

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum held at the Beehive, Honiton on 10 October 2018

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00am and ended at 12.30pm.

***1 Chairman's welcome**

The Chairman welcomed everybody to the meeting and invited those present to introduce themselves.

***2 Appointment of vice chairman**

Sally Twiss was appointed vice chairman of the Forum for the ensuing year.

***3 Minutes**

The minutes of the Arts and Culture Forum meeting held on 14 March 2018 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

The Service Lead – Countryside and Leisure updated the Forum on minute 19 – EDDC what's on website. He reported that the Council had recruited a new digital communications officer who had been tasked to review and revise the best format for the 'what's on guide'. This would go beyond arts and culture in East Devon. It was suggested that the officer be invited to the next meeting of the Forum to discuss these proposals.

RESOLVED: that the Council's new digital communications officer be invited to the next meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum to discuss proposals for a what's on guide/website.

***4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

***5 Queen's Drive Exmouth – a cultural regeneration**

The Service Lead – Countryside and Leisure introduced and welcomed EDDC's Senior Manager – Regeneration and Economic Development, and Exmouth Town Council's Arts Manager to discuss Exmouth events summer 2018, which included Queen's Drive Space and Exmouth Festival.

The Senior Manager – Regeneration and Economic Development explained and outlined the Queen's Drive regeneration area. The site, which had been branded 'Queen's Drive Space' was split into three zones:

- A children's play area.
- A seating area with food and drinks beverage.
- An events space area for temporary uses.

There had been a multi team approach across EDDC to delivering these areas and the 'active' zones were visible from the roadside. It was noted that 'play and leisure' was not just about children. There was a good pop up food offer with approximately 8 or 9 local food outlets, which varied and changed. There was relaxed informal seating which had been built out of old pallets and the existing kiosk had become a bar, run by Oddfellows.

A stage had been built for music and theatre events and the first event held at the space was a live screening of Swan Lake, which 240 people attended.

Lessons learnt from the first season included:

- The need for strong partnerships.

- Advertising and promotion of Queen's Drive Space and events – more signage.
- Managing ticket sales and ticket pricing.
- Housekeeping.
- Range of foot outlets and their offer – more in the future.
- Positive feedback, people want similar in the future.
- Type of entertainment, location, timings.
- Encouraged by the level of support – offers of help to promote.
- Actions speak louder than words.
- Engaging a relatively younger audience.

The lack of Box Office in Exmouth was a problem. There had been no venue in the town to take cash for bookings. It was noted that Streetscene, when running events at other spaces across the district had experienced similar problems.

Overall the area had been very successful. The total budget for the area was £300,000, which included site clearance, infrastructure, staffing and events. It was that thought that this year the area had broken even, which was very encouraging and would be in a much stronger position the following year. Sponsorship had been obtained from some private sector businesses, including Stagecoach, Clinton Devon Estates, Dyball and Butler, as well as from Exmouth Town Council.

***6 Exmouth festival 2018 – review and plans for the future**

Exmouth Town Council's Arts Manager explained that Exmouth Festival had been on at the same time as the launch of Queen's Drive Space. She went on to give some background information about the Exmouth Festival, which had been going for approximately 20 years. The festival was a Town Council initiative but was very much community led. It had initially been held in Manor Gardens, but then grew and moved to Imperial Recreation Ground. Now approximately 6,000-7,000 people a day attended, with over 40,000 people attending over the whole event. The festival worked so well and was so popular because it was free. There was a huge amount of good will around it and it was used by the community to show case what it was doing all year. It provided for meaningful engagement and services such as the Thelma Hulbert Gallery and the Countryside Service also encouraged people in through their activities.

The event cost around £70,000 to run. £10,000 was provided by the town council and £5,000 from the district council. The Arts Manager applied for Arts Council funding every year, but this could not be relied up. Neither could the £10,000-£13,000 received from donations in buckets. The remaining £25,000 was generated from the festival, for example through the fair and food.

The Arts Manager organised the festival annually, with approximately 30 volunteers. More information was now provided on the website, with a smaller printed programme produced. It was hoped to move the West Country traditions event, which was held the weekend after the festival as there were so many events going on beforehand people tended to be fatigued. It was suggested that this could be combined into a traditions and food weekend and held in September.

It was noted that local businesses benefited from the festival week, but that this was difficult to quantify as the event was also held over the May bank holiday weekend. The Arts Manager reported that she would like to use a quantifier to demonstrate the value of the festival to the town. To evaluate the benefit of the festival would help with raising funds long term. The Senior Manager – Regeneration and Economic Development advised that

the aim for regeneration in Exmouth was to increase the economy and level of spend in the town.

On behalf of the Forum the Chairman thanked the Senior Manager – Regeneration and Economic Development and Arts Manager for very interesting presentations.

***7 Manor Pavilion Theatre summer season 2018 review and plans for improving the future**

The Service Lead - Countryside and Leisure introduced the Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager who had attend the meeting to report on the 2018 summer season and plans for the future. He reported that he had found the Exmouth presentation fascinating, with many cross over areas for the theatre.

The 12 days in 12 weeks summer season at the Manor Pavilion Theatre had just finished. Paul Taylor Mills had been operating the summer season for the past 6 years and had produced 72 plays. The Paul Taylor Mills name had given the theatre great credibility. The summer season 2018 had been the best season ever, with ticket sales and audience figures up on previous years. There had been a launch night in May, with an invited audience of 252. The next day ticket sales were open to the public, with people queuing outside the box office from 7:30am waiting to buy tickets. The Theatre Manager reported on the shows that had been particularly popular, as well as those that had not worked so well. Some nights and performances had been sold out. It was thought that the theatre had been hugely successful with the weather as there were more holiday makers around looking for something to do.

It was noted that the summer season ticket prices had remained the same but audience figures had increased. In 2015 the box office had made £157,000, in 2016 it had made £167,000, in 2017 it had made £196,000 and in 2018 the box office had made £203,000.

The Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager circulated the 'what's on guide' for the autumn season. He reported that there was a great programme ahead for next year, with stand up comedy in the autumn season and a new show for Christmas. Bookings were already being taken for 2021.

The Theatre Manager advised that consideration was being given to internet ticket sales. He did not want to rush into anything, but the demand and need was there and online ticket sales would be in place for next year.

Councillor Faithfull asked for the profit figures for the Manor Pavilion car park. The Service Lead – Countryside and Leisure reported that to the end of August (month 5) £10,000 had been collected. He would ask for the car parks team to provide Cllr Faithfull with the net figure. The income was already being used to improve the customer experience as the money was being reinvested into the theatre. The Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager advised that the introduction of the pay and display car park had caused no adverse effects whatsoever for the theatre goers/audience. People understood and supported it and there had been none of the previous problems of people being blocked in and the car park being used by non-users of the theatre. In addition to this, even when there was no event being held in the theatre, the car park was now generating extra revenue for the premises.

On behalf of the Forum the Chairman thanked the Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager for his report and was pleased that online ticket sales would soon be going ahead.

***8 Thelma Hulbert Gallery's projects update and plans for 2019**

The Chairman welcomed the Marketing and Fundraising Officer from the Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG) to the meeting. She explained that she would be focusing on one project during her presentation and went on to outline the 'Experiencing the Landscape: Art on the East Devon Way', which was a collaborative project between THG and East Devon AONB to celebrate 25 years of the East Devon Way. This was the first time that the THG had been working outside the gallery space.

Some of the reason behind the project were:

- Raise public awareness of the EDW and celebrate its 25-year anniversary.
- Combine the natural environment and art to promote health and wellbeing.
- Recognise the strengths that the arts bring to rural economies and tourism.
- Pave the way for ambitious ongoing creative activities, placing East Devon's AONB on the region's cultural map.
- Bring high quality diverse art to new audiences, redefining where and how art can take place.
- Support the practice of artists working in rural areas.
- Strategically develop these partnerships.

Project funding partners were:

- Arts Council England
- East Devon AONB
- The Northbrook Community Trust
- Parishes Together funding
- (Beer, Colyton and Honiton)
- Tesco Bags of Help
- The Elmgrant Trust
- Arts Council England (via THG)
- As well as some anticipated workshop income

The project involved:

- 18 artists
- 11 East Devon schools
- 24 public workshops across East Devon
- 3 new commissioned artworks
- Over 80 creative sessions in total
- A project exhibition at THG
- A celebratory community event at THG, a museums at night party on 27 October 2018, 5pm – 7pm.

The project involved the THG partnering with seven local and national festivals and events:

- East Devon Heath Week
- Dorset Arts Week
- Devon Artists Network Open Studios
- Sidmouth and East Devon Walking Festival
- LED Walking for Health
- The Big Draw
- Museums at Night

Overall the project involved reaching greater audiences and meeting the needs of surrounding rural communities. EDDC's Senior Manager – Regeneration and Economic Development commented that she found the presentation fascinating and how important creativity was for people's well-being and mental health. She hoped that in the future the THG could link up with the Queen's Drive Space to offer things such as arts workshops, or wildlife walks run by the Countryside Service, starting at Queens Drive.

On behalf of the Forum the Chairman thanked the Marketing and Fundraising Officer for her presentation and thanked the team at THG for all their hard work.

***9 EDDC Countryside water vole recovery project and local charcoal produce initiative**

The Chairman introduced the Countryside Service's Team Leader for EDDC's local nature reserves, who explained two different and exciting commercial ventures. Both initiatives demonstrated how the Countryside team was looking to increase important wildlife and also how to grow an income from the nature reserves that would support these types of wildlife projects.

The first project was the water vole recovery project, which involved a two year phased introduction of water voles to the Seaton Wetlands area. Mink control was the great threat to this project, although there had been far fewer mink sightings this year and otters had also returned to the area and were the best natural form of minx defence. This meant that the habitat was more sustainable for the water voles. There were four key locations and technology was being used to monitor the sites. Volunteers were now being utilised in more proactive ways. 213 water voles were released in the first release, with a similar number planned for the following year. It was hoped that the water voles would become a positive attractive feature for visitors of the wetlands. It was noted that the Seaton Wetlands had a passive ask for donations and that weekly site income donation income represented a roughly 50/50 split between refreshment offer and donation post in car park.

The second project involved a mobile charcoal making kiln. The Countryside Service had invested in the Exeter retort, a charcoal making kiln. The arising from the woodlands the service managed would be converted into high quality barbeque charcoal, which were much more environmentally friendly than using briquettes and other charcoals. The Countryside Team Leader explained the robust process involved in using the retort, which took seven hours to produce 180 kilos of charcoal. It was a very effective for use on the dispersed local nature reserves and could also be hired out to other organisations.

The Countryside Service would be the exclusive supplier of locally produced charcoal for Darts Farm next year. It had been decided to use just one outlet and Darts Farm was a good, high quality brand to be associated with. There were three types of charcoal; woodland, hedgerow and heathland and these would be branded and include the badge 'made on East Devon nature reserves'. There would also be a tag giving more information about the area where the charcoal was made and how and where to visit it. Over a 26 week season it was expected to provide an income of £2,860, based on 20 bags per week being sole at £5.50 per bag. This was from core work and materials that would otherwise have been bonfired.

On behalf of the Forum the Chairman thanked the Countryside Team Leader for presenting these commercial approaches to the countryside. The Service Lead – Countryside and Leisure explained that these were examples of how the council was looking at ways to generate revenue to support service areas and meet budgetary challenges.

***10 Any other business**

The Chairman informed the Forum that a request had been received from Wendy Urqhart, the Beehive's events programme coordinator to join the Forum as an independent member. He reported that Wendy had a long experience in helping to deliver cultural activities in East Devon with her involvement in Villages in Action within Stockland and supporting all forms of performing arts within East Devon. She would bring passion, enthusiasm and as well as a wealth of experience to the Forum that would highlight the needs and opportunities for East Devon's arts venues.

RESOLVED: that Wendy Urqhart be invited to attend the next meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum to introduce herself and explain how she would help develop the aims and ambitions of the Forum.

***11 Date of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum would be held during early 2019, with a date to be confirmed in due course.

Attendance list

Present:

EDDC Councillors:

Cllr John O'Leary – Culture Champion (Chairman)

Cllr Peter Faithfull

Community representatives:

Sally Twiss

Town representatives:

Cllr Bruce de Saram - Exmouth

Cllr John Dyson - Sidmouth

Cllr Duncan Sheridan-Shaw - Honiton

Officers:

Charlie Plowden, Service Lead – Countryside and Leisure

Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer

Graham Whitlock, Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager

Also present:

James Chubb – Countryside Team Leader

Alison Hayward – Senior Manager, Regeneration and Economic Development

Carla Hiley – Exmouth Arts Manager

Emma Molony - Marketing & Fundraising Officer, Thelma Hulbert Gallery

Apologies:

Cllr Sarah Gunn – Cranbrook Town Council

Cllr Andrew Moulding – Axminster Town Council

Cllr Elli Pang – Ottery St Mary Town Council

Cllr Tom Wright – Budleigh Salterton

John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment

Chairman

Date.....