

## CABINET

Tuesday 1 October 2019

### LOWESTOFT CULTURAL STRATEGY

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The cultural sector in Lowestoft is a key driver for economic growth also meeting community pride and health and wellbeing outcomes, however good quality work, exemplar projects and partnerships are being delivered in the absence of a cultural strategy. The last time the Council (Waveney District Council) went through a process of setting cultural objectives was in 2006. A cultural strategy will unify the cultural sector under a shared vision, develop the sector, achieve more for people, place and the economy and be instrumental in attracting external investment.

Is the report Open or Exempt?	Open
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All Lowestoft and surrounding wards
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr. Craig Rivett, Cabinet Member for Economic Development
<b>Supporting Officer:</b>	<p>Paul Wood Head of Economic Development &amp; Regeneration 01394 444249 <a href="mailto:paul.wood@eastsuffolk.gov.uk">paul.wood@eastsuffolk.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Helen Johnson Great Places Project and Cultural Capacity Coordinator 01502 523398 <a href="mailto:helen.johnson@eastsuffolk.gov.uk">helen.johnson@eastsuffolk.gov.uk</a></p>

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Lowestoft has witnessed a transformation in terms of cultural activity over the last few years, which is in part due to previously receiving less external investment and having lower levels of cultural participation than the national average. In Lowestoft, cultural projects including the First Light Festival, South Beach Vision, Heritage Action Zone and Great Places are taking shape and delivering outcomes for our visitor economy, cultural organisations and our communities.
- 1.2 At a town and district level, East Suffolk Council currently doesn't have a strategic cultural framework. The former district of Waveney, adopted the first cultural strategy in 2006 which was an amalgamation of culture, sport and leisure. The 2006 strategy's main aim was to 'Increase cultural activity and opportunity for leisure, which improves the lives of residents and encourages visitors'.
- 1.3 A cultural strategy for Lowestoft is required in order to keep pace with the shifting national and regional changing cultural priorities. It will provide a place-based approach that links in with national (Culture White Paper) and regional (NALEP 'Culture Drives Growth') strategies, but which can also provide tangible outcomes at a local level.
- 1.4 Culture has a role to play in addressing some of Lowestoft's most pressing issues and promoting the place as a visitor destination. Like many coastal communities, Lowestoft does face some significant challenges, including the loss of traditional employment sectors, high unemployment, a low skills base, low educational attainment and low incomes. It is possible with the correct framework in place that we can use Lowestoft's cultural assets to help reverse and halt some of these socio-economic issues.
- 1.5 There are many studies to prove how culture can be enlisted to tackle some of the socio-economic challenges at a local level, including promoting more cohesive communities and maintaining healthier lives. Studies have shown that 85% of people in England agree that the quality of the built environment influences the way they feel, and art activities intended to improve health and wellbeing in health and social care settings and community locations resulted in 82% of participants enjoying greater wellbeing and 77% engaged in more physical activity. Engaging in cultural activities at a young age can have a profoundly positive impact on the lives of young people. Generally, those who do take part in cultural activity see an improvement in cognitive development, English and maths skills, and better behaviour, all of which lead to higher levels of educational attainment.
- 1.6 The cultural sector in Lowestoft is a key driver of economic growth and jobs. The value of tourism, which is closely related to cultural tourism, shows that in 2016 there were 1.2 million day and staying trips, with visitors spending over £60m in Lowestoft. Since 2016, the town has attracted almost £6m of investment in its cultural assets and activity from national funders such as Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage. This includes £4.3m to Suffolk Wildlife Trust to create the biggest habitat restoration and wetland development for a decade at Carlton Marshes. This investment has paved the way for the acceleration of cultural opportunities in Lowestoft and firmly placed culture at the heart of regeneration in the town.
- 1.7 Increasing levels of cultural activity are taking place in Lowestoft with over 120 Creative Industries and volunteer-led creative enterprises that are either delivering in or who have a registered address in the town. Lowestoft also has a large volunteer-led amateur arts sector, including music, dance and heritage centres. Furthermore, the Heritage Open Days initiative is an amazing success story for Lowestoft, ranked 13th nationally in terms of venues and activities, with around 10,000 visits to a site or activity across the two weekends in 2018. In addition, the Lowestoft Rising Cultural Education Partnership is seen as an exemplar partnership, bringing cultural and learning providers together to provide a menu of multi-arts activities for every child in Lowestoft. The Marina Theatre continues to be a flagship venue for cultural performances

with 183 live performances, 257 cinema showings and 31 live screenings last year enjoyed by an annual audience of 80,000.

- 1.8 Lowestoft was also awarded Heritage Action Zone status by Historic England in 2018, and is currently 1 out of 20 HAZs nationally and 1 of only 2 in the East of England. The First Light Festival was a tremendous success attracting 30,000 people (10,000 were anticipated), adding £700,000 to the local economy and changing minds and attitudes about Lowestoft with 35% of attendees visiting the town for the first time and 9 out of 10 agreeing that 'the First Light Festival has left them feeling positive about Lowestoft'.
- 1.9 The development of the Lowestoft Cultural Strategy has been made possible through the Great Place scheme, a partnership with Great Yarmouth BC and delivered by Arts Council England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic England, with additional funds from East Suffolk Council. The strategy is a strand of the Making Waves Together initiative which involves East Suffolk Council working closely with Lowestoft communities and partners to create and deliver a cultural strategy for the town and help support cultural organisations to share good practice and developing knowledge and skills.
- 1.10 The partners in Making Waves Together are building on their existing work engaging with a wide range of people to raise the aspiration and image of the two towns as centres of cultural excitement. The second aim of the project is to develop strong strategic partnerships through

connections, collaborations and shared learning between local authorities and cultural leaders of the two seaside towns and immediate areas.

## **2 PROPOSED APPROACH**

2.1 In order to drive positive change and growth in the cultural sector the draft strategy (see appendix A) has identified 3 key themes covering People, Place and Economy and has 10 objectives:

- People will be happier, stronger and more connected through taking part in cultural activity.
- Strengthen the role of arts and heritage in the local education offer through clear pathways for children and young people to engage in culture and creative activity.
- People will feel a sense of belonging through developing and having a say in culture in their communities.
- We will ensure that all our venues and cultural events are as welcoming, accessible and inclusive as possible.
- Championing the role of culture in everything that we do, supporting our local priorities and attracting investment to build pride and growth.
- Celebrate our position as the most easterly community through Lowestoft's relationship with water, the beach and protected landscapes.
- We will work with partners to support a strong and diverse cultural programme to promote investment and inward growth.
- We will work to transform our historic buildings and creative spaces, encouraging cultural entrepreneurialism by supporting cultural innovation and improved networking.
- Through supporting innovation and ambition, our cultural organisations will be at the heart of Lowestoft's growth.
- We will develop compelling and innovative offers for residents and visitors using our unique assets.

## **3 HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO THE EAST SUFFOLK BUSINESS PLAN?**

3.1 The activity that the Cultural Strategy will support and enable will contribute directly to the Economic Growth and Enabling Communities strategic pillars. In terms of Economic Growth, the strategy will increase cultural tourism opportunities in the town increasing visitor numbers, visitor spend and grow the tourism sector. In terms of enabling communities, new cultural experiences will help people come together to empower and enrich their lives. The strategy will also support the sector to tackle social isolation, help people lead healthier lives and improve mental health for some of our most vulnerable communities. Opportunities for all generations and resident groups to take part and enjoy in cultural activity and not to be limited by family income, age or by educational background.

## **4 FINANCIAL AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 A Cultural Leadership Group was established in November 2018 and brings together key national and local collaborators. The role of the group is to maximise the opportunities for developing a broad range of arts, heritage and culture in the town and supporting the delivery of this strategy. East Suffolk Council has established this group as part of the Great Places, Making Waves Together programme, providing facilitation and secretariat support and representation on the board. An action plan will outline how we'll respond to the strategy's high level aims and priorities of People, Place and Economy which will be agreed by the Cultural Board. While the strategy and action plan will be owned by the Lowestoft Cultural Board, to be robust and credible

it needs to be supported by East Suffolk Council and recognised by the council to be a definitive cultural strategy for Lowestoft and the surrounding area.

**4.2 Membership of the Cultural Board includes:**

- Peter Aldous MP, Member of Parliament for Waveney
- Cllr. Craig Rivett, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Heritage Champion, East Suffolk Council
- Cllr. Peter Knight and Alice Taylor, Lowestoft Town Council
- Jayne Austin, Museums Development Manager, Suffolk County Council (Association of Suffolk Museums)
- Phil Aves, Chair of Lowestoft Rising Local Cultural Education Partnership and Lowestoft Rising Change Manager
- Emma Butler Smith, Chief Executive, Marina Theatre
- Alex Casey, Co-Director, Suffolk Art Link
- Genevieve Christie, Director Flipside and First Light Festival
- Iain Dunnett, Senior Growing Places Fund Coordinator, NALEP
- Karen Reed, Manager, Seagull Theatre
- Jayne Knight, Arts Development Manager, Suffolk County Council
- The Broads National Park – Vacant
- Danny Steel, Vice Chair of Lowestoft Vision BID and Chair of Making Waves Together (Great Places)
- Claudia West, Senior Relationship Manager, South East, Arts Council England
- Paul Wood, Head of Economic Development and Regeneration, East Suffolk Council
- Oulton Board Parish Council – Vacant
- Edward James, Historic Places Advisor, Historic England
- Christine Luxton, Head of Engagement, Suffolk Wildlife Trust
- Bruce Leeke, Chief Executive, Suffolk Libraries
- Kate Chantry, Suffolk Records Office Manager, Suffolk County Council

**4.3 East Suffolk Council has invested £409k (includes investment in the HAZ, the Ness, Great Places, Marina Theatre and First Light Festival) in arts and culture in Lowestoft since 2016 and this has attracted a further £1.7m of external investment (Great Places, Arts Council England, Coastal Communities Fund and Historic England). To enable the Cultural Leadership Group to realise the vision and ambitions of the strategy, East Suffolk Council investment needs to continue to independently fund projects and lever in external grant funding. Furthermore, in supporting this cultural strategy, the Council will need to continue to channel its funding and cultural resources towards meeting the vision, aims and objectives of the strategy.**

**5 OTHER KEY ISSUES**

**5.1 The Equality Impact Assessment shows no negative impact in relation to any of the Protected Characteristic groups. On the contrary the delivery of the Lowestoft Cultural Strategy will provide all residents in Lowestoft and the surrounding areas with greater economic opportunities as well more opportunity to engage in a broad range of cultural activity..**

**6 CONSULTATION**

**6.1 As part of the development of the cultural strategy, an event was held at the Seagull Theatre, which was attended by local arts and heritage organisations. From the evaluation, 96% either agreed or strongly agreed that by working together, we can bring about change in our local neighbourhood. Subsequent discussions and feedback from attendees indicated overwhelming support for the development of Cultural Strategy, and also indicated their enthusiasm to be involved in shaping the new plan.**

- 6.2 The vision and priorities listed in the strategy have been created through listening to artists and cultural organisations, immersion in the sector and communities, undertaking consultations and learning from the sectors experiences of delivering projects and business plans, including Marina Theatre Trust and Seagull Theatre.
- 6.3 In consultation with the Lowestoft Cultural Leadership Group, members wanted the cultural strategy to be place-led rather than organisational led i.e. not owned or controlled by a single organisation and have requested that the cultural strategy goes to East Suffolk Council to be endorsed and supported.
- 6.4 The Cultural Strategy has been written by Great Places Project and Cultural Capacity Coordinator, following feedback from people working in the sector and people experiencing cultural events. The themes and content of the strategy have been scrutinised by Lowestoft Cultural Leadership Group.
- 6.5 Adopting a cultural strategy for Lowestoft will meet the grant conditions set by Great Places, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England and Historic England for Lowestoft to have a strategic cultural framework. This puts the town in a stronger position in the future to secure external funding to support the priorities of the strategy.

## **7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 7.1 The other option is not to develop a cultural strategy, but this will to the detriment of the cultural sector generally but also specifically in accessing funding and East Suffolk Council meeting the grant requirements of the Great Places initiative.

## **8 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 8.1 It has been amply demonstrated that the cultural sector contributes significantly to economic and community wellbeing. In recent years Lowestoft has experienced a significant uplift in cultural activity and in order to maintain this momentum and continue to attract investment in the town's cultural sector a Cultural Strategy is required. This will ensure an effective approach is put in place to developing and enhancing the cultural offer and creating more creative opportunities for the town, people and visitors.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That Cabinet endorses the draft Lowestoft Cultural Strategy including its vision, aims and objectives and that it is the definitive cultural strategy for Lowestoft and the surrounding area for the next 5 years.
2. That Cabinet provide delegated authority to the Head of Economic Development & Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet member for Economic Development to agree any minor changes to the draft strategy ahead of it being finalised by the Lowestoft Cultural Leadership Group.

### **APPENDICES**

<b>Appendix A</b>	DRAFT Lowestoft Cultural Strategy
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**BACKGROUND PAPERS** None.