

Annual Council – 13 May 2026

Annual Report of the Councillor Champion for: Arts and Culture

Councillor Olly Davey

Work Achieved during 2025/2026

During the past year, it has been my privilege to chair the Arts and Culture Forum, where we have heard from some of the many organisations supported by ACED. The exception was Simon Jutton, Senior Relationship Manager for Arts Council England, who explained the role of ACE in distributing government funding and the principles and criteria underpinning Arts Council grants. This broadly aims to enable people and communities to explore their creativity, and the detail he explained was of great interest to anyone looking for Arts Council funding.

In addition, we heard from:

Villages in Action – a regular contributor, and a long-standing initiative which exemplifies the ACE criterion of community creativity, using visiting artists and groups to work with local communities to unlock their creativity, through a strong emphasis on participation.

Museums Development South West – also a regular contributor, supporting museums with funding for specific projects, training for staff and volunteers, and enabling local museums to develop their offering.

Screen Devon – As many of you will know, a relatively new organisation looking to attract film and TV production crews to Devon by offering support with locations and building a resource of local talent and expertise to support filming locally. They have provided comprehensive reports of their activities and impact to both the forum and to ACED Networking meetings.

Thelma Hulbert Gallery – the gallery continues to stage high-profile and exceptional quality exhibitions, often referencing the local landscape. I particularly enjoyed the display of Dartmoor photographs by James Ravilious, which I am very familiar with, but it was a pleasure to see the actual photographs of the many characters he photographed.

Manor Theatre, Sidmouth – at the November meeting, we heard about the audience research that the theatre had done to inform future events, and just recently, we heard about the refurbishment of the seating and theatre space, including some bold colour choices. I look forward to seeing the results very soon.

It has also been a pleasure to hear from our own team – Sarah Elghady, the Cultural Producer, who has provided regular reports and updates on the progress of the Cultural Strategy, Geri Panteva, Senior Economic Development Officer, who recently announced a support fund to develop and extend the festival offering in East Devon, and who continues to report on the economic impact of Arts and Culture, and Caitlin

Davey, the Events Officer, who has kept us up to date with the many events hosted by the Council on its land and properties.

I was also invited to be part of the panel assessing a number of bids for the Creative East Devon Fund from local groups, events and festivals. Sarah and Zoe Smith, Economic Development Assistant, had already done an excellent job sifting the applications and using a scoring matrix to assess their strengths and weaknesses, making our job relatively easy. With a considerable amount of discussion, and a few requests for further information, we eventually decided on awards to nine projects, covering a range of genres, venues and activities to take place over the coming year, many with a strong emphasis on participation.

Finally, I have attended some of the ACED Networking events, hearing from local organisations and honouring the work of the many volunteers without whom much of our cultural activity could not take place.

Priorities for the future

I will continue to attend meetings and events and to support the wide range of cultural and artistic activity taking place across our region. As we move towards potential restructuring of local government, we shall continue to make the case for future funding to enhance the lives of our residents, support a thriving artistic community and to emphasise the contribution of arts and culture to the local economy.