

Coventry Cultural and Events Strategies - August 2007

**Creative Cultures**

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## **COVENTRY CULTURAL STRATEGY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Culture and Coventry's future**

Coventry has an exciting future as a prosperous 21<sup>st</sup> century city – and culture can play an essential role in achieving this prize. Coventry is in the midst of a £8bn city-wide regeneration scheme and the message of this cultural strategy is that Coventry's cultural sector – its people, facilities and activities – is poised to make a unique and essential contribution to Coventry's development and the quality of life of its citizens.

### **Coventry on the move**

Coventry economic and social position is improving after a long period of stress. For example:

- Coventry's population is now rising and its employment levels are reaching those of earlier decades
- The city has an increasingly diverse community and a national reputation as a place of relative harmony
- Coventry is only one of six cities in England where the proportion of young people in the population is rising
- Coventry has been identified by Central Government as a growth area and could see an increase in population to 370,000 whilst serving a wider hinterland of over one million
- There are some signs that the gap between the more deprived communities, designated as priority neighbourhoods, is being reduced.

### **Culture meeting the needs of a growing city**

And Coventry's cultural provision is already making substantial strides to meeting the needs of a growing city, for example:

- The Ricoh Arena offers a major sports and events centre within two hours drive for 75% of England's population
- Major developments are taking place at two of Coventry's cultural gems, the Belgrade Theatre and The Herbert Museum and Art Gallery
- Events such as the Godiva Festival, International Children's Games and Jazz Festival are putting Coventry on the map
- The two Universities, Coventry and Warwick, are leading exciting new creative projects building on the city's reputation for innovation and technological design
- Coventry's Transport Museum is one of the best in the world and is strengthening its role as Coventry's major visitor attraction
- Coventry Cathedral is poised to celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2012 signalling its position as an international symbol of peace and reconciliation and an icon for the city
- An increasingly strong and varied group of cultural practitioners and programmes are bringing innovative and inclusive cultural activities to city residents – including those in deprived neighbourhoods – and visitors alike.

### **The role for culture and the Cultural Strategy**

The past two decades have seen an enormous investment in culture across the UK, as realisation dawns that quality of life is essential in creating vibrant, competitive and successful towns and cities. In Coventry well over £100m has been invested in cultural facilities over the last decade, including external funding from a variety of sources such as the National Lottery.

Cultural involvement can bring benefits to both individuals and communities, creating a sense of well-being and pride in our city and in being a Coventrian. Culture embraces a wide variety of activities, places, values and beliefs that contribute to a sense of identity and well-being for everyone in our communities. Culture is about our way of life and our quality of life – it is about what people actively choose to do, rather than have imposed on them.

The aim of this Cultural Strategy (and its accompanying Events Strategy) is to maximise the benefits to Coventry and its communities from further cultural development. Other cities such as Leicester, Nottingham, Newcastle and Gateshead give strong examples of what can be achieved through the placement of culture at the forefront of development and with leadership firmly convinced of the power of culture to transform places and lives.

### **Access to culture in Coventry**

Coventry people and visitors to the city already enjoy a great deal of cultural activity. Each year, for instance, over two million visits are made to libraries, 1.7m visits to sports centres and golf courses, and nearly 300,000 visits are made to the Transport Museum.

Compared to other Metropolitan areas, Coventry people make good use of visits to museums and libraries and a high number of school children are involved in group visits. Whilst 70% of Coventrians are satisfied with their libraries and 69% with parks and open spaces, only 50% are satisfied with sports facilities and with theatres – although these figures differ only slightly from other comparable places.

Projects like Bookstart and initiatives by our major cultural facilities are also increasing access to culture. The recent Household Survey shows, for the first time, a decreasing gap in participation in cultural activities between our priority neighbourhoods and the rest of the city.

### **The view from Coventry**

One of the most consistent views of those consulted for the strategy was that Coventry feels as if it is **stuck with an outdated, industrial, manufacturing image** – and that other cities have moved ahead. Yet there was almost unanimous praise for **Coventry as a relatively harmonious place**, which had welcomed incomers throughout its history and maintained a positive attitude towards an increasingly diverse community.

Despite this 'image' problem, those consulted saw the **growing network of cultural facilities and activities within Coventry as a definite strength**. But **weaknesses in cultural provision** were also recognized with Coventry Sports Centre, voluntary sports club provision, lack of access to school-based facilities, the limited role of the city's heritage and lack of spaces for rehearsal, production and display highlighted.

The growing focus on the **creative and cultural business sector** and new initiatives by the two universities was welcomed and **Coventry's events** including Godiva and the Jazz Festival were widely praised.

The **city centre** was seen as a weakness by many, particularly in the evenings and in its ability to attract visitors, although **the role of CVOne** in managing and promoting the city was widely praised. And despite the current concerns, many are optimistic and see the improving city centre as contributing to the successful growth of the city as a whole with its cultural offer playing an indispensable role in attracting and retaining businesses, visitors and local people.

There were also concerns about **Coventry as a sub-regional centre**, needing to promote its role, for example, in community-based sports events without trying to compete with the regional and national provision offered by Birmingham and the NEC.

And a constant theme in consultation was the complaint that **people do not know about the range of cultural activities and opportunities in the city centre and beyond** – despite the current and past efforts to promote the city and its activities.

#### **The opportunities for culture**

Alongside these and other concerns there is, nonetheless, widespread recognition of the opportunities for culture in Coventry, including:

- the **planned growth of the city** with an expanding population, more diverse city centre both physically and economically, and the opportunity for public art to bring a new 'buzz' to life in Coventry
- the **development of cultural and creative enterprise** with Coventry's strengths in design and innovation supporting individuals and businesses in this sector
- building **links between the two universities, schools and colleges to develop creativity and creative business** to retain graduates and strengthen the economy
- Coventry's status as a **world centre of peace and reconciliation** and its relative **social and ethnic harmony** with the Cathedral could make a distinctive Coventry contribution to the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad
- Coventry is (demographically speaking) a **relatively young city**, and with the growth of newly established communities is getting younger, offering a real chance to **focus on young people** and their future creative role in the city
- the growth of **major events** at the Skydome and the Ricoh Stadium, the continued success of existing events like Godiva and the Jazz Festivals, a **growing city centre programme of animation** and a **more co-ordinated promotion of the City's heritage** to attract visitors and shoppers
- improved **community facilities** may be possible in, for example, the **Building Schools for the Future** programme and the Council's planned

review of community centres though this will require the addition of external funding for sports and arts facilities such as the Football Foundation and there will be opportunities for the development of community-based activities which are **networked with the City Centre**

- **new partnership opportunities** for linking culture with a wide range of regeneration, community safety, health, education and environmental initiatives.

### **The Cultural Strategy's aim and guiding principles**

The **aim for the Cultural Strategy** is to ensure that culture plays a leading role in delivering the Council's vision for Coventry:

*"Coventry to be a growing accessible city where people choose to live, work and be educated and businesses choose to invest".*

Culture has a unique and irreplaceable contribution to make in securing this vision. Cultural development will impact on the economy and the quality of life of everyone – Coventrians and visitors alike.

Its **guiding principles** are to:

- **focus on the 'big issues'** that affect the cultural sector and which offer the maximum opportunity for strengthening culture across the city
- **build on Coventry's strengths, address the existing opportunities** and identify the objectives against which present levels of resourcing need to be measured
- **be ambitious and aim for distinctiveness**, innovation, high quality and high profile
- **seek to increase participation** in all forms of cultural activity particularly by priority groups and priority neighbourhoods
- **recognise that all stages of cultural 'production and consumption'** need to be addressed if a strong cultural sector is to be developed in the city
- **initiate a process to strengthen the leadership** for and understanding of culture's contribution to the future development of Coventry.
- **ensure effective mechanisms for communication** and implementation of its objectives across stakeholders and the wider community.

The Cultural Strategy will need to be **actively supported by many organisations** - public, private and community-based - and it will be **led by the Cultural Partnership** which is part of the wider Coventry Partnership.

### **Four priorities for the Cultural Strategy**

To fulfil its aim the Cultural Strategy proposes four policy priorities. These are:

#### **A. Develop the new Creative Coventry**

Culture has a vital role to play in Coventry's future as a 21<sup>st</sup> century city. The development of creative and innovative businesses can help secure it a stronger place within the knowledge-based global economy. The

development of a robust and vibrant cultural sector will make it attractive to the new businesses and creative people who will help Coventry thrive

**B. Raise Coventry's profile with the community and visitors**

Culture in Coventry needs to raise its own profile and project an image of quality, distinctiveness, excitement and innovation. It needs to fulfil its potential role in promoting the city as a place to live, work, visit or do business in and in creating a vibrant cultural life for its communities and those attracted to the city. It needs to bring a greater degree of co-ordination to promoting the city and its culture – presenting a coherent vision and driven by renewed confidence in Coventry's future

**C. Connect the city's culture to the local neighbourhoods**

The cultural sector and its partners need to address the negative perceptions of culture in Coventry and the gaps in participation in cultural activities or access to cultural opportunities, particularly in the priority neighbourhoods. There need to be chances for participation, volunteering and employment in and enjoyment of a wide range of cultural activities, celebration and showcasing of local and diverse cultural expression and the development of pride in the city's cultural activities

**D. Make the city centre a vibrant centre of culture**

Cultural activity can help Coventry's city centre become a more attractive place for local people, increase numbers of visitors and address the many negative perceptions currently held about it. In the daytime and especially in the evening culture can enhance the quality and excitement of the built environment, bring animation to its streets and malls, encourage a wider range of users and uses and project a positive image of Coventry's diverse communities and innovative culture.

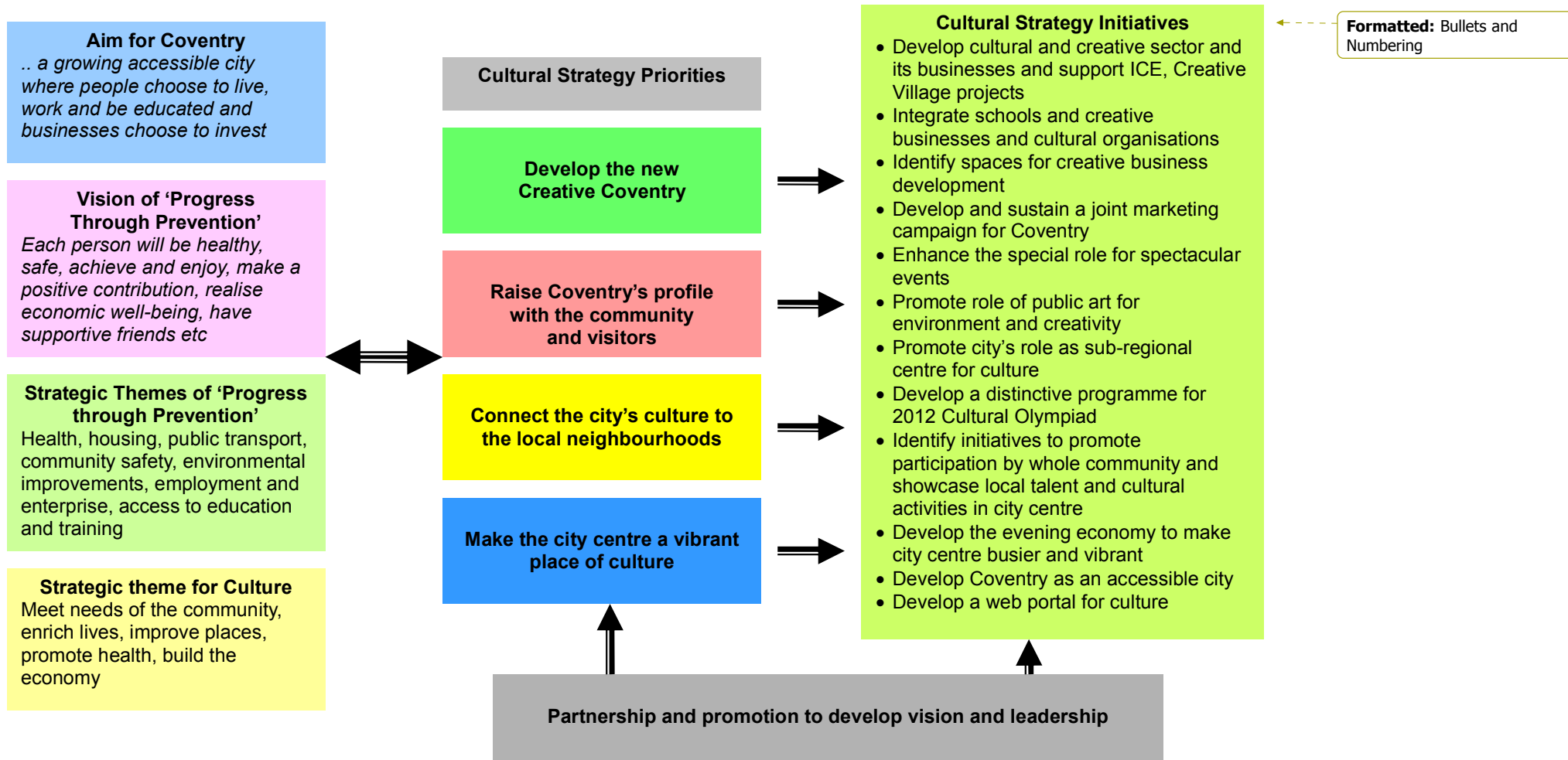
**Initiatives to achieve the Cultural Strategy priorities**

Working with its partners, Coventry's Cultural Partnership will focus on 12 initiatives to develop and strengthen the cultural contribution to the development of the city and the quality of life of its communities. They are:

- Work with the Universities and other partners to **develop the cultural and creative sector and its businesses** that are a crucial part of the new economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Work to **create links between Coventry's schools and colleges and creative businesses and cultural organisations** to ensure local people share in the growth of the new 'knowledge economy'
- **Identify new spaces which creative and cultural organisations** in the city can use to grow and develop their activities

- Develop a high profile and carefully targeted **joint cultural marketing campaign** that will ensure both residents and visitors are aware of Coventry's exciting cultural scene
- Enhance the **special role for spectacular events** in representing Coventry at its best
- Promote **exciting and innovative public art** that will enhance the quality and interest of the city and express its creativity
- Promote the city as a **cultural leader in the sub-region** of which it is the natural capital ensuring people look to Coventry as a key centre
- Develop a **distinctive programme for the 2012 Olympiad** including the Cultural Olympiad beginning in 2008 and which can build on Coventry's unique status as a centre for Peace and Reconciliation
- Promote and support initiatives and resources that increase **participation by Coventry's increasingly diverse community** ensuring good access to city centre and local facilities and showcasing local talent
- Develop the **evening economy** to make the city centre a busier and more vibrant place where everyone will feel safe and excited to visit
- Make Coventry **an accessible city** welcoming to local people, those with special needs and visitors alike with good transport, signage and inclusive provision
- Develop a **'One-Stop' online portal for Coventry's culture** at which residents and visitors can access cultural facility and activity web-sites and which can be used to promote a higher profile for a dynamic and inclusive cultural sector in the sector.

The diagram shows how the cultural strategy priorities and the initiatives will link to key community priorities for the city.



### **Action for and outcomes of the Cultural Strategy**

A Provisional Action Plan has been developed by the Cultural Partnership as a basis for discussion with, **and commitment by, key partners**. These discussions will follow formal adoption of the Strategy by the Council. **The Action Plan sets out a programme** to take place over the next five years with an indicative timescale for each action.

The Cultural Partnership will **lead the process of implementation, review and development of the Action Plan with its partners**. It will work closely with lead partners, monitor the results of agreed actions and initiatives, liaise with the full range of partners identified in the plan, and identify and agree new initiatives with them.

The Cultural Partnership and its partners will work alongside other initiatives by the Council and its partners to **achieve outcomes** which will include:

- increased level of recognition of Coventry's cultural facilities and activities (i.e. we now know that something is happening!)
- increased satisfaction with the city's cultural facilities
- broadening participation rates in cultural activities of all kinds
- reductions in inequalities in participation
- increases in city centre usage, dwell times and spending
- increases in visitor numbers to the city
- increases in cultural businesses being established and operating in the city
- improved graduate retention rates
- increased variety and quality of retail in city centre
- increased sponsorship for cultural activities
- raised earned income by cultural organisations
- increased school and community linked activity levels.