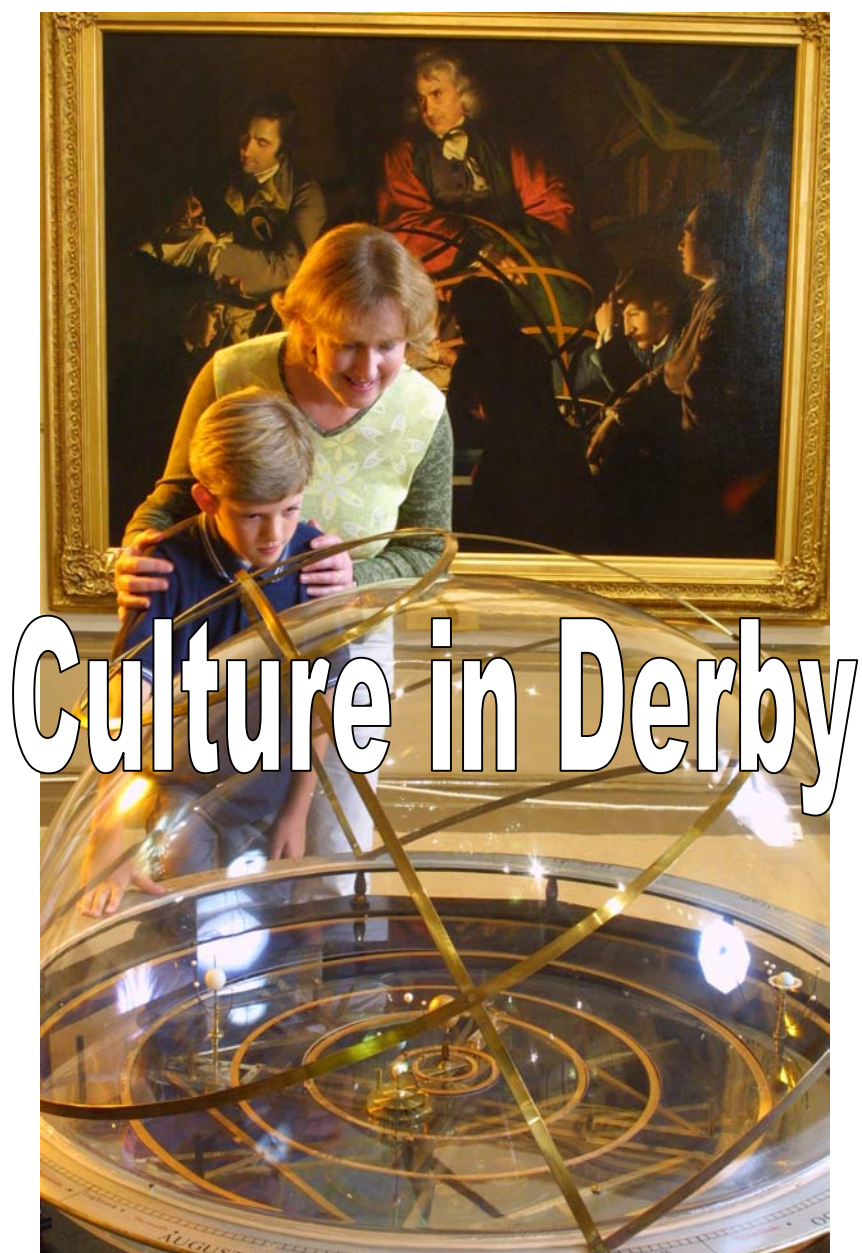


# Culture and Prosperity Commission



**April 2004**

## **Executive Summary and Recommendations**

### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 As its work plan topic for 2003/04 the Culture and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Commission has carried out a review of Culture in Derby. The purpose of the review was to try and find out what the public meant by 'culture' and to develop recommendations aimed at improving the match between the cultural services that the public want and those that the Council provides.
- 1.2 Derby offers a wide variety of cultural facilities that cover learning and information, entertainment and the visual and creative arts. In its review, the Commission has attempted to ascertain the views of the people and organisations that offer and use these cultural facilities and to glean from them suggestions about how the provision of 'culture' in Derby might be improved and made more accessible and attractive to people who live and work in, and visit the City.
- 1.3 The Commission's review has involved taking evidence from stakeholders who represent both the service providers and the service users. The form of the review is illustrated in Figure 1 on page 10 of this report.
- 1.4 The service provider witnesses that were interviewed by the Commission were representatives of the City's 'entertainment' providers and its creative arts and industries. The service provider group also included the Council officers who are responsible for the Museums and Library services and the Guildhall and Assembly Rooms. These witnesses gave the Commission a mass of detailed and specific information about their views on the 'cultural scene' in Derby and the ways in which they thought the Council might support and nurture the City's culture providers. A total of 29 witnesses representing a very broad spectrum of Derby's culture providers gave evidence to this part of the review.
- 1.5 The users of the City's cultural services are the public. In order to ensure that the review considered the views of all sectors of the population, the Commission engaged market research consultants Ingrim to conduct 1000 face-to-face interviews with a sample of people that were demographically representative of the population of the city.
- 1.6 The Commission has taken pains to ensure that as many people as possible were given the opportunity to contribute to the review. A report on the review together with a tick box questionnaire was taken to each of the Council's five Area Panels and the public were also invited to an 'open forum' meeting where they were able to talk informally with Commission members about their views on culture in Derby.
- 1.7 The views of young people on culture were assessed for the Commission by the Red Earth Theatre Company. A group of young people also

attended the Commission's open forum meeting on 7 January 2004 and gave their views on culture in the City to Commission members.

- 1.8 Most witnesses to the review, whether they were cultural service providers or the users of cultural services, have all given the Commission a remarkably similar story. In one way or another these witnesses have each commented very positively on Derby's advantages and on its great cultural potential. However they have also pointed out the City's failure to take the fullest advantage of what it has and to use its resources to the best effect. Many have also commented about the limited promotion of cultural events and facilities in Derby.
- 1.9 The picture painted by the witnesses to the review has been of a city that culturally has many good points. It has a diverse and friendly population. It has a rich and varied cultural heritage which shows in its buildings and its public art. It has good libraries and museums with great potential. It has well-established centres for the visual and performing arts. It has its own orchestra and thriving creative industries. All in all Derby is seen as a good place to live, but what the Commission's review has shown is that with a little effort and imagination the City could culturally be a really GREAT place to live.
- 1.10 The recommendations set out in the following section are intended to help achieve this objective. The recommendations are based on suggestions made by the culture provider witnesses and on the views and comments of the public who took part in the review.
- 1.11 The Commission is fully aware of the financial constraints under which the Council must operate and in formulating its recommendations it has avoided suggesting financially impracticable options. It has also confined itself to a small number of recommendations. This is because it feels that the problems it has identified are not essentially complicated or difficult to resolve. In fact, in some cases all that is required is for the Council, or another organisation, to act as a facilitator by matching needs and resources and providing advice and guidance. The Commission considers that doing this would provide a massive boost to cultural activities in Derby and that the results would be all out of proportion to the effort required to start the process.
- 1.12 Some of the Commission's recommendations suggest specific actions that the Council could take to improve the delivery of cultural services in the City. The others are of a more general nature and whilst some examples have been included in the Reasons, these should not be seen as the only options.
- 1.13 The Commission considers that implementing its recommendations would significantly enhance the 'cultural scene' in Derby and would make the City more interesting and exciting, and so more attractive, to visitors and residents alike.

## **2. Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1**

The Council should develop and implement better ways of informing the public about Derby's cultural facilities, events, programmes and activities. The Commission suggests that this information could be disseminated electronically via a purpose-built website. However a website would also need to be supplemented by other information that was more readily visible and was available to the large number of people who do not have access to the Internet.

### **Reasons 1**

Many witnesses to the review have emphasised the need for accessible information about what is and will be taking place in the City. This is a point that was highlighted by the results of the face-to-face survey. It seems such a fundamental point, but it is one where the Council is notably failing to deliver. Without publicity, people do not know what is happening, events are not as fully supported as they might be, and potential customers may be disappointed or lost.

The Council's website offers one means of providing the information but it has been suggested by a number of people that this was not somewhere that people would normally visit for information about entertainment and events. The Commission therefore suggests the setting up of a separate 'What's On in Derby?' website. This should be designed to be easy to use and to be attractive to a wide range of users. There is scope here for involving Derby people in the design and construction of the website. It is thought that in time this website could be developed into a major information asset for the City.

In addition to the website, the Commission considers that the Council should look for other ways of telling people what is happening in Derby. Posters seem one obvious way of doing this, and these should be displayed as widely as possible. Locations such as the entrance to the markets, car parks, the railway station and the bus station, supermarkets, hotels and shopping precincts would offer maximum visibility. Local radio stations may also be able to offer facilities for telling people about what is happening in Derby. Another possibility might be a free call, pre-recorded, 'What's On' telephone message.

It goes without saying that it is critical that both the website, the posters, and any other information are kept up to date

### **Recommendation 2**

The Council should take all reasonable steps to emphasise the importance of Derby's cultural achievements and to raise the local and national profile of culture in Derby. For this purpose it should, after consultation with its partners and the public, define and publish a series of cultural objectives and a timescale for achieving those objectives.

### **Reasons 2**

Derby has a rich cultural heritage, several sites that are of national significance, a number of nationally recognised, well-established culture providers and a strong 'cultural community'. However, witnesses to the review have told the Commission that there is a feeling that Derby does not make enough of itself, and that it 'sells itself short' and 'does not shout about what it has, or has done'.

It is the Commission's view that the Council, with its partners, could and should take action to reverse this trend and to actively promote Derby's cultural achievements, both past and present.

The definition and publication of an 'Action Plan for Culture' and a programme for achieving defined cultural objectives would give the necessary focus to process of raising the local and national profile of culture in Derby. The information contained in this report will give guidance on the content of the Action Plan. Such an initiative would fit in well with the opening of the QUAD Visual Arts and Media Centre.

### **Recommendation 3**

The Council should actively promote and support the development of visitor attractions that use or are based on Derby's cultural and creative heritage and achievements or that use cultural resources within the City.

### **Reasons 3**

It is the Commission's view, and that of witnesses to the review, that Derby could make far wider use of its cultural resources and could use them more effectively. It could better exploit its position at the southern gateway to the Peak National Park and it could certainly make better use of the Market Place for cultural events.

In the course of the review Commission members have heard a number of suggestions as to the way in which Derby might make more of its cultural and industrial history. Possibilities might include giving a higher profile to Derby's collection of Joseph Wright paintings, an event centred on Charles Edward

Stuart's stay in Derby in 1745, or an interactive exhibition showing the contribution of former Derby residents to the development of art, science and industry. One of the most intriguing of the suggestions that the Commission received was that the City might, with support from local businesses, investigate re-establishing the Derby Lunar Society.

Effectively promoted these and/or other initiatives would be a significant visitor attraction and could be used to give the City a 'national image'. If successful, they would raise its cultural profile of the City and enhance its economy.

#### **Recommendation 4**

The Council should take all reasonable steps to support local artists and creative industries.

#### **Reasons 4**

If the Council is to raise the local and national profile of culture in Derby and to meet the aspirations of Derby people, it will need to foster and retain the artists and creative industries that work in the City. Witnesses to the review from the creative arts have told the Commission that there is a lack of studio and workshop space in Derby and that artists have difficulties finding places to exhibit their work. Witnesses from the performing arts have said that there is a lack of suitable spaces in which they can perform.

The witnesses have also told the Commission about difficulties with finding out about the grants and funds that are available.

The Commission considers that the Council could offer practicable assistance in all these areas. This assistance might include:

- Increasing the amount of affordable and easily accessible studio/workshop space in the City.
- Providing showcases and show areas in Council buildings and on Council land where local artists could exhibit their work at no cost.
- Encouraging local developers to use work from local artists in their developments
- Offering free guidance on the availability of grants and funding to individuals and organisations
- Providing information to link the groups and individuals that require resources such as venues with those organisations that have suitable resources available

Support of this kind would help to establish 'new' artists and creative industries in Derby and to retain existing ones. By doing this the Council would create and foster the core of local talent that will be needed to raise the profile of culture in Derby.

### **Recommendation 5**

It is suggested that the Council should seek more, better, and more frequent, feedback from the public about the cultural facilities that are provided in Derby. The ultimate aim should be to develop a responsive cultural programme for Derby that meets the majority of current demands of the public but offers sufficient new interest to stimulate change and avoid stagnation.

### **Reasons 5**

The review has shown that the majority of the public consider Derby's cultural facilities to be either 'Important' or 'Very Important'. This is an excellent starting point, but if the Council is to ensure that it offers what the public want, it must actively seek the views of all Derby people on the cultural facilities that are available in the City, and it must respond appropriately to the views of the public. In doing this, the Council should not however fall into the trap of only catering for majority tastes, even though this may in the short term be the most profitable option. Instead, the Council should make certain that any programme that is offered not only satisfies some minority demands but also that it does this in a way that might excite the interest of at least some of the majority. This would be particularly important if the Council were to decide to promote a Derby Festival where a balance that reflected the possibly conflicting demands of majority and minority groups would be essential.

### **Recommendation 6**

The City Council should look for more ways of involving young people in 'cultural activities' in Derby and in doing so it should take into account their particular interests and concerns, the restrictions in their independence, and the influence that adults have over the choices they make in activities.

### **Reasons 6**

The Red Earth Theatre Company's investigations found that a lot of the arts activities in the City were seen by young people as being inappropriate for their age range. Consequently young people did not regard many of the key cultural activities provided by the Council as part of their voluntary activities.

If the Council and the arts organisations in Derby are to encourage young people's interests in arts and culture, it is very important that the culture providers recognise that young people have different views about what is 'interesting'. It should also be recognised that arts activities for young people are mediated by adults and they should be marketed and promoted accordingly.

Investment in young artists, creative entrepreneurs and cultural opportunities is essential if Derby is to nurture its home grown talent.

### **Recommendation 7**

It is suggested that the Council should investigate the viability of establishing a Charitable Trust to deliver the Museums Service.

### **Reasons 7**

The information obtained by the Commission in the course of its review suggests that there could be significant financial and operational benefits for both the public and the Council in establishing a Charitable Trust to deliver the Museums Service.

If the information that the Commission has received from witnesses to the review is correct, then it would appear that Charitable Trust status could resolve many of the problems facing the Museums service and that both the public and the Council would benefit.

It is therefore recommended that the possibility of establishing a Charitable Trust to deliver the Museums Service is fully investigated and if it appears viable, given careful consideration.

### **Recommendation 8**

Provide a sufficient level of IT funding for Derby Libraries and give consideration to making the libraries function as electronic access points to any future Council call centre.

### **Reasons 8**

The Commission was concerned to hear from the City Librarian that there was no budget allocated for the maintenance or replacement of the IT equipment installed at the City Libraries.

The Inqirum survey shows that the Library service is heavily used and is considered very important by the public. The Commission considers it is important that funding is available to maintain and ultimately replace this equipment which is essential to the delivery of a high quality Library service.

In order to help resolve the funding issue it is suggested that in addition to being used by the public for learning and information purposes, the IT equipment installed at the libraries could also be used to electronically access any future Council call centre.



### **Recommendation 9**

The Commission recommends that the Council support the proposal by Derby New Theatre to establish a venue for non-professional theatre in Derby. It is also recommended that the Council publicise its support for this venture by Derby New Theatre.

### **Reasons 9**

Derby New Theatre represents over 20 non-professional theatre and performing groups in Derby. The Commission were told that ticket sales for non-professional theatre exceed £500,000 per year and that more people go to non-professional theatre than go to the Playhouse. However there is no proper theatre venue available to the non-professional groups in Derby.

Derby New Theatre wish to establish such a venue, and to obtain the necessary backing they have told the Commission that they need to be able to show that their proposal is supported by the Council. They have told the Commission they do not require the financial backing of the Council, merely its public support for their proposal.

The Commission considers that it would be of benefit to Derby people to have a suitable venue for non-professional theatre in Derby and it urges the Council to support Derby New Theatre's proposal and to publicise its support.

### **Recommendation 10**

It is suggested that the Council should engage a person or an organisation to be responsible for driving forward its cultural programme and for achieving its defined objectives. Consideration should be given to appointing the person or organisation on a short-term contract that could be terminated if a satisfactory outcome was not achieved.

### **Reasons 10**

It is considered that the chances of achieving recommendations 1-5 and of delivering a successful cultural programme for Derby would be improved if one person, or one organisation, were given overall responsibility for the important task promoting and developing culture in Derby.

The Commission suggests that promoting and developing culture in Derby should be seen as a commercial venture and that commercial standards in respect of performance and results should consequently be applied. It is therefore suggested that any appointment should be made on the basis of a renewable contract that would be renewed only if defined objectives were achieved.

**Figure 1 – Elements of the ‘Culture’ Review**

