

# **THE PEOPLE'S REPORT**

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## INTRODUCTION:

In response to the country's shock at being thrust into lockdown, a member of Folkestone community group Touchbase Care said: "Well, now you know how it feels to be on your own". She spoke for many in our society who, like her, have long been isolated by disability. 'The People's Report' asks: how can we rise from the pandemic a more inclusive and less lonely society? Could we reinvent our failing high streets as centres from which to grow thriving, inclusive communities? Composer Anna Braithwaite and members of Touchbase Care have begun to develop a collection of songs which tackle these questions and present a vision of an alternative future for Folkestone's High Street. Together they have examined the possible solutions that the repurposing of the high street offers an increasingly contactless society.

'The Peoples' Report': a concise document of hope for the regeneration of the high street and the end of loneliness.

## ACTION:

During April and May 2021 Anna Braithwaite and Sadie Hurley conducted interviews with members of Touchbase Care about the future of Folkestone Town Centre. Material from these interviews appears on the following pages.

The online participants and members attending the centre were involved in six sessions of research, songwriting and recording to create two original songs about their experience of and future aspirations for Folkestone Town centre.

On Monday 19th April 2021 Anna Braithwaite and members of Touchbase Care attended the 'Folkestone Town Centre Place Plan Webinar' organised by We Made That. They contributed to the Q & A including a spoken question by Touchbase member Jemima Hughes who highlighted the need for Changing Places toilets in the town in an effective and affecting speech to the two hundred attendees.

On the 11th June 2021 this report and recordings of the groups' two songs were delivered to councillor Laura Davison and We Made That for inclusion in the research for Folkestone's Place Plan. They were promoted to the wider public using the Touchbase website and social media platforms.

## OUTCOMES:

The dialogue opened up between the Folkestone Town Council and the Touchbase members has led to the members feeling they have a more influential voice in the creation of Folkestone's 'Place Plan'.

This project and the contact it provided helped participants combat feelings of loneliness in the short term as well as influencing thinking in local government about how they can tackle isolation across the whole community in the long term via the repurposing of the town centre.

Two songs have been created which highlight issues faced by Touchbase members and will hopefully challenge preconceptions listeners may have about disability.

## Links to recordings of Touchbase members performing their songs:

'Inside Out' - <https://youtu.be/Jze6sTJZ-cY>

'Where The Shirt Shop Was' - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CO\\_NArP3Jm0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CO_NArP3Jm0)

THEMES WHICH EMERGED DURING THE PROJECT:

**Current perceptions of Folkestone town centre:**

"It's not much unique, it needs to be unique, it needs to be more, you know, colourful instead of grime and bitterness, that sort of thing, it needs like, you know, uplifting, it needs to be an uplifting town centre that doesn't have like arguments and breaking apart and shattered dreams."

"Folkestone town centre makes me think of nothing now, even though Debenhams hasn't been there for a couple of years now, that's what you think of."

"Sad really, it just looks like an empty shell. There's just... there's just nothing there to bring people in and make me really want to say 'Ooh!' To be fair everywhere's the same. We don't make the most of what's in front of us."

"Buildings aren't looked after like they used to be - not painted not, you know, just not maintained. Shops are shutting down no end and it looks so empty which is a shame."

**Folca:**

"What was really making me upset originally about Debenhams was that they were planning to make it into a cinema. Don't get me wrong, I would love a nice cinema but we've got a perfectly good one. It may be small but it's perfectly good and the price of the tickets is reasonable. Here's the thing, if we had another cinema here it would close that one down and we would end up paying more for tickets."

"Say if things were normal, say Easter, "I want to do like an Easter egg hunt", an' the weather was lovely, I'm going to go and get a little dress, or something, like in Debenhams, or somewhere, you can't. I think [the town] has a lot of potential, but it just depends what comes of it, what goes in Debenhams, I think, that's going to be the core, I think."

"One thing Touchbase does so well, it actually brings people together with activities,... it could be a choir, literature, once a week, it (Folca) needs a draw to make people come. An area for regular activities."

**Physical barriers:**

"I'm a full time wheelchair user, I'm quadriplegic, and the thing I need most in Folkestone is a changing place toilet." There is a need for two new Changing Places\* toilets in Folkestone ideally one in the town centre and one in the harbour. This will help Folkestone residents and visitors with: profound and multiple learning disabilities, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, as well as older people enjoy the community participation and active citizenship which is currently denied them because of the lack of a fully accessible toilet within easy reach of the town centre.

\*[www.changing-places.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=b06gQhp%2b7Pg%3d&tabid=38](http://www.changing-places.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=b06gQhp%2b7Pg%3d&tabid=38)

([changing-places.org](http://changing-places.org)) Government funding can be applied for here: [£30 million investment to provide Changing Places toilets - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

"Any new idea/development should automatically have disabled facilities in mind when redesigning."

"It needs more...accessibility to wheelchairs"

"There are a lot of spaces in town where they could use ramps and change the pavements to make things flatter and more accessible. A key thing is that pavements need to be safe, not too narrow."

"I see the stuff in the window and I think to myself "I'd love to go in there" but I don't because I know it's putting my safety at risk, because of how high the steps are, there's no access to a ramp or anything, a door bell that you could ring to say "I need help to get into this shop", there's nothing. In the twenty first century, old shops are meant to be made accessible to people like myself, but they're still not."

Participants also mentioned problems with: finding disabled parking bays, drop curbs that are impossible to use without assistance, heavy doors that are too difficult to use for those in wheelchairs and with mobility issues, glass doors which are easy to walk into if you are visually impaired, problems with toilets for the disabled not working or having doors which do not lock.

**Social barriers:**

"There's something I saw that Morrisons were doing for autistic people. They like, have an hour a day where they dimmed the lighting in the shop and turned off the music so autistic people can shop in peace. I believe if we had stuff like that in all the shops it would be much more helpful for neurodivergent people."

"There is a difference between, inviting somebody in, somewhere that's inviting, to feel invited, not to be 'shut out'. It's about opening doors isn't it? And on more than one front, it's being made welcome."

"Some training for the shopkeepers? Oh definitely, and the shop keepers shouldn't have to pay for it either. It should be like free training as well. The government really should be helping out more into the revival of these shops, making it comfortable for people who are neurodivergent and other disabilities."

"They don't want you on the buses, they just don't want you there, because they consider that you are a nuisance. They consider that they're having to take time out of their day to be helpful. Whereas if they made things accessible and you could get in there yourself without them having to help."

**Ideas for the future of Folkestone town centre:**

"Spaces could be put to use for the 'unpredictable people' - drug addicts and so on, a facility where they could go for assistance, talking to someone in a space. An outreach space would give them a place to go off the street. This would make the streets feel safer making a virtuous circle. There is space for outreach facilities in the town centre."

"One of the key things they could do to make it better, the town centre, is if they made that area feel generally safer. There are a lot of unpredictable people about. I think I do feel more that way because I can't quickly get away from it if there was a problem. I don't really go into the town after dark now, it doesn't feel safe."

"The city of Bath has a performance square just outside the baths, for good quality singers with people watching. Proper performers singing and making music would improve the atmosphere in the centre of town. There would be more people in the centre, it would be a draw for people and it would feel safer."

"I think live music would be great, an outdoor live music area, if I was in the mood, but you've got to be in the mood."

"They could build a tower to give Folkestone a fresh focus, maybe there could be a viewing space."

"It doesn't need to have one culture, it needs to be all cultures, it needs to be colourful rather than having a dark black and white scenario, so it needs to be a colourful town .. with some urban positive messages ...we need to learn about each other's cultures and we need to learn about people with disabilities - help draw us out from mental illnesses, problems, isolation and neglect."

"Something like a main art gallery for the whole town of Folkestone to see if they want to buy and sell art works."

"Walking past beautiful shop windows, something that doesn't feel like a back alleyway of, you know, of bad smells, be more like a comfortable safe environment that avoids bad people dealing with the scheming and misery."

"Using non art equipment, using natural, like Andy Goldsworthy's landscape art, or rather patterns, you might need to use the patterns from using plants with a patterned texture, with a symmetrical pattern or something that has abstract shape or colours. It could be something people could enjoy looking for." It needs like a new perspective feel-good. I would say like something like using spray paints with more like colourfulness, and shows like what Folkestone really is - like a mural artwork."

"I would like more places to go to that doesn't exactly take too much out of my pocket. I also want to conserve the nature of Kent. Instead of building more, why can't we just use the abandoned buildings that no one uses?"

"This would be good for Folkestone, but I don't know if they would do it, they've done wooden boxes in Dover.. that people can sit down on. They put like plants in it and that's it. They've put plants in and people can sit down."

"The youth particularly need direction and I believe if there are more educational facilities and resources available in Folkestone town centre this will benefit the region."

**The homeless:**

"I would like them to be building places for the homeless to live in. I see them sleeping in the doorways, I see them in the streets."

"They all disappeared when we went into lockdown, where did they go? They must have gone somewhere. When I went shopping I didn't see a soul, not a homeless person anywhere. Why can't they stay where they were?"

**A safe space:**

"It would be wonderful to have a safe space. Somewhere that you could get refreshments but also advice. Where you could get away from a situation if you felt unsafe. That you could literally just get in to."

"It all depends on what the person thinks is a safe space to be honest, like some people prefer their safe space to be people just like them all around them and having talks and stuff, some people think it is just a room with themselves and one other person just to talk things out. Maybe your safe space is just a computer you know."

"My safe space would be maybe like an area with just a couple of computers, maybe a crafting station, and just like, you just gather and sign yourself in, sit down, maybe talk to someone or be on your own, just whatever you want. People leave you alone unless you want to talk."

**Community:**

"More community groups in Folkestone would help loneliness. Book-lending schemes, a community library would be another destination place. Advice places e.g. mental health facility based in the centre of town would help loneliness."

"Social facilities, that would help, the atmosphere is very important, it doesn't have the right sort of atmosphere at the moment you know."

**Visibility of authority/council:**

"Things were going down before. All COVID has done really is to highlight, all the things which you could see were happening. "Oh, someone will sort it out." "Why aren't 'they' doing anything?" But who are 'they'? It is our responsibility to find out who is responsible and to say to them "I've noticed x, y and z. I've noticed this is happening" and then to suggest to them what would help."

LYRICS TO SONGS WRITTEN FOR 'THE PEOPLE'S REPORT':

Inside Out

*By Anna Braithwaite and members of Touchbase Care*

*Ladies and Gentlemen! Mesdames e Messieurs! Mahilā ra sajjanaharū! (महिला र सज्जनहरू)  
Welcome! Bienvenue! Svāgatam! (स्वागतम्)*

*Here, on the inside, we are so warm (Mmmm, so cosy!),  
We look hot and we're glowing, here, on the inside,  
It is delicious! Like slurping up a Mister Whippy, whilst soaking up the rays on Sunny Sands (when  
you've checked the tides first and it's actually there)*

*We hope you are not feeling too cold out there on this February evening, in the dark, with just your  
thin coat to protect you from the biting wind?  
We may look as though we do not have a care in the world, but believe me when I say...  
We know your pain!*

*On spotting vintage fashions, which I long to wear,  
I find my way is blocked... by the vintage stairs,  
the door is too narrow, there's no bell to ring,  
I'm always window shopping... 'cause I can't get in!*

*I like looking at the artworks, whilst rolling down the Old High Street,  
I always have the taxi fare (to get back up) because it's mighty steep,  
It's full of little craft shops, posh coffee, fancy cakes (or so I've heard)  
Oh! the fun I'd have, the tales I'd tell and oh! The friends I'd make...*

*On the inside, on the inside,  
There's unicorns here, rainbows and glitter,  
On the inside, on the inside,  
So much pleasure and leisure, please don't feel bitter... out there! (LAUGH!)*

*No honestly, we're only teasing, we know what it's like out there and we pity your situation.*

*The door mat says 'welcome', the staff all smile and fuss  
The customers look awkward, you're not one of us,  
Pub landlords and stately homes say "we don't do disabled"  
The broken lifts, the broken locks and oh! The broken laws!*

*On the inside, on the inside,  
There's unicorns here, rainbows and glitter,  
On the inside, on the inside,  
So much pleasure and leisure, things just feel better  
On the inside, on the inside,  
It's calm and serene, there's rainbows and glitter,*

*On the inside, on the inside,  
It's warm and it's clean, there's an absence of litter,  
Please don't feel bitter, It's a bit of a sh@!ter,  
Out there! Out there! Out there!  
I'd tell you more about it but you'd never understand!*

Watch and listen here: <https://youtu.be/Jze6sTJZ-cY>



Where The Shirt Shop Was

*By Jayde Shane*

Down the rocky path  
Where the shirt shop was  
Sun was shining  
People smiling  
Happy families busy shopkeeps

My dear town was full of fun  
Brightly coloured never wrong  
For I don't know what went wrong  
But if you knew where I was from

Cleaners picking trash  
People being brash  
Shopping lessens  
Online strengthens  
Growing up here  
Things seem quiet

My dear town knew right from wrong  
Light is fading friends were gone  
Understanding what went wrong  
Bought all my sadness all at once

All grown up now silence roams now  
No sound but cars passing by  
Leas lift shut down  
Shirt shops closed now  
No safe space to walk around

My dear town was almost gone  
Empty spaces where I was  
For I now know what went wrong  
It's not to late to overcome

Watch and listen here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CO\\_NArP3Jm0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CO_NArP3Jm0)

**LEAD ORGANISATION:**

**Touchbase Care** are committed to improving the visibility of their members in the town and are keen to embrace the possibility for public performance this project offers. Touchbase Care is a dynamic community group who take an innovative, holistic approach to supporting adults and young people with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, neurodiversity and sensory impairment. [www.touchbasecare.org](http://www.touchbasecare.org)

**ARTISTS:**

**Anna Braithwaite** is a composer and one half of the infamous cabaret duo [ShooShooBaby](http://ShooShooBaby), who have been entertaining audiences across the UK since 2000. They have written and performed three sell-out shows of musical cabaret for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and graced the stages of The National Theatre and Berlin's Bar Jeder Vernunft, to name but a few. Since 2014, Anna has been focusing on writing/devising music theatre shows for actor/musicians using verbatim text to explore issues around mental health and heritage. In 2019, she was composer-in-residence at Chatham Historic Dockyard. [www.annabraithwaite.co.uk](http://www.annabraithwaite.co.uk)

**Sadie Hurley** has run music, singing and drama workshops for Touchbase for four years and is in demand across Kent as a performer, director and workshop leader. She creates theatre-based community events in her role as director of JimJam Arts. [www.jimjamarts.com/sadiehurley](http://www.jimjamarts.com/sadiehurley)

**FUNDERS & SUPPORTERS:**

**Voluntary Arts** awarded Touchbase Care and Anna Braithwaite a micro-commission to carry out the research and six song writing workshops as part of their 'Get Creative' scheme to tackle loneliness through the arts. Voluntary Arts works to promote and increase active participation in creative cultural activities across the UK and Republic of Ireland. Their Purpose is to celebrate, encourage and champion people expressing themselves creatively in their everyday lives and practising their creativity socially with other people. [www.voluntaryarts.org](http://www.voluntaryarts.org)

**Strange Cargo** have commissioned Anna to create a performance of 'The People's Report' for [Cheriton Light Festival](http://Cheriton Light Festival) 2022. Please contact [annabraithwaite@me.com](mailto:annabraithwaite@me.com) if you would like to contribute money or assistance to the project's fundraising efforts.



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**ARTS COUNCIL  
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