

Community Engagement – Todmorden Arts and Culture Ideas Facebook Group

In early August 2020 Todmorden Town Deal Board member Andrew Kim initiated a Facebook group entitled 'Todmorden Arts and Culture Ideas'. Over a few days the group's membership grew to 146 and it generated many suggestions and much discussion around how the Towns Fund could be used in this sector. The results of an analysis of the group's activity are presented below.

By the end of November 2020 the group's page had 39 posts, of which 30 were judged relevant to the 'Arts and Culture Ideas' theme. These 30 posts attracted a total of 404 comments and 299 'likes' or other positive responses. Details of the posts, comments and likes are shown in the table overleaf. Where suggestions seemed to be for the same or very similar ideas, these have been grouped into categories and 'likes' for a category as a whole have been presented as a way of indicating the overall level of interest in an idea.

Judged by this analysis, the idea generating most positivity has been that of re-purposing old, disused or under-used buildings as spaces for **studios and workshops for artists and musicians**.

The second most popular idea was restoration of the **Centre Vale Park bandstand**, with extended functionality, including use as an outdoor cinema.

The acquisition of a **Futuro House** and creation of an **outdoor amphitheatre** received similar, and high, levels of support, although enquiries reported in comments showed one of the amphitheatre's most favoured possible locations to be probably not viable, and no more detailed proposal has been received by the TDB.

Other ideas which were suggested and well received, and for which project proposals have been received by the TDB, included renovation of the **Centre Vale Park coachyard** and **greenhouse**, a **repair emporium**, and **town centre roller shutter murals**.

Quotes illustrating the support for some of the ideas where project proposals have been received are reproduced below.

Studios and workshops for artists and musicians

"I think there is huge potential for an arts focused development in Todmorden. Right now there are a lot of artists in the area and essentially that is all it takes to work - having artists."

"I believe we need to make space for artists via adequate and affordable studio space. It's the bed-rock of a town's creative ecology. The more artists/makers we have, visible, practising in the town, the more stuff happens - open studio events, galleries begin to open, shops/cafes offer locally made work."

"An arts centre and organisation to facilitate arts would be a real asset to this town and community. Existing sites could be utilised I think. I think we do need more affordable studio space (I can't find any currently). The creativity in this part of the valley could be developed with some funding as an outstanding asset to the community."

"Artists are in crisis, nothing targeted at individuals during COVID. We need to recognise the fact that many of our resident artists cannot support themselves or sustain their practice NOW and in the forthcoming recession."

More studio space and more affordable studio space is essential. When artists are able to work and are supported to work they transform areas/towns."

"Lots of artists like myself have had to give up their studios due to loss of income. I've worked for over 25 years as an Arts Restorer. Never been out of work before! I like the idea of volunteering to keep studio payment low. Often studios are full of people with a financial backing or a pension. It would be good to encourage greater diversity/background/class/age."

"What about investigating what was the Acorn Centre almost straight across the road from the college, which maybe could work in tandem on events and workshops?"

Restoration of Centre Vale Park Bandstand

"The renovation of the bandstand for performance would be a priority for me. It would be so invigorating for the town. Particularly in current pandemic times. This could be available to the whole community and local schools and colleges."

"Good call on the bandstand idea +1 for that! especially with C19 restrictions on indoor concerts. Would love to curate the bandstand... gimme the keys!!"

"What could be better in the current Covid climate than a pop-up outdoor cinema [at the bandstand]?"

Returning a Futuro House to Todmorden

"The Futuro home is delightfully symbolic/emblematic of how arts and science – and an optimism for the future mixed with the unconventional – have a strong heritage in the upper valley. I'd love to see this celebrated or commemorated in an inspiring and non-cheesy way."

"On the Futuro, I would love to see these back in the town."

"A Futuro orientation centre, that would be wild! It's very unique to Todmorden and indicative of some of its engineering history."

"I would definitely support/roll sleeves up to return a Futuro to Tod. It's beloved across the world, made in Tod, there was one in Burnley too. It's not connected to UFO stuff. It's futurism, past future."

"[There is a] huge and increasing amount of interest in these little gems."

"This sounds very exciting!"

"[I would like to see it] in an all-glass atrium area stretching in-between a couple of retrofitted buildings. A Buckminster Fuller meets classic mill northlight construction which mirrors the past and the future in equal measure. It'd need to be indoors so it has some protection from the environment and more... but it'd be crying out for some kind of vista so I hope it was surrounded by greenery and texture galore. A useable, edible, explorable space. It's the kind of space which needs to be open, welcoming and inclusive, which would be perfect for collaborative discussion, meeting or breakout spaces in a wider arts campus."

Responses to the idea of creating a landmark exhibition/education/gallery/cafe space in the centre of Todmorden, featuring a Futuro House:

"Aye, that whole building complex is ugly as sin, it would be a good spot for redevelopment."

"Great idea. But I'd support anything that got rid of that horrible block of shops!"

"Ugliest site in town!"

“Wow what a superb idea! And the pedestrianised area near the market and town hall would be the making of Todmorden.”

Centre Vale Park Coachyard

“Have you thought about the Old Coach Yard in Centre Vale Park? It is a big, walled space boarded on one side by some derelict but protected buildings. It has enormous potential. With investment it could be a fabulous hub for creative work, including indoor space and a flexible outdoor space.”

“I’ve often thought this would be an amazing spot for outdoor events.”

Repair Emporium

“I love the idea of a recycling/ repair emporium. This is something that could promote skills sharing and workshops.”

“I think a repair shop/ repurpose centre would be a great asset to the town and could generate work.”

“There is a group of people planning repair cafes. Was one planned just as covid struck. We just don't have a permanent place to do them.”

Town Centre Roller Shutter Murals

“Fabulous idea! Especially if the murals gave a quirky indication of what was in each shop, that would tie them together...”

“Would be great if it actually happened.”

“Love this idea.”

“Murals on shutters have a proven record of reducing graffiti as well as brightening up the area!”

| Post/suggestion | Comments | Likes | Category | Total category likes |
|---|----------|-------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Artists' studio space | 21 | 10 | Artists/musicians studios/workshops | 62 |
| Ferney Lee Care Home as arts centre | 7 | 6 | Artists/musicians studios/workshops | |
| Acorn Centre as workshops/events space | 3 | 6 | Artists/musicians studios/workshops | |
| Arts/music studios/workshops | 16 | 18 | Artists/musicians studios/workshops | |
| Walsden Methodist Chapel as arts space | 1 | 2 | Artists/musicians studios/workshops | |
| Scaitcliffe Hall as arts centre/studios | 2 | 15 | Artists/musicians studios/workshops | |
| Recording/podcast studio | 5 | 5 | Artists/musicians studios/workshops | |
| Centre Vale Park Bandstand restoration (incorporating outdoor cinema) | 32 | 38 | Bandstand restoration | 46 |
| Centre Vale Park Bandstand restoration (with canopy) | 7 | 8 | Bandstand restoration | |
| Return a Futuro House to Todmorden | 43 | 17 | Futuro House | 31 |
| Cultural centre with Futuro House | 16 | 14 | Futuro House | |
| Centre Vale Park coachyard | 9 | 11 | Other | 11 |
| Centre Vale Park greenhouse | 22 | 25 | Other | 25 |
| Repair emporium | 23 | 15 | Other | 15 |
| Canal/river bridges | 13 | 7 | Other | 7 |
| Cycling sculpture trail | 1 | 7 | Other | 7 |
| Town centre roller shutter murals | 12 | 13 | Other | 13 |
| Fielden Wharf greenhouses | 16 | 11 | Other | 11 |
| City Museum | 28 | 3 | Other | 3 |
| Lidl flood sump amphitheatre | 24 | 9 | Outdoor amphitheatre | 32 |
| Centre Vale Park amphitheatre | 10 | 9 | Outdoor amphitheatre | |
| Unitarian Church amphitheatre 1 | 19 | 3 | Outdoor amphitheatre | |
| Unitarian Church amphitheatre 2 | 34 | 11 | Outdoor amphitheatre | |
| Town centre outdoor arts/performance space | 10 | 3 | Other | 3 |
| Arch canopy in Centre Vale Park or Pollination Street | 1 | 1 | Other | 1 |