

Meeting EXECUTIVE
Portfolio Area Children, Young People and Leisure
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STEVENAGE CULTURAL STRATEGY (A 10 YEAR STRATEGY FOR ARTS & HERITAGE)

KEY DECISION

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1. PURPOSE

1.1 The report outlines the finalisation of a Cultural Strategy for the town and summarises a number of cultural ambitions over the next 10 years in order for Stevenage to become a destination creative town.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the final draft of the cultural strategy at Appendix A to this report be approved.
- 2.2 That the proposed set of milestones for 2018/19 be noted.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council has been working with Arts Council England to develop an overall vision for the town as a cultural destination, building on both its unique heritage and the opportunities to further develop its cultural offer.
- 3.2 In August 2017 both organisations co-commissioned Arts Reach to assist in the development of a 10 year cultural strategy for the town. The creation of a dedicated strategy is recognised as a strong commitment to place-shaping and cultural regeneration. It recognises both the economic and social benefits a strong cultural offer brings to a place.

- 3.3 Arts Reach engaged with a range of cultural stakeholders and partner organisations as part of the process and captured the Council's ambitions as part of the Future Town Future Council programme – particularly linked to Town Centre Regeneration and the opportunities to re-imagine Stevenage as a cultural destination.
- 3.4 As a consequence the strategy focuses on a number of key themes in order to build the profile of Stevenage as a destination creative town.
- Widening the Cultural Offer
 - Increasing Cultural Engagement
 - Connecting and Advocating Cultural Opportunities
 - Celebrating the Heritage of Old Stevenage & The New Town
 - Developing Opportunities for Children and Young People
 - Improving Health and Wellbeing
- 3.5 Through stakeholder engagement the strategy outlines a number of cultural ambitions over the next 10 years. The draft strategy is attached to this report as an appendix. The ambitions are summarised below:
- Create an extensive new trail of public art, with a focus on interactive artwork, to draw residents and visitors to the cycle network and to Fairlands Valley Park and to enhance the regenerated town centre, also helping to revitalise the existing heritage sculpture trail
 - Facilitate new creative spaces for artists (studios), musicians (practice rooms/recording facilities) and creative/digital industry SMEs to build the local pool of artists, practitioners and creatives
 - Develop existing Outdoor Festivals and events to increase the cultural offer, and develop new Outdoor Arts and heritage offers that together create volunteering and other opportunities for local people and added value attraction for visitors
 - Maximise skills and personal development opportunities for Stevenage residents through engagement with cultural activity
 - Upgrade and improve the Gordon Craig Theatre offer and maximise other performance spaces to meet the 21st century needs of the Stevenage community
 - Relocate and revitalise the Stevenage Borough Museum to widen access and increase footfall. Develop a USP as the First New Town Museum
 - Increase provision of music making, recording and performance facilities
 - Support development of new focused Arts and Health initiatives and programmes (supporting the Borough Plan for Health and Well-Being)
 - Deliver the Cultural Education Challenge by supporting and enabling cultural entitlement for all children and young people

- Create a Borough wide Arts and Heritage Forum to act as a platform for communication and cultural advocacy, encompassing professional, amateur and community sectors
- 3.6 The ambitions are underpinned by a strong emphasis on culture being accessible to and valued by everyone and as a key driver for economic development and the broader benefits of Stevenage as a cultural destination.
- 3.7 Following executive approval of the draft strategy in January 2018 further cultural stakeholder consultation sessions were held during February to gain feedback on the draft strategy 17 different organisations engaged in the sessions along with a number of local residents and artists. There was strong support for the creation of the strategy with ideas and suggestions on activities that could be supported and developed. There was particular support for the creation of an arts and heritage forum to bring organisations and ideas together. The emphasis of literature and the spoken word being recognised as part of the cultural offer across the town was also highlighted. There was strong support for pop-up and creative use of empty spaces and a clear collective aspiration to better promote and market the cultural sector across the town. Opportunities to further enhance the offer at Fairlands Valley Park were also noted. All comments and suggestions were subsequently incorporated into the final strategy document.
- 3.8 On 16th February the Council hosted a visit from the Arts Council and other strategic partners including Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership to gain further commitment to the delivery of the cultural strategy. There was strong support for the ambitions identified in the strategy. The Arts Council were enthused by the Council's approach to culture, particularly in relation to SG1 and the place-shaping agenda. There is a clear opportunity to work with the Council's regeneration partner Mace to further develop the cultural regeneration of the town centre. Equally there is an opportunity for Stevenage to help to develop the Arts Council approach to "New Towns" in the south-east. The Arts Council expressed its willingness to work further with Stevenage on the delivery of the cultural strategy and will consider match-funding the initial facilitation and implementation of the strategy over the next 12 months.
- 3.9 The Community Select Committee met on 27th February to consider feedback from the stakeholder consultation events and to develop ideas around the cultural action plan and associated milestones for 2018/19. Ideas included the opportunities to enhance planned exhibitions/events over the next 12 months, the potential to further engage with the community and voluntary sector and Schools and possibilities to develop an interactive cultural trail around the town. There was also a clear focus that the future Stevenage cultural offer needs to be accessible to all of the town's residents to grow participation.
- 3.10 It is therefore suggested that during the next 12 months the following activities are undertaken:
- The appointment of a cultural enabler post to drive the initial implementation of the strategy.
 - A formal strategy launch.

- The establishment of an arts and heritage forum.
- The cultural enhancement of an existing community event/festival.
- Public realm community/schools arts projects.
- Utilisation of empty/redundant town centre retail spaces for arts/exhibitions.
- Further engagement with communities/cultural organisations and artists.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 The strategy has now been updated to reflect the comments and suggestions received since the draft was published in January. Members' approval is now sought to approve the final version.
- 4.2 It is proposed that a summary 'user friendly' strategy document is produced following approval to be shared as part of a formal launch later in the year.

5. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 It is recognised that the ambitions contained within the strategy will require financial investment. The Council will seek to work with other co-investors such as Arts Council England, Heritage Lottery Fund and Hertfordshire LEP to help to realise these ambitions.
- 5.2 The 2018/19 New Homes Bonus allocations recommended for approval (on this Executive agenda) include £40,000 to support a time-limited post to help to facilitate and mobilise the initial strategy implementation. The Arts Council will also consider match-funding to support this work.
- 5.3 In implementing the Strategy there may be some further match-funding or pump priming required related to progressing certain initiatives, however, individual business cases will be made to support these. In addition a fundraising strategy has been developed in appendix B to this report.

Legal Implications

- 5.4 There are no immediate legal implications highlighted through the finalisation of the strategy.

Risk Implications

- 5.5 The Council will need to consider associated risks in relation to key deliverables as the cultural action plan develops and will need to maintain an appropriate risk register in relation to key projects.

Policy Implications

- 5.6 The strategy links to the development of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for the town in the recognition that engagement in arts and culture supports wellbeing. The strategy will also link to the Capital Strategy with reference to physical cultural assets such as the Gordon Craig Theatre, Stevenage Museum and Stevenage Arts Centre.

Planning Implications

- 5.7 Policies HC6 and HC7 of the Local Plan outline the Council's commitment to protect existing and provide new cultural facilities.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.8 The development of further cultural opportunities and initiatives through the strategy will consider equality and diversity implications with an underlying value that culture should be accessible to and valued by everyone. For example, Stevenage has established groups representing communities from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, such as the Irish Network and Stevenage World Forum. It also has established structures for youth participation through the Youth Council and Youth Mayor programme and established groups representing older people across the town and those with disabilities. Through the development and delivery of the strategy engagement will develop through these mechanisms to maximise inclusion. The delivery of the strategy will make specific links to other inequalities such as health and financial exclusion to ensure an encompassing approach to tackling inequalities across the town.

Service Delivery Implications

- 5.9 The strategy references aspirations to replace the Stevenage Museum and aspirations to upgrade the current Gordon Craig Theatre offer as part of a wider leisure facilities programme. Considerations around the future culture and leisure offer at Fairlands Valley Park will also be considered in relation to this. Operational implications will be further considered as these aspirations progress.

Safeguarding Children Implications

- 5.10 The development of further cultural education opportunities for children and young people will need to include appropriate safeguarding considerations.

Other Corporate Implications

- 5.11 The strategy will link to the Town Centre Regeneration and Co-operative Neighbourhood Management strands of the Future Town, Future Council programme.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

BD1 Consultants Brief

APPENDICES

A Final Draft Cultural Strategy

B Fundraising Plan

C Action Plan