

Exeter

a place-based Cultural Strategy
(2019 – 2024)

Commissioned by Exeter Culture on behalf
of Exeter City Council, University of Exeter,
Exeter College and InExeter, with the support
of Arts Council England

EXETER
LIVE BETTER

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Foreword

I am delighted to introduce to you this new Place-based Cultural Strategy for Exeter, which sets an ambitious course over the next five years for us to develop as a major cultural centre. During the consultation process, five key Theme areas emerged, meaning that this is a Strategy for everyone in the city. I hope you feel you can be a part of it. At Exeter City Council, we will adopt it as the city's Cultural Strategy and align with the stated priorities.

We are at a crucial time in terms of culture in the city. Exeter boasts some fantastic assets, organisations and artists. If we work better collaboratively, we can maximise the huge potential that exists in the city. Through city-wide partnerships, we will be able to achieve results that are not possible on our own. This Strategy sets a course for these ambitions, and identifies the possibilities that exist for us to play to the strengths of Exeter's people, organisations and talent.

This is a 'living strategy' that we will update regularly, so that it adapts with the changes and opportunities in the city.

Thank you for reading.

—
Cllr Rachel Sutton

**(Deputy Leader and Portfolio
Holder for Climate and Culture)**
Exeter City Council

Executive Summary

This is a new five-year Cultural Strategy for Exeter. It has been commissioned by Exeter Culture in partnership with Exeter City Council, University of Exeter, InExeter (Business Improvement District), Exeter College and supported by Arts Council England. It will be adopted by Exeter City Council as the new strategy for culture, and their funding priorities will be aligned to the key Themes outlined in this document.

The Strategy has been developed by Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy, a leading international consultancy for the creative economy that offers strategy and policy leadership across the creative, cultural and arts sectors. Tom has developed strategies across the UK and to a number of international cities.

Exeter is at a pivotal and critical time in terms of cultural development. Many cities at a national level have recognised the role culture can play in place shaping. Cities such as Hull, Liverpool and Bristol have used culture as a regenerative force that has significantly changed the face and perceptions of these cities.

Exeter is a place that has many of the raw ingredients to develop a thriving and vibrant culture offer, but it is not currently playing to its strengths, maximising collaborative opportunities and setting its ambitions high enough. It has a good level of organisations receiving core funding from Arts Council England. The city also boasts a Council prioritising culture, an impressive independent arts scene, strength in heritage assets, a Russell Group University with a new Arts & Culture Strategy, and an award-winning College of Further Education. These two institutions provide a mix of further and higher education students as consumers and creators of culture. If these partners can come together around a shared cultural agenda, Exeter can achieve major developments for culture for its residents, businesses and visitors alike.

The Strategy has included a significant period of consultation with the cultural sector, businesses, and other sectors such as environment and wellbeing. One clear and consistent steer from consultees is that we must be distinctive to Exeter, maximising our unique assets. From this, the city has developed these Themes with Tom Fleming. Exeter as a:

- A. City of Culture and the Environment**
- B. City of Culture and Wellbeing**
- C. City of Heritage Innovation**
- D. City of Creative Making**
- E. City of Cultural Literacy and Learning**

There were also some recommended cross-cutting priorities that the city needs to focus on to be successful in the delivery of its Strategy. These include improvements around partnerships, internationalisation, communications, evaluation, and the relationship with business.

The Strategy contains some specific actions for each themed area. These will be reviewed and evaluated annually. It is essential that this document is a 'living strategy' that can flex and adapt as the city of Exeter changes accordingly. The content of this Strategy has come from the cultural sector and key stakeholders, and as such the delivery of the key actions are the responsibility of this collective group.



Writing the future of Exeter on the walls of a cardboard city model, during a performance of 'Here, Now', part three of the digital art triptych *This City's Centre* by Blind Ditch. Presented in the third floor offices of Princesshay management. Funded by Arts Council England and Exeter City Council with the support of Exeter Phoenix, RAMM and Arts & Culture at University of Exeter. Photography by Benjamin J Borley.

Vision

Exeter will be known nationally and internationally as a city of culture. It will innovate and lead in the areas of the environment, wellbeing, cultural literacy, creative making and heritage to build a city where everyone lives well through culture.

Exeter is a city of incredible qualities. It is a city of cultural ambition, innovation and openness. Its heritage, open and innovative cultural sector, education institutions, businesses, sports, natural environment and increasingly diverse communities generate a unique sense of place and possibility. These assets generate a unique sense of purpose: to the major challenges we face as a society and to the compelling opportunities Exeter has as a city that wants to make a difference, to lead, to collaborate, to innovate and to drive change.

Exeter is the right size to pioneer new ways of working and this is the right time to be a pioneer. Moreover, the city is demonstrating the appetite for change:

- With a growing ecosystem of independent creative, technology and science organisations, firms and artists working with a mission to do great work and be impactful for a better city and society.
- With renewed appetite for purposeful partnership – from the University and Exeter College to individual artists, there is a keenness to cross boundaries (of practice, sector and institution) and effect change through collaboration. Exeter is working toward becoming a ‘cultural compact’ where culture is the oil and the glue for a better city.
- Culture has an ability to deliver across various policy areas. In Exeter, these include a new Corporate Plan to 2021, Wellbeing Exeter, Exeter Live Better, a new Arts & Culture Strategy for the University of Exeter, a bid to be a UNESCO City of Literature, a national pilot with Sport England to uplift participation, and the work of Exeter City Futures.

Elements of the partnership landscape need more spirit, dynamism and resources to drive transformation. Within the city’s (tight) boundaries, Exeter can struggle with an identity born out of its smallness, seeing its size as a challenge rather than a strength. The cultural renaissance of Plymouth, and the role of Bristol as a de facto cultural capital and creative cluster for the region, have dented confidence in Exeter rather than galvanised a sense of opportunity.

However, Exeter can make its size count: as a leading smaller city capable of taking risks, piloting and demonstrating impact. It can make more of its growing independent cultural sector and celebrate the way it connects the city to global communities of practice. It can make more of its incredible health, wellbeing, science and technology organisations and businesses. And it can make more of the talent and knowledge base of its University, College and major employers, from the NHS to the Met Office.

The University of Exeter’s recent Arts & Culture Strategy calls for more and better purposeful partnerships within the University and across the city. This Place-based Cultural Strategy for Exeter recognises the need for stronger partnerships, and the alignment of civic and institutional interests for common good: a city re-imagined through culture.



Artist Bedwyr Williams in front of 'Phizogs', commissioned by RAMM to celebrate 150 years of the museum. July 2018-April 2019. Photography by Rhodri Cooper.

Context

Research and consultation for this Strategy has reached out and connected with a range of voices from across the city and its region. It has sought to understand the city's cultural distinctiveness, its strengths and challenges, and what its citizens care about. It has uncovered a city of incredible heritage with a rich and engaging contemporary culture. Exeter is a city of cultural values where people don't just see culture as leisure or purely for pleasure; they see culture as something that both defines us and provides us with the tools for a better society.

By working together with passion and purpose, we can achieve for Exeter where other cities fail – to be a city of cultural urgency to tackle **three systemic global and local issues**:

- **Climate change:** we need direct action to attend to the ongoing environmental catastrophe, with the arts and culture able to offer an alternative future vital to remodelling the city as a leader in environmentally sustainable urbanism.
- **Lifestyle change:** we need a cultural sector that provides alternative pathways for our communities. Culture can be the transformative agent for a more distinctive, engaging and productive city centre. It can inspire us to invest our time and emotions in our local community. It can help reduce isolation, improve confidence and enhance our health and wellbeing.
- **Narrative change:** we need to become more open, tolerant and welcoming. Culture in Exeter can help us connect more locally, and extend our reach and influence nationally and internationally. We can celebrate our distinctive heritage and embrace a future based on the city as an open process, a system of multiple voices that enables us to drive innovation and change, and play a leadership role as a progressive, radically alternative city of culture.

Culture

Culture is who people are, what people do and what people want to be. It is for every day and for the special occasion. It is at home, on the streets and across every neighbourhood. It has been a catalyst for economic diversification and growth; for talent attraction and retention; for inward investment and tourism; for health and wellbeing; for environmental awareness and sustainability; and for innovation and competitiveness.

Culture is:

- Our lives, identities and communities
- Heritage
- Museums, galleries, theatre, libraries, music venues, craft, dance, festivals and events
- The practice and production of artists and creative practitioners
- The Creative Industries
- Our shared future



Summer Film School at Poltimore House. A collaboration between Four of Swords theatre company and Exeter Phoenix. August 2018. Photography by Rhodri Cooper.

City of Culture for the Environment

A city that pioneers environmental responsibility and innovation through arts and culture. A city that builds awareness and changes people's behaviour through the work of artists in collaboration with scientists, technologists, planners and the city's communities.

City of Cultural Wellbeing

A city where arts and culture are a revitalising force that delivers a positive impact on health, cohesion, neighbourhoods and environments. A city where arts and culture influence people's wellbeing, helping to build healthier lives, reducing isolation, and shaping participatory communities where creativity becomes part of the everyday.

Overarching Themes

There are five overarching Themes that will enable Exeter to deliver on its vision. These are:

City of Heritage Innovation

A city of many histories, layered by the distinctive interventions of its ancestors, each re-imagining the city and shaping new senses of identity and place. A city where cultural organisations and their audiences and partners play an active role in engaging with the past and nurturing possibilities for the future. A city of innovation, building new partnerships that help to conserve and re-purpose its heritage, and which open up fresh histories through the active production of new types of cultural activity from a changing population.

City of Cultural Literacy and Learning

A city where culture can help people to grow in confidence, build self-esteem and feel a valued part of the society. A city where culture provides pathways to participation across the civic and social life; enhances the take-up of education and skills; and contributes to job creation. A city where enhanced cultural literacy – i.e. an active appreciation of and appetite for cultural activity – makes it more fulfilling as a place to live in, work or visit.

City of Creative Making

A city that is a critical hub for creative practice in South West England, with a growing strength in independent cultural production. A city that enables creativity to flourish – from the growth of hubs and platforms for creative making to interdisciplinary work with arts and science. A city where the festivals and events sector is diverse and growing, with multiple artist-led activities and an increasingly collaborative ecosystem that connects the local to the national and international. A city that champions its independent producers, artists and organisations to grow in stature and confidence, leading a process of values-driven, responsible, culture-led development.



A mini-collection of illustrations by artist Aylwyn Bowen of Exeter's well-known buildings was installed on Queen Street in the summer of 2018, with the support of InExeter and St David's Neighbourhood Partnership. Photography by Steve Haywood.

Cross-cutting Priorities



Our vision is for Exeter to be known nationally and internationally as a city of culture. It will innovate and lead in the areas of creative making, the environment, wellbeing, heritage and cultural literacy to build a city where everyone lives well. The five Themes and potential Actions presented in this Strategy point to a city that is more ambitious, hungry, radical and responsible.

To achieve our vision, the five Themes are not enough. We also need passionate partnership, shared ownership, new ways of working and many types of leadership. We also need to upgrade our governance, partnership and delivery models. Priorities include:

- **The Creative Case for Diversity**

This should permeate every element of cultural planning and production, thereby reflecting the full range of backgrounds and perspectives in our society.

- **Building capacity**

This needs to be physical (via the Cultural Capital Masterplan for the city, see p21) and organisational, with a commitment to supporting new or emergent cultural organisations as vital to the city's ongoing creative renewal. This also needs to include building capacity to develop new routes to funding for culture.

- **Enhancing governance**

There is a need for stronger senior-level participation in the city's cultural conversation (e.g. on the Exeter Culture Steering Group) and for high-level, outward-facing advocacy for culture as a key part of the city's plans for investment, and sustainable and inclusive growth. This can also play an influential role at a regional level – e.g. Exeter to help establish the building blocks for a Heart of the South West Cultural Plan for the LEP.

- **Internationalisation**

Exeter is an international city. Its population and thus its culture are increasingly formed through relationships that traverse the boundaries of the nation state. It is also a city that values and champions its internationalism – through its ambitious partnerships (such as the University of Exeter's new ERASMUS programme) and growing number of international networks across the city. To become an international cultural city, Exeter needs to better exploit its international networks and partnerships to create tangible opportunities for artists and organisations. This will in turn stimulate large creative projects that benefit residents, visitors and artists alike.

- **Audience development and engagement**

Identifying audiences for specific programmes and projects is crucial. Exeter can learn from innovative models of engagement and development from experienced cultural cities. Consideration and action needs to be given to non-traditional audiences and effective strategies of how to engage them. The significant student population should also be a factor when planning for engagement.

- **Relationship with business**

There has been some connection to business and culture in the city but this has not been one of strategic partnership. From consultation, it is clear that businesses are interested in culture and want to be more engaged. From a funding perspective, one of the suggestions has been to establish a Business Alliance for Culture that comprises businesses across the city. This group could potentially invest in culture in the city and decide where they would like to invest as a partnership.

- **Invigorating partnership**

In Exeter, existing partnerships require both consolidation and innovation. The University of Exeter, in its new Arts & Culture Strategy, talks of the need for 'purposeful partnerships' within the University and at a civic and sectoral level. Exeter has seven NPOs and a broader portfolio of organisations regularly funded by the City Council. Exeter Culture can play a catalysing role here, giving thrust to a new era of partnership working that goes beyond the boundaries of sector or institution to pioneer cultural transformation. It can also help to build a coherent and ambitious approach to culture beyond the city's limits – working at the level of Greater Exeter, Devon and the Heart of the South West LEP.

- **Communication**

Exeter should be better known and this requires it to be better networked, both internally and externally. The city lacks the density and intensity of cultural networks seen in other places. It also lacks clear touch and access points, whether this be to find out what is going on or what the cultural strengths of the city might be. There is a need for an imaginative restructuring and repurposing of the ways in which the city communicates its cultural offer and identity from the local to the international.

- **Evaluation**

A good Strategy is one that can be adapted, assessed for progress, and benchmarked with other cities. This requires a theory of change evaluation framework to be set up as part of the launch process for this Strategy with a research partner identified.

- **Nurturing talent**

With a growing and youthful population, we need to ensure accessible routes to cultural participation and opportunities.

- **Urban and rural connections**

Develop stronger cultural links between the city, rural communities and smaller towns.



'Swift' by Naomi Hart, an aerial installation made with copper wire and salvaged plastic milk bottles to raise awareness about migration, habitat, resources and recycling. Commissioned by The Crown Estates to celebrate Princesshay Shopping Centre's 10th birthday. Autumn 2017. Photography by Naomi Hart.

City of Culture for the Environment

The Vision

A city that pioneers environmental responsibility and innovation through arts and culture. A city that builds awareness and changes people's behaviour through the work of artists in collaboration with scientists, technologists, planners and the city's communities.

The Challenges and Opportunities

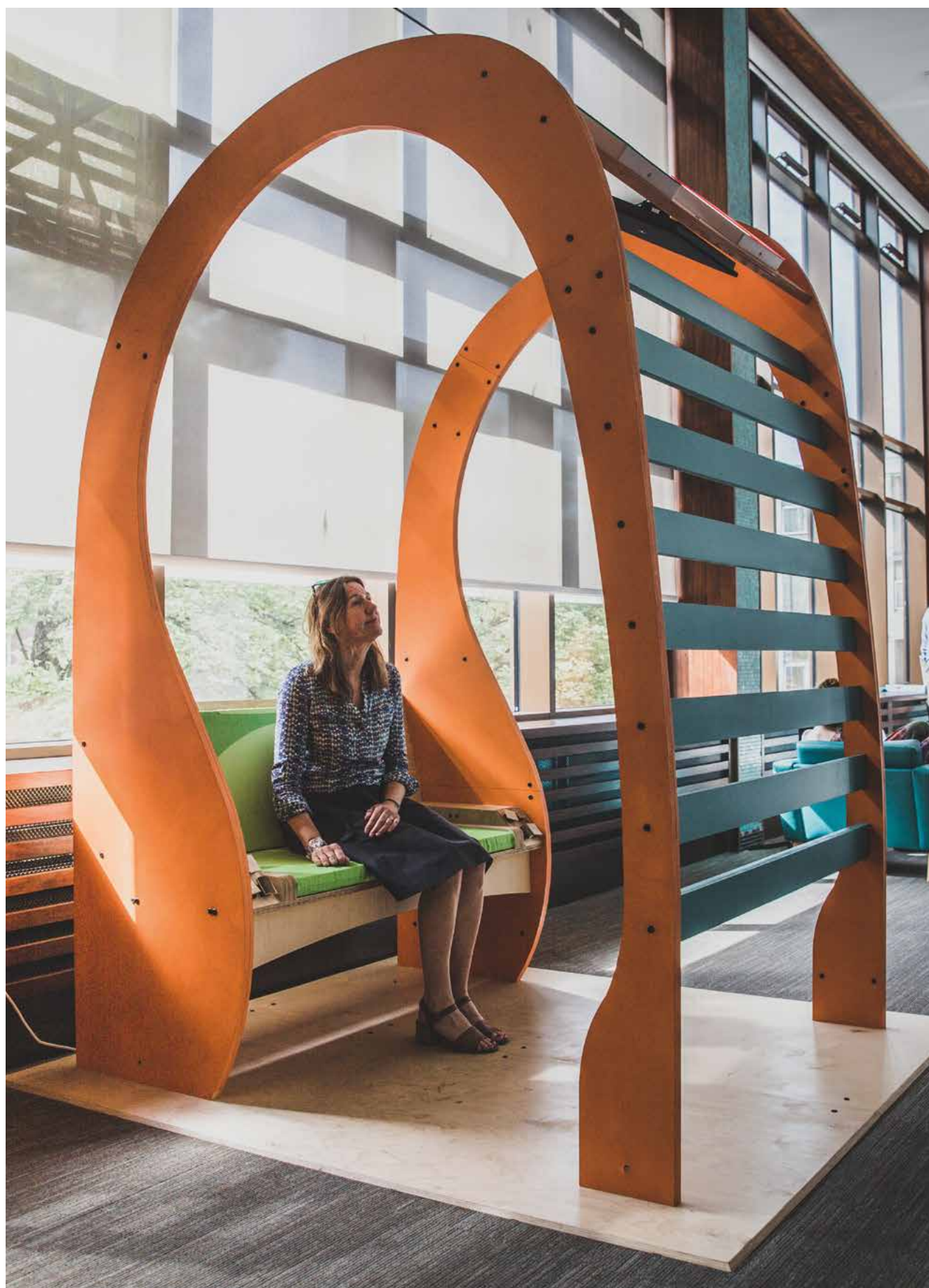
Environmental sustainability, and averting the catastrophe of non-reversible climate change, is a crucial issue of our time. It requires all of us to radically change the way we both understand the world and how we act and interact. This is a matter of cultural identity and practice. If we develop a cultural identity founded on environmental responsibility and awareness-raising, this will have a direct effect on the quality of our local environment and contribute to a global movement of environmental consciousness and action. If we develop cultural practices that help us to develop deeper relationships and interactions with our environment, then our city will be more liveable. Exeter can play a leadership role in culture for the environment, building from its rich mix of expertise, resources and passion. The University of Exeter has joined the City Council in declaring a climate emergency and is committed to building its research base to present the evidence and potential solutions to influence governments, businesses and communities, particularly on carbon management. In September 2019, the University will launch a new Masters in Global Sustainability Solutions to support a new generation to lead the necessary transformation.

The Solutions

- Artists can provide the creative, interdisciplinary spaces to create new patterns and stories to live by, and redesign and renew our communities and ecosystems.
- Through their work, artists and cultural organisations can help illustrate the key issues and questions connected to the environment.
- Artists and cultural organisations can help make the vital connection between social care, health and wellbeing and ecological justice, which are inseparable.

Actions

- Exeter's cultural sector joins the Climate Emergency campaign.
- The creation of a city/region-wide Arts & Culture for the Environment events programme to build interdisciplinary approaches to environmental challenges.
- A Sustainable Cultural Environmental Enquiry: a new conurbation-wide trial and review process to test our environmental sustainability, remodel our approach and build a set of pathfinder activities that set out new ways of doing and seeing through arts and culture.
- A lifelong learning environmental responsibility and action work stream to encourage personal development and environmental 'literacy' through supportive community processes and ongoing dialogue.



The Listening Booth, by Hugh McCann, is a space to hear words and sounds in Exeter Library. Designed to offer library-goers – including visually impaired people – another way to engage with content in the library, it is programmed with new pieces of audio every four weeks. Supported by Libraries Unlimited, Arts Council England and Exeter City Council. Built with Knowle West Media Centre: The Factory. 2019. Photography by Rhodri Cooper.

City of Cultural Wellbeing

The Vision

A city where arts and culture is a revitalising force that delivers a positive impact on health, cohesion, neighbourhoods and environment. A city where people's health and wellbeing are influenced by arts and culture, helping to build healthier lives, reducing isolation and shaping participatory communities where culture and creativity become part of the everyday.

The Challenges and Opportunities

Priorities for the Council and its partners include balancing housing-led growth with environmental sustainability, health and wellbeing, while supporting a dynamic city centre with high-quality neighbourhoods.

Consultations for this Strategy suggest that arts and culture are already making a big difference to the wellbeing of Exeter's citizens and to the quality and distinctiveness of place. The city has relatively strong civic participation with good audiences for culture. There is some excellent practice, from the engagement work of key organisations to the work of the football and rugby clubs as catalysts across the city's neighbourhoods. However, too many people feel disconnected from the cultural life of the city; loneliness and depression are major issues in contemporary society; and the role and value of arts and culture as a preventative tool relating to a range of health issues are under-explored.

The Solutions

Arts and culture can provide a vital arc of engagement and inspiration to open up possibilities for people to live more active, participatory lives. There are **two core areas** where arts and culture can make a profound difference to the liveability of the city:

- **Health and Wellbeing**

Wellbeing Exeter and the Sport England national pathfinder provide a major opportunity for this to be a leading city for social and cultural prescribing. Exeter has some leading experts in wellbeing and health research, including the University's Wellcome Centre for Cultures and Environments of Health.

- **Cultural Planning for Growth**

Exeter is growing – in terms of housing development and population. Cranbrook is fast developing and the city is pivoting towards being a conurbation with all the attendant challenges. Arts and culture can play a role in planning for distinctive neighbourhoods, in engaging new and existing communities, and in re-framing the narrative toward environmental sustainability.

Actions

- Extend Wellbeing Exeter to a cultural prescribing model.
- Establish an arts, culture, health and wellbeing advisory programme to drive partnership and fund-raise for new shared development and programming.
- Establish ways to build arts and cultural participation activities into the Sport England pathfinder: a shared approach to building a more participatory and active population.
- Develop a new Exeter Outdoor Arts Commission: a major bi-annual programme of events, participatory interventions in public spaces, and active culture projects (e.g. urban to rural cultural itineraries; disability arts programming).
- Coordinate programming and commissioning to maximise the impact of RAMM's Year of Health and Wellbeing.

City of Heritage Innovation

The Vision

A city of many histories, layered by the distinctive interventions of its ancestors, each re-imagining the city and shaping new senses of identity and place. A city where cultural organisations and their audiences and partners play an active role in engaging with the past and nurturing possibilities for the future. A city of heritage innovation, building new partnerships that help to conserve and re-purpose its heritage, opening up fresh histories through the active production of new types of cultural activity from a changing population

The Challenges and Opportunities

Exeter is a city of many histories, where the physical and cultural geography of the city coalesce. There is a willingness to engage with the past while nurturing possibilities for the future. There is a major opportunity to innovate through our strength in heritage, which would catalyse the visitor economy and make Exeter a national pioneer in this area.

Exeter (and Greater Exeter) is a city of heritage innovation:

- The city is home to valuable and significant collections, including at RAMM, the University and Exeter Cathedral.
- There is an engaging blend of heritage buildings, visitor attractions and sites, such as Powderham Castle, Killerton House, Poltimore House, Tuckers Hall and the Castle.
- Active projects innovating in this area include VISTA AR at the Cathedral, and the University's Digital Humanities work across various digital-based heritage projects.

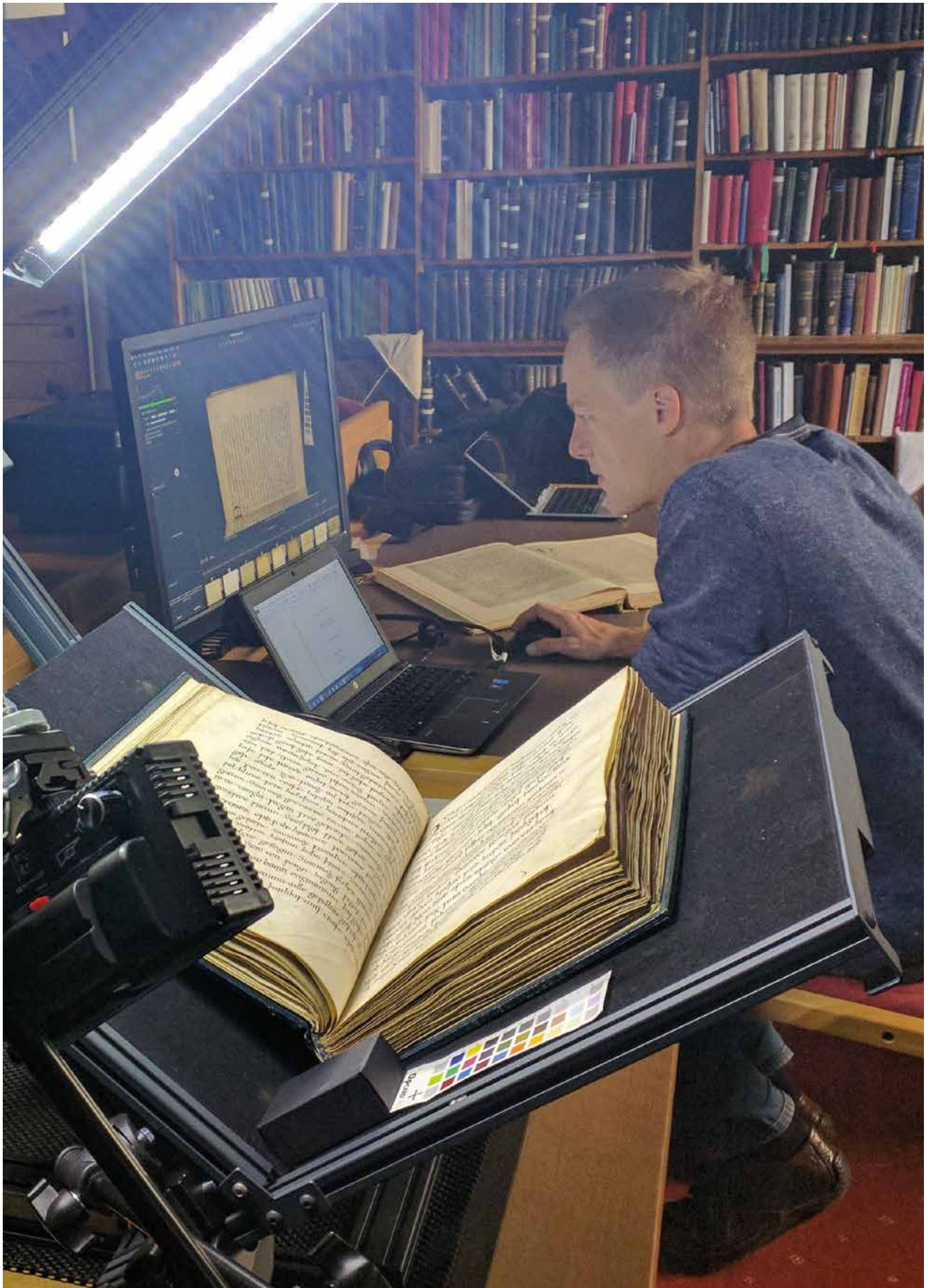
The Solutions

Heritage can be re-framed as a vital part of the city's cultural future. There are three priorities and a set of potential actions here:

- **Activate:** Further develop the Exeter Heritage Partnership to drive collaborations and enable more ambitious projects. There are opportunities to strengthen peer exchange within the heritage sector and across the wider arts, culture and education sectors, such as by 'buddying' larger organisations to the voluntary sector.
- **Animate:** Map the tangible and intangible heritage assets of the city to include contemporary cultural activities such as studio and workspace. Consider the city's post-war architecture as a heritage asset to be re-imagined and revitalised.
- **Amplify:** Scope opportunities for festival development and larger multi-stakeholder projects, and commission a set of heritage itineraries that connect with both residents and visitors. Scope further opportunities to digitise the heritage of the city – via virtual reality and augmented reality – to inspire new types of cultural engagement and literacy through the convergence of the city's heritage, technology and creative assets.

Actions

- Create a shared Heritage Action Plan through the Exeter Heritage Partnership.
- Undertake a heritage mapping exercise to help amplify the offer of Greater Exeter.
- Scope opportunities for the development of an Exeter Heritage Festival and creation of innovative/digital heritage itineraries for visitors and residents.



Graham Fereday, a member of the Digital Humanities Lab team at the University of Exeter, taking pictures of single pages from the Exeter Book, using the portable Conservation Cradle, part of the digitisation process funded by the University. September 2017. Photography by Gary Stringer.

City of Creative Making

The Vision

A city that is a critical hub for creative practice in South West England, with a growing strength in independent cultural production, artists and organisations. A city that enables creativity to flourish, from the growth of hubs and platforms for creative making to interdisciplinary work with arts and science. A city where the festivals and events sector is diverse and growing, with multiple artist-led activities and an increasingly collaborative ecosystem that connects the local to the national and international.

The Challenges and Opportunities

Exeter is becoming a critical hub for creative practice, with a growing strength in independent cultural production. There has been a long tradition of interdisciplinary working through local arts organisations, which convene collaborative practice from across the city and beyond. There is now a steady growth in new Creative Hubs that host creative practitioners. For its size, Exeter has a good level of National Portfolio Organisations supported for core funding by Arts Council England (ACE) and does relatively well for small project funds from ACE. Indeed, some of these organisations are seen as examples of best practice in their specific sector, such as the RAMM, Libraries Unlimited and Theatre Alibi.

Yet overall, the Exeter creative and cultural ecosystem lacks coordination, is fragile, and does not yet drive cultural innovation and production as happens in other cities. It has also lacked the visibility and voice of other cities, with networks still emergent and a perception at least that success (such as international acclaim) is not celebrated locally. There are systemic reasons for this: an inability to exploit opportunities for large multi-stakeholder programmes; the challenge of retaining talent; and the still emergent audiences and markets for independent cultural production, with a lack of critical mass and visibility also a factor.

With Exeter being an internationally connected city (through its airport and strong University connections), there is an opportunity to open up and exploit international opportunities for creative practitioners and organisations to stimulate innovation and collaboration.

The Solutions

- The opportunity to champion, develop and grow the independent creative production capacity of the city is also increasingly clear to strategic partners, inspired by the growth of the creative economies of other cities.
- Development of more creative clustering, such as South Street, Fore Street, and Paris Street and imaginative use of workspace and activity space. With a dedicated push to grow the festival sector, the city centre can be a model for diversification, creative resilience and inclusive growth. The proposed new performance venue on the bus station site can, with the right blend of uses, be a catalyst for scaling up and improving the quality and innovation of cultural production.
- Exploit opportunities for international project development through existing networks.
- The re-birth of the Exeter School of Art model at Exeter College can help open up new pathways to cultural production for the city's talent base.
- A proposed city-wide Cultural Capital Master Plan to ensure investment in infrastructure helps leverage the emergent creative production sector and drive new types of practice for which Exeter can be known.

Actions

- A creative enterprise zone for South Street / Fore Street, as a dedicated and incentivised push to co-locate long-term cultural production.
- Exploit opportunities for city-wide programmes of work.
- Consider theming activity, projects and festivals in a co-ordinated model – a potential ‘Year of . . .’ approach connected to the strategy themes.
- Work with the Heart of the South West LEP to promote intra-regional, inter-regional and cross-sector collaboration for culture
- Deliver an International Exchange programme for Culture.
- A new creative impact hub for Exeter – converging R&D and artistic practice from the University, Exeter College and the city.
- Creative networking and knowledge exchange activities – a network of networks for Exeter, with regular coordinated events.
- A festival development plan and trial festival network.



Lizzy Humber (independent producer and mother) and her daughter taking part in a 'Speculative Supermodels' workshop for Mothers Who Make Exeter, hosted at Art Work Exeter's gallery, the AWESome Art Space on Paris Street. Participants created Lego models of the buildings they'd like to see as part of the bus station redevelopment. May 2019. Photography by Rhodri Cooper.

City of Cultural Literacy & Learning

The Vision

A city where culture can help people to grow in confidence, build self-esteem and feel a valued part of society. A city where culture provides pathways to participation across the civic and social life, enhances the take-up of education and skills, and contributes to job creation. A city where enhanced cultural literacy – i.e. an active appreciation of and appetite for cultural activity – makes it a more fulfilling place to live in, work or visit.

The Challenges and Opportunities

Exeter is developing a new, potentially transformational partnership, focusing on literature and literacy as a core component of the city's cultural life, identity and future direction. Exeter Culture is working with the stakeholders University of Exeter (in particular the Wellcome Centre for Cultures and Environments of Health, and the Innovation, Impact and Business Directorate), Exeter City Council, Libraries Unlimited, Literature Works, Exeter Cathedral, and the Exeter Canal & Quay Trust to support the creative, social and economic potential of literature development for the city and the Greater Exeter area. These stakeholders are members of the City of Literature Steering Group, which has prepared an ambitious bid for Exeter to be a UNESCO City of Literature.

These are matters of distinction, which will contribute to Exeter's role as a much-valued UNESCO Creative City of Literature. But to deliver on this title requires the city to go much further than celebrate its assets. Exeter needs to use its literature pedigree to open up a new, expansive cultural literacy for all its citizens.

One example is the different levels of cultural participation and, arguably, entitlement between different wards of the city. Another is the extent to which the cultural narratives of the city are expressive of the cultural reality. In turn, this raises questions regarding the extent to which the different communities of Exeter are able to read or re-write the cultural narrative. Do they feel ownership? Do they have agency in the cultural life of the city?

Cultural participation for young people outside of formal settings (e.g. in partnership with Exeter College), imaginative urban planning, and volunteering can be a way of broadening participation. Hull (as City of Culture in 2017) achieved staggering levels of participation, which were driven through its volunteer programme. Exeter can learn from this as a conduit towards positive participation.

The Solutions

- Devon County Council has a Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-19. It articulates a set of Wellbeing Goals that have been adopted and adapted by the UNESCO City of Literature Steering Group as central elements for the proposed bid and programme. Each can be adapted as a toolkit for a more holistic Cultural Literacy programme, which it is proposed be established as a direct outcome of this Cultural Strategy. This can include some dedicated activities that encourage cultural learning (e.g. via the Devon Arts in Schools Initiative (DAISI), the Ted Wragg Trust and The Devon Cultural Education Partnership), cultural participation for young people outside of formal settings, imaginative planning, and volunteering.
- Working with the National Portfolio Network, Creative Hub and the wider cultural sector, consider and develop strategic approaches to all creative events, programmes and festivals in the city to ensure that there is an embedded offer for children, young people, volunteers and communities. In this way, cultural literacy and learning can run through all areas of cultural life.

Actions

- Apply as a city for UNESCO City of Literature status and develop a programme connected to wellbeing and cultural literacy.
- Establish a **Cultural Literacy Toolkit for the city**. This can be developed through an imaginative and practical process of coordinated planning by the arts, culture, education, and health and wellbeing sectors.
- In **Bristol**, the city's Cultural Curriculum provides a tailored programme that connects cultural learning to active participation with the city's cultural landscape. In turn, this helps to build local audiences and cultural literacy for and with the city.
- Develop a model for volunteering for major events based on the successful Hull 2017 model.

Such themes and cross-cutting priorities point towards the development of a **Culture Compact model** for Exeter. This would include senior-level stakeholder buy-in and support for culture from the sectors of education, health, environment and business. This positions the city as a beacon for purposeful partnerships where arts and culture are central to place-making and vital to wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

As we approach the third decade of the 21st century, Exeter will need to balance its economic development with social inclusion and environmental responsibility. It will need its artists and cultural organisations like never before – to offer alternative futures, to bring communities together, and to help problem-solve and innovate in a time of profound risk and opportunity. This Place-based Cultural Strategy for Exeter signals a way forward and requests that partners move fast, take risks and recognise that without culture, we do not have a city.



Preston Street Union performing 'Serge/Surge' – commissioned by RAMM as part of its 'Migration' programme – at the city wall, Exeter Quay. 28 May 2019. Photography by Jonathan Price.

exeter
culture



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