



Creative Centre's

Exploring the changing nature of Elgin centre & alternative approaches to regeneration

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Project Introduction

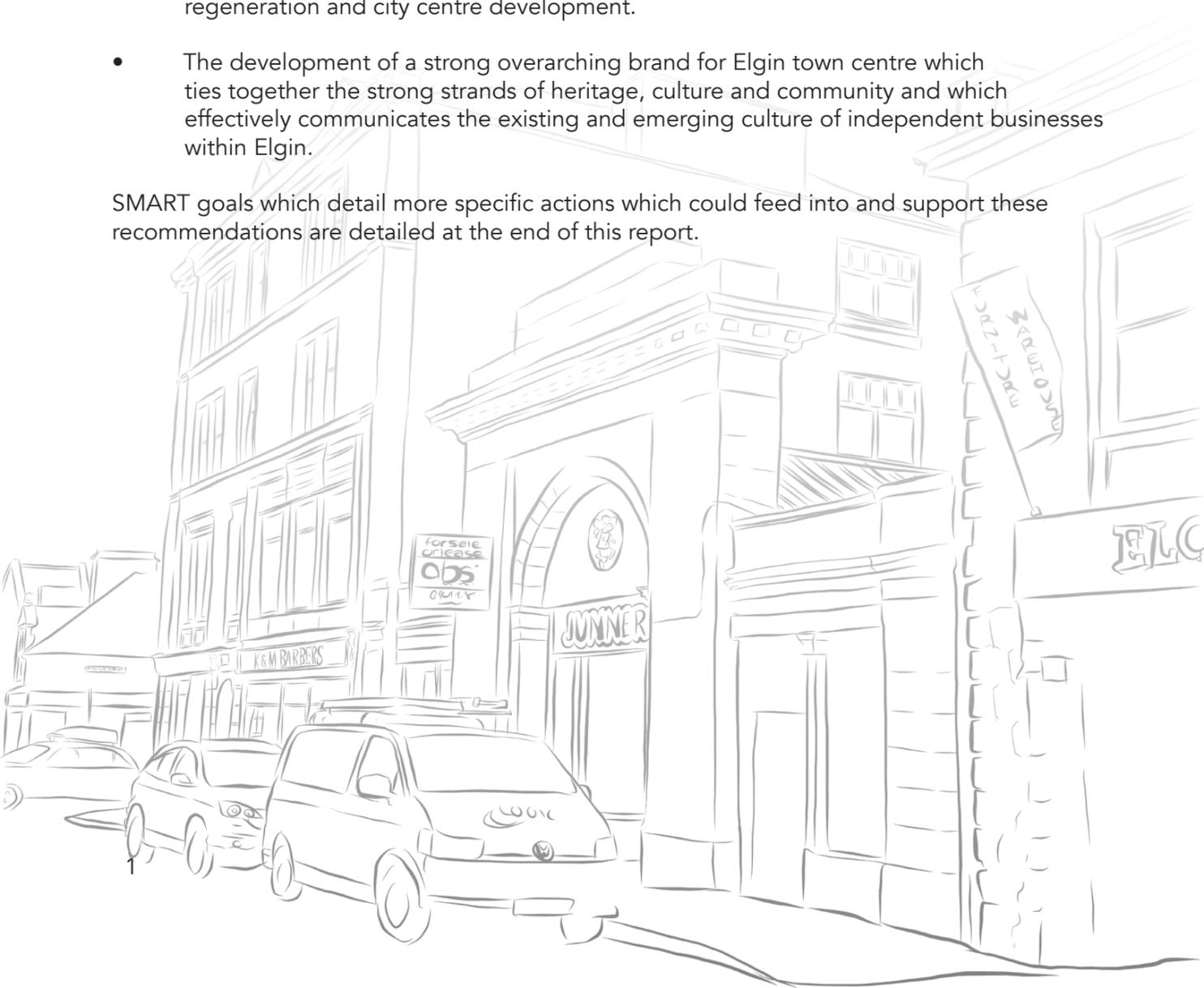
The *Creative Centre's* project was a three month long research-based residency in Elgin, Moray which ran from January to March 2020. The project involved engaging creatively with a range of community groups, organisations, general public and town centre businesses in order to explore alternative approaches to the regeneration of Elgin centre. The key partners were; *Elgin BID, We Make Moray, M:ADE and UHI*. The project also received important input and engagement from *Moray Council*.

A strong commitment to partnership working, openness and collaboration between partners greatly enhanced the project throughout. This joined-up approach has contributed to the development of outcomes, which are strategic in nature and which point towards three strands of development which are outlined below.

High level recommendations:

- Supporting the sustainability of business clusters or collaborative working groups within Elgin centre.
- A holistic public art strategy which integrates and employs a participatory approach to regeneration and city centre development.
- The development of a strong overarching brand for Elgin town centre which ties together the strong strands of heritage, culture and community and which effectively communicates the existing and emerging culture of independent businesses within Elgin.

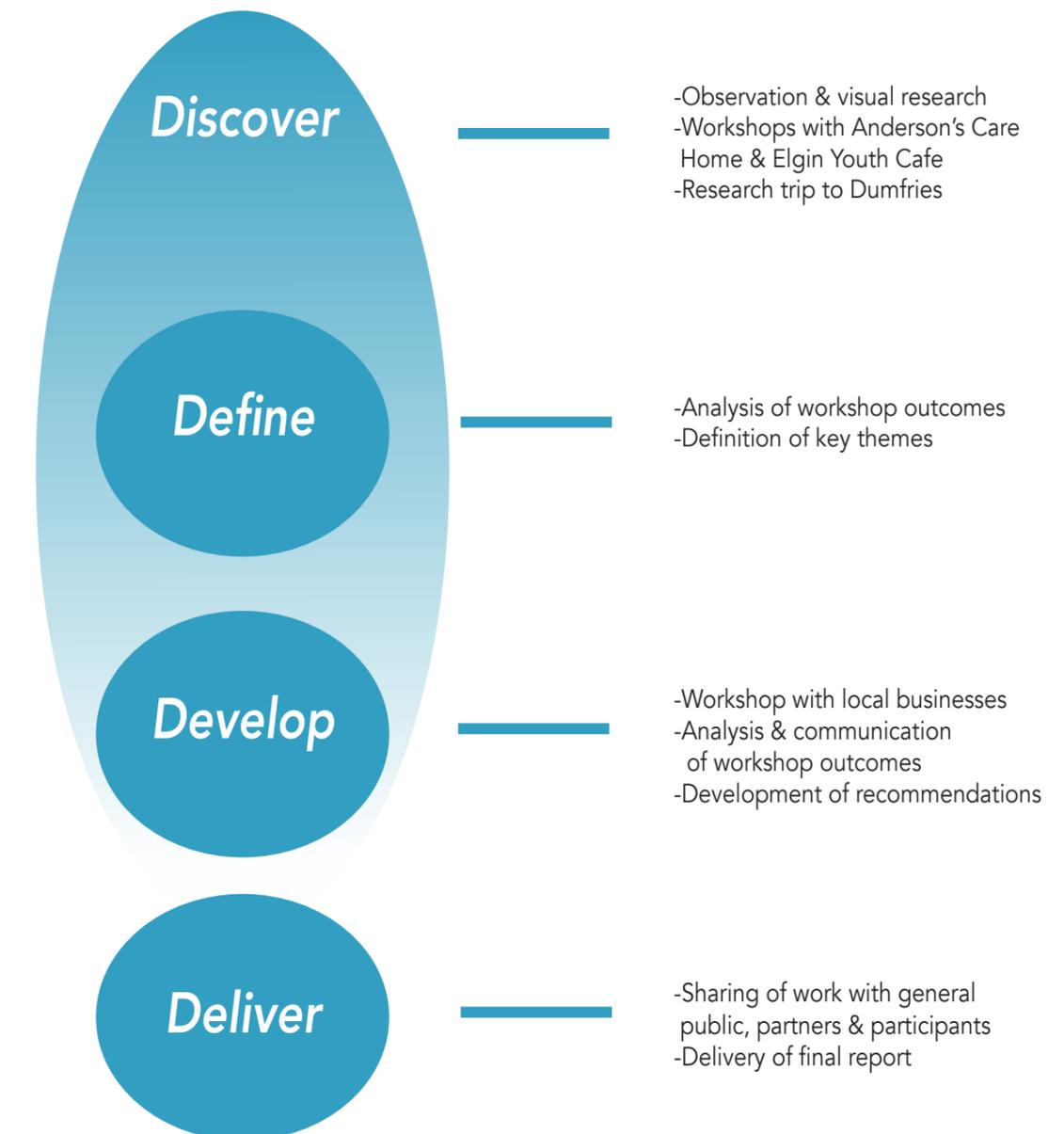
SMART goals which detail more specific actions which could feed into and support these recommendations are detailed at the end of this report.



Approach & Methodology

The project was conducted with a participatory design approach using codesign methods. These methods aim to generate new knowledge collaboratively by drawing on the range of lived experience available from participants. A variety of creative tools were used to actively engage those with an investment in Elgin centre and to draw on their unique and deep understanding of the space to inform project directions.

The project progressed through four interconnected phases as detailed below.



Discover - Initial Research

An important part of the discovery phase of the project was to understand and get to know the physical and social space of the city centre. This involved ethnographic research methods such as walking, photography, observation, natural conversations and sketching.

The initial phase of research formed around the exploration of three related contexts:

The spacial & architectural, which was mainly explored through walking, looking at maps and drawing.

The social context, which involved informal conversations as well as organised interviews and engagements.

The context of policy and strategy was also explored through both desk research and a walking tour with the planning department of the Moray Council.

Another important way of positioning the project within a wider context was through familiarisation with past and ongoing projects which impact on the city centre space and relate to issues of creativity and regeneration.

These included; the *Moray Growth Deal*, *Moray Economic Strategy*, *Moray Cultural Strategy* & the emerging *City Centre Master Plan* for Elgin as well as recent creative projects such as *Moray's Great Places*.



Engagements

An important part of discovering and learning about the centre of Elgin involved working with a range of groups and individuals from within the community using creative activities. Engagements were designed around the broad themes of 'past, future and now' and involved an exploration into city centre experiences both now and in the past as well as imagining a future Elgin city centre. The activities during this phase focused on engaging older and younger members of the community alongside the general public with themes of 'Conversation & Memory' and 'Imagination & Creativity'. This phase involved around 80-100 individuals who were asked to reflect on their personal experiences of Elgin city centre through conversation and creative activities. Key community stakeholders during this phase included *Anderson's Care Home* and *Elgin Youth Cafe*.



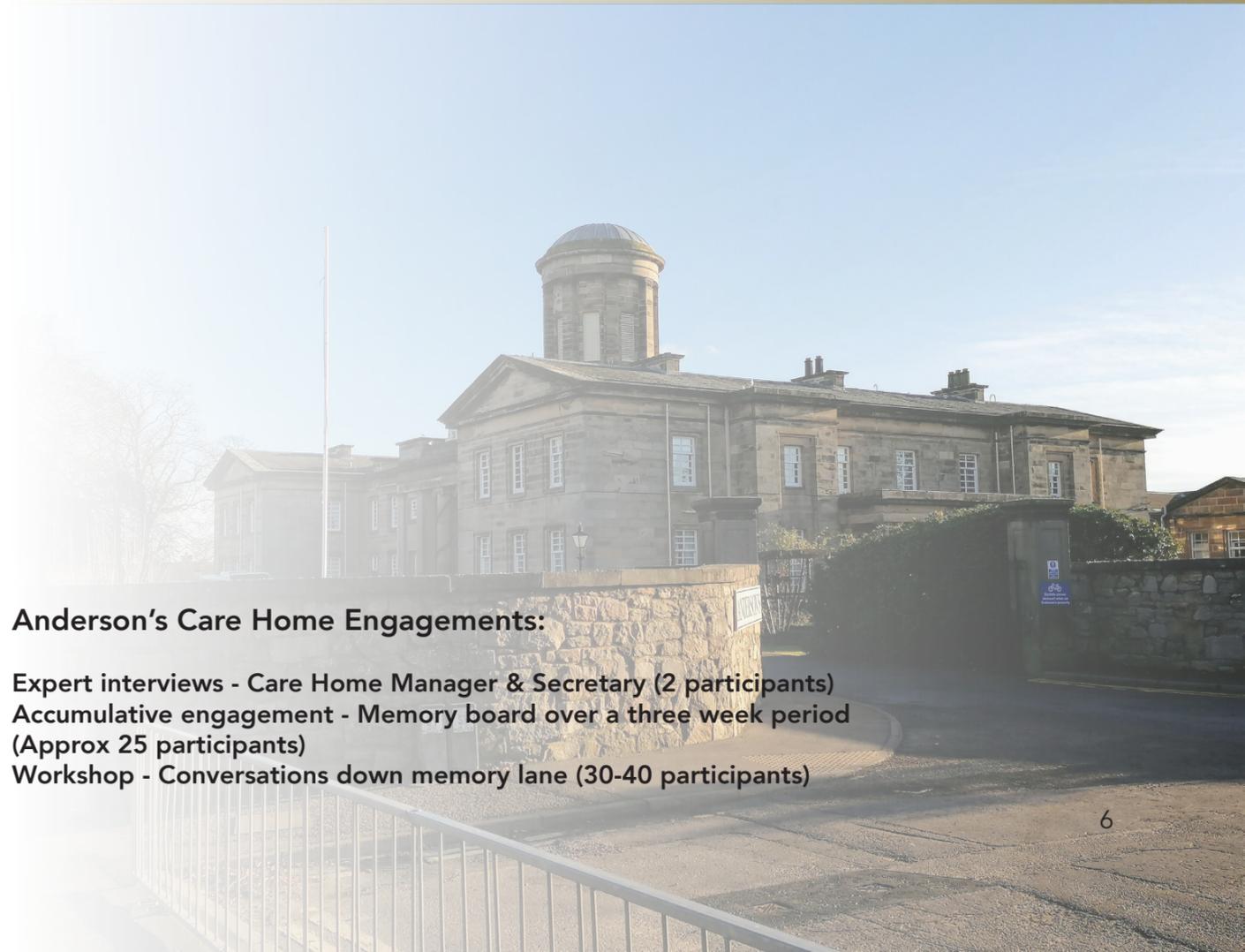
Elgin Youth Cafe Engagements:

Expert interviews - Youth Team Manager & CEO (2 participants)

Accumulative engagement - Graffiti wall over a two week period (Approx 10 participants)

Pop up - Welcome to Elgin 2050 - Large scale floor map drawing (10 participants)

Workshop - Welcome to Elgin 2050 - Zine making workshop (7 participants)



Anderson's Care Home Engagements:

Expert interviews - Care Home Manager & Secretary (2 participants)

Accumulative engagement - Memory board over a three week period (Approx 25 participants)

Workshop - Conversations down memory lane (30-40 participants)

Elgin Youth Cafe

The Elgin Youth Development Group was established in 1998 in response to concerns that young people did not have a place to meet and socialise. They now run a youth cafe called *The Warehouse* and offer a full range of youth work related services and activities including open evenings, after school clubs, holiday clubs, cooking and fitness classes as well as employability opportunities.

The young people who engage with the youth cafe regularly come into Elgin centre to use its facilities and are well placed to speak about their experiences of Elgin, both now and how they would like it to be in the future. Many of the young people were directly involved in the youth management group at the youth cafe and are motivated individuals who care deeply about Elgin. This meant that they were keen to contribute their ideas and suggestions as well as simply wanting to join in with a creative activity.

Initial interviews with the leadership team at the youth cafe quickly led to identifying ways to engage the young people in creative activities as a way to open up conversations about current and future use of the city centre space.

The approach was to develop a pop up activity at the regular Friday night youth club as well as a more focused workshop to be held during an in-service day. In addition to this, a graffiti wall and chalk pens were provided as an accumulative engagement for those using the centre over a two week period.

The theme was future focused 'Welcome to Elgin 2050' but activities were designed in such a way that they also opened up conversation about how the young people currently engage with the city centre space.

Graffiti wall pop up

Young people using the youth cafe were asked:

What do you like to do in Elgin centre?
Where are your favourite places to go?
What are your favourite things to do?

Explore Elgin 2050 - High Street floor map

The young people were asked to imagine what they thought Elgin centre would look like in 2050.

Together we used the existing city centre map to inform a new design highlighting all the new elements they would like to see.

Explore Elgin 2050 - Zine making workshop

The young people were asked to imagine how they might tell alien visitors about all the wonderful things to do in Elgin 2050.

The workshop began with a series of group activities designed to help the group collaboratively generate and evaluate ideas.

These exercises both helped prepare them to create their zine and provided valuable insight into the types of experiences and activities young people want to see in the centre of Elgin.

Anderson's Care Home

Anderson's Care Home has many deep and intergenerational connections to Elgin, situated just outside the centre to the East end, but very much at the heart of Elgin's social history. Many of the residents are very elderly with immediate family who are also part of the older generation, Anderson's also has active links to young people in the community and often partners with other organisations such as *V.I.P. Nursery* and *Elgin Youth Cafe*. Because of their wide community links, Anderson's was chosen as a key stakeholder and this enabled contact with a wide range of individuals from residents to staff and general public.

Kathy McGrath Gunn, manager of Anderson's, invited a group of residents and friends of Anderson's who wanted to speak about their past experience of Elgin centre to come to a workshop entitled *Conversations down memory lane*. The workshop also included those who may benefit from talking about their memories of youth in Elgin and provided a useful activity as part of Anderson's programme of afternoon events for residents.

Using sketches and key questions to prompt discussions, the workshop resulted in two hours of lively conversation around large circular tables, with staff and family members helping to take notes. Sketches and place names, taken from initial interviews with care home staff and other community members, were rotated as prompts for conversation and cards were provided to help staff and helpers to capture memories as they arose. The aim was to create a nice relaxed atmosphere exploring Elgin's social history with gentle conversation over a cup of tea.

Key questions:

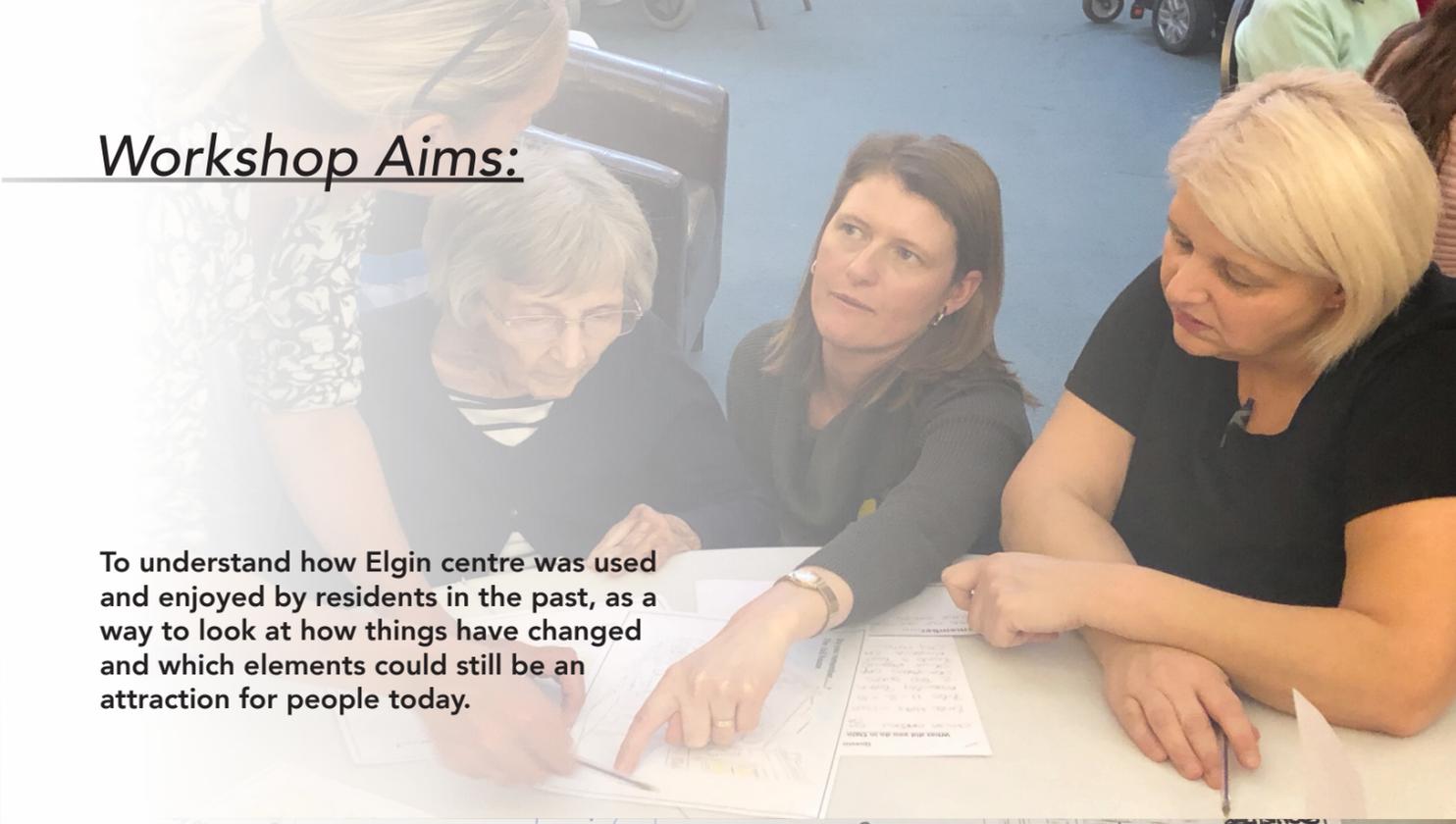
General questions:

- What do you remember about Elgin centre from when you were young?
- What did you do in Elgin when you were young?
- What were some of your favourite places in Elgin when you were young?

Related to the sketches/photographs:

- Do you recognise this building?
- Can you tell me anything about it?
- Do you have any memories related to this building?

Workshop Aims:



To understand how Elgin centre was used and enjoyed by residents in the past, as a way to look at how things have changed and which elements could still be an attraction for people today.



To facilitate conversations with people who can remember key elements of social history which have now disappeared.



To get to know Elgin in a deeper sense by tapping into elements of social history which can only be uncovered through memory and conversation.

Findings from Engagements

While shopping remained an important factor in people's experiences of Elgin centre, for both older and younger participants, this was placed within a wider context which focused on experiences of social engagement.

Strong themes relating to community and social experiences were at the foreground in all engagements, with particular emphasis on experiences which related to community and social events and unique food and drink experiences.

This led to the development of three overarching themes which emerged from the engagements.

Food & Drink Experience

Community Experience

Days & Nights Out In Elgin

"I remember sitting with my mates on the plainstones"

"We should have a cat cafe!"

"I remember rolling Easter eggs down Lady Hill"

"I remember boating in Cooper park"

"We should have kid's pubs, alcohol free!"

"I remember going to the park cafe for a Mr Whippy"

Insights:

People want to come to Elgin centre primarily for experiences. Community and cultural events linked with a strong independent retail offer will help to draw people into an experience and provide a reason to visit the centre.

Elgin centre's close proximity to natural amenities and heritage sites expands the possibilities for marketing 'days & nights out in Elgin' which include both leisure activities and shopping.

People are particularly interested in unique food and drink experiences. A strong food & drink offering can provide a big draw to visitors particularly with respect to the night time economy.

Case Study - Research Trip

Part of the residency involved a field trip to Dumfries to learn about the work of *The Stove Network* and the large-scale infrastructural development which is *Midsteeples Quarter*. The visit built upon connections made through a peer learning visit initiated by *We Make Moray* in May 2019 and was a rich learning experience allowing the many years of work from the Stove network to inform the project. The visit gave a valuable insight into how a creative and participatory approach can drive regeneration. The visit also included a meeting with *Frank Hayes*, founder of the community interest company, *For Enjoyment*. For Enjoyment also provided an interesting alternative perspective on creative approaches to regeneration.



Both organisations use art and creativity to contribute to regeneration but in very different ways. What they have in common however, is that they both use art and creativity to facilitate a process of engagement rather than as an end in itself.

For Enjoyment

The first meeting in Dumfries was with Frank Hayes who runs a Community Interest Company or CIC called *For Enjoyment*. For enjoyment run accessible workshops for all ages and abilities in drawing, printmaking and photography.

“The workshops create an atmosphere and provide an opportunity for the simple and genuine expression of our shared humanity through the simple act of creating for the pure enjoyment of it”- Frank Hayes

The workshops regularly attract between 20-40 participants on a drop in basis and are nomadic, utilising partnerships with organisations in the town who want to encourage footfall and engagement with their spaces.

Examples of these partnerships are: *The Usual Place*, a cafe and converted church which is a social enterprise supporting young adults with additional needs into employment, *Dumfries & Galloway museums* where art sessions interact with collections and exhibitions, and *The Bridge*, a newly opened educational trust where For Enjoyment hold workshops and exhibitions. For Enjoyment has also held workshops with *Dumfries Eco Warriors* on the beach to connect people with the group’s litter picking activities.

Approach to regeneration

For Enjoyment describe their approach to regeneration as being about connecting people and generating a sense of community in a very real and practical way by giving people an accessible space to spend time with others and share some of themselves through simple creative activity.

For Enjoyment really focuses on utilising art, not just to activate town centre spaces within Dumfries, but also to build a sense of acceptance, humanity and community. This accessible approach has seen the participation increase steadily and the ‘For Enjoyment ethos’ being spread to other parts of Scotland. Elgin is the first region in Scotland outside Dumfries & Galloway to be offering For Enjoyment workshops through a partnership made with *Moray WellBeing Hub* following a training delivered by Frank Hayes in late 2019.

Opportunity

There is the potential to build on the emerging links with ‘For Enjoyment’ and partner with Moray Wellbeing Hub to offer creative sessions in city centre spaces. Community spaces such as the Elgin museum or St Giles church could be utilised alongside cafés & bars to encourage people to visit Elgin and experience its spaces in new ways.

The Stove Network

The Stove Network was founded in 2011 by artist *Matt Baker* and a small team of dedicated artists who wanted to do something about the decline of Dumfries High Street. Matt Baker who is the current orchestrator of The Stove, has an established career in public art and has led on a number of community regeneration projects in Glasgow and Inverness. Rather than beginning with an externally devised creative project, The Stove Network wanted to explore what it would be like to begin with a High Street space in Dumfries town centre and to use this space as a type of open question to the community;

'What do you want this space to be?'

Since 2011 The Stove Network has run a cafe & project space from its High Street base and has developed into a multifaceted organisation which now leads on a wide range of creative projects. The Stove Network is also leading on the development of a large scale infrastructural project *Mid Steeple Quarter* in partnership with regional and national government partners. The Stove Network is essentially a creative hearth in Dumfries for people to gather round. It is a space for the seeding and development of ideas and for the growth of an evolving creative culture which is continually asking the question;

'What do we want the town of Dumfries to be?'

Approach To Regeneration

The Stove Network has developed a way of curating space, people and projects as a tool for democracy and participatory design. Founder Matt Baker describes The Stove as being a way to explore the research question of:

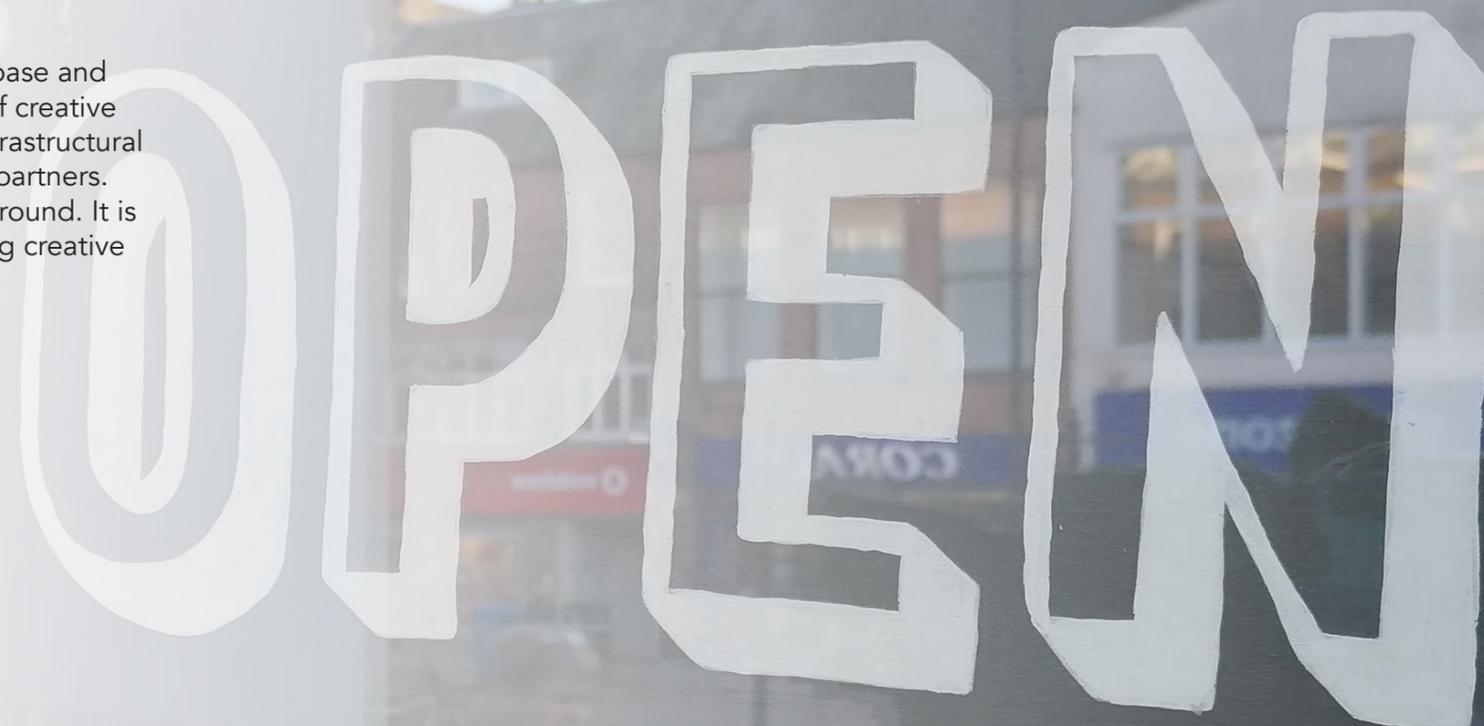
'What can a small Scottish market town be when retail is no longer the dominant factor?'

Ultimately, after many years of participatory research the answer to this question is the development of Midsteeple Quarter. Midsteeple Quarter is a huge infrastructural project, which will see 200 residents moving back into the town centre and a dedicated incubator space for creative industries & new enterprise.

Opportunity

There is an opportunity to learn from an enormous amount of prior research carried out in a Scottish market town with similar issues to Elgin such as; retention of talent and young people and the development and growth of local business and enterprise.

After many years of participatory research, The Stove Network have concluded that the key to unlocking regeneration on the High Street is to bring back residential properties and focus on independent businesses & industries, which keep the income generated locked in to the local economy.



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Define- Key Findings of the Discover Phase

The research in the first phases indicated a need to communicate the value of a range of unique experiences to be enjoyed in Elgin and to support the independent businesses and cultural activities which contribute to creating these. Part of this is a form of branding, which can be achieved by recognising existing strengths within the city centre and exploring ways to leverage these through effective collaboration and communication.

Elgin has a number of key strengths on which to build including:

Heritage

Architecture

Natural Amenities

Independent Retail

Good level of Residential Properties

Strong Community

Emerging Talent Pool Through UHI

The findings and research from the discover phase were fed back into local businesses through a series of conversations as well as the delivery of a workshop entitled *'Exploring collaboration'*

It was clear that there is a strong offering of independent businesses within Elgin Centre and over recent years, collaborative working groups such as *'Buzz on Batchen'* and *'South Street the Wedding Street'* have played an important role in sending out a positive message about Elgin centre.

Such collaborative working groups could play an important role in attracting visitors and locals into the centre by communicating effectively that Elgin provides a range of unique experiences. This communication about unique retail and food & drink experiences, combined with the other strong offerings in terms of natural amenity spaces and heritage sites could significantly increase the footfall of Elgin centre.



Develop - Working With City Centre Businesses

Theme - Collaboration & Building on Success

Workshop - 'Exploring Collaboration'

The develop phase centred around using insights from the discover phase to inform engagements with city centre businesses. This began with one-to-one conversations with individual business owners who had been key drivers in the establishment of two existing collaborative working groups within Elgin centre; *Buzz on Batchen & South Street* the *Wedding Street*. Both groups had a huge amount of learning gathered over a number of years which was very valuable to share with businesses who were considering setting up their own working groups.

There had been some early interest in initiating new groups from businesses in the West and East ends of the High Street and videos entitled *Wander the West End & Explore the East End* had been made by *Elgin BID* as a way of planting the seed of the idea. It therefore seemed worth building on the experiences of these existing groups and the early interest of emerging groups to explore the possibility of developing new collaborations.

A workshop was designed which involved a mix of peer to peer learning, discussion and focused workshop activities.

The aims of the session were to:

- Share best practice**
- Explore the opportunities and potential challenges of collaboration**
- Identify some essential elements of support**

Guest speakers *Sarah Holmes* of *Pencil Me In* and *Angharad Rogers* of *Angharad Bridal* joined us to share their experiences of collaborative working groups. We then used insights from their experience as a foundation for some simple group exercises to explore potential opportunities and challenges. We also considered what types of support structures could help with any new working groups which may emerge.



Workshop Outcomes

Although the workshop was attended by only four businesses, it resulted in the generation of lots of ideas as well as questions for further investigation.

There was a clear drive and enthusiasm from businesses in the West end of Elgin to begin their own working group and the benefits of developing ways of working together to increase footfall were seen to far outweigh the inevitable challenges.

The workshop helped participants to identify such benefits and think about ways to communicate these to other businesses in their area as well as to learn from some of the challenges experienced by established groups.

All the material from the workshop was analysed and four main areas of opportunity were identified. Each opportunity area came with clearly communicated benefits as well as a list of things to consider in terms of managing the challenges of collaboration.

A short visual summary was provided to each participant as a way of capturing the learning from the workshop and as a tool to help guide the early stages of setting up new groups.

Communicating the benefits of collaboration and getting businesses involved was identified as a key challenge, so it is also hoped that the summary will prove to be a valuable resource when communicating the benefits of working together with businesses.



This project has evidenced the benefits of applying a creative approach within a business context and indicates the huge potential of collaborations between the creative sector and traditional independent High Street business.

More work is indicated to build on the relationships and emerging networks which were developed in the final stages of Creative Centre's and to explore how a creative approach and cross sector collaboration could support the development of a framework of ongoing support for collaborative working groups in Elgin centre.

There is opportunity to build on a strong foundation and to develop rich and productive networks which link city centre businesses with the creative sector in Moray. This type of cross-sector collaboration could help support existing and emerging collaborative working groups in the centre of Elgin to develop a strong brand identity for Elgin and increase footfall.



Deliver - Summary of Recommendations

The research carried out in this short project indicates three high level goals in which a creative approach to regeneration could be utilised to impact on footfall in Elgin centre.

These are as listed below:

- Supporting the sustainability of business clusters or collaborative working groups within the city centre.
- A holistic public art strategy which integrates and employs a participatory approach to city centre development.
- The development of a strong overarching brand for Elgin city centre which ties together the strong strands of heritage, culture and community and which effectively communicates the existing and emerging culture of independent businesses within the centre.

In the short to medium-term there are projects which could help support or contribute to the development of these overarching goals. The following 'SMART Goals' are suggestions of projects which could be achievable within a short, defined time frame and which have been designed to have a fairly modest budget of around £5,000 or under. The first goal is a direct development of work done during the Creative Centre's project and the further goals look at suggestions for using creative participation to activate city centre spaces and increase footfall.

Supporting Collaboration

Creative support for the development of two new collaborative working groups for independent businesses

Elgin Exhibition Trail

A curated year round exhibition programme hosted by multiple venues within the city centre

Art After Hours

Regular 'For Enjoyment' sessions hosted by cafés and other venues during the evening

Activating Hidden Spaces

Outdoor art trail for Elgin centre. A series of small commissioned works to restore unloved spaces & draw attention to hidden treasures



Supporting Business Collaboration

Goal - East & West end collaborative groups

To work with city centre businesses to establish a further two collaborative working groups.

Time frame

Pilot over a 12 week period.

Outline

This project would see a creative practitioner working with businesses in the West and East end of Elgin to establish new collaborative working groups.

The aims would be:

- To facilitate networking sessions to promote the benefits of collaboration
- To establish a core steering group in each area
- To develop a brand/ theme for their area or sector
- To support the group to develop a programme of events which link to holidays or theme days

The role of the creative practitioner would be:

- To facilitate meetings & workshops
- To visualise and communicate outcomes
- To provide support to develop marketing materials
- To support the groups in brand development
- To support the group in developing a programme of events to generate footfall

Creative Participation

Goal - Elgin exhibition trail

To work with city centre businesses to establish a curated exhibition programme spanning multiple venues across the city centre with an aim to have four exhibitions per year which run for three months each, providing year round interest.

Time frame

Pilot framework developed over a 12 week period.

Outline

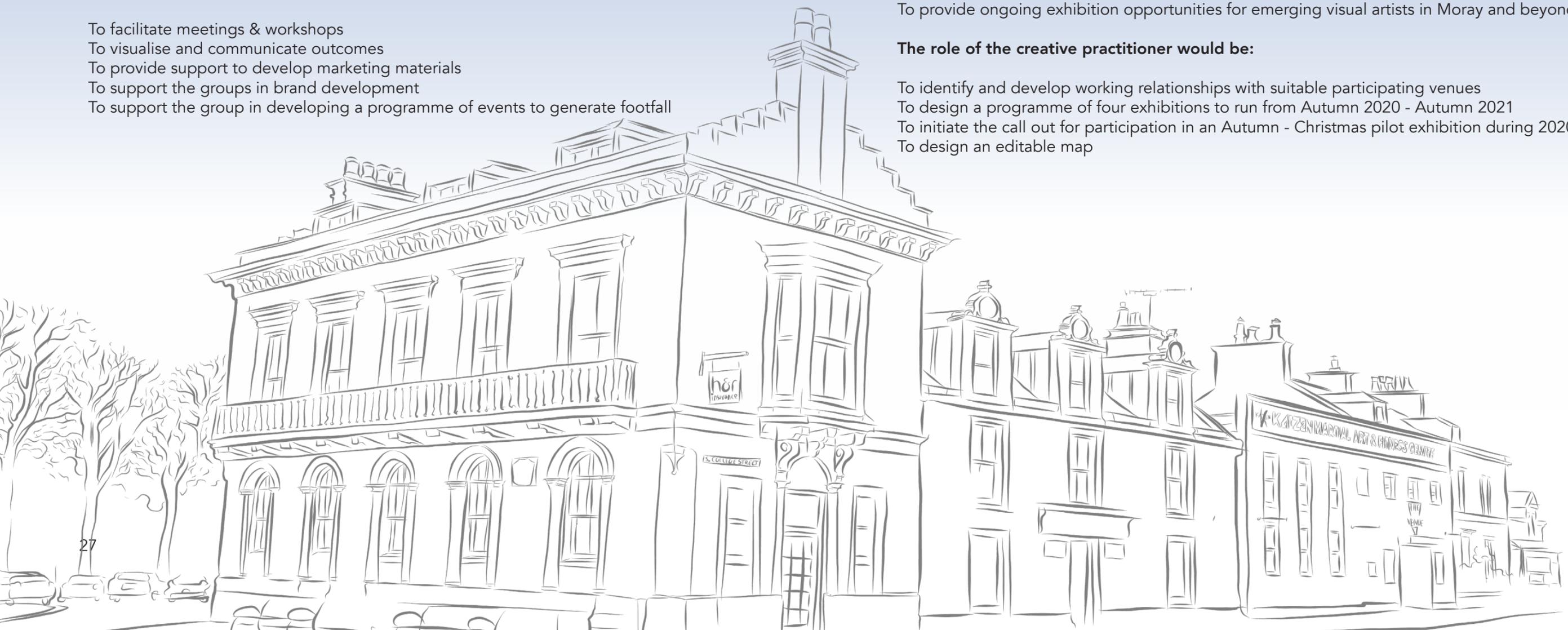
This project would see a creative practitioner working with businesses and venues within the city centre to develop an exhibition trail and associated map.

The aims would be:

- To create an attraction which would bring visitors into the city centre and provide an incentive to visit multiple venues multiple times during the year
- To contribute to promoting Elgin as a cultural destination with interesting experiences to discover
- To provide ongoing exhibition opportunities for emerging visual artists in Moray and beyond

The role of the creative practitioner would be:

- To identify and develop working relationships with suitable participating venues
- To design a programme of four exhibitions to run from Autumn 2020 - Autumn 2021
- To initiate the call out for participation in an Autumn - Christmas pilot exhibition during 2020
- To design an editable map



Goal - Art after hours

To work with city centre businesses to establish regular art sessions within cafés and other venues to contribute to a vibrant night time economy in Elgin centre.

Time frame

Pilot framework developed over a 12 week period.

Outline

This project would see a creative practitioner working in partnership with Moray Wellbeing Hub and local venues to establish regular after hours art sessions within cafés in the city centre.

The aims would be:

To generate focused footfall during the evenings to support late night opening events and contribute to the night time economy

The role of the creative practitioner would be:

To identify and develop working relationships with suitable participating venues
To liaise with Moray wellbeing Hub to design a pilot project with participating venues
To work with existing collaborative working groups such as *Buzz on Batchen* and surrounding businesses to integrate events with late night shopping or other promotions
To work with BID to integrate events with other planned events or activities

Goal - Activating hidden spaces

To work with businesses and property owners in the city centre to creatively activate a range of spaces which are currently run-down or hidden and to work towards the development of an outdoor art trail for Elgin centre.

Time frame

Framework developed over a 12 week period.

Outline

This project would see a creative practitioner working in partnership with Elgin BID and Moray Council to develop a pilot for an outdoor art trail in Elgin.

The aims would be:

To beautify areas which have become run-down or uncared for
To encourage visitors to explore the interesting architecture of Elgin through the highlighting of hidden spaces
To support emerging creative talent within Moray from *Moray School of Art* and beyond

The role of the creative practitioner would be:

To identify suitable locations and secure initial sites for a pilot
To work with partners to establish relationships with and gain permissions from building owners
To develop a template and generate designs for an editable map
To help in the recruitment and selection of artists for a pilot project



Useful Links & Further Reading

The following list provides links to some of the projects and organisations mentioned in this report. This list also points to some national, international and more local examples of projects which use creative engagement to increase footfall. The final link highlights the *Grimsey Review 2*, which is a thoroughly researched paper on High Street Regeneration, pointing to the High Street moving away from big retail and towards becoming a 'complete community hub'

It is hoped that these examples, along with this report of the Creative Centre's project will provide a useful resource in informing next steps for creative regeneration within Elgin centre.

The Stove Network

<https://thestove.org/>

Midsteeple Quarter

<https://www.midsteeplequarter.org/>

The Town Collection, Deveron Projects - Huntly

<https://www.deveron-projects.com/town-collection/>

Painted Doors Project - Aberdeen

<https://www.visitabdn.com/listing/painted-doors>

MAUS - Malaga

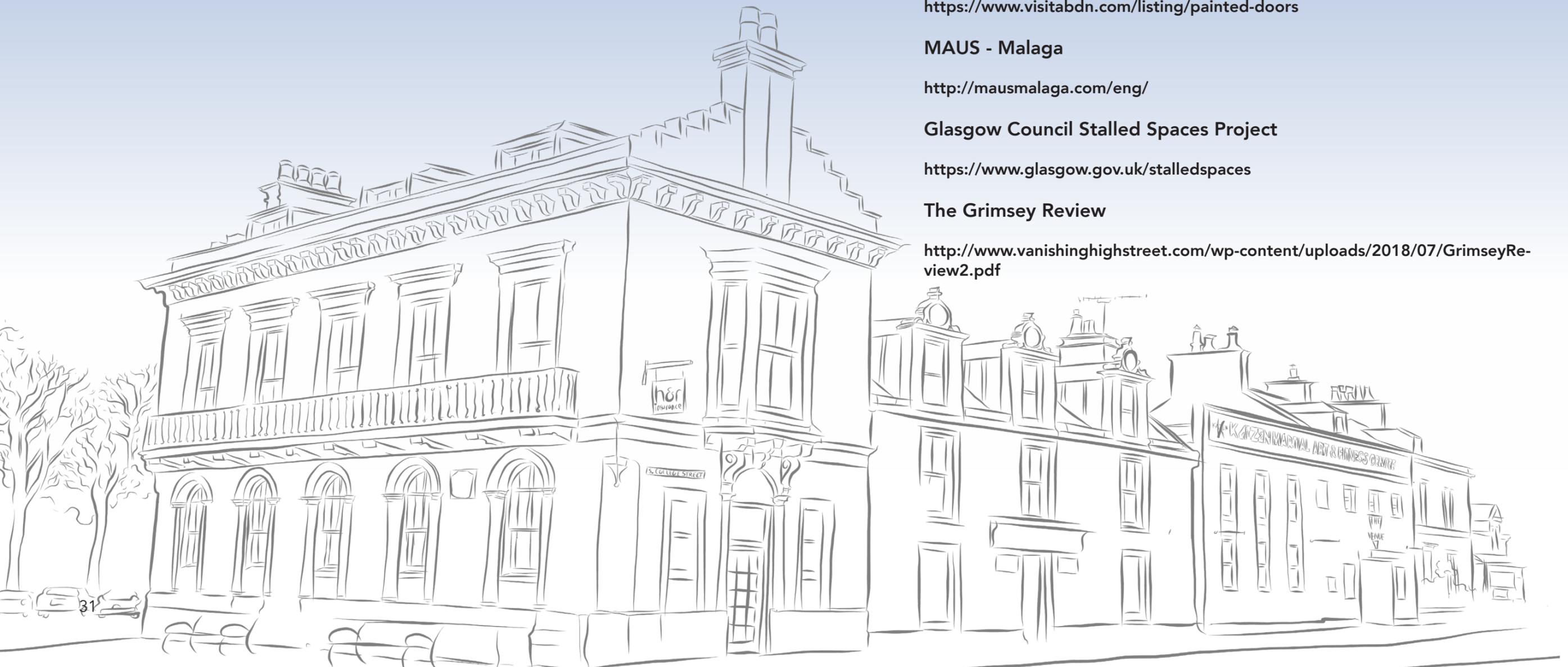
<http://mausmalaga.com/eng/>

Glasgow Council Stalled Spaces Project

<https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/stalledspaces>

The Grimsey Review

<http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GrimseyReview2.pdf>



Thank You!

Many thanks to all who participated in this project:

Elgin BID
We Make Moray
M:ADE
UHI
Moray School of Art
Anderson's Care Home
Elgin Youth Development Group
St Giles Centre
Elgin Museum
Pencil Me In
Angharad Bridal
Scribbles Restaurant
Qismat Restaurant



