

Nuneaton & Bedworth Cultural Strategy 2023-2028



Clockwise from top left: Sanctuary, Bedworth, photo credit Andrew Moore; Textile banner created by local women; Sharing the Light, Nuneaton, photo credit Andrew Moore; Art Reach with UNBOSI Marble Awareness Roadshow, Nuneaton, photo credit Art Reach

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Foreword

I am delighted to introduce the first Cultural Strategy for Nuneaton and Bedworth.

Culture is something that we are all involved with, in the way we live, work and the places we visit. Whether we are involved in the arts, exploring and celebrating our heritage, taking part in community festivals, seeing live music, visiting the cinema, using libraries, learning about different communities, going out with the family or coming together in our parks and open spaces, we are all taking part in cultural activities.

NBBC's plan is to Build a Better Borough, to make Nuneaton & Bedworth the place for our residents to live, work and visit, and restore the sense of civic pride in the Borough. Culture has a strong part to play, and this Cultural Strategy outlines the ways that culture can help us build towards our vision. Culture helps us to find a shared sense of identity and civic pride.

There are significant challenges across the country, which affect our communities too. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and an ongoing cost of living crisis has affected and continues to affect our creative people, businesses and cultural venues. Events have caused uncertainty about the sustainability of cultural activity and venues in many areas and has had an impact on Nuneaton & Bedworth too.

However, we have much to build on: there are amazing active artists and arts organisations in the Borough, such as The Makery and Abbey Theatre, making things happen and involving the community. We have a much-loved Museum and Art Gallery, attractive parks and buildings, and unique heritage, as the birthplace of author George Eliot and an industrial heritage of mining and ribbon making. Bedworth's Armistice Day Parade is the largest in the country. We have a Borough that is diverse, with a number of faiths practised and cultures to share, including a significant and culturally active Gurkha community. We are on an exciting journey with culture already, having attracted substantial funding to the Borough to invest in our cultural spaces, such as an extension to the Museum, and a recent programme of large-scale events in our towns, Sharing the Light and Sanctuary.

But there is much more to do and more potential to develop in our Borough. This Cultural Strategy aims to identify ways in which we can improve the great foundations that we know are there, bringing people together to make the most of what we can achieve culturally. The Strategy outlines how culture in Nuneaton and Bedworth can support and enhance every aspect of our ambitions, and make the Borough a better place to live, work and visit.

I am excited for us all to work together to achieve this future for culture in Nuneaton & Bedworth.

Councillor Sue Markham

Portfolio Holder for Public Services

Executive Summary

In 2022, Art Reach were commissioned by Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council to research and create a Cultural Strategy for the Borough. In initial meetings, it was agreed that the scope for the study would be inclusive of arts, heritage, creativity, leisure activity including wellbeing and healthy activity.

The key questions for culture in Nuneaton & Bedworth are: “What do people value in Nuneaton & Bedworth’s creative arts and heritage sectors, how do we sustain these, and what do local groups and organisations need to develop and achieve greater things?”

To begin to answer this question, an extensive consultation process was conducted, involving a range of consultation methods, and engaging with stakeholders, targeted local communities and cultural organisations, and the wider public across the Borough. A strong level of engagement was achieved using these methods and the feedback gathered from the process is rich and in-depth.

The context within which the Borough’s cultural sector is operating is complex. 2022 saw the emergence from a pandemic, which adversely affected cultural organisations across the nation, including in Nuneaton & Bedworth. Research has shown that the pandemic has also impacted the mental health of citizens, which is expected to become a long-term issue for many. In addition, a cost-of-living crisis is affecting the country, with high levels of inflation and the threat of economic recession.

These areas make the recovery of the cultural sector more difficult due to the economic impacts and uncertainties. However, it also means these services have become even more crucial to supporting people and communities in their own recovery. There are pressures on how to invest funding, especially for local authorities, to best support communities and culture, and it is within this context that Nuneaton & Bedworth’s Cultural Strategy aims to identify priorities for the sector.

Alongside these national concerns, Nuneaton & Bedworth is making ambitious plans to tackle its own regeneration projects in areas of need. The Borough has been identified as a Priority Place by Arts Council England, as an area of significantly low cultural engagement. There are funding opportunities available that can support the Borough with their ambitions, and a Cultural Strategy aims to help unlock these strategic opportunities.

Analysis of the strategic context and the richness of the consultation in the Borough, a set of three overall priority areas for supporting Culture in Nuneaton & Bedworth have been identified. A suggested Action Plan follows on how to begin to address these priority areas over the next 5 years.

The identified Vision for the Cultural Strategy is:

For Culture in Nuneaton & Bedworth to be ambitious, inclusive and a part of everyday life, bringing people together to celebrate and share the unique heritage and cultures in the Borough, and contributing to the vibrancy and economic success of the towns.

In order to achieve this vision, the three priority areas for development are:

- 1. Investing in People and Developing skills in culture and the arts**
- 2. Culture supporting community**
- 3. Culture supporting regeneration**

Introduction

What is a Cultural Strategy and why do we need one?

A Strategy can be understood as a set of principles which help guide decisions. The Strategy aims to identify approaches which will contribute towards a set of desired outcomes. The Strategy aims to provide a guide to all organisations and individuals who are engaged with culture across the Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough, to ensure a shared vision and direction.

The Action Plan for a Strategy, therefore, is not a delivery programme, but more an outline of steps that need to be taken in order to spark action to address the priorities that the Strategy has defined. For the Strategy to be effective, there needs to be a dedicated person or organisation with the role to drive the Strategy and ensure that the actions are progressed.

Used effectively, culture and the institutions and services of culture (museums, libraries, festivals and many other elements) can contribute toward the revitalisation of communities, the development of trust, improved health and wellbeing, and the possibility of a more positive future. In order to be effective, a Strategy is required in order to provide a shared vision and sense of direction across the Borough, which can guide all organisations and lead to improved outcomes.*

Having a cultural strategy in place as well as strategic partnerships increases the likelihood of securing larger amounts of funding, such as from Arts Council England. This is because those councils are seen as demonstrating a strategic commitment to culture and the role it can play for society. The inability to produce a cultural strategy for some councils not only results in a lack of a strategic cultural vision for the area, but also a lack of funding, which is already problematic against the challenging funding circumstances that most councils are currently facing.*

Defining Culture and the scope of the Cultural Strategy

Culture should be seen as not only the commissioning of arts and the production of events, but also as a tool; that builds upon the heritage of the area; that builds a shared vision and identity for the area that is steeped in history and has a wealth of cultural assets; that builds the local economy particularly in the context of tourism and creative industries; that improves the local quality of life and encourages engagement in community activities; and that provides new ways of tackling challenges around health and well-being.*

For the development of the Nuneaton & Bedworth Cultural Strategy, the scope of the Cultural Strategy was discussed in an inception meeting within the Borough Council. At this meeting it was agreed that, for the purposes of the study, Culture within Nuneaton & Bedworth be defined as inclusive of arts, heritage, creativity, leisure activity including wellbeing and healthy activity.

The key questions for culture in Nuneaton & Bedworth are:

“What do people value in Nuneaton & Bedworth’s creative arts and heritage sectors, how do we sustain these, and what do local groups and organisations need to develop and achieve greater things?”

* Source: *Cultural Strategy in a Box*, Local Government Association, February 2020



Creative consultation activities: Art Reach with UNBOSI, photo credit Art Reach

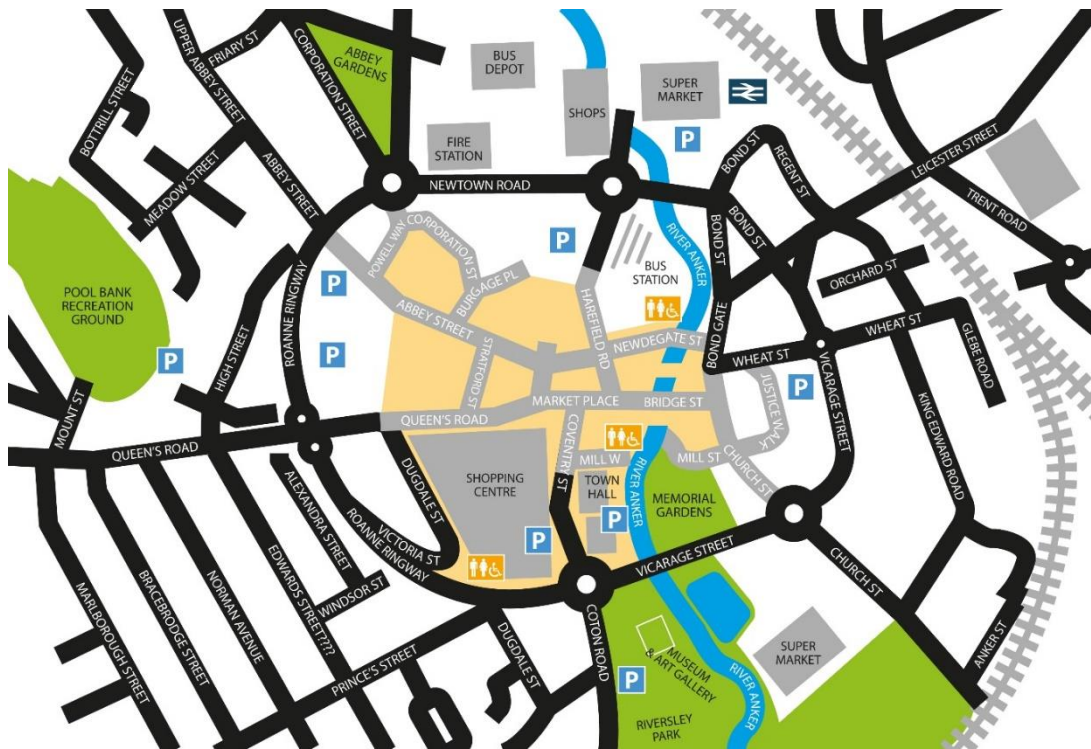
Context and opportunities

About Nuneaton & Bedworth

Nuneaton and Bedworth is one of five Boroughs within Warwickshire. It is the smallest area but has the largest population and the highest population density. The Borough borders the Warwickshire Boroughs of Rugby to the east, and North Warwickshire to the west. To the south it borders the city of Coventry and to the north Leicestershire. Nuneaton is the largest town in Warwickshire. With a population of 91,334 (2020 figures) it is significantly bigger than its Warwickshire neighbours (Warwick at 35,000, Stratford at 31,000, Kenilworth at 22,000, Leamington at 58,000). Only Rugby (at 77,000) begins to approach Nuneaton's population size. Bedworth's population is a further 31,000. However, Nuneaton currently does not have the same level of cultural offer or infrastructure expected of a town of its size.

The Borough has an industrial heritage rooted in coal mining, other extractive industries and heavy engineering; there remain a high proportion of employees working in manufacturing compared to the UK average. This along with other economic, social and environmental factors mean that Nuneaton and Bedworth lags behind the rest of Warwickshire in key indicators that make for a high quality of life. This has resulted in a significant gap separating Nuneaton and Bedworth from the rest of the County. Within Nuneaton and Bedworth there is also a divide between the east and west, with the most deprived areas located in the west.

The Borough is largely urban and has two market towns, Nuneaton and Bedworth, and the large village of Bulkington located in the Green Belt to the east of Bedworth. Nuneaton town centre is the main retail and commercial centre serving the whole Borough, whereas Bedworth town centre serves a local role. There are a number of local centres which offer convenience shopping and community facilities.



Nuneaton town centre



Bulkington Town Centre



Bedworth Town Centre

Bermuda Park to the south of Nuneaton offers a multiplex cinema, bowling alley and other leisure facilities. The Pingles Leisure Centre and Eton and Jubilee Sports Centres are located in Nuneaton, Bedworth also has a Leisure Centre and a number of local facilities and sports pitches.

There are over 500 hectares of accessible green space and destination parks serving the Borough, in addition to smaller Community Parks and open space serving local communities. There are three Local Nature reserves and 30 locally designated wildlife sites and areas of ancient woodland.

Significant population growth is anticipated in Nuneaton and Bedworth over the next few years to around 138,000 by 2031. There is high dependence on private transport across the area, given that public transport is limited, and there is a need to travel to the towns for education, retail opportunities and employment.

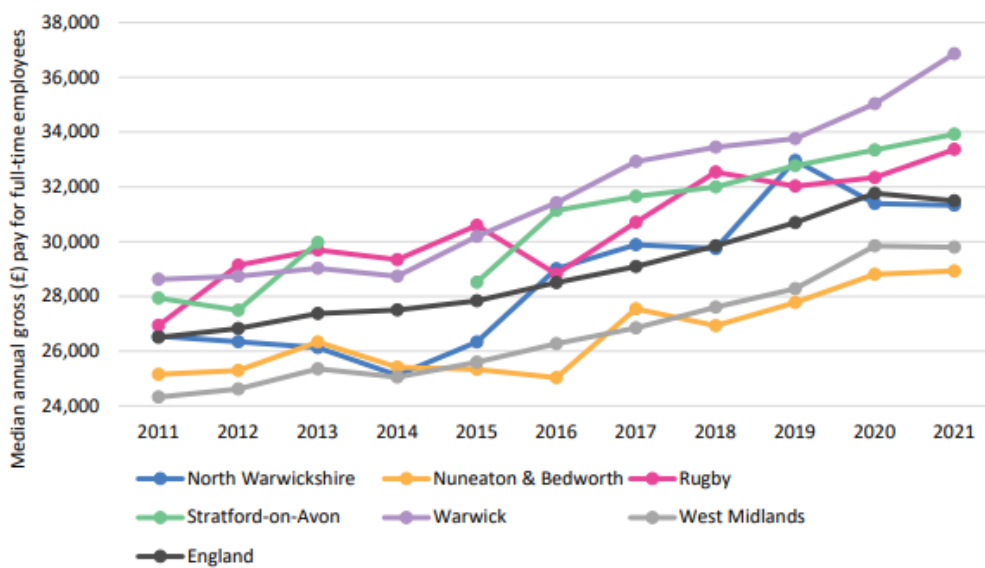
The Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region is recognised as one of the best performing economic areas of the UK but there are huge disparities across the small geographic area that makes up the sub-region. There are important disparities (in employment, income, educational attainment, health, etc) in evidence in Nuneaton and Bedworth (N&B).

In a recent report ([State of Warwickshire 2022](#)) prepared by WCC, data shows that for N&B:

- in the Government’s Index of Multiple Deprivation, Warwickshire is one of the 20% least deprived LA areas in England. However, within that (at LA district level) N&B was ranked within the top 10% most deprived nationally.

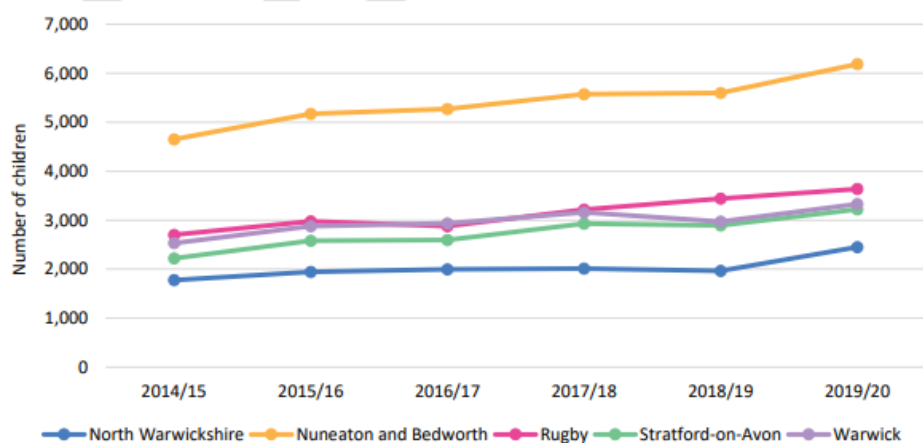
- median gross annual pay for full-time employees is the lowest in the county (at £28,500) and is actually lower than the whole West Midlands average,
- N&B has had the consistently highest level of unemployment of the 5 Warwickshire districts,
- Educational achievement levels are the lowest in Warwickshire,
- Gross Disposable Household Income (per head of population) is, and has been for over 20 years, the lowest in the county area, and
- Almost a third (32.9%) of Warwickshire’s children living in relative low-income families live in N&B, when N&B’s population is 22.5% of the county’s.

Figure X. Median gross annual pay for full-time employees, 2011-2021



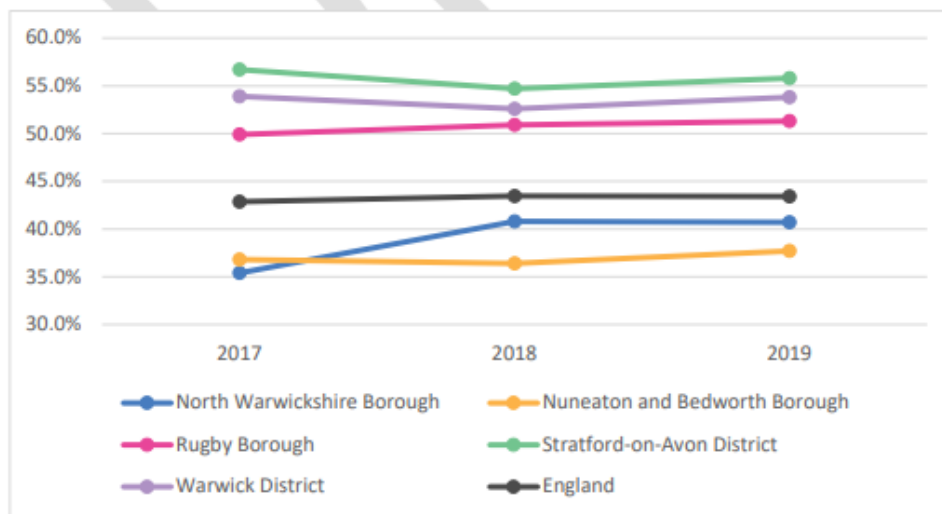
Source: ONS ASHE (2011-2021 (provisional)), Earnings and hours worked

Figure X. Number of children in relative low-income families, 2014/15-2019/20



Source: DWP (2021) Children in Low Income Families: local area statistics, United Kingdom: 2015 to 2020

Figure X. Key Stage 4 – proportion of children achieving grades 9 to 5 (strong pass) in English and Mathematics, 2017-2019



Source: DfE (2019). Based on district of pupil residence

Arts Council England has recognised N&B as one of its “Priority Places” and has encouraged the Local Authorities (and other agencies) to work with ACE to positively change people’s lives, their aspirations and ambitions as part of the true regeneration of the area.

NBBC has two plans to Transform both Nuneaton and Bedworth Town Centres.

The Transforming Nuneaton programme is anticipated to require c. £500M of investment. £157M has already been approved/secured and the first tranche of projects have begun. The Transforming Nuneaton programme recognises that town centres can no longer depend upon retail as its attraction, as the national trend continues for retail to leave town centres. As such the programme embraces education, transport, health and wellbeing, arts and culture and housing as well as improvements to the quality and diversity the overall quality of life offer. The programme has been recognised and supported by Central Government (through its Future High Streets and Towns Funds programmes) and by West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), the Metro Mayor and the previous Coventry and Warwickshire LEP. A Round 1 Levelling-Up bid was successful for a new Indoor and Outdoor Health and Fitness centre in Bedworth. A Round 2 bid was submitted for a town centre Theatre, Arts, Conference and Community (TACC) Hub for Nuneaton, however this bid was not successful. Two other Hubs (for Health and Wellbeing and Integrated Transport) are being progressed. These two Hubs and the proposed TACC are seen as the foundation stones needed to support the other comprehensive elements of the Transforming Nuneaton programme.

Arts and culture (and the other key elements that provide the “quality of life” offer now expected in successful and sustainable urban centres) can play a huge part in the social and physical regeneration that N&B needs.

NBBC has undertaken analysis of its population’s health needs in recent times and developed a Sports, Recreation and Community Facilities Strategy in 2016, and further updated in November 2020. A Nuneaton and Bedworth Sports Forum was established, who provide support and development to local groups, and reward sporting achievements in within the Borough. Learning from the Forum could inform a Forum for Culture to be developed

The Borough has some diversity in the population in terms of background, heritage and faith. There are small but growing Sikh (2.6% in 2021 census) and Muslim (3% in 2021 census) communities. There is a significant Gurkha population who make a notable cultural contribution, as a result of between 250 and 300 Gurkhas understood to have settled in Nuneaton and Bedworth as a result of the association with Gamecock Barracks.

Local context and initiatives

There are important developments going on in N&B, including significant funding secured towards Nuneaton town centre development with eleven major projects, including the development of new spaces for the Museum. Plans are also being developed for regeneration of Bedworth's centre.

N&B is in the county of Warwickshire, a county with important cultural connections, not least the birthplace of Shakespeare. The author George Eliot is a significant character who was born in Nuneaton, a fact which is celebrated to a certain extent and has potential to develop a visitor economy.

Heritage seems relatively vibrant, largely driven by the popular Museum who have professional staff and a strategy, and active voluntary heritage groups. However, N&B's arts sector seems to be largely un-networked and not well connected to the rest of Warwickshire's creative scene, not really benefitting from the Coventry City of Culture or proximity to Stratford-on-Avon.

Recent cultural events and projects led or supported by NBBC have begun testing the level of interest from residents for more ambitious arts events, with largely positive responses, such as the Sanctuary event and a performance by Dundu, both in partnership with Imagineer Productions (based in Coventry) and others. NBBC has also begun commissioning public art works, though with mixed response, and this is another area for potential further development.

There is a feeling that people in N&B do not recognise the value of the cultural assets that they have, but would miss these if they were gone. There are unique aspects in the Borough that could be much better promoted to attract visitors to the Borough and link better with Warwickshire County Council's wider remit to promote the county as a destination.

Strategic context

Nuneaton & Bedworth Corporate Plan



NBBC's Corporate Plan, *Building a Better Borough, 2022*, identifies three key pillars to develop, which the Cultural Strategy also needs to address: **Live, Work, Visit**. In undertaking this work, the Borough Council aims to be **Imaginative, Enterprising and Transparent**.

Culture in Nuneaton & Bedworth can contribute to a numbers of the objectives in the Corporate Plan:

Live:

- *We want to make our borough a place where our residents enjoy living and in which others choose to make their home.* Cultural offer plays a significant part in why people choose to live in a place and what makes it enjoyable to live there. Culture makes a place vibrant, it can bring people together in celebration and enjoyment, building community cohesion and a sense of pride and belonging to a place. Through heritage, people can become more connected to where they live by understanding its past.
- *Promote residents' health and wellbeing.* Cultural activity also supports wellbeing. Arts, creativity and heritage can all bring people together, creating social activities which supports people to stay connected and not become isolated. Wellbeing and mental health are supported by enjoyable activities, as well as opportunities for people to express themselves. Cultural activities can also support physical activities; sport supports physical health, but also arts activities such as dancing and theatre can provide physical challenge as alternative to sports.

Work:

- *Grow a strong and inclusive economy.* Government statistics (DCMS) in 2020 showed that the creative industries sector was growing five times faster than the national economy, contributing almost £13 million towards the UK economy every hour. As part of a diverse and inclusive economy, culture, creative industries and heritage assets should be a part of the mix.

- *Champion education and skills.* As part of a growing national economy, and with new technology forming a significant part of the nation’s cultural sector, developing creative skills and talent in the Borough is important to ensure the success of a future workforce.

Visit:

- *Create vibrant and diverse town centres.* Recent trends across the UK has shown that cultural activity is moving back into town centres where retail is moving out, with arts, culture and heritage playing a significant part in keeping town centres vibrant and attractive.
- *Stimulate regeneration.* There are opportunities in the Borough to improve existing cultural assets, but also to develop new or replacement assets where existing ones are no longer fit for the 21st century. Regeneration plans should include upgraded cultural spaces.
- *Celebrate and promote our heritage.* Heritage is a cultural asset and the Borough recognises its importance for a sense of place, belonging and pride through celebrating the story of the Borough through its heritage.
- *Improve the physical environment.* Culture also plays a part in improving the physical environment: parks and open spaces can be seen as cultural venues for outdoor arts, public arts and celebratory gathering spaces. Public art can contribute towards a local distinctiveness, with community involvement and expression.

Recent cultural achievements

Sanctuary



Photo credit: Andrew Moore

The Sanctuary event in 2022 in Bedworth was hailed as a huge success following analysis of the benefits it brought to the Borough.

Produced in partnership with Artichoke, Imagineer, Warwickshire County Council and Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, Sanctuary saw a temporary memorial to the nation's losses during Covid-19 built in Bedworth's Miners' Welfare Park. Constructed by US artist David Best, and built by members of the local Warwickshire community in collaboration with David's artist crew, the memorial was set alight in a symbolic act marking rebirth, recovery and regeneration.

The 65 foot high artwork and project resulted in:

- 26,781 audience members
- 593 participants in the community engagement programme

Local people brought together for opportunities for employment and training, working through community groups and local partners, resulting in a further:

- 20 volunteer guardians
- 17 paid build participants
- 412 participants from local schools and community groups

Sharing the Light: Dundu



Photo credit: Andrew Moore

Sharing the Light was a free family event by DUNDU that took place in Newdegate Square in Nuneaton Town Centre on the 26th of October 2022. This event was presented by NBBC, Imagineer & Global Streets. DUNDU is an international German based company that perform with illuminated

giant puppets in a walk about performance. DUNDU create illuminated large-scale puppets that have enthralled spectators worldwide.

Sharing the Light was highly successful, with positive feedback from the audience survey. At the time of writing the feedback was still being collated, however an estimated 3,500 attended the event, which had been expected to attract 500. This indicates a significant appetite for similar events in the Borough.

Place based funding from Arts Council England secured

In February 2023 Nuneaton and Bedworth was confirmed to receive £750,000 new funding for a Creative Explorers project that will help people across the Borough access new opportunities to be involved in the arts. Working with Warwickshire County Council, Arts Council England, and a wide range of community organisations, the funding will enable people to access opportunities to take part in arts projects.

The planning of the project was led by the team at Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery, with support for the bid from Imagineer and Artichoke, arts events professionals behind Sanctuary.

Creative Explorers is a 21-month project in which Borough Council, arts organisations, artists and residents will work together to create a unique cultural identity for Nuneaton & Bedworth which builds skills, generates civic pride and confidence, develops the visitor economy and leads to a creative borough.

Nuneaton Town Investment Plan and Museum refurbishment

In March 2021, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his budget that Nuneaton had been selected to receive the full £23.2 million it bid for from the Towns Fund in order to deliver 11 exciting initiatives outlined in the Nuneaton Town Investment Plan. The 11 projects include cultural development projects, including Re-imagining Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery, a Parks Revival project, The Saints heritage building as a learning space including arts activities, and a George Eliot Visitor Centre. Other projects aim to upgrade the physical environment and transport infrastructure, which will also enable better access to culture in the town centre.

The Museum refurbishment and extension aims to results in 28,500 new visitors annually, making the town centre a more attractive offer to visit.



View from the south of Nuneaton Museum proposals for extension

Result of Economic Impact Survey at Nuneaton Museum & Art Gallery

The museum has undertaken two economic impact studies at the museum in 2019. It wished to understand what role the museum had in footfall to Nuneaton and what that footfall generated in spend for the borough.

The results were encouraging; it appeared that 47% indicated that the museum was the main reason for their visit to Nuneaton. This equates to nearly 29,000 visitors to the town because of the museum.

We asked these visitors about their projected spend for their visit for the town and this equated to between £233,553 and £487,290. This only accounts for those for whom the museum was a primary reason. If you add in those visitors for whom the museum was a secondary factor then additional spend was upwards of an additional 200 -£400k. Unsurprisingly for a local museum the % of local visitors was high (59%) and it showed the museum also attracts visit from northern parts of Coventry, and the A5 corridor. Visitors also came from closer locations such as Tamworth as well as those further afield such as Oxford and Durham. These visits were driven by the museum's offer specifically our temporary exhibitions and our strong family offer both within our permanent exhibitions and our activities programme. This demonstrates the role the museum has in

29,000

visitors to
the museum
per year

47%

of visitors to
Nuneaton come
primarily for the
museum

£400,000

estimated spend in
the town by
museum visitors

bringing in visitors from elsewhere supporting the visitor economy and providing customers for local services. The redevelopment of the museum will enable it to welcome more visitors. The new exhibitions developed as part of the scheme combined with a strong programme of temporary exhibitions and family activities will help it not only maintain its current contribution to footfall but is predicted to increase it be around an additional 12,000 visits per year with the attendant benefit of more spend locally. At a time when town centres can struggle its important that the museum's offer can continue to drive footfall to the area.

Transform Nuneaton and Transform Bedworth regeneration programmes

Transforming Nuneaton:



Vision for Grayson Place, Nuneaton

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council and Warwickshire County Council are working together to deliver the transformation of Nuneaton town centre, to achieve a mixed used regeneration proposal aimed at boosting economic growth in the town and providing new employment opportunities. The plan includes creating a thriving cultural and leisure offer anchored with new entertainment facilities, vibrant food and beverage provision and social opportunities that supports and enhances the existing offer. It includes the provision of a new library, business centre and cafe building in Nuneaton town centre to act as a catalyst for the regeneration of the town as part of the wider Transforming Nuneaton programme. The vision for Abbey Street is to create a vibrant new cultural and leisure destination for Nuneaton which delivers on the Council's vision to breathe life into the town centre throughout the day and evening. Brought forward as part of the Transforming Nuneaton initiative, the mixed-use flexible masterplan will include new leisure, hotel, commercial and residential opportunities set around a new public square and anchored by a new destination food hall, cinema, arts and cultural spaces. The masterplan reintegrates existing buildings that contribute positively to the historic character of Nuneaton, redeveloping an existing surface car park and service yard to deliver a series of new landscaped public realm interventions and pedestrian and cycle connections between Abbey Street and Queen's Road extending Nuneaton's walkable town centre.

Transforming Bedworth:



Vision for Bedworth

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council and Warwickshire County Council are working together to deliver the transformation of Bedworth town centre to achieve a mixed used regeneration proposal aimed at boosting economic growth in the town and providing new employment opportunities. The draft vision for the site around the Civic Hall, proposes new housing, office space, retail units, a multi-storey car park and a multi-million-pound civic development to include a 350-seat theatre and a new library. Work on Transforming Bedworth has already seen completed new mountain bike trails, netball and tennis courts completed in Miner's Welfare Park. Work is also under way on site to create a new physical activity hub which will replace the ageing leisure centre.

Arts Council England

Arts Council England have noted that there is a level of investment planned by the Borough Council for cultural development. Arts Council indicated that they would like to see partnership working across sectors that support culture, integrating cultural activity and opportunities into other priority areas. Arts Council England are also interested in where Cultural Compacts can be created in order to embed culture into places.

- The Arts Council's [Let's Create Strategy](#), published in 2020, has an emphasis on creating artistic opportunity to more people who currently do not have access to quality opportunities, and ensuring inclusivity. As a place that has been recognised as having relatively low cultural engagement, projects in Nuneaton and Bedworth that bring opportunities to participate in, experience or develop skills in the arts within the Borough have the potential to be supported by Arts Council England. Two of the Arts Council's specific Outcomes are also priority areas for Nuneaton & Bedworth: Outcome 1, Creative People, is about ensuring that everybody has access to quality opportunities to participate in the arts, particularly young people but also everybody throughout their lives; Outcome 2, Cultural Communities, emphasises communities and organisations working together to create thriving and vibrant cultural places. Nuneaton & Bedworth already has the beginnings of culture becoming more embedded in other priority areas, particularly in regeneration through the proposed Transform projects. However, networks or partnerships for culture in the Borough are scarce and currently there is no forum for culture that brings together representation from more areas including health and wellbeing, leisure, economic development, parks and outdoor spaces.
- Nuneaton is currently a **Priority Place** for the Arts Council England. As part of [Arts Council England's Delivery Plan for 2021-2024](#), 54 places across England were identified in which Arts Council England's investment and engagement is too low, but the opportunity for it to effectively increase investment and engagement is high. Arts Council England is, therefore, prioritising working with the Priority Places from 2021 to 2024. This indicates that Arts Council England is actively seeking opportunities to increase their investment in Nuneaton & Bedworth, aligned with the Let's Create strategy.
- Arts Council England's **National Portfolio** is a scheme to support organisations undertaking significant arts programmes with three to four year funding agreements, providing sustained funding support that can really enhance the impact that organisations can make. Nuneaton & Bedworth currently does not have any NPOs based in the area, and the Arts Council is likely to be interested to see some develop in the area. However, there are NPOs who are operating within the

Borough for the benefit of its residents, including Imagineer Productions, and a newly NPO funded programme by Warwickshire Libraries.

- **Creative People and Places (CPP)** is a funding programme which focuses on parts of the country where involvement in creativity and culture is significantly below the national average. It is funded by the National Lottery and administered by Arts Council England. Projects are led by consortia and must include community groups and/or grass-roots organisations as well as cultural organisations such as museums, libraries or arts organisations. Other partners might include clubs, housing associations, private-sector organisations or universities. Consortia are only eligible to apply to CPP if they are included in the Arts Council’s list of places of lowest engagement. Nuneaton is currently on that list and a CPP application was attempted in the last round, however this was unsuccessful. With a stronger consortium of groups, perhaps through the proposed Cultural Forum, a stronger application could be made to the next CPP round, which will open around 2025. This also gives the Cultural Forum time to develop more robust plans and delivery mechanisms for how a CPP programme might work in the Borough, ensuring a stronger application can be submitted.



Building a marble run: Art Reach with UNBOSI Marble Awareness Roadshow, photo credit Art Reach

- **Cultural Compacts** is an initiative created in 2019 when Arts Council England and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) supported the creation of 20 Cultural Compacts and analysed their impact. These Compacts are partnerships designed to support the local cultural sector and enhance its contribution to development, with a special emphasis on cross-sector engagement beyond the cultural sector itself and the local authority. The Compacts model was included in the recommendations of the UK Cultural Cities Enquiry, an independent enquiry into the cultural resources of Britain’s cities.

NPOs operating within Nuneaton & Bedworth

Warwickshire County Council's library service was successful in a bid to become a new National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) in Arts Council England's funding plans for 2023-26.

The new NPO status means that Warwickshire Libraries will receive up to £630,000 in funding from Arts Council England's Investment Programme over the next three years. This will support with cultural and creative programming and outreach activities delivered through Warwickshire Libraries, with a particular focus on the North Warwickshire and Nuneaton and Bedworth areas.

Over the three-year funding period, Warwickshire Libraries will work closely with Arts Council England to:

- promote libraries as places for people to access great art and culture within their local communities;
- create new and exciting opportunities for the people of Warwickshire to enjoy and participate in culture;
- seek new opportunities to work with creative individuals and organisations to explore, develop and deliver new work through Warwickshire Libraries' events programme;
- grow and develop the creative and practical skills of library staff and embed new opportunities for them to think and approach cultural programming differently and to grow their skills working with artists and creatives; and
- deliver work which is inclusive, accessible, and representative of Warwickshire's people and communities.

The focus on Nuneaton and Bedworth libraries as cultural venues in the community will make a significant impact on the cultural offer of the area.

Live & Local is a rural touring scheme and not-for-profit arts organisation working with a network of voluntary groups across the Midlands, including Warwickshire, to tour live performances to community venues. Live & Local will continue to be supported as a National Portfolio Organisation in 2023-2026. For this period, they were granted additional funding for their "Levelling Up For Culture" programme that is aimed at places where arts engagement and investment have been lower in the past.

Imagineer Productions, based in Coventry, aim to make extraordinary outdoor and site-specific work at the intersection of art and engineering, environmental and social change. Their projects bring together artists and creative thinkers with engineers, architects, educationalists and designers. Imagineer's outdoor arts programmes are developed in parallel with community and education projects.

In 2022 Imagineer, in association with Artichoke, produced Sanctuary in Bedworth, a unique public memorial built in Nuneaton & Bedworth. Sanctuary aimed to stand as an unforgettable temporary structure and space of healing, designed by Burning Man artist David Best and built in collaboration with the local community to commemorate the nation's loss during Covid. Community workshops were held to design panels for the structure, reflecting local people's stories. The structure was ceremonially burned, with an estimated 10,000 people coming to watch. The event also referenced Bedworth as the "town that never forgets", being the home of the country's largest Armistice Day Parade.

Sanctuary was produced by Artichoke in association with Imagineer, supported by Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council, Warwickshire County Council, and the DCMS Culture Recovery Fund. This ambitious project demonstrated how professional production companies and artists could bring spectacular works to Nuneaton & Bedworth, but ground them in a local context, involve local people and develop skills in the community.

Imagineer are keen to develop more projects in the Borough, including along environmental themes which will, again, develop skills in the community. In early 2023, NBBC working with Imagineer and Artichoke, were successful in securing £750,000 over three years for a Place Partnership Project (Arts Council England funding) for creative work to be delivered across Nuneaton and Bedworth. NBBC will be administering this grants with its partners to help deliver a range of events over 2023-24.

Heritage



Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre, Nuneaton

Nuneaton & Bedworth has distinct heritage through its industrial history of coal mining and ribbon weaving, as well as being the birthplace of significant historical figures including the author George Eliot and film director Ken Loach. There are a number of dedicated and well linked voluntary heritage groups active in the area, producing publications and events to celebrate the Borough's heritage. Local voluntary run organisations include George Eliot Fellowship, Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre, Bedworth Heritage Centre and Nuneaton Local History Group. At the time of writing, the George Eliot Fellowship was planning to develop a George Eliot Visitor Centre on the site of the outbuildings at Griff House, Nuneaton.

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), as the UK's biggest heritage funder, set out their strategy for 2019-2024. The strategy recognises the role of heritage in wellbeing, and increases its focus on wellbeing, capacity-building and innovation. Their two priority areas are landscapes and nature, and

community heritage. In addition, all projects funded by HLF have to meet their inclusion outcome of “a wider range of people will be involved in heritage”. This presents an opportunity for organisations in Nuneaton & Bedworth to access funding, especially for community heritage and to widen the range of people involved.

[Culture supporting recovery from a pandemic, and current national and global challenges Cornerstones of culture: a Commission on Culture and Local Government report](#), December 2022, explored the contribution of local culture, the barriers it faces and the four cornerstones that are essential to a healthy local cultural ecosystem.

Culture, heritage and creativity are essential to our future national prosperity and wellbeing. During the pandemic, people turned to culture for solace and connection. Local cultural services such as libraries, museums, theatres, and arts centres reached out to communities in lockdown to address isolation, support mental wellbeing and provide educational opportunities.

As the nation recovers from the pandemic, it faces a new set of challenges: a growing cost of living crisis and the prospect of recession; pressure on public services; rising inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic; climate change, and global instability. Under these circumstances it would be tempting to dismiss investment in cultural services as an unaffordable luxury. However, the Cornerstones of Culture report states that, for the same reasons, these services have never been more important. Cultural services, organisations and practitioners bring people together at times of crisis and celebration, they provide support and social connection, create jobs, develop new adaptive skills, and underpin empathy and critical thinking.

The report recognises that Local Authorities have an important role to play in supporting a thriving local cultural ecosystem, but are under increasing financial strain with the Local Government Association (LGA) highlighting the significant issues facing council services as a result of inflation and other pressures.

Culture works in relation to place. Councils sit at the heart of this ecosystem. They run a nationwide network of local cultural organisations, including libraries, museums, theatres and numerous historic buildings, parks and heritage sites. This core funding keeps the civic infrastructure of culture running within places.

The Commission gathered evidence from cultural services and organisations up and down the country on the following statements:

- Resilient places: local publicly funded culture can promote civic pride and change perceptions about a place, contributing to improvements in wider social and economic outcomes.
- Inclusive economic recovery: local publicly funded culture is essential to our national economic recovery, particularly in relation to the growth of the wider commercial creative economy and in levelling-up economic inequalities between regions.
- Social mobility: local publicly funded culture can help to address educational and skills inequalities and challenges around social mobility.
- Health inequalities: local publicly funded culture can challenge health inequalities and the impact of loneliness exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Sanctuary. Photo credit: Andrew Moore

Culture and Health

Research suggests that physical environments can impact people’s health and wellbeing, and multiple cultural activities can support people’s wellbeing. Spending time in and connecting with nature and cultural activities can enhance physical and mental wellbeing by reducing stress and increasing physical activity levels. Warwickshire North Place, which includes Warwickshire County Council Public Health team, have identified five priorities for 2023 onwards to reduce health inequalities across Warwickshire North (Nuneaton and Bedworth and North Warwickshire). These five priorities intersect and all need to be addressed in a holistic way to make an impact. Attractive, healthy environments and a variety of positive cultural activity should be a part of delivering against these priorities.

The 5 priorities for Reducing Health Inequalities are:

1. Promoting / improving healthy lifestyles and reducing the burden of Long term conditions
2. Improve access to services
3. Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing
4. Children and Young people
5. Addressing the Wider determinants of Health

NBBC will be prioritising these five areas with specific measurable actions for its corporate delivery across its Directorates and working with partners.

Culture supporting Economic development

The creative industries have been identified as a driver of economic growth and employment by the government and industry stakeholders. The government has said it will publish a ‘sector vision’, setting out its strategy for increasing growth in the creative industries sector. Initially set for publication in 2021, the sector vision has been delayed until 2023. The sector vision would address the following:

- creative skills and other workforce issues affecting the sector
- the impact of artificial intelligence
- how to ensure people from all backgrounds are able to access the creative industries and the arts

(Source: [Arts and creative industries: The case for a strategy; 1 December 2022, House of Lords Library](#))

The government’s levelling up white paper, published on 2 February 2022, described the creative industries as having a “critical role to play in levelling up”. It described creative industries and the arts as a source of “local pride and improved quality of life” as well as “drivers of growth and productivity”.

In its report, ‘Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda’, published on 2 November 2022, the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee said the arts, culture and heritage can support levelling up by engaging local communities and supporting local industry. However, it identified several barriers to the development of the arts and culture in certain areas, including geographical disparities in funding. It recommended that the government and its arms-length bodies should consider how to address these funding disparities, including by better incentivising private sector investment. The government has yet to publish its response to this report.

The Cornerstones of culture: Commission on Culture and Local Government report (December 2022) identified that arts and creative industries are an important driver of economic recovery. It identified that culture has an important role to play in reviving town centres. According to the Arts Council England’s research, 50 per cent of adults would like to see more cultural experiences on their high streets. Local cultural infrastructure is essential in supporting a healthy visitor economy.

Culture, and particularly heritage, is the main driver of inbound visits and the basis of Britain’s reputation overseas. The creative industries contributed £115.9 billion to the UK in 2019. In the year from October 2019 to September 2022, the Creative Industries accounted for 2.2 million jobs. They grew at four times the rate of the rest of the economy prior to the pandemic and are geographically dispersed in more than 700 micro clusters across the country.

As such they are an important driver of our national economic recovery and levelling up. But the long-term sustainability of the creative industries cannot be delivered without public funding of culture, which underpins the development of the wider creative sector. There is ‘symbiosis’ between publicly funded arts and the creative industries, for example between the performing arts and the film and TV industries or the commercial stage.

The pandemic and cost of living crisis have exacerbated existing economic inequalities in our society. The report advocates that the nation should pursue an inclusive economic recovery to reduce inequalities and grow shared prosperity, cultural democracy aspiration and social capital.

The report calls for local government, regional bodies, cultural arms-length bodies and national government to work together with cultural organisations and communities to take immediate action to safeguard the future of local cultural infrastructure in the context of rising costs, followed by a longer-term action plan to deliver the following outcomes:

- Access and inclusion. Locally accessible and inclusive cultural infrastructure for all, addressing the structural inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Creative growth. Removal of barriers to growth of creative industry clusters and micro-clusters to support the development of the creative sector as an engine of post-pandemic growth.
- Cultural education and pathways to creative employment.
- Access for all in all places to a high-quality cultural education and routes into the burgeoning creative industries from schools through to further and higher education and employment.
- Health and wellbeing. A strategic approach to health and wellbeing in place that recognises the preventative and health benefits of culture in supporting our national recovery.

The Local Government Association's recent report, [Culture-led regeneration: Achieving inclusive and sustainable growth](#); Local Government Association, March 2019 acknowledges the huge contribution that the cultural industries and visitor economy make, accounting for over £200 billion of economic activity between them, and that local government plays a significant role in the sector. However it also acknowledges that local government's cultural budgets are seen as 'non-statutory' services and remain precarious.

Through the evidence collected for this study, culture-led regeneration has been shown to deliver a broad range of social and economic impacts, re-emphasising its importance, including:

- The economic and social impacts of culture-led regeneration
- Creating employment
- Enhancing community cohesion and pride
- Attracting more visitors, boosting the tourism sector
- Supporting enhanced resident health
- Stimulating town centre footfall, boosting local business
- Bringing enjoyment for residents
- Stimulating and supporting creative sector growth
- Attracting inward investment
- Developing the skills, knowledge and confidence of residents
- Enhancing the area's image, helping to attract skilled people and business investment.

Arts Council England commissioned BOP Consulting in June 2021 to undertake a rapid evidence review on the impact of culture on high streets, resulting in its report [A High Street Renaissance How arts and culture bring people and pride back to our high streets](#), 5 August 2021

The report found that:

Of the buildings used by organisations funded by Arts Council England, 75% are either on or within a five-minute walk (500m) of a high street in England. This high street presence:

- Builds civic pride: 62% of UK adults agree that cultural experiences on the high street give them a sense of pride about their local area, according to new polling to support this research.
- Defends against high street decline: Closure of high street retail dents civic pride and creates spirals of decline.
- Footfall as an indicator of high street vitality: Culture drives footfall and spending. Many cultural activities require in-person settings, which drive footfall. For example, the Turner Contemporary in Margate is estimated to have injected £70 million into the local economy between 2011-19.
- Contributes towards multi-functional high streets: Trips to cultural destinations have many motivations, including artistic participation.

West Midlands Combined Authority

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) was created to deliver an ambitious plan to drive inclusive economic growth in the region. One of their pillars supporting economic growth is around [Culture](#).

The WMCA area has one of the largest cultural sectors when compared to other combined authority areas across the country, reflected in its rich heritage, diverse cultures and entrepreneurship. Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 and the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games provided opportunities to showcase the region, and demonstrate cultural possibilities to build on in the area.

WMCA states that arts, heritage and culture are vital to skills development and can improve the attractiveness of cities and towns, making residents feel better about the places they live and work in.

They also matter in economic terms. The economic footprint of the West Midlands' cultural sector (excluding film, television and wider creative industries) is £1.1 billion. It is estimated that the sector directly supports over 24,000 jobs, with further 22,700 jobs supported indirectly. A total of 28 million tourism visits to the WMCA area are attributable to culture – generating £2.8 billion of visitor expenditure.

Museum and Libraries development

In November 2017 an independent review, led by Neil Mendoza, outlined recommendations for how government can support the museums sector in England. [The Mendoza Review: an independent review of museums in England](#), identified nine challenging priorities for museums today:

- Adapting to today's funding environment
- Growing and diversifying audiences
- Dynamic collections curation and management
- Contributing to placemaking and local priorities
- Delivering cultural education
- Developing leaders with appropriate skills and diversifying the workforce
- Digital capacity and innovation
- Working internationally

The report states that: “Contributing to placemaking and local priorities helps museums play a part in their communities and in local decision-making, as well as leveraging investment in culture to also deliver on priorities such as health and wellbeing. There is increasing evidence to show that cultural institutions contribute a great deal to the local economy, to the wellbeing and education of its residents, and to attracting tourists and businesses to the area. Museums are especially able to do this because of their position as a civic space and their collections, which connect people to place. To encourage this work it is important that museums have and use consistent, statistically robust methods to measure economic and social impact.”

Following the Mendoza Report, Arts Council England created the Museums Development Programme. The Programme is delivered by nine regional providers, to support the resilience and development of local museums based on an informed understanding of the context and needs of museums in their area. The regional provider for Nuneaton & Bedworth is West Midlands Museum Development (WMMD) who offer training, advice, resources, projects and small grants to museums who are Accredited or Working Towards Accreditation in the wider West Midlands. The programme aims to support the raising of excellence in local museums and runs from 2018 to 2024.

Arts Council England invests in the Museum Development Programme. Delivered via nine regional providers until April 2024, this programme focuses on building the ambition of museums in England not funded directly by Government or the Arts Council by providing free training, development programmes, small grants and networks. The relevant regional Museum Development provider for Nuneaton & Bedworth is West Midlands Museum Development (<https://mdwm.org.uk/aboutus/>). From April 2024 Arts Council England will continue to invest in the programme, but it will become more of a national programme with regional flex and relationships. Arts Council England will be opening an application process to find five partners to work with. The outcome will be publicised in October 2023. The relevant local programme, from April 2024 will be Museum Development Midlands.

Arts Council England is also the development agency for the country’s public libraries. Following research in 2012-13, the report *Envisioning the library of the future*, explored the value of libraries, understand the future of libraries and how to develop them.

The report found that there was a compelling and continuing need for a publicly-funded library service. In order to develop the library of the future, the report recommended the following priorities:

- Place the library as the hub of the community
- Make the most of digital technology and creative media
- Ensure that libraries are resilient and sustainable
- Deliver the right skills for those who work in libraries

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)

The government department, DCMS, responded to the pandemic with new initiatives to support recovery in the sector.

The first Culture Recovery Fund of £1.57bn was announced in July 2020. Administered by Arts Council England, The British Film Institute, Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund,

the fund aimed to financially support cultural organisations in England whose sustainability had been affected by the economic impact of lockdowns. The fund aimed to save businesses and jobs in the cultural sector.

The government also launched its #Here for Culture campaign, aiming to unite the public, government and cultural organisations in support of the country's fantastic cinemas, theatres, music venues, museums, galleries and heritage.

In October 2021 a new campaign, Every Mind Matters, was launched after half of adults in England said that the pandemic negatively impacted their mental health. As a result, a campaign was launched by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) to help adults improve their mental wellbeing.

These two initiatives demonstrate that the government recognises the importance of securing the sustainability of cultural organisations and assets in the country, and has been willing to invest in them through the crisis. They also demonstrate that the government recognises the mental health needs of the population as a result of the pandemic, which are expected to be long-term, and which cultural activity can play a part in supporting.

On 7 February 2023, the Government published a [new policy paper](#) outlining its approach to delivering priorities through four departments, in response to recent and continuing trends. The paper notes the significant expansion of the digital side of the DCMS, driven by the increasingly central role that technology now plays in everyday lives and globally. It also notes the continued growth and resilience of the cultural and creative industries in the UK, the potential for further growth, and the major contribution that the sector can make to the levelling up agenda.

In response to these trends, the paper announces changes with the following four departments:

A new **Department for Energy Security and Net Zero**;

A dedicated **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology** which will take on the focus on digital and technology;

A single **Department for Business and Trade**;

and a streamlined and refocused **Department for Culture, Media and Sport**. This department will now focus on supporting the UK's world-leading cultural and creative industries to thrive; creating a broadcasting and media system fit for the 21st century; boosting participation opportunities by increasing investment in grassroots sports, and delivering reforms to football governance; completing the review of the Gambling Act to make the UK the safest place in the world to gamble; and delivering the National Youth Guarantee to give young people access to more activities, trips away from home and volunteering opportunities. In the context of Nuneaton & Bedworth, the new focus has particular significance for supporting the cultural and creative industries to thrive, boosting participation opportunities and giving young people more access to activities and opportunities. Consultation for this Cultural Strategy showed that people were concerned about the lack of opportunities for young people, so attention should be paid to how this more streamlined government department could support N&B in this area.

Assets

Nuneaton Museum & Art Gallery

Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery's collection contains over 15,000 objects and photographs. A small, professionally run museum (NBBC) with three galleries, it aims to be a free, fun and friendly museum. The museum is located in the beautiful grounds of Riversley Park, just 10 minutes walk from the centre of Nuneaton.

The Museum and Art Gallery offer a programme of exhibitions, events and activities aimed at a wide range of visitors. Permanent exhibitions relate to Local History, fine art and a gallery dedicated to local writer George Eliot. With offers and resources to support visiting schools and families, and activities for children in the galleries, a tea room and a shop. The Museum also supports local groups with advice and exhibition space, with meeting rooms available. The Museum has previously attracted an average of 60,000 visitors annually.

The building is over 100 years old, and is currently planned to benefit from a £3.5million extension in order to better meet present and future needs. The Reimagining Nuneaton Museum & Art Gallery project has part funding from the Towns Fund for phase 1 of the development. The extension will offer an improved café area and create a large multi-use space, aiming to extend the engagement activities for both community and commercial use as well as enabling greater access to the collections. Phase 1 also includes a new ground floor temporary exhibition gallery, a new permanent Local History Gallery and an exhibition about the Park and Museum. Access will be improved with the addition of ground floor toilets and a Changing Places facility. The new entrance hall will include an exhibition called We Are Makers and include craft cases for selling artists' work. The stated intention is that the expansion will improve the building as a community resource.

The continual financial pressures of approving a balanced budget has meant that in 2023/24 NBBC had to review its current spend and look at its medium-term financial strategy. This has impacted on the Museum directly as a non-mandatory service area with a 30% cut in revenue funding at this time. This will result in reduced opening hours, reduction in footfall and a loss of experienced team members. The delivery of the planned extension and refurbishment will require a site closure for several months. This lower capacity presents a risk that the Museum will not be able to meet its deadlines for Museum Accreditation, which could close off its access to potential funds. During the time of closure, a review of the site will need to be undertaken to understand what is required moving forward and the operational needs and structure to be put in place for the re-opening of the extended Museum. With a lack of staff to deliver outreach work or marketing to retain connections with the local community and schools, rebuilding visitor numbers could be a challenge once the site re-opens.

Once the new extension opens, there will need to be considerable work undertaken to attract visitors back to the Museum & Art Gallery if the immediate risks are not addressed. Reduced service provision and loss of accreditation could make it difficult to re-launch the Museum effectively after the development as the collections, exhibitions and community connections will have been neglected. This presents a threat to the successful opening of the new extensions and the resulting business plan for its viable success.

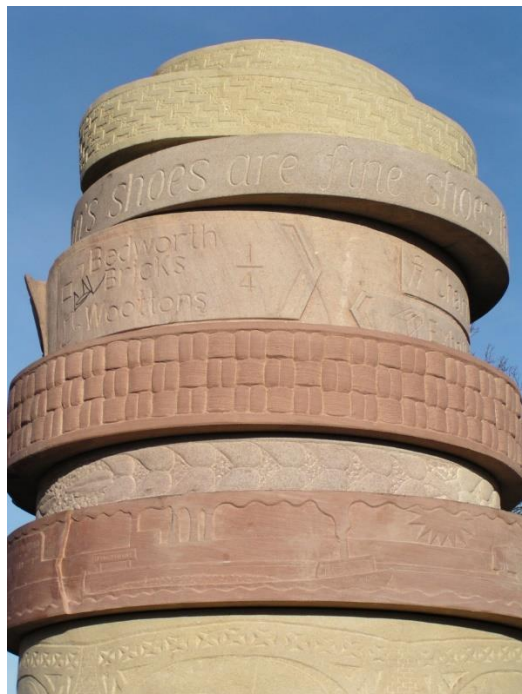
Bedworth Civic Hall

The Civic Hall is the main cultural venue in Bedworth, purpose built in 1973, of which many residents and generations have fond memories. The Civic Hall is a multi-purpose venue with a 745 seat theatre, a substantial size for a town the size of Bedworth, with conference and meeting rooms, and previously a Bistro providing breakfasts and lunches. The Hall also has the only piano suitable for large scale orchestral performances in the Borough.

However, the Civic Hall closed its doors in 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and was then utilised as a vaccination centre by the NHS until October 2022. During the course of the study for this Cultural Strategy, the future of the Civic Hall was in debate and in October 2022 NBBC decided not to re-open the Civic Hall. The decision was due to the financial strain on the Council's resources that the operational costs required to bring the venue back into operation which were deemed to be too high, based on an assessment of required maintenance works as well as running costs, at a time when the Council faced significant financial challenges. At the time of writing, Expressions of Interest are invited for external organisations to take on the operating of the Civic Hall which requires a sustainable business model without reliance on funding from NBBC.

Bedworth Arts Centre were also operating from part of the building. They have opted to terminate with the venue from 31st March 2023 as a result of the closure.

In January 2023 the Bedworth Civic Hall was registered on the list of Assets of Community Value (along with Bedworth Library on the High Street). This recognises the asset's importance for the local community, and places additional restrictions on development for the building, offering greater opportunity for communities to keep such buildings in public use and ensure they remain a social hub for the community. However, at the time of writing the future of the Civic Hall (and Bedworth Library) remain undefined.



Ribbon Reel, Bedworth: sculpture by Graham Mitcheson that celebrates Bedworth's industrial heritage

Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre

The building is owned by NBBC and voluntary run as a charity with a Board of Trustees, supported by NBBC and WCC. It is an historic building, now run as the Nuneaton Heritage Centre, housing several community meeting rooms, an interactive Victorian Schoolroom which welcomes school visits, a museum with a local collection and historical exhibitions. The Trustees work to fundraise to improve and maintain the building, with some success at accessing lottery funds and grants.

Abbey Theatre

Abbey Theatre is Nuneaton's only local theatre operated by a Registered Charity, Nuneaton Arts CIO, whose trustees are all volunteers. Nuneaton Arts CIO aims to provide the local community access to arts and entertainment, whilst providing opportunities for learning and improving awareness of the arts. They offer audiences excellent local talent and national touring events. The building itself is owned by NBBC and leased to Nuneaton Arts CIO who run the theatre. Currently located in Pool Bank Street, the theatre building has aged and the location has issues with accessibility, limited parking and some feel it is an unsafe area to visit. As a result the theatre is actively seeking a new location, and has been involved in the Transform Nuneaton discussions towards a new purpose-built Theatre and Arts Centre in a more central location.

Leisure Centres

NBBC provides three leisure centres in Nuneaton and one in Bedworth, operated by Everyone Active, part of Sports and Leisure Management Ltd. The leisure centres are: Pingles Leisure Centre, Bedworth Leisure Centre, Eton Sports Centre and Jubilee Sports Centre. Significant plans are being developed to further upgrade the leisure centres. A Leisure Strategy has been adopted to provide long term vision for delivering physical activity.

Parks and open spaces

The Borough has over 90 parks and areas of public green space across the borough, varying in size and with a range of facilities. The Borough has three Destination Parks, the largest in the borough: Riversley Park, Miners Welfare Park and Whittleford Park. Between them they offer a range of facilities, including formal gardens and a period bandstand at Riversley Park, outdoor sports facilities at Miners' Welfare and a Heritage Sculpture Trail at Whittelford. The Council and residents see their parks as important cultural spaces and continue to develop the facilities, including a current plan to develop Miners' Welfare Park to include an outdoor performance space, and for Riversley Park to develop a riverside path.

The Borough also has a number of nature and wildlife parks providing a variety of habitats for nature. An overarching strategy is being drafted, 'Parks and Green Spaces', to provide a medium to long term vision for its parks and open spaces future, which will include play areas, tree planting, allotments and more.



Public art at Miners Welfare Park

SWOT analysis

Strengths

A number of active local arts, heritage and community groups exist in the Borough (such as the Festival of Arts, Abbey Theatre, George Eliot Fellowship, “The Makery”, Reel People and Art Alert), who are taking on their own initiatives, and a strong cohort of enthusiastic volunteers and established voluntary organisations (such as WACA and Big Local programme) are active and show interest in culture. In addition, there are established arts organisations from the surrounding area who also work in the Borough (such as Escape Arts who run the weekly Nuneaton Escape arts group). Groups such as Reel People and Aspire in Arts organise opportunities to engage young people in creative activity.

A motivated and significant Gurkha community who are willing to support and be involved in cultural and community activity.

A well loved Museum, good public parks and outdoor spaces that are appreciated by residents.

The Borough Council is developing ambitious plans for investment in cultural infrastructure including sports facilities, parks, town centres and new cultural and community venues.

Established cultural and heritage traditions such as Armistice Day and an annual Nuneaton Festival of Arts.

Significant success in recent large-scale arts and cultural events in the Borough such as Sanctuary (Bedworth) and Sharing the Light (Nuneaton), which has generated an appetite for more.

Weaknesses

Low number of professional cultural organisations in the Borough, resulting in low skills and knowledge of areas of cultural business such as fundraising, audience development and organisational development.

Lack of networking within the arts sector in the Borough. The Gurkha community is not well linked with other sector groups in the area.

The Warwickshire CEP (Cultural Education Partnership) has not served the Borough well as transport issues and accessibility to attend meetings in Stratford has excluded young people from Nuneaton & Bedworth from fully taking part.

Lack of opportunities for young people to be cultural active, with few quality facilities available.

Lack of centralised or coordinated communication about arts, heritage and cultural offer in the Borough, which makes it difficult to build a profile of a vibrant cultural scene for the Borough.

Cultural assets (Nuneaton Museum & Art Gallery, Abbey Theatre and Bedworth Civic Hall) have unclear futures. A plan for cultural venues across the whole Borough is needed that does not place undue financial burden on NBBC, has realistic and viable plans that meet communities' needs appropriately without duplicating facilities.

Opportunities

Cultural ambitions are supported within NBBC by the Museum but also by the Events Team and Leisure Services. Culture is starting to be seen within NBBC as linking into broader remits. Plans for Transform Nuneaton and Transform Bedworth town centres both include culture and upgrades of cultural facilities. Culture will be a contributor towards the development of town centre offers, thus supporting economic development objectives. Parks and Green Spaces are being developed to provide more facilities that support health and wellbeing through active lifestyles but also with outdoor performance spaces and events programmes.

Warwickshire County Council's Arts Service and Libraries are both actively developing projects in the Borough and enthusiastic to support the development of a Cultural Forum and contributing towards skills development. Warwickshire Libraries has achieved Arts Council NPO funding for three years to deliver cultural activity in the Borough.

Professional Arts organisations such as Imagineer and others are interested in working in the Borough, bringing their expertise to benefit residents and they have the potential to support the development of skills within the Borough as well as deliver projects.

Arts Council England has listed Nuneaton & Bedworth as a Priority Place which is likely to attract Arts Council funding for well thought-out projects. This has already been demonstrated with the success of the Place Partnership Project funding secured. An application to the Creative People and Places Scheme could be revisited with a strong local Cultural Forum behind it, and a lead organisation who could form a Consortium.

The benefits of Coventry's City of Culture activities could provide models and learning for N&B's cultural sector.

The Cultural Compacts initiative could benefit Nuneaton & Bedworth strategically if representatives from different sectors could be drawn together to support strategic delivery of culture integrated into different priority areas for the Borough. This could include organisations with economic development or regeneration remits, and health and wellbeing.

Threats

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are still being felt nationally, and the cost of living crisis and inflation are also threats to achieving ambitious targets across the country.

The perceived value of cultural activity may remain low amongst decision makers and residents, resulting in a lack of investment in culture.

Lack of coordination of funding bids could result in rejections of applications.

NBBC has low capacity in terms of staff and resources to dedicate to driving cultural development. Culture could become sidelined or remain isolated from other sectors if responsibility falls to one small team. Therefore partnership approaches are the best way forward to maximise success for culture.

Unclear future for the operating of the Museum & Art Gallery leading up to and following the redevelopment of the building, because of current reductions in revenue to the Museum & Art Gallery which are likely to result in the negative impacts identified earlier in this document.

Unclear future for Bedworth Civic Hall and Bedworth Library as community assets. The loss of the Civic Hall as a significant cultural venue is felt strongly in the community.

Unclear future for the existing Nuneaton Arts Centre Building (Abbey Theatre). The current building has limitations for its use, and has become out-of-date for the needs of a 21st century Theatre and Arts Centre. The lease has not been agreed with the organisation that run the building, which restricts their ability to access funding themselves and is restricting their progress. The Levelling - Up funding bid to develop a new centre (TACC) which would replace the existing centre was not successful. Therefore, there is currently an unclear picture of how to achieve the proposed new facility.

Proposals

Vision

The vision for culture in Nuneaton & Bedworth should be tied to the NBBC Corporate Plan as well as the priorities identified by community consultation. The proposed Vision is:

For Culture in Nuneaton & Bedworth to be ambitious, inclusive and a part of everyday life, bringing people together to celebrate and share the unique heritage and cultures in the Borough, and contributing to the vibrancy and economic success of the towns.



Sanctuary. Photo credit: Andrew Moore

Priorities

Full results of the consultation can be seen in Appendix 2. The consultation identified the following common priorities for culture in the Borough, which underpin the strategy.

Priority 1. Investing in People and Developing skills in culture and arts

- more **ambition** in arts activity, and to attract professional arts to the area to raise **aspirations**
- **outreach** cultural activity to engage isolated neighbourhoods
- **local artists** want to feel that they are offered opportunities and that opportunities do not only benefit creatives from outside of the Borough
- more cultural activity for **children and young people**



Workshops at Nuneaton Museum & Art Gallery: Left, Participants in the Abbey archaeology workshops; Right, family Easter holiday workshop, photo credit Brian Wood

Priority 2. Culture supporting community

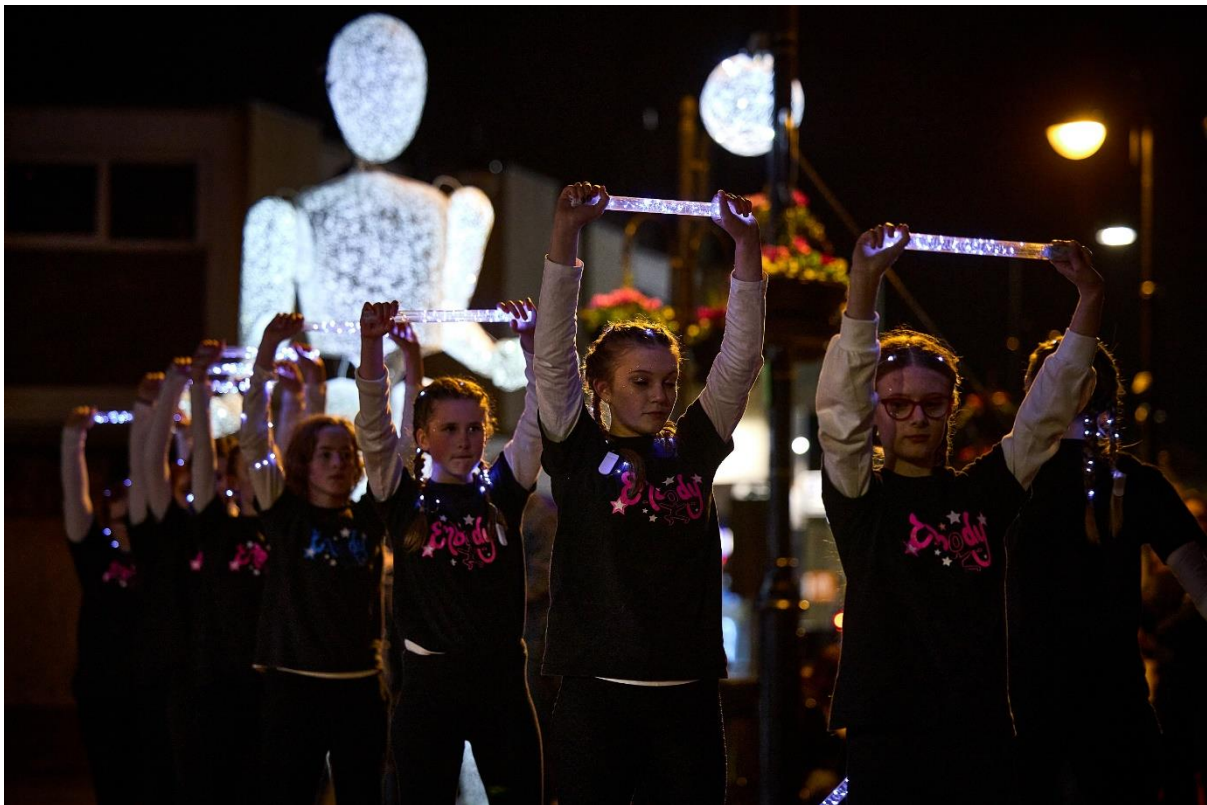
- cultural activities that bring people together to contribute towards **community cohesion** where there are new housing developments which will bring in newcomers to the area, and celebrating the diversity of residents through culture
- multi-use venues which provide for the Borough's culture and community needs: **“Community hubs”**
- better **communication** of cultural activity on offer in the Borough a **shared vision** between Nuneaton and Bedworth, as an **identity** as one Borough that can share complementary cultural offers and assets across the area



Textile banner created by intergenerational group of local women

Priority 3. Culture supporting regeneration

- cultural offer supports the **vitality of town centres**, through venues, festivals, celebrations of local talent, and ways in which culture can support community safety, learning from the [City of Culture Coventry example](#)
- **Public Art** to develop the distinctiveness of the Borough and contribute towards the improvement of the quality of environment



Sharing the Light, Nuneaton town centre, 2022. Photo credit: Andrew Moore

Recommended Actions

The following actions aim to respond to the identified priorities for the strategy.

Aim	Action	Who	When
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involve local artists and local people in working with professional artists to raise ambition and develop skills. Imagineer’s proposed programmes can support this. 	Continue developments with Imagineer on how they can support ambitious projects and skills development in the area, but also seek other professional companies to begin working in the area.	NBBC, Imagineer, other professional organisations	2023 and ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outreach: Bringing cultural activity to where people are: villages, outdoor spaces and parks, schools and community venues. Warwickshire Libraries’ NPO programme could support this. Another bid to the Creative People and Places programme (CPP - Arts Council England) could also aim to bring cultural engagement to villages and areas with limited cultural offer. The Cultural Forum (or a subset of it) could become a vehicle for a consortium bid to the CPP. Rural touring schemes such as Live & Local could bring cost effective quality arts to local spaces. 	Look to local partners to develop outreach arts programmes, e.g. Support the promotion of the Libraries’ cultural activity; look at opportunities for arts activity to support health and wellbeing; and discuss with Live & Local and other partners how they can bring more performances to communities; Develop an agenda for the Cultural Forum to plan towards a refocussed CPP application in three years’ time; Plan for more outdoor arts activity on accessible green spaces around the Borough.	Warwickshire Libraries; Warwickshire Arts Service; Live & Local; other programmes. Cultural Forum and Voluntary Sector Parks, NBBC, Festivals, Street Arts, Reel People	2023 and ongoing Start planning 2024; apply 2025; activity in 2026-2029 2024 ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop skills and celebrate the talent of children and young people. Seek ways in which cultural opportunities in the Borough can integrate with programmes for young people and support their development, for example providing showcases for talent 	Develop a structure to link local schools and local arts organisations and festivals in order to develop joint working and develop opportunities for young people to integrate into wider Borough activities.	Local schools and colleges, Warwickshire Education, local festivals, local youth provision	2024 ongoing

<p>within events, and developing training or work experience opportunities for young people as part of other cultural initiatives, making the most of expertise in the Borough.</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festivals, large scale community celebrations: celebrating the borough, showcasing talent, shared identity, celebrating diversity, revitalising town centres. Link the existing Festivals to create an enhanced, expanded and coordinated annual programme: Nuneaton Festival of Arts, Street Eats and Beats, Reel People, Imagineer’s Combustion events, Dance Academy showcases, schools’ showcases, Art Alert, Craft Centre, Heritage Festivals (perhaps around George Eliot). 	<p>Connect local arts festivals and NBBC Events teams, perhaps through the Cultural Forum, to create a coordinated approach to delivering an annual programme of festivals and events, thus sharing marketing and promotion and audiences, and potentially working together to access funding to enable more ambitious events.</p>	<p>Cultural Forum, local festivals, arts and heritage groups</p>	<p>2024 ongoing</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop venues as “Cultural Community hubs”, revitalising town centres. 	<p>Continue discussion with cultural organisations to develop cultural community hubs through the Transform town centre programmes that meet the needs of local groups and will be sustained by them using new facilities, as adaptable spaces of a relevant size to meet needs and a variety of cultural and community activities. Revisit plans to develop the Nuneaton TACC and discuss with stakeholders a viable plan to access funding for this facility. Look at complementary plans for venues in Bedworth, that also take into consideration the offer from Nuneaton TACC to the whole Borough. See Appendix 1 for more detail.</p>	<p>NBBC town centre regeneration, Abbey Theatre and Nuneaton Arts CIO, Bedworth Arts and local groups</p> <p>Cultural Forum, community venues</p>	<p>2023 ongoing</p> <p>2023 ongoing</p>

	<p>Through the proposed Cultural Forum, share knowledge about community venue spaces and facilities which could be utilised by other cultural groups, for example could the Gurkha Cultural Centre support other larger scale creative activity.</p> <p>NBBC should extend conversations with stakeholders who can support in finding a way to maintain Accreditation for Nuneaton Museum & Art Gallery, continue valued community engagement and public access to collections and exhibitions, and to develop a viable business plan as a valued community resource. Stakeholders include Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund and Warwickshire County Council.</p>	Nuneaton Museum & Art Gallery, NBBC, Warwickshire CC, national funders	2023 and immediate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a Cultural Forum to bring cultural sector together, to learn from each other, fundraise jointly, plan collaborative projects and coordinate marketing and promotions. The Forum could be supported and facilitated by NBBC's Events team, Museum team and Warwickshire CC Arts team. 	Extend invitations to local organisations to form a Cultural Forum, meeting twice per year, with a programme of development support, for example inviting funders to talk to the group and for festivals to look at joint working opportunities.	NBBC Events team, Nuneaton Museum team, Warwickshire CC Arts Team	2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a Public Art Strategy that develops distinctiveness and creates walking trails. 	Develop a Public Art Strategy as part of the regeneration programmes that creates an overall and coherent vision, informed by local communities, which links in to walking trails, outdoor space developments and new housing developments.	NBBC	2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a Communications Strategy for Culture. This should include a centralised and 	Add to the Cultural Forum agenda to find solutions to coordinate communications.	Cultural Forum	2023

<p>coordinated What's On, which could be coordinated through the Cultural Forum. Consider a full range of communication methods to reach different audiences, including websites, social media, printed newsletters and brochures, posters and banners.</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor spaces utilised for cultural activity. This also supports outreach, arts in public spaces and festivals as part of an annual programme. 	<p>Events team to connect with parks and open space teams; Museum and Leisure teams to support promotion and delivery of festivals and events to maximise on possibilities for programming arts in outdoor spaces.</p>	<p>Local festivals, Parks and Open Spaces Teams, NBBC Events, Museum and Leisure teams</p>	<p>2024 ongoing</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the foundations to work towards a Cultural Compact for the borough. 	<p>Bring together place based partners to begin to look at ways that Culture can be invigorated for higher place-based impact. This should include NBBC, local businesses, local arts organisations and tourism (WCC), health and wellbeing, local policing/community safety.</p>	<p>NBBC facilitates this: to include local businesses, Cultural Forum, tourism (WCC), health and wellbeing, local policing</p>	<p>Begin partnership in 2025; develop Aims, Objectives and an Action Plan and implement 2026-2028</p>

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Towards a Venues strategy for Nuneaton and Bedworth

There seems to be evidence from the consultation that a multi-use arts facility of an appropriate size in Nuneaton (the proposed TACC) would be appropriate for community need, to rehouse Nuneaton Arts CIO (the theatre) and provide other, more flexible spaces as a community hub. The size of Nuneaton's population suggests that a TACC could be sustainable.

However, the picture in Bedworth is more complex. The community feels the closure of Bedworth Civic Hall as a significant loss as a cultural centre, which results in a desire for Bedworth to have its own Arts Centre as a replacement. However the considerably smaller population of Bedworth on its own does not suggest that this would be a viable proposition, especially when a TACC is proposed in Nuneaton which could, theoretically, provide a service to the Bedworth population too.

A short comparative study with other small-scale arts centres in towns around the country suggest that Bedworth's population is too small to support its own arts centre. Arts Centres usually aim to support the whole Borough or District population size.

The Mill Arts Centre, Banbury, Cherwell
Serves the Cherwell population: 150,503

The Brindley, Runcorn, Halton
Serves the Population of Halton: 128,600

The Level Centre, Rowsley, Derbyshire
Serves the Population of Derbyshire Dales: 71,681

Stamford Arts Centre, Stamford, Lincolnshire
Serves the Population of South Kesteven: 141,853
(South Kesteven is also served by Grantham Guildhall Arts Centre and two Corn Exchange venues.)

Pocklington Arts Centre, York
Serves the Population of East Riding of Yorkshire: 341,173

The Core at Corby Cube, Corby, Northamptonshire
The Core Theatre is part of multi-use venue, The Cube, which serves the town of Corby,
Population: 56,810

Population of Bedworth: 31,330

Population of Nuneaton: 94,630

Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough population: 129,883

The population of Bedworth is unlikely to sustain its own stand-alone arts centre. However, Nuneaton's population could sustain this, and if a centre in Nuneaton also reached out to audiences in Bedworth and the rest of the Borough, this looks feasible as a proposition.

Having noted this, it is still important to consider the residents of Bedworth's views.

Proposed Strategy

A fully developed Venues Strategy is outside the remit of this document, however there are significant changes and developments taking place in the Borough around venues which require stronger consideration. This report recommends that a Venues Strategy that looks at the whole Borough and how venues complement each other to bring a varied offer to residents and visitors, should be developed.

As a result of the cultural history in Bedworth, people are feeling the Civic Hall closure as a significant loss for Bedworth. There is still a desire to have an arts facility in Bedworth, but the figures don't suggest this is sustainable. Therefore, any arts facility proposed in Bedworth could be part of a wider community hub facility which could house a library, council services, health services and community rooms in addition to arts spaces, in order to make it viable. The Cube in Corby is a potential model for this, where the town has successfully moved its Council services, Council chambers, library and theatre into one building and includes spaces on the ground floor for commercial bars and restaurants. Corby has a smaller population than the other Arts Centres compared in this report, although it is still nearly twice that of Bedworth.

Transform Bedworth proposes a smaller arts venue as part of its plans, however it is uncertain when this transformation would begin.

The current strategy is to seek a financially viable proposal for the building that was the Civic Hall to operate as a venue, for which expressions of interest have been invited for an organisation external to NBBC to run it. This could be agreed for the interim period of around 10 years.

With a view to what follows in 10 years time, consideration should be made for how a community hub facility which includes an arts space could be part of the Transform Bedworth programme. This is similar to the current proposal which locates certain community services within the same area, however housing them in one building (like in Corby) could result in savings for shared utilities and management.

After 10 years, the Civic Hall as a venue will need to be assessed for its continued viability. If a viable plan is not put forward for the Civic Hall to operate as a venue within that period, then investment should be made for better connections between the Nuneaton TACC facility and the wider Borough, such as improved transport links, to ensure that the TACC serves the whole Borough population.



Nuneaton & Bedworth Cultural Strategy Survey

Summary of Survey Results

The survey was run for two months, throughout August and September 2022. 309 responses were received.

84% were completed by members of the public, 6% by cultural organisations, and 9% by creative practitioners.

The majority of responses were from postcodes CV12, CV10 and CV11. The vast majority found the survey through Facebook. Other sources were HTC Big Local (where Art Reach had undertaken a consultation event), Bedworth Civic Hall, Pingles Leisure Centre, direct emails and Twitter.

The following summarises the main points from the survey. The full results are contained in a separate appendix.

Cultural activity

There is a good overall mix of variety of cultural activity being delivered. A high proportion of practitioners or organisations are delivering arts, crafts and heritage exhibitions, and drama or theatre performances.

Delivering music tuition, moving image film or video, and heritage and history talks were the lowest proportion of activities being delivered.

Cultural activity is being delivered in a variety of settings, though delivery in youth settings was a low proportion.

Over 50% of those who responded involve more than 10 people delivering the activity, showing that cultural organisations in the Borough are of a significant size.

Volunteers make up a high proportion of those delivering cultural activity in the Borough.

Qu. 10 asked respondents to share more about their work. Many respondents were concerned with supporting wellbeing as an important element of their delivery. Producing high quality arts,

both amateur and professional, was important for many. Giving creative people a platform and being inclusive were also important elements of practice.

Funding

50% of all respondents receive 100% of their income from earned income. Although this shows there is resilience and strength in the sector, it indicates that other funding sources such as grants are perhaps currently under utilised in the Borough.

There were 3 organisations who were 100% funded by either Arts Council England, other Lottery Funding or the Local Authority. These organisations could be at risk as funding from many traditional sources are expected to decrease, as a national trend.

Less than a quarter (23%) of respondents were receiving Arts Council England funding, although for half of these the funding was a significant proportion of their total income (25% to 100% of total income). Less than 8% were receiving Heritage Lottery Funding, at less than 25% of their total income.

Nearly 27% of respondents had between 25% and 100% of their income from membership income. This shows great support from the community for these organisations, however they are at risk if membership numbers diminish over time. 23% also received individual donations.

Only just over 15% of respondents receive funding from Trusts and Foundations, which indicates that this is a relatively untapped source for the cultural sector.

Overall, the results suggest that cultural organisations in Nuneaton & Bedworth would benefit from having a more diverse mix of funding sources. Providing support to groups with diversifying their income streams could be considered in order to build more resilience into the sector.

Nearly 68% of respondents do not have a dedicated fundraising role in their organisation. This indicates that there is a lack of capacity for fundraising within the sector and support could be required.

10 respondents had applied for funding unsuccessfully. However, there was also 6 organisations receiving Arts Council funding, 2 receiving Heritage Lottery and 2 Other Lottery. This indicates that there is some expertise in the Borough in accessing these funders, and perhaps partnership working could support other groups to access funds.

Networks and partnerships

Certain individuals are well networked themselves, and beyond the Borough, but actual formal partnership working seems low in Nuneaton and Bedworth, and involvement with the local CEPs seems quite low.

22 out of 23 respondents were enthusiastic about partnership working and recognised that partnerships and networks had the potential for collaboration, access to funding, exchange of knowledge and skills, and reaching more audiences and participants. This shows an interest and willingness for more collaboration, however there seems to be a lack of network structures which enable this to happen.

Over 65% said yes (17 out of 26) respondents said they would be willing to partner in funding bids.

Needs of cultural organisations and creative practitioners

The most needed support were for marketing and communication, and fundraising skills.

The most common reasons for feeling held back in achieving their mission were lack of funding, lack of venues either through suitability or affordability (Civic Hall mentioned as no longer available), or security of tenure, and lack of income from arts means lack of time to spend on developing it.

From comments received (as well as from conversations in focus groups), there seems to be a perception that the arts are not valued or supported for what the local arts want to achieve. There is a feeling that investment is given to more high profile and one-off projects, rather than supporting the day to day work that cultural organisations are doing in the community. Many local grass root organisations are feeling a lack of security and are worried about their long term sustainability.

At the same time, there is a sense that there is a lack of vision and confidence for N&B culturally, resulting in a lack of ambition.

Comments about recent public art projects indicate a discrepancy between the feeling of lack of vision whilst at the same time complaints of money wasted when ambitious projects are achieved. When money is talked about for the arts, there seems to be a lack of understanding of how the money is actually spent, and the added value of projects which engage with local people and provide participation experience is not understood – the focus seems to be on the physical end product of projects rather than the bigger engagement that these projects can bring to N&B. This perception is largely holding N&B back from achieving more ambitious work. A wider conversation about the value of arts and cultural activity is required to move beyond this negativity, and local artists need to be involved more in creative projects so that they both benefit and understand better the value of ambitious projects for residents. Local artists could, potentially, become advocates for ambitious work, but currently feel left out.

Opinions from all respondents (general public and cultural workers)

The most common responses to describe the arts in N&B were Mediocre and Uninspiring. The most common responses were that heritage in N&B is also Mediocre and Uninspiring, and over 20% also said it was Conventional. Both these results reiterate the perception that the cultural sector lacks ambition and innovation and needs re-inspiring.

Participation

The results show that people are accessing cultural activity at a range of venues. There is a significant proportion who are going outside of the Borough to access culture, and this is reiterated in some of the comments in Other. Parks and Open Spaces seem to be well used (by over 50% of respondents) and perceived as places for culture. This could indicate that Parks and Open Spaces could be made more use of for cultural programming as they seem to be very accessible to a large proportion of people.

Weaknesses

Cultural venues was the most commonly commented on aspect that is perceived as a weakness for culture in the Borough. Certain venues have been closed and others, such as the Abbey Theatre and Civic Hall, people felt were neglected buildings in need of refurbishment or replacement. Many respondents said there are a lack of venues for community performance or arts activity, as well as for audiences to go to. The need for a modern theatre and arts centre was commonly expressed. The heritage offer, Nuneaton Museum and leisure centres also seems to be perceived as in need of improvement.

“Our only theatre is closed, and has been for over 2 years. It's underfunded, consistently poorly managed and needs to be flexible and affordable for hirers and users alike. The theatre should be the hub of the town. Restaurant, bar, business centre, arts projects, youth projects, older peoples' projects“

Communication was the second most frequent comment as a perceived weakness. People feel that they don't know where to find out about cultural activity and offer, there is not enough publicity and a lack of outlets for local organisations to promote their events.

The **variety of cultural offer** was the third area perceived as a weakness. Variety requested needed to be aimed at different age groups, and inclusivity was important. Variety was linked to inclusivity, with different offers needed for different target groups, so that there is something for everybody. There was a feeling that there is not enough on offer for people to get involved with, including things to go and see such as performances, activities to take part in such as classes and workshops, and not enough for young people to be involved with.

Parks and open spaces were commented on frequently as needing cleaning up, litter picking and the river needs cleaning.

The **town centres** were mentioned as feeling run down with empty buildings and lack of offer such as cafes and restaurants, cinemas or music venues. There was a feeling that town centres could have more cultural activity as a draw to make them lively and inviting, but that recent public art had not been well received.

The **local council** was often mentioned. There was a feeling that local people's ideas could not progress as there was lack of communication or a way to approach the council, and efforts of local people to work in collaboration with the council did not go anywhere. In terms of culture, there is a feeling that there is a lack of engagement with the public.

A number of respondents expressed a **sense of loss** and a need for **conservation** of certain aspects, such as the loss of green space due to house building programmes, and sites of local heritage and historic buildings removed. People felt that Bulkington Village and Bedworth were being forgotten.

Sustainable activity was seen as difficult, with many cultural activities unable to be sustained due to lack of long term support of funding, and that projects were not run for long enough to develop properly.

The **development of cultural activity** is weak, with lack of support or funding but also lack of expertise to develop culture, meaning that many people in the Borough are not getting the opportunity to experience high quality cultural activity.

“Little expertise and knowledge of contemporary practice in the area to engage all walks of life and break down perceptions as to what art and culture is. Any creative and artistic educational experience or tuition is only accessible if you pay for it from private providers, making it only accessible to all through schools. Schools have limited funding to provide these experiences or in some cases understanding of current practices. For example, introduction to theatre in primary schools is limited to panto, whereas there is so much children's theatre available. Therefore access to good theatre requires money and travel to outside the area. Schools can't afford it, parents can't afford it, so this is something many kids in the area don't or will never access”

Community cohesion and opportunities for the community to come together were often mentioned as lacking. This was often mentioned in terms of not having central spaces to bring people together.

Ambition is seen as lacking. Fresh ideas, risk taking and new thinking all needed.

There was some concern about **anti-social behaviour** in towns and parks which result in people not going there to take part in cultural activity.

Other areas mentioned were difficulties in **transport and parking** to reach cultural activity, including walking and cycling routes available. **Affordability** of arts activity was a concern to ensure that everybody can afford to take part. **Community engagement** was mentioned and the need for more outreach to engage more people. Some people thought that art and heritage offers were of poor **quality** and not interactive enough. **Wellbeing** seems too low on the creativity agenda. **Accessibility** was also an issue for some, not central enough and low provision for wheelchair users. Lack of **coordination** of events, and publicity, was noted.

“Art needs to become embedded in our local mindset as the norm, not the exception/treat.”

Developments for the future

The most commonly stated development that respondents would like to see in the next 5 years was about **improved venues** – both improvements of existing ones and building new or replacement ones. Clearly there are many people who feel that the closure of the Civic Hall in Bedworth is a significant loss to culture. However, there was some understanding that the Civic Hall needed re-thinking and redevelopment. A need for a theatre that is fit for modern needs was a frequent response, but also that an arts centre with multi-arts on offer, as well as community hub venues or multicultural centre. Expansion of Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery was also a need, and a George Eliot centre or museum. Local libraries were mentioned as needed to be kept, and improved leisure centres, particularly a swimming pool. Making spaces (for both visual arts/crafts and for performance rehearsals) were also mentioned as a need.

The second most commonly stated development was for **outdoor spaces** (parks, rec and the river) to be improved, cleaned up and used more as outdoor event spaces that bring people together. More outdoor music, park entertainment, use of bandstands and open air dancing, summer fetes and family activities were all suggested.

The third development need was for more **variety** of cultural offer, across both the arts and heritage for example receiving more touring exhibitions to the museum, and more variety of performances to attend. Art courses and classes to participate in and learn were mentioned a number of times, for adults as well as children. Activities at different times of day or week, to suit those who might be at work in the daytimes etc. More on offer for children, as well as more for elderly people and those in the villages who might find it hard to access the towns.

Festivals, parades and civic events were suggested often. Cultural community activities that bring people together, including carnivals, music festivals, sporting events and festivals such as a George Eliot Festival and growing the Ragged Bear Festival. Activities that share culture were suggested, such as a Thai festival or food festivals. Social and celebratory events that bring the community together.

Opportunities for artists, arts development and networks are seen as a need to support those locally in the arts sector. Calls for a dedicated arts officer or department express a need for people with the expertise and dedicated time to develop the arts in the Borough, currently lacking. Showcasing and celebrating local artists and supporting their development is needed, making more opportunities available to them and longer projects to support sustainability.

Improved **town centres** is important to many respondents. Alongside the need for regeneration and variety of shops and facilities, cultural venues and activities are seen as supporting the town centre’s transformation. Cultural activity could enliven town centres and make them a destination for visitors again.

Cultural activity is seen as a way of **building community and participation**, and many respondents had ideas for how communities could be engaged more if given cultural opportunities to showcase their talent, perform for their Borough, linking voluntary and community sectors to create celebrations, art and activities that involve lots of people and build shared sense of community.

A number of respondents want to see more made of the **heritage, conserving** important heritage and celebrating heritage more, especially George Eliot, as well as some of the heritage buildings, canals and mining heritage.

Many respondents had opinions of **art in public spaces** in the Borough, which included conserving some of current features such as water features, but also creating new sculptures, water features and landscaping in outdoor spaces. In addition, performance arts outdoors were suggested, including street performances and using the bandstands.

More **opportunities for young people** to develop their talents and interests was suggested by a number of respondents.

More accessible and **better promoted information**, with a central information system for the arts/culture, was suggested.

Accessible transport, walking and cycling routes are needed.

Changes needed

Again, **venues** were the most pressing need for change for most respondents. A large number of respondents either said that the Civic Hall needed to re-open or be re-purposed. A new theatre/arts centre was also required, and a museum for George Eliot and a town cinema were suggested. Local community venues were also needed, with affordability to hire the spaces or free spaces also important. A more central location for culture and art was suggested.

As before, **variety of offer**, which also supports **inclusivity**, is important, and respondents gave many examples of a wide range of ideas for variety of activities.

The third most frequently mentioned change needed was about **changes in attitude and ambition**. Many of the comments were about the local council changing its mindset or having fresher ideas, however they also referred to wider education about the arts and its value.

“Information to change the shift in attitudes that the arts are worthless or inaccessible“

“Art seen as a community good, not a waste of money”

Regeneration was the next most commonly stated change needed, especially for town centres which people recognise need investment and to be made more appealing. Culture has a part to play in making town centres more attractive and vibrant places to visit.

Again, **promotion and communication** of what's on offer and events happening needs improving, to better market the Borough and its culture and raise awareness of the positive aspects taking place in the Borough.

Public spaces and public art need investing in, improving, cleaning up and maintaining.

Many comments were about the need to **support local professional artists** in the Borough, as well as **arts development, collaborations and networks**. There were a few calls to have a dedicated officer for the arts at the Council, and others that need people with arts expertise to support the sector. Coordination and networking was called for.

Funding was recognised as needed and many people asked for more investment in culture.

The next most commonly mentioned category was about **celebrations and community coming together**. Festivals, large scale arts events and cultural celebrations that involve lots of local people coming together were all suggested.

Transport and parking were mentioned as areas that can impact on the accessibility of cultural activity.

Another area often mentioned was about **consultation** and that the Council needs to **listen** to local people. Many respondents felt that they were not listened to enough, so re-thinking ways to engage with residents on culture is important.

Safety, especially in regard to anti-social behaviour and in town centres, was an area of concern for quite a few people and this is another area that will impact on whether people feel confident to attend cultural activity or not.

There were other comments about **young people** needing more activity and spaces, and concern about **protecting green space**.

Focus Groups

Notes from Bedworth Focus Group,

Old Meeting Hall United Reformed Church, Bedworth

Saturday 24 September 2022

17 attendees

People attending represented Old Meeting Hall, Rainbow Sunshine Company, NAC16, Bromage Theatre Company, Julie Bromage Dance Academy, Guardians Grow Charity, The Makery, Ash Green Residents Association, Warwickshire County Council Education Service, Nuneaton Arts Council (Abbey Theatre), individuals from the theatre community and other Bedworth residents.

Notes captured on flipchart:

What do we value?

Culture = Community

Brings communities together

Young people are the future

People – volunteers

What is missing in the Borough for culture?

“An Arts Forum” – this is a brilliant idea.

There is no community hub in Bedworth.

Civic Hall needs to be reimagined as a Community Hub, like Bulkington Village Centre, with lots of different services and cultural offers in one place.

- With day and evening activities
- Youth clubs / education centre

Communication and awareness of what’s on in the arts – this needs to be coordinated.

There’s too much reliance on the internet for Comms.

Language barriers

Embracing diversity and cultures.

The Borough needs to be tidier!

What is distinct about the Borough?

The Civic Hall was a community facility, more than a theatre, it was a social facility. The offer was diverse, dinner and dance etc. It offered lunches. The elderly used it a lot. It was generational – people from generations of families used it. Everybody’s got a story about it! People came from further afield to go to the Civic Hall, it put Bedworth on the map.

“The Town That Never Forgets” – armistice

Past industries/heritage: ribbon weaving, coal mining, armistice

The green belt is disappearing.

Bedworth town centre is compact.

What are the cultural challenges for the Borough?

To draw people into the towns, they need something to do – a community hub.

Accessibility and affordability.

Art and culture needs to go to where people are, e.g. care homes

Removing obstacles to participation and engagement, e.g. relaxed performances.

The rivalry between Nuneaton and Bedworth towns – is this a generational thing, younger people do not recognise this so much.

There is a strong sense of community supporting each other, this is an opportunity to meet challenges.

Nuneaton & Bedworth

Focus Groups

Nuneaton Museum, 26 August 2022

Attendees

People attending were involved in:

Nuneaton Festival of Arts

Community Voices Choir

Several individuals who were an artist and teacher, graphic designers, college tutor and a public artist.

What do we value?

The Abbey Theatre. The number of seats at the venue are adequate.

Nuneaton Museum – the gem of culture, the main hub for the visual arts. It feels like not enough people know about the regularly changing exhibitions.

The Station Gallery has just been set up. It is not in a prime location and never going to be open every day.

Nuneaton Urban Arts festival (James Bennett / Reel People). Think it's brilliant – opening up to a new audience.

Street East and Beats – more were needed because there were long queues. Who organises this? Is it possible to link this to other things?

The Nuneaton festival brings families into the Museum. Most people attend through Word of Mouth.

We value how green it is here, history on your doorstep, people living here sometimes don't see their uniqueness.

What is needed?

Need a bigger stage for dance troupes, now that the Civic Hall is not open.

Need a grand piano for concerts, but the Civic Hall is too expensive.

Nuneaton tend not to sing their own praises.

Because the college has moved to Hinckley, Nuneaton students are not linked to Nuneaton Museum but to Hinckley.

Children not being brought to the Museum so not growing up with the gallery. There used to be a tradition of classes of children coming to the Museum after being at the swimming pool!

People are reluctant to go out of Nuneaton e.g. to visit Birmingham, what is the barrier?

Art in schools – perhaps the experience of art in schools can be negative. How do we break down these barriers to enjoying art. Perhaps having interventions in every day life – put food on! For example like the Street East and Beats event.

Schools need to take children and families to arts venues so that they can learn how the venues are, become familiar and comfortable. Coach prices are higher but public transport is more doable! Make the trip part of the experience – walking tour!

Outreach – going out to the community – making those links. (thinking of the Museum)

Ideas:

Should be promoting walking more. Creative ways to walk differently. Trails. Space invader trails. Ghost signs. Look up at the buildings. Linking to healthy walking. Hidden architectural features. Need to rediscover those hidden worlds.

An Arts Officer post is required to make these things happen, to coordinate things.

Awareness: there are still lots of people who don't know about the Festival of Arts. Need to create a central place where people can post and find out what's on, perhaps online. Needs somebody to take control and moderate it. There are no local newspapers any more to share local news. This used to be a big part of Nuneaton culture, to have a free paper. There are various papers but they don't go to all houses.

The Council's In Touch – by the Comms department at NBBC, now online and seems to be more corporate messages rather than supporting community events.

Learn from Hinckley! They have a printed Borough Bulletin and an arts officer, use events on parks more.

There is an arts and crafts fair growing in Atherstone.

Too much is delivered by good will – nobody whose job it is to take up the reins, keeps cultural activity precarious. The arts needs to be valued as a profession, not just a nice-to-have. The Council role – needs somebody who is a professional funding bid writer, with the capacity to coordinate things and bring in the money.

Need to take art to the people, e.g. “Paint in a Pub”, “Paint and a Pint”.

BARRIERS:

The time people need to give, relying on volunteers,

Not enough places to sell work,

Sustainability is a problem, it's hard to re-fund things that work!

Funds to do more ambitious things or just hire bigger spaces (thinking of the Festival). Could we encourage people from Coventry to come here to use our spaces? E.g. Coventry does not have enough rehearsal space.

PARTICIPATION:

Want to start with smaller, more familiar art, to get people participating.

Hoardings that protect the building sites – the Festival would love to use these and show work more professionally to heighten the ambition and sense of pride.

People need to feel ownership and be involved in the development of public art so that it is not vandalised or graffitied.

Create local public art with people that tells their stories etc.

Is an audit of art facilities and spaces for hire required? People don't know where they can find spaces, and don't know what's missing or available.

Lack of somebody to coordinate something like this group to share knowledge, this could be useful to have a group coming together.

What should we celebrate?

Beautiful green spaces and fields. Very close to the deep countryside.

Strong history, artefacts and archaeology excavations here.

Geological features – every age of rock is found in N&B!

Lots of pockets of talent doing their own thing – how do we bring this together and celebrate it? Older and retired people entering the festival too, giving older people the confidence to show work. Celebrate it's never too late!

Warwickshire Open Studios – started from Leamington. Art Alert started to do a North Warwickshire one.

Priorities

To stretch ambition: familiarise people with new experiences.

Greater engagement

Better publicity drive, celebrating all the creative things that happen in the Borough

Vision

“It's got all the raw materials”

“hands-on”

“A Place of Making”

“Moments of Wonder!”

“Find Your Superpower!” (have a go events)

Targetting non-arts engage people. Needs to happen over a sustained period of time to build engagement. Being interested in the audiences.

Main themes

We value the main cultural venues and activities going on.

We value the green spaces.

We want to promote walking more and healthy activity through creativity, e.g. creative walking trails etc.

There are barriers to participation in the arts and culture: starts at a young age, schools, not enough familiarity with arts and culture. Needs to start young; needs to be more outreach to those not participating. Art needs to become part of the every day, all around us.

Public art needs to be made with communities, telling their stories and involving them so they have a sense of ownership.

Better awareness and promotion of what’s on in the borough is needed, people don’t know about it.

Coordination required – a dedicated office post to coordinate, with expertise and fundraising skills. Too much reliance on volunteers.

Celebrate the creative things going on more; celebrate heritage and strong history; celebrate unique geology, celebrate green spaces.

Stretch ambition – but need to start with more familiar and accessible to build engagement.

Nuneaton & Bedworth

Focus Group notes

Bulkington Village Centre, 22 August 2022

Attendees

People attending were involved with the following:

George Eliot Fellowship, Chilvers Coton Heritage Centre, Bedworth Heritage Centre,

Art Alert, Escape Arts,

Station Gallery in Nuneaton

Nuneaton Local History Group

Also attending as individual creative makers/designers/artists and with backgrounds in art administration and heritage.

What do we value?

Riversley Park, the Miners Welfare Park, for wellbeing.

There is a broad section of the population walking through Riversley Park. We would also like boating! And the bandstand to be used more.

There used to be a walk through from Pingles, used to be a paddling pool now fenced off, was this to do with health and safety or vandalism?

The Nuneaton Library (1963) – such an iconic building, why pull it down?

Represents music and drama in Warwick.

The library has the world's best George Eliot section and first editions.

Like the reading challenge in the summer for children. Gigs, poetry and music, good events, easy to get to, people would like to keep the library!

What is needed?

Marketing: there is a lack of newspapers. Disjointed marketing of things on. There is “The Local Rock” magazine for community news etc. which goes to Nuneaton and South Leicester, Hinckley and villages. But nothing that goes to the whole of Nuneaton and Bedworth area.

A network of cycleways.

A Tourism Office – there used to be an officer with a budget, the George Eliot Fellowship used to provide expert tour guides as a tourism offer. Need to tie tourism better to the George Eliot heritage groups. We mostly get overseas tourists – what about attracting more locals and UK visitors?

There is no cohesion – to bring together all the individual things and promote them better. A Theatre Hub could make a huge difference.

Art Deco buildings are valued. E.g. The Ritz. There's a feeling that they are all under threat.

The School on Park Avenue, now an empty building.

Nuneaton Town Centre doesn't feel safe after dark, around the Hilton Hotel on Abbey Street.

Need to re-imagine the town centre: like Market Harborough. We like the small streets and old buildings. The signs are better! Remove all the street clutter.

The City of Culture in Coventry did a lot for Coventry – put it on the map!

- Live music in the town
- Coventry market has workshops for families
- Nuneaton has enough empty premises to do something like that
- Would like pop up shops, experiencing different things, pop up theatre, food court/festival food

The market used to be really good. We had farmers' markets.

Bring in unique things as an attraction.

There is a BIG interest in making Nuneaton into a cultural centre.

Art Alert coordinates exhibitions in various venues locally. But they rely on volunteers so it is not always able to be open.

The Craft Centre – has 20 units and a café. But not enough people are there. How is this supported? The old tourism officer used to support promoting this.

Ad hoc activities doesn't sustain change, the City of Culture in Coventry seeded things with enough money. A festival of Culture could seed start things here.

What should we celebrate?

Being the Centre of England!

George Eliot

The Abbey

The Albion Buildings (Weavers' cottages)

Little quirky buildings with interesting histories

Celebrate the Ribbon Weaving heritage, unique heritage.

Should have one of the weaving cottages set out as it used to be, weaving workshops.

Manufacturing histories, textiles.

Parallels in Bedworth.

Mining histories. The Miners' community, still attracted to miners' stories and heritage.

We have the most coffee bars per square mile in England!

TikTok should be used to promote things.

Ideas:

- George Eliot Festival
- Outdoor Theatre
- Nuneaton Light Up Arboretum

People should be working together, driving it.

Carnival. This is difficult to bring back because of the cost of insurance for the vehicles etc.

Need something to create a sense of involvement.

Talked about a consortium group of community to drive a festival-type event.

There's huge inertia when the look around the town so we need to change the perception of the town to create the enthusiasm.

If the regeneration works, people might want to get more involved.

Ideas:

A Cultural Magazine. Printed so that it is come across, can be picked up by people who don't know about it, as opposed to online where you have to search. Deliver to every house in the Borough!

Arts centres: need a multi-arts centre, for building participation and audiences. Should be quite central. Everywhere needs an arts centre. What could it offer different to places nearby? Cinema, workshops, café. Something for the older generation. Day time and evening audiences.

Nobody knows where the Bedworth Arts Centre is!

The Bedworth Arts Centre seats 60, has a community room and is voluntary run.

Bedworth Civic Hall – the folk festival and craft fairs were very successful, was it 10 years ago? The amateur operatics used to use the Civic Hall but it's too expensive now.

It's absurd that the Museum can't have its own website!

Main themes

Value the outdoor spaces and walking and cycling routes, would like more

Nuneaton Library iconic building and valuable as a venue, plus collections.

Many local buildings are historic, interesting, quirky, and are at risk -feeling that this is a loss to the character of the town and could be made more if instead as an attraction

Central marketing and communications that go to all homes in N&B needed, also central tourism that communicates about the Borough more.

Strong feeling that bringing people together is needed, the community needs to drive things, events that bring people together, to celebrate and share culture. Outdoor, inclusive activities, festivals, markets etc. Community Hub / Theatre Hub.

Should be celebrating the unique heritage more, the industrial/manufacturing and mining heritage as well as George Eliot.

Need to spark enthusiasm, get people together to make things happen.