



# ST HELENS BOROUGH COUNCIL ARTS STRATEGY

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# 1. FOREWORD

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I am delighted to introduce to you the Arts Strategy for St Helens Borough which sets an ambitious direction for the arts over the next 4 years.

I know that in St Helens we have some fantastic artists, assets, and creative organisations. This Strategy builds on the talent and passions for the arts that already exists and brings together a shared ambition that has been developed with the arts sector to develop St Helens as an inspiring place to live, work and visit.

The arts has true social value for the borough, enriching our lives through improving our

physical and mental health and well-being, improving self-confidence, helping us to develop new skills, helping to raise attainment in schools, supporting community cohesion and using the creative industries to support economic growth.

This is a strategy for everyone and is mindful of all the different forms of art across the Borough. I hope that through a shared commitment to work together we can enable the arts to thrive and provide great opportunities for all to enjoy.



**Councillor Anthony Burns**

**Cabinet Member for Wellbeing, Culture & Heritage**

## 2. OUR STORY

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St Helens' motto, **EX TERRA LUCEM: Out of Earth - Light**, was restored in 2013 by popular petition.

The phrase reflects the Borough's mining history, it influenced Danny Boyle's Olympic Opening Ceremony, the creation of St Helens iconic sculpture, Dream and Jonathan Bates' composition dedicated to Jay Hall and the St Helen's Youth Brass Band.

As we emerge from the darkness of the current pandemic lockdown there is no better story for the St Helens Arts Strategy to embrace.

A single word: **Emergence.**

In philosophy, science and art, emergence occurs when a discreet idea, element or creation interacts with a wider whole.

As St Helens begins to emerge from lockdown, public art will start emerging from unlikely places, beloved buildings will emerge from their temporary desolation and new structures from freshly broken earth. Musicians, dancers, and artists will emerge from their studios and bedrooms and lockdown dreams will emerge as inspiration.

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 and experiment and makers.

In its latest emergence St Helens arts and culture will lead the way for the borough and by its shining example, for the nation.

### 3. OUR VISION

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A thriving arts scene is good for the health of people and places. The benefits of taking a fresh approach to the arts will be substantial and will be felt by residents and businesses across the borough.

Art and culture and the encouragement to be creative helps lives. Creativity helps us to communicate ourselves and our values in images, sounds, movements, and stories.

**This is why St Helens wants all its young people to experience the possibilities of being creative, because arts can help self-expression and build self-esteem and contribute to practical skills achievements.**

Arts and culture can be a conversation that translates experience across space and time, that can build a sense of a developing community, aware of its past, hopeful for its future and in constant creative dialogue.

**This is why St Helens is thrilled with its Creative People and Places programmes and will seek ways to amplify its scope and reach.**

The arts can provoke new thoughts and feelings and help us address difficult problems in our lives.

**This is why St Helens wants to extend its work with public health and through its Arts in Libraries work.**

The arts bring us joy - who does not stop, smile and wonder when they first see Dream?

**This is why St Helens wants more people to see it through a wider City Region public art programme.**

And the arts can be pure, unadulterated fun, they can cheer us up and they can literally brighten up and colour our towns and villages.

**This is why the possibilities of the English Cities fund and Town Deal are so important to St Helens to get right, because they will allow St Helens to create the world it wants its residents to live in - a better, more serious, more playful, more lively, more joyful, more engaged, more confident St Helens.**

**All of this will be celebrated when St Helens becomes Borough of Culture in 2023.**

## 4. OUR MISSION

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To help each and every one of St Helens residents to emerge through arts, creativity, and culture.

By 2023 every St Helens resident can contribute, experience and benefit from an uplifting cultural encounter.

## 5. OUR 7 PRIORITIES

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The Strategy centres on 7 priorities which we will work to deliver over the next 4 years. The Delivery Plan details how the priorities will be delivered.

They are pragmatic and seek to embed strategic aligned thinking, decision-making and sustainable borough-wide delivery.

They align to regeneration opportunities and the Town Deal and emphasise the need for close working relationships with the LCR Cultural Compact. Finally, the issue of timeline is addressed to focus on the critical opportunity of 2023.

In 2023 St Helens will once again be Borough of Culture for the City Region. This should now be the clear focus for the Art Strategy because of the opportunities it creates and that it is of vital importance that 2023 is a success.

In 2023 local residents, the wider region and the nation as a whole will be invited to judge St Helens, therefore there must be a series of tangible and positive differences between the St Helens of today and the St Helens of tomorrow.

The Arts Strategy seeks to help St Helens foster a change in mind set. By highlighting the fundamental need for closer relationships between St Helens and the region, the strategy seeks to place open communication, close collaboration, and mutually beneficial ambition at the heart of the St Helens arts and culture sector.

By harnessing the power of the word **emergence**, the strategy hopes to energise the sector and the borough.

This is the creative thinking and context from which tangible positive differences will emerge.

**By 2023 the Borough will *feel* different.**

A sense of emergence and forward movement will infuse the professional and voluntary sector alike because things are happening.

Ambitions we hope to see realised are various.

- A public art plan has been agreed with Liverpool City Region and is being delivered.
- ‘Dream’ can now be seen as it was designed to be seen and is properly interpreted on site and digitally.
- Heart of Glass has developed a way-finding map for St Helens which includes new and planned international artworks as well as little known curiosities and surprising interventions.
- The Town Deal programme is being formed, enhancing the townscape, visibly improving the arts, cultural and heritage offer and skills development opportunities for young people.
- An increased number of artists occupy vacant shops and start-ups are beginning to use dedicated business incubation co-working spaces.
- Existing infrastructure has been strategically repurposed, and the year-long live events programme is bringing surprise, joy and laughter to the whole community.
- There is a sense of life about the place, a sense of emergence and yes, a sense of pride.

The Arts Strategy and the following recommendations sets out a realistic framework to make these needed, wanted, and desired tangible, positive differences.

# PRIORITIES

## **1 To deliver a successful year in 2023 when St Helens is the Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture**

A dedicated delivery unit should be created to strategically plan and deliver the Arts and Heritage Strategies. This should sit within the Council, overseen by the Executive Director of Place. The role and purpose of the Council's Arts Service should be reviewed and remodelled to provide the dedicated resource required to support the delivery of the St Helens Arts Strategy. The priority will be to prepare for co-ordinating an outstanding year in 2023, when St Helens is the Borough of Culture in Merseyside. Key to this will be an improved and co-ordinated marketing for arts across the sector. It is proposed that the current Arts Strategy Steering Group, which has overseen the development of the Strategy is developed as a consultative group, with added membership, for the Council's Arts Service with the aim in the longer term of becoming a St Helens Cultural Partnership.

## **2 To align the priorities of the Borough's Arts Strategy with the Borough's priorities for regeneration with a particular emphasis on the Town Deal**

The Town Deal is a huge and real opportunity for both the Borough's town centres. The cultural and heritage component of the Town Deal must align to the overarching strategic direction and priorities of the St Helens Arts Strategy. The Council has stressed the need for a strategic and cohesive Arts Strategy. The Town Deal will therefore be a means of delivering elements align to the Arts Strategy and not the other way around. There is a specific opportunity around the updated Town Deal advice for arts and heritage projects, which should be geared to both help accessibility and improve facilities in a way that will drive both town centres use. The reconfiguring of both the Gamble Building (to display the Library, Archive and Borough Art Collection as a collective story) and The World of Glass (to provide facilities for use by a range of amateur and other arts users) could be a significant driver of town centre use for St Helens.

## **3 Align the St Helens Borough Arts Strategy to national and City Region arts priorities and timescales**

St Helens should align with Arts Council England priorities and the Liverpool City Region Cultural Compact. It should define with the LCR Combined Authority the role St Helens will play, particularly when it is Borough of Culture in 2023. There is an opportunity for St Helens to lead on socially engaged arts practice and the role of the voluntary arts sector. The Borough should commit to these themes and suggest ways of working, projects, partnerships, and collaborations in order to deliver them fully. This will allow an overarching strategy to be clearly communicated with the public and strategically guide the sector.

The first key milestone is 2023 when St Helens will be the Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture. It is critical that planning for this is the initial focus of the Strategy.

Subsequently, the Strategy can then concentrate on those areas of the Arts Council England and LCR strategies which play to St Helens' strengths and can be developed further and implemented up to 2030. These include

- using arts and culture as a core part of the skills programme for young people in the Borough
- working across both NPOs in the borough to amplify scope and reach, including connectivity with amateur groups
- extending its work with public health and through its Arts in Libraries work;
- positioning 'Dream' as part of a wider City Region public art programme; and
- 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.

#### **4 To identify and promote the role of arts and culture in the skills and talent development programmes for the Borough and City Region**

St Helens has a strong College, an outstanding sixth form college which draws arts talent from all over the Liverpool City Region, and some schools with excellent arts provision and a strong track record. There is also considerable interest from borough residents in developing a reputation as ‘Making Towns’. With cheap studio space and a tradition of manufacturing skills, it is a good time to make connection to both the Chamber of Commerce skills plans and those associated with the Town Deal and the City region skills programme, to ensure that arts and culture are seen to be playing a significant role for St Helens skills development.

#### **5 To maximise the physical and other assets available for Arts provision**

An independent audit of need (provision, for what, for who, in what way?) and physical space is required in order to inform the physical elements around arts, culture and heritage within the Town Deal and beyond.

The delivery unit will need to assess the viability of operating models and work with national funders to ensure that their objectives are also prioritised and are consistent with the themes and priorities of the Arts Strategy.

#### **6 To align with the Liverpool City Region proposals for public art to a) develop Dream as an asset b) develop an approach to support public realm change in St Helens**

‘Dream’ is a major artwork by an international artist which connects to the heritage opportunities for St Helens. Strategic senior leadership from the Borough is required to work with the City Region in their development of thinking for public art in the region, in order to ensure that Dream plays as big a role as the Anthony Gormley exhibition

in Sefton, and that LCR supports significant improvement in marketing and interpretation.

There is a key opportunity now to create a distinctive, accessible and vibrant public realm co-created with artists, architects, planners and communities (in collaboration with English Cities Fund).

A public art strategy should be put in place to enable the realisation of a unique public realm. An LCR public Art Strategy is planned. There is potential for St Helens to play a key role in driving a Place based approach for each borough within this Strategy; piloting St Helens as the first bespoke element of the Strategy, developed in collaboration with St Helens Borough Council, Heart of Glass, the LCR and partners.

The unique opportunities around the planned public realm changes in St Helens and Earlestown programmes offer potential for St Helens to involve artists in a large number of aspects of the plan, including the Youth Zone development as well as specific commissions.

#### **7 To align the Arts and Heritage Strategies with the voluntary sector**

The voluntary sector is a critical part of the arts ecology in St Helens and has been a key part of the Steering Group. It is recommended that the Council further develop the database and connections with the voluntary sector they have made as part of this project, and a wide strategic approach for involving them, working across arts programmes, particularly Cultural Hubs in Libraries and Heart of Glass’s CPP programme to 2023.

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 recommendations 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 fully consulted all through the Strategy process and we are extremely grateful for their support for the Strategy.

## 6. OUR DELIVERY PLAN

Ref	Issue	Implication	Recommendation	Owner/ Timescale
1	<p>There is a need to strengthen dedicated resource in the Council with responsibility for both Arts and Heritage.</p> <p>The current arts team is dedicated to delivering Cultural Hubs, the Arts in Libraries programme, there is a need to strengthen at a strategic level as part of the Place Directorate.</p> <p>Knowledge of St Helens arts activities outside the Borough could be improved.</p>	<p>A dedicated delivery mechanism to manage, resource, communicate, market and review a borough-wide Arts Strategy, to ensure it succeeds.</p>	<p>St Helens Council will review and reset a dedicated and skilled delivery role and strengthen its Arts Service team to focus on delivering St Helens Council’s cultural output including Libraries, Arts, Events, Music and Heritage. (This aligns with the Heritage Opportunities document recommendation as in the 2019 Heritage Strategy). The team will manage the resources dedicated to arts and will deploy resources to build outward from its major organisations with committed long-term funding. It will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• responsible for Arts and Heritage Strategies and their delivery, including a successful 2023 Borough of Culture</li> <li>• managing a single budget</li> <li>• responsible for convening the Culture Steering Group</li> <li>• responsible for developing an Arts Partnership and contributing to LCR Cultural Compact and linking the sector to international networks through this</li> <li>• responsible for the Arts and Heritage components of Town Deal</li> <li>• responsible for ensuring initiatives connect and support existing NPOs and CPP plans</li> <li>• tasked with securing S106 funding in tandem with LCR recommendations</li> <li>• responsible for coordinating and developing capacity for place-based fundraising</li> <li>• responsible for internal and external communications and marketing</li> <li>• the primary contact for the arts and heritage sector, particularly to ensure they are fully engaged with wider initiatives such as Public Health and skills development.</li> </ul>	<p>Director of Communities</p> <p>June 2021</p>

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implication</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Owner/ Timescale</b>
2	A framework for decision-making for arts and heritage in terms of prioritisation or investment/ de-investment is required.	There is a need for clear measurement of objectives and alignment of arts with wider borough and region priorities, to maximise the opportunities arising from 2023.	<p>The Council's remodelled Arts Service will use the framework and this Strategy to implement the priorities for the Borough, and in particular how it can connect to the Town Deal, LCR and ACE plans in advance of 2023. This includes LCR thinking around potential shared services and supply chains.</p> <p>The will ensure the continuation of the Arts Strategy Steering Group to amplify and advise on decision-making. With the aim to become a St Helens Cultural Partnership in future.</p>	Head of Culture and Wellbeing April 2021
3	St Helens needs to align better to regional and national thinking around harnessing the arts and culture. there is a need to strengthen influence and engagement with wider plans.	The Borough must maximise opportunities to deliver wider ambition and position itself nationally.	St Helens should align itself with Arts Council England priorities and Liverpool City Region Cultural Compact priorities. By so doing it will be able to justify a wider strategic place at the table. St Helens will work collaboratively with the LCR Combined Authority and play a strong role, particularly when it is Borough of Culture in 2023. It will particularly support its two NPOs, including promoting the role of Arts in Libraries across the City region, and for Heart of Glass's wider work and partnerships. The Council's Arts Service should also be the channel to make the decisions about which arts and heritage projects work with the wider LCR funding, particularly the Strategic Investment Framework.	Head of Culture and Wellbeing With effect from January 2021. Regional influence to be achieved by July 2021
4	The Town Deal and the English Cities Fund plans are being developed in tandem with the Arts and Heritage Strategies. Projects and proposals need to align with the Arts Strategy.	The Town Deal is a huge and real opportunity for St Helens. There is a need to ensure that proposals arising from the Town Deal Board are aligned to the Strategic direction from the sector. A key opportunity is to redevelop the Gamble and TWOG.	The Council's Arts Service should take immediate ownership of the cultural and historic components of the Town Deal and maintain the The Arts Steering Group will help advise and deliver the Town deal Projects under a strategic and unified Arts Strategy. Recognising the recent Government guidance on Town Deal support for capital projects for arts and heritage focus particularly on access and repurposing to help COVID recovery. This offers a perfect opportunity to focus on the sector ambitions for studio space and access needs for the Gamble. It could potentially bring the Library, Archive and Borough Art collection together again, and repurpose TWOG spaces for improved community use. This may require support advice and expertise to assess feasibility plans and operating models (also see recommendation 7).	Head of Culture and Wellbeing January 2021

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implication</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Owner/ Timescale</b>
5	Findings emerging from consultation is that it is challenging for an Arts Strategy to be useful for a decade, particularly given the current funding landscape.	There is a need to ensure that opportunities to enhance St Helens year as Borough of Culture in 2023 are made the most of.	To align the St Helens Arts and Heritage Strategies with the timeline for the LCR Cultural Compact 2020-2024 and annually review.  2023, when St Helens will be LCR Borough of Culture is a key focus for the borough and needs clear planning, now, as does how the borough supports the opening of Shakespeare North in Knowsley.	Head of Culture and Wellbeing  From January 2021
6	Arts programmes and projects should not operate in silos they need to work collectively. They must engage with the wider regional skills agenda.	Opportunities for co-creation and to engage fully with the amateur and education sectors to fully align to wider arts programmes, thereby serving local populations.	The Strategy will operate under the principles of transparency, alignment and pragmatism. The Arts Service will consult regularly with the Steering Group to advise on projects and programmes. The Arts Service will strengthen higher education and in-sector training opportunities, in tandem with LCR plans.	Arts Development Manager  Ongoing
7	There is a need for a process or framework to prioritise the development of physical spaces for art/heritage use or assessing needs from an audience/user/artist viewpoint.	Projects being developed and lobbied for, must align to a clear Place and Culture plan. This must include hard financial business plans.	There will be an audit of assets for the borough (including its art collection and archive) to help inform physical elements of the Town Deal for culture and heritage (such as the provision of studio and performance spaces). The Arts Service will consider financial operating models to ensure they are sustainable as well as what will be a priority for capital funding and why. This may result in the repurposing or decommissioning of individual venues and the development of shared facilities and collaborations.	Library Services Manager  July 2021
8	‘Dream’ requires greater interpretation and need to address accessibility, it should be used as an asset for the town.	Dream, as a major international artwork must be recognised as a vehicle to support the arts and cultural development of the Borough.	St Helens will work with LCR Cultural Compact and the wider sector on public art opportunities, to ensure St Helens distinctiveness is represented and the potential for Dream is developed as part of a bigger City region public art plan.	Head of Culture and Wellbeing  September 2021

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implication</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Owner/ Timescale</b>
9	The absence of a specific Public Art Strategy.	<p>There is a key opportunity to create a distinctive, accessible and vibrant public realm co-created with artists, architects, planners and communities (in collaboration with English Cities Fund).</p> <p>A Public Art Strategy would support this and prevent future public artworks being developed in silos.</p>	A public art strategy should be put in place to enable the realisation of a unique public realm. An LCR public Art Strategy is planned. There is potential for St Helens to play a key role in driving a Place based approach for each borough within this Strategy; piloting St Helens as the first bespoke element of the Strategy, developed in collaboration with St Helens Borough Council, Heart of Glass, the LCR and partners.	Arts Development Manager Ongoing
10	The arts voluntary sector (large and active in St Helens) must be fully part of the strategic thinking for arts in the Borough.	Projects involving the sector are ad hoc; support the professional sector can offer (e.g. storage, archive support) not properly harnessed.	To align the voluntary sector to the Arts and Heritage strategies via Steering Group. Ensure database for consultation gathered through this process is maintained and managed via the Delivery team.	Arts Development Manager Ongoing