

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the inaugural meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum held at Knowle, Sidmouth, on Thursday 14 March 2013**

**Present:**

Councillors:

Vivien Duval Steer – Equalities Champion  
John O’Leary – Culture Champion  
Phil Twiss – Deputy Portfolio Holder Environment

Town representatives:

David Chapman - Exmouth  
John Dyson - Sidmouth  
Douglas Hull – Axminster  
Vernon Whitlock - Honiton  
Tom Wright – Budleigh Salterton

Community representative:

Gerri Bennett

**Also Present:**

Councillor:

Geoff Chamberlain (substitute for Exmouth)

**Officers:**

Angela Blackwell, Thelma Hulbert Gallery Curator  
Steve Edmonds, Nature Conservation Officer  
Denise Lyon, Deputy Chief Executive Transformation and  
Systems Thinking  
Charlie Plowden, Countryside and Leisure Manager  
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer  
Graham Whitlock, Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager  
Roger Werner, Villages in Action

**Apologies:**

Town representatives:

Stephanie Jones - Seaton  
Graham Liverton (substitute)  
Andrew Moulding (substitute)  
Claire Wright – Ottery St Mary

Community representative:

Nikki Milican

The meeting started at 10.10 am and ended at 1.15 pm.

Councillor Phil Twiss welcomed all those present to the inaugural meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum and invited everyone to introduce themselves.

\*1

#### **Election of Chairman**

**RESOLVED:**

that Councillor John O’Leary be elected Chairman  
of the Forum.

**\*2 Appointment of Vice Chairman**

**RESOLVED:** that Councillor Douglas Hull be appointed Vice Chairman of the Forum.

**\*3 Declarations of interest**

<b>Forum Member</b>	<b>Minute number</b>	<b>Type of interest</b>	<b>Nature of interest</b>
David Chapman		Personal	He was a member of the Exmouth Pavilion Advisory Forum and the Manor Pavilion Theatre Steering Committee.
John Dyson		Personal	He was on the sub committee of Sidmouth Town Council considering the Manor Pavilion and he was a member of the Manor Pavilion Theatre Steering Committee.
Douglas Hull		Personal	He was a member of the Axminster Drama Club.
Denise Lyon		Personal	She belonged to Friends of the Thelma Hulbert Gallery.
John O'Leary		Personal	He was a member of the Manor Pavilion Theatre Steering Committee and he belonged to Friends of the Thelma Hulbert Gallery.
Vivien Duval Steer		Personal	She was a member of the Exmouth Pavilion Advisory Forum.
Vernon Whitlock		Personal	He belonged to Friends of the Thelma Hulbert Gallery.

**4 Remit**

Members considered a draft constitution which set out proposed terms of reference of the Forum. The constitution also set out the membership of the Forum and it was noted that members of the Forum included District Councillors, Town Councillors and Community Representatives. For the purpose of the minutes all members of the Forum would be referred to as 'members'. The Forum suggested the following amendments:

- To specifically include towns and surrounding villages under 1.
- The ability to set up smaller working groups if necessary to deal with particular issues under 9.
- To include other arts and culture organisations in East Devon under 1.

The Forum discussed setting up a website which all town and parishes could publicise events and activities, so that all events in the district were available on one website. This would be a user generated website and provide links to other organisations. This could be set up as a stand-alone platform to sit beside the EDDC platform. Other organisations to work with included Heart of Devon, Devon County Council and the Tourist Information Centres.

## 4 **Remit (cont'd)**

### **RECOMMENDED:**

- 1 that the following amendments be made to the constitution of the Forum:
  - To specifically include towns and surrounding villages under 1.
  - To include other arts and culture organisations in East Devon under 1.
  - The ability to set up smaller working groups if necessary to deal with particular issues under 9.
- 2 that consideration be given to creating a website to advertise all arts and culture events across East Devon.

## \*5 **East Devon's Arts and Cultural offer**

The Forum discussed East Devon's arts and cultural offer and considered event programmes for the:

- Thelma Hulbert Gallery
- Manor Theatre
- Countryside Team
- Villages in Action

Officers then made presentations.

### **Thelma Hulbert Gallery**

Angela Blackwell, Curator of the Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG) outlined events and exhibitions that the gallery had recently produced, and provided visitor numbers for the exhibitions. It had been 100 years since the birth of Thelma Hulbert and events were planned to celebrate the centenary year. Other forthcoming events included:

- A free valuation day sponsored by Honiton auctioneers.
- Beekeeping exhibition, demonstration and workshops.
- Evolver prize exhibition.
- Lace exhibition.

As well as the exhibitions the THG would continue its community based work with Millwater School, youth groups, MIND (a charity for mental health), St Paul's homework club, East Devon housing tenants, schools and many other local groups. Angela went on to outline the awards that the gallery had recently received.

The Chairman thanked Angela Blackwell for attending the meeting and demonstrating the range of activities provided at the THG, which the Forum agreed was more than simply an art gallery. Members felt that the THG was a valuable community service and that Angela's presentation provided a strong case for the gallery.

## \*5 **East Devon's Arts and Cultural offer (cont'd)**

### **Manor Pavilion Theatre**

Graham Whitlock, Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager explained to the Forum events that had happened at the Manor Pavilion Theatre (MPT) over the last six months, and what was planned for the next twelve months. The Theatre was going from strength to strength and the future was very exciting, with some major events planned for the forthcoming financial year.

Graham reported that the MPT had been closed for six weeks during January and February 2013 for an upgrade on the building's heating and air conditioning systems. This work had come in under budget so it had been possible to carry out more maintenance than anticipated. The Box Office area was a huge improvement and was now twice the original size. Since the Theatre had reopened, many people had made positive comments and no hirers disrupted by the work had been lost.

Audience figures were increasing and a new company to operate the summer season had been appointed. This would enable the Box Office to be run for 12 months of the year. The Theatre had achieved well over its target figures for the current financial year and was a popular choice for artists.

The Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager summarised his presentation in the following way:

- There were exciting times ahead
- There was a new summer rep season
- There were 18 shows in the year ahead
- There was a newly refurbished building
- Audience figures were increasing
- There was a wide range of programmes on offer.

The Forum congratulated Graham on his enthusiasm and success and thanked him for his presentation and all his hard work.

### **Countryside Team**

The Countryside and Leisure Manager introduced Steve Edmonds, Nature Conservation Officer and described him as enthusiastic, motivated, experienced and knowledgeable. Steve explained the educational programme of events, looking back at last year's events and the development of this year's events.

He reported that last year's events had had mixed successes, mainly due to the weather and the economic climate, as well as the distraction of the Olympics.

There had been a number of successful events which included:

- Annual bluebell day
- Heath Week – reptile rambles, bug hunts and mammals of the marshes
- Christmas on the wetlands wreath making
- Exmouth beach cleans
- Tree walks
- Wet and Wild festival.

## \*5 **East Devon's Arts and Cultural offer (cont'd)**

Steve explained the educational offer and reported that figures for these were improving. He was working with schools in the area to develop a resource learning pack and trying to tap into the curriculum. The Countryside Team were hosting a teacher training day on 15 April 2013. The Junior Rangers programme was fully booked last year and there was a full waiting list of this year. The John Mills week was also very popular and a price increase was being investigated.

Two events guides (spring/summer and autumn winter) would be published in order to allow greater flexibility in terms of what was offered. It gave officers the chance to review events' success and what worked well. Events on offer this year included:

- Seasonal activities – apple pressing, Halloween activities
- Food themes
- BBQs on the wetlands
- Tree walks
- National Tree Week events.

The Nature Conservation Officer was thanked for his interesting and informative presentation.

### **Villages in Action**

Roger Werner from Villages in Action (VIA) reported that it was now in its 20<sup>th</sup> season. There was a menu launch event to which all village promoters were invited and two show case events. Achievements in the past twelve months included:

- Jurassic journey project.
- Working with three new communities in East Devon.
- Young promoters' project.

Villages in Action had won a contract with Devon County Council for three years of funding to provide performances across Devon and had also secured Arts Council funding. This allowed much greater freedoms and flexibilities in the future. VIA were looking to provide afternoon performances in residential homes, reaching people who found it difficult to get out.

Events planned for East Devon in the forthcoming year included:

- At least 28 village performances.
- Residential home performances.
- Exhibitions with Devon Guild of Craftsmen.
- Threads project – a textile project for older people.

The Forum agreed that local village hall events brought people together and improved the lives of people in East Devon. On behalf of the Forum the Chairman thanked Roger for his presentation and gave the Forum's support to Villages in Action.

**\*6 The future of the Thelma Hulbert Gallery**

Members considered a progress report on the Thelma Hulbert Gallery which had been presented to Cabinet on 6 March 2013.

The Forum agreed that the gallery offered a valuable community service. However, some members felt it needed to be more mainstream in terms of the exhibitions it offered. It needed to attract more visitors and raise more revenue. The gallery had made impressive progress but needed to show further valuable progress this year. Volunteers were critical to the success of the gallery.

Members of the Forum had many ideas on how to raise the profile, revenue and visitor numbers to the Thelma Hulbert Gallery, and discussed these in detail. The Forum agreed that the gallery needed focus from the Forum and that another meeting should be held soon. It was agreed that a small group meet to urgently consider options for the Thelma Hulbert Gallery and actions to take, with the aim of producing a summer action plan to increase footfall to the gallery and income.

**RESOLVED:** that Councillor O'Leary, Councillor Twiss, Councillor Whitlock, Councillor Tom Wright, Angela Blackwell, Denise Lyon and Gerri Bennett meet at the Thelma Hulbert Gallery at 4pm on Thursday 21 March 2013.

**\*7 Date of next meeting**

The Chairman thanked all those present for attending the meeting and gave particular thanks to the curator of the Thelma Hulbert Gallery.

**RESOLVED:** that the next meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum be held at 3.30 pm on Thursday 25 April 2013.

Chairman ..... Date .....