

Connection to the town centre workshop 3 March 2022

Attendees - Holly Lewis, We Made That; William Beeston, We Made That; Katharine Harvey, Folkestone & Hythe District Council (F&HDC); Jane Walker, F&HDC; Jade Smyth, F&HDC; Daniel Sanguiseppe, Folkestone Tourism Board; Martyn Jackson, Folkestone Independent Retail Regeneration Group ; Matthew Fraser, Southeastern; Philip Haynes, South Kent Community Church and Tim Goode, Guy Hollaway Studio.

Railway community partnership

A community-led plan to turn station platform into a station garden, providing edibles and places to sit was discussed. The possibility of an underpass and buildings on the other side to make it accessible is also being looked at

It was agreed that anything improving appearance of the area on arrival at the station was sensible, including signage for travellers arriving, by foot or by bike.

How are people arriving?

It was stated that a big percentage of hotel visitors come by coach and will visit the town centre by foot or by bike. Click to Cycle was introduced in the area some time ago and there is a base at the Burlington Hotel, as well as at the harbour.

20% of hotel visitors were on their way to Eurotunnel, so they arrive by car.

Wayfinding and Signage

It was generally agreed that wayfinding is an issue. It was stated that visitors often go to the South Kent Community Church near the station for direction to the town centre.

It was felt a dedicated skate route would be good to keep skateboarders separate from pedestrians.

It was suggested that young people use buses and trains and are becoming more and more environmentally conscious so their needs should be considered.

Bouverie Square

It was raised that the development of the Saga building will be much more viable with improvements to surrounding spaces.

It was suggested that the NCP car park is very empty, payment machines are broken, and it seems derelict. 150 spaces (of 400) were on a long lease to Saga, so it doesn't seem viable as a car park.

It was felt a building on the eastern side of the square to mask the ramps would be a good idea.

An idea to include parking in the new square was raised.

A covenant on the land requires it to be a public use and the aspiration is that this should be a place where people can come and enjoy an open space. Filling the space with car parking would not achieve this.

Shellons Street

It was agreed that this is currently a bit of a race-way so this would need to be dealt with.

Priorities for the wider set of proposals

The team asked attendees where their priorities would lie and the following view were given:

- The district council do a great job down at the beach. Once you're in the town centre you're very close to The Leas but it is not well connected so this would be a good improvement.
- The Leas, the coastal park and harbour are good assets. The challenge is finding your way there if you're not local.
- In order to encourage people to stay in the town centre, a green space in Bouverie place which encourages people to stay longer in the town centre would be good, together with a play park for younger people where it is nice to hang out.
- Link from the station is very important, but can see that taking care of itself. However, improving the skate park environs needs attention.
- The six projects seem geared towards day visitors. The way they are ordered in the list is the best priority.
- The main artery of the town is Castle Hill A, Sandgate Road, down to the harbour so this should be a key priority.
- Definitely clear signage and clear route into town is needed.

Any other business

The team referred to the upcoming public engagement events and that there will also be engagement as part of the parking review.

Town centre improvements workshop 4 March 2022

Attendees - Holly Lewis, We Made That; Will Beeston, We Made That; Katharine Harvey, F&HDC; Debbie Spalding, East Kent Spatial Development Company; Martyn Jackson, Folkestone Independent Retail Regeneration Group (FIRG); Daniel Keeling, Go Folkestone; Liz Flynn, Chaos Cards; Philip Carter, FIRG and lease residents; Daniel Sanguiseppe, Folkestone Tourism Board; Darran Cowd, Folkestone Town Council and Museum and Jo Oliver, freeholder of The Grand.

Skateboarding and cycling

The potential of skate boarding and cycling in the town centre was raised as an issue.

The team responded that there is a need to separate skateboarding and cycling as different issues. For cycling there are clear rules. Skateboarding is more of a grey area. There will be skateboarders and rather than banning skateboarding, the idea would be to design it in.

It was raised that groups are practising tricks on The Leas - but that this will now be happening around F51. Skateboarding is likely to complement other uses and bringing in additional footfall which could benefit the town centre.

The team highlighted that people could be travelling a long way to come to F51 so this offers an opportunity for local businesses. There are likely to be 'older' skateboarders coming, as well as parents of young people, all with money to potentially spend in the town.

Town centre users

There was concern about how much need has been assigned to the 'lab' to test new uses.

The team replied that this is an idea for experimenting with vacant property, a chance to broaden the town centre offer and so this conversation is ongoing.

It was raised that pre Covid the town centre had an over-supply of retail space and the council was looking to shrink by 37%. How do we sustain a shopping area of 1.5 miles? An issue that the town is naturally moving east. This wasn't the case six years ago, so we need to see this change across the whole town.

The team replied that the plan is to seek alternatives to retail - e.g. health centre coming to Folca. The town lab is the idea that we should be able to test things. And that use of space for community space is an opportunity too.

It was raised that by ruling out retail and housing you are really limiting yourself.

The team explained that retail is not being ruled out and more housing in the town centre would be positive. However, for current retail units in the prime area this wouldn't be appropriate at ground floor level.

It was mentioned that there are a number of charities - particularly the Samaritans who would be interested in using community space if this was available in the town centre. They don't have a physical presence. A space that charities could use on a rota system would be good, but many won't be able to make a financial contribution.

A business owner mentioned that they have a large space, and are tied into the lease. The online business subsidises the shop which is how they have survived. Having more

spaces on flexible leases for businesses to try out things would be very positive. If they had a choice to pick a smaller space, or shorter lease, they may have gone for that.

They also have spaces to hire out, and are approached by organisations to use these spaces. For example, mums with young babies wanting to meet, parents with home schooled children. Their space is not the perfect fit so it would be good if something could be provided.

It was mentioned that the current wrap on Folca is great because it is promoting Folkestone's assets and has allowed independent businesses to advertise. The new health centre that will be in Folca is fantastic, but there needs to be other reasons for people to visit. Could we get a 'Macknade' on the ground floor or another food hall retailer or something that would encourage artisan businesses?

Concern that no interventions between Castle Hill Avenue and West Terrace are suggested.

The team replied that the whole of Place Plan is hung on the fact that it is the prime Sandgate Road retail area and the secondary area in Guildhall Street that are under performing, whereas the secondary areas along Sandgate Road seems to be doing pretty well.

Vacant units

Differences in rents was raised as a key issue. Rents in Guildhall Street are only £8,000 whereas Sandgate Road is more like £20,000 - £30,000. This is why there are vacancies in this part of the town centre.

It was agreed that flexibility is key. Most of the local landlords are willing to negotiate but the problem is with properties owned by large investors. The council also needs to be flexible in terms of business rates.

The team replied that commercial investors can be a problem but there are solutions elsewhere where a charity can take on a lease and avoid business rates and run the space for community-focussed activities.

F&HDC function in the town centre

It was noted that F&HDC might put some of their operation in the town centre. The team confirmed that this was being considered and asked for views on this. Views were unanimously supportive. Lots of enquiries are made at the town hall about how to get to the district council, so having a presence in the town centre would be really good.

The Bouverie Business Centre

The Bouverie Business Centre was discussed. It is going better than expected. 60% occupied. They support small and start-up businesses so want flexibility. Identified a

demand for smaller office space for two or three people. So they are looking for a smaller premises for businesses to grow into.

Current occupants include a community company and all are SMEs and start-ups.

There seems to be an increase in people wanting to work 'from home' but not at home, and wanting a desk with some privacy. They are losing people because they want smaller offices of 150-200 sq foot. Bouverie starts at 400sq ft.

Town hall and museum

Issues regarding the town hall and museum were discussed.

The parking survey will be useful - it is not easy for visitors to park.

The idea of a 'Guildhall Square' was seen as positive.

It was suggested that Guildhall Street traders always feel like they're not very visible so the an idea that is being worked on is for a large umbrella structure to be put up annually at northern end which would provide a big sheltered outdoor space. It is very early days.

The town hall functions as a tourist information centre and this needs to be more visible too.

It was raised that the infrastructure of the town is really important for allowing for temporary events. There could easily be lots more of these on Guildhall Street. However, this needs flexible space to work, so benches and new public realm can be problematic. Therefore the siting of these things needs to be considered.

Priorities for wider set of proposals

The team asked attendees where their priorities would lie. Points that were made:

- The appearance of the townscape on the journey into town and in the centre is important.
- Access to the harbour area is a key issue. It is tricky for tourists to get into the town and harbour.
- Government funding should be utilised for aspects that are not commercially attractive and therefore wouldn't happen without public intervention. The commercial focus is heading eastwards while the top end of the town centre is struggling. Therefore from Folca westwards is where the emphasis should be.
- The station arrival is really important, but the town centre area should be the priority.

- Connecting people down to harbour area so traffic doesn't impede our residents. And first impressions of town at the railway station, and wayfinding system.
- Encouraging small businesses and flexible terms.
- Parking and traffic is an issue but it is a good issue to have because it means the place is busy.
- Summer sucks people out of the town centre towards the harbour so there is a need to redress this balance.

Any other business

The team referred to the upcoming public engagement events and that there will also be engagement as part of the parking review.

Creative Quarter, F51 and Payers Park Workshop 4 March 2022

Attendees - Holly Lewis, We Made That; Will Beeston, We Made That; Katharine Harvey, F&HDC; Lisa Highton, Workshop; Paula, tenant at Workshop; Richard Moffat, Remembrance Line; Hannah Richardson, R & R Jewellery; Dan Hulme, The Sports Trust; Diane Dever, Folkestone Fringe; Alastair Upton, Creative Folkestone; Paul Hudson, Creative Quarter committee; Matt Whitby, Hollaway Studio;

Routes to F51 and the harbour

It was raised that access to F51 is crucial in the heart of the town centre. It is hoped that it will be a draw for locals and from elsewhere.

Google shows the journey from station is past Radnor Park and different potential routes were discussed. It would be good to have interventions along the route, to make the most of skateboarding as a community sport. A dedicated route, like a cycle path, would be desirable.

There is a desire to make F51 the hub of skateboarding. We want it to be as accommodated and to make the most of the opportunity, like in Malmo.

It was raised that the route through to F51 extends through to the harbour and Creative Folkestone has already done some work on this for the Triennial. Ship Street isn't going to be built on soon and with F51 opening there needs to be an interim route that doesn't rely on the Ship Street site.

In relation to resistance towards skateboarders, experience at the harbour area has found them to be considerate and there haven't been any issues there. Therefore work needs to be done to challenge perceptions.

Safe access to the skatepark is important and it was suggested that making space safe for skateboarders will help everyone.

Lighting is an issue. Christmas lights made a big difference but when these stopped it has become an issue. The Workshop often have to use taxis to get people to the train stations as the roads and route is perceived as being dangerous. A number of people agreed that it is important that there is a safe cycle and walking route to the station.

There is a need to ensure that the people coming to and congregating at skatepark bring benefits to the wider town.

It was acknowledged that not everyone will be skating down to F51. A plan for a tram link between central station and the harbour has been developed by the Remembrance Line Trust.

Payers Park

A basket of disparate uses around the park was discussed and that this needs to be linked up. Mill Bay's function could become an important link and it was suggested this area could be reimagined.

The idea of a 'Learning Campus' was raised; there's a lifelong industry learning around this site, for all ages and groups.

There is a need to 'down gear' the car and 'up gear' the pedestrian. This can be achieved through changing the tarmac, marking the route up to the high street.

It was suggested that we need to ask; why do this. Why here? Why not focus on the bike route to New Romney, for example. It is very important to understand the group of organisations and freelancers based at the Creative Quarter and it needs to be the flag waving area. There needs to be interconnections. Opening up skills and opportunities to those passing through.

Benefiting the town centre

The team asked how these propositions impact the town centre.

A lot of tenants cycle to The Workshop and they want to encourage that more. However, feeling safe is an issue. Few people take a bus from the station. Two way traffic on Tontine Street would be good and make cycling easier.

It was suggested making Guildhall Street a cycle and skate friendly thoroughfare - it could be really animated with furniture that doesn't necessarily look like 'skate stuff'.

It was suggested that there needs to be a cultural change to accept skateboarding. Maybe a six week trial would be a good approach?

Harbour Line

The Remembrance Line proposal is to make more than just a cycle way; it is to include interactive, visual and audio displays 'from sea to the Downs' which will be an attraction in itself. The Remembrance Line Trust has some funding, which we could contribute to the LUF. The Remembrance Line could enhance LUF proposals.

It was suggested that the rails should be kept as a heritage feature but also to enable retrofit of light railway in the future.

It was raised that Tram Road is the main arrival point even by car and at best traffic links are confusing. Historically there have been different road layouts. A few more well-sited crossings would really help.

It was suggested that it's worth thinking about what the junction of Tram Road and Harbour Road could be in the future. There are opportunities for this to be a programmable space rather than a green space. A new building could accommodate cultural uses such as a gallery space for example, to make the place a real destination. Or places for young people and families to hang out. There are so few places like this in Folkestone.

There was concern about the proposal for a multi-story car park and that any changes to parking or roads need to be accompanied by education around sustainable transport.

Concern was raised about having a car park right in the area which currently gets gridlocked so the appropriateness of this should be considered.

Sunny Sands

Public toilets in this area were raised as an issue. The team explained that there are proposals for a 'changing spaces' toilet which are being explored at The Stade.

It was raised that the Shepway Sports Trust have had quite a lot of work done on sport facilities proposals - a sea sports centre and the intention is also to put a changing places toilet here.

Priorities for wider set of proposals

- A key bidding criteria is deliverability - there is little value in putting up projects that are only at feasibility stage and some of the proposals seem to be at a very early stage. The work already done on the new learning campus building means that project is reasonably worked up. Other priorities should be the station and Payers Park.
- Need to consider who is capable of delivering projects? Involving the interested parties in the proposals around the station and Payers Park, which is in ownership of Creative Foundation, will be important.

- Levelling up funding is an opportunity to drive something new and it is necessary to consider what can be pulled together with expertise available. Perhaps look at Harbour car park area, with new build for cultural offer.
- Railway should be a priority because the Tram Road is an eyesore. Make it into a basic walkway. Second, the station. Then Payers Park.
- Firstly, the projects have to be deliverable within the timescale. Secondly, cohesion is important - how do the projects join together? Questions over the importance of stations - they're always not great, but it doesn't really matter as long as you can find the way to where you want to go. It's the place that counts. What was done at the harbour was great in terms of wayfinding. So really it's the connections between all of the area that are important.
- The catalyst for the town is connections. The top end of the high street will become more important with the development of Bouverie Square which will be really nice. More about squares and public realm including the skate route is what is needed.
- It is connectivity that is key - connecting up all the great things. Where to go has to be obvious and routes have to feel safe. It currently doesn't feel safe enough travelling from the station. This will make public transport more feasible.
- Station is difficult because it's far away, visual clues can be done quite cheaply. What's going to noticeable difference? The high street is in trouble but the harbour area is doing well.
- Would a bid comprising road changes be exciting enough? Difficult to call this without understanding of indicative costs.
- It is important to consider which projects are going to deliver most economic impact.

Any other business

The team referred to the upcoming public engagement events and that there will also be engagement as part of the parking review.