

# Big Buxton Conversation What If Visioning Exercise Notes – Condensed Version

The complete Notes form a 20 page document available seperately.

Saturday 24 April 2021, 10:00 start – 15:00.

43 individuals (of 69 registered) assembled on a sunny Saturday via Zoom to participate in this event. The day followed a process designed by the Transition Network UK which is being undertaken in many towns. Transition Buxton is grateful to the National Lottery Community Fund and players for the small grant that made it possible to host this free whole town event to which everyone who lives, works, studies, owns a property, or runs a business in Buxton was invited.

There were three parts to the proceedings, focussing on 'What is', 'What if' and finally 'What Next?'. Throughout the sessions, professional sketch artist, Jenny Leonard created a visual record of our journey which resulted in two colourful illustrations – scroll down to view.

To get to know some of the other participants and start thinking about our town, we were broken into groups of 3 and asked to think of things that we love or inspire us about Buxton and to record these on a Miro board – the responses below have been clustered without loosing any of the things we love about Buxton which clearly include a sense of community, location, landscape and built environment, good transport links, and more.

## Buxton - what we love or inspires us

Sense of the town being an entity, self-contained amongst the hills  
The water, the rivers, the streams, fountains - water everywhere!  
Provides lots of facilities/ for having a good life, Some great facilities  
Isolated as it is surrounded by hills, so has to have life of its own  
Doesn't feel like a suburb  
Lots of people actually work here  
it's a place people choose to come to  
Good schools  
Green spaces, culture, architecture, community  
So many wonderful creative artists, Creative community  
The people - such a variety of people. Very friendly, The People, So many 'can-do' people, committed to the greater good, People care for each other  
The people, the landscape,  
Community spirit x 5, Sense of community x 2, Buxton is a real community  
Its isolation makes for a community spirit  
Great people and variety of things to do.  
Events and activities, Lots going on  
The hills!  
Location in the hills, Access to landscape, Proximity to National Park, Close links to countryside, Close to the countryside  
nearby woods, green spaces  
the fresh air

The Serpentine - much quieter than the main park  
 The history & buildings, Heritage and architecture, Wonderful architecture, The historic architecture  
 Blend of heritage and informality  
 The changeable weather  
 Revival and success of the market to mirror the community  
 Independent shops, Independent businesses, The lack of corporate junk food outlets  
 Felt safe shopping at the market during Covid  
 National footpaths/ cycle routes and rights of way.  
 Most things in walking distance  
 Easy transport routes to cities, Good Transport links, Location and easy access to Manchester airport  
 Tourism contributes to vibrancy of the town, Long history of welcoming visitors  
 The maintenance of the flowers in the roundabouts/bus stop near Iceland/ triangle on St Johns Road/etc  
 Recycling bins around town, although a bit limited/not everywhere, still great to see!  
 That Buxton is pedestrian accessible/has road crossings and is faster to navigate by foot.  
 Benches in great locations!

For the 'What is' session we broke into different groups to take stock of Buxton at the present time. Each group explored either **Resilience**, **Relinquishment** or **Restoration**. Notes were taken in each group and then the main points fed back to the whole group. The points raised are clustered and edited a little below and definitely reflect some of the things we love about Buxton revealed above.

**Resilience:** What are the things around you that contribute to the resilience of Buxton? What were the things that during COVID enabled the community in Buxton to support itself? What have you seen, during times of shock, or flood, or heatwave or other disasters, that have enabled your community to better manage those shocks and to rebuild itself afterwards?

- Community spirit, culture of volunteering, Buxton Street by Street, the way people collaborate & work together, networks have been set up this past year, existing community groups e.g. BCA, BTT, Food Bank, neighbours coming together, the way people react to & help each other, not formal, generous people - seeing an issue and trying to fix it. Kindness from community during times of struggle e.g. Toddbrook when evacuees who needed places to sleep had more offers than needed, incl companies e.g. Palace Hotel. Friendliness of people, ease of getting into conversation in shops, people are welcoming.
- Domestic and local WhatsApp groups in each road sharing info and concerns Now know neighbours better as a support group and keeping an eye on each other
- Connectedness - communication networks online and in neighbourhoods, community networks, lots of social groups, lots of things happening, formal groups also great and important, opportunity and environment to meet and build community spirit - pubs, cafes, community spaces, GMG, allows it to evolve naturally. Different generations are all connected, inter-generational connections families and otherwise.
- Using the resources we already have - so much donated for Baby Bank they've had to seek additional space! Redundancy - unused space, spare items, need redundancy to be able to help in difficult times, need excess in reserve.
- Independent shops, businesses run by members of the community diversified and adapted e.g. delivery services, the market place responded to people feeling safe shopping outside. Pubs and clubs are community centres. Independent businesses - high

street not a clone with chains and national brands helps our resilience.

- Cohesive town - Buxton is surrounded by amazing countryside that everyone has access to, green spaces. Countryside wrapped around town. This has been essential mentally and physically. Everything in walking / cycling distance. Size of the town - Big enough place to support attractions but not so big that it feels anonymous and can't get involved, able to walk to school. Self-contained - don't have to travel miles to access facilities, can get everything you need in Buxton. Different areas of the town - distinct character but little areas have their own sense of identity but still interact.
- Green spaces close to the town centre - many people live near to a green space, adds to community - made friends during Covid just by walking nearby, places to get together
- Schools - source of resilience, have been amazing, teachers and governors do so much
- Trainline to Manchester. Bus services - good town service to get to different areas of the town, but it could be better
- A lot going on
- A practical place

**Relinquishment:** what are the things in your community that simply no longer have a place if we are to move towards a low carbon, more connected and just future? What do we need to let go of, to leave behind, to put to one side?

- Excess car use - find forms of transport other than the car, traffic is a problem, especially pollution on Fairfield Road & A6.
- Car centric place design - shared surfaces = less isolation of cars, bikes and pedestrians
- Structure of Buxton. New housing in set areas risks more polarisation - need to find ways to integrate better - central part of Buxton needs to be attractive and valuable to people - so it works for everybody. Planning constraints in conservation areas - there is a lack of innovation. UPVC is a problem - discourage people from fitting them?
- Lack of shared identity for the whole of Buxton - people in neighbourhoods, for example Fairfield, don't feel part of the wider Buxton. Higher Buxton / Lower Buxton divide, not enough connection.
- Council isolation - council may need to relinquish some of its control to enable community to influence, contribute, community actions. Council not recognising how challenging it can be (e.g. Big lunch event restrictions). Council represents old fashioned view.
- Air freight - we need to value that which is found local to where we live.
- Fossil Fuels - move to more renewable sources
- Inefficient buildings – all newbuild to pasivhaus standard and all existing retrofitted to be more energy efficient
- Consumerism – we are exporting our carbon emissions to economies, often far away - relinquish unsustainable choices - focus more on local options. Stop buying so much new.
- Disrespect - concern about negative comments about young people, need to address the issues in a positive way.
- Relinquish green lawns and replace with wildflowers - support biodiversity. Lawns don't support biodiversity - introducing wilding. The cutting down of everything in a blanket manner - need to be appropriate.
- Geese - problematic for children

**Restoration:** what needs to be put into place in order to repair the damage that has been done to our place by climate change, by austerity, inequality, biodiversity loss and so on? What are the things that already exist in Buxton that represent the process of restoration or have a key role to play in that process?

- Trees: Let's replace any trees that have been cut down. Produce a long term tree management plan to replace the older trees. Review the existing tree planting and take out those that are crowded or in the wrong place, e.g that are dangerous. Need a new plan that will maintain the tree coverage. Plant more trees. More wildflower meadows, trees and native species.
- Engagement & Activists: Need people who have the will to make it happen, need the will of people to change/restore. Many community groups in Buxton. Town Team, Street by Street, Food Bank, BCA, Save Hogshaw. More youth groups needed.
- Business Incubation - more small businesses, new businesses have grown up; food, Day Zero. Revival of market is good for shopping. We had thought losing M&S would be the death of the town but in fact it's created a great opportunity.
- Brownfield Sites: should use all of these areas to provide new living accommodation. Brownfield can be more expensive to develop than greenfield! e.g. contamination, so incentives may be required. Let's build on & provide housing on these sites and not only extend housing areas further out of the town centre. Developers appear to be just sitting on some land why can't these areas be used to build appropriate accommodation. More thought about what types of houses are needed. Where should houses be built and their infrastructure - shops, schools, nurseries in neighbourhoods - 15 minute neighbourhoods
- Heritage Buildings: If plans for restoring older buildings are sensitive to the development restrictions why can't we develop more buildings. Let's look at the opportunities all of these areas could provide. Civic restoration - lot of housing stock that has heritage value that could provide a different style of living accommodation - e.g. St. John's Road.
- Stop over-development
- Travel: Restoration of a full integration bus service for work, shopping and leisure. More charging points for electric cars. More cycle lanes and walking routes.



For the 'What if' we were taken forward to 2030 in the Time Machine for a walk around this new world in our imagination using all our senses – what will Buxton 2030 smell like? Sound like? etc. After 8 minutes we were put in breakout rooms to discuss the world we had imagined. We were asked to record, on the Miro board using sticky notes, two 'glorious ideas' each that we had envisioned. The result was dozens of delicious ideas including quite a lot of similar or complimentary ideas – below is a summary with some repetitions taken out and some clustering (see yellow highlights at the start of topic clusters) – the full list is available on request.

### Our Glorious Ideas

Make sure we do not lose sight of what we already love about the town, and are not drawn to change for changes' sake.
Establish a 'Town Council' that brings together all the Buxton community groups
Buxton leading: Become the exemplar for future living: Who is coming next to see how we do it so well. Establish Buxton as a health and wellbeing town for residents and visitors. Healthy lifestyles supported by Buxton infrastructure and logistics. Buxton becoming known as an outdoor capital with more family friendly links to existing facilities and attractions e.g. Monsal trail, Goyt Valley. More showcasing of the area as an outdoor centre.
Local focus - shops, independent businesses, local services, indoor market area to guarantee markets, workspaces for businesses and artists so young people don't leave the town, so we can be more than a tourist town, but not isolated or disconnected
Being able to shop locally / affordably to support local business
15 Minute Neighbourhoods Many community hubs throughout Buxton, each has own set of shops, houses, solar panels on all houses, air source heat pumps. Communal leisure areas that are safe and encourages responsible sharing of space.
Surrounded by trees, plants, birdsong, flowers, biodiversity with no litter! More greenery and more sheltered for all weathers. Edible roundabouts - use the waste verges for edible plots. Community orchards & vegetable gardens in all areas.
Music and sports spaces for young people particularly <b>Transport</b> & workplaces : sharing transport and workplaces. Reducing resource needs and increasing business interactions. Shared space where pedestrians have priority over cars.
Reduced pollution - traffic, noise, delivery vans, quarry lorries, no car parking in town in front of heritage buildings, more pedestrianised areas, better local bus service, hop-on-hop-off free, electric service, private-car free in the town centre, free parking in hidden/outer areas with effective transport into the town centre.
We would like to see a revolution in public transport - a much more joined up approach to allow people to move around. More electric transport including electric cycles - more equitable transport. Better public transport. Both rail and bus services not as good as they could be.
Pedestrians a priority around town, only public transport and all low speed
jump on - jump off transport - turkish 'dolmus' type transport
Free transport (tram or golf buggy) up and down the slopes to connect lower and higher Buxton. Easy access to public realm with free public transport & chairlift up the Slopes.
A thriving <b>town centre</b> with empty shop units filled with local independent businesses and craft workshops. What if every empty building in Buxton was in use? - housing, workspaces, workshops, back-packers hostel, offices,
There would be a group for incubating new business ideas and helping people get

started. An incubation organisation to create new small businesses for repairing, creating 3D parts and other things.
All goods repairable not disposable. Education of children not to throw things away but repair them and appreciation of the countryside and how to [protect it.
Town Centre: Multi-use activity facility for young people and older. Focus on residents' - particularly children 's and young people's - well-being.
Spring Gardens to have more of an outdoor feel (restore canopy along shops)
We would have a hub for repairing things, 3D printing replacement parts, learning skills, and borrowing items. Community resources hub - for borrowing items, unwanted resources from buildings/businesses which could be used by schools, artists and groups, reducing waste-to-landfill
Good quality affordable housing for all. Affordable good quality housing for all.

The next step was to create the 'What if' questions that could be pivotal in unlocking the 2030 we had just explored. In small groups we captured the 'What if' questions which occurred to us on the Miro board. Then, during a break the 'What if? questions were clustered into themes. The themes that emerged were: Local Government, Public Transport, Empty Buildings & Built Environment, Businesses, Energy, Nature, Provision for young people, Waste & Resources, Parking/private transport, Housing, Food, Leisure & Tourism and Health.

Participants were asked to review the themes and ask:

- Which ones have the potential to become viable strong initiatives?
- Which is there the most energy in Buxton for making a reality?

They each had five votes.

With so many great 'What if' questions it was not possible to drill down further than the themes today.

### Our What If Questions – clustered into themes & prioritised by votes on 24 April'21

Vote	Theme	What If Questions
16	<b>Local government</b>	<p>What if...we devolved power to the appropriate level?</p> <p>What if we thought of Buxton as a collection of villages each with its own hub support infrastructure</p> <p>Community asset transfer - what if Buxton people owned &amp; operated the Dome, the Town Hall, the Springs Centre...?</p> <p>What if we have more say in how public money is spent?</p> <p>What if the public had more input to the planning system?</p> <p>What if there was a proper town council?</p> <p>What if every part of society in Buxton was engaged in things like this and decision-making for the town?</p> <p>What if we had participatory budgeting and more local democracy?</p> <p>What if young people designed facilities for young people in Buxton?</p> <p>What if local authorities had more funding to support local actions?</p> <p>What if decisions were based on environmental impact rather than money?</p> <p>What if some council powers and responsibilities were delegated to the local community</p>

Vote	Theme	What If Questions
16	<b>Public Transport</b>	<p>What if time was no pressure so that small buses could wait until they were full and then they drove around</p> <p>What if road widths were reduced with additional space for pedestrians, cyclists and trees?</p> <p>What if we had a Boris Bike scheme in Buxton?</p> <p>What if the Monsal Trail was connected through to Buxton?</p> <p>What if there was a free, hop-on-hop-off, electric bus service around the town?</p> <p>What if people could get in and out of Buxton by bike?</p> <p>What if there were an electric circular hop on hop off bus to move around Buxton, including shops, doctor's surgeries etc?</p> <p>What if all local deliveries were by e-cargo bike?</p> <p>What if pavements were gritted as well as roads?</p> <p>What if the whole of the town centre was a shared space?</p> <p>What if there was an A6-A515 bypass for lorries (with a bridge from Fairfield to Staden)?</p> <p>What if pedestrians had more priority over vehicles in more areas?</p> <p>What if people felt safe to cycle for utility and people used e-cargo bikes to get around the hills</p>
15	<b>Empty Buildings / Built environment</b>	<p>What if the Town Hall was used for an indoor market to guarantee certain traders business?</p> <p>What if we re-used and re-purposed empty buildings?</p> <p>What if every empty building in Buxton was in use? - offices, studios, housing, shared workspaces?</p> <p>What if Buxton owned its own buildings and spaces?</p> <p>What if empty retail units were offered to locals at lower rates to start new businesses?</p> <p>What if the canopies were returned to the shopping areas to make it better when it's raining?</p>
14	<b>Energy</b>	<p>What if we invested in green energy as a community/communities rather than as individual households?</p> <p>What if there was funding for all public buildings to get renewables?</p> <p>What if big buildings had solar panels e.g. shopping centre, supermarkets, factories?</p> <p>What if community ground source heat pumps were built?</p> <p>What if every new building had to have solar panels?</p> <p>What if there were more help and advice for older (i.e. Victorian) houses to become carbon neutral?</p> <p>What if the community organised its own energy programmes?</p> <p>What if every building in Buxton had solar panels?</p> <p>What if roads and pavements were solar panels?</p>
14	<b>Businesses</b>	<p>What if empty retail units were offered to locals at low rates to start new businesses?</p>

Vote	Theme	What If Questions
		<p>What if we all used local shops for everything?</p> <p>What if the canopies were returned to the shopping areas to make it better when it's raining?</p> <p>What if all businesses and shops had to better maintain the appearance of their premises?</p> <p>What if Buxton owned more retail buildings e.g. Cavendish Arcade where rents are v. expensive?</p> <p>What if independent businesses were given lower rates for premises?</p> <p>What if larger businesses could provide local hubs which could sustain social interactions?</p> <p>What if business delivery was by bicycle or green transport?</p> <p>What if empty shops could be converted to pop up shops?</p> <p>What if shops had delivery services not including cars?</p>
13	<b>Nature</b>	<p>What if there were trees down the centre of Terrace Road</p> <p>What if we had bus stops with green growing roofs?</p> <p>What if we encourage respect for the countryside and educate to prevent litter?</p> <p>What if there were trees, plants or flowers on every road in Buxton?</p> <p>What if all areas of the town were beautified?</p>
11	<b>Provision for young people</b>	<p>What if we had a non-military community service as part of secondary education?</p> <p>Children were more connected socially</p> <p>What if there were more support for young people to find the kind of work they want to do.</p> <p>We focused on support for children's health and well-being from birth through to teenage.</p> <p>What if Buxton had as much to do indoors as it does outdoors? Thinking mainly of children?</p> <p>What if we had the equivalent of Surestart centres to provide proper childcare support?</p> <p>What if children were allowed to play in the street?</p> <p>What if young people designed facilities for young people in Buxton?</p>
10	<b>Waste &amp; resources</b>	<p>What if there was a hard-to-recycle champion on every street?</p> <p>What if we eliminated disposable packaging?</p> <p>We passed our skills on to young people / manufacturing had to manage the end use and make everything totally repairable?</p> <p>What if there was a library of things in the town centre (to borrow things you only need occasionally?)</p> <p>What if there was a community resources hub with free unwanted resources for schools, groups and artists?</p>

Vote	Theme	What If Questions
8	<b>Parking / Private Transport</b>	<p>What if more roads were car free so children can play out?</p> <p>What if we had no car zones near schools?</p> <p>What if we had a "pocket park" scheme to enable the replacement of a parking space with an area to sit, relax and grow things - community driven application process?</p> <p>What if people walked for short journeys instead of taking their cars?</p> <p>What if relied on cars less, walked more?</p> <p>What if there no town-centre parking? Or parking in centred spaces like the Market Place and Water St?</p> <p>What if the lorries used clean energy?</p> <p>What if the shops had more bicycle deliveries so we don't have to carry shopping?</p> <p>What if we had no heavy traffic / we all used public transport?</p> <p>What if there was free parking? Or businesses sponsored the space?</p> <p>What if business delivery was by bicycle or green transport?</p> <p>What if the quarries used smaller lorries?</p> <p>What if we had no internal combustion engines in the inner part of Buxton?</p> <p>What if there was a park-and-ride for visitors?</p> <p>What if cars were stopped from parking on pavements?</p>
7	<b>Housing</b>	<p>What if some closed shops were converted into housing?</p> <p>What if there were more help and advice for older (e.g. Victorian) houses to become carbon neutral?</p> <p>What if there were many different types of houses, for example to support multi-generational living?</p> <p>What if there was land available and support for designing our own living spaces?</p>
6	<b>Food</b>	<p>What if we had community gardens (vegetables) in every part of town?</p> <p>What if we grew lots of food locally incl in public spaces, roofs and green walls?</p> <p>What if we could become self-sufficient for food?</p> <p>What if there were more opportunities for growing food, more allotments, use of public space?</p> <p>What if we could get council support to collaborate w/creating edible green space?</p> <p>What if we ate less meat?</p>
4	<b>Leisure &amp; tourism</b>	<p>What if there was a backpackers hostel in the centre of town, in one of the empty hotels/care homes?</p> <p>What if Buxton had as much to do indoors as it does outdoors? Thinking mainly of children?</p> <p>What if foreign holidays became a rare luxury?</p>



The engaging and stimulating day raced past and we were all left wanting more. The grant that allowed us to host this event will cover the venue hire for **a second instalment of The Big Buxton Conversation which is proposed to be face to face in October 2021**. The format of that event will be determined between now and then as the participants in this first session take the ideas and provocations from today forward into our lives and the work that many of us do through the passionate community organisations that Buxton is blessed with. Although not yet confirmed, over the summer months various meetings and informal conversations will hopefully see:

- A Buxton Community Forum with representatives of key groups and HPBC to integrate community representation and resources into the everyday work, decisions and priorities of local government agreed and underway.
- Public Transport and Parking / Private transport questions will be taken forward by the Sustainable Transport Group led by Buxton Town Team working in partnership.
- Provision for Young People will be fuelled by the combined passions of Buxton Street-by-street, Climate Pathfinder Youth Forum, and Funny Wonders.
- Transition Buxton will support retrofitting and renewables development.
- Vision Buxton will take on board and share the business opportunities revealed through this process.
- Buxton Street-by Street and Serpentine Community Garden might take a lead on some of the food priorities, perhaps in partnership with the Food Bank.
- And many more of the questions and ideas that have emerged through this process taken on board by local government and other groups.

The last thing that folks did was to respond to two feedback questions:

### **A key 'next step' following today as posted by participants at the end of the day**

Keep talking with each other and turn the talk into action

A local groups forum with HPBC

Keep the process going

'Town council' is needed!

Funding to facilitate changes

Next step? That Community Forum Jean Ball talked about...

Feedback to BTT Directors on Wednesday

Make sure Transition people are aware of my background & contacts when it comes to repurposing empty buildings (Kate Dickson)

Keep the momentum going

A wider conversation with people with different viewpoints

Turning great ideas into actions

Identifying grants etc to fund some of these activities

Open volunteering for next steps to everyone in the town

More publicity of volunteering opportunities

More sessions like this

Getting HPBC on board

We're obviously a self-selecting group. Would be good to see next conversation broadened out to more ages (young people) and socio-economic groups

Would be good to keep momentum flowing. maybe through whatsapp or a facebook chat

The Big Buxton Conversation has been led by Transition Buxton CIC, but this is a whole town process and tool. People attending included representatives of; Transition Buxton, Buxton Rotary, Buxton Town Team, High Peak Borough Council, Buxton Civic Association, Vision Buxton, Buxton Street-by-Street, Churches Together, Funny Wonders, Buxton Neighbourhood Forum, and others we may not have identified. We are also grateful to our neighbours from Acclimatise Whaley and Transition New Mills for their help and support. **It is now up to these Buxton groups and representatives to take this inspiration forward to create the Buxton we choose. This conversation has been important, but it is the actions that follow that will make the difference.** We can continue to communicate using [conversation@transitionbuxton.co.uk](mailto:conversation@transitionbuxton.co.uk)

Finally, feedback on the experience today:

### Feedback

**Something you've really appreciated about the day** (lots of compliments on the organisation and facilitation removed to save space)

Great sharing ideas with enthusiastic people - thank you

Leaving with a real 'feel good' feeling about the future. Thank you!

Thank you for making this happen

Lovely participants

Having different people in each of the breakout rooms

Friendly conversations

Meeting new people and sharing ideas

Engagement of everyone involved

Talking to people I hadn't talked to before

Feeling shared passion for Buxton

Talking to other people who live here and feeling engaged in what's going on