

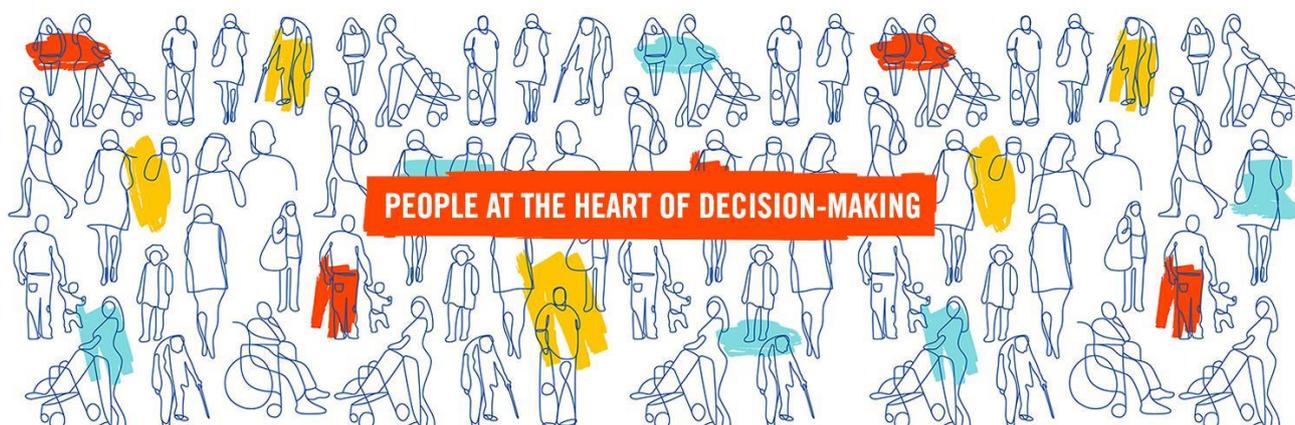


Houses of Parliament Restoration & Renewal Programme

Community Conversations

Final Report

February 2022



Who we are

We're the UK's leading public participation charity, on a mission to put people at the heart of decision-making.

We're a small but passionate team focused on giving people more power over the decisions that affect their lives. We want to build a stronger democracy that works for everyone – that gives people real power to bring about change in their lives, communities and beyond.

Involve was founded in 2003 “to create a new focus for thinking and action on the links between new forms of public participation and existing democratic institutions”. We've been promoting and practising participatory and deliberative decision-making ever since. We have worked with governments, parliaments, civil society organisations, academics and the public across the UK and internationally to put people at the heart of decision-making.

We believe that decision-making in the UK needs to be more:

- **Open** - so that people can understand, influence and hold decision-makers to account for the actions and inactions of their governments;
- **Participatory** - so that people have the freedom, support and opportunity to shape their communities and influence the decisions that affect their lives; and,
- **Deliberative** - so that people can exchange and acknowledge different perspectives, understand conflict and find common ground, and build a shared vision for society.

What we do

We demonstrate how citizens can help solve our biggest challenges.

Our work seeks to create:

1. **New innovations** - to demonstrate better ways of doing democracy;
2. **New institutions** - to put people at the heart of decision-making;
3. **New norms** - to make democracy more open, participatory and deliberative.

We approach this in three ways:

1. **We set the agenda** - by developing a vision of a democracy that puts people at the heart of decision-making;
2. **We build coalitions** - by mobilising and partnering with broad, unexpected and powerful networks of allies; and,
3. **We make it happen** - by developing and supporting world-class participatory and deliberative processes.

Our recent projects have included:

- **The Citizens' Assembly on Social Care** - the first deliberative process commissioned by UK Parliament;

- **The Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland** - the first citizens' assembly to take place in Northern Ireland;
- **Climate Assembly UK** – the first ever UK wide citizens' assembly on climate change commissioned by six Select Committees of the House of Commons.
- **MH:2K** - a youth-led approach that has engaged over 3,400 young people in tackling mental ill-health.

Find out more about our work: www.involve.org.uk/our-work/

Our values

- **Collaboration** – because change comes when broad coalitions of people work towards a common vision.
- **Equality** – because everyone in society has an equal right to be listened to and participate in decisions that affect their lives. No one should be held back by societal divisions or prejudice.
- **Purpose** – because participation must have an impact. We reject tokenistic or ineffectual engagement.

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Community Conversations

Overview of Methodology

The Houses of Parliament Restoration and Renewal Programme (R&R) is committed to engaging, informing and listening to the public.

As part of the range of engagement being undertaken, the R&R Programme wanted to proactively reach out to those who may be less likely to participate, to make sure there is an understanding of the public's views overall. In particular, the R&R Programme wanted to hear from people who evidence¹ shows are less likely to engage with Parliament and formal politics – those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, unskilled workers, people in long term unemployment, women and disabled people. This enables the programme to consider the needs of people who are currently less likely to visit and work in the building.

The agreed approach was a community conversation methodology, partnering with 16 groups and organisations with existing networks. This involved the following:

- Ensuring the partner organisations were agreed in advance with the R&R programme and spanned the demographics of those the programme particularly wanted to hear from and across the geographical spread of the UK.
- Providing resources and support for organisations to host their own conversations and provide an appropriate honorarium to participants to support their participation.
- Developing a pack to guide community hosts through the process, including a common conversation guide and options for different ways they might run the conversation tasks including online and face to face, together with an introductory PowerPoint presentation.
- Providing support for engaging different groups, such as:
 - Resourcing to provide British Sign Language translation and live captioning
 - Alternative text simple picture descriptions (Alt Text) and fuller picture descriptions for the presentations.
 - Providing the presentation in different formats – e.g., large text and printed versions for visually impaired participants.
 - The pack presentation was translated into Welsh in case this was needed (it was not), and the offer of translation into Easy Read format was offered but not taken up by any of the groups.
- Providing a common feedback mechanism to collate the results from the conversations (Survey Monkey).
- Reporting on the findings in two waves of activity in 2021: one during the summer and one during the autumn.

¹ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7501/>

Community Conversations hosts and Participants

Overall, 300 people took part in the community conversations through 16 host organisations representing around 600 hours of deliberations and feedback. We thank all the host organisations and their participants for their commitment to this work, running sessions and sharing their views.

By working through existing organisations the conversations were able to happen where people meet in their everyday lives, reaching deep into communities and including a diversity of people across the nations and geographies of the UK, representing many different demographics. The conversations being facilitated by organisations closest to their communities took away as many barriers to participation as possible, enabling us to hear authentically the views of a diverse range of people over the course of a 2-hour conversation.

“The conversation was much more animated than I expected. People who had never been inside the building [Houses of Parliament]– and who weren’t aware that you were allowed in it – nevertheless had strong views and great ideas about how it could be made more accessible and welcoming to ‘everyday people’ like them.” (Facilitator)

This report provides a summary from the conversations of the important themes to consider as the R&R programme moves forward and to augment the other public engagement work that the R&R team has undertaken.

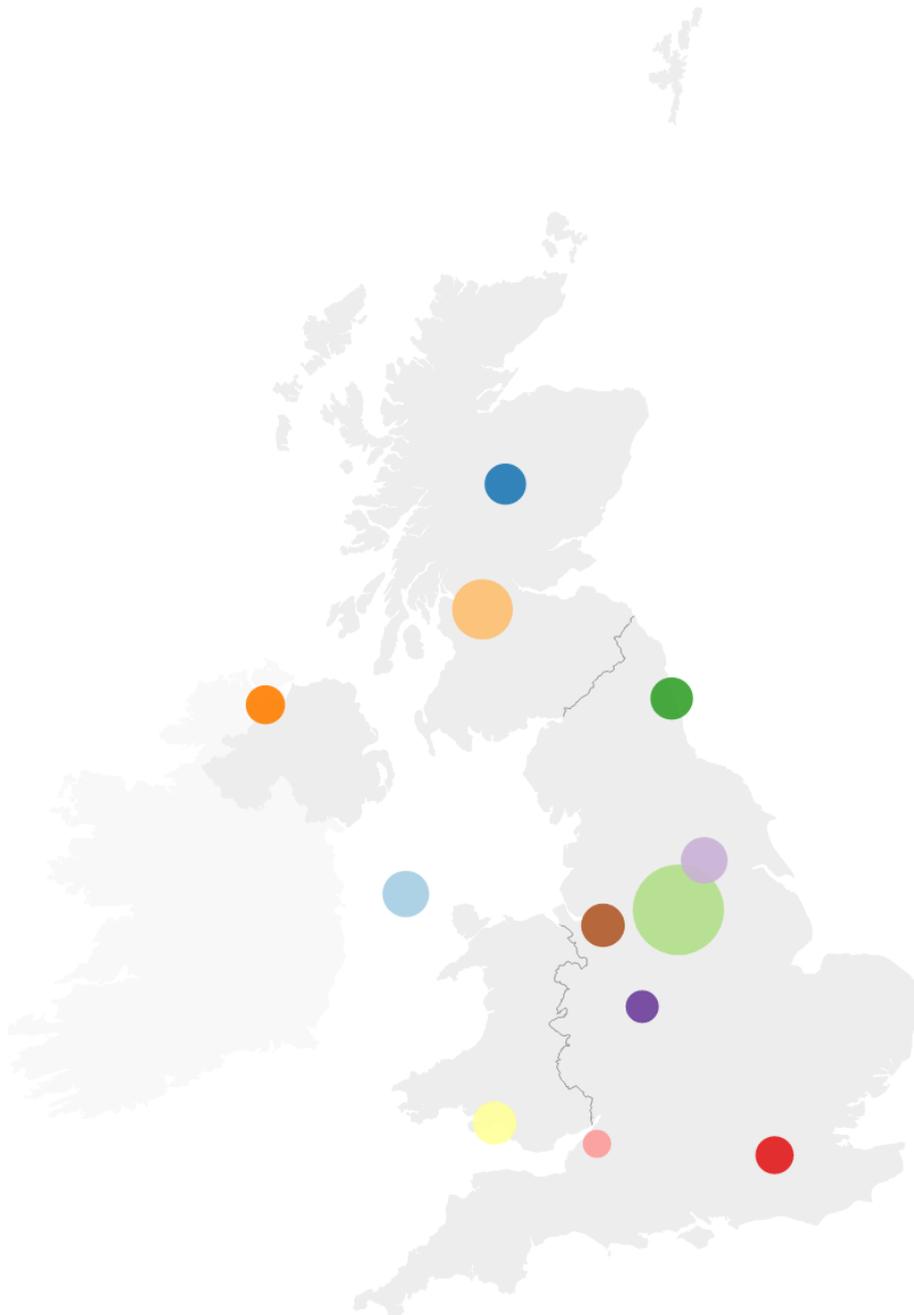
There was a huge wealth and diversity of information gained through the conversations. The focus of the conversation guide and PowerPoint presentation provided to organisers was issues within the remit of the Restoration and Renewal programme – the building and its facilities. However, it became clear that for the public these issues are inextricably linked to wider questions which are clearly outside the scope of R&R – for example about the building’s operation, policies and management. For example, and as will be noted through the report, whilst accessibility features are strongly welcomed, accessibility was seen to be maximised by staff training that would facilitate disabled people’s feeling of belonging, or through representation in terms of disabled staff employed. We have been faithful to participants’ views by including these wider points throughout the report. Whilst the report is for the R&R programme, we hope it will also be of wider interest and impact.

In addition to this report, all the feedback provided from host organisations from their community conversations was themed and provided to the R&R team to enable them to see all the detailed points raised under the prompt questions.

Restoration & Renewal Conversations

Number of Participants

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



Size of Circle represents number of participants.

Map: Involve • Source: Involve • Map data: © OSM • Created with Datawrapper

Host Organisation & Location	Participant descriptions (numbers engaged)
Beatfrees, England wide	Workshop 1: All women, mixed ethnicities, aged 19-29 /Workshop 2 and 3: A mix of genders, aged 18-29 (21)
Boots and Beards, Glasgow	BAME (predominantly Pakistani and Indian), aged 18-61 (39)
Blyth Resource & Initiative Centre, Blyth	Employed, retired and out of work white men and women aged 20-66 (18)
Bristol Black Carers, Bristol	Caribbean and African men and women aged 40 to 59 (7)
Epsom & Ewell Foodbank, Epsom	Mainly women of mixed ethnic backgrounds aged from late 20s to 60s, all out of work or on low income (14)
Everyday Enable, Selby	Mainly white British women, most working with a few unemployed, quite a few with disabilities (22)
Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team, Swansea	Mixed sex and ethnic background aged 25-51, most in employment (19)
Holywell Trust, Derry/Londonderry	All women representing a range of community organisations within the local community. Mixed age range, some retired, some stay at home mums and some out of work. Ensured a balance of participants with both "main" community backgrounds Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican represented equally. (14)
Involve/Climate Assembly Women, UK wide	Women from all over the UK who had previously been part of the Climate Assembly UK (22)
Locality, England wide	Workshop 1: Mixed ethnic backgrounds and ages, mainly unemployed and some refugees/ Workshop 2: Women aged 18-45 with a range of disabilities, most unemployed / Workshop 3: All white women aged 70-90, some with physical disabilities (20)
My life My Say, England wide	Mainly women of mixed ethnic backgrounds aged 18-25 with range of disabilities (16)
National Federation of Women's Institutes, England wide	All women, mainly white aged from late 30s to 60+ (19)
Poverty Truth West Cheshire, West Cheshire	Mixed sex white British, middle age to 60+, mix of in work and out of work with a range of disabilities (19)
Shaping Our Lives, England wide	Workshop 1: Middle aged women, mainly white, all with a range of disabilities and on low income/ Workshop 2: Mixed sex and ethnic backgrounds aged from 20s to 60s with a range of disabilities/ Workshop 3: Mixed sex, mainly white with a range of disabilities (22)
The Collective, Scotland wide	Workshop 1: All women, Scotland based, mix of different ethnic backgrounds and ages/ Workshop 2: All women, from 25-50, 2 white, 5 BAME women (17)
Transforming Communities Together, Walsall/Wolverhampton	Mainly men from a British Asian background, aged 30-50 (10)

Context factors to note

As we planned and ran the community conversations the following factors are worth considering in relation to organisations which either ran or were approached to run community conversations:

- COVID-19 affected participation. Some organisations reported impact on participation due to illness, self-isolation requirements or caring responsibilities prompted by COVID-19.
- Wave one coincided with the start of summer holidays, this had several impacts:
 - Staff from host organisations were on holiday
 - Activities being run by organisations had largely ceased for the summer and therefore the usual meeting opportunities had subsided.
- Resource planning for small organisations meant that they needed longer timeframes to organise community conversations, this eased for the wave two conversations as there was more planning time. However, inevitably working through small organisations meant that some sessions were rescheduled due to staff illness. We are incredibly grateful for the commitment host organisations put in to making the conversations happen.
- Resourcing to reach out to just 15 organisations (16 in the end were recruited) against a desire to get to the widest possible diversity was a balancing act throughout the project. If repeated a more open call for participation and then selection may have worked better.
- The emphasis of the methodology was on enabling host organisations to run sessions with their participants and service users. This approach enables a more welcoming space for those that might not otherwise engage with other recruitment approaches, and therefore really reached to a diversity of voices within the focus of this project.
- There was no “Restoration and Renewal specialist” in the room to direct, clarify or push on aspects that might be important to those responsible for the R&R project. The feedback from participants was raw and unfiltered, generated from the prompting questions and has value in that state as an honest portrayal of public response.

How to read this report

Each host organisation facilitated a conversation with their participants to a common workshop plan and with a common short set of PowerPoint slides which had been developed by Involve and approved by the Restoration & Renewal team.

We have ordered the feedback in the following ways:

- Pulled out key conclusions that read across all the groups or that came out as dominant themes across the conversations and questions.
- Under each section and question of the conversations provided a summary of the key themes that emerged, starting with the themes that attracted most comments. Each theme is then described in a bit more detail.
- Quotes are used to add depth to particular themes – due to the nature of how the information was recorded these may be direct quotes from participants/facilitators or reported/paraphrased quotes recorded by facilitators of the sessions.

Overall conclusions

The following were consistent or dominant themes heard throughout the conversations.

- Accessibility and inclusion were the strongest themes recurrent in all conversations across all groups and in relation to visiting and working in the building for both comfort and feeling like they belonged. A huge range of specific ideas and suggestions from participants were covered.
 - Accessibility spanned both visible and invisible disabilities through to, for example, supporting those with neurodiversity; and for a design and facilities that had considered disabilities from the outset, rather than accessibility “add ons”.
 - Provision and facilities for children and childcare was consistently raised.
 - Inclusion also centred on facilities respecting genders and religion in particular.

“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.” (Facilitator)

- Beyond accessible and inclusive design, restoration was seen as more than just the building and bricks but an opportunity to update and modernise in terms of a culture and attitude of inclusion and welcoming.

“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....”. (Facilitator)

- Representation was a strong and recurring theme with many dimensions. This included:
 - Being able to see “someone like me” represented in employees for example – whether that be disabled, ethnicity, regions and nations, perceptions of class or status.
 - Representing the diversity of the population in terms of the art and artefacts displayed.
 - Representing the history of the building with a wider lens, from the Commonwealth to colonialism through to suffragettes.

“And I think that one of the biggest things for me would be just seeing diverse people working there and going about their duties, disabled people and people from all different places with different skin colours and ... and all the diversity that's part of Britain” (Participant)

- Participants gave many ideas on their expectations of facilities, features, and spaces of an inclusive place to visit and work beyond those for accessibility. These included:
 - Facilities for children / childcare both for employees and visitors.

- Provision of spaces for catering.
 - Spaces to rest and destress whether as a visitor or employee, including seating and use of outside spaces.
 - Provision of good clean toilets and shower facilities.
- General building environment considerations were also an important and recurring theme, including lighting and fresh air, controllable temperature, signage, soft furnishings, and decoration as well as Wi-Fi and water dispensers.
 - All groups were surprised by the current level of access and activities available to the public; they were unaware of the range of activities, including being able to get married there, free tours, the ability to watch debates live and accessibility to their MPs. There was a desire to make sure these opportunities were advertised more widely for people to increase engagement and participation.

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

- There was shock at how much repair is needed and that the building had been allowed to get into the state that it is in without earlier substantive action to address the long-term issues.

“Surprised it has taken quite so long for them to suddenly realise how much money and effort needs to go into the building” (Participant)

- The historic nature of the building was recognised and valued, though some people struggled to see how the different roles of the building as a working parliament, a workplace and historic place you can visit could necessarily all be reconciled and achieved well. People saw a challenge between the balance of retaining the historic value of the building, which was seen as the core asset, with modernising the building.
- Participants saw a diversity of ways and opportunities to increase participation with the building’s history, politics, and democracy. From interactive and audio tours through to performances. There was a sense of an untapped resource and rich seam of learning if only people knew about it and it was translated into something more accessible for them.
- Environment/ sustainability was raised and expected, with the opportunity seen for the restoration to showcase and lead in terms of what is possible to retrofit an old building with “eco technologies” at the centre and in particular renewable energy sources, energy efficiency and use of green materials in the renovation.
- The cost of restoration was raised, but principally how it was being paid for and ensuring that a good job was done with the restoration to prevent future costs. Participants wanted a transparent and fair procurement process, and a key message was for contracts to go towards UK firms.

- Participants challenged whether all the work of Parliament needed to be in the Houses of Parliament and whether it made sense to move to another location. On the one hand, recognising the iconic nature of the building representing democracy, but on the other some suggesting that the wider work of Parliament can and should be achieved elsewhere. This was driven by a range of factors, for example as part of rebalancing the different areas of the UK and becoming closer to the communities it serves, through to the challenge of having a modernised workplace in an historic building.

Key points raised mapped onto the Restoration & Renewal strategic themes

The following are high level findings mapped against the strategic themes of the Restoration and Renewal programme. Not all the nuanced points and suggestions made by participants are covered, but can be seen in more detail in the rest of this report.

Health, Safety & Security (Ensure high standards of health, safety and wellbeing and provide appropriate protection for the building and those in it)

- The key driver for participants was ensuring the health, safety and security of staff and visitors as a result of addressing the restoration need. In terms of security a balance was sought between the need for security and the unwelcoming nature of excessive security interventions.

Functionality & 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)

- Primary comments here related to a modern workplace that is fit for purpose and enables a comfortable and inclusive working environment.

Accessibility & Inclusion (Open up the Houses of Parliament, improve access and encourage a wider participation in the work of Parliament)

- A large number of comments from participants focused on design and features that enable physical accessibility for those with disabilities. This was a fundamental expectation and for the design to have considerations of accessibility and inclusion embedded from concept.
- Accessibility and inclusion covered features for those with disabilities both hidden and visible; those with additional support requirements, genders; life stages particularly children and older visitors and religion.
- There were a wealth of idea of ways and opportunities to open up accessibility and participation in the work of Parliament through activities, displays and spaces to achieve this – through interactivity in the building and digitally for online participation.

Sense of History (Conserve and enhance the fabric of the Houses of Parliament and build appreciation of its rich history)

- There was an appreciation for the history of the building both as a piece of architecture and in what it represents for history and democracy. Although some felt that the different

functions of the building could be able to be delivered elsewhere, they saw the building's history was nonetheless core.

- There was a call for information about history to be more richly displayed, and whilst outside the remit of the R&R programme, for choices about representations, art, and artefacts to reflect a wider diversity of the historical heritage associated with the building.
- Participants saw the tension of balancing the different roles of the building and how that could be achieved in what is fundamentally an old building.

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)

- Participants called for environment and sustainability to be at the heart of the restoration and to showcase what is possible with new technology and restoring an old building. As a place where policy on environment /climate change is made the building needs to lead by example.
- There was a sense, countering the surprise about the state of the building, that restoration work should be done well, be sustainable and minimise future maintenance issues.
- Reference was made to using the project as an opportunity for apprenticeships and craftspeople.

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)

- Cost and value for money were mentioned, with questions raised about where the money would come from and wanting money used well to ensure long term sustainability for the building.
- There was an expectation for UK firms to be prioritised for the work and a fair procurement process.

What first 3 words come to your head

After introducing the session, participants were presented with a few slides introducing the Palace of Westminster building. They were then asked for the first three words about the building that came into their heads. The below wordle captures the essence of participants' contributions.

How much repair is needed and why it has taken so long to take action

Participants across all groups expressed surprise and concern at the number of repairs needed. Many also questioned how long these issues have been known and why it has taken so long to take action in the form of a full restoration.

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

The scale of the issues with the building

Under this theme, the participants highlighted two focus areas:

- Concern that it may be unsafe for people who work in the Houses of Parliament because of the issues with the building. Some participants argued that this should be a reason for all the staff to be moved elsewhere. (Note that the information provided in the presentation did detail the measures in place currently to ensure safety of people visiting/working in the building).
- That there are numerous dangers and hazards such as the risk of fire, asbestos, crumbling stones and issues with the sewage system.

Access and activities available to the public

All groups said that they were not aware of all the activities available to the public, including visits and tours, hiring rooms for events, the tactile tour and being able to get married in the building among others. In addition, they were surprised that they could access their MP and the process of Parliament so easily.

Number of people working there

Most of the participants were surprised at the number of people working there, the different uses and people visiting and working in the building beyond MPs.

Costs and contracts

Some groups raised the financial implications of the maintenance works needed for the building and where the money would or should come from and against other priorities such as poverty in the local areas or asbestos in schools. Some suggested that sharing more information about the restoration works with the public might make people more inclined to accept that taxpayer money will be used for it. There were questions about who would get the contracts, later in sessions this developed into a focus on UK firms and transparent procurement practices.

Tensions on how the building can meet its different roles and location questions

The building's iconic nature and stature was recognised and the need for its preservation and respect as the seat of democracy. Some groups raised whether the building was fit for purpose both as a Parliament and workplace and that the current building should be left as a museum. Others cited Parliaments such as the EU, Welsh, and Scottish Parliaments as being more appropriately designed and fit for purpose. There was a sense that a new building could raise accessibility standards but that also day to day work could be better served in a more accessible location.

Questions and other comments

Some participants asked more general questions about the R&R programme, such as why restoration had not happened sooner and who they were consulting with (and were encouraged by the consultation happening). Others raised comments about facilities not mentioned, such as a creche or spaces for women or lack of surprise that such an old building needs such maintenance.

Do any of the roles feel more important to consider than others when thinking about what the future building should be like?

Participants considered the different roles of the building as a working Parliament, an historic building you can visit and a workplace, and considered which they thought was more important in considering the future building.

Working parliament

Under this choice, people centred on its role as living and representing democracy, the history and its core function. Though some people questioned that Parliament could function from anywhere – it didn't necessarily have to be in that building or in London. Physical accessibility of the building was a common theme but also accessibility in terms of being able to see the workings of Parliament.

"Living in a democracy the most important thing is that it's a working parliament" (Participant)

Historic building

Under this choice, many participants stressed the historical value of the building which needs preserving. Other groups talked about the opportunities for tourism that come with such an historic building in the capital city and that you can have a Parliament anywhere, but you can't have the history anywhere else.

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

Workplace

Under this choice, participants argued that the given the number of workers in the building employment and staff safety should be prioritised, and that to function well as a Parliament it must be fit and functional for employees. Again, the suggestion of moving from the current building was prompted by this question in terms of rebalancing the different parts of the UK, but also staying wherever they have to move to when restoration work is undertaken.

"...and there are 3000 people working there, I think that's very important to make sure that it works well for the diversity of all employees." (Participant)

All and other roles

Some found giving priority to any one role difficult, seeing all roles as vital and none more important than another, but instead said it was a question of balance. Other points prompted

through this question included its role in education, ensuring accessibility was addressed, the cost and income potential, as well as the priority to modernise the building and make it safe and secure from damage.

Some groups misunderstood this question. Their contribution is still included in the raw material provided to the R&R team.

Considerations as a workplace

Participants explored the different aspects that would make the Houses of Parliament a great place to work. Under this topic, they answered two questions.

If you were going to work in a building like this, what facilities and spaces would make it an ideal place to work?

Across the groups participants identified the following themes:

- Accessible facilities and spaces
- Inclusive facilities and spaces
- General building environmental considerations
- Fit for purpose work environment, culture & practices
- Catering facilities – spaces and provision for all diets, wholesome, affordable, and sustainable
- Facilities to relax or rest
- Facilities for children/childcare for employees
- Facilities/spaces to socialise and for leisure
- Parking/travelling facilities
- A range of other considerations

Accessible facilities and space

Across all groups, the participants were keen on ensuring that facilities are made fully accessible for those with physical and other disabilities, including hidden disabilities. A huge range of suggestions were made – from doorways, lifts, audio markers, braille, coloured floors to indicate different rooms, parking, signposting, scooters to get around the building and hearing loops amongst others.

“A building where you feel everyone is equal: “you don’t feel like you’re being treated like a second-class citizen.” (Participant)

Inclusive facilities and spaces

Connected with accessibility features was the notion of spaces and facilities that were inclusive of religion, in particular prayer spaces, and of genders for example including both gender neutral bathrooms and female only spaces.

General building environment considerations

Participants stressed the importance of having adequate building environmental conditions within the workplace. These included aspects such as temperature, signage, seating, light and ventilation, space, storage as well as comments about doorways lifts and access.

Fit for purpose work environment

Under this theme, three main ideas emerged:

- The restoration of the building should focus on modernising it and showcasing how working environments should be, including comments on enabling greater ability to work from home and flexible working practices as well as solid IT systems.
- Employment practice and culture focusing on equality and a diverse workforce and support such as health and well-being practitioners.
- Safety in terms of removal of asbestos and fire risk through to security and medical and mental health support.

Catering facilities – spaces and provision for all diets, wholesome, affordable, and sustainable

Participants said catering options should be varied, healthy and affordable and cater for all diets including Halal/Kosher for example. Coffee and catering areas should be a place to step away from their desk. Other facilities mentioned included bars, vending machines and kitchens where food is supplied so they don't have to spend time out looking for food during breaks. Affordability and sustainability of food was also mentioned.

Facilities to relax or rest

Under this theme, the participants' comments centred around three main areas of focus

- Having spaces for quiet and destressing, such as 'chill out zones' for the workers to have their breaks. Quiet space away from noise and the public was seen as important.
- Outdoor and green spaces for people to socialise and enjoy their breaks. Examples of these include cafes with affordable prices and common/staff rooms.
- Provision for those working long hours, or commuting, including dormitories, rest areas and showers.

Facilities for children/childcare for employees

Provision for adequate childcare facilities for employees was raised primarily creches/ nursery and breast-feeding areas together with play areas.

Facilities / spaces to socialise and for leisure

Some participants said that it was important for employees to have a space to socialise with other staff and make new friends. They suggested creating private spaces to have confidential conversations as well as open group spaces and games areas, greenhouse, communal areas, a gym, library, and classes.

Parking / travelling facilities

Some participants suggested ensuring that staff have free parking and/or subsidised travel to get to the Houses of Parliament. They also highlighted the importance of adequate and accessible parking plus electric vehicle charge points and safe bike storage.

Other considerations

Participants also highlighted a range of other considerations, many of which stood alone. One tension arose between making provisions for children and considering how this might affect the people that work there.

What would make the building feel comfortable and welcoming as a place to work?

Across the groups the following key themes were identified by participants:

- Inclusive and more diverse through people, culture, and facilities
- General building environment considerations
- Accessibility
- Health, safety, and support
- Working space
- Communal spaces
- Children/family friendly
- Women specific factors

Inclusive and more diverse through people, culture, and facilities

This was a significant theme across all groups and covered a range of different aspects including:

- Provision of facilities for religious worship.
- Inclusive facilities and layout – ensuring all people can move around easily and the provision of restrooms for men, women, and gender-neutral people. Provision for disabled visitors including the need for positive images, language, policies, and procedures to help with making the building comfortable and welcoming.
- That the people in the building are reflective of different people, cultures, ages, and backgrounds.
- That the culture of the workplace is welcoming, non-discriminatory, friendly, and inclusive, including working with a small team of likeminded people, feeling ownership, and being user friendly.
- Workplace policies and the ethos of the workplace. This included being inclusive, having inductions and reminders, training, HR helplines and an approachable ethos.

"I think it's probably, for me, about people and policies. So, you can make the building as accessible as, you know, as if it was a new building, but what if staff haven't got the training and staff have got the wrong attitude and your manager, doesn't provide a welcoming environment for you, policies don't support flexible working ...then it doesn't matter how accessible the building is it won't be a good place to work." (Participant)

General building environment considerations

Participants picked the following focus areas under this theme.

- Adequate and sufficient lighting and ventilation, including natural light, to avoid headaches and/or tiredness and to improve wellbeing.
- Temperature should be adequately regulated through heating and ventilation systems, with the ability to control temperature especially for women during menopause.
- The importance of soft furnishings and decorations such as plants, colourful walls, fish tanks and green spaces among others to create a calming ambience.
- Modernised facilities not only to make them accessible but including USB ports and water fountains.
- Signage so you don't get overwhelmed or daunted.
- Commuter factors, such as parking, hotel accommodation, and free bikes.
- Quiet spaces to avoid noise and have calm from emotive politics.

Accessibility

Under this theme, participants focused on making the building accessible in all ways and to all through public transport links and general accessibility. Scooters to go around the building were suggested again.

Health, safety, and support

Given the current maintenance needs of the building, participants highlighted having a safe environment in the workplace. This included no loose asbestos and other health risks as well as having adequate security procedures that were robust but not intrusive, recognising the negative impact this can have for some. In addition, no rats and mice!

Working space

Participants identified the space where you work as an important theme to make the building feel comfortable and welcoming. This included having different spaces for different purposes. Pods to have privacy for meetings, working on your own or having lunch; ergonomic workstations; an open plan working area; locker storage and an outdoor area to work. Some felt having the historical aspects in a workplace would hinder their comfort and make them feel they "needed to be careful".

"At the moment I'd feel cautious I might break something - I wouldn't feel comfortable. Keep the old parts and things for visiting, not for where people work." (Participant)

Communal spaces

In addition, there was an emphasis on communal spaces. Participants said communal spaces would improve feelings of isolation given the size of the building and number of people working there. Suggestions also focused on outside space to sit and relax, gardens with benches and a prayer room. Seating and comfy chairs featured as well as wellbeing areas.

Children/family friendly

Consideration of areas for children, creches, changing rooms, areas for breastfeeding including access to a fridge were mentioned.

Women specific

Among the women's organisations in particular points were raised specifically to make the building feel comfortable and welcoming to them. This included having pictures of women on walls and statues as well as a place where women can talk, feel relaxed and empowered in their roles.

Considerations as a place to visit

Participants explored the different aspects that would make the Houses of Parliament a great place to visit. Under this topic, they answered three questions.

What facilities and spaces would make the building a great place to visit?

Participants raised the following key themes when discussing this question:

- Increasing ways to engage with the history and learning opportunities
- Encouraging and supporting visitors
- Children/family friendly provision
- Physical accessibility
- Wider accessibility factors and inclusion
- Comfort
- General building environment considerations
- Catering and hospitality
- Use of the building for events, weddings, and income generation
- Environment/sustainability

Increasing ways to engage with the history and learning opportunities

Within this theme participants identified several different aspects:

- Increasing interactive features and opportunities, to make the history of the building come alive.
- Different ways to engage with the history of the building. This included ideas such as reenactments and the greater use of visuals, plaques, and pictures, as well as connecting with key historical events and eras such as the suffragettes getting the vote.
- Audio and guided tours with an emphasis on ensuring provision for different languages and with clear descriptions. Participants suggested having a visitors' centre to support this.
- Building on the learning opportunities through an increased learning offer with facilities and spaces for the public to engage with the work of Parliament.
- Community engagement, both through provision of a room for community-based projects and a gallery given over to local projects.
- Interaction with democracy. Participants raised ways to connect and interact with democracy through encouraging it as a space for dialogue and for use by youth parliaments for example.

"...I like museums that tend to be interactive where there's visual things that you touch or things on an audio tour." (Participant)

Encouraging and supporting visitors

Two main aspects emerged under this theme:

- The need for better advertising of the opportunities and activities available to the public. It was suggested that this should include social media and advertisements in public spaces like train stations.
- Providing clear and accessible information through a dedicated visitors' centre and adequate signage around the building and orientation guides. Providing information in advance was noted a few times to help with visit planning and particularly for those with accessibility needs and neurodiverse visitors.

"I want to see the green benches! Keep access to House of Commons. Make it clear you can actually visit the House of Commons and sit on the green seats!" (Participant)

Children/family friendly provision

Two core aspects of family friendly provision were picked out by participants.

- The need for physical facilities for children, including breastfeeding spaces, creche, play spaces, family orientated restaurant or picnic areas and access for prams.
- Provision of facilities to support children's learning and engagement with Parliament and the history. Comments focused on ways to make visiting more interesting for younger visitors, with an emphasis on more interactivity, activities, visuals and displays. Different language provision for these was noted.

Physical accessibility

The need for physical accessibility in all forms was raised across all conversations:

- General physical accessibility should include information in braille, wheelchair access, movable walkways, accessible toilets, hearing loops, wide doors, and quiet rooms for neurodiverse individuals.
- Being able to access the building through affordable transport and the provision of parking facilities, and bike storage.
- Orientation. Participants suggested having clearly defined and welcoming signage and a map of the building in different languages.
- Supporting accessibility, by having disabled /non-disabled guides and staff trained to assist disabled visitors including those without English as a first language.

"It will make me feel uncomfortable if I have to go a different route in the wheelchair from other people." (Participant)

Wider accessibility factors and inclusion

Four additional aspects came from participants under this question:

- Financial accessibility, noting that visiting should be affordable for all, the challenge of the cost of visiting and a suggestion of free/ subsidised entry, as well as virtual tours to make it more accessible for people.
- Religious inclusivity with a prayer room available for all religions.
- Gender inclusivity in terms of available facilities such as toilets.
- Representation and inclusion of different groups, especially of BAME communities. Participants wanted history in its totality acknowledged, including colonialism and the contributions to Britain made by different peoples.

"Recognise the contributions and sacrifice of different cultures/peoples that have made Britain what it is today." (Participant)

Comfort

This theme focused on what participants expected to make their visit comfortable. Key points raised were:

- Seating and quiet spaces, in particular, for those with mobility challenges or the elderly; to be able to relax and sit down.
- Toilets and cloakrooms, with a focus on having enough and cleanliness.
- Drinking water provision.
- Charging points and free Wi-Fi.
- Security to ensure the safety of everyone in the building, though some participants pointed out that this might be off putting for ethnic minorities.

"Security is very intimidating, especially for ethnic minority groups." (Participant)

General building environment considerations

Points picked out by participants referred to the general feel of the building environment and making it more welcoming. These ranged from the decoration being brighter and more colourful through to it being “less stuffy” and more appealing.

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

Catering and hospitality

Provision of affordable coffee shops, vending machines and restaurants catering to the range of diets were mentioned by many participants. In addition, a gift shop, bookstore, and picnic areas.

Use of the building for events, weddings, and income generation

A few participants raised the need to capitalise on the use of the building for a wider diversity of events such as weddings and conferences. Generating income and cutting the use of taxpayers’ money together with additional ways to attract visitors was a rationale for this.

Environment/sustainability

This theme was raised in more depth by participants in the more open question asking about other important considerations in how the building is restored (see later section).

What would make the building feel comfortable and welcoming as a place to visit?

Participants focused on the following key themes when discussing this question:

- Greater engagement through activities
- General building environment considerations
- Welcoming staff and building decoration
- Enabling accessibility
- Reflecting wider society through items and decoration
- Making your visit comfortable
- Children and family friendly
- Sustainability
- Other considerations

Greater engagement through activities

The following topics came under this theme all focused on ways to engage visitors more in the purpose and wider history of the building and Parliament:

- Engaging visitors through stories and reenactments, or involvement to connect with the history of the building through the ages and the history that happened during that time - both good and bad.

- Engaging visitors through connecting with communities. This covered ways to connect more with communities, from displays that show where previous visitors have come from through to a suggestion to hold more community events.
- Engaging visitors in MPs' work and that of Parliament. With MPs the focus was on transparency in terms of what they / the parties stand for. For Parliament, the focus included women's involvement, greater insight into politics and the workings of Parliament as well as ways to connect MPs/Parliament with the people.
- Art also featured in comments with reference to more contemporary art and political art that questions current issues.
- Other comments related to a range of points including expansive late-night opening and good guidance in terms of a "how it works" leaflet and map.

"I'm a visual learner and having a mix of modern tech & timelines showing us what's happened in Parliament/Politics and how we've gotten to the point we're at now as a way of making people feel included, like they can learn." (Participant)

General building environment considerations

Key points raised by participants under this theme related to the overall environment in the building. They were:

- Ambience and mood with comments focusing on lighting and music to create atmosphere. Creating a balance between comfort and a nice area to be in with security and respect for the environment.
- Making the building more contemporary and less formal and traditional versus comments about keeping the history and heritage intact.
- Ambient environment, particularly temperature and heating as well as air conditioning and ventilation and the ability to control this.
- Clear signage for directions, rooms and historic events were suggested to help visitors.

Welcoming staff and building decoration

Under this theme, participants identified three key aspects:

- Having welcoming and friendly staff was a priority among many participants. This included training staff to connect with and treat people from all areas of life equally.
- Having a welcome desk with people to greet and guide you at the entrance was also raised as suggestion. This should be balanced with welcoming and less obtrusive security on arrival.
- Points were raised about how the building interior is decorated contributes to its welcoming nature, such as lighter colour schemes and lighting to make it "more exciting and friendly". In addition artwork including reflecting all parts of the UK and communities.

"Being able to identify with what is going on as a visitor. Secure and efficient but not alienating security." (Participant)

Enabling accessibility

Again, accessibility and inclusion featured as it had in earlier questions:

- Inclusivity should be encouraged with free entry, late night openings, prayer rooms, and clear and accessible signage.
- Offering facilities and information, including tour guides, in different languages.
- Ensuring disabled access through adequate facilities, including wheelchair ramps and handrails, lifts, and escalators. This should also focus on attitudes towards disabled visitors (e.g., not feeling rushed).
- Being able to plan your visit with access to clear and satisfactory information.

Reflecting wider society through items and decoration

Many participants suggested reflecting the diversity of society through decoration such as flags of the countries that contributed to building the UK and art such as statues of figures like Nelson Mandela. Importance was also given to having a workforce that reflects this diversity.

"Seeing people who look like me." (Participant)

Making your visit comfortable

Comfort factors were again raised in terms of facilities from comfy chairs and seating, cloakrooms, free Wi-Fi, quiet spaces, toilets, and places for picnics. In addition, storage of baggage was raised whilst recognising security issues.

"Toilets are a major issue. Please don't just upgrade the actual facilities within the toilet area, please make sure you can open the door because a lot of the doors are too heavy for people." (Participant)

Children and family-friendly

Again, the need for children and family-friendly provision was highlighted through comments. Focus on keeping children occupied with provisions such as art, play areas and making tours more interesting for families.

Sustainability

Some participants raised sustainability issues such as ensuring changes are eco-friendly, from heat pumps to green toilets and energy. In addition, the need for plants and greenery was also raised.

Other considerations

Some participants found it hard to answer the question as they hadn't been to the building and others whilst unsure thought there was a greater need for advertisement about the opportunities of visiting.

Other points raised included the need to be transparent about what the renovation money is being spent on and who is getting the contracts. In addition, comments were made about being clear about the vision for the building in terms of visitors – is the focus towards families or other groups, or all? And recognising the challenge in balancing a working building with an historical one.

What would make people feel like they belonged in the building?

Participants' discussions centred around the following key themes when discussing this question:

- Reflecting the diversity of people and places
- Reflecting history
- Creating a welcoming feeling
- Creating greater engagement and activities opportunities
- Making the building more child and family friendly
- Greater advertising and awareness of the building access for the public
- Facilities and catering for different needs
- Other considerations

Reflecting the diversity of people and places

This was the most dominant theme raised by participants who picked out the following topics:

- Providing connection to regions and places where people are from. The Northern Ireland group raised points relating to being represented more and seeing people from their area working there, other groups talked about building materials drawn from around the countries and regions. Flags again were a common reference point. Participants made comments about having history and information displayed in a way that represents them and the other parts of the UK, including BAME communities.
- Engaging visitors from and on the different places and parts of the UK. Participants raised points about involving / inviting communities to make them feel special and providing a particular focus on places to encourage visits. In addition, creating opportunities to learn about other parts of the country as well as London.
- Ensuring the diversity of the population is reflected throughout. Participants made points about wanting to see a culture of welcoming people from different backgrounds, including more young people, and having visible diversity in photos and positive images of diversity. In addition, seeing diversity reflected in the employees and elected representatives rather than it feeling like “an elite minority”.
- Being reflective of gender, with more female staff and elected representatives and a challenge to the “male dominance”. It was also suggested that tour guides have pronouns on badges.
- Feeling of belonging. Points were raised to counter not feeling they would belong. The suggestion of reenactments was made to overcome this and give a sense of fun and history. Belonging was also rooted in a point about how honest history information would be.

- Inclusion through MP's was seen as positive – that people can turn up and speak to their MP.
- Other considerations under this theme included a suggestion box and a virtual tour to expand accessibility. Devolved parliaments were also seen as inclusive examples to learn from, e.g., the Scottish Parliament being more inviting.

"Having people who look like me working there – more non-white faces, younger people, etc."
(Participant)

Reflecting history

In part connected to the point above, some participants specifically raised openly acknowledging and displaying the history of the UK. This should include the history of protests, the empire and colonialism as well as other historic events like the NHS being formed.

Creating a welcoming feeling

Under this theme four core topics were raised:

- The need to balance security with being welcoming. High security, feeling safe and security were recognised but with a balance of points against it feeling "like a fortress" or unwelcoming or discriminatory to certain groups.
- MPs welcoming and encouraging visits. In addition, for staff to be friendly and welcoming as well as having a non-discriminatory environment.
- Improving the welcoming features of the building. That it is currently uninviting from the outside, particularly the entrance and the need for brighter decorations and using local artists to increase a sense of belonging.
- Bridging the disconnect between Parliament and MPs, and the public. Some comments related to the distance people feel to parliament and politics more generally.

Creating greater engagement and activities opportunities

Comments made by participants picked out the need for:

- Greater community engagement including community art and workshops.
- Promoting greater access to the building without the need to ask.
- Encouraging different activities from community debates, special visits, and open days through to ex MPs giving tours and being able to have conversations on what is discussed and done in the Houses of Parliament. More interactivity was also mentioned. There was a suggestion that without MPs there the security issues reduce and enable a more creative use of the building.
- Having virtual tours of the building which might also help with accessibility.
- Some suggestions to move Parliament from London to make it more accessible to everyone in the rest of the country.

"If they had conversations with us about the House of Parliament and what they have spoken about etc. or do a Q&A" (Participant)

Making more children and family friendly

Digital exhibitions, tours that are not too rigid and creche provision were all points raised under this theme.

Greater advertising and awareness of the building access for the public

Participants raised points about needing to raise awareness of the ease of public access and generally raising awareness of the opportunities to visit and get engaged through better advertising.

"Need more education and maybe a programme on TV to show what goes on and invite people in." (Participant)

Facilities & catering for different needs

Meeting accessibility needs should also cover facilities and catering provision, including having prayer rooms, catering to different diets, and offering signage and guides in different languages.

Other considerations

A range of other points were made by participants including visiting being affordable, maximising the opportunities to make money from the activities and souvenirs and gifts and eradicating extremism.

Other important considerations raised in how the building is restored?

Participants were asked two prompting questions to explore whether there were other factors they would like to raise about how the building is restored. This enabled participants to consider wider priorities or points, unconstrained by the directed questions from earlier in the session.

Is there anything else that you'd like from the building or think is an important consideration around how it is restored, including because it's the home of the UK Parliament

Across the groups participants identified the following themes:

- Environmental sustainability at the heart of renovation
- Maintaining historical significance
- Ensuring accessibility and inclusion
- Representing UK society
- Cost and value for money
- Who works on the restoration and how it is done
- Wider uses, activities, and promotion of access to the building
- Wider and changing role for the building
- Health, Safety and Security – for the building and the people
- Involving people in the changes that are made
- Other design considerations

Environmental sustainability at the heart of renovation

Under this theme, the participants identified four main focus areas:

- Most participants agreed that environmental concerns / sustainability must be considered. They called for the restoration works to focus on long-term sustainability, use of green materials, clean technologies and ensuring energy efficiency, while keeping the character of the building.
- Some participants suggested using the river Thames to create clean energy for the building.
- Some raised the potential for the Houses of Parliament to lead as an example of leadership for climate and environmentally focused renovation and retrofitting.
- A couple of participants argued that the building must be assessed against future climate risks.

"Think about what young people would want. They will be the future politicians and the workers who use the building..." (Participant)

Maintaining historical significance

Under this theme, the participants identified two main focus areas:

- Across all groups, the participants recommended that the historical aspect, original character, and legacy of the building are maintained after the renovation.
- The participants also argued that a balance needs to be found between maintaining the heritage of the building and modernising it with new technology.

Ensuring accessibility and inclusion

The theme of accessibility and inclusion was reiterated across all groups with participants recommending having accessible and inclusive facilities and provisions such as disability access to all areas, diet provision, prayer rooms, child friendly, and non-gendered toilets.

"Reflect the communities you are serving! The space should be welcoming and inclusive to all groups." (Participant)

Representing UK society

Again, a common theme reiterated in response to this question was the importance of representation of the diversity of backgrounds in the UK. This was expressed in terms of:

- The importance of representation and diversity in terms of staff who work there, as well as equality and diversity training for staff.
- Ways to reflect the whole of UK society, from the different countries to the diversity it represents, through decoration, flags, displays, paintings through to the representation of history - for example for women's votes.

Cost and value for money

Costs and financial sustainability considerations were raised, focusing on:

- Concern about the costs of the renovation works in relation to the value that these would bring and in relation to the current climate of austerity; and questioning how it should be paid for including the building being able to sustain itself financially.
- Ensuring that costs, repairs and time spent now ensure longevity, and not a repeat of works.
- Concern that the building had been allowed to get into the state it is in in the first place.
- Different activities available at the Houses of Parliament to enable income generation to ensure financial sustainability, rather than ongoing use of taxpayers' money.

Who works on the restoration and how it is done

Who works on the restoration was a theme that developed from this question, this included:

- A clear message for firms undertaking the work being from the UK, Ensuring the work is completed by the best experts and not the cheapest bidder and an emphasis on using local tradespeople (as opposed to large firms) and enabling work experience and mentorship schemes for young people. Procurement for the work should be fair and not "jobs for the boys"
- The logistics of the work was also raised mainly raising the timeframes and being able to prioritise the most urgent jobs.

Wider uses, activities, and promotion of access to the building

Participants raised points relating to the wider use and participation in the building, including more arts, classes and activities for people and workers to be involved in as well as online and in real life festivals (such as the Scottish Parliament festival of politics). There was also a call to promote awareness of access to the building and outreach to increase participation and interest and overcome the perception of inaccessibility.

Wider and changing role for the building

Here questions again were prompted about moving all or some of the work of Parliament to a different building and out of London and retaining the current building as a museum.

Health, Safety and Security – for the building and the people

Points raised covered included making the building structurally safe, making it safe from a health and safety perspective such as reducing the fire hazards. In addition, safety and security were raised including CCTV security and panic buttons.

Involving people in the changes that are made

Participants raised the need to create greater awareness of the restoration and renewal project and how public engagement had informed the plans. Some participants believed that the changes influenced by these conversations on the renovation plans should be shared with the wider public. There was also comment about the need for an accessible strategic 5-year plan that is accessible to/can be viewed by the public and increasing a sense of community ownership via the restoration.

Other design considerations

Points raised in relation to design considerations in this section focused on more green and community space, efficiency in facilities and how the space is organised and managed, changes to the oppositional benches through to colour, lighting and the use of virtual meeting technology.

One thing to make a priority

Before the end of the workshops, participants were asked to identify one thing they would suggest to the R&R Programme as a priority.

If you could tell the R&R Programme just one thing about what they should make a priority, what would it be?

Participants raised the following key themes:

- Accessibility, inclusion, and representation
- Health and safety for staff, MPs, and visitors
- Environmental sustainability
- Preserving the building history/character together with challenges to modernise
- Financial sustainability and cost effectiveness
- Who does the work and how it is done
- Better communication and connection with the public/people
- Function of the building and design considerations
- Other priorities

Accessibility, inclusion, and representation

Across all groups, participants wanted to see these themes being prioritised:

- Accessibility and safety for everyone, including people with disabilities, were mentioned consistently.
- Equality, diversity, and inclusion were important issues for many. Suggestions ranged from having inclusive facilities to having a diverse workforce and providing staff with relevant training.
- They also stressed the importance of representation for groups such as women and ethnic minorities, from the staff body to the art across the building.

“Just try to make the space as inclusive and transparent as possible for the people that work there and the public that parliament is supposed to be there for and making the actual building sustainable and environmentally friendly as well every penny goes a long way” (Participant)

Health and safety for staff, MPs, and visitors

Participants were keen on ensuring that the building is safe for the staff and visitors. This includes having adequate security, removing health hazards such as asbestos and managing other safety risks including fire and COVID-19.

Environmental sustainability

Many participants prioritised making the building environmentally friendly through the renovation works. This included how an old building can be “eco-friendly” through to use of renewable energy.

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

Preserving the building history/character

Participants discussed the importance of preserving the character and history of the building while modernising it and making it eco-friendly. This should also be balanced with making the building future-proof and forward looking.

Financial sustainability and cost effectiveness

Some participants were concerned with making the works cost-effective and prevent wasting money by planning thoroughly and doing it right, especially against a backdrop of the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. They argued that the building should become financially sustainable through its different activities and sources of income.

“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.” (Participant)

Who does the work and how it is done

Participants raised the possibility of creating job opportunities, including for young people, through the restoration works. They also discussed leaning on UK-based businesses to support this work and small firms. There was a call for transparency about the procurement processes and ethical sourcing of materials.

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

Better communication and connection with the public/people

Engaging and honestly communicating with the public were priorities for some participants. There was interest in knowing and understanding what happens in Parliament as well as creating opportunities for people to connect with the building and MPs.

*"Need to remember the history of it. We need some young people involved. We need to embrace moving forward with respect to the past. My one word – keep communicating to everybody."
(Participant)*

Function of the building and design considerations

Some participants thought that the building should be mainly regarded as a working place. The plans and design for the restoration and renewal should consider this and make it simpler to navigate for staff.

Other priorities

Some expressed frustration with the political class, system, and policies.