

Penrith Town Hall Visioning Report

Summary of Initial Outcomes

Prepared for Westmorland and Furness County Council
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This document summarises the outcomes of community visioning workshops delivered as part of the wider consultancy programme for the redevelopment of Penrith Town Hall.

It is not a full consultation report, nor does it set final recommendations.

Part 1: Introduction and Purpose

The visioning workshops detailed in this report formed one strand of the consultancy commissioned to explore the future of Penrith Town Hall. A substantial amount of work has already been undertaken to develop a needs analysis and establish the strategic case for investment.

This visioning strand does not duplicate that work, the findings presented here are intended to complement it, by bringing in community perspectives and aspirations to inform and support the parallel work on business planning, architectural feasibility, and fundraising strategy being undertaken by Westmorland and Furness County Council.

Part 2: Engagement Approach

A series of **three visioning workshops** were delivered during September 2025, using a range of participatory and creative facilitation methods designed to explore **what a 'creative and community hub' means to the local community** and how the wider infrastructure/ ecology could support and benefit from it. A further two feedback workshops were held in October, to share initial findings and **test the ideas that emerged** from the initial visioning workshops.

Approximately 40 representatives attended these engagement workshops, which included local businesses, community organisations, council representatives, and other stakeholders. Many of those who took part attended more than one workshop and this has been weighted in the final report, to avoid over/ under- representation.

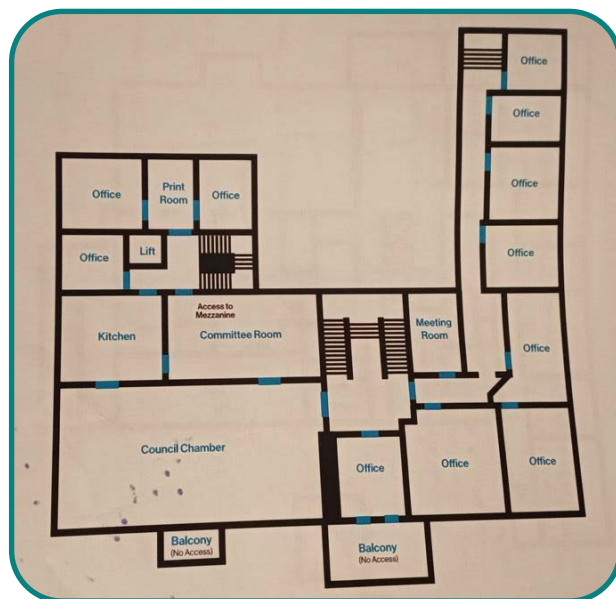
It is important to acknowledge that these workshops provided a **useful snapshot of local perspectives**, but it cannot be considered a full consultation, which is an ongoing process for the redevelopment. The information included in this short report has been **anonymised and summarised to ensure confidentiality**.

Part 3: September Workshop Outcomes

Each workshop delivered in September 2025 was delivered in 5 parts:

1. Town Hall Tour: A map (right).
2. A Warm Welcome: Discussing inclusion;
3. Building Character: Exploring representation;
4. Character building: Testing assumptions;
5. Emerging Ideas: Key questions and partnerships.

The workshops were designed to identify key themes and co-design an emerging vision for the future of Penrith Town Hall. The following themes emerged:



Keys Themes:

a) Identity and Belonging

“It needs to be truly owned by the community not just the council.”

There was a real desire for local people and organisations to be involved in every aspect of the Town Hall redevelopment, from running the building, co-designing the programme, to promoting activities and sharing local stories to form heritage plans.

Takeaway: Local people want to be involved at every level, to support long-term success.

b) Accessibility and Inclusion

“It needs to be a safe space for everyone.”

Many of the participants discussed the importance of making the space physically, emotionally, and socially accessible and inclusive for a diverse range of needs. Discussions reflected the need to embed this from the start and the necessity of engaging experts by experience.

Takeaway: Partnerships with specialist organisations are crucial to achieve authentic inclusion.

c) Links and Connections

“You can’t forget the fact we are rural, things work differently around here.”

Many of the participants discussed the importance of making the space physically, emotionally, and socially accessible and inclusive for a diverse range of needs. Discussions reflected the need to embed this from the start and the necessity of engaging experts by experience.

Takeaway: Community-led programming and promoting needs to be embedded in the model.

d) Community and Participation

“There are local community groups ready and waiting to use this space.”

Many participants commented on the lack of space for community-led organisations or spaces for creative activities in Penrith and suggested that the hub could provide a home for this- and an opportunity for more cross-sector collaborations to support creative health and wellbeing.

Takeaway: The venue could catalyse new creative and community partnerships/ projects.

e) Spaces and Places

“Adults see them as a nuisance, but young people have nowhere to hang out in the evening.”

Participants shared a frustration with the general offer in Penrith, highlighting a need for dedicated spaces for communities to congregate together (particularly young people) and a well considered place-based night-time economy offer in the town after 7pm.

Takeaway: There is a need for well programmed multi-functional spaces to meet these needs.

f) Heritage and Identity

“We need to see ourselves on the walls and in the fabric of the building- literally.”

There was a consensus that some of the architectural features should be conserved to ensure the integrity of the building, but there was also discussion about how the stories of Penrith (past/ present/future) should be woven into the redevelopment to maintain a local identity.

Takeaway: Local heritage should be a defining feature of the building and the programme.

g) Sustainability and Climate

“We need to be thinking about how this building works in 50 years, not 5 years time.”

Digital and technological considerations were discussed at length, but participants were also keen to ensure that the redevelopment future-proofs as far as possible, by learning from other examples- to ensure it is fit for purpose for the long-term.

Takeaway: It is essential to work with specialists to ensure that renovations are future-proof.

h) Economic and Innovation

“Penrith is well-placed to be the new Cultural Industries Hub for Cumbria.”

With good road and rail links, it was suggested by a number of organisations that the building should become a hub for cultural industries: supporting business development, incubation space for new work, specialist training, and innovation opportunities with Lancaster University.

Takeaway: The delivery model needs to be aspirational and dream ‘the art of the possible.

i) Get In and Get Out

“It has potential to be a destination venue for touring companies- if the get in/ get out is right!”

Several organisations reflected on how poorly equipped/ laid out the Town Hall currently is for touring performances/ festival take-overs and how the redevelopment could be an opportunity to improve this and attract more high-quality organisations to the venue.

Takeaway: Work with touring/ festival producers to ensure the offer meets their needs.

j) Ecology and Infrastructure

“There is a reason why many of us are concerned about these proposals.”

Throughout each workshop concerns were raised about the impact of the redevelopment on local businesses, established creative and community programmes, and other regeneration projects that are already in progress, to avoid duplication.

Takeaway: The vision must add value to what already works well locally and wider investment.

Draft Vision for Penrith Town Hall

“Community-led creativity that is accessible and aspirational for all, with multi-functional spaces that catalyse cross-sector connections, incubate innovation, and centre Penrith as a destination for world-class culture.”





Zones

Workshop participants were keen to emphasise that every part of the building should be cohesive and multifunctional to support diverse programming and varied income streams.

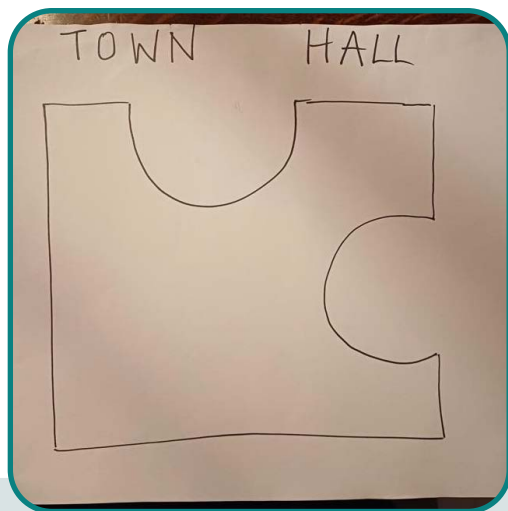
The 'zones' that people felt were most important included:

- Accessible car-park with bicycle racks/ electric charging stations
- Creative accommodation for short stays
- Dark room/ specialist rooms for creative practice
- Digital zone with accessible kit and technicians for support
- Eco- zone connecting the indoors to the outdoors and environment projects
- Exhibition space for thematic takeovers
- Food zone for catering and community kitchen
- Hang out zone with everyday creativity offer
- Hot-desk/ co-working/ break out spaces to support networking and cross-sector collaborations
- Innovation zone for learning at every age
- Long-term rentable spaces to give local community/creatives a home
- Maker Spaces with creative kit loans
- Music zone with specialist equipment
- Out of hours space for warm hubs/ safe spaces/night-time economy offer
- Performance zone for international/national/local programming
- Support zone for advice and signposting in partnership with specialist organisations

Part 4: October Workshop Outcomes

The two workshops delivered in October 2025 included the following activities:

- An **overview of the engagement process** as a whole, delivered by Nick Wright (Project Lead);
- A **question and answer session** to respond to initial findings;
- A **mapping session** to add more organisations to our long-list of local partners;
- A **deep dive into four key themes** that emerged from the first series of workshops:



1. Economic and Innovation

“Penrith is well-placed to be the new Cultural Industries Hub for Cumbria.”

2. Community and Participation

“There are local community groups ready and waiting to use this space.”

3. Spaces and Places

“Adults see them as a nuisance, but young people have nowhere to hang out in the evening.”

4. Links and Connections

“You can’t forget the fact we are rural, things work differently around here.”

The reason these four themes were chosen for further discussion was because they rely on partnership working and a strong local eco-system.

Using a range of participatory methods, we explored wider perspectives and shared local knowledge to test our assumptions and ensure a rounded approach.

In the first October workshop we focussed on theme 1 and 2: **The Town Hall as a cultural industries hub and a home for community groups.**

In the second workshop we focussed on theme 3 and 4: **The night-time economy and the rurality of Penrith.**

The following outcomes present an overview of the discussions that emerged, along with 'word clouds' that reflect discussions on the day:

1. The Town Hall as a cultural industries hub and a home for community groups

The Town Hall was described as a '**Hub for Hope**', a place where people could access high quality opportunities to participate, make, and share creativity in a wide range of innovative ways.

With studio space, workshops, incubators, coaching, mentoring, learning, training, and access to high quality support, with specialist equipment and advice.

2. The Town Hall to support the night-time economy, within a rural context

Unlike the workshop focussed on culture and community, there was less consensus on what the Town Hall could be, although the group suggested it should be 'A portal to other worlds...as well as your own world.' The strands that did emerge can be summerised as:

- **Aesthetic** - people should be inspired by the architecture and the building itself- inside and out.
- **Aspiration** - people should identify the hall as 'the' place to experience something different.
- **Safe** - people should feel comfortable to go into the space and spend time there for free.
- **Future** - partners should be thinking about a 100 year plan, not base it on current trends.
- **Connected** - partners should be creative with the way people travel to and from the building.

Visioning

At the end of each workshop, participants were asked

'If nothing else, the Town Hall redevelopment must...'

and these were the answers people gave listed in alphabetical order:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| • Art of the possible | • Listen |
| • Beautiful | • Local |
| • Contact | • New! |
| • Creative | • Network |
| • Eco-systems | • Open on demand! |
| • Expertise | • Partnerships |
| • Flexible | • Passion |
| • Future-proof | • Succeed |
| • Grow | • Sustainable |
| • Helpful | • Useable |
| • Inclusive | • Used |
| • Innovation | • Young People |



Part 5: Potential Benefits and Considerations

The themes and zones identified throughout the workshops suggest several potential benefits that could arise from redevelopment, depending on design and delivery decisions:

A) Social and Community

- **Enhanced Community Cohesion:** By providing a shared civic space with multiple entry points for different groups, the redeveloped Town Hall could strengthen local networks, reduce isolation, and build intergenerational connections.
- **Wellbeing and Inclusion:** A welcoming, accessible and inclusive venue has potential to support health and wellbeing outcomes, contributing to local strategies around prevention, healthy ageing, youth engagement, and tackling inequalities.
- **Civic Participation:** A Town Hall designed around community use could encourage greater local ownership, active citizenship, and volunteering opportunities.

B) Cultural and Heritage

- **Place Identity and Heritage:** Integrating Penrith's stories and heritage into the fabric of the building can reinforce local identity, civic pride, and sense of belonging.
- **Cultural Programming:** A flexible, multi-use space can enable a range of activities from grassroots participation to professional touring work.
- **Destination Profile:** Redevelopment could position Penrith as a recognised cultural and heritage destination, complementing existing provision across the county.

C) Economic and Regeneration

- **Local Economic Impact:** Increased footfall, venue hire and partnership activities could generate local spend and stimulate the surrounding high street economy.
- **Employment and Skills:** Opportunities may emerge around job creation, volunteering, and skills development in cultural, digital and creative industries.
- **Business Growth:** The Town Hall could serve as an anchor for cultural industries, creative enterprise, and innovation partnerships with universities and local businesses.

D) Environmental and Sustainability

- **Future-proofing:** Redevelopment offers an opportunity to improve the building's energy efficiency and reduce long-term operational costs.
- **Climate Alignment:** Aligning with county council's Environmental policies may strengthen the case for capital investment and external funding.
- **Sustainable Design:** Incorporating sustainable materials and technology could enhance the building's resilience and reduce maintenance pressures.



Part 6: Next Steps

Participants were asked to suggest who is ‘**missing**’ in these conversations.

These organisations were suggested for future consultations and partnership development:

*Please note that this list is illustrative, not exhaustive.

- Action with communities ACT
- Age UK
- Alston Moor Partnership
- Andy’s Man Club
- Appleby Hub
- Arts Council England
- BID
- Bingo
- Blue Jam
- Branched Out CIC
- Brewery Arts Centre
- Brougham Hall
- Buses
- Carlisle Old Fire Station
- Castle Park
- Chatter Matters
- Churches
- Cinema
- Cumbria Chamber of Commerce
- Cumbria Music Hub
- Cumbria Pride
- Cumbria Transport Services
- Cumbria Wildlife Trust
- Cumbria University
- CVS
- CYA
- Dockray Hall
- Drum Nation
- Eden Rural Foyer
- Eden Rock
- Euphoria Circus
- EVAN & Gallery
- Family Hub
- Fell Runner Trust
- Festivals
- Folk Music
- George Hotel
- Health Centre
- Highlights Touring Company
- Housing Associations
- Kendal Calling
- LDNPA
- Leisure Centre
- Library Services
- Lions
- Live Music Venues
- Mostyn Hall
- My Community Penrith
- Museum
- Open Studios
- Parish Councils
- Penrith Civic Society
- Penrith Freemasons
- Penrith Young Farmers
- Penrith Players
- PERN
- Playhouse
- Plug n play
- Potfest
- Prism Arts
- Pubs
- Pubwatch
- Repair Café
- Roller Rink
- Royal British Legion
- Rugby Club
- Running Clubs
- Schools
- Scouts and Guide Groups
- Skatepark
- Sports Clubs
- Sight and Sound
- Stomping Ground CIC
- Sunbeams
- Taxis
- Team Autism CIC
- Theatre By The Lake
- The Foyer
- The Gathering
- Triple A
- Tullie House
- U3A
- University of Cumbria
- Upfront Gallery
- Village Halls
- Volunteer Transport
- Warehouse Nightclub
- Youth Groups
- Young Farmers

Due to the timing of the workshops and the iterative nature of the engagement programme, key questions were raised throughout the workshops that have been captured below.

Many of these questions were answered in the feedback session in October 2025, however they have all been listed, for transparency:

- What is the schedule for delivery?
- What is the engagement approach?
- What are the investment principles?
- What is the financial investment?
- How will you ensure rigour?
- Will we get to review final plans?
- Will it be fully accessible?
- What is the plan for sustainability?
- What is the tourist market?
- Who will run the Town Hall?
- How will we attract quality performances?
- How will we balance local/ economic needs?
- How will you preserve historical character?
- How will you represent local people?
- Will funding support local organisations?
- How will start ups be supported?
- How will it be strategically aligned?

With Thanks:

We would like to thank everyone who generously gave their time to participate in these visioning workshops.

For details of the participants who took part in the engagement process, please contact the Penrith Hall Development Team.

The artwork displayed here is just a small section of the ideas co-created during workshops in September, using participatory approaches.

