

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Arts and Culture Forum held online via the Zoom app on 24 February 2021

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.40 pm

25 Public speaking

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

26 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 December 2020 were agreed as a true record.

27 Declarations of interest

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

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Bruce De Saram, Personal, Exmouth Town Councillor.

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Joe Whibley, Personal, Exmouth Town Councillor.

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Olly Davey, Personal, Exmouth Town Councillor and he had performed at the Sidmouth Folk Festival in the past.

28 Resilience, Adaptation and Innovation Fund for East Devon businesses

The Service Lead – Growth, Development and Prosperity presented his report, previously considered by Cabinet, which set out proposals to launch a fund (Adaptation, Innovation and Resilience Fund) aimed at supporting businesses and other organisations to adapt to the post pandemic landscape and associated changes in operating conditions.

He demonstrated the proportion of employment furloughed in the UK and it was noted that accommodation and food, and arts, entertainment and recreation were the two highest sectors. These sectors also fell into the category of businesses with less than three months cashflow.

Those present were implored to look at the fantastic opportunity that the Adaptation, Innovation and Resilience Fund gave for the cultural sector in East Devon and officers were keen to see applications being made. It was noted that there was no bar for those organisations that had previously benefitted from discretionary funds.

Members of the Forum agreed that arts and culture were often overlooked, but felt that it was one of the things that had sustained people over the past year during the pandemic. It was regarded as a crucial way of allowing people to come together. It was also a positive thing to offer holiday makers and visitors to the region following lockdown. Arts and culture were crucial to financial, psychological and social recovery.

29 **Sector insights - guest speakers**

The Arts Development Manager/Thelma Hulbert Gallery Curator welcomed a number of guest speakers to the meeting to explain to the forum the variety of activities that were being undertaken in the arts and culture sector. These demonstrated that out of adversity came opportunity and were examples of diversity, ambition and brilliance.

30 **Visual arts - Tidelines - Anne-Marie Culhane and Jo Salter**

Anne-Marie Culhane and Jo Salter introduced themselves and explained that Tidelines with as not-for-profit CIC (community interest company) serving the community. The pilot year was funded by University of Exeter 'Socially Engaged University' funding. It was co-ordinated by Anne-Marie and Jo, with an advisory group and support from a wide group of individuals and partners. Arts and culture was seen as crucial to navigating climate change and the ecological crisis.

The aims and objectives of Tidelines were to:

- Focus on and celebrate the estuary and coastline.
- Increase public understanding of and interest in the estuary and coastline to develop greater care of it.
- Interpret and create artworks – to see and experience differently.
- Create opportunities for active participation in real community-led research.
- Create an ongoing programme of events and activities that focused creatively on different aspects of the estuary.
- Through the above to develop discussion, learning and care for the area, including restoration and re-envisioning new possibilities for sustainability, resilience and co-existence at a time of climate change and ecological crisis.

The Covid-19 pandemic had occurred during Tidelines' pilot year. Despite this a number of online activities and events had occurred, as well as The Exe Estuary Box, summer read of *The Sea Around Us*, and High Water. An exhibition/display event was planned for summer 2021. Examples of a mapping part of the project were shown to the Forum and indicated how different people experienced the estuary differently.

Anne-Marie and Jo went on to explain how Tidelines had come about and why there was a need:

- Increasing curiosity about the estuary and environment (from all sections of the community). People want to know more and to get involved.
- Gap in accessible information provision and community involvement: no place to learn more about the place we live.
- Introduce a greater presence of the arts and to foster an all year round creative culture.
- Community health and wellbeing: It was positive to be actively involved.

- Linking across communities, geography, arts & environment; co-creating a new culture.
- To address the mismatch between academic and scientific research on our doorstep and public information
- Responding to changes in the policies of universities and local government:
 - interest from universities in working with and communicating with local and regional community (Civic Universities)
 - Declaration of Climate & Ecological Emergency.

They believed that Tidelines could develop into a great asset for the community in many simple ways. It could also improve the environment and mitigate for climate change.

Tidelines' plans for the future were:

- Exhibition and event to share back artwork and responses to the Exe Estuary Box and invite people to the next phase.
- Further developing the next stage of community co-designed research projects.
- Developing funding bids with partners.
- Keep developing links to other projects beyond the estuary.
- Exploring options for a Tidelines hub.

On behalf of the Forum the Chair thanked Anne-Marie and Jo for their presentation and wished Tidelines well for its next year.

31 **Museums - Anne Tanner, Curator, Sidmouth Museum**

Anne Tanner, Sidmouth Museum Curator outlined the history of Sidmouth Museum. It was a volunteer run museum owned by the Sid Vale Association. It was founded in 1846 and was a registered charity with over 1,500 members. The role as a museum was to conserve, inform and share Sidmouth's extraordinary heritage.

The museum had experienced a very good 2019 season and a full programme of winter works had been completed by 10 March 2020. The museum was due to open on 20 March 2020, however, all events were cancelled on 16 March due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A covid risk assessment was carried in April 2020 and this was re-assessed in August, with a decision to remain closed for the 2020 season. Reasons for this included:

- Narrow staircase and small rooms made it impossible to follow social distancing guidelines.
- Many displays required 'hands on' interaction by visitors.
- 90% of the volunteers were over 70 and many were considered vulnerable.

Closing the museum gave time to re-imagine the new normal and devise ways to connect with visitors and give greater access to the archives and collections. A project was designed to develop and deliver the first digital offer. The museum successfully applied for a South West Museums Recovery Grant for the cost of equipment. The outcomes of this were:

- No 'dead zones' anywhere in the building.
- A separate guest wifi network.
- QR codes for all displays.
- Digital photobox history of Sidmouth – this offered greater flexibility and could easily be kept up to date. It was a delivered a unique display experience.

On behalf of the forum the Chair thanked the Sidmouth Museum Curator for her interesting and informative presentation.

32 **Tourism - East Devon Excellence**

Ruud Janseen Veeneboer explained that East Devon Excellence comprised of 45 hospitality businesses with the aim of putting East Devon on the map as a high end tourist destination, boosting the economy of East Devon from a tourism and food and drink point of view by working in collaboration.

A key objective was to talk to all festivals and events happening across the district and to join them all up, improving productivity and the financial viability of all. Currently 75% of the major players in East Devon were involved. It was hoped that this would attract people to the area as well as keep local residents better informed. East Devon Excellence had magazines in the Tourist Information Centre as well as in member organisation venues. A map purely of East Devon had been produced to keep tourists in the East Devon area, rather than advertising activities and attractions further afield across the county. It had a good website, active social media and was linked to Taste East Devon.

The Forum agreed that there was a lot of correlation and synergy between the hospitality sector and the arts sector. These had been some of the worst affected industries by the Covid-19 pandemic and it was important to support them as lockdown ended.

On behalf of the Forum the Chair thanked Ruud Jansen Venneboer for attending the meeting.

33 **Education and Research - Sarah Campbell, Associate Director Arts & Culture, University of Exeter**

Sarah Campbell, Associate Director for Arts and Culture, University of Exeter presented 'Activating Creativity' to the Forum. The Arts and Culture Strategy was launched in October 2018. Its aims were:

- Develop purposeful encounters
- Enrich our cultural environment
- Unlock resources and potential

The audiences were inward and outward facing:

- Staff and students across four campuses
- City and region
- National and global

The focus of the strategy was:

- Creative process
- Interdisciplinary practice

And the profile was:

- Communications and marketing:
 - Website – hub model
 - Social media – facebook, Instagram, Twitter
 - Press – print and radio
- Networks
- Programming – this highlighted the potential of the digital reach, with

- Creative fellowships – these were held three times a year and were short term placements that brought creative practitioners into research settings and encouraged new conversations across disciplines. The focus was on mutually-beneficial exchange between artist, any art form and host, with seed funding for future opportunities.
- Arts Commissions – support for artists, working in any medium, to take inspiration from the university and develop new work. These took on variable formats.
- ESI Creative Exchange
- Creative Dialogues
- Partnerships – including the Thelma Hulbert Gallery
- Events – in 2019 50 events were held with 4,234 people.

Exeter Culture was Arts Council funded and was hosted by the University of Exeter. The Exeter Cultural Strategy had five themes:

1. Culture and environment
2. Culture and wellbeing
3. Heritage innovation
4. Creative making
5. Cultural literacy and learning

Exeter had secured UNESCO City of Literature in 2019, which was a great achievement. There were 246 'creative cities' in 28 countries across six continents, all working together towards a common objective: placing creativity and cultural industries at the heart of their development plans at the local level and co-operating actively at the international level. The Forum acknowledged that although Exeter was outside of East Devon, it was a powerful resource.

On behalf of the Forum the Chair thanked Sarah Campbell for her interesting presentation.

34 **Sidmouth Folk Festival - John Braithwaith**

John Braithwaith was welcomed to the meeting to discuss Sidmouth Folk Festival. He explained that due to Covid-19 a decision was made at the end of March 2020 to cancel the Sidmouth Folk Festival for 2020. He explained that cancelling a festival was a huge logistical effort, with monies already being spent and tickets sold. The intention was to retain loyalty and 70% of the big season tickets went over to 2021. Once the decision had been made to cancel the festival there was the opportunity to look forward into what could be done. Two projects were undertaken:

1. A huge crowd funder, with 1000 rewards and more than 1000 donations. This generated a lot of interest and contributed to the festival's survival.
2. A virtual festival was created, which ran for over a week and gave the opportunity for the festival organisers to speak to their customers and for the performers to perform virtually. There were around 40,000 views and 1200 participants in online workshops. The virtual festival received a lot of positive feedback and also reached out to a broader audience

It was noted that the Sidmouth Folk Festival was a highly complex festival to run and was a massive undertaking. Festival organisers had spent autumn applying for grants. The uncertain environment had forced plans to be pushed back. There would be some form of physical festival in 2021 but it was unclear exactly what would be put on. A development board had been created to bolster and support the younger element of the

audience. It was highly likely that a combination of physical and online events would form the 2021 folk festival.

The Chair thanked John Braithwaith and empathised with the folk festival's predicament due to all the uncertainties and the Forum agreed that it was imperative to get something up and running at all costs, keep a presence and put on whatever was possible. The Sidmouth Folk Festival was a high profile event and huge boost to East Devon's economy, with accommodation being booked up far outside of Sidmouth. This was another example of how culture, arts and hospitality all interject.

35 **EDDC Arts and Culture Forum and Cultural Strategy**

The Arts and Culture Forum began in 2013 with the intention of providing a strategic steer for the Council's work in all areas of cultural development with internal services and wider partnerships. It was proposed to relaunch the forum in 2021 as a platform and network for all local cultural services, working with local social, health and economic development agendas and supporting local arts and culture organisations and creative businesses.

The Arts Development Manager/Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG) Curator outlined how the role of arts and cultural tourism could aid economic recovery. Arts and Culture were vital in helping find a positive way forward and to realise a better future for communities – it could help support health and wellbeing, the environment and economic recovery. In 2018 cultural tourism represented 37% of the total tourism sector, with an annual growth of approximately 15%. With the covid-19 pandemic it was estimated that international tourism fell by around 80% in 2020. There was an opportunity to build a more resilient tourism economy promoting digital transition and rethinking a more sustainable tourism system. East Devon had a high cultural, social and environmental potential.

The Arts Development Manager/THG Curator introduced 'Art and Culture East Devon' (ACED). Its purpose was 'a public forum for arts and cultural services such as theatres, museums and galleries, programming festivals, delivering workshops and participatory and music events, commissioning public art, working with local social, wellbeing, inclusion and economic development agendas and supporting local arts and culture organisations and creative businesses'. ACED would sit within EDDC's Culture Plan 2022-27.

The aims of ACED were:

- Embed the role of the arts in the cultural, social, educational, environmental and economic life of the district by providing a supportive network.
- Support advocacy work for local arts and culture services and identify areas for collaboration.
- Share news, best practice, plans and ambitions- aiding communication between arts practitioners, arts organisations, non-arts organisations, local government and regional and national bodies.
- Develop and promote local authority arts and culture-led economic growth initiatives.
- Support an increase in engagement in cultural activity in the district, developing a healthy social and cultural ecology which enriches communities and visitors.

There would be two parts to ACED. There would be an executive membership/steering group, led by EDDC, which would meet at least twice a year. In addition to this there

would be an EDDC Arts and Culture network of members (database held by THG), with three zooms per year and a bi-monthly newsletter.

The intention was to launch an umbrella brand, with an identifiable offer for the district. A network survey would be circulated during March 2021, with ACED being launched in April 2021.

The Forum agreed that ACED offered a fantastic opportunity to provide a platform for a much wider arts and cultural network, by reaching out and supporting organisations wherever possible. Cultural regeneration and tourism could be extremely powerful.

The Chair thanked all those involved and commented on how useful a platform and social media could be.

36 **Date of the next Arts and Culture Forum meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum would be held at 10am on Wednesday, 20 October 2021.

Attendance List

EDDC Councillors present:

J Whibley (Chair)
B De Saram
G Jung
E Rylance
O Davey
A Moulding
J Loudoun

Community representatives:

S Twiss
B Norris

Town Representatives

S Twiss, Community Representative
B Norris, Community Representative
P Lewis, Budleigh Salterton Town Council
C Buchan, Cranbrook Town Council
E Pang, Ottery St Mary Town Council

Officers in attendance:

Ruth Gooding, Arts Development Manager/Curator THG
Charles Plowden, Service Lead Countryside and Leisure
Graham Whitlock, House Manager (Manor Pavilion Theatre)
Anna Aaroussi, Project Co-ordinator
Gemma Girvan, Gallery & Shop Officer
Fiona Page-Turner, Marketing and Fundraising Officer
Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Andrew Wood, Service Lead - Growth Development and Prosperity

Angela Gordon Lennox, Events Officer

Also Present

P Hayward
N Hookway
S Jackson
P Arnott
P Faithfull
D Ledger
D Manley

J Braithwaith, Sidmouth Folk Festival
S Campbell, University of Exeter
A-M Culhane, Tidelines
M George, Villages in Action
V Harding, South West Museums
C Marshall, Villages in Action
J Salter, Tidelines
A Tanner, Sidmouth Museum
R Jansen Venneboer, East Deon Excellence

Apologies:

J Golding

Chairman

Date: