

REPORT OF: Economic Development Officer

To: Full Council

Subject: Northern Devon Culture strategy

Date: 18.7.2022

Reference:

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

- 1) To seek approval for the Northern Devon Cultural Strategy
- 2) To request approval for a Cultural Development Fund bid for Bideford

1. INTRODUCTION

In December 2021 North Devon and Torridge District Councils collectively commissioned the development of a cultural strategy and delivery plan to span across both districts.

The objective was to:

- deliver a powerful shared vision for the future of culture in the region
- be distinctive and relevant to Northern Devon, taking into account our region's international Biosphere designation and the high quantity of natural, archaeological and built heritage in the district
- reflect the needs (economic, educational and social) of all people who live and work in the area

The strategy primarily sought to be 'place-based'; focusing on the geography, socio-economic status and demographics of the area. As part of that there was a focus on it covering artistic programming, existing cultural organisations, creative businesses and practitioners, community groups, cultural buildings and facilities, festivals, audiences, training and education.

The aim for the strategy is to create a distinctive and inspiring vision for culture in the region for the next 10 years, including strategies for increasing cultural engagement that can be used by practitioners and organisations to focus their activities and projects.

Both councils believe that:

- culture and identity are at the heart of social cohesion and wellbeing
- everyone should have the opportunity to create, participate and be an audience for culture
- encouraging a thriving culture in our communities will enable the visitor economy to prosper too

There are several factors which drove this piece of work. North Devon District has been identified as a Priority Place by Arts Council England (ACE) and Torridge District has been identified as a Levelling Up Priority Place, again by the Arts Council. As a first step to unlock future funding opportunities, an ambitious yet deliverable strategy was key. Another is the fact that the Covid pandemic has had a significant adverse affect on our residents'



mental health and studies have shown that participation in culture can have a positive effect on wellbeing.

This report will outline the details of that strategy and recommend to adopt the strategy, as well as approving a bid to the Cultural Development Fund in order to begin to deliver upon the delivery plan.

2. REPORT

“Culture means different things to different people. For some it is a welcoming and enriching avenue to explore creative expression, for others it’s a word that conjures up feelings of elitism, uncertainty and exclusion. There are many that claim to not care for it at all, until you probe a little further and find they have a healthy interest in the live music scene at their local pub.”

- Northern Devon Cultural Strategy, Executive Summary page 3

The ambition for the cultural strategy was not solely to support the good work of existing “cultural” organisations such as Burton at Bideford or The Plough Arts Centre- although it will support their ongoing funding bids. It was also focused on understanding the breadth of what different people across the region have “the right to experience, participate in and enjoy cultural activity, in whichever way they choose to perceive it”¹ and ensure that more people across the community are able to access the kinds of culture that matter to them.

The arts organisations themselves in northern Devon currently receive less per head investment from the Arts Council compared to other regions outside of London. Culture in general has significant economic impact but enormous potential for far greater impact, both economic and on supporting wellbeing and place-making.

- 45 organisations employing 125 people
- £2.07m GVA to the local economy
- An estimated 105,630 local people accessed at least 1 cultural event in 2017/18
- £86.5m personal wellbeing value derived from people regularly attending cultural events in Northern Devon
- On average £1 of public investment in Northern Devon arts charities generates £1.34 in earned income

However, northern Devon is more known for being a blossoming area for artists and creative makers. Although it is difficult to precisely pin-down that economic or place-making impact, data from ArtMakers surveys combined with studies of the national creative freelance economy by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre gives a conservative estimate of £4.5m per year GVA to the Northern Devon Economy², whilst the estimated value of creative industries to the region is £82m. Given the growth in remote working that is a figure which has significant growth potential, especially given that there

¹ Northern Devon Cultural Strategy, page 2

² Northern Devon Cultural Strategy, page 7



are already a number of strong agencies in the region and the opportunity to further grow the film tourism support and appeal.

With £84.8m personal wellbeing value derived from people regularly participating in creative arts activities in Northern Devon and 56,566 people in Northern Devon estimated to participate in some form of creative arts activity at least 3 times a year the cultural sector is one which is intrinsically entwined with not only creating a stronger local economy but also a better place to live and, in return, developing an even stronger visitor economy.

Community engagement

Over 900 people have been engaged in developing the culture strategy for Northern Devon through individual interviews, workshops, community consultation events and surveys. This has included:

- 598 respondents to a public survey
- 31 respondents to a cultural sector stakeholder survey
- 98 children, young people and adult learners in consultation workshops
- 24 attendees at a cultural sector stakeholder workshop
- 18 residents at community consultation events in Winkleigh, High Bickington and Combe Martin
- 37 sector stakeholders through one-to-one interviews

Public Survey

596 people responded to an 18 question survey, distributed online, across Northern Devon via Things Made Public CIC and stakeholders. Over 60% of respondents stated they participated either weekly or daily in the cultural activities presented. 83% of those who participated in the survey were aged 45+.

Key Takeaways:

- **Main Barriers to Participation in Culture**
 - I don't hear about what is going on - 42.64%
 - Cost - 38.7%
 - There isn't enough going on - 37.3%
 - Too far to travel/transport issues - 37.1%
- **Main Reasons for Participation in Culture**
 - Enjoyment - 74.5%
 - Wellbeing - 69.3 %
 - Learning new things - 67.62%
- **Culture People Want To See More Of**
 - Live music - 62.77%
 - Theatre - 57.87%
 - Heritage - 57.87%.
- **Where People Most Experience Culture**
 - Barnstaple - 80.9%
 - Bideford - 46.9%
 - Torrington - 42.38%



- **Environmentalism** - Environmental issues were very important to those that responded to the survey. 16.86% stated that 'they support and lead change', 51.77% state that they 'do their bit' and 25.8% expressed a desire to 'know/understand more'³

A cultural sector survey was also undertaken, as were workshops with school groups and Sunrise Diversity.

Themes and priorities

The resulting Cultural Strategy for northern Devon focuses on **3 main themes**:

Flourishing Culture: The Northern Devon Cultural Strategy focuses on **3 main themes**:

Helping People Blossom builds on a long history of culture passing between people in Northern Devon, from skills being shared through the generations, to ideas travelling the world through trade. This theme explores how everyone in Northern Devon has opportunities to develop their creative potential, share their passions, increase their mental wellbeing and experience great culture.

Our Cultural Hubs recognises the particularly important role that Northern Devon towns play as hubs of cultural activity throughout the region, creating a cultural offering that radiates out of urban areas and into even the most remote rural places.

Helping Places Thrive takes inspiration from the region's landscape to support a cultural offer that is as unique, diverse, celebrated and generous as its natural surroundings. This theme explores culture that is expressive of place, connects people to where they live, is protective of the environment and is distributed across the whole region. It recognises the built heritage of our towns and the need to support their role as the beating heart of cultural activity

These three themes are supported by a set of **priorities**. These are targeted areas of focus for developing and sustaining Northern Devon's cultural ecology.

<p>Helping People Blossom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nurturing the Future - Champion the youth voice in Northern Devon whilst actively developing pathways to creative opportunities and sustainable creative careers. ● Cultivating Connections - Ensure Northern Devon culture is embedded in regional, national and international networks that expand the reach of its borders, whilst bringing cutting edge culture and knowledge into the region. ● Making Culture Visible - Collectively celebrate and promote Northern Devon culture so that it is a source of pride to our communities and attractive for people who visit.
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³ Northern Devon Cultural Strategy, page 18/19



<p>Our Cultural Hubs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cultural Investment Plans - Integrating culture into visions and investment plans for our town centres, positioning town's as the heart of Northern Devon's cultural offering. ● The Public Realm - Maximising the potential for culture in the public realm of town centres throughout the region. ● Using Vacant Spaces to Fuel Culture - Leveraging temporary and long term vacant spaces, development opportunities and heritage assets for cultural use.
<p>Helping Places Thrive</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expressions of Place - Create the conditions for our communities to make and experience culture that expresses their connection to the local environment, in the places they live. ● Protecting Our Landscapes - Recognise the interdependent relationship between people, culture and the environment through cultural activity that acts on the climate crisis. ● Navigating the Cultural Landscape - Use culture to break down the distance between people, both physical and social, by spreading cultural opportunities across Northern Devon.

Recommendations and actions

The themes are further developed into a series of priorities and suggested actions, supported by case studies from other parts of the UK and abroad. These include a focus on outdoor arts and festivals, digital and community activity, protecting the environment, talent development, national and international connections and improving visibility.

The Strategy identifies a number of potential funding streams for achieving these goals, while recognising that delivery will depend on a cross-sectoral approach, not local authorities alone.

The key initial recommendation proposes the creation of a Northern Devon Cultural Partnership to work in close partnership with Arts Council England and sets out a suggested process.

We anticipate that the Partnership will work closely with Northern Devon Futures and would likely include specific sub-groups working in the areas of Culture & Environment and Culture & Education, and Culture & Health.

Many potential partners have already been engaged in the creation of the Strategy but building a balanced and agile partnership may be a long process.



Some Cultural Partnerships (e.g. Exeter Culture, Torbay Culture) act independently while being hosted by an existing organisation. Others find that a separate legal identity is beneficial (e.g. Plymouth Culture)

After adoption of the Strategy by both Councils there will be a public launch event, inviting participation in the Cultural Partnership.

Cultural Development Fund

The Cultural Development Fund will “unlock local growth and productivity, promote economic and social recovery from the impact of Covid-19, and regenerate communities through capital investment in place-based creative and cultural initiatives”⁴. It is a £30.2million funding stream to be managed by Arts Council England, along with The National Lottery. Bids are welcomed for a minimum of £2million, maximum of £5million, which can include up to £700,00 revenue support. Bids are sought from local authorities or LEPs- although any submission must be demonstrably part of a wider partnership rather than just as a local authority acting in isolation. As an Arts Council England Levelling Up Priority Place this is therefore a suitable funding stream to seek grant assistance for delivery of elements of the cultural strategy, especially given that “The aim of the fund is to level up through investment in culture”⁵ and that “we are particularly keen to fund activity in areas of low cultural investment (our [109 Levelling Up of Culture Places](#), and areas of least engagement”⁶. However, that status is no guarantee of success.

An Expression of Interest needs to be submitted by Friday 29th July, 2022 to enable successful bidders to continue on to a Full Application process with a deadline of 18th November, 2022 before a decision notification expected in March 2023.

For a full submission any capital projects will need to have been through an options appraisal, feasibility study and provide architectural sketches to a minimum of RIBA Stage 1.

Given the status of Bideford as the most economically vulnerable in Bideford⁷, and the support provided by Torridge District Council to the development of a Bideford Regeneration Board, it is therefore proposed that an Expression of Interest be developed and submitted to deliver both on the work of that Board and the relevant actions of the Northern Devon Cultural Strategy. Bids are expected to be place-based and strong justification has to be provided to expand the geographic focus beyond a single town. It is not considered that the required level of detail is already available to justify this, nor would it be possible to develop a strong portfolio bid within the timeframe available to provide that justification

As part of that Expression of Interest process a suitable feasibility study for the future of Bideford Library should be undertaken and initial architectural concepts to be developed for consideration.

⁴ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/cultural-development-fund-round-three#section-1>

⁵ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/cultural-development-fund-round-three#section-2>

⁶ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/cultural-development-fund-round-three#section-4>

⁷ Devon County Council, Urban renewal in Devon’s Coastal and Market towns, October 2021



3. IMPLICATIONS

Legal Implications

N/A.

Financial Implications

Funding implications will be appraised on a project by project basis, with further requests for approval returning to Community & Resources as appropriate, especially for use of the Economic Development Project Reserve.

However, the northern Devon Culture Strategy should be viewed as a significant tool to leverage external funding, for example the Cultural Development Fund which requires a 10% match funding element with a view to securing a minimum of £2million to support regeneration and place-making agendas. This is not about Torridge District Council delivering the Culture Strategy singlehandedly, but about working as part of a partnership with all partners delivering where appropriate.

Human Resources Implications

Development of future bids will require significant human resource input from the Economic Development Officer and liaison with other internal teams, including Major Projects, for example when exploring future opportunities for Bideford Library.

Additional capacity should be explored through the Shared Prosperity Fund to drive future cultural opportunities, including the creation of the cultural partnership.

Sustainability/Biodiversity Implications

The Northern Devon Culture Strategy has the landscape and our environmental heritage at the heart of its content, with strong links to the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere. High sustainability standards are therefore established at the core of the strategy.

The strategy includes a target to “Lower the collective carbon footprint of board organisations of the Northern Devon Cultural Partnership”.

Equality/Diversity

The strategy has as a core ambition the desire to create cultural and economic growth across the district and take into consideration a range of social groupings in order to further equality and diversity, and creating opportunities for all.

Risk Management

At this moment the stronger risk would be to adopt a do-nothing policy, which would prevent future funding from being leveraged. The adoption of this strategy does not commit Torridge District Council to future spend, although this will be necessary for delivery. However, future funding requests will be seek approval from Community & Resources where appropriate.



Compliance with Policies and Strategies

- North Devon and Torridge Local Plan 2018 - 2031
- Torridge District Council Strategic Plan 2020-23
- Devon County Council Strategic Plan 2021-25
- Northern Devon Road to Recovery Plan
- Healthy and Happy Communities - Devon's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Data Protection (GDPR) Implications

None

Lead Member Views

Date of Consultation- 5.7.22

Culture is such an important part of life to support our communities to thrive, both in terms of wellbeing and also in terms of creating stronger conditions for economic opportunity. This Culture Strategy lays out an ambitious but exciting vision for how culture of all forms can be moved forward in northern Devon. It is also important that this is not just seen as being deliverable by Torridge District Council, but instead as a series of partnerships with each partner delivering to strengthen the collective.

Council Leader Views

Date of Consultation- 5.7.22

The Northern Devon Culture Strategy is another step towards truly delivering on our Strategic Plan and ensuring that Torridge really is a great place to live, work and visit. Linking with other projects that Torridge District Council is progressing, such as the Appledore Clean Maritime Innovation Centre, this represents another key component to addressing deprivation and improving lives.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Northern Devon Culture Strategy presents a strong opportunity to not only seek further funding support to deliver on local regeneration and place-making but also has wellbeing and sustainability at its heart. Delivery of the cultural strategy should also be seen alongside opportunities to develop a more year-round, sustainable tourism sector, with the sense of shaping a "Great Place to Live, Work and Visit" being at the heart of both threads- the enhancement of Torridge as a great place to live strengthens its attractiveness as a great place to work and visit. The element of partnership will be key to delivery, leveraging the range of skills and passions available to fully capture future opportunities for economic and wellbeing growth.



5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adopt the Northern Devon Culture Strategy
- The approval of a funding bid for Bideford to the Cultural Development Fund. If successful as part of an EOI in July 2022 any match funding requirements will be returned to Community & Resources for approval.
- Endorse the creation of a Northern Devon Cultural Partnership to support the delivery of this Strategy.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Appendix 1- Northern Devon Culture Strategy

Appendix 2 – Northern Devon Culture Strategy Executive Summary

Consultations:	Date of Consultation –
	Officers Consulted –
Contact Officer:	Economic Development Officer

