



A Cultural Strategy for Crewe 2019–29

VISION



Culture and heritage at the heart of a newly invigorated town centre.

A cultural sector that is bold, productive and vibrant and which supports transformative culture-led economic growth.

Crewe will be a place where innovation and creativity combine to define a confident new future.

CONTEXT



Crewe is in a time of change and a time of opportunity, with redevelopment of the Town Centre taking place and proposals for HS2 and a new hub station by 2027. Local organisations and residents are invigorated and passionate about the role of culture in the town, both now and for its future. The town has some good examples of established cultural assets such as the stunning Edwardian Lyceum Theatre, the new Library and Lifestyle Centre, a reinvigorated Heritage Centre and plans for an ambitious History Centre. Crewe also has the signs of an emerging, new, cultural sector such as Platform Theatre Company, and new events such as Chalk it Up, LUMEN and trAction.

At a time of potential and change, there is an opportunity for culture to be a positive driver. The strategy will facilitate collaboration, help to develop place-based cultural and creative initiatives that engage local people and businesses, and support regeneration. This will ensure that Crewe continues to be a place where people want to live, work, visit and do business, to the benefit of the town and its communities.

The strategy will focus physical activity in the town centre, keeping in mind that as plans for HS2 develop, there will be further opportunities to embed cultural activity in the area around the Station as well as how the two areas are linked. Although the physical activity will be focused here, the impact of the strategy should be felt across the Crewe area into its communities.

This document is the result of a set of workshops held with a number of interested parties and key stakeholders (listed at Appendix 1), which took place between February and September 2018. It also takes account of audience research conducted by The Audience Agency in 2017 which looked at the impact of a number of cultural events and made recommendations for the future.

The strategy sets the level and ambition for Crewe's cultural offer for the next 10 years and will be reviewed on a regular basis by a core cultural strategy group to make sure the priorities remain relevant. The Cultural Strategy group will be instrumental in ensuring a joined-up approach, to reduce duplication and more efficient use of limited resources.

What do we mean by Culture? Culture is defined as: arts, heritage, museums, festivals and events, creative and digital media.



The Cultural Strategy is a product of several workshops and research sessions between January 2018 and June 2019 attended by over 100 individuals living and working in Crewe. This document is presented with thanks to the following organisations and individuals:

- / 4ward Futures
- / Axis Arts Centre
- / BeerDock
- / Cheshire Archives and Local Studies
- / Cheshire College South and West
- / Cheshire East Council
- / Crewe and District Local History Association
- / Creative Crewe
- / Crewe Heritage Centre
- / Crewe Heritage Working Group
- / Crewe Historical Society
- / Crewe Library
- / Crewe Lyceum
- / Crewe Market Centre
- / Crewe MP's Office
- / Crewe Neighbourhood Partnership
- / Crewe Pledge
- / Crewe Town Centre Working Group
- / Crewe Town Council
- / CVS Cheshire
- / Diocese of Chester
- / Dope Male Performance Company
- / Family History Society of Cheshire Crewe Group
- / Forest Tribe Dance Theatre
- / Healthbox CIC
- / Heritage Rescue
- / Love Music Trust
- / Mako
- / The Audience Agency
- / Platform Theatre
- / South Cheshire Chamber of Commerce
- / St Andrews PCC
- / Squeaky Pedal CIC
- / YMCA Crewe
- / Several individual artists, makers and interested residents

This strategy has also been developed in consultation with Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England, Architectural Heritage Fund and HS2.

The Strategy and Action Plan are live documents and are necessarily subject to change, in order to respond to changing circumstances and developments. Other organisations and parties may be involved in the Crewe Cultural Forum as new projects and opportunities emerge and are developed.

THE OUTCOMES



- 1 Young people will have a strong sense of cultural identity, have opportunities to develop skills and pathways into work and showcase talent
- 2 Crewe will have a new cultural confidence and distinctiveness
- 3 Crewe's unique history and heritage will be celebrated, promoted and protected for the future
- 4 Crewe will have a strong and sustainable creative and digital sector
- 5 The transformational role of culture in promoting positive health and wellbeing will be well recognised
- 6 Crewe will be a culturally vibrant place, where culture and creativity are at the heart of its economic success and appeal

THE OUTCOMES



Photo: trAction Crewe 2019, Peter Robinson

1

Young people will have a strong sense of cultural identity, have opportunities to develop skills and pathways into work and showcase talent

Children and young people in Crewe currently face a number of challenges which prevent them from fully accessing cultural opportunities and career pathways in cultural and creative industries. A cultural strategy cannot solve all these issues; however culture can support positive steps to reduce the challenges facing young people and help them to achieve their aspirations.

We know that there are organisations working to provide opportunities, such as the development of the learning and engagement programme at the Lyceum Theatre, but we also know that there is a need for greater collaboration to connect with groups such as Crewe Pledge, Crewe UTC and South Cheshire College.

We will seek to:

- / Enable young people to define what culture means to them and develop a strong cultural identity
- / Provide high quality cultural experiences and opportunities to develop and showcase young talent
- / Provide increased opportunities for young people to develop creative thinking skills and experience working in the cultural and creative industries, raising awareness of local creative businesses
- / Work collaboratively to reduce barriers to cultural participation
- / Ensure that the cultural needs of young people inform the physical regeneration of the town

THE OUTCOMES

2

Crewe will have a new cultural confidence and distinctiveness

Like many town centres, Crewe has suffered from reduced footfall and low occupancy on the highstreets, whilst out of town shopping developments have led to a lack of distinctiveness. This has resulted in a poor perception both locally and further afield, and a reducing sense of pride in the area. The plans for regeneration of the town centre, along with the arrival of HS2 and a new hub station, present an important opportunity to put culture at the heart of a newly invigorated, vibrant and prosperous town, confident of its identity and place in the world, and which has a thriving night time economy. The closure of Axis Arts Centre will leave a gap in the provision of challenging and contemporary artistic programming. This gap must be met through alternative programming.

This strategy will:

- / Promote culture as a catalyst for Crewe's regeneration
- / Ensure that heritage and culture seen are an important part of Crewe's identity –
to both locals and visitors
- / Support the new Studio Theatre at the Lyceum Theatre to offer contemporary and challenging programming, as well as increased opportunities for local creatives to develop and showcase their work
- / Develop and promote a year round, high quality programme of vibrant, innovative events which are relevant to Crewe, driving town centre footfall
- / Champion and celebrate local creative and cultural businesses
- / Promote environmental sustainability within culture and heritage organisations and programmes

THE OUTCOMES

3

Crewe's distinctive heritage will be celebrated, promoted and protected for the future

Crewe has a varied and fascinating heritage, built on innovation, industry, enterprise and entrepreneurialism. This is epitomised by the original town motto 'Never Behind'. It was the 'new town of the Victorian Age' and has experienced continuous population growth thanks to opportunities in industries including textiles, rail, manufacturing, agriculture, and in more recent years, software and engineering. Unlike many other post-industrial towns, Crewe has high levels of integration between both established and recent migrant communities. This bold, welcoming spirit and cutting edge thinking is a huge source of pride to Crewe's people, and is what makes Crewe distinctive. Currently there is limited opportunity to explore and celebrate Crewe's past and future. Crewe Heritage Centre has enormous potential to develop as a vibrant visitor attraction and plans for a new History Centre will bring relevant stories to life in fresh ways. Therefore the cultural strategy will:

- / Champion the stories of Crewe's people, past and present
- / Adopt and embed a spirit of daring and innovation in all cultural programming, being willing to take risks and try new things
- / Celebrate Crewe's heritage through key regeneration projects such as the Market Hall and History Centre, and in the public realm through public art and quality design
- / Prioritise development of the new History Centre and redevelopment of Crewe Heritage Centre as key visitor attractions
- / Work with partners to identify heritage in Crewe which is at risk and develop plans to protect it for the future
- / Develop further opportunities to make Crewe's heritage relevant to all, including young people and new communities



THE OUTCOMES

4

Crewe will have a strong and sustainable creative and digital sector

There is a burgeoning digital and creative sector in Crewe, with a cluster of high growth SMEs and a specialism in software development. A local Digital Strategy and programmes such as SHIFT* have invested in and raised the profile of this sector, as well as encouraging young people to consider it as a career. Despite the success of individual businesses, Crewe has not yet benefitted from traditional clustering effects such as knowledge exchange or a voluntary cultural sector. This has been emerging recently, with the creation of organisations such as Platform Theatre and DMPC; support for this needs to continue. Investment in digital infrastructure will be critical to revitalising high streets: this can be supported by cultural & creative activity which uses cutting edge technology.

The strategy will:

- / Further support creative and digital industries, including encouragement of physical location of organisations and companies in Crewe and improving the digital infrastructure
- / Improve promotion of Crewe's digital and creative sector, linked to place branding
- / Encourage sector networking, peer to peer collaboration and support; including networking with other Creative Clusters and universities
- / Build pathways into the creative and cultural industries for local people
- / Foster young organisations and emerging artists, for example by commissioning local people and developing an Artists in Residence programme at the Lyceum Theatre
- / Further support creative and digital industries, including encouragement of physical location of organisations and companies in Crewe to grow the Creative Cluster†
- / Encourage the innovative use of technology within artistic and creative commissioning

* SHIFT is a programme of digital activities led by Cheshire East Council: www.shift-digital.co.uk

† Creative Clusters' is a term used to describe areas where multiple creative and digital businesses are located. Crewe is identified as a Creative Cluster in the NESTA 2016 report 'The Geography of Creativity'.

THE OUTCOMES

5

The transformational role of culture in promoting positive health and wellbeing will be well recognised

There is significant evidence of socio-economic challenges in Crewe in comparison to other areas of Cheshire East. This leads to poor health and wellbeing factors, such as poor mental health, alcohol and substance misuse, low aspiration, isolation and loneliness, antisocial behaviour and homelessness. Again, whilst a cultural strategy alone cannot solve these problems in Crewe, culture can be used as a tool to impact positively on these factors by working with other agencies. Volunteering not only has cultural benefits such as improved learning, and is known to have a positive impact on health and wellbeing. In order to maximise the role of culture in positive health and wellbeing this strategy will:

- / Embed socially-engaged practice and resident participation into cultural programming, especially into the events programme
- / Work to provide opportunities to participate in cultural activity for those who experience barriers to participation
- / Champion volunteering in cultural activity, to develop a network of support for cultural programmes and to provide learning opportunities and enhanced cultural experiences for volunteers
- / Provide activities where people can interact safely and socially with each other and their surroundings within the public realm
- / Work in partnership with appropriate agencies to ensure programming is relevant to local social and community needs



THE OUTCOMES

6

Crewe will be a culturally vibrant place, where culture and creativity are at the heart of its economic success and appeal

The strategy recognises the important opportunity presented by the Town Centre Regeneration plans and the forthcoming HS2 development. Crewe has a unique opportunity to reposition itself as a key economic and cultural hub, within Cheshire but also regionally and nationally. Culture has an integral role to play. It can act as a catalyst for further regeneration, growing and diversifying the local economy, and celebrate Crewe as a cultural destination, attracting visitors, investors and improving lives of residents. The strategy will support regeneration initiatives, re-invigorating the Town by developing key cultural facilities which improve the appeal of the town centre, strengthen the tourist offer and boost local pride and confidence.

Cultural anchors such as the Lifestyle Centre and Lyceum Theatre, and new proposals such as the History Centre, Christ Church and Market Hall will play a key role in hosting events, attracting additional footfall, underpinning regeneration and boosting the evening economy. Creating a greater sense of 'destination' and 'experience' gives town centres a competitive edge. This strategy will provide a mechanism for ensuring that cultural and community factors can be considered alongside the more traditional factors, such as retail offer.

The strategy will:

- / Prioritise and champion projects which increase visitors, bringing Crewe's stories to people in innovative, engaging ways
- / Prioritise development of venues in the new Culture and Civic Quarter, such as Crewe History Centre, Crewe Heritage Centre, Crewe Market Hall, Library and Christ Church
- / Promote the cultural offer in Crewe town centre, driving footfall and positioning Crewe as a cultural destination
- / Improve physical design of built and open spaces through creative design solutions, public art and creative interventions, that reinforce a distinctive sense of place
- / Work with businesses to engage them in Crewe's cultural vibrancy, through sponsorship, corporate volunteering and place branding
- / Promote creative use of unexpected, pop up and temporary venues to improve high street retail, leisure and cultural mix
- / Adopt a collaborative, co-ordinated and strategic approach to funding applications to attract increased investment into Crewe's cultural offer

MAKING IT HAPPEN

The success of the strategy will depend on a number of things, namely collaboration, cooperation and connection. This cannot be delivered by any single organisation but will require the efforts of many.

Collaboration

Creating opportunities for organisations to collaborate in order to stimulate, incubate and showcase creative economies in and around Crewe

Cooperation

Aggregating the potential of people, organisations and enterprises to deliver greater leverage, influence and outcomes

Connection

Integrating and combining contributions that make explicit connections between the creative ecology and economic growth. Cultural activity can provide opportunities for engagement with communities for regeneration projects, which creates a sense of ownership.



GOVERNANCE

Delivery of the cultural strategy will be overseen by a core cultural strategy group. This group will be made up of representatives of key cultural organisations plus representatives from business, education, voluntary and health sectors.

This group will seek to become constituted in its own right, in order to pursue funding opportunities independently of any one organisation.

A wider Crewe Cultural Network will be established, open to any interested person or organisation in the Town. This wider group will hold twice yearly network events to receive updates on progress from the Strategy Group and to discuss common interests.


The Strategy Group will be co-ordinated by members on a rotating basis each year. Initially this co-ordination will be provided by Cheshire East Council.



FUNDING

A more collaborative, strategic approach to funding should be pursued. The profile of Crewe as a town with immense potential will be articulated to main strategic funding bodies, such as Arts Council England and National Lottery Heritage Fund. The Strategy Group should identify key funding opportunities, within the context of the Cultural Strategy to ensure a consistent message and prevent duplication and competition.





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Questions? Please contact
creweculturalforum@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Photo: LUMEN 2018, Peter Robinson