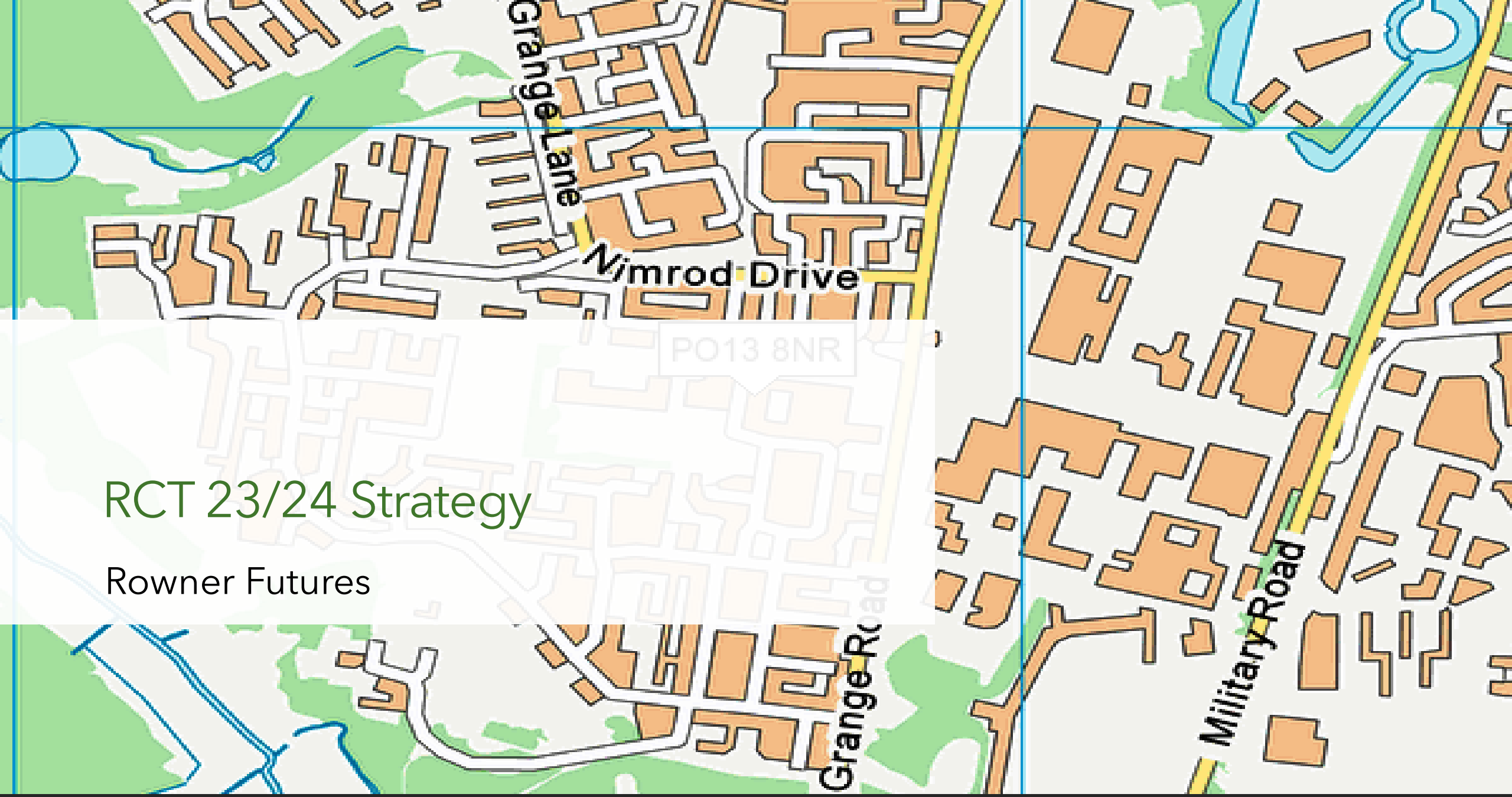


RCT 23/24 Strategy

Rowner Futures

Introduction

Rowner has seen substantial change in recent years. It has changed and is still changing, and it is now a young and increasingly diverse area (see our accompanying community profile report). On top of this are the accelerating broader economic and social changes and challenges with rapid shifts in work/technologies and values and ongoing economic tumult which affect residents. Rowner Community Trust (RCT) has a unique role in shaping change with and for the benefit of residents and to secure the sustainability of our community.

Core to a more sustainable Rowner is shaping a new shared, positive and inclusive identity, the promotion of personal and community resilience, environmental quality, social cohesion and community vibrancy. There are some specific challenges in attainment, skills, a very young demographic profile and potential issues around community cohesion as well as the major broader social and economic challenges. To assist our residents and improve the local environment. RCT needs to act as a 'community anchor' proactively and systematically engaging our residents across the spectrum, consolidating our unique business model and achieving a more distinct approach and clear impact in order to shape the future of our community with our residents.

We also need a refresh of local community offers and to secure more investment for Rowner which reflects a new narrative and positive identity that celebrates Rowner as a good place to live and which includes all residents as a core focus for our work over 2023-2024. This is about responding to the immediate challenges facing residents and our community while creatively engaging a broad spectrum of residents, refreshing RCT's profile and also generating new voices and insights to underpin a longer-term 2025-30 Strategy which potentially could include elements such as a neighbourhood plan, community budgeting, young leaders…

This 23/24 RCT strategy has three key objectives:

1. Engage a wide cross-section of residents in identifying Rowner's strengths and aspirations as the basis for the generation and articulation of a positive shared identity and longer-term community sustainability.

2. Develop and test core RCT programmes which distinctively address the key challenges facing Rowner and work with local collaborators to develop new aligned and resonating offers which promote local resident's resilience, wellbeing and a flourishing vibrant community.

3. Refresh RCT's business model and approaches to become more of a community-driven organisation which is proactively shaping Rowner, attracting new investment and which is able to demonstrate impact for levy-payers, all residents and aligned key stakeholders.

This 23/24 RCT Strategy document seeks to introduce some of the key issues









Rowner

Rowner has changed in the last decade+. We have a unique chance to continue improving our local environment, promote a vibrant and inclusive community identity through better branding, celebration, environmental improvements, energising community events and offers. A young, diverse and inclusive community can flourish but this requires a purposeful and active animation of community life and resident involvement.

A Whole Rowner Approach

The 2021 Census and Experian data show how much Rowner has changed, and that it is continuing to change. Rowner is a young and diverse area. There are potential fractures between the new and older areas and tenures. In challenging times Rowner needs an independent focus and vehicle for collective community-level resilience & flourishing and action with a concern for both people & place. Targeted 'projects' will only ever reach a small proportion of our community,

RCT needs to act more as a focus for collaboration, an informed facilitator and advocate and investor which helps build local connections and relationships. Acting as a platform for communal voice, aspiration and action with the primary driver being local voice, insight and involvement.

For RCT a new community building model and approach means shifting to working in a positive, community-driven approach which is more focussed and informed and shaped by broad, creative and open engagement + involvement. Learning from the past of our community we believe that there are several key challenges/opportunities for building new approaches and achieving the wellbeing and sustainability of Rowner. These include:

Firstly, the majority of the 'official' conversations and online imagery on Rowner still hark back to physical regeneration and/or have a deficit/helping slant. We now need to curate the emergence of a/the better Rowner story: that includes the 50% + who don't know the old Rowner, which is celebratory of the changed and changing Rowner. It is forward looking, with a younger, more diverse and positive vibe, story and offers. RCT can act as the brand leader and actor which brings local people (and select aligned organisations) together to collaborate within a positive shared ethos which inspires and makes a difference.

Secondly, RCT is a community trust and is here for the whole community. It is by growing a shared inclusive + integrative identity with a confident narrative which is acted on in high-quality and positive ways that RCT can make the biggest difference in difficult times for many of our residents. We want to be more than just service providers, hosts or 'partners' and go beyond projects with select purposeful and sustained programmes which catalyse better connections and relationships which in turn reaches and includes new people in creating and generating new resources *with* our residents to act in new distinctive ways via their RCT.

Thirdly, as a young and diverse area. We will need to win the trust of new segments and groups particularly the levy payers, younger people and newer residents. We will need to actively model an integrative and a positive (physical and social) environment, diversity and inclusion so that we can build bold and generative community action which will clearly contribute to more shared and connected lives.

The pages below outline the key elements of the RCT 23/24 Strategy (a more detailed 23/24 Strategy action plan and an RCT improvement plan are also available).

23-24 Objectives and outcomes

1. Engagement & Local Sustainability

Engage a wide cross-section of our residents in identifying Rowner's strengths and aspirations as the basis for the generation and articulation of a positive shared identity & longer-term community sustainability.

Outcomes:

A 1000 residents have been engaged through events, codesign and creative sessions by the end of 2024.

A bold positive 'new' identity by Rowner is in place and being actively promoted which is leading to a better internal and external image.

2. Promoting Community Resilience & Vibrancy

Develop and test core RCT programmes which address the key challenges facing Rowner and work with local collaborators to develop new aligned and resonating offers which promote local resident's resilience, wellbeing and a flourishing vibrant community.

Outcomes:

A core youth programme has been developed and tested and it has engaged 300 younger people.

A more vibrant community with a minimum of three local spaces seeing a high-profile & animating improvement.

3. Renewing RCT

Refresh the RCT's business model and approaches to become more of a community-driven organisation which is proactively shaping Rowner, attracting new investment and which able to demonstrate impact for all residents and stakeholders.

Outcomes:

A minimum of £300,000 new investment has been attracted to Rowner.

An RCT impact report has been produced and a broad spectrum of residents are aware of and involved in RCT's work.

23-24 Strategy – key actions

1. Engagement & Local Sustainability

- Develop and run series of high profile whole community events.
- Lead co-creative work and opportunities to shape a positive local narrative and image.
- Run co-design events focussed on animating spaces and enhancing environmental quality + sustainability.
- Work with residents to celebrate Rowner as a young, diverse and vibrant community.

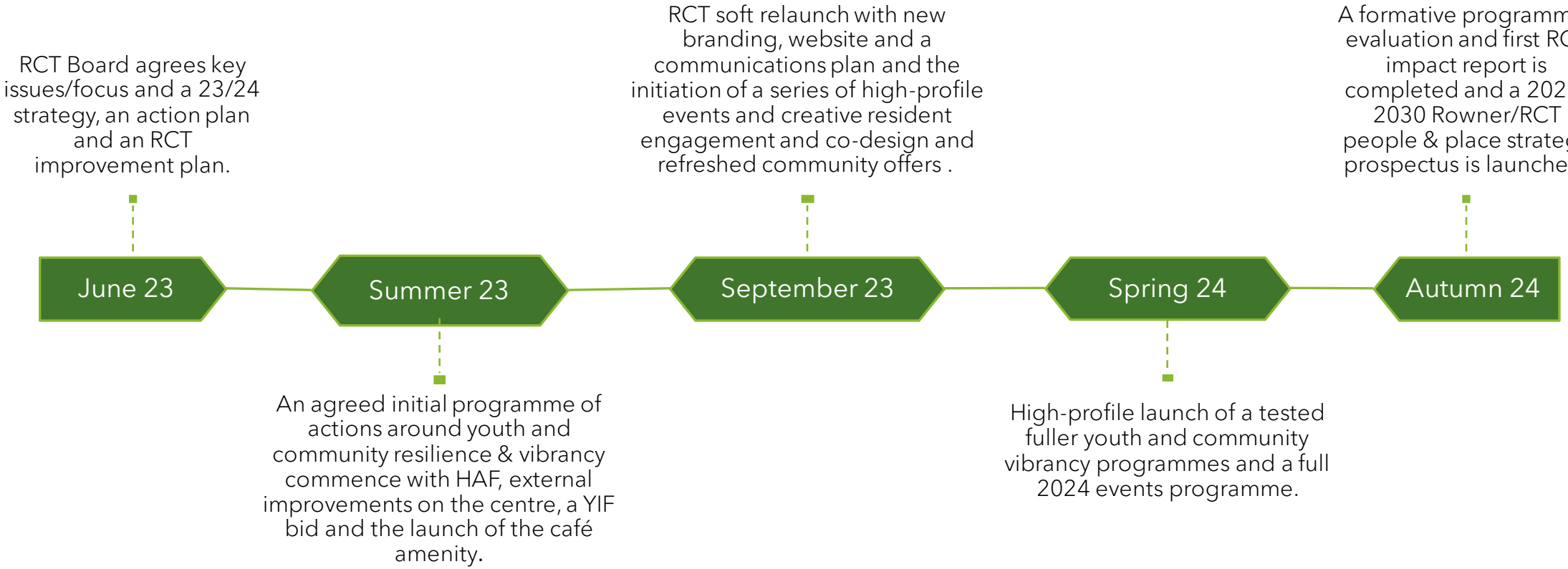
2, Promoting Community Resilience & Vibrancy

- Develop and test purposeful planned events which bring residents together and celebrate a 'new' Rowner.
- Develop core RCT programmes *with* young people and on community vibrancy.
- Refresh existing and develop new groups & activities to ensure that there is a distinct positive and animative local offer.
- Renew the current community spaces to be more contemporary and welcoming.

3. Renewing RCT

- RCT communications have achieved a higher-profile and engagement for RCT.
- Advocate and work with local and external stakeholders and funders to secure positive action and investment on key local issues.
- RCT is working to maximise the value of the levy and to attract new external investment.
- A clear positive impact for Rowner for RCT's work is identified and well communicated with all residents and stakeholders.

23/24 Strategy Timeline



Summary

Rowner and RCT are entering a new era. There are some key issues facing Rowner along with some significant external risks to its sustainability. RCT now needs a refresh of its focus, business model and its efforts in engaging residents so as to generate fresh insights to scope its future focus. It is through co-design and creation and the emergence of a new positive local narrative and distinct programmes that reach, which involves all residents, that RCT can increase its resonance and impact *with* residents. This is central to underpinning the future of RCT and also the wellbeing, vibrancy and sustainability of Rowner.





Appendix 1: Strategic Challenges & Opportunities

Rowner key challenges

- Rowner is an exceptionally young area – a demographic dividend which needs acknowledging, celebrating and investing in to realise it.
- There is now much more diversity in social, cultural and other segments and groupings including LGBT+ which can contribute to a dynamic and vibrant community life if it is facilitated, or potentially community tensions if it is not.
- New build and a disparity in environmental quality and inadequate proactive community formation which has led to an implicit social divide based on tenure, income and housing type/age. This is happening within a broader norm of social disconnection/distancing and this can potentially contribute to divisive feelings of neglect from both 'sides'. This 'ecology' can also limit the reach and resonance of RCT's offer.
- Poor attainment and skills outcomes that particularly leaves longer-standing households behind and which could potentially underpin polarisation, resentment and ASB. This will also be a major future risk to community sustainability with the risks/opportunities of the green transition, new technologies etc.

RCT opportunities to make a difference

- A sustained substantive proactive youth investment programme (YIP) would address some shared/projected concerns on ASB and the long-standing attainment issues and which gains recognition for RCT & Rowner's young people as positive contributors.
- There is an opportunity for a proactive RCT being a local brand leader shaping a generative local and vibrant narrative and identity which contributes to a shift towards being a more confident, inclusive community and also increasing local involvement and 'ownership'.
- Structured, purposeful and consistent creative engagement, generative conversations, high-profile communications and investments will increase RCT distinctiveness/brand value and impact while increasing local connections and trust and this also help to attract external investment.
- Developing a whole community response that means all segments can benefit from positive RCT offers ensuring buy-in from levy payers (e.g. CAB, a community emergency facility, shared high-quality brand/events) and which also increases social cohesion and community sustainability.