

Penrith Town Hall Youth Consultation

Commissioned by Westmorland & Furness Council
Creative consultation and report by The Knotted Project

Young people are the future of Penrith and have offered valuable insights into the opportunities that may lie in a building such as the Town Hall.





Context

Westmorland and Furness Council has secured £3m to reimagine Penrith Town Hall as a community and cultural hub, celebrating the town's heritage.

A large piece of work and community conversation took place with members of the community and key stakeholders on the future of Penrith Town Hall. An online survey was circulated as well as physical survey stations at key local buildings. Westmorland and Furness community and cultural officers attended sessions at libraries as well as bespoke targeted engagement with partner organisations. A large proportion of this work engaged with people over the age of 18 in the community.

The Knotted Project were therefore commissioned to design a creative workshop that engaged young people from the Penrith Community in the Penrith Town Hall consultation. The workshops aim was to inspire and engage children and young people but also provide the opportunity for them to express their ideas and views through creativity. The outcomes from the workshops will contribute towards developing the vision for Penrith Town Hall and embed the young people's voices into the wider planning and creative design.

Traditional consultation methods often miss young people's thoughts and feelings as many are not hosted in the young people's spaces. Many of the young people spoken to reflected this during the consultation, not feeling that many local spaces were for them. The Knotted Project went directly to the young people in their youth club or school setting to ensure that young people felt comfortable and confident to express their views and understood that their points of view were valid and essential to visioning the future of the Town Hall.

What we did

We worked with 112 young people in the Penrith area, who lived in Penrith, went to school in Penrith or visited the town centre regularly. We spoke to young people in the community ranging from 6 to 16 years old to hear their ideas and authentic views on what is needed in Penrith and what the future of the Town Hall could look like as a community hub.

The aim of the consultation was to find out what young people currently accessed, what they felt was missing from the community and focusing specifically on the needs of young people. The workshop was broken down in to multiple stages, to unpick some of these thoughts.

We began by looking at what is currently on offer for young people in Penrith, asking:

- **Where do they currently hang out after school? What clubs or groups do they currently access?**
- **What is missing from the Penrith community that doesn't currently exist?**

Through physical theatre, the young people brought some of these places to life, image building and narrating their ideas. We then looked at what young people think and feel about the current Town Hall. We looked at images and planning designs as many had not accessed the Town Hall before and engaged in discussion.

We then looked at some of the essentials for making a space welcoming and where young people would feel safe and happy to be. We looked at how the spaces would look and feel as well as what activities might take place and what the must haves for young people would be. The young people worked in groups to mind map their ideas and came up with hundreds of brilliant suggestions.

We then asked the young people to dream to the extreme! Working in small groups they designed what their new Town Hall community hub would be like and brought this to life through drama. Each group presented their idea and walked us through their imaginary building, with the group bringing to life the different elements of their design and acting this out.

They focused on:

- The approach to the building Who you would meet there
- What the building would look and feel like in the future
- The activities that might happen there
- How you would feel when you left the Town Hall



Who we engaged

We consulted **112 young people** through accessing multiple existing groups in the community including 3 primary schools and 1 after school community drop-in session supported by Stomping Ground. Groups we worked with included:

Kirkoswalds C of E primary school 11: Year 5 and 6 students

A rural primary school 15 minutes outside of Penrith town centre. Many children here live in Penrith or spend time there most weekends. Many of the year 6 children will be going to secondary school in Penrith for the following academic year.

Brunswick Primary School 42: Year 1 and 2 students

This school is less than a 5 minute walk from the Town Hall and most of the children walk past the Town Hall on the way to the schools local church. This work captured some of the youngest voices included in the consultation.

St Catherines Catholic Primary School: 32, Year 5 and 6 students

This school is a 5 minute walk from Penrith Town Hall, with teachers explaining most children would walk past the building on their way to school. Even so, over half of young people we spoke to in this group said they didn't know where the Town Hall was.

Stomping Ground: 27 young people 8-16 years old

This session is run by Stomping Ground CIC who run weekly evening sessions at Pategill, Play Park in Penrith for young people to drop in to. The session is relaxed with some small activities, but mainly allowing young people to come together to hang out in a safe space. Most of the young people were secondary school age and most dropped in from local housing estates and the hyper local community.



55% of young people said that there were not safe places for them to hang out after school

41% of young people said there wasn't a lot for young people to do in Penrith

69% of young people didn't know where the Town Hall was in Penrith

76% of young people had never been inside the Town Hall

86% of young people said they wouldn't feel comfortable going inside the Town Hall with their mates

80% of young people said that the Town Hall doesn't look like a place for young people



What is there for young people in the community currently?

Where can we go after school or on the weekend?

- Penrith Leisure Centre
- A bench in the park
- Football pitch
- Shops
- Neighbours house
- Friends house
- Mums shop
- Park- but it rains
- Cinema, but it's a bit expensive
- Skate park
- Beacon
- Castle Park play equipment
- McDonalds- it's warm and you can chat with friends (but not safe at night)
- Pump track
- My house
- Sainsbury's
- Basket ball court
- Stomping Ground

Groups we are part of?

- Gymnastics
- Karate
- Hockey
- Rock climbing
- Sport clubs
- Cheerleading
- Football
- Horse riding
- Church
- Dancing
- Swimming
- Ballet
- Rounders



What's missing in Penrith now for the community?

- A youth club
- A sweet shop
- Soft play area- for all ages
- Go karting
- Toy shops
- More drama clubs
- Beauty shops
- Singing and dancing clubs
- Park for older kids with better equipment
- Better shops
- Trampoline park



Young People's current view of the Town Hall

We asked young people about the town hall currently, based on their knowledge of the building or by showing photos and maps of the building. We asked young people to tell us their honest opinions on how the building made them feel.

What do you think looking at or approaching the building?

- "It looks very boring with no colour"
- "Looks scary"
- "Looks old"
- "It looks like a haunted mansion and not welcoming"
- "Looks intimidating"
- "Like a palace- we wouldn't be allowed to go in there-it's too fancy for us, we would get told off"
- "It needs painting"
- "I don't know what's inside"
- "You can't get in"
- "Not a place for young people"

What activities might currently happen inside the Town Hall?

- "Meetings and important stuff"
- "Reading- boring things"
- "Business stuff, working on a laptop making a presentation"
- "People getting money out"
- "Interviews"
- "Stamping papers"
- "Business deals"
- "Nothing fun"

Who might be inside the building?

- "Business people working in offices" "
- Judge from a court"
- "Old people"
- "Someone reading books"
- "Councillors"
- "People paying bills"
- "No one- it looks boring"
- "Westmorland and Furness Council"
- "Special people with important jobs"
- "People wearing suits and drinking coffee"
- "Adults"



How does the current Town Hall make you feel?

- "Nerve-racking"
- "Bored"
- "You are only allowed in there if you are important"
- "Not creative"
- "You might get in trouble if you go in there"
- "Curious"
- "Doesn't feel right"
- "Unimpressed"



Looking to the future of the Town Hall

What are the must haves?

- A youth club
- Somewhere to sit
- A colourful cafe inside
- The outside of the building looking welcoming
- Waiting area/entrance space
- Toilets
- Trees and plants
- Music
- A big welcome sign
- Accessible
- Free activities for people who need it
- A sensory room
- Water fountain
- Gaming and consoles room- equipment that we can't afford
- Reliable Wifi
- Lockers
- Colour
- A creative space for young people
- Computers/ tech you can use
- Working space/ study room for students during the day & evening
- A quiet reading room
- A place we can go to get help
- Adults who can walk you home/ get you home safe
- Jobs for local people in the Town Hall
- Headphones you can use
- Charging points
- Stuff for younger kids and an older kids area
- Beanbags and comfy area
- No grumpy adults - adults that are chilled
- Open in the evenings
- Be fun for all ages
- Staff to make you feel safe
- Police around to make you feel safe
- Chill out space
- Snacks
- Desks
- Fidgets for anxiety

What activities should there be?

- A colouring station with arts activities
- Bath bomb making
- Building with boxes or lego
- Games and boardgames
- Darts
- Lego room
- Discos
- Seasonal activities- Halloween disco/ Christmas markets
- Music workshops
- Table tennis & air hockey
- Soft play
- Bowling
- A gym for kids to get fit
- Trampolining
- Live shows
- Makeup tutorials/ stations
- Den building
- Art club
- Eco club
- Arcades
- An indoor skate park
- Social clubs and youth clubs
- DJ workshops
- A meditation/ zen room
- Equipment to use and the ability to try new things
- People to help you with school work and study
- Support groups for people struggling with addiction
- Guest speakers to educate young people on things like vaping



How it should look in the future...



How it should make us feel...





Summary

Young people in Key Stage 1

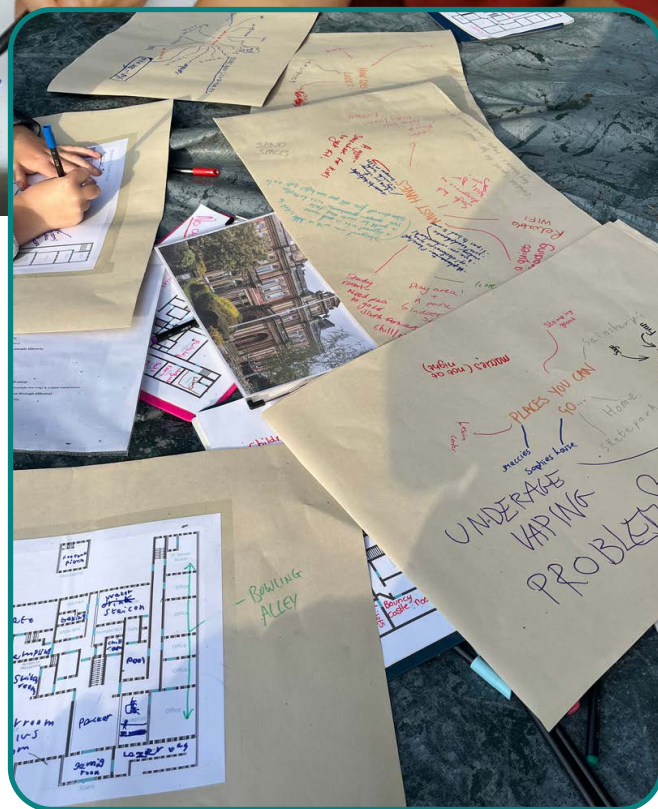
Young people we spoke to in this age bracket (5-7 years old) were mostly interested in an imaginative space where they could play. Most spoke about places to build with lego, or build pillow forts as well as lots of mentions of arts and craft activities. They all felt that the building should feel colourful and bright and provide somewhere to go when the weather was bad and they couldn't play at the park. There were also lots of mentions of creative workshops such as dance and drama and performances they could go and watch.

Young people in Key Stage 2

Young people we spoke to in this age bracket (8-11 years old) told us that they wanted spaces where lots of different activities can happen. This ranged from sports, arts activities and sensory/quiet spaces. There was a large focus on the space feeling welcoming to young people and signage explaining what is inside the Town Hall and welcoming visitors inside. There was a big emphasis on fun, colour and the space feeling exciting. This age group also mentioned a cafe or space where you can get snacks and drinks being very important as well as chill zones and cosy corners.

Young people in Key Stage 3 and 4

Young people in this age bracket (11-16 years old) had safety and security as a much higher priority. Many of the young people we spoke to at Stomping Ground told us that they do not feel safe in many areas of Penrith, especially during the evenings. Many told us stories of being chased or intimidated by adults at parks or other public spaces. They therefore, wanted a space at the Town Hall where there were adults to supervise and support, but without the feeling of being 'told off' or told what to do. Many young people spoke about the need for somewhere to study and a work space that wasn't inside school where they can find it hard to focus. Other elements that featured heavily were a chill space for teens to hang out, charging points and devices to access as well as activities that were accessible and free to the community.



The current situation is that many young people didn't know about the building, whilst those who did have a knowledge of it, felt it wasn't necessarily a place for them. The general perception of the target group was that the Town Hall was a space for adults that would be full of people working, or undertaking serious tasks. Young people felt intimidated by the presence and appearance of the building and felt it wouldn't be a space they would be welcome in, and consequently, wouldn't approach.

The young people we engaged expressed a strong interest in the future of the Penrith Town Hall.

There is an evident need for a safe, inspiring and welcoming space that young people feel they can access and relax in. There is a significant opportunity to attract young people to use the space by; Programming engaging and diverse activities within the building / Creating a colourful, bright and appealing space / Staffing the building with experienced and professional team members who can build rapport with the young people and make them feel welcome and safe.

The town hall could be a vital resource in making the young people of Penrith feel safe, welcome and that they had somewhere they belonged in Penrith. Many of the target group we engaged, expressed a keen interest in being part of the future developments of the building and were excited at the possibilities that the investment could bring.

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