


Agenda Item No:	7	
Committee:	Overview and Scrutiny Panel	
Date:	7 December 2020	
Report Title:	Culture and Creativity - A Strategy for Fenland	

1 Purpose / Summary

This paper outlines FDC's approach to developing a draft Creativity and Culture Strategy for Fenland and the key outcomes as well as the approach to delivery that the Strategy will address. The draft Strategy is attached at Appendix 1.

2 Key issues

The Council recognises the importance of creativity and culture for our local communities. This is a broad area of activity and includes the heritage of Fenland and the communities living here. Developing a vibrant creative and culture sector in the District will ensure that Fenland continues to be a great place to live, attracts more inward and intra-District tourism, generates jobs and supports the local economy, creates strong and cohesive communities and supports people's mental health.

Now more than ever a robust approach to developing creative and cultural opportunities across the District is necessary as the area recovers and moves forwards following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Creativity and Culture in Fenland has been identified by the Arts Council England as an area requiring more support and funding as creative organisations in Fenland have an opportunity to work more closely together and be better able to access funding opportunities where possible.

FDC recognised the importance of improving creative and cultural opportunities for the area in 2019 and has been working towards a strategic guiding document. A good example of an area that has seen incredible benefits from improving creative opportunities is Great Yarmouth. If a similar approach could be utilised across Fenland in the coming decade the impact on local communities will be significant.

FDC is working with the Arts Council and a number of other partners to develop a Creativity and Culture Strategy. The Arts Council has funded an arts sector specialist, ArtReach, to understand what is happening in the creative world in Fenland, consult with local groups and Members to develop a draft Strategy. This is not a Fenland District Council Strategy document but a document for all Fenland for a wide variety of agencies to use and draw upon in their work to develop cultural activities in Fenland.

3 Recommendations

For Overview and Scrutiny Panel to comment on the draft Culture and Creativity Strategy for Fenland.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holders	Cllr Chris Seaton - Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility & Heritage
Report Originators	Phil Hughes - Head of Leisure Services Carol Pilson - Corporate Director
Contact Officers	<p>Phil Hughes Tel: 01354 622520 Email: phughes@fenland.gov.uk</p> <p>Carol Pilson Tel: 01354 622360 Email: cpilson@fenland.gov.uk</p>
Background Paper	Draft Creativity and Culture Strategy

1 Creativity and Culture Strategy for Fenland

1.1 The draft Strategy highlights four key outcomes to aspire to:

Connections

- Assets in the cultural sector will be well networked, both within Fenland and further afield, in order to build partnerships that can lever in funding and build infrastructure across the District.
- Networks share skills and support volunteers.
- Opportunities to access cultural opportunities is addressed in order to make cultural activity in Fenland more accessible.

Communication

- A focused communications campaign celebrates the culture of Fenland, and key people and their achievements.
- Marketing shows Fenland as a cultural destination, linking it to the strong heritage and unique nature of Fenland traditions and natural landscapes.
- Information about cultural activity in Fenland will be centralised, creating an information Hub with a dedicated coordinator to promote Fenland's culture and join up marketing of culture into a multi-faceted offer across the District.

Empowerment

- Community Connectors will be identified and supported to work with communities in order to develop their skills and confidence in creating cultural opportunities.
- Young people are supported to be heard within cultural plans, as well as supported to achieve their own cultural ambitions.
- Address the skills gap within Fenland's cultural sector, identifying opportunities to support young people to train in the sector and gain experience and skills as well as uplifting the skills of existing practitioners and cultural sector workers in Fenland.

Inspiration

- Inspiring events and activities will take place in Fenland on a regular basis, bringing high quality arts to the District, co-programmed with communities and appropriate for the different towns, and drawing larger audiences from further afield to engage with it. Fenland has great potential for outdoor events, such as festivals, with its market places, fields and green open spaces.
- A Creative Hub will be developed, perhaps making use of an existing venue to become an arts centre, hosting regular activities and attracting creative people to work and programme there.

2 Delivering the Strategy

2.1 Delivering this Strategy cannot be achieved without focus and community buy-in. This is not a Council strategy, but a Strategy for Fenland. In order to move the area forwards and achieve the key outcomes over the coming years, an infrastructure needs to be built that will drive and deliver this Strategy over the next 10 years, embedding it into the whole of Fenland:

Leadership

- Leadership Steering Group; The Steering Group that loosely exists should be formalised, sustained and developed to provide the necessary leadership to drive this Strategy forwards. The Steering Group will connect existing cultural providers in the District to deliver towards the Strategy outcomes. In the initial stages, the Council would facilitate the Group to ensure it is formalized leading to its self-sustainability.

Development post

- Through external funding, an Arts & Heritage Development officer will be established who can facilitate key actions of this Strategy in the first three years, working with the community to bring people together to create sustainable growth in creative activity and heritage.

Community Connectors

- The Steering Group will identify and support, accessing funding where possible Community Connector roles with a remit to develop community groups in cultural activity. (Existing roles include Care Network Community Development Workers, Fascinating Fens, Fenland 6 Museums, Festival Bridge, Young Fenland Cultural Consortium, Cambridgeshire

3 Considerations

- 3.1 To deliver the Strategy support from an Arts Development officer will be required to join up the creative community, improve skills development opportunities and offer guidance and support, certainly early on, with funding applications. It is anticipated that the bulk of funding for such a post would come from third party funders such as Arts Council England.
- 3.2 It is worth emphasising that this Strategy is not an FDC strategy. It is a Strategy for Fenland that should be led by a group of people involved in the creative and heritage sector within Fenland, not an FDC group. This leadership will strengthen the possibilities that the Strategy can offer, ensuring community ownership to effect positive change within the sector in Fenland.

4 Effect on corporate objectives

- 4.1 An effective Creativity and Culture Strategy will improve opportunities for the community in Fenland to enjoy art and heritage activities, ensuring that Fenland remains a great place to live and work in.

5 Community impact

- 5.1 A strategic approach to creativity and culture in Fenland will offer residents more diverse, exciting and interesting opportunities to take part in arts activities. This in turn will increase the attractiveness of Fenland as a place to live and work in, strengthening communities and ensuring that Fenland's unique culture and heritage are enjoyed by more people.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 The Creativity and Culture Strategy is expected to lead to more effective and joined up opportunities for the Fenland community to take part in creative, cultural and heritage activities. This type of activity will be very important to help the local community recover from social isolation during the pandemic, improving personal resilience and creating a more cohesive community.

- 6.2 It is anticipated that the Strategy would facilitate the establishment of an Arts and Heritage Development Officer who would work with local creative practitioners to further develop opportunities to enjoy creativity and culture in Fenland.
- 6.3 A key aspect of early wins for the strategy will be the upskilling of the creative community in Fenland. Skills to be targeted will include;
- Communication and marketing skills
 - Fund finding and effective application skills

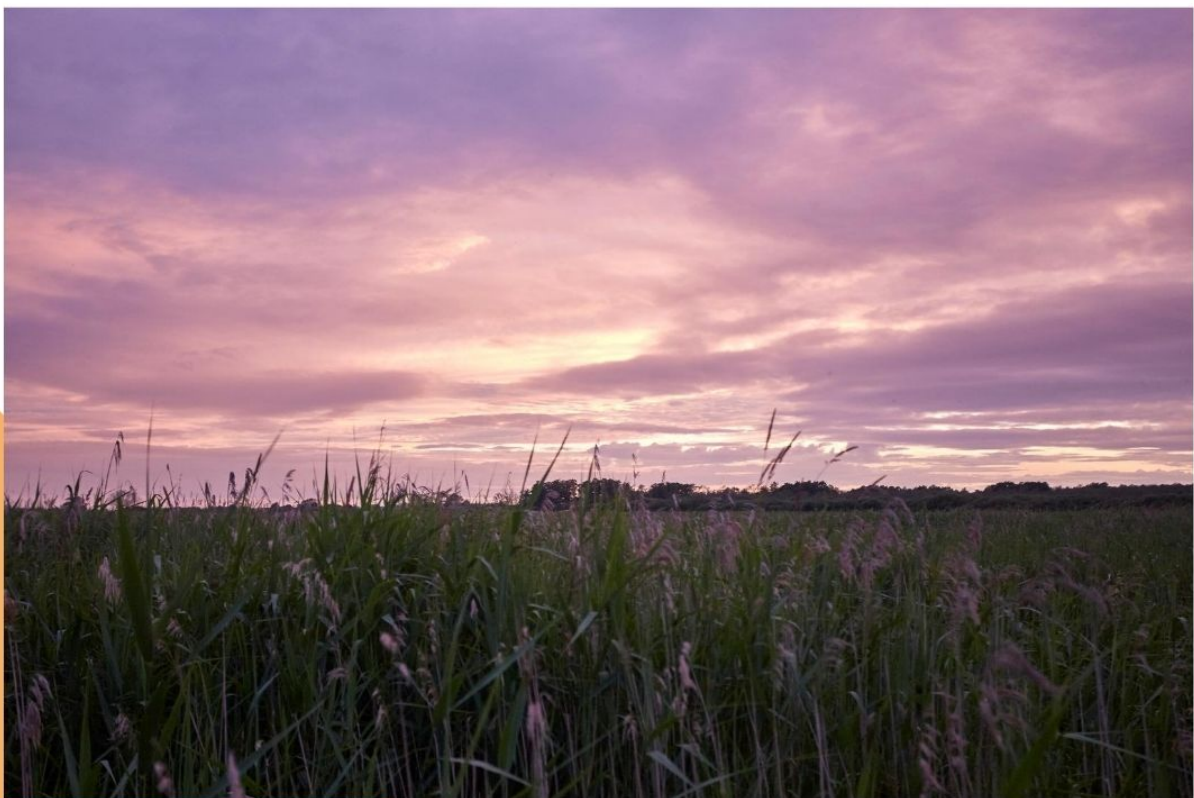
These skills will ensure that activities are better promoted, more joined up across Fenland and better supported by external funding sources. Creative practitioners in Fenland do not attract significant third-party funding. This is primarily due to a lack of applications from the Fenland area, not the result of unsuccessful applications.

- 6.4 Longer term the strategy highlights the wider opportunities that a facility in Fenland for creative practitioners could deliver. Whilst it is likely that this is a longer-term ambition, it should be borne in mind as a possible goal for the future.

Broad Horizons

Forging Fenland's Future

A Creativity and Cultural Strategy
2021 – 2030

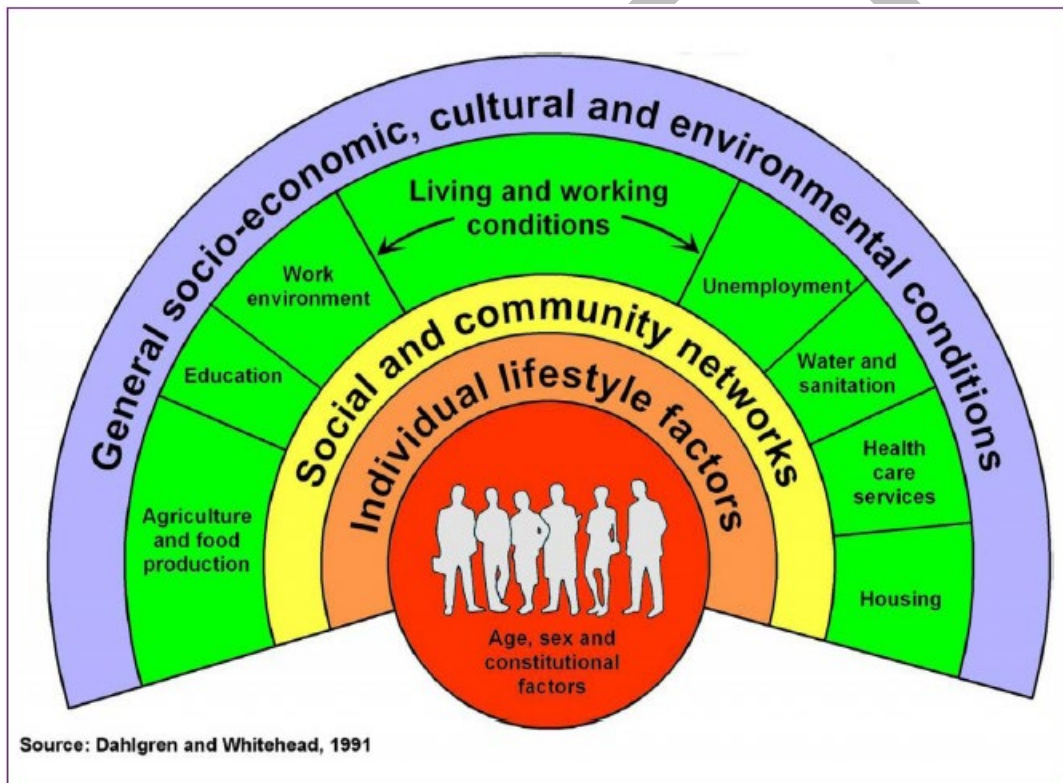


Introduction

This strategy has been developed for Fenland's communities, proposing how they can work together to strengthen cultural opportunities, creative activity and heritage within Fenland.

This is a broad area of activity and includes the heritage of Fenland and the communities living here. Developing a vibrant creative and culture sector in the District will ensure that Fenland continues to be a great place to live, attracts more inward and intra-District tourism, generates jobs and supports the local economy, creates strong and cohesive communities and supports people's mental health.

Culture sits firmly within the wider determinants of health model, as detailed in the following diagram under both 'social and community networks' and 'general socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions'.



Arts Council England's Let's Create strategy highlights that the cultural sector plays a critical role in regeneration, place making, engagement, employability, community cohesion and resident wellbeing.

Now more than ever a robust approach to developing creative and cultural opportunities across the District is necessary as the area recovers and moves forwards following the COVID-19 pandemic. Creativity and Culture in Fenland has been identified by the Arts Council England as an area requiring more support and funding as creative organisations in Fenland

have an opportunity to work more closely together and be better able to access funding opportunities where possible.

Fenland District is a rural area with villages around four market towns. There are strong local cultural and heritage traditions, such as the community run Straw Bear Festival in Whittlesey, Rose Fair in Wisbech, Chatteris Summer Festival and St George's Day celebrations in March and several independent museums across the district. The landscape has its own unique beauty, with wide open skies and fields, and the towns have kept many attractive heritage buildings. Market places in the towns offer the potential for communal centres, and there are creative companies who are doing exciting work in their local area such as 20Twenty Productions in March, who support young people working in the creative industries through their exciting initiatives.

However, connections between the towns, particularly transport, mean the towns' and villages' creative endeavours can be isolated from each other. As a result, it is difficult for creative and heritage organisations to connect with each other and grow partnerships across the District.

There are several exciting initiatives being taken forwards within Fenland by different groups, demonstrating that people in Fenland support the development of creativity, culture and heritage in their area. However, these initiatives remain localised and allowing greater collaboration will significantly increase their impact on the community within the district as a whole.

There is a lack of capacity within the creative and heritage sector as many active groups are run by volunteers operating with little financial or infrastructure support. There are professional artists within Fenland, however they are also unsupported and their capacity to work across the whole district is limited, which inevitably results in areas of Fenland that do not have access to the arts. There are no Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations (NPO's) within Fenland, and fewer arts venues or facilities than elsewhere.

People in Fenland access cultural activities outside of the District's boundaries. This is important within the cultural sector, as many of the cultural assets available to the people of Fenland exist just outside the district, such as Flag Fen Archaeology Park (who run a cultural programme) and Babylon Arts in Ely (who are the lead organisation for Market Place, the Creative People and Places project that crosses Fenland and Forest Heath). There are opportunities here, as there is expertise around the District which could be brought into Fenland more effectively through partnership working to benefit the people of Fenland. An example of this is the recent £100,000 grant from Arts Council England that has been secured by Cambridgeshire ACRE in partnership with Creative Arts East, who are an NPO, to deliver a three year Rural Touring Scheme, bringing professional performing arts to village halls including in Fenland, working with local communities to devise their own local programmes. This scheme shows the potential for

partnership working, with experts such as Creative Arts East bringing relevant and high-quality arts to Fenland, working with local communities.

Fenland has huge untapped potential in the creative and heritage sectors. There are a number of excellent creative people and heritage volunteers doing great work, but their capacity is limited. The area has potential as a unique landscape with distinct cultural traditions, and an enthusiasm to do more shown by people who engaged with the consultation for this study.

Fenland is a place where people want to come together, to celebrate and be inspired as a community. The cultural sector needs to develop the confidence to be more ambitious. Through culture and creative activity, communities can be strengthened and connected more. People have willingness and energy to make things happen. With the right support and infrastructure, with coordination and leadership within culture in the district, Fenland can successfully match its wide horizons in the landscape for its creative future.



Vision

Fenland's *Broad Horizons* brings together the districts unique landscape heritage with people's creative aspirations to support strengthened communities.

*In ten years' time, more people in Fenland will be **connected** by coming together for **inspiring**, enjoyable and widely known creative and heritage activity that **supports communities** to achieve and grow their ambitions.*

Themes

Connections – There are many great cultural activities already happening in Fenland, often undertaken by volunteers with limited resources but with great support from local people. More could be achieved if organisers and key community players worked together across the District. This would allow them to achieve activities and events with greater impact, draw down funding from major national funding bodies and share resources and skills.

Communication – The interesting and exciting cultural activity already going on in Fenland is well supported by those who know about it. However, there is a lack of communication beyond people already involved. Fenland's geography of numerous villages which are far apart, makes it difficult for cultural workers to communicate what they do widely across Fenland. There is a perception both within and beyond Fenland that there is not much cultural activity taking place, however the consultation shows that this is not the case. This perception needs to be challenged and the cultural activity in Fenland needs to be better communicated, celebrated and amplified, both within the district and beyond.

Empowerment – Many people in Fenland are actively involved in cultural activity, ranging from keeping traditional events alive, creating new arts activity opportunities, energising museums, generating new creative work and supporting young people in creative careers. However, many of these people are volunteers and have limited resources, would benefit from skills development as well as funding support, and have ideas but not the knowledge of how to make their ideas happen. People need support and empowerment to grow their ideas; where there are community brokers in place such as Festival Bridge and the Care Network, these organisations have the knowledge and connections to support people in starting new ventures, with seed funding and help in building infrastructure. However, the resources of these organisations only stretch so far, and they need to find a variety of sources of funding for them to continue their work.

Inspiration - Focused coordination can bring inspirational, high quality events and activities to Fenland to inspire people and encourage participation. A Development Officer for Fenland would assist with access to regional and national funding to do this, bring people in Fenland together

to enable small ideas to grow into bigger ones, and to promote the great work that is already happening underneath the surface.

Fenland's Priority Areas

Culture is well placed to contribute towards a number of Fenland's priority areas.

- **Changing population: community cohesion**

Fenland has a changing population, with new homes being built and large migrant communities. Cultural activity is a great way of building community cohesion, by bringing communities together through shared cultural experiences. Additionally, there is potential for communities from other countries to share their own proud cultural traditions with Fenland residents and celebrate their own rich arts and heritage. Not only could this reaffirm migrant communities' own sense of pride, but also promote understanding between people of different cultural backgrounds. Key community workers who support migrant communities could work with them to identify key events or festival opportunities to share cultures within Fenland. More events that share heritage and cultural activity would help to bring new settlers together with established residents in sharing a common sense of place.



- **Aging population: physical and mental health**

Fenland has an aging population, which brings with it expected health issues that people experience as they grow older. In addition, there is potential for many older people in Fenland to experience isolation and loneliness, especially in rural areas. Culture has a part to play in supporting people through social activity that can be healthy both physically and mentally, giving people the opportunity to spend time with others and take part in enjoyable and creatively expressive activity.

- **Outstanding heritage - supporting tourism**

Heritage in Fenland is rich and varied. The landscape is unique and a key feature of Fenland, bringing with it its own traditions as well as natural heritage. There are several independent Museums across the district, as well as archaeology groups promoting Fenland's history and heritage.

- **March – A Destination Market Town**

The Growing Fenland report for the town of March aims to develop the town as a destination. Culture can contribute towards this aim, particularly by contributing towards the development of evening economies through evening events, as well as through signage to amplify the town's heritage.

- **Chatteris – An Aspirational Community**

The Growing Fenland report for Chatteris proposes that Chatteris develops as an aspirational community, including cultural activity such as a new community festival to bring people together in inspirational events, and to re-imagine the high street, which should include arts and creative input.

- **Whittlesey – A Market Town Fit for the Future**

The Growing Fenland report for Whittlesey proposes that the town can become fit for the future by making more of its assets. These include the town square, to develop as a community 'piazza', which would be supported by cultural activity that encourages the use of the square. Also proposed is the development of a heritage centre at Kings Dyke Nature Reserve, as well as a trail to amplify the town's heritage, and links to nearby Flag Fen's developing cultural programme.

- **Wisbech – A Resilient Town for the Future**

Drawing on historical inspiration, Wisbech will embrace heritage and cultural opportunities to encourage tourism, support a resilient town centre, and support community cohesion realising the potential of the town's economy.

- **Four Seasons Events**

Fenland District Council organises the Four Seasons events programme in the four market towns with support from Town Councils and volunteers. These events are platforms for creativity, including showcasing local talent, encouraging more local participation through creative activity and linked projects, and introducing new and inspirational creative events and artists from further afield to engage with Fenland's communities.

- **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Business Plan**

The joint authorities' business plan aims to encourage a visitor economy for the area. Fenland's heritage, creative and cultural activity and events should be amplified in order to contribute towards the area as an attraction to bring in more visitors and boost local economies.

- **Fenland District Council Business Plan**

The Council's Business Plan recognises the potential to promote Fenland through its culture and heritage. It also aims to strengthen links between Fenland communities which can be achieved through creative and cultural events and activity that brings people together to share common experiences. The Council also aims to support the numerous voluntary groups who wish to organise events, which, with the right support, can grow and contribute towards a new narrative for Fenland as a cultural place, supported by its community.

- **The Fens Biosphere**

The Fens Biosphere project aims to achieve UNESCO Biosphere designation for the Fens as a unique and valuable landscape. If successful, this will bring international recognition to the Fens, the partnership managing the project recognises the potential for cultural and creative activity within the project. Creative activity will help link the community to the economic and environmental developments in the project, essential for its success.

The Biosphere project hinges on creating a strong identity for the Fens. It responds to the heritage of food production and land and water management in the Fens, which has developed Fenland's unique heritage and culture. The project could provide a strong brand and community pride to the area, galvanising communities to be involved in a project that will support tourism and celebrate its cultural traditions.

Creative organisations within Fenland may wish to get involved with the project to support its aims, for example they are already involving local people in photographing the distinct landscape in the Fens to create beautiful images that celebrate the natural heritage.



National Cultural Context

Covid-19

At the time of writing, the world is engulfed in the coronavirus pandemic, resulting in lockdown in the UK. The full effects of this will become clear in time, however there are already two apparent impacts on the cultural sector that are evident.

The lockdown has affected creative practitioners and cultural venues hugely. Many cultural venues rely on visitors to raise their revenue and continue their reason for existing but have been forced to close due to the coronavirus lockdown. Theatres and arts venues were the first to be shut down. In addition, most creative practitioners in the UK are self-employed, freelancers or on short term contracts. Again, this has disproportionately affected cultural sector workers who have seen their income drop substantially. The cultural sector is hugely threatened by the lockdown and many organisations will not survive.

However, the crisis has also highlighted the huge benefit of the cultural sector to communities. Creative people have quickly adapted their ways of working in order to continue to support the wellbeing of people through the crisis. Many have relied on the arts and entertainment to get them through the period of isolation. A statement on creativity and culture from Ernesto Ottone, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture, said:

"COVID-19 has brought into stark relief, as crises often do, the necessity of culture for people and communities. At a time when billions of people are physically separated from one another, culture brings us together. It provides comfort, inspiration and hope at a time of enormous anxiety and uncertainty... Now, more than ever, people need culture. Culture makes us resilient. It gives us hope. It reminds us that we are not alone. That is why UNESCO will do all it can to support culture, to safeguard our heritage and empower artists and creators, now and after this crisis has passed. We hope you will join us in this effort, by supporting culture in your own community, however you can."

Culture and creativity has an important role, not just to support people through the crisis, but to re-build as we emerge from it. As Darren Henley, CEO for the Arts Council England, observed,

"...people and communities have turned to culture and creativity in this crisis... they will surely turn to it again and again as we begin the work of restoring our sense of wellbeing and our sense of our place in the world. Through the creativity of our artists, arts organisations, museums and libraries, we will be heard, and we will explore the meaning of all this. We will celebrate, console, commemorate and come together. Through creativity and culture, we will heal."

Mr Henley sees the role of creativity and culture as even more important to communities now, with a vital role that goes beyond the sector and supports all aspects of our lives: "Imagine then the compelling story we could tell about how we brought our precious communities back together and helped to heal the emotional, social and economic scars left by this terrible virus."

It is within this context that this strategy needs to address the short-term emergence from the coronavirus lockdown, as well as the long-term vision for Fenland's creativity and heritage.

Arts Council England

Arts Council England recently published their 10-year strategy, Let's Create, 2020-2030.

The strategy has three outcomes and four investment principles:

Outcomes:

- Creative People: everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life;
- Cultural Communities: villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture;
- A Creative & Cultural Country: England's cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international.

Investment Principles:

- Ambition and Quality: cultural organisations are ambitious and committed to improving the quality of their work;
- Inclusivity & Relevance: England's diversity is fully reflected in the organisations and individuals that we support and in the culture that they produce;
- Dynamism: cultural organisations are dynamic and able to respond to the challenges of the next decade;
- Environmental Responsibility: cultural organisations lead the way in their approach to environmental responsibility.

Fenland's Creative and Cultural Strategy needs to describe clearly how it will support these outcomes and principles if it is to draw down investment from Arts Council England.

Creative People:

Let's Create wants more people to have access to creative activity and be able to participate. The Arts Council lists Fenland as an area where participation in the arts is lower than the national average. Initiatives such as MarketPlace CPP already exist to address this, however their reach is limited. Creative thinking needs to be undertaken to find innovative ways to allow access to creative activity for more people in Fenland, which is especially difficult with a lack of venues and public transport links. We should be asking ourselves: if people are not able to come to us, how can we bring culture to them? There are pockets of isolated communities in Fenland and aging populations. Cultural activity could be mobile and touring to reach more places, and this requires a well networked infrastructure which does not currently exist. Outdoor events and festivals can be developed where there is a lack of indoor venues. In other parts of the country, outdoor events have been shown to be particularly effective in getting people involved. There is already good practice, such as

Cambridgeshire's Libraries Presents touring programme, however, there needs to be expansion beyond the library venues to reach community centres, empty spaces and outdoor spaces. There are also large travelling communities and migrant communities in Fenland. Cultural events and activities should make efforts to connect with migrant and travelling communities and include them, integrating them into the cultural activity of Fenland. This will, over time, support community cohesion. Work in other areas of the country have shown that sharing of diverse cultural traditions has supported understanding between different communities.

Cultural Communities:

Let's Create recognises that more can be achieved when people and organisations work together. By building those networks, as stated above, more arts can tour in Fenland and reach more people.

In addition, different sectors can come together to support each other's aims: creative activity can support:

- health
- heritage
- economic regeneration
- social cohesion
- environment
- place-making

These sectors need to involve creative practitioners at the planning stages of projects allowing creative thinkers to come up with innovative solutions using culture to connect people and encourage engagement. Over the long term, Fenland's community could develop cultural hubs that can bring a number of creative and heritage practitioners together to generate exciting and varied programmes that create a buzz of creativity and encourage community involvement.

A Creative & Cultural Country:

Let's Create recognises that a creative and cultural country will only develop if all children and young people, regardless of their background, are given the opportunity to develop their talent. For them to take up these opportunities, they need to understand the opportunities available to be able to have a vision of what is possible. They need inspiration from a variety of quality artists and creatives and need to be introduced to the possibilities of varied creative careers. The excellent practices of organisations such as 20Twenty, who provide supported work experience for young people, need investment as their work has limited capacity without additional help. Let's Create also wants to see cultural organisations using more digital media and technology to be innovative and reach larger audiences. Young people need to be supported to take on this challenge and become technology innovators to support cultural organisations in Fenland into the future. This could be done through traditional education or by connecting technology businesses with young people in Fenland.

Historic England

Historic England's Corporate Plan includes the following aims:

- Championing heritage: this includes working in partnership with cultural and creative sectors, promoting the value of heritage to our cultural life and increasing cultural uses of and responses to the historic environment: "Closer working with arts and culture organisations will enable us to build active participation among diverse communities, enabling more people to understand, enjoy and care for the historic environment.";
- Wider Engagement and Diversity: Reaching more people and more diverse audiences all over England: "We need to engage with more diverse audiences, and in different ways, to fulfil our remit to champion and protect England's historic environment."
- Strengthening national capacity and resilience of the heritage sector, includes:
 - Grants and collaborative working to sustain and strengthen capability and effectiveness of heritage sector and community groups
 - Sustaining local authority contribution to delivering heritage protection through strategic support for the planning system, training, guidance and digital access to data
 - Developing heritage apprenticeships and craft skills, supporting High Streets, supporting Place-making and Rural heritage.

Heritage Lottery Fund

The Heritage Lottery Fund Strategic Funding Framework 2019-2024 lays out its two priority areas:

- landscapes and nature
- community heritage

There are six objectives:

- continue to bring heritage into better condition
- inspire people to value heritage more
- ensure that heritage is inclusive
- support the organisations they fund to be more robust, enterprising and forward looking
- demonstrate how heritage helps people and places to thrive
- grow the contribution that heritage makes to the UK economy.

The Heritage Fund's definition of heritage is broad:

"The National Lottery Heritage Fund will continue to fund the full breadth of heritage across the whole of the UK, enabling people to define heritage for themselves, so that what they value can be enjoyed and passed on to future generations. This scope and reach is essential to our role as a distributor of National Lottery funding for heritage, and our approach is recognised as having made heritage more democratic and widely appreciated than before."

The Fund's new outcome is: "People will have greater wellbeing", thus they link heritage with people's enjoyment and sense of pride in their community and locality.

The priority areas are applicable to Fenland in that it involves communities and landscape/natural heritage, both of which should also be priorities for Fenland. Initiatives like the Biosphere paired with strong community traditions such as the Straw Bear Festival makes Fenland an area that the Heritage Lottery should be interested in supporting. Heritage Lottery Funding has already been secured for Wisbech to invest in the High Street. Other projects identified in the Growing Fenland town plans include heritage to boost visitor numbers and local economies, and to celebrate heritage with new signage, trails and community festivals.

Most of Fenland's heritage provision is run by volunteers including Angles Theatre and four of the five museums. These groups have ambition but lack support. Investment from sources such as the Arts Council should be identified to support links between local assets enabling resource sharing, encouraging more ambitious and enterprising work to be undertaken to enhance the good practice already achieved with limited resources. A key priority would be to enhance heritage in the area with technological innovation, digital initiatives and better online presence and marketing, which will be most effective shared between them. Links between the heritage that exists in the area and the wellbeing of the community that engage with it should be amplified; connecting people to heritage through their own stories, ensuring that heritage remains relevant to people in all their diversity. Making this case for local heritage collections and museums, Angles Theatre and the natural landscape, should ensure that the Heritage Lottery Fund would be drawn to investing in Fenland projects.



Fenland's Cultural Assets

Venues

- Angles Theatre
- Community Centres
- Libraries
- Luxe Cinema Wisbech and The Light Cinema Wisbech
- Market places
- March Town Hall

Organisations

- 20Twenty Productions
- Blackfield Creatives
- Fascinating Fens
- Care Network
- Cambridgeshire ACRE
- Market Place CPP / Babylon Arts
- Libraries Service (The Library Presents)
- Young Fenland Cultural Consortium
- Fens Biosphere project - Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership
- Cambridgeshire Community Arts
- Red Barn Creative
- Town Councils

Heritage

- Museums
- Landscape and Natural Environment
- Archaeology
- Cultural traditions e.g. Straw Bear Festival
- The Castle (Wisbech, Grade II listed, owned by Cambridgeshire County Council and run by Wisbech Town Council)



Challenges

- Creativity and heritage in Fenland is not perceived as exciting enough by consultation respondents. Though this may be a perception rather than reality, it indicates a need to grow creative aspiration and introduce inspirational events and activities into the district. There is little capacity to influence arts coordination which would enable inspirational activities to be developed, attracting high quality art to Fenland.
- There is no central hub for cultural activity in the district. Young people particularly expressed a wish to have a central place as a creative hub where people could get involved in a range of activities. Hubs would need to develop over time with several organisations coming together to deliver creative hub activity.
- Transport is a challenge in Fenland to support attending venues, activities and events, especially for people without access to their own transport, e.g. young people and those in rural areas.
- People in Fenland are used to operating with low financial support and they feel that Fenland cannot attract investment into the cultural sector. This is not the case, with Arts Council England and the Heritage Fund both keen to invest in Fenland. Coordination is required to match expertise to draw down funding with local communities who have ideas and want to make things happen.
- Migrant workers from Europe are essential to the agricultural industry in Fenland and community relations with residents are complex. "The impact of migration in the Fenland area: A scoping report" 2019, commissioned by the Rosmini Centre as part of the Migrant Workers' Mapping Project, recognised that there are conflicting conclusions on the overall effect of migrant labour on community cohesion, often depending upon whether migration is permanent, seasonal or cyclical, with greater social cohesion found to occur over time as migrants become more established in communities. There are case studies around England where sharing and celebrating cultural activity from different countries has contributed towards better community cohesion and understanding between nationalities, and this potential should be investigated further with the migrant communities in Fenland.

Outcomes

Connections

- Assets in the cultural sector will be well networked, both within Fenland and further afield, in order to build partnerships that can lever in funding and build infrastructure across the District.
- Networks share skills and support volunteers.
- Cultural activity in Fenland more accessible.

Communication

- A focused communications campaign celebrates the culture of Fenland, and key people and their achievements.
- Fenland is a cultural destination, linking it to the strong heritage and unique nature of Fenland traditions and natural landscapes.
- Information about cultural activity in Fenland will be centralised, creating an information Hub with a dedicated coordinator to promote Fenland's culture and join up marketing of culture into a multi-faceted offer across the District.

Empowerment

- Community Connectors will be identified and supported to work with communities in order to develop their skills and confidence in creating cultural opportunities.
- Young people are supported to be heard within cultural plans, as well as supported to achieve their own cultural ambitions.
- Address the skills gap within Fenland's cultural sector, identifying opportunities to support young people to train in the sector and gain experience and skills as well as uplifting the skills of existing practitioners and cultural sector workers in Fenland.

Inspiration

- Inspiring events and activities will take place in Fenland on a regular basis, bringing high quality arts to the District, co-programmed with communities and appropriate for the different towns, and drawing larger audiences from further afield to engage with it. Fenland has great potential for outdoor events, such as festivals, with its market places, fields and green open spaces.
- A Creative Hub will be developed, perhaps making use of an existing venue to become an arts centre, hosting regular activities and attracting creative people to work and programme there.

Delivering the Strategy

An infrastructure needs to be built that will drive and deliver this Strategy over the next 10 years, embedding it across Fenland:

- **Leadership Steering Group.**

The Steering Group that loosely exists at present, should be formalised and sustained and developed to provide the Leadership to drive this Strategy. The Steering Group will connect existing cultural providers in the District to deliver against the Strategy.

It is anticipated that the work of the Steering Group will be broad. To ensure that local expertise, with a local approach (not necessarily linked professionally to the culture sector) is used to move the cultural agenda forwards, the Steering Group will use sub-groups to drive progress with specific local input from time to time.

Additionally, it is expected that areas within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough that have a more mature and experienced cultural offer, may be able to work together with those that are still developing. Members of the Steering Group will work together across the County to bring knowledge into Fenland, learning from our neighbours. This approach should fit well with Area Partnership Funds that the Arts Council is considering for their Let's Create Strategy delivery model – due in Spring 2021.

- **Development post**

External funding will be sought to establish an Arts & Heritage Development officer who can facilitate key actions of this Strategy in the first three years, working with the community to bring people together to create sustainable growth in creative activity and heritage.

- **Community Connectors**

The Steering Group will identify and support, accessing funding where possible Community Connector roles with a remit to develop community groups in cultural activity. (Existing roles include Care Network Community Development Workers, Fascinating Fens, Fenland 6 Museums, Festival Bridge, Young Fenland Cultural Consortium, Cambridgeshire ACRE)



DRAFT Action Plan

Years 1-2

- **Arts and Heritage Development Officer (AHDO)** post established to drive the strategy action plan and connect cultural organisations across the district, enabling more creative and cultural activity to take place, whilst also supporting identification and the drawdown of external funding. The post should be a 3-year post to embed cultural activity into Fenland and ensure its sustainability. Funding from Arts Council England and Historic England to support this post, with some local matched funding identified;
- The AHDO post will focus on supporting the cultural sector recovering from the pandemic; building resilience and infrastructure into the sector, **enabling connections** between organisations in order to strengthen them and putting in place the means to communicate more effectively about culture in Fenland; and to **represent culture within other sectors**, using creativity to support the economy, tourism, wellbeing, skills development and the environment;
- **Support existing groups** and initiatives to grow and be sustainable, such as 20Twenty, Angles Theatre, Rural Touring Scheme, Blackfield Creatives, Museums etc. Work with these organisations to support **opportunities for young people** to develop skills in the cultural sector;
- **Establish the cultural infrastructure** necessary to drive the strategy, addressing Leadership and the Steering Group, and Community Connectors;
- Potentially make use of the **apprenticeship levy** to lever in match funding to support an apprentice to work with the AHDO, investing in the skills gap and developing future expertise in this area;
- Develop opportunities to **address skills gaps** in the cultural sector, for existing practitioners but also for young people. Make use of networks, local organisations and organisations from outside Fenland who can provide training and develop skills in the cultural sector. Encourage initiatives to involve young people in heritage, perhaps modelled on the Kick the Dust initiative (by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, 2016-2019) as an example of innovative practice.

Years 2-5

- **Conduct a study into the feasibility of an independent, sustainable Arts Centre** with cultural facilities. An arts centre would need to support a number of cultural organisations who can use the venue to make it viable. A long-term plan would need to be developed if this is to become a reality;

- **Marketing campaign** that joins up all cultural activity in Fenland, linking it to tourism;
- Give creative and community led activity the support and encouragement to use creativity to **celebrate Fenland's natural heritage** and visibility as a tourist destination, where appropriate supporting the Fens Biosphere project and other projects or opportunities that raise Fenland's profile;
- Work with **migrant communities** to develop events and projects to share cultural traditions with the wider population of Fenland;
- Develop initiatives to **improve transport links** that support cultural activities and venues, enabling more people to access these offers across Fenland;
- Develop **Information Hubs** in key local places, such as village noticeboards, pubs, community venues, and through word of mouth, making use of Community Connectors to ensure that information is shared across the District into very local areas;
- **Develop links with national and international organisations** who can bring new, inspiring work to Fenland. These should include outdoor arts / festival networks and rural touring networks;
- Develop **new events and activities** and expand existing ones to include new, inspiring creative work, co-produced by communities and young people. This should include outdoor arts and festivals, linking the existing Seasons Festivals in the towns with the apprenticeship post to develop Producers of the future;
- **Lever in funding** from Heritage Lottery Fund and elsewhere to support **heritage** organisations in Fenland. Network these organisations to enable them to work together to access larger, more ambitious funding.
- Develop projects to upgrade the use of **new technology** for heritage venues, including establishing their presence online as well as integrating new technology into their venues, displays and operations, and developing digital skills for heritage workers.

Years 5-10

- Build on successes to introduce **new activities** into Fenland and to grow existing ones;
- **Link with national and international cultural organisations** to bring high profile artistic works to Fenland;

- Have established the **unique selling point** of Fenland and be communicating this to the world;
- Build on opportunities to have more **apprenticeships** and develop **career opportunities** in arts and heritage within the District, investing in young people to develop skills and continue cultural growth into the future;
- Establish an **Arts Centre** and/or other cultural facilities, if deemed feasible, within the District with good links for it to be accessible to as many residents of Fenland as possible. Continue to develop the offer of these facilities, establishing programmes of activities and events.