Reflections on *Our Community Inheritance* #Edition 2, made with Phoenix Rising and Kirkham communities

Written by Dr Cecilia Wee
February 2024

“The Our Community Inheritance workshops gave people permission to openly contribute where perhaps they had not had this kind of opportunity before. It gave them a taste of what is and should be possible and to develop a vision for what the community needs to thrive. Whether sharing their thoughts individually or collectively, participants developed greater ownership, advocacy and a self-determination to deliver activities for health and wellbeing within their town.”
Phoenix Rising team

This document is a reflection and write up of the artist project *Our Community Inheritance* #Edition 2, created by Dr Cecilia Wee, in collaboration with Phoenix Rising team and community members of Kirkham as part of Kirkham Futures Heritage Action Zone, which took place from July - December 2023.

Our Community Inheritance was created by Dr Cecilia Wee FRSA (she / they), London/Margate-based artist and independent curator, educator, coach, and equalities activist working with arts and culture, community, health and wellbeing organisations and trade unions. She has edited books, curated exhibitions, events, workshops and led research with organisations including Arts Council England, Akademie der Künste Berlin, Contemporary Visual Arts Network, NHS Grenfell Health and Wellbeing Service, Resonance FM, Shape Arts and Tate Modern. Cecilia’s work examines issues of equity and precarity, to make strategies and infrastructures of learning and dreaming with/for marginalised communities. https://linktr.ee/CeciliaWee

Introducing *Our Community Inheritance*

Our Community Inheritance is an artist project initiated by Dr Cecilia Wee that reimagines shared civic resources, made with local communities through artistic practice and research. *Our Community Inheritance* brings together decolonial approaches to cultural production, knowledge from community organising, radical, community-centric approaches to fundraising and liberatory understandings of economics as 'making home'.

Our Community Inheritance creates hyperlocal archives that document understandings of diverse, intergenerational knowledge and wealth and makes community-generated proposals responding to what our communities need to thrive. It is a creative action research project that works with communities on journeys to develop and enact decolonising community resources, through cultural activity and community organising.

Whilst *Our Community Inheritance* incorporates and draws on methods and skills from fields including community research, organisational development and consultancy, it functions *as* an artist project, in the spirit of Arte Util and what art theorist Stephen Wright describes as art operating on a 1:1 scale within communities: '1:1 practices are both what they are, and propositions of what they are.'[1]

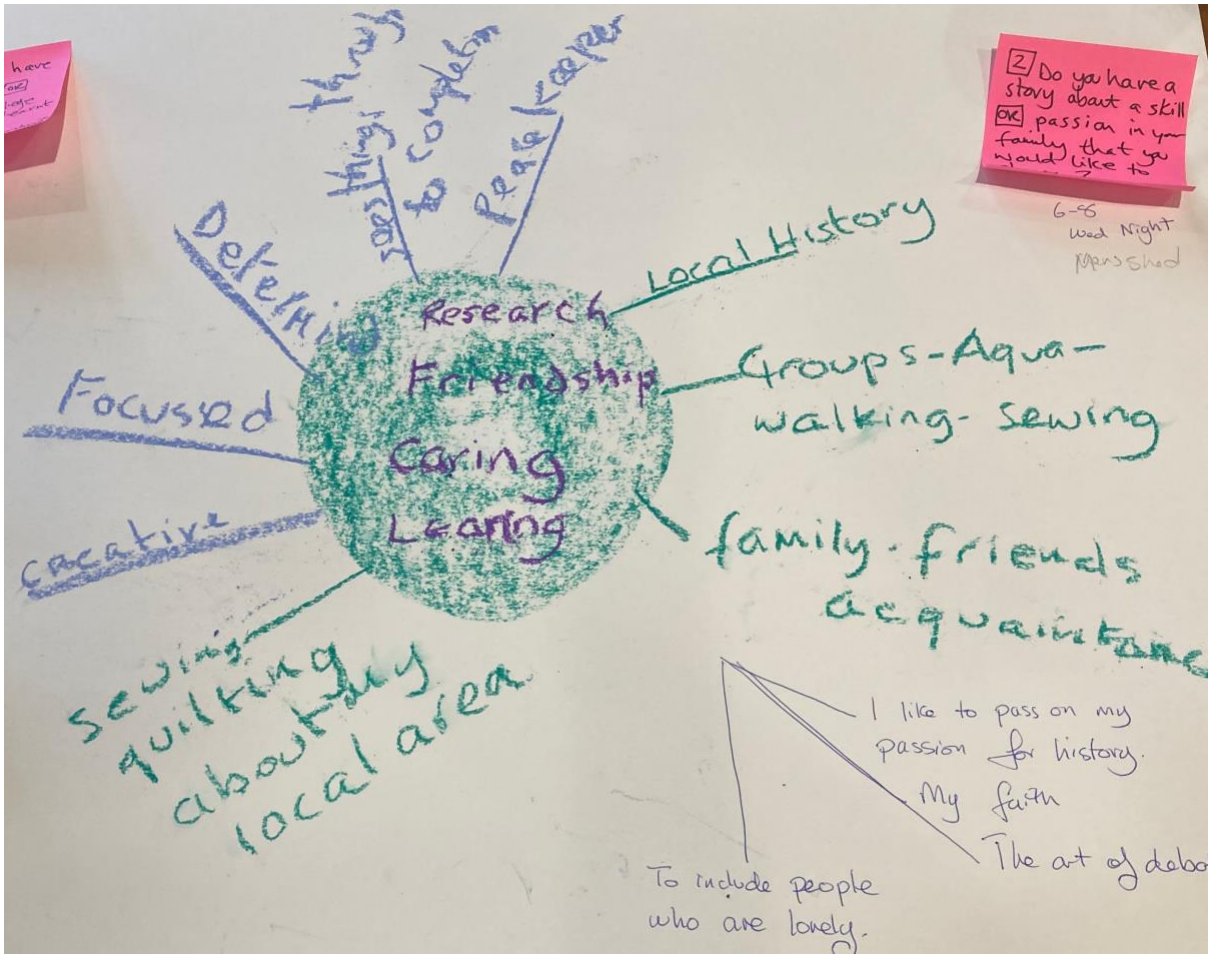
Starting from where communities are presently, in response to their needs and desires, *Our Community Inheritance* aims to

- Gather knowledge with / about the community
- Create time and space to discover and define what is valuable to the community
- Create time and space to be together, learn and creatively make together
- Tell non-institutional stories about what wealth (in financial and non-financial terms) is and where it comes from - stories from the perspectives of people, their families and communities.
- Draw attention to and documenting what we have inherited
- Invite proposals for what the community needs to thrive
- Explore more equitable circulation of wealth and resources
- Talk about inheritances to feed our futures

[1] Stephen Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership,* Van Abbemuseum, 2013 https://museumarteutil.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Toward-a-lexicon-of-usership.pdf p.3

Working with local partners, each ‘edition’ of *Our Community Inheritance* is a bespoke and generative process for reimagining shared civic resources with community partners.

Our Community Inheritance develops a conversation about resources, wealth and what is valued within a local community, identifying key themes and collaborators, convening intersectional, intergenerational community workshops and discussions. The project invites us to reflect on what we have inherited (not only in terms of money) but also in terms of knowledge, our skills, ways of being, culture, environmental wealth and health in the community



Each edition involves people who would like to think about their personal relationship to the past and heritage and would like to explore how this connects to present and future infrastructures in their local community, i.e. community organisers, activists, women’s groups, social workers, local historians, gardeners, hobbyists, creatives.

Edition #1 of *Our Community Inheritance* was in collaboration with art, community and health professionals from the NHS Grenfell Health and Wellbeing Service and Grenfell impacted communities, and took place from September-December 2022.

1. Background philosophy of *Our Community Inheritance*

Our Community Inheritance draws on the knowledge, experience and richness of a number of varied practices, stakeholders and resources, building on Cecilia's ongoing research and interventions into the long-term impacts of the 2008 global financial crisis, alternative economics, complementary currencies and alternative funding infrastructures for arts and culture. The project is influenced by the glorious work of many artists, designers, activists and theorists who are working against the long-embedded tropes of white, male, hetero, able-bodied, neurotypical, middle/upper class power as exclusively shaping what constitutes wealth and resource in our communities. These artists, designers, activists and theorists provide insightful critique of capital, land and labour in its various forms, offering alternative ways of being, models and visions that contribute to the creation of more just and inclusive communities.

For instance, Gargi Bhattacharyya's work shines a light on how contemporary capitalism - as a legacy of the British empire - impacts communities in different ways[2]; Edgar Villanueva's concepts of 'money as medicine'[3] and decolonising wealth as 'closing the (racial) wealth gap' have been fundamental to OCI's framing of giving and resourcing; J.K Gibson-Graham's iceberg model of economy[4] builds on Hazel Henderson's love economy layer cake to articulate forms of labour beyond official markets. Gibson-Graham discuss the labour, knowledge and expertise that we and our communities give, that are not valued because they escape being accounted for within official economic figures and ciphers of value. Historical and contemporary experiments in community and complementary currencies and mutual credit systems have also sought to redraw the parameters of what we consider to be valuable, namely, our relationships and partnerships as humans.

Radical philanthropy initiatives such as The Giving Project (in the US), Resourcing Racial Justice and the Edge Fund (in the UK) challenge the dominance of scarcity economics, whilst also centring and lifting up historically underrepresented and marginalised communities. Similarly, the work of the Design Justice Network and equitable listening practices as championed by Nusrat Faizullah and Farzana Khan[5] aim to remake the circulation of power and agency between project managers (or funders) and 'beneficiaries' towards co-production and co-creation.

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[2] I interviewed Gargi as part of my commission for the Sunlight Doesn't Need a Pipeline project. See Cecilia Wee. 'Livability - A conversation between Gargi Bhattacharyya and Cecilia Wee', Sunlight Doesn't Need a Pipeline newsletter, 2022 https://sunlightdoesntneedapipeline.substack.com/p/livability

[3] Edgar Villanueva, *Decolonising Wealth - indigenous wisdom to heal divides and restore balance*, Berrett-Koehler, 2018.

[4] JK Gibson-Graham (ed.), *The Handbook of Diverse Economies*, Edward Elgar, 2020

[5] Nusrat Faizullah and Farzana Khan, 'Who Has Gained? Moving from Extractive to Equitable Listening', The Listening Fund, 2020, https://www.thelisteningfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/who-has-gained-the-listening-fund-extract1.pdf

Artistic projects such as Kathrin Böhm's work on the Centre for Plausible Economies, the Radical Renewable Art and Activism Fund (now Glasgow Community Energy project), Raju Rage's Under/Valued Energetic Economy project and the Arte Util project have also been important references in developing this project.

Our Community Inheritance is particularly relevant in the current political climate because of several factors, including, high levels of inequality and division within public life; increasing focus on the neighbourhood level as the locus to make social change; and a need for better understanding of existing assets, resources and wealth distribution within local communities. *Our Community Inheritance* is not part of a project to shrink or replace statutory services and the role of government, but looks to community resourcing as *strengthening* communities.

Our Community Inheritance was developed with support from a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of Cecilia's Clore Fellowship (Autumn 2022). Cecilia wrote a report about the research underpinning the project, which you can read about here: https://www.cloreleadership.org/research/the-role-of-cultural-leadership-in-decolonising-community-wealth/

2. *Our Community Inheritance* Edition #2 process

Exploring the idea of community inheritance was important for Kirkham, as part of the time-limited Kirkham Futures Heritage Action Zone project and during a time of historic redevelopment and change within the town centre. *Our Community Inheritance* found alignment with the Phoenix Rising programme and Kirkham communities as we all wanted to affirm the strengths of the local community, nurture relationships, knowledge and energy as a way to connect, combat loneliness and develop routes to community organising and local empowerment.

The process of *Our Community Inheritance* in Kirkham built on the method Cecilia developed with NHS Grenfell Health and Wellbeing Service in *Our Community Inheritance* Edition #1, namely,

1) Audit
Collating knowledge about the community with the hosting organisation/team, which entails an ongoing reflective process about relationships with local community, and other stakeholders, including funders and other community initiatives.

2) Workshops
Recruiting creative practitioners from the region who are passionate about creative action research and community organising, recruiting community participants to take part in a series of intersectional, intergenerational workshops that explore the financial, spiritual, environmental, emotional, physical and psychological health and wealth of their community.

Through making and discussion, we construct new stories that link the community's past to its present resources and wealth, uncovering what is valued and cared for within the local community. The co-creative workshops publicly map what participants hold dear in their cultures across generations.

3) Reframe
Convening a participatory decision-making workshop with the hosting team and community participants that invites responses about how the community might want to change in their local area. By documenting and making visible this process, the conversation becomes an archive of community connections and helps build capacity of community participants and organisers.

The project also trialled different ways to engage - including a drop in conversation space and an online workshop.

Central to this process was development of a network of regional practitioners around the project. Co-production discussions with the host team from Phoenix

Rising collectively garnered understanding about what the community needs, folding reflection and iteration into the ongoing planning of the project. As well as responding to community activities and the team's insights, the discussions helped explore the team's role in relation to the community.

Working with a visual scribe and artist facilitators based within the region was also important to help collectively listen to what was coming up for community participants. The artist facilitators supported conversation and creative activities in the workshops, as led by Cecilia.

Following preparatory meetings with the Phoenix Rising team, Cecilia conducted workshops in Kirkham in July, September, October 2023 and held an online participatory decision-making workshop in November 2023.

Coinciding with the regular Soup Social events organised by Phoenix Rising, the project's creative making and discussion workshops in July and September brought together participants from different parts of the community and Phoenix Rising's activity programme, including members of the Men's Shed, Grow Kirkham, Friends of Kirkham Library, Kirkham Singers and the local history association.

Facilitated by Cecilia, with support from the Phoenix Rising team, community art practitioners, and a visual scribe, the workshops invited members of the community to share their stories and experiences of intergenerational knowledge, talent and

wealth in the community. The workshops asked people about the knowledge, skills and gifts they have learnt from older and younger generations. These individual and collective community assets were mapped and documented through conversation and writing, drawing and model making. The workshops also invited participants to offer their proposals about what would be beautiful, inspiring, useful, valuable, for their community, building on the various community assets they had identified. Each workshop concluded with a group sharing of what had been revealed through the process.

The September workshop built on knowledge and methods introduced in the first workshop, welcoming new participants. In addition, Cecilia introduced ideas of participatory budgeting and participatory decision-making to the group, with the Phoenix Rising team providing context and unpacking how this could benefit the town and foster community organising. This facilitated discussion invited participants to draw on their prior experiences of rethinking shared resources and reflect on how they would collectively decide on what they would wish for their community.

Cecilia hosted a drop-in conversation space at the Kirkham Wellbeing Festival in October 2023. Sharing posters of the visual notes created by the visual scribe in the previous workshop sessions, this conversation space was an added opportunity to learn about community concerns and hopes from a wider cross-section of the community. Attendees were able to have 1-2-1 and small group conversations with Cecilia, responding to the questions:

- What do we need for the future of Kirkham?
- How do we make it happen?

Our Community Inheritance Edition #2 was conceived as supporting residents of Kirkham, in particular members of the community who had participated in the Phoenix Rising programme, to collectively decide on the activities that would support their wellbeing after the official close of the Phoenix Rising project. The last in the series of workshops was an online participatory decision-making discussion workshop to facilitate members of the community understanding and taking agency of activities within their town.

3. Workshop findings

Our Community Inheritance Edition #2 took place within the framework of the Phoenix Rising programme, targeting wellbeing and loneliness in the town.

Local history, research, nature, crafting, woodwork, art and poetry were all highlighted as important skills, knowledge and experience of the people who participated in the workshops. Workshop participants also emphasised their support for others in the community through listening, laughing and advocacy with / for one another - connections that were deepened and made possible through the Phoenix Rising programme.

Alongside identifying these community assets, many of the participants spoke about how the redevelopment of the high street and market square have impacted their individual sense of community. These reflections came up alongside discussions of feelings of isolation, barriers to making change in partnership with the council and how dynamics in the town have changed since the start of covid.

The discussions that took place as part of the *Our Community Inheritance* process foregrounded recurring themes for community participants -

- Need for physical spaces to meet one another

Participants repeatedly spoke about how they lacked sufficient number of spaces in the community that are open during the day and in the evening, safe and suitable for all ages. There was also much discussion about disused buildings in the town and the potential to repair and resurrect old buildings for use by the community. Several participants spoke about the importance of the local swimming pool, which has closed down. They mentioned that the swimming pool had a very wide catchment area beyond Kirkham and facilitated health and wellbeing of many in the area through activities such as yoga and fitness classes.

- Connecting with young people and intergenerational knowledge

Participants spoke about the challenge of getting young people engaged with the *Our Community Inheritance* project. This was due to several factors, such as timings of sessions and the majority of Phoenix Rising regular programme participants being elders. However, it also highlighted a wider issue of connection between generations within the town. Many workshop participants commented on the lack of indoor safe spaces for young people to hang out and wondered if this was contributing to a rise in youth anti-social behaviour in the area. Participants also noted that young people are only able to get access to the Zone youth club if they are referred by social services or other statutory authorities. This existing understanding of community activity provision as being predominantly linked to social services referrals may be a factor in how the Phoenix Rising programme and *Our Community Inheritance* project were perceived by young people.

Participants felt that programming a diversity of activities for young people would help connect them with each other and the wider community. Moreover, they thought it is important to change attitudes towards young people, encouraging them that Kirkham is for them and supporting them to have a voice in their community. Participants also noted that the direction of a programme with young people needs to be shaped by and for them, rather than led by adults.

- Access provision for those who are disabled and/or have caring responsibilities

Participants spoke about how they benefited from the Phoenix Rising programme and valued the opportunity to think about next steps and future community actions and wellbeing activities, through the *Our Community Inheritance* workshops. They also noted that other members of the community would enjoy the activities they had participated in. Support for individuals with caring responsibilities, such as providing a crèche area and a larger room with more potential for breakout discussions, were mentioned as considerations that would encourage participation from residents with different needs.

- Making local events and activities more visible

Participants frequently mentioned that the dissemination of information about local activities was a barrier to wider participation in local events and activities. They felt that since covid and the redevelopment of the high street, notice boards and physical spaces to share local information had decreased. This had led to members of the community missing events and/or feeling less connected to what is happening in the town. Participants suggested that more publicity for events and activities, produced and distributed both online and in person at cafes, the library, shops and schools would increase participation and a sense of community connection.

The community proposals discussed through the project centred around the core idea of a community hub. Participants were variously interested in the hub as a space where you can buy an affordable coffee, that is open in the evenings as well as during the day, with a meeting space for classes, wellbeing groups and activities, incorporating an exhibition space for local artists and outdoor space for gardening.

4. Online community decision-making workshop

Taking place on Zoom in November 2023, the aim of the online community decision-making workshop was to discuss, prioritise and decide what community participants would like to focus on developing in the future and how they would like to use remaining resources from the Phoenix Rising project. This workshop ran parallel to discussions led by the Phoenix Rising team about the continuation of wellbeing activities and groups that were initiated through the Phoenix Rising programme.

In the first half of the online workshop, participants reflected on the shared recurring themes and findings of previous workshops to co-produce proposals for Kirkham's thriving. Building on ideas of the community hub (as mentioned in the previous section), Cecilia facilitated a discussion around what the community wants to thrive and spoke about participatory budgeting and decision-making practices, and how many of these were established in Latin America, where communities discuss and take control of budgets in their neighbourhoods. Cecilia wanted to bring this aspect of community ownership and capacity building to the community development taking place in Kirkham.

The second half of the workshop incorporated use of the interactive digital meeting tool slido.com to get feedback from participants. Slido was used to invite participants' thoughts on the future of wellbeing in Kirkham and to vote on community proposals and longer term goals for the community as discussed in the first half of the workshop. Slido was also used to encourage members of the community to state what capacity they might have to put these goals into action.

Whilst numbers of participants were lower than the in-person workshops, participants were very engaged in the session and keen to offer their views. Although some attendees were unfamiliar with the technology, the session worked well with positive participation from attendees and support with using Zoom and Slido from the Phoenix Rising team.

Describe the future of wellbeing in Kirkham in 3 words

Wordcloud Poll | 14 responses | 7 participants

slido

What would you like the Phoenix Rising resources to support from January 2024?

Multiple Choice Poll | 7 votes | 7 participants

Work towards pilot of a Community Hub / Heritage Arts Space - 3 votes — 43%

Access an empty space in the town centre - 3 votes — 43%

Use Kirkham community centre more if possible - 5 votes — 71%

Work with youth services, ask the young people what they want / consultation process - 4 votes — 57%

Cookery sessions - 1 vote — 14%

Introduce other activities - 4 votes — 57%

Resource for planting for wellbeing sessions - 3 votes — 43%

slido

5. Posters reflecting on *Our Community Inheritance* Edition #2

Our community is full of resourceful people who create change by doing things together

We need more community spaces .... to create intergenerational connections with our young people

We are investing in young people

“There’s no future without the new ideas and new energy from young people”

Our Community inheritance is

Feminism
Singing
Crafting
Gardening
Woodwork
Local history

Support for one another,
Knowledge we can share,
Our passions
and determination.

6. Outcomes and impacts of the project

After a four month-month working process, *Our Community Inheritance* Edition #2 identified a key project for the community to take forward: establishing a safe, accessible, multi-purpose community hub suitable for all ages and members of the community have begun to map and think about the steps to make this a reality.

Our Community Inheritance provided the Phoenix Rising team with an opportunity to reflect on and create a good ending for the Heritage Action Zone work, and nurture confidence in community organising within Kirkham.

The project helped groups who were part of the Phoenix Rising programme decide and take ownership of the activities they wanted to take place on an ongoing basis.

Prior to *Our Community Inheritance*, the majority of participants (from the Phoenix Rising programme and the wider community) did not see themselves as community organisers and there was a concern that the project might compound ‘consultation fatigue’ at a time of town redevelopment.

By listening to the knowledge and insights of community participants, the Phoenix Rising team and local facilitators, Cecilia was able to connect and build trust, which was vital to the process.

By bringing members of the community together through creative making, conversations about their dreams for the community and the identification of steps they can take to get there (that are already within their grasp), participants grew in confidence and felt able to rewrite narratives about power as collectively produced within Kirkham.

Our Community Inheritance functioned as a diagnostic tool for Kirkham, enabling participants to explore their connections, roles and wishes for the town. That there is a group of emerging community organisers and champions for working together is a strong signal of the project’s effectiveness.

Impacts of the project so far, from the Phoenix Rising team:

Our Community Inheritance helped to bring the community together to consider the needs of their community and how they could use their skills to address these.

The workshops *opened up an airway* and invited people to contribute, where perhaps they'd not had this kind of opportunity before, and helped enable some new connections between different groups in the town.

The visual notes from the workshops by Grace Collins have provided *a sort of a roadmap* illuminating complex considerations and feelings that some people may have felt too shy to say out loud, and ideas that aggregate and grow through seeing them collectively on the page. Seeing their words illustrated gives confidence too, that their voices are respected and heard.

Our Community Inheritance has empowered some individuals to make contact with key policy makers and councillors to advocate for the needs of Kirkham and enquire about future funding to meet the town's needs.

The project has increased confidence, ownership and self-advocacy within the community to take forward organising future wellbeing activity.

Overall, people have a greater understanding of what the community needs to thrive and the importance of self-determination in affecting positive change within Kirkham.

7. Observations and suggested ways forward

My observations and suggested ways forward for community organising within Kirkham centre on three key interrelated topics - young people, understandings of the street and upskilling within the community.

There is much opportunity for intergenerational sharing and for young people to become involved with community organising activity in Kirkham, however, we are not there yet. Participants told me that there is a lack of spaces for young people to hang out, that young people's voices and concerns are often not heard or considered, and that there needs to be a change in adult's attitudes towards young people. It seems that the experiences of young people and their relationship to public space needs further exploration and unpacking - this could be through projects such as detached youth work where youth workers engage with young people in the places where they hang out. Both young people and the people of Kirkham as a whole would reap rewards from changing adult perceptions of how young people contribute to the community. Creating opportunity and voice for young people would bring great benefits to Kirkham, building and deepening connections between the generations, and bringing new ideas and energy to the town.

Given the redevelopment of Kirkham' high street and town centre, it is a pertinent time to consider how the street is used and understood by Kirkham's communities. Participants recalled experiencing negative stereotypes about people who spend their time hanging out on the street - it's likely that such negative perceptions are also being applied to young people who may have nowhere else to socialise. Kirkham is primed to develop new, inclusive narratives that reclaim hanging out on the high street as positive. This may involve ongoing interventions into public space and the architecture of the street, as well as more seasonal celebrations of the town's skills, passions and pride. Engaging young people in conversations about public space and development would be key to more positive use of Kirkham's streets and would be an important focus for community organising activity.

Kirkham would benefit from support for participants who would like to take up and get more involved in community organising. Addressing the barriers to community organising in Kirkham would be valuable in helping the community build capacity in their organising work. For instance, some participants spoke about an interest but lack of experience in writing funding bids - interested individuals within the community could be given training and helped to upskill their knowledge. Further mentoring support could come from a bid writer outside the area - this would encourage knowledge to develop and flourish within the community, rather than creating dependency on time-limited expertise from outside Kirkham. Opportunities that allow members of Kirkham's community to learn and build on their organising skills, collaborative working and become more self-sufficient would be key to the town's future flourishing.

8. Visual notes by illustrator Grace Collins

Compiled notes from workshops in July and September 2023

Visual notes from online participatory decision-making session in November 2023


KIRKHAM
OUR COMMUNITY INHERITANCE
WHAT'S NEXT?
BELONGING
MEETING
SPACE HIVE DEADLINES
14TH FEB
HELP WRITING BIDS
IT'S A GREAT IDEA!
celebrating the re-opening of the high street
THE LANTERN FESTIVAL
TIME COMITMENT ON HOW LONG THINGS WILL KEEP GOING
ADVERTISING
COOKING
CROWDFUNDING OPPORTUNITIES
DEMONSTRABLE COMMUNITY NEED
USE MATCH FUNDING WE HAVE
DESIREABLE
WHAT IS A ECO HUB?
MORE THAN ECO
ART
HERITAGE
DISPLAY
EXAMPLES OF THIS THAT ALREADY EXIST
LINK UP WITH YOUTH SERVICES
SCHOOL CHILDREN BUSY AT SCHOOL
Food + DRINK
WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE DO? ACTIVITIES? WORKSHOPS?
CINEMA?
DISCO
WELCOMING
HOPEFUL
LONGLASTING
RELATIONSHIP TO
COMMUNITY CENTRE ?
SOMEWHERE CENTRAL TO MEET
YOUNG PEOPLE + INTERGENERATIONAL SOCIALISING
TIMING?
GO TO THE SCHOOLS?
+ GO IN TO TEACH THEM SKILLS?
AND ASK THEM WHAT THEY WANT
BUT AT WHAT COST?
EMPTY SPACE
LIKE SUBWAY
NEEDED
COMMUNITY SPACE IS IMPORTANT TO WELLBEING
REGENERATING THE HIGH STREETS
OR YOUNG FAMILIES? YOUNG MOTHERS?
NEED LOTS OF PEOPLE TO HELP, A COMMITTEE, COUNCIL, BID WRITERS,
WHO WILL THAT BE? OR COULD IT BE LOTS OF PEOPLE?
PERHAPS TO HELP ORGANISE?
- find empty space
- work with young people
- create a new community hub
- using kirkham community centre
- short term: introduce other activities
- recruitment drive for Grow Kirkham
HEADLINES:
HOW TO MOVE THINGS FORWARD
INTERGRATION
SAVING A BUILDING THAT'S HISTORICALLY IMPORTANT
TOGETHERNESS
MAYBE WE NEED MORE
HOW DO WE MAKE IT HAPPEN?
WE'RE STUCK!
WHAT DO WE WANT TO MAKE HAPPEN?
INPUT FROM THE COMMUNITY?
A COMMUNITY HUB.
£6000
IT FEELS TOO BIG!
WE CAN GET FUNDING BUT WE NEED PEOPLE
MAYBE THERE'S NOT ENOUGH OF US?
CONNECTED
NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND
ASKING PEOPLE TO VISIT + SUPPORT
PROMISING
WELLBEING CENTRAL TO THIS!
by grace collins

ENDS