

Tales from the BCP Future Lab

# FUTURE



# STORIES

Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole

# FUTURE STORIES

Tales from the BCP Future Lab

# FUTURE STORIES

Tales from the BCP Future Lab



[www.feria-urbanism.com](http://www.feria-urbanism.com)

Copyright © 2022 Feria Urbanism

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-3999-1952-4

# CONTENTS

## PART A

01	Introduction	8
02	Independence	24
03	Ecology	50
04	Health & Social Prosperity	70
05	Playable	88
06	Culture Drift	104

## PART B

07	Specific Urban Interventions	122
08	Bournemouth	124
09	Christchurch	142
10	Poole	156

## PART C

11	Eventful BCP	176
----	--------------	-----

## PART D

12	Conclusions	194
13	Research & Evidence Gathering	196



# PART A

# 01 Introduction

## 1.1 About This Book

BCP Future Lab is a research project designed and run by urban design and urban planning practice Feria Urbanism, with support from Eventful Consulting. The project was commissioned by R<sup>3</sup> – a working group comprising BCP Council Officers, council members and representatives of the local retail, hospitality, and leisure industries. The R<sup>3</sup> group acted as both mutual support network during the Covid-19 pandemic and as a think tank, exploring ideas for how best to respond to the challenges it presented to the three town centres.

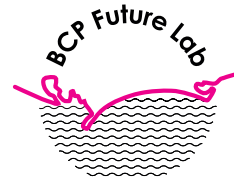
The geographical scope of the work was expressly limited to the three town centres of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole. The wider suburban area that makes up much of the BCP Council area was excluded from the research. Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole is the UK's newest city region and is administered by BCP Council, the tenth-largest urban local authority in England.

## 1.2 About the R<sup>3</sup> Network

The research commissioned from the R<sup>3</sup> network is important. The Covid-19 pandemic brought together people from across the BCP conurbation who genuinely care and feel passionately about the future of our three town centres. This network see the decline of our town centres not just as a threat to their own businesses and interests but also as a challenge to local people who rely on such places as centres of community.

In one of the initial research interviews, Andy Barfield – Chair of the Christchurch Chamber of Trade and member of the R<sup>3</sup> network – spoke with great feeling about how his local town centre of Christchurch was not just a place that people went to shop, it was the essence of the community – a place where people could go to have a conversation, or a chat at a shop checkout or at the bus stop. He cited these casual encounters as important for people's mental health and a chance for people to connect and feel part of something bigger.

His observations have been echoed by many other members of the R<sup>3</sup> network, along with more poetic or romantic associations of the city. For example, Alan Dove – commercial manager for retail, licensed trade, food, entertainment, and marketing at Bournemouth



University – talked about sitting in a café and people watching, observing life unfold around him, the street as a piece of theatre playing out under the gaze of the casual observer.

What was striking about these conversations with the R<sup>3</sup> network is just how much people care about the town centres. That they feel strongly about the role that these places play in the day-to-day lives of people who live there.

However, there was also a sense of pragmatism at play. The network retains a healthy realism that our town centres are quickly changing. In the immediate term, this means local businesses and city authorities need to be light-footed and reactive to the current economic situation the town centres find themselves in.

Over the medium to longer term, local businesses and city authorities need to consider strategies to address an uncertain future. In this uncertain future, change is an inevitable response to current economic weaknesses inherent in town centres but also as society faces up to a necessary system change to mitigate against climate change. There is some acknowledgement that acting locally is an important part of this response and this piece of research can be considered a catalyst for the medium to longer term changes needed.

## 1.3 About the Project Team

Feria Urbanism is an urban planning and urban design practice based in Bournemouth. The team members are local, live in the area and – just like the R<sup>3</sup> network – care passionately about creating a bright and beautiful future across Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole.

The focus of the practice is co-created design, and the team has embedded face-to-face and one-to-one research with the public into this research process. Designing and running the BCP Future Lab project has been a fantastic opportunity to explore and refine these co-creative methods. The team believe that thinking about the future of town centres requires a collective response and as such, Feria Urbanism's role in the project has been to act as a conduit for the public to express their experience of town centres.

Dr Caroline Jackson, as Eventful Consulting, complements the Feria Urbanism team on this project. She represents the UK events sector identifying and strengthening pathways into events, safeguarding, and developing talent and improving diversity and inclusion. She is also local and her work looking at eventful cities contributes to an understanding about why and how events can play a valuable part in the regeneration and rejuvenation of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole.

## 1.4 Understanding People's Experiences

The team has used this research opportunity to talk to people about how town feels to them, to understand what draws them to town and the kinds of experiences they wish to have in town in the future. The focus of the questioning has been to understand people's experience. To uncover tacit experience of place to build, formulate or indeed articulate what is at the heart of town centre experience, for the people who use town regularly and for those who visit.

It is the team's view that creating a snap shot of what people love about town will enable businesses, entrepreneurs, and city authorities to respond creatively, and give decision makers an indication of where more support is needed and what infrastructure needs to be put in place.

### 1.5 A Handbook for Action

This book can be used as a handbook or a manual. The first part of the book describes the principles defined in response to the conversations with the public. These principles have emerged as the project team learned what people care about, what they wish to see in town and what they enjoy the most about the town centre experience. The focus of this element of the research was to capture how people feel and what they value.

The book outlines a description of each of these principles and the ways in which they intersect and relate to

one another. For each principle, there is a case study and a set of precedents that profiles the work of a local individual or organisation working in the BCP area, or work being done elsewhere that can inspire change closer to home.

The purpose of these principles is to help imagine new stories and create new narrative threads that reflect the collective desire for our town centres to also be our cultural centres and for them to be places that reflect peoples hopes, desires and aspirations.

### 1.6 Personal Collective Stories

The title, Future Stories, indicates that the outcome of this project is not big glamorous buildings or shiny shopping malls, but something far simpler yet also highly complex: the personal and collective stories that will remake our culture and inspire our future. The stories that we tell ourselves and each other about the town centres we live in, are a way of describing not just where we live, but who we are.

Thinking about future stories affords the opportunity to imagine a hopeful future in which humans are part of the solution, not the cause of the problem. These future scenarios allow us to

imagine town centres that are open and inclusive, healthy and fun places to be, and that the result of getting this balance right is a thriving economy.

The second part of the book focuses on specific project ideas that have been developed for each of the three town centres based on the principles previously defined. Each of these projects emerge from a combination of the principles. Specific projects of various scales are suggested that can be implemented over a flexible time-frame to improve town centre use and experience. Each of these projects is embryonic and a continuation of the co-creative design process is advocated in order to develop creative responses in line with the aspirations of specific communities.

### 1.7 Eventful BCP

Events come in all sizes and content and have multiple purposes. The fundamental one is bringing people together, whether for a celebration, sharing of knowledge and cultures, sporting endeavour or wellbeing retreats. They create personal and civic stories.

The pandemic has restricted or even prohibited these gatherings of people. The ecosystem, the people and the businesses that organise and build these event experiences have been hit hard.

As society learns to live with Covid-19, a positive opportunity is that these events can be regenerated, and new ones created as town centres and businesses are rebuilt. Events are agile and flexible, with limited need for capital investment.

Events can be used to drive footfall and to create an image in placemaking aspirations. Events are an integral part of displaying and creating a person as well as a place's identity. They can create the glue that brings Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole together.

The difference is between BCP with events and an eventful BCP. An eventful BCP means that BCP collectively

creates, shapes, manages, and markets events, while they also shape BCP's spaces and its image.

*'Eventfulness should not be an aim in itself, but a means of improving the city and making it more attractive and liveable.'* (Richards and Palmer, 2010, p.4)

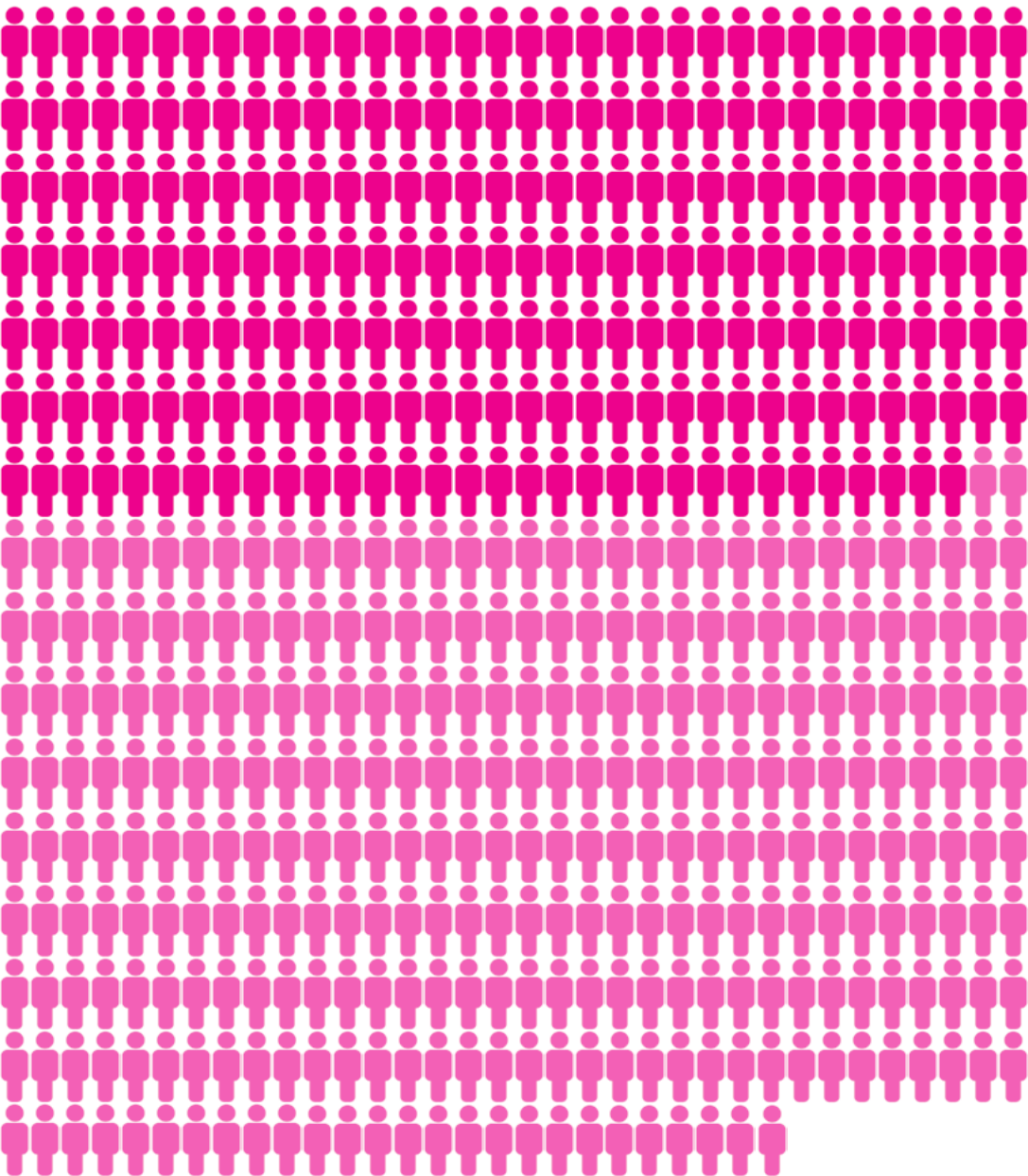
All advice is that events should be an integral part of any city planning and not just an add on or after thought. This can be seen, to various degrees of success, in cities such as Edinburgh, Melbourne, Coventry, Bristol and Brighton. The approach of the BCP Future Lab has therefore been to include the role of events in reimagining BCP.

As well as being the tool through which engagement and experiment occurs, events can also be part of the visioning of this future.

Events are therefore included throughout the narrative of this book, an integral part of the built, natural, and human environment of town centres. There is a dedicated section (Part C) that outlines the existing and potential future purpose for BCP becoming an eventful city region.

# Public Engagement

For more details on each of these events, turn to Part D, section 13 of this book.



537

Total number of participants

222 Library Event attendees

282 Other Events

## Timeline of events



Ongoing social media



## 1.8 A Recent History of the Town Centre

16 The premise of this project was to look at how town centres could be rebuilt after the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Curiously, few of the people who engaged with the project were prepared to put the failings of the town centre down to pandemic alone. Indeed, during the pandemic both Poole and Christchurch town centres appeared to have experienced a renaissance, as newly established home workers enjoyed walking to their local high street at lunch time, meeting or connecting with friends in real life outside a café.

In many ways, the fortunes of local high streets that are located at the heart of what are described by urban planners as 'Fifteen Minute Neighbourhoods' – a unit of geographical coverage that contain all the daily or weekly needs of somebody within a fifteen minute walk from their home – improved during the Covid-19 lockdowns. With people under instruction to stay at home, and to not make unnecessary journeys, the local high street became the place to visit for essential supplies. These experiences reminded people that meeting on a high street and the unexpected encounters they offer are wonderful ways to connect with other people. Both Poole and Christchurch town centres, unlike Bournemouth, fulfil the function of a local high street in similar ways to Winton, Kinson, Westbourne, and the many others across the BCP area.

## 1.9 Investigating 'The Pause'

When people were asked about the demise of their shopping centres, they blamed online shopping, rather than the Covid 19 pandemic and stated that shopping online was so much easier than coming into town. Many people talked about transport and parking or gave reasons of convenience for shopping on line, however most people we spoke to were in town and the conversations were held on the street- there was often a gap or a pause in our conversation as they struggled to articulate the reasons they stopped coming into town to go shopping. They stated one of the main reasons is that they now see town as a social centre and place to meet up with friends or family.

This pause happened often enough for the team to start thinking it is the pause that needed to be investigated. And the question that needed to be answered: What if Amazon didn't shut the high street? What if Amazon just filled a high street shaped hole? What if the town centre vacuum opened and Jeff Bezos simply jumped in?

Through this research the team wanted to, at the very least, scratch the surface and ask what really happened – what factors influenced the relative decline of the town centre? Because everyone that the team spoke to throughout the project valued the

experience of town. Indeed, when people talked about the demise of Bournemouth town centre, it was with a sense of grief and sadness. People talked about it in terms of loss.

Nobody suggested the town centre just gets shut down or rubbed out. They wanted it to survive. All of the people that engaged with this project said that town centres are worth saving, that they still wanted to go into the town centre, and they do still come to town to meet friends, to walk, to spend time on the weekend ... so what's to stop them drifting into a shop and buying a towel ... or a plant pot or browsing the jumper section on a chilly day? What's gone wrong?

## 1.10 The Design of Town Centres

What follows is speculative. However, this speculation comes from a reading between the lines. Listening closely to what people have told this project and considering the question:

Q: *What if bad design has contributed to the decline of our town centres?*

The experience of retail is almost entirely framed by its architecture. Over the last thirty years or so retail architecture has become dominant. It has been constructed from materials like glass and steel which can feel cold and industrial. It has super-sized shopping, from the small intimate shop experiences of a Victorian Arcade to the massive, exhausting, life-sucking, escalator-riding over-sized stores that are tungsten lit in blue light and blast the endless loop of repetitive beats. The mission to go and buy a jumper has become not just a question of navigating geography but also encountering a sense-numbing environment that can dull the mind and exhaust the body.

These environments can be unpleasant. They are trying and they can be exclusive. They exclude all but the bravest parents of small children. They exclude the elderly, and they exclude anyone who is sensitive to these kinds of environments. They increasingly exclude anyone with an ethical compass. Going shopping has become the contemporary equivalent of doing battle. It is the survival of the fittest and far from retail space being a democratic space, it has become a place for the few, not the many. In turn the 'many' have gone online, to exchange the tactile, material real-world experience of exchange for online transactional simplicity. Many others simply buy their jumper at the supermarket as part of a weekly shop. However an equal number of people told us that if they want to shop, they might go to Lymington, Ringwood, or Wimborne. These are smaller town centres that have fewer big brands, more independent shops but are also characterful and offer a diversity of experience.

A strong message we received from participants is that they wished for more independent high streets, interesting and unique places to visit, shop and eat, with things to do that connect them with the character of that place or enable them to better connect to the people they are there with.

### 1.11 A Question of Scale

This research wishes to reframe that assertion and suggest that it may not be that people just want to see independent shops. What they are articulating is that they wish to experience smaller shops that are scaled to a more human size, which offer more personal service and are more pleasant environments to shop in. Retail experiences where lighting is subtle, music is in keeping with the brand and where people feel valued and included. Moreover, people want variety – the team was told again and again that people wanted independent stores and greater variety.

If poor retail design accelerated the decline of the town centres, the origins of that design might also be considered. Who is commissioning this kind of architecture and what is the culture that manifests it?

The materials used in contemporary retail design – metal, glass, concrete, and steel – are the kinds of material associated with corporate culture.

People will make a subconscious connection between corporate culture and the kinds of building we have increasingly seen in town centres, shopping centres and local high streets in recent times. As part of this shift, the people stopped being customers and became consumers. Our choices became consumer choices, and our power became the power to shop.

At the same time as this, the idea of the town centre shifted. It narrowed. As a culture, we were told that retail is everything from being the industry that underpins our economy, to a leisure pursuit, to family time, to culture itself. Alongside this, retail activity in itself became a commodity as city authorities sought to attract more retailers with statistics about footfall and spend. At some point in this shift, humans started being called 'footfall' and they became the commodity that was being sold.

The team understands this book has been prepared for a client group that comprises representatives of the retail and hospitality industry and that there is an incongruity here. However, what this research has shown, is that people wish to go to town to connect to a broader culture and that they can connect to this through shopping (a culture they can buy into) and dining in cafés and restaurants (a culture that they can also buy into). But people saw these two activities as ways to unlock a much broader experience.

### 1.12 Being Part of Something Bigger

At one of the engagement events in Bournemouth Library, the team asked people 'What draws you to town?' and people were given forty words to choose from which included business, retail, shopping, cinema, eat and more. Most people that took part chose words that related to feelings, experiences and connecting to others. They explained that shopping was often a part of a visit to town but not the only activity they participated in. What was learned from these workshops was that people want to access a range of activity.

This library workshop, which included face-to-face conversation with 220 people, revealed key themes around a sense of community, culture, walking and wandering, people-watching, and connecting. People value feeling valued and being part of something bigger. They also want a sense of ownership over their town centre. Their place.

The visual and experiential messages that town centre architecture and urban design has been giving communities for years is in opposition to this. The design principles that underpin these over-sized stores and malls have emerged from a rationalised 'science of shopping' – a manifestation of corporate culture or global capitalism in the heart of our town centres.

The perceptual shift that has occurred is that at some point the town centre stopped serving us and instead, we, the people, started serving it. The town centre experience had become a simulacrum of 'the market' in the traditional sense. What people actually began to experience was the surface of something, a thin skin concealing a matrix of share prices, FTSE 100 profits and an interleaving of property investment, insurance, and pension funds. In effect, the market was selling us. We had become the commodity.

### 1.13 Participation in the Urban Life of Town Centres

Whether consciously or not, people coming to town can identify and understand their place in this system. What has been learned through this research is that this is people's tacit experience. Consciously or not, moving their custom online is a refusal to participate in an urban context that has become discomforting.

What the Covid-19 pandemic has done is cement what people value and the experiences they enjoy. The feeling of being part of a community, enjoyment of walking and a slow pace of life, simple pleasures around connecting to the local environment and casual encounter.

What was learned from listening to students at Arts University Bournemouth (AUB) and Bournemouth University (BU) is that these young people want to come to town to participate. The designs they produced in the BCP Future Lab workshops included

ideas to reappropriate empty shops through climbing walls, trampoline parks and roller discos. They wanted to meet up for an afternoon and do an 'Escape Room'. They wanted to have experiences or take part in activities that allowed them to be part of a group. When they talked to the project team about what these spaces felt like, the experience of the Peckham Levels development was invoked – this is a large indoor space carved out of a multi-storey car park, where there is the chance to meet at a yoga class, but then swing by a trendy bar or independent café next door or encounter a small makers market or go onto a club afterwards.

The clear message given at these workshops was that young people wanted a town centre in which they could act and take part, rather than a town centre where they look at things. They wanted to encounter spaces where it is possible to take part in many different types of experience and merge easily and seamlessly from one thing to another.

The young people told the project team they value a town centre as a place to act and to do. That traditional modes of consumption in which they buy and receive no longer hold the level of interest they once did. What is understood from conversations with students and school pupils is that they value more complex of multifaceted days out in a town centre. That town is still a place of exchange, but that 'exchange' includes ideas, conversations, glances, as much as the purchase of things. That the way the town centre works for them is as a real world meeting place and that they would be far more likely to converge in town via a WhatsApp group called 'Climbing Wall Meet Up' or drift into town and then use Snapchat to see who is about and what they are doing, rather than to plan a shopping trip or a meal.

### 1.14 The Challenge of Town Centres for Children, Young People Families

At the library workshop, the project team encountered many families. It was a rainy Saturday, and the library was hosting an event as part of the Arts By The Sea festival. Lots of people were bringing children to take part, to return or borrow books or just to see what was happening. The first thing to note is just how busy the libraries can be and that they, in themselves are cultural centres that are a well-used resource and an anchor bringing people into the town centre.

The message received that day, was that town is not a place for a parent with children. They do not come into town unless there is a specific event or activity and they feel excluded from town without this because it is a difficult place to navigate. Fundamentally, what they interpret from the town centre around them is that town is not for them.

In each of the three town centres – Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole – there are very few places to buy children's clothes. So, on a purely pragmatic level, a huge market is being left out of the town centre. Many people with children felt that the town centre experience would be improved if there were more activities that they could do together and that they would enjoy a day out in town where shopping, food and cinema were done alongside making or educational activities. One person talked about the success of the Winchester Science Centre and wondered if a similar workshop-based attraction in the heart of the urban centre would draw people in.

The message received from many of the teenagers, particularly the girls, is that they are not allowed into town any longer because it is considered too dangerous. Too many stories have circulated about young girls being attacked in the park, encounters with drunks and similar, which results in them being stopped from going to town on their own.

This is a shame because the day trip to Bournemouth with friends is a teenage rite of passage on the pathway to independence. More than that, it sets in motion a feeling that girls are not safe in town, they should not go to town, and they should change their behaviour and limit their freedom because of acts of aggression by others, especially men. This perception needs to shift, and broader research shows that when there are more families and more young people in a town centre – the better the mix of generations – the safer that town centre will become.

The most valuable message received is that people want a town centre that is expansive and allows for engagement with ideas and culture. It should create opportunity, surprise and be a place for the curious. People do not just want to be shoppers, they want to be adventurers heading into the centre to encounter the unexpected, to engage with culture in the broadest sense of the word and to navigate a place in which they can encounter themselves, reflected back in a myriad of forms.

### 1.15 The Value of Social Prosperity

What has been learned through this research is that people value social prosperity over economic prosperity. They value encounter and exchange over stuff and things. The future of the centre is multiplicities, it is authentic, it is people, and it is experience-focused. It is multi-layered. The future of the city is participation. That does not necessarily mean actively taking part in any formal arrangement, it means taking part through acting and doing and for there to be the space, breadth and value given to a broader spectrum of activity.

More recently, the successful town centre model relied on anchor retail stores creating footfall. The recommendation of this book is that the anchor model is still used to bring people into town and create footfall, but instead of these being retail anchors, they are activity based. They might be inspired by the Peckham Levels model of a mixed-use, multi-storey space that includes workshops and studios alongside other activity and places to eat and drink. Or activity-centred attractions, such as the trampoline park or the roller disco that bring teenagers and young adults into town to play. Or it might be the spa or the swimming pool or the gym as a meet-up space

and that smaller scale retail happens around these activities. Retail is ancillary to other activities, not the other way around.

How do these findings help us to consider the three town centres of the future? More directly how do these findings help the R<sup>3</sup> network evaluate the future direction of the three town centres? What this book offers is practical ideas and suggestions from the small-scale interventions, to larger infrastructure changes. It also investigates policy and notions that town centre regeneration often hinges on; private ownership of buildings, rental returns and rates that have become over-inflated in line with the movement of global capital that expected retail to be the core activity. Restructuring the town centre for activity-based renewal will therefore likely require significant shifts in policy approaches to private versus public ownerships, rental expectations, and land use planning policy.

Changes at policy level also need to be made to make it easier for individuals and community groups to establish events or activities.

### 1.16 Living in Town Centres

Creating more homes in a town centre has many positives. It can create urban density and relieve pressure to create urban sprawl. It will also create intensity for the urban experience, generating more footfall in the town centre and help to maintain a strong town centre community that needs to buy everyday items as much as fruit and vegetables and consumables, driving demand for everyday shopping experiences in the centre.

This community will also want to live in a place with easy access to culture, shifting the emphasis away from a more raucous night-time economy towards a more relaxed after dark experience. Yet caution is also needed. If the three town centres were to be perceived as simply yet another local neighbourhood – one more fifteen minute neighbourhood in the network – then there is a risk that a full town centre experience could be lost. The centre needs to retain its primacy as a place of culture, a place to gather, to party, to meet and to connect.

The risk is that BCP simply becomes a sprawl of small, interconnected neighbourhoods with no obvious centre or centres. A happy city needs this single focal point (or in the case of the BCP area, three focal points) that are places and space that allow people to define whatever going into town is for them. The romanticism of the city is that you can be one of a crowd, that you can lose yourself in that crowd and you can be free in this space to express who you really are. This is a freedom that allows you to escape the everyday and lose yourself. Whether that is in the nightclub, the bar, the department store or at a festival in the park or simply by walking in the crowd. Loosing yourself might well be about free expression but may equally be the lonely connecting to others, that a trip to town is a trip away from one's own isolation (see Petula Clarke). That being one of the crowd allows you to be part of something and also open to chance encounter ... a new story opening up or indeed simply a chance to connect to old stories from our past, memories held for us in the routes and pathways that we habitually walk.

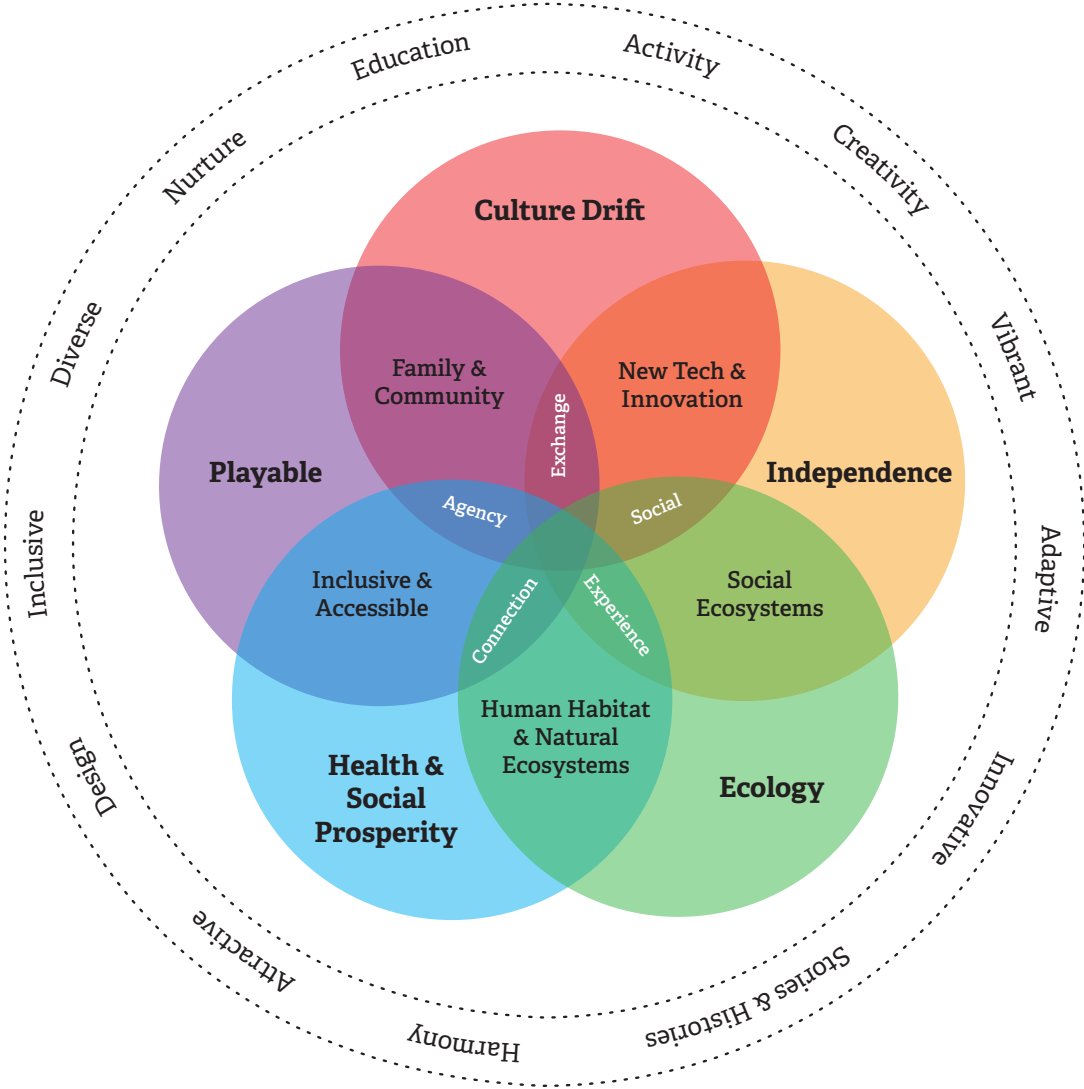


1.17 The Principles Behind the Recommendations

Throughout this book, these broad concepts are unpacked using a series of interlocking principles. These have emerged from the analysis of the many and varied engagements undertaken. These principles are:

- INDEPENDENCE
- ECOLOGY
- HEALTH & SOCIAL PROSPERITY
- PLAYABLE
- CULTURE DRIFT

The principles unlock multiple pathways for a balanced, socially, and economically-prosperous, human-focused town centre. These principles are presented as concepts. However, the principles are also applied to specific locations and includes in this book is a series of site based interventions across Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole town centres.



**02**

# **INDEPENDENCE**



Photo by Richard Page



Left by Richard Page, right by Ashley Woodfall









All photos this spread by Ashley Woodfall



## 02 Independence



### 2.1 The Desire for Independence

People value independence and the team have been told this by almost everyone that has engaged with the project. They wish to see more independent shops and businesses in the town centres. They want a town centre full of character. This desire for independence is complex and something the project team have attempted to break down and understand in more detail when in conversation with people. It seems that this idea of independence is not about ownership but about experience, authenticity and, to an extent integrity. People value the opportunity to spend time in a unique, characterful town centre.

If this is their local town centre, they want it to be unique. This is because they want to feel proud to live there. They want to be part of the history of that place, and they want to be able to define and celebrate its specific culture. They want to feel part of that place and community.

From a visitor's perspective, they want to be able to go into a town centre and encounter something new, something different. They want to learn about this new place and participate in activities and events that are authentic to that place and that offers them something that they cannot experience in their own town centre.

### 2.2 Distinctive Town Centres

In the first instance, there was a clear message that people want their local town centre to be its 'own thing' – a place that is grounded in history, but which is about the here and now. What people crave are places like no other places where they encounter and experience interesting histories and architectures, where they can be curious and where they can learn something about how people live in this new place.

It is important to consider how the current generation can contribute to the unique qualities of a place – whether that is new buildings, structures, or public spaces or indeed through new events, such as annual activities that contribute to the seasonal rhythm of a place. A recurring message was that people want their centre to be its own place and therefore any new developments should

focus on what contributes to a locality's uniqueness in an authentic and meaningful way.

The best way to achieve this is through genuine, meaningful exchange that actively engages communities in the creative design process. Something that has been referred to throughout this book as co-creativity.

The desire for unique experiences and localised innovation is illustrated by the street interviews with a group

of young men in their twenties who were on holiday in Bournemouth. They said they loved the Beryl e-scooters and that this had been one of the high points of their visit, travelling along the beach and around town. This was not something they could do where they lived, and it made their trip to Bournemouth unique and memorable.

### 2.3 Thinking Like a City

The idea of independence can be useful to BCP. The locality is in a time of transition as Bournemouth town (but without Poole or Christchurch) bids for city status. In many ways, these findings are useful whatever the outcome of this bid. If Bournemouth were to obtain city status, there would be a real value in defining and characterising the town centres of Poole and Christchurch by creating variety and difference to distinguish these places as different from Bournemouth.

In the same way Londoners often refer to themselves by the local neighbourhood where they live – Brixton, Hampstead, Islington and so on – people who live in the BCP area can continue to say they are from Christchurch, Poole, or Bournemouth and each of these centres would be differentiated and characterised. On the next level down, people could also claim an emotional or cultural attachment to the neighbourhoods - Winton, Kinson, Westbourne.

There is also a value in better defining the different characteristics of these places. This research has revealed the following descriptions of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

### 2.4 Independent Christchurch

An attractive coastal town with a deep history dating back to pre-medieval times. The narrow high street, the walks and alleyways around the river, the medieval street pattern around the Priory and the jumble of architecture along the high street have the potential for a town centre that is well-suited to words like charming, quaint, and historic.

There is a mix of business from established independent book shops, shoe shops, a clay studio, and the fantastic Christchurch Library & Learning Centre. There is also the Regent Centre, a large independent theatre and cinema run by volunteers, as well as a

range of lovely independent restaurants and cafés. While these operations are well-established, they are not celebrated and are often obscured and rendered less accessible by cluttered pavements and poor street furniture, and a high street often choked by cars and buses. The intrinsic qualities of Christchurch need to be brought to the fore to amplify its character. This recommendation is addressed extensively in the projects section.

To go to Christchurch is not to head for a big day out at the shops, but to encounter small shops, cafés, a walk along the river and around the Priory, and to visit a gallery. It is a centre that locals like to walk to, and many people talked about how they enjoyed walking into town along the river, spending time on the high street then walking back home, maybe after lunch. They talked about how the food festival and the market were an extension of this meandering and how they liked to connect these activities. It is clear to see how the character of Christchurch could be better celebrated to create a space of intimate experiences, a place to meet a friend for an afternoon or indeed as a fifteen minute neighbourhood serving the immediate surroundings. For the people who live in Christchurch, it is a charming yet functional place where you can get your shopping, visit the market, buy a book, and meet a friend for coffee. People in Christchurch referenced Lymington and Ringwood as similar-sized centres that were getting it right and to which Christchurch could aspire.

Christchurch might also look to a town like Frome in Somerset that has a quaint street pattern, small-scale shops, a food market, and a creative community to create a street scene that feels visually coherent, where the curious might follow their nose to see what is around the corner and the local community might collaborate to put on exhibitions and events.

## 2.5 Independent Poole

Poole is town centre that might look to the recent success of Plymouth. Both located on a harbour with a maritime history. Both struggling to define a sense of identity now the port provides less employment, income, and emphasis. Both have a long high street. Plymouth has focused on cultural regeneration recently, as well as embracing a slightly edgy sense of self as a place in transition.

Poole has its own unique history that emerges from its ancient natural harbour and maritime history. Kingland Crescent has successfully embodied something of Poole's creative community and independent shopping. It is capturing something from the edges or margins of culture. Port towns have always had an underlying edge to them – Liverpool, Marseille, Gdansk, east London – a sense of operating at the edges of culture and open to new ideas from overseas. Poole town centre must find a way to harness this energy,

rather than sanitise it. It can become a place that lets things happen, an organised chaos against the backdrop of this maritime history. It has a town centre that connects to the sea, the wildness of 'out there'.

Port towns are a meeting place; they are places of exchange. Not just goods arriving and leaving, ships disembarking and those being carried off to sea but also places where the wild norms of the sea meet the order of society. Behaviour in port towns has typically been bawdy and on the edge. Can Poole allow this bawdiness or carnivalesque spirit to be a positive force, containing it whilst also celebrating this essential spirit of the place?

In recent years, night clubs and pubs have closed on the quayside in Poole because this kind of behaviour perpetuates and disturbs. Nobody would argue for Poole to deliberately become rough and dangerous. However, acknowledging this history starts to create associations with carnival and the carnivalesque. The people of Poole like to party.

The creative industries – and retail in particular – that are being encouraged and supported by the scheme at Kingland Crescent, might indeed provide a link by extending this notion as the space for the outsider. Comparatively, Bournemouth feels very much like a centre that should be accessible to all generations, all comers which can offer something open and democratic. Poole could, with imagination, use its grit and rough edges to attract creatives, intellectuals, performers, activists, environmentalists.

Speaking with the newly established businesses in Kingland Crescent it became apparent that the seeds of such a community were already being sown. The shops themselves are already creating a community of business owners and shop workers. They said, 'We often have events or workshops or activities here in the evenings, but there is nowhere for us to go onto afterwards.'

There is some value in identifying the Kingland Crescent businesses as a community who attract people from outside. And these incomers typically have the capacity to fuel an evening and night time economy. They can also kick-start the kind of artistic regeneration witnessed in Hull, Margate and Folkstone, other coastal towns which have fostered and celebrated their own local version of culture.

The value of this creative community is the innovation, passion, values, authenticity, and integrity they can bring to the town. The key to attracting this community is by creating an urban area that supports their requirements. These include live/work spaces, exhibition spaces and clear lines of communication between the council and other agencies that can make it easy to set up a temporary cinema in the multi-storey car park or a town centre greening project or a carnival or open community shop.

What this creative community needs is access to funding (both public and private) and non-financial support, such as removing barriers to obtaining permits for events. They then need access to spaces in which to express this creativity. By creating opportunities for innovation and offering genuine support, this community can transform Poole town centre in a way that is innovative, imaginative and creates a vibrant and unique urban experience. Good things will happen in Poole if the right ground is created for a range of independent, ethical businesses and activities to grow and thrive.

Simultaneously Poole High Street needs to serve its local community, the people who live within a fifteen minute walk of the town centre. This community need access to community meeting space, everyday shops and a regular food market. This is a community that suffered due to the loss of children centres and children support services and which also has an older population who use this area of the High Street to socialise. The middle section of Poole High Street should support the day-to-day needs of this community and also provide spaces to support people's health and social prosperity.

## 2.6 Independent Bournemouth

This is the town centre of the three that must also be the cultural centre of the conurbation, something addressed in a later principle. Yet despite being the most well-known and the 'centre in the centre', Bournemouth has perhaps suffered the greatest decline in recent years.

Unlike Poole and Christchurch – which are perhaps better connected to their immediate residential areas and function as fifteen minute neighbourhoods – Bournemouth does not have that association as a local high street. Many local people have felt alienated from Bournemouth town centre, especially in the summer months when there are high levels of visitors from outside the area.

When this research project began in July 2021, it was difficult to encounter a local resident in the town centre. If Christchurch is the charming, historic, and lovely, local high street and Poole is the place to be for a young, creative, intellectual community then perhaps Bournemouth is the big sister – a more recognised place that attracts all generations and affords a 'sense of the established.'

Poole is the fringe event; Bournemouth is the main show. It must be seen as the jewel at the heart of the conurbation and ultimately be the centre of the urban area. Diluting the importance of Bournemouth town centre will diminish all of three town centres. Christchurch and Poole are unique places, but they are not the centre of the urban area. Policy or investment requirements that insist

that everything must be shared equally between the three towns, will negatively impact on Christchurch and Poole in that inappropriate activities or land uses could be directed to these towns.

Establishing Bournemouth as the main centre affords Poole the time and space to become authentic Poole – attracting that edgy creative community already described – and Christchurch the opportunity to become more like Christchurch – that charming, attractive coastal town. Both are valuable in their own right and also attractive to visitors because they are different.

On the basis that Bournemouth is centre of the BCP Council area, it becomes vital to invest in this town centre of the three as the place for an integrated mix of shopping, culture, leisure, and tourism. This is the town centre that is an attractor, a place for residents to go at the weekend, for people from across the conurbation to meet, for students to hang out and for outsiders to visit on holiday or day trips. For this to happen effectively, Bournemouth must expand what it offers and what people can do there. And if Bournemouth acts as the inward attractor, it will indirectly mean more visitors to Poole and Christchurch too.

While many people said that they want to see more independent shops in their town centre, paradoxically Bournemouth could be the centre to sustain more national and international brands. But these should focus on the shopping experience in the form of smaller concessions, with greater variety and choice linked to the option for online delivery for a wider choice of items. This reinvention of the shopping experience in Bournemouth will need to be property-led to an extent. Westover Road already has smaller empty units and could perhaps become Bournemouth's response to Poole's Kingland Crescent.

Bournemouth's history is relatively recent. It is a purpose built town founded in 1810 as a health resort. This span of history also witnessed the birth of the middle classes and consumer culture. This is reflected in its architecture and street plan, including three large department store buildings, a theatre, and cinemas, previously on Westover Road but now located on the edge of the Lower Gardens. Bournemouth is a town built around leisure and tourism as its primary industries alongside retail. It is also a town centre built for walking and promenading; the walk being a way to move between beach, shops, gardens, and amusements.

Understanding how online brands such as 'Not On The High Street' or 'Etsy' address a customer desire for variety, provenance and individuality can inform the mix of retail that might best work in Bournemouth. Critical to this is knowing the mechanisms that can successfully transfer those online transactions into the real world of Bournemouth town centre. Would a brand such as 'Not On The High Street' see the value in taking a store not necessarily to sell, but to offer workshops, talks and gain direct real life experience of customers?



## 2.7 The Application of Independent Thinking

Across the sweep of the conurbation, each of these town centres have their own unique character. It is the essence of this character that can be extracted, understood, and applied to create three highly-distinctive places which celebrate difference by drawing on history and contemporary iterations of that history. To distinguish themselves effectively, each town centre must be bold and innovative, creating new architectures and new community events that look to the future.

Local government – and its partners – must therefore consider each town centre as a unique entity, and this remains true whether Bournemouth achieves city status or not. What flows from this consideration is a response to the public request for more individual, independent shops. It makes sense to gently shape and influence each of the town centres towards a stronger expression of its inherent specific characteristics as this will better enable entrepreneurs and investors to select the best location for their business ideas.

In some senses, this process is a dialogue between the character of a place and a particular type of business. And in reverse, the clustering of particular types of business also shape the character of the town centres. To an extent, these things can happen organically but active intervention by local government and its partners in response to the defined characteristics of each town centre will allow them to signpost business to the right place, or indeed actively curate town centre land uses and experiences.

Regardless of the process that is adopted, the message here is that people wish to visit distinctive town centres that express their character by supporting a business, retail and food offer aligned with that character.

The people that engaged with this research wanted to see more independent shops and businesses and have greater access to creative activities in town centres. This has been interpreted as a refusal of the clone town creep that began to effect UK towns and cities between the late 1980s and early 2000s.

The New Economics Foundation produced a report in 2004 that revealed a growing unease with the increasing uniformity of the UK's high streets.

This research showed that people did not grow to love their local clone town, they simply put up with it until such a time that shopping online meant they no longer need to drag their hapless partner and children around acres and acres of a Marks & Spencer just to locate a new t-shirt and six pack of sports socks. They can simply get this stuff online.

It is unrealistic to imagine that time can be rewound to recover a high street of independent shops – the butcher, the baker and indeed even the sports sock maker. In part, this is due to property owners that are still of a mindset that retailers can afford the high rents of the 1990s and 2000s. The deadlock is evident and visible, particularly in Bournemouth town centre where empty shops are boarded up and papered, optimistically, with posters stating that Bournemouth is Open for Business.

## 2.8 What Does Independent Really Mean?

With this in mind, it is important to scratch beneath the superficial demand for independent business and deconstruct what people actually mean by this. At one end of the spectrum, there is a genuine desire for, and market for, the creative business – the haberdashery, the craft workshop, the ceramic studio, the independent bookshop, and café. These kinds of business give a town centre a flavour, a character, and a sense of the unique or the quirky. They also connect to values of authenticity and integrity which people have said they really value.

Even though such businesses can be economically viable, it would be unrealistic to imagine that these businesses alone could support an entire town centre. Which is why it is important to deconstruct what it is about the experience of an independent business people are attracted to. The question of values is important: what that business stands for, what it means, what it represents. And the experience of the independent is about scale and choice. But not too much choice, a sense that a person has sourced and stocked the shop and a feeling that this particular architecture, this space is offering a one-off experience.

This kind of experience personifies the independent shop, and chain brands that are perhaps struggling in the real world (if not online) could learn a lot from this is what people want.

The independent town centres of Poole, Christchurch or Bournemouth are places that can amplify the unique qualities and characteristics of each of those places. They are places that can attract a mix of independents and recognised brands but foreground experience over scale and create a more personal shopping experience that can connect to online stores.

This approach requires a rethink of rental expectations, the creation of smaller units through plot subdivision within urban design thinking and more flexible approaches to tenancy.

Alongside this is the opportunity to encourage online-only brands to open real-world shops in the town centre. These town centre operations may not turn a direct profit but can be a cost effective way to market the brand, create brand visibility, test new product ranges, and engage in the real-world material quality of interacting with customers. Known as the 'bricks n' clicks' approach, Bournemouth would be the place to attract such operations.

Many of these initiatives around independence can happen without intervention, with the everyday interaction between capital, property and investment in urban areas delivering the changes described. However, in more challenging circumstances, an infrastructure of support and mentoring will also likely be needed. Gap funding for local business may be necessary and the rental relief at Kingland Crescent is a good example of how financial instruments can affect real and genuine change.

## 2.9 People, Places & Ideas

This research suggests that there is greater benefit to be had by investing in people and their ideas than in capital works, such as new building or infrastructure projects in the town centres. Providing loans and gap funding to entrepreneurs and start-ups will provide cash investments, but advice and support is also required on how to navigate systems to put ideas more easily into action. In short, investing in people and their ideas will allow for the organic growth of independent business across all three town centres.

## 2.10 Independent Events

The BCP area is fortunate to not have events that are dominated by a few providers, such as the music festival sector. It does, however, depend upon the BCP Council in many instances to give permissions and lease public space for events. Outdoor events rely upon council services such as waste and public amenities, as well as the events team.

By supporting the local event ecosystem, the people and businesses involved in organising and supplying events will inherently produce events that are unique to Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. A form of independence from outside control encourages creativity and innovation. Many of those within the local ecosystem also work outside of BCP e.g., RNLI, Seventa, freelancers. They gain experience and insights of events being organised elsewhere. This does not mean that all content is from within the local area. Bringing in national and international content (e.g., artists, speakers, athletes), encourages and inspires local people to aspire to better levels and quality. For example, the artists working with local groups in preparation for the Arts by the Sea Festival.

The increased managerial approach to events, especially with expert knowledge of health, safety, and security, has resulted in some events being replaced by event companies outside of the local area (e.g., Christchurch Food Festival). As community and voluntarily run events become too big or have lost their voluntary commitment, private and commercial operators may well take over. What needs to be done, is to create an ecosystem where different people and parts learn from each other. Knowledge exchange is not a natural process of a fragmented industry. The pandemic has encouraged organisations who may have seen themselves as competitors to work more closely together (e.g. South Coast Events Forum, Wonky Table).

This principle also infers that events (as with other activities and businesses) should be given as much freedom to explore their potential without interference. With a set of principles and agreed

practices through something like the licensing process, events can create their own ecosystem and portfolio. This would then encourage autonomy, creativity, and innovation. Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole all have a history of enabling new business to thrive. The events would also then have a sense of authenticity, without being artificially created or imposed from outside.

This does not mean that outside events, such as the major event of the UK City of Culture, should not be bid for. What it does require is the cultural community of the three towns to decide that this would be an ideal showcase for local talent and progress their development. It should not be bid for as a vanity project nor just to imitate others. The desire and commitment need to be genuine and are part of the bidding process anyway.

One advantage of events is that they are flexible and adaptive. They make the most of the resources available to them and do not rely on fixed facilities. They are however more efficient if there are fixed services but this is not necessary if mobile energy, marquees, toilets etc are locally available at reasonable prices.

The temporary and mobile characteristics of events, especially outdoor events, results in higher costs. This could be reduced if event spaces were identified and services provided, such as power, toilets, and Wi-Fi.

Events could be more clearly linked to the town within which they are organised and hosted. By having a programme of events, these connections can be further amplified, just as the events amplify the distinctiveness of the location. Poole Seafood festival is ideal on the Quay, for example. More could be made of the fishing community and local restaurants and suppliers. Encouraging more local businesses to be involved should be a priority.

Events should not be seen just as creating footfall. Additional activities are needed to encourage people to have further behaviours e.g. going into and spending money in local businesses. The Christmas celebrations in Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole, for example, bring people into town. Town centre businesses then need to get them into their premises or go out and meet them there.

## 2.11 Twelve Ways to Express the Principle of the Independent Town Centre

1. Create footfall in town through anchor experiences, rather than anchor stores.
2. Anchor experiences are activities that will bring people into town who will then shop and use cafés and restaurants.
3. Amplify original architectural features and profile or showcase the unique design elements of each town.
4. Create a high quality, open and shared public realm.
5. Celebrate unique features such as alleyways and arcades to create visual interest and curiosity.
6. Highlight the public realm and the experience of the public realm. This includes maintaining seating and landscape planting.
7. Always foreground the pedestrian experience of the town centres.
8. Create well-connected green walking routes that make accessing the town centres pleasant and enjoyable.
9. Support local creative communities and innovation by providing access to mentoring, financial support and funding.
10. Create a supportive environment so that community groups find it easy to put on public events, whether through advice, equipment or licensing and insurance.
11. Provide support for small independent businesses and fledgling independent businesses.
12. Invest in people and support them to put their ideas into action.

## CASE STUDY

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole are undoubtedly distinct towns in their identities: their landscapes, demographics, and arts and culture scenes. Can the behaviour and initiative of self employed creatives in these areas change arts and culture in BCP for the better? Local visual artist, arts facilitator and coordinator for TOSH (The Old School House, non-profit creative space in Boscombe), Corrianna Clarke spoke to creatives in her network about their perceptions of, and aspirations for, the arts in their towns.

In Bournemouth, artists and makers Bridie Cheeseman, Gem Mordle and Lauren Marina are forming a collective and adopting a physical space together. The group will soon be based within the Bad Hand Studio, a converted warehouse in the centre of Bournemouth, owned by independent coffee roasters, Bad Hand Coffee.

become a centre of everything she feels strongly about - 'sustainability, grassroots projects' - and that co-founder Joel Lovett has 'really worked hard in bringing in local young enterprise, and independent businesses'. Previously a resident of the Factory Shop in Boscombe, Gem knew that she would thrive among other creatives, and recognises that Bad Hand has established a vibrant



Left to right: Lauren Marina, Gem Mordle, Bridie Cheeseman

*'We all are quite multidisciplinary, and we all have a skill that we bring to the table. We're all willing to share our wisdom, that's a wonderful thing about our coming together. I'm really excited about the opportunity to have those creative conversations, to share learnings and elevate each other as we are moving into this new space and new era for our creativity.'* Lauren Marina

Illustrator and designer Lauren Marina sells her own printed products (an ever-growing, eco-conscious collection including greeting cards, prints, tote bags and more), and also produces commissioned designs for brands. Bridie Cheeseman primarily developed her illustration career through pattern design and is keenly pursuing more editorial work and the potential of more public art projects. Gem Mordle is a self-trained potter, running her ceramic homeware business under the title 'Homethrown Studio'.

With Lauren having ambitions to expand into more surface design, Lauren and Bridie both hoping to work more with ceramics, and Gem wanting to push the meeting of illustration and clay, their collaboration is more than fortuitous and will surely lead to growth for each of them.

With regard to Bournemouth town centre as the location for their studio, Gem feels that the environment established by Bad Hand has been integral in the decision making process. She feels that the space has

space to be. Lauren similarly praised Jo Brierley as a 'trailblazer' for having brought independently run, contemporary, curated arts fair 'South Coast Makers Market' to Bournemouth in 2018. For Lauren, the market offered a 'platform and boost in self-confidence at a really integral point' where she feels that she was not taking herself seriously for being a self-employed artist, but was 'astounded' by the amount of people that wanted to buy her work.



Lauren Marina

*'Everybody's contributing something that helps to lift someone else: it's the same with Bad Hand, they've contributed a space that is going to lift us, Jo creates a space with the market which has lifted hundreds of different makers and creatives now.'*

Lauren Marina



While all three artists agreed that their decision to live in Bournemouth was more circumstantial than a conscious choice, all agreed that it feels that it is increasingly becoming the right place for them to be as more hubs emerge, and creatives find and connect with each other. As well as via Bad Hand and South Coast Makers Market, they mentioned the addition of social events by Pen Gallery (community arts exhibitions and shop) in Poole, and TOSH in Boscombe for contributing toward an inclusive and supportive arts scene.

Despite the optimism of the collective, Lauren, Bridie and Gem do feel that Bournemouth as a town centre has a great deal of untapped potential as an arts and culture space. Bridie and Gem would like to see Bournemouth take note from a more European approach to town centre spaces, perhaps with more effort put into a 'cultural square', with more outdoor dining and a pop up stage or a live events space.

'We're becoming a culture that is almost anti-crowd, it's not about togetherness and sharing food, or music, or art. There should be more visible art around the town - because there's so much art behind walls and there's so much art in galleries - but if children and young people and artists are seeing art on the streets, a bit like Bristol and Brighton and London, it would bring that through I think.'

Gem Mordle

Lauren would like to see more investment in an arts centre that could be a 'contemporary, elevated, modern, clean space' for events and markets.

Bridie would love to see Westover Road and subsequently the Art & Makers Market in the Lower Gardens given a new lease of life, feeling that 'the gardens are the best thing about Bournemouth' but that presently 'everything is so separate', where it could be stronger for being better integrated. A visiting tutor for the Arts University Bournemouth's illustration course, Bridie senses that there is a 'wealth of unused creative minds', and as a visitor you wouldn't even know about the existence of this internationally renowned university. She shared concerns that much of the public art in Bournemouth 'seems to be by the same handful of (male) artists' and that she would like to see more diversity in those commissioned. All felt that lower rents, more accessible funding and more trust in creatives - particularly local students and graduates - could transform the town and seafront areas into more inspiring spaces.

Operating as 'DawsonWard Creative Entertainment', with a wealth of experience in the entertainment industry, director and creative consultant Jason Ward is also based in Bournemouth, and echoes similar feelings to Lauren, Bridie and Gem.

*'Bournemouth has some dedicated and hard working creative people who are doing great work to build a*

*community but there does not appear to be a critical mass or momentum just yet. Bournemouth is a real dichotomy because demographically it has all the markers of a town that should have a strong cultural identity - average age 44, median salary £35k (higher than Dorset), and large higher education presence - but it is still essentially a seaside town.'* Jason Ward

Jason feels that in recent years he too has felt more aware of a creative scene in Bournemouth, encouraging, but still largely disconnected, with 'no core to orbit around'. He wishes to see the local authority become more serious about arts and culture in Bournemouth, bringing 'a clear commitment to a cultural development strategy that is currently lacking' and giving priority - and aforementioned trust - to creative thinkers to drive this development. In light of the decline of high street retail, accelerated by the pandemic, Jason believes that the need to give attention to Bournemouth is imminent, lest it become regeneration focused.

*'It is not about huge international projects or statements but about the unfashionable work of strategically developing the ecosystem that will encourage existing arts and culture to flourish and attract members of the creative community to choose Bournemouth as their base.'*

Jason Ward

With his specialism in live performance, Jason feels that our main venue, Bournemouth Pavilion Theatre, could also be doing more to build a relationship with the town, cultivating a loyal and committed audience through more considered, original and high quality programming selections. He does feel that there is potential for an engaged audience to be built in Bournemouth, and that further improvements could also come from a better connection between the Arts University and the town.

The smallest town within the conurbation, **Christchurch** might be said to have the most distinctive identity of the three, but is also often perceived as the quietest.



Jake Williams

Illustrator and graphic designer Jake Williams grew up in Christchurch, and has recently returned to the area after studying in Plymouth, and living in Poole. Jake celebrated his first 3D illustration exhibition, 'Our World: Travel Without Travel', at Pen Gallery in 2021, and launched his latest book, 'Leonardo Da Vinci's Life of Invention', back at the gallery in February 2022.

Jake is also a part time resident coworker at TOSH. When asked whether he would have considered positioning his studio in Christchurch, he explained that he hadn't found a comparable creative community, and specifically sought this as opposed to more corporate or commercial coworking environments. Not dissimilar to Jason, Jake feels that across the last year in particular he's felt 'a massive difference' to the creative scene across BCP, but that initially he wasn't sure whether it was just a matter of being unaware of what was happening because he was further removed from it, and is conscious that it could be missed by others.

*'Where do you go to know about TOSH or things like BEAF, or even Pen, how do you find out about that? I really miss that studio environment from uni, so I think coming back into TOSH and working there really, really helped. Just chatting to people about different industries has been really, really good for my job. The biggest thing that I didn't enjoy about my job is now not an issue anymore for me.'*

Jake Williams

Jake admitted that although he lives within walking distance of Christchurch town centre, he doesn't visit, feeling that 'there's not really anything there', and that for him it can't compete with Boscombe, Southbourne or Poole - 'what would be the reason to go to Christchurch over any of those other places?'. He explained that prior to the Kingland Crescent development in Poole, (invested in by Legal & General, supporting multiple entrepreneurs to create a curated retail environment), he wouldn't have travelled to Poole town centre either, but that this has now created an area that he will not only go to with his partner, but also share with visiting friends. Jake feels that the Regent Centre cinema stands alone in Christchurch, and that a similar format of investment in independents could expand upon the visitor experience.



Lorna Rees

He also acknowledges that Christchurch centre is scenically beautiful, and if more did start 'popping up there, it would be amazing'.

Artists Lorna Rees, director of production company 'Gobbledegook Theatre', and Heidi Steller, whose practice is heavily influenced by her role as an arts educator, also grew up in Christchurch, and chose to raise their families in the town. Each admit that they probably more often refer to themselves as 'Dorset based' rather than Christchurch based artists, feeling that many people are not aware of where Christchurch is, but that they do still feel 'quite strongly' that they want Christchurch's identity, as they don't want it to be 'erased' and it is often 'overlooked'.

*'I think Christchurch self-organises, it has the Stompin' on the Quomps events, it has jazz events and different Christchurch music festival things. The Priory drives a lot of cultural activity, but none of it is publicly funded, it's all just people self-organising and that's actually really bad. There's a whole group of people that are not being served by arts and culture in this region.'*

Lorna Rees

Heidi and Lorna both believe that there is huge potential in Christchurch, not just for visual arts, but for arts activity and events and that people really engage with what does happen. Despite the largely older population, many are 'still quite young and active - they might have retired, but they're in their 60s, early 70s, they want to go to stuff. They're real cultural vultures!'

Heidi added that she thinks it would be very valuable to have more of the locality involved in the arts and culture scene of Christchurch, and has previously approached this herself, connecting the central schools with those in Mudeford and Somerford. Like Jake, she would like to see what the Christchurch equivalent of the Kingland



Lorna Rees



Heidi Steller

development could offer, particularly in adding appeal for the younger demographic, particularly teenagers, in the area, bringing 'somewhere you can go and get good things made by good makers from Dorset.

At present there's nothing in terms of retail that either she or her children would buy from - largely due to inaccessible, 'totally unaffordable' rent costs.

Heidi and Lorna feel that a large part of the arts and culture that takes place in Christchurch is self-led, through experienced, artistic people in the town 'who are completely capable of running quite large scale events, single handedly' and although a connected and responsive smaller community is conducive to this too, it is 'frustrating' feeling predominantly unsupported, and occasionally challenging feeling 'undervalued' in Christchurch compared to other towns.

In order to add to and extend beyond the success of events such as Christchurch Food Festival (which is increasingly 'overcrowded'), Stompin' on the Quomps, creative programming at the Regent Centre, and the live music offering, Lorna would like to see a centralised, coordinated approach that nurtured community arts and events led by local artists. Perhaps a cultural development strategy, as Jason hopes for Bournemouth.

*'We need a few more people that can just make some stuff happen. Facilitate stuff to happen, I feel like that could be a really good way of going forward with Christchurch. It's a producer role really. I'm very fortunate I'm very well connected, but I would love that for other people too.'*

Lorna Rees

In Poole, many conversations refer to Pen Gallery as having been seminal in the recent evolution of arts and culture for the area. However, working solo as the gallery director, Emma Rowland attributes the changes brought about to Kingland Crescent as a holistic development, rather than through her unit alone.

*'It's really hard because obviously I'm in there every day, so I didn't see it like a drastic difference, but people have said to me that they feel like there's something to go and do now in Poole. And I think it compares to Bournemouth in the sense that you've got Giant now but before it never had that.'*

Emma Rowland

Whilst she feels that Kingland has provided Poole with a contemporary creative scene, Emma senses that Poole could still be more appealing beyond Dorset, and that its arts and culture is still not yet comparable nationally - with people whose travel choices are influenced by this still likely to opt for 'Bristol or Brighton or Margate, where it's a known hotspot for things to do'. Mirroring comments made regarding Bournemouth and Christchurch, Emma would like to not only see lowered rents for commercial units, but a change in how these spaces are offered, in order to foster more independents - rather than giving the same treatment to individuals as 'massive high street chains'.

*'Commercial leases are off-putting, it's so expensive and the way people shop has changed so it's just not viable. If they want full shops, they need to make it easier and then all of the open units might tempt people out more.'*  
Emma Rowland

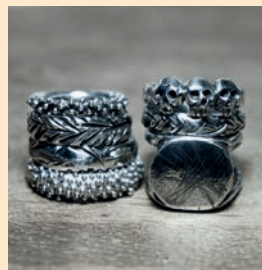
Emma would also like to see an increase in collaboration between locations, bringing the conurbation together more and looks forward to hosting her first collaborative exhibition with the Arts University Bournemouth in February 2022.

Multidisciplinary artist Jane Cooper is proud to declare that she is Poole based, and is resistant to leave the community that she has found, having only left Dorset to study Textiles Design in Falmouth. Jane runs her jewellery brand, 'Hex Cavelli' from home, and engages in printmaking with the local co-operative Poole Printmakers, whose studio is based near Poole Quay.

Reflecting Emma's opinion that the art scene in Poole is behind, Jane would also like to see the creative scene become more competitive with that of other towns, and more up to date. Considering Dorset Art Weeks, Jane commented that 'you don't expect a contemporary aesthetic from Dorset Art Weeks, but I think you should', mentioning that from her experience of the event, many attendees and buyers were of an older generation, and emerging artists were not recognised where they could have been in an attempt to diversify and broaden this audience.

*'The South Coast Makers Market, everyone there should be feeling like Dorset Art Weeks is the opportunity for them to open their studios. They could do things as groups. Dorset Art Weeks should be the way to bring everyone, and make everyone visible. Hopefully it will change.'*  
Jane Cooper

Jane drew a comparison with London Craft Week, which she stated 'highlights new makers' as well as having activities for visitors to engage with, trying different crafts. Describing her own approach as 'creative layering', Jane thinks that more people in the area should be supported with opportunities to try various disciplines, not feeling pressured to define



Jane Cooper

themselves or feeling intimidated that they should know what their work should look like. She thinks that an increase in accessible artist-led workshops and short format courses could really help others to experience creativity and making, improving artist development in Poole. She is keen to see 'more people who are inspiring other people to have a go - and then to make something of it.'

Across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, similar feedback has arisen across this limited study, from self employed creatives working in very different ways and disciplines. Consistently there is a theme of a desire for a collaborative approach to revitalisation or rejuvenation of the town centre spaces - not through large scale commercial developments and complexes - but led by the creatives that reside in these areas, with support in coordination, funding and faith in the artists. The Kingland Crescent development in Poole has been an example of the potential of this kind of partnership, making it possible for independent creatives to enter and add colour and character to the high street. Creatives would like to see more accessible funding generally, and a greater number of local artists benefitting from this. Compounding this, many are keen to see dedicated roles, such as the return of the arts development officer. They can drive projects forwards and provide consistency, whilst ensuring that the arts and culture scene of these locations is having its standard and status continually raised for the benefit of all.

More often than not, the creatives interviewed attributed recent developments in the arts and culture scene to independently led or group led hubs, or complimented the area for the community spirit between its creatives, with a focus on knowledge sharing and support between each other, rather than competition. Once discovered, this ethos seemed to be the key reason that these creatives choose to stay in the area and devote themselves to proliferating this ecosystem, working on self-directed activity, or forming collectives to handle this together. Many would like to see larger organisations, creative or otherwise, recognising this atmosphere and behaving with similar initiative.



Informal hubs that join creative professionals, while effective, are surely still so few for the number that reside here. With no groups yet mentioned in Christchurch, and space for these to certainly spread, connect and collaborate across the entirety of Dorset, positive steps in the direction of linking the dots of our creative network can be seen, almost entirely led by self employed, entrepreneurial individuals. Small steps from many creatives in the area can only be the beginnings of a big leap for BCP - and it can be seen that they will take these steps regardless - but it could be a much bigger leap if these creatives are offered support in moving forward.

-

Visual artist and arts facilitator Corrianna Clarke attended the Arts University Bournemouth from 2014 -2017, graduating with a BA (Hons) in Illustration and Animation. It was during these years that Corrianna first developed an affinity for Bournemouth, connecting with the arts and culture scene, unexpectedly discovering what she believed to be a particularly exciting and rapidly growing network of creativity. Corrianna feels that she became a true Bournemouth resident in 2020, returning to pursue a Master's degree at Arts University Bournemouth, and to take up the role of Marketing and Development Coordinator at non-profit creative space, TOSH (The Old School House) in Boscombe. As a practitioner based in the area and working in a community space, Corrianna is invested in the development of local arts, and especially in supporting and connecting the emerging and more established creatives that contribute toward this.



## Frome, Somerset & Lymington, Hampshire

Two examples of existing quaint town centre streets which have an independent feel are Catherine Street in Frome, Somerset, and the High Street of Lymington, Hampshire. They each demonstrate how use of colour can create variety and interest, with shop windows being well-maintained and period features giving them an individual style. The shops are primarily independent which has helped to maintain the sense of a historic market town in both locations.

Frome saw decline in the 1990s with high vacancy rates making it an unpopular place to shop. However, creation of a Task Force sparked a revolution in the Catherine Hill area, with major reductions in vacancies which helped to reinvigorate this part of the town centre. The centre has shifted towards a place for retro goods, cafes, gifts and crafts.



Photos by Jennie Savage  
Top: Catherine Street, Frome. Bottom: High Street Lymington



Top: Photo of Stoke Croft Murals by Sam Saunders via Flickr  
Bottom: Photo of Banksy mural by KylaBorg via Flickr

## Stokes Croft, Bristol

Stokes Croft is a neighbourhood in Bristol; not an official area but a nickname given by locals. Ten years ago, it was a run down area with shuttered businesses, an overlooked and run down part of town which was heavily vandalised. However, the neighbourhood has undergone a massive transformation and is now well known as a creative centre filled with street art, with music venues, bars and independent shops. It is now a popular place for a night out and is a tourist area. It is well-known for its street art including early examples from street artist Banksy.

The area's distinct character has given rise to a group of activists and artists who are seeking to revitalise the area through community action and public art.

**03**

# **ECOLOGY**





Photo by Richard Page



Photo by Ashley Woodfall





Photo by Richard Page



Photo by Richard Page





Photos by Zeynep Aktuna



Photos by Richard Page

## 03 Ecology



### 3.1 Nature & The Town

The term nature is a word typically used to describe the green, feathery and furry stuff not covered by the word human. It sets humans apart from all that is 'other' and put us in a separate realm where we can govern all of the messy chaotic stuff.

Unfortunately, this process of othering creates a chasm between that which is human and that which is not. It establishes an order in which we are separate. It is timely to reconsider this language and establish terms that more accurately describe the network of connections between all things.

### 3.2 Ecology & The City

The term ecology is better at expressing this network of connections between plants and animals (what might be called nature) and the environments in which these things reside, whether that be a craggy rock face or the corner of Asda car park. These environments are often wrapped in complex histories and stories. Thinking about 'ecology' rather than 'nature' acknowledges the interleaving of physical elements with social and cultural histories and a more nebulous connection to time and process.

This book is published within the context of the climate crisis and the political ambition to rapidly achieve global net zero carbon emissions. At a local level, ecology has an immediate relevance directly linked to social and economic prosperity in the town centres of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole.

This section defines the broad concepts around the ecology principle and Part B contains projects that show how this principle can work across the BCP area.

### 3.3 Three Town Centres by The Sea

The first and most obvious point to make about the local ecology is that each of the town centres are shaped by proximity to the sea. This being the quayside in Poole, the beach in Bournemouth and the river estuary in Christchurch.

The urban area is shaped by its watery neighbour and it is this proximity to the sea and the local rivers that attracts many people to live in the area and to visit.

This ecology has shaped and defined these places over time and also plays a big part in local culture. Bournemouth's culture happens at the beach – it is a place to meet, to surf, to swim. People like walking, cycling, and running along the generous promenades which connect the length of the conurbation. People also enjoy access to parks and wilder areas flanked by the characteristic pine trees that define much of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole.

### 3.4 Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

Thinking globally and acting locally has become an over-used term however for the purposes of this book, let's focus on the local. Acting against climate change requires resilient communities. People who can work together, collaborate, and make a change within their local community. In this context, it is helpful to consider social prosperity as a priority for urban renewal and mitigation of climate change.

Resilient communities are the first step in this process and people have told this project they value, more than anything else, town centres that are thriving centres of community. The town centres need to be places where communities from across the BCP area connect. They must also be places that reflect our collective culture and values in terms of our commitments to local ecology.

### 3.5 Ecology as an Urban Design Principle

People wish to connect with current ideas and contemporary trends. The ecology principle aligns with this both visually, in terms of contemporary design and style but also, and more crucially, by introducing new ecosystems to town centres.

The greening of a town centre is functional in that it can enhance biodiversity, create green corridors for wildlife, and help to sink CO<sub>2</sub> whilst also creating better conditions for humans.

The greening of a town centre is a visual manifestation of our current culture. There is now a widespread expectation that a contemporary urban area should be verdant, green, and lush. This is the dominant visual image of the city of tomorrow.

Equally a town centre that relies more on social prosperity and places greater reliance on human connectivity, is also a town centre that refocuses emphasis away from rampant consumerism and throw away culture and more on quality of experience.

### 3.6 Town Centres that Inspire & Give Hope

As urban populations re-engage with town centres and public life as the Covid-19 pandemic fades, there appears to be a shift in cultures around how we live and what we wish for in the future.



Town centres are in a sense the best representation of public life and attitudes towards the future. This book therefore contends that it is the role of town centres to lead the way, to inspire and to give people hope.

Life during the Covid-19 pandemic has been a struggle for many, but it has perhaps been masking the more critical underlying changes needed to our way of life if society is to transition to the conditions needed to meet the challenges of the climate crisis.

Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has shone a light on the weaknesses of our current society – loneliness and isolation, a growing disparity in wealth and unequal life chances for children.

Urban centres and civic life are the spaces that consciously frame society. What people are currently saying is that they want town centres to lead with a sense of optimism and responsibility and for the town centre to embody that change both visually and actually.

If town centres can become beacons of hope that guide communities through the next decades, they can inspire individuals. They can also generate wealth and prosperity because they will be places where people feel they can connect to ideas and culture as well as to business and commerce.

### 3.7 Creating New Urban Ecosystems

Developing a new aesthetic that moves away from glass and steel and towards city greening projects will create wildlife corridors across town. Pleasant walking routes and pathways will transform urban streets into softer, more organic environments, more textured places.

Ecology and town centre greening are as much design choices as they are about the functional aspects of greening.

Thinking of this green urban environment in playful ways allows for the possibility of the green spectacle – architectural interventions that are monumental and of our time, expressing cultural aspiration and signifying a shift in our relationship to the world around us.

Thinking in this way is expansive and establishes new systems from green urban play, spaces for urban agriculture that limits food miles and can provide produce for a town centre market; through to beautiful places to meet friends.

Considering ecology in town centres is therefore both about creating new systems as well as new ways of inhabiting space. It is also about creative design choices that afford new relational experiences in new contexts.

### 3.8 Walking As Transport

Many research participants explained how they enjoy walking into town from their home and that they value the trip into town because of the walk, as well as being able to pick up a few things at the shops, meet a friend for coffee or to see a film.

This sense of town as an extension of their own local area is positive in terms of developing active travel, reducing car use, and the connecting of walking routes between town and the nearby residential areas. This book recommends that each of the town centres is to create green walking routes that ‘frame the journey’ into and out of the town centre. Placing the town centre as a way point on a wider green network.

Thinking about ecology is acknowledging the bigger picture but also the local urban grain, within the context of an already rich and diverse environment. Local residents value and love the location and it is the surrounding landscape that makes the area one of the best places to live in the UK.

Therefore, this ecology principle responds to the desire for town centres to become an extension of this surrounding Dorset landscape experience. This was a suggestion made by many respondents. The first way this can happen is through green walking connections between the town centres and the adjacent landscapes.

The second way is for people to feel that their town centre comprises softer, more organic forms, uses sustainable construction techniques and applies ecological principles to the town’s urban design. The blending of the more conventional harder forms found in the urban environment with these softer, greener conditions best represents contemporary (and futuristic) city life.

The seafront promenade that runs between Hengistbury Head and Sandbanks is an amazing local resource. It is a route that combines a sense of the urban, of participating in culture, with the freedom to walk or cycle by the sea and experience a connection to the horizon. It should become a core aim of the strategies and plans that guide the urban development of the three towns to follow on this configuration of elements within the walking and cycling experience in the urban areas. For example, a walk along the river, through the park, past historic monuments and through the trees creates a possibility for the feelings associated with the promenade to be recreated.

### 3.9 Event Ecosystems

Ecology is the connection between things and not just about greening. Concerns of the natural environment should also be part of why, where, and how events are organised. The principles of the circular economy and practices of, for example, greening events, should be integral to all event design and production.

Events, by their nature bringing people and content together, whether in-person or online, have an environmental impact. These are often negative impacts, but they can be eradicated or reduced through clever design and planning, and by having systems for reducing, reusing, and recycling.

Agreeing on adopting the UN Sustainable Development Goals, having strategies such as Vision 2025, working with organisations such as Julie's Bicycle and Event Cycle, would help the events across the BCP area to become more ecologically aware and adopt best practices. Collectively events could aim to work to ISO20121 (and its successors) recognition and award. In doing so, people involved with events will be more aware of responsible actions and may change their own lifestyle behaviours.

Events by their nature also have a social impact and create their own social ecosystems. Events are about people, with space and equipment to aid their creations and engagements. Social networks are created by those who work on events and those who participate and attend the events.

These connections can be temporary in nature but have the potential to be longer-term and more meaningful. Social media has provided a platform where people with common interests can meet and share content. Some events have used this, but more could be done and across a wider portfolio of events.

A potential criticism of event organisers is that they use the same suppliers and are not diversifying their ecosystem enough. Creating organisations such as the South Coast Events Forum could work to alleviate this problem.

Local events happen for their own for distinct reasons, but they all require a healthy supply chain (ecosystem) of support, and this supply chain will include local businesses. Some of these events are linked to institutions that are regional, national, and international. These are often part of a network that work beyond the confines of the BCP Council boundary. Some of these work within the BCP area and reach out, whilst the others reach in. Those that are unique to the BCP area include both universities (AUB and BU), the hospitals, RNLI, BH Live, Lighthouse, Sunseeker, Merlin Entertainment, Lush and AFC Bournemouth.

Like the strength of having a biodiverse natural environment, to be an eventful BCP, there needs to be an event diverse environment

that permits and encourages events to emerge and flourish. The seeds of ideas and the nurturing of their growth are an important part of the ecosystem.

The result could be a portfolio of events, places and people that are on offer throughout the year. Too often events have mirrored the tourism seasons and been programmed during school holidays. People live, work and study in Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole throughout the year and so a programme of events is possible. Outdoor events also should not be dependent on summer months. The Christmas markets and light events demonstrate this.

As with the need for a multi-agency organisation to deal with the influx of visitors in the summer of 2021, an event programme is needed to co-ordinate the timings, and density of events. As there is concern of over tourism, the same is true of over events. The three town centres want to be eventful rather than event full.

The conurbation has always been successful in winning awards and recognition for their offer, with blue, green, and purple flags. There is no coloured flag for a well-run event programme. Perhaps BCP could start one for its own hosted events?

### 3.10 Thirteen Ways to Express the Principle of Ecology in Town Centres

1. Create views into courtyards and gardens with natural features so greenery is visible.
2. Ensure there are views of green space from all town centre offices and workspaces.
3. Establish green roofs and green walls in as many places as possible and ensure effective and ongoing maintenance.
4. Invest in widespread street tree planting.
5. *En plein air* – Create fresh air areas, places that people can reach within the town centres that offer fresh air and green surroundings.
6. Stop the practice of thoughtlessly pulling down and rebuilding, and instead require developers and architects to first consider how outdated structures can be adapted and reappropriated as part of a wider greening strategy.
7. Create connected green walking and cycling corridors between the town centres and the surrounding residential areas.
8. Though a combination of punitive and rewarding measures, including through de incentivising car use and making walking and cycling the default choices for daily journeys, critical to this is reallocation of road space away from cars to create segregated cycling and walking networks.
9. Celebrate walking as a leisure activity, the casual drift into town along pleasant green corridors.
10. Connect existing and new pocket green spaces with green streets and pathways so they are integrated into a wider network.
11. Provide ample outside seating for rest and sociability as well as excellent quality, accessible public toilets.
12. Ecology to become an urban design principle in and of itself – a way to signal connection with contemporary culture and present trends.
13. Ecology as spectacle – architecture and urban design that creates green spectacle in town centres are today's equivalent of the grand exhibition and mark the paradigm shift in thinking about the relationship between the urban and the natural.

## CASE STUDY

### Urban Biodiversity and Ecology

Many of our urban areas have become reduced in biodiversity due to the erosion of suitable habitats for native flora and fauna. While greenspace is available in most of our towns and cities, these spaces are often isolated from each other, and thus become fragmented pockets of nature.

Our towns and cities are densely populated places, where often retrofitting of green elements bring challenges to create more resilient places. Allowing space above ground, requires room below ground to let the green elements establish will always involve compromises, but agreement can be reached to the benefit of all stakeholders.

GreenBlue Urban are global leaders in harnessing nature to protect communities from extreme climatic challenges and to improve quality of life in the most complex urban areas.

Combining Green and Blue elements together is an effective way of providing a sustainable natural solution. Vegetation assists with air pollution removal, stormwater management and heat island effects as well as creating places which are more pleasant and less stressful to live in.

#### Re-creating the Forest Floor

There are many aspects that need to be considered when planting trees in urban areas, one essential factor being soil compaction. It is important to determine site environment and soil conditions to mitigate the constraints of compacted soil and create healthy tree planting conditions.

Soil compaction is the most prevalent of all soil constraints on urban tree growth. Every place where humans and machines exist, and the infrastructures that support them are built, soil compaction will be present. Compacted soil has become a fact of life for urban trees.

Soil cells are modular units that are assembled to support the pavement load while providing large volumes of uncompacted soil for root growth within the matrix structure.

GreenBlue soil cells safeguard the all-important root zone, keeping the load off the soil, allowing aeration and water drainage – giving trees a real long-term future – for the benefit of generations to come.

#### BENEFITS OF BIO-DIVERSE GREEN-BLUE URBAN SPACES

1. Directly assists with climate change mitigation.
2. Improves health and well-being
3. Improves both air and water quality
4. Adds value to a property
5. Drives increased retail sales

#### SPECIFIC BENEFITS

##### GREEN

- A single mature tree can absorb carbon at a rate of 21.6kg per year.
- For every 10% increase in urban tree canopy, carbon is reduced by 3-7%.

##### BLUE

- Evapotranspiration – trees 'breathe' water – a mature tree can use up to 200 litres per day, cleaning and cooling the air.
- Potential attenuation space within specialist soil can store 22%-35% water by soil volume without effecting tree health.



## Urban Tree Planting Constraints

There is an incorrect assumption that utilities and tree roots cannot mix, and this has often meant that planned planting has been cancelled – we believe – unnecessarily.

## Roots Do Not Pose a Threat to Cables

Because tree roots are opportunistic, the provision of good quality uncompacted soil is critical to the baiting of tree roots into the zone that has been designated for their establishment. It is often the lack of accessible soil volume that forces the tree to seek out nutrients, water, and air from other areas. When installing utility ducts and pipes, the excavated sub-soil is backfilled,



Installation on Richmond Hill, Bournemouth

usually with sand or gravel surrounding the service run, and this tends to aerate the soil, creating a more root-friendly medium.

The use of GreenBlue Urban's root management systems greatly eases the challenges of protection of below-ground infrastructure; when installed in accordance with the instructions, they are root proof for the life of the tree.

## The Only Fully Integrated Tree Pit System

ArborSystem is the world's leading complete urban tree planting package, providing an easy solution for specifiers and installers. It covers everything a tree needs to mature in an urban environment. It incorporates RootSpace soil cells which provide uncompacted soil volume, RootRain irrigation and aeration systems, ReRoot root management, ArborGuy rootball guying, and tree grilles and guards.

## Creating Linear Corridors

One important area of research has shown that the creation of habitat highways or corridors is an effective way to enhance biodiversity. These linear features



ArborSystem

enable fauna movement along them, and access to further areas of green space. It is important to consider the different areas of movement, as mixed planting widens the use of these zones. For example, tree planting with hedges and underplanting can support more animal movement than just tree planting alone.

## Right Tree, Right Place

Another consideration is the aspect of maintenance. Many local authorities are forced to reduce maintenance costs, and this can have a serious impact



Northwood Hills, London

on the quality of the green infrastructure. When choosing plant species for urban planting, it is often worth thinking of how fast this plant or tree grows, how much leaf litter it produces, whether it is hardy in a street environment, whether it has fruits or seeds that could cause problems and then whether its long term will help with climate change mitigation.



Canary Wharf, London

When tree planting is under consideration, there are some critical considerations that must be considered. Firstly, what tree species is suitable, secondly, can we achieve a suitable uncompacted soil volume for the tree, and thirdly, can we adequately secure the tree, keeping it upright until the rooting system establishes itself. GreenBlue Urban operates as the interface between nature and the built environment – creating healthier urban spaces for all.

## Case Study: Commercial/Retail – Richmond Hill, Bournemouth

Richmond Hill leads to the heart of Bournemouth, Bournemouth Square. Now predominately commercial and retail, it was originally residential with large hotels being built on the street. Bournemouth Square was the junction of the first roads in the town, where a rudimentary bridge crossed the river Bourne, and Richmond Hill gave access to the north of the town. In 2014, Bournemouth Borough Council undertook some footway improvements, with new car parking spaces and street trees. The GreenBlue Urban StrataCell soil cell system was chosen to assist the trees' fast establishment, holding the high-quality forest floor soil in an uncompacted and aerated environment. The roots were encouraged to grow deeper into the good soil using ReRoot ribbed root barrier, and the ArborGuy underground guying system was installed to ensure that the trees did not move – a serious consideration in a coastal location. There were several utilities found when the tree pits were excavated, but careful use of the modular StrataCell solution overcame these challenges – and although the trees were planted in sub-optimal soil volumes, they have continued to grow and thrive. Ultimately the trees are unlikely to achieve species potential size but should attain species potential longevity. Unfortunately, some of the trees were hit by vehicles, so the replacement trees now have vertical guards to protect them for the future.

## Case Study: Institutional – St Ann's Hospital, Poole

St Ann's Hospital in Poole was completed just before the First World War with 56 beds. Designed by the famous 'Arts and Crafts' architect, Robert Weir Schultz, it backs onto the beach at Canford Cliffs and was the seaside branch of the Holloway Sanatorium, caring for people with psychiatric illness.



Richmond Hill, Bournemouth

In 2013 a new wing was constructed, giving needed extra space, and the car park was laid out in a geometric fashion with Scots Pines (*Pinus Sylvestris*) planted within this geometric pattern. The tree pits were all joined together to maximise rooting volume, and to give the trees the best chance of long-term survival. Like much of this area, the soil is very sandy, and struggles to retain moisture, so a high-quality topsoil was used within the GreenBlue Urban StrataCells to ensure that the trees established well in this exposed situation.

Recognising the benefits that trees bring to reduce stress levels, lower blood pressure and improve mental health, GreenBlue Urban tree planting products were specified as a long-term solution to ensure that these benefits were felt by visitors and patients for decades to come.



St Ann's Hospital, Poole

GreenBlue Urban is the global leading solutions provider in assisting trees in their battle to thrive in urban spaces. Established in 1992 with more than 40 years' experience in the landscaping industry GreenBlue provide exceptional expertise in planning, design and the installation of green and blue infrastructure in the hard landscape.

Working alongside architects, landscape planners, urban designers, local authorities and contractors, the renowned ArborSystem® brings together the key elements of successful tree pit design and simplifies the planning and installation process. Landscape professionals can combine SUDS, root management, structural soil components, aeration, irrigation and choose an appropriate above ground surface grille and vertical guard in a single package.

Continued innovation has enabled the progression into Smart Space, offering street furniture, off-grid lighting and IOT monitoring. Discover more on our ground-breaking products visit [www.greenblue.com](http://www.greenblue.com).





L'Oasis d'Aboukir @ Paris. Design: Patrick Blanc. Image: Guilhem Vellut on Flickr.

### L'Oasis d'Aboukir, 2nd arrondissement of Paris

L'Oasis d'Aboukir, translating to 'The Oasis of Aboukir' in English, was Patrick Blanc's contribution to Paris Design Week 2013. This comprises a vertical garden creating an oasis of greenery on a once barren wall in a central Parisian neighbourhood. 7,600 plants of 250 different species were placed up to a height of 25 metres to create this piece of art, which has contributed to the success of the area's shopping and residential offers. Green walls are designed to be installed on a structure or supporting surface which mimic miniature ecosystems, helping to improve air quality and providing an eye-catching aesthetic feature.



### The High Line, New York

The High Line in New York is a 1.45 mile-long elevated linear public park created on a former rail line on the west side of Manhattan. It has been redesigned as a living ecosystem, comprising areas of woodland, water features, public seating. It overlooks an interesting variety of views and vistas within New York. It has shown how planting at different levels can create new landscapes within the linear plane of the city, creating a hybrid public place allowing visitors to experience art, nature and design. The High Line acts as a tourist attraction which has also increased house prices in the surrounding area.

Image: High Line Park, Phase One from Gansevoort to West 20th Street. Project by Field Operations and Diller Scofidio + Renfro Design Studio. Photography by Joevare.



**04**

**HEALTH  
& SOCIAL  
PROSPERITY**



Photo by Richard Page



Left by Richard Page, right by Ashley Woodfall





Photo by Ashley Woodfall



Photo by Zeynep Aktuna

# 04 Health & Social Prosperity



## 4.1 The Return Visitor

The social and economic success of town centres is conditional on it being a place where people feel happy, safe, welcomed, included, valued and comfortable. It needs to be a place in which they will spend time and money and want to return to. On a basic level, if people have an enjoyable experience they will come back.

This research has shown that people value social prosperity more than economic prosperity. That said, economic prosperity is critical to a functioning society and this economic success will flow more freely from a healthy town centre. The simple premise being if conditions are created for social prosperity, economic prosperity will naturally manifest around those places.

There are several ways to approach the principle of healthy town centre and for the purposes of this book a range of perspectives are outlined. This is because the notion of a healthy town centre is, in and of itself, a multifaceted and complex idea. However, addressing these nuances remains important.

## 4.2 A Healthy Town Centre

A healthy town centre is a space in which all members of the community feel safe, welcome and are able to be themselves. This refers to the impact a place can have on a person. However, it can also be a way to talk about the impact a place has on an entire community.

## 4.3 The Role of Urban Design

Good urban design can successfully bring together the elements necessary to create places that enable people to feel safe and happy, take care of themselves, socialise, feel included, participate, take part, voice dissent, have agency and not feel inhibited.

Urban design plays a key role in fostering psychosocial health. The fundamental role of the urban realm is to create places in which individuals are able to make connections and where people can meet and create stories and share experiences. This builds a sense of place which enhances health outcomes and social prosperity.

People must be able to create a sense of belonging, of feeling safe, to have fun, to make memories, create stories, connect to friends, and make new friends.

The extent to which urban design and urban planning can create town centres that impact on how public space feels is significant and relates strongly to many of the other principles in this book.

For example, it is known that green space and ecology have a positive impact on people's sense of wellbeing. So do town centres, where there is a diverse mix of people from all generations who can participate simultaneously and in their own way. A sense of play engenders shared stories and creates individual and cultural memory.

## 4.4 Poor Urban Health: The Homelessness Example

In Bournemouth town centre, there are increasing numbers of people who are struggling with mental health and the many complex issues of homelessness. For a range of personal and political reasons, these people do not have the capacity to resolve this situation on their own.

Leaving the problems faced by these people unsolved is an unhealthy decision by the authorities responsible. It is unhealthy for the individuals, but it is also an unhealthy decision for the town centre. In turn, it is unhealthy for other members of the community who no longer enjoy the experience of visiting the town centre.

The effect of not helping people who do not have the capacity to help themselves, is that people are deterred from being in the area because of fears for their safety or the safety of their family. Or simply because the experience of being in town is less enjoyable.

People may feel conflicted about shopping when they see rough sleepers. They may feel angry that this situation is allowed to happen. It can make them feel helpless or disappointed that these problems cannot be solved by society. None of this creates the conditions for social or economic prosperity. Many people simply do not want to see or be exposed to the suffering of others.

This point is made to illustrate that when one area of town becomes unbalanced it has a knock-on effect. Ultimately, this decreases footfall and damages confidence, and the cycle of decline continues.



#### 4.5 The Sense of Centrality

Thinking about healthy town centres is a way to conceptualise the town as an organism that needs investment, care, and nurturing. The healthy town is a town that takes care of people, it is a town that feels safe, it is a place that fosters creativity, and it is a place where all members of the community are able to co-exist and feel that this is their place. That they are valued and that they belong.

This research has revealed that people value the centre of town. They see town as a place of connection, a place to gather, a place to feel part of a tribe, part of a place. There is a deep psychology at work and this cultural attachment to the centre is deeply embedded in our cultural history.

Throughout time, humans have travelled to centres to meet and connect with each other, we are social beings. There is a tradition of travelling to a meeting place to see others and our town centres function as a magnet, drawing people together.

Losing this centrality would possibly lead to a fracturing of community. Town and city centres give us space to experience a kind of freedom, anonymity, the opportunity to get lost in the crowd, a chance to connect to culture. There is a social and cultural function of centres that goes way beyond the present moment and honours something deep in our culture.

Social contact and interactions with others are critical factors in shaping the psychological wellbeing of individuals and their communities. Social isolation has been linked to increased mortality and lower levels of psychological and physical health. Loneliness and lack of social belonging are critical risk factors implicated in suicide. Social wellbeing includes feeling part of society and believing you are a vital member of that society.

The town centre could therefore be seen as a critical indicator of both individual health and the health of the broader community.

The psychosocial health of town refers to this intersection between individual psychology and how that is supported by (in this case) the urban context.

This covers a broad spectrum of concepts from social wellbeing which include how integrated people feel in a community, how hopeful they feel about the community around them, their social capital, engendering reciprocal relationships and the extent to which they feel valued and part of a place.

#### 4.6 Poor Urban Health: The Loneliness Example

There is increasing recognition amongst the medical community that loneliness can become a mental health issue. Feelings of loneliness can be personal, so people's experience of loneliness will be different. One common description of loneliness are the feelings experienced when a person's needs for rewarding social contact and relationships are not met.

This is why people who feel lonely often go into town to simply to see who is about. What a trip into town offers is the chance of connection and encounter. One young student during the workshops with the universities said that she felt isolated, and that Bournemouth town centre offered not just the possibility of connection but also a trip away from her loneliness.

Meanwhile, two retired women in Poole said they would wander into town in the afternoons to see who they bumped into. There was a tacit agreement between a number of retired people in the same situation that if they needed company they could simply go and sit on a bench and strike up a conversation.

Similarly, the research revealed the role that the many cafés in Christchurch play in supporting the elderly, providing welcoming spaces to socialise and the opportunity to chat. Again, these simple opportunities for engagement with others are known to mitigate the effects of dementia and to help people keep active.

Homelessness and loneliness are two examples of what happens when systems of support and community break down. They are symptoms of systemic problems that need to be fixed.

#### 4.7 Urban Health & The Public Realm

Town centres are a space of potential and hold the possibility of encounter. This encounter maybe with another or it maybe to simply watch an event or give shape to the day.

This is what healthy town centres do. They enable us to create stories. Personal stories that shape who we are, that make us feel part of something, stories that become culture and become part of the collective memory. A healthy town centre is a place drenched in such stories and these stories should be about happy, joyful encounters that bind us together as a society.

The role that urban design can play in the creation of healthy town centres is to establish a good public realm that enables people to feel safe, to see other people, to be curious. This public realm can accommodate a programme of events-based activity that animates the space but also enables people to meet and connect.

## 4.8 Healthy Events

Those voices heard through the BCP Future Lab project recognise that, as well as the built and natural environments, events are part of the mix of bringing people together for a particular purpose and for a variety of reasons and motivations. Most of the time, this involves socialisation. This includes not just the participants and spectators, but those working and volunteering on the events and even non-attending residents.

Events affect not only individuals but whole communities. Healthy town centres are associated with socialisation and physiological health. It relates to how people feel about themselves, their communities, where they live and work. Healthy town centres are about quality of life and so integral to being happy, contented, and proud. Events can be used to foster the health of our town centres.

Events offer shared experiences where there is interaction and engagement with like-minded people. The experiences result in an affirmation of community identity and values, fostering a social cohesion and boosting resilience in challenging times.

Many events allow participants a freedom to be themselves and to share their culture with a wider audience in a safe environment. These connections may not be available in any other part of a person's life, especially if they are working and living alone.

As identified elsewhere, the health of the three town centres and the event ecosystem have been affected by the health emergency that was the pandemic. Not only were the restrictions and modifications imposed by Covid-19 a factor, but also the indirect issues of isolation, fear, and anxiety came into play. These will take some time to overcome but events, in motivating people to get out and be with others, will play an important part in this process.

It is not to say that all people were negatively impacted by the pandemic. Increased levels of outdoor activity were recorded, as was the cleaner air and reduced traffic congestion and pollution. The BCP area being such a beautiful outside place to be did receive increased visitor numbers from the national outdoor and staycation effect.

Outdoor activities and events were seen as some of the safest. The Arts by the Sea Festival was able to provide some in-person activity, albeit under stringent restrictions, during 2020 and more so in 2021. It was one of the few events not to be cancelled, postponed, or pivoted online.

There are three main health benefits that events can contribute to:

**Psychological** – Events bring people together and can generate collective identity and provide a sense of belonging. This is especially useful for people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The BCP area has several ethnic communities who come together to celebrate their cultural heritage and share this with other interested people.

The Bournemouth Reggae Weekender held for the first time in 2021 is an example of where local community interest can organise something of wider interest. Tapping into all the diverse cultural groups within the conurbation would create colourful and cultured celebrations throughout the year. From Hogmanay, Chinese New Year, Saints days, to Day of the Dead Mexican celebration mixed with Celtic Halloween.

Intellectual stimulation and educational growth are seen as an important outcome of events, especially if they include explicit activities to learn. For example, Christchurch Food Festival offers opportunities to learn and take part in activities, as well as purchase and consume food and drink.

Emotional wellbeing can be linked to the emotional relationships encouraged and engendered through engagement with events. Events can generate heightened excitement and even euphoric moments which assist with not just personal happiness but also a community's collective sense of quality of life.

**Physiological** – This benefit is often associated with events containing sport and physical activity, especially for the participants rather than the spectators (although they could be motivated to undertake physical activity post event).

It is not just the events themselves that generate the benefits of physical activity such as reduced risk of heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic conditions, but the preparation for the event, in the regular training required.

Just getting out and being involved in events can have physiological benefits. Events such as music festivals have demonstrated how the kinaesthetic engagement has physical as well as psychological and social benefits.

**Sociological** – Events bring people together, so automatically creating social connections through shared experiences. This helps create social capital for both the individual and the communities involved. This has the potential to generate more lasting social networks, although not taking away from the power of short-term socialisation.

The purpose of the event is often centred around the content of the event, such as, food and drink, vehicles, sport or music genre. These can also be online communities, but face-to-face events have



proven their increased value since being restricted during pandemic lockdowns, even conferences and exhibitions.

In-person events are proving that they can cement a sense of place when they are associated with a particular destination, especially if there are personal emotional ties, such as residency. Successful events create a sense of pride amongst those who are part of the host community, whether they attend or not.

#### 4.9 Events & Inclusivity

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole were all formed as towns by people arriving and settling within growing communities. Even the recent pandemic has encouraged more people to move to the area because they are able to work more from home and because of quality-of-life choices.

It is not easy to uproot and move to another town, despite the increase in mobility. Events have been shown to facilitate cultural awareness, knowledge, and integration of newcomers. It is a way of meeting new neighbours and having a focus for conversations.

Much has been focused on diversity and inclusion during the pandemic and since the rise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Like all parts of the town centres, events must ensure that they are inclusive and accessible. They are a way in which people and organisations can feel and be part of the town within which they live, work, study, or visit.

Intersectionality is one area that events could help build future identities by bringing people together from different areas, communities, and businesses. Social capital is mostly generated through where people live, work, study, and play. They are where people create networks, either functionally and/or through choice.

#### 4.10 Six Ways to Express the Principle of Health & Social Prosperity

1. Create an excellent quality public realm, comprising town squares and open spaces that allow people to meet and gather.
2. Ensure flexibility in all outdoor spaces so that they can be used for smaller community events and larger scale activities.
3. Include seating, street furniture, details and features that are convivial and social.
4. Encourage architecture and urban design that reflects the aspirations of our culture.
5. Design outdoor space that lends itself to small group meetings, for example network meetings convened by a support worker.
6. Deliver a programme of events and social activities that create shared experiences.

## The Future of Sport Eventscapes & Festivals in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole

There is significant potential and increasing demand for community based active sports events throughout the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole area, whether they be hosted on land or sea, or within urban or rural environments. Historically sports events divide opinion and are not always well received by local residents (Shipway et al, 2020). The dangerous distribution of tacks on roads in the New Forest to sabotage mass participation 'sportives' cycling events is one example of apathy and antagonism towards local participatory sport events. Likewise, the costs of both participating and organising sports events can vary, depending on size, scale, duration, and type of sport. One potential solution is to support sustainable events that will have a low impact upon the local environment, and which are bottom up grassroots sports events that embrace and engage locals. Logically, based on both demographics and existing infrastructure in the area, large scale major or hallmark spectator based sports events are not a sustainable or cost-effective solution. From a resident perspective, one key future challenge will be to further develop a diverse range of community based active sports events that can integrate and incorporate rather than isolate and alienate.

High profile annual active sports events are already popular and prevalent in BCP. These include, but are not limited to, the Bournemouth Triathlon, cycling events and sportives, the Run Bournemouth Half Marathon, the BHF Pier to Pier Swim and a range of both water or marine and beach based sport and leisure events and festivals. Shipway (2008) also highlights the further potential of 'Blue Gym' initiatives where coastal environments specifically are used to promote health and well-being, reduce stress, facilitate social interaction and build stronger communities. The full list of sports events across BCP is too extensive to document here, and existing events continue to expand, whilst new events emerge. This reflects both the increasing demand for community based sports events and how, through the 'Power of Sport', they have the potential to contribute towards supporting broader cross department societal health and wellbeing initiatives within the local area.

Prior to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the South West of England Regional

Development Agency (SWRDA) commissioned Bournemouth University to develop an events strategy for the South West of England (Shipway, 2008). This strategy, called 'From Parish to Podium', prioritised the creation of new and innovative community embedded sports events. The strategic document explored how sports events could be utilised to balance individual and community wellbeing and quality of life (QoL). It also examined how people, places and spaces could align with opportunities to best utilise the existing cultural and sporting infrastructure through (i) major sports events; (ii) sports events in general (notably sailing, adventure sports, and events linked to main cities and major planned infrastructure developments), and (iii) more specifically through broad support for community based sport participation events. Recommendations for future action, under the umbrella marketing slogan of 'Active Events, Active Lifestyles' included (i) experiential events in the great outdoors, (ii) exploring the volunteer legacy; and (iii) optimising the strategic leveraging of sports and cultural events.

More targeted recommendations from the Bournemouth University strategic report were for sports events that were 'outdoorsy' (King and Church, 2020), or could be considered inclusive in nature, such as (i) adventure / lifestyle sports events; (ii) beach based and coastal sports events (including rugby, cricket, football, volleyball and handball); (iii) mass participation events in running, cycling, swimming and walking; (iv) sailing events; (v) better resourcing for existing events; (vi) developing the sport-art-culture interrelationship; (vii) creation of 'skills' specific events; and (viii) to establish and maintain a user-friendly communication and knowledge gateway or hub for events (Shipway, 2008). These proposals were underpinned by the pride and passion of local, regional and national networks of sport enthusiasts, participants, event organisers and residents alike.

The impacts of Covid-19 on the mental health and well-being of local communities has been a major negative societal outcome of the pandemic. Sport and physical activity are frequently cited as effective tools for supporting mental health and wellbeing. It is also widely documented that community sports events have the ability to foster and support mindfulness, build

confidence, enhance mental health and wellbeing, and increase self-esteem, whilst also engaging and empowering participants to drive social change and health development (Shipway and Fyall, 2012). Sport events provide spaces to enable lived experiences and to facilitate positive emotions, through the power of sport. More recently, the central role of sports events in supporting a sense of belonging, community engagement and social identity has been extensively documented, most notably in the post pandemic era (See Inoue et al, 2021).

In summary, participatory sports events are at the heart of communities throughout the area and can be the strategic glue to bind communities together. Likewise, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole are already the host destination to numerous popular sporting events and festival sites that will continue to attract both residents and tourists alike, and provide opportunities to better leverage both economic and social benefits. This area is a truly iconic Sport Eventscape (Brown et al, 2015), and these active community embedded sports events truly provide a window into the destination.

### Parkrun: People's Innovation

One localised example of an increasingly popular and engaging local sport event is Parkrun, hosted at various local parks and open spaces within the conurbation and across Dorset. Locations include Slades Farm, Upton Park, and Kings Park. Further afield, Parkrun events are also organised in Dorchester, Weymouth, Blandford, at Moors Valley and at multiple locations in Hampshire, including Lymington and Brockenhurst. The events take place weekly at 9am on Saturday, whilst on Sunday mornings there are 2k junior events for children aged four to fourteen.

Parkrun is one example of a sporting event that has significantly impacted models of organised exercise, and in doing so has attracted a new group of participants that would have been unlikely to join running clubs, gyms of other activity-based sporting organisations.

Parkrun is unique and has now become a global phenomenon. The focus is on the 5km running events being free and fun. They are reliant on the commitment of volunteers to create a bottom-up culture of running in local communities. The event has effectively disrupted those organisations that made money out of running (and exercise more generally), and it has done this for free. The founder of Park Run, Paul Sinton-Hewitt's underlying motivation when starting Parkrun was about helping people be the best they can be, to change their lives, and to grow as individuals (Chakraborty, 2018).

Parkrun has also helped to change the profile, positioning and paradigm of running events, and active outdoor participatory sporting events more generally. In doing so, these grassroots community events have helped build social interaction and a sense of community in places and open spaces in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. Whilst medical practitioners correctly highlight that exercise can help reduce mortality and interaction can be aligned with longer life, as far back as 2007 academics have argued that mega sports events, like the Olympic Games, do not increase physical activity levels in society (Shipway, 2007). Studies on endurance based participatory sports events suggest that increases in health and wellbeing are more likely to emerge from community-based sports events like running and Parkrun, which are inclusive, open to everyone, interactive, and have the potential to make a tangible difference (Shipway and Jones, 2007).

Steve Flowers from the University of Kent has described Parkrun as an example of 'people's innovation', where the events are driven by users rather than producers, by volunteers rather than professionals, and are horizontal rather than hierarchical and not about making money (Chakraborty, 2018). Flowers suggests that it is purpose not pay that motivates these citizen innovators, by having fun and helping others within local communities.

Parkrun, as an innovative idea emerges from our social and cultural perspectives in a modern world that is dominated by machines and computers that have taken over our everyday physical and cognitive routines. This is almost a complete inversion of how we have come to think of many of our daily activities, especially in the workplace. Parkrun is one example of a pioneering social innovation that continues to flourish in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

-

Dr Richard Shipway is an Associate Professor of Sport Event Management in the Department of Sport and Event Management, Bournemouth University Business School (BUBS).



Photography by Barney Moss on Flickr

### The Scoop, London

The Scoop is an outdoor sunken amphitheatre which seats around 800 people, lying on the South Bank of the River Thames in London close to Tower Bridge. During the summer months, the venue often hosts a variety of free events, including films and sports screenings, theatre performances and music events as well as supplying food and drink. It is open to everyone with most events being free of charge.

Public spaces like this can facilitate social interaction, create a sense of place and create a feeling of belonging for visitors and locals.

### Modified social benches, Paris

Modified social benches are the common name for a form of bench which emulates the traditional park bench, however, has had varying degrees of modification to turn the act of sitting into a physical endeavour. They encourage playing or climbing, transforming their surroundings into places of activity rather than rest. They foster exchange between users through challenging the amount of space individuals feel is required to leave set between strangers, thus sparking conversation and lending the work a social quality. A concept by Jeppe Heim, they can be found across the world in cities such as London, Paris and New York.



Photography by Groume on Flickr



**05**

**PLAYABLE**



Photos by Richard Page



Photos by Ashley Woodfall





Photo by Ashley Woodfall



Photo by Zeynep Aktuna



# 05 Playable



## 5.1 Children & Young People

The concept of the playable and inclusive town centre gives priority to the universal experience of children and young people. It also allows us to think about the whole town centre as a playground, a space in which all of us can, in our way, play.

One role of the urban centre is to offer a place to pass the time, to find and pursue activities that bring pleasure. For some this will be an adventure in bars and clubs, wandering the streets and singing at 3am. For others this will be walking into town with family, finding places to go and activities to do that create opportunities to connect both to the place and with each other. All of these activities along with events, carnival, festivals, performances, can be characterised as playable.

People want to be able to go into the town centre and choose their own adventure. They want to feel that going to town is multifaceted, unexpected and surprising. That it is a place of chance encounter where there is the possibility for detournement, to become lost in the scene, whilst looking out of a café window or being distracted by an unexpected encounter.

Play means different things to different generations. This research has engaged with different sample groups in order to learn what play in a town centre context means to them.

## 5.2 Families with Young Children

During the library workshop, many families and people with young children said categorically that town was not a place for them. They would like to be able to use town but they felt excluded because it was a space devoted almost entirely to retail and consumption.

One parent said that they would like to come into town more often as they enjoyed going to the cinema and to eat in the BH2 complex but that there are so few child-friendly spaces, options are limited.

Another parent said that they would like to be able to bring their children in to town to do something fun or educational and that it was sad to see so many empty shops that could be reused for such activities.

## 5.3 School Aged Children

The workshops carried out with two local schools as part of the research revealed perspectives about the town centre that were limited to either shopping in Primark or going to Costa Coffee. A more extreme perspective was that the town centre had become a place of fear, that it was tricky to negotiate and felt dangerous.

Through the process of talking about town experiences, it became clear that children in the 13 – 16 age group used town as a place to meet and hang around or to shop for fast fashion that fits their limited budgets.

Both of these are primarily social activities but somewhat limited in scope. Trips into town as teenagers are rites of passage. If the options available to this generation are broader than retail, what positive things could they be drawn into? In what ways can the horizons of young people be expanded by casually encountering things in a town centre that fall outside the everyday experiences afforded by family life or school life? Would those kids who drift into town and search for mates to hang about with take part in something completely different and inspiring if they could encounter it casually in a town centre? Would this lead to new hobbies or interests or even career paths?

Across all three towns, there are activities for young people to engage with but many of them happen on the edges of town or out of town, for example in leisure centres. This is a missed opportunity for a number of reasons.

Locating the roller disco at the edge of town first of all involves more driving, and children rely on adults to ferry them about, reducing their independence and exacerbating the negative impacts of traffic.

Secondly, this footfall is lost to the town centres. For example there is a regular roller disco in the Two Rivers Meet Leisure Centre in Christchurch. There is also one at the Sir David English Sports Centre, between Charminster and Kinson. This activity – on the edges of town – means cars turn up, drop kids off, then return two hours later. If this activity happened in the centre of town, more people would come into town, parents may stay in town for several hours while their children are skating. The opportunity for linked trips around cinema or shopping is currently being missed by not holding this kind of activity in town centres.

## 5.4. University Students

Working with students at AUB and BU revealed that this twenty something age group use town differently. They feel disappointed by the lack of options and the lack of variety of things to do in the centre. They would be more likely to go to town if there were more things to do.

This workshop revealed that this age group take a drifter's attitude to town. They will meet to do a specific activity and then once in town, they will drift towards a café or to see a film then go to a bar or onto somewhere they can dance. This group want a seamless experience in town where they can drift from one activity to another.

## 5.5. Seniors

Even further up the age range, the members of the Christchurch U3A (University of the Third Age), most of which were 70+ years old, also see town as a centre for play even if they would not define it in such terms. To meet a friend, wander the market, take a bike ride, people watch from a café, or attend a cultural event. All activities which serve no specific purpose other than being enjoyable and spontaneous are the very definition of play.

## 5.6 Integrating Play into the Urban Centre

In recent history, play has been separated from other activities in our urban centres. Urban planners have placed activities in separate locations across the city (e.g. zoning) and encouraged use of the city in different ways at different times (e.g. day time for shopping, after dark for parties). The cultural quarter, the playground, the mini-golf, a time to dance, to get drunk.

Opportunities where diverse types of play can merge creates better outcomes. What happens when the cultural quarter is also the playground? What happens when the playground is also a place to dance?

In all three town centres, it can be seen that opportunities to play have

been marginalised and, in many cases, pushed to the edge of town, to particular times of day or particular places. A better approach is to embed spaces into the town centres that are open, that can be appropriated by different groups and for different activities, which are multi-functional, and which support the opportunity to play. This play can occur on an hour-by-hour or day-to-day basis, or as specific events that allow communities to come together to act or perform.

Events are an ideal way through which people can engage with all attributes of play. This is especially true for adults who are not well-served for play by the built environment. (i.e. play grounds)

## 5.7 Playable Events

Events can add another layer of sensory engagement with the place in which they are held. They create an ambiance and atmosphere and animate the environment, the history, and the people.

Events have often been a way of families, friends and more widely, communities coming together. Not only are these beneficial for those involved but also externally as part of one's identity and sense of inclusion.

Studies on loneliness and isolation show these feelings were exacerbated by the pandemic. Events are seen as a way of coming back together, with 2022 being a year of events in the UK.

## 5.8 Ten Ways to Express the Principle of Play in Town Centre

1. Thinking about anchor activities rather than anchor stores.
2. Encourage architecture and urban design in these anchors that enable play, and which can be used by all generations or communities.
3. Enable play by making it easy for communities to put on events and provide support through the planning and permit process, through a shared data base of resources.
4. Create 'diamond moments' – these are the unexpected gems and interventions that spark curiosity or participation. For example turning all the benches along one street into swings for teenagers.
5. Encourage architecture and urban design that is open and flexible and offers playable opportunities. For example town squares that are flexible, open and allow for both programmable activity and spontaneous events.
6. Create opportunities for play for all generations and integrate these opportunities into the street scene or along walks and routes into town.
7. Turn walks into adventures.
8. Create opportunities for natural play, by converting disused corners into pocket parks, creating surprising or fun interventions in green areas that afford a different kind of relationship both to each other and to the place.
9. Map the flexible spaces that can be used in diverse ways at various times of the day, week, or year. For example, a place that is a skate park on a Sunday afternoon but is tai-chi space on a Wednesday afternoon, is a child's play area on a Saturday morning, and hosts live bands on a Saturday night.
10. Create a public realm full of details that are multi-use and multifaced. For example, water fountains that are beautiful and elegant but are also used for paddling. Seats and benches that are also for climbing, planter boxes with edges that are deep enough to sit on and at a variety of heights for people of assorted sizes. Paving and surfaces that can also be used as a child's game.

## CASE STUDY

### THE FLOOR IS LAVA!! But why isn't it always lava when you're grown-up?

Play is how we interact with the world around us and each other. Play interactions can be miniscule or massive. The knowing smile with a stranger, banter at the supermarket checkout, dancing wildly in a summer field, cheering on your team.



A chalked message inviting others to think

As adults, in public space we are usually going from A to B. We are time short and our brains are elsewhere. There is often no time to see what is actually around us. A playful disruption can snap us back into the present place and moment in time. It can open the door to creatively re-imagining spaces, to re-designing their purpose and our relationships to them. Play can make us look up.

What is play to you, and how can one use this slippery, intangible lifeblood to reconnect and develop people's relationship with places? Imagine your favourite play right now. What feelings does it invoke? When one is in a play state, one is focused, light, often brain engaged and spontaneous.

In these ways, play is a powerful tool. It costs (almost) nothing yet can form the beginning of a proposal for a project, a redesign for a space, a new way of being. It can enable change and can motivate positive action. Play allows us to step into the shoes of another, to take on different roles and to imagine new perspectives if we give it the time and space it deserves.

We propose #oneplaything, a playful philosophy and way for adults to engage with play that can unlock its potential and help us to take creative control. #oneplaything invites playfulness through invitations, provocations and modifications to spaces.

A #oneplaything could be a chalked message or drawing that invites others to think, act or disrupt the flow of a space; a sign in a window that questions the space; a set of games that allows one to pop out of the A-B of daily life. It could ask you to imagine something different or make a suggestion. It is a site-specific act,

where we ask ourselves what could and should this place be? We reimagine it in simple, temporary ways for ourselves and others to experience.

#### How do I #oneplaything?

To get started, you need a space and a simple way to modify it. This can be a piece of chalk, some string, even sticks or stones to make markers. It can also be digital, doodle over photos of places to invite playfulness. You can #oneplaything alone or with friends, as an impromptu act or as part of a planned workshop; there is no wrong way to #oneplaything and there are many ways to get involved.

#oneplaything is also a way of connecting; document and share on social media using #oneplaything where other members of the international play community also share their site-specific playful acts.

When we were invited to contribute to this book, we thought we might offer some provocations as recipes for playful public interventions. So grab a saucepan and some seasoning and we shall begin...

#### #oneplaything cookbook

Welcome to the #oneplaything cookbook. Playful recipes which use simple ingredients to liven up, reconsider and reshape real world spaces. You need very little to get started but can make profound shifts in your and others' perspectives of a space and its possibilities. If you would like further inspiration, to share your own creations or to connect with other #oneplaything-ers, explore #oneplaything on social media.



Play in the urban environment can take many forms



## Original #oneplaything

### Ingredients:

1 piece of chalk

1 location

A pinch of inspiration

**Method:** In your chosen location, review your surroundings. Consider this space. What works? What is less effective? Is there anything particularly interesting? Could it be improved somehow? Using your musings, write a message in chalk in a key location - this message could be phrased as a question, an invitation or as something to ponder. The goal of this recipe is to share your thoughts and hopefully inspire other people.

## #oneplaything a la mode

### Ingredients:

1 piece of chalk

1 location

A playful mindset

**Method:** Look for something unusual. How could this become something new? Think of looking at clouds and making shapes out of them. Is there a way to do something playful on the ground with some chalk? Make a new shape from the shadows on the ground, the puddles or some chewing gum? What will the effect be? Will it help you? Could it help others? What will it add to this place?

## #oneplaything infusion

### Ingredients

1 piece of chalk/string/markers

1 location

1 mobile phone with a camera

Access to the internet

**Method:** Create an invitation, a provocation, a question, a new path in space. Do it in a temporary way using chalk or string. Wait and watch. How do people interact? Take a picture of what you have created in real space. Post it on social media using #oneplaything. Post your thoughts about it. Post any interactions you had whilst making it. Think about what it means to be reshaping public shape this way. Talk to others in real space and online about it.

Malcolm Hamilton is Creative Director of Play:Disrupt, which uses playful devices and creative values to engage communities, widen participation and interrogate systems in the built environment, health and research. He designs innovative ways to widen and deepen engagement, connecting with communities whom others may have overlooked. A former actor, his background is in outdoor arts and theatre making. A Leverhulme scholarship shifted his practice to work with organisations including Arup, RIBA, Bristol City Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Chester University, Brigstow Institute, UWE, ARC WEST and Civic Theatre Dublin. He is an advisor for TRUUD ('Tackling the Root causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development') a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator and a resident of Pervasive Media Studio. Malcolm's playful interventions make complex issues accessible and engage communities in unexpected ways.

Dr Lynn Love is a play designer and lecturer at Abertay University. When not teaching games and technical art at Abertay, Lynn is passionate about social play, the use of play to reframe our perspectives about all aspects of life and seeks to promote the benefits of participation in play to all. As a member of Abertay Game Lab, she creates video games and playful installations that aim to bring people together. Recently she collaborated on a playful chalkscape installation at VA Dundee and an outdoor multiplayer arcade machine at Whale Song Park in Dundee. She almost always has chalk in her pocket, just in case, and can be found on Twitter @toadrick

## PRECEDENTS

### King's Crescent Regeneration, Hackney

King's Crescent, Hackney is a multi-award winning council-led regeneration scheme. The redevelopment placed people at the heart of the strategy, aiming to change the quality of life for residents of the original estate through a variety of means.

At the heart of the scheme is a semi-pedestrianised and landscaped 'playstreet', furnished with traditional and interpretive play equipment as well as street furniture, encouraging social interaction for all generations. Landscaping is a key element of the scheme throughout the public realm, integrating trees and moments for play throughout the estate to encourage people to reclaim and enjoy their urban space. Creation of new amenity space in public areas and private balconies has encouraged people to spend more time outside than previously when the estate featured no external space. Cultivation of plants on the upgraded walkways has increased the greening of the area. These features have meant that the scheme is attractive to all generations, including children.

*'If developments are attractive to children and families, they appeal to all ages, automatically marketing themselves, as vibrant, safe, clean places.'* (Frost, n.d).

The King's Crescent scheme was informed by detailed community engagement with the community that lived in the pre-existing development. This has resulted in high quality placemaking and high standard mixed-use development including a variety of tenures of homes, a new community centre, workspaces and shops. The mixed-use and playable



King's Crescent Estate regeneration, Hackney. Photography courtesy of John Sturrock.





King's Crescent Estate regeneration, Hackney. Photography courtesy of John Sturrock.

element of the scheme has helped realise economic benefits where space sharing and decreased anti-social behaviour has resulted in lowered management costs. Frost (n.d) highlighted how small actions that consider children's perspectives can make big changes to a community. The scheme has greatly increased social interaction; the neighbourhood is a lively and active place where people can meet neighbours and friends.



Photography courtesy of Read Photography.  
Designed by Erect Architecture & LUC

**Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park Tumbling Bay Playground, London**

The multi-award winning Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park Tumbling Bay Playground is an adventure play area comprising features for naturalistic play. It is set within the Olympic Park in Stratford, based on ecological concepts of succession and life cycles, entwined in a riverine landscape. The landscape offers play, recreational and learning experiences with a combination of forests, sand and water play, climbing structures and natural rock pools and celebrates the rich ecological heritage of the UK. The space also features a timber café and community hub to ensure something for all generations.

Scheme constructed by Frosts Landscapes.

**06**

# **CULTURE DRIFT**





Photo by Zeynep Aktuna



Top left and right by Richard Page, bottom photo by Zeynep Aktuna





Photo by Richard Page



Photos by Zeynep Aktuna



# 06 Culture Drift



## 6.1 A Gallery WItout Walls

The Culture Drift is a gallery without walls which enables each of the town centres to put on a range of events or connect venues to curate projects across the whole town. It also has the possibility of connecting all three towns in the conurbation.. The architecture of the Culture Drift is the walk itself. Imagine venues across the town centre as different rooms in a living museum. People can drift between exhibitions, events, performance spaces and activity or venues taking part in the culture or cultures that speak to them.

Here, culture is a broad-church and refers to a full spectrum of activity from educational events for kids and families, to street music and informal encounters through to internationally-renowned concerts, performances and exhibitions. Culture is the collective activity that brings us together, enables us to play and tells us about who we are as a society. It refers to a range of activities that is enabling, it is about discourse and it is about supporting everyone to take part in the life of their town centre.

The walk is the space that connects these activities and the walk itself navigates the mixed ecology of each town centre, utilising outdoor spaces, flexible events spaces, parks, gardens and the sea front in and around the town centres.

The key delivery of the Culture Drift is via an app and social media and a regularly published newspaper which communicates a timetable of activity alongside articles and interviews with artists and producers.

The Culture Drift will be co-ordinated by an overall director. This new post will be to oversee the programme and liaise between venues in order to deliver and communicate regular Culture Drift events and to provide support and mentoring to local practitioners.

Culture Drift will bring activity to town centres, it will create and support new communities and it will attract visitors.

## 6.2 Culture Drift as Tactical Urbanism

The Culture Drift is a tactic as much as it is a principle. It offers a specific set of solutions to the current deficit or lack of acknowledgement of culture across the conurbation.

The notion of culture is broad and expansive, and this project has chosen to define culture in the broadest possible terms and through the lens of people and place.

## 6.3 What is The Culture Drift?

The Culture Drift is a concept that focuses on connecting existing cultural assets and creating opportunities for innovation and activity. The main premise of Culture Drift is that it focuses on creating connections between activity by creating a walk. And the walk, in effect becomes the architecture and provides the framework in which an expanded notion of culture can be experienced and enacted.

## 6.4 The Latent Demand for a Cultural Connection

There is a relative lack of opportunity for people to engage with critical thinking and that the intellectual life of Bournemouth resides in university institutions and on the fringes.

But there is a real and unmistakable demand from people who live in the Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole area to have greater access to a cultural life. They want greater opportunity to connect with the arts.

## 6.5 Graduate Retention

To build the creative industries in all three towns there must be a focus on graduate retention of students from AUB and BU. This requires professional infrastructures that allow them to develop and progress in their chosen careers.

This infrastructure should contribute to the creation of a community, for example, of independent shops, creative businesses, and makers-markets. Support structures need to be established to provide funding and mentoring, and to ensure best practice.

## 6.6 Manifest Expressions of Culture

A sustainable economy around the arts in which people are able to make a living and have the necessary time to develop ideas and grow professionally, creatively, and commercially is vital. Local infrastructures are invaluable in creating support networks and the necessary critical discourse that enable practitioners to grow. Funding is key, as are commercial networks with links to local, national, and international opportunities.



The creation of work spaces that are open to practitioners from a range of backgrounds also creates the ground for hybrid forms to emerge through collaboration. Across the BCP area there could, for example, be interesting connections made between the 'Silicon South' tech sector start-ups and a burgeoning new cultural sector.

## 6.7 The Need for Cultural Support

The first recommendation in terms of culture is that it needs to be encouraged and grown organically through supportive networks and opportunities for growth. For a local cultural scene to grow, there needs to be influence and input. An individual cannot grow and develop as an artist in a vacuum. There needs to be an ebb and flow of ideas, cross-pollination and the opportunity to expand practices and methods.

Creating culture is a conversation and local artists and makers need to be supported. It will be important to establish cultural connections that extend beyond a local scene (or local scenes) become stagnant.

The Giant gallery in the Bournemouth town centre is already playing a key role in this. In Poole, the Kingland Crescent community provides the nucleus of a cultural community that can benefit from further support networks, spinning out into, for example, live/work spaces and low-rent studios.

## 6.8 Using Existing Infrastructure

There are established walking routes through Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. These are local infrastructures that connect local cultural institutions. The addition of flexible, programmable space, which can be used by anyone to put on events, would animate the Culture Drift and allow for diversity of experience and unexpected encounter. For example, throughout the warmer months the Sunday ukulele club could start to practice outside on the Pavilion Theatre terraces.

However, these Culture Drifts can also connect to each other, and to other places, such as Boscombe, at certain moments in the year, such as during the Arts by The Sea festival or for specific themed projects. In such instances, all three Culture Drifts can link up, be programmed and share publicity and resources.

## 6.9 It Is Not a Wayfinding Project

Culture Drift is about connecting and making visible existing activity and creating a clustering effect to encourage new culture. This will create impact and a sense of logic to where culture can be found. It is also a way to give cultural identity to each town centre and a way for visitors and viewers to easily connect to culture.

Although described as a walk, this is not a wayfinding project. It is about identifying an area of town – a route – and making sure that everything that happens on that route has the capacity to be open and contribute to the cultural life of the town.

The walk is the architecture that connects venues and spaces. However, activity would be accessible via a Culture Drift App that would enable everyone from institutions to community groups to share activity.

The leading principle of Culture Drift is that it connects and makes visible existing activity. However, in the same way that an arts centre is programmed, the Culture Drift is a programmable gallery without walls where the town centre itself becomes the cultural centre with the capacity to expand and connect or to shrink back and operate in isolation.

Key to a successful Culture Drift is that it does not operate in an exclusive space neither does it target a specific audience. The Culture Drift is about encounter and possibility and conversations around events and activity.

Can the blank walls of the Dolphin Centre and the underpasses and walk ways around Poole be reimaged as Poole's contemporary art gallery?

It is a pragmatic way to create an identity for culture. It could begin as a mapping and marketing project, whereby all existing activity on the route can be published. Or it may be about putting in post a co-ordinator who can collaborate across venues, link activities together and initiate certain festival events on the route of the various Culture Drifts.

The Culture Drift draws a map around a specific area of town and creates a series of flexible spaces that can be programmed either as one off events or as ongoing activities over the course of an exhibition or run.

For example, there might be an exhibition in the Giant gallery and elements of that exhibition are taken out into the open air and programmed on the Culture Drift circuit. A further example could be Pavilion Dance South West creating a series of outdoor performances in different spaces along the Culture Drift.

At times when 'the drift' is not programmed, these spaces double as playable spaces or meeting space. Meanwhile, around or along the Culture Drift route is where efforts to curate and establish independent shops and independent business will be best placed.

## 6.10 Events as Culture

The twenty first century has seen a shift from the built environment to celebrate culture to the ephemeral nature of events. Events are seen as more flexible, inclusive, and transient. Events would fit the proposal for Culture Drifts in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, emphasising their individual identities as town centres. Events would animate and activate the physical spaces and encourage people to explore more deeply the spaces and routes made available.

The purpose of Festival Coast Live was to bring personality and people back to the public realm during the pandemic. This is a good example of what can be achieved. Greater theming and connection with the locations in the Culture Drifts could be built into future programming.

As well as interpreting and creating history, events can also challenge perceptions of places and histories and encourage a greater depth of understanding. They can do this without permanently changing the physical environment, with temporary creations and permanent digital artifacts.

Events are an integral way of making sense of the place in which we live, work, play, study, and visit. They bring a person in touch with the place where the event is staged and to the stage that has been temporarily created; the imaginary. By doing so an event can assist with translation, of sensemaking and potentially, of transformation.

Events perform best when they are clear about what they are trying to achieve. Since the pandemic hit there has been concerted effort to get events returned to real life. However, it must not be at the expense of events that can achieve a greater impact when utilising all available communication and engagement tools.

Online events and events that utilise technology can reach a larger and wider audience. Not all events are expected to pull people physically to a location alone. People can be part of an event remotely but still create a sense of community and identity. The use of events online can also raise the profile of a community and location. This is particularly important for tourism, whether leisure or business visits.

Technology can also aid engagement of an event, whether in an enhanced staging, content, and interaction. Working with existing technology companies and developing these possibilities is important going forward.

Within the South Coast Event Forum there are already several people and businesses who support the local events industry. They also support the national event tech ecosystem. Parts of the industry cannot work in isolation. For example, Bournemouth's Managing Director, Craig Mathie plays a part in the Event Tech Live event in London each year, a specific event for the event technology sector to meet, engage and interact.

## 6.11 Seven Ways to Express the Principle of The Culture Drift

1. The walk is the architecture.
2. Identify and retain the established spaces and independent producers that already exist along each of the designated Culture Drift routes.
3. The Culture Drift connects existing activity and creates an identity for each of the three town centres.
4. Design elements used to identify the route could include an iconic gesture that connect elements. For example, one Culture Drift might be identifiable through a distinctive paving colour or a particular motif in the surfaces. This could be a significant architectural commission.
5. The Culture Drift should open or create specific and discrete spaces that can be used for exhibition. These should also be multi-purpose and appropriated at various times by different activities. For example, one area could be the terraces and car park around Pavilion Dance South West. The terraces could be improved and repurposed as outside exhibition and performance space, but it could also be used to host a market or food vans or a teenage hang out.
6. The urban design thinking behind the Culture Drift needs to be about creating pauses, the ability to stop and stare, and flexible. This is not a route to rush along.
7. The Culture Drift can also be explored and understood via a phone app.



## Taking Up Space

Being drawn to outside spaces and invigorated by the noises, smells, colours, and sense of freedom must have something to do with my heritage as someone from a mixed background, living abroad and the yearning for diversity and difference. I often come across statements like 'Is this for me?' from members of the ethnically diverse community as they manoeuvre through decision-making quandaries about whether specific spaces belong to them and or will cater to their needs.

I, therefore, believe addressing the sense of belonging requires an invitation to co-design and create shared ownership of places and spaces across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

I want to experience diverse art forms and cultural experiences that I can relate to on my doorstep. The environment, therefore, needs to be a welcoming space, a place where some of the people look like me and where people who look different to the majority see themselves reflected back, such as the staff teams, the design of a space and the vibrancy of the colours, smells and sounds. I have been privileged to program such cultural events indoors and outdoors over the years.



Umoja Carnival, Bournemouth beach, 2011

Umoja Arts Network, an African Caribbean led organisation based in Bournemouth, offered me a vehicle to contribute to change. I have enjoyed working with diverse communities, schools and

talented artists producing dance programs, fashion shows, visual arts exhibitions and carnival extravaganzas.

My outdoor programming journey began in 2011, with a small procession along the Bournemouth seafront and through the town centre, showcasing local talent and fantastic community involvement from local groups from the Caribbean, Brazil and the Muslim community. A follow-up event in 2012 took over the town centre with interactive dance workshops and live music showcased to packed audiences.

'Carnival Connexions' completed the three year strategic programme, which worked with three schools across Bournemouth designing and creating costumes inspired by award-winning carnival designers from Luton. Local community groups from Nigeria, Gambia and Trinidad also archived their stories and experiences of Carnival and Masquerade. The carnival route was from Alum Chine on Bournemouth beach, along the promenade, through the gardens and finished off at the Triangle part of the town. We brought multiculturalism to the doorstep with an offer



Umoja Carnival, Bournemouth Lower Gardens, 2011

that could be accessed by bystanders, tourists, the local community and specifically the ethnically diverse who saw this as an opportunity to reminisce and cloak themselves into the warm blanket of nostalgia. Attracting a footfall of over 10,500 people with a mix of people of all ages and ethnicities, the carnival created a lot of interest from people wanting to volunteer in the Lower Gardens and get involved in future work.

Other outdoor festivals, such as the recent 'Africa Comes to Bournemouth', a showcase for people of African and Caribbean descent, created inviting social spaces for eating and experiencing quality music. A broad range of people came together to take part, shop and enjoy watching relatable arts and cultural heritage and programming that expanded the mind with new cultural experiences.



Umoja Carnival, Bournemouth Sqaure, 2012

These events have created spaces in central Bournemouth that were playful and inclusive, journeying together through performance and visual experiences, connecting people through the relevant programming and enhancing one's wellbeing whilst sharing positive contributions and offering a safe space to be yourself. The success of programmes has been through creating partnerships and establishing common interests with organisations such as Soundstorm, Pavilion Dance South West and Arts University Bournemouth. Opportunities to meet and connect to strengthen relationships is vital for a sustained approach to cultural activity.

Funding is required to make events happen. It can often feel like a roulette wheel. Equitable access to funding opportunities and event management skills is still not favouring the ethnically diverse communities I have encountered. My recent work with the Cultural Compact has highlighted a lack of knowledge about such skillsets, that the process does not reasonably adjust to peoples' cultural positions. Training, skill-sharing and mentoring opportunities will support the growth of diverse-led festivals to maximise their understanding and navigate the cultural sector.

In 2021, I also had the pleasure of interviewing diverse-led festivals such as Bournemouth Reggae Festival, Dorset Mela and the World of Love Festival as part of the 'Your Shout' consultancy, a Cultural Compact project funded by BCP Council to understand their needs in the future. These festivals helped local people return to the outdoors, celebrate and connect with their own cultures and communities and add their ingredients to the arts and culture ecology as they start to 'Take Up Space'. Opportunities to information share are key to widening participation and creating a cultural calendar by joining up mainstream cultural providers and smaller unique events sharing resources and offering a wider richer offering.

I have been privileged to foster relationships that would not usually have occurred by taking over places and opening doors that may be new to some or that previously they did not think was a space for them. I suppose organisers can have their hand-held a little whilst creating a shared narrative that values the diverse multi-cultural identities of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. We can build successful

shared ownership that responds to the cultural shifts that a diverse, more inclusive society requires. And by celebrating the diverse assets of the town, enhancing that sense of belonging and increasing visitor footfall from untapped opportunities in the long term.

The town, therefore, requires a multi-functional approach of different meeting points that can 'flex and flow' based on why residents and visitors are coming to a city. Addressed by the use of various constructed spaces and their pop-up functionality, the colour schemes and sensory flavours offered or specific funding from local businesses and BCP Council to sustain festivals and events. Significant investment to enable networking, diverse-led festival development, and training opportunities can create a more robust infrastructure to contribute to the overall arts cultural ecology.

Natasha Player is an arts and culture management consultant focusing on diversity and inclusion, a freelance producer, an action learning facilitator with a previous background in dance. She began her career producing one-day pop-up festivals and working with cross-art form artists. Producing choreographing indoor performances and outdoor processional work for organisations such as Umoja Arts Network, Activate Performing Arts, Arts by the Sea and the Weymouth 2012 Olympics celebrations. Gaining an MA at Dartington College of Art in Arts and Cultural Management, Natasha continued producing and programming work made by ethnically diverse artists for ethnically diverse audiences and wider.

Since 2018, Natasha has been a freelance changemaker supporting venues and organisations such as Pavilion Dance South West to work more inclusively on audience engagement, programming and as a Critical Friend on recruitment processes. Natasha is a diversity and inclusion consultant, reviewing and offering training and strategic planning with national venues and organisations such as outdoor arts lead 'Without Walls', visual arts venue De La Warr Pavilion in the South East, and BCP's Cultural Compact.





### Peckham Levels

Peckham Levels is a re-purposed multi-storey car park turned community hub. Over 100 local and independent businesses and activities have found a home over the seven floors that were once used to store parked cars. Local businesses are located in the co-working space of floors one to four, where a wide range of products are created. The upper three floors comprise bars and street food businesses, a yoga studio and hair salon, spaces for children to play as well as a rolling programme of exhibitions and events run by local artists and creatives. The project aims to bring prosperity to local communities, supporting local talent and enterprise to create a major community asset. It champions local businesses through providing supportive networks and repurposing and retrofitting an existing building with small and accessible studio spaces which keeps their rents within reach of smaller businesses, supporting their growth.

The project was founded on the principle of environmental and social sustainability. Alongside a variety of unique experiences for visitors and tourists, free event spaces are also provided to the local community. It is a joint venture between Make Shift, a platform for local talent, and Southwark Council, who own and maintain the building as an Asset of Community Value.

Peckham Levels is now a cultural destination which enables independent enterprises and local businesses to thrive.



Photos by Tim Crocker.  
Scheme by Turner.Works



# PART B

## 07 Specific Urban Interventions

The principles outlined in Part A provide insight into the widespread feeling about how the public wish to use their town centres, how people feel in town and the kind of values people hold dear. The principles are based on these values and have been interpreted through the lens of the research findings.

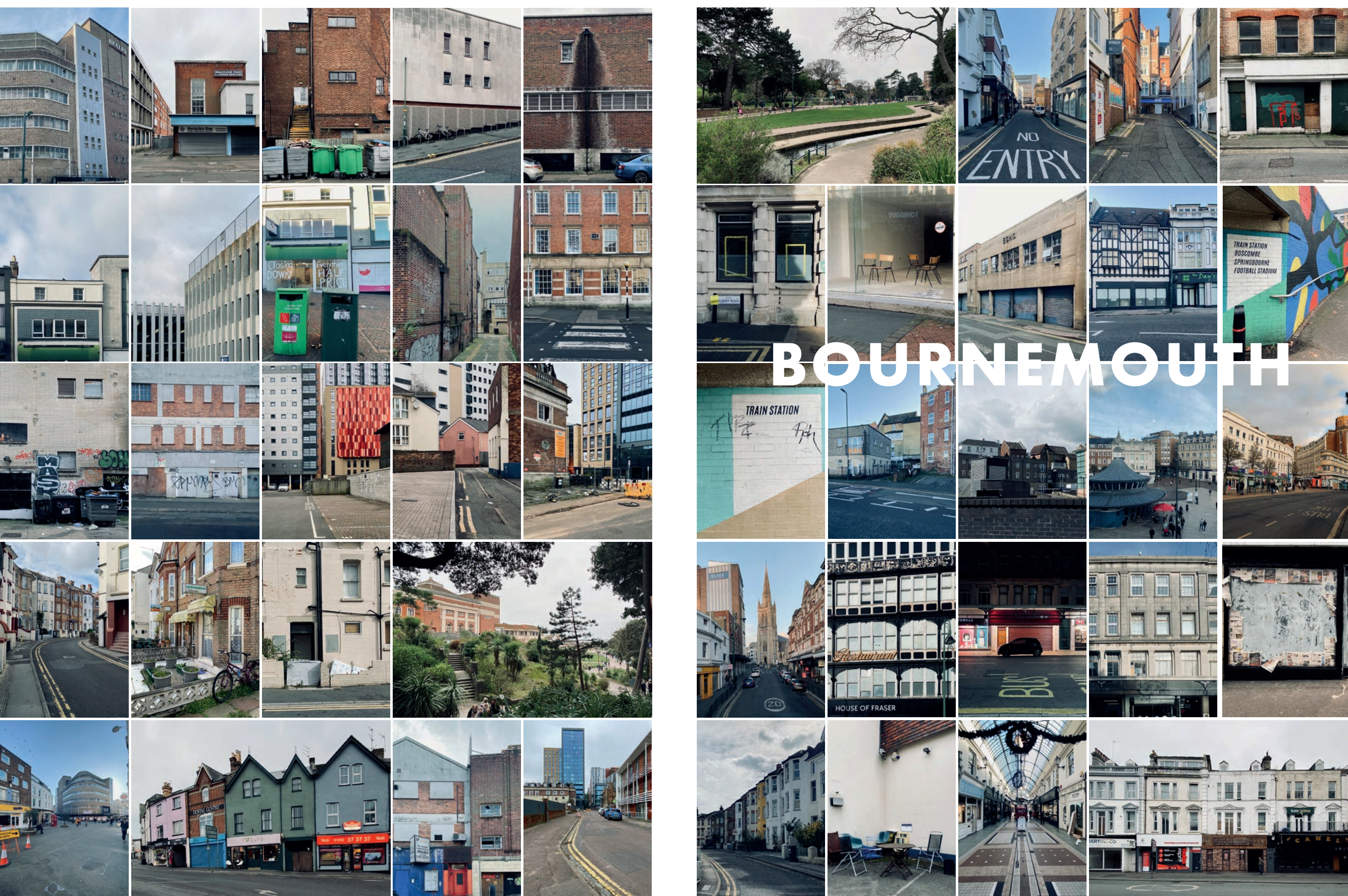
In this section, the principles are applied in the form of urban interventions to specific locations across the three town centres of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. These centres function in quite separate ways, and they present geographically-specific challenges and unique qualities which these interventions seek to amplify.

The following projects apply the principles in ways that can be mapped onto each of the town centres. The proposals comprise urban design and architectural interventions alongside suggestions around programming of events. This includes the 'soft structures' that are needed to support local cultures, independent businesses, and creative industries that this research project has found are highly valued by local people.

The projects outlined are embryonic. Continuing a co-creative design process with local communities, in order to develop more focused project outcomes, is advocated.

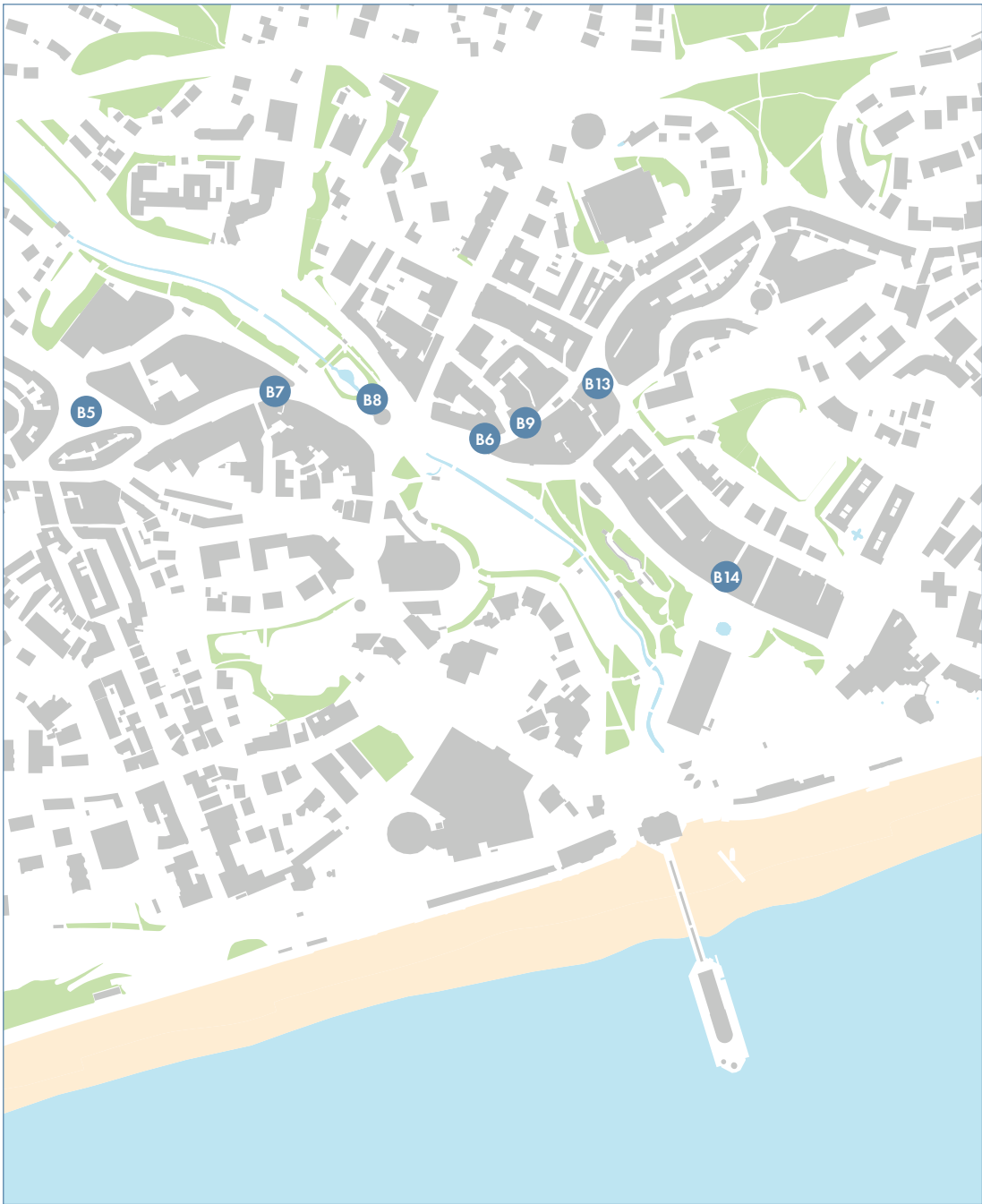








# 08 Bournemouth



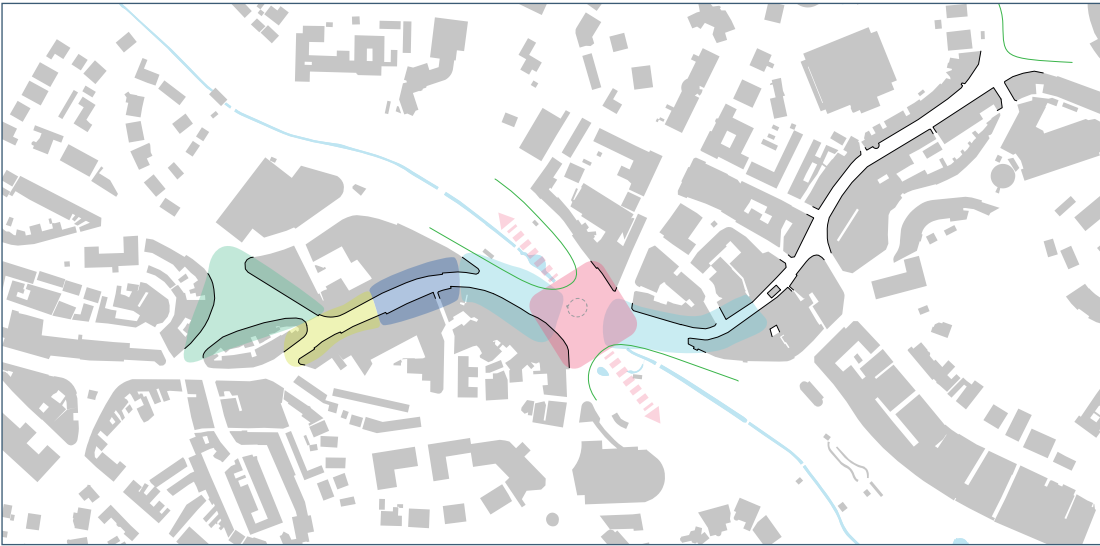
Only the site specific interventions are shown on this plan

B1	Bournemouth needs to become a thriving community centre, a meeting place and cultural centre for people from across the conurbation
B2	Creation of greater and more visible access to culture is required, and that culture needs to reflect 'who we are' in the BCP area
B3	Replace the concept of the anchor store with the anchor experience
B4	The Triangle is an area of town that is rich in independent shops, cafes, and businesses. This area can be seen to personify the future of Bournemouth town centre.
B5	Create a 'village green' at The Triangle. Unify this area with better surfacing and plant a forest of silver birch trees, to shield the space from the road.
B6	Initiate a Saturday artisan and farmer's market here. Encourage local business to programme this space with events and activity by directly funding and supporting a consortium of local traders to host events throughout the day and evenings.
B7	Commercial Road towards the Square should connect The Triangle to the centre of town. This can be achieved by planting an orchard down the centre of the street, towards The Avenue' shopping centre. A long pergola then runs from The Avenue towards The Square providing cover for outdoor seating.
B8	Remove the Obscura Café from The Square. Open this space up to improve sight lines from the Lower Gardens to the Middle Gardens. The Square becomes an event space and elements of events in the Lower Gardens should be bought into The Square. A playable water fountain is installed in the Square. This feature creates a playful atmosphere in the heart of the town where the green parks and the urban feel of the town meet. Fountains can be turned off for events or in colder weather.
B9	Seasonal markets remain connected to The Square however they are located along Old Christchurch Road and Commercial Road, not in The Square itself, drawing people up either side of the town centre. The Square is a place for activity (not retail) - it can be programmed, and it can also be appropriated by people for informal activity. For example, a Saturday afternoon dance battle?
B10	Create a Culture Drift to connect arts venues, temporary and flexible outdoor space with pop-up galleries, workshop space and activity space. Focus on activity and participation. Invest in people and enable them to propose and enact projects that will liven the space.



B11	Explore mechanisms to make it easier and cheaper to temporarily lease shops to stage short term projects.
B12	Replace the concept of the anchor store with the concept of the anchor experience. Town centre activity should make going to town fun and be an inclusive experience. For example, a town centre roller disco to bring kids into town also brings parents into town. A town centre spa and swimming pool will attract people, who will also shop, eat and go to the cinema.
B13	Support innovative town centres ideas that will create footfall and bring people to town. Innovative spaces and activities for children and young people. The precedents for this would be a mix between The Museum of Childhood (Victoria & Albert Museum) meets Palais De Tokyo meets The Olympic Village and Westfield in London where play areas meet with retail in generous spaces.
B14	Affordable creative hybrid work space. Think 'Silicon South meets graphic design meets artists and writers' – and then support collaboration and encourage these people to see town as their playground.
B15	Invest in people and enable people to see town as their space. Put in place mechanisms to make it easier for people to put on events and create a stage for whatever it is they do e.g. youth gymnastics squad demo.
B16	Improve Bournemouth town centre. Local business owners describe Bournemouth town centre as scruffy and want a better public realm and more activity which brings more people.
B17	Create a Culture Drift in Bournemouth that brings local, national, and international work to a local stage.

Possible interventions in Bournemouth town centre



- Create a 'village green' at the Triangle with better surfacing and a forest of silver birch trees
- Plant an orchard down the centre of the street
- A long pergola runs from The Avenue towards The Square providing cover for outdoor seating
- Seasonal markets remain connected to The Square however they are located along Old Christchurch Road and Commercial Road, not in The Square itself
- The Square becomes an event space and includes playable water fountain

## 8.1 The Main Attraction

Bournemouth town centre is the main attraction and lies at the centre of the BCP area. However, of all three town centres Bournemouth has the biggest vacuum to fill. Unlike Poole and Christchurch, it does not naturally serve a fifteen minute neighbourhood community. It appears not to have retained footfall and public perceptions of the town centre have fallen during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many residents that engaged with the project said Bournemouth town centre had 'fallen between the cracks', focusing too much on tourism and not enough on the local population, while at the same time, attracting a dangerous or edgy feel as people formed 'alternative communities' around the edges of the town centre.

This decline in Bournemouth town centre has led to a low point but this is when moments of new growth can emerge. The empty shops and what they represent presents an opportunity to respond to some of the key messages heard from the public.

- Bournemouth needs to be a thriving community centre. It is the centre of the conurbation, and it needs to be a meeting place for people from all across the conurbation.
- It must have an emphasis on events and gatherings to attract, engage and create an appropriate atmosphere.
- It needs greater and more visible access to culture.
- Replace anchor stores with anchor experiences.
- Make the town centre playable, inclusive, green.
- People say they live in or close to Bournemouth town centre because they are drawn to the mixed ecology of the area. They love the beach and cliff tops and local access to the forests.

## 8.2 ACTION 1 / Public Realm Strategy for the Main Street Pattern

- The seating and planters look neglected and outdated. Replacing these could create an opportunity to plant more trees and adopt a coherent paving strategy.
- This strategy should also be extended to the railway station to psychologically shorten the walk between the station and town.
- Connect pedestrian routes between the town centre, beach, rail, and bus links by creating pleasant and green paths ways.
- These routes and connections can be further enhanced at particular times with animated events that surprise and inform; e.g. a parade/promenade route to be utilised in outdoor events.



A revitalised Bournemouth Square, with playable street furniture, a flush water fountain (that can be switched off for events or in the winter) and better connections to the green gardens that frame the space

## 8.3 ACTION 2 / Reconnect the Gardens

- Remove the Obscura Café in the Square in order to make a bigger square for events and to reconnect the two halves of the gardens.
- With the Obscura Café gone, sight lines are opened up across the square between the Lower and Middle Gardens.
- Include a water play area in the square. During warm weather and when there are no events, this fountain is a place for kids and families. It puts play at the heart of Bournemouth town centre.
- Move some festival elements out of the Lower Gardens and into this new public space.
- Any street markets should be nudged towards Old Christchurch Road and Commercial Road leaving the square as a social space and a space for play.
- A programme of events should be provided that connect each public realm, as well as the routes, with the town centre rather than the beach at the hub.
- With most people not resident within Bournemouth town centre, it could be seen as the centre stage for community and cultural events to showcase themselves. Salsa in the Square, for example, has proven to have both a participatory and spectator appeal.



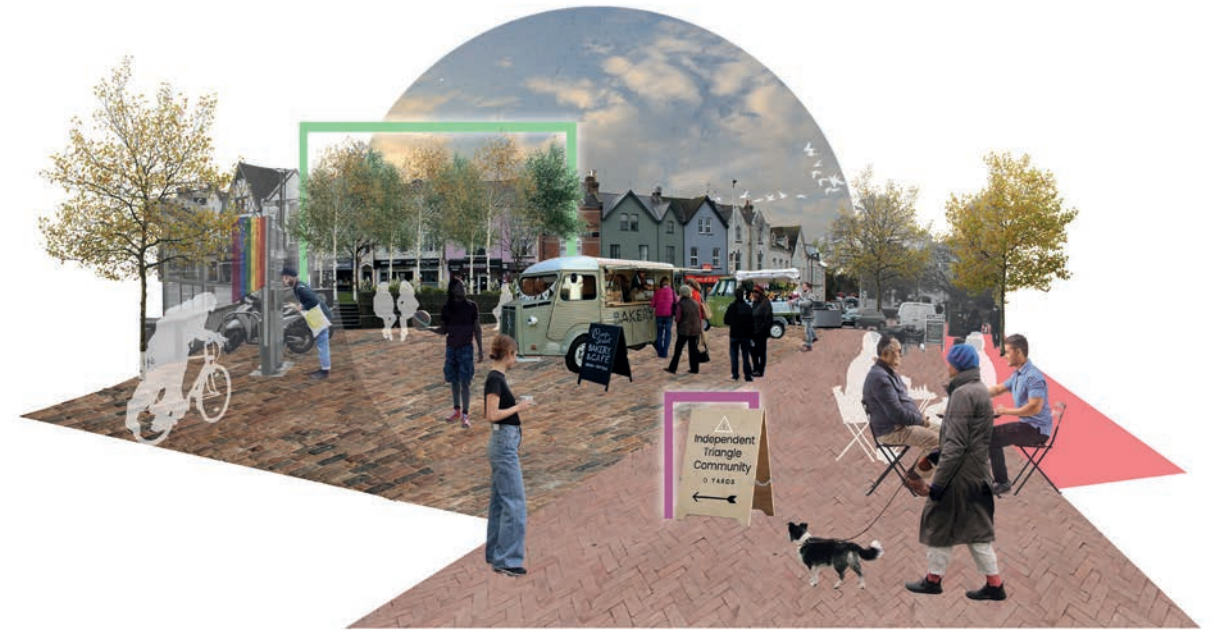
## 8.4 ACTION 3 / The Urban Orchard & Pergola

- A pergola in the lower section of Commercial Road would soften the street scene and provide seating for people to eat takeaway food from local cafés. It would provide shade in the summer and vines and plants would soften the street scene.
- An apple orchard along Commercial Road between the Triangle and the Square would be a unique intervention in the town centre. This wide street can be softened by tree planting.
- Fruit-bearing trees bring a richness and a complexity into a town centre and people can engage and connect and eat.
- New festivals, new rituals and new meaning are now possible – for example, a Bournemouth Apple Festival that includes juicing, selling via stalls on the street.
- This street orchard could connect to a ‘pocket forest’ at The Triangle – a silver birch forest that could form a windbreak and would improve the amphitheatre outside the library creating a more social space that would feel magical and unique. These trees could, for example, be strung with lights.
- It should be noted that the greening of Commercial Road has already begun on façade of The Avenue shopping centre. The feedback to this has been positive not just because people like how it looks but because people want to connect to solutions that address the climate crisis.

A pergola in the lower section of Commercial Road would soften the street scene and provide seating for people to eat takeaway food from local cafés



The Triangle should be the village green at the heart of independent Bournemouth



## 8.5 ACTION 4 / The Triangle: Independent Bournemouth

- The area around the triangle in Bournemouth is vibrant with independent shops and cafes and a real sense of independent culture. The Triangle should be the village green at the heart of independent Bournemouth. There could be a regular artisan or farmers market here and the opportunity for the local business owners to programme this space.
- The Triangle is already a viable community and festival space. However it needs resurfacing to create a coherent and high quality visual finish.
- A silver birch forest at the top of The Triangle would screen the space from traffic and add to the sense of this being an independent village within the town centre.

## 8.6 ACTION 5 / Fill the Empty Shops with New Uses

- There needs to be a new financial incentive or policy approach to help unlock vacant retail space.
- Without tackling the combination of issues that include high rents, business rates, restrictive leases and unit sizes that are too large for independent retailers will remain impossible to create a thriving town centre.

## 8.7 ACTION 6 / Carefully Introduce More Residential Uses

- More people living in the town centre in flats and apartments above street level is a good thing as it will increase vibrancy and increase general footfall. It will also create a market for local goods and services within the town centre, such a convenience stores.
- This research has shown that people really value the town centre 'as a centre' and see it primarily as a place of connection, a centre for culture and community as well as retail. This means it is crucial to retain the proper feel of town centre. Too much residential development risks diluting this.

## 8.8 ACTION 7 / Replace Anchor Stores With Anchor Experiences

Establishing anchor experiences over anchor stores will bring people into town to take part in many different activities.

There follows a series of three scenarios for anchor experiences, based on the ideas collected from all age groups and potential user groups throughout this project. These three ideas are just examples of how a matrix of anchor activities could be located across the town centre to create footfall.

### A. Ex-Cinema Buildings on Westover Road

- The cinema on Westover Road becomes a hang out space inspired by Peckham Levels (which combines artists maker studios).
- This could become home to Silicon South creating an 'arts x tech' incubator of small independent concessions, stalls, bars, music venues, yoga studios etc.
- This could be designed as a seamless drift between activities but could also incorporate a challenging climbing wall which would attract one time users and regular climbers.

- This playground would be aimed at a 20 – 35 age group, the student and graduate population, the local creatives, the Silicon Southers. The notion of a playground captures what this age group say they would use.

### B. Ex-Beales Department Store

- The ground floor of Beales becomes 'The Future Learning Space'; a place for teenagers comprising a trampoline centre and roller disco on the ground floor. The upper floors cater for younger age groups.
- Clothes concessions and shops for kids run throughout the building as do parent-friendly cafés.
- A children's performance area and theatre and a changing exhibition space – a mix between cultural centre, activity space and a parent hang out.
- The precedent for this would be a mix between The Museum of Childhood at the Victoria and Albert Museum meets Palais De Tokyo meets the Olympic Village at Westfield in Stratford where play areas meet with retail in generous spaces.
- This is 'Montessori meets South Coast Roast' and not a ball pit hell. This is a pleasant well-designed contemporary feeling space, not screaming primary colours, terrible acoustics, and uncomfortable seats. It is designed as much for the adults who care for children as the children themselves.

### C. Roof of the Avenue Road Multi-Storey Car Park

- A swimming pool and roof top terrace with a combination of a fun pool and slides, adult training pool and relaxing spa. This could be on a roof top along Commercial Road or Avenue Road, over the large floorplate buildings of over a car park.
- Bringing a pool into town would offer swimming lessons or holiday fun on a rainy day, also connecting the town to beach activities.
- Cardiff International Pool combines all three types of swimming while Bath Spa presents a contemporary reimagining of a historic feature. Meanwhile, the public pool and private spa in Bethnal Green shows how these two enterprises could work together.



## 8.9 ACTION 8 / The Bournemouth Culture Drift

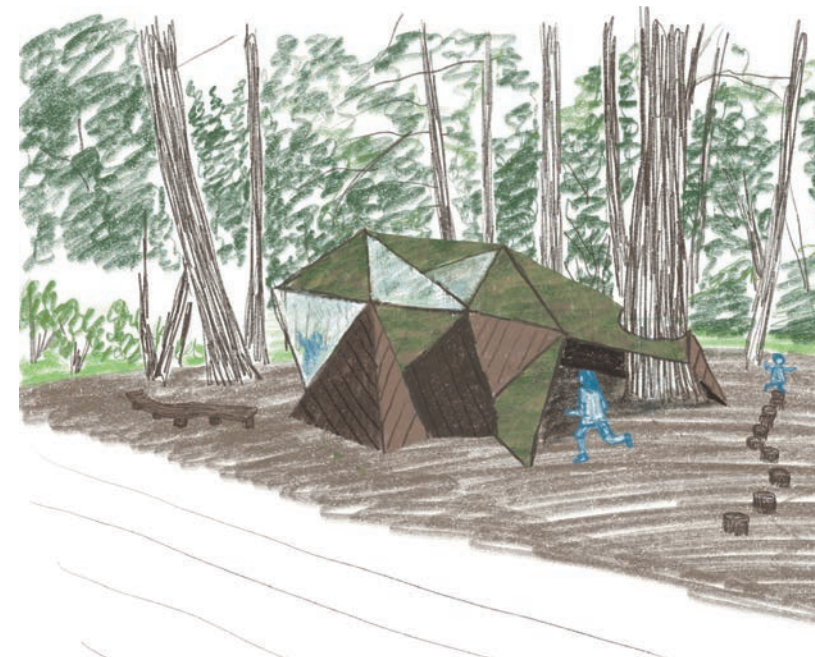
The Culture Drift for Bournemouth will open up areas of the town and create new opportunities for people to engage with both culture and ecology. The Culture Drift will help profile cultural work of local, national, and international standard, giving residents the opportunity to access great work in their town centre. This emphasis on culture also encourages visitors to travel to the town to experience culture in a unique setting. This emphasis will also build connections with AUB and BU, creating opportunities for students to stay local post-graduation and pursue a viable career in the arts and creative industries. The potential for collaboration between the arts, culture, and tech start-up networks, such as Silicon South, creates the opportunity for hybrid forms of enterprise and culture to emerge.

The ecology of Bournemouth is unique, making it an extraordinary place to live. This research demonstrates that people wish to have greater connection to nature. The Culture Drift in Bournemouth is therefore designed to emphasise and enhance the town centre by strengthening these connections to ecology.

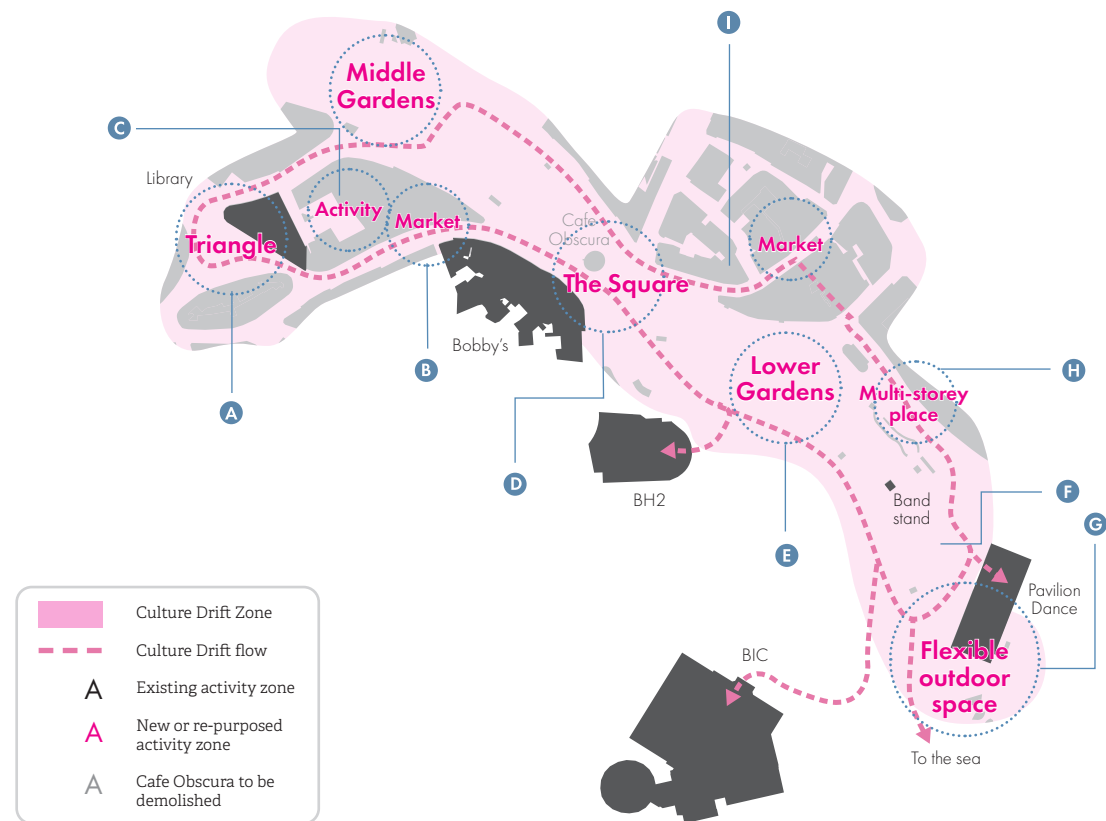
In Bournemouth, the Culture Drift is a circular route that takes in the Square, the Lower Gardens, and the Middle Gardens. This loop will provide access to mass culture summer festivals, ice skating, Christmas trees, pop-up events for families, music, theatre and dance with a broad appeal and party atmosphere. The loop also includes the BH2 cinema complex, the BIC, and the Pavilion Theatre – all occupying places in town centre culture.

- The loops includes connections to a refurbished and/or rebuilt BIC and to the Pavilion Theatre and Pavilion Dance South West (PDSW).
- PDSW can offer contemporary dance on a flexible, programmable space outside on the terraces south of the theatre building itself. This area should be a place for small scale events, outdoor arts activities, performances.
- The Lower Gardens, as a more formal event space, need to address the flood plain nature of the space and the impact built structures have upon on the soft landscape. There are several potential performance stages that could be serviced – the bandstand and the ex-balloon site are potential amphitheatre venues for more regular programming and resourcing.
- The recent “Picnic Park Deli” events could be further supported and encouraged as part of the renewed Bournemouth Aviary and Pine Walk Art Exhibition spaces.

- Big screens are a potential seasonal feature at the ex-balloon site, as witnessed during the 2021 Wimbledon tennis tournament. There is potential for more structured fan zones for future televised events in 2022, such as the Queen’s Jubilee or the Commonwealth Games. Certain public events are better experienced as shared happenings rather than isolated viewing at home or on a mobile device.
- The rockery and Picnic Park sections of the Lower Gardens offer opportunity for people to sit and look out across the park. Here, more intimate happenings can occur.
- A regular “makers market” amongst the trees in the Lower Gardens can sell the independent products that people are looking for. It can also become a test bed for local makers before they progress to a concession or a full retail outlet.
- Westover Road has a history of high end fashion and tailoring. Attracting new, independent fashion retailers to this street, linked to the street’s existing reputation for art galleries, aligns with the Culture Drift concept. Can Westover Road be Bournemouth’s answer to Poole’s Kingland Crescent?
- The “culture meets tech-start-ups” concept for the old cinema buildings on Westover Road will provide the anchor experience for this part of town.
- The Culture Drift also incorporates the Arcade on Gervis Place, which is one area of town that feels attractive (the result of a combination of scale, materials, and maintenance) as well as Bobby’s, the key landmark building fronting the Square.



The Children's Story Telling Theatre is a scaled-down mini theatre space set amongst the trees



**E** The Lower Gardens and band stand - These spaces continue to provide entertainment throughout the year. The spaces and the activity that happens here is popular and well loved.

**F** The Children's Story Telling Theatre - A scaled-down mini theatre space set amongst the trees.

**G** The Pavillion Terraces - Remodelled as flexible outdoor space. This can be used as a performance space, dance floor, a place for dance lessons and more. Perhaps even a regular Silent Disco on a Friday night.

**H** The old cinema on Westover Road - It is converted to a mixed use space accommodating artist and technology studio space, cafes, bars, spaces to play and spaces to meet.

**I** Old Christchurch Road - Empty shops at the southern end of Old Christchurch Road become pop up spaces for events, and other activity.

**A** The Triangle - This distinctive part of town is independent Bournemouth. This area is home to the library, independent shops and cafés, and attractive architecture. The open space at the centre of the Triangle is to be the 'village green'. A silver birch forest, planted to the rear provides a screen from the road. The space will be programmed by a committee of local business owners, who will be given an events budget.

**B** Commercial Road - This street has an apple orchard and a long pergola. Planting an orchard down the centre of the Commercial Road radically re-invents this space. A pergola with seating underneath provide a shady space to sit in the summer.

**C** Town Centre Swimming Pool and Rooftop Spa - An empty unit on Commerical Road is transformed into a swimming pool and wellbeing centre.

**D** The Square - It is to be opened up by demolishing the Camera Obscura Café, thereby connecting the Lower and Middle Gardens. Activity from the Lower Gardens is extended into the square, bringing people into the town centre. Seasonal markets are moved up Old Christchurch Road and Commercial Road to draw people up the high streets. The Square is an events and social space.



Pavilion Dance South West should offer contemporary dance on a flexible, programmable space on the terraces outside the theatre.





### Rooftop pool at Thermae Bath Spa

In the centre of the historic city of Bath lies the rooftop pool at Thermae Bath Spa. This is a contemporary re-working of a historic town centre monument.

It offers a unique experience. Visitors can bathe in Britain's original natural thermal spa with views over the city skyline.

Image courtesy of Thermae Bath Spa.  
Photography by Philip Edwards.



Project: Höweler & Yoon Architecture.  
Photography by John Horner.

### Swing Time

Swing Time consists of an interactive playground of 20 illuminated circular swings of varying sizes. The playable element invites users to interact with the swings and with each other, creating an active urban environment. The swings have internal LED lighting, operated by a micro-controller, which measures the swing's acceleration so when the swings are in motion, the swing changes colour from white to purple.

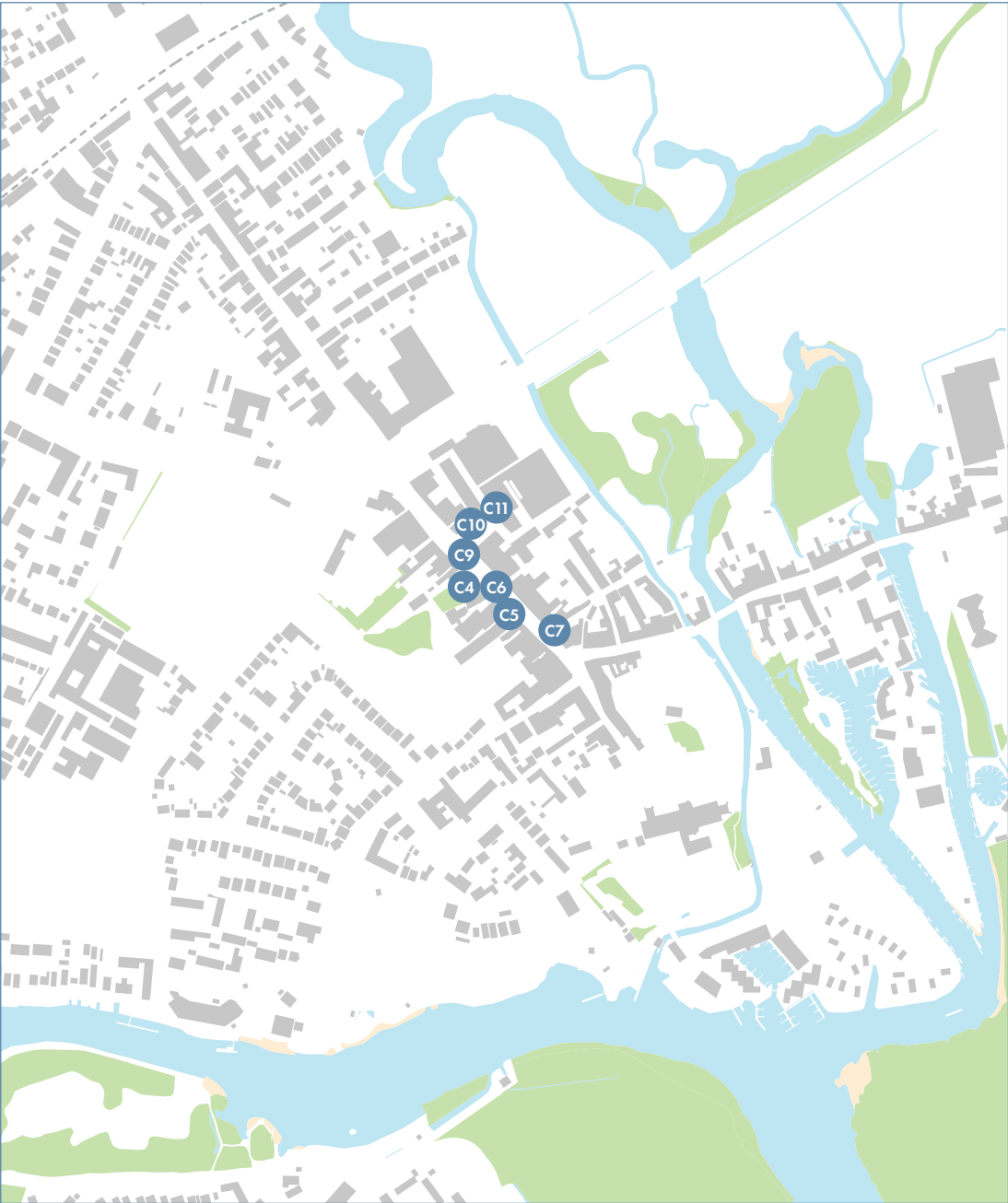
A playable element such as this could be introduced in Bournemouth town centre to encourage younger people into town, although the swings can be used by all age groups.







# 09 Christchurch



Only the site specific interventions are shown on this plan

C1	Enable better access to the high street for walkers by creating coherent walking routes through and around the town. These routes should utilise walks along the river, through Druitt House and Gardens, The Quomps and Priory Gardens and further afield. Connecting the High Street to the rest of the town centre via walking routes will bring more people into town.
C2	Create a Culture Drift that connects local culture and heritage assets to local ecology.
C3	Support and create a connected programme of cultural activity and events that uses the town centre, The Quomps and riverside walks. This could build on, for example, the success of the food festival.
C4	Provide a better setting for the Library & Learning Centre by moving the bus stop, improving, and widening pavements to create generous public space for people to sit and meet or for the library to host events that spill out into public space.
C5	Provide a better setting for the Regent Centre by improving and widening pavements so that people can meet outside before and after performances and so that activity can spill onto the street.
C6	Foreground the pedestrian experience by widening pavements and calming traffic. Consider ways to reduce daytime traffic, slow traffic down and create a better experience for pedestrians.
C7	Declutter and widen pavements.
C8	Develop and implement a Design Code that amplifies the historic qualities of Christchurch High Street. For example, consider restoring or unifying shop frontages and introduce a colour palette for buildings.
C9	Apply green landscape elements from the Priory Gardens and echo elements of this onto Christchurch High Street and Saxon Square in order to create more curiosity. Also, amplify the medieval feel of the town by creating curios and interesting pathways, opening up alleyways or short cuts in order to create a sense of 'stumbling upon' or 'finding something hidden'.
C10	Consider Saxon Square as the 'village green' in Christchurch. Focus on creating ambience and using this as an event space during the daytime and evening.

C11	Consider ways to create a softer and more welcoming feel in Saxon Square, for example greening buildings, adding benches around trees, using lighting to create ambience. Consider adding more cafés and restaurants to Saxon Square with outdoor seating. Live music could be added to create an atmosphere.
C12	Introduce a 'Local Crafts Guild Model' where people can gain support and advice, have mentoring and discussions with fellow creatives and be part of a creative community. Investing in people to start up independent business and enabling them to organise activity will benefit the town centre.

Possible interventions in Christchurch town centre



- Amplify the historic qualities of Christchurch High Street by restoring or unifying shop frontages, introduce a colour palette for buildings, and declutter and widen the pavements
- Consider Saxon Square as the village green for Christchurch
- Make stronger connections between the High Street and both the waterfront and the Priory
- Provide a better setting for the Regent Centre and for the Library & Learning Centre by improving and widening pavements so activity can better spill onto the street

9.1 Simply Make a Good Place Better

Christchurch town centre is thriving. It has good sense of community and people who live here care passionately about their local town.

People are proud to live here, and community venues are well-used. These include the excellent facilities at the Library & Learning Centre and the Regent Centre which is staffed by volunteers. Druitt Hall is a community hall set in Druitt Gardens and provides a venue for local groups to meet.

The Regent Centre, the Library & Learning Centre, Priory Park Gardens, The Quomps, The Quay and Red House Museum & Gardens are all key cultural and heritage assets. Saxon Square can become a flexible public space used for events and as an outdoor meeting space.

Christchurch town centre has a matrix of cultural assets, easy access to green space, river walks, historic buildings, and many great locally organised activities. It has a good night time economy and a range of restaurants and bars. In many ways it is an example of a town that uses activity rather than an anchor store to attract people. The regular market and food market show that locals and visitors will come into town to participate in events.

Christchurch could be seen as a town where the matrix of activity afforded by cultural assets, events and activities is in equal balance to retail. People want a greater diversity of shops from smaller maker type shops to smaller brands.

Its main failing right now is the quality of the pedestrian experience on the high street. The high street is an attractive historic street that, because of traffic volumes and speed, is blighted by noise. This deters people from spending time on the street.

The visual clutter of vehicles makes it difficult to appreciate the beautiful period buildings. These are discoloured and obscured by traffic. The pavements are cluttered with bus stops, street furniture and brick planters. These add to the overall congested feel of the pavement.

The experience of the high street on Market Day – when no traffic is running along the street – allows for a better appreciation of the historic buildings and a more relaxed walk along the street. Finding ways to extend this relaxed experience on non-market days would make Christchurch high street feel more like a destination.

Many people referenced Lymington and Ringwood as examples of what they would like Christchurch to be. It should be noted that both of these towns have traffic systems and road designs that foreground pedestrian experience.



## 9.2 ACTION 1 / A Pedestrian First High Street

- Declutter the public realm and widen the pavements. The southern part of the High Street (approaching The Priory) has maintained a positive atmosphere, and this should be the 'atmospheric benchmark' for the rest of the street.
- Introduce measures to reduce the volume and speed of traffic.
- Commission a study into the full or partial pedestrianisation of the high street at various times of day.

Develop and implement a Design Code that amplifies the historic qualities of Christchurch High Street. For example, consider restoring or unifying shop frontages and introduce a colour palette for buildings.



Saxon Square should be seen as a community meeting place for festivals and events.



## 9.3 ACTION 2 / Better Public Spaces

Saxon Square should be seen as a community meeting place for festivals and events. At the moment, it feels bare and the materials bland. There are already a number of pop-up businesses who use the square, for example Mickey's Florists. These give much needed vibrancy to an otherwise banal square. Improvements could include:

- Greening the shop fronts and public areas in order to soften the buildings and provide some relief from the architecture.
- Transforming it into 'the village green': a central focal space for outdoor activity.
- Curious spaces to playfully mimic medieval history, for example archways, trellis and pergola.



### 9.4 ACTION 3 / Highlight Civic Buildings

The Library & Learning Centre and the Regent Centre are two cultural centres lost in the street scene. Both need to be highlighted and profiled through public realm changes. The Library & Learning Centre is behind a busy bus stop.

- Create civic spaces immediately adjacent to both The Library & Learning Centre and The Regent Centre to provide a better setting for these buildings, including wider pavements and areas to sit out.

### 9.5 ACTION 4 / Connect Walking Routes

- Connect walking routes to enable people to better access the high street from The Quay, The Quomps, Priory Gardens, Druitt Gardens, and the riverside walk. This connected walking route will provide pleasant, green, traffic free walks into and around town.
- By connecting these high quality routes to the heritage high street, the high street becomes an extension of the walking experience rather than a poor, secondary experience.
- These routes also comprise The Culture Drift and connect with local ecology. The pleasant, green nature of these spaces should be amplified in order to maximise the benefit of walking into town.



Provide a better setting for the Library & Learning Centre by moving the bus stop, and improving and widening pavements to create generous public space for people to sit and meet.



9.6 ACTION 5 /  
Christchurch Design Code

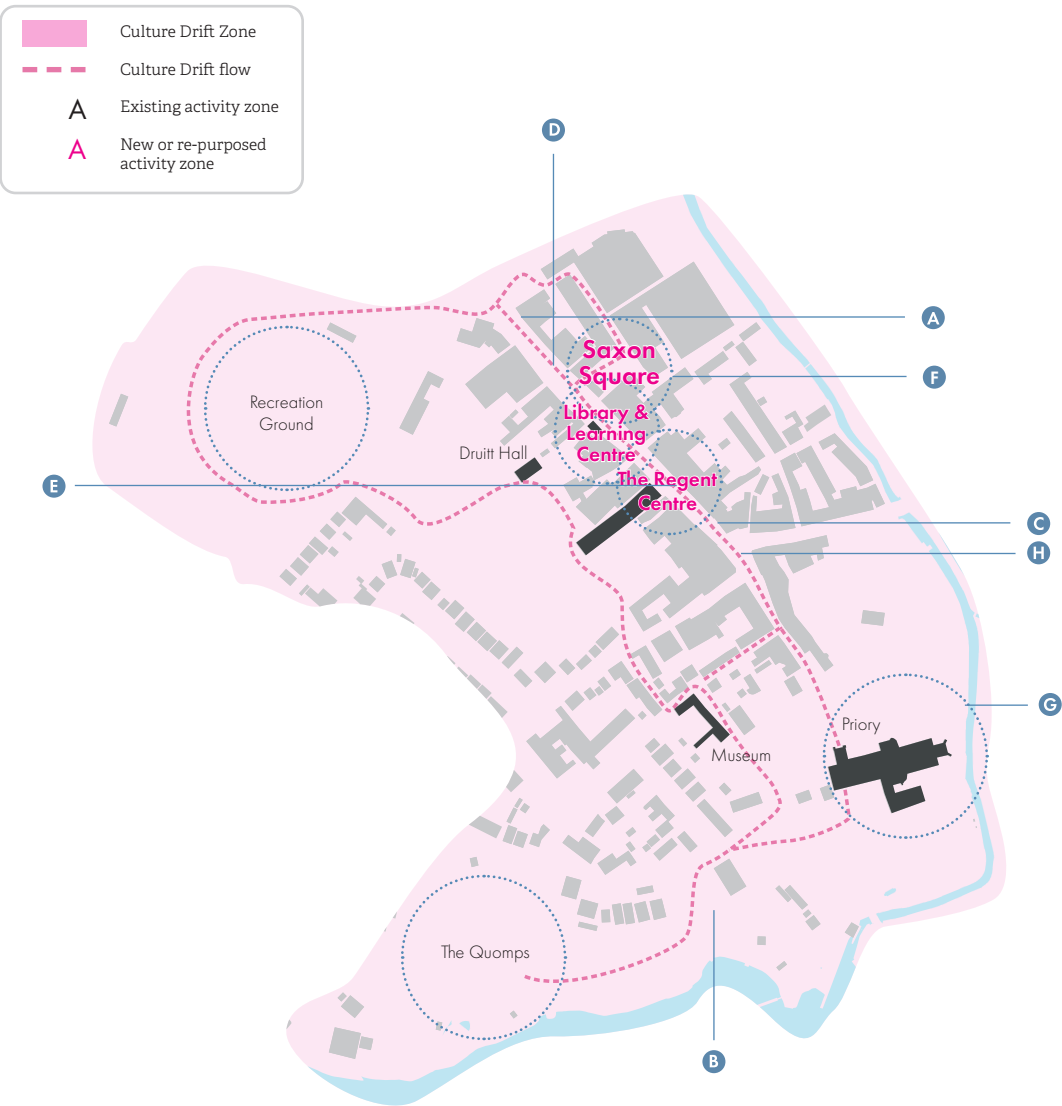
Poor management of shop fronts means that at first glance the High Street appears run down. Yet the high street is extremely rich architecturally and this can be overlooked.

- Amplify the character of the high street through use of a design code that has a focus on shop fronts growing larger through plot amalgamation and adopted national or international brand identities.
- The design code could specify a limited colour palette to create greater diversity. At the moment the shops are almost all a version of off-white. Adopting a range of colours could amplify sense of a coastal town, enhancing the charming character feel that makes Poole different to Poole and Bournemouth.

9.7 ACTION 6 /  
Christchurch Culture Drift

Christchurch town centre is rich in history and all activity around the Priory grounds has a deep sense of tradition. Christchurch also has a very strong and active local community who engage in local culture. The Regent Centre is run by volunteers, The Red House Museum runs a professional and varied programme of exhibitions, events and workshops, Druitt Hall is fiercely independent flexible community and the river walk, and The Rec and The Quomps provide access to large open green space where there are already regular visits from the circus and the fair.

Christchurch already has strong provision and a good, established community who access and rely on access to Culture Drift for social life.



- A** Widen pavements and give priority to the pedestrian experience on the High Street to make walking on the high street a relaxing and pleasant experience.
- B** Improve wayfinding and connect walking routes along the river and The Quomps.
- C** Develop and implement a design code to help restore original features along Christchurch High Street and to help amplify its architectural features.
- D** Improve the public realm outside the Library & Learning Centre in order to highlight this well-used community building.
- E** Improve the public realm outside The Regent Centre so that events might spill out onto the pavement or people might comfortably meet before a performance.

- F** Saxon Square could function as the village green in Christchurch. It would host music and performances and allow people to casually encounter activity. The space should feel more welcoming and be visually more interesting.
- G** Create visual references to The Priory and medieval history of the town. This could include borrowing elements from Priory Gardens or echoing the historic ambience of the streets around The Priory.
- H** Local people referred to Lymington and Ringwood as town centres Christchurch could take inspiration from. Frome has an established food festival and farmers market; this could also be a reference point for Christchurch.

**The Furlong, Ringwood**

The Furlong Centre in Ringwood is a town centre retail focussed development. It is populated by a mix of high-end branded stores and some independent traders. It is set around a car-free courtyard space, enhanced by street trees and places to sit, chat and people watch. The place is characterised by a variety of big name brands, independent stores, salons, and cafés spilling out into the attractive public realm. The public space regularly hosts popular live music events, local farmers’ markets, and events for the whole community.



Right image courtesy of New Forest Cottages (Reasons to Visit Ringwood – New Forest Cottages Blog)

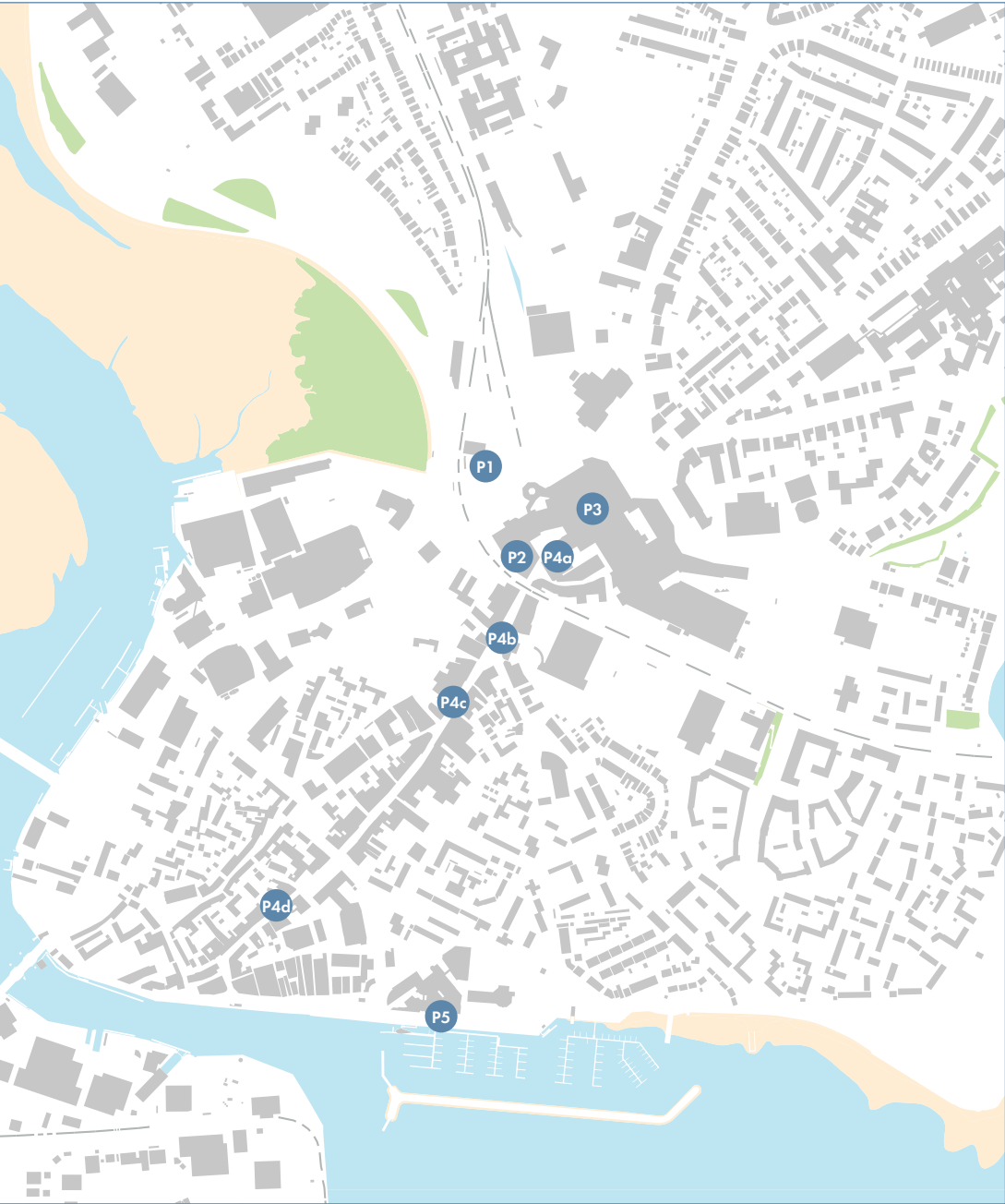
Bottom image – @FurlongCentre on Twitter.











Only the site specific interventions are shown on this plan

P1	Relocate the bus station adjacent to the railway station to create a transport hub. Repurpose the existing bus station structure to create an amphitheatre and public park. This new gateway into town will connect Poole Park and Poole Lighthouse to Poole High Street.
P2	Create a visitor attraction in the form of a rooftop garden on the top of the Dolphin Centre car park. This will exploit the amazing panoramic views south, across town and towards harbour. This will become Poole's answer to the New York Highline.
P3	Transform the external structure of the Dolphin Centre into a living green wall. Repurposing existing modernist architecture to create a contemporary entrance to the town centre.
P4	<p>Establish a Culture Drift through Poole. The emphasis of this Culture Drift is live events.</p> <p>a Dolphin Centre, Kingland Crescent and Falkland Square – This area is inspired by Kingland Crescent as the beginnings of a creative quarter. The character of this Kingland Crescent spreads to Falkland Square which now acts as a social space and festival area for a creative community</p> <p>b Railway Line to North Street – This area is 'everyday Poole': focussed on a friendly plaza and meeting space. This develops into a town square, place to meet and gather for seniors or kids on the way home from school.</p> <p>c North Street to Chapel Lane – This area serves a local residential neighbourhood. It features everyday useful shops and a local market selling fruit and vegetables. This area could also be considered a community zone, with empty units given over to health and wellbeing uses, providing support for local people. This area becomes a hub for social entrepreneurs.</p> <p>d New Orchard, Castle Street and to the Quayside – This area is closed to traffic to allow cafes and restaurants to spill onto the street creating an atmospheric evening and night time economy and a lively day time scene.</p>
P5	Quayside to be decluttered to allow more flexibility as a meeting and outdoor events space. For example, when the road closes, the roundabout at the eastern end becomes a stage area and adjacent seating accommodates the audience.
P6	Design and deliver other flexible space across the town to encourage the opportunity for live performance. This should celebrate Poole's recent history of regular outdoor performances, festivals, and parties.



## 10.1 Reuniting Different Planets

Consider for a moment the external environment and the public realm around the Poole Lighthouse arts centre. Dual carriageways, guardrails, fast traffic, narrow pavements, tortuous pedestrian crossing experiences.

Contrast this with the external environment and the public realm around Poole Museum at opposite end of the town centre. Largely traffic-free, pedestrians can wander freely on high quality surfaces and active ground floors lead down a network of streets and lanes. Two cultural anchors in the same town, only a kilometre apart, but they feel like they are on different planets.

The challenge in Poole is to create a coherent and cohesive experience: united disparate elements that all need to contribute to the success of the town centre.

## 10.2 Poole High Street, a long street with different characters

As part of the research phase, the team listened to two ladies whose experiences act as an interesting case study about the character of Poole High Street. Both were widows, pensioners and lived in flats in the town centre. They said they would often go to Poole Park and take part in an outdoor tai chi class in the morning and then walk back to Poole High Street for a coffee. They would bump into a friend and sit and have a chat. They used the town centre as an 'outdoor social space' and community centre. They like it when 'things were on in town' and they would enjoy being part of the street scene. They talked at length about one afternoon when Pavilion Dance South West had people dancing in the street. They enjoyed watching this and would like more things like this happening.

They were not interested in Kingland Crescent further north and were priced out of the cafés in the southern part of the high street. This middle bit of town felt like their place.

This middle area of Poole High Street could be identified as a community area, a zone for generations to meet, bargain shopping and to sit out and people watch.

Designing this area with the playable and inclusive principle in mind, and the independent attitude would enable this area to keep its community feel and transform it into a community zone for local people to use in an everyday way.

Other action points for Poole include:

- Consolidate what works on Poole High Street and amplify the zones that have naturally emerged making a series of public spaces that give the long high street a grammar.
- Repurpose exiting modernist architecture with a greening programme that makes it feel contemporary.
- Create gardens on the roof of the Dolphin Centre.
- Create a transport hub by placing the bus interchange immediately adjacent to the train station.





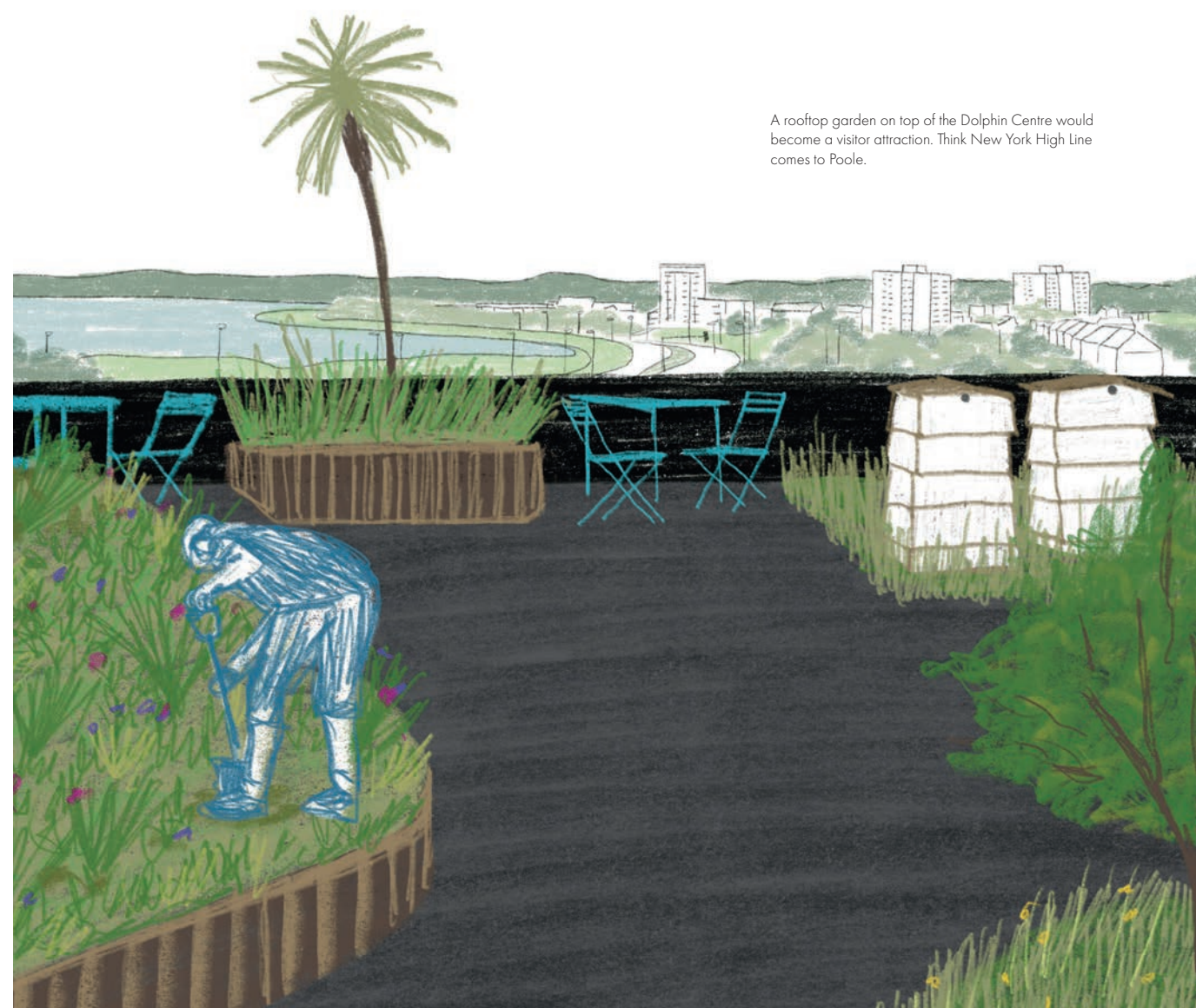
Greening the grey at the top of town will significantly shift perceptions about Poole town centre

### 10.3 ACTION 1 / Top of town – Dolphin Centre, Car Park & Bus Station

- Monuments to modernism. Do not demolish the amazing structures and brutalist architecture that form the complex of the Dolphin Centre and the associated car parks and bus station. Instead, make precision interventions to pull apart and make a more permeable, delicate structure, shot through with greenery and verdant enhancements.
- The strip of modernist architecture in this space defines the town centre but also creates a disconnected space. Reworking the existing architecture as green infrastructure will create striking images for the town and will soften the edges of an area of town that currently feels intimidated and gloomy.

- A rooftop garden would be a visitor attraction. The RHS gardens in Bridgewater, Salford provide a template as do other rooftop gardens in London and New York.
- The corridors and lanes between the car park and The Dolphin Centre and Poole High Street can feel intimidating, although the spaces themselves are interesting and create a series of interconnected routes into town. Consider how to repurpose these corridors. A music venue? Bouldering? Better lighting? Continue the greening theme? Allow the corridors to become an arts venue or gallery? Navigate them using zip wires? Fun, playful creative repurposing of these spaces is required.

165



A rooftop garden on top of the Dolphin Centre would become a visitor attraction. Think New York High Line comes to Poole.



Do not demolish the structures and brutalist architecture that form the complex of the Dolphin Centre and the associated car parks and bus station. Instead, make precision interventions to pull apart and make a more permeable, delicate structure, shot through with greenery and verdant enhancements.



Falkland Square to adopt a village green type feel



## 10.4 ACTION 2 / Improve Falkland Square

This book has identified Poole as an area to develop the creative industries through the development of live / work spaces that build on the success of Kingland Crescent. If the Kingland Crescent feel is extended in Falkland Square, then connects with The Dolphin Centre, this would create a high end sophisticated feel in this part of town.

- Continue the atmosphere and feeling of Kingland Crescent into Falkland Square creating a village green type feel that attracts the kinds of people who go to Kingland Crescent.
- Outdoor seating, market space, shops, cafés and restaurants should spill out on this space. Remove the planters, grass the middle area.
- This space should have a range of mixed level seating and flexible spaces that could accommodate live music.

## 10.5 ACTION 3 / High Street North

- Establish a market on the southern side of the railway tracks. This would be an everyday market in an everyday area of town, part of a Fifteen Minute Neighbourhood serving the residential community close to the town centre.
- This is to be a useful part of town where you can buy fruit and vegetables cheaply at the market, kid's clothes, cat food, a bag of screws and more.





An everyday market in an everyday area of town

### 10.6 ACTION 4 / High Street Central

This middle part of Poole High Street is often seen as a problem area. However this part of town has a community of people who use it. This community need to feel valued and included.

This tricky bit of the high street becomes 'the community zone' - it is for a place for parents with kids and people who come to town for a bit of company, to bump into neighbours. This section of Poole High Street is to serve the local fifteen minute neighbourhood.

The aim is to create a mixed use area where kids can play, parents can shop, and older generations can interact or enjoy a family scene – an intergenerational cross-over.

Adding a mix of seating, planting, trees, and elements that could be playable to the civic square outside the HSBC building will consolidate this area as the everyday practical area of the high street. The aim is to create somewhere to meet after school for children to be able to play in a relaxed way from traffic and where green elements soften the street scene.

With this part of the street feeling like a square, the likelihood of encounter is made greater and activities on the Poole Culture Drift could be programmed here.

The shops would be shops that serve the local area as well as community centred spaces. There might be a play group or an after school club in one of these empty units. Local social entrepreneurs might enrich this section of town setting up community-focused projects for the people who live here.

There should be support available to facilitate business ideas. For local entrepreneurs, community support can be found in shops on this street along with projects and activities. These could include arts and crafts for children and adults, access to services around health and wellbeing, advice and training, places to exercise, places to play, and places to socialise.

### 10.7 ACTION 5 / High Street South

This southern end of The High Street is anchored by Poole Museum. It is full of cafés and restaurants, and it affords casual strolling to The Quay and sitting out in pavement cafés. It is largely pedestrianised and becomes a party and social street in the evenings.

This narrow end to Poole High Street has a lovely intimacy to it, and if that opens out onto an expansive bit of public realm on Poole Quay, this will provide contrast in scale and the opportunity for the whole community to meet on The Quay.

This southern end of Poole High Street is full of cafés and restaurants is largely pedestrianised and becomes a party and social street in the evenings.

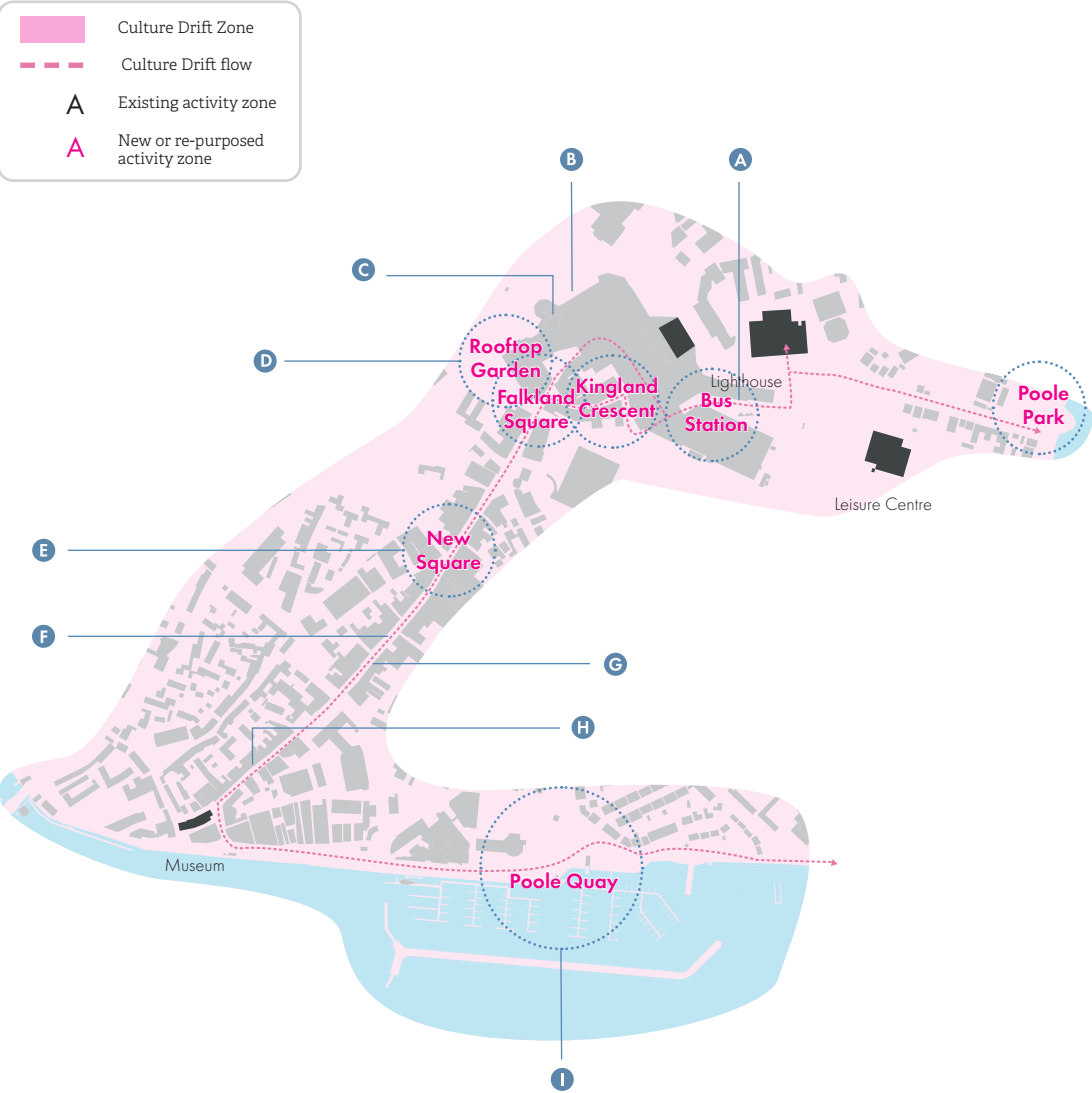




10.8 ACTION 6 /  
Poole Culture Drift

Culture Drift for Poole comprises a walk that can be taken from Poole Quay along the coast to Poole Park and back to The Lighthouse, through the bus station – see suggestions for unpicking and greening this structure – and through onto Poole High Street.

In Poole the Culture Drift connects Poole Lighthouse and The Maritime Museum via a number of new or newly re-purposed outdoor spaces. Each of these event spaces can be used for community events, music and performance, theatre and dance. The purpose of these open ended, flexible spaces is to create more opportunities for the community to connect and to enjoy their town. The people of Poole like to party and this project has revealed that people want more live events in the town.



**A** The bus station - It is relocated to create a transport hub at the train station. The current bus station structure retains its brutalist architecture, and the structure is hollowed out to create an amphitheatre and public park. This space connects Poole Lighthouse to the High Street and opens up new walking routes to the town.

**B** The front edge of The Dolphin Centre - It becomes a monumental living green wall which connects to the park and amphitheatre in the site of the current bus station.

**C** The top floor of the multi storey car park - This becomes a roof top garden and terrace with views of the harbour, connecting Poole to the contemporary movement toward 'green' spectacle.

**D** Falkland Square - This becomes a new village green, serving the creative community that has grown around Kingland Crescent. The space will have a festival feel. It will be a place to watch bands and live theatre. There will be a regular artisan market and street food. This space can be easily booked and programmed by the community.

**E** New Meetings Square - This area is used by people who live locally. It is a place where older generations meet in the day time. This area will serve this demographic with more seating, more trees, and a central area. Throughout the week there will be the chance to encounter activity specifically tailored to this demographic and the isolation some people experience.

**F** The section between North Road to Chapel Lane - It will usefully serve the immediate neighbourhood. It will have every day, useful shops. There will be a regular useful, affordable market selling fruit and vegetables, hardware, and plants. Empty shops should be opened to offer services and activities ranging from mentoring for people wishing to start their own business and gain skills, through to health support and wellbeing.

**G** 'Every Day Useful Poole' - This will interweave with 'Social Entrepreneurs Poole' with empty shops becoming flexible spaces for pop- up galleries, places 'to make and do', yoga studios and places to learn new skills. New partnerships built across local business. AUB and BU support graduates to set up shops and experiment with new business along Poole High Street.

**H** The area from the southern end of High Street to the Quay - The part of the street should be taken over by restaurants and cafés. It should feel curious, unique, with cafés able to put up structures and pergolas to extend seating. In the evening flags and lighting can be strung across the street to create a magical feel.

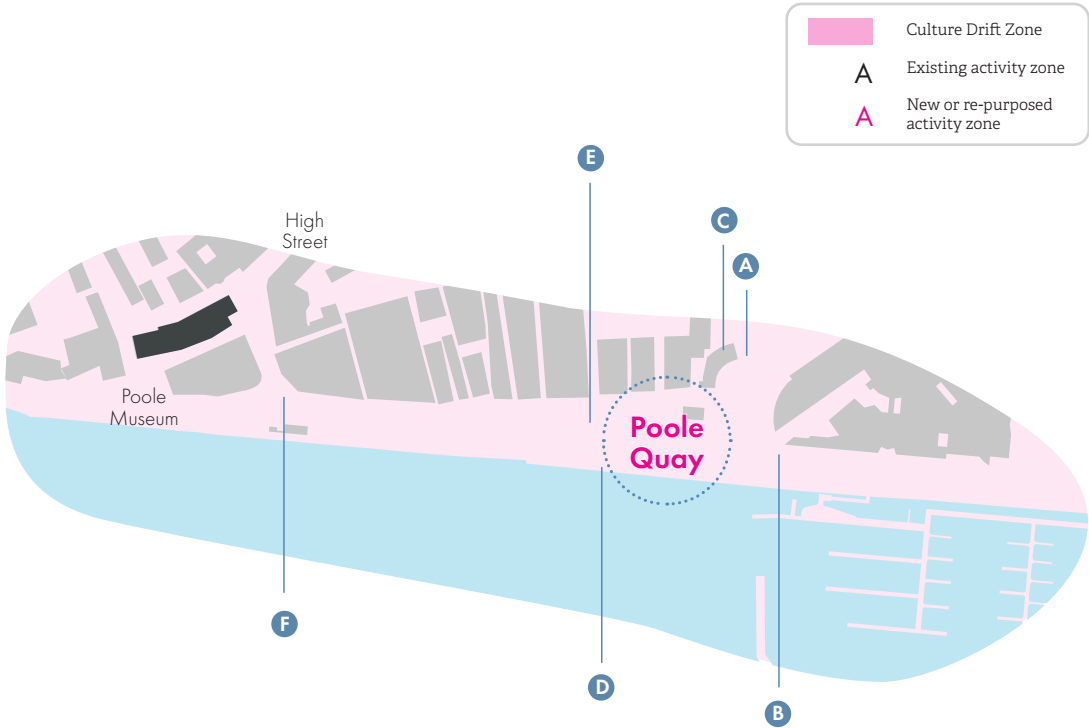
**I** Poole Quay - People miss the parties and social events that were once held on the Quay, and which gave people a strong sense of community. A remodelling of the area to accommodate seating and places for people to meet in the evening is proposed. The road will regularly be closed for evening or weekend events. The road is closed to vehicle traffic the round-about will be transformed into a temporary stage.

10.9 ACTION 7 /  
Poole Quay

The Quay is a primary attraction for visitors who take ferries to Brownsea Island and come to see the harbour. A fresh, uncluttered, and simple hard landscaping design for this area will create coherent space. At present it is cluttered and too busy. A more flexible design space can create space for performance, carnival, and local events.



Photo by Zeynep Aktuna



**A** This area could be improved and decluttered to create an open space for people to sit. When there is a specific event the road can be closed to vehicle traffic so people can safely use the whole area to meet and gather.

**B** A temporary stage can be designed to transform the roundabout and create a centre or focal point for activity. This stage can be used when the road is closed to vehicle traffic.

**C** The current trade stalls feel tired. This is a prime location for seaside food. Upgrading these stands would transform the space. Look to places like Margate and Whitstable for temporary seaside- shack catering. Better seating here and a canopy would make the area feel welcoming. In the evenings and when the road is closed to traffic this would be the central hub catering for events.

**D** The promenade along the quay is charming and authentic. The walk along the quay is pleasant and atmospheric providing places to sit. Booths selling ferry tickets are characterful. This walk could be preserved as an historic experience of Poole and enhanced to create a welcoming atmosphere, a sunny spot to sit in the day time and vibrant social scene in the evening.

**E** Make the closure of this road easy to manage, so that evening and weekend events can utilise the whole area.

**F** Maintain the atmosphere of the lower end of the High Street to allow people to spill out onto the Quay. This area around the lower end of the High Street is a place for people to wander and explore by day. In the evening it comes alive as a thriving social centre.



Cardiff Bay Beach

Cardiff Bay Beach is a popular attraction for locals and visitors alike. It includes a variety of funfair rides, games, sports activities, a giant child-friendly sandy beach, a shallow water play area, a range of food and drink and many deck chairs to use to relax and enjoy the sun. It has benefitted Cardiff residents, increasing the number of local activities during the summer months. It also helped bring 250,000 visitors into the area, a boost to the local economy.

Image courtesy of Wales Online.



Image courtesy of @Dublin\_ie on Twitter.

Wood Quay Amphitheatre, Dublin

Wood Quay Amphitheatre is a public space development in Dublin. It allows a celebration of local culture through a range of outdoor events including a popular lunch time opera show during the summer months. The amphitheatre is set in the context of a green park which creates a calming and shady environment.

# PART C

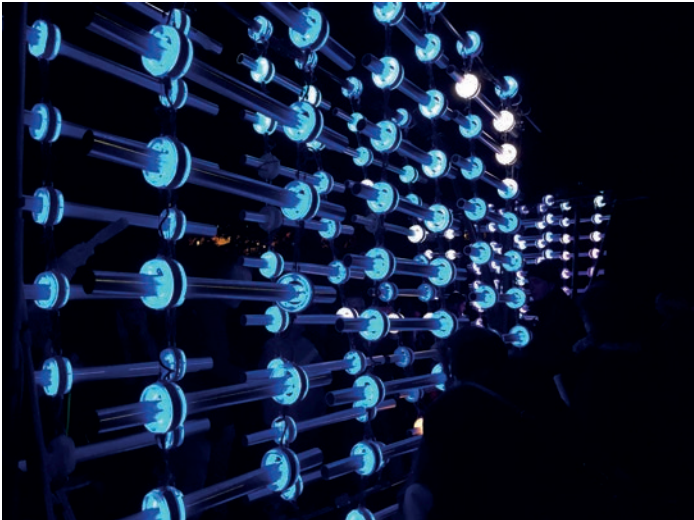


# 11 Eventful Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole

178



In Memoriam by Luke Jerome,  
Bournemouth Arts by the Sea Festival  
2020, Sandbanks, Poole



Illumaphonium, Bournemouth Arts  
by the Sea Festival 2021, Lower  
Gardens, Bournemouth



Lifted by Mimbire, Inside Out Dorset  
2021, Activate Performing Arts,  
Poole Quay



Silicon Shores by The Colour Project,  
Bournemouth Arts by the Sea Festival  
2018, Town Hall, Bournemouth



Crossroads by Lucid Creates,  
Bournemouth Arts by the Sea Festival  
2021, Horseshoe Common



Thrive by Grace Willow Cirque  
Bijou. Presented by Pavilion Dance  
South West, Bournemouth Arts by the  
Sea Festival 2021, Lower Gardens,  
Bournemouth



Last Orders by 2Faced Dance  
Company, Inside Out Dorset 2021,  
Activate Performing Arts,  
Poole Quay

179

## 11.1 The Eventful Approach

Not only do events animate and amplify places and cultures, they are also part of the business and community ecosystems. Events enhance the retail, hospitality, and leisure offer, as well as town centre public realms.

Events are ubiquitous in our lives and across the BCP area. However, for these events to create an eventful BCP and contribute to the reimagining and regeneration of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole town centres, they need to have a purpose, whether that is for business, education, or fun.

Events, to be purposeful, need to be seen as a platform on and through which wider economic and social changes can take place. No one event on its own can initiate positive changes for the town centres of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole.

Events are enablers, bringing people together in a synergistic network. A powerful event ecosystem within the conurbation would be part way to enabling this to occur. Working for the greater good of events and the three towns rather than individual or company gain would release the agency afforded by competition.

The greater good would be the adoption of policies and practices that align to the five principles identified through this project. Events can potentially be transformative if considered in this way.

Strategically this would need to move the mindset from seeing town centres with events to being eventful town centres: from being busy to having something to do.

Although the focus of the BCP Future Lab project is on the town centres, the overall event, principles and practices are relatable to the wider conurbation.

Care is needed about the negative side of 'eventification', and not result in towns just full of events. Over tourism and over provision of events has to be managed through a programme and portfolio of events, but without the top-down or local authority controlled approach.

A framework of principles would assist in bringing events into an overall policy, planning, process, and practice. Few towns and cities have successfully created and implemented an event strategy that is incorporated within the overall policy framework. Too often, events and festivals are left to market forces, despite well intentioned aims.

## 11.2 Value of Events

There are many reasons for an event to be held and too often the focus is on one event, rather than the programme or portfolio of events that make up a destination or location. The following are list of the reasons for having a programme and portfolio of events.

### *Economic benefits (financial capital)*

- Economic vitality by motivating increased visits and longer stays for both visitors and residents.
- Revenue generators for BCP, event ecosystems, secondary spend in existing hospitality, leisure, accommodation, and travel businesses.
- A varied portfolio of events will encourage different groups of people to visit the three town centres at different times of day and throughout the year.
- A unified programme of events with shared principles would enhance the image of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole and the BCP area collectively.
- A vibrant environment and economy would encourage inward investment and job retention.
- Promoting and showcasing the three towns to encourage business, media attention, and tourism for summer and shoulder 'short/city-breaks' markets would bring economic benefits.

### *Sociocultural benefits (social and cultural capital)*

- Creating a sense of shared interests and culture.
- Facilitating social awareness, and inclusion.
- Creating healthier, cohesive, and sustainable communities.
- By adopting the five principles in this book, the shared values will encourage a greater sense of identity.
- Attract creative ideas that animate the three town centres.
- Events that are authentic and unique can reinforce the sense of what is Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole: they are singular and collective in their identities.

### *Individual benefits (human capital)*

- Improving quality of life by providing a portfolio of exciting and enjoyable events.
- Events are social by their nature of bringing people together. The pandemic has heightened the need for social interaction outside of the home. Working from home will continue to feed this need.



- Events can provide the benefits of increasing self-awareness and self-esteem when given the opportunity to engage and have an active part in organising and supporting events.
- Motivation to become part of a community and overcoming loneliness and isolation.
- Building capacity through activities such as workshops, volunteering, and skills training.
- Stimulating broader education and knowledge by introducing innovative ideas and challenging thoughts and emotions.

It is recognised that there are also challenges and limitations to events that have the potential to devalue a portfolio of events. Many of these can be managed as risks, with mitigating interventions made to reduce and limit negative impacts:

- Not maximising the opportunities for local people and business e.g. Bournemouth Air Festival attracting hundreds of thousands of people who do not visit the town centres.
- Limitations to the capacity and durability of space, especially open space.
- Events causing disturbance and amenity impacts when they are in locations near to people doing other things. E.g. residents, businesses, learning and creating nuisance, waste, congestion, and noise pollution.
- Crowds can add vitality and buzz for some, but safety and security concerns for others.
- Events can be temporary in existence and impact. There therefore needs to be a BCP Council framework within which individual events operate that can leverage the longer-term benefits and overcome the challenges in a more strategic way.
- The need for designated spaces, which are programmed and have the necessary infrastructure – services, toilets, hard and/or recoverable standing, Wi-Fi.
- Co-ordinated programmes across spaces and the conurbation.
- More effective promotional strategies are needed. This is because various research studies in recent years have revealed lack of awareness as one of the main reason given by the public for not attending events.
- Understanding of what is permitted and what a good quality event is.

- Transparency and positive encouragement for events to be organised by community and commercial organisations e.g., risk assessments part of the support and not the barrier.
- Funding – need for seed-corn funding, skills, and resources in-kind
- Skills and talent – an attractive event ecosystem encourages events as a career choice, from volunteering to a company owner. Event students and graduates go to London to gain their work experience and first jobs.  
Why not here in the conurbation?

11.3 Event Ecosystem

There is a whole event ecosystem, which includes all the people, businesses, venues, equipment, and expertise required to perform the event cycle: ideate, create, produce, and evaluate.

Often this whole sector has not been visible because they just get on and do events. The pandemic has however highlighted the fragility but also the resilience of all the people who organise and supply the many events that occur in our economy and society. The BCP area is a microcosm of the UK and even global events sector.

Nationally those involved in the event ecosystem come together through several trade and professional bodies and sit around the table of the umbrella organisation: the Business Visits and Events Partnership. They act as the main sounding board and communicator with the UK Government, mainly through the Departments for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS). They also work with the DCMS created Events Industry Board and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Events to collaborate on celebrating and addressing challenges faced by the industry.

The pandemic has seen events shut down and the ecosystem looking elsewhere for business. The fear is that these people and organisations will not return to events. Despite some evidence of resilience (DCMS 2022), the danger is that the sector will be far reduced from the £85bn value given it before the pandemic because it does not have the people and equipment to service it.

Like many across the UK, those with a passion and respect for the industry pulled together locally during the pandemic to give support to each other and formalise some of the relationships with BCP Council. One such initiative is the South Coast Events Forum who have a WhatsApp group, website, and regular meetings.

Events are seen as a way of recovering from the pandemic, both socially and economically. Efforts are being made to make events part of various Government recovery programmes, especially the Tourism Recovery Plan.

Events were also seen as a fantastic way of showcasing and championing all that is good about the country, after the UK's departure from the European Union. 2022 is going to be a year of UK-wide events, with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the Commonwealth Games, and Unboxed, a UK-wide celebration of creativity taking place during 2022. The challenge is to be able to resource the demand for live events given the loss of resources, including people and equipment.

The conurbation's role in the event ecosystem should not be underestimated and should be seen far beyond the tourism product often associated with events. The area has a rich history of events, albeit loosely defined and coordinated. The events are as old as the towns themselves and have helped to shape the uniqueness of the towns. This includes Bournemouth's more recent creation through tourism and spa and health activities, Christchurch's medieval trade and religious events and Poole's maritime celebrations.

11.4 Local Events Portfolio

The current event's landscape is varied, and this adds to the uniqueness of the event offer of the different spaces and places where events are hosted. All three towns have their unique public and private realm space that is and could be used for events. All three towns are linked to the natural green and blue environment. They all have a built environment that offers space for specialised activities, such as the BIC, Pavilion, Lighthouse and Regent Centre.

These could link more effectively with other places for events across the conurbation e.g., AFC Bournemouth, RNLI College, BU and AUB Universities and Shelley Theatre. Indoor and outdoor spaces need to be connected.

A more formal relationship could be created that enables a more flexible and dynamic approach to event programming, in the way that The Old Fire Station music venue works with the Academy Music Group and the O2 event venue in Boscombe, Canvas bar in Bournemouth has worked with Halo, a nightclub in Bournemouth. The value of having a portfolio of events is that there are clear aims for organising and supporting specific events. A typology and hierarchy of events would assist in determining the aims for each event. It would also create a shared sense of purpose and inspiration. The following model identifies what these could be for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, and the table outlines the main characteristics of each.

Category	Description	Audience	Time	Financial Value	Media
Major	Usually an event that is peripatetic and bid for e.g. City of Culture	International through to local	Periodic but one-off for the host	High	International with many platforms
Hallmark/Signature	An event that is associated with its location e.g. Edinburgh Festival	National – with international growth potential. Relies on local to give authenticity	Regular – annual or biennial	High	National with some international potential
National/Regional	Like a major event but smaller and more niche e.g. BMX Nationals	National/ regional with local groups and people with specific interest e.g. political party conference	Periodic but one-off for the host	Medium	National with potential social media
Conurbation Wide	Events that are held or organised across BCP	Locally driven but with staying tourist interest	Periodic and one-off	Medium	Local
Three Towns	Events unique to each town, even if the theme/occasion is the same e.g. Christmas	Locally driven but with interest from day visitors	Periodic and one-off	Medium Low	Local
Neighbourhoods	Events that are smaller in scale and located outside of the town centres of BCP	Community and resident groups with little interest from tourists	Periodic and one-off e.g. annual fair, Jubilee street party	Low	Local



It is assumed that the BCP area would not look to host a mega-event such as the Summer Olympics and Paralympics, FIFA World Cup or Expo. These are extremely large-scale events with over a million tickets and global media coverage. The model therefore excludes this from the top tier of classified events. It does not mean that it cannot play a part in any of these events if hosted nationally, as it did with the Summer Olympic Torch Relay and with Weymouth & Portland hosting the Olympic sailing.

The top three tiers of major, hallmark, and national/regional events are those that require greater investment but would attract more tourists and outside involvement. They would generate more media coverage. They should not be held without the larger foundations of the conurbation wide events to give them the quality and value required. They need to be rooted within BCP, whether from a community group or business.

By having an event strategy, it is easier to address issues and take on opportunities. Events may have many distinct roles, so having a portfolio and programme, these can be met through several events organised by community groups, commercial enterprises and businesses, as well as BIDs, BCP Council and town councils.

These events can be an attractor for visitors as well as residents and workers. But more than that, they can enhance identity, meaning, and pride. What is needed is co-ordination, collaboration, and communication.

BCP organises and hosts many events. The conurbation is fortunate to currently offer top sporting and cultural events, including:

- Sport: AFC Bournemouth, Poole Pirates speedway, Athletics, BMX, Triathlon, Half marathons.
- Culture: Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra; venues (Lighthouse, Poole; Bournemouth International Centre and Pavilion; Pavilion Dance South West and Christchurch Regent Centre) hosting top class concerts, theatre, dance, light, and visual arts.
- Heritage: events bringing to life and educating on our history at the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum, Poole Museum, Red House Museum.
- Festivals: air, food, music, sport e.g. Bournemouth Air Festival, Arts by the Sea Festival, Christchurch Food Festival, Poole Harbour Festival, Bournemouth 75.
- Business: Conferences, meetings, exhibitions, trade fairs, experiential, PR.
- Life-stage: Baby showers, Bar Mitzvahs, Weddings, BU and AUB graduations, Funerals.

- Charitable: Awareness, support and fund raising e.g. Bay Run, RNLI, Diverse Abilities, Forest Holme.
- Parades and carnivals such as Bourne Free Pride or Poole Santa Parade.
- Religious festivals and commemorations, including Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter, Remembrance Day.
- Unusual: events that raise media profile e.g. dog surfing; sand polo.

These are just examples of a few of the events organised and hosted across the conurbation. These groupings of mainly content and purpose are not mutually exclusive. Most events, for example, will raise money and engage with the charitable third sector. Many of the events occur in or close to the town centres. They can all be part of a more rigorous and networked framework for events across and throughout the conurbation, with the town centres being major hubs in this event web.

The impact of the pandemic on events saw a pivoting to online and digital formats. This is not the end of in-person events. There has been an unprecedented demand for a return to live events because of the human social interaction and feel good factor that is difficult to replicate online. However, online, and digital formats should not be ignored and can form an additional platform for content, engagement, and promotion.

Some events are public and free to attend, others are ticketed with a charge for attendance and others are private for business and personal purposes. All events cost time, skill, and money to organise and produce. There is agreement that there is a wide variety of events across the conurbation. The aspiration though is to move from a place where there are events to an eventful place.

## 11.5 Reimagining BCP events

The list of existing events could be reviewed against the principles in this book to identify which could form part of the portfolio of local events. There currently is no one place that all events and event organisers are listed. BCP Council work directly with those events that are on their land, require a license or temporary event notice. These tend to be for outdoor events.

The beach, promenade, and quaysides are ideal and unique places for events to be held. The water and land-based activities particularly encourage participation in a beautiful environment.

The Bournemouth Bay run and other running festivals, the triathlon, the other charity walks and runs all provide great opportunities for taking part and fundraising. As these are focused by the water, their presence is not felt within the town centres.

Incentives may be needed to link these events with the town centres, to have presence to draw people up the gardens in Bournemouth, through and up to the high streets in Christchurch and Poole. The Air Festival, for example, works hard to have a programme of events in the gardens to pull people off the beach. Light up Poole successfully pulled people from the Dolphin Centre, High Street, old town and quay, or varieties of routes.

More experiments are needed to pull people further up and along the Culture Drift route and through the town centre routes. Parades are one way of doing this, with Bourne Free and the Arts by the Sea Festival successfully navigating the route from the Triangle to Horseshoe Common to Meyrick Park. Poole's Christmas Parade links the water, quay, High Street, and Lighthouse. Christchurch Carnival links the high street with the quay.

Consideration of possible routes and their navigable and risk assessed courses, with innovative ways of moving people and stages would encourage people to organise such activities.

The Culture Drifts in each town and the network of new cycle routes are all sites for events to be encouraged. Why do people pay to take part in walking, running, cycling, and swimming challenges when they can do them for free?

It is the importance of the event management, of the organisation of a particular time, place, equipment, and people. More than that, it is the camaraderie created by the shared experience. The challenge is not just the length and time of the activity but competing against and with others, as well as your own personal best. Without the event people will not come together. The Parkrun began as an informal meet up for a run and became a nation-wide ritual.

Events are multi-dimensional, and the use of land, water, sea, and air are unique natural environments for a variety of events. The Air Festival is an example of where air, sea and land can be used as the stage for various activities. The question of the sustainability of this as a hallmark event needs to be discussed. The same for fireworks; where alternative laser and drone technology can extend the light projection works onto iconic structures such as the Bournemouth Town Hall.

Maximisation of existing planned events could bring in more people and the local event ecosystem. The Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum Centenary Celebrations in 2022 and the RNLi Bicentenary in 2024 could bring the community groups and event ecosystem of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole together.

A variety of outdoor and indoor stages, with supporting people and equipment would facilitate this. The content would be curated and sometimes provided by the community. As with a busking policy, there could be a degree of quality control.

All businesses should be encouraged to be part of the events programme. Space should be given to community groups and organisations to host events. Point out a calendar date and invite local groups and businesses to take part. For example, there are groups of people who come together to learn Welsh. Why not ask them to organise some activities around St David's Day?

The current infrastructure and services could be brought together in a database and people be encouraged to use them, such as expanding the South Coast Events Forum. The status of these needs to be secured and maintained. For example, the BIC is currently part of some touring circuits, especially as a warmup for the larger arena tours. It does not mean that Bournemouth needs an arena but their place on the circuit needs to be sustained.

The business events sector could be viewed conurbation wide to encourage movement across the conurbation. Now that there are higher end hotels there is potential to expand the conference market. Greater innovative use of other spaces for exhibitions and break-out activities could improve Bournemouth's position.

Festivity and having fun as part of all events, whether leisure or business events, is still an event trend. The programme of events could provide incentives for others. There's nothing better than being at a conference and walking out, not just to the beach or quayside, but the festive feel of music, dance and people enjoying themselves.

## 11.6 Eventful Aspirations

BCP events contribute to the economic and cultural vitality of the towns and existing and new events will continue to be an integral part of the town developments. These will assist in forming new identities and offer richness of meanings for those living, working, studying, playing, and visiting the towns. They can also waymark the routes and networks that link all parts of the conurbation together to form a diverse but coherent geographical distinctiveness.

Events can play a pivotal role in bringing people into the town centres, connecting those already there and showcasing what is unique and vibrant about what the towns are and who forms them.

To realise the potential and aspirations of an eventful BCP will require a more cohesive and collaborative strategic approach by as many representative stakeholders as possible. This needs to be independent of but inclusive of BCP Council.

An approach akin to the Cultural Enquiry and the resulting Cultural Compact could be undertaken or at least dovetailed into their development. A group that cuts across several of the key policy-making organisations in the three towns.

The aspirations for an eventful Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole need to come from the desires, motivations, and passion of



the people of the three towns. Imposing a top-down or BCP Council plan will not succeed in meeting the principles contained in this book. The strategy and framework need to be established through co-creative consultative methods, as demonstrated by BCP Future Lab, and development nurtured organically.

There are many who would like Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole to be known for professionally organised events that are undertaken by and for local people, organisations, and businesses. This was not about bidding for and hosting major events, but those that fit with what is already being sought, should be considered. The Cultural Compact, for example, may decide that the process of bidding for the UK City of Culture could assist with galvanising the artists and arts organisations together. Plymouth, for example, did not win but have continued with their cultural events.

To be successful as an eventful place requires events not only to create physical space, but also fill those spaces with vibrant social and cultural interaction. Individual events hosted by Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole focus on competition, have a sectorial approach, and develop as individual containers of events.

Eventful cities, as Richard and Palmer (2010) state, 'instead, focus on cooperation with the stakeholders of the event industry, have a holistic approach, and are famous for their capacity to generate new events.' Therefore, the development of eventful cities depends on 'the strategic coherence of events, which usually leads to the development of an event strategy, and often to the creation of an organisational structure to help coordinate events programmes.'

### 11.7 Eventful Recommendations

- Creation of a robust network that forms the basis for an event ecosystem that works synergistically with other sectors. This should be powered from all angles and have high aspirations in terms of outcomes and quality of offer. This could be brought together through a BCP Eventful Strategy that is created and owned by the ecosystem. Most strategies are council created and owned, with residents and businesses consulted only.
- A full portfolio will consist of diverse types of events, for different target markets, held in various places, and at different times of the year and day, in pursuit of multiple goals. This includes the whole typology of events, from the grass-roots local events to the hallmark events for each town and the conurbation as a whole.
- Welcoming of a year-round programme of events that encourages involvement from all businesses and community groups within the corresponding town centres. For example, Christmas festive season to incorporate all opportunities

within a town centre. For example, Christchurch Live Advent Calendar 2021 were able to showcase different venues and businesses throughout Christchurch.

- Development of an event portfolio that aligns with the self-image congruity of both tourists and locals.
- Using the five principles as a measure of whether an event should be supported and part of the conurbation's event portfolio. Serious reflection can be made of whether particular events are important e.g. Bournemouth Air Festival.
- A regular use and non-use valuation survey of residents to be undertaken to gauge support and value of the portfolio of events.
- Support through space, licensing, insurance, infrastructure (see next item), skills, funding e.g. Lambeth Council have an event app to streamline and focus support.
- Designated event spaces need to have services (power, water, Wi-Fi) and supporting equipment - stage, toilets, lighting, sound, furniture. Co-ordinated procurement process could improve local provision.
- Events should be promoted internally and externally through a co-ordinated calendar (could be a self-completed hub).
- There is a need to develop a range of guides that require event organisation processes that encourage/ensure events are sustainable, i.e. building on BCP Council Events Team application process (e.g. greening event plans such as Lambeth's Green Events Guide Vision: 2025; Julie's Bicycle); socially inclusive and equal; SAG and generally healthy, safe and secure (Purple Guide access); that are overall well run (e.g. EventScotland Event Management Guide or Lambeth outdoor events guide).
- There is a need to enhance the development of event knowledge, skills, and expertise with direct collaboration between event organisers, Bournemouth University and Arts University Bournemouth event courses and local training providers (e.g., Event Crowd, RNLI).
- There is a need to promote responsible working practices and ensure the living wage is paid to those working on events.
- There is a requirement for a co-ordinated volunteer programme to be professionally managed and not seen as a way of exploiting people. In exchange for time and skills offer CPD, tickets, travel.

- The use of local suppliers and traders should be encouraged through the networking of the event system (e.g. South Coast Events Forum).
- People should be encouraged to curate and animate events. For example, the opportunities to link and amplify a theme e.g. Harry Paye Pirate Day, the Poole Museum and the Poole Pirates speedway team.
- The possibility of an Event Management/Marketing Organisation (EMO), like a Destination Management/Marketing Organisation (DMO), that looks internally to BCP as well as externally to image creation and visitor/business attractor should be investigated.
- Participatory events should be a priority. Spectators, friends, and family will come with them. This maximises psychological and physiological wellbeing, as well as participant and spectator numbers.



# PART D

# 12 Conclusions

**The project team was formed through a collaboration between Feria Urbanism – a people-focused urban design and urban planning practice – and Dr. Caroline Jackson, a consultant with an academic interest in eventful places. This collaboration has created fascinating synergies and resulted in a work that creates connections across and between the built environment, the ways people use public spaces and the ways in which town centres can better serve us in the future.**

## 12.1 Town centres are places for people

Town centres are porous. We shape them as much as they shape us. We shape them by ‘performing’ them, by using them, but more importantly, our town centres create us. They are the architecture of our memories, the material of our dreams and the glow that tints the nostalgia we feel as we walk past the now closed-down night club, the streets, and alleyways we occupied as students, the hours spent waiting in department stores as a child.

The feeling of ‘town’ has an aura, a richness and texture to it. As we move towards a new kind of future, our town centres need to be places that are hopeful, aspirational and centres of community.

When we talk about how town centres are places of ‘exchange’ we acknowledge that this notion of exchange can be tacit – something as deeply personal as memory. We might imagine a mirror where the exterior world replicates infinitely in every one of its citizens and visitors. That the blocks that build us are held by the bricks and mortar of our local town centres. The relationship between ‘town’ and ‘us’ is deeply personal.

But we also need to change the way towns work. Prioritising them as centres for people allows them to be co-created by the community who live there. This allows us to imagine a new kind of future. It foregrounds our collective values and priorities. They become places that are about enabling and empowering.

The collaboration between Feria Urbanism and Dr Caroline Jackson foregrounds experience and values over stuff and things. It places people at its heart. The qualitative research that helped formed the five key principles came directly from people who live and work in our three town centres. The design ideas presented in this book are inspired and informed directly by what has been learned.

The findings of this project are that people need to lead the regeneration of our town centres. They need to be given the support, the agency, the funding, and the guidance to bring their town centres back to life. They need to encourage local cultures to grow

in our town centres. Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole need to amplify what makes them special. Each of these towns should be encouraged to create new festivals, new activities, new events, and new kinds of businesses that bring communities together. The creative industries and creative people have a significant role to play in this process. This has to be authentic, and it has to be organic. The project team has learned that all of these resources are latent. They are here already yet are untapped.

The civic agencies and local government authorities must now see their role as one of facilitation. To facilitate the re-invention of town. They must become the organisations who make ideas possible. They are to become the people who say yes and the people who solve problems.

Doing this will make towns better. It will create town centres that are multifaceted places. It will broaden horizons and it will give the next generation memories that are wild and magical. They will grow up to be people who are hopeful and believe that change is possible and that we all have a future.

## 12.2 The spaces between buildings

The principles defined in this book – and the design ideas generated in response to them – involve an urban design approach to be applied to the spaces between buildings. It is these spaces that will accommodate the eventful moments. Those moments to look forward to, that brighten the day-to-day, and which live on not only as memories, but also as potential. These are civic spaces that can support the co-creation of an eventful town centre.

This report refers to architectures in the plural because the structures proposed are as much about event planning as they are about the spaces defined and created for events. This is architecture at the service of people. Armatures which become places and things to hang ideas on. They are to be given to people with the expectation that people take ownership, they appropriate, they co-opt, and they programme these spaces. They use them to create something – a moment, a memory, an idea.

The physical form of town centres, when compared to other urban typologies, are flexible, robust, and adaptable. They have responded and adapted over time to numerous social, economic, and political changes. Town centres therefore comprise social architectures as much as the architectures of physical buildings. This combination of qualities gives them promise and should infuse them with confidence they need to adapt to the next set of challenges.

Town centres are inherently future-facing as they have the ability to absorb and accommodate new ideas and new activities. Future Stories: Tales from the BCP Future Lab contains a collection of new ideas and new activities ready for our three town centres to absorb and accommodate.



# 13 Research & Evidence Gathering

## The Co-Creative Approach

BCP Future Lab was a co-creative design project. This means the consultancy teams have worked directly with members of the public to draw out key themes and concepts. The team then used what they have learned to inform the content of the book, including the principles and the recommendations for urban interventions.

This approach foregrounds the experience and values of people who live, work, or use the three town centres in order to create spaces that respond to their wants, needs and aspirations.

This book draws heavily on this research and because of this it is important to outline who engaged with the project, and the various techniques.

The conversations with people informed the principles described in the first half of this book. The principles represent the recurring topics of conversation, such as more independent shops and more access to culture and events.

Other themes emerged through the analysis of the results in more nuanced or indirect ways. For example, how people talked mental health, the need for community and a desire for there to be more ways to connect with and meet people in real life.

Dr Caroline Jackson undertook a specific piece of research examining at events looking at how the three town centres can become 'eventful places.' She also engaged directly with people, undertaking a series of video calls with key stakeholders working in culture and events.

Much of the research that underpins this book is empirical and captured in surprising ways, such as conversations at bus stops and down alleyways. As well as qualitative findings, the team also used quantitative material generated through handouts and clipboard type questioning of individuals.

Taken together, these different approaches have helped the team to understand how people feel about town centres and their future aspirations for these places.

The R<sup>3</sup> network that commissioned this book wanted to explore the future of the three town centres after the Covid-19 pandemic. The network wanted an engagement with a representative group consisting of regular town centre users, young people, and people in the 20 – 30 age group. They were keen that the team talk to people who use the town centres and also those who do not use the town centres.

## 45 Street Interviews

The research began in July 2021 with a series of street interviews in Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole. These recordings were made in the town centres and featured a range of randomly selected voices from a range of age groups and backgrounds. The team made forty-five recordings, speaking to around 10 – 12 people in each town.

What was learned from these recordings was helpful in terms of gaining insights into why people come into town, how they use their local town centre, what draws them into town and why they stay away.

People see town as a social space: they enjoy live, open events, locals enjoy walking into town and the freedom that affords, and people prefer independent shops and favour local business.

These interviews were used to create a series of social media images in the form of quotes that were posted to Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, sharing the results, and encouraging people to get involved in the project via social media.

## 15 In-Depth Events Interviews

At the beginning of the project fourteen people with an interest in events undertook in-depth interviews about what the town centres of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole town centres meant to them. The aim was to uncover the nuances of their experiences. The findings were fed into the analysis and formation of the final five principles in this book.

Each participant had views on how the three town centres can become stronger as they regenerate for the future. Conversations centred around past and present experiences of each of the town centres, but with there being one that each interviewee were most associated with. This was either because they worked, lived, shopped, or spent their leisure time there.

There were mixed views about the role of retail, hospitality, and leisure in each of the town centres, but they all spoke about the unique and independent offer that was going to be crucial for future resilience and growth.

They all had personal stories of being at, participating in and/or organising event experiences. The events were often the main reason for attending each of the towns, whether as a resident or a visitor. It gave them the motivation to make the effort and the encouragement to go with friends and family.

The challenges of the town centres often dampened enthusiasm but there was usually a sense of optimism and the desire for renewal. They did not have the solutions but did have some ideas. These are included within the narrative of this book, especially in the principles that were created from their conversations, along with other voices from the local area.

## 15 Library Suggestion Boxes

From early August 2021, a series of fifteen libraries across the conurbation hosted 'ideas stations' – a suggestion box, blank action sheets and information posters about how to get involved. The libraries that took part were Bournemouth Library, Christchurch Library & Learning Centre, Poole Central Library, Tuckton, Boscombe, Southbourne, Parkstone, Hamworthy, Westbourne, Winton, Charminster, Rossmore, Canford Cliffs, Springbourne and Broadstone.

The actions sheets asked the participants to select five words out of a series of forty to help them to generate ideas on how they would improve their town centres. When all of the actions sheets results were processed, the most popular terms selected were as follows:

- Walk
- Community
- Events
- Live music
- Family
- Festival
- Beach lifestyle
- Shopping
- Safety
- Places to meet.

On the other side of the sheet, participants were asked to draw ideas surrounding how they perceived the town centres could be improved. The ideas that were drawn were grouped into themes as follows:

- Culture and events
- Safety and maintenance
- Activities
- Shopping
- Infrastructure
- Outdoors.

Popular suggestions within these themes included:

- Creation of more places to sit
- Independent shops
- Live music and events
- A cleaner environment with regular litter picking
- More community meeting spaces
- Support for homeless people who base themselves in the town centre
- Better parking and improved bus services.

## 1 Dedicated Website & 3 Social Media Channels

Participation in the project was also possible through the dedicated website, [www.bcpfuturelab.org](http://www.bcpfuturelab.org), where there was a link to sign up for the workshop series. The project could also be followed on social media using #BCPFutureLab.

Although social media has been important to the project, the majority of data has come from real world, long form interviews that allow nuance and subtext to be captured as well as more statistical data.

## 13 Workshop Events

The street interview findings helped to programme a series of thirteen engagement events, both digital and real world across the conurbation. These were set up in September 2021 and took place in October 2021 in the form of walking tours, design forum events and drop-in sessions. The aim of these events was to get people together either on Zoom or in a room in the library, to talk town centre planning. Despite best efforts using social media and the local press to advertise these events, these workshops were not well attended. However the lack of attendance at these workshops was not entirely disappointing. Often at workshops of this type, the 'usual suspect' are the only people present.

These are community-minded people who enjoy attending events. Such individuals often devote themselves tirelessly, and thanklessly, to the good of the community. However, the BCP Future Lab team were keen to capture a range of voices from people of varying age groups and backgrounds. The low uptake at the workshops therefore allowed these often unheard voices to be amplified and became part of the success of the project.

However, one of the scheduled thirteen events was planned as a drop-in event, to be held at Bournemouth Library on a Saturday, coinciding with the Arts by the Sea festival and this was well-attended.

## 220 Participants in the Bournemouth Library Drop-In Event

This event, running on 2nd October 2021, was formatted to allow for informal conversations with people as they walked into Bournemouth Library.

Displayed in the foyer space, a series of posters and maps with the title 'What we have learned in Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch?' These posters assimilated that key findings up to that point and enabled the team to engage people in longer conversations. This was an opportunity to test the key principles that were emerging and to seek some consensus in some areas.



The library on this Saturday morning was heavily weighted towards families with younger children. They said they felt excluded from town, that previously they would have enjoyed coming to town to wonder around but that this activity was not a pleasant option with kids. Ironically, families with young children were the group identified as wanting to use town to socialise and meet in a convenient, pleasant, and safe place. This inspired the Beales conversion idea.

One task asked people to explain how they would evaluate a successful town centre. Thirty-six participants ranked twelve statements in order of priority to indicate what a successful town centre was and what was less important to them. The top six most popular of the twelve statements were as follows:

- Thriving community centre: A great place to meet friends and family, a place to connect, to people watch & to spend time.
- A safe city where you can walk day or night.
- A great place for culture with a national reputation for arts and creative industry.
- Priority given to climate emergency and building a transition economy.
- Eventful city, where there is always something going on.
- Economic success generated through busy shops, retail and food offer.

### 53 Street Further Interviews

Rather than waiting for people to come to the team, the team went to the people. Over the course of the autumn 2021, in lieu of the workshops series, face to face interviews were conducted with a further fifty three people.

These interviews were held in shops with shop workers and customers. In bus stops, on park benches, in library foyers, in cafés, outside Poole Museum, on The Quay, down Old Christchurch Road. Each of these conversations was recorded in an A2 sketch pad, respondents noting down thoughts whilst notes were taken on what they were saying.

The focus of these interviews was to understand what draws people to town, how they had used town differently during the lockdowns and how town could serve them better in the future.

These interviews were multifaceted, and the depth of information captured has been key to shaping the five principles. The messages received were that nature and local environment are important to them. People also felt that BCP Council should '...lead by example' on climate change. Town centres should become beacons of positivity and hope, and places to inspire.

People value their town centres as centres of culture. They wish to have more opportunity to engage with local, national, and international culture and they wished to do this in a way that was unique to the three town centres.

People said that as well as being cultural centres, town centres were places that connected people, they were places to meet and share ideas, stories, days out with family or places to meet with friends.

Town centres are democratic and open, and people said they appreciate the 'freedoms' town affords. For example, teenagers come to town to be teens and find a way to make town 'their own'. At the same time the same space is occupied by families, a group of students, tourists, and the people watchers.

Town centres are still places of exchange, however this extended beyond cash for stuff. Town centres are important for people's mental health and wellbeing. They are places for the lonely to connect and wish to simply lose themselves in the throng of other people, or sit in a café people watching. The overriding message from these conversations on the street was that town centres serve an important social function.

### 15 Attendees at the Events Workshop

As part of the second phase of the project, once the interviews, audio recordings, library workshops and feedback sheets were analysed, an Eventful BCP workshop was held with representatives from across events and the three town centres. Owing to Covid-19 some participants could not attend the workshop so were interviewed separately.

The workshop on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2021 answered a series of questions and used maps of the town centres to visualise the events and places that are important and could be provided.

Why should there be events in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole town centres? What role(s) can events play in making the conurbation a better place to live, work, study, play and visit?

Given the themes emerging from the BCP Future Lab research, what events could take place and where they could take place in the town centres? What is needed to have a world-leading event ecosystem?

The main findings, incorporated into this narrative, were that the emphasis should be people and not necessarily the list of events.

Keeping events linked to the individual town centres, with the businesses operating there and local community groups would give people a sense of place, building upon place-making and sense-making principles.

It was believed that the events programme was too tourism rather than resident focused. To be authentic the approach needed to pivot. By providing more locally based events, a more authentic experience would be created and be more attractive to tourists. A more unique and sustainable identity and reputation would emerge for each town centre and the conurbation.

The view was that events could create an improved culture by being challenging and more intellectually stimulating. Being the home to three universities and a college, there is scope for greater engagement and collaboration for academics, staff, and students. A more collegiate offering.

### 3 Online Meetings

Alongside the street interviews, there were a number of online digital sessions in the autumn of 2021. These were using Zoom and Google maps. These allowed people to talk about specific areas of each town centre, discuss what works and what needs improvement and also talk about big ideas.

### 56 Participants in School Workshops

Part of the project brief was to find out what children and young people felt about the town centre experience. Several workshops were run directly through local schools during November 2021.

The purpose of these workshops was to create situations in which participants would be asked to engage in the task of thinking about their relationship to public space and articulated what they would like to use that space for, by working in groups to create design projects.

The school groups were asked to design either Saxon Square in Christchurch, Falkland Square in Poole or The Square in Bournemouth and fill these spaces with elements that would make them feel welcome.

These school groups saw town as a social space, a space of freedom and independence but also of relative safety. They emphasised the importance of spaces to listen to bands and music, spaces to hang out, spend time and to meet friends which were at once open and public but at the same time private enough to not feel they were being looked at by adults.

A number of female pupils said they were no longer allowed into town, because it was considered too dangerous, and their designs looked at creating safe spaces. However, others wanted their town square to be flanked by an oversized Primark and a massive Costa.

There were lots of conversations about how these spaces should look. The sensitivity of the designs and the attention to quite subtle details about materials and design was surprising.

Something these pupils prized was the idea that these spaces should look good and feel contemporary. It transpired that they understood that such elements reflected back on them and made them feel cool – something that might be translated as self-esteem.

This was an incredible breakthrough in terms of the research as it indicates that young people understand that if they live in or visit a place that has great design, feels cared for and interesting, it directly affects how they feel about themselves and their own esteem. This research finding is a key takeaway from this project as it underlines the role that good urban design plays as a direct influence on individual psychology.

Thinking beyond this allows a consideration around how a good public realm can raise self-esteem and that the confidence this brings can be seen as formative.

### 100 Students from AUB and BU over 4 days

Working over two days with each institution during October 2021, the BCP Future Lab project became an integral part of the student's teaching.

At AUB, the students came from the BA Design course and at BU from the Business & Management course. The AUB design students were set the task of designing an element of the Culture Drift in Bournemouth while the BU business management students were tasked with creating a proposition for Bournemouth, Christchurch, or Poole.

To begin their task, the BU students were given a range of words to choose from to describe how they perceived the town centre. The most popular terms mentioned were as follows:

- Big night out
- Leisure
- Places to meet
- Shopping
- Day out
- Good food
- Family
- Independent shops
- Events
- Live music
- Restaurants
- Diversity.



On the other side of the sheet, participants were asked to draw ideas relating to how they perceived they could improve the town centre. These ideas were grouped into themes as follows:

- Entertainment and events
- Food and drink
- Shopping
- Social and community
- Culture
- Environment.

Popular suggestions within these themes included:

- Creation of more places to meet
- A larger variety of shops and independent shops
- New restaurants
- A focus on beach lifestyle
- Live music
- Better integration of the community
- A greater variety of restaurants
- Biodiversity enhancement
- Nightclubs.

These tasks revealed how students in their late teens and early twenties use town centres and what role town centres play in their lives. This group are perhaps one of the first to grow up as native internet shoppers and so it was not surprising that they did not associate town centre with retail or shopping.

Town, for them, was a place of action or activity. They socialise in a completely different way to an older generation, setting up a WhatsApp group in the morning to meet up later in the afternoon or evening.

What was revealing particularly in the sessions with the designers, is that for them, town was a place to act. Their designs and projects proposed activities that were both social and active. A climbing wall, a sports centre, a place to encounter. Working with this group really informed the concept that the anchor store be replaced with the anchor experience.

# Practice Statement

## 208 Feria Urbanism

Feria Urbanism is an award-winning urban design and urban planning practice. We deliver local change by making community aspiration the foundation of our activity. This is enabling and gives people a voice in the design of playful, multifaceted places that enhance local ecologies and community life.

We use a range of digital and real life tactics to capture local knowledge and collective dreaming. What we learn from the community informs our design process in order to build better places for people. Our approach to co-created design informs our work on city vision documents and neighbourhood plans; parks and public gardens; urban squares and civic spaces.

Feria Urbanism was founded in 2007 by Richard Eastham. He is an urban designer and urban planner with extensive experience in the preparation of design strategies and development frameworks. He has particular expertise in engaging with local communities to help shape and influence emerging spatial strategies. Richard is a member of three design review panels, a recognition of his skills and wide experience. He is a visiting tutor on the architecture course at the Arts University Bournemouth and an urban design teaching fellow at the University of Southampton.

He has recently found synergies with Jennie Savage, who joined the team in early 2020. Jennie trained as a fine artist and has worked nationally and internationally devising process-led projects that use collective mapping and map-making techniques as a form of activism that enable communities to articulate their voices and to be heard.

Before joining the practice, Jennie taught at on BA (Hons) Fine Art course at Chelsea College of Art and on the M. Arch course at Arts University Bournemouth. Jennie was able to find a home in a practice where Richard had already made significant progress developing co-created approaches to urban design and neighbourhood planning.

This innovative collaboration between urban design and fine art has enabled Feria Urbanism to develop a distinctive methodology and approach to public engagement, urban design, and urban planning. It is an approach that seeks to address the complexity of planning concerns from a community perspective.

Kim Walker is the practice graphic designer. Her background in information design, visual communication, and traditional graphics contribute to the success of the practice. Kim uses her illustration and animation skills to create dynamic videos, diagrams, drawings, infographics, social media content, maps, plans, and sketches.

Amelia Rose is an urban planner with a background in planning policy and development management. Her understanding of the planning and design process allows her to provide planning and administrative policy support to our full range of projects.

[www.feria-urbanism.com](http://www.feria-urbanism.com)

## 209 Dr Caroline Jackson PhD, FRSA, FHEA

Caroline is an event consultant and educator. Caroline was Head of Department of Events & Leisure within the Faculty of Management at Bournemouth University. She developed both the BA (Hons) and MSc Events Management courses.

Caroline is Vice Chair of the Business Visits & Events Partnership; the umbrella body that represents organisations responsible for events in the UK. She leads the Skills, Talent & Diversity Working Group and is championing diversity, equity and inclusion.

She has researched, presented and published on the event experience, the creativity of events and events education and professionalisation. In 2018, she undertook the research for the Events Industry Forum on the Value of UK Outdoor Events.

## Photographers

**Dr Ashley Woodfall** is a Senior Principal Academic at Bournemouth University, where he lectures in media theory and practice. With a background in TV, he started off in cameras before moving in to producing and directing (across children's TV and comedy). The images selected here are part of a psychogeography project triggered by becoming a father for the first-time during lockdown (and the many (odd) hours of pushchair and sling-wearing walking that came with that). The theme-impetus, '@aimless.strolls', in response to Debord (1955), led to a (re-)engagement with seemingly familiar spaces, but from the perspective of a slower, less directional and slightly bleary-eyed traveller.

**Zeynep Aktuna** is an urban planner and designer based in Christchurch. With a curiosity to reflect the beauty of everyday life made up of ironic dualities, Zeynep enjoys discovering and documenting the charm of small urban spaces. Her work can be found on Instagram under the name @hey\_chuckk



**Richard Page** grew up in Christchurch, Dorset and currently lives on the south coast. Richard has exhibited widely throughout the UK and abroad. He received the Jerwood Photography Award in 2004 and his book What We Already Know was published by Ffotogallery in 2007. His solo exhibition The Dialogue of the Dogs at the Francesca Maffeo Gallery in 2017, was featured in The Guardian, Wallpaper+ and Paper Journal. In 2020 he curated the exhibition Paper Geographies and Manchester's Central Library. His work has been featured in Diffusion: The Cardiff International Festival of Photography. Richard's work was also included in JAP Alexander's Perspectives on Place (2015) and published in Portfolio Magazine, Art Review and the Royal Academy's RA Magazine. Richard is currently Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader of BA (Hons) Photography at Manchester Metropolitan University.

[www.richardpagephotography.net](http://www.richardpagephotography.net)

Instagram: richardpagephotography

### Special thanks to

Miss Walton and the pupils of Parkfield School

Mr Bishop and the pupils of Twynham School

Miss Eastwood and the pupils of St Edwards School

Franziska Conrad and Dilek Hocaoglu and the students from BA Design at Arts University Bournemouth

Edward Ward and students from Interior Architecture at Arts University Bournemouth

Laura Roper, Corinna Budnarowska, and the students from the Business Foundation course at Bournemouth University

Medi Bernard and the BCP Council libraries team

Bobby's for support with the Future Stories exhibition





## OUR TOWN CENTRES ARE CHANGING

'Future Stories: Tales from BCP Future Lab' is the result of an eight-month co-creative research project. It reimagines what our urban centres will become as we emerge back into public life, post-pandemic.

The project has been a true collaboration with the public. The principles and ideas have been shaped by over 530 face to face interviews in the form of meetings, street encounters, online interviews and workshops with school pupils and university students. The results provide an insight into what people value about the town centre experience.

'Future Stories' uses public opinion to help to reframe the town centre experience. This reframing prioritises social prosperity as an outcome of town centre improvements. People want resilient and inclusive communities, a greater integration of the urban area with local ecology and the rebuilding of town centres that amplify local character while accommodating the independent sector and creative industries. They want town centres that are playable, social, cultural, curious, interesting, eventful. They want town centres that are fun places to spend time.

'Future Stories' is a book by Feria Urbanism & Dr Caroline Jackson.

'Future Stories' features contributions from Zeynep Aktuna, Cora Clarke, GreenBlue Urban, Richard Page, Play:Disrupt, Natasha Player, John Sturrock, and Ashley Woodford.



**feria**  
urbanism



ISBN 978-1-3999-1952-4



9 781399 919524 >

£5