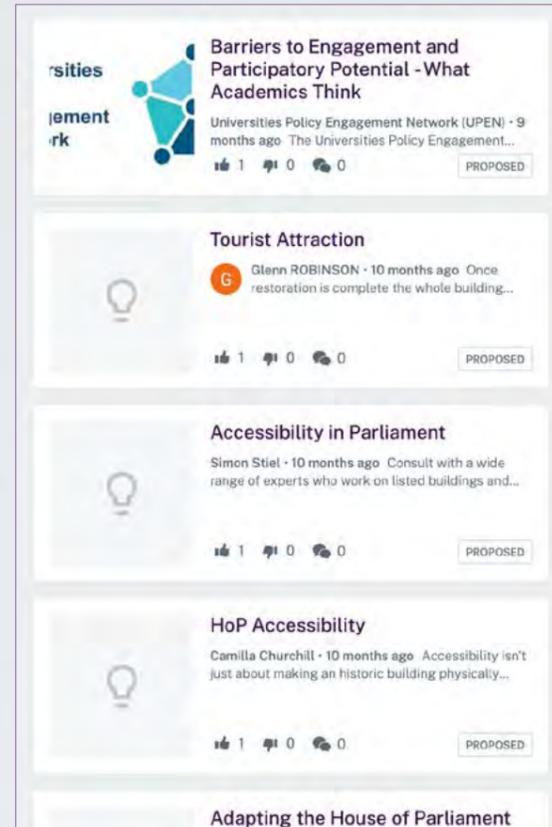
A moderated online discussion forum, open for four weeks, on which people could post thoughts/ideas and respond to and/or 'like' those posted by others. The discussion was organised into four threads on different topics, with a short video explaining the context, challenges and opportunities associated with each topic.

The Conversation was promoted through social media, including paid-for posts. In total 734,000 people saw an advert or post about the Conversation, and 7,200 people clicked through to the platform. Many chose to share their views directly in response to our social media posts and those views were gathered too.

Key topics covered:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Environmental sustainability
- Heritage
- Jobs and skills

Anybody could submit views and ideas to our online engagement platform, as part of the Online Conversation



School Debates

Date

May-June 2021

Number of participants

1675 (debate 1)
2723 (debate 2)
1803 (debate 3)

Rationale

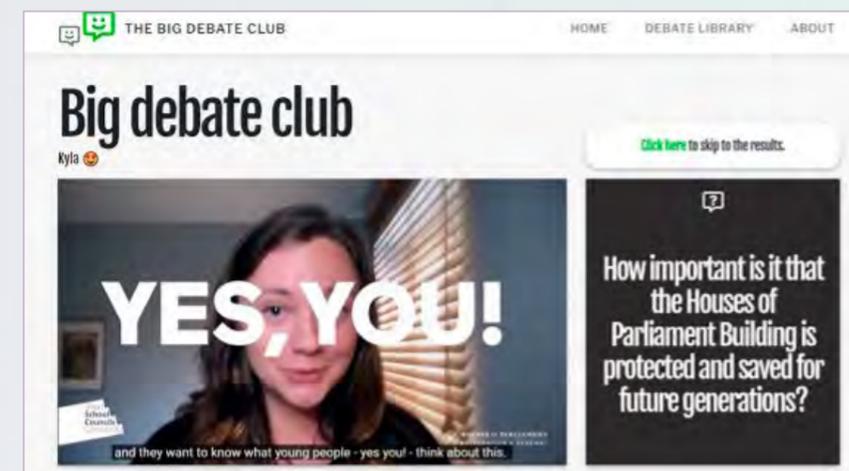
To understand the views of young people about key topics, in a way that also enabled them to learn about the Palace of Westminster and R&R.

Description

Three debates hosted by Smart School Councils on its free and open-to-all [Big Debate Club](#) website. Each debate had an explanatory video plus supporting materials and a lesson plan. Debate results were fed back into the website, along with a summary of the main arguments. In total 103 schools from all UK nations and regions participated in at least one debate, covering primary, secondary and special educational needs.

Key topics covered:

- Heritage (“How important is it that the Houses of Parliament is protected and saved for future generations?”)
- Sustainability (“How important is it that the Houses of Parliament building sets an example for protecting the environment?”)
- Democratic access (“How important is it for people to be able to visit the Houses of Parliament building?”)



The three School Debates were available free online for schools around the country to use during lessons and assemblies

Quantitative Research

<p>Date</p> <p>November 2020 and February/May/August/November 2021 (five rounds)</p>	<p>Description</p> <p>Quarterly online quantitative research within Yonder's wider omnibus survey, undertaken over 2-3 days. NB: in this report, results are generally provided as a range (eg. 25%-30%) indicating the lowest and highest scores for a question over the five rounds.</p>
<p>Number of participants</p> <p>10,455 in total (c.2100 in each round)</p>	<p>Key topics covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudes to the building • Awareness of and concern about issues with the building • Awareness and importance of potential R&R benefits • Balance of costs/outcomes and continued presence (November 2021 only)
<p>Rationale</p> <p>To understand views about key topics relating to R&R among a statistically significant sample of UK adults, including how they changed over time.</p>	

Education/Tourist Visitor Survey Data

<p>Date</p> <p>July 2016-September 2019 (Education), May 2019-March 2020 (Tourist)</p>	<p>Description</p> <p>Direct surveying of visitors was not possible as research took place during the Covid-19 pandemic when there was no access for the general public, so historical survey data was obtained from Parliament's Participation Service and analysed for relevant insights.</p>
<p>Number of participants</p> <p>2621 (Education) 2635 (Tourist)</p>	<p>Key topics covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of visitor and education services and facilities
<p>Rationale</p> <p>To understand the experience visitors have of the Palace and the facilities available to them.</p>	

Previous Research Review

<p>Date</p> <p>2021/22</p>	<p>Description</p> <p>A review commissioned from a leading UK academic specialist, drawing on 31 different sources.</p>
<p>Rationale</p> <p>To understand the findings of previous research into public attitudes towards parliamentary buildings in the UK.</p>	<p>Key topics covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public views about parliamentary buildings in the UK

Summary of what we heard

“It’s beautiful. I love the building. I think it’s stunning. I mean the building is iconic. I think the architecture is just amazing! It’s such a British icon. It would just be a shame to see that go to ruin.”

(Deliberative Panel Participant)

The building is meaningful and important to many people across the UK, valued for its history, architecture and symbolism, and for its role in attracting tourism. There is a high level of support for saving the building.

People are surprised, even shocked, that the building has deteriorated to the condition it is in.

Many people spontaneously assumed R&R would be very expensive and were concerned about how costs can be managed, and value for money achieved.

Once people understand the condition of the building and its vulnerability, they are more likely to accept the case for R&R.

When considering the balance of cost and benefits in depth, people generally conclude that investing enough to deal with problems properly now would be worthwhile to save money in the long term and avoid a need for further work.

Safety and security is the most important issue, with people very supportive of measures that will maintain and improve the safety of occupants and the building itself.

Because the building is where laws are made, many people feel it should set an example, particularly in terms of accessibility and inclusion and sustainability. A significant number of specific suggestions on these topics were received.

Equal access for disabled people is considered to be a fundamental principle.

People take a broad view of what accessibility means, spontaneously raising the effect of factors such as gender, invisible disabilities and cultural background on how accessible and inclusive people find the Palace.

Although people recognise the value in principle of being able to visit Parliament for democratic or educational purposes, they often do not expect to visit personally and are therefore ambivalent about the provision of visitor facilities.

Nonetheless, people who do visit find the experience rewarding and there were a range of suggestions about how the visitor experience could be further improved.

People value the contribution the Programme can make to UK jobs and skills and they want transparency around procurement processes.

People are not concerned about Parliament fully vacating the Palace while the works take place.

Although not something we asked about, there is ambivalence over whether the building should remain the home of the UK Parliament, with a vocal minority advocating strongly for alternative locations citing a range of reasons. They usually suggest repurposing the Palace, for example as a museum.

Some people’s comments about R&R are affected by dissatisfaction with politics more widely.

People greatly value the opportunity to give their views and were pleased to be able to participate.

Up to 75% think the Palace of Westminster should be protected and preserved for future generations.

Health, safety and security

R&R strategic goal: Ensure high standards of health, safety, and wellbeing and provide appropriate protection for the building and those in it

Maintaining and improving the safety and security of the building and those who use it is a key part of the rationale for R&R. The presence of asbestos, and high risk of fire, flooding or stonefall, require extensive proactive management by the Parliamentary authorities to keep people safe. Limited fire protection measures currently mean that, in the event of a fire, while occupants would be safely evacuated, large parts of the building could be destroyed. As a high profile building, the Palace also has substantial security requirements.

Additionally, life-expired building services and failing building fabric mean the Palace is often an uncomfortable place to work – often too hot or too cold, poorly ventilated or drafty, and subject to leaks and floods. There are opportunities to promote the physical and mental wellbeing of those who work in or visit the building, for example through improved environmental conditions or better welfare facilities.

Various issues relating to safety were discussed in detail with the Deliberative Panel, and were also covered in the Quantitative Research. Attitudes to security, and ideas for promoting health and wellbeing of building users, came up across a number of the activities.

“What stood out for me is what a bad state of repair the building is in, and that there’s a threat of fire and things falling down and hurting people. It seems like a real problem and I think they should definitely fix it.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 1)

Key findings

Ensuring the safety of those who work in and visit the building has very strong resonance with the public. People are very supportive of measures that will maintain and improve the safety of occupants and the building itself.

The importance of robust security is not questioned, but people highlight that security measures can have additional impact on some people, such as those with invisible disabilities or from certain backgrounds.

Measures that contribute to the physical and mental wellbeing of building users are generally supported, with a number of suggestions received.

Safety

Once people were made aware of the condition of the Palace, people placed a high priority on addressing issues affecting the safety of people working in and visiting the building, and of the building itself. People generally considered that safety issues were the most urgent to be fixed.

“If that was an ordinary office building it would be shut down by health and safety immediately, they’d be sent out and they’d have to find new offices. So for sure, a benefit of this would be to make sure everyone can work safely inside.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 1)

“The most dominant themes for the group were safety and accessibility – this was universal when considering the context of a place to work or a place to visit.”

(Feedback from Community Conversation facilitator)

In the Quantitative Research, more people agreed that “ensuring the safety and welfare of all the people who work in the building” was important or very important (86%-90%) than any other benefit of R&R. When asked to rank a number of current issues with the building in order of how concerning they are, a majority of people consistently chose “serious risk of fire”, “risk of falling stones” and “presence of asbestos” among the top three concerns.

Similarly, participants in the Deliberative Panel attached great importance to measures designed to improve building safety. They chose the highest possible outcome level for fire safety, despite increased cost, when they discussed this topic in November 2020, and reaffirmed that view when considering the holistic scheme options in January 2022 (there was no

differentiation of fire safety measures between the essential and intermediate schemes, with high outcome levels recommended for both). Panellists were influenced in part by other recent examples of catastrophic fires, citing specifically Notre Dame de Paris and Grenfell Tower.

“I think the fire intervention is essential. We can’t go and spend a lot of money on upgrading the building and fixing it up if it’s still at risk from a fire. Also you have to make it a safe work environment.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 2)

“You can justify the expenditure on this. If anything happened to that building, well the cost of replacing it would be huge. You can see what happened with Notre Dame and how tragic that was, so I don’t think we should risk it.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

“It should be commended that they haven’t given two different options, or two different schemes for fire. This scheme has to be as good as it possibly can be in terms of fire because it’s the biggest risk to life of people in there.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

Similarly, when discussing the topic of building fabric (walls, roofs, floors, doors, windows, fixtures and fittings) the Deliberative Panel chose outcome levels which ensured that any issues affecting safety would be dealt with (although panellists chose a lower outcome level than for fire, because the highest outcome level for building fabric included non-safety related repairs that they considered to be more discretionary). Asbestos was not discussed with the Deliberative Panel in depth, given the technical nature of the topic and its solutions.

Security

People who raised the issue of security generally acknowledged that security needs to be robust, but some also noted that it can be intrusive. There was no suggestion that security should be lessened, but people raised the design of search points and visibility of security as an accessibility concern.

“Security procedures which are robust but not intrusive as these can have negative impact on some people particularly with mental health issues”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

For example the Disabled People's Tours led to conversations about dignity in security spaces and the need for multiple routes and larger spaces equipped for people with mobility impairments, so that people feel comfortable and welcome. The need for spaces for people to sit down and 'recover' after security was raised. Some people also highlighted their need to be searched out of the view of other members of the public, so their invisible disabilities were not made visible.

“If you were a person who was autistic going through security – and I know it has to be done – you would be anxious in that area.”

(Disabled People's/Workshop participant)

“When I came through the security area it was a bit embarrassing for me... trying to keep my balance. I felt that it should have been more private... I dropped my stick... It wasn't a nice experience.”

(Disabled People's Tour/Workshop participant)

Other work strands emphasised the need to understand how people from different backgrounds experience security and the visible police presence and how that might be considered in design. The behaviour of security staff and onsite police was not criticised but some felt their presence could be intimidating, creating another barrier to visiting the building.

“I believe the largest physical barrier into the Palace of Westminster is the police presence ”

(Online Conversation participant)

“Security is very intimidating, especially for ethnic minority groups.”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

Health and wellbeing

Participants across a range of activities highlighted measures to support the health and wellbeing of building users. The Deliberative Panel participants chose higher outcome levels for the building services design area, despite increased costs, noting that this is an important contributor to decent working conditions for staff in the building.

“The ventilation, plumbing and sewerage for the building is essential for it to actually function properly, and crucial for the people who work there as well to be safe. I think, after fire, this is the next most important issue.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

“It is important, not only from a health and safety point of view, but if you leave these things to snowball, and they just keep getting worse and worse and worse, it will have a knock-on negative effect with other parts of the fabric of the building.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

There were also a range of ideas to support the broader wellbeing of building users, including mental health. These suggestions are covered in more detail in the accessibility and inclusion section.

Heritage and sense of history

R&R strategic goal: Conserve and enhance the fabric of the Houses of Parliament and build appreciation of its rich history

Protecting the Palace's heritage and preserving it for future generations is another key rationale for R&R. The building's history dates back to the construction of the original Westminster Hall from 1097. The great fire of 1834 destroyed most of the medieval Palace, and its subsequent rebuilding led to the buildings that stand today. The outstanding architecture of Sir Charles Barry and detailing by Augustus Pugin is recognised in the UK and worldwide, through the building's Grade 1 listed and UNESCO World Heritage Site statuses. The Palace is also home to a large and significant collection of heritage items, including art, furnishings and archives.

Heritage was one of the four themes featured in the Online Conversation, and was also integral to discussions in a range of other activities, as well as being the subject of a number of questions in the Quantitative Research.

Key findings

The building is meaningful and important to many people across the UK, valued for its history, architecture and symbolism, and for its role in attracting tourism. There is a high level of support for saving the building.

People are surprised, even shocked, that the building has deteriorated to the condition it is in.

There is some concern about how the many functions of Parliament can be contained within the one building, while preserving its heritage.

People generally prefer the building to retain its historical features and the architecture to be preserved rather than extensive modernisation.

Tourism is recognised as an important consideration and justification for R&R.

Historical and architectural importance

Many people strongly valued the architecture, design and overall visual impression of the building, both externally and internally. Equally, they recognised the unique role it has played in UK and world history. For these reasons, ensuring the building is protected and preserved provided a strong rationale for R&R in people's minds. In the Quantitative Research 75%-80% agreed that "it is an important part of my country and history", and 81%-86% agreed that "it is an important historic building, regardless of the activities and debates that take place inside". 72%-75% agreed "it should be restored and protected for future generations". Meanwhile in the first School Debate, 86% of school groups voted it was important that "the Houses of Parliament building is protected and saved for future generations."

"The Houses of Parliament are stunning, they must be restored. The thought of replacing with a modern building is abhorrent, look at the monstrosity that is city hall."

(Online Conversation participant)

"It's amazing, the building. We went there on school trip and I think we should look after it for hundreds of years more."

(School Debate feedback)

"Beautiful building, lots of history and learnt quite a bit about how parliament works".

(Tourist Visitor Survey respondent)

"It's our duty to protect our heritage and our identity. The building is something that we've inherited that is integral to being British. There are lots of lessons in the stonework and people are coming to see the historical building and the architecture."

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

Although the public were clearly aware of the building being where MPs and Peers conduct their work and where laws are made, this function was often considered secondary to the iconic status and irreplaceable heritage of the building itself. Indeed, the many functions of the Palace – as heritage site, legislature, workplace for thousands of people, and visitor attraction – raised doubts across various activities that one building could realistically fulfil all of these roles in a satisfactory way. While there were sometimes suggestions for moving the legislative functions elsewhere (see Out of scope section) most people nonetheless wanted the Palace to remain, even if it was used for a different purpose for example as a museum.

"Historic building first, whereas working Parliament could be held anywhere in another building whereas history is history!"

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

The Deliberative Panel discussed the building's status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which was previously unknown to some panellists. For them this international recognition further underlined the need to look after the Palace, making doing so a matter of the UK's international reputation. In the Quantitative Research too, "preserving the status of the building as a UNESCO World Heritage Site" was identified as an important benefit of R&R by 64%-75% of people, although this gradually declined over the course of the five rounds.

If it's a World Heritage Site it's your duty to sort of maintain it. It's part of our identity. It's what Great Britain is known for."

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 1)

However the grandeur of the Palace's architecture can also serve as a deterrent to some people who find the building intimidating and unwelcoming, as referenced in the accessibility and inclusion section.

State of repair

Common across many activities was a lack of understanding among the public about exactly how the building had been able to fall into such disrepair. Some people highlighted that the amount of time and money required to protect and preserve the building now could have been reduced if this issue had been taken seriously earlier.

"It is a disgrace that such a magnificent building is in such disrepair."

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

"Surprised it has taken quite so long for them to suddenly realise how much money and effort needs to go into the building"

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

"What stood out for me is what a bad state of repair the building is in, and that there's a threat of fire and things falling down and hurting people. It seems like a real problem and I think they should definitely fix it."

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 1)

Interventions to the building

The Deliberative Panel discussed options for restoring the fabric of the building (walls, roofs, floors, doors, windows, fixtures and fittings) in depth. They considered this should be a priority for R&R, choosing the second highest of four outcome levels, under which the backlog of repairs would be fully addressed and further works would be undertaken to extend the life of the building fabric in the medium term.

"For me, the fabric of the building is the most necessary, so I'm staying at number three. The other things we talked about are just improvements but this is about keeping the main building intact."

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 3)

There was some concern among participants in various activities that interventions – for example to improve accessibility or sustainability, or modernise working conditions – shouldn't unnecessarily undermine the building's historic architecture.

"A great historic building is there to be admired and accepted. Restore it, add in modernisations which do not detract from its appearance and otherwise leave it be."

(Comment from social media)

"The building should be kept exactly as it is, restored to its glory, but behind the scenes updated. If we're talking about what it looks like and how attractive it is as a building, then that's the bit that needs to be saved and be kept the same."

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 1)

Engaging with the Palace's heritage

People recognised that architecture and history are key motivators for people to visit the building. They raised a variety of ideas about how the Palace's heritage could be communicated – both to visitors and remotely – through the design of Parliament's educational and engagement materials and activities. These are covered in more detail in the out of scope section.

Many people drew a connection between the building's heritage and its importance to the UK's tourism industry. People felt that these wider economic benefits were another part of the rationale for R&R. Suggestions that increased

commercial revenues, including from tourists, could help cover the cost of R&R are explored in more detail in the time and value for money section.

"It's so well known. If you go to London, the amount of tourists that just come to stand and look at that building! In Edinburgh you have your parliamentary building. You've got Stormont in Ireland; you've got the Kremlin; you've the White House. Everywhere seems to have – let's call them iconic again – a building that people throughout the world can refer to."

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 1)

Accessibility and inclusion

R&R strategic goal: Open up the Houses of Parliament, improve access and encourage a wider participation in the work of Parliament

Accessibility was one of the most important and commonly mentioned themes throughout all of the view-seeking activities, and was often raised in combination with other strategic themes. The Palace currently offers poor accessibility for disabled people. It has around 65 different levels and around 100 staircases, but only one compliant lift and only 40% of entrances are step-free. People with less visible disabilities also face significant access challenges. Meanwhile there are

opportunities to improve facilities for visitors more generally, and provision for education facilities will need to be reviewed as the current education centre has only temporary planning consent.

Although the public mostly experience the building as visitors they also, of course, sometimes stand for election or apply for jobs at Parliament. So this section also covers views on the building as an accessible and inclusive workplace.

Key findings

People feel Parliament should set an example for accessibility as it is where equality laws are made and, particularly for disabled people, they consider equal access to be a fundamental right.

People want physical interventions to improve disabled access in the building, but in a way which is respectful to the look and feel of the estate and architecture.

Beyond access for disabled people, people take a broad view of what accessibility and inclusion means, spontaneously raising the effect of other factors such as gender and cultural background on how accessible and inclusive people find the Palace, whether as workers or visitors.

People recognise the value in principle of being able to visit Parliament for democratic or educational purposes, and people who have actually visited found the experience rewarding.

However many people often do not expect to visit personally and are therefore ambivalent about the provision of visitor facilities.

A wide range of ideas for making the Palace more accessible and inclusive to all, and improving the visitor experience, were received.

People greatly value the opportunity to give their views about R&R and were pleased to be able to participate in view-seeking activities.

Setting an example

Across all activities, people highlighted that the legislative function of the Parliament buildings means that this is where laws about equality are created, so Parliament has an even greater responsibility to lead by example with regard to its own buildings.

“It’s about what Parliament represents and if it’s the place where we make our laws then I think it absolutely must be fully accessible to anyone who’s a British citizen!”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 1)

Equal access for disabled people

Only 22%-26% of people in the Quantitative Research previously knew that the Palace has “poor access for people with disabilities”, indicating that awareness of this issue among the general population is limited. However people place a very high priority on improving equality of access for both staff and visitors, considering this to be an essential and fundamental right. 82%-85% thought that “making the building more accessible for people with disabilities” is an important benefit of R&R.

Similarly, the Deliberative Panel in November 2020 chose the highest possible outcome level for accessibility (alongside only fire and sustainability), despite knowing that this outcome would be most expensive.

“I don’t think accessibility should be dropped. I think it’s non-negotiable, really. It’s fair that everyone should have access to the building.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 2)

Fundamentally across multiple different activities, the message was that people feel that disabled people should be treated with dignity and that their disability should not restrict them from having the same experience as a non-disabled visitor.

“It will make me feel uncomfortable if I have to go a different route in the wheelchair from other people.”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

“They need to make sure everyone can get access to it, whether that’s workers or visitors. Just because I don’t have any problem getting around it myself, there’s certainly plenty of people who would. I think on an equality basis it’s quite important.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 2)

People were keen to point out that not all disabilities are visible, and that the needs of people with invisible disabilities also need to be taken into account.

“I was also struck by how important it was for them for the building to be accessible to people with different types of disabilities, like autism, that are often hidden. If we want the use of the building to be truly welcoming for all, then we need to look at it through their eyes and find creative solutions to the barriers that get in the way of disabled people being able to enjoy and value this extraordinary place.”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

People also drew a link between better access for disabled people and safety, for example in relation to making evacuation in the event of a fire easier and more dignified.

However there is some evidence of limitations to these principles where high costs are involved. The Deliberative Panel did indicate that the outcome level for accessibility could be slightly (though not significantly) reduced if budgets were constrained. And when they considered the essential and intermediate schemes holistically in January 2022, with more information about the detail of the proposed outcomes for accessibility, there was disagreement over whether the objective of 95% internal step-free access (intermediate scheme) merited additional expenditure, with some arguing that 75%-80% (essential scheme) was nonetheless a good outcome and a reasonable compromise.

“I think scheme one, to me, would be the one to go for. I mean, 15 percent accessibility right now, that’s next to nothing. So an improvement of up to 75 to 80 percent is a significant improvement!”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

“It’s perfectly reasonable, for people with disabilities, to have as much access as everybody else. It’s crucial everything is equal and everyone has fair access to the building. Isn’t that the law? That’s why I agree with scheme two. My only question is why is it only 90% accessible and not 100%?”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

Accessibility for staff and visitors is one argument put forward by people who believe that Parliament should move to new purpose built accommodation elsewhere. They note inherent limitations in how accessible the current building can ever become, and the likely high cost and heritage compromises needed to deliver an acceptable level of accessibility. Others, however, point to examples of historic buildings being successfully adapted.

“Accessibility is not what this building is about. You can’t meaningfully improve matters with a building designed with none of this in mind, and which (rightly) is protected from fundamental alteration... Parliament should be moved into a modern purpose designed new building.”

(Online Conversation participant)

“I think the Houses of Parliament should remain the home of the UK Government. There are many examples of excellent historic buildings which can be made sensitively more accessible and inclusive.”

(Online Conversation participant)

Measures to improve accessibility for disabled people

Feedback from disabled people who have visited the Palace indicates that they are often dependent on proactive (and generally excellent) support from operational staff to overcome the building’s access limitations.

“Improving the accessibility of the building more generally would allow a wider range of experiences for disabled students, and would reduce reliance on special adjustments made by operational staff.”

(Education Visitor Survey respondent)

“Exceptional support was provided for one of our students that was wheelchair bound!”

(Education Visitor Survey respondent)

“The staff that were there to accommodate us – it was done very well, to make me feel safe and comfortable... I’m really grateful to the staff who supported us through the tour.”

(Disabled People’s Tour/Workshop participant)

A wide range of specific ideas and suggestions were received about how the building could be made more accessible for disabled people who visit or work in the building, and others with impairments. These included:

- More lifts, ramps and handrails throughout
- Lifts which are large enough for all types of wheelchairs
- More wheelchair spaces in the Commons public gallery
- Wider doorways, and doors which are less heavy to open and/or automated
- Taking account in design decisions of turning circles of different types of wheelchairs
- Widening particularly narrow corridors
- Avoid carpet in circulation areas, especially with thick pile, as it makes pushing a wheelchair much harder and can pose a trip hazard
- Regularly spaced seating so people can rest as they move around the building
- Installation of moving walkways or provision of mobility scooters
- Adequate provision of accessible toilets, including Changing Places toilets and stoma-friendly toilets with a shelf
- Provision of accessible parking within the parliamentary estate, and dedicated areas for taxi drop off close to visitor entrances
- Visual fire alarms (flashing lights)
- Installation of hearing loops, use of audio markers, and provision of signage and materials in braille
- More detailed information provided in easy read format
- Coloured floors to indicate different rooms
- Tackling acoustic issues that make it difficult to hear in Central Lobby, cafes and other public areas
- Dedicated quiet spaces for neurodiverse people to destress after intense experiences such as passing through security or visiting the most opulent parts of the building
- Design of security areas that allows disabled people to be searched with dignity, and for people’s invisible disabilities to not be made visible (see health, safety and security section)

Broader accessibility and inclusion considerations

People spontaneously took a broader view of what accessibility means, beyond access for disabled people, citing the effect of factors such as gender, caring responsibilities, class, religion, ethnicity, neurodiversity, life-stage, and cultural background on how accessible and inclusive people find the Palace as a workplace or a place to visit.

“Accessibility isn’t just about making an historic building physically accessible it is about ensuring that all UK citizens are welcomed. The physical, economic and social barriers to access all need to be considered and addressed.”

(Online Conversation participant)

“Reflect the communities you are serving! The space should be welcoming and inclusive to all groups.”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

Some people specifically referenced the grandiosity of the building’s architecture as something they find intimidating and unwelcoming, something which previous studies have also found, as highlighted in the Previous Research Review.

“As I walked through the grand entrance to Parliament I felt a sense of unease with my own bodily arrival in this monument to democracy, nation and Imperial Englishness. A set of stories come with the building.”

(Previous Research¹)

“I think the grandness of the building needs to kind of be offset with something aesthetically ‘normal’”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

“It’s lovely, but it’s quite intimidating.”

(Disabled People’s Tour/Workshop participant)

Beyond those listed above relating to disability, other ideas put forward for making the building accessible and inclusive to all – whether working there or visiting – included:

- Facilities for simultaneous interpretation of proceedings into other UK languages such as Welsh, Gaelic and British Sign Language
- Signage in other UK languages
- Localised ventilation and temperature control, which is helpful for women experiencing menopause
- Breast-feeding areas
- Childcare facilities
- Gender-neutral toilets
- Female-only spaces
- Ensuring all areas benefit from natural light
- Faith and meditation rooms
- Shower facilities
- Soft furnishings, art, dimmable lighting, green spaces, fish tanks, and even music – to encourage calm

Although not within the remit of the Programme, a lot of suggestions for making the building inclusive to people of all backgrounds related to representation in art, interpretive materials, and among employees. This is covered in more detail in the out of scope section.

The value of visiting

A range of differing views were heard about the value to the public of visiting the Palace.

Many people considered that the principle that everybody has the right to visit the building, as the place where they are represented, is very important. 78% of school groups voted that it is important “for people to be able to visit the Houses of Parliament building” (although this is lower than the percentage voting “important” in the other two debates).

“It’s really important for people to be able to visit Parliament as it is the symbol of our democracy and people need to visit that symbol so they feel a part of what is being done to the country and to have their say.”

(School Debate feedback)

“I feel like politics is maybe a bit of an elitist thing, so to have more access to Parliament from a younger age to educate children would be really important.”

(Deliberative Panel participant)

“It teaches children the value of their voice – that their voice can make a difference when they see where Government takes place... It could inspire future generations to want to become MPs and Prime Ministers.”

(School Debate feedback)

People who visited often found the visit very rewarding, appreciating both the beauty of the building and its democratic function.

“The best part was seeing the architecture and layout in the context of history and parliamentary goings on.”

(Tourist Visitor Survey respondent)

Enabling school groups to visit was highlighted by some as particularly vital, because of the value to young people’s education:

“Education is really important, very important. So that’s the only one that I’m not going to drop. It’s such an opportunity, why would you not want kids to learn about this?”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 3)

Among those who had participated in education visits, there was a strong sense that these are valuable for children, and general praise for the current education facilities. Responding to the Education Visitor Survey, 99% of group leaders agreed that “your visit today help[ed] your students better understand that Parliament affects their daily lives”.

“The workshops and immersion rooms are just amazing... and allow the students to learn through practical engagement.”

(Education Visitor Survey respondent)

“It’s been an amazing day and loved the new education centre.”

(Education Visitor Survey respondent)

However, aside from for education, among those who hadn't visited many people were more equivocal about the value of visiting for them personally. Less than half of those participating in the Quantitative Research (35%-45%) agreed that the Palace "feels like a place I would be welcome to visit". Deliberative Panel participants mostly thought it unlikely that they would personally visit, and this feeling strengthened the further they lived from London. The pandemic also seemed to have affected some people's attitudes towards visiting.

"If I'm being truthful I wouldn't take my young kids to visit and I don't know many families that would go either."

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 3)

"Because of its location, the building is a very London-centric thing, so for me in Scotland it doesn't affect me as much."

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 1)

"There are a lot more people hesitant to go out in crowds and visit places at the moment. I know I won't feel comfortable with this."

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

Previous research has also noted the tension between the principle of democratic access and how often it is used in practice.

"Westminster's central lobby is where you can send a message to your MP as a constituent and ask to have a word with her, and although they are unlikely to be available to see you then and there, you do have the right to ask. In practice people rarely do."

(Previous Researchⁱⁱⁱ)

"And I think Parliament as well seems abstract because it is an abstract place. It's not, it's not something that people can relate to."

(Member of the public quoted in Previous Researchⁱⁱⁱ)

Panellists noted that if they wanted to engage with Parliament's democratic processes, it was usually easier for them to do so in ways other than visiting – for example by watching debates online or attending their MP's constituency surgeries (see functionality and design section). Similarly, some participants in the School Debates thought that virtual learning methods could be more effective than physical visits.

"We felt that it was enough to admire the beautiful building from the outside and if we wanted to see what was going on inside we could watch on the TV or internet"

(School Debate feedback)

Aside from education, Deliberative Panel participants expected that most people who visited would be doing so as tourists to appreciate the building's history and architecture (see heritage and sense of history section).

For panellists, this ambivalence about the value of visiting often meant they placed a lower priority on measures to improve visitor facilities, than they did on other outcomes of R&R. When discussing the overall level of provision there should be for general visitor facilities, they were split between levels 2 and 3 on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest). Those who opted for lower outcomes related this back to their personal unlikelihood of visiting the building, and a belief that spending on visitor facilities was less essential than other design areas such as fire and accessibility.

"Focusing on visitors is not a major importance. Fixing leaks and the fact that the windows don't shut and making things safe, those are more important, I think, than improving the visitors' experience."

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

Meanwhile, when discussing the capacity of a future education centre, the Deliberative Panel felt that a moderate increase (rising from three to five school groups per hour) justified increased costs.

Improving the visitor experience

Analysis of the Visitor Survey Data showed that most people who do visit found their visits rewarding, but also highlighted a number of areas of potential improvement. Many people said that their tour was too short, too rushed, too crowded, had too much background noise, or missed out key areas of the Palace – indicating that increasing overall capacity for visitors could provide a better experience. People also highlighted poor accessibility for disabled visitors (see section above).

"A longer tour would have been greatly appreciated. The visit was truly inspirational and the only complaint from students was they wished they could have seen more."

(Education Visitor Survey respondent)

Particularly for education groups, group leaders highlighted that strictly enforced visit start times are incompatible with the complexities of travelling into and across London with large groups of children, and that there are very limited waiting or toilet facilities for those that arrive early.

"Unfortunately as we had travelled from outside London – leaving at 6.30am we were still late arriving and our tour was rather rushed."

(Education Visitor Survey respondent)

However staff were consistently praised as being welcoming and extremely accommodating to guests, often going out of their way to assist visitors.

Aside from the accessibility points listed above, a number of other suggestions were made across various activities for how the experience of those visiting the Palace could be improved:

- A dedicated visitor centre
- A clearly visible welcome desk
- Clearer signage, to improve wayfinding and clearly demarcate which areas do and don't allow public access
- Better facilities for school groups to use on arrival before the start of their formal visit, including toilets, waiting areas and bag storage
- Facilities for children and families, including play areas, picnic areas, and increased access for pushchairs
- Brighter decoration
- More prominent spaces for exhibitions, and a more interactive format for exhibitions, making more use of technology
- Spaces for community-led events or exhibitions
- Providing a larger, less cramped giftshop
- Sufficient catering facilities
- Drinking fountains
- Wifi and phone charging points
- General cloakroom facilities for coats and bags

“Allow students into the building as they arrive so that they can use the toilets especially after a long journey... We were told to wait outside until our tour time and there were no public toilets close by.”

(Education Visitor Survey respondent)

“For the visitor, a much stronger, curated visitor experience both in the physical place, as well as online. The passive nature of the traditional museum model is becoming increasingly ineffective, and the current visitor offer at the Houses of Parliament is too similar to this. 21st century media should be explored further which is experiential, engaging, honest and relevant to the questions people have today about the history and future threats to democracy.”

(Online Conversation participant)

The approaches to the building

As noted above, some people feel the building's architecture generally can be intimidating. More specific comments were also made about the entrances to the building, which they found particularly unwelcoming. Some participants of the Community Conversations gave the Scottish Parliament as an example of a more inviting entrance.

“Only disappointment was the entry... It is a very unwelcoming experience, no signs, messages about what to do.”

(Education Visitor Survey respondent)

There is, however, understanding among some members of the public who recognise the limitations of the buildings' location in the centre of a busy capital city.

“The areas around the building aren't important. It's located in the centre of London, so it's always going to have really busy traffic and crowded pavements. It's a tourist hotspot, so I don't think there's anything you can really do to fix these issues.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 3)

Indeed, when the Deliberative Panel considered options to improve the spaces around the building they chose the lowest outcome level of all of the design areas, reasoning that improvements to external realm, particularly outside the building boundary, were not problems that it is relevant for R&R to address.

“I really think that no outside work needs to be done, and it will be very costly to create parks nearby. That's not why people come to see the building anyway.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 3)

Engagement activity by the R&R Programme

People taking part in the more in-depth activities generally appreciated the opportunity to participate and thought it was important that the public's views were being asked for and listened to.

“It’s done me the world of good. I feel like I actually lived today. I talked, I laughed and socialised honestly. I haven’t stopped.”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

“I had a chance to discuss the ideas with others whom I don’t know. It was nice to get shared opinions and give myself a chance to consider the differing views of others.”

(Deliberative Panel participant)

“We should have a voice now so we can add to what happens in the future.”

(Museum Workshop participant)

“Ongoing consultation as you go, involving people at all stages... You don’t want to do something and then find out that it’s actually no good.”

(Disabled People’s Tour/Workshop participant)

However some people who posted comments on social media questioned the value of the view-seeking exercises and whether their comments would really be taken into account.

Sustainability

R&R strategic goal: Deliver a refurbishment programme that minimises but also facilitates future maintenance and improvement, that ensures efficient and responsible resource consumption, and that provides for the development of national construction and craft skills

Sustainability covers both the environmental performance of the building and the wider positive impacts the Programme can have, whether environmental, economic, or social.

The Palace of Westminster currently is energy inefficient and carbon intensive, with outdated systems and drafty windows. R&R provides an opportunity to contribute to the UK’s commitment to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050, and also to achieve other environmental benefits, for example through reusing or recycling waste materials, or by promoting biodiversity. R&R also provides a unique opportunity to create jobs and promote the development of construction and heritage skills, across the United Kingdom.

The environment and jobs and skills were two of the four themes explored in the Online Conversation, and were also covered in detail by the Deliberative Panel and in the Quantitative Research. One of the School Debates was dedicated to the topic of the environment, and this topic also came up spontaneously in the Museum Workshops and the Community Conversations.

Key findings

Many people – and particularly young people – expect the restored Houses of Parliament building to set an example in terms of protecting the environment.

There are a wide range of ideas about how environmental benefits can be achieved.

People generally support substantial improvements in the building’s energy efficiency and carbon footprint, although this is tempered for some by concerns about cost and untested technology.

People value the potential jobs and skills benefits of R&R and want these to be spread across the whole of the UK.

The environment

As with accessibility, there was a sense from many people across multiple activities that Parliament should set an example for when it comes to environmental protection, as it is the location where environmental laws and regulations are made. Young people were particularly keen, with 93% of the school groups that debated this topic voting that it is important that the “Houses of Parliament building sets an example for protecting the environment.” This was the most popular of all the School Debates, with 2723 participants.

“What an opportunity to set an example!”

(Online Conversation participant)

“It is a very important building and part of history. Parliament makes all the laws and should therefore think about looking after the environment. Restoring the Earth is everyone’s responsibility, especially those in power.”

(School Debate feedback)

“The Houses of Parliament could change the country’s mindset about energy use and carbon reduction and lead by example.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 2)

However, scepticism about how such an old building can really be made energy efficient was one argument used by those in favour of moving Parliament permanently to a new building. Although others felt that heritage, functionality and sustainability can go hand-in-hand.

“The PoW is beautiful but outdated, and hopelessly inefficient. It should be preserved, as far as is safe, as a relic of past times, but the business of government in the 21st century requires a more modern, efficient building.”

(Online Conversation participant)

“Buildings can be old AND futuristic AND green.”

(School Debate feedback)

A large number of specific proposals were received, across multiple activities, for measures to make the building or R&R works environmentally friendly. These included:

- Utilising the proximity to the Thames to heat the building through water-source heat pumps
- Incorporating solar panels or wind turbines to generate carbon-free energy on site, although some people explicitly rejected installations that would impact the external appearance of the building (see heritage and sense of history section)
- Creating building-wide or neighbourhood-wide central energy centres
- Capturing heat from solar gain on the cast iron roofs and establishing thermal stores to retain heat over time
- Adding secondary glazing
- Promoting on-site biodiversity, for example by: adding nesting sites for swifts, peregrine falcons and house martins; creating floating wetlands in the Thames; installing beehives; and installing green building edges and roves to encourage wildflowers useful to native invertebrates
- On-site gardens to grow produce for catering outlets
- Installing water-saving technologies, including rainwater harvesting and low flush toilets
- Using sustainably-sourced and toxin-free materials
- Providing water fountains around the building
- Incorporating composting and a circular waste system
- Providing digital technologies that could enable MPs and Peers to reduce their travel requirements
- The Programme committing to purchasing only renewable energy or not using plastics

“Given it sits on the bank of the river Thames, there’s a fantastic opportunity to heat the PoW using water source heat pumps. This will contribute to the decarbonisation agenda that is central to sustainability and climate change policies. Add self-generation via solar PV and it really will be an international exemplar of what can be achieved.”

(Online Conversation participant)

“Rooftop gardens and a Victorian style garden should be implemented, this would provide a source of heating when in the building, would decrease inner city temperatures and improve air quality, increase quality of life for the people of London and help to improve biodiversity. Furthermore, algae and water plant population could be increased using their respiration to provide energy for the building.”

(Museum Workshop participant)

“Because it is a historic building it should be preserved the way it is – environmentally friendly options aren’t the most attractive and will change the look of the building.”

(School Debate feedback)

People also raised concerns about the effect rising sea levels could have on the Palace, given its location alongside a tidal river.

Energy and carbon

Energy efficiency and carbon reduction were among the most cited aspects of environmental sustainability across multiple activities.

“The climate change agenda must be part of every decision and recognised throughout.”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

The topic was considered specifically in the Quantitative Research and Deliberative Panel. In the Quantitative Research, 80%-86% thought that “improving the energy efficiency of the building” was an important benefit of R&R, although only 20%-23% included “the building’s high carbon footprint” among their top three concerns about the building, with precedence usually given to safety-related topics.

The Deliberative Panel were asked to consider energy and carbon on a number of occasions. Their initial reaction (phase 1), particularly among older panellists, was somewhat equivocal suggesting this was a ‘nice to have’ but less important than some other benefits of R&R and wouldn’t necessarily justify the cost. However when considering it in more detail in phase 2, they chose the highest possible outcome level (60% carbon reduction) despite this also being the highest cost.

“I think they need to do the best they can now to benefit the future and be green for the planet even though it will cost the most. Like someone else said, in the long run it will probably end up saving them so much money on their gas and electric bills.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 2)

Nonetheless this was one area where they indicated it would be acceptable to reduce the outcome level if necessary because of overall budget constraints.

In phase 4, panellists looked at carbon offsetting, being asked to choose between two schemes in which the overall carbon reduction was the same, but one relied on more off-site offsetting to achieve this than the other. (The scheme that relied less on offsetting therefore used more innovative and advanced on site technology to minimise direct emissions.) There was no clear consensus and arguments were made for both options, with some asserting that the outcome is most important not the way it is achieved and concerned about untested technology, while others felt that Parliament should set an example by aiming for the maximum possible reduction in its direct emissions.

“Scheme one, I think. It’s probably going to be incredibly difficult to get a building as old as this to have all the modern tech and everything else, so it could be difficult to get net zero.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

“Scheme two because looking to the future we’re only going to go more environmentally aware, and all these new technologies are going to be the way that everybody is going to have to be going, so it will be just as well to do it now.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

There was often an assumption that using energy more efficiently would reduce the Palace’s future running costs and may even contribute to the costs of R&R (see time and value for money section).

Jobs and skills

Many people valued the potential role that R&R can play in creating jobs and helping people gain construction and heritage conservation skills. People felt it is important that these benefits are spread across the whole of the UK, rather than being confined to London.

70%-85% of people felt that “creating thousands of jobs working on the project, including in my local area” is an important benefit of R&R and 67%-84% felt that “significant investment in training and creation of hundreds of apprenticeships” is important. However the importance people accorded to these benefits fell gradually over the five rounds of Quantitative Research.

Participants in the Online Conversation and Deliberative Panel also thought that jobs and skills were important benefits.

“Job creation is essential right now so that’s an important benefit for sure. If they train some young people from the East End and more deprived areas, then even better. I mean you’re hearing daily unemployment statistics, the young people that aren’t going to get jobs, so if this is going to help young people or anyone getting a job, well, then yes, that’s important.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 1)

There was support for the Programme to prioritise British companies and suppliers, to ensure the economic benefits to the UK are maximised. In the Quantitative Research 74%-80% said “sourcing materials from the UK whenever possible” is important.

“Support for local and British [suppliers] in all purchasing, looking to create new and long term jobs”

(Online Conversation participant)

Ensuring that employment opportunities are accessible to all – including for example disabled people and people from outside London – was a common theme. In the Disabled People’s Workshops, people specifically asked the Programme to focus on recruitment of adults with learning disabilities and to consider reserving a place on the Board for someone with disabilities. Elsewhere, the importance of promoting opportunities to young people through schools and universities, was highlighted.

“Individuals with invisible disabilities struggle to find full-time employment. Visual and focusing skills of autistic people could be helpful to the restoration project. Perhaps promote the Programme to dyslexic and autistic individuals.”

(Online Conversation participant)

“It would be brilliant if the restoration was able to offer apprenticeships for young people from across the country – finding ways to offer them appropriate accommodation and supervision in or near London during their stay. Older tradespeople will have experience in relocating for jobs, but I imagine it would be daunting for a young person to make such a move themselves, so giving them the opportunity to do so in a safe environment on such a prestigious project could be a truly wonderful opportunity.”

(Online Conversation participant)

Time and value for money

R&R strategic goal: Deliver on time and maintain a relentless focus on delivering value and being on budget through the control of costs

Attitudes to cost, value for money and time were discussed in depth with the Deliberative Panel, and also explored through the Quantitative Research. These topics also frequently came up spontaneously in the other activities undertaken. No specific costs or timescales were provided to participants in any activities, although participants may have heard media speculation. All activities were completed before the Programme provided interim cost and schedule assessments to the Commissions of both Houses in January 2022, figures which were subsequently published and widely reported.

Key findings

Many people spontaneously assumed R&R would be very expensive and were concerned about how costs can be managed, and value for money achieved.

Once people understand the condition of the building and its vulnerability, they are more likely to accept the case for R&R.

When considering the balance of cost and benefits in depth, people generally conclude that investing enough to deal with problems properly now would be worthwhile to save money in the long term and avoid a need for further work.

People place great importance on probity and transparency in procurement practices.

Some people thought that the costs of R&R could be partially or totally recouped through commercial activity or efficiency savings.

Overall cost

The cost of R&R is a key concern for many people, and most people assume (or have heard media speculation) that it will be very expensive. In the Quantitative Research the proportion of people choosing “the overall cost to country” as among one of their top three concerns about R&R rose to a high of 72% in August 2021, up from 58% in November 2020 (this was one of the few topics that saw any significant change over the five rounds of research.) This substantial increase was likely driven by wider economic factors, and perhaps occasional media speculation about costs.

When R&R was first explained to them, some Deliberative Panel participants expressed concern about what they assumed would be high costs, citing other pressures on public expenditure and household budgets.

“It’s the cost and the fact that it’s coming from taxpayers’ money when education, health, and especially mental health which has gone up since COVID, needs more money. I just can’t justify it.”

(Deliberative Panel Participant, phase 1)

“If you had asked me before coronavirus, was it worth spending the money to fix it up, I would have said yes, but not now. I don’t even know if I have a job to go back to in September and my husband doesn’t work, as he’s in bad health. It’s all so uncertain.”

(Deliberative Panel Participant, phase 1)

However even initially, others felt that the significance of the building and the importance of saving it for future generations would be likely to justify the costs. Learning about the poor condition of the building helped people accept the case for R&R and associated costs.

“[I thought] they’re probably going to waste a lot of time and money on that building redoing it and it didn’t really cross my mind that it’s a building that is vulnerable to deterioration so quickly. Now that I’ve seen the damage, it seems such a shame for it just to go to rack and ruin. It’s such an iconic building.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 1)

“Although it may take a lot of time and money, I think it will be worth it. It is where laws and vital decisions are made and therefore it means a lot to the history of the United Kingdom.”

(School Debate feedback)

Similarly, in the Quantitative Research a significant minority of people (between 19% and 33%) regularly chose “opportunities to improve the building being missed because costs are cut too far” as among one of their top three concerns about R&R.

Previous research found that, in relation to the new Scottish Parliament building at Holyrood, public concern about the cost of the project reduced over time.

“What we see is that the outright hostility expressed in agreeing that the Parliament at Holyrood should never have been built has waned from 45% in 2003 to just over one-third by 2007”

(Previous Research^{iv})

Value for money

Many participants in a range of activities took a more nuanced view when invited to consider value for money – the balance of costs and benefits – in more depth. This was explored at length with the Deliberative Panel over several sessions.

Overall, the Panel repeatedly stressed that the work should be done ‘properly’. They spontaneously highlighted that cutting costs too much could mean that more money would have to be spent later to carry out repairs that had been missed first time round, or to deliver further accessibility and/or sustainability improvements as regulations tightened and/or expectations rose.

In other activities, concerns about costs were also often raised, and sometimes used as a rationale for abandoning R&R, or even the building.

“A new build somewhere else. This place is past it and will cost millions to sort out.”

(Participant on social media)

The Quantitative Research tested awareness of a range of current problems with the building, which was generally low (11%-26% across seven problems over the five rounds). However once people were aware of them, they people generally said that the benefits to be gained from addressing them were important (77%-90% across four benefits tested that directly address problems with the building, across five rounds).

“Obviously, cost is a big factor, but when you’re doing a job, you’re better doing it well the first time, rather than having to go back and spend more money and have more disruption. So I’d say do it, all of them, properly now.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 2)

Panellists discussed in detail the trade-offs between cost and outcomes across nine design areas, over two sessions in November 2020 and January 2021. They chose a range of different outcome levels, making active judgements about the importance of different types of improvement

and whether they were worth spending more money on. They were also asked which design areas they could deprioritise if budgets were constrained. Feedback on specific design areas is covered in the relevant sections of this report, and their choices are summarised in the appendix.

Those findings informed the development of the essential and intermediate scheme options, which were subsequently tested with the Deliberative Panel in January 2022. Although they didn’t agree with every element, overall panellists chose the intermediate scheme over the essential scheme by a significant majority (17 – 3), knowing that it would cost more, again on the overall basis that it was better to do the work ‘properly’ and to ‘future-proof’ the building.

“Rip the band-aid off, let’s spend the money, let’s get it done. I think eventually if we waited it’s probably going to cost more money if we went for scheme one.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

“It’s the most iconic building in the UK. Do it right and let’s show the rest of the world what we’ve done. We’re supposed to be one of the innovators and leaders of the world, so let’s get it right.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

“If you are going to invest this sort of money you need to do the job right, and do it once, rather than potentially having to top up other areas in the future.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

The same point was made in some other activities.

“Whatever is done needs to be long lasting for all these efforts to be worth it and to ensure that there will not be need for more works in a few years’ time.”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

The trade-off between outcomes and costs was tested more broadly in the Quantitative Research. In November 2021 (the only time this question was asked) 53% of people said it was better to accept higher costs in the short-term if that would result in lower costs in the long-term. Conversely, only 19% would prefer to save money in the short term, at the expense of more spending in the longer term. This question had a higher than usual number of “don’t know” responses, at 28%.

Another angle of the value for money discussion centred on procurement. There was spontaneous discussion within both the Community Conversations and Deliberative Panel, about the importance of contracts awarded by the Programme being transparent and fair.

“Contract for work to the right people not friends and relatives.”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

“People budgeting in restoration project – this project is through use of taxpayers money. It [must] be made sure that money is being spent in the most appropriate way possible.”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

Comments posted to social media channels in response to posts/adverts about the Online Conversation also made reference to concerns about other public procurement activities.

Time

Attitudes towards timescales for R&R came up during the activities much less frequently than cost. The Deliberative Panel was asked to factor in time, alongside cost, when considering optimum outcome levels for the different design areas, but this had less salience for them and was not a driver of decision making.

Recouping the cost of R&R

Some people across a range of activities highlighted perceived opportunities that R&R may bring to reduce or even eliminate its cost to the public purse, by increasing commercial revenues or making efficiency savings compared to current operations. Revenue-related suggestions often focused on tourism (as highlighted in the heritage section), including increasing the capacity for paid-for tours, private event hire and retail. Equally, some people hoped R&R could pay for itself through improved energy efficiency or reduced ongoing maintenance.

“More activities to generate their own income to cut the use of taxpayers money.”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

Functionality and design

R&R strategic goal: Deliver a building which supports Parliament’s core function as a working legislature, both now and in the future using high quality design and technology

A number of topics related to the functionality and design of the building have been covered in previous sections. This section looks in particular at attitudes towards repurposing the building’s courtyards to provide more functional workspace, and also at the public’s views on temporary accommodation for Parliament during the R&R works. These topics were primarily covered in the Deliberative Panel, as well as in the Quantitative Research.

Courtyards

The Deliberative Panel considered options to make better use of courtyards within the Palace to provide extra meeting or work space for building users, for example creating spaces similar to the atrium in neighbouring Portcullis House. Some saw a real opportunity to make the best of these spaces, while others were concerned about cost.

Key findings

People see value in covering some courtyards to provide functional new workspace for building users, but support is contingent on cost.

People think any temporary accommodation used by Parliament during the works should provide the minimum facilities necessary for its core functions.

People are not concerned about Parliament fully vacating the Palace while the works take place.

“I think covering courtyards would make for a great solution and make use of these spaces. The building is obviously under pressure for floor space, so absolutely they should use the empty areas of the building.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 3)

“As soon as you said courtyards will not be used for deliveries and would be moved underground, I saw massive, massive pound signs and millions of pounds, and I thought to myself, I’m not paying so people that work there can go in the courtyard to have their coffees and chats!”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

Temporary accommodation during the works

The Deliberative Panel considered the functionality necessary in temporary accommodation used by one or both Houses during the R&R works.

Panellists thought that for temporary accommodation, keeping costs low would be particularly important. Provided the accommodation enables the core work of Parliament with space for essential staff, many other facilities were seen as unnecessary. Similarly, people felt that Parliament's temporary home would not need to look impressive or important.

“Pretty much they can work from anywhere, whether it is from just an empty building. They don't have to put a lot of money into it. As long as it's functional and safe for them to work in, that will be most cost effective.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 1)

Many panellists felt that public access to a temporary building would be less important as it's not a historic building that people will want to see, and because it is usually more practical for them to participate in the democratic process in other ways – for example by meeting their MP at a constituency surgery, or by watching debates online. Similar sentiments were found in the Quantitative Research, with only 3-4% of people choosing “not being able to visit the Houses of Parliament building while the work is taking place” among their top three concerns.

“Why do they need any visitors, other than people that are there to do their actual roles? The temporary location will not be a location that needs to be shown off. And in order to allow for those extra visitors, you're going to have to put things in place, like extra safety measures and it just adds to the expense. Having visitors isn't crucial or essential to the running of Parliament.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 1)

A few panellists felt that schools that want to learn about Parliament should have priority visitor access to see democracy in action, but only if this didn't raise overall costs. Others felt that remote learning channels would be an acceptable alternative for schools.

Panellists also perceived opportunities for Members to use technology to do some of their work remotely, as they had during the pandemic, thereby further reducing the need for and cost of temporary accommodation.

“Yes, I actually think it will be quite easy for them to keep working remotely. Most of the world has had to adapt to working from home for the last few months. If we can do it, I'm sure they can as well.”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 1)

Disruption to the work of Parliament

In the Quantitative Research 60%-67% of people thought that “avoiding disruption to the work of Parliament” was an important benefit of R&R, however this was the lowest of all the potential benefits posed. The Deliberative Panel also gave lower priority to this benefit in phase 1. There was a sense from the discussion that nobody seriously believed that either a catastrophic failure of the Palace, or the delivery of R&R, would be allowed to cause any significant interruption to Parliament's democratic and legislative processes. People recognised and accepted, however, that while works were underway Members and staff would need to work differently from normal.

The public were very comfortable with the principle of Parliament vacating the Palace while the works take place, particularly if not doing so would increase the overall cost of R&R or the time it takes to complete the works.

In phase 4 the Deliberative Panel discussed the possibility of a ‘continued presence’, whereby the House of Commons would continue to meet within the Palace throughout the period of the works. They strongly felt this was unnecessary, would likely be impractical or unsafe, and could not justify increased costs.

“It seems silly. I wouldn't like to stay in my house while the rest of it was being renovated. I think it's impractical to say that there should be some of them still there, and some of them moved out. Why not just move them all out and get the whole works done?”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

“If there's nearby buildings, they can set them up and surely that has to be safer for everyone?”

(Deliberative Panel participant, phase 4)

In the Quantitative Research, 73% of people thought it was not important that “MPs continue to use one of the current debating chambers inside the Houses of Parliament during the restoration works rather than use an alternative location” if doing so would increase the overall cost of R&R. Meanwhile only 6-8% people chose “MPs and Peers temporarily moving elsewhere while the works take place” among their top three concerns about R&R.

Although this was not specifically asked about in other activities, some people did raise the same point spontaneously.

“Leave the whole place temporarily so it can have a full and quicker refurbishment. Not working around people, meetings etc.”

(Comment from social media)

Out of scope

Although these were not specifically sought, across most activities there were also views on a number of topics that are outside the remit of the Programme. The most common of these are reported here.

Key findings

There is ambivalence over whether the building should remain the home of the UK Parliament, with a vocal minority advocating strongly for alternative locations. They usually suggest repurposing the Palace, for example as a museum.

Some people spontaneously offer ideas about how they believe Parliament's procedures, culture, and engagement activities can be changed or improved.

Some people's comments about R&R are affected by dissatisfaction with politics more widely.

Location

A theme that came up regularly in a number of activities was whether the Palace of Westminster is the right building for a modern Parliament, or London the right location.

As well as raising concerns about the cost of R&R, those who advocate for a new Parliament building often argue that a heritage building of this type can't be successfully adapted to ensure accessibility and sustainability, or provide a fit-for-purpose 21st century legislature. Others believe that moving to another location in the UK would address broader political, social or economic issues.

"I strongly believe that a new, tech enabled and modern Parliament should be built in the centre of the country. This would be efficient, cost effective, environmentally friendly, empowering to the regions, create jobs and make a powerful statement about our future."

(Online Conversation participant)

"A total waste of money – it's not accessible it's intimidating and costs a fortune – not to mention it's hardly 'green' – turn it into a museum"

(Comment from social media)

However the Quantitative Research found that consistently 65%-68% of people agreed that the Palace "should continue to be the permanent working home of the UK Parliament".

Those who did advocate moving elsewhere often suggested that another use be found for the Palace (hence ensuring its preservation), for example as a museum.

"We can make a smaller and less expensive Houses of Parliament that is less prone to safety hazards and use the money we saved to combat the global pandemic and develop the vaccine... we understand that it's the home of UK democracy but we could make it a museum"

(School Debate feedback)

Procedure and ways of working

Participants in a number of activities suggested changes to ways in which the institution of Parliament works. These included moving to electronic voting, holding more virtual meetings, and digitising parliamentary archives. Others focused on upholding Parliament's traditions.

"Continue with a semi-virtual chamber to reduce travel costs and promote working from 'home'."

(Comment from social media)

"Install a bit of technology so votes can be quicker. Also screens available to those at dispatch box, maybe others, so they can show information to all."

(Comment from social media)

"Customs in the chamber could be restored and renewed. The Speaker of the Commons should wear wig and robes. Applause too should be forbidden in the chamber as it was in the past."

(Online Conversation participant)

In the Online Conversation, some participants were especially interested at the prospect of redesigning the debating chambers, arguing that a semi-circular shape could help foster a more consensual political culture. This topic also came up spontaneously in the Deliberative Panel, where opinion was divided – with some arguing in favour of the traditional layout.

"The building isn't fit for purpose – not least because chambers are too small and wrong shape. A modern parliament would improve our democracy. Mistake to value "tradition" above function."

(Comment from social media)

Representation

Representation came up in many of the discussions about accessibility and inclusion, particularly in the Community Conversations and the Museum Workshops. People say that one way to ensure the Palace is inclusive and welcoming to all is through ensuring that art and exhibitions on display reflect the diversity of the UK's different communities and the contributions they have made to the UK historically, and that they make to its national life today.

“Recognise the contributions and sacrifice of different cultures/peoples that have made Britain what it is today.”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

“I think we should have a space that celebrates queer people and queer politicians. How they've changed politics over the years”

(Museum Workshop participant)

Other measures suggested to increase representation include the flying of flags from different UK nations, diverse menu options within catering outlets, and translation/interpreting of information materials and debates into other languages such as Welsh, Gaelic and British Sign Language.

Diversity among employees was another angle to the theme of representation.

“Having people who look like me working there – more non-white faces, younger people, etc.”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

People also asked for extra promotion of the opportunities to visit, with many unaware of these (particularly in the Community Conversations, which were explicitly targeted at people less likely to be engaged with politics and the work of Parliament).

“How little we know about what goes on there in terms of tours, meeting MPs”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

“Need more education and maybe a programme on TV to show what goes on and invite people in.”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

“I thought you had to be invited... it was news to me that the public can just show up.”

(Disabled People's Tour/Workshop participant)

Parliaments' engagement and outreach

People often suggested using technology and outreach to enable people to engage with the work of Parliament and/or the heritage of the building without having to physically visit it. People suggested interactive virtual tours, digitised archives, television documentaries, and online learning opportunities for children.

“Maybe make it more relevant to people who cannot get into London with regional workshops at schools, local museums could also take part in virtual tours, including hands on activities.”

(Online Conversation participant)

There were also many ideas about the content and format of education, engagement, and exhibition materials and activities available for those who do visit.

“And also tell children and adults that during Britain's tumultuous history we have had parliaments in Oxford during the Civil War and those in other nations like Wales, Scotland and Ireland before Westminster represented them. Then there was devolution.”

(Online Conversation participant)

Political culture

When people expressed dissatisfaction it often related back to the way politics is conducted. It is possible that the relatively low number of people who agree the building “makes me proud” (41%-50%) compared to those who agree “it is an important historic building, regardless of the activities and debates that take place inside” (81%-86%) is because of wider associations the building has with the political process.

Some people called for wider changes to the UK's political culture.

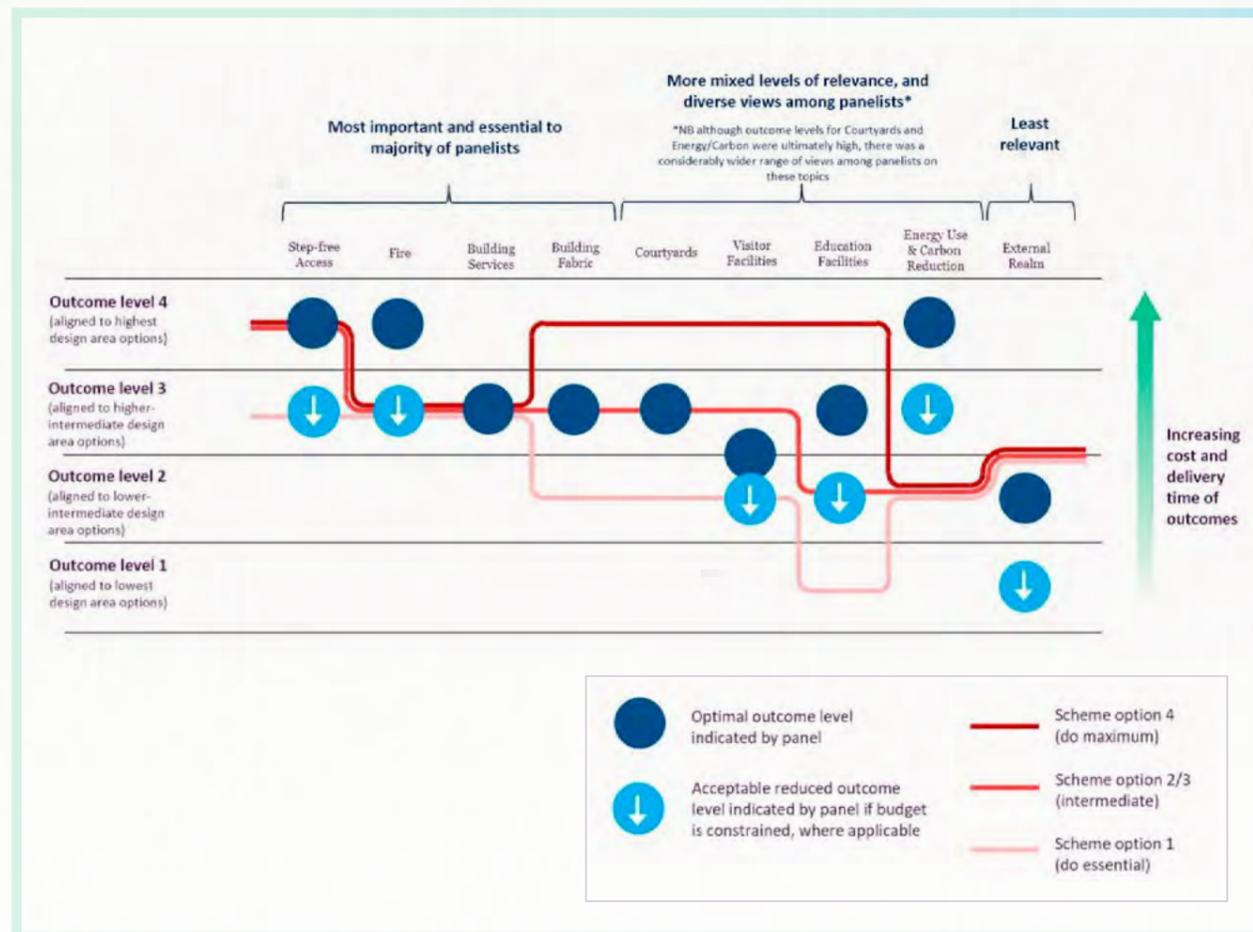
A substantial number of people posting on social media channels in response to posts/ adverts promoting the Online Conversation used comments about the Programme as a vehicle to voice – often in pejorative terms – their dissatisfaction with wider political culture and conduct in public life.

“This group were quite philosophical. They talked quite a lot about bigger concepts like equity and respect. They made it clear that successful restoration and renewal was about more than just material changes – it demanded changes in attitude and perception so that more people felt this was a building for them....”

(Feedback via Community Conversation facilitator)

Appendix

Deliberative Panel outcome levels



Optimum and acceptable reduced outcome levels across all nine design areas, mapped against the three holistic scheme options

Principal partners for delivery and/or analysis of activities

- CitizenLab
- Dr Alexandra Meakin
- Involve
- Nisbett Consultancy Ltd
- People's History Museum
- Smart School Councils Community
- UK Parliament Participation Service
- Yonder

Partner organisations hosting Community Conversations

- Beatfreeks (England-wide)
- Boots and Beards (Glasgow)
- Blyth Resource and Initiative Centre
- Bristol Black Carers
- Epsom and Ewell Foodbank
- Everyday Enable (Selby)
- Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team (Swansea)
- Holywell Trust (Derry/Londonderry)
- Involve / Women of the UK Climate Assembly (UK-wide)
- Locality (England-wide)
- My Life My Say (England-wide)
- National Federation of Women's Institutes (England-wide)
- Poverty Truth West Cheshire
- Shaping Our Lives (England-wide)
- The Collective (Scotland-wide)
- Transforming Communities Together (Walsall and Wolverhampton)

Partner organisations participating in Disabled People's Tours and Workshops

- Action Disability Kensington and Chelsea
- Harrow Mencap
- Sunderland People First

Source materials

Community Conversations

- [Community Conversations full report](#)
- Add a second bullet point with “Community Conversations appendix” (no hyperlink)

Deliberative Panel

- Deliberative Panel phase 1 full report
- Deliberative Panel phase 2 full report
- Deliberative Panel phase 3 full report
- Deliberative Panel phase 4 full report

Disabled People’s Tours and Workshops

- Disabled People’s Tours and Workshops summary report

Education/Tourist Visitor Survey Data

- Education visitor survey data analysis
- Commercial tour visitor survey data analysis

Museum Workshops

- Museum Workshops summary report

Online Conversation

- [R&R online engagement portal](#)
- Online Conversation activity summary
- Online Conversation analysis of findings

Quantitative Research

- Rounds 1-5 analysis of findings

Research Review

- Review of previous research

School Debates

- [Big Debate Club debate library](#)
- Debate 1 findings report
- Debate 2 findings report
- Debate 3 findings report

References to previous research:

- i Nirmal Puwar, 2004, p35
- ii Emma Crewe, 2021, p8
- iii Alex Prior, 2019, p189
- iv David McCrone, 2009, p102



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