



Helensburgh Waterfront Community Engagement

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Introduction and Methodology

In order to gather opinions and feedback on potential development options for the Helensburgh Waterfront site, stakeholder engagement was held over the course of a week from 17 to 23 June 2023. This included both drop in sessions and targeted sessions to cover a variety of age groups and interests. This activity was not a formal public consultation, but was targeted engagement to help achieve an inclusive approach.

Invites were sent to 63 community groups, eight Community Councils and published several times on social media to broaden the reach and generate interest. This was to ensure people with a variety of interests, and those who may be lesser heard voices or who tend not to get involved with engagement activities, had the opportunity to have their say.

In total, 83 people participated in the engagement events.

With the exception of the schools engagement, at each session attendees were shown five sets of images to aid discussion. These sets were grouped to represent the range of options currently being put forward for the Waterfront site, in terms of broad function or type. It was explained to all attendees upon arrival that the images were for illustrative purposes only, and were not intended to represent any particular brands, size or design of building.

Attendees were invited to identify any images they particularly liked or disliked, and discuss the pros and cons of each option (or individual parts thereof).

At the schools engagement, pupils were invited to talk about what they would like to see in their town, and draw their ideas for the Waterfront site.

The schedule of engagement sessions is shown on the next page.

Engagement Sessions

Date	Times	Session Type	Location / Venue	Invites
Saturday 17 June	10:00 – 16:00	Drop in session	HLCC Annex	Community Groups
Monday 19 June	09:30 – 15:30	Schools	Hermitage Academy Conference Room	Schools
	17:00 – 20:00	Drop in session	HLCC Annex	Community Groups
Tuesday 20 June	18:00 – 20:00	Community Councils	HLCC Community Room	Community Councils
Wednesday 21 June	17:30 – 18:30	Targeted group	HLCC Community Room	Grey Matters Active Aging
	19:00 – 20:00	Targeted group	HLCC Community Room	Royal Navy Family Support
Thursday 22 June	18:00 – 20:00	Business evening	HLCC Community Room	
Friday 23 June	18:00 – 20:00	Targeted group	HLCC Annex	Mid Point Youth
	10:30 – 11.30	Targeted group	HLCC Annex	H&L Autism
	12:00 – 14:00	Drop in session	HLCC Annex	Community Groups

Key Findings



There was no single consensus on any of the five options, with each generating a range of pros and cons.

Several attendees felt strongly that anything much higher than a **single storey** building would not be desirable, as it would block the views across the water. The site is felt to be a prime spot to attract visitors and enjoy the open aspect so, whilst many are not averse to some kind of building or units on the site, they would like an attractive design that is in keeping with the existing leisure centre.



Overall there was a strong preference for an option with at least some **outdoor recreation** space, ideally with seating and activities suitable for locals and visitors. Whilst some liked the idea of event space, others pointed out that there is already plenty of provision such as Civic Centre indoor / outdoor event area, Colquhoun Square event area, Hermitage Park event area, Kidston Park, Helensburgh Pier car park pop up events facilities.

Several attendees acknowledged that a fully open, non commercial public space would struggle to secure funding and was therefore unlikely. Many also commented that the town lacks indoor attractions, and an open air space would not be particularly useful in poor weather for much of the year, therefore a combined indoor / outdoor offer might be preferable.



The prospect of **retail / fast food** was of considerable concern to some attendees, who are worried that it will have a damaging impact on local businesses which are already struggling. Concerns included an overprovision of certain types of retail or food offerings, creating more competition, and a concentration of business in the centre of town which could detract from those businesses based further along the promenade. However, younger people were particularly interested in high street chains such as Starbucks.



Others would welcome a **retail or hospitality** option, provided it is in keeping with the needs of the town. For some, this could be a supermarket. For others, a clothes shop would be desirable since the recent loss of clothing retailers in the town. Some noted the setting would be ideal for a bar or restaurant looking out over the water to create a destination with a real wow factor.



The lack of **indoor recreation** space in Helensburgh was a recurring theme across most sessions, and this was felt to be lacking in the current options for the site. Many people would like to see something that appeals to both locals and visitors, perhaps with a flexible, multi use space that could change uses throughout the year.

Key Findings (Cont'd)

Suggestions ranged from indoor sports courts to activities such as bowling and climbing walls, as well as some kind of art space or museum dedicated to local history, such as John Logie Baird.



The option including a general **community space** received mixed feedback. People were generally positive about such a space in theory, however some pointed out that there are already many such spaces available in Helensburgh in church halls and private buildings. There was positive feedback for an event / exhibition space, if perhaps it could be combined for community use.



Likewise, the prospect of a **hotel** received mixed feedback. It was considered by some attendees to be a real need in Helensburgh, as they struggle to find rooms for friends and family. The Waterfront site could provide a very attractive spot for visitors to enjoy the view, perhaps with associated restaurants and bars. For others, there is sufficient existing provision and they were concerned a new hotel would take away customers from local businesses.



The issue of a **skate park** was discussed at every session, and is clearly a subject close to the hearts of many Helensburgh residents. There are strong feelings both for and against having the skate park at the

Waterfront site, but most agree a park would be an asset.

Those who would like to see it at the Waterfront argue that the views, central accessibility, nearby facilities such as cafes and the leisure centre, and the ability for the community to passively supervise the park due to its open aspect, make it the ideal location with the potential for a park that attracts national visitors. Those who would like to see it elsewhere (such as Hermitage Park) argue that the skate park would cause noise and disruption to those round them, and would benefit from more space than can be afforded at the Waterfront.



Coach parking was also a hot topic, with many people observing the need for Helensburgh to maintain its visitor numbers to support local businesses – with more coach parking a necessity. Whilst some could see the value of having coach parking on the Waterfront site, most however thought it should go elsewhere, with perhaps only a drop off and pick up point at the Waterfront.

Feedback by Option

Convenience Retail / Fast Food

Pros

Outdoor seating was very popular, with many people commenting that the site is a prime spot to attract visitors and locals with the right mix of food, coffee and pleasant seating to take in the view.

Several people thought more parking would be of benefit, as it is felt to be lacking in the town centre.

The prospect of a tea / coffee stand is appealing, perhaps an independent local brand.

The opportunity to incorporate local businesses or pop ups, rather than established chains only, was a welcome idea to make the most of retail and food offering.

Cons

Helensburgh is perceived to already have plenty of good quality food outlets offering a wide choice, with several people commenting that more food outlets are not needed.

Potentially poor sustainability credentials of fast food and convenience retail, such as packaging and air miles.

A general negative perception of fast food and large chains, which are not felt to be in keeping with a town like Helensburgh or contributing towards the community and its existing businesses.

Potential for litter and attracting gulls around seating areas.



Convenience Retail / Fast Food

“Whatever it is, make it an attractive, sustainable, high quality build.”

“A vibrant, independent retail, food and craft boutique [offering], to be a social and tourist attraction.”

“Small local businesses are unlikely to be able to afford this type of development.”

“Food retail of this sort [convenience] is not sustainable and net zero – high food miles, plastic wrapping adds to the carbon footprint.”

“No drive throughs!”

“[There are] enough fast food outlets in Helensburgh – keep Helensburgh unique, not generic!”

“Outdoor seating would be really nice, but with a kiosk / coffee rather than a fast food outlet.”

“I really like the public realm and seating by the leisure centre. We could have car parking and seating, particularly for visitors – especially if boats are coming in again.”

“It would be ok as a fast food point if local businesses were encouraged to move there, freeing up units for shops. But I doubt there’s capacity for an additional food offering [on top of what we already have].”

Open Space / Community Use

Pros

Attractive to both locals and visitors. Could blend nicely with the existing leisure centre if outdoor activities were on offer, such as the outdoor gym.

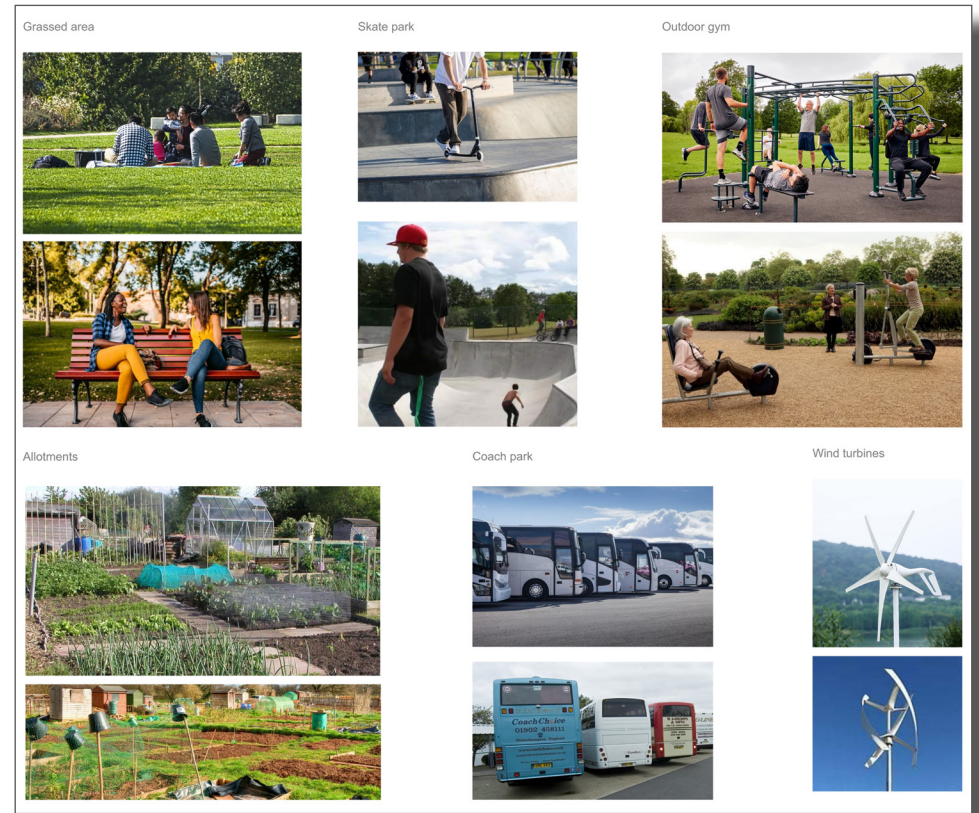
Providing a large open space for events throughout the year, such as music festivals and food markets – but it was noted that this type of facility is available at the Civic Centre (hosting the recent gin festival and street food Sunday events) along with the redeveloped Colquhoun Square and Hermitage Park multi use area.

A number of attendees felt that, with the right investment, a skate park could be a considerable draw for tourists and sports enthusiasts on a national level, drawing in tourism and money to local businesses.

Attendees noted the support of internationally renowned BMX rider Kriss Kyle, who lives in Helensburgh.

It was felt that a skate park in this location would be easy to supervise, helping to keep any potential antisocial behaviour to a minimum. It could provide a central facility for young people centred around healthy hobbies – something that is felt to be lacking in Helensburgh.

In relation to coach parking, a drop off and pick up point could be attractive for visitors on tours and arriving / leaving by boat. This could be tied in with pier redevelopment. Some people commented that older visitors need to go back and rest during the day, therefore coaches should be able to stay on site if a drop off point is provided, however note that most thought coaches should park elsewhere to free up space on the Waterfront site.



The prospect of outdoor community space also opened up discussion about an outdoor pool, which was not part of the options but some people would like to see reinstated.

Open Space / Community Use

Cons

Whilst the skate park was a very popular offering, there was mixed feedback about its location. Some people do not think the Waterfront site is the right place for it, with concerns about noise and lack of space.

Allotments were almost unanimously felt to be a poor idea on this site as the weather would make it difficult to grow plants. There are felt to be plenty of other suitable places for allotments.

This option would have limited use in inclement weather – most people thought outdoor space would need to be complemented by at least some shelter, and many suggested it be combined with indoor recreation space.

Whilst coach parking is felt to be much needed in the town, many feel the Waterfront is not a suitable place – too many vehicles taking up too much space.

Outdoor gyms received mixed reviews as a concept – although the idea is felt to be good, some people do not think they are well used in practice. Wind turbines were not thought to be a compelling offer. Few people seemed particularly concerned about the aesthetic appearance, rather they felt they would not be especially functional nor cost effective in this location.

“A multi use seasonal site, eg ice rink in winter, mini golf in the summer, skate park and soft play all year round.”

“Ideally a mix of indoor and outdoor things to do.”

“I would use an outdoor gym, but it wouldn't really appeal to visitors.”

“A skate park would be a massive benefit to the young people in the area and further afield.”

“A skate park – it needs to be in the right place, though. We wouldn't put it there – it needs to be in a park somewhere so the noise doesn't affect people relaxing nearby. Could it go in Hermitage Park?”

“We don't want the skate park in Hermitage Park – the people using it are fine, but the location and environment attracts antisocial behaviour. We don't want to create more of a problem with that.”

“We do need coach parking, and it would be useful in the centre of town, but you don't want to stare at a load of coaches there. Could it be a drop off point, and park coaches elsewhere?”

“You can't have allotments there – nothing will grow!”

Multi Storey Retail / Residential / Exhibition

Pros

The prospect of some exhibition space was very welcome, provided it does not impact negatively on existing businesses. Some people suggested a heritage or civic space, such as a John Logie Baird exhibition, which could be rotated for different events.

Some attendees liked the idea of pleasant shops and galleries combined, creating a destination for people to relax, shop and eat – attractive to tourists and locals.

Overall, few people seemed to have strong opinions on the prospect of residential development on the site. Positive comments related to the possibility of an aesthetically pleasing, high quality development that would raise the profile of the waterfront, and deliver benefits for the local economy.

Cons

A development of more than one storey sparked considerable concerns about the loss of the view across the water. Many people felt that a smaller development would be acceptable, but not multi storey.

Many attendees were concerned about the impact of large scale retail, particularly national chains, on local businesses – and pointed out that there are some empty retail units in the town already, questioning whether the market can support more retail. There were strong feelings that large brands would put independent retailers out of business and / or concentrate shoppers in the town centre, losing the spread of retailers further along the promenade.



Multi Storey Retail / Residential / Exhibition

Much of the feedback concentrated on a desire for the site to be more focused on local community benefits and independent business owners.

The cons for residential tended to relate to a preference to keep the site for more general community use, rather than a select few who can afford to live there. It was also questioned whether there is a need for more residential development.

“See NPF4 and community empowerment legislation, which is all about place. A focus on retail is wasteful.”

“Multi storey just seems like a bizarre suggestion – why would we want to lose the view?”

“Multinational retailers are not needed in town. We should be encouraging and supporting local independent businesses to grow and develop.”

“Clothes shops have closed because the rents are too high. Young people go elsewhere to buy things all in one go, and people shop online.”

“I’d be completely against a multi storey building. The thing that’s good about Helensburgh is the water and views. Towns that have developed their waterfronts have died.”

“The Local Development Plan prioritises Helensburgh for housing, so this is in line with the Plan. Increasing the population is in line with the area’s objectives for things like heating networks. Mixed use residential and retail would boost the economy, and it’s close to the train station and local amenities.”

“We don’t have many places for museum / cultural type exhibitions – it would be good to have something for tourists to do in poor weather.”

“There are two art galleries on the sea front, and exhibition opportunities at the library, community hub, Oak Tree Gallery, Destination Helensburgh and Hermitage Park Pavilion.”

“I don’t have an objection to retail etc, but would question if it’s the right site.”

Multi Storey Retail / Hotel

Please note that the pros and cons related to multi storey retail were the same for this option as for the mixed use retail, residential and exhibition space – primarily a concern about competition which would negatively affect local businesses, and losing the views with a multi storey development.

Pros

There were very mixed views about the need for a hotel, with some attendees advocating for the benefits of a hotel while others questioned the need. For those who would welcome a hotel, comments tended to focus on their struggles to find accommodation nearby for family and friends to visit, and the benefits of the waterside location for an attractive tourism destination combined with some shops and restaurants.

Cons

Several people felt that Helensburgh already has plenty of hotels so there would not be sufficient demand for another. It was also noted that an additional hotel could take customers away from existing businesses.

There was a suggestion that the service areas for a retail and hotel development of this type would negatively impact the aesthetics of the location and the public realm around the leisure centre, making it appear messy and attracting vermin.



Multi Storey Retail / Hotel

“Three or four storeys [for a hotel] would be out of scale with the town.”

“No multi storey – a low level development would be more appropriate.”

“I’ve struggled to get hotels for family. A nice hotel, with some nice shops and restaurants, would be lovely. It’s such a nice spot looking out over the bay – people who visit want to look out over the sea, and that’s a perfect spot for it. People will pay a premium to sit and look out over the bay.”

“A hotel would be nice for a few people taking rooms, but spoils the view for everyone else.”

“An assessment should be made of existing hotels to see if it’s viable. The people who come here to visit are usually day trippers.”

“There’s a massive demand for hotel rooms, but this is not the right location – it would be too high and spoil the views.”

“There’s not enough demand for a hotel.”

“A hotel would be acceptable, and could be a conference centre etc. It would bring people into the town and be beneficial for businesses.”

Retail / Community Space

Pros

A community space was particularly appealing to many attendees, particularly if it provided facilities for young people, families and visitors.

This option sparked a lot of debate about the need for indoor recreation and leisure areas, particularly for younger people, which could make the most of being close to the existing leisure centre. Many people felt that it is not the right spot for a supermarket, but that the site could support both a leisure and some kind of retail offering if the building itself were an attractive design and single storey.

A pleasant, single storey building could complement the leisure complex well and would not be too obtrusive, given the desire to maintain views across the water as much as possible.

Cons

Whilst some people felt that another supermarket would be welcome in Helensburgh, however some questioned whether the Waterfront is the right location. This largely stemmed from the feeling that the site should be dedicated to community use and recreation, so a suggested solution was to combine the community space with other civic or leisure provision.

As with the other retail options, some attendees were concerned that a retail offering, particularly a supermarket, could impact on local businesses such as butchers, fishmongers and delis, risking putting smaller independent retailers out of business.



Retail / Community Space

Whilst the concept of community space was attractive, several people commented that there is plenty of existing provision in the town that is well used, but not at capacity – therefore an additional space might not be useful, depending on size and cost compared to the existing provision.

“People go out of town for clothes shopping – they close here because people don’t shop here enough. Kids want Primark, older people want M&S, but neither shop enough to make it worthwhile.”

“Everyone wanted a Lidl or Aldi, but that’s not the place for it and it’s too small.”

“Something like an Aldi or Next would be ideal – people need cheaper food options and there are no clothes shops. You could even put a leisure offering above it on a second floor.”

“We are lacking supermarkets, but that’s not the place for it. It would be sacrilege to put a supermarket on that site.”

“A mix of small retail and community (outdoor) use would be ideal. However, how many businesses can you support here – would it be viable?”

“Is there an opportunity to combine open space with something commercial and covered, to complement the leisure centre?”

“There’s community space in the Pavilion, and hardly anyone uses it. There are rooms in the tower, church etc that are well used. But we could certainly use a bigger community space / hall.”

“Community and retail is very ‘Meh...’ – think different!”

“We could really use a multi use room for community and visitors – a building [on that site] would be fine, but [keep it] lower level with things for visitors to do.”

EV Charging

Please note, most of the options were presented alongside EV charging to gauge reactions to buildings of various types with parking. Overall it was positively received, with many attendees seeing the benefits of more sustainable options and the possibility of bringing in visitors to use the charging points. Several commented that more parking in general is needed in the town centre.

A counterpoint to this was an argument that Helensburgh should be trying to reduce car usage and parking, to increase the use of active travel and reduce pollution.

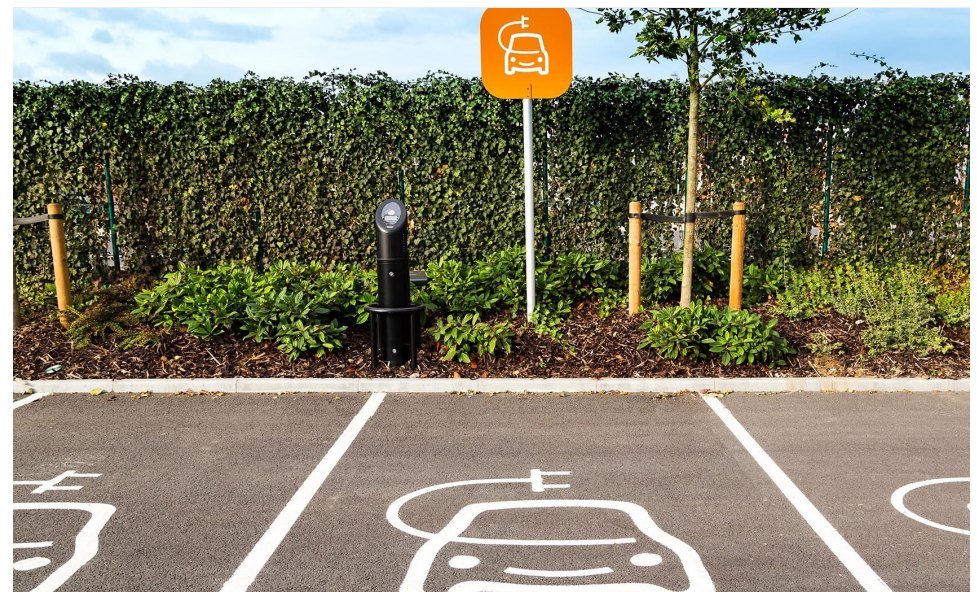
“EV charging can bring people to the town who can then spend their money on the existing businesses and support the town.”

“EV parking can help with people’s decisions on their destinations for days out.”

“If you were going to put multiple chargers you’d need fast charging ones, and I don’t think the grid there would support it.”

“Additional parking would be a waste of space and doesn’t benefit the town (other than disabled parking). We want to see people walking and cycling around, in line with a ‘strong towns’ approach and avoiding car heavy communities.”

“Any parking / EV charging should be covered and have solar panels on the roof.”



General Comments

Throughout the course of the engagement, attendees provided additional comments and suggestions that were not directly related to a particular option, but touched on their broader perceptions of Helensburgh and its needs. Below is a summary of these comments and conversations.

Sale or Lease?

A small number of attendees talked about the potential sale or lease of the land, and were keen that it be leased rather than sold. There was a suggestion that selling the land...

“...would encourage developers to put a large commercial building on it – a lease might leave it more open to sympathetic development.”

This theme was echoed by another attendee who commented that the site is a valuable and attractive spot in Helensburgh, which the Council should keep control of:

“The land is too valuable for single storey – if you’re selling it, someone will build multi storey. More sustainable for the Council would be to put business units on it and rent them out, ideally with a park. Smaller business units would be more sustainable and allow smaller local businesses to take them, and the town becomes more resilient.”

“This land is a key piece of Helensburgh’s waterfront.”

“We need to make sure the land is used responsibly, the Council should keep control of it. Once it’s gone, it’s gone.”

Visitors and Young People

Several conversations centred around the need to attract more visitors to the town, with the Waterfront site providing an ideal spot for this. Likewise, attendees commented that there is little for young people to do in Helensburgh therefore some kind of civic space, multi use exhibition space, or leisure facility would be useful. Some people also lamented the loss of the outdoor swimming pool, and would like to see it resurrected.

“We’re missing the big picture here: the indirect cost benefit of a facility that attracts visitors to the town and doesn’t affect existing businesses. [That would have] wider benefits to the town.”

Some attendees tied this in to the potential for developing the pier to receive tourists by boat.

“To develop the pier we need facilities for marine tourism – cruise ships brought ashore, not just getting on a coach and going elsewhere. ‘Step ashore’ facilities so people stay in Helensburgh for the day.”

General Comments

It was suggested that the site could be used to signpost visitors to other attractions, such as an information point to send people along the promenade or to local parks.

More broadly, it was suggested that Helensburgh could be better connected to events and attractions outside the town, by creating a hub for coach and boat trips to places like Edinburgh.

The issue of activities for young people also came up in most sessions, with a suggestion that this would likely be a similar offer to a visitor attraction:

“We have a huge demographic of families because of the naval base. We need something to keep families here at the weekend rather than going out of town.”

“We often forget there are a lot of kids here. It’s seen as a town for bus tours, but kids need things to do.”

“There’s nothing here to attract young people, other than swimming. The submarine museum is too old for [primary age] children. Without a car, you’re stuck.”

Schools Engagement

Schools Engagement

Primary and high school pupils were asked to tell us what they would like to see in Helensburgh, and discuss the reasons behind their suggestions. The exercise generated a wide range of ideas, from parks and community gardens to cafes and shops, via trampoline parks and bowling alleys.

A key theme for many young people was the lack of things to do in Helensburgh, with many travelling to Dumbarton for shopping trips or activities. For some, this is a negative as they would prefer to have shops and familiar chain stores / cafes closer to home. For others, they are happy to travel elsewhere and spend a day out with family, perhaps combining shopping, eating out and / or recreation in one trip.

There were no strong themes or differences emerging by age group, although this may largely be due to the relatively small number of participants – the activity was designed to gather ideas rather than carry out quantitative analysis. However, it is interesting to see the wide range of ideas the young people came up with spontaneously and through discussion with their peers at the workshop.

The table on the right shows the main suggestions, followed by a selection of drawings produced during the workshops.

Suggested Activity	Mentions
Actviity centre (eg bowling, trampolines)	9
Small shops / cafes / stalls	8
Outdoors sports pitches / courts	8
Grass / trees / fountains	8
Skate park	7
Large retail (eg Sports Direct, clothing)	6
Arcade	6
Supermarket (suggestions included M&S, Lidl)	5
Coffee chain (eg Starbucks)	5
Play park	3
Car park	3
Museum	2
Cinema	2
Fast food chain (eg McDonalds)	2
Vegetable garden	2

Schools – Pictures

