

1 October 2020		ITEM: 8
Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
A collaborative approach to Arts, Culture and Heritage in Thurrock		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: No	
Report of: Stephen Taylor, Strategic Lead Economic Development		
Accountable Assistant Director: n/a		
Accountable Director: Andy Millard, Director of Place		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

This report sets out a collaborative community driven approach to arts, heritage and cultural activity in Thurrock. It recognises the value of arts, heritage and cultural activity in itself and as a way of engaging with communities to deliver related priorities including improving health and wellbeing, learning and skills, civic pride and a community driven growth agenda.

The report sets out the role the Council has to facilitate a collaborative approach to develop shared ambitions around community driven arts activity and the steps being taken by partners to secure resources and support delivery.

The report proposes to broaden out the collaborative approach taken to community driven arts and consider other ways the sector can contribute to Thurrock's growth ambitions and a vision for the borough as a proud and ambitious collaborative community.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to:

- **Note the report and the collaborative approach taken to developing the shared ambitions around community driven arts activity.**
- **To support the development of funding applications to help secure delivery.**

- **To comment on the collaborative approach to broadening out the work to consider the impact the cultural sector can have on the economy, jobs, skills and the growth agenda.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The Council has a clear vision for Thurrock as... 'An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future'. The vision is supported by priorities for people, place and prosperity that reflect pride in the borough's heritage, in the environment people live and work in and in ambitions for the future. Arts, culture and heritage have an important role to play in developing and maintaining civic pride and in enabling lasting transformational change that benefits local people as part of a wider placemaking agenda.
- 2.2 Thurrock's level of ambition and determination to drive growth that benefits local people remains as strong as ever. The Council is determined that growth will be infrastructure led, community driven and of high quality. This means that alongside the strong emphasis on the physical regeneration of the borough there is a focus on people. Supporting a vibrant and exciting community that engages people, that delivers things people want to do, that contributes to improving health and wellbeing and that enables residents to lead fulfilling lives.
- 2.3 In recent years Thurrock has developed a proud tradition of co-designing services with stakeholders. From the 'your place your voice' consultation informing the Local Plan to the Stronger Together Thurrock partnership the value of developing a shared vision and acting together is well recognised. In line with the collaborative approach taken elsewhere, stakeholders ranging from local artists to community groups to public sector institutions have worked together to develop ambitions for a community driven approach to arts, heritage and culture.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 In the past the Council has worked towards developing a cultural strategy for Thurrock that reflects our ambitions and priorities. The work has been a useful foundation - to set the scene, to raise awareness and to identify some of the issues and the opportunities that could be addressed. However it was clear from the consultation on the draft strategy that it did not enjoy widespread support amongst stakeholders. Given the importance that Thurrock places on collaborating with communities and that so much cultural activity in Thurrock is delivered by artists, volunteers and community groups a different community driven approach to developing a shared direction of travel has emerged.
- 3.2 The 2018 Active Lives survey results reflected that engagement in arts and culture in Thurrock are significantly below the national average. At 35.8%, this is the lowest in the Arts Council Eastern Region without strategic Arts

Council England funding in place (Creative People and Place programme funding). Given our proximity to London, the services delivered by the Council (Thameside Theatre, Heritage Service), the Royal Opera House (notably the Trailblazer programme) and the endeavours of the many individuals, voluntary groups and organisations in the borough this statistic was both a surprise and a cause for concern.

- 3.3 As a result the Council and a number of individuals and organisations who recognise the contribution that cultural activity can make to many agendas started a discussion to reflect on what could be done to boost cultural activity in the borough.

A community-driven approach

- 3.4 Early in discussions the stakeholders involved recognised the opportunity to build on two strategic opportunities:
- The development of nationally significant cultural production facilities at High House Production Park. Bringing incredible cultural production facilities to Thurrock has put the borough on the cultural map, enabling engagement with strategic initiatives such as the Thames Estuary Production Corridor and the development of proposals such as those for the Television and Film Studios in Purfleet. Bringing nationally significant cultural organisations to Thurrock has also been a catalyst to develop the Thurrock Trailblazer programme, a collaboration between the Council and the Royal Opera House to give young people in Thurrock the opportunity to access great arts and culture.
 - Five years of statutory and voluntary sector development based on Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) under the umbrella of 'Stronger Together' which has provided a framework within which partners in Thurrock have sought to collaborate and co-design services that meet the needs of local people.
- 3.5 Building on these two strategic opportunities partners in Thurrock recognised the opportunity to develop a community driven cultural programme ranging from world class arts and cultural activity to locally developed opportunities that would boost participation. A series of 8 open workshops and roundtable discussions where different stakeholders could contribute to the development process were held between November 2018 and March 2020 to help refine thinking and develop clear, shared propositions.
- 3.6 At the same time partners recognised the natural alignment between the collaborative approach to the arts and the objectives of the Arts Council England Creative People and Places Programme – a programme to encourage more people to choose, create and take part in brilliant arts experiences in their area. Working collaboratively and democratically the partners selected a partner – the Tilbury on the Thames Trust – to lead a consortium and wider partnership and submit an application for funding.

- 3.7 The proposal focussed on delivering two key ambitions in Thurrock:
- Leveraging community strengths and networks to co-produce place-based cultural programming that reaches and inspires more people;
 - Developing our cultural sector to support co-produced place-based cultural programming and achieve excellence in arts and culture;
- 3.8 The proposal recognised the importance of using the fantastic cultural hubs in Thurrock - Coalhouse Fort, Tilbury Cruise Terminal, the Thameside Complex and High House Production Park, as well as the many places in communities where people might feel comfortable engaging in cultural activity. It also recognised the importance of continuing with the collaborative approach and proposed mechanisms for listening to and developing ideas with the community alongside local decision making that would drive the activity commissioned.
- 3.9 The partners developed an application for support in early 2019 that just missed out on funding – reaching the final 3 bids in the Arts Council Eastern Region. Given the positive feedback from the Arts Council England the partners agreed to continue to work together, develop proposals further and to look for alternative funding opportunities. A second opportunity to bid for Creative People and Places arose in late 2019 and the partners submitted a proposal however the programme was suspended as the Arts Council, in common with many other organisations, suspended Business as Usual to respond to the COVID pandemic. The programme should reopen again towards the end of 2020 and the partners aim to submit a further application for support. In the meantime core partners have met during lockdown to continue developing ideas including a web portal and a small grants programme linked to the Voluntary Sector Development Fund administered by the Thurrock CVS.
- 3.10 Members of the Cleaner, Greener Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee are invited to note and comment on the approach and to support the submission of a new application for Creative People and Places Funding when the opportunity arises.

Broadening out the Approach

- 3.11 Community driven cultural activity can help develop a vibrant community. Opportunities to do things that we can appreciate and enjoy contribute to a better quality of life and can help deliver other priorities:
- Civic Pride: understanding the story of borough helps build civic pride;
 - Building a stronger community: cultural activities often involve participation and working together to overcome barriers, build stronger communities based on shared experiences;

- Learning and ambition: Cultural experiences are often learning experiences – helping us to aspire and to develop new skills;
- Health and wellbeing: cultural activities can be used as a vehicle to help overcome depression, loneliness and address other health issues.

3.12 Cultural activity can also link with and contribute to delivery of the wider growth agenda in Thurrock. The cultural and creative sector is widely recognised as a key growth sector for the UK economy. It is an increasingly important sector in itself and because of the contribution it can make to develop other sectors of the economy. The potential for a truly world class centre for cultural production in the Thames Estuary has been recognised by both the South East Local Enterprise Partnership and the Mayor of London. The Thames Estuary Production Corridor is a joint initiative between London and the South East that recognises the potential of the sector to create jobs, to grow businesses and add value to the UK economy.

3.13 Using the same collaborative approach the partners are now in a position to broaden out the work from a focus on community driven cultural activity to build strategic links to the growth agenda and support the economic recovery from COVID. The partners would focus on creative business, enterprise, skills and employment. Partners would also work together to develop a shared vision and priorities around a place-based approach focussing on people and creating prosperity. Discussion would focus in four areas:

- Place-based creative engagement which is world class and puts us on the map;
- Place-based creative engagement that is locally relevant to Thurrock's diverse communities;
- Supporting and growing Thurrock's world class cultural, creative and digital businesses, encouraging inward investment and selling product 'made in Thurrock' to other parts of the UK and to the world in line with the 'Global Britain' agenda;
- Supporting Thurrock creatives to develop and grow their businesses as a key part of plans for economic recovery and growth;

3.14 By working together, partners will develop a shared ambition, a set of priorities and project ideas and will then collaborate to apply these towards strategic and local opportunities and to secure external resources that will support delivery. It is proposed that these discussions take place by March 2021, which could be accelerated should the Arts Council England reopen their Creative People and Place programme earlier.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 Cultural activity can play an important role in securing Thurrock's ambitious plans for growth and in securing the development of stronger and more resilient communities. Partners have already recognised this and the Council has worked with individuals, groups and other public institutions to facilitate the development of clear shared ambitions around community driven cultural

activity. Members of the Cleaner, Greener, Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment on the approach and to support efforts by partners to secure external funding through the Creative People and Places programme and other opportunities that will fund delivery.

- 4.2 The Cultural sector is also an important contributor to UK PLC and, most importantly, has been recognised as a key growth sector of the economy. High House Production Park has put Thurrock on the map in terms of cultural production and helped secure a seat at the top table of initiatives such as the Thames Estuary Production Corridor. The partners in Thurrock are now in a position to broaden out the collaborative approach and develop an overall vision and ambitions around creative enterprises, economy and skills.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The collaborative approach to developing community driven ambitions for cultural activity has engaged individual artists and local historians, voluntary and community groups and public institutions in a series of roundtable discussions and workshops to map existing activity in Thurrock, understand strengths and opportunities as well as issues and to develop two clear propositions that describe what partners collectively want to achieve.

- 5.2 The paper outlines proposals to build on this approach to consider the skills of local creatives and the contribution the sector can make to economic recovery and growth in Thurrock.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 There are links to a number of other agendas including the approach to economic recovery and growth, to building stronger more collaborative communities, to improving skills and to addressing health and wellbeing.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Rosie Hurst**
Interim Senior Management Accountant

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Deputy Head of Law and Deputy Monitoring Officer

There do not appear to be any legal implications directly arising from this report.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager – Community Development and Equalities

Both new and existing communities, representative groups and organisations will be supported to come together to develop a wide range of shared cultural ambitions building on and celebrating the rich heritage of the borough and creating opportunities for wider connection and collaboration. As a direct outcome, the design and articulation of the vision for this agenda in Thurrock will help community groups and organisations to attract funding and develop their offer which will help build stronger more collaborative communities overall.

The final vision, priorities and work programme will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment that will help to identify means for achieving positive outcomes including accessible programmes and activities for all regardless of their protected characteristic.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None.

9. **Appendices to the report**

Appendix 1 - A collaborative approach to Arts, Culture and Heritage Summary

Report Author:

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