Journey Three

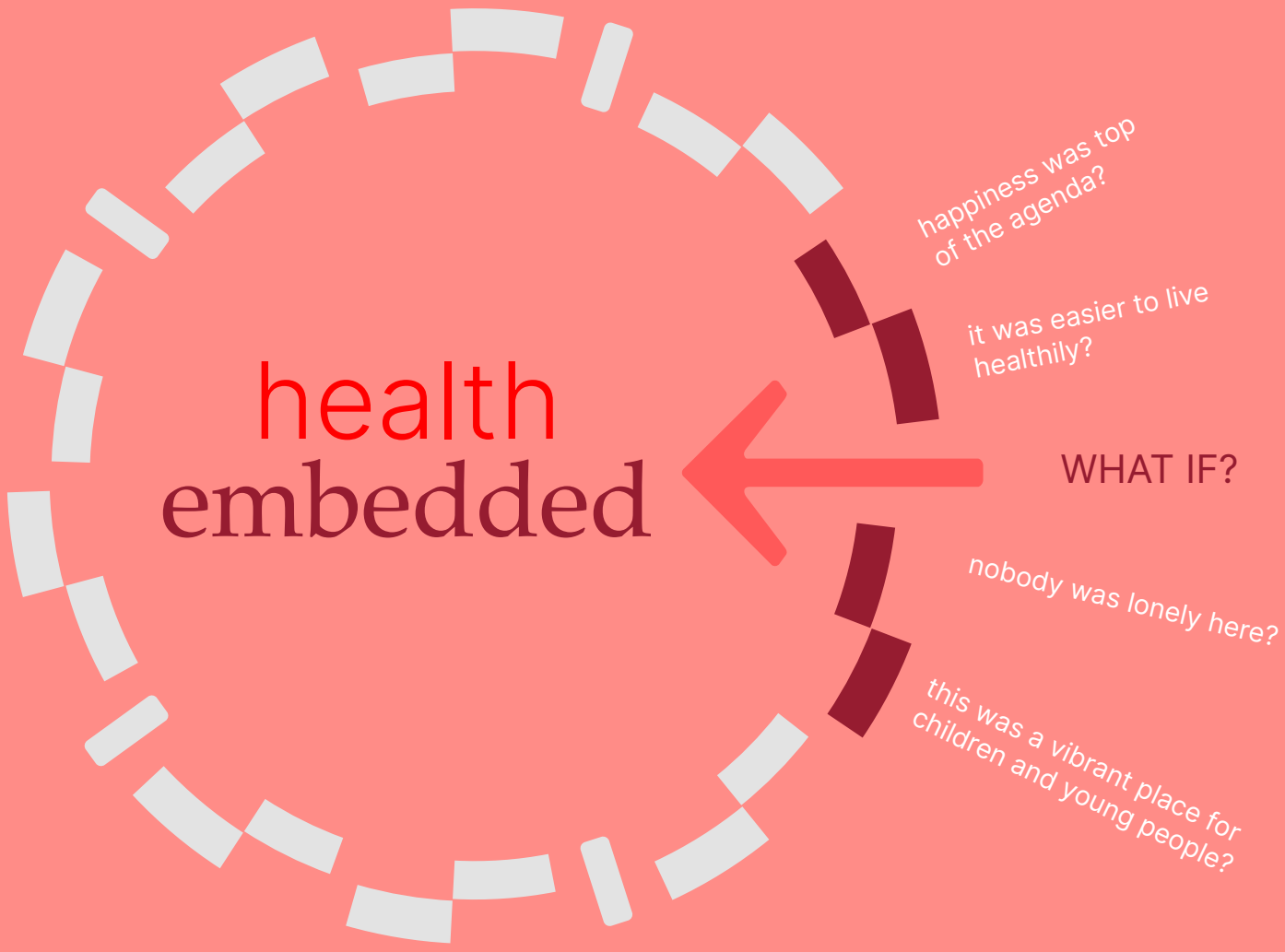
Healthier and more holistic — in 2050 Huntingdonshire will value happiness and health above all else, supporting good quality of life for all people at all stages of life.

You said...

‘It would be better to do more to prevent people from getting to the point where they’re really ill. Whether that’s physical health or mental health.’

‘Mental health is being pushed aside in this conversation.’

‘There are lots of people who work in care in this area, and we don’t do enough to support them’


health
embedded
WHAT IF?
happiness was top of the agenda?
it was easier to live healthily?
nobody was lonely here?
this was a vibrant place for children and young people?

What if...

happiness was the top of the agenda?

In a world where... we know that economic growth does not necessarily result in wellbeing — health really matters and our mental and physical health is under strain. Prioritising profit has widened social inequality and in Huntingdonshire fewer than 1 in 3 residents have 'very good' life satisfaction.

There is a place... that has all the ingredients of a great quality of life; a kind community, beautiful green spaces, access to secure jobs and generally low levels of deprivation.

Which could become... a place that prioritises the happiness of its people and their health. A place with a cohesive support system that starts from the top and spreads through the community. A place with culture, a good work life balance, access to nature and opportunities for leisure and play — all the ingredients for a good life.

But only if... 'happiness' is top of the agenda for the council and our businesses, instead of just a nice-to-have. This will involve defining what happiness means for Huntingdonshire and how it can be measured in a way that reflects the diverse community — and then using this to inform our plans and decision making.

What could we do?

1. Define what happiness means for Huntingdonshire

In order to try to achieve happiness, we need to know what happiness means for the people of Huntingdonshire.

Through collaborative sessions, for example a Citizens Assembly, we could come up with a way of defining and measuring happiness that reflects all of Huntingdonshire's diverse communities. This approach could consider factors such as health metrics, work life balance, mental health, opportunities to socialise, access to culture and leisure and financial security.

2. Ensure happiness drives decision making

Once a definition for happiness has been determined, and metrics developed, improving happiness should be the shared goal alongside economic growth.

Council programmes and grant-funded organisations should be required to demonstrate how they are improving happiness and the direction of these organisations should be structured towards an approach that best improves happiness.

There should be regular information gathering, to understand progress and understand which aspects of happiness are harder to achieve and require additional investment.

Gross National Happiness

The concept of Gross National Happiness was developed by the Buddhist nation of Bhutan as they felt that sustainable development should take a more holistic approach towards notions of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing.

An Index was developed which seeks to define what happiness means for the residents of Bhutan and includes metrics on health, wellbeing, nature and culture. This is used as a tool to measure national progress and inform policy, with projects, funding and decision making meant to be directed in a way that increases happiness.

Source: Gross National Happiness

3. Celebrate happiness

Raise the profile of Huntingdonshire as a happy place to live and work. This includes branding campaigns that celebrate the high quality of life that Huntingdonshire provides and its new and innovative approach to running volunteering actions, community projects, the local services and initiatives.

This could be supported by a series of community events and festivals that bring places and people together.

What if... it was easier to live healthily?

In a world where... our physical and mental health isn't something we can take for granted, living healthy lives needs to be the obvious choice, but that's often not the case. If you live in the least deprived areas, you can expect to live on average 7 years longer than those living in the most deprived areas of Huntingdonshire. Residents are frustrated by the health service — often struggling to get basic appointments. Depression rates have almost doubled since the pandemic began and depression is also more prevalent amongst young people and those in more precarious economic positions.

There is a place... with abundant parks and open spaces, topography that supports active travel and community initiatives that can help to remove barriers to healthy, happy lifestyles.

Which could become... an environment where being healthy is inclusive — where all people independent of their abilities can easily access their daily needs so that exercise is embedded in their daily routine, where choosing fresh food options is the easiest and most affordable choice, where mental health is prioritised and where service providers are coordinated and mobile, bringing care into our communities.

But only if... the council, NHS, Cambridgeshire County Council, businesses and residents view health and wellbeing holistically, investing in programmes that examine the social and economic determinants of health and treat the cause of physical and mental health complaints before they arise. This includes the promotion of healthy new places, encouraging active travel and addressing economic insecurity and social isolation.

Guiding Lights

The High Street Hospital

Post-pandemic, we reflect on how interlinked community and healthcare are.

Being local to the community also plays a vital role in accessibility and ways of navigating healthcare are changing, as it strives to become human-centred, meeting people where they are.

Sheffield Hallam Teaching hospital, alongside ARUP, plans to replace dying city centre retail with walk-in clinics – high street hospitals that can use these strategically placed spaces.

Source: Arup High Street Hospital

What could we do?

1. Focus on low income communities

There are significant health inequalities across Huntingdonshire, so investment in health and wellbeing should be directed towards those that need it most. In Huntingdonshire, this tends to mean low income neighbourhoods and rural communities.

The council should work together with key stakeholders to ensure that new services or investment in improvements to existing services, public realm and open space prioritise these areas. They tend to be in less accessible locations, with poor access to public transport or low car ownership. Investment in public transport including subsidies would also improve health outcomes for those that need it most.

2. Fast track community based integrated services

Community-based integrated services enable people to receive care closer to home, preventing physical and mental health challenges before they arise.

Focusing on everyday health and wellbeing at the local level, through coordination between health care providers and community groups, gives people the support they need when they need it, including services to support self-care and wellbeing, independence and social participation. These sectors should coordinate, adapting the design of their services to better reflect the specific needs of the local population.

This aims to avoid unnecessary hospital care which can be traumatising for individuals and place strain on the NHS.

3. Create community food systems

A “community food system” is one in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular community. This could be facilitated across Huntingdonshire to initiate diverse projects that develop connections between different parts of the food system. More allotments and orchards can be created in spaces close to residents that support mental and physical wellbeing. Space in both high streets and rural areas could become equipped with community kitchens where people can gather. There could also be support for the development of small food enterprises.

Source: Community Food Systems

What if... nobody was lonely here?

In a world where... increasing loneliness and social isolation affects the mental health of every pocket of society, the most vulnerable and the elderly are hit hardest — although isolation is also rising in young people. Research by the Campaign to End Loneliness found loneliness is likely to increase your risk of death by 26%.

There is a place... with passionate and empathetic people in an active volunteering sector and communities focussed around neighbourly towns and villages. People are proud of the strong community ties here, and a growing retired population have time to help those in need.

Which could become... a place where everyone has a friend, as all residents have the opportunity to feel engaged in their community and places help facilitate social interaction. This includes parks, high streets community centres, playgrounds and allotments which provide ample opportunities to leave the house, making it easy to engage and participate.

But only if... we ensure the built environment provides solutions including co-living, activated public realm, community spaces and good connectivity. In addition, there is promotion of a diverse range of events and volunteering opportunities to increase participation and grow local networks.

Source: Campaign to End Loneliness

What could we do?

1. Trial co-living

With loneliness on the rise, collective living offers a solution and could be trialled in Huntingdonshire. Here, a community of unrelated individuals or families share housing and facilities. This might be a fully shared home, or just a group of homes organised around a communal garden or kitchen.

This helps counter loneliness and supports a sense of belonging and cohesion by creating easier opportunities to socialise. Through sharing space, these models can be more affordable and reduce consumption of resources.

2. Promote intergenerational care

Intergenerational care refers to the practice of bringing the young and elderly together by co-locating and integrating nurseries and care homes.

The practice can decrease loneliness and improve quality of life amongst the elderly participants and has been shown to delay mental and physical decline. This also gives children the opportunity to mix regularly with elderly people, which can be missing if extended family do not live nearby. Children can also benefit from the attention of people who have time to listen and share stories which connect them with the past.

This could be achieved through locating a new nursery and care home together, expanding sites if the opportunity is available or by having reading sessions or shared outings.

Guiding Lights

Marmalade Lane

As we are beginning to understand the dire consequences of loneliness on our health, new models of co-living are being tested on our doorstep, with concepts such as Marmalade Lane, Cambridge.

Here, residents across forty two homes share facilities such as a common house for residents to socialise, host guests and eat together. A shared garden makes up the heart of the community, with mature trees, food growing and space to relax and play. The homes face onto a child friendly car free street which encourages neighbourly interaction.

Source: Marmalade Lane

3. Create a community wellbeing network

Healthcare providers and the voluntary sector could collaborate to establish a network whose purpose is to improve the wellbeing of individual participants and the community as a whole.

This involves creating support plans, signposting to opportunities, helping individuals to access support groups, referring them to specialist agencies or just having a chat.

The network could serve as connectors in the community, providing spaces to socialise and find out about the range of opportunities available across Huntingdonshire, from events, clubs, volunteer opportunities and training.

What if...

this was a **vibrant place** for **children** and **young people?**

In a world where... poor mental health is on the rise, social media has worsened social isolation and there is the perception that crime and anti-social behaviour is on the rise.

There is a place... that has passionate and engaged communities, a strong voluntary sector, independent initiatives such as Shift Momentum and the potential to make the most of links with Cambridge, London and Peterborough.

Which could become... a place where children and young people are engaged and inspired through activities and opportunities that reflect their diverse interests. Where ambition is nurtured and young people can reach their full potential — allowing them to socialise, develop confidence, discover productive new hobbies or learn new skills.

But only if... the public, private and voluntary sectors come together to deliver places, projects and events that children and young people can enjoy. This includes listening to and responding to the actual interests and needs of those who are intended to participate and fostering a culture of trust that fosters independence and a sense of care for the community.

Source: Huntingdonshire Futures Stakeholder Engagement. Top image: #iwillmovement Twitter

Guiding Lights

Young Technicians Academy

Recently opened in Yaxley, the Young Technicians Academy helps young people build their skills, knowledge and experiences in the creative industries, including music, performing arts, media and live events. Primary and secondary school students learn about backtstage operations from performers, while young people can participate in courses and clubs to learn essential skills while having fun.

Creative therapies are also delivered in partnership with communities and not-for-profit organisations.

Source: Young Technicians Academy

What could we do?

1. Promote Youth Social Action and the #iwill movement

Youth social action refers to activities that children and young people can do to make a positive difference to others or the environment. The #iwill movement is made up of over 1000 organisations and 700 young ambassadors across the UK that helps to ensure meaningful action is taken to support more children and young people to be active citizens.

Huntingdonshire organizations including schools could sign up to gain access to support and funding opportunities to increase youth social action, recognizing the benefits this provides.

2. Support Youth Services and Create a Youth Action Plan

Create through collaboration with young people and organisations across Huntingdonshire, an action plan for the district that sets out how to plan and deliver youth services. This includes preparing a comprehensive map of youth services and out of school activities across the district. Then invest in services and assets that can deliver opportunities for children and young people. This could include community transport options for rural areas, encouraging existing community organisations and spaces to deliver more youth specific activities and providing adequate resources for youth work. The action plan may identify priorities for young people in the district, for example the need for investment in mental health support or requirements to widen participation in youth services to meet Huntingdonshire's changing demographics.

3. Youth volunteering networks

Huntingdonshire already has a strong voluntary sector. Enhancing youth participation would support skills building, create opportunities for meaningful social interaction and deliver community benefits.

A network could be established between youth organisations and existing voluntary groups to establish a programme for youth volunteering that balances the interests of children and young people with the specific opportunities Huntingdonshire has to offer. This could be linked to digital tools and incentives to widen participation.

Youth volunteer networks could also make the most of links to opportunities in nearby cities, to broaden the horizon of children and young people, particularly those who may not have access without family support.