

SCRUTINY REPORT



MEETING: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: Tuesday 19th July 2022

SUBJECT: Culture Strategy and Bury's time as Greater Manchester Town of Culture

REPORT FROM: Councillor Charlotte Morris, Cabinet Member for Culture and Economy

CONTACT OFFICER: Lynne Ridsdale, Deputy Chief Executive (Corporate Core) / Chris Woodhouse, Strategic Partnerships Manager

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Bury operates a small arts and culture service which is led by the Corporate Core and comprises Bury Art Museum and a small Visitor Information Service which operates from and provides reception support to the Fusiliers Museum.
- 1.2 Through the leadership of this small service Bury became the inaugural Greater Manchester Town of Culture in December 2019. The recognition was retained for two years, because of the impact of the pandemic, during which time a programme of culture and events was showcased across the Borough and included:
 - Bury Art Museum and Gallery exhibitions
 - Online live music and performance led by the Met
 - Community driven projects like Prestwich Arts Festival, Bury Pride; ELR and numerous independent artists and creative organisations
 - The Library Service, which took author events direct to their audiences
- 1.3 As an outcome of these celebrations, together with wider recognition through *Let's Do It!* that culture is a key driver to attracting new businesses and people to towns, a Culture Strategy was commissioned from a partner called Curated Place. This paper presents the headlines of feedback received and points for discussion based on the current strategic and resource context in Bury.

2.0 BURY'S TIME AS GREATER MANCHESTER TOWN OF CULTURE

- 2.1 In December 2019 Bury was named the inaugural Greater Manchester Town of Culture, an initiative to promote the 'distinctive culture' of towns across the region. Appendix 1 showcases Bury's Town of Culture journey and key themes, and was highly praised at the Greater Manchester Combined Authority for demonstrating delivery in complex circumstances.

- 2.2 Bury's bid, titled 'Happy', drew inspiration from the life and inspiration of one of our most famous daughters, Victoria Wood, following the success of an exhibition of her works at the Bury Art Museum and the unveiling of a statue of Victoria in the town's cultural quarter. The proposal focused on a 'Happy' festival, planned for May 2020, which celebrating the influence of Victoria through a festival of music and comedy.
- 2.3 Shortly after the award, outbreaks of Covid-19 began to be reported across the world and prior to Happy being able to take place the initial Covid lockdown took force. As such, during early 2020, Town of Culture activity shifted on-line to provide digital engagement and entertainment resources including on-line shows, groups and creative skills development.
- 2.4 Community culture was further embraced through provision of a range of grants during the Town of Culture years including a series of community micro commissions to mark the platinum jubilee. A list of supported community commissions is appended.
- 2.5 Cultural impact will, ultimately, be evaluated through measures including hotel bookings; visitor economy size and ticket sales at arts and culture venues. The pandemic impact unfortunately prevented typical reporting arrangements figures during the Town of Culture period, however impact was monitored through anecdotal feedback at a partnership Town of Culture Board and feedback from the GMCA as described above. Future monitoring will be managed through a series of key performance indicators linked to the night time economy set out in section 4 through the corporate performance report.

3. CULTURE IN CONTEXT – THE NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

- 3.1 There is a council-wide recognition that culture, including an evening and night time economy offer is a key driver to growing and sustaining Bury's local economy in terms of attracting new businesses and people to its town centres, including the night time economy.
- 3.2 The Council's existing Evening and Night Time Economy Strategy (ENTES) is a strategy for all partners, including businesses, licence holders, public services and residents, to develop an approach to successfully managing the evening and night time economy thus maximising the potential benefits for all who live, work and visit Bury town centre.
- 3.3 Its vision for early evening (6pm to 11pm) is to promote family friendly leisure and entertainment activities supported by easily accessible venues catering for a diverse range of users; and its vision for night time (11pm to 2am and beyond) is to promote a town centre with broad appeal which creates a safer environment for users and a reduced need for public service resources covering the early morning period.
- 3.4 Through the ENTES, Bury town centre has achieved annual Purple Flag accreditation since 2015 that demonstrates that it is a safe, vibrant, appealing and well-managed town centre offering an excellent evening and night time offer. It was the first town in Greater Manchester (GM) to be awarded Purple Flag status. Its accreditation enables Bury to positively promote the town's evening and night time economy whilst facilitating improved partnership working and communications. The accreditation requires renewing by October 2022 and discussions are to commence on the continued merits of renewal.

- 3.5 The recently refreshed Community Safety Plan for the Borough includes a new theme around Creating and Maintaining Safe Places, to further ensure people are encouraged into our town centres to partake in cultural activity. There will be more information on this at the update to Scrutiny on the CSP Plan in September.
- 3.6 Bury Council is currently working with a consultant and in partnership with several retail and businesses owners to develop a BID (Business Improvement District). A BID is a business-led initiative that aims to improve the economic prospects of a defined area through the delivery of short, medium, and long-term projects and initiatives that have been identified in consultation with the local business community. An annual BID levy is collected from all involved and used to fund the projects – it is therefore self-funding and no financial resources are required from the Council apart from an upfront levy (that will get paid back) to enable a BID manager to be appointed to develop and implement the business plan.
- 3.7 In March 2022, the business community and other stakeholders operating in Bury town centre that are involved in the project voted yes via a ballot for a BID in Bury town centre. The Council is currently supporting the establishment of a BID Task Group and eventual BID Board and BID Manager to take this initiative forward. The BID will be complementary to support the delivery of the ENTES action plan. Subject to its success, BIDs could be introduced and developed in other towns in Bury
- 3.8 Bury is actively engaged with the development of a draft Greater Manchester Night Time Economy Strategy, and as part of this Bury Council and partners are in very early discussions with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority on the establishment of a Creative Improvement District (CID) to compliment the BID proposal. A CID would support the ENTES by the provision of cultural-based activity that would attract people back to Bury town centre and help unlock its economy further
- 3.9 The Council will now look to undertake a review of the ENTES alongside the renewal of Purple Flag accreditation given the seamless links between this work, the proposals below, and other important Council activity including the Bury Town Centre Masterplan and new flexihall, alongside regeneration activity across the Borough.

4. FUTURE CULTURE STRATEGY

- 4.1 As an outcome of the Town of Culture celebrations and recognised potential economic opportunity, a Culture Strategy was commissioned from a partner called Curated Place. This work was also tasked with exploring the opportunity to put cultural investment centre stage of the delivery of “Levelling Up” schemes in Bury and Radcliffe.
- 4.2 Curated Place have proposed a strategy and associated investment requirement with the vision *to make Bury the best place in Greater Manchester to be an independent creative*. A programme of priorities and investment has been proposed for the council to take forward.
- 4.3 The strategy, which will be considered by the Cabinet in due course and has not yet been formally accepted, provides a set of 10 adaptable and agile priorities, as set out in Appendix 3, which have been shaped specifically to align

with Arts Council's strategy "Let's Create", and Heritage Lottery's "Strategic Funding Framework 2021-2024", alongside other national policy aimed at developing arts and culture as part of the recovery from Covid-19.

4.4 The strategy proposes several "time critical" investment requirements to achieve this:

- A minimum 10% of the Levelling Up budgets should be dedicated to culture to support leadership and training, audience and programme development to ensure the new assets are fit for purpose from opening.
- A 3 year outline cultural programme should be in place for the Bury Flexi Hall and Radcliffe Hub to ensure both buildings are well used from day one.
- Section 106 funding should be utilised for programme delivery, skills development investment and affordable creative start-up spaces
- Provision of workspace to early lifecycle creative businesses and artists in Radcliffe as the engine of production around the new town centre -
- Physical reconfiguration of Textile Hall, BAM, Bury Library and Fusilier Museum into Bury's Creative Campus as the engine of production for the new Cultural Quarter to reignite Silver Street's offer and drive further investment.
- A cultural skills development programme is required to nurture the knowledge and networks across Bury to embed the economic benefits in the borough.
- Creative and community groups should be supported to develop their own funding bids and projects strategically alongside the development of each capital project to test and learn how the new spaces could be used

Delivery of the above would require an (additional) indicative annual events budget in the region of c£500k and equivalent additional investment in the staffing structure.

5. CURRENT ISSUES

5.1 The LET'S Do It! strategy establishes some important principles which should frame the Council's response to the Curated Place advice:

- The "Local" and "Enterprise" principles absolutely support the proposed vision to support and enable local creative industries in Bury Council, with an arts offer as part of regeneration strategies within every township. The Levelling Up schemes are significant opportunities in this regard
- The "Together" and "Strengths" principles of LET'S philosophically direct cultural leadership towards community rather than public services, which has been evidenced through the Town of Culture experience where much of the high impact and volume activity was led by the Met in particular and the ELR. The ambition and capacity within our communities is currently being experienced in Radcliffe where culture has been identified as one of seven community-led priorities within the People and Communities Plan as a strategic focus for delivery of the Strategic Regeneration Framework.

5.2 The Council is, however, also managing some practical constraints which impact on the ability to respond to Curated Place proposals.

- a. Budget is not available within Council revenue funding streams to respond to Curated Places' proposals to expand the team and, more

widely, the scale of revenue budget challenge presents significant limitations to further investment.

The Council is, however, subsidising several cultural partners at present at an annual value of c£150k such as the cost of utility bills at the MET; direct funding for the ELR and reception support at The Fusiliers. Options are being considered with respect to opportunities through the Shared Prosperity Fund

- b. The Bury Art Museum building is beginning to present some disrepair challenges, particularly the roof which could, if left unresolved, present a risk to the collection. The revenue budget to maintain the current assets is minimal and capital funding of c£1m will be required to bring the estate back to the appropriate level.

6. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- 6.1 The Committee is asked to reflect on the opportunity of the Town of Culture legacy and subsequent ambitious advice from Curated Place, but also the practical resource constraints which are being managed by the Council.

Particular feedback is welcomed about:

- the proposed vision *to make Bury the best place in Greater Manchester to be an independent creative*
- the balance of responsibility between the council and its partners in delivering a cultural strategy, including the balance between a professional arts offer and community-led and council activity, such as that provided by the council's museum, library and archive services
- the direction of the night time economy strategy.

List of Papers:-

Appendix 1 – Bury Town of Culture highlights – It's been a blast
Appendix 2 - Town of Culture Community Grants and Microcommissions
Appendix 3 - Curated Place: Ten Strategic Priorities

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Appendix 1 – Town of Culture highlights

Happy Festival

With Happy not able to take place due to the initial lockdown, work took place to provide alternative online content, with a evolving programme of events which reflected the prevailing restrictions on being able to run physical events.

Digital weekend in May 2020	<p>A crowdsourced Ballad of Barry and Freda, online song writing workshop, comedy workshops - with showcased monologues, ALFA choir performance, Doolally and limerick comp. There were over 4,500 views of the special cover of the Ballad of Barry and Freda including coverage by ITV Granada</p> <p>Question and Answer session with the cast of Dinnerladies (2,100 views)</p> <p>Archive films linked to the Victoria Wood exhibition and archive (1,800 views)</p>
Digital event in November 2020	Song writing question and answer session (1,200 views)
Hybrid event in May 2021	<p>In person hyper local, distanced performances by the Halle, Beth Allen and 'Dial Doolally' to residential care homes and sheltered accommodation, along with 'end of the garden path' performances</p> <p>Singing workshop with Hallé choir Leaders from The Met and On A Happy Note streamed performances (3,900 views)</p>
In-person event, September 2021	<p>Andy Hollingworth exhibition and talk; alongside Q&A with Jasper Rees (official biographer), Vikki Stone and Hannan Brackenbury (400)</p> <p>Roaming performances including Uke Club workshop, Lucky BagS performances (fitness workouts drawing inspiration from the character of Hailey Bailey and concept of Acorn Antiques) , At the Chippie, Met Express improv and on East Lancs Railway (c.600)</p> <p>Burrs Live finale day with Steve Royle as compere; Alfa Choir, Brighouse and Rastrick brass band Sue Devany and Rachel Fairburn. (500)</p>

Examples of activity during lockdown

Bury Art Museum and Sculpture Centre provided weekly inspiration through themed art and creative activities including resources to design, print, colour, make and display. Residents were able to take a virtual tour of the planned sculpture centre exhibition - The Pothole (Mark Tanner Sculpture Award National Touring Programme), by Anna Reading.

Sketchbook Still Social became the gallery's Digital Social Hub providing daily prompt words and inspiration from the art collection each day where it is as much about about giving it a go and having fun as creating a masterpiece. Groups who would have met at the gallery can now engage remotely and attracted new audiences throughout the year. Projects included:

- Bury Art Mail : a new sketchbook initiative connecting artists through traditional post by collaborating on concertina art books.
- Spirit of Place: delving into the local history around Silver Street and the Gallery surrounds; as a legacy this work has expanded into Radcliffe, linking people and place through the culture priority within the Radcliffe People and Communities Plan.

Bury Art Museum & Kwoff presented a charity postcard exhibition and silent auction at Kwoff Window Gallery on Silver Street in November and December 2020 raising hundreds of pounds for Bury Samaritans. Post Art Street Show was an exhibition of 99 postcard-sized original artworks on display in the centre of Bury's Culture Quarter.

The Met and Bury Art Museum contributed content to the Greater Manchester Creative Care kits, which acted as inspiration for Bury Art Museum Winter Fayre Packs. The Creative Care kits were distributed to over 16,000 people across the region. The packs contained a range of activities from 25 local creative organisations that could be completed at home using materials that are provided in a box, including an activity book, art supplies and craft materials

In August 2020 the Fusiliers Museum led a virtual VJ75 celebration including the external screening of a specially commissioned film which followed the Borough of Bury Veterans Association crowd-sourced digital Last Post and Reveille for VE75 (including broadcast into our intermediate care facility at Killilea House). These activities were devised to discourage people to gather as a crowd and to engage virtually. Broadcast of the film, a series of regimental band performances, poetry readings and short military ceremony drew a reach of 29,294

Community creativity saw the Tottington Snake, a collective contribution of over 500 individually painted rocks added to the Kirklees Trail, a rainbow from a Ramsbottom pupil to adorn the window of 10 Downing Street and in Prestwich a community art trail and walking map, 'Home is where the Art is' to promote creativity.

Light and Hope

Light and Hope in December 2020 had the dual purpose of being a thank you to those people who had been stars, lighting up people's lives during such a challenging year whilst providing a platform to bring some cheer (including that of the festive variety) to local people, enabling activity which couldn't take place in a traditional format to still be enjoyed. 1,000 stars were made adorning Bury Market, Prestwich Library, Ramsbottom High Street and local supermarkets.

The first Saturday in December saw the coolest 'Head for the Hills' festival to date – in terms of impact and temperature! Normally held on a cricket field in Ramsbottom, this year 35,000 people engaged, from the comfort of their warm homes to witness poetry, prose, and performances from Bury based artist and from the continent. Bury Art Museum brought the entertainment on Fridays through regular costumed life drawing sessions from the collections gallery through film, accompanied by fabulous live music whilst Bury Faith Forum led an virtual session on Light and Hope in faith, exploring Diwali, Chanukah and Christmas.

Community streaming continued with the town's annual Council and Greater Manchester Police carol service being online for the first time, opening up to a new audience as part of wishing our communities a very Bury Christmas.

United We Stream

Bury became a nation focal point for live music streaming during the pandemic and clubbing capital of the country and the 400-capacity Met Theatre welcomes the world. Launched on Friday 3rd April 2020, United We Stream GM provided a diverse blend of entertainment and creative content on one free online platform. Streaming live DJ-sets, live music and live performances, United We Stream provided a platform to entertain during times of national lockdown and encourage people to remain indoors to help the fight against COVID-19. Those watching the streams were encouraged to buy a virtual ticket, donating what they could, with money raised going to support bars, clubs, pubs, venues, restaurants, performers, freelancers and cultural organisations across Greater Manchester as well as to support the fight against homelessness in Greater Manchester and to support the vital work undertaken by music therapy charity Nordoff Robbins.

In total 448 artists took part in streams from literature to cookery; 24 hour DJ sets; a DJ battle between the Metro Mayors of Greater Manchester and Merseyside; the best of local, regional and international creativity; comedy; folk and trance. 2020 ended and 2021 was brought in with the New Year's Eve Hacienda House Party – performances from 22 countries, including live from Bury, raised £115k for OneGM with 4 million streams, bringing the total raised to over £580k by United We Stream GM.

A key legacy of United We Stream was the skills development locally in the utilisation of streaming approaches, which The Met have continued to utilise to supplement the return to 'in-person' performances.

Burrs Live

Speaking of the return to audiences, as restrictions began to be lifted during the summer of 2021, a series of events took place at Burrs Country Park under the umbrella of *Burrs Live*. The intention was to bring live, in-person, entertainment back to Bury, celebrating Bury's green space whilst taking advantage of holding activities outdoor as a mitigation in relation to virus transmission. Over 2,500 people attended events, including hundreds of key workers and volunteers who took up a proportion of tickets which were made available for free as a thank you for their work during the previous 18 months in particular. Shows between 28th August and 5th September including The Bootleg Beatles, Magic of Mowtown and the in-person return of Head for the Hills.

Microcommissions and Community Grants

As part of Town of Culture activity, funding opportunities were made available for local creatives and community groups to apply for. Over 25 individuals and groups received funding towards creative works ranging from composing a folk piece as a thank you to the volunteers of Holly Mount Orchard; Bury's first in-person Macfest; to putting on an Arts and Culture week at Radcliffe Market. Details of all the successful projects are listed in Appendix 2.