



ST HELENS BOROUGH COUNCIL ARTS STRATEGY

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Strategy has been developed at a pivotal time for St Helens in terms of its arts and cultural development. In 2023, St Helens will be the Borough of Culture for the Liverpool City Region when residents, the wider region and the nation will be invited to judge St Helens. This will be a significant opportunity for St Helens as a place to showcase that we have some great assets, organisations, and artists and that we are pioneers in socially engaged arts practice.

We know that we have many of the key ingredients to produce a thriving and vibrant arts and culture offer which will support the wider strategic ambitions of the Council and the priorities of Arts Council England and the Liverpool City Region Cultural Compact. We recognise that we can build on these foundations and on our heritage to respond to the challenges and opportunities ahead.

This Strategy sets out the change we want to achieve over the next decade and will help to put in place the conditions that will enable creative practitioners and organisations to respond to what lies ahead.

In January 2020, St Helens Borough Council commissioned Counterculture to help the Borough develop a 10-year Arts Strategy with the aim of establishing the strategic direction of the arts for the next 10 years and to highlight the wider role of the arts in supporting the development and regeneration of the Borough, building on the artistic assets already in place and ensuring that the Borough can make the most of the opportunities and resources available to develop creative talent.

In developing this Strategy, we have adopted an approach which recognises that the Strategy needs to be co-produced and co-owned by the Arts sector and

that responsibility for its delivery and implementation will be a shared responsibility. This is very much in the spirit of the *#StHelenstogether* philosophy. This approach has resulted in a shared recognition of the challenges ahead and a shared commitment to the Strategy's vision and priorities. The development of the Strategy has been supported and overseen by a Steering Group consisting of representatives from arts organisations, the wider cultural sector, the education sector and officers of St Helens Borough Council. The Steering Group has played a pivotal role in shaping the approach of the Strategy, agreeing the priorities for action and developing a Delivery Plan based on a clear set of principles and an agreed methodology.

The Strategy has included a significant period of consultation. One clear and constant theme that has emerged from this is that the St Helens Arts Strategy must be ambitious, must be unique to St Helens and must maximise our assets.

This Strategy focuses on the three Arts Council England (ACE) priorities: Creative People, Cultural Communities and a Creative and Cultural Country. It acknowledges that everyone has the capacity to be creative and to benefit from creativity, so that the Strategy is about both developing the professional sector and supporting community-led activities that are open to everyone. It is about individuals and communities living in a creative place and their access to the arts, public arts and to arts and heritage assets. It is about developing cultural infrastructure, skills and knowledge and about diversity, promoting innovation and creative thinking which opens us up to new ideas, perspectives and ambitions.

The vision for the St Helens Borough Arts Strategy can be summarised in a single word - Emergence. St Helens has always been a place where things emerge - coal from earth, canals from brooks, glass from sand. It is a home of artistry, experiments and makers. As St Helens begins to emerge from the impacts of COVID-19, public art will start emerging from unlikely places, and musicians, dancers, singers and artists will emerge from their bedroom studios and lockdown dreams will emerge as inspiration. Arts and culture will lead the way for the Borough.

Based around this vision, the Strategy identifies 7 priorities for action and a Delivery Plan for their implementation:

- To deliver a successful year in 2023 when St Helens is the Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture
- To align the priorities of St Helens Borough Arts Strategy with the Borough's priorities for regeneration with a particular emphasis on the Town Deal
- To align the St Helens Borough Arts Strategy to national and Liverpool City Region arts priorities and timescales
- To promote and identify the role of Arts and Culture in the Borough and City Region Skills Development Programmes
- To maximise the physical assets available for Arts provision
- To align with the Liverpool City Region proposals for public art to a) develop 'Dream' as an asset and b) develop an approach to support public realm changes in St Helens; and
- To align the Arts and Heritage Strategies with the voluntary sector.

The Delivery Plan details how these shared priorities will be delivered.

The arts are a revitalising force, which when linked to other wider cultural initiatives, deliver positive impacts on health and wellbeing, community cohesion and can play a positive role in planning for the regeneration of the Town Centre and planning for distinctive neighbourhoods. This is a Strategy for everyone in the Borough and recognises that if we work collaboratively to strengthen existing partnerships and develop new ones, we can maximise the huge potential that exists and achieve results that are not possible working on our own.

The St Helens Borough Arts Strategy provides a sustainable, pragmatic and engaged framework for delivering, promoting and inspiring arts and culture in the Borough. It is realistic in its priorities and deliberately seeks to align national, regional and local priorities and to promote a working ecology that is focused, collegiate and transparent. Arts Council England have been consulted throughout the development of this Strategy and are fully supportive of St Helens' ambitions for the arts.

Out of the current pandemic and the resulting economic and societal impacts, St Helens will emerge. It is essential that this document is considered as a 'living' Strategy and it is reviewed and evaluated annually as St Helens itself grows, changes and succeeds. With energy, will and talent, St Helens will inspire its residents, artists and creative industries to flourish and become the cultural model for other boroughs to follow.

2. INTRODUCTION

St Helens is one of six metropolitan boroughs of the Liverpool City region, with a population of just over 180,000. It has a proud history but, like many northern towns, has experienced major post-industrial decline and significant levels of deprivation, poor health, unemployment and demand for social care services. The Borough has significant ambition and aspiration to develop St Helens as an inspiring place to work and live, this will be aided through investment planned from the Towns Fund and the English Cities Fund. The Authority is using arts and culture as a significant part of this drive for change and improvement.

To support the Council's modernisation and transformation agenda, the Borough Strategy has identified six priorities to:

- Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life
- Promote good health, independence and care across our communities
- Create safe and strong communities for our residents
- Support a strong, diverse and well-connected local economy
- Create a green, thriving and vibrant place to be proud of; and
- Be a modern, efficient and effective Council.

The Council's Arts Service, based within the Communities Department of the Place Directorate, supports the development of the arts in St Helens through activities linked to the Library Services' National Portfolio Organisation aims and objectives, the main delivery of which is Cultural Hubs, the arts in libraries programme. It does not run a conventional grant support programme for arts organisations or initiatives.

In 2014 the Heart of Glass organisation became part of the Arts Council England (ACE) national Creative People and Places programme (CPP), and St Helens began to grow its reputation in the area of socially engaged art. In 2018, Heart of Glass and St Helens Library Service both became ACE National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), meaning they are part of the group of 800 national arts organisations given four-year regular funding from ACE, in return for playing a national and regionally important role. St Helens is the only Merseyside borough other than Liverpool to have any NPOs. Other arts organisations within the Borough include The World of Glass, MD Productions CIC, St Helens Theatre Royal, Platform Studios, Citadel Arts and many voluntary and community organisations.

St Helens Borough Council has a Music Service which is the lead for the St Helens Music Education Hub and Cultured, the St Helens Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP). Both these services focus on children and young people.

As well as St Helens College, the borough is home to a number of schools with strong arts departments. Carmel Catholic Sixth Form College is one of the top 10 sixth form colleges in the country, and attracts arts students from across Merseyside for its provision, including in fashion, textiles and photography.

In 2020, Counterculture were commissioned by St Helens Council to help develop a Borough 10-year Arts Strategy. The brief included four core areas of work to:

- review and update any previous mapping of arts activity and provision to understand the ecology and partnerships, and understand any gaps;
- consult with key stakeholders and communities, in person, by phone and via survey
- research relevant placemaking approaches elsewhere that could inform St Helens' approach; and
- write a Strategy and Delivery Plan with input from key partners.

Counterculture have worked on the principle that the Strategy needs to be co-created with the sector and co-owned with them, rather than being seen as a Council plan.

The development of the Strategy has been supported and overseen by a Steering Group consisting of representatives from arts organisations, the wider cultural sector and education sector and officers of St Helens Borough Council.

The Steering Group has played a pivotal role in shaping the approach of the Strategy, undertaking extensive consultation and research, agreeing the recommendations and developing a Delivery Plan based on a clear set of principles and an agreed methodology.

We would like to thank all members of the Steering Group for their help and commitment to this work.

3. PRINCIPLES AND METHODOLOGY

This Strategy has been developed using the principles and methodology below:

PRINCIPLES

To recognise wider operating contexts beyond the arts and to ensure the St Helens Arts Strategy aligns to national (Arts Council England, Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government and others) and regional (Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and LEP priorities) strategies and supports the Council's wider priorities and strategies set out in the Borough Strategy. By doing so it offers a strategic framework that will allow the Council and partner organisations to access national, regional and local resources, support and partnerships.

To engage the wider cultural sector, including the voluntary sector and schools and colleges, so that they can contribute to and define what is required and how it can be delivered within their individual mission/vision. This transparent engagement, embracing the St Helens Together philosophy, has been critical in analysing the current issues facing the Arts sector, its strengths and challenges and identifying future priorities:

- To understand and learn lessons from other similar boroughs
- To deliver a clear and ambitious vision which supports the Borough's post COVID-19 Recovery Plan
- To make key recommendations about the arts, delivery processes and the financial context which are sustainable; and
- To recognise that this is a partner Strategy and requires the support and commitment from the arts sector and community to deliver its ambitions and priorities.

METHODOLOGY

A detailed needs analysis to inform the Strategy has been undertaken based on the following:

- Understanding of previous work in St Helens Borough and the City Region
- Analysis of operating contexts nationally, regionally and locally
- Sector consultation, both in St Helens and in Merseyside
- Working with the project Steering Group to develop a SWOT analysis and vision and Delivery Plan for the Strategy, through workshops in April and June 2020; and
- Researching relevant place-based case studies, learning lessons from elsewhere.

Based on this approach, a number of key principles and recommendations and an accompanying Delivery Plan have been identified, which have then been tested and sense-checked back with the Steering Group and other key stakeholders such as Arts Council England and the LCR Combined Authority.

4. RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

The first phase in the development of the Strategy was to review a variety of operating contexts, undertaking consultation with the sector, and analysing comparator models elsewhere in the UK. The findings were then used by the Steering Group to develop a SWOT analysis and agree the parameters for a new Arts Strategy. The impact of COVID-19 has had a significant influence on developing a deliverable plan for the Strategy, and this is referenced further in section 5.

OPERATING CONTEXTS

Global

COVID-19 was unknown in the West when this Strategy was commissioned. Since then it has changed all operating contexts, for everyone, everywhere. It is too soon to know the impact it will have specifically for St Helens, but it will be economically profound. The positive is likely to mean increased desire for the sector to provide excellent arts experiences, and in particular experiences which are scalable and domestic – what one practitioner termed ‘theatre in a bag’. The recognition of the need for creativity, the importance of the amateur as well as the professional sector to deliver creative experiences, and the rapid migration to digital experience all look set to stay and need to be recognised and reflected in the Strategy. COVID-19 also offers an impetus to taking pragmatic decisions – resources cannot be wasted and need to be used where they can offer most benefit to most people.

National

Arts Council England (ACE) published its new 10-year national strategy ‘Let’s Create’ in January 2020. The Strategy’s focus is on how to create a nation that has better access to culture in ‘every village, town and city’ by 2030, where creativity in every individual is valued and fostered. The strategy has 3 broad outcomes:

Cultural communities - with culture inputting to placemaking policies at a variety of levels so that towns and villages thrive through a collaborative approach

Creative people - with equality of access to developing cultural skills and talents so that everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life; and

A creative and cultural county in terms of fostering a strong professional, innovative and international cultural sector right across England.

Art Council England’s delivery plan has still to be developed, since COVID-19 has forced a major recalibration of ACE resources (and reserves) but offers an opportunity for boroughs such as St Helens to take a significant lead in how they approach working with ACE on their ambition to support individuals at every stage of their life, championing a wider range of culture and in particular increasing support for libraries. However, it is clear that a global recession will have a major impact on the Council’s funding and that of other agencies such as Arts Council England or National Lottery Heritage Funds. Competition in the sector to survive will be fierce and funds will be limited. In response to this new landscape, it is clear whilst our aspirations and expectations need to be ambitious, they will also need to be realistic and that plans or proposals which may come forward for new or repurposed buildings or large scale sector resources may not be feasible or achievable.

There are also potential opportunities for the St Helens Arts Strategy through the Town Deal programme, initiated in November 2019 by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. This fund has invited a number of towns to each apply for up to £25m to increase economic growth with a focus

on regeneration, improved transport, better broadband connectivity, skills and culture. Submissions are made via a private sector-led Town Deal Board and need to be lodged with central government by January 2021.

Regional

The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority developed its own Cultural Strategy through a newly created Cultural Partnership Board in 2017, with a small annual budget of £300k as a 'percent for culture' from the £30m annual funds for the Authority. One of the initiatives was a rotating annual title of Borough of Culture. The first Borough of Culture year was 2018, the 150th anniversary of St Helens creation as a Borough. St Helens will next be Borough of Culture in 2023, and this offers a major platform for the Borough to demonstrate its arts offer and ambition to a wider public.

'Growing Transformational Cultural Capital' is one of the 4 pillars of the Liverpool City Region Local Industrial Strategy produced in 2019, which focuses planning and resource around increasing assets and skills in creativity, as well as pride and identity in local place. The Cultural Partnership Board's membership is being aligned with the City Region's Visitor Economy Board and the City Region Music Board, both of which have recently delivered updated strategic plans, to become a Cultural Compact. The Cultural Compact Board will be responsible for agreeing and delivering a Strategy which:

- delivers significant visitor numbers and economic impact
- brings communities together, raising engagement and participation
- builds the reputation of Liverpool as the UK's most exciting city
- endorses the Combined Authority's ambition to be an exemplar in cultural innovation; and
- leads a City region response to COVID-19 impacts for the creative sector, based

around short-term actions to help prevent sector collapse, and a renewal and rebalanced recovery programme, to develop new structures and skills to make the sector and the region more resilient.

It is important for St Helens' plans and opportunities that stronger links are made to the Combined Authority City Region plans, so that the Borough is better able to promote its priorities as supportive of a wider LCR strategy. The Cultural Compact will also lead on its regional relationship with key funders such as ACE, and as such it is vital that we are aligned to them.

St Helens will be referenced in a wider placemaking bid to the City Region Strategic Investment Fund (SIF) that is being proposed, drawn up by Culture Liverpool on behalf of the City Region Combined Authority. The purpose of the bid (delivered within each of the six boroughs of the Liverpool City Region) will be to create commissions which attract national and international press attention, create a programme of engagement and community outreach and deliver economic and wellbeing returns, in line with both the LCR Culture & Creativity Strategy as well as individual town and borough development plans. This bid is anticipated to be submitted in early 2021.

Local

St Helens currently lacks an over-arching Arts Strategy. Previously, work has been undertaken on several occasions to recommission a new Strategy, but this has not progressed. There has also been an over-reliance by the arts sector on the Council as the vehicle to both commission strategic thinking and fund its delivery. It is important that the Arts Strategy is a borough strategy and not solely a Council strategy and that all partners and organisations commit to its delivery.

The focus on the re-development of St Helens and Earlestown Town Centres offer opportunities for connecting the priorities identified through the Arts Strategy into the wider priorities of the Borough Strategy. This is combined with a major investment from The English Cities Fund who will be working with the Council on a £200m investment to revitalise St Helens town centre. The cultural offer is seen to be a key delivery arm for town centre physical changes; the vision for the wider town plan is about building confidence in St Helens, through the sense of ‘we can make it together’ and turning St Helens into a town which engages with its communities, health, experience and creativity.

In order to make the most of this exciting opportunity, it is important that the Council and the wider sector stop thinking in silos, work more collectively, and use combined knowledge and expertise to best effect. The arts sector can support the Town Deal Board to achieve agreed and clearly evaluated priorities. The Strategy addresses this point.

SECTOR CONSULTATION, PRIORITIES AND SWOT ANALYSIS

The wide range of consultation and research has developed a comprehensive understanding of the views, wishes and aspirations of the Arts sector to inform the development of this Strategy. The key themes that emerged from this consultation can be summarised as:

- a) Need for action – there was unanimous agreement that the status quo cannot continue as this is not providing what St Helens needs.
- b) COVID-19 – whilst it was recognised that the impact of the pandemic will present a real challenge in terms of the likely financial resources that will be available. However, the pandemic also presents an opportunity to help get the arts and culture woven into local and national recovery plans.

- c) Learn from elsewhere - places which are successful ensure their Arts Strategies have a realistic business plan, clear principles to underpin priorities which are properly measured and are sufficiently resourced.
- d) Build on asset strengths - 2023 will be a major opportunity for the Borough. There is ambition to do something distinctively different. Studio space is affordable in St Helens and could be a real driver for artists if considered strategically. There are significant opportunities to build on the work already done with shops and the Heart of Glass as well as the Library Service Cultural Hubs programme to develop a distinctive programme around community and place-based working that can be a real strength for the wider City Region plans.

The voluntary arts sector is regarded as large and varied for a town of St Helens’ size and potentially there are big opportunities through Arts Council England’s 10-year Strategy, particularly around talent development and diversity. As the delivery programme for ‘Let’s Create’ is still to be finalised, there may be opportunities for St Helens to pilot or lead on work in these areas.

Improve visibility

Communication about the arts and culture in the borough needs to improve. Outside the Borough, the only organisation that is known is Heart of Glass. Inside the Borough, visibility and branding around arts activity needs more thought, time and resource. For a number of institutions connected to the Council, new web pages and more autonomy is needed.

There is a desire by some to have ‘Dream’ properly maintained, but most of those consulted outside St Helens didn’t mention it as an asset. The public art planning also needs to support the Heritage Strategy - the two should not be separate - and should also fit within the wider City Region thinking.

Need for Alignment

There is a history of St Helens not being aligned with, or involved in, strategic thinking for arts and culture in the region and more widely. This includes the wider skills agenda, not just creative skills development, and the opportunity to work with the wider LCR plans to ensure Merseyside has a sector skills plan for the creative sector, as well as a range of merged back-office functions for cultural organisations. This requires resilience and long-term senior management input from the Council at City region level and ensuring that City Region plans are shared with the sector locally, particularly in relation to the Cultural Compact plans.

Timing - there are strong opportunities to work with LCR Cultural Compact just coming into play, plus Shakespeare North opening nearby in Knowsley in 2022.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND TRENDS

Current trends in UK Borough Culture Strategies

Successful UK borough Arts Strategies recognise that every borough is different, and an effective Arts Strategy must be aligned to a borough's wider priorities. They seek to support and make use of the borough's successful arts delivery infrastructure, to address or restructure underperforming arts delivery infrastructure, and, if needed, they create new arts delivery infrastructure, skills and funding streams.

Analysis of successful Arts and Culture Strategies elsewhere identifies the following common features, and it is critical that the St Helens Arts Strategy adopts and embeds these principles:

- alignment to national and regional culture strategies
- alignment to wider borough priorities
- a focus on place and place-making
- a focus on sustainability
- they are clearly administered and financially resourced
- there is focus on communication; and
- they are inspiring and ambitious.

Conclusions from Research and Consultation work

The information from the local and regional consultation, combined with the national analysis of other borough approaches to Arts and Cultural Strategies has helped identify some key conclusions in formulating an Arts Strategy for St Helens. These include:

The need for a skilled delivery mechanism.

Examples from elsewhere, combined with the evidence of how St Helens has found it difficult and challenging to create and deliver an Arts and Heritage Strategy demonstrates that without a dedicated delivery mechanism to manage, resource, communicate and review a Borough-wide Arts Strategy, it will fail. A similar recommendation is identified in the Heritage Opportunities document and should combine the focus on both arts and heritage under the leadership of Place. A component of this work is to recognise and align funding streams.

A change in timeframe. Whilst a Heritage Strategy can look a decade ahead, it is important that there is an initial focus on a detailed four-year plan from 2020 to 2024. This will align with the timescale for the LCR Cultural Compact, the 2023 opportunity for St Helens to be Borough of Culture and the work for developing the next round of NPO funding from ACE in 2022. It is also clear that the impact of radical changes in the national funding environment post COVID-19 will also need to be assessed, and that these will need to be flexible, agile and responsive. The Strategy will still be able to support the wider place-making and Heritage Strategy effectively and should be reviewed annually. Beyond 2023/24, the Borough should take stock; there are a number of core areas of focus for the ACE and LCR strategies which play to St Helens strengths and need further development to 2030. These include:

- using the arts and culture as a core part of the skills programme for young people in the borough
- working across both NPOs to amplify scope and reach, including connectivity with amateur groups

- extending its work with public health and through its Arts in Libraries work; and
- positioning Dream as part of a wider City Region public art programme.

Using the possibilities presented by the English Cities fund and Town Deal to create the world it wants its residents to live in - a better, more serious, more playful, livelier, more joyful, more engaged, more confident St Helens. This includes a new way of working with artists during the town centre development period, a fuller analysis of studio and work/live provision for the creative sector as part of the Town Deal, and a review of public civic spaces and what is needed to support cultural resource for the next decade

There is a need for alignment with wider strategic plans, both existing and in development. This was true pre COVID-19 but doubly so now as resources deplete. Duplication of effort is not required. The key strategies that St Helens Borough Arts Strategy must work with include:

Arts Council England 2020-2030 'Let's Create'

ACE's Strategy will focus on ensuring that the country has improved access to culture, that creativity in every individual is valued and given the chance to flourish and that nationally England continues to produce professional art of the highest international quality and appeal. Its pillars of creative people, creative places and a creative country will be supported by four investment principles around ambition, relevance and inclusivity, inventive dynamism and environmental responsibility. COVID-19 has caused ACE to delay the next NPO round for applications until 2022. Both St Helens Library Service and Heart of Glass will be applying to renew their NPO status and it will be important that they are able to show how they are supporting wider town and city region strategies, as well as contributing to ACE objectives.

Liverpool City Region Cultural Compact 2020 to 2024

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority have been working through their Cultural

Partnership to ensure that 'growing transformational cultural capital' is one of the 4 pillars of the LCR Local Industrial Strategy. This entails growing assets and skills as well as pride and identity in local culture. It is planned that this will be monitored and delivered through one of the country's Cultural Compacts (This initiative came out of the Cultural Cities enquiry in 2019 and is funded by ACE). It will run from 2020 to 2024 and focuses on following Arts Council England's overarching categories and priorities. There are a number of key Cultural Compact recommendations that the St Helens Arts Strategy can support and amplify. These include:

- ensuring cultural principles are observed in Planning decisions within local authority Planning departments, particularly at a time when venues are vulnerable as a result of COVID-19
- working across the cultural and creative sector to develop a plan for the sustainable use and operation of cultural heritage assets in the LCR, including options for strategic investment and alternative business models for operation of existing facilities
- a new Public Art Strategy for the Liverpool City Region
- developing a regional sector skills strategy for the cultural and creative industries
- accelerating development of shared services (rehearsal spaces, production services, comms platform) to save costs and identify 'invest to save' and 'invest to grow' opportunities
- a sector 'relaunch event' around Shakespeare North opening in 2022
- using commissioning spend on a regional basis to prioritise development of LCR supply chain and talent
- working with the SIF to establish new city region models for IP funds, Soцент funds, Angel/VC networks to provide specialist sector knowledge and 'patient capital' for creative sector entrepreneurs
- working at LCR level to develop and leverage private funding and philanthropic giving for arts and culture

- providing support for bid writing for artists and microbusinesses
- working with industry, national agencies and HEIs to identify opportunities and funding for new creative research institutes and regional network and creative industries cluster initiatives; and
- working with partners (GP, HEIs, Daresbury) to develop soft landing spaces and support package for inward investment into CCI.

St Helens Heritage Strategy 2019

This Strategy, ratified by the Council in May 2020, proposes an ambitious vision for the future of Heritage in the Borough:

In 2030 St. Helens Borough will have achieved national and international recognition for the significance, quality and management of its heritage assets, attractions and infrastructure. Its heritage visitor economy will be thriving, based on industrial heritage and the outdoors, and its communities will feel that their heritage and identity is respected and celebrated.

The key priorities in the strategy were listed as:

1. provide capacity and sustain it
2. further protect and enhance the historic environment
3. develop first class heritage attractions, facilities and services
4. empower the Borough's heritage groups and interested individuals
5. respect and celebrate the Borough's different identities and places.
6. achieve a reputation for celebrating heritage through the arts and culture
7. promote the heritage offer to best practice standards
8. develop and maintain strategic partnerships
9. build momentum through early success; and
10. achieve further recognition for the Borough's most significant heritage asset through UNESCO status.

The Council is now planning to implement some of the actions suggested immediately:

- establishing clear lines of responsibility for heritage and ensuring heritage is referenced in a Cabinet portfolio title
- establishing a virtual team for heritage from across council functions
- re-establishing the St Helens Borough Heritage Network
- ensuring that links are made with arts and culture and the emerging Arts Strategy; and
- beginning conversations with key Heritage funders about the Strategy.

They will then develop the recommendations into short, medium and long-term priorities.

St Helens Town Deal and English Cities Fund

St Helens is one of 50 towns to be awarded the opportunity by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to bid for up to £25m in the Town Deal. This funding will help to increase economic growth with a focus on regeneration, improved transport, better broadband connectivity, skills and culture. This is part of the national strategy to help rebalance the national economy and 'level up' the regions. The timetable for the first round of applications is July 2020, although COVID-19 may cause this to slip.

St Helens has been working on plans to redevelop its town centre, and post COVID-19 the retail difficulties for the town are likely to be even more serious. The opportunity to link the Town Deal strategy with the development opportunity offered through the £500m English Cities Fund investment allows a long-term and large-scale opportunity to review the town centre, and for arts, culture and heritage to play a significant part in its physical change.

Heart of Glass forward plan for phase 3 delivery of Creative People and Places

Heart of Glass has been successful in achieving a third round of ACE funding for its Creative People and Places programme from October 2020 to September 2023. This is an important national scheme as well as definite funding to help further support socially focused arts practice. It is therefore important that any wider St Helens strategy supports this work and helps amplify its impact and works with its planned programme.

5. DEFINITION, PARAMETERS, PRINCIPLES AND AIMS

DEFINITION:

Strategy: A plan, or set of actions, designed to achieve a long-term aim.

PARAMETERS:

What the Strategy cannot and should not do:

The Strategy cannot tell St Helens Borough Council or the arts sector which specific arts and cultural events to programme or produce.

The Strategy must not be dogmatic. It is rather a set of principles, aims and themes to work within and which always allow room for creative conversations and indeed creative accidents.

What the Strategy can usefully do:

- Articulate an ambitious and energising vision and mission
- Identify the prerequisites required to implement and deliver a borough-wide strategy
- Present a financial prism to help Council, Steering Group and Sector make strategic and realistic decisions as to viability and sustainability
- Help the Council and the Arts Sector to align thinking
- Highlight existing successful assets, infrastructure, organisations and people
- Inspire forward-looking programmes, projects and relationships
- Ensure clear strategic direction; and
- Know its own useful lifespan.

PRINCIPLES

The Strategy was developed through 3 core principles adopted by the Steering Group.

1. Transparent Engagement

The Strategy emerged from significant transparent consultation with national, regional and local art culture sectors, including independent creatives, the local voluntary sector, schools and colleges.

2. Alignment

The Strategy seeks to manage potentially competing priorities by aligning the St Helens Borough Arts Strategy to Arts Council England's new 10-year national strategy, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's Cultural Compact and the Borough Council's own strategic objectives. By doing so the strategy offers a framework for continuing access to national, regional and local resource, support and partnership.

3. Pragmatism

The Strategy seeks to evaluate ideas and contributions in terms of their viability and practical success. Initially it focuses on successful arts offers and amplifying their reach so by 2023, when St Helens is Borough of Culture, it will be a shining light in arts and culture and a model for the nation to celebrate and learn from.

6. STORY, VISION AND MISSION

The story, vision and mission of St Helens Borough Arts Strategy are the messages the Council, Steering Group and sector will work within and communicate for some years to come. The story, vision and mission need to communicate clearly and succinctly.

The story needs to relate St Helens past to its future ambitions. The vision needs to encapsulate an over-arching and inspiring goal. The mission is how that goal - that aim - will be practically achieved and measured.

7. ALIGNED FRAMEWORK

The Steering Group have agreed an aligned framework to support all St Helens arts decision-making and this has informed the key priorities outlined the Strategy. The framework aligns decision-making to national, regional and local arts and funding priorities and so enables continuing access to national, regional and local resource, support and partnership.

Aligning to Arts Council England:

The St Helens Arts Strategy aligns to Arts Council England's new 10-year strategy, Let's Create. It aligns itself to both ACE Investment Principles and the three Let's Create outcomes:

- Creative People
- Cultural Communities; and
- Creative and Cultural Country.

Aligned to Liverpool City Region Culture Compact:

Liverpool City Council's Cultural Strategy and the Cultural Compact priorities for Liverpool City Region are currently being developed. It is crucial that St Helens Arts Strategy is also aligned to these priorities. The Cultural Compact will be aligned to ACE, and the existing Cultural Partnership Board will be responsible for agreeing and delivering the strategy. The Cultural Compact will also lead on the regional relationship with key funders.

Aligned to St Helens Borough Council:

Finally, it is critical that the strategy aligns with St Helens Borough Council priorities in particular with the re-development of St Helens town centre and the support of skills development for borough residents.

8. INVESTMENT PRINCIPLES

ACE Investment Principles should be considered first, followed by those of the LCR

Cultural Compact and finally the financial realities of the Council's and the partners.