

# Why a cultural strategy?

## Culture's Contribution to 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 people.

Coventry has been identified by the government as one of five growth points in the UK and it is creating a strong basis for the cultural development and enrichment of the city, for example:

- The Ricoh Arena offers a high quality sports stadium for Coventry City FC, for major events, conferences and for community activities – readily accessible to the city and within a two hour drive for 75% of the population of England
- Major developments are taking place at two of Coventry's cultural gems, the Belgrade Theatre and The Herbert – which will provide exciting new facilities and services in each
- Events such as the Godiva Festival, International Children's Games and Jazz Festival bring together the local community and visitors to celebrate the best of local and world-wide talent - putting Coventry on the map
- Coventry University's Institute of Creative Enterprise academy (ICE) and Warwick University's Science Park are drawing on the city's skills and reputation for design and innovation to promote new cultural and creative businesses in the city, encouraging the emergence of new cultural entrepreneurs
- Coventry's Transport Museum is one of the best in the world and continues to build on its position as Coventry's major visitor attraction and one of the most popular in the region alongside Coventry Cathedral, renowned 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 which are bringing innovative and inclusive cultural activities to city residents – including those in deprived neighbourhoods – and visitors alike. For example, the Creative Partnerships' work with schools, the Library Services' Reading Imagination Cafes, the Positive Images Festival, local sports activities such as the Race for Life and a host of community events.

These and many other cultural strengths and developments will link to the continued improvements in the city, including the first city centre IKEA store, to create a vibrant and attractive centre for local people and increasing numbers of visitors.

## Case Study 3



# Positive Futures

Positive Futures is a national sports-based project based in the most deprived areas of the country. Since it began in 2002, the Coventry project has been one of the most successful in the UK. As a result of Positive Futures:

- **Eight young people are active as Positive Future volunteers or paid members of staff, all coming through the projects as participants and over 150 young people take part in lunchtime, classroom-based and community sessions every week**
- **A total of over 370 young people enrolled in some form of regular Positive Futures activity last year and more than 20 young people who attended the education-based sessions or lunchtime referrals completed their GCSEs in 2006 and have gone on to Further Education**

Abdal Razak has been involved in the project for five years. He is a key member of staff, employed as a full-time Youth Mentor. From being someone who used to get bullied at school and who tried to find any excuse not to attend, he picked up football skills through Positive Futures, which helped boost his confidence. Abdal's self-esteem was helped by working with his project mentor who convinced him of the importance of school and encouraged him to achieve more. Abdal gained eight GCSEs and four A-levels, and secured a place at university. He left university to take up a full-time post with Positive Futures and is keen to progress his own career in sports-related community programmes. As he says:

*'I'll always be in debt to Positive Futures in every way and I want to do what I can to give back to the community and help others out of their difficulties'.*



# What We Mean by ‘Culture’

What does this strategy mean by culture? First, culture is used as an inclusive concept that 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 choose to do - cultural services and activities are the ones people opt for rather than have imposed on them.

As the starting point for Coventry’s Cultural Strategy we will follow the Department of Culture, Media and Sport’s widely established definition or understanding of culture set out in ‘Creating Opportunities’ (DCMS, 2000), the guidance for Local Cultural Strategies. In this definition:

Culture encompasses the following types of activities - an illustrative, rather than exhaustive, listing. 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**

## Culture is also about:

- **relationships - between individuals and groups**
- **shared memories, experience and identity**
- **diverse cultural, faith and historic backgrounds**
- **social standards, values and norms**
- **what we consider valuable to pass on to future generations.**

Coventry’s cultural strategy draws on and includes all these aspects of its culture.

# Culture – the Future of our Cities

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.

In adopting its Cultural Strategy, Coventry will maximise the benefit 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.

## The Positive Impacts of Culture

Cultural development is not just important for the future of Cities in the 21st Century. Evidence of culture's beneficial impacts on people and communities is growing, for example:

- The **Positive Futures** programme (Home Office and Crime Concern) has shown that young people involved in sport have improved education attainment and have improved family and community relations
- The **Study of the Effects of the Visual and Performing Arts in Healthcare** carried out at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital (1999 – 2003) found that patients involved in music and visual arts activities benefited from decreased pain and depression and from shorter hospital stays
- In addition, there are more than **30 studies** which show how exposure to nature quickly decreases stress and reduces pain, slowing respiration and lowering blood pressure. The importance of access to green space is essential to the well-being of all our communities
- **Sport Playing its Part** was produced to provide senior officers with an advocacy toolkit that provides evidence of the contribution which sport and active recreation can make to social, economic and environmental outcomes and shared priorities of local and central government. It was prepared by Sport England, DCMS and LGA and has four key strands;
  - Building safe, strong and sustainable communities
  - Meeting the needs of children and young people
  - Healthier communities
  - Economic vitality and workforce development
- **Creative Consequences**, a study established by Essex County Council shows that the arts in Essex provide good value for money and a financial return on public investment: each pound invested from the public purse achieves a return of £3.17

- **Bookstart**, the national programme to encourage all parents and carers to enjoy books with children has successfully contributed to show how improving children's language and literacy skills can contribute to tackling social exclusion, and influencing how children's services are delivered
- **Renaissance in the Regions** has commissioned research into visitors to the West Midlands from MORI in 2004, and which included The Herbert. This demonstrated high levels of visitor satisfaction on whether they had enjoyed their visit (97%), and with 81% feeling they had gained new knowledge and understanding, though there were a lower proportion of first time visitors than to museums in other regions and also fewer from overseas

## What the Cultural Strategy will do

Coventry's Cultural Strategy focuses on those issues and opportunities around which all of those involved in cultural provision, of whatever kind, can come together to make effective decisions about its future.

The Strategy's objectives and recommendations seek to ensure that culture plays a full role in making Coventry a vibrant, tolerant and enjoyable place to live, work or visit.



# The starting point – Coventry and Culture

## Coventry's Participation in Culture

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.

Coventry's latest Household Survey for 2005-2006 provides an insight into how much Coventry people get involved in cultural activities and what they think of the provision in their city. For example:

- 50% participate in active sports at least 12 times a year, whilst 35% participate in arts events at least twice a year
- 46% make at least one visit each year to a museum whilst 44% visit an art gallery or an historic site

We can compare Coventry with other Metropolitan authorities in terms of how many cultural visits are made per 1,000 population. These figures from the 2004/5 Best Value Data from the Audit Commission show that Coventry's cultural participation is relatively high.

	<b>Met Average</b>	<b>Coventry</b>
Visits to Museums in person	643	1070
Visits to Libraries	5371	6579
Number of pupils in school trips	12,928	22,154

Satisfaction levels with Coventry's cultural provision however vary but are not too different from other comparable places. 70% of Coventry people are satisfied with their libraries, which have benefited from an extensive refurbishment programme over the last seven years, 69% are satisfied with parks and open spaces, 50% with sport and leisure provision and 50% with theatres.

These figures can be compared with other Metropolitan areas which show that the level of satisfaction with sport and leisure is 5% under the average Metropolitan area, Parks and Open Spaces are 6% under, with libraries just 1% under. Coventry scores above the mean Metropolitan area averages for Theatres and Concerts (by 1%) and for Museums and Galleries (by 4%).

Coventry holds extensive knowledge in relation to the activity patterns of young people aged 11 – 16 years. Communities that Care (CtC) is a long term preventative programme. It identifies key risk and protective factors for any given community of children and young people and then introduces a range of effective interventions. These seek to reduce the risks of problem behaviours, including youth crime, drug abuse, school age pregnancy and school failure.

## Case Study 4

# Creative Partnerships - Space of Possibilities



Creative Partnerships worked with Talking Birds Theatre Company, Imagineer Productions and Coventry Common Purpose to create an exciting and innovative project to enable the voices of Coventry's youngest citizens to be heard.

More than 150 children worked with 13 different creative practitioners and teaching staff to explore '**my Coventry**'. They recorded their observations, impressions, thoughts, feelings and desires for the future. They reflected on what they liked and disliked about Coventry, what they considered to be missing and their hopes for the future of their city. The result is an inspiring list of ten ambitious and original '**possibilities**' for Coventry's future cultural direction.

Hundreds of local people viewed the Space of Possibilities exhibition that was created by Talking Birds at the opening of Coventry's Ricoh Arena in February 2007.



## 10 Possibilities for Coventry

- Coventry should aspire to be the greenest city in the UK
- A place where no one is lonely
- A place where all journeys are thrilling
- A city that makes us laugh
- A place that is spectacular, yet full of accidental beauty
- A city with views - high up and low down
- A city that eases family stress
- A city that is a safe risk
- A place that gives us pride to say we live here
- A city where everything is celebrated

In August 2007 the **'Beach of Possibilities'** was conceived and realised through a young people led project involving pupils from Lyng Hall school supported by Creative Partnerships, Imagineer Productions and the Youth Service with encouragement and cooperation of the City Council. This project enabled young people to make their vision a reality. They created a real beach in the city centre, a space for everyone to enjoy complete with a live DJ, deck chairs and the city's Kombat Breakers to open the event.

*'We want all the organisations in the city to recognise that young people offer us a massive and vital resource of creative thinkers and problem solvers. Coventry will be a very different place if we take time to listen to children's voices and value their perceptions, creative ideas and aspirations.'*

Jo Trowsdale, Director Creative Partnerships Coventry



Photo: Imagineer Productions

Significant information is available based on a 10,000 strong dataset from the Communities that Care research conducted in 2004-6:

- 9 in 10 (89%) of children and young people indicated that there were lots of chances to get involved in sports/clubs in breaks and after school.
- Girls (91%) were significantly more likely than boys (87%) to say there were opportunities to get involved in sports/clubs.
- Year 7/8 pupils were significantly more likely than Year 9-11 pupils to say there were opportunities to get involved in sports/clubs.
- In terms of ethnicity, boys from the Indian (53%) and White & Black Caribbean (53%) and White (52%) community were most likely to have been to a leisure centre. The least likely were Pakistani (20%) and Bangladeshi girls (14%). This may be for cultural reasons.

## Increasing Access to Culture

There are some instances in which Coventry's level of cultural participation is above that of similar areas in the UK, but there are still lower levels of participation in Coventry's priority neighbourhoods than in the rest of the city. However, there have been some real successes in increasing access to cultural opportunities, for example:

- Bookstart – meeting the needs of the younger population has achieved 67.2% take up for 18-month olds (national benchmark 26%) and 100% for 3-year olds (national benchmark 40%)
- Participation in education programmes at The Herbert - which stand at 16,225 in 2006/7, a rise from 7,449 in 2003/4 (although this covers a period of major redevelopment)
- Attendance at arts events in Coventry by people with disabilities has risen from 13.2% of 2005 to 19.5% in 2006
- Access to art galleries by people from BME communities at least twice a year has risen from 11.8% in 2005 to 14.8% in 2006
- Participation by people from BME communities in moderate physical activity at least three times a week has risen from 22.4% in 2005 to 41.5% in 2006

In priority neighbourhoods, residents include activities for teenagers, facilities for young people and parks and open spaces among their top priorities for improvement to their quality of life.

There have been some activities with high local profile which have used innovative means to increase cultural participation. For example Coventry Inspiration Book Awards, a Big Brother style web site competition in which adults and children read and vote for two winning books out of a short list of over 160 in a series of eliminating votes.

# The City Centre and Culture

How do Coventrians view their city centre and do they see it as a place for leisure and culture? CVOne's Annual Survey 2006 provides some answers.

- Most visitors to the City Centre are from Coventry itself and not surprisingly most were shopping
- Only 2% reported they were visiting for sight-seeing reasons and some of these were also visiting because of shopping
- Safety is an issue with 44% of respondents feeling unsafe in the evening
- Only 25% of respondents rated the City Centre as good or excellent
- Those visiting for non-shopping purposes included a great number of young people visiting for pubs, cinemas, restaurants and nightclubs.

Nearly half those surveyed had attended one of the city's events, although a surprising 36% of respondents had not attended events because they were not aware of them. Events, nonetheless, were an area of increasing satisfaction for city centre users.

## Coventry's Cultural Provision – an overview

What are the main features of Coventry's cultural landscape? What facilities and resources are there and what range of possibilities do they offer the people of Coventry and visitors to the city? This section summarises some of the main features of and variety of cultural provision in the city (with fuller details provided in the Appendices).

## Sports Provision in the city

The **major sports providers and facilities** in the city are:

- **Coventry Sports Trust** which manages the Coventry and Foleshill Sports and Leisure Centres, Brandon Wood Golf Course, Ricoh Fitness facilities as well as leisure programmes for education bodies and community use of school facilities at Sidney Stringer, Foxford, Ernesford Grange and Tile Hill Schools
- **Coventry Sports Foundation** which manages three community sports facilities: Centre AT7, The Midlands Sports Centre and the Alan Higgs Centre
- **Schools**, all of which are now part of the School Sports Partnership and with Woodlands School as a specialist sports college
- **Private Health and Fitness Clubs** - there are 18 main private sector health and fitness clubs in Coventry, some of which are hotel-based
- **Other provision** which includes 23 swimming pools on school sites, 11 synthetic sports pitches and a number of sports halls plus a large number of football, rugby and cricket pitches around the city for senior and junior level use
- **Sports Clubs** – there are over 30 significant clubs in the city.

Sports provision is currently undergoing a **number of major developments**, for example:

- Coventry Sports and Leisure Centre will provide a major redevelopment including provision of a 50m swimming pool in a city centre location
- Foleshill – work is underway to look at the feasibility for a new neighbourhood facility
- Midlands Sports Centre has been re-provided at Westwood School
- A new leisure centre is planned for Wood End, Henley Green and Manor Farm as part of the New Deal for Communities Programme
- Coventry University and Henley College Coventry are planning major developments of sports and fitness provision
- The University of Warwick is developing an Indoor Tennis Centre with the Lawn Tennis Association.

The Active People survey is the largest survey of sport and active recreation to be undertaken in Europe and provides reliable statistics on participation for all 354 Local Authorities. Coventry's profile shows participation at least 3 days a week x 30 minutes of moderate activities (all adults – 16+) to be 20.4% for people from minority ethnic communities.

Coventry is a key partner in CSW Sport (Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire) which is the strategic body with the delivery system for sport in the county. The partnership is the conduit between Coventry and any resources to sport distributed from the Regional Sports Board.

## Arts Provision

Well-established arts facilities and more recent arrivals in Coventry include:

- The Belgrade Theatre which has two auditoria and will be a focal point of the Belgrade Plaza development
- The Herbert including gallery space and the Arts and Media resource
- Warwick Arts Centre and the Students' Union
- The Cathedral, including the ruins
- The City College's Butts Theatre which is to be retained and refurbished as part of the development of the site
- Coventry University's Ellen Terry performing arts space
- A range of pubs and clubs offering live music
- Skydome and The Ricoh for large concerts and gigs
- Facilities and activities at Specialist Arts Colleges based in city schools e.g. Foxford and Blue Coat Music College

Coventry also boasts an array of organisations and individuals who are responsible for arts activity across the city (and indeed, beyond its boundaries). There are companies of all types and scale of operation, covering all art-forms including the performing arts, events organisers, media projects and community based groups.

The city is also enlivened by a year-round programme of events, with a mix of one-off specials and annually recurrent activities (see also Events Strategy at appendix). Many of these are celebratory in nature and serve to bring communities together.

Coventry also benefits from important support services and networks which have been set up to strengthen the arts infrastructure and offer opportunities to bring arts practitioners together. These include:

- Coventry University's ICE project for creative and cultural business development
- Creative Partnerships
- Arts and Media Training (AMT)
- Performing Arts Service (PAS)
- Coventry Music and Artists Networks
- Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Arts Partnership
- Arts Information Centre (at The Herbert)
- 'Emerge' (published by Coventry City Council's Arts Service)

## Children's Play

Play facilities are an important part of cultural provision particularly for families with young children. Coventry City Council, along with other providers of services for Children and Young People, has created a Play Strategy to address the needs of its young residents for enjoyable and safe play activity.

In Coventry the City Council provision currently includes:

- Play Centres at Foleshill and Hillfields and other equipped play areas for young children and one for older children around the city
- Teen areas with basketball hoops and shelters, skate parks and Multi Use Games areas
- Splash'n'Play Park in the War Memorial Park and an adventure play area in Coombe Country Park
- Popular ActiveZone Summer Playschemes.

The City Council is also bidding to develop six pilot informal, natural or environmental play spaces in disadvantaged areas of the city and Whitefriars Housing Group, Groundwork, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and community centres also provide play areas.

## Case Study 5

# Positive Images Multicultural Festival and Refugee Week



First held in 1995, the Positive Images Festival has grown from a one day event to a **three week festival** of the arts, alongside learning and information events and activities. The Festival really brings communities together, and celebrates the culture, traditions, heritage and artistic skills of all Coventry's communities. One of the Festival's main aims is to **break down negative images of ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum-seekers and make them feel a part of the city and its life.**

Positive Images is organised by a large number of the city's ethnic minority and community groups, and takes place from mid-June to early July across Coventry, from the city centre to the neighbourhoods.

In 2007 you could choose from over 75 events (virtually all free).



# Coventry's Heritage and Museums

Coventry's heritage is a significant part of its cultural assets, reflecting the city's mediaeval development, its growth as a manufacturing centre and of course its losses through the Blitz in 1940 and 1941.

In the City Centre the major heritage attractions are:

- The old and new Cathedrals which stand as important symbols of peace and reconciliation
- Coventry Transport Museum
- The Priory Visitor Centre and the Undercroft
- The Herbert - art gallery, museum and media centre which will also house the archive service.

Outside the City Centre are the Lunt Roman Fort and the historic landscape of Coombe Country Park and within the city are a substantial number of historic buildings from all periods of Coventry's development.

## The Library Service

In Coventry the Library Service has 2 million visits and issues 1.5m books each year. One third of Coventry residents – 100,000 people – used a library in 2006, and libraries reach out to all of Coventry's diverse communities, with services for children, young people and older people. Libraries also handle over 300,000 enquiries per year.

Libraries have benefited from an extensive refurbishment programme over the last seven years and its facilities and services include:

- The Central Library and sixteen community libraries
- Two mobile libraries
- Multicultural provision, including books, newspapers and magazines
- Support for eleven reading groups
- A variety of on-line resources

Libraries also provide a wide range of cultural activities and events, both in the Central Library and in the community libraries and works with a wide range of partners. These include Imagination reading cafes with story telling and art for children, classes on family history and creative writing, and two annual events – the new Coventry Festival of Literature and Liberty, which focused on the bicentenary of the abolition of slavery in 2007, and the Holocaust Memorial Day anniversary events.

# Resourcing Culture in Coventry

Over the last 10 years capital investment of well over £100m has been made in culture through the City Council and its partners including:

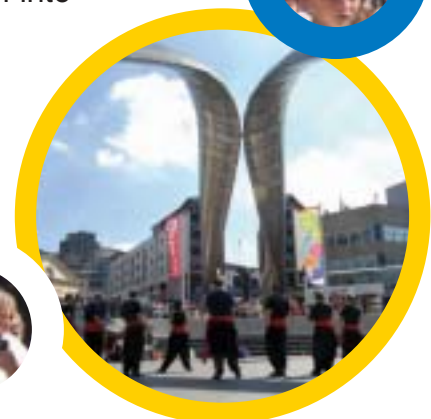
- Expansion of the Transport Museum - £12m
- Expansion of the Belgrade Theatre - £14m
- Development of Priory Place and Visitors Centre as part of the £32m Coventry Phoenix project
- Building of the Ricoh Arena at a cost of £116m
- Expansion of The Herbert - £18.5 m
- Investment in the Foleshill Sports and Leisure Centre - £5.5m to date
- New Deal for Communities in Wood End, Henley and Manor Farm to support the development of a new Sports Centre - £11m
- Building a new sports centre (with Coventry Sports Foundation) to replace the Midlands Sports Centre - £8.8m
- Investment of £2.8m in parks since 2001/02
- Investment in refurbishing library infrastructure of £2.7m since 2002 and a further £3m committed to the end of financial year 2008/9

External capital funding has formed part of this considerable Council investment from a variety of sources including the National Lottery.

The City Council is the major revenue funder for cultural facilities and activities investing £62 per head each year on behalf of residents – somewhat below that of comparable neighbouring areas.

The City Council makes a £16.5m annual net contribution to Culture and Leisure and a £5.8 annual net contribution to Libraries in the city. This money is mainly within the Culture, Leisure and Libraries Division of the Community Services Directorate but additional resources have been committed from Children, Learning and Young People as well as smaller contributions from other City Council areas, e.g. Neighbourhood Management. It is estimated that other Government Bodies (The Arts Council, the Big Lottery and The Museum Hub) are putting an additional £3.3m into these Council services and activities.

It is recommended that a full analysis takes place of the money that is spent from the Public Purse across the city in order to review whether the money is supporting the priorities of this strategy.



# Making the Links

## Facing the Economic Challenge and Opportunities for Coventry

Coventry in the 21st Century faces the challenge of all cities in the developed world – of prospering within an increasingly globalised and competitive economy where a focus on knowledge-based industry, environmental concerns and quality of life issues are of increasing importance.

Coventry has emerged from a difficult period associated with the decline in manufacturing in the 1980s. Coventry's extended period of growth, based on the flourishing of manufacturing which gave it a world-wide reputation particularly as a centre of cycle and motor production, came largely to an end. Now employment levels in the city have regained those of earlier decades and there are 20,000 more jobs than 10 years ago.

Coventry is also home to two universities, Coventry University and the University of Warwick, both of which have ambitious plans for developing their research and business related activities.

## Some Key Facts about Coventry

A number of facts about Coventry illustrate the challenges that face it and which impact on the role that cultural development can play in the opportunities facing the city.

- After 20 years of decline Coventry's population is now rising: the 2001 census shows a population of around 300,800 – an increase of 2.3% from 1991
- Whilst Coventry's population structure largely replicates the national picture, it has a greater proportion of young people and Coventry is one of only six cities in England where the population profile is getting younger
- About 22% of Coventry's population belong to an ethnic minority group with particularly strong Asian representation; this growing diversity has enhanced Coventry's reputation for peace-making, reconciliation and tolerance
- There are now 145,000 jobs in the city compared to 146,000 in 1981 with the substantial decline in manufacturing largely offset by a growth in the service industry
- Coventry is ranked as the 64th most deprived local authority area in England (out of 354) with lower than average incomes and low car ownership being particular economic features. It has identified 31 priority neighbourhoods, primarily in the north and the east of the city, which exhibit multiple deprivation

- 31% of the population aged 16 – 74 have no qualifications – despite the presence of two universities and a growing educational sector
- Two-thirds of people with jobs in Coventry live in the city, with most of those commuting from the immediate surrounding area
- The city is one of Central Government's New Growth Points, and could see an increase in its population to 370,000, with it serving a sub-regional population of over one million



# Making the Links – Coventry's Policy Priorities

## The Vision for Coventry

The Cultural Strategy needs to support, the vision, objectives and priorities of key policies for Coventry. (These are found in Appendix D). In this way it will be abundantly clear that cultural development is not just an 'add-on' or option that can be ignored or placed low on the city's agenda.

Coventry City Council has adopted a vision for Coventry:

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

This calls for a drive to ensure that culture, knowledge-based industry and the expression and enjoyment of creativity are at the heart of where Coventry wants to be. Cultural development should take its place alongside the City Council's priorities for education, health, community safety, clean and green environment and the active promotion of equality.

## The strategic links for culture

There are many strategies and policies adopted by the City Council, the Coventry Strategic Partnership and other stakeholders at local and regional levels which have influence over and connection with culture.

Common themes characterise most of the plans, which are fundamentally aimed at improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of Coventry and its people. These are most clearly expressed in the city's Community Plan: Progress Through Prevention: Community Plan 2005-10 and Progress Through Prevention: A refreshed Local Area Agreement for Coventry.

In addition to Progress Through Prevention, the key plans which the Cultural Strategy will link with are:

- The Local Development Framework
- A Community Cohesion Strategy for Coventry City Council

- The Children and Young People's Plan
- Coventry Urban Design Guidance
- The Culture, Leisure and Libraries Strategic Plan and the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Libraries Draft Strategic Plan for 2007/8 to 2009/10
- City Council's Play Strategy, 'Something to do'
- City Council's Sport and Physical Activity Strategy
- City Council's Playing Pitch Strategy
- City Council's Art, Sport and ICT Curriculum Development Plan
- City Council's Strategic Arts Policy
- City Council's Performance Venue Strategy
- City Council's Heritage Strategy
- City Council's Library Service Plan
- The Coombe Country Park Management Plan

Aims and ambitions of other major players in the city are set out in plans for Coventry Transport Museum, Coventry Cathedral and Creative Partnerships. For example. Coventry's Community Plan sets out the shared priorities for culture, and the importance of visitor attractions which are not managed by the City Council, notably the Cathedral, are recognised in the Tourist Strategy and Action Plan for Coventry, whose latest version appeared in 2003. The 'Space of Possibilities' joint work through Creative Partnerships, Arts and Media Training and Imagineer in 2006-7 has ensured that evidence from young people is gathered and incorporated into the cultural strategic objectives. There are explicit links to the power of culture to increase activity levels, and deliver directly the Children and Young People's Plan in terms of the "Enjoy and Achieve" and "Positive Contribution" themes.

The most significant of the regional plans are:

- Advantage West Midlands: An overview of delivering advantage: The West Midlands Economic Strategy and Action Plan 2004-2010
- Culture West Midlands: Cultural Life in the West Midlands: Vision and Aims, Regional Cultural Strategy 2001–2006
- Sign Up For Sport – A Regional Plan for Sport in the West Midlands 2004-2008
- Arts Council England (West Midlands): regional delivery of 'Our Agenda for the Arts 2006–2008'
- Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) West Midlands: priorities for the region
- Advantage West Midlands: West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy

## Case Study 6

# UK School Games



Coventry's reputation as a city that can host large-scale national events, with a high quality athletes village at the University of Warwick, was once again enhanced with the hosting of the UK School Games.

The sporting event incorporated a weekend of live music, dance and performance under a '**Celebrating Coventry**' banner. The UKSG weekend has been estimated to have brought a **£4m economic boost to the city**.

The event, which ran over four days in August 2007, was a superb example of city partnership working. Over 1300 young people competed in eight sports across five city venues, over 150 volunteers, alongside several thousand supporters, family and friends came to take part and they were greatly impressed with the city.

The '**Celebrating Coventry**' cultural contribution was spread over three days with carnival, drama, live music, dance and street theatre bringing over 50 individual performances with 470 participants and the weekend attracted an additional 10,000 people to the city centre. Performances involved a large community cast from Coventry working alongside professional performers and producers. One highlight was a specially commissioned performance entitled '**Truth About Lies**', an outdoor spectacular used as part of the event's Civic Reception.



# The strategic ambitions for Coventry

These are most clearly expressed in Progress Through Prevention, in which it is stated simply that 'Each person in Coventry will:

**'Be healthy  
Keep safe  
Achieve and enjoy  
Make a positive contribution  
Realise economic well-being  
Have supportive friends, families and communities'.**

The underpinning principles are those of equality and the need to address disadvantage across the city.

Its strategic themes look to Coventry's communities benefiting from:

- Healthier lives with more rapid improvements in the priority neighbourhoods
- Better quality housing with a better mix of type and tenure of housing in neighbourhoods
- Improved public transport particularly for priority neighbourhoods
- Increased community safety with less crime and anti-social behaviour
- Environmental improvements including more attractive parks and open spaces
- Improved employment and building up an enterprise society including stimulating the knowledge-based economy
- Encouraging access to education and training and provide people with the skills for business success, innovation and growth.

The Community Plan's strategic theme on Culture sets out priorities to:

- Ensure that Coventry's cultural life meets the needs of communities
- Enrich individual lives, strengthen communities, improve places where people live, promote health and build the local economy through the city's cultural life.

The Plan also identifies the major 'Communities of Interest':

- Children and young people
- Older People
- Physical and sensory impaired people and those with mental health problems or learning disabilities.

A full account of the strategic context for culture is included in Appendix D.

# The View from Coventry

## Consulting Coventry

What are the views of those with a stake in the future of Coventry including people and organisations within the cultural sector itself? Coventry's cultural sector, like the city as a whole, is on the move, but in many cases this is taking place in a fragmented way, without an overview or strategic plan. One view that was frequently and consistently expressed was the need for a Cultural Strategy to bring together and provide a focus for stakeholders in the city's future, seizing upon its many cultural opportunities.

A large number of people and organisations, within the cultural sector and in related sectors such as education, economic development and regeneration, and community development have been consulted both as individuals and as groups in developing the Cultural Strategy. The Strategy also builds on the extensive community consultation carried out in 2001 for the previous Cultural Strategy.

Whilst there is, of course, no absolute unanimity about cultural provision in Coventry, many common themes emerged – based on the shared experience of living and working in the city.

## Culture in Coventry today – the views of those consulted

One of the strongest responses concerned **how Coventry sees itself and the relative success of other places**. For example:

- some think that Coventry feels as if it is stuck with an outdated, industrial, manufacturing image – and that other cities have moved ahead
- its location near other cultural 'big hitters' strengthen this sense of inferiority, symbolised in a city centre that lacks buzz
- Coventrians are still reluctant to sell themselves and their city – amongst themselves, as well as to the outside world
- culture in the city is widely perceived in a negative or limited way with local audiences that are not familiar or comfortable with the new or innovative

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:**

- the 'great leaps of faith' which established the major cultural facilities in an earlier period are being matched with more recent developments and refurbishments
- there is also strength in community-based facilities, the local libraries, an informal network of pubs and clubs supporting live music, local sports clubs and facilities and small theatres for example.

But there are **weaknesses in this facility infrastructure:**

- the Coventry Sports Centre is in need of renewal along with other facilities at a local level
- Voluntary sports club provision is in need of revitalising
- the Cathedral and much of the heritage of the city is playing too limited a role for local people and visitors
- there are doubts that University and school-based facilities and activities are truly accessible to those who neither study nor work there
- there are gaps in provision of creation, rehearsal and production spaces, contemporary exhibition facilities for artists and craftspeople, and affordable, flexible spaces for local heritage groups
- there are facility weaknesses in some neighbourhoods, with limited community and sports provision all of which limit access to cultural opportunities for many residents
- there was a recognition that facility planning has in the past been based on targeting opportunities for funding rather than supporting an agreed overall strategy.

There is, however, a **growing focus on the importance of creative and cultural business** and on training. The two Universities are taking a leading role in this, with the ICE project at Coventry University being set up to build a source of excellence to take Coventry's traditional background in design and related skills into the 21st century.

The cultural infrastructure, of course, extends well beyond its buildings – interviewees pointed to the **strengths of the programme of events within the city and its growing range of organisations and networks supporting cultural development.** These include:

- major events, like Godiva and Jazz Festivals, are placing Coventry on the map
- a strong tradition of 'urban culture' in Coventry, reflected in music, MCing, and graffiti art
- the emergence of new theatre groups
- an innovative events organisation, Imagineer, has established itself and programmed a community opening of the Ricoh Arena
- National, sub-regional events such as UK School Games, Coventry Half Marathon and the Race for Life

- the Creative Partnerships programme linking Coventry schools with creative and cultural organisations, businesses and individuals
- BBC Coventry and Warwickshire promoting local heritage and other cultural activities
- voluntary sector groups representing Coventry's diverse communities (such as the Muslim Resource Centre or Minorities in Europe UK) supporting a range of cultural activities
- the Coventry Performing Arts Service providing activities, resources and advice to the city's schools and communities.

**Outreach work was seen as a strength** (within the limits of funding): the Library Service supports story-telling and art workshops in local libraries and other venues and many cited the quality and range of outreach work undertaken by the Belgrade Theatre, Warwick Arts Centre, Arts Exchange and The Herbert amongst others. But the need to **address 'people development' and develop the skills and experiences to empower** local people to develop cultural activities within their communities was stressed. In sport the city has been successful in bidding and delivering projects such as Positive Futures which has received regional and national recognition in engaging with difficult communities using sport.

The role of the City Centre emerged as a contentious issue with many of those interviewed saying:

- the current state of the city centre is a serious weakness, particularly in the evenings when the preponderance of young and alcohol-fuelled groups and a lack of restaurants and cafes are off-putting
- the ring road is acts as a barrier to movement and there are limited bus services
- the City Centre is weak in attracting visitors with limited or inadequate marketing of its cultural attractions and its heritage beyond the Cathedral
- signage and navigating around Coventry's distinctive pattern of routes and public spaces is difficult

However, there was widespread recognition of the value of CVOne as a single co-ordinator of city centre services, praise for events and street activities organised by them and appreciation of physical improvements to the public realm and the retail centres. 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.

Some of those consulted raised the role of Coventry as a sub-regional centre, for example with its role in community-based sports events seen as an example of taking a positive approach without trying to compete with the regional and national provision of sporting and music events provided by Birmingham and the NEC.

A constant theme in consultation is the complaint that **people do not know about the range of cultural activities and opportunities in the city centre and beyond**. Some point to the lack of joint marketing by cultural bodies, although this is now being partially addressed by the City Council and the Cultural Partnership.

There is a general recognition that the many successes of the ad hoc and even opportunistic approach which has underpinned some of the substantial development to date would **need to be developed into a more strategically led approach**. Views included:

- culture needs to build on its recent successes and progress to make and win the argument for the key role it should play in the city's future
- strengthening and improving leadership for culture **across** the city needs to be encouraged
- the establishment of the Cultural Partnership as part of the Coventry Partnership is greatly welcomed, but does not yet fully represent the whole cultural sector, with libraries, sport and the private sector notable areas of weakness
- work has commenced to develop improved linkages between the City Council the two Universities, and in joint marketing between the main cultural institutions and this needs to be built on
- sub-regional links between Coventry and its surrounding hinterland are limited.

However Coventry has paid a critical role in the evolving CSW Sport from its former role as Active Sports Partnership.

The further growth and development of the city – which will demand a commensurate expansion of cultural provision – will in turn result in even greater need for strategic planning and leadership for culture.

The **financing of culture** is, unsurprisingly, seen by many of those interviewed as a major issue. Views included:

- recognition of the increasing pressure on all local authority funding generally and of culture in particular when faced with other national and community led priorities
- the reliance on uncertain and often short-term external funding for development of new projects, of outreach work or for innovation – whether by the existing 'flagships' of culture or newly emerging organisations
- the management of capital funding linked to regeneration initiatives has appeared to be excessively bureaucratic and inflexible, discouraging some small-scale and emerging community projects from obtaining the funding they need
- Coventry University's ICE project and the Arts and Media Training programme have begun a process of developing opportunities for creativity and creative businesses which will need to be built on if this sector is to play a significant role in the city's future development
- major events such as the Godiva Festival, street activities and local neighbourhood activities always face a challenge in placing themselves on a sustainable basis particularly since they have few or no opportunities to levy entry or participation charges
- there is limited sponsorship throughout the sector and this is recognised as a national issue although also perhaps also reflecting the decline of Coventry's industry (and its limited role in the city's cultural provision)

- the small scale of the visitor economy, except for major festivals and for free such as to the Transport Museum, also limits the funding available to the cultural sector as a whole.

## Culture in Coventry - the Opportunities

Many of those consulted drew attention to multiple opportunities for culture in Coventry's future development and in establishing it as a place where everyone has the potential to enjoy a good quality of life.

- many pointed to the **planned growth of the city** with a growing population, more diverse city centre both physically and economically, and the opportunity for public art to represent a new 'buzz' to life in Coventry
- a second significant platform for culture in the city's growth and development is seen in the **development of cultural and creative businesses** 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** was seen as one way to help retain the graduates which the city often loses
- many point to Coventry's status as a world centre of peace and reconciliation to its relative social and ethnic harmony with the Cathedral, linked to a distinctive Coventry contribution to the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad
- in response to the success of gaining the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games Coventry has played a lead role in the region in developing opportunities encourage more people to become active and encouraging more volunteering.
- Coventry is (demographically speaking) a **relatively young city**, and with the growth of newly established communities is getting younger and there is a real chance to focus on young people and their creativity through projects such as Creative Partnerships
- 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-coordinated promotion of the city's heritage** are all seen as offering potential to develop the **visitor**, as well as attracting more of Coventry's and the sub-region's shoppers to the city centre
- improving **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**
- above and beyond the potential identified here, those consulted also pointed **new partnership opportunities** within and across cultural sectors and for **linking culture** with a **wide range of regeneration, community safety, health, education and environmental initiatives**

# The Views of Young People

## Coventry as a Space of Possibilities

Coventry's Space of Possibilities project (by Creative Partnerships in collaboration with Common Purpose, Talking Birds and Imagineer) provided an extraordinary vision of how young people view Coventry – powerful, playful and with an amazing understanding of what makes a city worth living in.

Thirteen schools were involved in the project, both primary and secondary, with children aged 5 to 15. The overall aim was to use arts as a way of promoting discussion with young people about their vision of what Coventry might become, and to examine how it is at present. The children were asked what excited them about Coventry, what they thought excited other people and how they wanted their city to make them feel.

They visited parts of the city, discussed their issues and concerns with a range of adults, including Cllr Gary Ridley (former Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Libraries), staff from the Cathedral, the BBC, Coventry Tourist Information and the Priory Place Visitor Centre. As a result of the project, the young people involved have suggested ten possibilities for a newly reinvigorated city – with culture as the driving force. They wanted Coventry to be a place:

- that is "Green" and is contributing to the environment
- to have a good and varied social life
- that is easy to get about
- where you can have fun
- where it feels good to live
- with interesting places to visit
- with good places to take the family together
- in which it is safe to live
- where we can be proud to live
- that celebrates success



# Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

These views have been summarised in the SWOT table below – providing the starting point for the Cultural Strategy.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Location and transport links</li> <li>● Ongoing regeneration programmes and projects</li> <li>● Strong communities and good community relations</li> <li>● City centre cultural facilities and city centre management</li> <li>● Community facilities and outreach work</li> <li>● Events, music and local performance scene</li> <li>● Design excellence and ICE business initiatives</li> <li>● Two first class Universities and college sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Negative perceptions (internal and external) about the city and culture</li> <li>● City Centre lacks ‘buzz’ and variety</li> <li>● Weakness in facilities and opportunities in some neighbourhoods and for development</li> <li>● Lack of strategic direction and leadership for culture including the City Council</li> <li>● Marketing and visitor economy including the Cathedral’s role as an icon for Coventry</li> <li>● Limited funding and sponsorship for new developments</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Growth of the city, diversification of the city centre and its population profile</li> <li>● Creative business development and the evening economy</li> <li>● 2012 and Coventry as world centre for peace and reconciliation</li> <li>● Development of the visitor economy through promotion of cultural activities and heritage</li> <li>● Raising city profile through spectacular events, iconic structures</li> <li>● Partnership with education, community, health sectors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Failure of ambition and vision resulting from inability to make a strong case for culture</li> <li>● Weakness of leadership and partnership working</li> <li>● Other priorities lead to lack of resources for securing cultural impacts</li> <li>● Failure to connect with Coventry’s communities and raise participation and support levels</li> </ul>