

# *Our communities; our heritage; our shared future*

## **Buckinghamshire Cultural Strategy**

### **I. Introduction: Buckinghamshire Culture**

Culture plays a vital role for Buckinghamshire: contributing to distinctive communities and places, enhancing our quality of life and wellbeing, enhancing our tourism offer and contributing in many significant ways to our economy.

Buckinghamshire has an enormous breadth of cultural offering: our heritage and history; our built and natural environments; and our contemporary cultural lives, activities and the amenities that support them. Unique elements which contribute to the cultural mix of Buckinghamshire include the Chiltern Hills, National Trust properties such as Waddesdon Manor, country parks such as Langley Park, as well as the County Museum and internationally renowned facilities such as the film studios at Pinewood and the motor racing circuit at Silverstone. We have a unique selling point as the birthplace of the Paralympic movement. Culture is also a vital component of our creative industries: providing talent, ideas and innovation. Plus, we have many artists, crafts makers and creative businesses. **The rich mix that Buckinghamshire has to offer to residents, visitors and investors is worth celebrating.**

This Cultural Strategy is the culmination of a period of critical discussion which has provided a set of fresh perspectives on the role culture can play in shaping Buckinghamshire. It is commissioned by Buckinghamshire County Council through a new Cultural Partnership which brings together some of the leading organisations and voices for culture in Buckinghamshire. It recognises the valuable contribution culture already makes to the county but also the potential for far wider engagement that would deliver a better future for all and thus ensure culture sits at the heart of approaches to economic development, new housing and communities, education and skills.

**Buckinghamshire – a County of Culture:** We want to make Buckinghamshire an even more dynamic, distinctive and enjoyable place to be, using culture to address the county's social and economic challenges and to build from its real strengths. For the purposes of this strategy we are defining culture in its widest sense, embracing: our lives, identities and communities; heritage; museums, galleries, cinemas, music, theatres, libraries, festivals and events; practice and industry.

**The Challenges We Face:** Buckinghamshire has so many qualities for which culture plays a starring role: our built and natural heritage, rural arts and crafts, growing creative industries, and strong voluntary sector - to name just a few. However, we need to work much harder and more collaboratively if culture is to make the difference it can. Our attractions and places of historical and cultural interest are widely dispersed and sustainable and accessible transport and accommodation options need to be explored. We need to build lasting partnerships which put culture at the heart of the economic development and growth agenda - to ensure we future-proof the economy and develop high quality places through new housing-led growth. We need to do much more to reach and engage everyone across the county with the same degree of impact; being fully inclusive, reflecting the county's diversity of perspectives, ideas, skills and aspirations; and securing sufficient levels of financial investment to attend to the inequality of opportunity that our residents face.

**The Opportunities We Can Embrace:** Parts of Buckinghamshire are fast-changing - demographically, economically and culturally. Local plans across the county indicate that approximately 50,000 new homes will be built over the next 15-20 years. These developments - including Aylesbury Garden Town, the Oxford/Cambridge Arc and new transport infrastructure - need to be recognised as cultural opportunities. It is crucial that cultural opportunities are developed alongside the new communities to maintain a high quality of life for Buckinghamshire residents both now and in the future. We also have an opportunity in Buckinghamshire to revitalise our historic town centres by enhancing their role as hubs for cultural activity as part of a wider and richer mix of uses. In addition, our creative industries can be a catalyst for economic growth which in turn enhances the innovation capacity of our cultural sector. With the Government's new Sector deal for the Creative Industries, Buckinghamshire can play a much more pronounced role, complementing London's position as a global creative city.

## **So, what is the purpose of this Cultural Strategy?**

Partners in Buckinghamshire need to take every opportunity to ensure the county champions culture as a key way to improve quality of life, enhance wellbeing, and deliver sustainable and inclusive economic growth. A joined-up cultural offer that has participation from across both the public and private sectors, with strong leadership and a clear 'ask', is essential.

To ensure culture is a headline agenda for Buckinghamshire, a new Cultural Partnership Group has been established. This Group will use this outline Strategy and build on its aims and priorities. It will work closely with partners across the county to build on the County's strengths and attend to its challenges. It will be tasked with shaping a smarter, more coherent and innovative approach to culture, maximising potential investment and the returns this brings.

Senior-level participation from key strategic partners will be key - bringing together the county and district councils, universities, health, Buckinghamshire and Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), The Rothschild Foundation, and a sample of key cultural organisations.

Overall, this Cultural Partnership will activate the Strategy and make connections and seek new types of commitment to ensure Buckinghamshire builds from rather than holds back from its considerable cultural strengths:

- To articulate a shared ambition and priorities
- To provide a vehicle that drives collaboration
- To help cultural organisations and creative practitioners increase visibility, reach and engagement
- To help build capacity and enhance the sustainability of our cultural sector
- To increase inward investment, with culture increasing the attractiveness of the county
- To ensure culture enhances the quality of all our places – from reinvigorated town centres to major new housing developments; from our rural landscapes to our villages.

## 2. Vision and Aims

**Our vision is to celebrate our identity and increase opportunity.**

**To use culture to make Buckinghamshire a creative and exciting place to live, study, visit and do business.**

**We aim to protect and promote our cultural and artistic heritage and help communities to grow.**

### Why Culture Matters

Culture improves the quality of life for Buckinghamshire people, offering participation in activities that go far beyond what traditionally might be recognised as ‘the arts’. It provides access to ideas, to community, to fun and to employment. It helps to bring confidence, cohesion, health and wellbeing.

Culture is a catalyst for economic diversification and growth; for talent attraction and retention; for inward investment and tourism; and for innovation and competitiveness.

So, what do we mean by culture?

**Culture is our lives, identities and communities.** It is the way we see ourselves and our place in the world. It is where we live, who we are and how we learn. It is how we express ourselves – from music to sport.

**Culture is heritage.** It is our memories and stories and possessions and artefacts. It is the built and natural landscape.

**Culture is industry.** It is the economic value generated by culture in terms of jobs and revenue. It is the added value – to innovation, productivity and brand. It is the creative and digital businesses and the design, production and trade of intellectual property. It is tourism and retail and the competitiveness of the wider economy.

**Culture is museums, galleries, cinemas, music venues, theatres, libraries, festivals and events.** It is how we record, collect, curate and present our identities and how we understand others’ identities. It is how we preserve and bring to life our stories.

**Culture is practice.** It is the applied imagination of artists, writers and performers. It is the act of making – ideas, text, code, objects, paintings, sound and vision. It is performance and active participation.

### The Case for Culture

*“Culture is integral to the identity of local areas up and down the country and has the potential to transform a place”* The Culture White Paper, DCMS, March 2016.

*“There is a need to fashion proactively investment strategies and interventions that are more responsive to local need and demand, to talent from across the country, and to natural organic growth in the creative vibrancy of our town and cities.”* Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth The 2015 Report by the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value.

# The Value Proposition for Culture

## Social, Health and Wellbeing

Participation in the arts can contribute to community cohesion, reduce social exclusion and isolation, and make communities feel safer and stronger (Arts Council England 2014)

“A quality cultural and creative education allows people to develop rich expressive lives, and it is essential to the flourishing of the UK’s cultural and creative identity and the Cultural and Creative Industries that this opportunity is not limited to the socially advantaged and the privately educated. This is a fairness, equity and economic imperative” (Warwick Commission 2015).

Seventy-six per cent of older people say art and culture is important in making them feel happy; 57 per cent say art and culture is important in helping them meet other people; and 60 per cent say it is important in encouraging them to get out and about (Arts Council England 2014)

Arts and cultural intervention can have a positive impact on specific health conditions such as dementia, Parkinson’s and depression (Arts Council England, 2014)

Engagement in structured art and culture improves the cognitive abilities of children and young people (Arts Council England, 2014)

People who had attended a cultural place or event in the previous 12 months were almost 60 per cent more likely to report good health compared to those who had not (Arts Council England 2014)

## Economic Growth and Prosperity

Nationally, the creative industries are the fastest growing sector of the economy. The sector has created jobs five times faster than the overall economy since 2010. (Arts Council England, 2015)

In 2016, there were around 284,000 Cultural and Creative Industries businesses in the UK - over one in ten of the total number of businesses in the country, generating £91.8 billion for the UK economy in GVA and supporting over 3 million jobs. The geographic distribution of such businesses is dominated by London, and the South East, with strong concentrations in the M4 and M40 corridors.

The Government estimates that by 2023 the sector will create 600,000 new jobs and that GVA will increase from £91.8 billion to £150 billion.

## 3. Building from our Cultural Strengths

In Bucks we have several key areas of strength that we can build from. These include:

### Literary Heritage

Buckinghamshire has a rich history as a place of writing, reflection and imaginative story-telling. For example, John Milton finished Paradise Lost in his cottage (now a museum) in Chalfont St. Giles and world-famous children’s author Roald Dahl lived in Great Missenden for many years and wrote many of his best-selling books from a ‘writing hut’ in his garden. Children’s author Enid Blyton and fantasy

writer Terry Pratchett are also both former Bucks residents. For many years, every summer in Aylesbury, a Roald Dahl Festival has been held, celebrating the work of this local author, including a giant puppet parade featuring local school children and artists, attracting thousands of visitors. Recently the festival has grown as Whizz Fizz to become a wider celebration of children's literature, keeping the parade and fun activities but also including other contemporary authors delivering workshops.

*In Buckinghamshire, we can do more to celebrate our literary heritage and provide accessible itineraries for visitors. We can also inspire our young people to become brilliant story-tellers, enhancing literacy and confidence. Plus, we can support a new generation of writers, film-makers, games developers and other types of story-tellers to establish Buckinghamshire as a county of contemporary literature.*

## **Sports Heritage**

Buckinghamshire is a county with a strong tradition of innovation and excellence in sports. It is the home of Silverstone, the purpose built rowing lake at Dorney, and Wycombe Wanderers - a football club with a strong community tradition. Buckinghamshire is also widely recognised as the birthplace of the Paralympic movement. Sir Ludwig Guttman organised the first 'Stoke Mandeville Games'; the forerunner of today's Paralympic Games to coincide with the start of the London Olympics in 1948. The revolutionary treatments at Stoke Mandeville Hospital introduced sport as rehabilitation and an exciting movement was born. To coincide with London 2012, a Cultural Olympiad project was delivered by Bucks County Council celebrating our unique heritage. Buckinghamshire County Council is one of the founding partners of the National Paralympic Heritage Trust, a charitable trust which has been set up to protect and celebrate British Paralympic Heritage. Through an agreement with the International Paralympic Committee, this heritage is recognised at the start of each Summer and Winter Paralympics as the Paralympic Heritage Flame starts its relay at Stoke Mandeville Stadium with a celebratory festival televised by Channel 4 News.

*In Buckinghamshire, we can build from this tradition of innovation and excellence. For example, inspired by the Paralympic Movement, we can become the UK's most accessible county for cultural participation. We can embrace digital technology and our cultural assets to increase the legibility of our cultural offer and grow a more immersive and interactive programmed of cultural experiences.*

## **Our Places of Historical and Cultural Interest**

Buckinghamshire has a huge variety of attractions and places of historical and cultural interest, and our proximity to London provides a major opportunity to build the audience for our culture. We have a significant number of National Trust properties with some of the finest country houses and formal gardens in this region: the sumptuous Rothschild chateau at Waddesdon, Prime Minister Disraeli's country retreat at Hughenden Manor, the most magnificent landscape garden in Britain at Stowe. We have a great County Museum in Aylesbury (now a National Portfolio Organisation for Arts Council England); the second longest-running visual arts open studios event in the country (Bucks Art Weeks); one of the UK's largest arts centres (Queens Park Arts Centre) and outdoor activities available include climbing the high ropes or mountain biking in Wendover Woods and seeing the cherry blossom and bluebells, mountain biking at Aston Hill, kayaking on the Thames or competing on the Olympic rowing course at Dorney Lake. Nowhere is very far from a country pub with fresh, contemporary food, ales from a family brewery and wine from the county's award-winning vineyards. Bucks is Britain's most filmed county, and home to Pinewood Studios. Its villages have witnessed countless gruesome Midsomer Murders. Many of the larger towns throughout the

county offer theatres, galleries and museums, with a range of arts, crafts and studios open to the public. There's a great range of summer festivals including Penn Fest music festival and Feast Food Festival at Waddesdon.

*In Buckinghamshire, we have a wide-ranging and high quality cultural offer, but we can do more to connect it. We can develop a more coherent programme of activities and map of attractions; we can work harder to share knowledge and jointly promote activities; and we need to make our cultural landscape more accessible and participatory. We can develop our accommodation offer to encourage more leisure overnight stays in the county.*

### **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

Buckinghamshire has some fine and varied countryside. The Chilterns are known for their rolling hills, wooded green valleys and chalk downland meadows. 324 square miles of superb scenery offer opportunities for walking, cycling, water sports and canals, wildlife-watching and camping. The Chilterns are quick to reach by train or by car, and easy to explore with boots, buggies, bikes or boats. The Chiltern Way is a circular walking route of around 125 miles km, and the Chilterns Cycleway is a 170-mile circular cycle route - both taking in some of the finest scenery in the country. A new walking festival has launched featuring a host of locations, landscapes and lifestyles with hikes, guided tours and special events taking place across the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty throughout Spring.

*In Buckinghamshire, we can more effectively attract visitors to our beautiful countryside and we can do so by engaging them in innovative and sustainable cultural activities. This includes festivals, food and drink programming, and artistic commissions which raise awareness of ecology and sustainability issues. We can also make connections between the urban and rural areas, such as through active audience development activities which open up appetite for diverse communities to come to the countryside; or partnerships with universities to encourage activities which connect art, science and technology.*

### **Our Cultural and Creative Economy**

Buckinghamshire has a high growth cultural and creative economy. This includes the globally significant Pinewood Studios, an anchor cluster for the UK film industry; and the National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield, which plays a vital role in nurturing talent and ensuring the country continues to produce some of the best creative talent in the world. The south of the county is home to multiple high growth creative firms, with particular strengths in digital (e.g. TV, film, gaming and software); and music publishing. Across the county we have many micro creative firms, with specialism in visual arts, craft and design. They are often playing an active role in their communities and connecting to the wider cultural tourism offer (e.g. via the new Buckinghamshire Craft Guild). In High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire New University has a strong track record in nurturing creative talent, building on the town's furniture heritage to develop a pipeline of graduates in design and arts. To the north of the county, the University of Buckingham is investing significantly in its cultural infrastructure, paving the way to become a cultural and creative hub.

*In Buckinghamshire, we have a strong tradition of creating and making - from furniture to film. However, we do not have a detailed overview of the current profile and dynamics of the cultural and creative industries. It is over a decade since the last sector mapping exercise was undertaken. It is also clear that we need to do more to support creative talent to develop and grow in the county - rather than leave to London and beyond. Our main towns, in particular High Wycombe and Aylesbury, can become important regional hubs for the*

*cultural and creative industries - with a focus on high quality workspace and stronger sector networks; plus on establishing strategic links to major clusters in London (e.g. in design and crafts). We must also work much harder to provide opportunities for creative and cultural work for our full talent base - ensuring we develop a rich cultural education offer and develop with industry effective skills programmes. The LEP's Creative Skills sub-group can play a key convening role here.*

## 4. Priority Outcomes

In Buckinghamshire, we want to use culture to make Buckinghamshire a creative and exciting place to live, study, visit and do business. To achieve this, we will prioritise 4 main strategic outcomes. These will provide the terms of reference for the new Buckinghamshire Cultural Partnership.

### Outcome One: A thriving economy and more high quality jobs

#### Ambition

- To establish Buckinghamshire a major hub for high value cultural creative and industries activity. This will require an active and imaginative approach to our town centres and to main areas of housing-led growth: encouraging the development of local hubs and clusters. It will also require a dynamic approach to sector networking: connecting Pinewood and the National Film and Television School to networks of micro firms across the county and building stronger business to business exchange. There is also an opportunity to increase the visibility of the local cultural and creative industries sector to other parts of the economy - to increase opportunities to 'buy local'.
- To establish Buckinghamshire as a recognised destination for leisure, heritage and arts through a cohesive tourism plan based on stronger sector networks which encourage knowledge exchange and shared approaches to programming and marketing. Specific strengths can be leveraged here - e.g. to promote Buckinghamshire's offer as a preferred centre for major sporting and cultural events and accessible tourism.

#### Proposed priority actions:

- Work with the LEP to prioritise culture and the creative industries as major drivers of growth and competitiveness and as key to the success of town centres and areas with significant new housing and transport infrastructure development.
- Work with Bucks Business First on the Regional Tourism Strategic Group to develop the offer and increase the economic impact of tourism in Buckinghamshire.
- Refresh the Creative Industries Audit from 2007 (turnover worth £3bn in 2007) to identify the potential for creative industries in Buckinghamshire.
- Work with the LEP to identify and promote opportunities for the public, private and not for profit sectors to collaborate to achieve inward investment and benefits for the creative industries. Investigate the development of creative clusters with the infrastructure to grow skills and talent.
- Ensure training opportunities in our schools, colleges, university to fit people for creative economy, tourism and hospitality skills agenda.

## **Outcome Two: Equality of access to cultural activities and opportunities**

### **Ambition**

- To support all residents to engage in culture at a local level through innovative programming, new models of delivery, securing external funding and working in partnership.
- To establish Buckinghamshire as a centre of excellence in cultural participation and education: with partners working to establish cultural education as a right for every young person, by reaching out and expanding vital parts of the offer- e.g. the Music Service.

### **Proposed priority actions**

- Increase exposure to and participation in cultural activities in school age children of all backgrounds
- the development of a Bucks Cultural Education Partnership can be an important first step.
- Support and champion our arts centres, libraries and other cultural buildings as hubs for cultural participation. Coordinate programming to reach and engage audiences for whom there is historically low levels of participation.
- Support lifelong learning in the community through arts, heritage and culture - prioritising activities which interact with the natural and built environment.
- Work with Arts Council England (e.g. via the Audience Agency) to undertake baseline research on audience profile, participation rates and barriers to participation. Identify funding opportunities to undertake targeted audience development activities with the goal to uplift cultural participation across the county, with a particular focus on areas with a low baseline of participation.
- Pioneer coordinated approaches which reach and engage audiences and which increase the depth and interactivity of the experience - e.g. by digitalising cultural content, live-streaming performances, and supporting young people to operate as cultural producers for the county.

## **Outcome Three: Improved health and wellbeing of the population**

### **Ambition**

- To maximise the role of culture in promoting both individual health and wellbeing and a personal sense of achievement, as well as the benefits of participation and engagement in a wider community setting.
- To establish Buckinghamshire as the most accessible county for cultural participation.

### **Proposed priority actions:**

- Fund-raise and develop partnerships with the aim to a pilot cultural commissioning project which positions cultural organisations and artists as providers of cultural services to deliver health and wellbeing outcomes to target beneficiaries. This can operate as a 'testbed' for a larger-scale programme of cultural commissioning for 2020.
- Develop a shared platform and network for cultural providers and health/prevention professionals, to foster cultural commissioning, harnessing the benefits of participation in cultural activities, and enhance the role of culture as part of a preventative solution. For example: as part of the early help



offer for families, reducing loneliness and social isolation, providing activities for children and young people to bring benefits in terms of reduction in antisocial behaviour. This platform can work as a Buckinghamshire version of the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance – a national membership organisation representing everyone who believes that cultural engagement and participation can transform our health and wellbeing<sup>1</sup>.

- Increase the range, quality and sustainability of festivals and celebrations that bring the community together, with strong community leadership and participation.

## **Outcome Four: Re-vitalised heritage and transformed places**

### **Ambition**

- To improve the sustainability of our culture offer and exploit new opportunities.
- To position our heritage offer as a resource for contemporary cultural practice - e.g. festivals, events, filming, creative workspace and reinvigorated town centres and rural hubs.
- To put culture at the heart of town centres: establishing a dynamic and distinctive mix of retail, cultural production (e.g. crafts, design, visual arts and other types of ‘maker spaces’), events and leisure activities.

### **Proposed priority actions**

- Put culture at the heart of Growth Plans and align this Cultural Strategy to the Strategic Economic Plan of the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership. This includes an imaginative approach to cultural use in town centres - to include clusters of cultural and creative production and a diverse night time economy.
- Develop a cultural plan and strategy for Aylesbury Garden Town: as a beacon for cultural planning which builds from international best practice. This is to establish Aylesbury as a pioneer for innovative culture-led place-making which ensures quality, distinctiveness, pride, cohesion and fertile ground for the cultural and creative industries.
- Develop a set of heritage meets contemporary pioneer projects: festivals, digital platforms, cultural commissions and ‘hack events’ which position heritage assets as dynamic enablers of contemporary creative and cultural practice.
- Strategically cultural infrastructure to operate as hubs and brokers for cultural and creative activity - venues/spaces, the excellent art centres (High Wycombe, Queens Park etc.); the main theatres (The Swan and Waterside); the Buckinghamshire County Museum; and the many libraries, museums and heritage assets. Co-develop a programme of activities which prioritise reaching new audiences and building the capacity of cultural organisations to undertake meaningful and engaging work with a diversity of local communities.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/>

## 5. The Buckinghamshire Cultural Partnership

The new Buckinghamshire Cultural Partnership will take ownership of this Strategy and seek ways to deliver on its vision, aims and objectives, themes and priority actions. It will bring together senior leaders from key cultural organisations, Buckinghamshire County Council, the district councils, health, the Local Enterprise Partnership, Pinewood Studios, The National Film and Television School and Buckinghamshire New University.

It will play a strategic leadership and development role for culture, with an aim to position culture to the heart of strategic agendas across the county. It will meet quarterly. It will be chaired by an independent cultural champion. Terms of reference will be established to guide the focus and function of the Partnership.

Key areas of responsibility will include:

- Sharing knowledge and connections to enhance the quality of partnerships across the county
- Playing an advocacy and fund-raising role - to attract investment for culture and the creative industries in Buckinghamshire. Vital will be aligning the priorities of the LEP with those of the Cultural Partnership.
- Presenting a shared voice and access point to partners seeking to develop a strategic approach to culture - e.g. in planning, economic development, tourism, health and wellbeing.
- Setting up task and finish groups on priority areas - to fund-raise and deliver on activities - e.g. baseline mapping of the creative industries; a Cultural Strategy for Aylesbury Garden Town etc.
- Working closely with strategic and funding partners for culture - e.g. Arts Council England.