

Cultural Strategy

for Huntingdonshire

(2007 – 2010)



Executive Summary

Huntingdonshire
district council

1. INTRODUCTION



Culture has a fundamental role to play in community life by providing opportunities to improve standards of health, well-being and quality of life. It can also contribute to, and develop, economically vibrant communities, with positive benefits for local and regional tourism, increased investment in culture-led growth and regeneration, and positive impacts on housing and employment opportunities, reinforcing the notion of sustainable communities. Acknowledging the importance of culture, the Council will work towards meeting the following vision statement:

To enhance the quality of life and ensure that all of Huntingdonshire's residents have the opportunity to pursue a wide range of high-quality, sustainable cultural activities that fully reflect the diverse needs of the district

What is Culture?

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport defines 'culture' as having the following key characteristics:

"Culture has both a material and a value dimension and includes a wide range of activities including arts, media, sports, parks, museums, libraries, the built heritage, the countryside, and playgrounds."

With this definition in mind, the scope of this Strategy includes:

- Arts - The performing and visual arts, crafts, design and fashion
- Built heritage - The built heritage, architecture landscape and archaeology
- Leisure – Formal and informal leisure pursuits
- Libraries - Libraries, literature, writing and publishing
- Museums - Museums, artefacts and archives
- Open space - Parks, open spaces, wildlife habitats, water environments and countryside recreation
- Play - Children's play, playgrounds and play activities
- Sports - Events, facilities and development



2. LOCAL CONTEXT

District Profile

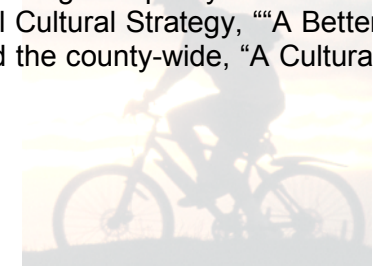
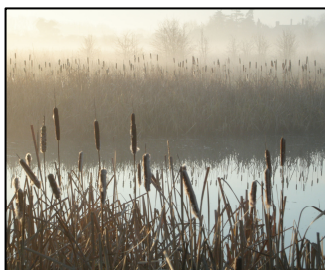
Huntingdonshire is predominantly a rural district, covering an area of approximately 350 square miles, and has a population of 162,000 (Mid-2005 population estimate, ONS). Approximately half of the district's residents live in four market towns - Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives and Ramsey, with the remaining residents distributed within key settlements and rural villages.

Given the rural nature of much of the district, isolation is seen as a major issue. Indeed, rural areas often lack an adequate range of services and facilities in their immediate localities. Therefore, this strategy looks at addressing the negative effects of isolation ensuring that all residents, irrespective of their location, can access culture and cultural services.

The majority of housing and economic growth has been, and will continue to be, located within the district's largest towns of Huntingdon and St Neots. Lesser scale development is planned in other market towns such as St Ives and Ramsey. In rural areas new development will be limited and will be restricted to a number of key settlements. In villages there will be limited growth to meet local needs. The Council's Corporate Plan also states that resources will be focused upon the need to reinvigorate all of the district's towns and to assist more deprived communities, including rural areas. When considering all of these different growth pressures, it is vital that all communities have access to, and can participate in, culture and cultural activities.

Policy Context

The development of a Cultural Strategy is of high priority to the district as it is identified as a key objective of the Huntingdonshire Local Strategic Partnership and also within the Huntingdonshire Children and Young People's Plan. Therefore, it is important that this Cultural Strategy has strong links to the Council's emerging Sustainable Community Strategy. Aside from the importance at the district level, key national and regional policy also has an impact upon culture within Huntingdonshire, examples being Living East's Regional Cultural Strategy, "A Better Life: the role of culture in the sustainable development of the East of England", and the county-wide, "A Cultural Strategy for Children and Young People in Cambridgeshire".

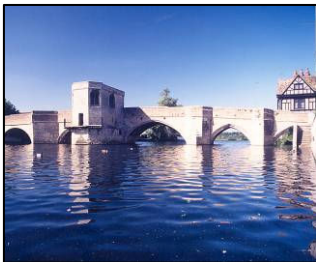


3. AUDITS OF PROVISION

Existing cultural offer in Huntingdonshire

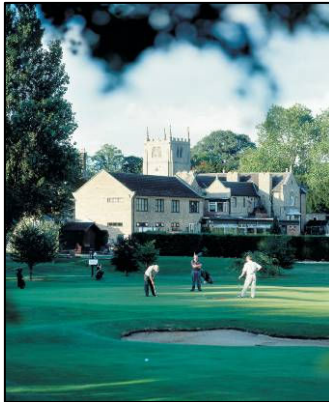
A detailed audit of existing provision has been completed for all areas of culture – please refer to the Cultural Strategy for a full breakdown of provision levels. In summary:

- Arts Services deliver a range of activities and events including 'Art Attack', 'Hinchingsbrooke Spring Music', 'Riverside Music', 'Huntingdonshire Arts Diary, and the 'Arts and Health Referral Scheme'. The Council also works in partnership with other organisations such as 'Vital Communities', and 'Arts in Cambs on Tour'.
- With regard to the Built Heritage, the District has 58 Grade I listed buildings, 133 Grade II listed buildings and 2032 Grade III listed buildings. There are a further 60 conservation areas in Huntingdonshire.
- There are eight libraries in the district and 1 library access point.
- Museums in the district include the Ramsey Rural Museum, the Norris Museum (St Ives), St Neots Museum, Blacked-Out Britain War Museum (Huntingdon) and the Cromwell Museum (Huntingdon).
- The District Council has five Leisure Centres located in St Ives, Huntingdon, St Neots, Ramsey and Sawtry. There are also seven privately owned health and fitness centres, whilst a further 85 community facilities are owned or maintained by Parish / Town Councils. Schools and colleges also have indoor leisure provision, and an increasing number are now available outside of school hours due to the extended schools programme.
- An open space audit conducted by PMP Consultants identified that the district has 240 playing pitches. This figure is dominated by football pitches including 88 adult pitches, 54 junior pitches and 14 mini-soccer pitches. Other provision exists including rugby pitches, cricket pitches, tennis courts and golf courses.
- Water sport and recreation activities are popular at locations such as Grafham Water and the River Ouse.
- Huntingdonshire District Council's Leisure Development focus on delivering four key areas of work: *Prevention programmes* (e.g. Youth Sports Development and the Community Sports & Recreation Project), *Intervention Programmes* (e.g. Exercise Referral scheme, health walks, etc), *Sporting Infrastructure* (targeting clubs, coaches, volunteers and officials) and *Raising the profile of sport*
- The Countryside Services manage 12 sites which are open to the public 24 hours a day. The service also maintains and promotes the 26 mile Ouse Valley Way and a nursery project in Godmanchester. There are also numerous parks and open spaces located across the District, and furthermore, there are 117 sites that have formal equipped play provision for children and young people.



4. IDENTIFYING CULTURAL NEEDS

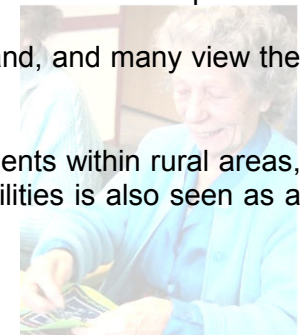
Consultation



Undertaking robust consultation is vitally important to ensure that this Cultural Strategy, and its associated action plan, properly meets the needs of the district. Through consultation it is possible to identify attitudes to existing cultural services, identify aspirations for culture, identify barriers to accessing provision, and consultation can help to inform the development of the culture action plan.

A range of consultation exercises have been undertaken by the Council in the past two years including specific service-related consultation, and more general consultation undertaken as part of wider studies. Examples of key consultation include the Cambridgeshire Joint Consultation Partnership, “*Cambridgeshire Quality of Life Survey*”, PMP “*Open Space Needs Assessment*” and Huntingdonshire District Council “*Annual Report*”. The main findings of the consultation are as follows:

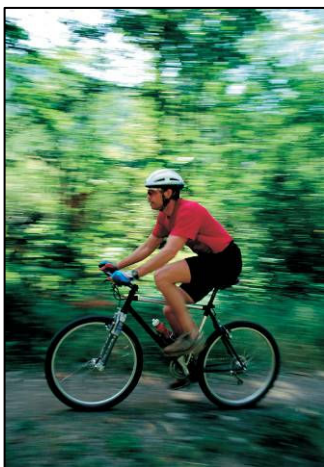
- Whilst the general quality of open spaces is seen to be acceptable, in some cases it is limited by anti-social behaviour, litter and vandalism.
- “Natural and semi-natural greenspace” and “parks and gardens” are viewed as the highest quality open spaces within the district.
- Teenage play provision is deemed to be insufficient, whilst existing open spaces could be improved by increasing the play value of existing play facilities.
- Leisure centres are deemed to be accessible facilities within the district, although there is scope for improvements in accessibility to theatres and cinemas, and other cultural facilities
- Residents within Huntingdonshire are less satisfied with the availability of cultural facilities when compared to residents of neighbouring authorities.
- Sports clubs within the district feel that there is sufficient pitch provision to meet demand, and many view the quality of provision as good.
- There are insufficient training areas for sports clubs, with few accessible floodlit areas.
- Transport is seen as a major barrier to accessing cultural facilities, particularly for residents within rural areas, where provision is generally much poorer compared to urban areas. Cost of using facilities is also seen as a barrier to some – particularly children and young people.



5. IDENTIFYING THE PRIORITIES FOR CULTURE

Long-term principles

In support of the broad vision statement outlined in the introduction, Huntingdonshire District Council has developed a set of long-term cultural principles that it will aspire to achieve. These are as follows:



1. Huntingdonshire will be a centre for cultural excellence, with a clear distinct identity where people choose to live, work and visit.
2. Culture will help to improve quality of life by significantly impacting upon all areas of local community life through a range of opportunities resulting in improved health and well-being.
3. Implementing this Cultural Strategy will make a real and positive difference to community life and community cohesion by specifically targeting resources at meeting needs in priority neighbourhoods and communities.
4. The development of a Cultural Strategy for Huntingdonshire will help to positively contribute to Council policies and priorities including education, health, equality and community needs.
5. All key cultural partners will ensure that 'culture' is sustainable by embedding it into all relevant strategies and plans, both at the local and regional level.
6. Huntingdonshire's cultural diversity, its local character and its diverse natural and built environment will be celebrated and enhanced.
7. All residents will have the opportunity to access and participate in a wide range of high quality cultural activities, and this will be reflected in increased participation levels.
8. Barriers will be removed so that all children and young people can access a range of safe inclusive play and recreational opportunities.
9. Enhanced cultural activity will support and encourage community programmes and the personal, social, environmental, economic and physical development of all residents within the district.
10. All key cultural partners will work towards understanding the changing cultural needs of the district, by improving methods of engagement and consultation including isolated and under-represented groups.
11. Using tools including the "Open Space, Sport, and Recreation Needs Assessment and Audit", a co-ordinated approach across culture will be adopted when considering future provision of open space, recreation and cultural activities, in relation to section 106 monies.
12. All key cultural partners will work towards maximising potential external funding opportunities to support cultural activities and events.
13. All key cultural partners will work towards raising the profile of culture within the district, actively seeking out new ways of highlighting and promoting cultural opportunities within the district.

In order to deliver against the identified vision and thirteen long-term principles, the Council has developed three key themes to act as a basis for developing a three year action plan. These three themes address priority areas identified within the consultation and wider corporate objectives, and are as follows:

- 1. Improve access to culture and leisure opportunities**
- 2. Develop and improve life-long learning**
- 3. Develop vibrant communities which are safer, healthier, cohesive and economically sustainable**



6. ACTION PLAN: 2007 – 2010



At the core of Huntingdonshire's Cultural Strategy is an action plan which is underpinned by the three key themes listed previously. For each of the themes, a set of objectives have been produced as demonstrated below. (*Note:* Many of these objectives are supported by a list of actions which can be monitored throughout the life-span of the Strategy. These actions relate to specific service areas of the Council and / or to key cultural partners. To view the key actions please refer to the Cultural Strategy document)

THEME 1: *Improve access to culture and leisure opportunities*

Identified objectives



- Make effective use of section 106 monies to positively contribute to cultural opportunities within the District
- Make accessible leisure opportunities for all
- Meet local leisure provision needs
- Enhance the standard of service provided at Leisure Centres and by Leisure Development
- Make sport and active recreation opportunities accessible for disabled people; and for over 50's
- Provide under-represented groups with the opportunity to participate in sport and active recreation
- Promote healthy lifestyles by enabling vulnerable people through ill health / rehabilitation to lead active lives via improved participation in physical leisure activities
- Increase opportunities to pursue a healthy lifestyle by encouraging walking
- Raise awareness of sports clubs available in the District
- Raise the profile of sport and culture linked to the 2012 Olympics
- Raise the profile and awareness of water-based sporting and recreation opportunities
- Promote, maintain and improve access to Ouse Valley Way
- Promote and enhance the Public Rights of Way Network (PROW network)
- Provide countryside sites that are accessible to all
- Raise awareness of the District's greenspace including both countryside sites and parks and open spaces
- Raise the standards of all District Council maintained parks and open spaces
- Develop existing & new opportunities for arts activities and events
- Improve access to opportunities for cultural enrichment that promote good health & mental well-being
- Increase the number of cultural & leisure opportunities for young people
- Develop and improve the Arts Venue Database
- Improve the understanding of and access to the countryside & the heritage of the landscape



6. ACTION PLAN: 2007 – 2010



THEME 2: *Develop and improve life-long learning*

Identified Objectives

- Develop further opportunities for local people to improve or gain work related skills
- Provide volunteer activities for all at countryside sites
- Provide open space events and activities for all
- Develop learning opportunities through cultural activity
- Develop understanding of local heritage
- Promote all libraries and library access points

THEME 3: *Develop vibrant communities which are safer, healthier, cohesive and economically sustainable*

Identified Objectives

- Ensure that there is clear linkage between this Strategy and the new Sustainable Community Strategy
- Ensure that key actions are helping to deliver vibrant communities
- Enable residents to take an active part in their communities
- Ensure high-quality built-environment
- Develop Godmanchester Nursery Project
- Develop community involvement in greenspaces & biodiversity projects
- Increase the Biodiversity value throughout the District
- Enhance provision of Facilities for Healthy and Active Lifestyles
- Seek to encourage greater community involvement in the districts parks and open spaces
- Support communities in protecting & valuing open spaces & historic sites & buildings
- Develop further opportunities for local people to improve or gain work related skills
- Support the development of play and recreation facilities in identified communities
- Adopt Neighbourhood Management Approach within three identified priority areas of Oxmoor, Eynesbury and Ramsey
- Apply to Big Lottery through the 'Children's Play Programme

7. MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE STRATEGY

Review Mechanisms



This Cultural Strategy acknowledges that risk management is important in ensuring the delivery of objectives and key actions outlined in the Action Plan. To help identify the potential for risk, key organisations and partners responsible for delivering each action have been identified. Furthermore, to enable actions to be monitored, timescales and performance measures / indicators have been established to enable the District Council to assess progress.



This Cultural Strategy is intended to act as starting point to address issues in the long-term – working towards achieving the thirteen long-term cultural principles. Therefore, this strategy will be reviewed in due course so that a new strategy will immediately follow on at the end of this initial three-year period.

The development and implementation of this Cultural Strategy is a key objective of the Huntingdonshire Local Strategic Partnership (Culture and Leisure Thematic Group). Therefore, it follows that the three-year action plan will be monitored and reviewed by the Culture and Leisure Thematic Group. With regard to the specific actions and objectives identified within the action plan, progress will be tracked and monitored by individual service plans, which are refreshed on an annual basis. If appropriate, reference will also be made to relevant performance indicators from the Local Area Agreement.



Within the three-year action plan, Huntingdonshire District Council also commits to investigating and reviewing appropriate evaluation tools and where appropriate, will build them into the Cultural Strategy review process.

This Strategy has been produced by Huntingdonshire District Council working in partnership with environmental consultants, Jones Plus Limited



jones plus limited⁺

Consultant: Alex Jones
e-mail: jonesplusltd@yahoo.co.uk

