

Member Champion for Arts and Culture – Report for Annual Council 2022

This year marks the end of a challenging but exciting period for the arts and culture sector. The challenge is in the form of arts funding being under pressure both at a local level, but also at a national level, with The Arts Council having faced a challenging time even before the pandemic, including lottery funding being reduced. The excitement comes from the recovery from that pandemic, with venues reopening and people being hungry for their fix of music, art and local cultural experiences.

Locally, we have seen exhibitions at various venues across East Devon - part of a concerted effort to widen the influence of the Thelma Hulbert Gallery. Mikhail Karikis, an innovative artist who works in the media of film exhibited two pieces, one at Ocean in Exmouth and a second, his critically acclaimed piece Children of the Unquiet at the Thelma Hulbert Gallery. This followed Mike Perry's Land / Sea, a pop up exhibition at Ocean, focussed on how environments have changed and in some ways mourning the loss of what was once. THG have also continued their outreach and education work across the country including more appearances from The Creative Cabin, our mobile gallery / workshop designed to involve as many people in creating art as possible.

Speaking personally, I have been delighted to see many of the grass roots venues returning to action. Local pubs have resumed musical performances and jam nights are popular. Communities, including my own in Exmouth, have really missed their scene and it's great to see it back, recovering and hopefully going from strength to strength. The Pavillion in Exmouth has resumed its usual selection of performances and our very own Manor Pavillion Theatre in Sidmouth has a full and exciting of events programmed, and selling well.

This year has seen further development of ACED, effectively our directory of arts and culture groups and offerings in the district. Bringing together the diverse elements of everything we can offer to tourists and residents is at the heart of this initiative. This has run alongside our Arts and Culture Forum, when more internal matters are now discussed.

At this point I'd like to offer my heartfelt thanks to Ruth Gooding and Charlie Plowden, along with their respective teams, for their work bringing together, consulting on and reviewing our culture strategy. When this document arrives, I believe we will have a positive, forward thinking strategy which aims to expand on, organically grow and encourage involvement in the arts across the district.

With that, comes a plea, obviously! In these financially challenged times, arts and culture are often the first things to go from the list of priorities when it comes to spending. Please bear in mind, the compelling evidence that can be found, from our own work and that nationally and internationally, which shows the financial gains that we can reap from tourism by keeping the faith. Let's make East Devon a focus of the arts in the south west - one to be proud of and one which people from across the country will come to visit.

As for my own contribution to 'art', I've been playing a few gigs since pubs have reopened, and can reveal that I'll be playing at the Pride Fest I always in Exmouth on the 18th June at 12pm. Come along and celebrate the festival with me, if you dare...

Councillor Joe Whibley

Member Champion for Arts & Culture

May 2022