Interim report – 12 July 2022

RAMM about Town was a pilot project of the Creative Arc, a unique collaboration between the University of Exeter, Exeter City Council and RAMM to explore how the museum and its collections can help shape a better Exeter.

Between Wednesday 18 May and Saturday 11 June (inclusive) RAMM, in partnership with the University of Exeter and Art Work Exeter, took over one of the empty shops on Exeter High Street (the old GAP unit). The aim was to reach out to local residents and engage them in discussion over what they would like to see in a future high street. The feedback received forms part of the consultation around the city plan and participants were encouraged to engage with this consultation as a next step.
View the video on YouTube here

Who was involved?

The project team included:
- Staff and volunteers from RAMM
- Academics from the University of Exeter
- Four interns from the University who gave a significant quantity of hours (and who between them managed to cover the majority of shifts required to people the space during opening hours)
- Art Work Exeter (Stuart Crewes assisted by an Emerging Creative Producer and volunteers)
- Local stakeholders and community groups who participated in workshop sessions and talks – Sanchos, CoLab, Exeter City Council, Co-Create, InExeter, Devon Doughnut, Exeter City Futures

How we engaged with visitors

We used a combination of:

- Interpretive panels and projected historical maps, drawing upon museum objects and research from Professor Steve Rippon's 'Exeter a Place in Time' project
- Minecraft on two dedicated laptops in the space, using specially-designed maps of Roman, Tudor and 18th Century Exeter
- Lego interactive play – both public drop-in and specific sessions for community groups – giving people to chance to build and propose the future High Street of their imagination
- Powerpoint presentations
- Object handling
- Evening talks with panel discussions and audience Q&A
- An archaeology day with Professor Steve Rippon
- 'Hidden Cities' tour of Exeter using digital app developed as part of Professor Fabrizio Nevola's Hidden Cities project

We opened the 'shop' between 11am and 3pm on Wednesday to Saturday over a four week period, which included the May Half Term and the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

Themes

The historical content covered the following themes:
- Selling/buying things
- Making things
- Recreation/leisure/culture
- Living/residential housing
- Connecting people (river and roads)
- Civic space for celebration/protest/marking important events
- People stories – enables us to talk about age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and religion

Themes discussed during LEGO building focused on the overarching question, which was: What will our community need in the high street of the future?

Conversations covered the high street as a place to…
- buy things (commercial)
- work (commercial, workplace)
- meet my friends (social)
- escape my home for a while (mental health, accessibility)
- relax and feel calm (culture, health and wellbeing)
- experience new exciting things (culture, virtual experiences)
- learn new things or skills (culture, education, training)

Other topics that were discussed included transport, accessibility, cultural inclusion, and safety.

Underpinning everything was the question: how we do all of this in a sustainable/green way?

Themed LEGO activity sessions/workshops covered the following topics:
- An Inclusive City (cultural, economic, The Commons, night-time/evening economy)
- A post-internet High Street (social spaces, exchange and loans, pop-ups)
- A Green City (net zero, transport infrastructure, planting)
- An Accessible City (physical space, developments, infrastructure, inclusion)
- A Healthy City (live and move, Sport England, transport infrastructure, planting, food miles)
- A Growing City (affordable homes, city centre living, Devon Doughnut)
- A Fun City (playable, adaptable, affordable, flexible, Temporary Autonomous Zone)

Marketing and promotion

We used the following channels/methods to promote the project:

- Website News item: RAMM about Town - RAMM (rammuseum.org.uk) (85 views)
- Website Event: https://rammuseum.org.uk/event/ramm-about-town/ (160 views)
- Website Landing page: https://rammuseum.org.uk/ramm-about-town (41 views)
- Advertising - phone kiosks on High St and Queen St - attached
- Flyer (3000 copies)
- Postcard advertising Minecraft and Hidden Cities app (500 copies)
- Organic social media
    - Instagram – 5,950 reached
    - Twitter – 20,036 impressions
    - Facebook – 9,907 reached
- Welcome to RAMM about Town - YouTube 106 views on YouTube
- 260 clicks through to Ramm About Town webpage in June Connect: RAMM Connect newsletter, June 2022
- Press release sent to media list - coverage:
16/05/2022	ECC News
Exeter's museum to host a pop-up exploring the future of the High Street - Exeter City Council News

    13/05/2022	Exeter University news
University news - Exeter's museum to host a pop-up exploring the future of the High Street - University of Exeter

    17/05/2022	Devon Live
Your chance to have a say on the future of Exeter High Street - Devon Live

    06/06/2022	National Museums Directors' Council
News - National Museum Directors' Council Website (nationalmuseums.org.uk)

Footfall/numbers engaged

Final numbers are being collated and the final evaluation report will contain more detail, but headline figures to date (12 July) are:

Over the 16 days that the project ran, the footfall in the shop was 1,322 visitors (daily split available).

Those 1322 people provided feedback in a number of ways:

- 332 people filled in the Shaping your High Street form, detailing what their model represents and what they want from the high street of the future.

- Others fed back comments via post it notes and verbally, which were captured in the project Log Book. These comments are currently being transcribed.

- The rich nature of this content means that some time will be needed to analyse the feedback and a freelancer is being hired to carry out this analysis.

68 people attended two evening talks.

14 community groups participated in special sessions.

Data collection

There were five methods for gathering data for this project:
1. Comment cards (visitor experience)
2. Shaping your High Street (Lego) feedback forms, including questions from Liveable
3. Post-it notes for visitors who just wanted to make a quick comment
4. The project Log Book for workers to record any particular comments or useful conversations that they had experienced during their shift
5. EAPIT app feedback

On reflection, this was quite complicated and we will explore whether we could we have rationalised this or made it easier in any way.

Feedback received

Spreadsheets have been populated detailing responses from the General Comment cards and the Shaping your High Street questionnaires. Work is underway to document feedback from the log book and post it notes. The project evaluator will produce a final report and analyse the feedback, but a few sample comments are below.

What people enjoyed

"The finds and being able to find out more about particular sites with an expert."

"The fact that the exhibition gets people to think about and contribute to the local community."

"Loved the LEGO, loved the museum inspiration and the friendly staff."

What people want from their high street

"More independent shops needed. Have city centre living."

"More secure cycle storage… More green walls, trees and other green infrastructure… more solar panels for public needs from lamp posts to bike charging and lighting…"

"More communal green space and social/community space."

"Convivial spaces, resting, hanging out with friends, eating, playing. A place where you want to spend time."

"Garden for homeless people to rest, sleep, be warm and safe"

"More independent businesses. More greenery. Safer for pedestrians and cyclists – defined spaces. Appealing seating- not in the middle of busy pavements. Outdoor public focal point/meeting place/shelter/performance space e.g bandstand, but modern. Play space for kids."

Summary

The project brought RAMM out of the museum and into the high street in a visible way and was a good way to highlight university research in an accessible way.

The project generated a great deal of content and comments to feed into the city plan and helped build relationships between RAMM and the Liveable Exeter team.

The project received a great deal of positive feedback through comments and through social media. The activities were seen as fun and thought-provoking. It was very well-received by the EUniverCities delegates who attended after their conference.

The University interns were fantastic in supporting the RAMM elements of the project, generating content and staffing the shop, particularly as this was an off-site pilot.

The speaker events gave RAMM an opportunity to connect with other stakeholders and build relationships.

Involvement of the evaluator early in the project meant that evaluation was planned into the project, not an add-on.

Lessons learnt

This was a great learning exercise for the museum, particularly in terms of partnership working, resourcing, data analysis and the practicalities of taking over a shop on the high street. We have fed back learning points to the external evaluator and will these will be reflected upon in the Creative Arc evaluation process and final detailed evaluation report.