

Exeter

a place-based Cultural Strategy
(2019 – 2024)

Commissioned by Exeter Culture on behalf
of Exeter City Council, University of Exeter,
Exeter College and InExeter, with the support
of Arts Council England

EXETER
LIVE BETTER

Foreword

I am delighted to introduce to you this new *Place-based Arts and Cultural Strategy* for Exeter, which sets an ambitious course over the next five years for us to develop as a major cultural centre. During the consultation process, five key Theme areas emerged, meaning that this is a Strategy for everyone in the city. I hope you feel you can be a part of it. At Exeter City Council, we will adopt it as the city's Cultural Strategy and align with the stated priorities.

We are at a crucial time in terms of culture in the city. Exeter boasts some fantastic assets, organisations and artists. If we work better collaboratively, we can maximise the huge potential that exists in the city. Through city-wide partnerships, we will be able to achieve results that are not possible on our own. This Strategy sets a course for these ambitions, and identifies the possibilities that exist for us to play to the strengths of Exeter's people, organisations and talent.

This is a 'living strategy' that we will update regularly, so that it adapts with the changes and opportunities in the city.

Thank you for reading.

Rachel Sutton
Exeter City Council



Writing the future of Exeter on the walls of a cardboard city model, during a performance of 'Here, Now', part three of the digital art triptych *This City's Centre* by Blind Ditch. Presented in the third floor offices of Princesshay management. Funded by Arts Council England and Exeter City Council with the support of Exeter Phoenix, RAMM and Arts & Culture at University of Exeter. Photography by Benjamin J Borley.

Vision

Exeter will be known nationally and internationally as a city of culture. It will innovate and lead in the areas of the environment, wellbeing, cultural literacy, creative making and heritage innovation to build a living city where everyone thrives.

Exeter is a city of incredible qualities. Its heritage, open and innovative cultural sector, education institutions, businesses, sports, nature, and increasingly diverse communities generate a unique sense of place and possibility. They also generate a unique sense of purpose: to the major challenges we face as a society and to the compelling opportunities Exeter has as a city that wants to make a difference, to lead, to collaborate, to innovate and to drive change.

Exeter is the right size to pioneer new ways of working, as a leading smaller city capable of taking risks, and piloting and demonstrating impact. This *Place-based Arts & Cultural Strategy* recognises the need for stronger partnerships, and the alignment of civic and institutional interests for common good: a city re-imagined through culture.

Context

Research and consultation for this Strategy has connected with a range of voices from across the city and its region. It has sought to understand Exeter's cultural distinctiveness, strengths and challenges, and what its citizens care about. It has uncovered a city of incredible heritage with a rich and engaging contemporary culture. Here, people don't just see culture as leisure or purely for pleasure; they see culture as something that both defines us and provides us with the tools for a better society.

Culture is who people are, what people do and what people want to be. It has been a catalyst for economic diversification and growth; for talent attraction and retention; for inward investment and tourism; for health and wellbeing; for environmental awareness and sustainability; and for innovation and competitiveness.

The content of this Strategy (and its five themes) has come from the cultural sector and key stakeholders, and as such the delivery of the key actions are the responsibility of this collective group.

Cross-cutting Priorities

To achieve our vision, the five Themes are not enough. We also need passionate partnership, shared ownership, new ways of working and many types of leadership. We also need to upgrade our governance, partnership and delivery models. Priorities include:

- **Creative case for diversity** – embedding diversity in all cultural planning and production so it reflects the full range of backgrounds and perspectives in our society
- **Enhancing governance** – there is a need for stronger senior-level participation in the city's cultural conversation
- **Audience development and engagement** – identifying audiences for specific programmes and projects and learning from this is crucial
- **Invigorating partnership** – work better across organisations, communities and the business sector to maximise tangible opportunities for artists and organisations
- **Internationalisation** – better exploit Exeter's international networks and partnerships to create tangible opportunities for artists and organisations
- **Communication** – restructure and repurpose the ways in which the city articulates and shares its cultural offer and identity, internally and externally, locally, nationally and internationally
- **Evaluation** – embed evaluation into the delivery of the Strategy to understand impact
- **Nurturing talent** – with a growing and youthful population, we need to ensure accessible routes to cultural participation and opportunities
- **Urban and rural connections** – develop stronger cultural links between the city, rural communities and smaller towns



Summer Film School at Poltimore House. A collaboration between Four of Swords theatre company and Exeter Phoenix. August 2018. Photography by Rhodri Cooper.

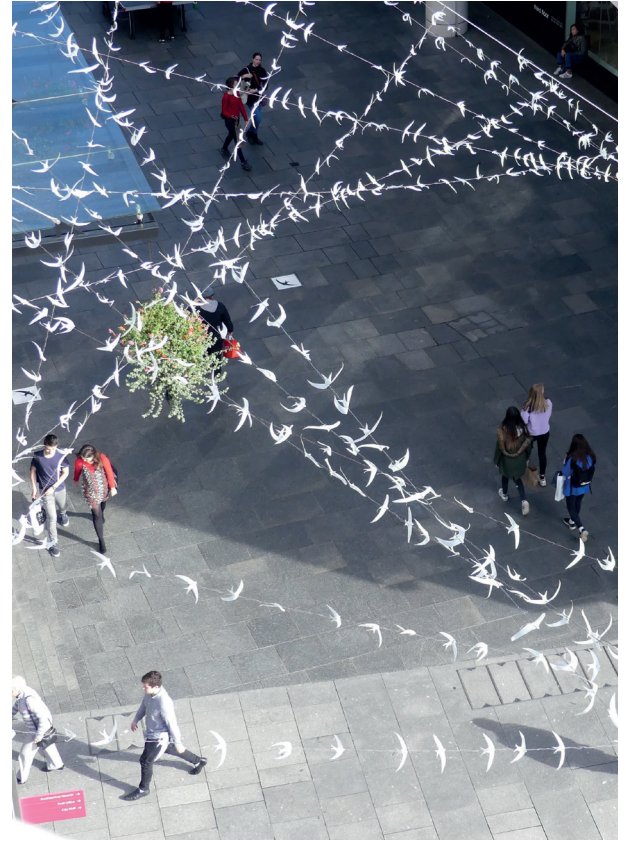
City of Culture for the Environment

A city that pioneers environmental responsibility and innovation through culture.

Environmental sustainability, and averting the catastrophe of non-reversible climate change, is a crucial issue of our time. Exeter is in a position to develop a cultural identity founded on environmental responsibility and innovation through arts and culture. If we develop cultural practice that helps us to develop deeper relationships and interactions with our environment, then our city will be more liveable. Exeter can play a leadership role in this area, building from its rich mix of expertise, resources and passion. Artists and cultural organisations can provide the creative, interdisciplinary spaces to create new patterns and stories to live by, and redesign and renew our communities and ecosystems.

Key Actions

- Exeter's cultural sector joins the Climate Emergency campaign.
- The creation of a city/region-wide Arts & Culture for the Environment events programme
- A Sustainable Exeter Culture Enquiry: a new conurbation-wide trial and review process to test our environmental sustainability through culture



'Swift' by Naomi Hart, an aerial installation made with copper wire and salvaged plastic milk bottles to raise awareness about migration, habitat, resources and recycling. Commissioned by The Crown Estates to celebrate Princesshay Shopping Centre's 10th birthday. Autumn 2017. Photography by Naomi Hart.

City of Cultural Wellbeing

A city where culture is a revitalising force, delivering a positive impact on health and wellbeing.

Exeter is growing – in terms of housing development and population – and the city is pivoting towards being a conurbation with all the attendant challenges. Priorities for the Council and its partners include balancing housing-led growth with environmental sustainability, health and wellbeing, while supporting a dynamic city. Culture can play a role in planning for distinctive neighbourhoods, and in engaging new and existing communities. Exeter can position itself as a city where people's health and wellbeing are influenced by arts and culture, helping to build healthier lives, reducing isolation and shaping participatory communities.

Key Actions

- Extend Wellbeing Exeter to a cultural prescribing model
- Develop a culture and wellbeing board
- Establish an arts, culture, health and wellbeing advisory programme
- Establish ways to build arts and cultural participation activities into the Sport England pathfinder



The Listening Booth, by Hugh McCann, is a space to hear words and sounds in Exeter Library. Designed to offer library-goers – including visually impaired people – another way to engage with content in the library, it is programmed with new pieces of audio every four weeks. Supported by Libraries Unlimited, Arts Council England and Exeter City Council. Built with Knowle West Media Centre: The Factory. 2019. Photography by Rhodri Cooper.

City of Heritage Innovation

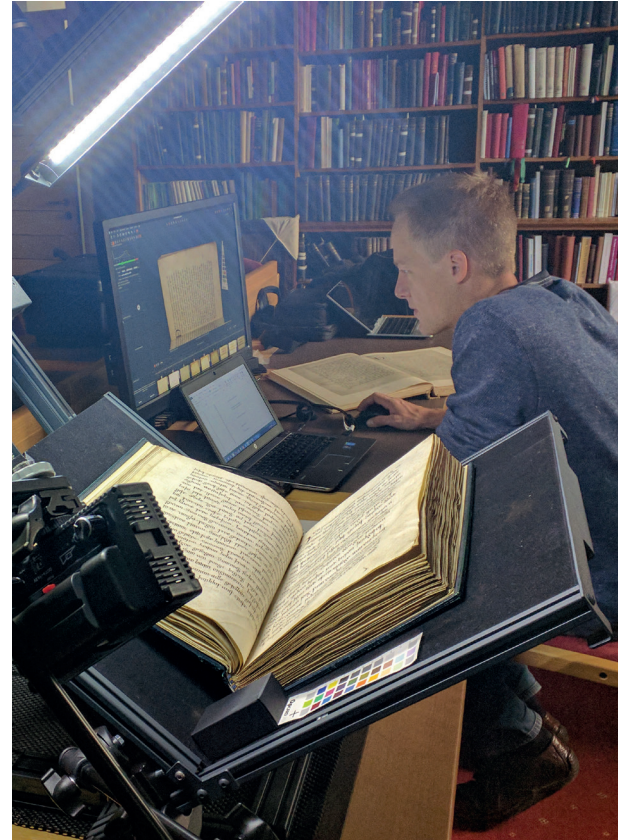
A city where culture plays an active role in engaging with the past, and nurturing possibilities for the future.

Exeter is home to many histories, where the physical and cultural geography of the city coalesce. There is a major opportunity to innovate through our strength in heritage, which would catalyse the visitor economy and make Exeter a national pioneer in this area. We can strengthen peer exchange within the heritage sector and across the wider arts, culture and education landscape, especially if we include contemporary cultural activities such as studio and workspace, and consider the city's post-war architecture as an asset to be re-imagined and revitalised. This will inspire new types of cultural engagement and literacy through the convergence of the city's heritage, technology and creative assets.

By recognising its assets and innovating, Exeter can re-frame its rich heritage as a vital part of the city's cultural future.

Key Actions

- Create a shared Heritage Action Plan through the Exeter Heritage Partnership
- Undertake a heritage mapping exercise to help amplify the offer of Greater Exeter
- Scope opportunities for the development of an Exeter Heritage Festival and creation of innovative/digital heritage itineraries



Graham Fereday, a member of the Digital Humanities Lab team at the University of Exeter, taking pictures of single pages from the Exeter Book, using the portable Conservation Cradle, part of the digitisation process funded by the University. September 2017. Photography by Gary Stringer.

City of Creative Making

A city that supports creative practice with a growing strength in independent cultural production.

Exeter is growing in strength in terms of independent creative practice; however, it is recognised that we need to improve in areas of artist support and development, opportunities for connection, and internal and external communication. With a dedicated push to grow the opportunities for new work, the city can be a model for diversification, creative resilience and inclusive growth. As an internationally connected city (through its airport and strong University links), Exeter is in a position to exploit international opportunities for creative practitioners and organisations to stimulate innovation and collaboration.

Key Actions

- Development of creative enterprise zones for culture
- Exploit opportunities for city-wide programmes of work (themed years)
- Deliver an international exchange programme for culture
- Creative networking and knowledge exchange activities – a 'network of networks' for Exeter, with regular coordinated events and a shared platform for recruitment
- A festival development plan and trial festival network
- Development of a Capital Master Plan for Culture



Lizzy Humber (independent producer and mother) and her daughter taking part in a 'Speculative Supermodels' workshop for Mothers Who Make Exeter, hosted at Art Work Exeter's gallery, the AWESome Art Space on Paris Street. Participants created Lego models of the buildings they'd like to see as part of the bus station redevelopment. May 2019. Photography by Rhodri Cooper.

City of Cultural Literacy and Learning

A city where culture provides pathways to participation across the civic and social life.

Increased cultural literacy – an active appreciation of and appetite for cultural activity – has the power to make cities more fulfilling places to live, work and visit; it boosts confidence, builds self-esteem and makes people feel valued. Exeter has the potential and newly formed stakeholder partnerships to focus on literature and literacy as core components of the city's cultural life, identity and future direction. To deliver on this aspiration requires the city to go much further than celebrate its assets. Exeter needs to use its literature pedigree to open up a new, expansive cultural literacy for all its citizens. Cultural participation for young people outside of formal settings, imaginative urban planning, and opportunities for volunteering can be a catalyst for appreciating the city in new ways.

Key Actions

- Develop a programme connected to wellbeing and cultural literacy
- Establish a Cultural Literacy Toolkit for the city
- Support projects that connect cultural learning to active participation with the city's cultural landscape and key stakeholders
- Develop a model for volunteering for major events



Preston Street Union performing 'Serge/Surge' – commissioned by RAMM as part of its 'Migration' programme – at the city wall, Exeter Quay, 28 May 2019. Photography by Jonathan Price.

So, what's next?

As we approach the third decade of the 21st century, Exeter will need to balance its economic development with social inclusion and environmental responsibility. It will need its artists and cultural organisations like never before – to offer alternative futures, to bring communities together, and to help problem-solve and innovate in a time of profound risk and opportunity. This *Place-based Arts and Cultural Strategy* for Exeter signals a way forward and requests that partners move fast, take risks and recognise that without culture, we do not have a city.

Exeter can be a beacon for cultural innovation and excellence.

Let's work together to make it happen.

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This is a condensed version of the *Place-based Arts & Cultural Strategy* produced by Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy.

To read the full version, please visit: **exeterculture.com**

If you would like to use any of this Strategy,
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