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Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG) Update

Report summary:

This report gives a summary of THG activity for 2025.

Our theme for 2025; Community and Place

The aim was to strengthen our ties with both our local and artistic communities through the following initiatives:

- Encouraging Emerging Artists: Providing opportunities and support for new talent.
- Collaborating with Local Artists and Photographers: Showcasing the unique perspectives of our community's creative voices.
- Bringing Renowned Artists to a Rural Setting: Creating a platform for our local audience to engage with established artists.
- Continuing our climate-focused Exhibitions: Highlighting the interconnectedness of climate and racial justice through impactful programming.
- Embedding Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and accessibility into our programming and delivery.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That the Arts & Culture Forum note and support a funding bid to the Arts Council to support Thelma Hulbert Gallery to

- Enrich our Exhibition Programme by delivering an ambitious engagement programme that benefits the wider East Devon community — including local schools and our expanding Youth Network.
- Develop our Youth Network into a region-wide platform that extends beyond the gallery, engaging young people who may not otherwise have access to creative opportunities — such as those with school-related anxiety and young people leaving care.
- Reframe opportunities for young people by introducing live projects and creative briefs designed to build skills, confidence, and pathways into the creative industries.
- Expand internship opportunities through partnerships with Exeter College and support for care leavers.

- Continue our focus on the climate emergency by developing our Climate Conversations into a Climate Symposium – a day to carve out space and time to inspire creatives to protect and enhance the natural environment through their creative practice, share expertise and network in a participatory, supportive and solutions focused event of interactive workshops and talks.

Reason for recommendation:

The current Arts Council England project grant funding of 29K which we received in September 2024 to support our delivery for 18 months is coming to an end in March 2026.

We are requesting just under 30K from the Arts Council to ensure the continuation and growth of the Youth Network and engagement programme that enriches our exhibition and wider programme. This support will also enable the gallery to maintain its vital focus on key priorities including

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)
- Addressing the Climate Emergency
- Supporting emerging artists
- Bringing renowned artists to our rural community.

Continuing funding investment will help us sustain and strengthen our reputation for 'punching above our weight' as a rural gallery.

Officer: Gemma Girvan, Gallery Manager and Curator, tel 01404 45006,
gemma.girvan@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Assets and Economy
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Council, Corporate and External Engagement
- ☒ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- ☐ Environment - Nature and Climate
- ☐ Environment - Operational
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
- ☒ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
- ☐ Financially secure and improving quality of services

Report in full

1 2025 Achievements – Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG)

2025 has been an exciting year for THG. It marks the first year that Manager, **Gemma Girvan**, has curated the Exhibition Programme. Below is a summary of our key achievements and highlights from the year.

1.1 Refurbishment of THG

THG began the year with a major refresh and refurbishment. The entire gallery was repainted, new fire doors were fitted in line with Fire Risk Regulations, and the kitchen and toilets were reconfigured to create a more usable space for visitors, staff and volunteers.

The project was efficiently managed by Property Services and the appointed contractor. The result is a gallery that looks well-maintained and professional.

1.2 Ashish Ghadiali

THG reopened on 22 March 2025 with an exhibition by influential artist and activist **Ashish Ghadiali** featuring three high-profile films focusing on **climate and racial justice**.

The exhibition was very well received, gaining national press coverage and prompting important conversations. A highlight of the exhibition was a **day of talks and engagement**, featuring international keynote speakers and powerful discussions about the Climate Emergency.

1.3 James Ravilious – An English Eye

THG secured a significant exhibition of work of **James Ravilious**, renowned photographer of rural life and one of Devon's most beloved artists, the exhibition was selected from a major retrospective mounted by the Royal Photographic Society and loaned from the permanent collection of **The Burton at Bideford**.

A solo exhibition of Ravilious' work has not been seen since 2021 and garnered widespread interest from visitors across the region.

Exhibition Impact:

- Visitors: **3,270** – our highest attendance in ten years. **42% were new visitors**, who had not attended the gallery before.
- Website: **3,200** visits to our home page (double the average) and **5,140** visits to the *English Eye* exhibition page – our most viewed exhibition online.
- **Visitor Feedback:**
 - Pure enjoyment of a passing era. / My father and I worked on a farm, and this reminded me of him. It's been emotional to see the exhibition. / Just fabulous / Inspiring / Wonderful to see. / James Ravilious is one of England's best photographers.

1.4 THG Open 2025

The **THG Open** is a biennial exhibition and a key part of our programme, celebrating the rich talent of both established and emerging artists from across the South West.

The exhibition showcased a diverse range of work: **painting, photography, mixed media, sculpture, and printmaking**. All works were for sale.

Prizes sponsored by Bearnas Hampton & Littlewood:

- **Overall Prize (£500): Mellony Taper – Trousseau**
- **Emerging Artist Under 25 Prize (£250): Lucie Sivier-Voller – Tapestry of Dance**

- Over 460 entries – the most ever for a THG Open and 104 artists selected.
- Sales during our Open exhibition increased by 50%, rising from £4,387.25 in 2023 to £6,582.46 in 2025.

1.5 CAMP (Contemporary Art Membership Platform)

This year marked our first collaboration with **CAMP**, an exciting and dynamic network of artists based in Devon and Cornwall.

The exhibition *Where Are We Now?* explored contemporary environmental issues from multiple perspectives. The exhibition featured a wide range of disciplines including **painting, printmaking, sculpture, video, audio, photography, ceramics, textiles, collage, drawing, and embroidery**.

We continued our successful programme of *Climate Conversations* talks to coordinate with this exhibition. The aim is that through the lens of arts and culture, *Climate Conversations* can help us discover different perspectives and create new opportunities to help us understand and adapt to our changing planet.

Its success has evidenced the need to broaden these conversations further into the form of an Art and Climate symposium, which we are proposing as part of our next Arts Council funding application.

1.6 Present Makers

Present Makers remains one of the most popular exhibitions in our programme, featuring hand-crafted gift ideas showcasing the talent of contemporary craftspeople in the South West.

From open submissions, entries are carefully selected to highlight the **quality, variety, and creativity** of local makers working across a range of materials.

This year, we received a **record-breaking 90 entries** and selected **70 artists** –more than ever before.

2 Engagement

Social media success: through a targeted approach of maximising popular content and an increased use of reels to reach new audiences:

- THG's Instagram has reached a landmark 5,000 followers – an increase of 1,000 (+25%) since November 24.

Summer engagement programme:

- During July and August, over 790 people visited THG's offsite and gallery activities - of these 370 engaged in art activities at the gallery including 236 children. THG also sold out of the five days of Summer Art Week activities for 11 to 17-year-olds.

3 Summary Arts Council Funding

We have been successful in gaining sequential funding from Arts Council England to boost our interaction with young people and embed roles and opportunities for them within and beyond the gallery. To date this has seen us interact with over 1500 people across 7 different locations and 50 different events, including schools workshops, community events and gallery workshops.

Highlights include:

- establishing a Youth Arts Network who have commissioned new sustainable off-site delivery: the Creative Cabinet, which will begin interacting with our wider audience and regional communities in late Spring/ Summer 2026.
- working with Honiton Community College and Honiton Town Council to create public art showcasing the variety of activity that young people can engage with in Honiton.

We have an exciting programme of exhibitions planned for next year. Please visit the website to find out more.

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implications arising from the report. (JS/131125)

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications requiring comment (ALW/02553/131125)