

North Yorkshire Cultural Framework summary

1.0 Key issues and opportunities for culture:

1.1 Health and wellbeing

The Framework notes that in North Yorkshire the potential contribution of the arts to health and wellbeing is not fully realised. Programmes are temporary, and provision is uneven across the County.

There is a need to increase awareness of the benefits of cultural participation and the opportunities that exist on people's doorstep, within North Yorkshire.

During the Covid pandemic issues of social isolation and loneliness have been exacerbated. A key factor in reducing loneliness is the social interaction experienced while participating in cultural activity. Cultural initiatives such as Community First Yorkshire's loneliness initiatives could offer the opportunity to connect into an established programme

1.2 Place shaping and town centres

The cultural tradition of market towns as gathering places is ready for reinvention in North Yorkshire. Town centres traditionally serve their rural hinterland's needs for retail and civic amenities but as shopping and banking move online culture can help in animating spaces through activity or art, driving footfall and creating a buzz and amplifying sense of identity – all things that create desirable places to live and work, develop profile and attract inward investment and economic growth.

Observations include:

- Lots of activity is happening, but in isolation, or in some cases with inter-town rivalry. There is opportunity to share practice and learning across the sector and the need for a networked sector to support this.
- The need for the cultural sector to be involved in shaping the development of Town Centre renewal planning and bid development from the outset – to ensure appropriate activity and creative ambition.
- Creative solutions emerging to make old heritage work in a new 21st Century context.
- The need for good practice in commissioning cultural content – whether pieces of work or events.
- The need to work more consistently with BIDs as a delivery partner and other town centre partners.
- Culture as a means to broker community engagement and co-design of the reinvented town centres.
- Authentic places should range from vibrant young spaces to slow culture catering for the needs of community and audiences.

1.3 Creative Skills and Economy

Our research uncovered that, due to its location and comparatively cheap per metre of space and storage, North Yorkshire has strengths in infrastructure and support industries that service the cultural sector – which only become more visible due to the impact of COVID and their need for financial support. Also noted was the range of freelancers covering every aspect of the cultural sector – from consultants to producers to education session workers. This group is anticipated to become an ever greater proportion of the workforce and, are the means by which the sector can inject capacity, energy, experience and ideas into its work, if connected properly. Both freelancers and support industries are represented in North Yorkshire but tend to work nationally and internationally.

Consultation highlighted the mismatch between skills and available people. There is the challenge of securing people with the right skills or finding those newly qualified aren't trained in the right skills, or are prepared to move into North Yorkshire. For example, Screen Yorkshire sources locations, but needs to bring in technical crew from outside the area. On the other, in more established cultural areas, is the contradiction of 'dead man's shoes' and limited appropriate vacancies.

A particular challenge for North Yorkshire is affordable spaces in which to live and work. Craven District has started to challenge this and find solutions and Northallerton, through its High Street Heritage Action Zone has plans too. There is need to share learning as well as keeping an eye on innovations developing elsewhere in the Country.

Conversations with young peoples' groups indicated general lack of awareness of the breadth of culture and the potential career opportunities within the sector. The reduction in cultural subjects in the Curriculum might limit this workforce pipeline further. Crescent Arts in Scarborough have recently held careers sessions to raise the awareness of these possibilities.

1.4 **Audiences**

Data shows that different parts of the sector attract different participation rates, and that participation in rural areas, with the exception of museums and libraries tends to be higher than elsewhere. This demonstrates that the barriers to engagement (for many) aren't necessarily the rural location.

Our Conversations indicated an increased focus on local audiences. This supports the reasoning that attention to local communities increases vibrancy, which makes the place more creative, illuminating it and making it more attractive to others, which in turn translate into more contemporary, place-based visitor offers.

Local perceptions of North Yorkshire tend to be in line with the national image of a beautiful, historic county, with an abundance of outdoor space. Beyond the natural heritage, while there are varied cultural offers across the area, it was observed that many people travel to towns or to neighbouring authority areas for a more contemporary or varied or larger scale culture offer.

Other comments indicated that although there is a never ending need to find things to do with younger children, these are well provided for. Conversely, finding things for adults to do was far more challenging.

1.5 **Connectivity Networks and Leadership**

The discussions with stakeholders and the cultural sector consistently highlighted a desire for opportunities to achieve new ways of working independently and in partnership with the cultural sector in North Yorkshire. While it is clear that local government has a key role in this, so do wider strategic and delivery partners, including sector stakeholders or the York and North Yorkshire LEP.

Throughout our Culture Conversations there was a consistent message about the absence of connectivity. In interviews the sector described itself as disconnected, inconsistent, siloed and lacking collective identity, with an overall effect that individuals and organisations struggle to understand their role.

In taking any Strategic Framework forward, it is essential that this local government influence is joined by sector (i.e. industry) representation and that cultural ambition, identified in consultations as something that was essential, is currently lacking.

1.6 Funding and Investment

The sector in North Yorkshire is known for its self-reliance, independence and resilience with majority of organisations predominantly rely on income generation from admission, café or retail along with project grant funding.

The scale of many smaller cultural organisations can mean that they get into a cycle of being locked out of future investment opportunities open to larger organisations. Some element of core funding can build capacity to enable this development.

It also brings capacity to experiment and take risks – building creative ambition and extending reach.

Conversation with funders such as the Community Foundation suggest that a dormant Cultural Fund could be resurrected to support cultural projects in North Yorkshire. This could be used to catalyse new approaches to innovation and engagement.

North Yorkshire has 8 organisations in the Arts Council's 2018-22 National Portfolio (now extended until 2023). All but Scarborough Theatre Trust receive the smallest scale of investment.

Next round of applications to be considered as part of the Portfolio are likely to open in 2021 (postponed from 2020 due to the pandemic emergency response).

1.7 Emerging from the Pandemic

The UK's cultural sector has been significantly affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Live performance and theatre productions, to exhibitions and festivals have been put on hold as venues have closed their doors, gatherings been prohibited, and stay at home orders have been put in place across the Country.

Perversely, those organisations that have diversified their income streams to have less reliance on grant-funding, focussing on ticket sales and retail, have been the most severely impacted. Organisations have been reliant on the many Government support initiatives, including furlough, rent reduction and the Department for Culture Media and Sports £1.57bn Culture Recovery Fund.

4.0 A strategic framework

4.1 The Framework is intended to provide an overarching direction of travel and act as a catalyst for conversation, partnership brokering and investment. Investing in the process of collective leadership development, capacity building and conversation over the next two years will help the sector move forward with confidence, innovation and creative ambition.

The set of aims stated within the cultural framework are outlined below:

4.2 Culture, participation and wellbeing

By widening our reach and brokering new cross sector partnerships we will improve wellbeing for those at risk of social isolation or mental ill-health.

Proposed activities:

- i Raising the profile, celebrating and communicating the sector's cultural activities, everyday creativity and volunteering opportunities to engage more people in different and relevant ways, and ensure they can participate in choices about their lives.
- ii Building on existing good practice to scale up, work County-wide and cross-sector with GPs, Care Commissioners and Local Authorities in social prescribing and personalisation.

4.3 People, place shaping, and culture

We will help shape places, reimagine our highstreets and celebrate their distinctiveness, by engaging audiences and strengthening identity, and breathe new life into vacant and underutilised spaces.

Proposed activities:

- iii Embedding cultural industries in short-, medium- and longer-term visions and investment plans across the County, revitalising vacant property into affordable and accessible space and creative clusters, resulting in cultural vibrancy.
- iv Cultural Hubs & Hinterlands: using cultural activity to engage communities in shaping their places and to attract footfall through festivals and events.
- v Quality Commissioning: developing a new framework for authentic, locally relevant and distinctive cultural commissioning.

4.4 Creative skills and economy

North Yorkshire is a place where a creative career is possible, with people in all stages of their working life invested in the success of the County's cultural industries.

Proposed activities:

- vi Stayers, Incomers & Returners: Attracting young people and young families through a possibility-rich, cultural economy with a strong sense of place, converting 'leavers' into highly skilled returners.
- vii A Culture of Possibility: Working with schools and FE colleges to promote the possibilities provided by work in the cultural sector - the value of creativity and creative thinking in all walks of life.
- viii Supporting Growth: providing the support and infrastructure for independent practitioners to grow their business, including mentoring talent development pathways and business support.

4.5 Inclusion, Relevance and Access

By developing new delivery models we will ensure that everyone can enjoy and participate in culture, regardless of age, ability, background or locality.

Proposed activity:

- ix Partnerships & Programming: Partnering skilled programmers with the rural community venues and developing new funding models to expand their reach, and support community spaces to take creative risks.
- x Co-creation and Community: Building audiences at home to ensure that alongside a thriving visitor economy, venues and town-centres can sustain high levels of attendance year-round.

4.6 Cultural leadership and connectivity

By connecting the sector and building capacity and leadership we will develop shared ambition and the coherence and capacity to deliver.

Proposed activities:

- xi Connecting Conversations: Building new networks across the area to share opportunities, develop skills and identify opportunities for collaboration.
- xii Growing our Capacity: Leading organisations from the County are keen to build their capacity and expand their reach. Working with local experts to reach audiences in new parts of the County will help develop audiences, test new models of delivery and encourage sector-leadership to emerge.
- xiii Shared Leadership: Developing leadership capacity and capability at all levels across the sector, to own and evolve strategic actions to maintain relevance and be opportunity ready.

5.0 Underpinning principles

5.1 A number of underpinning themes have been identified in the development of the above priorities.

1. **Creative ambition:** We embrace innovation in pursuit of bold solutions to all aspects of culture delivery.
2. **Digital dimensions:** We confidently blend digital and real-world engagement, making use of new technology to open up access and expand reach within the County and beyond.
3. **Climate emergency:** We use our creativity and voice to alert communities to the challenges we face and help catalyse action.