

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION: CULTURE AND PROSPERITY

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.

There is now a 24 hour electronic "What's on" available via touch screen at the Tourist Information Centre and on the Internet. This is the first fruit of the Tourist Information Centre's collaboration with partners throughout Derbyshire to implement the Derbyshire Destination Management System. This enormous database will provide the platform for future promotional literature, marketing campaigns and TIC services

We have created a partnership with all of the local authorities in Derbyshire to strengthen the web presence and visibility of Arts and Cultural activities in the sub-region. We are currently at the stage of recruiting a co-ordinator for this work.

The Cultural City Executive is also looking at paper-based ways of increasing the profile of cultural activity. The most promising avenue at the moment is the possibility of using large poster displays in the City Centre to publicise the "THREE" Festival programme

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.

The cultural objectives projects and timescales are published in the recently updated 20/20 Vision: the Community Strategy for Derby.

This is the Government's preferred way of publishing the Cultural Strategy for the city.

We have begun to plan for the work of re-writing this Action Plan ready for a revision to be published in 2005. One of the objectives which we are aiming to fulfill is to make the plan more strategic and wide-ranging.

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.

Later this year a ten-year capital strategy for Cultural Services will go forward for Cabinet approval. It will include a programme for the development of visitor attractions based on Derby's heritage and culture

An important step forward in the promotion of visitor attractions has been made through the implementation of the Destination Management System at the Tourist Information Centre.

Quad is an excellent example of a visitor attraction based on the creative heritage of the city.

Plans are in preparation for a large-scale re-think of the role and content of the Silk Mill Museum. That building will be considered in future the home of a Museum of Derby, telling the story of Derby's people, industries, geography and history. The change will exploit the Mill's position in the World Heritage Site. The heritage resources in the Museums Service will be promoted actively through the new posts that have been created in 2004: Museums Learning Officer and Museums Outreach Officer.

Festival activities within the city are growing in scale and diversity. Recent additions include the Derby Jazz Festival and the South Asian Arts Festival.

The search for a new function for Saint Helen's House is a good example of the Council rethinking the status of an iconic heritage building.

Recommendation 4

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

The City Council has recently appointed a Creative Industries Officer. He is M Reid, formerly Manager of Banks' Mill Creative Workspace Centre. He is now working on a major expansion of workspace provision in Derby.

A new guide to public art for developers has just been finalised. This signals a new emphasis on the inclusion of arts in commercial developments in the city.

The Arts team already deal with a large number of enquiries about funding streams. Their capacity to provide this information has been increased recently through the introduction of an Arts Forum newsletter which carries this type of information on a regular basis.

The Museum & Art Gallery regularly features exhibitions of local artists' work, and the Museum Shop sells the work of local craftspeople.

Derby's Creative Partnership is being moulded as an opportunity for children, schools and local artists to provide a new market for creative professionals.

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.

The major cultural venues in Derby have taken on board the message to respond to the public's wishes. The 11% increase in customers at the Assembly Rooms and the spectacular growth in audience figures at the Derby Playhouse are testament to this. The venues are still developing suitable means of communicating with groups of users, for instance, the newly created disabled users forum at the Assembly Rooms.

Library consultation is well covered by the Public Library User Survey - a national survey conducted every year.

Museums monitoring is being strengthened through the introduction of performance indicators as part of the East Midlands Museums Hub. A Customer feedback system has been in place for over 10 years now, supported by regular visitor surveys.

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.

Derby's Creative Partnership programme is about to begin in late 2004. This will inject a new level of creativity into the learning activity of young people in schools. At the same time this Assembly Rooms is actively developing a programming stream designed to appeal to teenagers and young adults. The enormous success of the "Bloodstock" weekend in September 2004 demonstrates the potential for this.

The Guildhall Theatre will be developed over the coming years as a specialist theatre for children and young people. The Derby Dance Centre is particularly successful in appealing to young people and hard to reach group.

One of the PSA targets for the museums, now they are part of the East Midlands Hub, is a 25% increase in contacts with under-16s

Recommendation 7

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

The City Council has watched with interest the developments at Sheffield. It is clear that the Museums service there has undergone a spectacular rejuvenation. However, this has been achieved through very significant investment in the service by the City Council, after Trust status. Without this Council investment, they would not have attracted the external funding that they achieved.. We shall continue to keep a watching brief on the possibilities of Trust status.

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.

In the latest budget round and in response to the recommendation of the Commission the City Librarian has created a budget for the renewal of IT. The budget is small and has been supplemented with a successful bid for Government grant provided for the development of electronic Government.

The underlying problem remains and will be tackled again during the coming budget round.

The role of the Central Library and neighbourhood libraries is being carefully considered in the light of the development of integrated service delivery. Computers in libraries will be seen as an essential resource in this context.

Recommendation 9

The Commission recommends that 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.

Derby New Theatre is one of the stakeholders urging the City Council to support development initiatives. It is important that initiatives are based on a thorough and co-ordinated understanding of the cultural life and market in Derby and its sub-region. To this end, the City Council has earmarked money for a comprehensive study of performance spaces and their markets. We are currently negotiating for this money to be matched by the Arts Council East Midlands, so that a study can be started at the end of 2004.

It is sensible that support for individual projects should be cautious until the results of this study are known.

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.

We can find no evidence that a commercial contract for the promotion of cultural activity on a city-wide scale can be funded or made to work. The crucial job is the co-ordination and support of the multifarious cultural organisations in the city, so that their own energy and will to succeed and expand is harnessed to the common good.

This role is already being played by the Assistant Director for Cultural Services, especially through his additional role as convenor of the Derby City Partnership's Cultural City Executive. This places the Assistant Director at the very centre of a network encompassing the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Action Plan produced by the Executive has been published as part of DCP's 2020 Vision, and it is an impressive catalogue of collaboration and initiatives.

The entrepreneurial approach in a more targeted fashion is already paying off, however, in developing our outdoor Events programme. The Arts & Events Team has engaged a consultant on an innovative no-win-no-fee basis to develop new sponsorship.

Ray Rippingale
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