

Real Ideas Organisation

Looe Business & Learning Initiative

2023



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1. Introduction

This report is the Stage One output for the Looe Business and Learning Initiative.

Initiated by Looe Town Council (LTC) and supported by Cornwall Council through the Town Vitality and Town Accelerator fund, the initiative aimed to surface insight and build further consensus around the challenges and opportunities for local economic development in Looe, southeast Cornwall.

The work builds on prior economic research by PFA Research Ltd (Aug 2022) and Horscroft Research Solutions (Aug 2022) that painted a detailed, mixed and complex picture of the local economy. While areas of strength and growth are clearly evident, a range of minority, yet significant, needs or missed opportunities were identified around areas such as inward investment, skills and business workspace. Being presented with this complex cocktail of smaller, but nevertheless important, needs creates a challenge in terms of how to respond, what interventions to pursue and how to build a sufficient consensus for action, particularly in the context of sustained economic scarcity and uncertainty.

In the face of this complex challenge, there was a shared sense from LTC and the Business and Learning working group of a need to think broader, to engage deeper and to understand better the concerns and aspirations of the town's learning and business communities.

While there is a shared view that Looe is a unique and special place, simultaneously it shares many of the same challenges, opportunities and questions of other towns. How to support established businesses to grow, adapt and sustain; how to better build and retain a local skills base; and how to nurture new start-ups and embrace emerging economic sectors, such as culture, digital and the environment? How could Looe further build a local economy that works for the long term and for everyone?

From here, through a tendering process, the Real Ideas Organisation were commissioned to undertake this Stage One Study, based around a series of structured conversation interviews with local representatives of Looe's business and learning community and an open engagement event, culminating in this summative report.

The interview sample was by its nature informed, yet convenient, and to an extent iterative, where interviewees made suggestions as to other local actors to interview. The process was highly qualitative and relational, all with the view to providing practical clarity while at the same time building a sufficiently shared view.

The method, key findings and summary of the interviews and open engagement session are outlined below and in the Appendices.

2. What we did – method

Structured Conversations

To hear from and collect data from a broad cross section of stakeholders and groups in the town, whilst ensuring sufficient depth of information, a series of structured conversations, interviews were undertaken with people representing different business/enterprise and learning/skills groups and interests in the town. Interviews were conducted in person and online.

Interviewees were initially contacted via email with the subject line of “Community Economic Development for Looe”, where interviews began with a broader general conversation about the town and then focussed down further on to more economic matters, relating to business and learning.

In total 15 conversations were undertaken, with the following people and organisations:

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|---------------------------|---|
| Helena Jaycock | Cornish Collection |
| Nicola Lloyd | Cornwall Trade & Investment |
| Justin Spreckley | Looe Development Trust |
| Simon Ryan | Three Seas/Coast Guard Cottages/Looe CLT |
| Brian Galipeau & Jane Day | East Looe Town Trust |
| Scott Yalden | Looe Academy Trust/School |
| Jimmy Dingle | West Looe Town Trust/Local Business |
| Cllr Armand Toms | Councillor/West Looe Town Trust |
| Kim Spencer | Looe Development Trust/Wringworthy |
| Stephen Horscroft | Researcher |
| Stuart Haresnape | Looe Town Council/Entrepreneur |
| Tina Hicks & Dave Jackman | Looe Harbour CEO and Harbour Masters |
| Lindsey Hall | Real Ideas CEO, Liskeard and Seaton |
| Barney Baron | Boundless Trust |
| Tim Gundry | Resident/photographer/ Assistant Dean Arts University Plymouth |

The structured conversations, while conducted in an open conversational manner, all followed a broad structure and set of questions, to allow for a coherent shared picture to emerge. The guiding questions were as follows:

Introduction: Tell me a bit about your work and organisation.

- 1) What do you love about Looe, what works well? What are the key assets and strengths?
- 2) What doesn't work well, what could be better/improved?

- 3) What are the barriers to improvement?
- 4) Thinking more about your organisation/business, what are the problems you are trying to solve? What are you working/focussed on currently?
- 5) Have you been involved in any past or current partnerships and projects in the town? Tell me about that?
- 6) Thinking more about the local economy, skills and training, opportunities for young people, support for new and existing businesses, what does the landscape and offer look like here? How could that be improved?
- 7) What could you bring to a wider business and learning partnership, how could this benefit you?
- 8) What does Looe need in way of business space?
- 9) Blue sky thinking, if you could have one ask and change one thing, what would that be?
- 10) What have we not asked, what are we missing?

Interviewees were also asked to suggest other people and organisations in the town that might be useful to speak to.

A summary of the outcomes from the structured conversations is given in Appendix I, page 11.

Community Engagement Drop-in Session

Following the interviews, to support greater engagement and inclusion, allowing for anyone from Looe to join the conversation and to contribute their ideas, an open community engagement drop-in workshop with members of the Real Ideas team and LTC was held on the 15th February 2024 at the Millpool Centre in West Looe.

A summary of the outcomes from the workshop is given in Appendix II, page 18.

3. Key Findings

While a write-up of the fuller responses from the individual structured conversations listed above can be found in Appendix I, recurring and prominent themes have been further summarised below. In addition, some early reflections on potential viable ways forward and lines of enquiry that merit further consideration have also been outlined.

3.1 Recurring and Prominent Themes

The below section provides a summary of the recurring and prominent themes that were highlighted by a range of interviewees. Due to their reoccurring nature, certain themes exhibited a greater degree of prominence and consensus across the interviewees. They identify common areas of challenge and opportunity and subsequently begin to inform ways forward for the Business and Learning Initiative.

An intuitive/light coding process was used to pull out and group similar ideas, challenges, concepts, opportunities, etc, where they were repeated numerous times. Based around the key areas of the enquiry, what works well, what doesn't, and the economic concepts of business and learning, a number of key themes emerged.

What do you love about Looe, what works well? What are the key assets and strengths?

- Tourism, hospitality and accommodation in Looe are major sources of revenue and employment in the town. This is generally a quality and increasingly higher value offer and provides some opportunity for expansion and development.
- There is a strong sense of community, positive identity and civic pride within the town. People tend to turn out, join in and volunteer to support a range of events, activities and initiatives in the town.
- The town has considerable natural and built assets and heritage: the sea front/beach, harbour, high street, woodlands and rivers, etc. These are high quality and well maintained by organisations within the town.
- The town is good at putting on events and cultural activities and offers a diverse and full programme of activities over the season and into the shoulder months. This cultural "placemaking" benefits the community, local business and visitors alike.

What could be better/improved (what doesn't work?), what are the barriers?

- Housing prices are significantly high and transport and connectivity in and out of the town are difficult and can be expensive. While the town is quite well situated in the context of Cornwall, transport remains a barrier. Coupled with high housing costs and prices, this restricts the disposable income of households and exacerbates exclusion and social problems.
- There is a very limited post-16 and wider skills and training offer. While there is a perceived level of "brain-drain" where younger people who are able to leave, leave, there are limited options for those who stay to progress and build a career beyond the hospitality sector. A lack of social mobility and aspiration were also noted as well as needs around skilled trades and new economy sector such as creative, digital and green skills.
- There was a general sense of, that to an extent, there is a lack of unity and an element of factionalism in the town where, with some exceptions, groups do not always sufficiently support each other or work well enough together. Often restricted for good reasons, organisational rules, funding, etc., groups have tended to focus on their own specific areas, to the cost of working together on collective, town wide, shared challenges and opportunities.
- A view of a "two-speed" Looe was frequently noted where people often pointed to growing perception of inequalities entrenching in the town. Mirrored across the county, and the nation, there was a noted growing socio-economic division between, for example: people owning property and business and

those servicing them, people who have the aspiration/opportunity to leave and those who don't, incomers with wealth and second homes and longer-term residents. Ideas of hidden poverty, isolation and a growing sub-class were mentioned, as was an increased need for relief-type projects i.e. food banks and hardship funds etc.

Business and learning, local economy, workspace and skills?

- There was a broad recognition that there is not enough business and workspace, of all sorts, both across Cornwall more generally and specifically within Looe. While there is a pipeline of new space, such as the Old Lifeboat building on the sea front and the subsequent freeing up of space at the Guildhall, and potential light industrial work units in planning for Kimlers Way and Polean, the timings and outcomes here are unclear. Even if all these developments proceed, this would only provide an element of what may well be needed and, would probably not provide for a more serviced office/hotdesking offer and may have limits to what they might be able to create in terms of skills and training.
- While a number of people did not have a view on a more specific development at the Millpool site, on balance, more people were generally in favour of a development than against. There was a feeling that such a development could play a role in supporting aspirations around inward investments/relocations, the start-up and growth of enterprise, the diversification of the local economy and create opportunities around supporting aspiration, training, upskilling and re-skilling. The objections raised related more to questions of land ownership, flood risk and a perception that any scheme would require significant loan financing. Any scheme would need to be resourced by government grant funding and not place a burden on the local precept. Therefore, having a shovel ready scheme would be advantageous in securing funding.
- The gap around a more localised skills and training offer was repeatedly highlighted across the majority of interviewees. While the visitor and hospitality sector is generally self-managing in this area, underlining its strength as a sector, little else was identified. A need for upskilling, training and reskilling was identified, for younger as well as older people. The need for more traditional trades and apprenticeships was pointed to, as well as the need to create opportunities in new, more knowledge-based and potentially inspirational sectors, such as creative and cultural, digital and technology and the environmental green sector.
- While the local fishing industry remains established and solid, and showing some level of growth and more land-based industries remain steady, there was a common perception the town has increasingly become a mono-economy, highly oriented towards the visitor and hospitality sectors. While this is clearly an economic golden goose for Looe, with all economic models there are trade-offs. In addition to contributing to questions around high house prices and lower wages, etc. there was a noted danger around over reliance on one dominating sector. Looe having too many eggs in one basket and a lack of diversity in the economy was highlighted.

In terms of “community economic development for Looe” and ideas around business and learning, from the 15 structured conversation interviews, three areas of possible consensus have emerged, that could form the basis of a way forward and are therefore worthy of further consideration.

1. **Business space** - the development, creation and provision of additional and new types of business and workspace in Looe, supporting both existing and new business as well as training and skills, is needed. The question of what, where and how merit further discussion and it is worth noting that government funding tends to prioritise the three areas of: skills, business development and capital projects.
2. **Training and skills** – linked and supported by point 1 above, the research points to a significant gap in provision and subsequent need around the creation of a more local skills and training offer for the town. While this need and aspiration was highlighted by people and organisations across Looe’s communities, responding to this challenge, given the changing nature of the learning and skills landscape will require an innovative approach.
3. **Heritage Culture and Events** – building on what interviewees highlighted as an area where Looe excels, drawing on the town’s strength around culture, community and volunteering and equally making an offer to local residents and the town’s core visitor economy alike, there seems to be consensus around putting some developmental focus on Looe’s cultural activities and annual event programme. In addition to supporting and building on what is there, a focus on cultural and creative industries can further drive opportunities around skills, workspace and help extend the season.

To explore this further, these three development areas were taken to the Community Engagement Drop-in Session on the 15th Feb for further workshoping and wider discussion.

Community Engagement Drop-in Session

The Community Engagement Drop-in Session, while not hugely well attended (on a wet evening in February), did create the space for an additional set of engagements and a number of high quality and enthusiastic conversations.

Based around the three discussion areas of business space, training, skills and development and events and culture, the key points are summarised below and a fuller write up of the conversations is given in Appendix II, page 18.

The Drop-in event conversations further fleshed out and added a level of richness and weight to the conversations to date. All areas were given extra support by the attendees, with the areas of business spaces and skills and training attracting the most comment.

The area of culture and events was built on further, particularly with the idea of more sports and physical activity focussed events. The Looe Pioneers and their annual 10k Hillish and Hellish trail running race was

highlighted, attracting 500-600 people into the town off-season, as was their expressed desire to develop additional events in the autumn. The Looe Regatta and raft races were also noted, in addition to the town's excellent access to local footpaths, trails and high-quality countryside.

The idea of culture and events was augmented by the discussions, particularly around the idea of some need to provide support around the skills and administrative structures, to better enable more and better events. The extent to which Looe required more of a cultural strategy was discussed, as was the wider idea of "placemaking", which is given further consideration in the following section.

The need for a greater, more accessible and localised skills and training offer was given significant weight in the discussions. There was recognition of a need around more traditional trade-based skills, as well as practical generic skills, around areas such as health and safety and first aid, linked to the events and culture discussion. Conversations also covered training more specific to business support and development, business planning, marketing and mentoring were all cited. Particularly in the context of high levels of local self-employment and the need to support start-up and younger people. Linked to this, conversations also shifted into areas of broader business development. Opportunities and needs around areas such as town marketing, a Town Team and some form of local business network or chamber of commerce where all touched upon. In addition to being linked back to the ideas of skills and training, the need for business and training space, a place where training could happen, bringing enterprise and learning together was also given significant weight.

Building once again on the outcomes from the structured interview phase, the lack of, and the need for business and workspace of all sorts was highlighted repeatedly. Both the need for more "dry" space to support start-ups, hotdesking and more private serviced offer, as well as training and skills, and "wet" space, light industrial units to support small scale production and trades. In addition to what came out in the interview stages a number of new ideas also emerged. Questions over the ownership of a number of key town centre buildings, such as the old Lloyds Bank building were interrogated, as well as an apparent need to provide an additional level of storage space to support existing business.

3.2 Considerations and Lines of Enquiry

The Horscroft and PDF research reports pointed to a complex economic picture. A diversity of "significant minority" needs and potentially missed opportunities that individually taken alone might struggle to warrant intervention. However, given a range of compounding needs i.e. inward investment and external funding opportunities; the lack of business space and post 16 and adult education offers; a predominantly seasonal and lower wage economy, taken together, amount to a larger challenge in need of attention.

In larger more urban areas the breadth of need/opportunity and the scale of the market, creates the conditions for a division of labour i.e. a big enough need that a broad post-16 educational offer can be justified and resourced, or a sector specific workspace can be easily filled and economically viable.

Conversely, in smaller, more rural markets a broad range of offers and solutions need to be aggregated into a proportionate set of more encompassing initiatives, requiring a greater level of creativity and consideration.

Furthermore, this complex picture, which can be tricky to respond to, is potentially aggravated by a set of apparent dualities. For instance, Looe has a strong and enviable visitor economy, yet this is set against and potentially indirectly contributes to, a level of hidden poverty and social exclusion; the town is also well situated at the upper end of the county close to Plymouth, but problematic road and rail links over the last 7/8 miles makes access and transport harder; while there has been a reported sense of factionalism, common in any town or neighbourhood, there are high levels of volunteering and positive community action and; the area is blessed with an outstanding natural beauty and built heritage, though as a result, space for development is limited and the town is subject to flooding. As a result, any intervention can be exposed to easy criticism.

As a consequence of this diversity of smaller, yet collectively more substantial, needs and conflicting dualities, inaction and the choice of doing nothing can seem like a tempting option. However, given known longer-term trends of growing economic inequalities, climate change and increased localisation, there is a need to act and to begin to put in place a sustainable strategy for the future.

The three areas of consensus, or lines of enquiry, identified at the interview stage were further supported at the open engagement session and can therefore be considered to be valid. They also make sense at a more strategic level i.e. they are in line with national funding priorities and by their nature are able to attract a range of possible partner organisations.

Furthermore, cultural activities and events (or cultural offer and placemaking), skills training and business development and business workspace (capital projects to drive local economic development), all overlap significantly, creating a synergy where each strand is supportive of the other.

How this activity can be practically taken forward is given some consideration in the following section.

4. Next steps and recommendations

As a next step to taking forward the Looe Business and Learning Initiative, based on the research, engagement event and prior experience, the following recommendations are put forward.

- The Looe Business and Learning Initiative has developed momentum and the process to date has begun to bring in some new voices and partners. This should be maintained and nurtured, conversations should be broadened and continued. Some consideration might be given to language, “enterprise” could be considered a more contemporary phrase which may better appeal to new sector SMEs, such as technology and social enterprise. Likewise, “training” and/or “skills” may sit better with businesses, partners, funders and the target group of more adult learners.

- The majority of government funding is geared towards economic development: skills, business support and capital projects, Looe is increasingly well positioned here and the concept of deprivation in coastal towns is durable and unlikely disappear. With a forthcoming general election and the past round of the shared prosperity fund (SPF) now closed, future funding is less clear. However, a number of things are likely. Whether there is a change of government or not, before the next administration develops and puts new programmes into action, there is likely to be an element of stop gap funding, using the current existing frameworks i.e. SPF and Levelling Up. Furthermore, there may well be underspends from the previous SPF rounds in Cornwall, which will become apparent as we move into the Spring. Hence, being sufficiently prepared with a “shovel ready” capital project(s), and associated revenue delivery programmes (business support and skills) is advised.
- While a planning application for new business and workspace should be submitted, a low-risk option that banks the opportunity for the future, any further progress towards delivery does not need to be pursued immediately. However, there is a current need for skills and business support initiatives and work in this area could be considered now. Even a relatively small intervention would not only create outcomes for business and trainees but would also help to build local intelligence and capacity, partnerships and networks, and a track record in this area. Hence, shorter term delivery programmes and partnerships should be explored and pursued where funding can be identified. One example here could be to explore how to make greater use of Looe’s existing and/or retired business community as mentors for new starters. Conversations seem to suggest that there is an untapped resource here.
- Where programmes around business support and training could be considered a smart path to take – it is hard to argue against good economic development and opportunities for young people - an earlier focus on cultural events and activities could also be considered equally sensible and in many ways complementary. In addition to building on what is good in Looe - its ability to put on a good show and get people together - it works well for a range of stakeholders, supporting the visitor economy and local community cohesion alike. Furthermore, it can legitimately be positioned as a key plank of a local economic development strategy. Torridge District Council currently has a significant focus on culture and placemaking, not as a tourist strategy, but primarily as an approach to attracting new business to the area. When companies consider relocations, attracting staff and skills, they will be keen to offer a good quality of life and therefore the culture of a place is often a key part of their consideration. “Placemaking” and a good “cultural offer” are a central part of economic development. These offers also have the potential to stimulate new start-ups and training opportunities, in support areas such as marketing and design, and could begin to position the town to take advantage of other forms of funding, from the likes of the Arts Council and National Lottery Heritage Fund. The NLHF supported Moor to Sea and Smugglers Way trail project provides for a good example here, which is aiming to deliver a Spoken Word festival in autumn/winter 2024. The towns current programme of events including the Looe Weekender, Lights Up and Tractor Parade should all be considered community and cultural assets that can be built on and learned from.

- While the process of beginning to consider delivery and exploring external funding opportunities can commence now, it should avoid the temptation to go too big too soon. To build capacity, track record and to bring people along with it, early interventions should focus on doing something small, but done well, with the view to building for the longer term and making sustainable change. Starting to understand the particular role, or roles, the Town Council wishes to play here would be good to test out and iterate through the process. How much does it see itself in a delivery role, or more as a partner and enabler? These would be good to explore and develop further. For instance, the initial stated difficulties of developing the Food Festival have been turned into a positive, with the event now being handed over to other partners. An early win might be understanding and acting to support Looe Pioneers with a possible idea to develop an additional race event in November time. Supporting ideas such as this, or similar, could be a relatively small but effective intervention, growing additional and new off-season events, testing ways of working and developing new partnerships. Conversations also highlighted other active and successful groups - sea swimmers, sailing and other water sport groups and marine conservation - that should be considered as cultural assets and potentially engaged.
- Identifying and beginning to further nurture and develop partners should form part of the next steps, both locally around the town and with key organisations and institutions in the sub-regional areas. Some of the town's Trusts are seeking to bring forward capital business focused developments, these should be celebrated and supported as needed, as part of a wider coalition of partners working to similar ends. Local partnerships with other interested groups and individuals in the town with shared aspirations should be invested in, with the view to taking tangible action, e.g. Looe Pioneers. Beyond this, Looe should seek to further identify and develop partnership with relevant institutions and organisations in the skills and training, culture and development sectors. These organisations will have particular experience and capacity in these areas, and some may well have a greater interest in Looe i.e. Arts University Plymouth provide a range of creative business support programmes, have an interest in the local creative economy and have staff that live in the town. The Real Ideas Organisation has similar interests. Link exits with Falmouth University, which provides increasing level of online content and has been rate as the number 1 in the UK for graduates starting or running their own business. It would be good to engaged wider with other local FE, HE and post-16 training providers, as well as key institutions and funders within the economic development space.
- While the immediate focus should be on partnerships and some quick win activity, alongside and informed by this, there is a need for greater business and longer-term planning. How could activities be developed and resourced over time, how can income generating partnerships and initiatives be developed, and how can these feed into a viable business case and ultimately more detailed plan for a new building, as and when it comes forward. The process of partnership development and delivery will all begin to inform this, creating and increasingly shovel ready and fundable capital programme.

- Finally, wrapping around and building on the above, some greater consideration could be given to the idea of mission and strategy – what are the shared aspirations for Looe and the collective problems we are trying to solve? While more practical and instrumental initiatives such as a building or particular programmes may well attract their supporters and detractors, a wider shared big picture and stated mission could both inspire, drive momentum, attract positive external attention and help to unify more voices. Phrases such as “community economic development for Looe” and “building a local economy that works for the long term and for everyone”, could provide clues as to a starting point here. Further to this is, the idea of leaning into the fact that southeast Cornwall has, to an extent been overlooked historically, in terms of Cornwall based funding. With other towns such as Liskeard and Saltash keen to do more and better here, the idea of wider partnership working, or a wider southeast Cornwall strategy should be kept in mind.

5. Appendices

Appendix I – Structured conversations

NB: the narrative below reflects a summary of what interview subjects told us, from which recommendations have been developed. They do not necessarily represent the view of the interviewer or Looe Town Council.

1) What do you love about Looe, what works well? What are the key assets and strengths?

- School interactions with the council are good.
- Good work with the library and school
- School work experience for young people is quite well supported by local businesses.
- Good local cadets offer for young people and new youth offer at the Haven.
- Many young people stay within the local area.
- West Looe Town Trust provide support with funding bursaries for young people, similar from East Looe Town Trust.
- Good community use of college sports fields.
- Millpool centre well used as a dry hire community space and washes its face.
- Local Trusts and Harbour Commissioners, do good work, but restricted within their areas/rules.
- Looe Development Trusts seeks to provide a bridge link between local trusts/groups and bring people together.
- **Lots of volunteering, good community spirit and people turn out to get involved.**
- **Tourism and hospitality are good and a key income for the town.**
- **Looe is really good at putting on events, people turn out, people volunteer/help and they bring lots of people into town.**
- **High street generally does well, few vacancies, but some signs of decline/people selling-up.**
- Harbour – very well run.
- Many of the holiday camps are better run and high value, but increasingly try to keep people on site, so less spend in town.
- WLTT – does good work in supporting education and young people through grants.
- Portbyhan Hotel – good example/well run.
- **People get on and do things around the town, lots of informal volunteering.**
- **Really good beach, very well maintained.**
- **Events, celebrations and festivals are really good in the town.**
- Lots of work and jobs supported by tourism and hospitality.
- Great heritage and fishing industry, beautiful town and historic buildings and quay.
- Hospitality often provides a good “first job” opportunity for young people to learn core work skills: timeliness, customer service, teamwork, confidence, etc.
- Good exchange of knowledge/skills between hospitality business, often self-managing and well networked in terms of training.
- Lots of key leaders in the hospitality/tourism sector.
- Working port - still has established and slowly growing fishing industry.
- Being close to the sea is a big asset and makes the area attractive to businesses wanting to relocate.
- New Guildhall Clock Tower recently renovated. Guildhall will provide additional space as East Looe Town Trust will move to the Old Life Boat Station and Lookout Building.
- The Trusts and Harbor Commission often work well together, i.e. sharing plant and equipment.
- Wooldown is a good natural asset for the town.
- There is plenty of work, not really a worklessness problem.
- Food club and food banks are a good service, provides meals for older more isolated people.
- The fishmongers at the new yard/quay
- Fundraising for local causes often good/successful.
- Good local retail offer and centre of employment.
- Tourism is double edged and a bit of a trade-off, good general income and employment for the town, but most jobs are lower paid and it distorts the housing market and creates a bit of a mono-economy.
- Local environment is high quality and a key asset, could more be made around environmental industries/services?
- Boundless Trust doing good work at the Haven, also runs foodbank. Works well with all other groups in the town.
- It's a good community, but more than one community, welcoming to people who want to get involved.
- The business units on and around the harbour are all full, good quality well used and in demand.
- A very active fishing fleet - around eight larger commercial trawlers, with a growing amount of more boutique/diversified fishing businesses.

- Above all, the key asset of Looe is its beautiful harbour / scenic landscape combined with its medieval / Victorian heritage and historic buildings and structures
- Harbour has its own fish market and processing facilities, lots of good infrastructure now.
- Annual music festival still does well with a round 10-15,000 footfalls.
- Fishing industry well supported in Cornwall via Cornish Fishing Group.
- People often love the lifestyle in Looe, even though wages are low due to seasonality.
- Access to the water, waterfront and water sports.
- Despite seasonality, the town still manages to “stay open” over winter.
- Community – can take 1 hour to walk down the high street as you meet and talk to so many people you know.
- Not too far down into Cornwall, relatively easy to get in and out.
- **Lots of volunteering.**
- Sailing club is good.
- **Tourism is a big driver.**
- Relatively close to Plymouth.
- Looe is more ripe for development/investment that it has ever been, the quality of the offer is better than ever and lots of useful people in the local area.
- While there are lots of holiday/second homes, still manages to have a sense of being open during the off season. The town is still able to offer a bit of a day-out in winter months and is not overly seasonal yet.
- It is less tatty but still a bit “bucket and spade”, but maybe this is a good thing, it is not Fowey.
- Good volunteering around events, such as the fireworks, boat race and new pioneers running group, good collective will.
- Good collective community spirit doesn’t feel like a ghost town.
- School is good because it is quite small and therefore feels like it has a good community.
- Shops work well together.
- Good location, not too far from bigger places and to come for a day out.
- A good offer including the Sardine Factory, lots of parking, new sea safari place, boats trips and outdoor sports.
- New heritage centre in west Looe is really good.

2) What doesn’t work well, what could be better/improved?

- Paperwork for young people and businesses can be a barrier to work experience and need some administrative support.
- Integrated health centre at school, provide space for lots of pastoral care, but questions over longer term funding.
- Lack of all-weather pitch at community college, has some support from Sports England, but a significant shortfall remains.
- Limited connection between local businesses at community college – missing the voice of the employer.
- While computer science has been introduced, there is a sense that the skills gap is more around general computer literacy i.e. formal letter writing etc.
- Some students did used to attend council meetings but stopped over Covid.
- Much of the past funding around business support/development, skills and Local Action Grants are no longer available and funding is more restricted, hence a gap in support.
- Local Trusts and Harbour Commissioners, do good work, but restricted within their areas/rules.
- **Looe feels like two towns - a bit divided.**
- **The town is quite factional, there is infighting and groups don’t sufficiently support each other/work together.**
- **Limited or no current skills and community education offer.**
- Youth services generally been cut back.
- Looe has quite high council tax/precept, and Town Council has limited/no other income.
- Limited cash points and no banks, but new banking hub.
- Patchy and mixed quality high speed internet across town.
- Lots of inertia in the town, hard to get things going and to create change.
- **There is a two speed Looe, its quite unequal, people owning business/tourism, people in the more lower wage/low skill economy. A big “sub-class”.**
- If you take out tourism – what would you have left?
- **There’s a division, between younger people who have the skills/opportunity to leave, who leave and those who don’t and often get “stuck” in a more zero hours/low pay economy with limited opportunities to upskill/reskill.**
- High street not as good as it used to be, but still does well, some higher turn over now.

- Not enough development of/support for/promotion of events in the town.
- Many of the holiday camps are better run and high value, but try to keep people on site, so less spend in town.
- No longer so many coach visits and day trippers from Plymouth etc.
- Massive shortage of trades people in the local area.
- Some elements of poor customer service.
- **Housing now very expensive and local people priced out. Need to provide more affordable housing.**
- **Transport links in and out of town are problematic, cars/fuel expensive, rail line unreliable, buses not frequent enough.**
- **Too many holiday homes, some suggestion that most are not owned locally.**
- Hospitality often not seen as particularly cool or aspirational for younger people.
- **Limited facilities for young people, The Skate Park not happen/getting stuck has been an issue/disappointment for young people.**
- **Need for training and a lack of apprenticeships available in the town, no post-16 offer, not enough vocational training.**
- While worklessness isn't an issue, it is more about low pay.
- Younger people who can tend to leave (university), those that can't have more limited opportunities.
- Flooding remains and major issue.
- Busy from Easter to October, no parking and traffic issue, but very quiet for the rest of year.
- Better sign posting to amazing walks in the local countryside/woodlands.
- Very little progression routes for young people beyond first jobs in hospitality.
- Locally there are people struggling, there are high levels of shame for people asking for help, hidden poverty.
- Hidden community within caravan park, in emergency accommodation, often stuck there for longer periods.
- There are lots of isolated people, particularly in surrounding villages, that have worse travel connections and broadband.
- Even if the skate park happens, that can't be our only offer for young people.
- Looe Town Council has been quite good at leading on and generating events, could do more?
- Did have past event manager, good idea, but didn't work out at the time.
- The tourism offer is often still quite bucket and spade, but also now really expensive.
- **It's a bit of a dual society. People owning houses/businesses and people servicing them.**
- Lack of quality local sports offer, need to leave to play in/with better teams.
- **No post 16 training offer. Limited access to learning about trades. Need local programmes to provide inspiration.**
- Like all places, Looe has peaks and troughs. Has been in a bit of a trough, but hopefully starting to emerge again.
- Groups don't work well enough together, a lack of trust.
- You are never going to get everyone onboard, sometimes you just need to press on with things.
- Slightly unruly nightlife, a certain amount of anti-social behaviour.
- Too many lower value shops, feels like the town has lacked investment.
- Could be really great, but lacks a cultural offer, no cultural centre or bookshop.
- Second/holiday homes have driven up housing prices.
- No training offer locally, would be good to see more entrepreneurial thinking and skills development around digital, social media, finance, promotional marketing, support for micro businesses, etc.
- Much untidiness / rubbish, too many advertising flags, signs, cones and warning notices coupled with insufficient quiet space, order and areas greenery / tree planting.

3) What are the barriers to improvement?

- Limits and pressures on current public funding.
- **Tribalism, division, people not working together.**
- Over reliance on tourism, which is good, but vulnerable (covid, etc.)
- **Brain-drain – young people who can, tend to leave.**
- There is no longer a Chamber of Trade for the town/or not sufficiently attended/supported.
- No functional "business group".
- Council elections not really contested, a certain amount of apathy.
- Town could be marketed better.
- Bit of an anti-tourism element.
- Difficult to get in and out of town, physically not very accessible.
- For businesses, it's hard to know who owns what, who's responsible for what, Trusts, Council, etc.
- Need to tell the story of Looe better, it's not Padstow but its not wholly a business/trades town.

- **Lots of looking back to the past, needs to look to the future and innovate more. People want everything better, but don't want change.**
- Looe presents a complex picture. While there is plenty of work, lots of it is casual, lower pay and in the informal economy (people often do multiple jobs). In some ways this is good, but there are limited opportunities to progress and build a career.
- The town presents a small and relatively low tax base.
- Holiday lets are recognised as businesses, therefore pay business rates, which goes to County, not local council.
- East Looe Town Trust is the custodian for historic/expensive buildings, this works well, but means the Trust has limited spare capital or capacity.
- Looe is slightly restricted by its geography – in a valley, flooding and limited space.
- Difficult for local people to afford/buy a home here, now about 70% new incomers. Lots of people on housing waiting lists.
- Self-building is not allowed in Cornwall.
- Other than the Trust, there is a lack of a more enterprising social enterprise sector, who are the new problem solvers and entrepreneurs in this space?
- Lack of organisations in the creative industries space – big growth areas nationally and big in Cornwall. Could support with towns cultural offer and events, etc.
- Lots of houses on Airbnb, very little or nothing to rent.
- Tourism dominates and drives too many of the decisions. It feels like we have all our eggs in one basket.
- Not always easy to engage with secondary school, academy structure harder to work with, not enough community focus.
- Looe misses out on much of the funding on offer, needs better capacity here.
- Need for more business unit/workspace to support businesses beyond the fishing industry.
- **Quite a lot of families in poverty/broken homes. Lack of aspiration, people with greater aspiration leave.**
- People/young people don't know what's possible. They don't know what they don't know, so hard to aspire to other things.
- Needs a new coalition of the willing to drive and shape a much-needed business and learning developments. Possibly better to think more in terms of enterprise and training – better language. Needs some fresh thinking to develop and take forward an enterprise space.
- Risk aversion - Looe looks two steps ahead at all the possible problems and then comes up with 10 reasons not to do anything. Not enough "can do" attitude.
- There is a problem of a lack of land/space for development.
- Looe is its own worst enemy.
- Hard to know who does what and is responsible for what i.e. council, trusts, harbour, etc.
- Looe lacks a unified vision for the town.
- Needs more of an online presence and development.
- Needs a skills offer that is both online and in person.
- Hard to maintain an arts offer in school as it is hard to recruit art teachers due to government changes in priorities.
- Lack of awareness by local organisations and decision makers.

4) Thinking more about your organisation/business what are the problems you are trying to solve? What are you working/focussed on currently?

- Smugglers trail route up Looe valley being developed and launched, a community and tourist offer.
- Working to support bringing local communities/groups together.
- Big gap/needed around heritage construction and conservation building skills, hard to recruit and create the skills.
- Developing business space at Polean.
- Keen to find way to extend the holiday season into shoulder and winter months.
- Need a more reliable customer service workforce.
- There is not enough workspace of all sorts in Cornwall, there is a big need.
- Youth and children's club, food activities, supporting groups in need.
- There are many older people, living in inaccessible homes, who are functionally locked in.
- Harbour and quay support lots of community events as its the waterfront, very busy, could do more but can't manage them, but can provide the space.
- Supporting developments in Liskeard and southeast Cornwall
- Arts University Plymouth, keen to promote greater recruitment/access for students and retention of creatives within the area to support the growth of the creative economy. Therefore, keen to support skills programmes and space for more creative enterprise.

5) Have you been involved in any past or current partnerships and projects in the town? Tell me about that?

- College environmental tree planting project near Widegates.
- College litter picking project with Looe Town Football Club.
- College speed networking and mock interviews with local business for students.
- Past skills and business development programmes.
- Lots of events, competitions, etc.
- Good partnership working between hospitality/accommodation business, often support each other with more technical training/learning needs.
- Previous business development manager brought some good/new energy.
- Passing on the Food festival has been a good example of the role the council can play, getting it going and passing it on.
- Cornwall Trade and Investment has limited links and knowledge of the town and local business.
- Past good work with tourist committee, linked with charity events and fundraising.
- Promoting apprenticeships and links to Babcock, sharing jobs on social media.
- Past project with council providing 50cc bikes to enable transport for work.
- Food bank, community fridge, meals service for older more isolated people.
- Supporting training delivery for fishing industry.
- Looe Neighbourhood Plan and other planning matters.

6) Thinking more about the local economy, skills and training, opportunities for young people, support for new and existing businesses, what does the landscape and offer look like here? How could that be improved?

- **Very limited skills offer of any sort – needs softer skills, core skills and more technical skills.**
- Lots of people in low pay, low skills, zero-hour contracts and very little opportunity to upskill.
- Need more training/access into trades/apprenticeships. Long waiting list for trades people.
- Need better access to apprenticeships.
- **Need to think of way of extending the season, Looe is good at events/culture, how to do more around the shoulder months, particularly November.**
- Increasingly give people more of a reason to come, to stay and an increasingly quality offer to increase spend.
- There is a significant shortage to all forms of business/workspace across Cornwall, but Looe doesn't have much space to offer currently, creating a barrier to inward investment.
- Town needs to develop better links with Cornish business groups and get more on the radar.
- **Need to create aspiration and motivation for young people, could be good opportunities around developing online/digital skills, social media and marketing.**
- Needs some local chamber of trade/business group. Networking for businesses/business lunches.
- A "shop with confidence" certification for good shops.
- **Need to support aspiration and social mobility.**
- Bude provides a good example of being relatively self-sufficient, diversifying its economy and attracting businesses to relocate and start-up.
- Needs to be better networked into the wider business/investment networks in Cornwall, local intelligence and relationships are important.
- Falmouth University is increasingly moving to an online offer. With a fall in foreign students, they are focussing more of a digital offer, how could a learning space benefit/link with this?
- Cornwall is developing a single platform for all skills offer/jobs in the county.
- "Placemaking" is important to both supporting local communities and creating an attractive offer for attracting inward investment/business relations. Location, cultural offer, food and hospitality are all part of this. A Looe Business Improvement District (BID) could help. Newquay did well in changing its offer and perception.
- Even over Covid, Cornwall has seen no drop in businesses wanting to relocate to the area. This is about having clear offer, and a diverse offer of workspace.
- More support around the backend/administration of apprenticeships, for both employer and apprentice.
- Better partnership with school around education and skills. Link to Build Plymouth?
- Over reliance on tourism, need to diversify the economy.
- Need a more creative and additional approaches to education/skills/training.
- Need a more local offer to support remote learning. If young people are in in sixth form in Bodmin or Truro, need to leave home at 6:00am and not back until 6:00pm.
- Need to develop a more digital learning offer.

- Need more of an offer for out of season and when it rains.
- Need to create a better skills/training offer for not just young people, but older people also to upskill and reskill.
- Need someone or group of people/partnership that can sell/pitch and focus on business development, inward investment, finding people and bringing them together.
- Council should be supporting/investing in economic development, if only to bring in more funding.
- Need to keep developing the quality of the offer: high value tourism, cultural/events programme, and wet weather offer. Are there opportunities around green tourism and green skills - retrofitting?

7) What could you bring to a wider business and learning partnership, how could this benefit you?

- LDT – training and skills delivery, facilitation coordination and management.
- Need new trades and skills to deliver capital projects i.e. Coast Guard Cottages.
- Link to and continue to grow the food festival.
- Could we explore the possibility of first floor space in the town, and look to develop as business/workspace?
- Partnership working around inward investment and business relocation. Good example in Saltash.
- Could be a link between LTC, bringing in funding, training and workspace.
- Lots of link with CCC, help with funding as the area has been overlooked in the past.
- Supporting a new coalition around training, digital and creative.
- Arts University Plymouth – partnership around local skills provision.

8) What does Looe need in the way of business space? What sort of space?

- Business space would not support the school much, unless located on site, town too far away for staff during the day.
- Any space that would support social/pastoral work would need discrete space.
- Lots of more community spaces, but very little business space available.
- Business/light industrial unit in development at the Polean site, needs bringing forward and to happen.
- Very limited business/workspace – needs light industrial, services officer and hot-desk.
- Little or no offer to bring in small inward investments into town.
- A new business development at Millpool could help to bring together council, library and Millpool centre buildings and operations, creating possible economies of scale and greater impact.
- Real needs for new building/workspace to create new more diverse jobs and to support aspiration and social mobility.
- Small business unit development at Millbrook, was built and “they came”. Always full, 20m2 and £300 pcm.
- Polean/Jewson’s site being develop for light industrial.
- Potential, but probably limited, first floor space which could be converted into workspace (Truro did and analysis). Though most probably covered for accommodation.
- Polvelan old care home site could be good, but still stuck.
- Lifeboat station and Look out currently being renovated, will create and new workspace and new office for East Looe Town Trust and free up space at the new Guildhall.
- Looe has quite a lot of community spaces and halls.
- Even small innovations centres tend to do well in Cornwall because people don’t want the extra cost/hassle of travel (Liskeard is too far), Having a virtual offer is also useful. The innovation centre on St Mary’s, Scilly Isles is a good example.
- It is not quite as simple as “build it and they will come”, it does need some level of development support around it.
- A concern was raised about meeting the capital and revenue costs of building and new building for business are learning, if the was paid for by the Public Loan Board, which would create a significant ongoing cost for the taxpayer in Looe. External funding must be sought.
- Could space at the Millpool Centre be better used for training?
- Kimlers Way/ Barret housing site should be delivering more work/business space but has geological/environmental issues.
- Any business pace would need to be flexible in early days, but with some focus/theme.
- A new development at Millpool, could initiate a wider conversation about how the library/LTC and Millpool Centre could work differently.
- Homeschooling is probably significant in the local area and business and learning space could support this.
- Probably a significant amount of people that WFH, many would be interest in a hotdesking/workspace offer.
- Need a business and learning hub, would support smaller business and freelances, would also create e more opportunities for people to engage with training and develop skills.
- Any new building would need a key anchor and organisation to lead it.

- To attract funding, you need to have a “shovel ready” project. For now, just commit to getting planning permission nothing more. The building would seek government funding, therefore not a big ask.
- Needs to focus on upskilling/reskilling.
- Any further development at Millpool would need to resolve issues of ownership and flooding.

9) Blue sky thinking, if you could have one ask and change one thing, what would that be?

- Improved links into Plymouth businesses for the college.
- College – being able to deliver Duke of Edinburgh awards, currently too expensive and needs a partner. Would support core skills around teamwork, communications, confidence etc.
- Need a town-based bidding team/capacity to bring in grants and funding.
- A Business Improvement District (BID) and town manager.
- Need to find a way to tap into young people and create opportunities to stimulate aspirations.
- Develop some more circular history and nature walks around the town. Work with Devon and Cornwall rail partnership and develop moor to sea project and link to Liskeard.
- Looe could benefit/seek to make a link with the Freeport in Plymouth, particular around specialist boat building.
- There is lots of change going on economically/nationally, it is therefore a good time to be embracing change and innovation.
- There is a steady stream of small inwards investments/relocations, businesses value the Cornish flag and want to be able to use it.
- Town can be overcautious and therefore steps on its own ability to innovate.
- Needs at least 1 FTE supporting economic development, inward investment, skills, etc.
- We need a local/remote learning hub in the town. We need to be more innovative about how and where learning happens.
- Need hyper local training offer and Further Education provision, needs to create a skill offer beyond tourism.
- An event manager, or support/capacity for events development in the town.
- Scotland has pioneered economic approaches to supporting rural communities.
- Code Clan - successfully Scottish programme to support digital and creative skills, need something similar. How can Looe become destination for tech and creative learning?
- Lots of digital skills have been off shored, can be onshore them back to Looe and SE Cornwall?
- Needs a cultural centre/space, support local and Cornish arts, that also has a focus on skills i.e. selling online. Would help support a year-round offer.
- A greater recognition of the importance of the natural and historic built environment we in Looe are lucky enough have inherited from our forefathers

10) What have we not asked, what are we missing?

- It is good that the council is looking at this, but needs to make sure the town is getting the basics rights as well i.e. parking and loos, etc.
- As a town we need to focus on what is achievable and realistic. We need to build on what's here and work with existing organisations to make small sustainable change.
- A development at the Millpool site could be tricky due to issues over flooding and ownership.
- While business may well be needed, there is a bigger need for affordable housing, local rents are very high.
- Significant uplift in shop lifting in the town, some business owners looking to sell up.
- It is difficult to prioritise with a complex picture such as Looe, but we need to start somewhere and build from there.
- Flood defences scheme, may or may not happen, may or may not be a good thing.
- The Quayside Centre (Malley's Shed) is a good example. Lots of initial objections, got EU funding, now very well used.
- Could there be a bigger Looe/Liskeard partnership? They are chalk and cheese, therefore do not compete and offer something very different, and being closely linked they could work well in partnership?
- You should ask about the presentation of Looe and what could be done to strengthen its USPs for the benefit the local economy and learning.

Appendix II - Community Engagement Drop-in Session Notes

Events and Culture

- Popular events inc. Looe Regatta Raft Race and Made in Looe (Crafts and Boats)
- There is a need to support more generic skills to better enable events i.e. First Aid and Health and Safety

- Events have become less (covid) but are coming back, though there are barrier/perceived barrier around administrative/technical areas: health and safety, insurance, road closures, licensing, etc. what role could LTC or another organisation play in making this easier?
- Looe Pioneers, running group constituted under Run England and part of the Cornwall Grand Prix. Holds the annual Hillish and Hellish Looe/Polperro 10km in February. Brings in 500-600 runners, with an additional kids race. With a £20 entry fee raised £5000 annually for the Air Ambulance. Would be keen to create an additional autumn event and other trail events. Could seek Sports England funding. There are barriers around the car parking fees. Purple Gecko has provided running events, but much more commercial charging £50/60 per head entry fee.
- Pre-covid, lots of this was great, things went down hill and are taking time to recover.
- There have been lots of changes within the council, need longer terms strategy and stability.
- How can we have, do we need more culture-led activity. Do we need a cultural strategy? Food Festival is back and new literary festival.

Training, Skills and Development

- Shared Prosperity Funding could be sought to support areas around skills and business support.
- Lots of people in the Looe area are self-employed out of necessity, they need to create their own jobs.
- Limited opportunities for young people beyond hospitality and retail.
- There need to be better start-up support around investment to help with pump priming and cash flowing.
- Could we create a shared corporate structure to help with a range of activities.
- Need support with helping to write and develop business plans.
- People are trying to start a new chamber of commerce.
- A better network of businesses to go to that can provide support.
- Need space to develop peer-to-peer networking and business development support, using local skills and expertise, offering structure and mentoring, to allow people to jump from the kitchen table into a workspace.
- Need a clearly defined business space to allow for mentoring schemes to take place.
- A Looe brand – a positive campaign around paying good wages.
- Support to diversify business more would help cut down of competition.
- How could we improve transport between Looe and the local villages?
- Need practical training H&S etc. How could courses be incentivised or subsidised?
- Many businesses have difficulty recruiting.
- Can we develop new approaches to sharing staff? Some sort of Looe Agency? This is partly about the issues of part-time/casual staff and partly about creating opportunities for innovative approaches for staff training.
- Lack of 6th form and no good connections with universities.
- Looe town brand, what should it be? Do we need a BID?
- We need more of a mechanism to bring businesses together – Town Team?
- How do we get more volunteers?
- Digital Peninsula Network online courses.
- Needs to be an investment in marketing, support for skills and reach – Peter Friend?
- Marketing efforts are very fragmented.
- How do we create a year-round employment offer in a visitor economy? There are high costs over winter and less income, hard to retain staff. How do we support a better approach to “portfolio careers”, combining different jobs and a skills offer?
- The adult education offer in Cornwall isn't visible or local, its hard to find.
- Can we create and “off-season” training offer, or something that happens on “closed” days?

Business Workspace

- A number of buildings in the town are for sale, some have been on the market for some time: Lloyds Bank Building, Riverside Apartments, old book shop, Barclays House Hotel, could these be brought by council/local organisation and turn into work or cultural spaces – community ownership fund? What about Polvean?
- There is a need for more storage space, to allow for the storage of bulky items, to free up space in retail units.
- There is need for office space, separate/away from retail space.
- The NHP was supportive of more office space.
- Workspace can be more on the outskirts, doesn't need to be in centre.

- There is no where for people to get started, when they have ideas.
- There is a lack of space, outside of fishing and tourism.
- A tech/IT space would be difficult without better connectivity. It has improved but needs to be better.
- We need small industrial similar to Barbican Industrial estate but smaller and initially more affordable.
- There is a need for storage space to support trades, they need places to store materials, and office space.
- There needs to be space if we are to drive tech ventures, such as gaming, and it needs to create a sense of community. Could a pipeline/partnership be developed with the universities, Falmouth, etc.?
- Food – a small scale production facility that could be shared would be helpful. Would support diversification for farming.
- Space is needed to attract inward investment/small scale relocation from other bigger cities/areas.
- Need to support and stimulate small scale industrial activity.
- Barriers: no post-16 training offer, transport, connectivity, visibility of offer, road network.
- Something that stimulates and inspires business and puts out a message that Looe is serious about business.
- We need low tech as well as high tech, crafts and small-scale production.
- A space for marketing and design type businesses.
- A space that gives people options and reasons to stay in the town.
- A space that can also support basic/core skills and entry level employment.
- Also, a space that can offer more social support i.e. Citizens Advice.
- Difficult to start a business, need small, cheap, low risk space.
- A need for a space for men, who aren't interested in football or the pub, etc., to support practical skills, carpentry, etc.
- There is a need for a visible "drop-in" growth hub and space, and face-to-face business support, particularly for micro-businesses.
- No start-up, move-on, or storage space.
- Do we need more of a high street strategy?
- Repurposing the old Lloyds Bank building into a cultural/arts space.
- Cultural space – SPF – old lifeboat building.