

## Reconnecting Runcorn

### Creative and Digital Skills Centre

#### Open Day 12 July 2022 and online feedback responses

Thanks to everyone who came to our Open Day, or shared views via the survey on <https://reconnectingruncorn.info/>. We hope to host further consultations and open days as the project develops and will advertise these opportunities on the Council's social media and Reconnecting Runcorn website. The email address [reconnectingruncorn@halton.gov.uk](mailto:reconnectingruncorn@halton.gov.uk) is always open for queries

*Q1. With regard to repurposing vacant High Street properties, one member of the public asked for "shops that sell useful things" in the town centre, another mentioned "not just take aways, barbers and charity shops".*

A1. Whilst the Council would welcome interest from retailers, it is not in the gift of the Local Authority to attract specific commercial retailers. Retailers will decide for themselves to invest here, or not. The Local Authority wants to make the town centre more attractive for private investment by refurbishing historic properties and help reducing vacancy rates. The overarching aim of the Towns Fund is to drive the sustainable economic regeneration of towns to deliver long term economic and productivity growth. The Governments funding aims are Regeneration, Skills and Enterprise facilities, and Connectivity.

*Q2. With regard to refurbishing the Camden buildings, one member of the public suggested, "that whole terrace need demolishing and replaced by residential accommodation".*

A2. Whilst the Camden buildings are not listed buildings, the Local Authority does not want to demolish the block (or terrace) but wants to try save the historic properties that dominate the appearance of the High Street. Six different properties make up the Camden buildings block. The Council owns three of six, one has been empty for 25 years, and two have private owners with successful businesses. Even if it wanted to, the legal ownership situation would make it very hard to demolish the whole block. The Council intends to refurbish and repurpose the four vacant properties.

*Q3. How did the Council select the organisations mentioned?*

A3. The Council shared initial project ideas with the Local Cultural Education Partnership during their meetings in 2020 and 2021. Following this, a number of organisations came forward with expressions of interest to be involved in this project.

*Q4. What is proposed to ensure disability access and facilities in the units?*

A4. In line with building regulations, where the public can access the upper floors, a lift is part of the plans, as well as accessible toilets. Furthermore, different organisations will take further considerations into account for their specific client base.

*Q5. Who are the organisations to go in the centre aiming their services at, and how can they assist local people in gaining relevant skills for employment?*

A5. Although no final decision on participating organisations has been made, conversations have been held with:

A Place for Us – A dynamic Performing Arts Academy and a critically acclaimed Theatre Company for those of the age 7 -19 offering the chance for their students to develop their Self-confidence, presentational skills, team work, flexibility, creative thinking resilience and self-discipline skills.

Halton Community Radio – HCR is a community radio station broadcasting to the whole of Halton. HCR is a fully volunteer-led organisation, run by the people of Halton, for the people of Halton. HCR brings people together in Halton, providing a platform to broadcast and allows their presenters to have a safe, inclusive space for members of the community to learn, build confidence, and express themselves.

Hazlehurst Artist Studios – A creative hub situated in the heart of Runcorn. Hazlehurst offer an affordable and like-minded environment for artists and makers in Halton. Hazlehurst currently houses 10 artists within their existing studios with expertise in a range of disciplines including Photography, Textiles and Printmaking.

Mako Create – Provide fascinating experiences, which inspire communities to embrace creativity and express themselves. They achieve this through improving peoples' knowledge and understanding of digital arts, media and technology. This inspires people to have confidence in their ability to learn new skills and empowers them to utilise their skills in a positive way, which helps to enhance their lives.

Power in Partnership - PIP believes that all young people have the potential to develop their own skills and talents given encouragement and a learning environment that helps them to study in a non-traditional, community based setting rather than using an academic, class based approach.

*Q6. Will there be spaces that other groups could hire?*

A6. The project aims to create a variety of spaces, including a so-called 'winter garden' in 59 High Street. In the first instance, these spaces are available for the organisations who will lease the buildings from the Council. If, and how these spaces become available to third party groups, will be dependent on the organisations who will take up the responsibility through leases for the units. Any local organisation in the creative and digital sector can express interest for a lease.