

Appendix A

FRAMEWORK REPORT Consultant's Report

STROUD - A DISTRICT OF CREATIVITY

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This Framework Consultants Report sets the context for the creation of a cultural strategy for Stroud district. It is an update and identifies core themes and opportunities. It is intended to provide a basis for the production of the strategy and delivery action plans

A cultural strategy for Stroud District Council created by communities.

THE AIM OF THIS STRATEGY

A district that harnesses the creativity of its diverse communities and generates more opportunities for people to connect, create and communicate. Capitalising on Stroud's unique heritage, character and landscape, this strategy will unlock ways for creativity to contribute to a greener, healthier and more prosperous district for the generations to come.

THE DISTRICT

Situated in the South of Gloucestershire, Stroud district is home to some 115,000 people in towns, villages and hamlets. It is bordered by the River Severn with historic canals and mills showcasing its unique industrial rural heritage. Its hills and woodland areas are popular with tourists and visitors, and it has a rich cultural heritage; it has long been the home of artists, writers and activists.

WHAT THIS DOCUMENT IS FOR

This strategy sets out key challenges and opportunities that the District Council can act upon over the next few years to build on Stroud district's vibrant culture. It outlines how working across traditional agendas, creativity can support regeneration, sustainability and health and wellbeing. It is designed to initiate action leading to with a series of recommendations, some specific and others more aspirational but the overall aim is to create a platform for the council to transform attitudes and ambition around creativity and culture from 2024 into the future.

WHAT WE DID

Over 12 months from December 2022, the national champion for everyday creativity, 64 Million Artists, worked with citizens from across the district to understand the value they placed on culture and creativity, where they saw opportunities and what their hopes and worries were for the district in the future. These conversations, creative encounters and collaborations grew a sense that culture was central to people's lives and their sense of wellbeing and belonging. These conversations, with people across the district, will form the basis for these recommendations and ideas for future action.

Everything in this strategy has been generated and created by the people of the district - 64 Million Artists have coalesced these ideas and hopes into several themes and prioritised suggestions according to what we heard people needed the most.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

A particular focus in speaking to people across the district was to hear from people who feel excluded from culture. These perspectives are particularly important because culture has the power to challenge historic oppression and marginalisation. The approach herein aims to consider throughout how culture and creativity can be agents for change to improve the lives of everyone in the community and help generate more equitable ways of living together.

INTRODUCTION

Stroud district has a vibrant, joyful and dynamic cultural and creative scene, including excellent cultural organisations, festivals and craftspeople, alongside a huge and involved community of volunteers. It is home to international creative businesses, world renowned artists, and is a beacon of creativity. Its rich literary and artistic history along with its living heritage of making and creating means it has a reach and reputation internationally - it punches above its weight as an area of culture and the arts.

Culture has long contributed to the district's vision of itself. It is quirky, independent and knows its own mind. It revels in the beauty of its history and landscape but it is gritty and sometimes impatient to try new things. Artists have helped build an identity for the district - whether they grew up here like Laurie Lee or Adjoa Andoh or located here like Sade or Damien Hirst. People from across the district are proud of it and proud to come from here. They enjoy coming together at events and festivals, at gigs and exhibitions, online and in person.

The district is unique. On the edge of the Cotswolds, it is pretty but not picture postcard with an industrial heritage unlike other parts of Southern England. It is quickly connected to Bristol, Cheltenham, Swindon and London but parts of it are deeply rural and quiet. It has long bred activists and changemakers from William Tyndale to the founders of Extinction Rebellion. It is also forward looking with a young population and business sector quickly embracing the potential of new technologies.

While Stroud has a national and even international profile, it could do more. There is a sense of a potential not quite fulfilled, that more could be done to celebrate, shout and advocate for the district as a whole and what it has, and can, achieve. Too many of its cultural highlights are undervalued, obscured or unknown. Too many potential creative citizens are unable to find fellow travellers, explore their creativity or connect with what's on offer. Some residents don't see themselves in the culture that is made visible and feel the culture of the district is not for them.

Opportunity across the district is uneven, inequalities that exist in employment, health and education are often emphasised further in access to culture and creativity. National (cost of living) and global (climate) crises are affecting the district and its residents acutely. The next decade will be one of huge change for the district with massive population shifts, digital opportunities and a revolution in the future of work existing alongside climate changes that will directly affect the district through flooding and the need to change the way we live, work and travel.

While this strategy cannot solve these issues, it aims to draw on the potential of culture and creativity to bring Stroud's peoples together, to instill optimism, build hope, and generate community. It will specifically point to the ways in which culture can contribute to improving the health and prosperity of the district's residents, as well as the ways in which creativity can offer approaches to climate and the wellbeing of future generations of the district.

WHAT WE WANT TO SEE

By celebrating the value of culture, creativity and the creative industries, Stroud District Council will seek to harness the incredible power of culture to build community resilience and wellbeing; make positive individual, local and district-wide impacts on the environment and climate; and tackle economic and social inequality across the district. Growing awareness of what is happening in the district's cultural and heritage sector will build civic pride, enhance people's sense of belonging and burnish the area's reputation nationally and internationally.

Small, co-ordinated changes along with modest investment over a 3–5-year period will build on the district's existing strong cultural offer to attract inward investment and boost tourism and employment. Tapping into the arts and heritage sector's existing environmental activism will embed a spirit of hope in citizens and in their willingness to tackle global challenges. At the heart of this will be our attempts to set an example by proactively valuing culture and what it has to offer, encouraging others to do the same and enabling all citizens to explore their creativity.

WHAT WE WILL DO

The Council will take the same approach to culture and creativity as it is taking to carbon and climate.

- To always... ..act as an example in the community.
- To be an enabler and encourager of positive action.
- Through its services, policies and projects to do everything in its power to collaboratively achieve a creative, resilient, inclusive and, equality driven district.

It will achieve this by emphasising the impact creativity can have in a district that thrives on its:

- Invention
- Innovation
- Independence
- Industry
- Disruption

CELEBRATING, ENCOURAGING

In order to embed the potential of culture and creativity across the Council's agenda, a strengths-based approach will be necessary. There is already a brilliant, imaginative and impressive network of cultural organisations, artists, musicians, crafters, writers, thinkers who are making great culture in the district. They need to be celebrated, showcased, highlighted and valued.

There is also a huge audience for this culture, people who want to dance, sing, laugh, play, eat and be entertained. More can be done to bring these people together with the culture on their doorstep. The Council can also blur the lines between audience and provider by encouraging people to be adventurous, trying new things, seeing other cultures and ways of being, inventing new stories and unearthing hidden ones.

This role of cultural cheerleader needs some resource in order to be credible and to bring the many different players working in creativity and culture together. Some of this process has begun through the development of this strategy. The next stage is to build on this and to join the dots, creating a role within the council with real power and influence to act as an agent for change and an internal advocate for culture and creativity. In the same way that everyone who works for and with the council is empowered to promote 2030 carbon neutral, so should a mindset of exploring and exploiting creativity be adopted across the council. Leadership will be key.

This leadership role for the council can be ably supported by organisations working across the district to create cultural opportunities for the people of the district. These organisations can be supported to widen their delivery - bringing the excellence of their cultural offer to new geographies and communities who are currently limited in their capability to access arts and culture.

The wider pool of volunteers exploring their own creativity and creating opportunities for others should be celebrated and bolstered. One approach to this will be to measure and capture the wider impact of culture in the district - looking at numbers of people contributing to the vibrancy of the district. Volunteering contributes economically and as a boost to health and community cohesion. Capturing and celebrating this will help articulate the special qualities of the district.

It is these special qualities which have (particularly in recent years) drawn creatives to the district. The honeypot effect of Stroud's buoyant creative scene has the potential to create a virtuous cycle bringing people and businesses into the district, growing opportunities and magnifying impact. Alongside creating a district in which young people wish to remain in, to live, work and play.

As Stroud grows and changes, its creative history should be celebrated and lauded. As well as the prestigious and well known artists and histories, untold stories should be shared. The story of Stroud as a leader in creative health, of creativity in activism, of diverse communities sharing their creativity and culture needs to be shouted from the hilltops.

1. CREATIVITY AND CLIMATE

The Council has an active and ambitious plan to take climate action. Founded on its mission as enabler, exemplar and encourager the plan is detailed, wide ranging and focused. It fails to capitalise on what creativity and culture might add to its approach which is to ground this work in hope, belief and aspiration for the future. Without creativity, action on climate is liable to become mired in a sense of what will be lost rather than what will be gained. Organisations like [Hawkwood College](#) are already part of a national conversation about climate activism and the role of culture in tackling these challenges. Arts and creativity can help spearhead broad behaviour change - one of the biggest challenges in tackling the climate crisis. There are creative ways to achieve all sorts of climate action outcomes.

There is the potential for the Council to use a creative approach to stimulating conversations at a family, business and community level to help deliver on its 2030 strategy. Beyond this, the Council can rightly celebrate its successes in achieving its climate goals and, again, culture can be an effective partner with the council to celebrate and communicate these achievements. Framing this approach in hope and a focus on future generations will likely embed new opportunities for the cultural sector to generate fresh thinking and action on climate change.

The potential for old and new technologies to help people be more creative and act sustainably is huge. By embracing new digital technologies, the Council can support online cultural activity and sustainable in-person activity (active travel, renewable generators, drone displays replacing fireworks). At the same time, sharing tools, premises and makerspaces will offer new ways of reducing the carbon footprint of individuals and organisations. The Council can lead the way in innovating towards sustainability.

And nowhere is this more in demand than across the Stroud District. The area's long history of social action has bubbled forth around the need to take drastic and immediate action on climate change and for planet preservation. Ensuring that everyone understands the perspectives of other people, communities and eco-systems is essential if climate activists are to succeed. Art and creativity is the key to building this understanding and framing the most difficult of conversations in ways that make it possible for people to engage. The Council should be proud of its citizens' passion to save the planet and should unite with storytellers to enable, encourage and set an example.

Opportunities

1. An audit of activity to examine opportunities for new/old technologies to create environmental benefits in cultural provision (festivals, events, etc.)
2. Drawing on the cultural sector's expertise to achieve the 2030 strategy - challenging myths and suspicions with hope and realistic actions - a small climate fund for public awareness building
3. Work with communities to develop artistic responses to help tackle the district's transport challenges - including public transport and encouraging active travel through creative initiatives

2. COMMUNICATING, CONNECTING

Crucial to growing the district's cultural and creative future is the means to tell people about what is going on. Investing in what the creative community is already doing to share ideas and promote activity will quickly yield results. At present, communication about cultural opportunities across the district is patchy and unequally distributed. While the Council should not set up its own cultural communications work, it should support developing localised offers to make them district wide.

Further to this, the council can support the creative/cultural sector to take its existing offer and link it authentically to the needs of the community by forging connections with the community hubs. The Council needs to foster an eco-system of a connected, integrated (and celebrated) cultural community which is embedded in its community and not existing alongside or only in relation to certain parts of the community. The Council could trial support for individual creativity champions to activate and build connections across and within communities through creative activities.

Better communication of cultural opportunities would encourage micro-tourism and foster civic pride. Helping people to explore the wealth of opportunity on their own doorsteps and growing audience and market for local artists, makers and producers. This would foster a more sustainable and durable approach to culture in the district, creating new and younger audiences and potentially fostering dialogue that ensures that the culture that happens locally is made by, with and for local people.

Opportunities

1. Identify a cultural advocate to provide a cross cutting view to add to value culture's contribution
2. Support for existing communications channels (e.g. investment in Good on Paper to expand its operation to have broader and deeper district wide reach and an online platform with detailed 'what's on' information)
3. Enable an audit of cultural value across the district (e.g. partner with a research partner such as [The Centre for Cultural Value](#) to establish baseline measures of culture's impact on economy, health, criminal justice, etc.)

3. ECONOMY AND REGENERATION

The cultural and creative sector within Stroud's district is a core part of the eco-system that defines the place. People and businesses move to the district because of what is there already, its reputation, its nightlife, its food, its character. These are all defined and determined by the creatives who live here already. As discussed above, an audit of cultural value would help quantify this and identify opportunities for growth. Beyond this, though, the Council can foster a culture of cross-sector collaboration, encouraging businesses that are not defined as part of culture to consider themselves creative, to challenge themselves to work in new ways and try new things.

The process of researching and creating this strategy has initiated new conversations, networking and ambitions within and beyond the district's cultural sector. As already embedded in the Council's [Economic Development Strategy](#), supporting the creative/cultural sector will help it become better networked and connected - so that they avoid duplication and find shared ways to work together (e.g. joint bids for funding). There is already evidence of the cultural sector sharing resources - volunteering, fundraising and equipment, more is possible. New and hitherto unimagined projects and partnerships might emerge through a generous approach to creating networking and community building activities with the cultural sector.

A number of small, practical measures would help ease red tape and make delivering creative activity easier. Whether this is help with the costs of planning, road closures, costs for hiring parks, or in putting on events. Consistently, the community feels the Council does not currently 'get' culture and its value; while individual officers and elected members may champion the value of culture, there is not a collective, organizational instinct that recognizes culture's wider value. As a consequence the Council is, itself, seen as a block to unleashing the district's creativity – seeing challenge where there might well be opportunity. Training for staff and a process of internal advocacy would help the Council build an approach that makes it a valid, genuine and plausible fellow traveller in igniting the district's creative flame. Accompanying this with profile boosting action on the high street and with business partners will generate rich rewards.

Opportunities

1. Bring together the creative sector for meaningful networking opportunities to explore collaboration around fundraising, volunteering. Offering creative organisations opportunities to lead 'training' or ideas workshops for Council staff and members to build understanding of cultural value)
2. Connect cultural organisations to business opportunities, taking the cultural organisations' lead around high street regeneration, nighttime economy, licensing and events.
3. Explore co-working opportunities with hospitality and tourism to target events and activities to increase inward investment.

4. FUTURE GENERATIONS

There has been a national degrading of access to culture for young people both in and out of school. This is creating a generation of culturally disenfranchised children where only those with family wealth or family connections experience the benefits to their health, learning and future careers that cultural engagement can generate. What is more, young people don't know what they are missing - if they don't see it. As a consequence, many young people are not in a position to advocate for improved access to culture and the arts. Coupled with a reduction in available opportunities for young people to participate in culture, even young people keen to get involved struggle to find routes to express their creativity.

The Council should, , draw attention to reanimating youth provision to embed creativity, particularly in parts of the district with the most limited access to other cultural opportunities. By helping to embed creativity in youth clubs and other out of school provision, the Council can help build a level of cultural articulation in young people across the district which will help ensure the district - and all its citizens can benefit from imagining, dreaming and advocating for a bright future. Creativity breeds confidence and a consciousness of the perspectives of others. It generates an appetite for risk and for vulnerability which will be vital in a rapidly changing society. Most pertinently, it builds a meaningful sense of civic rights and community connection which will have benefits in schools and across society.

As this takes hold, a greater range of young people will build skills and enthusiasm for shaping the district's cultural offer. This should take the form of young people being given the keys to the castle and enabled to put on their own events, defining content, building new forms of dialogue and sharing hitherto underground stories to help everyone hear diverse perspectives. This could take the form of an annual event or a fund for young producers. New and emerging artforms can be explored so that agency and the power of production shifts to the next generation.

Further, training and opportunities can be developed that will help young people see their futures in the district. Increasing creative opportunities for young people could be developed in partnership with colleges and cultural institutions but also with new and untapped partners in digital technology industries, gaming, design, manufacturing and invention. A focus on young voices will not only benefit this generation of young people but the generations of the future. By exemplifying the concept of being a good ancestor, the Council and its partners will foster a culture of innovation that is future focused and takes into consideration the planet and the heritage we will leave to future generations.

Opportunities

1. A partnership programme to support the cultural sector and creative industries partners to offer apprenticeships, training, mentoring to create a co-ordinated pathway for young people to launch creative careers
2. Reanimate youth provision through creativity by supporting creatives to be embedded youth clubs, schools, after school provision and colleges
3. Co-create youth led activity - diversifying decision-making, providing a ring-fence resource for a youth led festival or other celebration

5. COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING

The district is nationally renowned for its work in creative health. Dursley was one of the first places to successfully develop arts on prescription - a forerunner of the now national move towards social prescribing. With a track record going back 20 years, [Artlift](#) is well established as a nationally significant leader in social prescribing and arts and mental health. Along with [CreateGloucestershire](#) and other work across the district, there is the opportunity to build on this history and continue to attract national acclaim for this important work in connecting creativity with health and wellbeing. As the evidence base continues to grow for the role of culture in supporting the health of individuals and communities, this practice will only spread, and the Council can play a significant role in supporting and shaping this to the benefit of all its citizens.

The landscape of the district with its pattern of national paths, historic parks and leisure spaces, lends itself to drawing people outside. Already there is a wealth of creativity on display in festivals in summer and winter encouraging people to get outside and to get involved. While the district Council already draws on [the Five Ways to Wellbeing](#) to support residents' mental health, there is room to be more explicit about the ways that culture can connect and contribute to this agenda through joining with cultural sector partners to encourage creativity and curiosity for all. Partnerships with sport and leisure can also draw people to explore creativity and try cultural activities they may have felt weren't for them.

There is evidence that a sense of belonging to a place and a community has a positive impact on individual and community wellbeing - and the arts and culture can play a key role in supporting the District Council to foster this sense of place. Crucial to this will be the way in which people and groups who do not typically see themselves represented and reflected in the stories that are shared start to hear and see them and people like them being given platforms to explore creativity. Through actively collaborating with historically marginalised groups, the Council can utilise creativity as a tool to bring communities together through shared storytelling in a range of forms.

By magnifying the role of culture as a tool for the council to achieve its aims to tackle loneliness, social isolation, the needs of an ageing population and contemporary challenges in adolescent mental health, there is the potential for culture to make a significant contribution to everyone in the district living healthy and happier lives. Other local, regional, national public and charitable bodies share this agenda, and these relationships should be fostered and developed.

Opportunities

1. Professional artists can be supported to work with community hubs, schools and hospitals (e.g. a small creative health grants scheme for artists to support community activity)
2. Partnerships with bodies like the community response network, ICS, the police, Age UK, should be convened with the cultural sector to develop new activity and relationship
3. The council should actively enable intergenerational cultural practice to build community cohesion focused on the concept of the wellbeing of future generations and the role of the good ancestor.

6. HERITAGE AND PLACE

Stroud district is visibly a place of the past and the present. Many churches, castles, canals and cottages have a beauty, grandeur and awe that can inspire everyone and needs to be preserved and protected. Alongside this, stories and histories of the past (both uplifting and heartrending) have the means to teach us about the present and learn for the future. Many of these stories are not well known and in shining a light on them, the Council will help to tell a story about a district and its people that is optimistic, inclusive and ambitious. The significant current work in reimagining the Sharpness-Brimscombe canal presents a great opportunity to shout about how heritage can connect communities today. The Museum in the Park and Stratford Park itself are much loved and valued jewels in the district's crown but more could be done to connect and highlight the many brilliant groups and communities which are conserving and capturing the history of a unique place.

The district's story - and its future - has been and will continue to be shaped by its landscape and developing new ways of interacting with this offers a simple way to help people learn about and love their home. Through reinterpreting landscape names and places, the Council can also unearth hidden stories and address the difficult and even shameful histories that are also an important part of Stroud's story. Artists are skilled at bringing stories to life with nuance and care to help everyone understand where we have come from and where we might go.

While the district has a fascinating history, the present and future will require new infrastructure and growth. This development is an opportunity to centralise the value of culture and heritage and by committing new developments to invest in culture, the Council can secure funds to deliver on its cultural and creative ambitions. Adopting creative approaches to planning and development could bring widespread benefits to the whole community.

National policy moves (such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund's new strategy) are strengthening the connection between culture, creativity and heritage. By building on the Council's existing [heritage strategy](#) but weaving in the contribution of artists and creatives and actively supporting the sharing of stories that have been marginalised, Stroud's heritage can be brought to life for residents and visitors to the district now and in the future.

See appendix XX and YY for further reflection and ambitions for The Museum in the Park and Stratford Park specifically.

Opportunities

1. Nature trails - across hills, woods, parks and canals, heritage - connection to nature and equality of access with robust efforts to market these to the widest possible audience
2. Understanding what is already happening in the district - supporting the wide range of community and individual efforts to capture and share the district's history. There is potential for partnerships with Town Councils to support 'outreach' from cultural hotspots (e.g. Stroud town) to other parts of the district
3. Major bid to NLHF - co-ordinated bid to celebrate history, heritage and greener futures

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

Opportunities for action are brought together here - both the headline ones from the document above - as well as some of the more specific **ideas** which have emerged from the consultation process.

- An audit of activity to examine opportunities for new/old technologies to create environmental benefits in cultural provision (festivals, events, etc.).
- Drawing on the cultural sector's expertise to achieve the 2030 strategy - challenging myths and suspicions with hope and realistic actions - a small climate fund for public awareness building.
- Work with communities to develop artistic responses to help tackle the district's transport challenges - including public transport and encouraging active travel through creative initiatives
- Identify a cultural advocate to work within the council and provide a cross cutting view to value culture's contribution (e.g. a fixed term role as an Agent for Creativity to activate the council around this agenda, securing adjustments to job descriptions and recruitment processes to embed culture in roles across the Council).
- Support for existing communications channels (e.g. investment in Good on Paper to expand its operation to have broader and deeper district wide reach and an online platform with detailed 'what's on' information).
- Enable an audit of cultural value across the district (e.g. partner with a research partner such as [The Centre for Cultural Value](#) to establish baseline measures of culture's impact on economy, health, criminal justice, etc).
- Bring together the creative sector for meaningful networking opportunities to explore collaboration around fundraising, volunteering. Offering creative organisations opportunities to lead 'training' or ideas workshops for Council staff and members to build understanding of cultural value).
- Connect cultural organisations to business opportunities, taking the cultural organisations' lead around high street regeneration, nighttime economy, licensing and events.
- Explore co-working opportunities with hospitality and tourism to target events and activities to increase inward investment.
- A partnership programme to support the cultural sector and creative industries partners to offer apprenticeships, training, mentoring to create a co-ordinated pathway for young people to launch creative careers.
- Reanimate youth provision through creativity by supporting creatives to be embedded in youth clubs, schools, after school provision and colleges.
- Co-create youth led activity - diversifying decision-making, providing a ring-fenced resource for a youth led festival or other celebration.

- Professional artists should be supported to work with community hubs, schools and hospitals (e.g. a small creative health grants scheme for artists to support community activity).
- Partnerships with bodies like the community response network, ICS, the police, Age UK, should be convened with the cultural sector to develop new activity and relationship.
- The council could actively develop intergenerational cultural practice to build community cohesion focused on the concept of the wellbeing of future generations and the role of the good ancestor.
- Support for nature trails - across hills, woods, parks and canals, heritage - connection to nature and equality of access with robust efforts to market these to the widest possible audience.
- Understanding what is already happening in the district - supporting the wide range of community and individual efforts to capture and share the district's history. There is potential for partnerships with Town Councils to support 'outreach' from cultural hotspots (e.g. Stroud town) to other parts of the district.
- Major bid to NLHF - co-ordinated bid to celebrate history, heritage and greener futures.

CONCLUSION AND ACTION

The Council should consider itself as a catalyst for change. Smart investment in culture and creativity can deliver on wider Council priorities (Economy, climate, young people, health and wellbeing etc.) Relatively modest input from the Council is likely to leverage support from other sources: private and individual donors and sponsors (not least potentially wealthy creatives based in the district); funders like Arts Council England and National Lottery Heritage Fund; earned income through public engagement and participation in cultural activity.

An initial period of 2 years support for culture and creativity could kick start this strategy, demonstrate commitment to the cultural sector and leverage external match funding (and beyond).

Key targets within 2 years could include:

1. significant inward investment (e.g. grants from ACE, NLHF, etc.);
2. partnerships with health (ICS), criminal justice, etc. where funds are allocated to cultural social prescribing and other initiatives to build infrastructure;
3. partnerships with Town and Parish Councils that generate support in kind for distributive cultural activity (where cultural organisations are supported to extend their activity to parts of the district with lower cultural opportunities)

Demonstrable increases in cultural engagement, especially by young people should be measured through this period. Dialogue with cultural organisations should be recorded and actions (on both sides) measured and tracked.

Relationships should be developed with potential donors (high net worth individuals with an interest/involvement in arts and culture), with potential supporters and allies (Barnwood Trust, Gloucestershire County Council, Power to Change); and with the wider community – a dialogue about what citizens value across the district, what brings joy and pride in their lives, what they want to treasure and foster.

Commercial opportunities should be tested and initiated. These could include sponsorships, promotions, cross-sector working and requirements on match funding.