Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole

The Big Conversation

Place Values Identification to inform a Brand & Place Making Strategy

September 2022

1HQ
PART OF CEUTA GROUP

BCP Council

FuturePlaces.

In December 2021, 1HQ was jointly commissioned by BCP Council and Future Places to undertake a deeply researched 'discovery' exercise to explore local opinion, assets and to help key values to define and inform the development of initiatives in both place brand and place making. The objectives of this work were two-fold:

For BCP Council: to articulate a fresh and distinctive, locally resonant narrative on which to build a strong brand to represent the region.

For Future Places: to identify core 'place values' that should be reflected and embedded in its proposition for regeneration and growth.

1HQ's commission falls within the wider remit of the Corporate Strategy and Big Plan to build Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole's reputation as a world-renowned place to live, visit, work, learn and invest. It will also support FuturePlaces define a place proposition that is embedded in local values and resounds with local aspiration and attachment whilst optimising opportunity for regeneration and growth. This document is intended to introduce stakeholders to the project, its approach, findings and recommendations.

Shared 'discovery' exercise
Evaluation of local 'assets'
Deep and Broad opinion testing
Comparator Research

Place Identity & Value Proposition

Place Positioning
To inform:
- Brand
- Public Relations
- Service Delivery

Place Making Vision
To inform:
- Policy
- Projects

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Introduction

What is the need?

Places compete for recognition, reputation and investment – both nationally and internationally. They do so to attract and retain the residents, visitors, businesses and investment that contribute to building thriving and sustainable communities.

This need has been given added impetus by the global pandemic and the widely-held ambition to 'build back better' for the emerging post-Covid world. For all the personal tragedies and hardships of this once in a lifetime event, there is a sense that in its aftermath, there is a unique moment of opportunity to re-set and plan for a brighter future.

This region is no different: together, place branding and place making are key components in a drive for positive change.

To be relevant and find resonance with resonance, businesses and institiutions it is critical that the vision for place grows from analysis of the values that underpin peopls' commitment to place.

What do we mean by Place Branding?

It is important to stress that our interpretation of brand is not focused on, or limited to the creation of new marketing materials – such as logos, slogans or advertising campaigns. Rather, by our definition, brand represents the sum of the perceptions, associations and feelings that are ascribed to it. In other words, the meaning it evokes in people's hearts and minds.

Developing the place brand is, therefore, a strategic initiative, aimed at defining a core proposition and point of difference for the region, as well as a set of values and principles to inform the way we need to act in pursuit of our vision. >>>

What do we mean by Place Making?

Place making is a way of thinking about development and regeneration that focuses on building thriving environments that support happy, healthy and sustainable communities – bringing together an optimal development response to the overall place, as opposed to the maximisation of an individual site.

Unlike traditional development approaches, place making entails a commitment to the creation of overall place value through long-term investment, ongoing stewardship and genuine engagement with local stakeholders to understand the opinions, ambitions and values that should inform decision-making. All three are key in delivering both consistent quality and liveability and in creating places where people have a real and lasting sense of belonging.

Equally it relies upon bringing high quality professional input to projects at the correct stage to ensure that best in class thinking, design and delivery expertise is focussed into projects at critical junctures.

What are the attributes of a successful Place Brand?

Individual

When talking about place, it is important that the strategy clearly defines and articulates the unique character that distinguishes it from others.

Authentic

The narrative should be based in genuine truths. While it can project towards an envisioned future, it needs to be grounded in demonstrable reality.

Memorable

There should be a simple, single-minded asset or attribute, be it physical or conceptual, that acts as a trigger to unlock association.

Co-created

Its development should be a collective effort that engages and involves key audiences and stakeholder groups in the process.

Purposeful

It is vital that the promise is supported and realised through tangible action and cooperation in a comprehensive approach for all facets of the area and its life.

Well-informed

The best place strategies know their competition and know where to draw on ideas and practices that have succeeded elsewhgere; they also recognise when to adapt inspiration from elsewhere to respond to the specifics of local geography, culture and place values.

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The Challenges

From the outset, we recognised a series of challenges for the strategic development process:

Multiple urban centres

Three unique towns, with their own history, heritage and character coming together in a single, newly defined region.

Multiple audiences

Residents, visitors, interest groups, business and investor categories with their own needs, opinions and motivations.

Multiple narratives

In-line with multiple audiences, a range of existing takes on the region's story.

Multiple assets

Without there being one, standout man-made or natural landmark that signifies the region (think: White Cliffs of Dover, Blackpool Tower).

In short, the challenge was to identify a single, unifying idea that would define the region's 'unique selling point': relevant to people's needs and aspirations, distinctive versus the places with which we compete, and credible in the region's potential to deliver.

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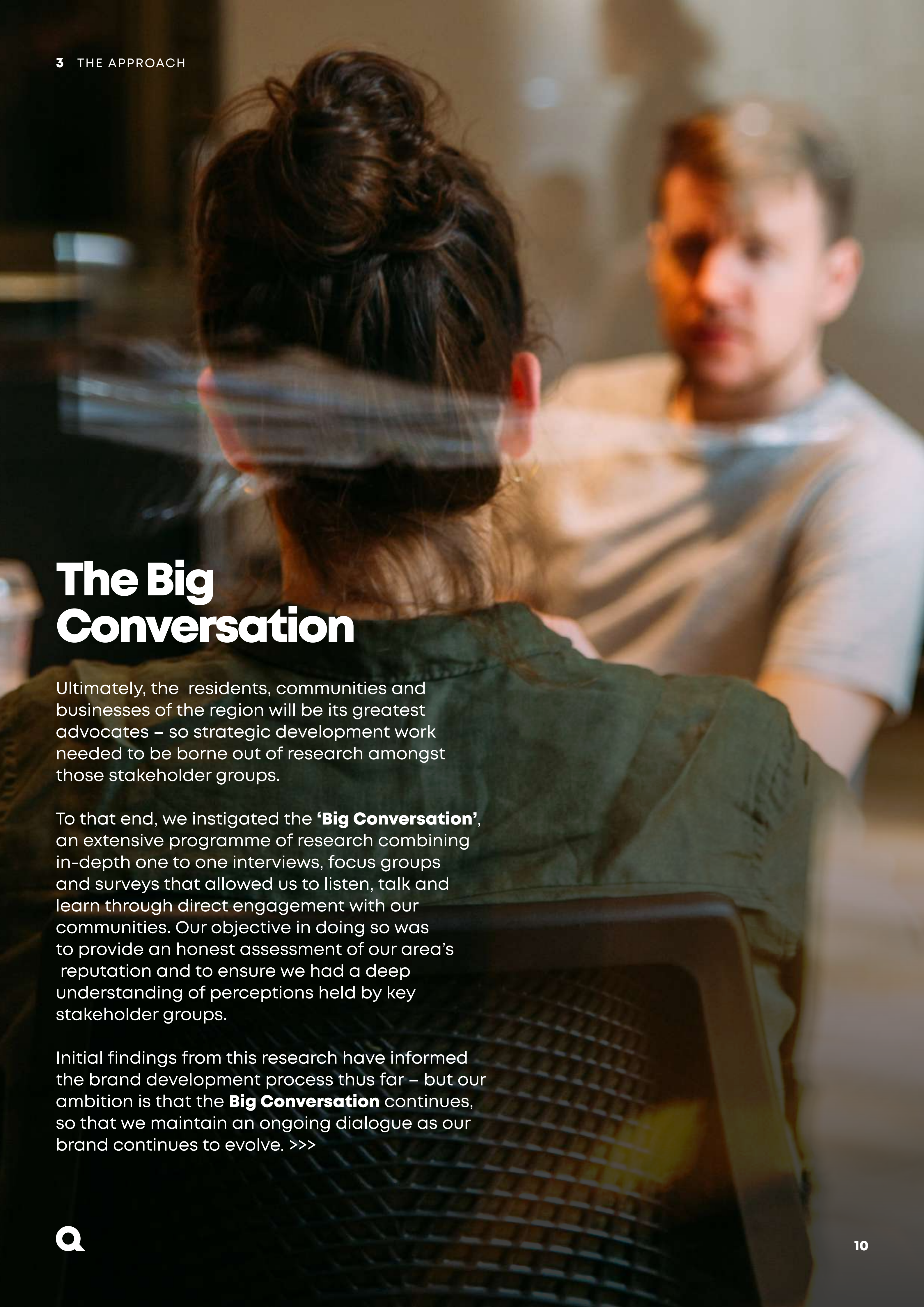
The Approach



The Big Conversation

Ultimately, the residents, communities and businesses of the region will be its greatest advocates – so strategic development work needed to be borne out of research amongst those stakeholder groups.

To that end, we instigated the **'Big Conversation'**, an extensive programme of research combining in-depth one to one interviews, focus groups and surveys that allowed us to listen, talk and learn through direct engagement with our communities. Our objective in doing so was to provide an honest assessment of our area's reputation and to ensure we had a deep understanding of perceptions held by key stakeholder groups.

Initial findings from this research have informed the brand development process thus far – but our ambition is that the **Big Conversation** continues, so that we maintain an ongoing dialogue as our brand continues to evolve. >>>

What did we learn?

The way people think and talk about place is stratified. We noted three levels of connection and association: with ‘my high street’, ‘my town’, and ‘my area’.

“The High Street feels like a special community. It’s a real personal experience as everyone knows everyone, so visiting the cafés and bars feels like a home away from home.”

Christchurch Male, Empty Nester

While they have issues, there is a feeling that High Streets are re-emerging as spaces for micro-communities to flourish. As Covid-19 has forced people to stay closer to home, this connection has strengthened and driven a deeper sense of care and emotional investment in what it is to be ‘local’. This often manifests in a desire to see independent businesses opening and doing well – not just because they are seen to be more committed to community but because their success is a measure of its strength.

“Kingland Crescent is awesome, it brings a new vibe and community to Poole which we were lacking. Everyone feels connected to the scheme in the area & wants to support the businesses.”

Poole Female, With Kids >>>

What did we learn?

The general positivity expressed when talking about 'my high street' starts to break down when people think in terms of 'my town' – and specifically their town centres.

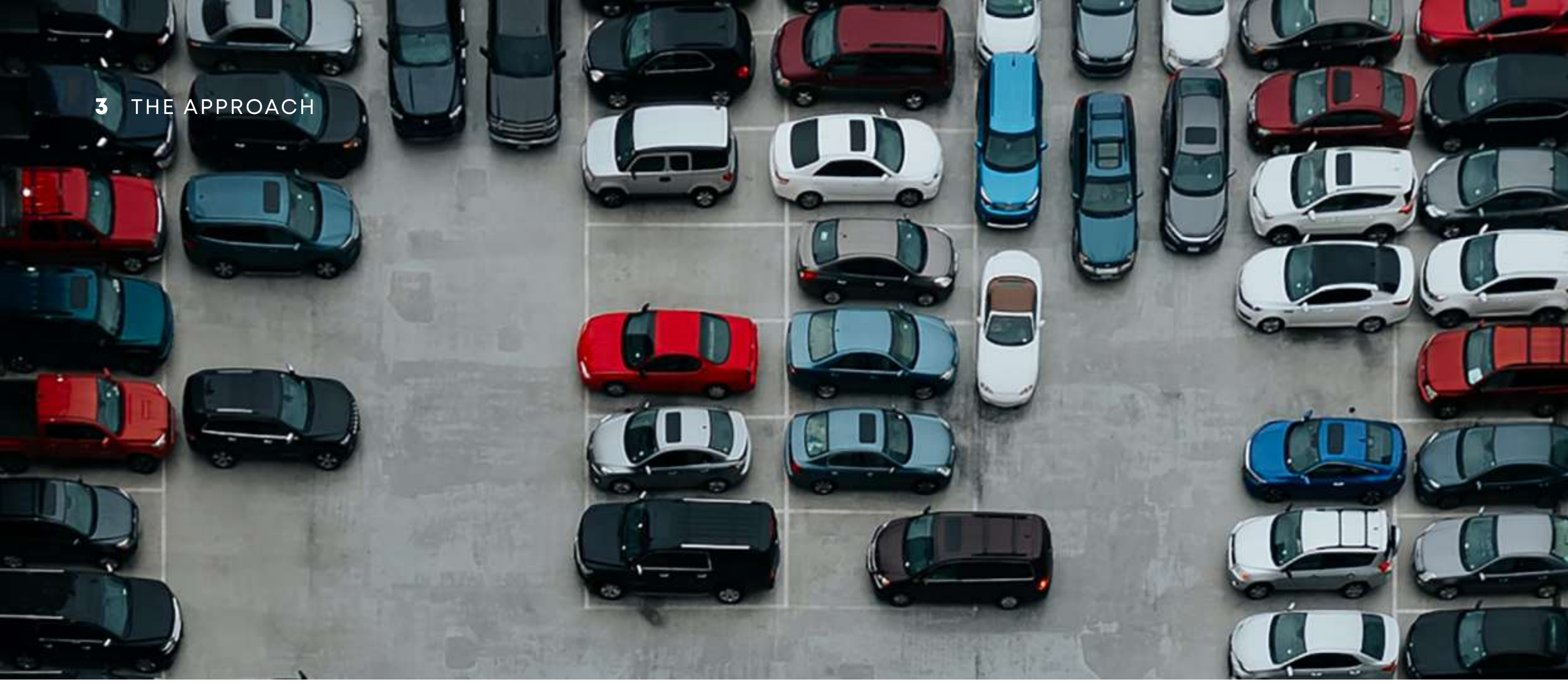
"I wouldn't go to Bournemouth town centre anymore – I don't feel safe. It doesn't feel made for me, it's rammed full of students."

Bournemouth Female, With Kids

At best, these places (particularly Bournemouth and Poole) can feel rundown, at worst like no-go areas – with anti-social behaviour, drug use and homelessness leaving people feeling unsafe. The closure of large retailers, and concerns over the availability and affordability of parking compounds this problem: not only do people feel reluctant to visit but they have fewer reasons to.

"It might be nice to have more shops aimed at our age group. At the moment the town is run down and there is a gap between Kingland Crescent and the Old town which feels abandoned."

Poole Male, Empty Nester >>>



A further 'my town' level issue emerges when people are asked to consider the collective context of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. While they may be aware, and to an extent accept that it's now one region, they are quick to point out the differences between the three. While residents of Poole and Christchurch speak naturally to their town's history and heritage, Bournemouth lacks this sense of identity. It's the 'big one in the middle' – and there is a distinct sensitivity to the idea of it taking over its smaller neighbours.

It's here that place, politics and policy become tangled – and there were **four key areas** of negative comment across different stakeholder groups that will need to be addressed.

1 Mobility & Transport:

A commonly heard complaint was that increasing congestion means getting around is 'a nightmare'. Getting people out of their cars was generally considered an ill-thought out response – with less parking, and higher parking prices not only exacerbating the essential problem of movement and access, but also diverting journeys to out of town destinations. This is seen as a 'double whammy': failing to deal with the problem of congestion while having a detrimental impact on the viability of town centres.

Compounding these issues is a lack of an integrated transport system to offer an alternative to the car. Examples quoted included Poole bus, coach and train stations being at different locations; an airport with no real onward connectivity; and retail parks without associated bus routes.

2 Planning:

The current approach to planning is seen as an issue by both developers and residents.*

Developers reported frustration at the length of time the process takes and what they regard as a lack of urgency and leadership in decision-making. For residents, the key concern was the nature of residential development – with schemes such as Poole Quay considered to be pitched at 'out of towners' and pricing locals, particularly first-time buyers, out of the market. >>>

*to note comments pre-date recent changes that have been made

3 Cleanliness & Safety:

As previously noted (and confirmed in 2021's resident survey), town centres and transport hubs are seen by many as 'grubby' and unsafe – especially after dark. Younger residents, workers and students, more likely to rely on public transport, feel this most acutely as transport hubs are 'hot spots' for anti-social and threatening behaviour.

4 Demographic Time-bomb:

Together, issues around transport, planning and safety are felt most deeply by the next generation of residents and contributors to the region (broadly 16-35 year-old's).

Feedback across the community, including education providers and investors, is that young people are not well served. Those at the pre-work life stage struggle to get around, lack safe spaces to hang out and have few indoor options for activity in bad weather. Those moving from education into work, and on to setting up home and family lack the job opportunities and affordable housing to enable them to do so.

In short, the next generation want to stay but increasingly feel they can't. >>>

Positivity & opportunity

And there are very good reasons to stay in, move to and visit the region.

Across the many voices we heard during the **Big Conversation**, something that everyone could agree on and could clearly articulate about 'my area', was the way of life that the region affords. Regardless of age, location or social status, its unique geography is a gift that is treasured. A combination of visual drama, green spaces, microclimate and south-facing ocean-side location work together to create a place that encourages an active, outdoor way of life where there is much to do and enjoy. And, importantly, a lot of that activity is free.

It all adds up to a quality of life that is seen as unique. It's what people love and why they choose to be here. >>>

"I feel lucky to live in the UK's best location, surrounded by everything you need and want; beach, un-spoilt nature, and the best climate."

From Place Values to Brand

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Food for thought

As part of the development process, we looked for insight and inspiration from examples of place branding and place making initiatives from around the world.

‘From destination marketing to strategic city branding’

Case Study: HAMBURG

In 2004, Germany’s second city made the decision to switch from traditional destination marketing to strategic city branding.

The issue with the former was that it could not serve the interdependent needs of the city:not just to attract visitors, but to secure inward business investment, build a skilled ‘fit for future’ workforce and, ultimately grow its resident population.

With a series of city marketing bodies having to thin-spread separate budgets across multiple messages, target audiences and channels the result was an incoherent and vague city image. The response was to create a central city brand unit to coordinate marketing activity and collaborate with urban planning and policymakers in a collective ‘one City, one brand’ strategy.

Over the next decade, Hamburg secured Germany’s strongest city brand status, increased its overnight visitors by 100%, achieved above average growth rates in GNP and GDP and was able to celebrate the presence of companies such as Facebook, Google and Siemens Renewable Energies. >>>

‘Storytelling for growth’

Case Study: EDMONTON

In 2012, Canada’s most northerly major city was working on its long-term economic development plan. In the course of that work, a major problem with image and reputation was identified. While residents loved their home city, they lacked a sufficiently powerful story to tell about it – and research indicated that outsiders considered Edmonton cold, boring and remote (if they considered it at all).

However, Edmonton’s leaders were convinced that this story should be bottom-up and not simply dreamed -up in the service of logos, slogans and advertising campaigns. In extensive community consultation about what made the place attractive and unique, a consistent entrepreneurial essence emerged:

“Years ago, when this was an isolated place, we invented our own fun. We created our own solutions. That spirit remains today: Risk-takers, people with ideas, thrive in a bizarrely cooperative city. Edmonton is a place without hierarchy. Five minutes here and you’re one of us.”

In turn, this essence was translated into a single story-telling idea for the brand ‘Make Something Happen’ – a concept celebrating the home-grown and capturing the City’s unusual ability to foster new endeavours in business, entertainment and the arts and across social and public sectors.

Importantly, it also acted as guide, not just for what the city says about itself, but the way it behaves: one example being a switch in focus for economic development away from seeking to attract head offices to a focus on start-ups. Another being a change in parking regulations that impeded the development of cafes and restaurants in the city centre. >>>

‘Building an international brand’

Case Study: LYON

Set up in 2007, the ONLYLYON programme was established to build awareness, reputation and to attract international talent, business and visitors to the city region – with a focus on positioning Lyon as a leader in innovation, entrepreneurship and culture.

Involving multiple public and private partners, ONLYLYON acts as a single point of liaison – bringing together all stakeholders and decisionmakers under one city brand umbrella. In addition to traditional marketing communication and PR activities, it has created an international ambassador network of almost 20,000 members and with 2,500 of these actively involved in shaping and spread goodwill in over 60 countries.

Disentangling the multitude of factors that contribute to the effectiveness of initiatives like ONLYLYON is difficult. However, the City has been ranked amongst the top 20 most attractive in the world for international investment (ahead of Frankfurt, Manchester and New York); amongst the top 20 most innovative in the world; and as the most attractive overall for executives.

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Competitive Landscape

Who and what are we up against?

While international case studies provide useful learning, the specifics of the UK competitive landscape are important to understand – particularly with a view to building a distinctive offer within the national context.

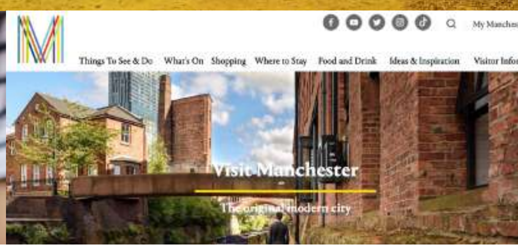
UK towns, cities and regions have long understood the benefits of promoting themselves actively – not least as a means to attract visitors. In this respect, much of the material to be found in the public domain falls into the category of destination branding.

Whether these materials have been executed relatively more or less effectively is a matter of opinion. Something that is easier to agree on, however, is that in content they are remarkably similar - offering a common combination of attributes (natural scenery, good food, culture, shopping, nightlife and leisure activities).

This common currency makes it difficult to build brands that are distinctive and differentiated from one another. Further, in pursuit of that single distinguishing 'hook' history looms large (think: 1066, Shakespeare, Robin Hood and Constable Countries). Focussing on an area's past is understandable in so far as it speaks to what it may have become famous for – but is problematic when looking to the future, and to connect with audiences beyond visitors.

A progressive, forward-looking approach to developing place (rather than destination) brands is more typically the preserve of the UK's cities. With their multiple audiences, stakeholder groups and range of development goals, cities like Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham are applying the thinking and approaches outlined in the international case studies above. In short, they are looking to identify the essence of their brand and deploy it, not just as a way to promote their cities, but as a unifying principle with which to help manage them.

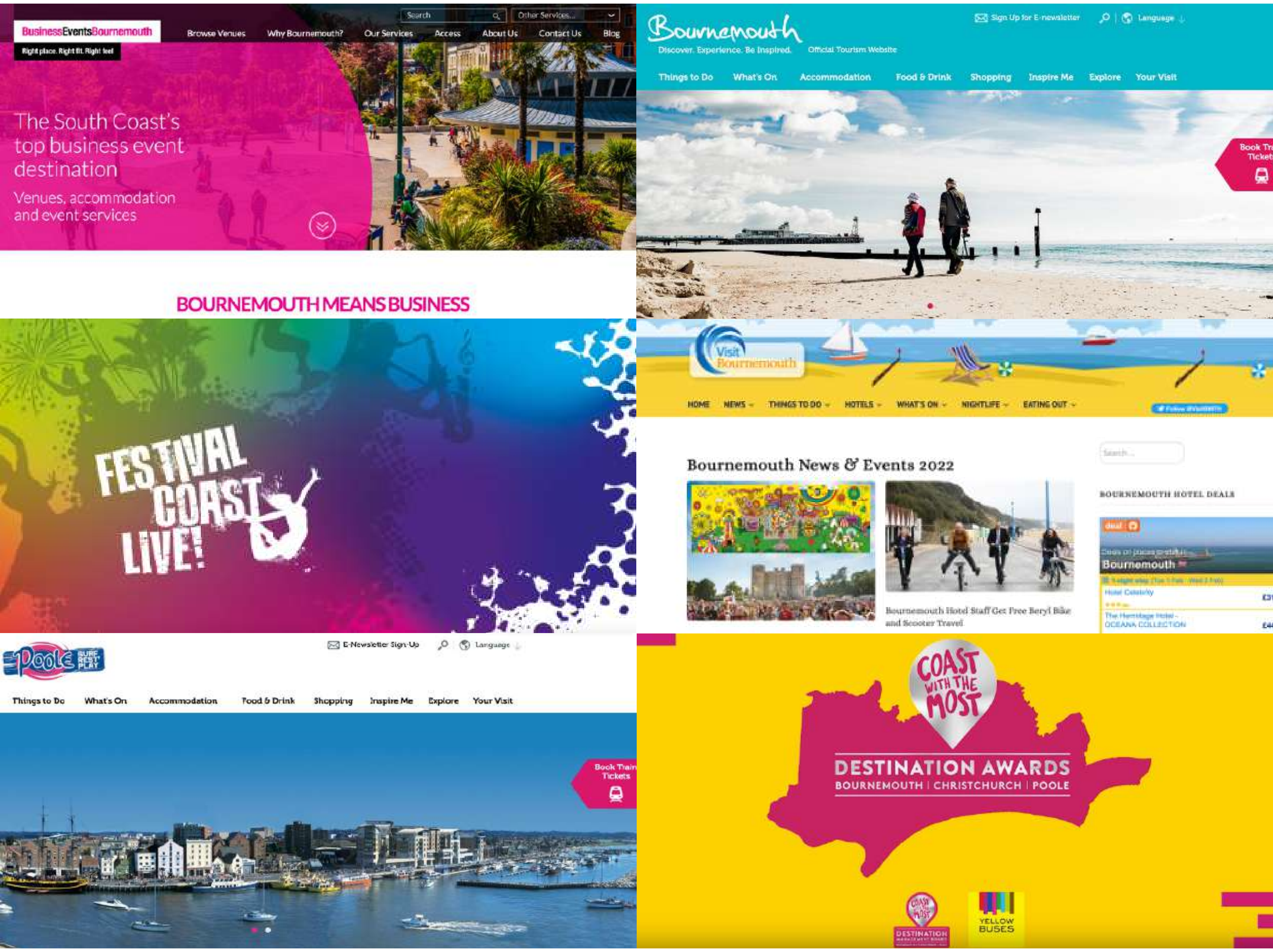
We believe this strategic, future-facing and integrated approach to building our brand is the right one for our region. >>>



How do we present ourselves now?

With multiple entities and interest areas producing their own content for communication in the public domain, the result is a variety of messages and visual styles. If a common thread does exist, it is in the emphasis of a beachside location, with the positive associations that this creates.

Established practice suggests that coherence and consistency is valuable in the presentation of a brand. However, it should be acknowledged that these separate entities will continue to exist and it is a strategic question, beyond the immediate scope of this project, whether a common set of branded assets should or can be applied in a more integrated public face for the region.



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The Analysis

Bournemouth isn't the brand

(and we're not re-branding BCP Council)

While Bournemouth is the physical centre of the region, its largest town and the one that is the most widely known of the three towns, it is the most problematic in brand development terms.

While Christchurch and Poole have distinct identities based on their history and heritage, Bournemouth is relatively anonymous – with perceptions of it shifting, for good or ill, with time and changes in the way people see it and use it. Awareness can be bought, but latent associations and deep-rooted meanings are costly to change or build. Added to this, concerns about Bournemouth 'taking over' are genuine – and we need to be sensitive to them.

We also need to be clear that the job to be done is not to re-brand BCP Council.

So what?

We need to build a brand for the whole region that is apolitical and which all communities can identify with and recognise as their own. The brand and its underlying strategy will have an influence on BCP Council's activities and decision-making but the two are distinct.

We can't build a brand on things we don't yet have

Aspiration, ambition and development are important but the idea that you can construct your way to a successful place is erroneous, even if you have the space, funds and collective will to try to do so.

So what?

Word's and phrases like 'iconic' and 'world class' need to be treated and used with caution – they don't describe what the region is about now and are open to interpretation as a direction of travel for the future. >>>

Our natural gifts are a treasure

They unite everyone, regardless of age, social status, location or interest. They can all talk about them and they can all agree they are very special.

So what?

They are our point of convergence, and should be the starting point to build a positive, meaningful narrative.

We need more than geography

As universally acknowledged as the sea views, green spaces, fresh air and appealing climate are, they are not truly distinctive or enough to be the sole focus of the narrative. Other places can, and do, say it's what make them special.

So what?

We should ground our story in physical location but elevate it with something more unique, ownable and human-centric.

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Building the Strategy

Putting people at the heart of our brand's narrative means identifying and articulating a central human-truth about the area that resonates and is recognisably based in reality. For this, we turn again to the **Big Conversation** and the key insight that it has revealed.

From insight to human truth

"This location is unique, surrounded by amazing nature on all sides, sheltered from the wind, facing the sun, with warmer temperatures and less rain - this is truly the best location in the UK."

We heard repeatedly that people see the region as **'the UK's best'**. But to build a narrative we need to think beyond what people say and capture the way their words translate into how they feel:

"This area is a physical and metaphorical embrace. It enables a way of life where I feel restored, energized and connected, every day."

The **Big Conversation** revealed the deep emotional connection people feel towards the region – and a strong sense that it nurtures an individual and collective sense of wellbeing that is unique. This, in turn, reveals the fundamental meaning and essence of our region: **QUALITY OF LIFE**. >>>

Quality of life: a comprehensive conceptual foundation

Fundamentally human-centred, rather than specific audience, segment or interest based, quality of life is multi-faceted and encompasses all aspects of a comfortable, healthy or happy existence.

Physical wellbeing	The way our bodies function.
Emotional wellbeing	The way we think and feel about ourselves.
Social wellbeing	Our sense of belonging, connection and shared cultural values.
Spiritual wellbeing	Our sense of meaning and purpose.
Intellectual wellbeing	Our ability to maintain and acquire new knowledge and skills.
Economic wellbeing	Our ability to meet our basic needs and feel secure.

It is this breadth and universality that marks out quality of life as a compelling and intuitive foundation for place brand and narrative. >>>

Quality of life: meeting the success criteria

Earlier, we looked at a series of criteria for developing a successful strategy. Compared with these, **quality of life** stands up as a powerful concept on which to deliver positive outcomes:

Individual
(unique & distinctive)

While some UK locations reference quality of life (particularly health and wellness) as an aspect of their appeal, very few do so as their core message and tend to limit this to destination marketing activity, rather than as a holistic 'whole place' concept. The most obvious examples of this are the traditional spa towns, such as Bath, where the story is rooted in the past (rather than a foundation for the future) and the offer, founded in 'taking the waters' is exclusive to the few who can access and afford it, rather than inclusive for all.

Other coastal areas associated with a more contemporary interpretation of wellbeing do exist - Cornwall being an example - but in comparison to our region they tend to be both more geographically remote and more limited in the scale and sophistication of infrastructure and amenities that they offer.

Authentic
(truthful & credible)

The trend in the developed world towards a rebalancing of quality of life versus standard of living was well established before the pandemic, and if anything, has been accelerated by it. At the same time, an understanding of the notion of wellbeing – and a demand for products and services to enable it – has been a key driver of innovation across multiple categories.

Time and again, the Big Conversation revealed that the region has what it takes to fulfil this need (backed by the results of national surveys and indices). Developing science further supports this – with a growing body of research indicating that access to natural environments, and particularly coastal (so called 'Blue Health') locations, has a positive impact on wellbeing.

Memorable
(simple & single-minded)

Quality of life is a concept that is both simple and single-minded but that which is capable of drawing together the multiple attributes, interests and audiences of the region under one overarching idea and a focussed, memorable meaning.

Co-created
(collective & cooperative)

The strategic development process has not taken place in a vacuum or an ivory tower. From the outset it has collaborative: engaging directly with multiple stake-holder groups, across the community – and acknowledging both the positives to celebrate and the issues to be tackled. The direction of travel for the region reflects the perceptions, thoughts and feelings revealed in the Big Conversation, and as a result its narrative comes from within.

Looking ahead, as the narrative continues to evolve, it should not be seen as the preserve of a single authority but as something owned and contributed to by everyone with an interest and stake in the future of the region.

Purposeful
(tangible & outcome -orientated)

As previously noted this is first and foremost, a strategic project which aims to inform a comprehensive place brand and place making vision and ambition.

In this respect, quality of life describes both a distinctive attribute of the region and a goal for its development. It is a tangible and measurable outcome that can guide and influence decision-making – from inward investment to seek, spaces, places and amenities to create, assets to protect and services to provide. Ultimately its success will be in its positive impact in the region's commercial, cultural and communal life.

A Model for the Brand

A Brand Model is, in effect, a 'blueprint' that provides a consistent point of reference for stakeholders - defining a common meaning and understanding of what the brand promises, how it credibly delivers to that promise and why that is important.

The Brand Model shown here is the key deliverable for the stage of development described in this document:

THE WELLBEING CAPITAL OF THE UK

BRAND PROPOSITION & PURPOSE: The brand's reason to exist and the meaning it is seeking to create	Promote & enable wellbeing in all its forms, for all our communities		
ACTIVITY SEGMENT	**LIVE & PLAY**	**WORK & INVEST**	
REASONS TO BELIEVE: The demonstrable evidence that enables the brand to claim it does or can deliver to its promises and be believed by its audiences	• 2021 UK Vitality index – 5th outside of London (need an ambition to be number 1) • Activities and Sports • Health and social care provision • Hospital a leader in… (vision for B hospital) • Home of wellness and HR conferences, – presenteeism over absenteeism • Voted no 1. for Work-Life balance • Arts & Music • Festivals & Events program • Education (Schools, FE & universities) • Bournemouth Spa Town heritage • Bournemouth 7s Festival • AFC Bournemouth • BSO / Lighthouse at Poole • Christchurch Priory • Poole Marina • The BIC	• 2021 Residents Survey 85% of Residents in this region say they have a strong sense of Belonging • Mixed economy with leading innovative hubs in 5 key verticals • World's 2nd largest harbour and hub for next gen maritime engineering and super yacht hub • Entrepreneurial incubator: start up / tech and digital hub, commitment to support the with 5G, flexible working spaces, bringing big businesses together to help foster innovation • Smart Place initiative – pioneering next gen WFA • Talent pool: high skilled, manual & digital workforce • Sunseeker / RNLI focus of boat building supporting multiple manufacturing businesses	
BRAND BENEFITS: What the brand promises to do or deliver in order to resolve the tension or exploit the opportunity revealed in the insight	**Physical** A place that nourishes & sustains healthy, happy lives	**Intellectual & Spiritual Wellbeing** A place that nourishes & sustains fulfilling, inspiring & purposeful lives	**Economic & Social Wellbeing** A place that nourishes & sustains secure & inclusive lives
INSIGHT: The truth that reveals a tension to resolve and/or opportunity to exploit amongst the brand's audience(s)	This area is a physical and metaphorical embrace. It enables a way of life where people feel restored, energized and connected, every day		
BRAND FOUNDATIONS: The important attributes on which the brand is built. They are timeless – important to the history and heritage of the brand and will continue to be leveraged into the future	Outstanding coastal location and climate & surrounding natural environment. Sheltered, south-facing, more sunshine, 425 hectares of parkland (tie to cortisol)		

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The Brand: What's Next?

On adoption of the strategy, principles and overarching narrative outlined in this document, the next phase of the brand development process will involve:

Resident research

A continuation of the Big Conversation, with research amongst residents in order to:

1. Validate the total region insight that it is its natural gifts (geography/climate) that promote quality of life/positive lifestyle

2. Create initial Wellbeing datapoints and benchmarks to help embed the proposition and provide a structure for ongoing evaluation/improvement.

Orientation & roll out

A series of briefing meetings to introduce the strategy to stakeholders and interested parties whose work may draw from, and be influenced by, its principles and narrative. This would include those involved in specific planning and development projects, as well as ongoing activities such as advertising and promotion of the region.

Branded asset requirement

An assessment of whether the brand strategy should manifest in new or revised branded assets (e.g. visual identity, digital and social media executions) and the extent to which these assets could or should be applied consistently across the range of entities and touch points that represent the region.

8

Crossover to Place Making Strategy

From Place Values to Place Making Vision

Having established the core 'place value' proposition, this exercise begins to inform the framing of a vision for place which - if embedded at each level of decision making, whether policy, strategies or at the project level - will be deeply rooted in local aspirations and will produce a coherent overall future place proposition.

1HQ are working with BCP and Futureplaces to identify how the core values identified through the Discovery exercise can also inform place making on a structured basis.

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Contacts

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