



**STRATEGY**

**2022-2027**

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***Appendix 1 – Arts Survey Report***

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Creativity and culture are a vital part of Corsham's ecosystem. The town has a long-held reputation for the Arts. The Bath Academy of Art was based here. We have an historic High Street, Pound Arts, Corsham Court with Bath Spa University in residence, the Creative Corsham Market, the Peacock Arts Trail, artists' studios at The Pound and Lancefield Place, retail galleries supporting local artists and public artwork that includes murals, sculpture and graffiti art.

Six years ago, the Town Council approved its first Creative Corsham Strategy (2017-2022), with its mission to champion and support the role of culture in Corsham. The Strategy had spun out of the Alive With Centres of Excellence theme of the Town Council's first Strategic Plan (2014-2018) and had a vision 'to grow and celebrate cultural and creative activity in Corsham.'

Undoubtedly the Town Council's increased links with the Arts and creative industries are stronger as a result of the work and suggestions outlined in that first Creative Corsham Strategy, which spanned both the 2014-2018 and 2018-2022 Strategic Plans. Also, undoubtedly, there were projects outlined in the Creative Corsham Strategy which were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, something nobody could have foreseen or planned for. However, the pandemic was a powerful reminder that people reach for creativity and culture in times of crisis as well of those of joy and celebration. Access to culture and creativity provides hope and inspiration and enriches people's lives.

This new Creative Corsham Strategy (2022-2027) builds on the desire to enrich people's lives using our vibrant creative ecosystem to support health and wellbeing, enhance learning and open up opportunities for everyone, as well as drawing people to the High Street, underpinning our visitor economies and supporting our creative industries. It also offers creative opportunities to help the Town Council deliver the four strategic themes of its Strategic Plan (2022-2026): Environment and Climate Change, Transport and Highways, Business and the Economy and Community Wellbeing.

The overall vision for this Strategy is to help the artistic and cultural resources in our town to flourish, and to ensure that creativity and culture are a vital and dynamic element in enhancing life in Corsham for everyone.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

“Culture is who we are. It is our heritage and future. It is how we live our lives and express our identities. It is art, music, film, fashion, design, even gaming. But it is much more: it is what defines us and how we are changing. For local authorities, culture can be viewed as part of the glue that brings and keeps our communities together. A strong cultural sector and enriching cultural life can contribute to welcoming, distinctive and attractive places. Used effectively, culture and the institutions and services of culture (museums, libraries, festivals and many other elements) can contribute towards the revitalisation of communities, the development of trust, improved health and wellbeing and the possibility of a more positive future.”

*Cultural Strategy in a Box, Local Government Association*

“We believe that creativity and culture are deeply connected, but different. Creativity is the process by which, either individually or with others, we make something new: a work of art, or a reimagining of an existing work. Culture is the result of that creative process: we encounter it in the world, in museums and libraries, theatres and galleries, carnivals and concert halls, festivals and digital spaces... Having the time and tools to develop personal creative potential can be profoundly fulfilling, while engaging in culture is often a route to inspiration and delight. Taken together, they can help us make sense of ourselves and of each other: they provoke and uplift us; they unite communities, and they bring us joy.”

*Let's Create, Arts Council England*

In November 2016, Corsham Town Council approved its first ever Creative Corsham Strategy (2017-2022), incorporating both culture and creativity, with an ambitious five-year vision: “To grow and celebrate cultural and creative activity in Corsham so that, by 2022, the town and local area is regionally recognised as a centre of excellence in the Arts and Creative Industries, and to develop our cultural assets to make a real difference to the economy of Corsham and the surrounding villages, to the lives of the people who live here and to those who work and visit here.”

The Strategy’s overall mission was to champion and support the role of culture in Corsham, enabling the Town Council to work with partners and the community to create positive and lasting change.

Research and a survey and workshop involving local creative practitioners had identified three strategic strands to grow Corsham’s creative economy: Develop Network Activity: Collaboration and Exchange; Market-Making: Develop a Sector Signing and Branding Exercise and Place and Planning: A Creative Corsham Hub

The Creative Corsham Strategy also highlighted ways in which the town’s arts and cultural assets could enhance the themes of the Town Council’s Strategic Plan (2014-2018), which were: Alive with Centres of Excellence, Destination Corsham, Open to Business, Managed Development, Safe and Healthy Community and Integration.

The strategic aims of the Creative Corsham Strategy proved less easy to fulfil, particularly with Wiltshire Council’s plans for the Mansion House development - identified as a potential

Creative Hub - being revised to create, eventually, the Digital Mansion Corsham. The arts-related aims of the Strategic Plan, however, were more successful, with the work to enhance Corsham's creative and cultural activity meeting, and often exceeding, expectations.

In the years since the Creative Corsham Strategy came into being, the Town Council has:

- Established a part-time Community Services (Arts) Officer role
- Developed the 'Creative Corsham' identity
- Allocated distinct Creative Corsham funding with its own budget
- Continued to build on its excellent working relationship, and Service Level Agreement, with Pound Arts, supporting its festivals and other events
- Created a Public Art Strategy and set up a Town Council Public Art Task Group
- Commissioned public art projects (including the repainting of the Bath lions by Caroline Rudge and Jonny Sanders, Garden of Remembrance poppy gate, graffiti art at the Skate Park, Springfield Rec gateway, Lacock Road Cemetery panels)
- Launched the Chamber Exhibitions, promoting the work of local artists
- Built an excellent working relationship with Bath Spa University
- Supported local stakeholders in the town with their creative ambitions (eg Martingate's murals)
- Been a funder, supporter and host for The Peacock Arts Trail
- Helped to promote the Creative Corsham Market, including inviting its exhibitors to Town Council-run events
- Offered opportunities for artists to network and engage with the Town Council
- Increased the creative element at its events (eg Faces in a Field at the Fete)
- Advised and promoted The Corsham Gallery
- Run arts-based competitions for young people
- Launched StoryTown – Corsham's celebration of storytelling in all its formats
- Funded Arts Council England's Arts Awards for young people
- Supported creative activities to improve community wellbeing and unite communities (eg Studio 64, Big Draw, Potley/Corsham Rise community art project)
- Funded creative projects and activities via its grants scheme

## **Creativity and the Covid-19 Pandemic**

The five-year Creative Corsham Strategy was, of course, impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and its long-lasting effects. For most of 2020, the Town Council's work was primarily concerned with supporting residents and High Street businesses as the whole community came to terms with its 'new normal'.

To discover what impact the coronavirus crisis had on the town's economy and the people whose work is based here, the Town Council initially surveyed the town centre retailers and businesses. The questioning then moved on to find out how the crisis had impacted the many artists and creative practitioners in Corsham (*Appendix 1 – Arts Survey Report*), with the results informing the Town Council's arts-related work in the intervening period.

Within the wider community, lockdown prompted a huge interest in culture and creativity. From digital exhibitions and streamed theatre shows to craft activities and community singing, the Covid-19 crisis demonstrated how important culture can be in supporting mental wellbeing.

**“The pandemic was a powerful reminder that people reach for culture in times of crisis, as well of those of joy and celebration. Access to culture and creativity provides hope and inspiration and enriches people’s lives. That access must be fair for all.”**

*Baroness Lola Young of Hornsey  
Chair of the Commission on Culture and Local Government*

The Town Council’s Community Wellbeing work, which has been a focus since the Strategic Plan of 2014-2018, when the theme of Safe and Healthy Community was first launched, and has become even more important post-pandemic, has seen the instigation of many creative projects being used to support local people of all ages. These have included art and music therapy for young people and art activities for older/vulnerable members of our community. This element of our work will only grow.

## **A Cultural Ecosystem**

In its *Cornerstones of Culture* report, the Commission on Culture and Local Government describes how a healthy local cultural ecosystem can deliver against the wider challenges society faces. It can help to:

- Build resilient, adaptive, networked communities in place, supporting civic pride and revitalising town centres.
- Promote local economic growth, supporting levelling up through the development of creative clusters, an experiential offer on high streets and providing a foundation for the wider visitor and night-time economies.
- Develop creative thinking, build cultural capital and provide local economies with high quality jobs that are resistant to automation.
- Promote better health and wellbeing, particularly addressing challenges of loneliness, isolation and mental ill health arising from the pandemic.

But local culture is more than the sum of the outcomes it helps to support. The Commission also found that local culture is essential to the identity and aspiration of a place and its people. Put simply, people like living in places with a thriving creative and cultural life.

**“Creativity has a role to play in shaping our response to climate change, globalisation and technological innovation – and in enabling the economy and society to ‘bounce forwards’ from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Making places resilient and outward looking depends on creative activities of all kinds – in our professional and personal lives, in the local economy and civil society.”**

*Creative Places, Local Government Association*

This Creative Corsham Strategy (2022-2027) therefore seeks to guide the Town Council’s cultural and creative work in meeting these outcomes, as well as linking culture and creativity to the themes of the Town Council’s own Strategic Plan (2022-2026) – see p11.

## **Links to Other Strategies**

The Creative Corsham Strategy should be considered alongside the Town Council’s Strategic Plan (2022-2026), Public Art Strategy (2020-2024), Community Engagement Strategy, Destination Marketing and Destination Management Plans (both due to be revised in 2023), Town Centre Policy and Neighbourhood Plan.

### 3. THE BIGGER PICTURE

#### The Economic Importance of Culture and Creativity

- Prior to Covid, the creative industries contributed £116bn in Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2019, growing twice as fast between 2011 and 2019 than the rate of the UK economy as a whole (*DCMS 2021*).
- In the year from October 2019 to September 2020, the creative industries accounted for 2.2m jobs (*DCMS 2021*). The creative economy (creative industries plus creative jobs in other sectors) employed 3.2m people in 2018 (*DCMS 2019*).
- Self-employment accounts for 32% of creative industry employment in the UK, compared with 16% of the broader economy (*DCMS 2021*).
- In 2019, 95% of creative companies were micro-businesses (fewer than 10 employees) (*DCMS 2022*).
- In 2019, around 300,000 businesses - over one in eight - were part of the creative industries (*DCMS 2022*).
- Local government invests £1.1 billion directly in cultural services each year in England (*Local Government Association, 2022*).
- Every £1 of turnover in arts and culture creates additional turnover in the wider economy of 23%, so £1 becomes £1.23 (*Local Government Association, 2022*).

#### Arts Council England's Outcomes and Investment Principles

*Let's Create*, Arts Council England's strategy for 2020-2030 centres around three outcomes:

- **Creative People** – Everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life.
- **Cultural Communities** – Villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture.
- **A Creative and Cultural Country** – England's cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international.

To achieve these outcomes, the Arts Council has four Investment Principles:

- **Ambition and Quality** – Cultural organisations are ambitious and committed to improving the quality of their work.
- **Inclusivity and Relevance** – England's diversity is fully reflected in the organisations and individuals that ACE supports and in the culture they produce.
- **Dynamism** – Cultural organisations can thrive and are better able to respond to the challenges of the next decade.
- **Environmental Responsibility** – Cultural organisations lead the way in their approach to the climate emergency.

## 4. CORSHAM'S CULTURAL ASSETS

In every community, there are cultural factors that contribute to the vitality and robustness of the people living there. These factors are shared and creative, and are assets that make life valuable, that make life worth living. They can be material, immaterial, emotional, or even spiritual. They can be 'solid' things such as concert halls, galleries, gardens, parklands and stadiums. They can be spaces within the natural environment which encourage particular types of cultural activities. Stories too might be cultural assets if they are attached to particular people and places if they are powerful enough to encourage people to care about and care for their place.

### Cultural Buildings

The obvious examples of cultural buildings are museums, libraries, theatres and cinemas, but they can also be buildings in which culture can either be consumed or produced, and that have meaning for the local community, such as pubs with a live music offer, or community centres that host a local choir. The cultural offer of these buildings should be greatly built upon, as it is likely that these buildings will be seen as anchor points for cultural activity by the local community and visitor economy.

### Cultural Spaces

As well as buildings, spaces such as public parks can be cultural assets, hosting events and activities.

### Heritage Assets

Heritage assets can be physical assets, but can also be the history of a place, a local historic monument or event, or story from the past with which local people strongly identify – and are fundamental to both culture and the visitor economy. Heritage assets can be reimagined to not only create an identity of place, but also to be used as key cultural venues, combining a celebration of both culture and heritage to create a strong identity.

### Meanwhile Use

Meanwhile use is the use of vacant space for cultural gain while definitive plans for the space are finalised. It could be for two weeks; it could be for years. Meanwhile use unlocks underused space for the benefit of cultural activity, community cohesion, place-making and enterprise. It can also transform a building for a very low cost.

Bearing all this in mind, Corsham has a wide and varied range of cultural assets, including:

**Corsham Court**, a Saxon royal manor, and home of the Methuen family, is based on an Elizabethan house dating from 1582. It houses, in the 72-ft long picture gallery designed by Capability Brown, a celebrated collection of Old Masters, including works by Van Dyck, Filippo Lippi, Reynolds and Romney. The gallery, along with other rooms, features furniture designed by Chippendale, John Cobb and the Adam Brothers. Corsham Court also boasts stunning gardens and parkland and a 13-acre lake. The house featured as a location in Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975), Merchant Ivory's *Remains of the Day* (1993) and the BBC's adaptation of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (2008).



The former **Bath Academy of Art** was also based at Corsham Court, opening in 1946. The then Lord Methuen – the artist Paul Ayshford – established the Academy at his home when he was President of the Royal West of England Academy. Additional annexes in Bath and at Beechfield House in Corsham incorporated a residential college for art teachers and the Bath School of Art that had been in existence since 1852. The Academy rapidly gained a

Corsham, Wiltshire



reputation as a centre for excellence, with staff and students at the forefront of British art. These included Kenneth Armitage, Adrian Heath, Howard Hodgkin, Clifford and Rosemary Ellis, Peter Blake, Anthony Fry and Michael Pennie.

The Academy at Corsham Court closed in the mid-1980s following changes in art education and returned to Bath, where it became part of **Bath Spa University**. The University returned to Corsham in 2008, creating a Postgraduate Centre on the site. Corsham Court is currently (2023) home to BSU's Research Support Office.

Corsham Court is also, of course, home to the town's peacocks, birds that should certainly be considered cultural assets.

**Pound Arts** is a registered charity that runs the Pound Arts Centre, two annual festivals and the Rural Arts touring programme for Wiltshire and South Gloucestershire. Its mission is "connecting people through creativity" with a vision that is "for the communities in our region to be engaged with breath-taking artistic experiences regardless of their background or circumstances. To be a creative catalyst and a place of refuge, discovery and nourishment for the public and artists alike. To maintain and grow a sustainable flagship arts provision across the region that acts as a model for excellent work that engages the soul, stimulates the mind and entertains the spirit of our communities".



The **Peacock Arts Trail** has taken place biannually since 2015, promoting the work of Corsham-based artists, as well as those in the Chippenham and Box areas, at various venues in and around the town. Across 10 days of exhibitions, workshops and open studios, the Trail brings hundreds of visitors to Corsham, boosting both the local creative and business economies.

Corsham's cultural buildings, cultural spaces and heritage assets could also include:

- Corsham Library
- Corsham Almshouses
- Town Hall
- Springfield Community Campus
- The Three Brewers, Flemish Weaver and Royal Oak pubs

- The Methuen Arms hotel
- Corsham Town Council's play and wildlife areas, including Springfield Rec, The Batters (with its First World War history) and Beechfield.
- Arnold House
- Cultural businesses, including The Corsham Gallery, Sanders Gallery, Willow Antiques, Right Angle Picture Framers and The Corsham Bookshop
- Lancefield Place, Pickwick – hub of artists' workshops
- Creative Corsham Market



## 5. CREATIVE OPPORTUNITIES AND THE STRATEGIC PLAN

### A Vision for Corsham

In producing its Strategic Plan (2022-2026), the Town Council agreed that its vision should be: “An engaged community – making life better in Corsham through equality, accessibility and inclusivity”. A guiding principle of delivering on that vision is the strong desire to create an engaged, sustainable community which balances environmental, social, cultural and economic needs.

The Plan has four strategic themes:

- Environment and Climate Change
- Transport and Highways
- Business and the Economy
- Community Wellbeing

And, central to all of them, community engagement.

*Cornerstones of Culture*, the 2022 report by the Commission on Culture and Local Government, states that: “A vibrant cultural ecosystem creates jobs, supports health and wellbeing, enhances learning and opens up opportunities for young people. It draws people to the high street, underpins the visitor and night-time economies, supports the growing creative industries and helps to make places unique”.

Creativity and culture, therefore, can actively help the Town Council deliver many of its strategic priorities.

### Creative Opportunities - Environment and Climate Change Objectives

- ***Produce and deliver a Climate Change Action Plan for a more sustainable environment***
- ***Be on target to achieve next zero carbon emissions by 2030***

In October 2021, Corsham Town Council declared a climate and ecological emergency stating: “Corsham Town Council fully accepts the need for urgent action in response to the climate and ecological emergencies that we face. We are committed to reducing the carbon footprint of our community in support of Government and Wiltshire Council targets to reduce carbon emissions. We are implementing a carbon reduction plan for our own operations which will enable us to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030. From 2022, we will implement a biodiversity action plan to protect and enhance our green and blue infrastructure.”

The Town Council’s creative and cultural ambitions should also support this commitment and should seek the most sustainable and environmentally friendly methods. We are in a position to develop a cultural identity founded on environmental responsibility and innovation through arts and culture. We can develop cultural practice that helps us to develop deeper relationships and interactions with our environment, and we can use culture as a tool to raise local awareness of environmental challenges and what residents can do to help.

We want cultural organisations to act as leaders within their communities in terms of taking an environmentally responsible approach... by lowering carbon emissions, increasing levels of recycling, cutting their use of plastic and reducing water consumption. We also expect them to promote the need for environmental responsibility in the communities in which they work.... They should be aware of the cultural sector's role in helping to lead change...

*Let's Create, Arts Council England*

- **Enhance our public realm and conserve the historic environment of Corsham**

Cultural placemaking can have a role here, with the arts, culture and heritage helping to shape renewed affection, passion and pride for a place. Placemaking draws on the combined assets of heritage, people, buildings and landscape to create places that people want to live in, work in, do business in and visit. It is also an opportunity to create an environment that supports the local creative community.

Culture can be used to reassess tired streets, squares, buildings and civic spaces to increase their potential. It gives people the opportunity to connect their individual stories with collective narratives, helping to make their place feel like home. It also brings depth and meaning to people's experience of a place.

*Cultural Strategy in a Box, Local Government Association*

In *Levelling Up Locally*, a report by the independent, not-for-profit, thinktank Onward, the challenges of bringing life back to high streets and town centres and supporting local sport, culture, heritage and green space are highlighted. The report states: "Town centres offered an important forum for strengthening an area's social fabric, through shared spaces and rituals that brought together different parts of the community.

"Residents were clear that they wanted their town centre to have a distinctive character – to be 'somewhere' and not just 'anywhere'. Details and beauty mattered."

- **Undertake a review of the Corsham Neighbourhood Plan**

The current Corsham Neighbourhood Plan (2016-2026) includes Policy CNP HW6: "Where appropriate the inclusion of public art within the context of the proposal site itself will be supported. Public art should reflect those founding elements unique to Corsham such as wool, stone, military links and communications and should contribute towards the delivery of the Creative Corsham Strategy 2017-2022".

A review of the Plan could see the inclusion of further policies that would underline the importance of the creative and cultural infrastructure in Corsham. Indeed, the government's *National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021)* states that, to provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies should "take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all sections of the community" (*Point 93 (b), Section 8 Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities*).

## **Creative Opportunities – Transport and Highways Objectives**

- ***Develop a new Transport Plan for Corsham to include public transport, highway maintenance and walking and cycling routes***

While creative responses to this objective seem less obvious, there could be opportunities for public art on walking and cycling routes, as well as innovative creative ideas for promoting active travel and public transport.

## **Creative Opportunities – Business and the Economy Objectives**

- ***Prioritise the vitality of the town centre in decision-making, making it more attractive, active and accessible***

Culture is a vital ingredient for successful high streets. It makes high streets more than places to spend money and - especially when deployed in effective partnership with other amenities - can retain local vibrancy, footfall and pride.

In research carried out for Arts Council England (*A High Street Renaissance, August 2021*), culture on the high street (or within a five-minute walk):

- Builds civic pride - 62% of UK adults agree that cultural experiences on the high street give them a sense of pride about their local area. In fact, 50% of adults would like to see more cultural experiences on their high streets.
- Defends against high street decline.
- Increases footfall and spending - many cultural activities require in-person settings, which drive footfall, and trips to cultural destinations are often combined with spending at nearby retail, hospitality and leisure amenities.



Arts and culture can also support evening and night-time economies, as well as daytime activity. Pubs and event spaces, including live music venues, are a huge part of the night-time economy but shops and buildings that lie empty at night could help maximise the cultural offer during the evening by hosting public art exhibitions, pop-up markets or performances. Our parks, library and the Town Hall could also offer more at night, encouraging people to stay longer in the town.

- ***Conduct regular business surveys and act on the outcomes***

Local artists and those working in the creative industries have not been surveyed since May 2020 when the Town Council ran an Arts Survey, to gauge the impact the Covid-19 crisis on those working in the industry (*Appendix 1*). Given the number of creatives living and working in Corsham it is important that the business surveys regularly target this sector. (*See also Measuring and Evaluation, p22.*)

- ***Support local businesses through engagement and advice where needed***

The Town Council has, along with The Pound Arts Centre, engaged with artists via networking opportunities (Artists' Café) and offered social media training, with varying levels of success. Proceeding with these initiatives was also impacted by the Covid-19 crisis



although information on financial support available for those working in the creative and cultural industries was shared. The Town Council has also supported the creative businesses in the town, particularly offering support to creation of The Corsham Gallery. Opportunities to engage with, and support, all those working in the creative industries will be a priority moving forward. There is potential, if there is a demand from creative practitioners, to create a business support programme tailored to their needs.

- **Grow Corsham as a visitor destination**

Local cultural infrastructure is essential in supporting a healthy visitor economy. Culture, and particularly heritage, is the main driver of inbound visits and the basis of Britain's reputation overseas, and these are already areas that the Town Council's destination marketing promotes, under our Visit Corsham banner and via our membership of Visit Wiltshire, Visit West and the Great West Way destination marketing organisations (DMOs).



Alongside our work with these DMOs, we highlight Corsham's creative credentials in a number of ways. The Corsham Map, and its illustrations, all created by artist Susie Brooks, indicate a town that's proud to be creative. The joint-creation and promotion of activities between the Town Council and The Pound widens audiences for both and, again, underlines the importance of creativity and culture in the town. Corsham's creative independent

retailers are a focus of much of the Town Council's advertising and promotional work. The monthly Creative Corsham Market at Springfield Community Campus, run by artist Nicola Davis, brings 300-400 people into the area. Corsham Court's picture gallery, the Co-op murals, the painted lion sculptures, the graffiti art at the Skate Park... all of these, and the other creative expressions in the town, offer reasons to visit as well as enhancing Corsham's reputation for the arts.

The Town Council's events, all of which have a creative/cultural element to them, whether that is live music, art activities, or street theatre, encourage hundreds of people (with numbers growing every year) into the town.

The launch of a Public Art Trail and, it is hoped, in the longer-term, a Sculpture Trail, will offer further opportunities to promote Corsham as a creative visitor destination.

## **Creative Opportunities – Community Wellbeing Objectives**

- **Improve the range of youth activities and facilities**

Young people are a main point of focus for the Town Council's Community Wellbeing work. Hugely impacted by the pandemic, children of all ages need more support than ever, particularly when it comes to their mental health. The Town Council is committed to funding art and music therapy projects at The Corsham School, as well as supporting Corsham Youth Zone – the Friday night youth club at Springfield Community Campus – in all its activities, many of which are arts-based; the annual SPARK festival for 13-14 year olds (Year 9s) and running our own creative competitions, including via StoryTown.

The Town Council has commissioned The RISE Trust to expand their work with local families with pre-school children, and also to run detached youth work initiatives in the town centre. There is potential for creative activities to be used with both these groups.

Children and young people talk passionately about the pleasure they get from creative activities (many of which they undertake in their own time, and often online) and how they use them to express themselves and develop their skills and confidence. They also talk about the important role that creative activities can play in helping them deal with anxiety, stress and social isolation. However, for most young people, access to high quality creative and cultural opportunities outside of the home is too dependent on their social background and their postcode. This has to change.

*Let's Create, Arts Council England*

The Town Council has good links with Corsham's schools, particularly through StoryTown and the projects linked to storytelling. There is an opportunity to fund other creative projects in school settings. In 2023, the Town Council and Corsham Area Board's Local Youth Network are planning a scoping exercise to establish the range of activities available to young people in Corsham. The two organisations may jointly be able to commission creative projects to fill any gaps in provision.

- ***Support measures to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour***

The Town Council's public realm work (see p12) should offer some opportunities to design-out anti-social behaviour and thus reduce crime via creative means.

- ***Increase support for health and wellbeing initiatives which target those most in need across all age groups***

It is well understood that arts and culture make a powerful contribution to health and wellbeing and people who are exposed to creative projects live healthier lives and make fewer demands on health services.

The Local Government Association states in its *Creative Places* report that an enquiry carried out in 2017 by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing found that:

- The arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives better lived.
- The arts can help meet major challenges facing health and social care: ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and mental health.
- The arts can help save money in the health service and social care.

Social prescribing offers great opportunities for creative and cultural activities within our community. This means of enabling GPs, nurses and other health and care professionals to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services seeks to address people's needs in a holistic way. It also aims to support individuals to take greater control of their own health. The Town Council is already committed to supporting and funding community wellbeing projects such as Studio 64 - dance, movement and art sessions held at The Pound, and Celebrating Age, which takes free musical performances to the older/vulnerable members of our community, and this will continue.

- ***Continue to enhance the Arts, events and culture in Corsham through our own projects and working with, and supporting, others***

This Creative Corsham Strategy (2022-2027) explains how the Town Council will fulfil this Strategic Plan objective.

- ***Develop existing relationships with key stakeholders, including Bath Spa University and our local schools, Corsham Area Board, MOD Corsham and Pound Arts***

Through its officers and Councillors, the Town Council has developed excellent working relationships with the key cultural and creative stakeholders in Corsham and will only build on these relationships going forward.

## **Community Engagement**

At the heart of the Town Council's Strategic Plan is a commitment to improve engagement with people and groups in our community. We want to ensure that local people feel well informed about local issues, have opportunities to get involved, can influence local decision making and are able to tell the Council what they think about all elements of its work. It is vital that this work is shaped and prioritised by Corsham's people.

We also understand that a 'community' can be many things. It can be a community of place or neighbourhood, from a whole town to a housing estate or street. It can be a community of shared interest or experience. And it can be a community of identity, defined by how people identify themselves or how they are identified by society, usually by demographic characteristics (for example: young people, older people, disabled people or those with special needs, faith groups, black and minority ethnic people, LGBTQ+ people).

It is especially important for us to understand different views within the community, ensuring that the needs of groups or areas that are under-represented or do not traditionally engage with us are not overlooked. By identifying how and where there is a lack of engagement, the Town Council can start to understand the barriers that might be stopping certain voices being heard and understand how best to communicate so that we meet the needs of the whole community more effectively.

By undertaking that meaningful engagement and encouraging community involvement, the Town Council and the Corsham community can work together to make life in Corsham better through equality, accessibility and inclusivity.

Community engagement will work in two ways when it comes to creativity and culture. We will seek engagement, when appropriate, on our major creative projects, inviting local people to be participants, decision-makers, artists, ambassadors, volunteers and, of course, audiences. We can, though, also use creative means to overcome the barriers that prevent members of our community engaging with us. Using creative tools and artistic experiences can help people imagine new solutions or spark ideas and can be particularly appropriate when it comes to encouraging local people to express their views and generate ideas in a participative approach. They are a useful technique for engaging with people of all ages through education or school programmes, local community forums and resident or interest groups. They can also be beneficial at the beginning of a community planning process to generate interest and raise awareness. Methods might include community mapping, model



making or using photography. In 2013/14, as part of a project to redesign Springfield Rec and its play areas, local groups were invited to design parks using cake, which proved very successful across all ages.

## **6. WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE: OUR VISION**

The Town Council's vision is to ensure that creativity and culture are a vital and dynamic element in enhancing life in Corsham, and to help develop the artistic and cultural resources in the town.

The objective of this strategy is to promote and develop creative work of quality and originality, for the benefit of all the people of Corsham and for visitors.

We will create opportunities for the arts to reinforce and add value to the Town Council's work, particularly the Strategic Plan.

We will work in partnership with the local community and key stakeholders to deliver our vision.

### **We want Corsham to be known as a place:**

- for artists and makers, where they are welcomed, supported and have opportunities to thrive.
- where creative thinking is recognised and appreciated when it comes to solving problems.
- where everyone in our community has the opportunity to engage with arts and culture and there are no barriers to taking part.
- recognised for cultural excellence.
- with a positive, respected image, rooted in our artistic heritage and our openness to innovative ideas.
- where creativity and culture has a real impact on the health, wellbeing and aspirations of local people.

## 7. HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE OUR VISION?

The Town Council will achieve its vision by mapping and researching the local creative economy, and creating an **Action Plan** (see *Implementation, p21*) from this Creative Corsham Strategy that will focus on six 'pillars' to help us deliver our goals:

- **Creative Communities** – participation and involvement, personal creativity, cultural democracy, identity and community cohesion, culture and creativity for wellness.
- **Creative Skills and Talent** – creative, technical, management and leadership skills – attracting, retaining and developing artists in Corsham.
- **Creative Enterprise** – support and advice, access to finance and funding, incubation and innovation and knowledge transfer.
- **Creative Places and Spaces** – High Street, public realm, natural heritage and the environment, tourism and destination management, including place branding.
- **Creative Infrastructure** – encouraging and influencing local infrastructure to help creative businesses and cultural organisations.
- **Creative Leadership and Governance** – partnerships, working groups, memorandums of understanding, service level agreements and consultation and other stakeholder engagement. Potential partners include creative and cultural organisations, other councils, SWLEP, education and health providers, community representatives and voluntary organisations.

*Based on 'Establishing Your Pillars' from Build Back Creatively by The Audience Agency*

### Mapping and Research

To ensure decision-making is evidence-backed, mapping and research is essential. This will be done by surveying local artists as a follow up to the Arts Survey run during the pandemic (*Appendix 1*); mapping creative assets and resources; carrying out qualitative research by identifying 'industry champions' and interviewing them. (Funding may be required to pay freelancers who give up their time for these interviews.)

It is also important that 'futures' work is incorporated into this research. Building an Action Plan based around the past performance of the creative economy risks setting objectives that are not fit for purpose in this fast-moving sector.

### Creative Communities

The Town Council will expand on the wide range of cultural activities already undertaken: arts activities at events, public art projects, funding and support for community arts projects and those that focus on health and wellbeing, with a particular focus on supporting social prescribing. Environmental and climate change arts projects will also be a part of this activity. (*See also Creative Opportunities – Community Wellbeing Objectives, p14.*)

There will be an emphasis on creating a place where everyone, no matter their background or abilities, will have the same opportunities to engage in, and benefit from, cultural activity and through doing so enjoy a good quality of life.

We will use the **Social Model of Disability** to inform our community arts work. The social model was created by disabled people and looks at the barriers erected by society in terms of disabled people being able to participate fully in day-to-day life. The social model seeks to remove unnecessary barriers which prevent disabled people participating in society. It also recognises that attitudes towards disabled people create unnecessary barriers to inclusion and requires people to take proactive action to remove these barriers.

The social model identifies the problems faced by disabled people as a consequence of external factors (eg not offering accessible information or using inaccessible venues). It recognises that a person does not 'have' a disability, disability is something a person experiences, and that experience is often caused by the approach taken by society/individuals. For example, a person is not prevented from going to see a play because they are a wheelchair user, rather it is the absence of accessible transport and access to venues that causes the disability and exclusion.

The social model also focuses on people's attitudes towards disability and recognises that these can create barriers in the same way as the physical environment.

The work of the We Are The People project, and its aim to set up a Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) in Corsham will also help inform the Town Council's creative ambitions.

**"Culture has no membership criteria."**

*Gerry Godley, Principal and Chief Executive, Leeds College of Music*

## **Creative Skills and Talent**

The Town Council will co-ordinate a local approach to attracting, retaining and developing the creative and cultural sectors in Corsham. We can play a key role in advocating on behalf of the local creative economy in two ways. We can help creative enterprises engage with local communities and funders and policy bodies by facilitating conversations, representing them on groups such as the Area Board's Health and Wellbeing Board or in discussions with local businesses or with Wiltshire Council. And we can also help communicate the needs of local communities to artists and creative businesses to see where there are opportunities to work together, being uniquely placed to set up working or stakeholder groups to bring everyone together.

This communication and engagement, alongside the Town Council's own project commissioning, should enhance the Town Council's reputation for supporting the arts and encourage creative practitioners to work with us for the good of the local area.

## **Creative Enterprise**

The Creative Industries Foundation found that one in 10 creative enterprises identified a lack of business skills as a key challenge. We will look to support our creative practitioners by identifying training needs and offering help and support to improve skills. Creative businesses often overlook general business support, feeling it will not be relevant to their

business model and markets, so our support will need to be properly tailored, and expertly led, for a creative audience.

Councils are the biggest funders of arts and culture in England, providing a lifeline for many creative and cultural organisations. Corsham Town Council certainly recognises this ethos and the importance of the arts to the town both economically and socially. In recognition of this, the Council has a number of budget streams available for creative and cultural projects through its general grants scheme, and Creative Corsham, Public Art, Community Wellbeing and Youth Activities budgets, as well as supporting activities at events via specific funding streams and the grant-based Service Level Agreement it maintains with Pound Arts.

Town Council funding can also help with the awarding of match-funding from other organisations, including Wiltshire Council's Area Board, as well as bidding for funding themselves for larger projects.

### **Creative Places and Spaces**

Through innovative use of Corsham's cultural assets (see p8), the Town Council can offer places and spaces where artists of all ages and abilities can create artworks for the local community. This will also offer promotional opportunities for tourism.

Extended use of the Creative Corsham branding will be encouraged to link arts projects across the town and underline the importance of creativity and culture in Corsham.



### **Creative Infrastructure**

While the Town Council has less influence over local infrastructure given that so much is the responsibility of Wiltshire Council, there are still opportunities to ensure that artists' voices are heard and that local priorities are raised. From a Planning perspective, opportunities for new workspaces and hubs should be supported as appropriate by the Town Council. There is still a decision to be made on the future of the Town Council's Arnold House, due in 2023, which could help the creative infrastructure in the town, should research and mapping highlight a need.

### **Creative Leadership and Governance**

As well as the Town Council Committees and working groups that cover cultural and creative activities in the town in all their forms (Community Services, Property and Amenities, Finance and Administration (grants), Community Wellbeing and the Public Art Task Group), Councillors also engage with other creative and cultural stakeholders, public bodies and groups with an interest in the arts. These include Pound Arts, Bath Spa University, Peacock Arts Trail, Corsham Civic Society, Corsham Climate Action, Corsham Local Youth Network and Corsham Youth Zone. There is also potential for working with local schools, local health practitioners, voluntary organisations, Wiltshire Council, SWLEP and local representatives of Arts Council England and other funders. This is an area for further expansion over the period of this Strategy.

## 8. IMPLEMENTATION

Once the Creative Corsham Strategy is approved (early 2023), a detailed **Action Plan** will be developed, based on the vision, policy and strategic objectives set out in the Strategy. Specific targets and timescales will be set for each detailed action, along with evaluation measures (see 9. *Monitoring and Evaluation, below*). The Strategy will be monitored with an annual report prepared for the Community Services Committee, setting out achievements against targets, which will be revised and updated each year.

While this Creative Corsham Strategy covers the period 2022-2027, it is likely that a full review and revision will be needed before the end of the five year period, given the speed of change within the creative sector.

The role of the Town Council in implementing the Creative Corsham Strategy will be:

- To make creativity and culture accessible to all
- To advocate on behalf of the arts, and help the community, and external stakeholders, understand its value and benefit
- To manage the work set out in this Strategy, working with artists, art organisations and other agencies
- To encourage partnerships and make links and connections, both internally and externally
- To act as an enabler and facilitator
- To provide resources and help secure resources from other sources

Priorities for Year One will include:

- Public art projects at Cross Keys and Corsham Rise
- Using creative means to highlight environmental issues
- Consolidating the Town Council's grants process for creative, cultural and community wellbeing projects
- Supporting this year's Peacock Arts Trail (7-15 October 2023) and helping with its longer-term succession planning
- Ensuring creative activities - for all ages - are available at Town Council events
- Building on the creative community wellbeing projects already in place, particularly for young people
- Assessing the future of StoryTown and its links with the community

## 9. MEASURING AND EVALUATION

Measuring the impact of this Strategy is crucial to determining its value in meeting the Town Council's Strategic Plan, as well as being able to provide evidence to potential Arts-project funders (eg Arts Council England, National Lottery Fund). Evaluation will, as far as possible, be designed into the Strategy and its projects with baseline data collected, if appropriate, before a project starts.

Depending on the nature of the project, items to measure before and after, could include:

- People's perception of Corsham (residents and visitors)
- Visitor numbers to cultural assets (Corsham Court, The Pound, Peacock Arts Trail)
- Number of events per year
- Numbers participating in events and where they have travelled from
- Happiness levels
- Residents' sense of belonging/civic pride
- Volunteer numbers
- Access to events
- Diversity of visitors
- Number of arts organisations involved
- Number of local businesses involved
- Level of funding
- Number of young people engaged
- Number of educational workshops or activities delivered
- Media coverage
- Social media engagement
- Increased availability of space for cultural and creative industries
- Cross-sector collaboration
- Engagement with other councils/Wiltshire Council
- Improved health outcomes\* (ie through social prescribing)

These measures are primarily quantitative so it will be important to measure outcomes and conduct qualitative research as much as possible as well, including surveying participants and gathering case studies.

*\*Wiltshire Council's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) (due late 2023) will provide information on local health and wellbeing.*

## 10. CONCLUSION

During the Covid-19 pandemic, a time of great challenge, people turned to the arts and culture for solace and connection. Creativity was a way to address isolation, support mental wellbeing and provide educational opportunities for young people. Now, in another time of great challenge, with a cost-of-living crisis, rising inequalities, climate change and global instability, creativity has never been more important. It brings people together at times of crisis and celebration; it provides support and social connection, improves pride in place, boosts economic growth and helps support local talent and skills, particularly among young people.

With this Creative Corsham Strategy, the Town Council recognises the vital role that creativity and culture has to play in supporting everyone in the Corsham community. Every day should offer a creative opportunity, whether that is art in the landscape, painting a picture, or using music, to help mental health, accessing a performance, learning something new at an event... And through these creative and cultural opportunities for all who live here, Corsham becomes known as a visitor destination for creative travellers, improving the local economy for the creative and non-creative sectors alike.

Through engaging, funding, collaborating and facilitating, as set out in this Strategy, the Town Council can ensure a thriving, creative and cultural life for everyone who lives and works in Corsham.

**“Whatever shape they take and wherever we experience them, creative activities and cultural experiences improve our lives. They challenge perceptions, broaden horizons, form and transform communities, and enable us to flourish in previously unimagined ways. The bottom line is: they make us happy.”**

*Darren Henley, Chief Executive, Arts Council England*

*Approved by Corsham Town Council’s Community Services Committee on 15 March 2023.*

CS/STJan23