

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 4 March 2020

Public Document: Yes

Exemption: None

Review date for release None



Subject: **Thelma Hulbert Gallery's new strategic direction and programming**

Purpose of report: To report to Cabinet the refocussing of the THG's work programme and priorities to deliver the new Council Plan's aims and objectives. The appointment of a new Gallery Manager and the need to develop a new Business Plan for the gallery provides an opportunity to reset specific goals over the next 3 years. The emphasis going forward will be on how the THG can help to deliver complex issues such as the Council's commitment to climate change, integrate its work programme into enhancing and celebrating East Devon's outstanding natural environment and working with local communities to help with place making initiatives.

Recommendation: **Cabinet to approve and endorse the new strategic direction for the Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG).**

Reason for recommendation: The Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG) has appointed a new Gallery Manager and will be developing a new Business Plan for the THG which includes a refocussing of its strategic direction to better align with the new Council Plan's aims and objectives. The report and presentation provide Cabinet with the proposed 'direction of travel' for the THG.

Officer: Charlie Plowden, Service Lead – Countryside & Leisure
CPlowden@eastdevon.gov.uk 01404 515616

Ruth Gooding, Gallery & Arts Development Manager
RGooding@eastdevon.gov.uk 01404 45008

Portfolio Holder: Portfolio Holder for Environment

Financial implications: There are no direct financial implications as a consequence of this report.

Legal implications: There are no direct legal implications requiring comment.

Equalities impact: Low Impact

Climate change: Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk

Links to background information:

Link to [Council Plan](#): Outstanding Place and Environment

Report in full

1. Background

- 1.1 The Gallery's work is set in the context of the Council's priority work under 'Outstanding Place and Environment' section of the Council Plan. A major aspect of the THG team's work is engaging with the district's community groups and hard to reach groups to help improve their quality of life through workshops and projects that help tackle a range of issues such as health and wellbeing, rural isolation, social cohesion, using art to understand complex educational issues. These important contributions over the last six years have helped to deliver our Council Plan's priorities and is recognised as an important function of the THG.
- 1.2 In 2019 the strategic mission of THG was redefined as operating as a '**cultural hub**' supporting communities in their **health, environment** and **well-being** through an annually changing programme of exhibitions, events and workshops, which inspire, challenge and excite. The gallery is driven to support **innovation** in rural cultural production and operate as a **resilient** rural arts organisation, strengthened through working in **partnership** and **collaboration**. The THG is preparing to apply to Arts Council England for National Portfolio Organisation status (2022-26). Following the announcement of the Arts Council England 2020-30 strategy, the gallery is in a strong position, already performing highly across all planned outcomes from the new 10 year Strategy.

2. THG & Social Value

- 2.1 The THG is now a core part of delivering EDDC's health and wellbeing agenda and our commitment to social inclusion as it has been firmly embedded into the work of the Gallery team and its key achievements since 2015/16. The THG is also playing a lead role in engaging with organisations such as Mind, Switch, Early Help Forum, Memory Cafes and Children Centres across East Devon to deliver activities that will help support individuals in coping with issues of mental health and wellbeing. This has led to the THG becoming a nationally accredited Dementia friendly gallery through leading workshops in partnership with the District's network of Memory cafes and also organisations such as Age UK, Alzheimer's Society and Mind.
- 2.2 Looking to the future, as these social prescribing responsibilities are now set up and successfully supporting numerous groups, there is recognition within the health care arena that the THG is providing important and meaningful support to these specific areas of healthcare and making a tangible difference to people's lives. This role is fully recognised and explained within East Devon DC's Public Health Plan.

3. Arts Council England Strategy 2020-30

- 3.1 Arts Council England's Strategy for 2020-30 is built around three Outcomes and four Investment Principles. They are designed to work together to achieve a vision of a country in which the creativity of 'each of us' is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where 'every one of us' has access to a range of high-quality cultural experiences.
- 3.2 The three Outcomes focus in turn on how people can develop personal creativity at every stage of their lives; how culture is created by and with **people in their communities**, and how it shapes the places in which they live, work, learn and visit; and the development of the innovative, **collaborative** and **internationally** facing **professional cultural sector** that we believe will be needed over the next decade. The first Outcome focuses on **amateur and voluntary creative activity**, including by children and young people. The third Outcome looks at the professional cultural sector, including those seeking to develop a career in the

creative industries after they leave full-time education. The second Outcome brings the first and third Outcomes together by considering how the professional and voluntary sectors can work with each other to help shape stronger cultural provision in villages, towns and cities.

3.3 The Arts Council England also produced a report in 2019 'Value of Arts and Culture in Place Shaping' that shows that arts and culture are as important as good schools when people make their decisions about where to live. There is not only tangible value in investment in the arts, but also a significant public demand for it. In the Report those surveyed, 44% said the local arts scene is an important factor, compared with 43% saying the same about schools. The presence of a theatre or a gallery – places where people gather to enjoy themselves and share an experience can help to sustain towns through the transformations that towns experience through time. Galleries or theatres can generate local pride and help to forge a new identity based on creativity, while still celebrating their past.

3.4 As well as considering the benefits to communities, people are also drawn to places with a strong artistic offering because they recognise the value of creativity to themselves as individuals. According to the report, nearly two-thirds of people think that arts and culture are good for wellbeing, and 36% think arts and culture are "essential to life". People who attended a wide range of arts and cultural events reported higher levels of satisfaction with their lives than those who did not, even after accounting for other factors that influence life satisfaction.

3.5 Artists and arts organisations can also shape conversations about the environment. They can challenge and be provocative, both informing and opening our minds. Recently there has been an overwhelming response from arts and cultural organisations to put this conversation centre stage. A range of innovative projects that engage audiences in the issue of climate change are now beginning to emerge across the country, working with leading visual artists, creative technologists and scientists to encourage meaningful responses to environmental issues. These are highlighting issues around plastic in drinking water or raising awareness of biodiversity in UK woodlands; The arts has an important role in helping society to face up to the challenge of climate change and create a more sustainable future for us all.

4. Arts Council England & Climate Change

4.1 Arts Council England wants cultural organisations (such as the THG) to act as leaders within their communities in terms of taking an environmentally responsible approach to running businesses and buildings: by lowering carbon emissions, increasing levels of recycling, cutting their use of plastic and reducing water consumption.

4.2 There is also an expectation from the Arts Council England to promote the need for environmental responsibility in the communities in which cultural organisations work, through their partnerships and with their audiences. This means the THG should be aware of the cultural sector's role in helping to lead change, and so the gallery should aim to be innovative and responsive in the choices it makes.

5. THG's new strategic direction

5.1 The THG has recognised the need to meet these new challenges going forward and with the appointment of a new Gallery Manager and the need to develop a new five year Business Plan (2020-2025) the moment and opportunity is now. The challenge that has been set for the THG is:

- To help deliver the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan by helping local communities understand the complex issues facing them through climate change by commissioning workshops and artists to engage in better understanding these challenges and finding solutions.

- To mainstream the work of the THG into the Council's commitments to its natural environment through using art and artists to help our communities to better understand, connect and engage with their green spaces and the wildlife that lives amongst it.
- To help deliver the Council's regeneration schemes by commissioning artists and public art to help improve the public realm and enable place making schemes that will enable a cultural dimension to the regeneration schemes, develop civic pride in public spaces that have been neglected or attracted anti-social behaviour.

5.2 The THG has set about meeting these challenges through a series of programmes and projects that are and will be working with local communities, schools, developers and other Council teams such as Countryside, Streetscene, Planning, Estates and Housing. This will ensure there is a joined up approach corporately, a maximisation of resources and clear identification of how the THG can add value.

6. THG's Culture + Climate Change 2020 programme:

6.1 In 2020, against the context of East Devon District Council's commitment to Devon's Climate Change Emergency declaration, and the University of Exeter's declaration of an environment and climate emergency, Thelma Hulbert Gallery and the University of Exeter are working together to deliver a series of ambitious exhibitions, projects and public programme. Audiences will be invited to participate in a range of activities at Thelma Hulbert Gallery, the University and diverse locations across East Devon. The core messages align to the strategic plan and service plans: Walking and health, The natural environment and conservation, reuse, repair, recycle

6.2 THG's Culture + Climate 2020 exhibitions and project highlights:

- Working in partnership with Tate and National Galleries of Scotland, ARTIST ROOMS Richard Long *Being in the Moment* opened on Saturday 22nd February 2020. It is a presentation of work by renowned Sculptor and Land Artist Sir Richard Long. The exhibition follows museum standards of display and interpretation, made possible through a generous exhibition bursary. This exhibition is followed by Mike Perry, *LAND/SEA which* runs throughout the summer (5th June – 5th September) featuring two widely acclaimed collections of environmental photography.
- Running in parallel to both exhibitions is an ambitious and wide-reaching environmentally themed learning and outreach programme, designed to reach new audiences and strengthen partnerships.
- Specific audiences include: Families from low socio-economic backgrounds, rurally isolated older people, Young people, Young people with additional needs and new audiences with little experience of cultural engagement. The ambition of the programme could only be realized with further generous support from Tate/National Galleries of Scotland, East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Arts Council England and University of Exeter.
- The programme has been a catalyst for high profile partners and strategic regional and local collaborations: including: Tate, National Galleries of Scotland, University of Exeter, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Beehive, Seaton Jurassic, The School of Art and Wellbeing and Devon Recovery Network (DRLN/NHS). Our work with DRLN uses art and the environment as a springboard to keeping mentally well using the format CLANG: **C**onnect, **L**earn, be **A**ctive, **N**otice, **G**ive back.
- This year the THG are also trailing two different models of engaging audiences from further afield including Exeter, Bristol and Plymouth. This is exploring and celebrating THG's role and voice in rural place making and cultural programming, while highlighting and inviting dialogue around the cultural and environmental achievements and challenges in East Devon:
- University of Exeter presents Creative Dialogues with Richard Long - At the Beehive, Honiton 13th May 2020

- Culture and Climate Change 2020 symposium. Various locations across East Devon including Exmouth, Seaton, Thelma Hulbert Gallery and School of Art and Wellbeing. June 18th & 19th 2020
- In 2020, following a successful application to HLF to fund a volunteer development project, THG will be working in the community developing training programmes for existing and new volunteers. Our new volunteer team who come from a range of backgrounds and ages (15-90), will receive specialist professional and creative training and equipment to enable them to support us to deliver our ambitious programme.

7. THG's 'Out and About' programme

7.1 THG's 'Out and About' programme is a way of bringing the benefits of cultural activities direct to the residents of East Devon and shine a spotlight on the districts outstanding natural environment for all to enjoy. It makes cultural activities accessible and a 'way of life', where everyone can enjoy culture in the outdoors, benefiting health and wellbeing.

7.2 THG 'Out and About' works in the outdoors to engage diverse audiences through participatory, interactive and unusual creative processes. It employs a range of creative practitioners from poets to artists, sculptors to designers, sharing ideas on our heritage and natural environment, inspiring and exciting communities locally, nationally and globally.

7.3 **Abode of Love, Exmouth - June 2020.** *Abode of Love* is an area on the beachfront of Exmouth. It runs along the back of the beach approximately 342 feet long, with 9 bays each 38 feet long intercepted by a flight of stairs leading up to the main road, acting as a flood defence. THG has devised a two year public art programme enabling an artist of national acclaim (Simon Terrill) to work with schools and groups of young people to develop a public artwork which responds to the site and context of the climate emergency. Historically the area has attracted anti-social behaviour. Working in collaboration with EDDC Countryside's Wild Exmouth project, participants will re-imagine the site as a social space. The project launches as part of the Culture + Climate symposium 18th June.

7.4 **Out and About & Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (EDAONB).** In 2020 THG enters its third year of partnership working with East Devon AONB. The Culture + Climate programme has been a catalyst for a programme of activity focused on nature connection: workshops, walks, maps and talks. This includes the launch of the Harpford's woods activity jars. A trail of activities inviting visitors to use the woods for creativity and wellbeing. A highlight of the partnership will be the presentation of Mike Perry's environmental photography at the University of Exeter, as part of the National Association of AONBs Conference being held in Devon in July 2020.

8. Summary

The THG has a clear role in helping to tackle the considerable challenges of addressing the Council's priorities on Climate Change through a mixture of engaging with communities, trying to help people to understand the complex challenges faced and how individually we can make a difference. The exciting new partnerships developed with the Tate and Exeter University will help to take this ambition forward. The connections being made with East Devon's outstanding environment with the 'Out & About' programme will bring a much closer and collaborative relationship with East Devon DC's Countryside team and the two AONBs. The new programme is the start of a bold and ambitious strategic direction and a way of working for the THG which will help it to deliver many of the challenges within the new Council Plan.