



Space of Possibilities

Coventry's Cultural Strategy
2007-2017

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Coventry - a city building a creative and sporting future for everyone that lives, works, studies or plays here. This strategy builds on previous strategies for culture and reflects our vision for a city that encourages and inspires cultural activity at every level.

The **Space of Possibilities** is a strategy that sets out priorities and actions not only for the City Council, but for all the partners who support the delivery of cultural services in the city. A strong cultural partnership is vital for a city determined to become a vibrant hub that attracts new businesses, visitors and residents to savour the quality of life that cultural activity delivers.



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Executive Summary

Coventry Cultural Partnership

This strategy has been produced by the Coventry Cultural Partnership. This is an organisation that brings together the range of organisations and people who are involved in delivering or promoting cultural services to the city of Coventry.

The Coventry Cultural Partnership sits alongside a number of city-wide partnerships in Coventry. The partnerships are set up between, public services, local industry and community organisations under the umbrella of the "Coventry Partnership". All of these partnerships are supported by the City Council who have endorsed this strategy. The cultural strategy links to other strategies that have been produced by other partnership groups – most notably the Community Safety Partnership, the Children and Young People's Partnership and the Older People's Partnership.

The Cultural Partnership has followed the guidance that has been given from the Government Department for Culture, Media and Sport, in order to provide a framework for this strategy. There has been wide consultation with a range of stakeholders. The key part of this strategy is what we propose can be done to improve the cultural offer in the city in such a way that more people will take part and will enjoy the experience.

It is expected that this strategy will be reviewed by the Cultural Partnership at least once a year with a report produced on progress against the agreed actions and in demonstrating the outcomes achieved. It will also be refreshed and reviewed each year as the cultural offer develops in response to customer expectations and demands and any changing circumstances in the city.

What is culture?

There is a **wide definition of cultural activity**. It may be described as all the things people might do to have fun. It includes:

- the performing and visual arts, craft and fashion
- media, film, television, video and language
- museums, artefacts, archives and design
- libraries, literature, writing and publishing
- the built heritage, architecture, landscape and archaeology
- sports events, facilities and activities
- parks, open spaces, wildlife habitats, water environment and countryside recreation
- children's play, playgrounds and play activities
- tourism, festival and attractions
- informal leisure pursuits



Case Study 1

Kombat Breakers and Frontline AV



The young dance group (aged from 13 to 25), **Kombat Breakers**, has worked with Frontline AV over the past five years in dance workshops, performances, break dance battles, new theatre pieces and film and television productions. Their unique blend of break dance with street dance and entertainment has developed to make them a popular fixture in Coventry's cultural landscape.

Their profile is certainly growing – from 'Jump Coventry' in 2005 through to the 2007 finals in ITV's 'Britain's Got Talent' show.

'Jump Coventry' was devised, shot and produced by Frontline AV, featuring the Kombat Breakers mixing breaking and free running skills across key landmark buildings and cityscapes in Coventry. The film was used to open the **International Children's Games** hosted in Coventry 2005, and has featured frequently since to promote Coventry and sports activities for young people.

After the success of 'Britain's Got Talent', other members of the Kombats have moved on to feature in the 'Dance X' show on the BBC and programmes such as 'Lazy Town'. But this mix of school kids and youth workers want to move on from dancing as a hobby into a career, so they can tour and teach other young people.

All this has helped to stimulate a massive amount of interest and enthusiasm for urban dance across Coventry –

*so watch out when you're next in town –
it's breaking out all over!*



Culture and Coventry's future

Coventry has an **exciting future as a prosperous 21st 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's economic and social position is improving after a long period of low performance. 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 in participation between the more deprived communities, designated as priority neighbourhoods, is being reduced.

Culture meeting the needs of a growing city

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
- 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 50th 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 view from Coventry

One of the most consistent views of those consulted on 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 recognised 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. 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.

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 Arena, 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 City 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 City 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.

Case Study 2

Belgrade Theatre 'Hussan and Harry'



'Hussan and Harry' was a joint venture between the Belgrade Senior Youth Theatre, Yuva (a group of young refugees supported by the City Council) and Talking Birds.

The work started with interviews with some of Coventry's elderly residents about their World War II experiences. This was matched by discussions with a number of young asylum-seekers, and drew out feelings and responses which mirrored those of the elders. The resulting play, combining improvisation and reminiscence, used young performers from refugee communities in Coventry, working alongside adult actors.

The story contrasted the experience of a young Coventrian (Harry), traumatised by the bombing of the city, with the problems faced by teenage refugees housed next to him, as an old man. The play explored similarities in the past of both Harry and Hussan, and showed how these could help both to deal with the wounds of the present.

The play's brief run met with great acclaim from its audiences: **'fantastic production'**; **'thought-provoking material'**; **'gripping'**; **'refreshing, deeply sincere and moving'**, and drew packed houses not only from Coventry but as far afield as Hull and Staffordshire. There are plans for a revival in 2008.



Five priorities for the Cultural Strategy

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



Develop the new Creative Coventry

Culture has a vital role to play in Coventry's future as a 21st century city. The development of creative and innovative businesses can help secure it as 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.

Raise Coventry's profile with the community and visitors

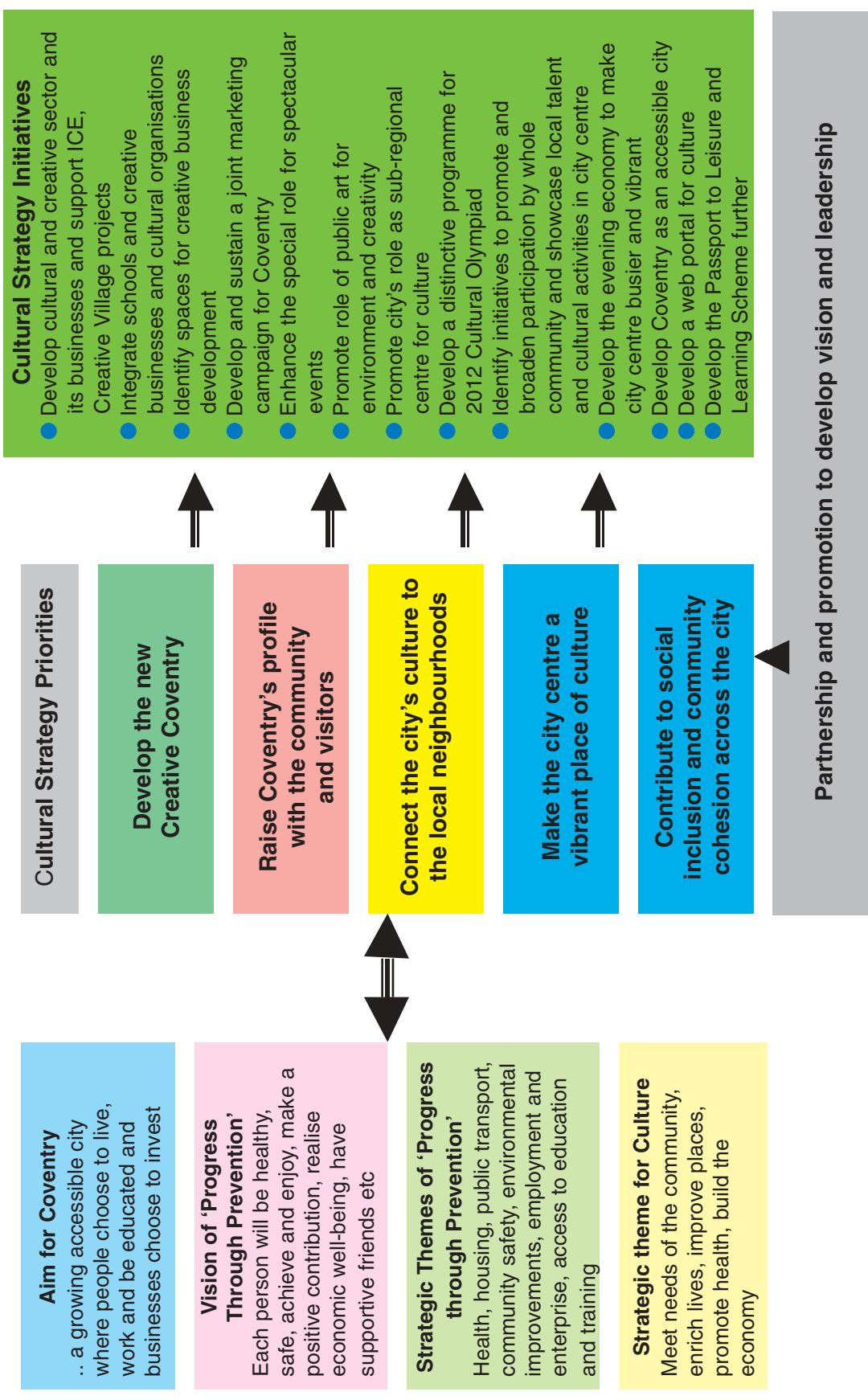
Culture in Coventry needs to raise its own profile and project an image of quality, distinctiveness, excitement and innovation. It needs to fulfil its potential role in promoting the city as a place to live, work, visit or do business in and in creating a vibrant cultural life for its communities and 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.



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 needs 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.

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

An **Action Plan** has been developed by the Cultural Partnership to support the outcomes. **The Action Plan sets out a programme** to take place over the next five years with an indicative timescale for each action and is reviewed annually.

The Cultural Partnership **leads the process of implementation, review and development of the Action Plan with its partners**. It works closely with lead partners, monitors the results of agreed actions and initiatives, liaises with the full range of partners identified in the plan, and identifies and agrees new initiatives with them.

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

- **increased level of recognition of Coventry's cultural facilities and activities (i.e. we 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**
- **raised earned income by cultural organisations**
- **increased school and community linked activity levels**
- **increased percentage take up of Passport to Leisure and Learning from the eligible population**
- **contributing to lower crime rates in the city, especially among young people**
- **developing young people to act as creative consultants and producers of city events. This might include the realisation of an idea proposed by young people in the original Creative Partnerships 'Space of Possibilities' project as part of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. (See Case Study 4 on page 21).**