

EXETER CITY COUNCIL
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY
4 SEPTEMBER 2008

ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consult members on the issues and proposed priorities for the draft City Arts Strategy, prior to wider consultation on the proposed strategic priorities and action plan and completion of the Strategy.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council supports the arts under the banner of its Arts and Media Strategy, which it approved in 2004 and which sits within the Cultural Strategy approved in 2003, providing a linking framework between Leisure, Arts, Parks and Open Spaces and Tourism.
- 2.2 The over-arching aim of the Arts and Media Strategy has been to contribute to the Exeter Vision objective of establishing Exeter's position "as a cultural and fun place to be". In particular, the priorities of the Strategy have been to both enhance the vibrancy and range of activities and to improve the quality, diversity and accessibility of cultural facilities and activities, whilst securing the city's reputation as an important regional cultural centre.
- 2.3 The approved objectives of the Arts and Media Strategy following consultation were to:-
- develop the arts and media infrastructure in order to establish Exeter as a county and regional cultural centre
 - improve the quality and diversity of arts and media activity in the city
 - increase access to and participation in arts and media activity
 - support the involvement of artists and their work to give added value to places and spaces in the built and natural environment, by investing them with character, social relevance and visual stimulation
 - support Exeter as a learning city through the development of arts and media activity that increases cultural appreciation and access to learning and skills
 - support arts activities that contribute to strong communities and social inclusion
 - maximise existing cultural investment in the city and increase external funding for arts and media activity and facilities
- 2.4 These objectives have provided the focus for the activities of the Arts, Festivals and Events team and partnership working with a number of organisations and individuals, including Arts Council England, Exeter Arts Council, Exeter Northcott Theatre, Exeter Phoenix, Spacex Gallery, Exeter Barnfield Theatre, South West Screen, British Film Institute and many others.
- 2.5 Members have received regular reports on specific initiatives, the Council's extended programme of festivals and events and its grant support for the core strategic organisations which provide the main infrastructure for arts activities in the City. The City Council is an active supporter and developer of the arts and media and in addition to its financial support for the key arts organisations, grants channelled through Exeter Arts Council, and its direct operation of festivals and events, it has

initiated new festivals and events and has worked at a strategic level to encourage the private sector to develop public art within development schemes.

- 2.6 The City Council has supported the arts strongly within its work on promoting and supporting the tourism sector and raising the profile and image of Exeter. It has recognised the value of the arts in animating the City Centre and revitalising public spaces, and has supported major capital projects to improve arts and media facilities.
- 2.7 The City Council has worked to widen access to the arts through its Service Level Agreements with revenue supported organisations, which emphasise the importance of taking work out into the community and partnership working with the education sector. It has also introduced the arts in community and play programmes, promoted arts and media through its tourism marketing, and developed the Exeter Corn Exchange as a venue for the live arts and entertainment.
- 2.8 The City Council's revenue budget for supporting the arts and contribution to the delivery of the current strategy is summarised below:-

Arts Grants to strategic arts organisations

• Exeter Northcott Theatre	£85,231
• Exeter Phoenix	£131,198
• Theatre Alibi	£19,196
• SpaceX Gallery	£11,365
• Wren trust	£16,205
• Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra	£11,865
• Barnfield Theatre	£10,000

TOTAL	£285,060
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Festivals and Events – net costs to the City Council

• Animated Exeter	£37,500
• Vibraphonic	£16,000
• Exeter Summer Festival	£100,000
• Exeter Autumn Festival	£25,000

TOTAL	£174,500
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Operating Costs

Including employees, premises and supporting services	£221,130
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- 2.9 As agreed by Committee specialist consultants have been commissioned to work with officers to support the development of a new Strategy for 2008-2012, to continue to provide a focus for the activities of the Unit, as well as other relevant parts of the City Council, and to influence the activities of other key agencies and partners.
- 2.10 Following consultation with the City Council and with partner agencies, the consultants have produced an interim view on the key issues relevant to the development of the revised strategy. These reflect upon the over-arching vision of the City Council, the national, regional and local context for arts development, and specific opportunities and needs within the City. The remainder of the report summaries these issues and recommends an ambitious and extensive set of potential strategic priorities to be used for wider consultation, following comments from Members of the Scrutiny Committee. It will be important to be realistic in that it will not be possible to realise all those proposals in the light of the likely availability of resources, in view of the current economic climate, increasing restrictions on public sector funding, and a much more difficult outlook for sponsorship and funding

available on the back of major developments. Member's views on prioritising acceptable proposals at Committee are important to the process of focusing down the strategy to a deliverable programme of activity. More detailed actions, outcomes and appropriate targets will be developed and included in the final draft, which will come back to this Committee for approval.

3. STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND ISSUES

3.1 The priority issues for Government through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England can be summarised into a few words:

- the creative economy – supporting the growth and survival of creative organisations
- cultural diversity – promoting understanding and respect between different cultures
- increased levels of participation by young people in high quality arts and culture, and
- vibrant communities – building community pride and supporting neighbourhood renewal

Underlying these and more fundamental is a renewed emphasis on arts organisations becoming more financially sustainable and reducing their reliance on public funding. Reductions in Arts Lottery funding, has already created a more competitive funding environment.

3.2 Culture South West's document, "People, Places and Spaces" is the cultural infrastructure development strategy for the South West supported by the Regional Development Agency, Government Office for the South West and the South West Regional Assembly, and is referenced by the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The RSS policies on culture are concerned with increasing cultural participation and the quality and diversity of our cultural life. The role of culture is recognised by the RSS as helping to grow the region's economy and contributing to the quality of life. Maintaining and enhancing cultural assets to raise the profile and image of the South West is seen as very important.

3.3 The City Council has recognised the important role of the arts in providing access to cultural provision and in supporting the local economy, by promoting activities which enhance the city as a visitor destination, contributing to environmental and public realm improvements and assisting the case for promoting and attracting investment. The challenge and opportunities over the next few years will be to ensure that the role and contribution of arts and media in delivering the Exeter Vision is reflected in a wide range of policy aspirations across the Council, and in its working relationships with other stakeholders in the city. Within the context of local authority functions it will be essential to build upon existing effective strategic and working relationships between arts services and other departments including:-

- Planning (public art, major development and environmental schemes and urban planning)
- Education (arts in schools, informal learning opportunities and the new responsibilities for further education)
- Leisure and Community Development particularly in view of the Museum development
- Libraries (in reaching local communities and supporting in literacy development)
- Economic Development (including opportunities to support creative industries development and supporting tourism)

Arts Infrastructure

- 3.4 Exeter's arts infrastructure consists of its main arts venues and galleries, professional and amateur creative arts and media organisations, arts agencies including the City Council, and its resident arts and media agencies. The basic arts infrastructure has not changed significantly over recent years, although there have been improvements to some venues – particularly the Exeter Northcott Theatre, Exeter Corn Exchange and Exeter Phoenix. Further improvements are needed or planned to these and other facilities. The University has plans for improvements to the front of the Great Hall.

Visual Arts

- 3.5 Exeter has historically had an active visual arts sector, which has led to initiatives to develop spaces and facilitate and contributed to the creation of the nationally renowned Spacex Gallery, the Exeter Phoenix and other less formal spaces for the visual arts. The major re-development of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum is expected to create new accommodation for exhibitions of the highest standard in the future. Many individual artists (over 60) have co-ordinated their activities and worked with the City Council to promote new annual events such as Open Studios and Exeter Arts Spaces, is a recently formed artist studio complex accommodating up to 30 artist makers, which need a more permanent base.
- 3.6 Exeter has an extensive range of Public Art, including a prestigious collection on the University campus. The City Council has a public art strategy and has worked with developers and undertaken its own initiatives to include public art commissions within capital schemes. Particular examples include those included within the city centre enhancements and the Princesshay development. The city is well placed to build on its strengths in the visual arts, but the consultant considers that it will need to achieve greater co-ordination and impact in visual arts development if it wants to make a major impact and attract the additional resources it would then need. If the city is looking for a contribution from the visual arts to its broader aspirations, it will need to find ways in partnership with the arts funding system and private sector of investing in the visual arts, to raise its public and regional profile.
- 3.7 Suggestions for achieving this include:
- establishing a new visual arts event or festival, separate to the current festival programme and bringing together all of the visual arts agencies and activities
 - identifying a number of landmark visual arts projects designed to promote the city as a vibrant contemporary place
 - building upon the recent strategic approach of integrating public art in public spaces, particularly on cycle-ways and walking routes, at key visitor destinations and public buildings
 - securing funding to embark on a programme of commissioning of work or host a major national exhibition by an artist of national/international standing to build on the existing portfolio of public art to place Exeter on the national visual art map
 - identifying ways of supporting and encouraging the availability of artistic workspace, providing opportunities for artists to exhibit work and promote their work to wider audiences

Performing Arts

- 3.8 The strength of performing arts activity depends a great deal on creative production. Exeter has a number of independent theatre companies, which produce work in the city and tour to other venues. The activities of Theatre Alibi, Magic Carpet and the

Exeter Northcott are notable. The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra is an important contributor in that the Exeter concert series is the most successful in their annual programme, selling more tickets than the Bristol concert series. The amateur arts sector is also important and the Exeter Arts Council plays a key role in channelling City Council grants to support local creative projects. Media production is supported by the Exeter Phoenix and independent media producers.

- 3.9 The challenge for many independent companies and individual practitioners is to secure the resources necessary to sustain their creative work. The main arts venues and organisations do support the independent sector by providing access to resources and opportunities to present work, as does for example the City Council through support in the Autumn Festival. However, the consultant notes that the sector is fragile and the reductions in Arts Lottery funding, added to the difficult economic climate, is adding to the uncertainties for creative practitioners and organisations. It is suggested that the solution is the integration of arts and media activities into social, educational, economic and environmental policies to produce new opportunities for creative organisations to generate income from making, promoting and selling creative products.

Film and Media

- 3.10 The consultant's view is that there is considerable potential for growth in the film and media sector, which needs to be considered within a broader strategy to support the creative industries in Exeter. In addition to the commercial screening of film in the city, the University is also a valuable resource running its own degree courses and centre for media focussing on animation and games. Exeter College and Isca College provide specialist education and Animated Exeter festival raises the profile of the industry and careers. Film and media, including the software and computer games industry, are key sectors for the UK economy and link well into Higher Education and the technology sector.

Cultural Quarter

- 3.11 The creation of the Cultural Quarter has been promoted by the City Council incorporating the development of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum complemented by activities of the Exeter Phoenix and the ambience of Gandy Street, together with events in the neighbouring parks contributing to this ambition. The proposed development of the Central Library by the County Council provides a further opportunity to establish the Quarter with additional cultural facilities, including improvements to the wider public realm to create more attractive public walkways and spaces. It is still hoped that the private owners of Exeter Castle (Rougemont) will achieve their expressed intention of creating a lively cultural venue.

Festivals and Events

- 3.12 Exeter has an established portfolio of arts festivals and events, which consist of the Exeter Summer Festival, Exeter Autumn Festival, Animated Exeter, Vibraphonic and Exeter Open Studios. All fulfil a function. Briefly, the Animated Exeter festival has been effective in engaging young people and links well into media work at Exeter Phoenix and the University. The Open Studios event promotes the visual arts and crafts sector, and Vibraphonic targets a younger and discerning music audience. The Exeter Summer Festival contributes to the city's visitor attractions and quality entertainment programming, whilst the Exeter Autumn Festival supports and provides a platform for the amateur and community sector.
- 3.13 The Council has regularly reviewed the festivals, a practice which should continue. The number of other events that have joined the annual calendar has increased in

recent years and costs, despite growth in budgets, limit them from being major festivals of regional or national significance. The challenge is achieving the balance between promoting the city and attracting visitors, whilst maintaining other festivals, to extend the range of arts provision available to the city's residents and engaging local people.

- 3.14 The recommendation is that the Council should continue to appraise its festivals' programme and consider the development of a festival of regional, and possibly national standing, in partnership with the private sector and as a key strand of its economic and cultural development. In view of resources, this would almost certainly result in a new event replacing or evolving from the existing range of festivals.

Creative Industries

- 3.15 The creative industries include those activities based on individual creativity, skill and talent, and those that have the potential to create wealth and jobs through developing intellectual property. The importance of the sector to the economy has grown in recent years. It enhances some of the most successful and innovative areas of economic activity and Exeter has most of the necessary ingredients for developing a successful creative industries sector.
- 3.16 The consultant considers that the development of a creative industry sector in Exeter should be an aspect of the Arts and Media Strategy. There are four main areas where development needs would need to be supported:-
- the provision and creation of workspace, including dedicated artist studios and incubation units for digitally based businesses
 - supporting the production and presentation of work, including via commissioning and exhibitions
 - creating new work and distribution opportunities e.g. commercial sound and video production, education and community programmes
 - through joint measures to support the development of the sector

Arts in the Community

- 3.17 Exeter has a strong amateur and voluntary arts sector. The grant aid channelled through Exeter Arts Council is a valuable source of funding support for amateur and community groups and individuals. The Autumn Festival provides a showcase for work produced by the community. Work within communities has been supported via the education and outreach programmes of the revenue funded organisations. There is scope to extend this further and have a greater focus on community and educational initiatives.

Arts and Learning/Arts and Young People

- 3.18 The City Council supports professional arts organisations and other who undertake a wide range of education and learning support programmes and work with adults, children and young people. Young people are provided with opportunities to participate in the arts, both within the formal education sector and through community based initiatives and projects including those linked to Animated Exeter and the programme of activities organised by the museum.
- 3.19 The consultant's view is that despite a great deal of arts and media activities taking place, including the Autumn Festival which provides an opportunity for showcasing and exhibiting work, work with young people is fragmented. There is no arts event or group bringing together the arts education sector or young people's art in the city, in order to maximise the best use of the limited resources available and avoid clashes

of programming. Improved networking between various strands of arts education and youth arts activity will be the key.

Sustainability and Growth

- 3.20 The arts and media sector continues to have a heavy reliance on public sector and grant funding. Government funding and much charitable sector funding targets work with disadvantaged or specific groups and it has been increasingly more difficult to secure funding. If the city's arts and media sector is to grow, its funding base will need to continue to diversify and new forms of income generation will need to be developed. Operating more business oriented models of development is inevitable, and measures to support the sector and adopt best practice from around the country should be pursued. It is suggested that if the public and private sector share Exeter's aspirations it is essential that a partnership is created, which encourages private sector investment in the development and enhancement of the city's cultural offer, and can attract new and additional funding from regional and charitable agencies. However, in the current economic climate securing additional particularly private sector investment will be difficult.

4. STRATEGY AIMS AND PRIORITIES 2008-2012

- 4.1 The main aim of the Arts and Media Strategy should remain that of contributing to the City Council's mission of securing Exeter's status as the regional capital of the South West, working in partnership to improve the quality of life for all people living in, working in, and visiting the city.
- 4.2 Arts and media, are now accepted as key areas for development in achieving the strategic aspirations of the City Council as set out in the *Exeter Vision* and endorsed in other local and regional economic and cultural strategies, including the Regional Spatial Strategy. The Regional Economic Strategy identifies Exeter's pivotal role and includes creative industries as a priority sector for development.

The Exeter and Heart of Devon Economic Development Strategy 2008-2013 emphasises the importance of the city's cultural assets and festivals and its *'role as a lively, animated meeting place, the centre for business meetings, conferences, dining, arts experiences, retail, entertainment, festivals and learning*.

- 4.3 This Arts and Media Strategy acknowledges the continuing importance of the arts, media and the creative industries in creating a successful economy and supporting the tourism sector. It also seeks to address the need to support cultural production and the greater emphasis being placed on encouraging wider participation in the arts by Government and Arts Council England.

Strategic Objectives

- 4.4 The Strategy sets out 8 key objectives, which build on and develop the strategic objectives of the last Arts and Media Strategy. It acknowledges the changes, which have occurred in the external landscape since the last strategy was produced, and the change of focus in national and regional policy. It has a set of tasks to be undertaken which recognises that resource implications of the Strategy and sets an agenda for development. In particular it identifies the important strategic role of the City Council needs to play in taking forward arts and media development and in forging new partnerships.
- 4.5 The consultant has suggested the following strategic objectives to:-

1. adopt a corporate policy approach to arts and media development which places the arts and media at the heart of the City's corporate ambitions
2. develop and strengthen the arts and media infrastructure and support and encourage creative production in the City
3. develop further the City's portfolio of arts and media festivals to create a festival of regional/national significance
4. support creative industries growth and development
5. develop access to arts programmes and opportunities within community settings to encourage greater participation and involvement with the arts and media by residents of Exeter
6. work in partnership with relevant agencies and partners to provide more opportunities for people, and young people in particular, to engage in arts education and learning programmes
7. work strategically in developing new partnerships in and funding for the arts
8. work with the arts and media sector and other partners to develop new models of sustainability and generate new income and funding sources.

In the light of limits on resources and the economic climate, it is important to prioritise the issues to be addressed and the resultant objectives to be agreed to form the basis of the new strategy.

- 4.6 Comments are invited from Members on the relevance and importance of issues raised, setting out the context for the new Strategy. A revised version will then be produced on the basis for wider consultation and a further draft of the Strategy and appropriate Action Plan brought back to Committee.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS.

- 5.1 There are no proposals for increasing City Council funding beyond what is already in the budget for 2008/09. The Strategy when complete will be used to support bids for external funding, where appropriate.

6. RECOMMENDED that:

- 6.1 Members comment on the issues raised and suggested strategic objectives for the new Arts and Media Strategy as the basis for wider consultation.
- 6.2 A draft strategy and action plan to be brought back to Scrutiny Committee following consultation.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:

1. Exeter City Council – Arts and Media Strategy 2004-2006
2. "Arts Overview" – report to Exeter City Council Scrutiny Committee – Economy, November 2007
3. "Service Agreements with Strategic Arts Organisations" - report to Exeter City Council Scrutiny Committee – Economy, February 2008
4. "Festivals Review" – report to Exeter City Council Scrutiny Committee – Economy, September 2007