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ABOUT

ABOUT THE RYDE HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE

The Ryde High Street Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) is a four year programme, funded by Historic England, Ryde Town Council, and Isle of Wight Council. Its aims are to regenerate Ryde High Street to create a vibrant town centre destination for residents and visitors to spend time in and enjoy. There will be an annual programme of cultural activities and events, with new street furniture, street art and planting. The aim is to reinvigorate pride in Ryde.



HIGH STREETS HERITAGE ACTION ZONE

The £95 million government-funded High Streets Heritage Action Zone programme, which is being delivered by Historic England, will unlock the potential of high streets across England, fuelling economic, social, and cultural recovery, encouraging people to say Hi! to the high street, and breathe new life into it for future generations. More than 60 high streets in England have been offered funding to give them a new lease of life.

The lead partners in each place (mostly local authorities) are working with Historic England to develop and deliver schemes that will transform and restore disused and dilapidated buildings into new homes, shops, work places and community spaces, restoring local historic character and improving public realm.



WORKING WITH FERIA URBANISM

Feria Urbanism is a dynamic, award-winning design studio. We have been appointed by the Ryde HAZ to support them in delivering change to Ryde High Street. The team at Feria Urbanism delivers local change by making community aspiration the foundation of our activities. This is enabling and gives people a voice in the design of playful, multifaceted places that enhance local ecologies and community life. We use a range of digital and real life tactics to engage local knowledge, hopes, and collective dreaming.

BACKGROUND

In late 2021, the Ryde HAZ appointed Bournemouth-based urban planning and urban design practice Fera Urbanism to run a public engagement process to help inform how the public realm in the centre of Ryde could be improved and enhanced.

Following a research phase that included various on-site and online engagement work, the project focused upon the pedestrianised section of the High Street, Co-Op Square and Minghella Square.

Design concepts around playful and interactive public realm designs were prepared for the central section of the street, including the two squares. The rationale behind these concepts was based upon young people's experience of urban centres and were designed to draw footfall into the heart of Ryde in a declining retail environment. Within these designs, opportunities for a celebration of filmmaking were explored, a recognition of Oscar-winning director Anthony Minghella's connection to Ryde. Alongside these concepts, proposals to improve the gateways at either end of the pedestrianised zone were prepared. All ideas were published on a dedicated website and tested during a five week public consultation phase.

Comments were received through a survey on the dedicated website; through participation in four separate on-site walking tours; and through an evening Zoom consultation. This report draws together the research and testing phases and makes recommendations.

DECEMBER 2021

Start of project with site visit and workshops in Ryde

MARCH 2022

End of Phase A which involved consultation and formulation of ideas

JUNE 2022

Dedicated website produced and went live for consultation on ideas

JULY 2022

Walking tours in Ryde town centre to test ideas

SEPTEMBER 2022

Results analysed

OCTOBER 2022

Final report produced

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Make something happen and quickly. There is a desire to stop talking and start doing.
2. Keep it simple – clean, unfussy, easy to maintain, high quality, conventional and traditional materials are preferred to anything bespoke, patterned, or complex.
3. Implementation of change starting at either end of the pedestrianised zone has public support, and the gateways as described should comprise the first phases of change.
4. Do not rely only on changed visual perceptions at the northern gateway to prevent vehicles entering into the restricted area. There was widespread concern that actual physical barriers will be required to enforce the pedestrian-only zone in the form of a gate (that can be closed/opened to allow servicing and/or emergency access) or a bollard (that can be dropped flat with key to allow servicing and/or emergency access).
5. The two squares function well at the present time and are in a better state of repair and condition than the main stretch of street between the two gateway areas. The broken, cracked tarmac and the legacy of the time when vehicles were permitted into the street (e.g. double-yellow lines, delineation of carriageway and pavement) require urgent remediation. Change along this linear section of street is considered more important and more vital to the success of the street than any changes to the two squares at this time.
6. While the relative narrowness of the street and its likely complex below-ground services preclude the introduction of street trees, there is a widespread desire for a greener, softer high street with increased planting. These will need to be in a form suitable for inclusion in a relatively narrow, historic street but not create unnecessary obstacles (e.g. big planter boxes). These might include ground level swales, window boxes on walls and other small-scale green interventions that will all visually lift the image of the street. The current concept designs were seen as not green enough.
7. In the spirit of refurbishment and making good what is there already, a refresh of the existing wooden-topped brickwork seats is recommended. Using new timber, repairs could include a reintroduction of soft landscape elements into what were once planter boxes, only more recently turned into seating.
8. The continued programming of the two urban squares by community groups in their current state is encouraged. While there was general support for longer term urban design interventions (such as the steps to create an amphitheatre effect or street furniture that can act as a stage) these were not seen as necessary for the continued success of the spaces.
9. Empower local businesses to make more of the opportunity outside their premises. The changes designed and delivered by Rob Madigan, the manager of Star Coffee & Ale House, were widely applauded during the walking tours. These comprise seating and planters that are kept indoors overnight and brought out into the street during trading hours. The changes brought about by these installations align with the way many want to see the High Street develop – greener, more welcoming, more seating, more convivial, longer opening hours, more people, more often. The offer of financial assistance to other businesses to do the same or offering them access to a standardised “kit of parts” for them to install their own set of benches planters should be explored.
10. Establish a long term vision for the street and the urban design changes needed to bring about that vision. Then work backwards from that long term vision to create a series of affordable phases of work that all build towards the vision. Part of this vision could include the curation of premise occupiers e.g. actively seeking to attract specific operators for empty units to get the right mix of retail, hospitality and residential along Ryde High Street.

PART A RESEARCH

KEY FINDINGS

Give people a reason to stay in the street and celebrate what makes Ryde special

In December 2021, we conducted a series of testing events in Co-op Square and Minghella Square.

We stopped many passers by to ask them how they felt about the spaces. We wanted to understand why they were passing straight through and find out what would entice them slow down and stay.

It became evident that for people to stay, they wanted to see something entertaining and exciting in the spaces, including something for young children.

We introduced large geometric foam blocks and it wasn't long before people started to slow down, tried sitting on them and had children climbing over them.

Many teenagers were engaged with suggesting the best formation for the foam blocks and were excited by the thought of interesting street furniture and obstacle courses.

In Minghella Square, we also heard about the desire to create more attention to the island's proud link to Anthony Minghella.



INITIAL ON-SITE RESEARCH

+78
CONVERSATIONS



In December 2021, we held events both indoors and outdoors. The events held in the town squares provoked emotional responses as people spoke about their immediate feelings for where they were stood. With the foam block experimentations, people were able to visualise exciting possibilities of new places to sit, socialise and play.

The indoor event held in the town hall allowed visitors to freely discuss their ideas and concerns with us and the Mayor of Ryde. We presented a slideshow and video of the outdoor events for visitors to reference to and offered worksheets for constructive feedback.

Both indoor and outdoor events led to many conversations with two common themes:

Common themes

1.

The social stories and historic buildings that make the town special to be celebrated more rather than new things being added to create contemporary spaces.

2.

Make more of the connection to Anthony Minghella, but also lean into the fascinating history of the town. Create new stories too.

ROADS & TRAFFIC

High Street

“Still get cars and vans on pedestrian high street”



“Change surface to make it feel like a pedestrian zone”

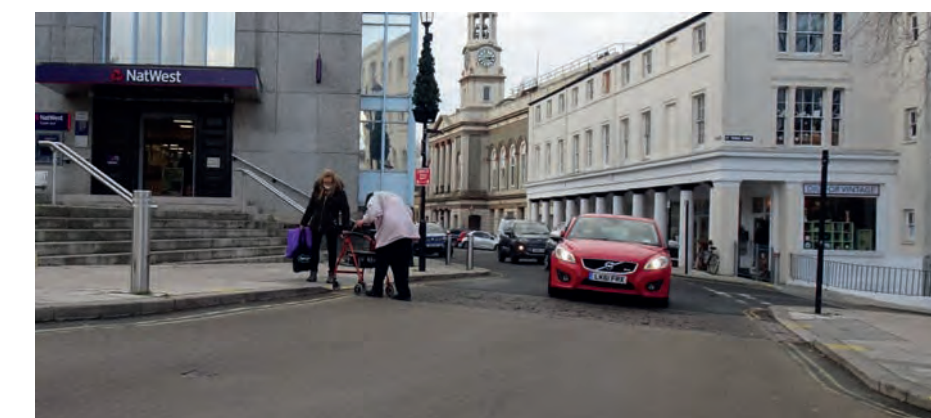


St Thomas' Square

“Difficult and dangerous to cross the road”



“Slippery surface on the square and steps”



SITTING & GATHERING

“Only use the area as a through route”



“Too cold. A shelter would be good here”

“Metal seating is cold and uncomfortable”



“Not sure about more seating. Might encourage ASB?”

“More seating for groups”



“Move the benches over there”

SITTING & GATHERING

1 Meeting Places

- Comfortable for the elderly and young
- More greenery
- More signage

2 Gathering Spots

- Café culture vibe in keeping with history
- Curated events calendar & market stalls
- Maintenance (Town Square)

3 Play Zones



INSPIRATION THROUGH ENGAGEMENT



PLAYABLE RYDE: WHY CREATING A PLAYFUL SPACE WILL HELP RENEW RYDE HIGH STREET

CASE FOR SOCIAL PROSPERITY

We currently measure the success of town centres in terms of economic output, primarily through retail and hospitality industries. Foregrounding this activity has privileged shopping, eating, and drinking as industry, leisure pursuit, culture, and social activity. Focusing on retail and hospitality as the totality of town centre experience, means that more meaningful, perhaps more subtle, and nuanced, less quantifiable activity, has often been lost.

When people go to town, they may well go to shop or to get a coffee, however they may also go with the hope of running into a friend, connecting, being able to sit in a sunny café window and watch the world go by. They may go to the town centre simply to pass the time. These activities give life a richness and quality and they are ultimately the things that people value.

These kinds of experience are important to people because they connect people to culture, to community and to each other. They create a sense of belonging, of being valued and of home.



Two examples of Hein's 'Modified Social Benches' designed to facilitate social interaction and allow people to connect.

Town centres are in decline due to several factors and people are concerned about the economic implications of a declining town centre. Empty shops and lack of activity leads to more empty shops and more lack of activity. Town centres can become spaces of anti-social behaviour, they cease to feel safe, then people stop going. Losing town centres would mean towns start to feel disconnected and a joyless place to live.

The concept of the 'playable' town puts social prosperity, rather than economic prosperity at the heart of urban renewal and seeks ways in which to create open and inclusive town centres, that value community and make space for all to 'play'. It is well known that happy, joyful, multi-faceted places inevitably also become economically prosperous, because people want to go there and are happy to spend time.



Image displaying the difference in use of a public space through street furniture encouraging a place to play for all, discouraging anti-social behaviour and increasing prosperity. Source: Swanson (2020).

WHAT IS A PLAYFUL TOWN CENTRE?

We can think about how to increase social prosperity in Ryde, by introducing several key concepts around play and playfulness. By foregrounding the experience of children and young people, we can create a culture in which young people feel valued, independent and invested in their town centre.

The term ‘play’, however, is a broad umbrella term that refers to traditional ideas – safe space for kids to be able to play in the street, but play is also something that teens do when they meet up and mooch about with no particular objective. Adults also play. We enjoy culture, dancing to music, being creative with our families, carnivals and street theatre, people watching, walking, window shopping, ambling – activities that could also be seen as playful, because they are about being curious whilst engaging in an open ended activity. Playful town centres are places where people can be spontaneous, creative, safe, and engaged.

The concept of the playable child friendly town is one that puts people and play at the heart of the design process to make the centre more liveable, open, and human. These spaces generate a social dialogue by creating shared experiences through play. Visible, democratic, surprising, inclusive – it re-uses the city infrastructure to create connections – person to person, person to city.



Colourful woven spinning tops at Discovery Green, Houston.



Musical public bench which enables a variety of social-seating interactions in Florida.



Blue Ribbon, a creative public space intervention designed to foster interactions among kids and adults in a virtually enclosed space, Shanghai.



Circle seating - Gehl



Temporary Landscape Play Installation. A playful landscape installation with the aim of increasing interaction between people and capturing the imagination of both young and old in Moscow.



Public outdoor play for children with adult seating, Dallas, Texas.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN PRACTICE?

A flexible, playable town square, for example is a safe, traffic-free space where children can go after school. This space might see a mix of older children, who want some degree of privacy, but they also want to be overlooked to feel safe. Younger children can engage in some form of active play, without the worry of traffic. This may involve jumping on and off elements, running around or making up games from found elements. Parents and carers will take this time to chat, have a coffee, get an ice cream. In the immediate sense this piece of public realm acts as a social space in which generations can comfortably mingle, enjoy being outside and enjoy chance encounter.

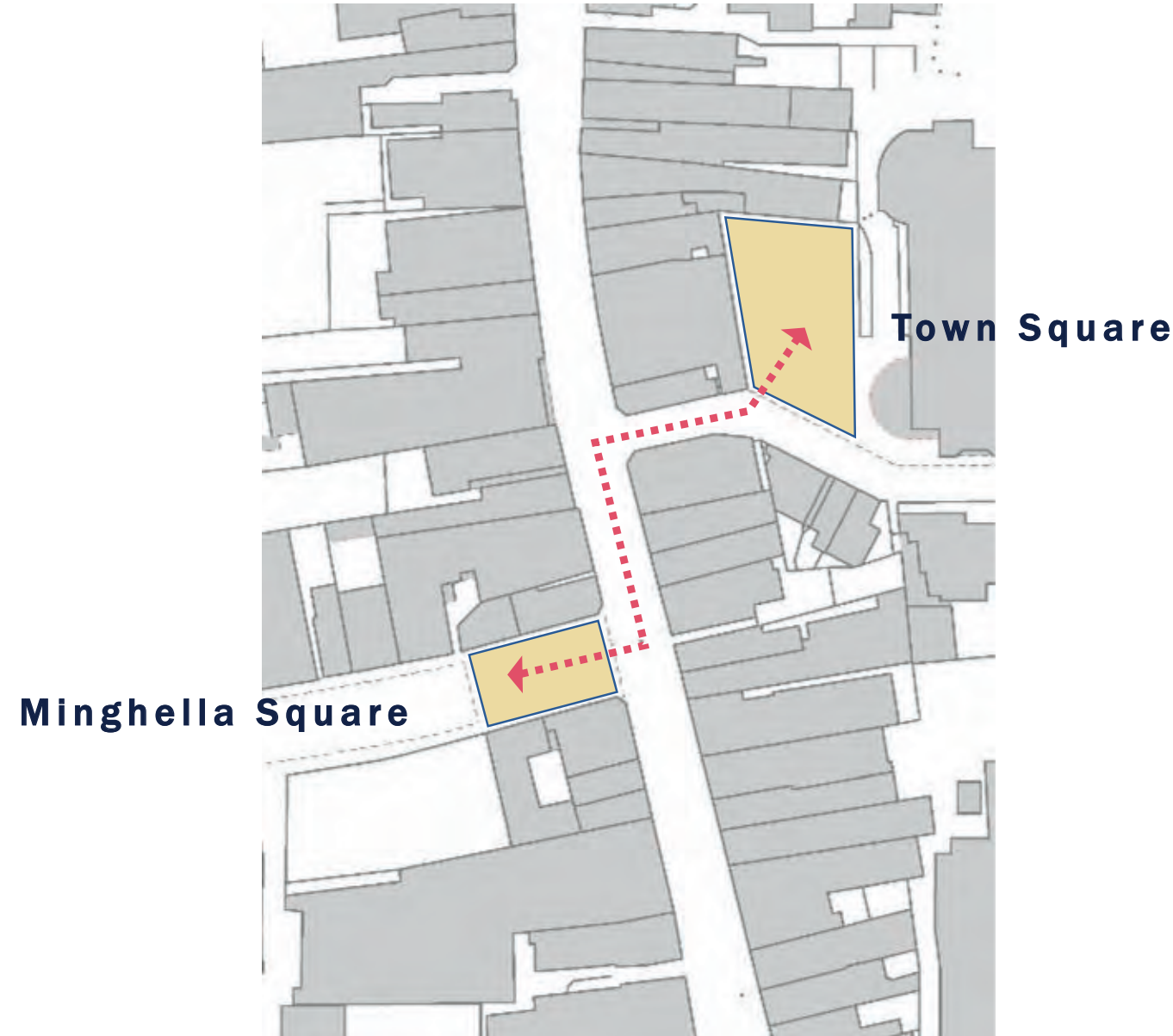
This space is also a flexible space and at Christmas this piece of public realm is where the Christmas tree and the carol service is, on Saturdays there is sometimes a street market organised by the local scout group, the choir practice here of an evening when it’s warm and in the summer the community get together and organise a small music festival.

This is an example of a piece of public architecture that affords both informal encounter, community organised events and municipal, formally organised activity.

“By encouraging activities that bring joy, we can create a happier, more cohesive urban future” (O’Shaughnessy, 2018).

LINKING THE TWO SQUARES WITH A PLAYABLE ROUTE?

This is a 60 second walk between the two squares



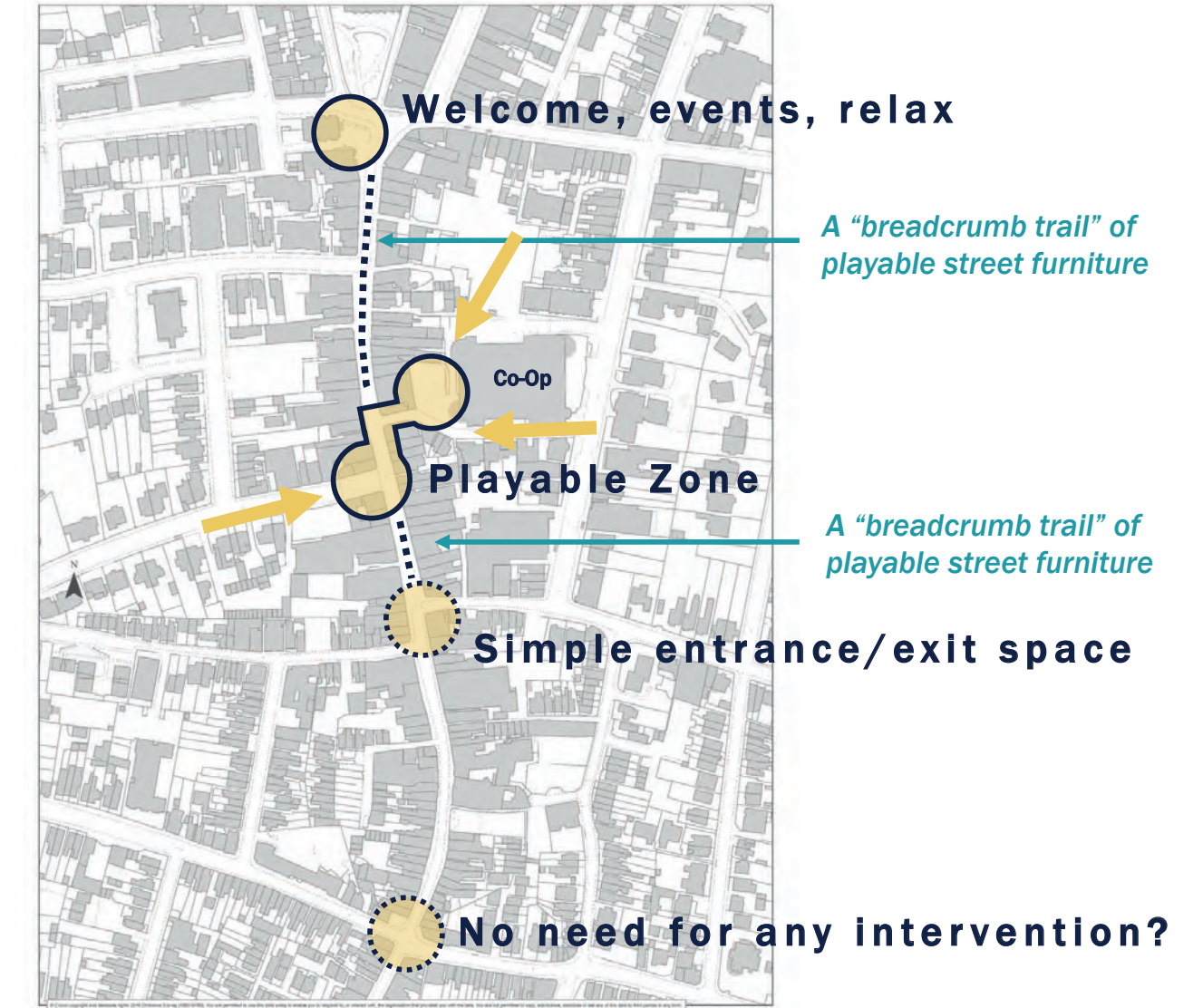
POSSIBLE STRATEGY?

The solid circles on this map at St Thomas' Square, Co-op Square and Minghella Square are our key areas in focus.

However, from our discussions with passers-by at St Thomas' Square, we understood that people felt it was a fairly welcoming space already with less need for intervention.

People felt more passionately about Minghella Square and Co-op Square which is where we would start our focus on interventions.

The dotted circles show areas that we felt work quite well as they are and need less immediate attention.



FEBRUARY & MARCH 2022 FOCUS GROUPS

The project team reached out to various groups and undertook focus group video calls to test out ideas and gather further inputs.

1

Young People

Ryde Academy
Ryde School
5th Ryde Scouts

2

Film & Creativity

Several online discussions
with members of the local
creative community

Results have
informed the
concept designs

FILM MAKING – LEGACY OF ANTHONY MINGHELLA

Can the public spaces on Ryde High Street be designed in a way that specifically supports performance and film?

Younger Generation



TikTok, Instagram, Dance, Fun,
Excitement, Friendship...

Older Generation



WhatsApp, Vimeo, YouTube,
Theatre, Choir, Campaigns...

Concept designs
to specifically
support this
activity

CONCEPT PLAN

KEY



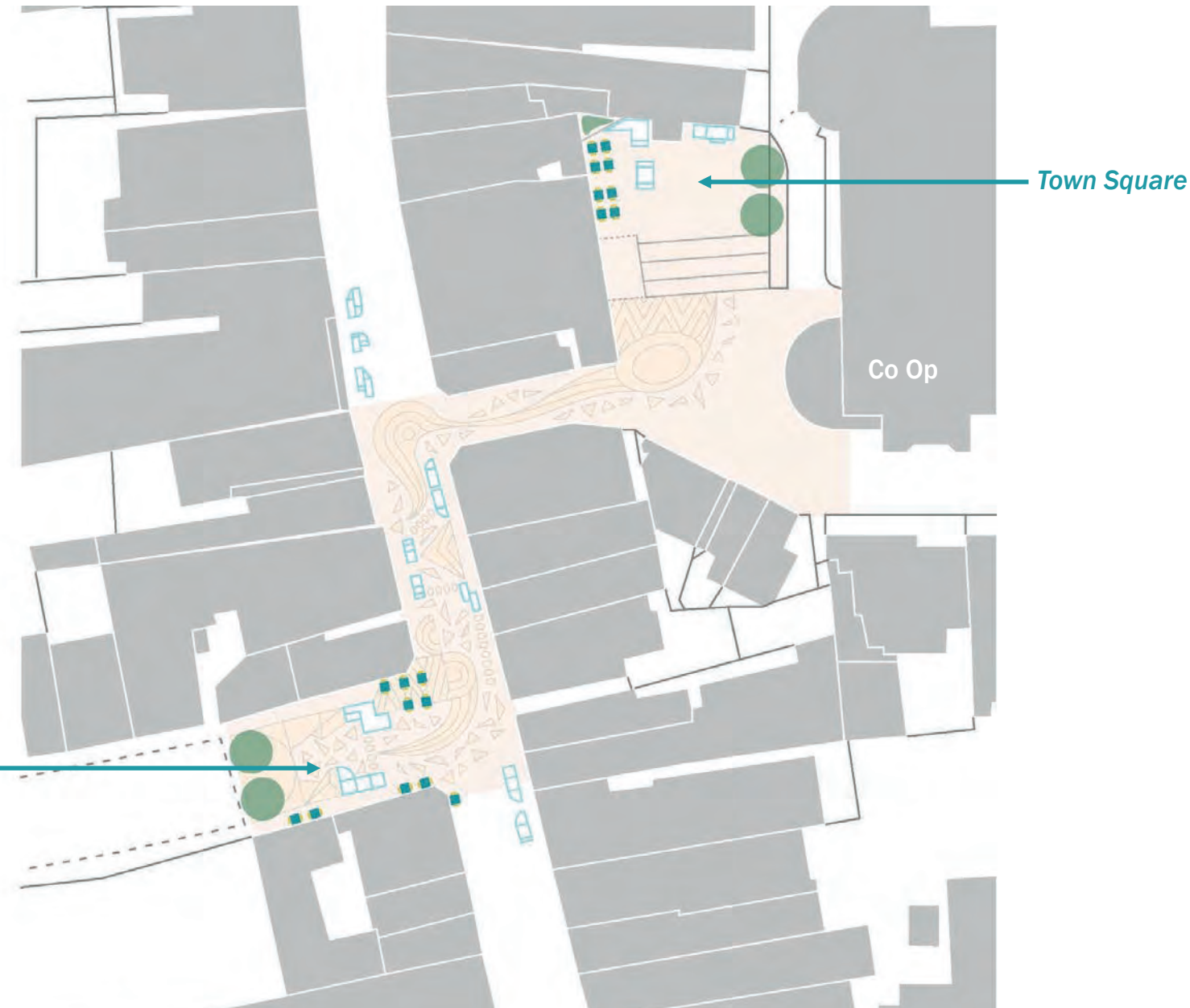
Multi-functional playable installations



Sitting out opportunities

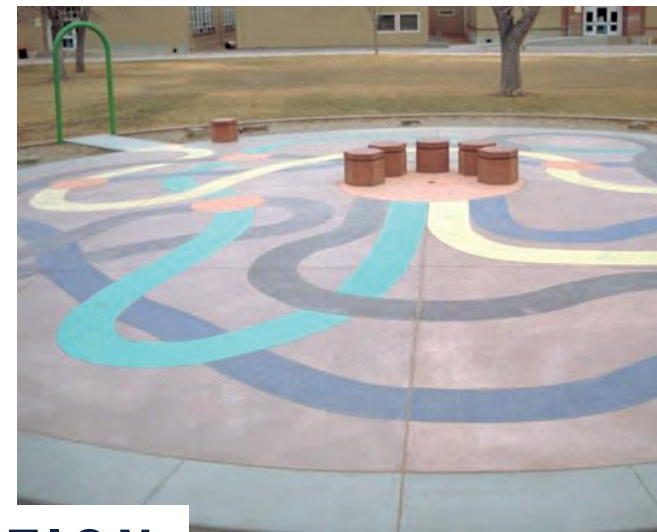
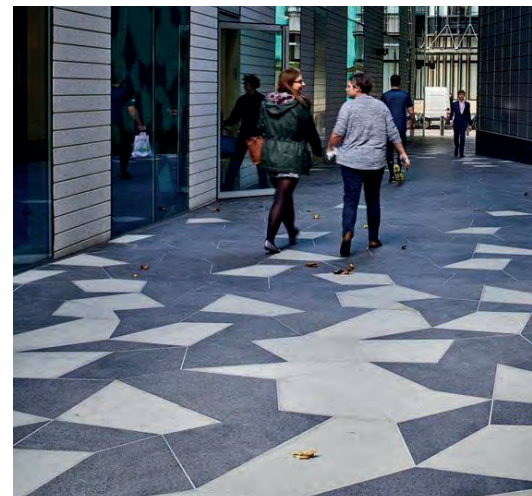


New surface details to create a connecting trail (indicative design only)



PLAYABLE OBJECTS INSPIRATION





PLAYABLE SURFACES INSPIRATION

PLAYABLE SURFACES INSPIRATION



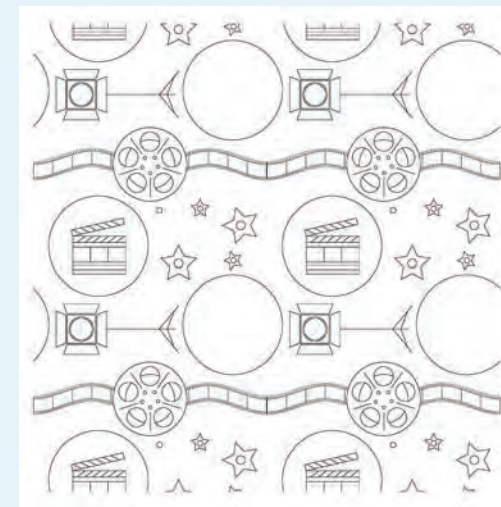


PLAYABLE SURFACES INSPIRATION



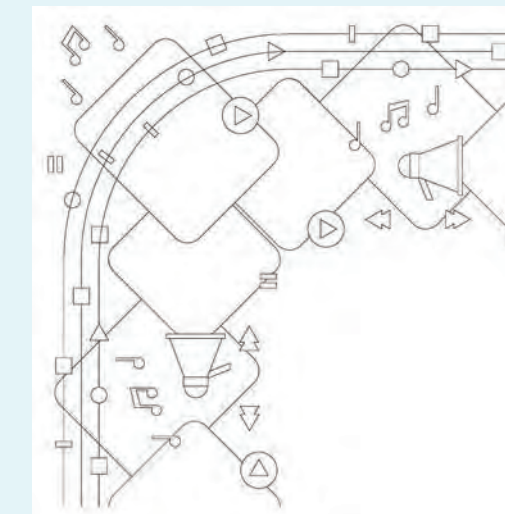
FILM MAKING / TRADITIONAL

Blank circles for drawing inside.
 Traditional filming equipment.
 Film reels act as leading lines and hop-scotch style marks for children to follow.



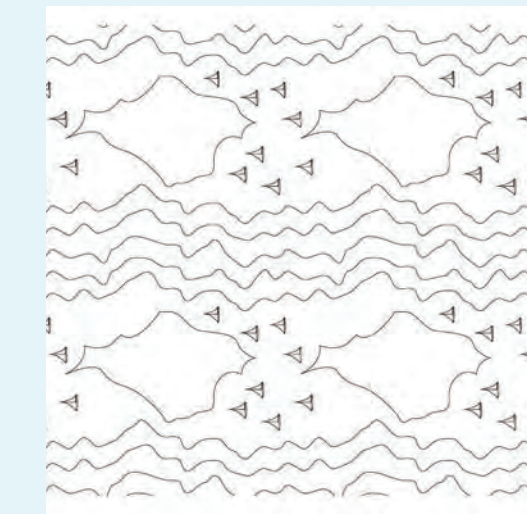
FILM MAKING / MODERN

Reference to sound, video editing, music and viewing – a modern and digital take on films and performance.
 Megaphone with blank space allows for temporary chalk messaging on the ground.
 Leading lines around corners.



ISLAND LIFE

Geographical reference to the island and surrounding sea.
 A not to sailing, a popular sport in the region with many boats frequently spotted on the horizon.

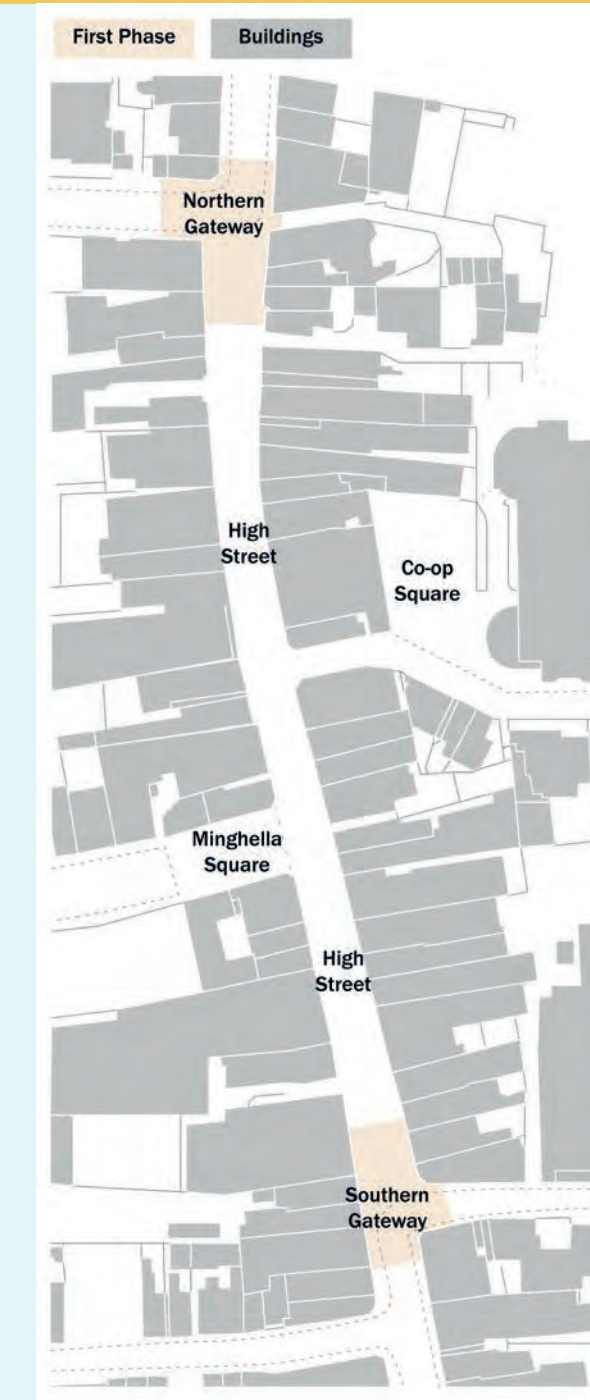


PART B TESTING

1. FIRST PHASE

WHERE ARE WE LOOKING AT?

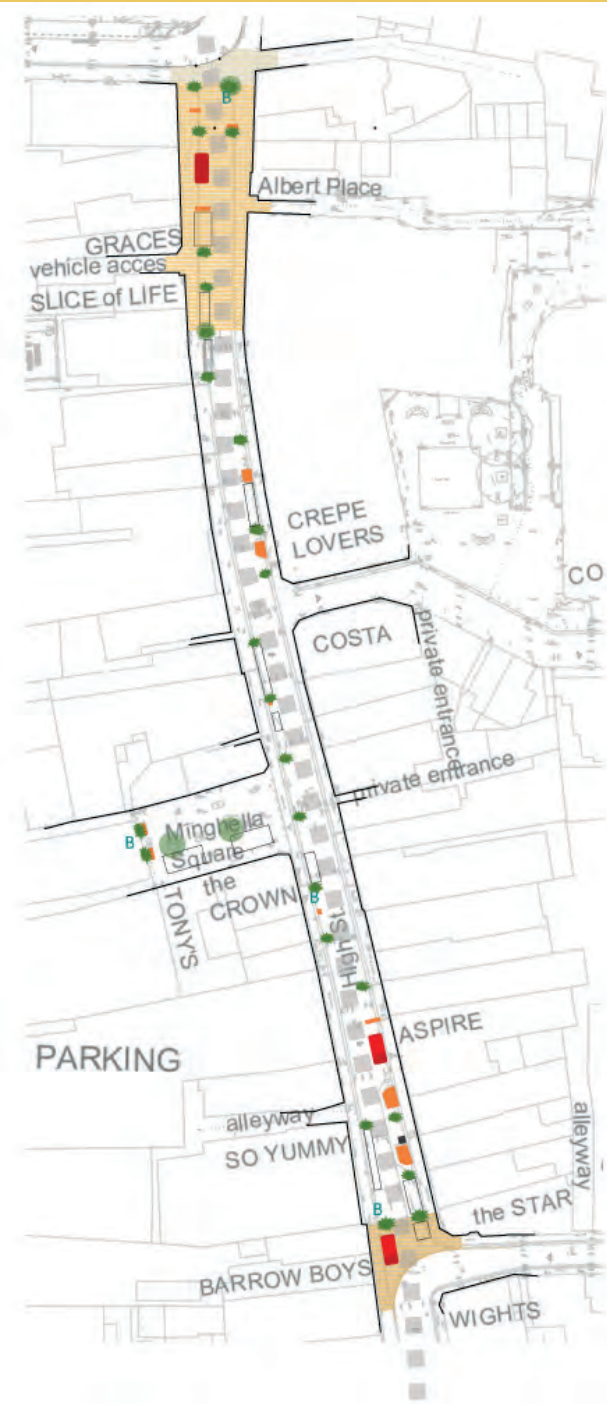
The first phase of the project focuses on Northern and Southern gateways of the High Street as seen on the plan here:



PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS:

KEY

- flag footway paving extended with small units at crossover
- 'multi' pavements & channel in same material
- café/bar tables & chairs
- planter
- new seat
- existing seat
- B bikes
- notional carriageway
- pull in space for passing



Northern Gateway

What do you think?
Would you change anything?



Southern Gateway

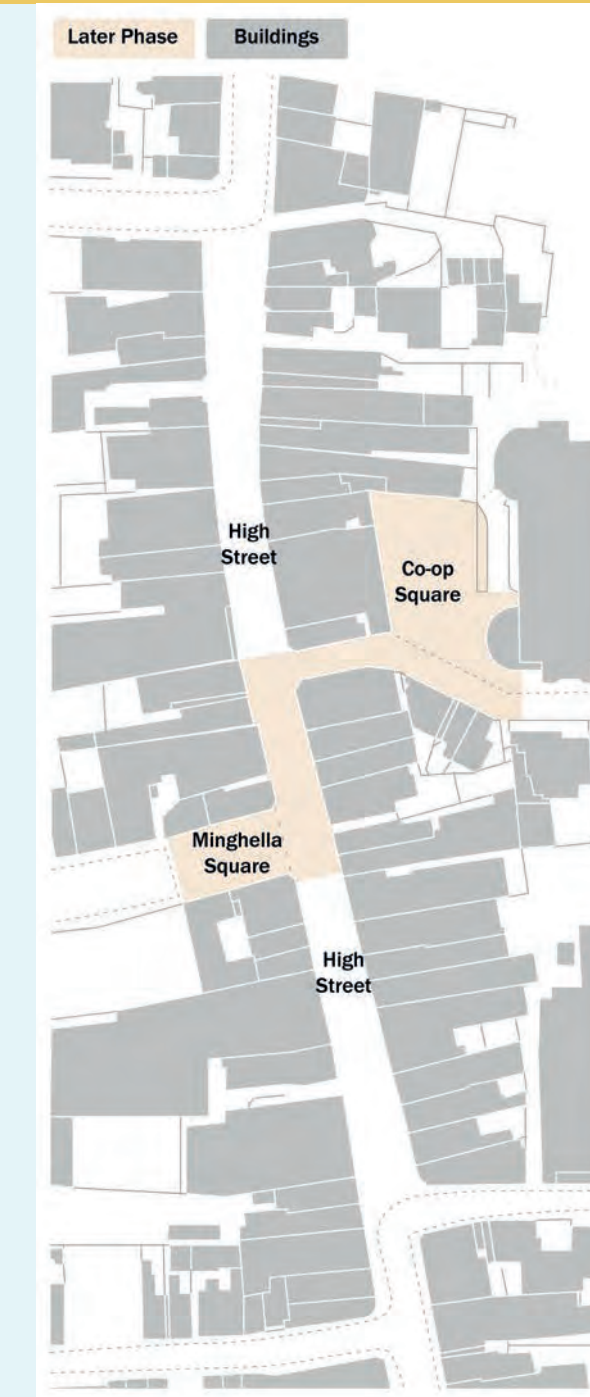
What do you think?
Would you change anything?



2. LATER PHASES

WHERE ARE WE LOOKING AT?

Later phases of the project will focus on three central areas of the High Street; Co-op Square, Minghella Square, and the space between the two squares on the High Street.



SO FAR WE HAVE...

- Defined the areas in focus with the Town Council and HAZ
- Talked with people on the High Street and in the squares to gain a better understanding of current use of space and opinions on what is important for the future of these spaces.
- Held a workshop and meeting at the Scout Hut for people to voice their opinions and generate ideas.
- Using the insight gained, Feria Urbanism have created design concepts and presented them to the Town Council and HAZ.



3. DESIGN PRINCIPLES

WHAT ARE WE AIMING FOR?

Before we present you with bespoke ideas for Ryde, let us introduce some key concepts and case studies that have proven to be successful approaches in other towns and high streets across the world. The schemes below feature interactive street furniture, patterned paving and playful elements to create a vibrant public realm and enrich the experience of a public place at the human level.

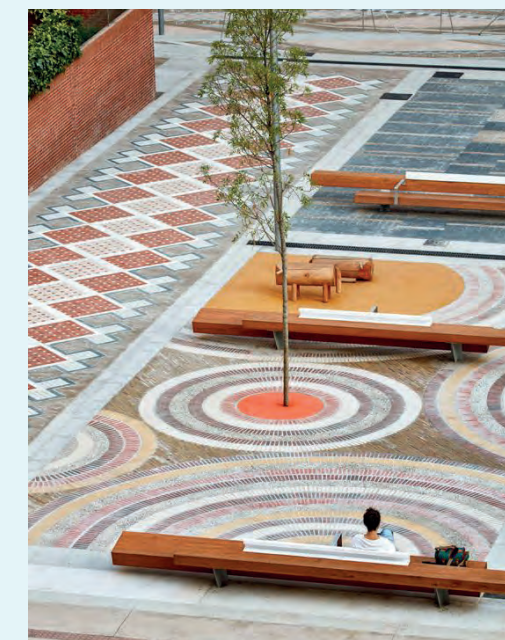
excellent quality public realm including at the town squares and creating places for people to meet and gather. Outdoor spaces should be flexible so they can be used for different types of events, and they should include street furniture, details and features that are convivial and social.

A HEALTHY AND INCLUSIVE TOWN CENTRE

The social and economic success of town centres is conditional on it being a place where people feel happy, safe, welcomed, included, valued and comfortable. It needs to be a place in which they will spend time and money and want to return to.

A healthy town centre is a space in which all members of the community feel safe, welcome and are able to be themselves. Good urban design can successfully bring together the elements necessary to create places that enable people to feel safe and happy, take care of themselves, socialise, feel included, participate, take part, voice dissent, have agency and not feel inhibited.

Key interventions for Ryde High Street that would express the principle of the healthy town centre would involve creation of an



Patterned street paving which transformed a gloomy environment between apartment blocks into a place with identity, creating a social public space in Barcelona, Spain



Human interaction born from the colourful benches at Jissen Women's University, Tokyo



Transformation of a marginal space at the edge of a roadway into a vibrant and green active place creating an environment for interaction and play in Hadera, Israel



Interactive street furniture encouraging children to play and facilitating social interaction in Kings Crescent redevelopment, Hackney, London



Contemporary landscape play installation which uses joyful vibrant colours in a playable landscape intervention in Moscow, Russia



'The Shower of Lights' which uses sunlight to transform the transparent acrylic panels into colourful butterflies, serving as a playground for kids in Nanchang Kan River District, China



A new town development with a distinctive identity, integrated with children's play zones in Zhengzhou, China



A spatially coherent and green open space connecting two plazas, creating a distinct urban identity in Hamburg, Germany

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Key interventions for Ryde High Street that would express the principle of the healthy town centre would involve creation of an excellent quality public realm including at the town squares and creating places for people to meet and gather. Outdoor spaces should be flexible so they can be used for different types of events, and they should include street furniture, details and features that are convivial and social.

Our vision for Ryde High Street is to create great spaces that encourage social activity and facilitate...

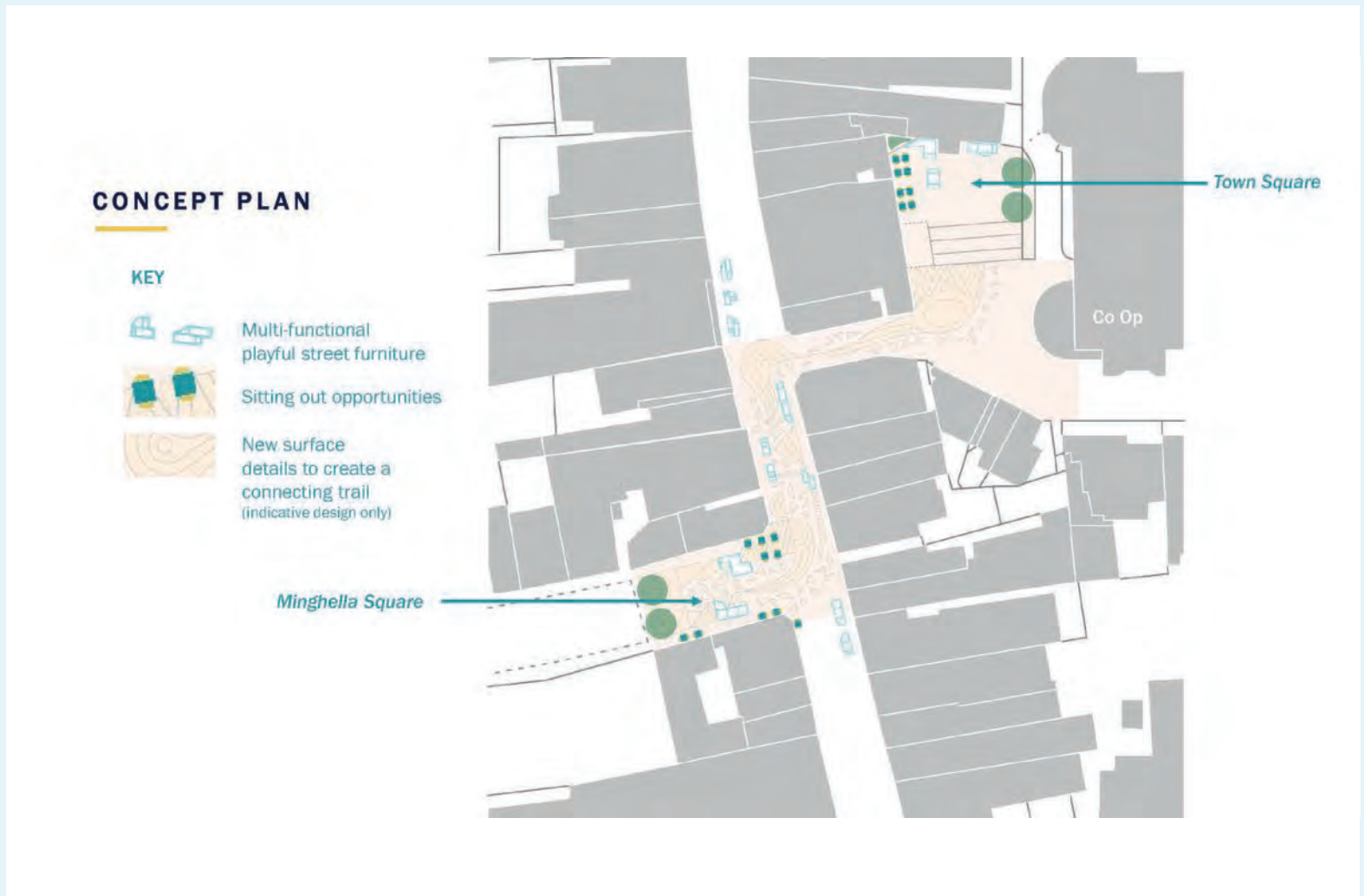
Public Events	Storytelling	Saturday night drinks	Social Gatherings	Play	Dancing	Markets and Fairs	Entertainment
Filming	Saturday morning coffee	A kiss	Festivals	Live Music	Seasonal Events	Social Media	Celebrations

Town Square (Co-Op)

Town Square is the larger of the two squares that this project focuses on. It lies adjacent to the High Street and Anglesea Street, with Co-Op facing out onto it. The square currently comprises metal seating with a few trees scattered throughout and the memorial to Ryde Hospital at the far end.

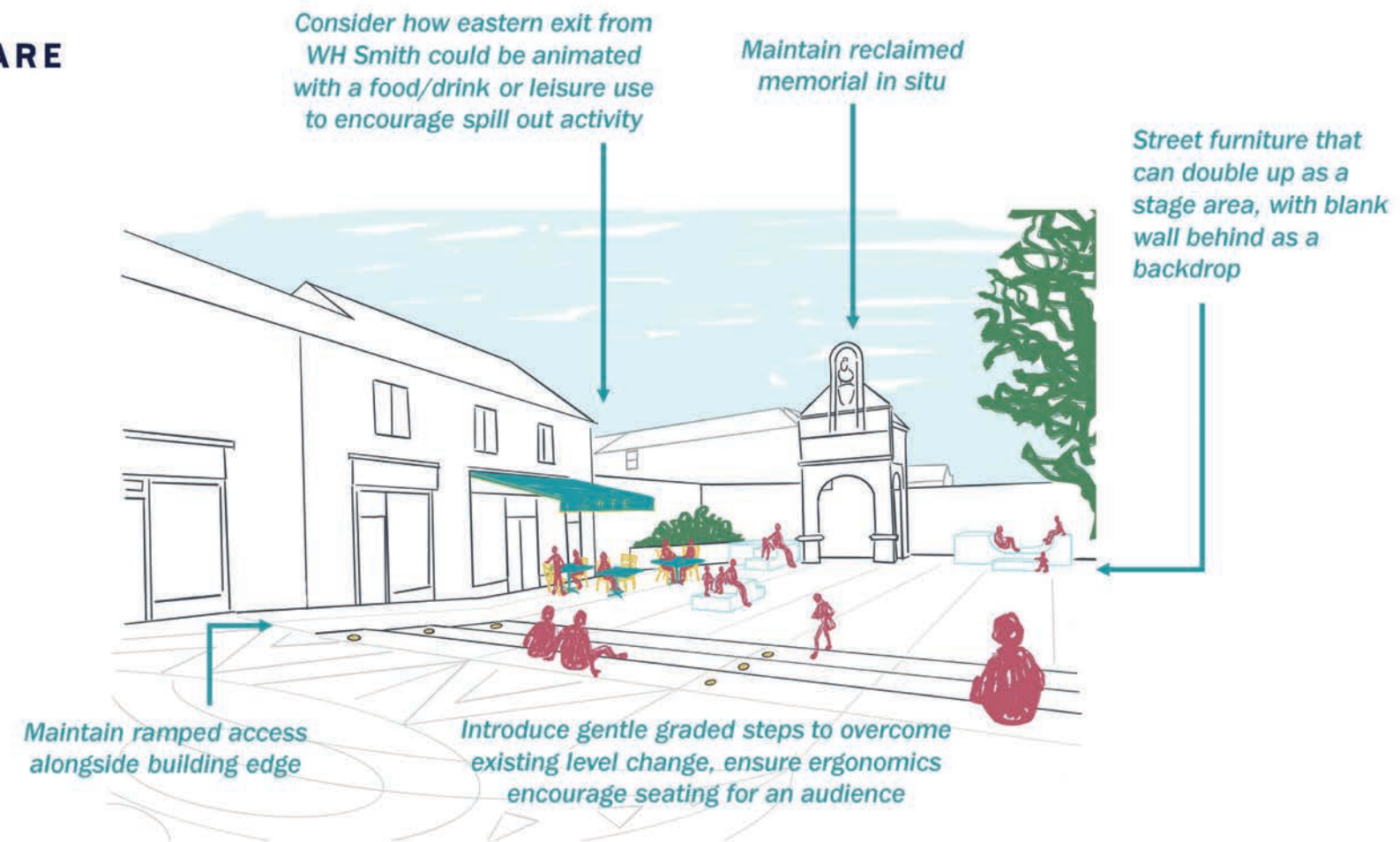
The proposed concept design incorporates the following features:

- An outdoor flexible performance space
- Interactive street furniture that promotes social interaction and encourages play
- Outdoor seating from cafes or restaurants that face out into the square
- Retention of the existing trees and incorporation of more trees and greenery where possible
- A unique paving design that incorporates Ryde's links to film.



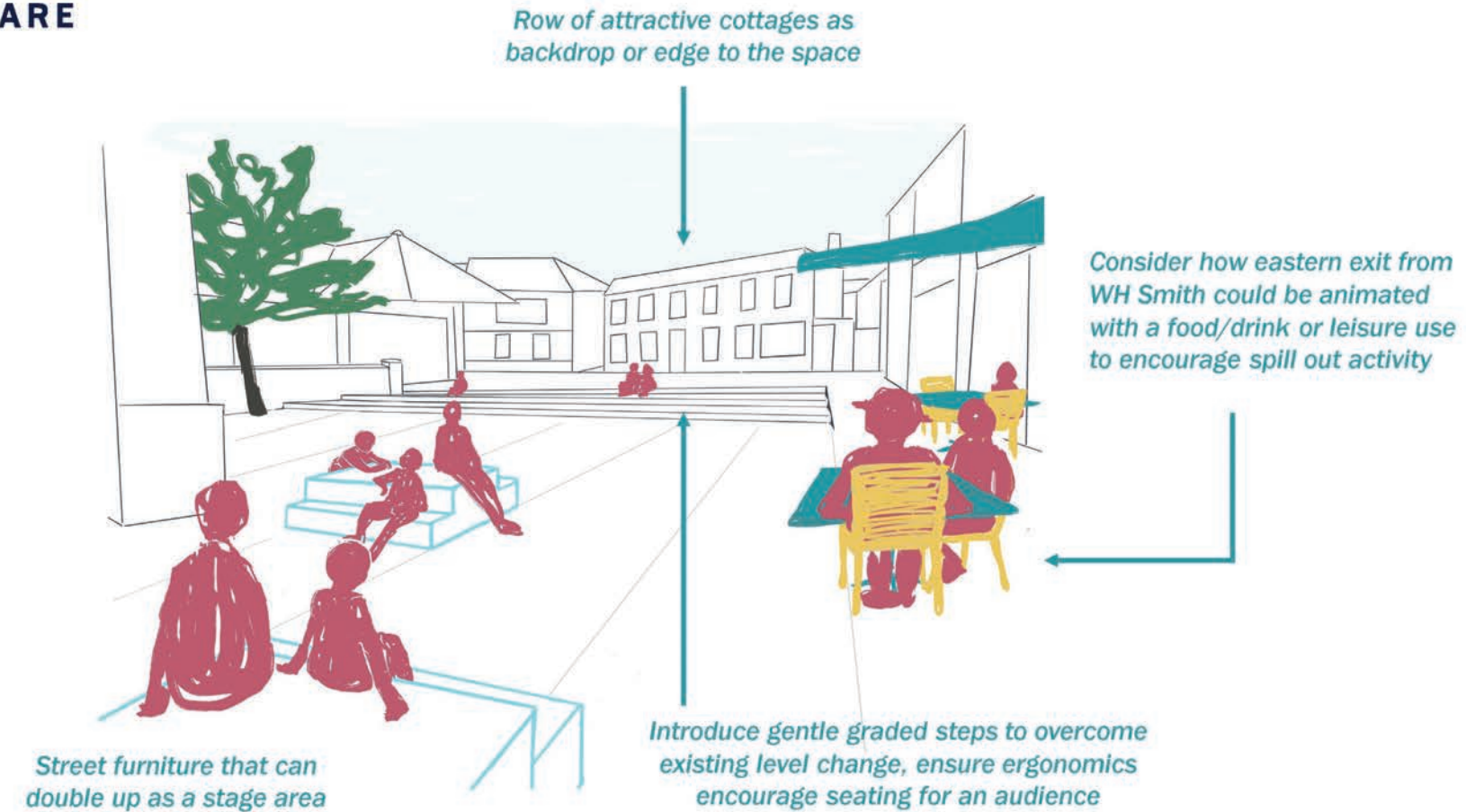
TOWN SQUARE

Looking north



TOWN SQUARE

Looking south



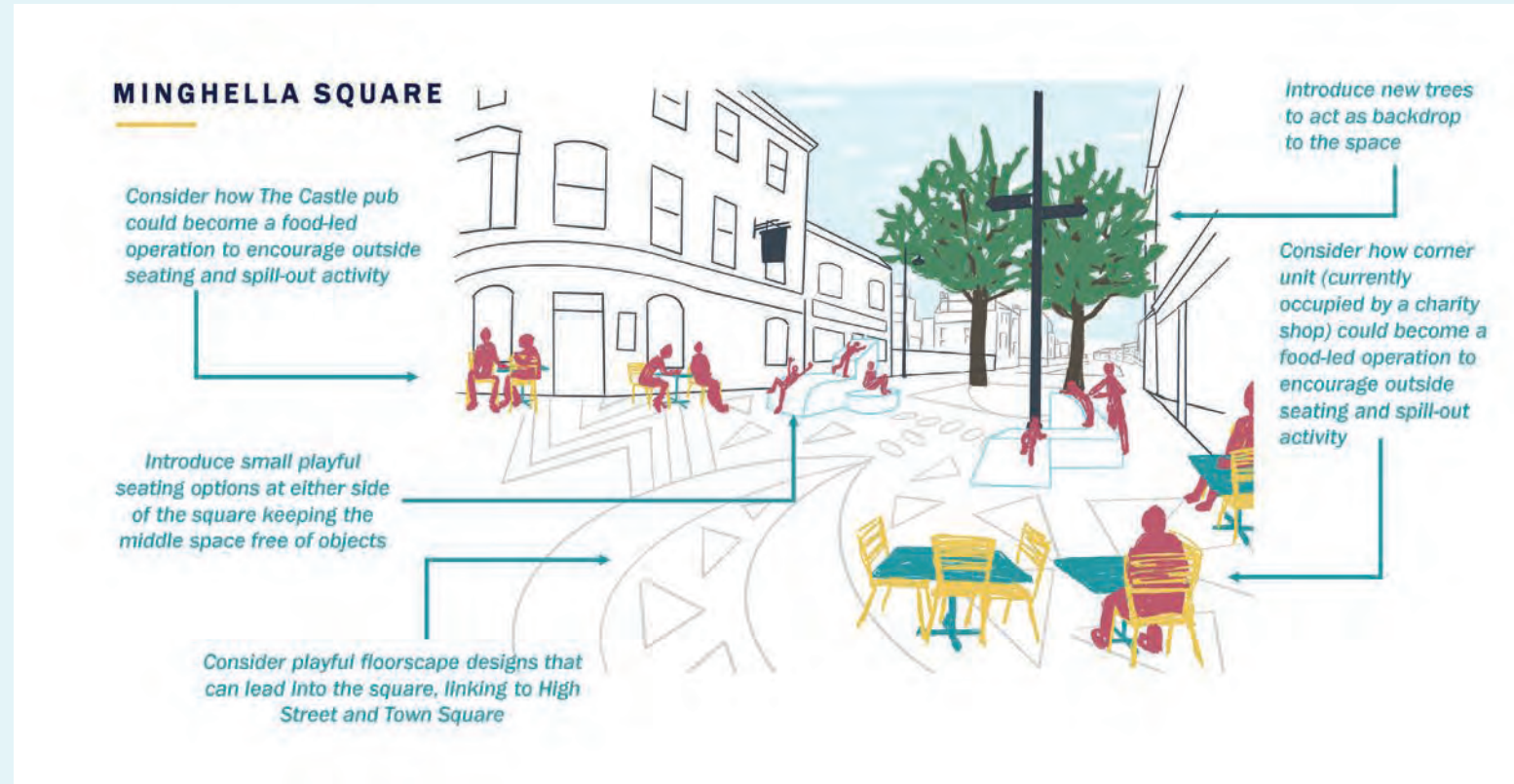
What do you think?
 Would these changes make a better square?

Minghella Square

The smallest of the two squares we are focusing on, Minghella Square lies just off High Street, adjacent to John Street. It currently comprises plain metal seating and two planters.

The proposed concept design incorporates the following features:

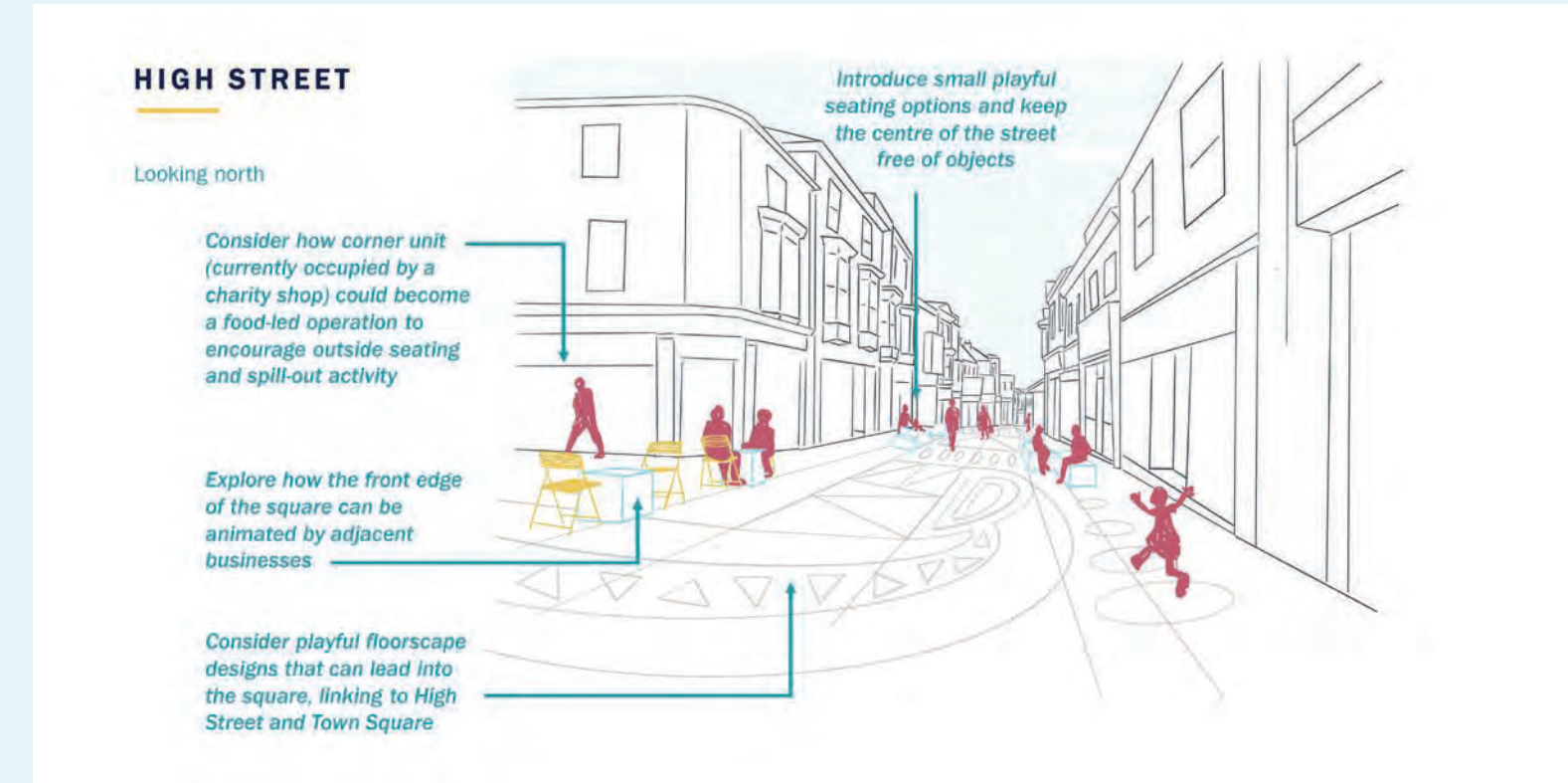
- interactive street furniture that promotes social interaction and encourages play
- outdoor seating from cafes or restaurants that face out into the square
- retaining the existing trees and incorporating more trees and greenery where possible
- a unique paving design that incorporates Ryde's links to film as detailed below.



What do you think?
Would these changes make a better square?

Connecting High Street

The proposed concept design not only focuses on improving two key public squares on the High Street, but the public realm between these squares. Interventions proposed here include paving and street furniture of the same style as proposed in Town and Minghella squares, to create a coherent High Street environment with a distinct identity.



What do you think?
Would you change anything?

MINGHELLA AND FILM INFLUENCES IN RYDE

Following the on-site consultation work in Ryde High Street, Town Square and Minghella Square in December 2021, a recurring theme captured by the team was that more was needed to be done to celebrate the links to Anthony Minghella CBE.

Minghella was a British film director, playwright, and screenwriter, born in Ryde with his family being well known on the island. He was chair of the board of Governors at the British Film Institute between 2003 and 2007 and a multi time Academy Award, BAFTA and Golden Globe Award winner.

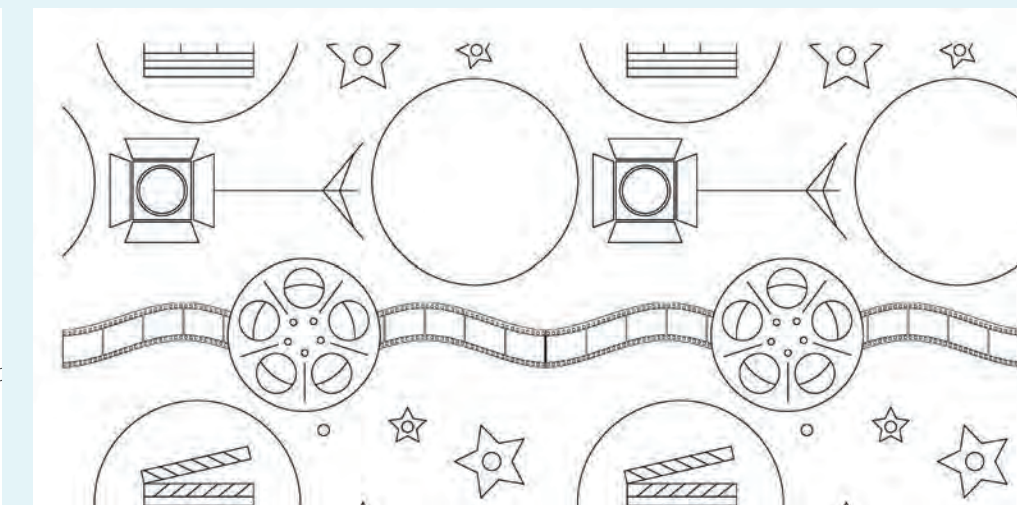
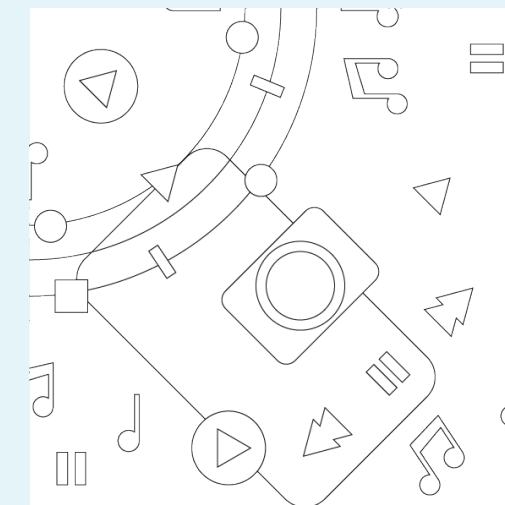
The team noted that a steady walk between Town Square and Minghella Square took exactly 60 seconds. This sparked an idea for an opportunity for an “outdoor film school” in which participants can create “one minute movies”.

Young people often feel excluded from high streets, with them often lacking in places to hang out or things to do. By describing/designing this central section of the Ryde High Street as a place for creativity, film-making and for young people, we invite young people to take a more active and participatory role, using Instagram, You Tube and TikTok to combine the physical environment with this youth-focussed digital environment. This space

should become multi-functional with use by various demographic groups and could have buy-in from local arts organisations or Ryde Film Club.

The design of the space at Town Square and Minghella Square, and along the stretch of High Street between them, should be a “blank canvas” for film creation, providing the objects necessary to create a dormant “empty stage set” with local people activating the space. They can act out and produce one minute movies in this stretch of town which are then uploaded to a dedicated website. Permanent or temporary projectors installed in Town Square or Minghella Square could then be used for regular public film screenings.

These events can bring people together and generate social interaction. Local cafes could provide food and drinks, and public film screenings could become a regular event to bring the community together and celebrate Ryde’s links to film.



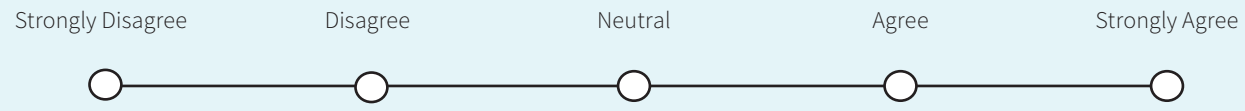
The above images display initial ideas for paving or sections of paving related to the film theme which could cover parts of Minghella and Town Square and High Street to create a coherent and playful street design and link Ryde High Street to its film influences.

5. FEEDBACK

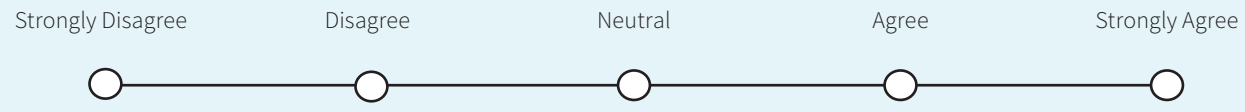
SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON PHASE 1 (THE GATEWAYS) AND PHASE 2 (THE SQUARES)

Phase 1

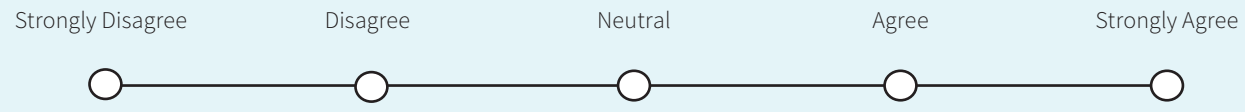
The proposed vision will improve the Northern Gateway



The proposed vision will improve the Southern Gateway



The proposed materials for the Northern and Southern Gateways will work well



Phase 2

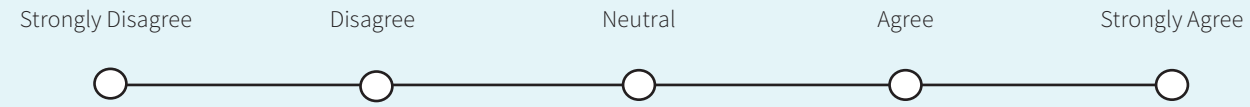
Of the social activities shown, which are the most important to you?
Please circle the words.

- | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Public Events | Storytelling | Social Gatherings | Saturday night drinks |
| Filming | Saturday morning coffee | Dancing | Markets and Fairs |
| A kiss | Live Music | Seasonal Events | Social Media |
| Entertainment | Celebrations | Festivals | Play |

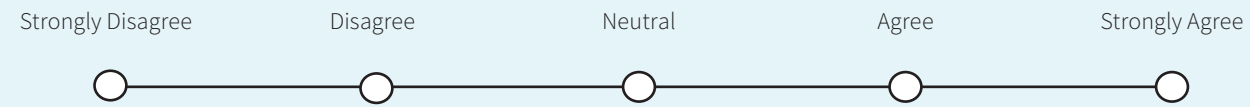
What activities have we missed?

My feelings about the proposed improvements are:

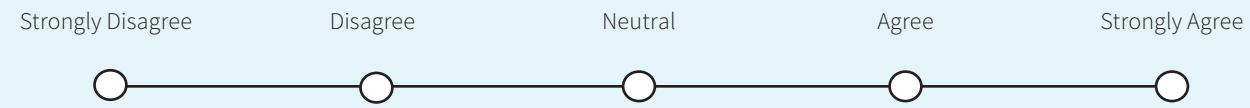
Co-op Square



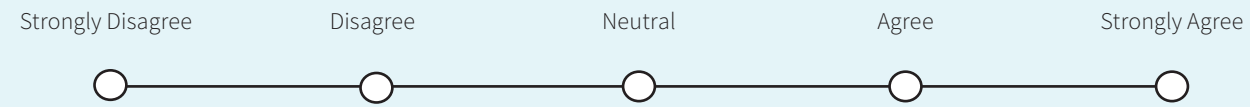
Minghella Square



Connecting the two squares



Do you agree with the proposed use of materials and street furniture?



In summary I think that...

What do you think is a good idea? What else would you like to see? What don't you agree with?

Your name:

Your email address:

PART C RESULTS

PART A – SUMMARY OF WEBSITE CONSULTATION RESULTS

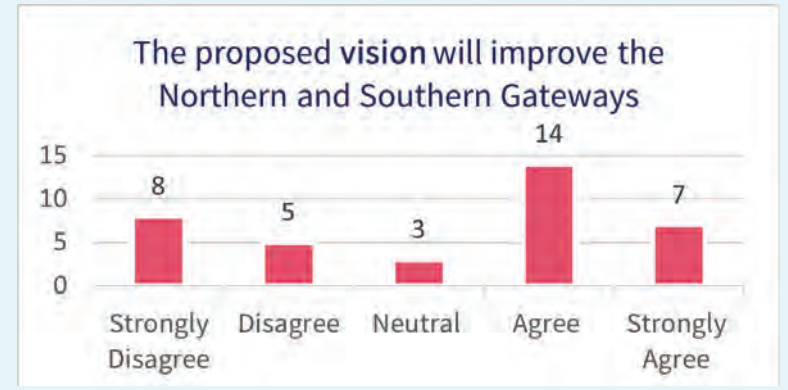
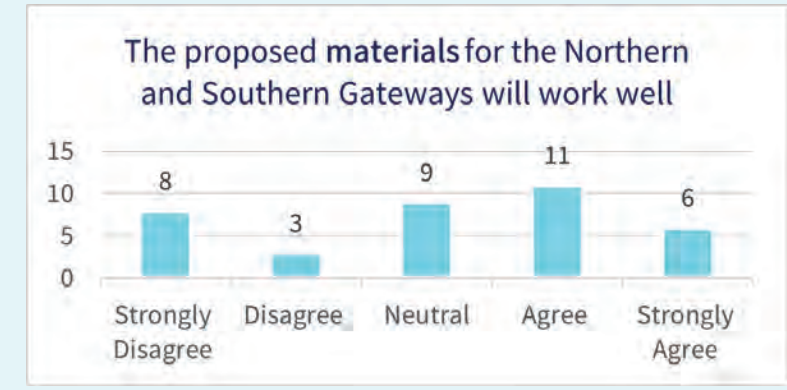
The website was open for five weeks from Wednesday 22nd June to Wednesday 27th July 2022.

FIRST PHASE

Question one queried the respondent’s thoughts on the visions for the northern and southern gateways to Ryde, and the proposed materials for these.

Thirty seven responses were received to this part of the survey, with the majority agreeing with the proposals. The opinions on the northern and southern gateway visions were the same, with 54% saying they agreed or strongly agreed, and 35% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. 8% felt neutral about the proposed visions. With regard to the materials proposed, 46% agreed or strongly agreed with the choices, 30% disagreed or strongly agreed, and 24% felt neutral about them.

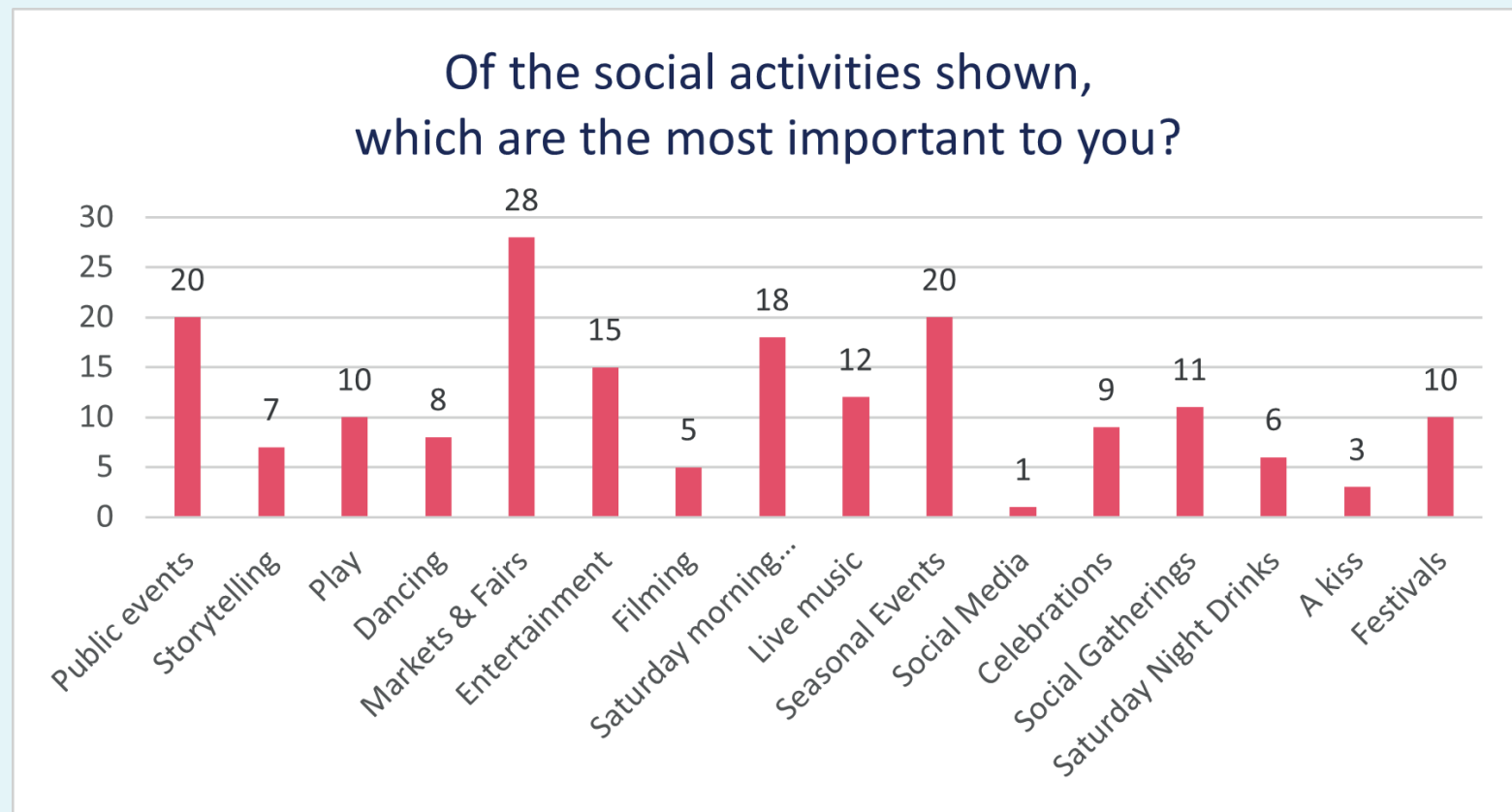
Questions – First Phase	Answers					Total
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
The proposed vision will improve the Northern Gateway	8	5	3	13	7	37
The proposed vision will improve the Southern Gateway	8	5	3	13	7	37
The proposed materials for the Northern and Southern Gateways will work well	8	3	8	11	6	37



The next question aimed to understand what social activities were most important to people in public spaces. The data showed that public and social events, including markets and fairs, seasonal events, festivals, and social gatherings were noted of high importance. People also valued coffee shops, entertainment, and live music, alongside play and celebrations. This was useful to see which of these features should be considered in the design of the scheme and also consider how a flexible public space could be designed to potentially incorporate these activities.

The graph shows the breakdown of which social events people considered most important in public spaces.

When queried what social activities had been missed, the responses mentioned that some everyday activities had been missed. Some wanted more places for a sit and a chat, during the week as well as on a weekend, stating that "... the reality of people wanting to meet and greet each other in a nice environment on a daily basis" needed more consideration.



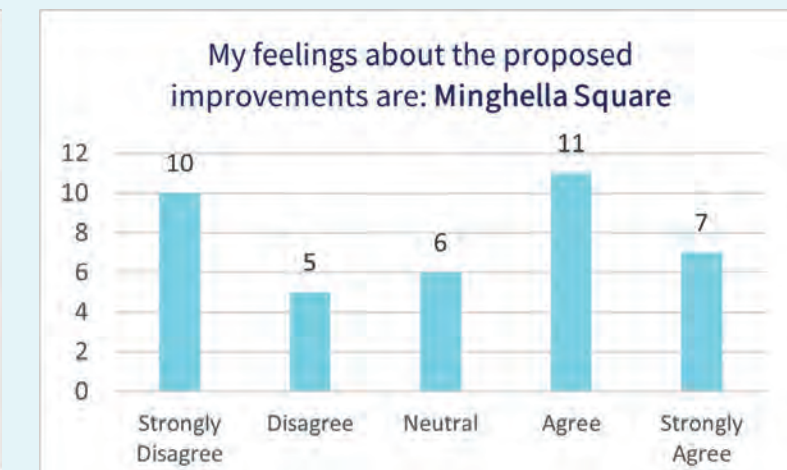
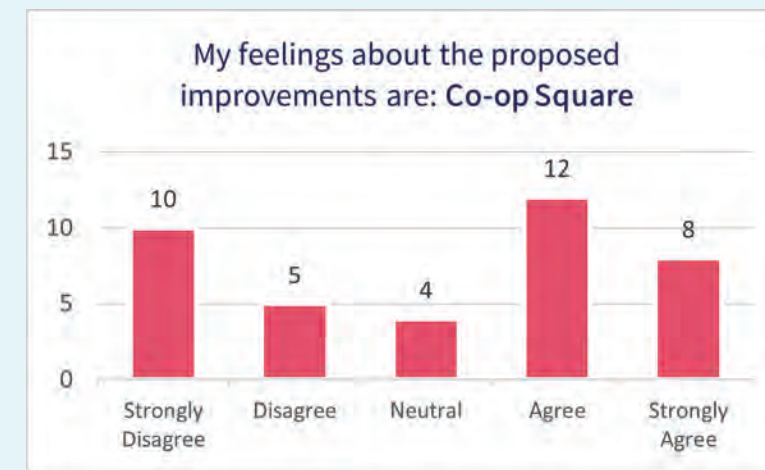
LATER PHASES

The next set of questions then asked the respondents about later phases of the scheme, and their overall feelings about the development proposals for both Co-Op and Minghella Square, connecting the two squares, and the initial proposals for the choice of street furniture and materials.

There was a fairly even split between those that supported the proposals and those that did not. The most support was given to the improvements proposed to Co-Op Square, with overall 51% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they support it.

The most common strongly disagree was in relation to materials, with 30% strongly disagreeing and 5% disagreeing with the proposed use of materials and street furniture. However, 40% agreed or strongly agreed. 25% felt neutral about it. The table and graphs below display the responses, and the reasons behind these responses are then explored.

Questions – Later Phases	Answers					Totals
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
My feelings about the proposed improvements are: Co-op Square	10	5	4	12	8	39
My feelings about the proposed improvements are: Minghella Square	10	5	6	11	7	39
My feelings about the proposed improvements are: Connecting the two squares	8	2	9	8	11	38
Do you agree with the proposed use of materials and street furniture?	12	2	10	9	7	40



SUPPORT FOR CHANGE

There were many positive comments in relation to the scheme’s aims and ambitions. People acknowledged how Ryde High Street was currently “uninviting”, “a mess with inadequate seating” and were excited that Ryde was being looked at for change and could once again become “the gateway to this beautiful island visible and be able to bring the community in through so many ways.”

In relation to Ryde High Street, one noted how “... a once fashionable and elegant town has been mistreated. Nowhere is this more apparent than the High Street that is now part of the Heritage Action Zone. The disfigured street surface with its variety of disintegrating mismatched materials encapsulates the thoughtless and piecemeal approach to maintenance and renovation of Ryde’s public realm in the past decades.”

Much support was also given to improving the squares, as “Minghella Square currently does not have a sign and is not marked on google maps or anything” and many were excited by the positive change that would come from the redevelopment of the squares. One exclaimed they ‘love the idea of things going on in those squares and being able to relax and enjoy them.’

Some had queries around the scope of the area of the project, asking why the upper High Street has been ignored (i.e. the non-pedestrianised section between Star Street

and St John’s Road) saying the study area should be extended to include this. Others said that a public realm scheme should be implemented immediately outside Ryde Town Hall instead. One respondent considered the pedestrianised section of the high street could be enhanced further with a physical gateway, “... there is an opportunity to identify the high street with a decorative arch or portal.”

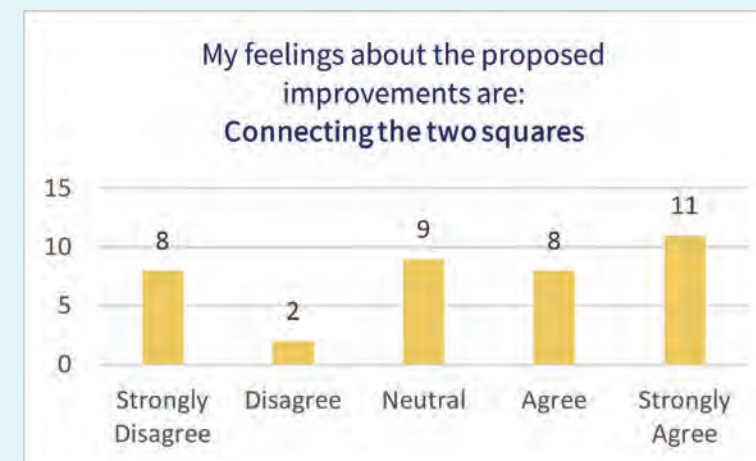
Therefore, a lot of constructive feedback came out of the consultation which has provided scope for development and amendment to the original ideas.

PLAYFUL & INTERACTIVE DESIGNS

One theme that was tested during the consultation period was the playable and interactive element to the scheme. This proved divisive. Those that saw this as positive did so for families with young children.

One stated “I like the idea for modular furniture and a playful theme, connecting opportunities around arts, culture, heritage for all age groups, with landscaping and improvements to the surfacing in the pedestrian zone which will make this part of Ryde High Street safer, more accessible and much more attractive as a place of choice to spend leisure time.”

However, others thought that the scheme was too “targeted at the younger person” and were concerned that this would exclude the “large mature group” with it considering playability, film, and social media at the core. They wanted the scheme simplified, asking “why can’t we have clean, even pavements, a few well designed tables and seats and maybe some improved signage?”



A GREENER HIGH STREET

A key consideration amongst the respondents was that they would like to see more greenery, with “more trees and fewer hard surfaces.” Some said that “greenery is sorely missing from the High Street” and expressed a preference for trees over planters detailed in the current design “to provide shade and to support the environment.”

It was acknowledged that “all places look better with imaginative and abundant planting”, and indeed “some of the most successful new shopping centres, Bicester Shopping Village and Gunwharf Quays were most notable for their traditional public realm layout and materials, but also the spectacular planting”, so this was viewed as an opportunity to make Ryde stand out.

There was also the suggestion for a living wall in Co-Op Square and a view that even more greenery would further enhance the plans. Shade was also mentioned in relation to shelter; some wanted provision of tree canopies or large sail canopies; they said, “as about 60% of the time the weather is cold and/or wet, it would be very important to have plenty of shelter.”

REFLECTION OF HERITAGE

One topic that was raised numerous times was that respondents wanted the designs to better reflect the heritage of Ryde, as there is “so much heritage to celebrate”, with much Victorian architecture as seen in the historic shopfronts along the High Street.

Many considered that the current proposals to be too contemporary, saying they would not augment the vernacular. Some considered how a more Regency feel is required to enhance the vernacular, with a suggestion of “tree planting augmented with large Versailles type planters” to “create a true Regency feel to the area.” Others considered that heritage should be incorporated into the design in relation to Ryde’s seaside feel, stating that “there doesn’t seem to be any effort made to incorporate any classic English seaside aesthetic in a modern way.” A further comment related to the colour palette with concerns relating to the scheme becoming “immature” if the wrong palette is used; it should be “subtle but obvious and a neutral but uplifting.” One noted how “as long as it’s done in good taste and isn’t tacky, and respects the architectural heritage of the town, [the scheme] sounds good.”

ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSIVITY

A few respondents raised concerns surrounding accessibility and inclusivity, mentioning how the designs would be a challenge for disabled people and those that are visually impaired to use, including the steps on town square but would be a “gift to skateboarders.” One queried where disabled people would park to access shops and considered more could be done to promote inclusivity throughout the scheme.

There was controversy around the impacts of the proposals on the shops in the high street. One considered how the plans “do not take into account at all the retail nature of area and that its primary raison d’être is to attract shoppers who spend money to employ people in the wide range of shops that actually make Ryde such a popular town.”

One respondent was concerned that the plans would hinder high street activity; “making it less likely shoppers will come”, but others saw the positives, considering that “a scheme like this would also improve the type and diversity of shops in the area” through bringing in more footfall, making Ryde “a proper and friendly town to visit.”

Some comments were raised around cutting vehicles out of the area and how more needed to be done to stop this. It was positively acknowledged that the plans will “stop the high street being a cut through for vehicles and properly pedestrianise the area.” A few noted that something should be

put in to stop cars from pulling into the High Street, with ideas including a gate, or a large no entry sign for drivers as some think they can drive through the High Street after 6pm.

RYDE & THE ANTHONY MINGHELLA CONNECTION

Finally, comments were given surrounding the ideas for incorporation of film into the design in a variety of manners. Many were supportive of incorporation of film, and suggestions were provided to take the theme further, including a “clapper board or film reel type art around Minghella square and lots of street lights that make the areas attractive for night time events so it isn’t left as a vacant space for anti-social behaviours.”

Comparatively, some more mature respondents were concerned over the noise and activity that this would generate, raising concern over “rowdy music sessions” and “film teams shouting.” Though some agreed that Ryde’s links to film should be celebrated, they viewed creation of Ryde’s unique paving design with links to film as potentially “gimmicky” and said it “could be costly to maintain” – it could become “dated and incongruous with its surroundings” in years to come and become burdensome. These respondents noted that “a classic traditional approach may not seem as exciting, but it does bring some guarantees.”

Others wanted to take the film ideas and widen them to incorporate a broader provision of more types of art rather than seeing a dedication to film, though there was explicit support for a plaque being installed in Minghella Square from a few respondents. Sculpture was a theme mentioned by some respondents, one mentioning how “a contest for sculptural entrants that entice public interaction would be good.”

There was mention of many well-known artists on the island such as Barbera Gowan, Jo Hummel-Newell and Laura Hatherway of Ryde who should be given more emphasis. People wanted to see a broader scope of artwork, including pop-up and permanent features.

A suggestion was had for art on the sides of buildings to help get more current and aspiring artists quickly and easily involved. Buildings could “be adorned with beautiful artworks, maybe celebrating the sunsets we enjoy in Ryde, the sea and the vast skies, all of which would have inspired the poets and writers who lived here.” This led to one respondent reflecting that “in a sense, the island’s nature is our most valued heritage.” It was finally noted that whichever art interventions are included must be of the highest quality.

CONCLUSIONS

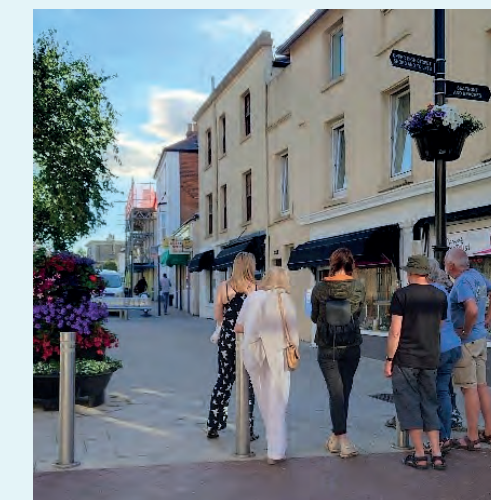
This online consultation has been useful to the consultancy team to help them better understand the public’s views on the concept and ideas for Ryde High Street. The collection of constructive feedback on different aspects of the concepts will allow targeted refinement leading to changes that will ensure a more responsive design proposal.

PART B – SUMMARY OF THE ON-SITE WALKING TOURS & ZOOM CONSULTATION RESULTS

A total of four walking tours were conducted on Thursday 7th July and Tuesday 19th July along the High Street in Ryde and one online consultation via Zoom on Wednesday 13th July, to invite feedback on the initial designs for First Phase: the Northern and Southern Gateways, and Later Phases: the Minghella and Town Squares.

Thirteen participants in total joined the walking tours on 7th July, and 13 participants joined in total on 19th July. Two participants joined the online Zoom consultation held on the evening of 13th July. The participants consisted of a range of demographics including local residents, business owners, town council representatives and local arts, community, and heritage organisations.

This is a summary of their feedback on the initial First Phase and Later Phase design concepts for the high street redevelopment as part of the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) project.



Photos from the various walking tours on Thu 7th and Tue 19th July 2022.

OVERALL REACTIONS

Participants overall liked the initial concepts and welcomed the greening, the playful approaches, and the decluttering aspects of the design concept. However, the feedback also included a requirement for the design to be braver and focus on areas that needed more attention than others. Three common concerns from most participants included:

- A need to see quick wins, with interim fixes to improve the space and test-bed ideas for longer term gains; it was felt that “developing a 10-year strategy with community engagement was more realistic”.
- Uneven tarmac surfacing through the whole street needs replacing as a top priority.
- Vehicles travelling up the high street was still an issue - 17 cars were noted within one hour on the last walking tour, as an example.

FIRST PHASE

The first phase of the project focuses on Northern and Southern Gateways of the High Street.

Northern Gateway

Participants noted that the entrance to the high street at the Northern Gateway still “feels like a road” and the signs are “not adhered to” and are “confusing”. They welcomed the resurfacing element of the redesign to clearly demarcate that this is now a pedestrian zone. However, some participants still felt that this was not enough.

Several domestic vehicles still travel up this route at all times of the day, especially after 6pm “because they still think they are allowed to”. A suggestion of a gate to bar access to this area was welcomed by many; it was felt this gate should have a heritage feel to it, so it is in keeping with the historical aspect of the town.

Another participant offered a suggestion that the entrance to the high street could be made more distinct to showcase an “attractive display of what Ryde has to offer”, perhaps with a “Welcome to Ryde” archway at this juncture.

It was felt by many that the high street “feels dead once the shops shut” and “people don’t have a reason to walk down the high street after 5:30”, so suggestions to “give people reasons to walk up this way” included more greening, a “bustling cafe

culture” and “better signage”, which might encourage more community engagement and visitor interest too.

All participants noted that the greening and seating elements of the design were important, but they “wanted to see more of it” in the design.

It was felt by a few participants that the bedding planters were too low to the ground and “would encourage littering and misuse”. More trees and higher planters would be welcomed to bring the eye line up, offer shade and encourage more greening along the high street.

Another suggestion was that the planters need to have “permanent plants and not bedding as this is too seasonal and would require more maintenance”. There were a couple of requests for plants that would offer scent in the air, like herbs and more hardy perfumed plants, which would invite wildlife such as bees and butterflies to the space. One participant suggested that these planters could be “sponsored by local businesses or the Rotary Club to help support long term maintenance of them”.

It was noted by many that the existing benches and wooden-top seating pods are always in constant use, and this should be a priority as part of the redesign. It was felt that the wooden seating areas “aren’t too bad but the wrong wood was used”, so an updated version of these would be welcomed using more hard-wearing wood.

Most participants wanted to see function and form when it came to the seating. “Many older people use this high street for their daily shopping supplies, and often use this as a chance to meet others and also take a rest” so “comfortable seating for all ages is vital”.

Another suggestion included offering USB phone charging points within the benches or seating areas to encourage people to stay longer and use the space for their daily activities.

A couple of participants noted that they would like to see more bike racks and bins along the high street as part of the redesign.

Most participants noted that they would like to see the seating and planters placed more “into the middle of the street” to discourage domestic vehicles from travelling up the street and offer a “safer environment for all pedestrians”.

Southern Gateway

A lot of participants welcomed the design concepts in a similar manner to the Northern Gateway ideas, in regard to the greening, resurfacing, and decluttering of the area, but again, “would like to see more”. They felt there is a “general sense of lack of care and cleanliness” along the high street at the moment and the resurfacing of the tarmac throughout the length of the high street should be a top priority.

The entrance to this gateway is on the corner of a busy road and participants said that all vehicles “often drive too fast” around the corner, so some speed restriction processes should be encouraged and the “curb along the road edge to be higher”.

The majority of participants noted that the new outside seating and planters at The Star pub has brought a fresh vitality to the area, and they would like to see more of this repeated down the high street leading to the two squares; many thought this could offer more reasons for residents and visitors to use the high street more, especially after shop hours and offer a sense of identity for the area.

However, some suggested that there isn’t a critical mass to sustain this cafe culture, or al fresco dining experiences, as “many food and drink businesses have failed in the past along here”.

Some participants suggested that a series of curated units with pop-up shops and experiences might be a better option to revive the high street; with one participant commenting that “this might kick-start a range of offers like retail alongside food and drink options”.

Most participants want the area to “feel safe”, especially after dark. So, lighting was a consistent point that was raised in all walking tours and during the online consultation.

It was felt that the existing streetlights were too high and “shone into residential flats throughout the night” and “made it look more like a road still”. It was felt that if these were lowered and made more “welcoming” within a heritage design concept, this would “help make the high street feel safer”. A lot of participants wanted to see “warm lighting” options, and a few mentioned they would like to see “those Victorian style string lights throughout the length of the high street”.

A couple of participants noted that the lighting could be incorporated within the seating and/or planters to animate the space in a new and exciting way.

Some participants repeated that the high street is used a lot by an older demographic, who might usually get a taxi into town. So, a loading bay and/or taxi drop-off point could be useful at the entrance to the Southern Gateway. This might also support the later evening dining experiences too.

There was still an issue of the entrance being used by domestic and non-emergency vehicles at the Southern Gateway, so a suggestion of some restrictions other than signage should be employed here.

A younger participant noted that the design should consider climate change as a factor, so plenty of shade from trees or awnings along the shop fronts, as well as water refill spots would be welcomed.

All groups noted that the current public telephone box “is out of keeping with the rest of the high street redesign” and should be replaced with “the old red version if possible”.

The responses about the seating were the same as the Northern Gateway, with an added point that “there is a view to the sea at the top of this street” and participants wondered if “the seating placements could accommodate that”.

A number of participants stated that there is a distinct lack of signage and way-finding points to key landmarks in and around the high street. It was suggested that “bigger/clearer signage and free-standing way-finding points could be stationed along the Southern Gateway entrance”.

It was also noted that any signage and way-finding points need to “have a heritage feel to the design”.

LATER PHASES

Town Square (Co-op Square)

The majority of participants welcomed the concept of the auditorium approach to the Town Square, allowing for people to sit, linger longer and enjoy the space at all times of the day. It would also demarcate a staging area to encourage more live events and community led activities in the Square.

Opinion, however, was split on the design of the steps as a seating option in this design. Some participants stated that they thought it would be a “trip hazard” and not functional for the older demographic; “people over a certain age don’t want to sit on the floor or hard surfaces, and they will need a back support too”.

This was also followed by a suggestion of erecting a handrail along the side of the steps between the steps and slope to “prevent older people from falling”.

Others welcomed the design concept fully and thought that this would be a “great solution for all ages, as long as the steps are clearly marked and not too shallow”. The local community enjoyed live events throughout the Queen’s Jubilee in June 2022, with one participant mentioning “if we had this design now, it would have prevented children and families having to sit on the floor”, adding “it was a popular event so having this auditorium style design would, I’m sure encourage more of this activity”.

Participants noted that the new mural design in the Square was a welcome change to the unkempt wall and negative signage. The majority also noted that they would like to see more of this within the rest of the high street, adding that the greening aspect of the design idea could be braver. “A living wall in the far-left hand corner might be a nice addition and more trees would be good for shade and shelter from wet-weather - especially if there will be regular events, markets and performances here”.

One participant, who was not formally part of the walking tour, came to offer some feedback to the sessions. As the manager of WH Smith positioned in the Town Square, he saw the value of engaging with the community in order to maintain and revive the local area; he noted that acting more like an independent retailer and working closely with other shops spaces and the local residents was key. This model could encourage a stronger working relationship between other small business owners and larger retailers along the high street, as supported by the example of a Business Improvement District model that is utilised in many towns across the UK.

Minghella Square

Participants were pleased to see the removal of the bollards in this design concept and welcomed the notion of extending the surface material of the Square out into the high street and linking this through to the Town Square area.

However, some noted that the shapes and designs on the surface material in the concept might look “dated in a few years’ time” and would need to know that the surface material “won’t look aged or dirty in a short space of time.”

A number of participants noted that the current surface of the Minghella Square “looked fine” and the “time and money should be spent on resurfacing the tarmac along the full length of the high street” instead. Some participants suggested the design concept should directly replicate the current surface material in Minghella Square out and along the full high street.

The social activities that would be preferred in this area included public events, seasonal events, markets, and fairs. All participants welcomed a more open space and better seating options from the design concept. The additional greening was also encouraged, especially moving the trees from the central location to the far end of the Square. However, a couple of participants pointed out that as “the shops aren’t open long enough to encourage people to enjoy the space after 5pm” the “lighting and after-hours activities need to be considered better in this design”.

Another participant noted that there “could be open WIFI across the whole of the high street” to encourage people to connect and stay longer in the area.

A number of participants noted that Minghella Square is not listed on Google/

Apple Maps so “visitors won’t know it’s there” and as the naming of the Square was “not officially agreed by the Minghella family”, some work will need to be done to officially name the Square before any redevelopment or signage and way-finding points are created.

Another suggestion of a “blue plaque to Anthony Minghella or the Minghella family would be welcomed from a tourism angle”.

One participant also noted that “Minghella isn’t the only history that Ryde has” and more historical interest and social stories would be a great angle to lean into to celebrate the town’s history for the local residents and visitors alike.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the participants welcomed the design concepts in a positive way and were encouraged to see that initial concerns and comments shared in the first stage of this consultation were taken into consideration.

However, a vast majority of the participants on all walking tours and the online consultation wanted to see more exciting design concepts displayed and more considerations for the major problem areas, which was most notably, the resurfacing of the tarmac across the full length of the high street and more developed ideas to stop traffic from entering the pedestrian zone.

Another keen response was that “Ryde is lacking in identity” and how this high street redesign should be picking up on elements of Union Street and the Esplanade to offer residents and visitors a more cohesive look and feel to the whole area.

One final note from most of the feedback was that they wanted to see “high quality” changes early on - so “people can start to see a change from the HAZ project”, with one participant adding “we are consultationally (sic) jaded”.

A couple of participants suggested that an interim version of the full plan would be useful, adding that “having meanwhile solutions, something workable and practical, not too ambitious - but will raise the quality of life now” should be a priority.



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