

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Arts and Culture Forum held at Online via the Zoom app on 12 June 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.45 pm

1 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

2 Appointment of Vice Chair

Nominations for Vice Chair were received for Councillor Nick Hookway.

RESOLVED: that Councillor Nick Hookway be appointed Vice Chair of the Arts and Culture Forum for the ensuing year.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 November 2023 were agreed.

4 Declarations of interest

6. Museum Development South West.

Councillor Paula Fernley, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Her father volunteered at the South West Airfield Heritage Trust.

5 Museum Development South West - report on progress of the East Devon Culture Strategy

Jo Cairns, Museum Development Officer for Museum Development South West (MDSW) gave the Forum some background to MDSW. They were a team of museum and heritage development specialists working with the museum and heritage sector in the South West to effect positive, lasting change the deliver public value. MDSW was an Arts Council England funded Investment Principles Support Organisation and was one of five museum development providers across England supporting accredited museums.

In the South West 67% of museums were independent charities, compared to 58% nationally. 57% of museums were 'micro', with fewer than 10,000 visitors annually. 42% of the museums in the South West were wholly volunteer run, with 9 volunteers to every one paid member of staff in the South West (compared to four volunteers to one paid member of staff nationally). These regional statistics highlighted the need for professional support from MDSW.

The key services of MDSW were:

- Local, place based Museum Development Officers.
- Small grants programmes and funding support.
- Skills and training networks.
- Specialist support in collections and volunteering.
- Organisational development and technical accreditation.

- Communications, advocacy and resources.
- Secure funding for projects.

MDSW worked in partnership with EDDC with funding provided through the Shared Prosperity Fund. There were four accredited museums receiving support (Allhallows Museum, Sidmouth Museum, Fairlynch Museum and Arts Centre, Axminster Heritage Centre) and there were five others not yet accredited, but still receiving support due to funding from EDDC (Exmouth Museum, Seaton Museum, Ottery St Mary Heritage Museum, Whimble Heritage Centre, South West Airfield Heritage Trust).

The Museum Development Officer explained that in 2023/24 EDDC received a 300% return on its investment from MDSW. It received:

- £4,685 in Museum Development Officer support.
- Technical accreditation support to two museums.
- £1,264 specialist officer support in collections and digital.
- One participant in Volunteering Fit for the Future at £1,400 (Exmouth Museum – dedicated volunteer management consultancy).
- 18 training attendances at 13 training sessions from 3 museums at £986.
- One On Display! grant awarded at £1,000 (Axminster Heritage Centre – Thomas Whitty Rug) which enabled a total project valued at £5,735.

It was noted that Arts Council funding was received by MDSW for accredited museums. The accreditation scheme run by Arts Council England ensured that museums were adhering to a certain standards. A return had to be submitted every five years to the Arts Council to demonstrate the museum was still adhering to the particular criteria. Being accredited showed that a museum was working to a particular standard and opened up opportunities for grants as a lot of funding was only open to accredited museums.

On behalf of the Forum the Vice Chair in the Chair thanked the Museum Development Officer for her presentation.

6 **Villages in Action - report on progress of the East Devon Cultural Strategy**

Mair George, Creative Director, Villages in Action explained that Villages in Action (VIA) had been in existence for over 30 years. It was an arts charity working across rural Devon. There was a small team of four part time workers – the Creative Director, two producers and a finance manager. Since 2021 VIA had embarked on a new journey to shift the way that rural touring in Devon was thought about, with a network of volunteer promoters and co-curators, re-imagining how and why towns and villages engaged with culture, and opening up the way that rural communities enjoyed and grew new creative opportunities. The aim was to strengthen the voice of towns and villages in both hosting and creating work that reflected changing communities in the wider world. This was done by growing a network of locally rooted co-curators who imagined and shaped new creative projects with VIA, inspired by what their community wanted and needed. The aim was that over time this culturally driven action network would grow meaningful. Agriculture was a way of thinking about rural touring differently.

The Creative Director highlighted four main points of VIA work over the last year:

- Community touring – hosted 25 high quality arts performances for 1,496 live audiences, with five participatory workshops sessions from visiting touring artists.
- Village exchange - Delivered 3 intergenerational skill-share projects in Ottery St Mary (young people; music focus), Honiton (older adults with dementia; reminiscence) & Membury (mixed ages; heritage storytelling).

- Zest - Active Care Homes commission, producing over 12 high quality digital works for use in care settings, engaging excluded participants, developing specialist digital production team & content (older adults dementia).
- Artist support - Supported over 80 artists including 8 open-call From Devon With Love scratch artists. Nurtured artists through the current fundraising re-submission cycle (Arts Council England). Developed a new relationship with University of Exeter Drama focusing on graduate retention in the South West.

VIA were most known for their community touring. Box office income in East Devon had increased, along with the number of performances and attendees. Some examples of high quality regional and national artists were given, including the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in Ottery St Mary. Overall there had been a range of work for all ages across a number of different community spaces with positive feedback received.

The VIA Creative Director outlined some forthcoming performances, workshops and activities and went on to thank EDDC for continuing to support the arts through VIA.

On behalf of the Forum, the Vice Chair thanked the Creative Director for her fascinating presentation.

7 **Arts and Culture East Devon update and Arts Council bid**

The Forum received a presentation from the Cultural Producer. The Arts and Culture East Devon (ACED) network met three times a year in person and the most recent meeting had been held on 10 June at Seaton Gateway Theatre. 34 people attended the meeting which was co-chaired by the ACED music champion. Different speakers were invited to present, including ACED climate change champion, Anne-Marie Culhane on a recent project 'Overwintering' on the Exe Estuary that had been successfully delivered and funded through the Creative East Devon Fund. The ACED network also heard about the new Carbon Action Programme, which community organisations could apply to for equipment that would help decarbonise their buildings. This built on the learning from last year's Culture, Leisure and Tourism Fund. This fund would open in the autumn and a range of other support services would be offered, including a free energy audit to ensure that community organisations were applying for the right type of equipment to be the most energy efficient.

The inaugural ACED volunteer of the year award was given to Colin Trussell, who had been volunteering with Sidmouth Folk Festival for over 30 years. The plan was for this to become an annual award in order to recognise the importance of volunteers as it would not be possible to deliver the festivals and events in Devon without their support.

The Cultural Producer explained the recently launched ACED mentoring scheme, whereby a young person aged 18 to 30 was paired with an experienced ACED network member who had training in being a mentor. There were currently 10 mentors signed up to the scheme which was in its pilot phase. Free training opportunities had also been delivered through the Shared Prosperity Fund including training specific to East Devon museums, training in bid writing, public speaking, producing live events and volunteer recruitment and retention. The next training opportunity, which was free to ACED members was equality, diversity and inclusion co-ordinated by the Thelma Hulbert Gallery.

There were now 174 ACED members, which represented a 54% increase in membership since November 2023. This increase was in part due to ACED membership being

essential for eligibility in applying to the Creative East Devon Fund. This fund was designed to provide discretionary financial support to local art and culture initiatives and projects that demonstrated a commitment to developing the East Devon Cultural Strategy. Creative projects could apply for up to £3,000. The scheme was funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

The Cultural Producer reported that she had been working on some projects around theme two of the Cultural Strategy: protecting and enhancing the natural environment. The objective was to establish East Devon as an innovator and regional beacon of culture-led environmental protection, enhancement and activism. The Cultural Producer was working closely with Exmouth Festival on action 2.2 of theme two – to improve the environmental practices of the district’s cultural festivals to establish them as leaders in sustainable event management. Those involved were looking forward to sharing the learnings from this once the event had taken place as it was thought that it could be a really useful blueprint for other event organisers to take actions to lower the carbon footprints of these types of events.

The Forum also considered the report on an Arts Council bid of approximately £30,000 relating to theme 2.1.2 in the cultural strategy, to work with local museums and South West Museums Development to engage in national conversations about the climate crisis and enable displays of natural science and biodiversity collections in East Devon’s museums. It was noted that funding bids to the Arts Council continued to be extremely competitive, with around one in ten applications being successful. A bid was also being submitted for the Thelma Hulbert Gallery to continue the success of its current programme, engaging young people with the gallery space, with particular focus on EDI and climate.

The Vice Chair thanked the Cultural Producer for her inspiring presentation and report and commented on the extraordinary commitment that volunteers across East Devon had made to its cultural landscape.

The Assistant Director – Countryside and Leisure highlighted how EDDC’s Culture Strategy, which was only two years old, was beginning to lead some interesting thinking across the county. He thanked the Cultural Producer and other officers involved for their hard work in getting funding into grassroots organisations and utilising the enthusiasm, expertise and knowledge within East Devon’s communities.

RESOLVED: that the Arts and Culture Forum note and support the two funding bids to the Arts Council to support the Thelma Hulbert Gallery and East Devon museums.

8 **Thelma Hulbert Gallery update and Arts Council bid**

Gemma Girvan, Gallery Manager and Curator introduced herself to those present and stated that she was six months into the role as Manager of the Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG). The Forum noted that gallery sales figures were in line with previous years, which was pleasing. The Gallery Manager and Curator went on to highlight the following activities:

- Present Makers exhibition had been record breaking this year, taking over £14,000 and showcasing over 60 established and emerging makers.
- The Mikhail Karikis exhibition focussed on climate change, with EDDC’s Climate Change Officer and the Curator at RAMM. The exhibition showcased work by Honiton Community College pupils as part of the Create Our Space (COS) project.
- South West Academy was opened by the newly appointed president, John Nettles, with over 100 artists and supporters at the opening.

- THG Open Winners Exhibition – this was well received, with press coverage in the Midweek Herald, Exeter Living, Evolver and Devon Life.
- Gluck's Flowers – a theatre company based in Bristol that had Arts Council funding to show this performance in gallery spaces, turning the gallery into a theatre for 2 days.

The THG's engagement programme was going from strength to strength. At the beginning of the year jewellery making workshops and print painting workshops sold out. The Create Our Space (COS) project, an Arts Council funded project encouraging young people to engage with the gallery was coming to an end, with the last round of workshops being delivered to five local primary schools. An evaluation of the project would be carried out at the end of July. As part of the Arts Council funding a few people took part in carbon literacy training and had been trained as trainers. They had delivered carbon literacy training to the THG teams as well as some volunteers. It was hoped that training could be rolled out to other groups, including the ACED network.

The Creative Cabin would be out and about over the summer at festivals. The option of a more portable creative cabin was being explored (in addition to the current one), for example something that could go into the boot of a car, that was more accessible and portable as well as being more 'green'. Taking the current Creative Cabin out and about could be logistically challenging at times. The THG team were looking at the next Arts Council bid to carry on the successes from the COS project as well as building the relationships with young people and a young persons network, and also continuing to focus on the climate. The Forum were reminded that funding bids to the Arts Council continued to be extremely competitive, with around one in ten applications being successful. There was also an opportunity with Art Fund as this year's focus was museums and galleries run by local authorities. Lots of areas of potential funding were being explored, as well as how the THG could work with other partners.

9 **Cultural tourism update**

The Chair welcomed the Senior Economic Development Officer to the meeting to update the Forum on cultural tourism.

EDDC adopted a tourism strategy at the end of 2022 which included a very strong focus on the cultural offer. The tourism strategy vision was for East Devon to become the leading all year long tourism destination in Devon, focussing on some of its key assets and advantages like natural diversity, as well as encouraging more businesses to do the same. The Senior Economic Development Officer worked closely with the Cultural Producer and they were now working on a joint cultural tourism project to highlight the cultural offer in the area.

An East Devon Tourism Network had been set up and running for approximately 18 months, with quarterly meetings. East Devon Excellence were delivering this strong network which was going really well and showcased different aspects of the cultural offer. For example, the November meeting would focus on festivals and events as a way of attracting tourists to the area and extending the tourist season.

The Senior Economic Development Officer explained that the current main project where efforts were being focussed to nurture and promote cultural tourism was a cultural tourism map. This was a product development project where all of EDDC's key assets where visitors could experience high quality cultural activity would be depicted on a map so that people could plan their visit. There would be printed versions available as well as an interactive version online where people would be able to build their own itineraries. The map would be based on an existing map from East Devon Excellence and was a

resource that could be built on. It promised to be a really engaging project and the aim was to launch it in September 2024 at the end of the active summer season, with the aim of promoting tourism outside of the peak summer months. It was noted that although the cultural tourism map was the main project, there would be other projects too. East Devon District Council would act as an enabler for tourism in the area, rather than being a promotional agent.

Input from the Arts and Culture Forum was welcomed and members were invited to attend all economic development events. On behalf of the Forum the Vice Chair thanked the Senior Economic Development Officer for her fascinating update.

Attendance List

EDDC Councillors present:

O Davey
P Fernley
N Hookway
I Barlow
T Olive

Town Representatives

J Bull, Axminster Town Council
R Doorbar, Budleigh Salterton Town Council
C Buchan, Cranbrook Town Council
I Barlow, Sidmouth Town Council

Officers in attendance:

Charles Plowden, Assistant Director Countryside and Leisure
Gemma Girvan, Gallery Manager and Curator
Caitlin Davey, Events Officer
Tracy Hendren, Chief Executive
Sarah Elghady, Cultural Producer
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Geri Panteva, Senior Economic Development Officer

Also Present

M Rixson
Jo Cairns, Museum Development Officer, Museum Development South West
Mair George, Creative Director, Villages in Action

Apologies:

A Aaroussi
V Johns
J Whibley
S Gazzard, Exmouth Town Council
R Sexton, Honiton Town Council substitute
P Arnott (non committee member)

Chair

Date: