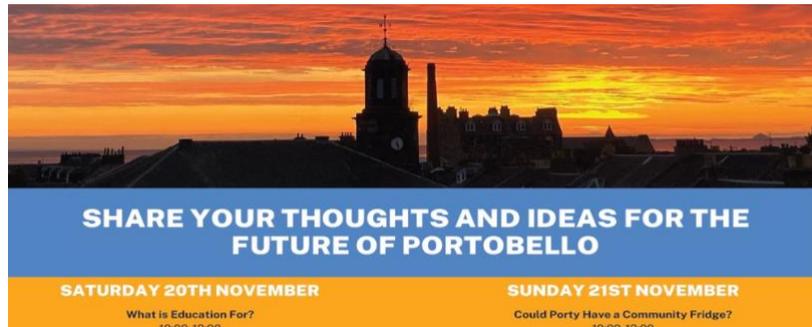


# Heart Talk Party November 2021 Conversations

a two page summary, then six pages of conversation



[Heart Talk](#) offered anyone who lives or works here space to hold the conversations they want on the future of Porty. The idea was to create an opportunity for people to come together to discuss possible community initiatives, and then potentially carry them out. It was also prompted by a sense among community groups that Portobello may need an anchor organisation to help coordinate community initiatives, so this was also an exploration of whether Action Porty should and could play that role.

Thirteen conversations were held outside the Town Hall, in Towerbank Primary School, in St Marks Church and in various halls in Bellfield, in or around the weekend of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> November 2021. Some had to be postponed to the new year, and will be held in the Wash House: two with youth groups and another on the future of work.



The indoor conversations involved between 6 and 26 people each. Based on some simple [agreements](#), these numbers allowed discussions to be more like conversations and less just talks and Q&As led from the front. The [programme](#) highlights the wide range of subjects covered. These included: supporting each other through grief and life transitions, ‘What is education for?’, a community fridge for distributing good food that otherwise goes to waste, gathering ideas for community growing, how to transform how we travel so Porty streets feel like home, how to help the Prom flourish, how to create a community cinema, supporting young mums, affordable community-led housing, ensuring community-led design at Seafield, and community decision making. The core question in the final session was: how do we enable inclusive and effective decisions-making, whether at community or broader levels, and what processes might an anchor organisation for Porty use to ensure enjoyable and enlivening community decisions-making?

Funded by a Neighbourhood grant to Action Party, the programme was put together and supported by a team that included folk from [Action Party](#) (who run [Bellfield](#)), the [Wash House](#), [St Marks](#) and [Grassroots2Global](#) (who support community processes, e.g. in [Torry](#)). The team held a 24th August [preliminary meeting](#) at Bellfield, and put a [call out](#) to ask what peoples big ideas were for Porty, or what peoples major concerns are, and out of that we created the programme of conversations..

As well as the conversations themselves, we held an open drop-in session in the foyer of Bellfield where members of the team were available to discuss issues with people, and the Cube was located. We had asked the folk who run [the Cube project](#) to be on Portobello High Street on the Saturday before Heart Talk, to use it to gather input from people of all ages in the form of scribblings, painting, graffiti, etc.



We had aimed to hold an online conversation during the weekend, but a combination of the fact that we had had good in person turn out for the run up events but didn't have people signing up to attend online events (plus the demands of organising becoming too great) meant that didn't happen.

A myriad of possible initiatives emerged out of each conversation. Some will be taken forward by those involved, some may require wider coordination, and might for example be coordinated by Action Party. This is simply the start of a process. We welcome more conversations and initiatives coming forward.

A community meeting to discuss 'What Next?' - what next steps might flow from the conversations - will be held at 2pm on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022 in Bellfield (or online). All are welcome. If the Covid situation allows an in-person meeting, we would be very happy to also have an online meeting if anyone would like that.

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***See below for a 6-page summary of the different conversations' initial ideas for next steps.***

## Heart Talk conversations held so far – some of the ideas from the conversations

**What is education for?** Is education as currently provided fit for purpose? How can the education system best reconnect us to our communities, to nature, to the skills and sensitivities children need?

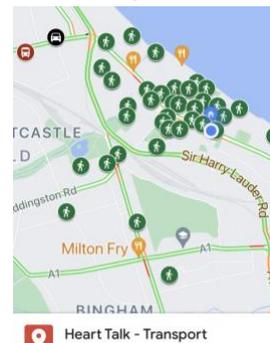


One teenager said kids are welcome in Porty, but once they become teenagers they are seen as a threat. Can we coordinate initiatives/ businesses to reach out to teenagers in the High School, offering work or community experience?

Other ideas: All school children having outdoor learning every week; youth clubs being warm and safe to hang out in; a Nature Porty series of walking talks on Our ocean, Our history, and Our biodiversity; an Online Map of community generated resource; a QR code Tour on the history / future of important places; workshops by Local people on their expertise / passion (baker, jeweler, etc); a Porty Carnival, History Club, Mini Museum. Notes from session [here](#)

**Moving around Porty:** Held outside the Town Hall, inviting people to talk about how they get around Portobello: “What is good? What is not so good? What would you like to change?”

Porty Community Energy and Spokes Porty asked the public how they had travelled and where they had come from. Of the 85: 59 had walked, 13 come by car, 7 by bike, 4 by bus, 1 by scooter, 1 by rollerblade. The general feedback from the event was that people very much want traffic along the High Street to be reduced and for active travel infrastructure to be better, safer and more joined up. Notes from the session [here](#)



**Grief and Building Resilience:** How do we create safe, inclusive and caring spaces in our community where those who are grieving and / or passing through a significant life-transition feel seen, heard and supported? How might we begin to repair the social chains broken by Covid?

Interest was shown in the possibility of hosting a collection of related events - a festival that gives voice to our grief, loss and resilience. Individuals might also be interested in coming together to offer a space for listening, coming alongside, or becoming involved locally as [Compassionate Neighbours](#). Notes [here](#)



**The future of work:** Reflecting on the changes to the way, hours and location of work brought about by the pandemic and exploring our collective futures using inclusive and community futures tools. *This session has had to be postponed until January due to illness*

**Community Cinema:** What could cinema be in Portobello? Social events, live music played to silent movies, comment from film experts, sing-alongs, party films or arty stuff and exotic movies?

Around 20 people contributed to the discussions on a new community cinema initiative. Discussion flowed and a wide range of ideas were proffered. Several attendees offered to contribute to a group and volunteer to make things happen. Notes from the session are [here](#)

**Pedestrianising Our High Street:** What would a pedestrianised Portobello High Street look and feel like and how would it contribute to a sustainable community?

Key points raised in this discussion (hosted by PEDAL) were that public transport must not be adversely affected (camera bus gates?), and shared space is not just for pedestrians but for low speed cars and cycles with more seating areas for people to congregate. Where does the traffic using the High Street comes from and go to? Is it mostly through traffic? Traffic counts indicate 700 vehicles per hour each way at peak times. A low traffic environment needs to be max 100 vehicles per hour. Supermarkets have a disproportionate amount of parking compared to town centre retailers. Idea of peripheral car parks with access to town centre on foot. The High Street is not a pleasant place to be because of the traffic. There would have to be a cultural/ behavioural shift for us to take ownership of the effects of our behaviour. Notes from the 'High Street' session are [here](#)

**A lively Prom that works for us all:** As the prom gets busier and busier, what do we need to do to ‘manage’ this demand in a way that minimises the negative impact on local residents, and ensures the beach and Prom can enable visitors and residents alike to improve our well-being?

The Prom / beach suffers from a lack of a coherent design, and would benefit from having clearer management (who has overall responsibility?). Many local people see the Prom and beach as the major local asset, and there is considerable interest in ensuring that it continues to be used, managed and developed successfully. Developing a vision and plan for the prom and beach may well provide a useful framework for this, especially since there appears to be a lack of overall responsibility and coordination between council departments responsible for different aspects. This is not solely a council problem, but requires a collective response from the community. There is the need for a space where the different stakeholders can come together to arrive at a common set of aims and actions. A short discussion paper will be developed, and a meeting inviting some of the key stakeholders will be organised to discuss the paper.

Notes from the Prom session are [here](#)



**Could Porty have a Community Fridge?** Food waste is a massive issue and many other places have started up community fridges to tackle it, providing healthy food for those who need it and reducing food waste in the process.

Would establishing a community fridge (where discarded food from supermarkets etc is made available for free) be a sticking plaster or system change? Maybe the sticking plaster protects while healing takes place? What does such healing look like? There was a wish to collaborate with the community growing conversation on a wider event around our Portobello food system. Small core group formed to explore the possibility of a possible on-street fridge/ freezer which will need a site identified for it.

Notes from the Community Fridge session are [here](#)



**Community Growing:** How can we reimagine our pockets of unloved or under used green and brown space? Non-traditional growing sites such as bus shelter roofs, areas of waste ground, roadside verges, as well as redesigning our parks as spaces for community food growing, planting for wildlife and spaces for people to gather, really bringing nature and food into the heart of our community.



The group identified the need for an event to get people motivated, to build on work done by PEDAL, and to link with the community fridge group (combining with them to create a wider event around our Portobello food system?).

Have a local food bus to resource local food growing?

Vertical gardens?

Notes from the session are [here](#)

**Seafield development – opportunity or threat?** What do we know of the current plans that are emerging for Seafield? Will the development bring benefits, area renewal and affordable housing or will it overwhelm our services and dominate the beachfront? How can the community engage with the proposal and best shape this new neighbourhood?

For us, Seafield is an extension of Porty because the beach makes for a continuity. What happens at Seafield impacts our beach, High Street, facilities and community. Will the council's proposed 'housing-led mixed-use' development be a market-led piecemeal disjointed development? Will it overshadow the beach, be high end and unaffordable, putting great pressure on existing infrastructure? Can we make sure it's thought-through and community-led? Any development will need huge resources for sewage, transport and coastal infrastructure. The Council has set up a 'Sounding Board' (of reps from Edinburgh Council, the 4 community councils, and the 15 landowners).

Our response? (1) Improve community representation: Following this meeting Action Party representation was accepted on the Sounding Board but the community needs to help shape the Place Brief and Masterplan; and (2) Respond to the Seafield part of the [City Plan 2030](#) by 20th December (relevant pages are 69-70) by emphasising the need for (i) a stronger community role in shaping the process, (ii) the elements needed for a good development (housing, transport, infrastructure, a lively Prom, green space, celebrating the coast, renewable energy, etc - see session notes below) and (iii) that development should not take place until after a Masterplan is produced, and only if that plan is agreed by all, including this community. Notes from the session are [here](#)

**Providing community-led housing opportunities in Portobello?** What are the housing needs in Portobello? What can be done to provide new housing opportunities – both owned and rented – for local people through community-led development.

Drawing on the work and experience of CoHere Collective Custom Build, the session explored the scope for small scale housing development, with people working together to address their specific housing needs. The conversation also touched on what, if any, role or contribution the organised community could play in making this happen. The lack of land was identified as the major barrier. It was agreed on the need to do a local housing needs survey, meet with various key players and ensure that scope for this approach is included in the Seafield Development. Notes from the housing session are [here](#)

**Supporting new parents to adjust to life out of lockdown:** Lockdown removed support networks from new mums everywhere. The struggle is ongoing with activities being the last to start up again.

Although 2 support people (from Action Party and [Grassroots2Global](#)) turned up, as well as the host, no new parents turned up. The very fact they were unable to spare the time to be there highlighted the importance of the need for support for them. Action Party has found someone to offer mentoring and support for developing a local parent run playgroup; Bellfield is trying to rearrange things so that, as well as providing playgroup space for the group, it can also provide storage for the group's toys.

**Reclaiming the streets of Porty:** How do we reduce traffic in Portobello and make it cleaner and greener? Based on the results of recent transport surveys, and on the discussion and survey held outside the Town Hall the previous day, Porty Community Energy and Spokes Porty facilitated a discussion on how to reduce car traffic in and through Portobello, how to enable and inspire people to leave their car, and priorities for active and shared travel.

After presentations on cargo bikes and recent surveys, 3 breakout groups focused on businesses, infrastructure and behaviour change. The possibilities of local businesses using cargo bikes for deliveries (e.g. Far Out cargo bikes talked with St Andrews), bike buddies to help those who find road cycling intimidating, real infrastructure change (from signage to Fort Kinnaird to segregated cycle lanes to make cycling safe) were all explored. As were the idea of a monthly critical mass cycle ride round Porty, possibly combined with a monthly closing of a different road so people can experience quiet streets.

Notes from 'Reclaiming the streets' session [here](#)



**How can community decision making in Portobello be enlivening and effective?** How can we organise in a way that is inclusive, energising and manages differences? How can we collectively respond to the rapidly increasing challenges we face now and in the years ahead where community is likely to become far more critical to ensuring our needs are met and our responsibilities enabled.

People feel they don't matter so you need to connect with them personally to help people realise that what they think matters. Make it possible for them to attend. Need an immediate aim/ win as well as long term relationship building. Make meetings inclusive and effective: use rounds, silence, listening, reflexivity (e.g. "What do I do when I hear something I disagree with?" Some will move in, others back off - get the chance to reflect and have suggestions on how we do things differently), encourage those who speak a lot to listen, those who stay quiet to speak - relearn the skill of listening to one another as peers.

Local Authorities in Scotland are huge. Portobello would be a normal sized local authority in the rest of Europe. Pilot a bottom-up community decision-making process in Porty that tries to reach out and include everyone, rather than having representatives 'doing politics' for us. Could start with initiatives coming out of these conversations, but also help link initiatives, and help create decision making processes that are enlivening not alienating.

Notes from 'Community decision making' are [here](#)

## **'What Next?' Meeting at 2pm on 23rd January 2022 - All welcome!**

A myriad of possible initiatives emerged out of each conversation. Some will be taken forward by those involved, some may require wider coordination, and might for example be coordinated by Action Porty.



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