

ALDERSHOT TOWN CENTRE – GROWING INDEPENDENT BUSINESS USES

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 “Help develop the vibrancy of Aldershot town centre (ATC) by attracting and growing independent business uses” was the project brief given to one project team from the 2018/19 Leadership Programme.

1.2 This report sets out the team’s recommendations as well as outlining the approach to the project, some further key findings and general observations from a learning perspective.

2. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

2.1 This report is a specific piece of work, carried out by participants of the Leadership Programme. It should be viewed in relation to the work of the ATC Transition and Strategic Plans, and within the context of the overall regeneration programme.

2.2 The regeneration of Aldershot is a complex partnership approach to addressing the economic and place-making challenges facing the town. The purpose of this project is to identify opportunities to develop the vibrancy of the town centre, in relation to the broader regeneration plans, by encouraging and developing independent business uses.

2.3 Regeneration of town centres is the key focus of the “Place” theme – one of four themes within the council’s three-year business plan. The plan sets out key activities for the next three years with longer term aspirations set out in the “Your Future, Your Place 2030” council vision.

2.4 “Your Future, Your Place 2030” identifies a long-term vision for both Farnborough and Aldershot. This includes broader provision and support such as leisure, arts and social spaces in the town centre with an aspiration to have a vibrant night-time economy and a cultural offer to compliment retail provision.

2.5 The aspirations of “Your Future Your Place 2030” embody more than developing and regenerating the physical place. It is about providing fundamental opportunities and change and generating a sense of pride of place with local communities.

2.6 The reputation and pride of Aldershot has struggled in recent years as a result of the challenges to the retail sector in the town centre. Like many towns across the UK, Aldershot has been unable to maintain healthy town centre retail provision in the face of stiff competition from online retailers and it has suffered the recent loss of a number of major multiple retailers. This has been compounded further by recent closures in the Westgate complex.

2.7 In order to help develop the vibrancy of the town centre, people need a reason to visit. The High Street 2030: Achieving Change Report (2018, Institute of Place Management & Manchester Metropolitan University) states that town centres of the future “should attract local people to take part in a variety of activities - including dining, leisure and sport, culture and the arts, entertainment, medical services, and many more uses”.

2.8 The emerging uses in the Union Street East development include 1-2 bedroom flats that will be aimed at and attract a young demographic. A new, vibrant young population will provide an ideal future client-base for potential local leisure and cultural facilities.

2.9 For this reason, the group agreed the need to explore different types of businesses that could be viable, but to focus on those with an emphasis on leisure and cultural provision. At the same time, it was prudent to ensure we considered whether the market and opportunities were right for Aldershot and would meet the needs of the local demographic, as well as those of potential visitors and future residents.

3. APPROACH

3.1 A group of council officers, representing a range of services, who were participants of the Leadership Programme, led the delivery of the project, supported by the Head of Economy, Planning and Strategic Housing.

3.2 The approach to the project had three stages:

- Creating a knowledge baseline
- Evaluating potential opportunities
- Developing ideas in order to form recommendations

4. CREATING A KNOWLEDGE BASELINE

4.1 The critical factor for the team at this stage was to build collective knowledge, understand the history involved in ATC and the current state of the town centre.

4.2 This involved undertaking research of other towns, site visits, analysing local demographic data, delivering workshops, holding meetings and interviews with colleagues and partners and understanding a range of high-level complex documents.

4.3 In addition, it was important to consider the national retail position and changing shopping habits.

5. EVALUATING POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES

5.1 A suggested list of ideas were tested at the Staff Showcase where officers

and Elected Members were given an opportunity to share their opinion.

5.2 Some ideas were not progressed past this stage if the group felt that the market or demographic were not appropriate, or the town did not offer the suitable facilities/space required.

6. DEVELOPING IDEAS IN ORDER TO FORM RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Post evaluation of opportunities and taking into consideration existing local and neighbouring provision along with information gained from our research, the group was in a position to develop ideas further.

6.2 The following were identified as the primary ideas the group were eager to progress:

- Soft Play
- Repair Café
- Escape Room
- Climbing Centre
- Gaming Centre
- Indoor Trampolining
- Cultural offer – to provide an extension of West End Centre provision more centrally
- Engagement with young people - previous reports had highlighted an opportunity to improve active Council engagement with young people under 25. The group viewed this project as a perfect opportunity to engage with young people and involve them in changes to the town centre

6.3 The methods used to develop the ideas varied depending on the project, but broadly speaking involved conversations with partners and businesses across a range of geographical areas in order to ascertain:

- Their needs/logistical requirements and customer base
- Other factors when considering opening a business in Aldershot
- How the Council may be able to provide support to facilitate new business
- Selling the “Aldershot Story” - the history, the increasing population and future customer base, and the emerging opportunities for the town

6.4 In many cases the group identified existing networks and partnerships to explore and progress potential ideas.

6.5 Over the course of the project, the group considered 11 ideas in total.

6.6 Appendices 1-11 provide background information and further detail on the evaluation of each idea.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The following section details the recommendations of the group for each idea considered over the course of the project.

7.2 This represents work focused on generating ideas and feasibility, therefore the ideas as a whole may benefit from further evaluation alongside other projects/initiatives underway.

7.3 The group's recommendations have been split into two sections: ideas for consideration within the council's Transition Plan and ideas for consideration within the Aldershot Town Centre Strategy.

7.4 The Transition Plan refers to work that is underway now, focused on supporting the town through the redevelopment of key sites. The group recommend these ideas being further evaluated/progressed straight away, as they are not dependent on the redevelopment of key sites.

7.5 The Aldershot Town Centre Strategy refers to the longer-term vision and plan for the town, post-redevelopment. The group recommend these ideas being evaluated/progressed alongside other initiatives aimed at setting the longer-term strategic vision for the town.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS – TRANSITION PLAN

8.1 Climbing Centre (Appendix 1, pg. 10-11)

- The group recommend that a purpose-built centre be considered for the periphery of the development site.
- This should include provision for changing rooms and showers as well as industrial kitchens to allow for catering on-site.
- Development of such a site should also include parking provision whether on-site or nearby.

8.2 Engagement with young people – display of local art students' work on existing RBC hoardings (Appendix 2, pg. 12-15)

- The group recommend that work already underway to display artwork from Farnborough 6th Form College and Farnborough College of Technology be rolled out to any future redevelopment sites that will be hoarded within the town.
- This should be expanded through collating any interest generated by these displays and offering similar opportunities/space to other groups/organisations linked to the town.

8.3 Engagement with young people – “Humans of Aldershot” concept for the Rushmoor Development Partnership (RDP) hoardings (Appendix 2, pg. 12-15)

- The group recommend seeking full support and approval from the RDP for this project before formalising the approach with Farnborough 6th Form College and Farnborough College of Technology.
- Following this, the group recommend that there is project space provided within the Princes Hall, along with dedicated support from Rushmoor officers in order to oversee the work and fulfil any safeguarding requirements.
- In order to facilitate the delivery of this project, the group recommend the agreement of budget provision to cover printing costs and an end of project exhibition event.

8.4 Engagement with young people – youth engagement project (Appendix 2, pg. 12-15)

- The group recommend that dedicated resource from key council functions be agreed before formalising the approach with Farnborough 6th Form College.
- In order to facilitate the delivery of this project, the group recommend the agreement of budget provision and for this to be managed within the council.

8.5 Engagement with young people – opportunities within construction (Appendix 2, pg. 12-15)

- Working with Aldershot College (part of Farnborough College of Technology) and in conjunction with the council’s Economic Development Team, the group recommend that an element of the youth engagement work is focused on providing construction opportunities for local students. This should form part of the overall skills and employment plan/offer that the council develops with the Regeneration Team and the RDP, linking to the college’s “Stretch Programme” that identifies students with potential and seeks to provide them with the opportunities to fulfil this.
- The group recommends specifically that the following be considered within this:
 - Mentoring programmes and work placements for students to work with local builders and businesses;
 - Delivering town centre improvements through opportunities to improve the look of the town such as making benches, flower-bed, etc;
 - Offering some space within the proposed Makers’ Yard where students can kit-out the units to specified requirements.

8.6 Repair Cafe (Appendix 3, pg. 16-18)

- The group recommend that a Repair Café be explored straight away, as this is not dependent on the availability of a new unit within the town centre.
- Consideration should be given to locating it within a church hall in the town centre, within a pre-existing empty shop unit or at the Princes Hall.
- In order to link this concept to the town and honour the terms of our Armed Forces Community Covenant, we recommend consideration being given to the role of armed forces veterans within this.
- To support the development of this concept, we recommend seeking guidance from pre-existing repair cafes in order to establish one within Rushmoor.

8.7 West End Centre (Appendix 4, pg. 19-20)

- The group recommend continuing work already underway within the council's Transition Plan which focuses on creating a greater town centre presence for both the West End Centre and the Princes Hall now, ahead of any longer-term cultural offer once Union Street East is redeveloped.
- Once the site is redeveloped, the group recommend progressing another strand of the council's Transition Plan which focuses on a town centre loyalty scheme, providing discount vouchers for food and drink venues.
- As mentioned in the recommendations for the Escape Room (9.1), the group recommends consideration be given to the development of a town centre app, providing visitors and residents with information, event alerts and discount/loyalty schemes, etc.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS – ALDERSHOT TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

9.1 Escape Room (Appendix 5, pg. 21)

- The group recommend working with an identified provider in order to facilitate the opening of an Escape Room as part of the Union Street East redevelopment.
- Part of this offer should include consideration of incentives such as reduced rental costs or Business Rates.
- As mentioned in the recommendations for the West End Centre (8.7), the group recommends consideration be given to the development of a town centre app, providing visitors and residents with information, event alerts and discount/loyalty schemes, etc.

9.2 Soft Play (Appendix 6, pg. 22)

- During the life of this project, the Aldershot Play Centre (soft-play) opened in the Wellington Centre, with a further planning application being approved for a separate soft-play facility at another town centre location. The group therefore recommend that no further provision of this facility is needed within the town at this time.

9.3 Indoor Trampolining (Appendix 7, pg.23)

- In light of the research completed in order to understand the requirements of such provision, the group do not recommend further exploring the viability of this idea at this time.
- The group recommends that any future review of the soft-play provision within the town should account for the possibility of including indoor trampolining as part of this, but not as a stand-alone offer.

9.4 Little Street (Appendix 8, pg. 24)

- Because of the emergence of two soft-play providers within the life of this project, the group recommend allowing both to establish themselves in the town before exploring whether the addition of a facility such as Little Street would be viable within the town.
- Before progressing this idea further, the group recommend market research with appropriate customer groups in order to understand the demand for and potential usage of such a facility, with particular attention to age and price-sensitivity of the target demographic.

9.5 Splash area (Appendix 9, pg.25)

- The group recommend further exploration of the provision of a splash area within the open spaces planned for the Union Street East redevelopment or the proposed redevelopment of the Galleries site.
- In particular, research into the put-in and maintenance costs associated with a splash area should be considered, as the cost may be prohibitive to inclusion within the plans for the town.

9.6 Visual Gaming Centre (Appendix 10, pg. 26)

- In light of the research completed in order to understand the requirements and utilisation of similar provision within Farnborough town centre, the group do not recommend pursuing the idea of a visual gaming centre/café at this time.
- The group recommends further exploration of the E-Sports industry, especially given Aldershot's position on the M3/M4 corridor which acts as a hub for gaming creation, with a view to providing space to watch and participate in e-sport tournaments within the redevelopment of the town centre.

9.7 Relocation of the Army Career's Office (Appendix 11, pg.27)

- Negotiations have been handed over to the Regeneration Team with the recommendation that they promptly engage with the Garrison Commander with a view to potentially identifying a new, town centre location within the Union Street East development, thereby securing an important long-term lease for one of the units.

APPENDICIES

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APPENDIX 1 – CLIMBING CENTRE EVALUATION.

Background and context:

A Climbing Centre was identified as a potential new leisure facility to form part of the Regeneration of Aldershot town centre. It was felt that with the right facilities a centre could be a big attraction to a range of ages and abilities and would draw visitors into the town for a day out.

Local research indicated that there are some “clip and climb” walls local to Aldershot but that the nearest climbing facility is Craggy Island in Guildford and White Spider (part of a larger business) in Richmond.

It was considered that a new climbing centre, which offers numerous changes to climbs to attract repeat visitors, as opposed to the limitation of clip and climb walls, will also attract serious climbers and could potentially draw people to Aldershot from existing centres.

The main concern identified was the available location of the climbing centre and the existing facilities that would be needed to make it a successful development. This included suitable parking provision and the need for some level of catering facility. The catering facility is considered a vital element of the business, in order to offer the complete package, climbing experience and food afterwards and make the business more financially viable.

A desktop research exercise was undertaken by visiting the webpages of existing climbing centres in the south of England. In addition, local planning portals were researched to ascertain the level of footprint required and members of the project team visited some regional centres to seek further specific information about logistics.

The site visited raised the following points to consider:

- The equipment initially cost around £150k but to replace would now probably be closer to £200k - £250k.
- The majority of centres have proper changing rooms, with showers, so that people would be inclined to come straight from work (a model that most gyms now work to).
- Climbing centres are well used by military personnel.
- The height of the building can limit the level of courses that can be provided. A centre with an atrium to about 10m to allow for the higher wall area will be able to provide a wider range of courses, and thereby is likely to eliminate the option of repurposing an existing building.

The idea for a climbing centre was suggested at the RBC Staff Showcase and at a workshop for the armed forces and received a significant level of support and

interest. In addition, The Leader of the Council and local Councillors also gave their support.

Recommendations:

- The group recommend that a purpose-built centre be considered for the periphery of the development site.
- This should include provision for changing rooms and showers as well as industrial kitchens to allow for catering on-site.
- Development of such a site should also include parking provision whether on-site or nearby.

APPENDIX 2 – ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE EVALUATION (4 PROJECTS).

Background and context:

During the research phase of the project we noted the emphasis in the High Street 2030 Report on the role of young people in the future of town centres. This identified to us a gap in our approach to regenerating both towns within our Borough and therefore we have taken this forward within our project.

One example of how successful this can be is the Youth Market in Altrincham, part of a broader market offer that has helped transform the future of the area. We initially pursued the same idea for Aldershot, focusing on the idea of setting up a council-led youth market, providing physical space and linking into existing business and tech mentoring through partner organisations such as the Community Matters Partnership Project (CMPP).

Through developing this concept, we spoke with several colleagues and these conversations allowed us to reframe our approach, therefore focusing us on starting with engagement work first in order to see what ideas might come from young people themselves. We also viewed this change of direction as a brilliant opportunity to strengthen the council's relationship with colleges along with our role in providing opportunities for young people in our locality.

We have established connections with two main contacts at Farnborough 6th Form and two main contacts at Farnborough College of Technology which includes Aldershot (construction) College.

Our work with them has identified four specific projects around youth engagement work, and these are summarised below.

Project 1 – display of local art students' work on RBC hoardings: (Farnborough 6th Form College and Farnborough College of Technology)

Working with the Town Centre Events Officer we have already commenced this project by inviting both colleges to curate art displays from their back-catalogue, covering courses such as Photography, Fine Art and Graphic Design.

We have secured funding from the Town Centre Events budget to print and display the artwork across the hoarding panels on the High Street side of the old Poundland site for Farnborough 6th Form College, with a display from Farnborough College of Technology on the Union Street side of the same site.

These displays will not only directly respond to feedback given as part of the research phase of the project, they will also create a platform for local young people to showcase their talent and promote both colleges.

Recommendations:

- The group recommend that work already underway to display artwork from Farnborough 6th Form College and Farnborough College of Technology be rolled out to any future redevelopment sites that will be hoarded within the town.
- This should be expanded through collating any interest generated by these displays and offering similar opportunities/space to other groups/organisations linked to the town.

Project 2 – “Humans of Aldershot” concept for the Rushmoor Development Partnership (RDP) hoardings:

(Farnborough 6th Form College and Farnborough College of Technology)

Working with the Town Centre Events Officer, we have started to set up two work experience placements for college students studying an appropriate course such as Photography and English Language – expected in early 2020.

They will be tasked with creating a back catalogue of photo-portraits and short interviews based on Brandon Stanton’s world-famous “Humans of New York” photoblog. The purpose of this is to link the regeneration of Aldershot Town Centre with its local people, highlighting the human faces and stories of people in the community, as well as giving local students the opportunity to create physical content for the hoardings, and digital content for social media.

This builds on pre-existing work within the Council such as the Story for Aldershot and work on the branding for the redevelopment of the town, all of which will be included in the project brief to students.

Each group will be given a pre-agreed list of approximately ten subjects but will then be expected to identify further subjects through spending time in the town and following up connections. Each group will be set an approximate number of portraits and interviews to be completed by the end of the two-week period.

At the end of both placements we are proposing on holding a celebratory exhibition event for students and their guests, representatives from the colleges, the subjects and their guests, and representatives from both the council and the RDP.

Recommendations:

- The group recommend seeking full support and approval from the RDP for this project before formalising the approach with Farnborough 6th Form College and Farnborough College of Technology.
- Following this, the group recommend that there is project space provided within the Princes Hall, along with dedicated support from Rushmoor officers in order to oversee the work and fulfil any safeguarding requirements.

- In order to facilitate the delivery of this project, the group recommend the agreement of budget provision to cover printing costs and an end of project exhibition event.

Project 3 – youth engagement project:

(Farnborough 6th Form College)

Having identified a gap in consulting with and engaging young people, the team felt passionately about making sure we provided real, live opportunities for young people to contribute and influence change and have their opinions and contributions recognised.

The purpose of the engagement project is to enable students to create and deliver a series of projects or programmes to engage young people with Aldershot town centre as it is redeveloped, and into the future. The brief is broad in order to allow for student creativity, but it is expected this could include surveys, works with schools, campaigns and social media work.

Longer term we would like to establish an on-going network of young people that we can consult with which as well as provide practical space and opportunity for students to progress their entrepreneurial and creative skills. For example, the provision of a youth market or space within the proposed makers' yard.

The project brief will be to create, develop and deliver activity that engages young people in the current redevelopment of Aldershot town centre.

Students working on this project will need to:

- Understand the context for the town centre redevelopment and its current status.
- Design and deliver engagement event(s)/activity for young people to help us understand what they want from the town whilst understanding challenges and realistic opportunities.
- Identify ways for young people to influence change and get involved with decision-making.
- Put forward recommendations to include how young people can stay involved in the implementation of the ideas.

Recommendations:

- The group recommend that dedicated resource from key council functions be agreed before formalising the approach with Farnborough 6th Form College.
- In order to facilitate the delivery of this project, the group recommend the agreement of budget provision and for this to be managed within the council.

Project 4 – opportunities within construction:

(Aldershot College - part of Farnborough College of Technology)

The regeneration of Aldershot lends itself perfectly to provide real, hands-on construction experience and opportunities for young people. It is important that the regeneration work generates opportunities for local Aldershot young people, engages them in the changes to the town and gives them some ownership. By working with Aldershot College, we can deliver unique opportunities for students.

Recommendations:

- Working with Aldershot College (part of Farnborough College of Technology) and in conjunction with the council's Economic Development Team, the group recommend that an element of the youth engagement work is focused on providing construction opportunities for local students. This should form part of the overall skills and employment plan/offer that the council develops with the Regeneration Team and the RDP, linking to the college's "Stretch Programme" that identifies students with potential and seeks to provide them with the opportunities to fulfil this.
- The group recommends specifically that the following be considered within this:
 - Mentoring programmes and work placements for students to work with local builders and businesses.
 - Delivering town centre improvements through opportunities to improve the look of the town such as making benches, flower-bed, etc.
 - Offering some space within the proposed Makers' Yard where students can kit-out the units to specified requirements.

APPENDIX 3 – REPAIR CAFE EVALUATION.

Background and context:

Repair Cafés are free meeting places and they're all about repairing things (together). In a Repair Café are the tools and materials to help you make any repairs you need on clothes, furniture, electrical appliances, bicycles, crockery, appliances, toys, etc. There will also be expert volunteers on site, with repair skills in all kinds of fields.

Visitors bring their broken items from home and together with the specialists, they start making their repairs in the Repair Café. It's an ongoing learning process. There are over 1,500 Repair Cafés worldwide.

We throw away vast amounts of stuff, even things with almost nothing wrong and which could get a new lease of life after a simple repair. The trouble is, lots of people have forgotten that they can repair things themselves or they no longer know how. Knowing how to make repairs is a skill quickly lost. Society doesn't always show much appreciation for the people who still have this practical knowledge, and against their will they are often left standing on the side-lines. Their experience is never used, or hardly ever. The Repair Café changes all that! People who might otherwise be side-lined are getting involved again. Valuable practical knowledge is getting passed on. Things are being used for longer and don't have to be thrown away. This reduces the volume of raw materials and energy needed to make new products. It cuts CO₂ emissions, for example, because manufacturing new products and recycling old ones causes CO₂ to be released.

The Repair Café teaches people to see their possessions in a new light and once again, to appreciate their value. The Repair Café helps change people's mindset. This is essential to kindle people's enthusiasm for a sustainable society.

Case study – Farnham:

Farnham Repair Café (FRC) is a collaborative project between The Centre for Sustainable Design at the University for the Creative Arts (UCA), Farnham Town Council and The Spire Church. It is also part of the global Repair Café movement led by Repair Café International Foundation.

It operates as a drop-in session once a month on a Saturday morning. Their average visitor numbers are 50-55 per month and currently demand is outweighing supply. There is a restriction of 2 products per person and other restrictions are in place such as no gas or petrol driven products and no clothing alterations. This is to protect the health and safety of all and to prevent custom being taken away from local businesses, such as the tailors.

Repair rate is approx. 66% across electrical, mechanical, bicycles, clothing and furniture.

Age of visitors is generally over 55.



Donations are expected, but not mandatory and average at between £5 and £8 per repair. FRC are a registered charity and have sought small grants to cover costs, but their primary income is from the donations. This covers costs such as PAT testing, insurance and refreshments. The Spire Church provides the hall FOC, which significantly reduces FRC's running costs. In return, FRC donates 10% of donations to the church. The church's café is open on Saturday mornings and have reported a significant increase in takings on Repair Café days, again benefitting the church.

Town centre presence:

The FRC works well for a number of reasons, but one being it is located in Farnham town centre. This allows visitors to come into the town centre and browse in shops and spend time in a café or restaurant, as well as visiting the Repair Café. Having a Repair Café in Aldershot town centre could have the same effect, giving people a purpose to visit the town and whilst there, enjoy and discover other attractions and businesses that the town has to offer.

A Repair Café's aim of building social cohesion and a creative community is equally important as reducing waste and battling climate change. It would therefore work well as part of a larger 'makers yard' concept in the town centre. Aldershot is unique in that it is home to a high number of army veterans. People who are highly skilled but are lonely and struggle to find a fulfilling purpose. Volunteers at a Repair Café are not necessarily environmentalists. In fact, they are usually enthusiasts who want to give something back to their community. Army veterans therefore would make ideal volunteers, as they have valuable knowledge and skills ready to pass on and the Repair Café could provide them with friendship and help break down social barriers.

Requirements:

- A medium-large sized room, large enough for at least 6 long tables with seating, a seated waiting area and a small reception area.
- Demand is likely to determine frequency at one Saturday morning per month.
- Car parking within a short distance, as people may bring heavy/awkward sized items.
- Toilet facilities for volunteers and drinking water on site.

Recommendations:

- The group recommend that a Repair Café be explored straight away, as this is not dependent on the availability of a new unit within the town centre.

- Consideration should be given to locating it within a church hall in the town centre, within a pre-existing empty shop unit or at the Princes Hall.
- In order to link this concept to the town and honour the terms of our Armed Forces Community Covenant, we recommend consideration being given to the role of armed forces veterans within this.
- To support the development of this concept, we recommend seeking guidance from pre-existing repair cafes in order to establish one within Rushmoor.

APPENDIX 4 – WEST END CENTRE EVALUATION.

Background and context:

The West End Centre is a well-established arts venue in Aldershot, which has hosted world-class touring bands and some of the biggest names in comedy. Despite this, it remains Aldershot's best kept secret, as many residents of Rushmoor and surrounding areas do not know it is there. Work has previously been carried out to raise awareness of the centre and a recent successful bid for government funding to create a 'Rushmoor Arts Hub' (RAH) helped to improve the centre's online presence, build a base where people could share their talents, and train staff.

Unfortunately, however, this funding was only for one year and further funding bids have been unsuccessful. There is still a desire to build on what the RAH started and activities including stalls during big town centre events such as Victoria Day and Shakespeare by the Wellington statue help this. Alternative funding streams through the Arts Council are also being investigated.

Participation in the arts by Rushmoor's population is very low and therefore there is a need to improve accessibility to and increase engagement by all demographics in and around the Rushmoor area.

Town centre presence:

Following a meeting with the West End Centre Manager, the following activities were highlighted as options that could potentially be held in the town centre, all with the aim of raising awareness, increase accessibility and build a creative and artistic atmosphere in the town. It is important that these activities add to what the WEC already offers however, not just moving current activities from the centre to the town:

- Regular workshops and classes – some of the arts and crafts classes that are currently held at the WEC could run taster sessions in the town centre or additional full classes.
- Hub for artists – create a multi-use area with a number of booths, to be hired short and long term. The aim is to create a space where the public can observe artists in action, and artists have a space where they can be creative and help to build a community spirit. An example of this has been successful in Eastleigh (<http://www.sorting-office.co.uk/>). The space could also be used for other activities such as a weekly/monthly repair café.
- Music venue – an indoor space with a small stage and café, where the public can go to relax and watch a performer whilst enjoying refreshments. The space would give musicians a chance to gain experience of performing in front of an audience.
- Adult comedy with coffee – parents with very young children can attend stand-up comedy performances during the day, whilst enjoying a coffee and socialising with other parents of young children.

Requirements:

The space(s) should be suitable for multi-use and accessible throughout the day and evening. Storage space is essential. Parking close by is also important as classes are often held in the evenings and people need to feel safe walking to and from their car. The WEC would not have the resource to manage the unit(s), so staffing would need to be sourced elsewhere.

The WEC's current customer base is mixed, however recent trend changes have resulted in audiences getting older. The WEC is less successful in engaging with the 14-22 age range, so new activities in the town centre could help change this.

Recommendations:

- The group recommend continuing work already underway within the council's Transition Plan which focuses on creating a greater town centre presence for both the West End Centre and the Princes Hall now, ahead of any longer-term cultural offer once Union Street East is redeveloped.
- Once the site is redeveloped, the group recommend progressing another strand of the council's Transition Plan which focuses on a town centre loyalty scheme, providing discount vouchers for food and drink venues.
- As mentioned in the recommendations for the Escape Room, the group recommends consideration be given to the development of a town centre app, providing visitors and residents with information, event alerts and discount/loyalty schemes, etc.

APPENDIX 5 – ESCAPE ROOM EVALUATION.

Background and context:

Escape Rooms have really developed as a popular leisure activity in recent years. Originally from Japan, they provide a real-life puzzle adventure where players are “locked” in a room and must work together to find clues, solve puzzles and escape before their time is up!

The number of escape rooms in the UK has doubled every six months since 2013 and London now has 55, having had just three in 2013. The closest escape rooms to Aldershot are based in Guildford and Reading.

Most escape rooms have no ‘physical’ activities so they are suitable for any age but they are particularly popular with students and young people aged between 18 and 24. With a young demographic and the local armed forces population, the escape rooms were identified as a potential new use for Aldershot and one in which the group wanted to explore further.

It was recognised that popular and successful escape rooms in other areas are located in town centres. Any potential escape rooms will require an easily accessible central location. This is crucial for Aldershot in order to encourage visitors to continue their stay in the town once they have completed their escape room. Some escape rooms are themed and further thought should be given to developing an escape room with a military/digital games theme providing a unique selling point that is relevant to the local area.

The team spoke to a successful escape room business in Berkshire and held extensive negotiations about extending their business into the Aldershot area.

Recommendations:

- The group recommend working with an identified provider in order to facilitate the opening of an Escape Room as part of the Union Street East redevelopment.
- Part of this offer should include consideration of incentives such as reduced rental costs or Business Rates.
- As mentioned in the recommendations for the West End Centre, the group recommends consideration be given to the development of a town centre app, providing visitors and residents with information, event alerts and discount/loyalty schemes, etc.

APPENDIX 6 – SOFT PLAY EVALUATION.

Background and context:

Through the research phase the group felt given the demographic of Aldershot a soft play area would be beneficial to the residents and therefore to the town centre. A soft play in the centre would mean those living locally could walk into the town and this would hopefully encourage footfall. This was also supported by the opening of the Farnborough play centre (2017), 360 Play which has been very successful.

During the lifetime of this project a soft play centre has already opened in the Wellington Centre called Aldershot Play Centre. This facility is open Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm, Saturday 9.00am to 5.30pm and Sunday 10am to 3.45pm, it is ideal for children between the ages of 1 and 6. As the play area is in the Wellington Centre it is restricted by the opening hours of the centre. On payment each child gets 90 minutes of play time. They also run an option of booking a party for a child at the soft play and both drinks and snacks can be purchased.



Recently there has been a planning application, 19/00324/COUPP, made for another soft play at 12-14 Union Street. The unit they want to use requires a change of uses application and is not in the Wellington Centre. This is a bigger unit than the Aldershot Play Centre and will be over two floors with a café. The suggested opening times are open Monday to Friday 9.30am to 5.30pm, Saturday 9.30am to 5.30pm and Sunday 10am to 5.00pm. The soft play will also provide a party room and deliver extracurricular classes. Two objections were made to the planning application and one comment in supports, the application however has been granted. The diagram below shows the plans for the soft play.

Recommendations:

- During the life of this project, the Aldershot Play Centre (soft-play) opened in the Wellington Centre, with a further planning application being approved for a separate soft-play facility at another town centre location. The group therefore recommend that no further provision of this facility is needed within the town at this time.

APPENDIX 7 – INDOOR TRAMPOLINING EVALUATION.

Background and context:

As a project group we identified an indoor trampoline park as a good fit with Aldershot Town Centre due to the demographic type and high population of young families with children.

The idea of a trampoline park is a smaller provision for younger people as opposed to the large industrial trampolining parks. Therefore, the space required is smaller with possible opportunities of reconfiguring an existing retail block to fit this leisure use rather than a purpose-built building.

We undertook some market research to identify any similar options/contacts to ask how successful they have been or if they would do anything different, with a longer-term view of getting them to start up in Aldershot town centre.

This research became more difficult than we imagined. We were unable to identify any indoor trampoline parks that run just trampolining for younger children. All the examples we found were linked to soft play buildings which we feel would work in Aldershot but haven't pursued this as other businesses are working on a soft play offer.

Recommendations:

- In light of the research completed in order to understand the requirements of such provision, the group do not recommend further exploring the viability of this idea at this time.
- The group recommends that any future review of the soft-play provision within the town should account for the possibility of including indoor trampolining as part of this, but not as a stand-alone offer.

APPENDIX 8 – LITTLE STREET EVALUATION.

Background and context:

Little Street is a children's role play centre for under 7's, where they create realistic streets designed with children in mind. This is a scaled down version of what a typical town would be like to inspire the children to explore the world they see around them.

There are currently 5 centres like this with another one opening soon. The nearest to Aldershot is Frimley, set in Frimley train station building. Frimley's existing facility is 142.81 square metres.

The centres are open 7 days a week, there are 4 bookable timed (90 mins) sessions each day to allow time to tidy up between each group coming in, opening times 9:30 to 5.00pm. They offer annual passes along with single bookings and shorted afterschool sessions.



Customers can book a party with up to 65 people allowed in the building for a 90 min slot. There is a café and snack bar.

Aldershot Town Centre does not currently have sufficient provision for young families and children. A new soft play has recently opened up in the town and the level of demand/success of the soft play should be closely monitored.

Recommendations:

- Because of the emergence of two soft-play providers within the life of this project, the group recommend allowing both to establish themselves in the town before exploring whether the addition of a facility such as Little Street would be viable within the town.
- Before progressing this idea further, the group recommend market research with appropriate customer groups in order to understand the demand for and potential usage of such a facility, with particular attention to age and price-sensitivity of the target demographic.

APPENDIX 9 – SPLASH AREA EVALUATION.

Background and context:

While researching town centres and what they have done in recent years to encourage residents to use the town centre, splash pads or water fountains have been something that has benefitted the town centre and provided a visual focus.

These areas can range from a full splash pad which is aimed more at children or water fountains with water jets shooting up from the ground throughout the day, constantly or on a timed basis. The jets might change colour as shown in the photo of Kings Cross and there might be a larger water fountain as a focal point.

They provide a focal point where, on a sunny day parents would be able to sit and enjoy a coffee and bite to eat while their children are playing, something for all the family. At night for those eating out or meeting friends, the coloured light creates a relaxing atmosphere.

The pictures show the water jets at Kings Cross and how they can look throughout the day.



There are two places that an area like this could be considered for Aldershot, either in the new Union Street East development or the proposed redevelopment of the Galleries site to create a town square area.

Recommendations:

- The group recommend further exploration of the provision of a splash area within the open spaces planned for the Union Street East redevelopment or the proposed redevelopment of the Galleries site.
- In particular, research into the put-in and maintenance costs associated with a splash area should be considered, as the cost may be prohibitive to inclusion within the plans for the town.

APPENDIX 10 – VISUAL GAMING CENTRE EVALUATION.

Background and context:

Aldershot is situated in the M3/M4 Corridor and is a hub for gaming creation in the UK. There is currently a big rise in the demand of people watching and participating in E-Sports and so the group identified a visual gaming centre as an idea for the town centre. This would provide an exciting and vibrant place where people could participate and watch the various games/tournaments.

The council is focusing on becoming more digital and investing in this sector and the café would be a great example of the Council's commitment to delivering our digital ambitions as well as providing a current and dynamic place to be for young generations.

Aldershot has a younger demographic than most other of our neighbouring areas and a gaming centre would attract local people to use the café whilst giving those further away a good reason to visit the town.

The café itself would be a place where people could play virtual games, watch other people play games, enjoy some food and drink and engage with likeminded people.

We wanted to speak to the market to see if this was a viable idea for Aldershot, so we engaged with a similar business located in Farnborough town centre. As a start-up business they are focused on making their new business work rather than discussing expansion options at this time. However, based on our own analysis we were able to identify that the opening hours are very short (non-school hours), and that visitor numbers were fairly average.

After several discussions with various parties we believe most people play games from the comfort of their homes and perhaps wouldn't use the café as we first thought. However, we feel there is still a market for watching E-sports in the town.

As Aldershot is starting on its regeneration programme there will be a lot of building and infrastructure work to achieve this. While the town is being redeveloped it would be a good time to consider installing some IT infrastructure such as 5G fibre, as this would be a great investment and a unique selling point for the town, therefore attracting more business from the IT/gaming sector.

Recommendations:

- In light of the research completed in order to understand the requirements and utilisation of similar provision within Farnborough town centre, the group do not recommend pursuing the idea of a visual gaming centre/café at this time.
- The group recommends further exploration of the E-Sports industry, especially given Aldershot's position on the M3/M4 corridor which acts as a hub for gaming creation, with a view to providing space to watch and participate in e-sport tournaments within the redevelopment of the town centre.

APPENDIX 11 – RELOCATION OF THE ARMY CAREER’S OFFICE EVALUATION.

Background and context:

Rushmoor Borough Council’s regeneration team had identified the relocation of the Army Career’s Office from Hospital Hill into the town centre as a potential area for consideration.

Members of the project team were asked to explore the possibility with the Garrison Commander on the basis that we had existing working relationships with him and that we had already engaged with the Army, delivering workshops to local troops about the future of Aldershot Town Centre as part of the research phase of this project.

Following informal discussions, the Garrison Commander confirmed he was, in principle, open to relocating to the town centre and confirmed that limited dialogue with the Ministry of Defence had taken place. He indicated that he would welcome the Council’s support to facilitate and enable the move to happen given the role that Capita play in delivering recruitment for the British Army.

Recommendations:

- Negotiations have been handed over to the Regeneration Team with the recommendation that they promptly engage with the Garrison Commander with a view to potentially identifying a new, town centre location within the Union Street East development, thereby securing an important long-term lease for one of the units.