Medway Cultural Strategy 2020-2030: Full Report

December 2020 (revised January 2023)

Content

Foreword from Strategy Drafting Group 3
Foreword from Medway Council 4
Summary 6
About this document 8
Introduction 9
Coronavirus 9
Our definition of culture 10
The ideas that underpin this Strategy 11
Section 1 15
Vision 15
Our Themes and Values 15
Our Values 16
Delivering our Vision 17
Connectivity 19
Shared Ambition 21
Spaces and Places 23
Creative People 24
Community Engagement 26
Section 2 29
Medway Today 29
Current cultural infrastructure 31
Current levels/types of cultural engagement 31
Section 3 34
Delivery mechanism 34
Action Plan 35
How we will review and evaluate 35

Cover image: © Paul Astley

Foreword from Strategy Drafting Group

Somehow, we found ourselves putting up our hands and volunteering our time to work with GJG Consultancy on the first draft of the Strategy: to take all the incredible conversations that have happened during the first Open Space event at the Corn Exchange and all the Strategy Theme sessions and shape them into a collective voice we feel the whole of Medway can be proud of.

Only a couple of people in the drafting group work for organisations; one of us is an engineer. The remainder are freelance practitioners operating as sole traders or small companies across film, fashion, theatre, literature, visual arts, education and heritage.

We didn't know one another particularly well when we started but we have gathered on more Zoom meetings with Ruth and with each other than we care to remember. We have even had homework, quite a lot of homework...

What none of us expected when the first draft dropped into our inboxes was to feel so moved when we read it.

In this Strategy the consultants have captured our need as a Medway community to find new ways to share our resources and to care for one another and this place in a fair, totally inclusive, kind and open way.

This is a fresh start full of hope and aspiration.

Now it is time for every one of us to work together to make it a reality.

Aidan Dooley, Alex Cameron, Christian Caruana, David Stokes, Fiona Watt, Jatin Patel, Kate Mechedou, Lucy Medhurst, Margherita Gramegna, Miriam Dooley and Sam Rapp. Medway Cultural Strategy Drafting Group.

Foreword from Medway Council

Medway is at a crucial point of its creative journey and has the chance to make a lasting change.

There are significant opportunities offered to us on many fronts; through our regeneration ambition, our economic potential, our geographical advantage, our bid to become UK City of Culture in 2025 and our aspiration to become a Child-Friendly City. As Medway Council, we want to advance access for all of our residents to the wealth of culture on their doorsteps, create opportunities for all, for children and young people to be able to consider a sustainable career in the arts, to nurture a sustainable creative economy through support for businesses, the growth of the night-time and digital economies and so much more. All this is underpinned by the recognition and importance of protecting the strong sense of place, as the foundation to build strong, healthy and resilient communities.

Heralding unprecedented levels of collaboration and integration, and as a fully committed cultural partner, we aim to embed culture within our priorities, developing a consistent cross-council approach to culture. This will be a framework for us to work with partners, to understand, promote and secure Medway's cultural and creative landscape now and for future generations.

We would like to thank the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England, and all our creative partners for their support in developing this bold and authentic ambition.

Cllr Howard Doe, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services.

© Jonathan Juniper

Summary

The Creative Medway Cultural Strategy runs from 2020 to 2030 – it is ambitious and forward-thinking, setting the foundations for the next decade of cultural development.

The Strategy sets out to make Medway stronger and more resilient in response to the current challenges, rather than simply survive them. It is based on two core beliefs:

- Culture is at the heart of defining Medway's identity – it's how we show the rest of the world how proud we are of our home.
- Allowing people's voices to be heard unlocks the possibility of powerful and meaningful change.

The Vision for culture in Medway set out in this Strategy is:

By 2030 Medway will be internationally recognised for its creativity and culture, exemplifying the positive impacts on everyone's lives. Diverse, inclusive, collaborative and engaged, we will celebrate the strength and creativity of all our residents.

This Vision, and the Creative Medway Cultural Strategy as a whole, is delivered according to six Values and through five Themes. These are core to everything we set out to do.

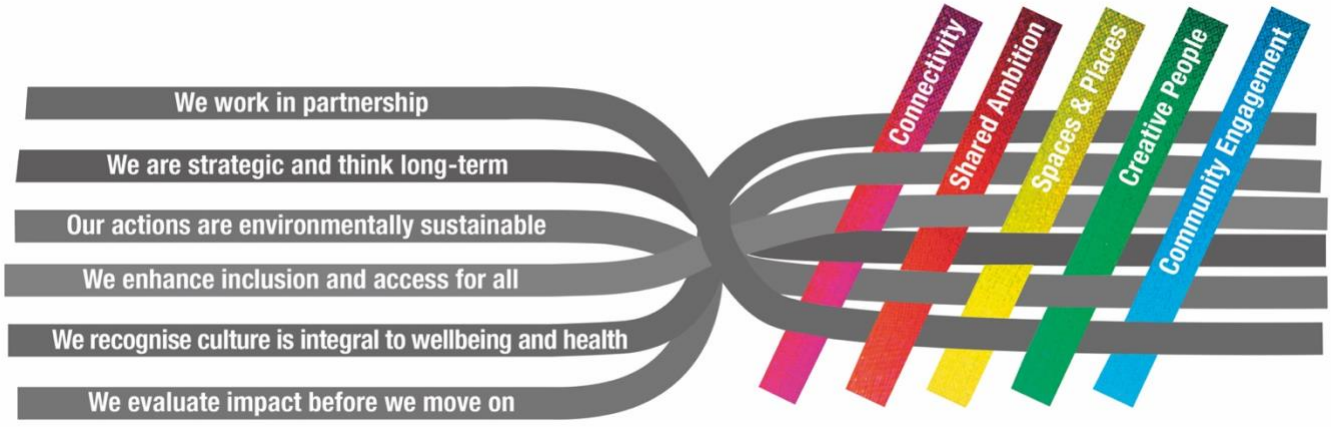

Figure 1: Medway Cultural Strategy 2020-2030: Values and Themes

This is a pivotal moment for Medway; we are ready and able to make a step change in terms of cultural ambition and reach – regionally, nationally and internationally. The next decade will see Medway reposition itself as a cultural hub, using its array of cultural assets – existing, hidden and prospective.

There are many factors that make Medway well placed to develop its cultural ecosystem and fulfil these ambitions – including its location and transport links, history of creative innovation and existing infrastructure.

To achieve the strategic outcomes set out in this document, we will adopt a unique and radical framework, the Creative Medway Delivery Model, that puts the people of Medway at its centre.

© Laura Fisher

About this document

This is the full report of the Creative Medway Cultural Strategy for 2020 to 2030. It accompanies a shorter document called Creative Medway Cultural Strategy 2020-2030.

This document is made up of the following sections:

- The **Introduction** sets out the context and purpose, our working definition of 'culture' and the thinking that underpins the development of the Strategy.
- In **Section 1** we outline the Vision for culture in Medway, the Values that shape it and the Themes around which it is built.
- **Section 2** provides a snapshot of Medway as an area and the current state of its cultural ecosystem.
- In **Section 3** we set out the unique Creative Medway Delivery Model and its component parts.

Introduction

The Creative Medway Cultural Strategy runs from 2020 to 2030 – it is ambitious and forward-thinking, setting the foundations for the next decade of cultural development. To achieve our Vision, we will adopt a unique and radical framework, the Creative Medway Delivery Model, that puts the people of Medway at its centre.

Our Strategy for Medway is a response to the world we live in, and to the one we want to play a part in building. It builds on what is already here to make Medway stronger and more resilient in response to the current challenges, rather than simply survive them. It takes a long-term view because making a difference on the big challenges will take time. At its heart is a strong belief that when people's voices are heard, powerful and meaningful change can take place.

Medway is at a crucial point in its history when it can make a step change in terms of cultural ambition and reach on a national stage. The period from 2021-2030 will see Medway reposition itself as a cultural hub, using its array of cultural assets – existing, hidden and prospective.

This will allow Medway to develop its reputation, recruiting and producing national and international level events. It will also encourage economic growth, reduce inequalities and raise the confidence and pride of its citizens.

A confident and ambitious bid for UK City of Culture 2025 was the starting point, but not the limit of our ambition. It offered a galvanising force to build on the breadth and strength of Medway's creative community and invited everyone to join in the conversation about the future of Medway.

The Creative Medway Cultural Strategy is the map for this ambition – acting internally as a guiding framework and a stimulus for ongoing challenge and discussion, and externally as a manifesto of our aims.

~~Medway's Cultural~~ This Strategy is for and of all the communities of Medway – those who live in, work in, learn in, or visit the area. We need to continue to include everyone in Medway in the process of delivering and reviewing our Cultural Strategy. Some people and organisations have particular roles to play in refreshing and sharing the Cultural Strategy – but culture is in us all, and about us all.

Having a ten-year Strategy means that Medway can strategically develop new ways of working as well as building and deepening partnerships. Creative Medway will deliver the Strategy through a series of Action Plans which will usually run for three-year periods allowing renewal and flexibility to changing needs.

Coronavirus

The work on developing this Strategy was begun in November 2019 prior to COVID-19 impacting on the UK. Consultation was paused in March 2020 when Lockdown restrictions were first introduced.

Consultation resumed (digitally) in May 2020 when it was considered essential that a strategy be in place to help guide the sector through the difficult next few years. The first Action Plan for this Strategy deliberately lasted only eighteen months to enable flexible response to a rapidly changing environment.

The pandemic, and its ongoing effects, are particularly critical for cultural and creative sectors impacted by a sudden and massive loss of funding and other income opportunities. Some organisations who benefitted from public sector support (e.g. public museums, libraries, theatres) are still experiencing financial problems with significant loss of income.

The overall sector in Medway includes major international and national companies with sustainable revenues. However, the cultural and creative sectors are largely composed of micro-firms, non-profit organisations and creative professionals, often operating on the margins of financial sustainability. Large public and private cultural institutions and businesses depend on this dynamic cultural ecosystem for the provision of creative goods and services. This pandemic has created a structural threat to the survival of many firms and workers in cultural and creative production. Many small companies and freelance professionals essential for the sector could face severe financial hardship.

Sustainable business models during and after the initial crisis are imperative for the sector's survival and resilience. Leaving behind the more fragile parts of the sector[1] could cause irreparable economic and social damage. The current challenge is to design ways of supporting the sector that alleviate the negative impacts in the short term – while helping identify new opportunities in the medium term for different public, private and non-profit organisations, and individuals, engaged in cultural and creative production.

Taking a proactive approach through the Creative Medway Cultural Strategy, Medway's creative sector will not only be more resilient, but can form the dynamic driver of the economy for the area as a whole.

Our definition of culture

Culture is often expressed only in the sense of its infrastructure: museums, galleries, theatre, libraries, music venues, public art, festivals and events. We define culture to include not only these things, but heritage, food, the night-time economy, creative interventions in the public realm and the creative industries. And most importantly, to reflect the diversity and value of the creative impulses in everyone in Medway.

Whilst developing cultural infrastructure is important, culture is about the people who make and enjoy it. This Strategy will ensure support and development of the practice, production and co-production of artists and creative practitioners, from all communities, and support wider creative opportunities for all. It will also build and highlight the links between culture and other areas of life, to recognize the cultural ecosystem as part of the wider Medway economy and society.

While we recognise that many different 'cultures' exist[2], we have created, however porous, a limit on our definition of culture. We recognise that limits exist in the field of

[1] In this context we are referring to those on freelance contracts who are not supported by government support schemes and who are not direct recipients of the cultural recovery funds. We are also referring to the independent music venues who cannot generate income, a part of the sector that was already not always well supported. Funding for organisations' survival over project delivery also leaves a potential for projects in communities and artists delivering in those communities to be cut short or not funded.

[2] Faith cultures, food cultures, political cultures, workplace cultures, sporting and artistic cultures (the list can be endlessly extended and sub-divided).

influence in which this Strategy operates and do not ignore or dismiss the wider cultural challenges that face Medway and the UK as a whole.

The ideas that underpin this Strategy

The Creative Medway Cultural Strategy is aspirational – with a broad vision which reflects the highest hopes for our place and our people. It puts artists, makers, storytellers and cultural influencers at its centre as the agents of change.

The Creative Medway Cultural Strategy shows how important culture is to Medway's future, and enables every-one to have the opportunity to take part in, as well as contribute to, its cultural life. In the short term, it will shape opinions and behaviours, and lead to social and economic benefits. Longer-term, it should look to transform Medway.

To adapt to changing times, the delivery of the Strategy needs to have an embedded iterative evaluation approach so that the process of delivery is an ongoing cycle of setting objectives, planning, delivering activities, assessing results, reviewing and then setting new objectives. This process allows for consultation, engagement and clarity, and creates a shared desire to deliver.

Consultation lies at the heart of the Creative Medway Cultural Strategy. It has been the constant thread through the development of this Strategy and will continue throughout its delivery. This consultation began with the earliest involvement of GJG Consultancy in November 2019, through the development and trialling of Themes, the finalising of the Strategy itself, and then the development of Action Plans. It will be carried forward in the review and evaluation of progress and outcomes on an annual basis.

Our approach to developing this Strategy has been a process that models good practice in consultation, which can then be taken forward into the implementation and regular review of the Strategy itself. It encourages people and organisations to work together in order to:

- Recognise each other's unique skills and contribution to shaping and delivering the Strategy,
- Listen to each other's voices to reflect the diversity of opinion and needs,
- Take responsibility individually and collectively for the Strategy and its delivery.

Our model for consultation aimed to include all stakeholders for the Creative Medway Cultural Strategy. We identify the stakeholders as including the cultural sector (including creative industries) within Medway, external suppliers to the sector (including possible national and regional touring partners), Medway Council, the education sector, community and voluntary organisations, residents who engage, residents who don't engage, sponsors and funders, tourists, local businesses, and housing developers.

Before March 2020 and the COVID-19 Lockdown, as part of the consultation, GJG Consultancy spoke with a range of people in Medway:

- Residents representing many different communities – from pupils at Rochester Grammar to Medway African and Caribbean Association's Senior Domino

Group, Dragon Co-working lunch club to the knitting circle at Walderslade Library,

- Around 70 stakeholders from sectors such as cultural, local government, health, voluntary and community, education, visitor economy, regeneration and economic development,
- Over 150 people at an Open Space session in Rochester in January 2020 including artists and makers, educators, council staff and charity workers.

This consultation identified the key challenges faced in developing a truly shared and ambitious strategy for Medway. The local authority, while investing heavily in cultural delivery, had not been successful in ensuring a sense of ownership of a shared ambition or collective vision for the place and the cultural sector was isolated and suffered from a lack of collective voice. This situation meant that Medway was underperforming on most metrics compared to its size, level of investment, and level of talent.

Input from various directions had started to develop partnership working via Medway Cultural Partnership but progress had been sporadic and incomplete.

In 2019, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Arts Council England, the Core Cities Group and the Key Cities Group undertook the UK Cultural Cities Enquiry, an independent enquiry into the cultural resources of Britain's cities. It recommended that cities consider setting up 'Cultural City Compacts'.

The approach aims to co-create and co-deliver a holistic vision for culture in a place, working together and with broader partners to provide leadership and strategic capacity and to provide a step change in the sustainability and impact of culture in that locality.

Medway was identified as an early adopter and, with support from Arts Council England, Medway Cultural Partnership and Medway Council began the development of a Compact and Cultural Strategy for Medway. Moving towards a more democratic structure and commitment to partnership and facilitative working would give Medway Council and all large and small cultural players the opportunity and ability to play to their strengths. It would also provide a space in which a new, shared ambition could be developed.

The restrictions imposed by the national Lockdown in March 2020 put the consultation project temporarily on hold. In June 2020 when the consultation was resumed it included a new, stronger focus on shape of delivery, as well as the Strategy itself.

A new proposed delivery model was shared, discussed and approved in principle with members of Medway Cultural Partnership in a Zoom workshop session.

Following this the wider consultation continued, with an emphasis not just on activity and vision, but also on delivery approaches to ensure there was ownership of these from across the sector.

Five Zoom ~~Theme~~ workshops were hosted (one for each Theme). The invitation was open to all, and members of the Medway Cultural Partnership and other stakeholders attended and discussed the content of each Theme.

Workshop attendance ranged from 20 to 50 attendees, with each workshop lasting three hours. Workshops focused on the development of a ten-year vision for each Theme and began to create Action Plans for their delivery.

Further one to one consultation took place with key stakeholders.

In partnership with Medway's UK City of Culture 2025 bid, four organisations that represent or who work closely with diverse communities across Medway were supported to hold community conversations with those who feel that their community's voice might be getting lost in current conversations about culture. Medway Diversity Forum, Youth Ngage who work with young people across North Kent, bemix who support people with learning difficulties and/or autism, and Christopher Sacre a visual artist, art facilitator and Deaf British Sign Language signer, held individual calls, social media groups, socially distanced events and online meeting technologies. These were held in multiple languages, including British Sign Language, and conversations fed into the development of the Themes and the approach for this Strategy.

After the Theme Workshops, all attendees were invited to join a series of Strategy drafting workshops. These workshops focused on the drafting of the final Strategy and development of Terms of Reference for the delivery model. A strong core of volunteers attended the workshops.

The development of this Strategy has engaged with a wide cross section of entities and people from across Medway, representing a diverse range of cultural perspectives, ambitions, drives and passions. These levels of interest, commitment and excitement have driven the emergence of this strategic vision for Medway.

© Paul Astley

Section 1

Vision

By 2030 Medway will be internationally recognised for its creativity and culture, exemplifying the positive impacts on everyone's lives. Diverse, collaborative and engaged, we will celebrate the strengths and creativity of all our residents.

By 2030 culture will be central to Medway: it will be how we show the rest of the world how proud we are of our home.

Every person has the right to cultural participation and its many benefits. To achieve our vision, we will ensure these opportunities are open to everyone nurturing the positive impact that culture has on other sectors – health and wellbeing, education, regeneration, community cohesion and civic pride.

Our cultural sector is diverse and exciting, reflecting the strengths and creativity of all our places and people. The way we work together makes Medway's brand of culture unique and we will achieve our vision by creating diverse, sustainable partnerships sharing our successes with the world.

Our Themes and Values

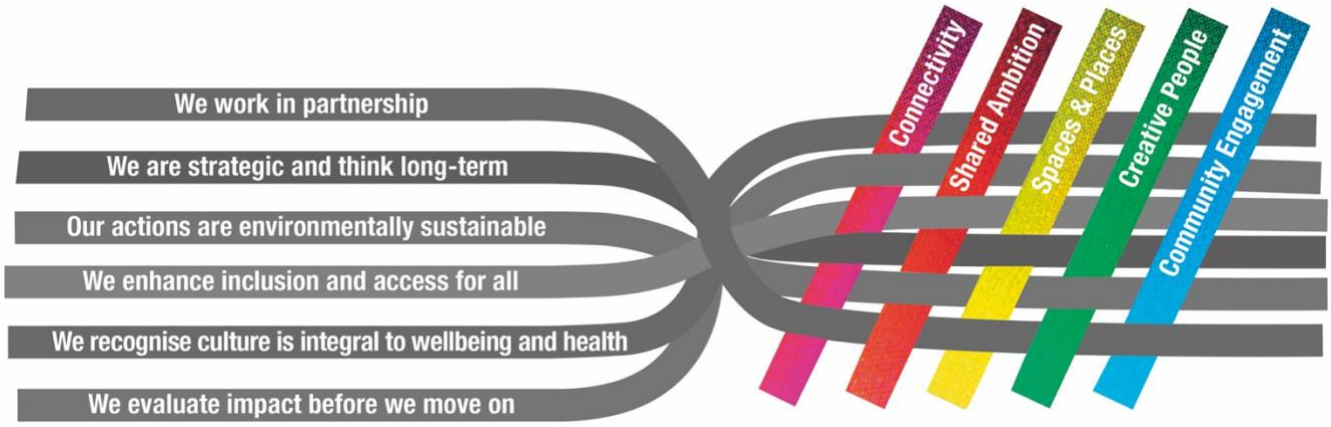

Figure 2: Medway Cultural Strategy 2020-2030: Values and Themes

The Creative Medway Cultural Strategy has five thematic areas and is guided by six key Values. These are core to everything we set out to do.

The Themes are the essential elements that provide the Strategy's structure, support and boundaries. In these sit the high-level business plans that form the basis for the Strategy's delivery. Each Theme has a vision that addresses, challenges or builds on opportunities present today.

The Values shape and guide how we deliver the Cultural Strategy and maintain focus over the next ten years.

Taken together, if we excel in these areas, we will achieve our overall vision.

Our Values

We work in partnership

We are generous, open and creative, understanding the needs of others, respecting boundaries and always looking for positives. Progress will come from our collective effort, imagination and generosity.

New sorts of conversations will have to happen – about collective needs and wishes, about roles and responsibilities and about the fair and effective use of resources.

This makes the Strategy a collective vision and sets a goal of working together.

We are strategic and think long-term

We think strategically, considering the long-term implications in everything we do. As we plan for 2030 and beyond, we will need leadership, guided by our Values, to provide a consistent sense of direction whilst building ownership of the Strategy.

This gives direction, consistency and oversight to the Strategy.

Our actions are environmentally sustainable

We recognise our role in leading change and promoting environmental responsibility. We will consider both the present and future impact of our actions on the environment and make plans to reduce our impact and to measure, understand and report on doing so.

This ensures our Strategy is sustainable and environmentally responsible.

We enhance inclusion and access for all

We must reflect all the people of Medway, respect difference and recognise that diversity is an asset and a major opportunity, the source of new ideas and innovation. This is not just about who we are as people, but also socio-economic and geographical factors. It challenges us to remove barriers to participation, tackle disadvantage and ensure that any bias is observed and corrected.

This ensures inclusion, equality of access and participation, alongside equality of opportunity, but also promotes innovation.

We recognise that culture is integral to wellbeing and health

We recognise that culture brings a host of benefits and impacts on people's lives every day, holistically supporting their emotional, physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual wellbeing.

This lets us show how we contribute to a wider health and wellbeing agenda and underlines the practical benefits of culture.

We evaluate impact before we move on

We employ a cycle of designing, testing, analysing and refining to make sure this Strategy can respond to change. Over the ten-year lifetime of this Strategy, many factors may influence change in Medway and this cycle builds in flexibility, learning and responsiveness to new challenges.

Delivering our Vision

Connectivity

By 2030 Medway's cultural sector is fully connected, physically, digitally and philosophically.

Shared Ambition

By 2030 we are recognised for our world leading approach to cultural delivery, and creatives locally and internationally want to make and share work in Medway.

Spaces and Places

By 2030 Medway has numerous spaces, accessible to all, to design, make and share, and engage with culture

Creative People

By 2030 everyone's creativity is recognised and supported, from their earliest moments to international collaboration and recognition.

Community Engagement

By 2030 all of Medway's communities have access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences and opportunities, and everyone has their creativity and diversity valued and given the chance to flourish.

© Paul Astley

Connectivity

Vision

By 2030 Medway's cultural sector is fully connected, physically, digitally and philosophically. Creatives and cultural organisations will feel part of, and have strong links with, Medway's diverse communities. They will have a voice in Medway's cultural future. There will be close links between different artforms, creative disciplines and wider sectors locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Challenges and opportunities

- Medway's cultural and creative sector must be more connected and communicate better with other sectors and places. There is a need to build new and strategic connections with different sectors. Connectivity is not just about internal connection within the cultural sector but must also be about working with other sectors. These include health, education, regeneration, and economic growth and connecting outside Medway – in Kent, the UK and beyond
- Creative Medway enables a more inclusive approach encouraging give-and-take, kindness and trustworthiness within communities. We need to be vigilant that when we make connectivity happen, it is in ways that do not exclude but maximise opportunities to make more links.
- To deliver this Theme, we will need to develop a shared set of behaviours[3], modelled across Medway and feeding into every aspect of how culture is delivered and experienced. These behaviours will ensure that no one feels invisible or unheard, and that no one feels unable to access the debate and decisions. These behaviours will be signed up to by all partners in the Creative Medway delivery model, and act as a model of good practice across Medway and beyond.
- Medway is a member of sub-regional, regional and national initiatives that should be further developed.

Delivering the Theme

- Offering clear ways of getting involved: through 'Task and Finish' working groups, the Creative Congress mailing list and events facilitated in a style which enhances inclusion, and accepting invitations to speak at and attend a range of meetings and events across our communities.
- Developing a clear communications strategy across a variety of different platforms and channels.

[3] For example, defined shared expectations around communication and connection as we work in partnership. Ensuring we consider encouraging closer understanding or sharing information.

- Coming together regularly to informally share and generate ideas via social meet ups and annually reviewing the Strategy, through Open Space[4] sessions, which allows everyone to contribute to the development of the cultural agenda.
- Through new strategic partnerships, creating a shared understanding of the ways in which cultural investment can add value to education and the economy and can enhance social wellbeing.
- Through openly sharing what we intend to do and what we have achieved, we will encourage others to join in and find their own connections.

[4] Open Space Technology (OST) is a way for groups to think, talk and take action together. It can work for as few as five people, and as many as 5000. Participants self-organise to create their own agenda on the day, allowing a dynamic and immediate response to the issues at hand. The process allows free-flowing conversations about the things that really matter to the people in the room. Open Space Technology can shift cultures both towards a more responsible and more pragmatic outlook. Find out more https://openspaceworld.org/wp2/what-is/

Shared Ambition

Vision

By 2030 we are recognised for our world leading approach to cultural delivery and creatives locally and internationally want to make and share work in Medway. We have achieved this by the way we work together – leading the UK in the level of community buy-in to cultural strategy, and the commitment to making all feel involved and engaged. Culture is intrinsic to our place-making and enhances wellbeing through the unique work inspired and developed through these approaches.

Challenges and opportunities

- Historically, and to this day, Medway has produced world class work. Chatham Dockyard's training was seen as among the best in the world, and 'the Medway Sound' is still found while browsing record shops across Europe and the USA. This rich heritage can be an inspiration in the development of future work so we can become internationally recognised for producing work with, and for, our diverse cultures.
- Our position 'on the edge' – of Kent, of London, the South East and Europe – gives Medway people a distinct 'fringe' perspective when viewing the world. Embracing this gives us the opportunity to be recognised internationally for producing work which builds on our unique heritages and diverse cultures.
- Our work needs to be led through a spirit of selfless, enlightened leadership that looks to the collective benefit for all, beyond short-term individual interests, and by doing so allows excellence to be achieved.
- Medway's bid for UK City of Culture 2025 showed what can be achieved when a place pulls together in support of culture to drive real benefits. Medway's City of Culture 2025 bid sought to mirror the values and ambitions identified in this Strategy, using the new collective ways of working as a core principle. Adopting and modelling these ways working carried benefits above and beyond the bid and its process.
- Collectively, we can bring about change but we can only do this with a shared ambition. As a sector, we need to be clear what the goal is, who our partners should be, and the routes that we will take to get there.

Delivering the Theme

- We used the 2025 UK City of Culture bidding process as a platform for our growth. We will build on our bid to explore what makes Medway unique and to draw on the focus and aspiration generated by the bid to deliver ambitious legacy activity.
- Planning, developing and producing specific opportunities for large scale events that excite and inspire, creating shared benefit and maximising potential as part of our Vision.

- Developing the ‘The Medway Principles’[5] to share and create agreement on what excellence in cultural delivery looks like for Medway. These will offer a shared language and a shared understanding of how we aim to deliver cultural projects in Medway – a language which explicitly makes it accessible to all, without sacrificing ambition.
- Nurturing selfless and enlightened leadership within the Creative Medway delivery model and beyond, that looks to the collective benefit for all, beyond short-term individual interests.
- Building consensus amongst all stakeholders on the value of culture investment and strategically plan for long-term delivery.

[5] Discussions in the workshops highlighted the need for a shared set of principles which outline what excellence in cultural delivery looks like in Medway. This encompasses both quality and inclusivity.

Spaces and Places

Vision

By 2030 Medway has numerous spaces, accessible to all, to design, make and share, and engage with culture. Beacon Spaces shine out from Medway whilst rooted in their communities. Medway works with partners in the region and beyond to enhance opportunities for inward investment to support spaces for culture. Throughout their careers, creatives have appropriate spaces, at a variety of scales, that are protected for their social, economic and community value.

Challenges and Opportunities

- Medway needs more spaces where people can collaborate to design, test, scale and engage with imaginative and enterprising ideas together.
- Medway particularly lacks affordable spaces for the creative sector. Culture is very vulnerable to rises in land values following urban regeneration.
- Managing and supporting these valuable, but fragile, communities is challenging, but crucial.
- Creative spaces should be recognised as assets of social, economic and community value, not just temporary solutions.
- Creative spaces need a wide geography to broaden engagement.
- Culture can create a vibrant, diverse night-time economy, and plays a vital role in reclaiming underused in-between spaces and filling in-between times.
- Finding spaces and places is also about ensuring that everything we do happens where the people we hope to reach can easily find out about it and access it. This could be a through a real place or a virtual place, such as a website or radio channel. Access to late-night public transport and other issues can be addressed by looking to provide wider geographical provision as much as by developing improved transportation to move audiences.

Delivering the Theme

- Supporting and developing work that investigates and demonstrates the economic, social and cultural benefits of creative workspaces.
- Encouraging the development of sustainable models.
- Producing long-term plans to secure and develop new spaces within Medway for creative practice.
- Developing a resource bank with shared resources both for making spaces accessible and for providing training and skills sharing.
- Defining, identifying and developing Beacon Spaces that can both shine out from Medway and be rooted within their local communities. Exploring and piloting design-led vibrant night-time spaces in the town centres.

Creative People

Vision

By 2030 everyone's creativity is recognised and supported, from their earliest moments to international collaboration and recognition. Acknowledging the central role both of creatives and of cultural and educational organisations in the creative ecosystem, a whole life approach is taken that welcomes new talent and supports existing creatives with what each needs at any time. There is a culture of mentoring and curating pathways and opportunities for everyone wishing to broaden or deepen their making, watching or participation in cultural activity. This leads to a stronger economy for Medway as a whole.

Challenges and Opportunities

- This Theme explores the importance of a holistic approach to a healthy creative ecosystem[6]. That is to say that all elements of the sector need to be supported: trickle-down or top-down approaches will not sufficiently support all parts. Collaboration and sharing of skills can be intergenerational; through working with young people, we shift the negativity and raise potential.
- We must recognise the gaps in the creative ecosystem, understanding that there are varying different levels of support needed for creative people and organisations through different stages of their career and life.
- There is a lack of transparency and universal knowledge of development opportunities which includes progression funding support, micro-grants and other support mechanisms for grass-roots culture.
- Medway needs to provide opportunities for young creatives from early years up within formal and informal education, through a creative curriculum which offers inclusive value. Home-grown and new-to-Medway talent can be retained and attracted with the development of post-16 opportunities.
- Medway creatives should be linked into wider regional/sub-regional groups which can offer support. Professional development is not just internal but should link Medway to the rest of the world, providing opportunities to collaborate, broaden minds and promote Medway. This needs to be supported to happen.

[6] Ecosystem is used here specifically to convey the interdependence between different parts of the sector. The larger organisations need smaller organisations and individual creatives in order to survive and flourish, like a natural ecosystem in a river; here larger fish are reliant on plants, small fish and microscopic organisms to survive and vice versa – no one is unimportant, all are needed and dependent on each other.

Delivering the Theme

- Reviewing existing resources, projects and funding sources to highlight gaps in support for the whole ecosystem.
- Making training and development opportunities available based on a cross-generational principle, linking Medway's array of existing talent with the next generation.
- Embedding the principles of this Strategy within schools and youth provision locally, linking to and building on existing work.
- Developing and promoting new and existing ‘pathways’ for the development for creatives, as well as supporting them to choose and develop their own career paths within Medway.
- We will review the existing resources, projects and funding sources to highlight gaps in support for the whole ecosystem and take a transparent approach to all major cultural provision and spend.
- Developing the opportunity for major stakeholders to test new development ideas involving the creative and cultural sector through ‘Task and Finish’ working groups and informal networks.

Community Engagement

Vision

By 2030 all of Medway's communities have access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences and opportunities, and everyone has their creativity and diversity valued and given the chance to flourish.

Communities know they have a voice and are architects of the projects that happen locally. Community engagement is recognised as a collective ambition, central to culture, the responsibility of all, and the core around which we galvanise our cross-sector partnership approach.

Challenges and opportunities

- We are not currently reaching into all parts of the diverse Medway communities. Engagement in culture in Medway is currently lower than regional averages. This Theme is around setting this straight and ensuring that we increase participation levels and reach as many people as possible, allowing them to get involved as much or as little as they want to.
- Medway has a number of creative practitioners who deliver high-quality engagement work with communities across Medway. However, work is often project-based and fragmented.
- We need to support long term engagement with communities recognising that engagement is a marathon not a sprint. Engagement in culture can have huge benefits in terms of developing pride in place and driving aspiration and change. We need to achieve a step-change in engagement to unlock these potentials.
- Community engagement should be a collective ambition; by reaching out collectively we can engage the widest range of audiences and participants.
- Ensuring diversity of our communities encompasses acceptance and respect, recognising our differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. By ensuring acceptance and respect, we can move to authentically embrace the rich diversity of individuals and communities across Medway.

Delivering the Theme

- Setting up a shared way to communicate who is doing what and in which communities.
- Auditing the skills within the communities we work with so that they can be recognised and used if they wish.
- Developing a programme of engaging and visible culture, developing arts and culture beyond traditional spaces to our streets and parks and open spaces.

- Establishing metrics that ensure that success and value is measured as much in terms of the breadth and diversity of who engages as in numbers of attendances.
- Through the Creative Medway Compact, ‘Task and Finish’ working groups and other opportunities, we will bring in business, education, regeneration health and other sectors who operate in communities across Medway and link with them into wider culture and community groups.

© Simon Kelsey

Section 2

In this section we take a snapshot of Medway today to get a sense of the area, its cultural resources and potential.

There are many factors that make Medway well placed to develop its cultural ecosystem and fulfil the ambitions set out in the Creative Medway Cultural Strategy – including its location and transport links, history of creative innovation and existing infrastructure.

Medway Today

Medway is one of the largest conurbations in the South East, with a population of around 280,000 which is projected to grow to over 315,000 by 2035[7]. It has been a place of significance for thousands of years because of its strategic location as a crossing point on the River Medway; Rochester Castle, Rochester Cathedral and Chatham Dockyard were built for that very reason. Medway is strategically positioned between the capital and the continent and is the gateway to the County of Kent.

As well as the 'five towns' making up Medway: Chatham, Rochester, Gillingham, Strood and Rainham, large parts of the area are green and rural, with the equivalent of 13.3 Hyde Parks under Medway Council's direct management. Medway has 70 miles of cycle routes and is part of the environmentally important North Kent Marshes on the extensive Hoo Peninsula to the north.

Medway has been a home to creative innovation for hundreds of years, from traction engines, to guided torpedoes and from Jubilee Clips to flying boats. Today's key sectors include advanced manufacturing and engineering, ICT and Digital, Health and Social Care, Construction and Cultural and Creative Industries.

Medway has been at the forefront of manned flight since the 1880's when the Royal Engineers at Chatham established a balloon section. During the two World Wars, Rochester was home to the Short Brothers' seaplanes and later bombers, and in the late 1950s the Elliot Brothers pioneered the use of computers in the aviation industry. BAE Systems continues to develop cutting edge technologies in the area.

Medway has a diverse and rapidly growing business base with a focus on high-value technology, engineering, manufacturing, cultural and creative, knowledge-intensive companies. Innovation is key to Medway's future and is being supported by state-of-the-art facilities across the area linked to the universities, all helping start-up businesses.

The new Innovation Park Medway is being developed to support up to 101,000 square metres of commercial space for high value technology, advanced manufacturing, engineering and knowledge-intensive businesses with office space, research and development, studios, laboratories, high-technology industries, light and general industrial uses.

[7] Medway Council population estimates 2016, 15% growth from 2016 to 317,529 in 2035 (Medway Council, June 2018) [https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/231/demography_population_projections_2016]

Alongside our universities, galleries, museums, theatres and Community Hubs that would have (in a normal year[8]) busy events calendars, we are home to makers and creators, film sets and festivals, spaces and studios.

Medway is part of the Thames Estuary, the UK's number one growth opportunity. The Thames Estuary Growth Board, led by government Envoy, Kate Willard, exists to drive forward an action plan to unlock the Thames Estuary's potential and make great things happen.

Medway is home to the University of Greenwich, University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University and Mid-Kent College. This is a young and vibrant community.

There continues to be strong investment in cultural activity especially from Medway Council, Arts Council England and Department of Culture, Media and Sport, and a clear recognition of the value in culture at the core of social regeneration.

The people living, working and studying in Medway, and our growing visitor numbers, all contribute to this growing cultural landscape.

The Strategy links into targeted strategies and partnerships across Medway Council and our partners into a single Medway-wide Cultural Strategy. This includes but is not limited to the following:

At a local level:

- Medway Local Plan
- Medway 2035
- Medway Council Skills and Employability Plan
- Medway Council Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Medway Children and Young People's Plan
- Medway Council SEND and Inclusion Strategy
- Medway for Business
- Medway Learning Partnership
- Medway Tourism Association
- Medway Cultural Education Partnership

At a regional level:

- Kent and Medway Cultural Transformation Board
- Kent Cultural Strategy 2017-27
- Creative Estuary
- SECEN and SELEP
- Thames Estuary Growth Board
- Thames Estuary Production Corridor

At a national level:

- Child Friendly City
- Climate Change
- ACE Let's Create
- National Cultural Compacts Network

[8] This report was published in 2020 after 10 months of restrictions and lockdowns caused by the global pandemic of COVID19.

Current cultural infrastructure

Provision mapping across Medway identifies strong potential, but a potential that needs to be supported to grow and connect. Attendance, enthusiasm, and the quality of feedback at the Open Space Session we ran in January 2020 highlighted the levels of talent, commitment and desire both for engagement and connection. This desire needs to be encouraged, nurtured and supported.

The cultural provision in Medway – as offered by both venues and organisations – was mapped according to the geographical location generated by the full postcodes of their current bases. An interactive map can be accessed through the following hyperlink, on which it is possible to identify each of the organisations and venues represented: Medway Provision Map.

This work highlighted two main issues:

- The current spread of the cultural ecosystem in Medway is predominantly an uncoordinated spread of mainly small and often unsubsidised activities. It shows an abundance of potential which needs to be supported to grow and interconnect as it needs and wants.
- The gaps in the mapping, both of individuals and organisations which came forward as part of the Strategy development and of individuals and organization who were mentioned but didn't make contact, highlight the starkness of the likely undercount of any estimate of the size of the sector.

It is clear that a fuller mapping of the sector is needed as part of the delivery of the Strategy.

There are a number of wider stakeholders contributing to culture infrastructure including:

- Public health
- Primary and Secondary Education
- Tertiary Education
- Local Economic Partnership
- Place Board

Current levels/types of cultural engagement

Medway is an area where arts engagement has tended to be somewhat lower than the national average, with only 57.4% of people in Medway having engaged in or attended an arts event according to the 2016/17 Active People survey[9], as compared with the then England average figure of 60.3%.

Audience profiling using Audience Spectrum[10] shows the main groups in Medway are 'Trips & Treats', 'Dormitory Dependables' and 'Up Our Street' ,with 64% of

[9] Active People Survey https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/participating-and-attending/active-lives-survey#section-2

[10] Postcode level analysis allows main population groupings to be described in terms of Audience Spectrum cultural segmentation, an Arts Council England commissioned segmentation of the population covering propensity to engage in the arts. Audience Spectrum models the behaviour and cultural preferences, down to household level, of each segment. The

Medway being in one of these three groups, compared to 41% of the national population. These three groups are characterized by low or medium engagement in the arts, and a propensity to choose heritage, museum and mainstream arts over more contemporary arts and crafts.

Audience Agency website gives comprehensive and detailed information on how to programme for and communicate with these groups.

© MPP Kent

Section 3

Here we set out the delivery model that has been developed for Medway as part of the development of the Creative Medway Cultural Strategy.

To achieve the strategic outcomes set out in this document, we will adopt a unique and radical framework, the Creative Medway Delivery Model, that puts the people of Medway at its centre.

Delivery mechanism

The delivery model[11] for the Creative Medway Cultural Strategy reflects both the consultative process which developed the Strategy and the shared delivery approach. The Strategy is open to everyone in Medway to participate in at a level and to a degree which suits them best.

Full terms of reference and a full breakdown of the definitions, purpose and responsibilities of each component element of the Creative Medway model can be found in Creative Medway's Terms of Reference along with the Code of Conduct governing participation in the model.

The Creative Congress is a broad group, open to all interested in culture in Medway. In addition to receiving information and invitations to activities, it meets regularly to review, reflect and plan. This broad group is kept informed of activity through Creative Medway's website, social media and mailing list as well as information sessions and informal sector meet ups.

The core of the delivery mechanism is the **Creative Medway Compact**. This Group acts to co-ordinate the delivery of the Strategy, monitor its overall performance and delivery and acts as an advocate for Medway's cultural and creative sector, regionally and nationally as well as within Medway. The membership of this group is made up of elected members who bring expertise and interest in each of the Strategy themes, a Chair, appointed stakeholders representing other sectors, a representative of Medway Council and Champions representing populations whose voice the Compact hopes to amplify. Information on maximum terms can be found in the Creative Medway Terms of Reference.

'Task and Finish' working groups will be convened to carry out specific objectives or tasks on behalf of the Creative Congress as mandated by the Compact. They will be short term (no longer than a year in duration), purpose-driven working groups made up of members of the Congress and Compact with relevant interests and skills. They will report to the Compact regularly and to the Congress at the end of their term. To encourage engagement from those within the sector where strategic engagement is frequently at the cost of other paid work or the development of practice, they will have a budget to support costs of participation wherever possible. Each group will have clear objectives which together with the Creative Medway Code of Conduct, will help ensure smooth running of the groups.

[11] This Strategy was developed as a joint piece of work with the development of the delivery mechanism, which is a Cultural Compact for Medway. As such, this delivery mechanism is coming into operation concurrently with the adoption of the Strategy, and will need to be evaluated alongside the strategy's evaluation. The new mechanism replaces Medway Cultural Partnership (MCP) the previously existing model that regularly brought together organisations and individuals across the creative sector to celebrate and promote the creative and cultural events, activities, and programmes and to discuss a wide range of issues and topics.

Action Plan

The Creative Medway Cultural Strategy will remain relevant and rooted in the local community through an Action Planning cycle and annual review and evaluation processes.

Action Planning will be linked to each Theme and be carried out on a three-year basis to enable flexibility and fit with changing circumstances following an initial transition Action Plan of 18 months covering the COVID-19 recovery period.

Following the agreement of action plans, key milestones and outcomes will be noted and measured against.

How we will review and evaluate

Evaluation will involve, both review against clear measures linked to the Action Planning and reflective review sessions during Creative Congress events, as well as review of 'Task and Finish' working group processes and outcomes.

The Creative Medway Compact will oversee review and reflection and ensure the Creative Medway Cultural Strategy runs to time.

Work will be shared via the Creative Medway website as well as with all Creative Medway partners and members of the Creative Congress.

Medway's Cultural Strategy is for all the people of Medway. Visit www.creativemedway.co.uk to see how you can get involved in helping to achieve our shared vision.

This Strategy was produced in consultation with, and has the ownership of, the cultural sector in Medway and key stakeholders. Particular input came from sector volunteers in the Drafting Group: Aidan Dooley, Alex Cameron, Christian Caruana, David Stokes, Fiona Watt, Jatin Patel, Kate Mechedou, Lucy Medhurst, Margherita Gramegna, Miriam Dooley and Sam Rapp.

The consultation was delivered by GJG Consultancy supported by Ruth Melville Research and The Audience Agency. This report was written by GJG Consultancy and Ruth Melville Research, drawing on earlier work by The Audience Agency.