

Draft Culture Strategy for Cheltenham

Consultation version – June 2022

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Introduction

Cheltenham is a great place to live, work, play, and invest. Our town continues to be rated as one of the best places to live and bring up a family in the UK and is recognised for its high performing schools, its extensive cultural scene including the world-renowned Cheltenham Festivals and its stunning regency buildings.

Cheltenham offers a diverse range of leisure and cultural experiences whilst also being close to the Cotswolds, the Forest of Dean and Gloucester's historic docks. Our town is only one train stop away from the city centres of Bristol, Birmingham and Cardiff and is in close proximity to the internationally significant destinations of Stratford and Oxford

But there are also distinct and long-term embedded inequalities across the town's communities that require a specific focus. For instance, we have recognised the impact of child poverty in the town and have also recognised the challenge of ensuring that cultural provision and venues are as accessible as possible to the local community.

Looking to the future, we have an opportunity with the Golden Valley Development - the home of our cyber central development - which will bring significant investment into Cheltenham. We are excited by the potential interface between cyber and our cultural provision and we want to ensure that culture and creativity plays its part in supporting economic growth in our town.

Cheltenham Culture Board connects our cultural sectors together and has taken on the role of producing a cultural strategy for Cheltenham. Although our first meeting was only in July 2021, we have made significant headway in building a strong alliance across Cheltenham's cultural and creative communities – we are now ready to advocate that culture and creativity should be central to the economic and social recovery of Cheltenham.

In producing this strategy, we have consulted widely with cultural partners and key stakeholders across the town all of which endorsed this assessment of Cheltenham as a place with powerful cultural and heritage assets that need to be celebrated and nurtured.

But what also emerged from our consultations was the need for a cultural vision that requires Cheltenham to really shift gear in our approach to developing and deepening our cultural offer; establishing our town as a truly innovative creative place and destination; fostering creative expression across our town; alongside much greater community engagement.

Our vision is:

Cheltenham is a vibrant place and cultural destination where the fusion of arts, digital and heritage innovation fosters creative and inclusive communities where everyone has the chance to thrive

To meet this cultural vision we have agreed six themes that provide the focus for this strategy.

- Opportunities to fuse heritage, cultural, and digital assets
- Improving the life chances of our young people
- Building inclusive and creative communities
- Nurturing grass-roots creative talents and ambitions
- Supporting visitor economy and our wider place brand
- Meeting the climate change challenge

The strategy starts with an assessment of current challenges and opportunities under each of the key themes – this is our story of culture and creativity in Cheltenham.

Our story of culture and creativity in Cheltenham

Opportunities to fuse heritage, cultural, and digital assets

In terms of heritage, Cheltenham has such rich heritage assets and a new forum, Cheltenham Heritage Network that is facilitating networking between Cheltenham's various heritage organisations.

Cheltenham also has a rich community heritage that reflects the dynamic history of the town. From working class communities associated with Cheltenham's manufacturing industries, to wealthy people who retired to Cheltenham from the colonies, and from Cheltenham's many ethnically and culturally diverse communities to the many students who choose Cheltenham as a base for their education.

It's the buildings, the green spaces, our entrepreneurial spirit and the stories our people tell that make Cheltenham special and the board is excited by the opportunity to place our heritage centre-stage when thinking about the future.

And in terms of our future, the Golden Valley Development, allied to Cheltenham's existing cultural and creative industry strengths, gives Cheltenham an opportunity to develop a distinctive culture based around digital industries, creating opportunities for cultural and commercial innovation and growth. Golden Valley, and the centrality of the culture, creative and digital sectors to the success of the development, were a constant refrain in our consultation interviews.

The Board should seek to lead the way in facilitating the interaction of creative, cultural, and digital innovation that builds on and celebrates our culture and heritage.

The board recognises that Cheltenham needs to improve its performance in terms of talent attraction and retention, particularly with regard to young graduates and entrepreneurs – our vision to fuse fusion of cyber, arts and heritage gives us powerful ambition to work within and one that is both credible with local residents and appealing to the outside world. Realising the benefits for local talent, skills development and our wider creatives industries is going to be a critical measure of success for this strategy.

The town's motto is Salubritas et Eruditio - which recognises that the town's historic success was built on the fusion of wellbeing and learning. The board is excited by its vision which entwines our heritage assets and organisations with our digital ambitions and be a place where arts, digital and heritage meet, and creative innovation happens.

In response the Culture Board will explore opportunities to

- build strong alliances across Cheltenham's arts, digital and heritage sectors and facilitate the interaction of creative, cultural, and digital innovation and co-creating the future.

Potential measure of success:

- Number of collaborative projects developed and nurtured by the board

Improving the life chances of our young people

Whilst partners acknowledged that work is being done to support cultural participation and engagement among children and young people, consultees agreed that there needs to be a big shift in the overall approach, with the emphasis being on giving them greater ownership of their creative and cultural expression, with the aim of empowering them and 'getting out of the way.'

The cultural sector has long used the language of producing work 'with and for' young people, but the shift called for by consultees was rather more demanding; a deeper challenge to the sector to co-produce with a wider range of young people, and facilitate new forms of cultural expression.

The cultural partners all accepted that they will work together more strategically to move the dials on access and opportunity for young people in the town. This in turn will require the Culture Board be serious about the representation of young people on the Board, and how to connect community, voluntary, education, and artistic networks in a way that fosters more focus and collaboration across partners.

The board must also work with schools to support creative and cultural practice in local schools, and to create more independent opportunities for young people to make, participate in, and enjoy culture, changing perceptions of Cheltenham, and retaining more local young talent in the town.

An important foundation of future success will be how we connect the taught curriculum to the town's cultural eco-system via talent development pathways that will create much stronger learning and career pathways across Cheltenham's creative industries.

Strengthening the cultural offer to young people, and Cheltenham's reputation as a truly innovative creative place and destination, is also vital if the town is to attract and retain the young talent that will shape its future. The new Minster Exchange, gives Cheltenham to change the narrative and create a dynamic cultural space where young people are central to the programming and delivery of artistic output.

In response the Culture Board will explore opportunities to:

- Create new opportunities for young people to more actively invent, and shape their creative and cultural aspirations
- Ensure young people are represented on the board
- Work with schools to support creative and cultural practice in local schools and create talent development and career pathways across Cheltenham's creative industries
- Strengthen the cultural offer to young people by using Minster Exchange as a test-bed to put young people central to the programming and delivery of artistic output

Potential measures of success:

- Number of projects which are being led by young people
- Number of young people on the board
- Number of projects developed in collaboration with local schools

Building inclusive and creative communities

Consultation feedback requested that the board take cultural inclusivity in Cheltenham to a much higher level. And although many cultural providers are delivering programmes of long-term engagement with different communities and neighbourhoods across Cheltenham, there is acknowledgement that there isn't enough co-ordination and coherence across these efforts.

Consultees noted that progress here has been too slow, and that only closer collaboration, coupled with a greater commitment to offer genuinely inclusive offers and routes in, can speed up the changes required. The need is for long-term programmes of work, responding to identified local need and aspiration.

The vision here is of cultural and community organisations working closely together; pooling resources and intelligence; identifying where they can each produce the most added value; ensuring projects are inclusive, co-produced and empowering. The board can do this developing joint commissioning and cross-over programming thereby ensuring we build opportunities for local engagement and programming that will really shift the needle on cultural inclusivity.

Community arts spaces can be a particularly important part of community engagement efforts. As the cultural partners seek to flex more community-level innovation, and grow grass-roots cultural offers, it is important to remember that community arts spaces can engage all our communities including those who do not usually participate in the arts and enable people to enjoy a quality and diverse cultural experience.

But Cheltenham does not have the arts spaces that you would expect from a town with our cultural heritage – the board is determined to explore how we create more community spaces for cultural and creative enrichment.

In response the Culture Board will explore opportunities to:

- Drive more inclusive community engagement activities through leading closer collaboration between partners
- Be empowering; developing joint commissioning and cross-over programming;
- Explore opportunities for more community spaces for cultural and creative enrichment

Potential measure of success

- Number of community engagement projects developed and nurtured by the board

Nurturing grass-roots creative talents and ambitions

“We need to nurture and celebrate and build from local alongside the international – that is the energy and drive that we are missing, connecting these two dynamics. The board knows that Cheltenham’s grassroots cultural talents can be world-class.”

One of the biggest cultural challenges, and greatest opportunities for Cheltenham, is how to connect the ‘international’ and the ‘local’ aspects of our cultural offer and activity. At the moment, the gap between these two scales of activity was seen as too large, and in the longer term something that could hold back the full creative potential of the town.

Consultees saw huge opportunities to build bottom-up cultural offers, driven by community engagement and local talent, which would appeal to regional, national and international visitors. Also noted was the potential to do more with our twin towns such Annecy, Gottingen, Weihai and Kisumu and celebrate these long-standing friendship links.

By growing the grassroots, and connecting current programming with grassroots offers would create more opportunities for local talent and progression. For example, consultees identified how Cheltenham has the potential to punch above its weight in terms of its music offer if we connected music education in schools; its amateur music scene; our music production and cross-media opportunities at university level; to the professional talent development of musicians and music producers; through to performance at the Music, Jazz and Wychwood festivals.

The board’s aim must be to make the cultural offer more collaborative, inclusive and co-produced and work towards a year round, town-wide offer. This would be a step change in scale and depth and would also open up opportunities for those outside formal education, especially post-16 years.

All of which requires the board and the key partners, to acknowledge and support all layers of the local cultural eco-system– from community arts groups, to artists’ networks, and young people’s DIY creative activity. Consultees were clear that there needs to be more opportunities for on-the-ground creatives, tackling barriers to making, displaying, or programming work.

In response the Culture Board will explore opportunities to:

- Connect commercial programming with our grassroots offers to support opportunities for local talent and progression
- Make Cheltenham's cultural offer more collaborative, inclusive and co-produced to create a year round, town-wide offer
- Support all layers of the local cultural eco-system

Potential measure of success

- Number of talent progression projects developed and nurtured by the board

Supporting our visitor economy and economic growth

Whilst the effects of the pandemic have disrupted established visitor markets and patterns, all partners recognise that Cheltenham's aspiration to grow its visitor economy will be enhanced by growing the quality, diversity, reach and coherence of our cultural sector.

The positioning of Cheltenham as a cultural destination is absolutely right, but the opportunity is to create a bigger sweet spot in terms of offers that work equally well for visitors and residents by finding the best balance of unmissable cultural provision for visitors on national and international stages with the needs of residents and the cultural opportunities they deserve. And our response cannot be just about the town centre, but it has to be a genuine town-wide approach, that also recognises the critical role that culture can play in economic growth.

And there is an opportunity to be creative in the spaces we use for culture, and make more creative use of the town's parks and gardens and empty retail units.

The board is keen to identify what can be used to help to raise awareness, build engagement and participation, generate new opportunities, and deliver revenues for the town – and to undertake a survey of cultural assets in the town to support this.

To unlock greater future value from these assets for Cheltenham as a cultural hub, and cultural destination, will require deeper cross-sectoral collaboration between arts, heritage, tourism, transport, leisure, hospitality, retail, business, education, communities, third sector and cyber partners.

The Board will also need to test and evaluate these new activities, and use that insight to inform future programming, partnership and investment to creatively animate the town year-round and especially at weekends and school holidays.

In response the Culture Board will explore opportunities to:

- Develop a year-round programming that works equally well for visitors and residents by finding the best balance of cultural provision for visitors on national and international stages with the needs of residents – being creative in the spaces we use.
- Undertake a survey of cultural assets in the town to identify what can be used to help to raise awareness, build engagement and participation, generate new opportunities, and deliver revenues for the town
- Lead deeper cross-sector collaboration between arts, heritage, tourism, transport, leisure, hospitality, retail, business, education, communities, third sector and cyber partners

Potential measure of success

- Progress made to achieve year round programming

Meeting the climate change challenge

In 2019, Cheltenham Borough Council agreed to set an ambitious target for Cheltenham to be a carbon neutral town by 2030.

As part of this commitment, CheltenhamZero - a cross-sector collaborative partnership that brings together private sector, public sector, charities and community groups from across the borough is now working together to achieve a net zero carbon Cheltenham by 2030.

Cultural partners are committing, via this strategy to play their part in helping the town reach this goal. The board supports the manifesto "Accelerating climate action through the power of arts, culture and heritage" that was produced for the COP26 summit and is excited by the potential unlock the potential of culture to tackle climate change.

"Culture anchors people to places and to each other. It can create cohesion in ways that enable community-building and collective action. Artists and cultural voices drive public awareness and action; their work can be a powerful tool for climate mobilisation. Through public accessibility and trust, cultural institutions like museums and libraries provide platforms for listening to communities and hubs of multicultural and inter-generational exchange, capacity building, and knowledge-sharing."

In response the Culture Board will explore opportunities to:

- Unlock the potential of arts, culture, and heritage to achieve the ambitions of the Cheltenham Zero.
- Lead transformation within our own organisations, embracing sustainable practices wherever possible
- Make culture and heritage available in inclusive ways, including through traditional and innovative artistic forms as well as new technologies

Potential measure of success

- No of projects developed and nurtured by the board that contribute directly / indirectly to Cheltenham zero

Our vision

The board has spent time reviewing the challenges and opportunities and speaking with key stakeholders and is proposing the following vision for where we want to be in 10 years:

Cheltenham is a vibrant place and cultural destination where the fusion of arts, digital and heritage innovation fosters creative and inclusive communities where everyone has the chance to thrive

Our big ideas

The board is committing to the following big ideas to achieve our vision:

- We will forge partnerships and collaborations across the heritage, cultural, and digital sectors
- We will have a particular focus on using culture and creativity to improve the life chances of our young people
- We will promote equity of opportunity to help build inclusive and creative communities
- We will celebrate and nurture our community helping them to realise their creative talents and ambitions locally and internationally
- We will work to drive our visitor economy and our wider place brand
- We will use culture, creativity and innovation to contribute to the Cheltenham zero and work collectively to address climate change

Our draft actions – the longlist

The board has reviewed the opportunities for action set out in the previous section to create a long-list of opportunities (see below) that it will refine and endorse through consultation, engagement and discussion.

The projects fall into three categories:

- Projects that could help the board understand the cultural landscape of Cheltenham and help develop the role of the board
- Short-term easier-win projects
- Longer-term more ambitious projects

Understanding the cultural landscape and developing the work of the board:

The Culture Board will explore opportunities to:

- Build strong alliances across Cheltenham's arts, digital and heritage sectors and facilitate the interaction of creative, cultural, and digital innovation and co-creating the future
- Ensure young people are represented on the board
- Undertake a survey of cultural assets in the town to identify what can be used to help to raise awareness, build engagement and participation, generate new opportunities, and deliver revenues for the town
- Lead deeper cross-sector collaboration between arts, heritage, tourism, transport, leisure, hospitality, retail, business, education, communities, third sector and cyber partners Lead transformation within our own organisations, embracing sustainable practices wherever possible
- Develop a culture board communications and engagement plan to cover off branding /messaging / delivery / use of data visualisation, plus building communication across and between organisations/individuals within Cheltenham
- Develop a performance framework - KPIs – for each of the big ideas –what's the story / baseline and target (revisit the economic impact of culture report)

Short term easier wins

The Culture Board will explore opportunities to:

- Strengthen the cultural offer to young people by using Minster Exchange as a test-bed to put young people central to the programming and delivery of artistic output
- Drive more inclusive community engagement activities through leading closer collaboration between partners

Longer term ambitions

The Culture Board will explore opportunities to:

- Create new opportunities for young people to more actively invent, and shape their creative and cultural aspirations and so strengthen the cultural offer to young people
- Work with schools to support creative and cultural practice in local schools and create talent development and career pathways across Cheltenham's creative industries
- Be empowering; developing joint commissioning and cross-over programming
- Explore opportunities for more community spaces for cultural and creative enrichment
- Connect commercial programming with our grassroots offers to support opportunities for local talent and progression
- Make Cheltenham's cultural offer more collaborative, inclusive and co-produced to create a year round, town-wide offer
- Support all layers of the local cultural eco-system
- Develop a year-round programming that works equally well for visitors and residents by finding the best balance of cultural provision for visitors on national and international stages with the needs of residents – being creative in the spaces we use
- Unlock the potential of arts, culture, and heritage to achieve the ambitions of the Cheltenham Zero
- Make culture and heritage available in inclusive ways, including through traditional and innovative artistic forms as well as new technologies.

Action plan – longlist of opportunities

Theme	Big idea	Potential Opportunities	Potential measures of success
Opportunities to fuse heritage, cultural, and digital assets	We will forge partnerships and collaborations across the heritage, cultural, and digital sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Culture Board wants to build strong alliances across Cheltenham's arts, digital and heritage sectors and facilitate the interaction of creative, cultural, and digital innovation and co-creating the future 	No of collaborative projects developed and nurtured by the board
Improving the life chances of our young people	We will have a particular focus on using culture and creativity to improve the life chances of our young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create new opportunities for young people to more actively invent, and shape their creative and cultural aspirations Ensure young people are represented on the board Work with schools to support creative and cultural practice in local schools and create talent development and career pathways across Cheltenham's creative industries Strengthen the cultural offer to young people by using Minster Exchange as a test-bed to put young people central to the programming and delivery of artistic output 	<p>No of projects which are being led by young people</p> <p>No of young people on the board</p> <p>No of projects developed in collaboration with local schools</p>

Theme	Big idea	Potential Opportunities	Potential measures of success
Building inclusive and creative communities	We will promote equity of opportunity to help build inclusive and creative communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drive more inclusive community engagement activities through leading closer collaboration between partners • Be empowering; developing joint commissioning and cross-over programming • Explore opportunities for more community spaces for cultural and creative enrichment 	No of community engagement projects developed and nurtured by the board
Nurturing grass-roots creative talents and ambitions	We will celebrate and nurture our community helping them to realise their creative talents and ambitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect commercial programming with our grassroots offers to support opportunities for local talent and progression • Make Cheltenham's cultural offer more collaborative, inclusive and co-produced to create a year round, town-wide offer • Support all layers of the local cultural eco-system 	No of talent progression projects developed and nurtured by the board

Theme	Big idea	Potential Opportunities	Potential measures of success
Supporting the visitor economy and our wider place brand	We will work to drive our visitor economy and our wider place brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a year-round programming that works equally well for visitors and residents by finding the best balance of cultural provision for visitors on national and international stages with the needs of residents – being creative in the spaces we use. • Undertake a survey of cultural assets in the town to identify what can be used to help to raise awareness, build engagement and participation, generate new opportunities, and deliver revenues for the town • Lead deeper cross-sector collaboration between arts, heritage, tourism, transport, leisure, hospitality, retail, business, education, communities, third sector and cyber partners 	Progress made to achieve year round programming
Meeting the climate change challenge	We will use culture, creativity and innovation to contribute to the Cheltenham zero and work collectively to address climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlock the potential of arts, culture, and heritage to achieve the ambitions of the Cheltenham Zero. • Lead transformation within our own organisations, embracing sustainable practices wherever possible • Make culture and heritage available in inclusive ways, including through traditional and innovative artistic forms as well as new technologies 	No of projects developed and nurtured by the board that contribute directly / indirectly to Cheltenham zero

APPENDIX - Introduction to the Culture board – who we are and what we hope to achieve

Our aim

Our aim is to build a collective response to deliver the vision and aims of this Cultural Strategy:

We will deliver our aim by:

Building a strong alliance across Cheltenham's cultural and creative communities to build a collective response to the vision and strengthen our capacity for innovation.

Advocating whole-heartedly for culture and creativity, ensuring that they play the fullest possible role in the recovery of Cheltenham, economically and socially

Developing a shared leadership model to increase cultural ambition, and support Cheltenham's cultural ecosystem respond to the vision and big ideas set out in this strategy.

Identifying the key risks that will prevent Cheltenham from realising our vision and work to mitigate these risks

We are committing to:

Develop a five-year broad implementation plan supported by annual action plans setting out how our vision will be delivered.

Develop specific objectives and measurable KPIs dependant on current needs that will allow effective progress assessment in the short, medium and long-term.

Keeping implementation under review and will produce annual reports so that it can be held to account by its stakeholders.

Developing a culture board communications and engagement plan to tell the story of culture in Cheltenham building communication across and between organisations and individuals within Cheltenham

Who we are

Sector	Representatives
Festivals	Anna Saunders and Ali Mawle
Visual arts	Niki Whitfield and Sarah Bowden
Heritage	Laura Kinnear and Hilary Simpson
Theatres	Paul Scott and Mark Goucher or Paul Milton
Performance	Shivan Mistry

Sector	Representatives
Cross-cutting	Louise Bardgett and Sue Silcock
GCC Libraries	Jane Everiss / Curtis Fulcher
Cheltenham Trust	Laurie Bell

Voices of the community

Sector	Representatives
Elected VCS representative	Andy Hayes
Young person representative	TBA
Diversity groups representative	Florence Nyasamo-Thomas
CBC elected representative	Cllr. Victoria Atherstone

Commercial / Industry

Sector	Representatives
Creative/cyber industries	Reid Derby
Business Improvement District	Belinda Wilson
Marketing Cheltenham	David Jackson

Education

Sector	Representatives
Further education/higher education representative	TBA
Secondary schools	David Evans Via Chelt Ed Partnership
Primary schools	TBA Via Chelt Learning Partnership

Help and support

Sector	Representatives
CBC lead executive director	Darren Knight
Admin support	Richard Gibson