

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the meeting of Arts and Culture Forum held at Online via the Zoom app on 3 December 2020**

#### **Attendance list at end of document**

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.50 pm

#### **10 Public speaking**

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

#### **11 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 February 2020 were agreed as a true record.

#### **12 Declarations of interest**

4. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Andrew Moulding, Personal, Trustee of Axminster Heritage Ltd  
President of Axminster Musical Theatre  
President of Cloakham Lawn Sports Centre.

4. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Bruce De Saram, Personal, Exmouth Town Councillor.

4. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Joe Whibley, Personal, Exmouth Town Councillor.

4. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Olly Davey, Personal, Exmouth Town Councillor.

#### **13 EDDC culture recovery work (April - October 2020)**

This was covered during the presentation for the next agenda item.

#### **14 Recovery challenges overview**

The Service Lead – Countryside and Leisure welcomed all those present to the meeting and gave a presentation on how his teams had responded to the Covid 19 pandemic.

The impact of lockdown had been keenly felt in the arts and culture sector. There had already been a reduction in funding since 2010, which had had a huge impact on the industry. Theatres, galleries, events and festivals were all shutdown first in April 2020 and were the last to reopen. There was a rescue package of £1.57 billion from the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), however local authority run venues were not eligible, therefore EDDC had not benefitted from this funding. DCMS guidance only allowed for theatres to achieve 30% capacity, which was not commercially viable for many. Galleries had been able to partially reopen with social distancing, but valuable income streams such as cafes, restaurants and shops remained closed.

The Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG) had shut during lockdown with the majority of staff furloughed, and exhibitions and outreach and events programming postponed. The Manor Pavilion Theatre also closed with all staff furloughed and box office redundancies and the restructuring of staff. The Countryside team postponed all schools, public events and volunteering activities. It was a credit to the organisations' relationships that many of the pre-booked performances, exhibitions and events had been rescheduled for the following year. All the teams had reprogrammed and adapted venues and activities to meet the challenges ahead and ensure they were Covid compliant. It was acknowledged that people in the arts were creative and the pandemic had provided both threats and opportunities.

A positive impact of lockdown had been the responding, reimagining and repurposing of planned activities. Lockdown had also given people the opportunity to engage with their natural environment, and with traffic levels reduced there had been a resurgence within the natural environment. A significant rise was seen in visitor numbers to all the local nature reserves. Both the THG and Wild East Devon reimaged their public events programmes and these were often fully booked within 24 hours of going live.

All East Devon's green spaces and cultural venues had never been as valued for both their contribution to mental and physical well-being as now. Investment in securing new green spaces for local communities was required as well as investment in new technology to recover income. The pandemic had shown beyond doubt the social value of the Council's nature reserves, arts, events and performances to all its communities and their wellbeing.

There was an opportunity to put arts and culture into the public eye following lockdown, with promotional messages highlighting activities as well as health and well-being. This could include an expansion of East Devon's tourism offer.

## 15 **Thelma Hulbert Gallery Creative Cabin project**

The Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG) Curator's presentation looked back on 2020 and celebrated the successes. In 2020, against the context of EDDC's commitment to Devon's Climate Change Emergency declaration, and the University of Exeter's declaration of an environment and climate emergency, the THG and University of Exeter planned to work together to deliver a series of ambitious exhibitions, projects and public programme. This included:

- Artist Rooms Richard Long.
- Creative Cabin - a project launched with Wild East Devon, a new travelling creative space which hosted an array of activities.
- Abode of Love – although the original activity was paused this was then reconfigured, and it also combatted the anti-social behaviour that was happening in the area.

During lockdown an online project had been run called 'Nature Shorts' – a series showcasing art practises which inspired, built creativity and deepened connection with nature. It explored how people connected with nature, particularly during periods of isolation, sharing different artistic approaches to land and space.

Another project was Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Talking Heads – in 2020 THG forged a new partnership with both East Devon AONB and Blackdown Hills AONB to deliver a diverse creative programme explaining our relationship with the natural world.

The Forum agreed that it was fantastic to hear how dynamic the THG was being and congratulated the team on the positive projects which were so valuable to people's health and well-being.

16 **Abode of Love update**

The Thelma Hulbert Gallery's Curator covered this in her previous presentation (minute 15 refers).

17 **Thelma Hulbert Gallery reopening and Richard Long exhibition**

The Thelma Hulbert Gallery's Curator covered this in her previous presentation (minute 15 refers).

18 **Wild East Devon events programme**

The Countryside Team Leader outlined to the Forum the Wild East Devon events recovery programme. It had been a difficult year, but all local nature reserves had remained open throughout. However, there had been huge restrictions on outdoor learning and some staff had been on furlough.

The events offer had been reinvented, with around 55 family/household events being run over the summer, with everything fully booked and hugely successful. Despite the pandemic Wild East Devon had raised £5500 in revenue, which was a testament to the team and also showed how well the public had responded to the events.

There had been a large audience drive through social marketing. During lockdown many people were looking for activities and outdoor ideas. There was a self-guided sculpture trail at Seaton Wetlands which had been a great success. The Wild Swimming project had also been a great success, selling out within 30 minutes.

Wild East Devon had also launched an art competition for a calendar, encouraging people to use their art skills and enjoy nature. This had just gone to print.

The Leader expressed his congratulations and thanks to the Wild East Devon project at Seaton Wetlands, which was an excellent example of combining environmental work with an extraordinary arts offer.

19 **Wild Exmouth**

The Countryside Team Leader explained that the second year of programme had been rejigged due to the Covid 19 pandemic, with the main aims of getting people out enjoying nature and linking them to the outside environment.

The purposes of the project were:

- Conservation volunteering
- Outdoor events
- Mapping and access
- Nature campaigns

The four themes of Wild Exmouth were:

- Wild and active
- Wild at home

- Wild around town
- Wild learning

Second year successes included:

- Increasing volunteers
- 65 orchard trees in two new locations
- Covid safe family bookable events:
  - Family bat walks
  - Bumble bee webinar
  - Family bee walks
  - Small group tree planting
  - Family bird box building
  - Family pond dipping
- Green space map
- Growth of 'my patch for nature' – a very successful and low cost project which could easily be scaled up across the district
- 16 volunteer days – within 'the rule of 6', including:
  - Tree planting
  - Event support
  - Wildflower seed packing
  - Practical projects
  - Orchard guardians
  - Pond restoration
- 6 newsletters

Overall the project had run more events than originally planned in the pandemic, with a large rise in social marketing.

The Strategic Lead – Housing and Environment commented that Wild Exmouth was an excellent example of rewilding and nature recovery. The project had joined up with Street Scene and agreed to leave certain areas of grass long and then maintained for diversity in nature.

A Wild Exmouth map had been designed and would be provided to every household in Exmouth, as well as being used in four locations as an interpretation map around the town. It showed how people could enjoy the green spaces around the town and would be launched in the new year.

It was noted that the funding for similar projects in other towns would be dependent on the outcomes of the project and the size of the town.

The Countryside Team Leader was thanked for his presentation and the amazing work of the Wild Exmouth team.

## 20 **Cultural plans - "re-imagined programme" 2021/22**

This item was covered under the following agenda items.

## 21 **Thelma Hulbert Gallery culture and climate change programme and exhibitions 2021/22**

The THG Curator outlined the 2021 programme for the Thelma Hulbert Gallery, which was very responsive to what had happened in 2020 and involved creating communities and captured the changing planet.

Events planned for 2021 included:

- Mikhail Kariki's Children of the Unquiet (2013-14) - involving renewable energy, climate change, community participation and song.
- In Plain Sight London Group – exploring the concept of perception.
- Ingrid Pollard
- Mike Perry Land/Sea – the tension between human activity and interventions in the natural environment, and the fragility of the planet's ecosystems.
- Volunteer project – a new project to make the opportunity more accessible and inclusive to volunteers with additional needs, funded through Devon County Council, focussing on mental health and using the Creative Cabin.
- John Francis art history lecture series.

The Forum agreed that the THG was offering a really exciting programme and that the gallery was very lucky to be having some of the projects. It offered real diversity and a great opportunity to promote the gallery during 2021.

## 22 **Wild Honiton project - nature recovery network pilot**

The Countryside Engagement and Participation Officer outlined 'Wild Honiton' to the Forum. This was a 2 year project led by EDDC's Wild East Devon team. It was aimed at improving the green space and residents' connection to green spaces. The two themes were nature recovery (year one) and nature connection (year two).

The Forum noted a map of the key areas in Honiton as well as the timeline for the project, which was currently on target, with consultation being completed. It was hoped to deliver the project from March 2021-2023.

The Engagement and Participation Officer was pleased with the consultation responses, with a large proportion of responses being in the younger age ranges, therefore engaging with a different audience to usual. The four improvements people would most like to be made were:

- More wildflower meadows.
- Installation of bird and bug boxes.
- More tree planting.
- Improvements with the aim of making visitors more comfortable, healthy and happy.

40% of people said Wild East Devon could make it easier for them to access the outdoor, public open spaces in Honiton.

The first year of the project would focus on the creation and set up of the network, with year two building on the framework to focus on the development and expansion of the project to targeted groups of people in Honiton.

There were three delivery options for the Wild Honiton project:

1. Delivered entirely by the team.
2. Delivered with a project officer.
3. Delivered with a mix of the above.

The Strategic Lead – Countryside and Leisure explained that Wild Exmouth had been very successful and that the proposal was to scale up the Wild Towns initiative so that eventually all East Devon's towns would be able to benefit from the improvement of its green spaces and wildlife. The Wild East Devon team was limited by team capacity, however it was hoped that after each Wild Town project a sustainable legacy would be left through establishing a strong community volunteering network. It would be a long term project, with each town presenting its own challenges.

All those present acknowledged how important the arts were in maintaining people's mental health.

### 23 **Manor Pavilion theatre reopening planning**

The Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager explained to the Forum the situation with the Manor Pavilion Theatre. The theatre was about to start its busiest season in March 2020, but had been unable to open and forced to cancel over 20 shows. Fortunately the computerised Box Office system allowed customers to be easily contacted and refunded. It was noted that as well as the lost revenue through ticket sales, the theatre had also lost income usually made in ice cream and bar sales.

The venue was Covid safe and planned to reopen in February 2021, with a different way of operating. Current regulations only allowed for 80-90 people per production (normal seating capacity was 277) and a deep clean taking place between performances. 19 shows had been rebooked and it was planned to work more closely with organisations for co-productions rather than operating as a hire only venue. A pantomime production was scheduled for June 2021. The Manager believed that audiences would be regained in the future, with the theatre coming back stronger, better and improved.

The Service Lead – Countryside and Leisure reported that the Council had a new events officer who would be invited to a future meeting to discuss her role in supporting cultural events

### 24 **Date of next meeting**

The Chair thanked everyone present at the meeting and acknowledged how useful it had been to see what the arts and culture services were doing across the Council. The teams' adaptations had been impressive and their positivity was great.

It was agreed to hold the next meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum in late February/early March 2021, with the date to be confirmed in due course.

#### **Attendance List**

##### **EDDC Councillors present:**

J Whibley (Chair)  
B De Saram  
S Jackson  
G Jung  
O Davey  
A Moulding

##### **Community representatives:**

S Twiss

**Town Representatives**

K Briggs, Seaton Town Council  
S Twiss, Community Representative  
C Buchan, Cranbrook Town Council  
E Pang, Ottery St Mary Town Council

**Officers in attendance:**

Tim Dafforn, Countryside Team Leader  
Ruth Gooding, Manager/Curator THG  
Charles Plowden, Service Lead Countryside and Leisure  
Graham Whitlock, House Manager (Manor Pavilion Theatre)  
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer  
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer  
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment  
Carla Hiley, Exmouth Arts Manager

**Also Present**

P Faithfull  
P Arnott  
J Bailey  
P Hayward  
P Millar  
A Colman  
N Hookway

**Apologies:**

B Norris, Community Representative  
J Loudoun

Chairman .....

Date: .....