

creative accelerator *Highbridge*



action research
consultation sessions
facilitated by seed

Report

November 2020

Creative Accelerator Highbridge

Thirty people living, working &/or with a keen interest in Highbridge joined us across two sessions on 7 and 13 October 2020, as a consultation focus group to workshop ideas about how to help make Highbridge a more fun and creative place to live and work.

Focus group participants were asked to consider four key questions and to bring their ideas to the sessions

- How can we make more of the best things happening in Highbridge already?
- What great activities & facilities have been lost? Can we bring them back?
- What creative activities and arts facilities does Highbridge need?
- What could we create that would be special and unique to Highbridge?

Using the concept of an ideas market, the participants prioritised ideas and determined which things they valued the most within their group.

The following is a summary of what our thirty Creative Accelerator participants determined.

Initial Ideas

Ahead of the session, participants reflected on what they most valued in Highbridge in terms of its creative, event and activity offering. Across the two groups **thirty-three** current activities and events were identified as valued. The ten *most valued* were:

Create You

Creative individuals working on an online platforms (Instagram etc)

Highbridge Festival of Arts – participatory music event

In Charleys Memory

Bay Club

Dance clubs including flash mob activities

Open mic events in the pub

Talking Café

Apex Park (including Family Day and other events held there)

Morland Community Hub



Participants also identified twenty-one things that used to be available in Highbridge that are no longer. The ten *most missed* were:

The Library

Regular Sunday Highbridge Market

Wider variety of Youth Clubs and activities for young people

Post Office

Kaz Danz - community dance group

Sports activities and youth hangout at the Rec

playgrounds/green spaces in local areas/open fields by the river/wild open spaces

Places you can find out what is going on - noticeboards and other communication instead of online

Events in the Town Hall

More little buses that brought people to the centre



Looking forward

Participants engaged with the question 'What would I like to be able to do in Highbridge that I currently cannot?'. This included exploration of facilities, but was primarily focused on activities that people can take part in or create for themselves. Many of the ideas that emerged at this stage of the discussion involved activities and facilities that are available elsewhere in Sedgemoor, some as close by as Burnham-on-Sea, but the group made the case that these are out of reach for many people in Highbridge due to the poor public transport links.

The groups identified thirty-seven activities they would like to be able to do in Highbridge but currently cannot, and/or ideas for improved or new creative amenities in the town. The ten ideas which had the *most* support among participants were:

A hub/centre to celebrate creativity, share what's on, a creative directory

Family/youth oriented creative arts venue & programmes - learning, rehearsing,

performing opportunities - eg a Youth improvisation Dance/Drama group, youth board game nights

Activities in the evening other than the pub/ Informal Performing Arts Venue/Space (eg. open mic nights, screenings, spoken word and poetry)

Transport to enable easy access offers in Burnham on Sea including Princess Theatre, and especially in the evening

Bring opportunities to people in their homes (People stuck at home can't get out to anything)

A community garden

Somewhere to wander around, stop and pause - a reason to go in to Highbridge Museum - the history of Highbridge / Living Museum - people sharing their knowledge and stories

Dance

A Highbridge equivalent to Bridgwater Together

It was noted that the Princess Theatre and Arts Centre in Burnham-on-Sea is keen to increase its engagement with and service provision to Highbridge, and that management is working on developing a 'BoSH Together' style of programme.

This discussion also brought up specific ideas around facilities, there was also support for a Theatre style venue for performing arts, for the development of the outside space at Create You as a place for music and other performing arts, increased utilisation of the Community hall, and a library/ knowledge space for people to work from and in.

In order to explore this further, participants were posed the question, "If there was a hub for activity/facility/event that was 'very Highbridge' where could it be?"

Fifteen potential locations were identified, with the six most favoured by the participants being:

The outside space at Create You

Highbridge Community Hall (former Town Hall)

YMCA Highbridge – including its café space

Apex Park – eg outdoor events and/or using gazebos and other temporary structures

Popup - outreach - not a fixed location eg at an existing facility and/or in an empty shop such as the former post office being used as The Meeting Place

King Alfred's School

Morland Community Hub



There was very strong support across both Creative Accelerator sessions for the idea that a 'Hub' need not mean one physical location, but rather activities in multiple locations being brought together to create a hub. This led to an idea of the hub being more a concept than

a place, with the concept being things happening at a local level at Highbridge, created for and by the residents of the town. The Hub concept would be the way in which people are informed about what is available in Highbridge for them to participate in and how they are brought together to create.

The discussions demonstrated that participants were more interested in a human dimension than in the facilities. The ideas for spaces were enthusiastically explored, but there was a sense that the people and possible activities were much more important. As well as being a place for organised creative activities, there was support for the hub facility/facilities also being a place for people to come together, chat, meet up, share thoughts over a cup of tea. There was a strong consensus that an effective and vibrant hub would be all about the people in the community, with the activities on offer being means of making connections.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The sessions strongly reinforced and supported Seed's other consultation findings that:

- a) Like other people in Sedgemoor, the residents of Highbridge would like to participate in arts and other creative activities but the main barrier to participation is access
- b) Providing activities locally is the preferred solution to that, followed by increased transport provision to where activities already are
- c) Establishing and resourcing local hubs of activity is strongly supported as the best way to go about achieving this
- d) Provision of activities and other opportunities in Burnham-on-Sea does not sufficiently cater to the existing need in Highbridge

The consultation participants made a strong case that there is a desire to build a sense of place and community loyalty/pride in where they live, and that creative activities would be an effective and engaging way to address that. The most strongly supported new ideas to grow out of the two sessions were:

- a) Although there are centres of activity with great strengths already in the community, Highbridge needs effective connections between them and more opportunities to be creative across a wider range of activities, participant groups and kinds of amenity
- b) There is no need for this 'hub' to be a single facility or venue, but rather it should be a connecting concept that draws on all of the creative opportunities in Highbridge to be connected as a creative hub through which opportunities to create and to enjoy the arts are shared, exchanged and promoted
- c) There is more need for/interest in opportunities to actively participate in creative activities than to be a passive audience member at events
- d) Particularly during this time of Coronavirus, there is a need to engage in creativity where people are, whether in their homes, local neighbourhoods or in the wild spaces and natural environment around the town
- e) Improved connectivity by bus would increase access to creative arts in Highbridge
- f) There is also a need to bring people out into the wider community through creating opportunities to come together
- g) A key idea in the first session was that Highbridge needs to become a destination rather than a place that is passed through. Although not strictly a response to any of

the key questions posed, both sessions raised the pedestrian point of entry into Highbridge from Apex Park as a particularly problematic physical area. Both groups saw this as a great disincentive for walkers from Burnham continuing into Highbridge, making Apex Park their 'turn-back' point instead, working against the idea of Highbridge as a destination

- h) A key idea generated in the second session, which had the overwhelming support of the group, was the concept of 'making Highbridge Instagram-able'

Next Steps

Seed will

- Deliver a creative-community element to the BoSH Council Christmas Lights Switch on event and ensure Highbridge is at least 50% of the focus of that activity
- Invite owners of empty shops on Market and Church Street to participate in a shopfront window art project
- Ensure our Sedgemoor wide activities (such as creative packs and sketchbooks distribution) have a strong presence in Highbridge
- Stage a pop-up 'Create the Future' event in Highbridge as soon as covid19 restrictions allow this to proceed safely, offering easy to participate in activities and further community consultation opportunities
- Encourage Highbridge residents and groups to bring potential local project ideas to Seed
- Plan a 'come and see/try' type event (post Covid) where residents in Highbridge will be able to travel by bus to see arts activities in a location with a more established and developed offer
- Develop ideas and activities to progress the 'make Highbridge Instagram-able' concept
- Deliver a co-created participatory arts project in Highbridge in 2021
- Further develop our relationship with the Princess Theatre and Arts Centre with a view to increasing connection to/service of residents in Highbridge
- Establish relationships with all of the consultation recommended hub locations to secure their involvement in furthering the concept of a multi-venue creative hub for Highbridge
- Establish relationships with public transport providers in the area
- Invite Create You and other potential suppliers in Highbridge to quote where services or materials are needed for Seed's activities
- Explore the idea of a creative arts element to be included in any community garden development projects that may emerge
- Prioritise other ideas from the consultation and develop them into activities to be staged on 2021-2022.