City of
Stoke-on-Trent

STOKE-ON-TRENT CULTURAL STRATEGY 2022-28

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FOREWORD

The development of our first dedicated Cultural Strategy (Making the Creative City) in 2016 was undoubtedly a real milestone in the unfolding story of our great city. At the time we needed a strategy to help shape and drive forward our emerging bid for UK City of Culture status. We felt at times as though we were climbing a huge mountain without any maps or guides, and we were missing some vital equipment. But we did it – we developed the strategy and the bid; we scaled that enormous mountain. We proved that, not only did the words "Stoke-on-Trent" and "culture" deserve to be in the same sentence, but that the city we had lived, worked and grown up in was actually buzzing with creative talent and brimming with historical and artistic treasures. Without ultimately being named as the UK City of Culture in that bidding round, we used the experience to lay the foundations of a much longer term, sustainable approach to becoming a real city of creativity, culture and heritage.

Six years on, we are immensely proud to be able to offer up a new cultural strategy for Stoke-on-Trent. This strategy feels quite different; we are no longer competing for prizes or trying to win over bemused sceptics. We have developed this strategy for all of us, to unlock the incredible potential of culture, heritage and creativity within Stoke-on-Trent. We developed it in the secure knowledge and understanding that we are a creative city; the city that makes art from dirt – the world capital of ceramics. Reminders of our proud history of innovation and creativity abound in our town centres, our parks, and many of our neighbourhoods. But I don't just want to celebrate our proud history; I also want this strategy to help to shape our journey to an exciting and prosperous future.

This strategy marks a truly momentous time for culture in our city. Culture is at the heart of the Government's Levelling Up policy agenda, with considerable emphasis being placed on the importance of cultural placemaking to transform the attractiveness of less affluent places, as well as the role of culture in building pride in place to unite and reinvigorate deprived communities around shared a shared cultural identity and vision. Culture has the unique ability to influence a vast array of outcomes in areas such as education, economic development, skills, health and wellbeing and community safety. This strategy sets out how we will use our wealth of heritage assets, our cultural heritage, our fantastic partnerships and our collective creative talents to consolidate Stoke-on-Trent's status as a national cultural destination and to grow and develop our cultural offer to transform lives, opportunities and the environment in which we live and work.

INTRODUCTION

The strategy is intended to outline the vision and priorities for culture and heritage in the city of Stoke-on-Trent. It has been developed by a wide range of local, regional and national partners, through direction and oversight from the Creative City Partnership with input and consultation across our local communities. It is a document that will guide us over the period 2022 to 2028 to ensure organisations, individual artists and groups with an interest in culture in the city can align their work and help to deliver the strategy. The strategy is also intended to outline cultural funding opportunities that exist within Stoke-on-Trent to potential investors and financial supporters. Yearly updates during the lifespan of the strategy will ensure that it remains relevant and reflects progress achieved, the policy landscape and emerging activity and opportunities. It will be supported by a clear delivery plan with milestones and timescales, with targets to measure outcomes. It will act as an anchor document for the city as we seek to align funding and resources to the priorities, and will provide a sound basis for inward investment and funding opportunities. Ultimately it is a strategy for everyone with an interest in Stoke-on-Trent's culture and heritage, and how better outcomes for local people can be successfully delivered.

OUR VISION

Across our great city's six towns and diverse communities, we build upon our heritage as arts and industrial producers, unlocking the potential of creativity and culture to transform lives, embrace opportunities, celebrate our gifts, and cherish the environment in which we live and work.

OUR AIMS

We will

➡ actively engage and work with our city's residents to involve them in culture and demonstrate the value of culture to individuals and communities.

➡ create opportunities for culture and creativity to improve the life chances, health, wellbeing and happiness of people of all ages, and children and young people in particular.

➡ use heritage, culture and creativity to enrich the lives of residents, workers and visitors to our city, to transform perceptions of Stoke-on-Trent as a cultural destination and foster pride in place.

➡ capitalise on opportunities to contribute to levelling up, community wellbeing and economic growth through culture and heritage-led regeneration, tourism and the growth of creative industries and sectors.

➡ invest in the skills and employment opportunities needed to build a rich and diverse cultural offer for the city.

➡ work with creative organisations, communities and partners to create opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to experience, and become involved in, culture and creativity.

➡ work with local communities to use culture and our natural heritage to identify and deliver environmental improvements throughout the city.

➡ work to ensure that Stoke-on-Trent is a city that nurtures creative talent, inspires lifelong creativity and makes culture and creativity accessible to all.

Stoke-on-Trent will fulfil its potential as a nationally important cultural destination.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

5.5m visits to the city **during 2019/20**

The visitor economy is worth **£365m** per year to the city's economy.

The creative sector employs **c.4,000** people in Stoke-on-Trent accounting for 3.4 per cent of the local labour market (compared to 1.9 per cent for the West Midlands and 2.2 per cent for the UK as a whole)

638 artists and arts organisations recognised by Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire Cultural Education Partnership

The development of the refreshed Cultural Strategy coincides with, and contributes to, efforts to 'level up' Stoke-on-Trent in terms of economic growth, productivity and the life chances of city residents. In February 2021, Stoke-on-Trent City Council launched Powering Up, a prospectus setting out a shared vision for the city and identifying specific elements of infrastructure and service innovation requiring targeted investment in order to unlock improved outcomes. Powering Up focused on four levelling up priorities: transport, economic development, education and skills and health and productivity. Culture was initially identified as a cross-cutting theme running through elements of all four priorities, but has since been redefined as a core levelling up priority for the city.

At a national level, the Government's Levelling Up White Paper, which was published at the beginning of 2022, emphasises the importance of culture in addressing geographical disparities and inequalities that exist in deprived areas of the UK. The paper sets out 12 levelling up 'missions', including 'Pride in Place', which aims to improve "people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community" by 2030. In addition, 'culture, heritage

and sport' is identified as an area of focus within the Levelling Up policy programme, with particular emphasis placed on the delivery of Heritage Action Zones, the Transforming Places through Heritage programme, the Cultural Recovery Fund, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Arts Council England's Priority Places programme, the Cultural Investment Fund and investment in grassroots sports facilities. Stoke-on-Trent is specifically referenced a dozen times in the white paper, including in relation to "explor[ing] how more flagship national cultural institutions can support the strength of our historic cultural heritage in great cities such as Stoke", as well as: "explor[ing] how local leaders can secure further investment from sources such as the UKSPF in cities such as Stoke-on-Trent to ensure its ceramics heritage is properly celebrated and the potential for that heritage to drive future economic growth is properly exploited."

In conjunction with the launch of Powering Up, local leaders and partners have also brought forward an ambitious programme of digital innovation that aims to put Stoke-on-Trent at the forefront of the digital skills revolution and give emerging high-tech industries and sectors in the city a strategic advantage over other parts of the UK. The Silicon Stoke programme aims to build on the successful delivery of the UK's first citywide full-fibre gigabit network to make Stoke-on-Trent the nation's most digitally advanced city and part of an emerging elite group of global Smart Cities which are well placed to exploit enhanced digital infrastructure and connectivity to transform services, opportunities and outcomes for residents and businesses.
Key opportunities include:
- Expanding provision of digital vocational skills linked to work opportunities;
- Growing the SME digital sector;
- Enhancing the city's educational offer through improved digital connectivity and first class digital education;
- Expanding the city's offer and reach with respect to game-making and digital production.

Stoke-on-Trent is a cultural city with a rich heritage that blends industrial expansion, innovation and cultural creativity. The city is the world-renowned 'Capital of Ceramics', but it is also much more. Culture is embedded in the city's DNA; it continues to influence local attitudes and identity and it is a hugely important, yet still largely untapped, asset in terms of Stoke-on-Trent's economic growth ambitions. Culture has become a source of burgeoning civic pride and indomitable creative spirit which are shaping the city's approach to the Levelling Up agenda. Stoke-on-Trent is a city of six towns, but shared culture and heritage are among the key factors that bind these communities together as a city.

Culture is already making a significant contribution to the local economy, and one of the aims of this strategy is to highlight and capitalise on possible opportunities to expand this area of activity. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Stoke-on-Trent's creative sector employed 4,500 people and accounted for almost four per cent of our city's workforce, although this has declined over the past two years due to the impact of Covid restrictions on activities and funding. The city attracted a record 5.5 million visits in 2019, generating £365m for the local economy.

Heritage is an important element of Stoke-on-Trent's cultural offer, encompassing aspects such as cultural memory, traditions, knowledge and skills which help to define the city's unique cultural identity, as well as historical collections, buildings, green spaces and features such as waterways and routeways. Stoke-on-Trent is home to almost 1,000 buildings of special local interest which contribute to the city's unique character and cultural offer. As well as having historical and architectural significance, many of these buildings contribute to the overall cultural offer on other levels, providing spaces for creativity and visual and tangible links to industries and past creativity which shaped the streets and places where they are situated and tell important stories about the identity of individual communities.

Culture in Stoke-on-Trent has come a long way since 2018, when the city embarked on a bid to become UK City of Culture 2021. The highly competitive bid process supported the development from scratch of a nascent infrastructure that accelerated development of the cultural ecosystem, however an historic lack of established cultural investment, cultural leadership development and anchor cultural institutions in comparison to some other entrants became evident during the process. The forming of strong partnerships, such as Stoke Creates, as well as effective public consultation have enabled us to build on those initial steps to engage effectively with the wider creative sector, both locally and with national cultural bodies such as Arts Council England and Historic England, in order to develop a coherent and compelling vision through the Making the Creative City Strategy published in 2018.

Although the bid did not lead to the city being named as the UK City of Culture, the process demonstrated that Stoke-on-Trent has a vibrant creative community with a wealth of ideas and expertise, and through the process developed a more clearly defined cultural identity, stronger relationships with key partners and stakeholders and a better understanding of how culture and heritage aligned with the priorities of key organisations. The bid also highlighted the importance of securing cultural funding and provided the impetus to explore funding opportunities and mechanisms. One of the aims of this strategy, which builds on the great work delivered through the Making the Creative City Strategy, bringing it up to date to guide our partnership work over the next five years, will be the identification and delivery of consistent sources of investment, funding and support for cultural activity in Stoke-on-Trent to nurture and grow the city's offer. In 2021 the city was designated as a "Priority Place" by Arts Council England, and was the first UK city to secure two Heritage Action Zones through Historic England. These projects demonstrate a clear commitment from national cultural organisations to work with local stakeholders to set bespoke objectives, and invest time and financial resources into the city. This strategy is the start of an exciting journey for local stakeholders in the city with national organisations, including those which are part of the Creative City Partnership, to realise the potential positive impact that culture will have on the city's future and the lives of all of its residents for generations to come.

CULTURAL THEMES AND PRIORITIES

The themes have been developed using the 2018 Making our Creative City Strategy, along with the strategies and priorities of partner organisations, as the starting point. The priorities similarly reflect the shared aspirations of partners incorporating both existing and new projects and activities that we will jointly deliver. The strategy recognises and makes allowances for the fact that these priorities do not exist in isolation, but often cut across one another. It is also based on a number of important assumptions, including that creativity is a wide-ranging field that includes, but extends beyond conventional definitions of 'art'; and that culture is and always should be for everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances. Building on what we have already achieved in relation to culture in Stoke-on-Trent, this strategy resets the agenda for the future based around four key themes:

Culture in communities

This priority relates not only to grassroots cultural activities that may be based in localities and neighbourhoods, but also to the various ways in which culture can have an impact on local areas and communities. It is about ensuring that the public have access to pubic collections and feel able to engage with, shape and participate in cultural and creative activities and opportunities. Culture can be an important connector between the multicultural communities in our city, so it must be inclusive, while recognising that different people and communities may want to access cultural in different ways. The differences between communities are part of what makes Stoke-on-Trent's cultural identity unique and vibrant, and as such they should be recognised and celebrated. It is also important to focus on the potential benefits of culture to communities in terms of wellbeing, placemaking, community cohesion, inclusivity, quality of life, educational and employment opportunities and, perhaps most importantly, the ability to deliver fun and enjoyment into people's lives.

For the purposes of this strategy, 'culture' can describe:
- Any form of creative or artistic activity or expression;
- Public performance (music, poetry, theatre, dance, comedy, factual, etc.);
- Any item, factor or activity which helps to define or celebrate the uniqueness of Stoke-on-Trent's identity or character (either current or historic);
- Any activity or artefact that is produced primarily to interest, entertain or educate
- Activities, buildings or collections which link communities to their heritage or the history of their local areas.

Heritage and history

This priority focuses on all of the ways in which heritage and cultural links to Stoke-on-Trent's past traditions and events relate to and shape the present cultural identity and sense of place in the city. The strategy is concerned with unlocking the wider cultural benefits of the city's rich heritage and ensuring that heritage plays an integral part in cultural placemaking approaches. Stoke-on-Trent has a proud industrial heritage as a leading creative city and an important role in Britain's Industrial Revolution. This history is still reflected in many aspects of the city's modern landscape – from its attractive waterways and urban parks to its historic factories and iconic bottle kilns. Alongside the physical heritage of the built and natural environments, there are many less obvious, but equally important forms of heritage which need to be recognised, highlighted and celebrated as parts of the city's rich cultural offer. Examples include the vast artistic and design legacy of centuries of pottery production; the stories and shared experiences of past and current residents and communities; and the distinctive language and customs of the inhabitants of the Potteries which set them apart from other people and communities.

For the purposes of this strategy, 'heritage' can describe:
- Anything relating to the social history or traditions of people who lived and worked in Stoke-on-Trent;
- Anything relating to former ways of life which no longer exist, including customs, beliefs or social behaviours which existed within defined communities or localities;
- Skills, conceptual knowledge or collective memory which contributes to Stoke-on-Trent's cultural identity;
- Structures and places which are of architectural, cultural, historical or archaeological interest;
- Anything which contributes to a historical narrative involving a specific place, person or group;
- Any inherited resources or artefacts which are valued by people primarily for their cultural or historical significance or interest or for their aesthetic qualities;
- Natural heritage, such as urban parks, green spaces and waterways which allow nature into predominantly urban environments;
- Any activity which may be designed to highlight, understand, promote or celebrate local links to past events, experiences or traditions.

Digital creativity

Digital creativity is one of the most important emerging creative sectors in the city. It is particularly significant because the city has positioned itself at the forefront of the unfolding digital skills revolution and set out its stall as an emerging national hub for the development of computer games and digital production for use in TV and film. The aspiration is that Stoke-on-Trent can build upon its cultural heritage and once again be renowned as a beacon of innovation, artistic talent and creative manufacturing. But digital is not just about commercial activity. Digital technology and connectivity have the potential to transform, not only the types of creative activity taking place in Stoke-on-Trent, but the actual ways in which ordinary people can access, experience and interact with culture. Digital has the potential to engage with harder-to-reach audiences that conventional forms of creativity may not appeal to – particularly children and young people. Digital also provides an invaluable opportunity to work with our city's universities, higher education colleges and schools to explore ways in which culture can play a part in transforming life chances, skills pathways and employment opportunities for existing and future generations of residents.

Digital creativity refers to creative, cultural and commercial activities in the areas of:
- Digital production (e.g. TV, film or computer programming);
- The use of technology to develop and/or deliver a creative output;
- The use of digital tools and/or techniques to explore creative ideas;
- Any creative activity aimed at producing an output which is designed to be accessed via digital channels or technology (including via a website, app, game or digital video channel);
- The development and delivery of digital-themed or enabled performances, exhibitions, galleries, or activities which use digital or technological innovation to make aspects of culture accessible to potential audiences, or to educate and inform people about culture.

Arts, creativity & cultural experiences

This priority not only reflects the 'traditional' creative arts such as art, music, dance and drama, but also touches on important aspects of the city's visitor economy and tourism offer. This priority is as much about the ways in which people can get involved in delivering good-quality cultural activities as it is about improving access, experience and enjoyment of the arts. Although engagement with the arts is often viewed through the lens of leisure attractions and the visitor economy, it is also important to recognise that thousands of people in Stoke-on-Trent work in cultural sectors and industries, and many of these will make their living through art and other forms of creativity. The strategy aims to understand how to better meet their needs in terms of access to affordable spaces in which to hone and demonstrate their talents, as well as engagement with lifelong learning and training.

This priority therefore encompasses a wide range of creative activities and outputs, including:
- Cultural events;
- Festivals (music, literary, film, artistic, community, culinary, etc.);
- Exhibitions;
- Performances and shows;
- Educational events about any aspect of culture or creativity;
- Activities or events aimed at an audience which contribute to the cultural identity of a place or group of people;
- Events and activities which bring people together to engage in or focus on any aspect of culture, creativity or heritage;
- Creative or cultural activities which contribute to the social capital of the city and its local communities.

ACHIEVING OUR CULTURAL PRIORITIES FOR THE CITY

This strategy is focused on achieving a range of important outcomes involving culture and creativity across three core areas of activity:

Placemaking

Focusing on how culture impacts on people in all parts of Stoke-on-Trent and how investment in culture can unlock benefits which will make a difference to people's lives. Examining how culture contributes to the creation of quality places where people want to live, work and spend their leisure time. Helping to create a stronger sense of place and improving the quality of life for residents and workers in the city. Placemaking can also include less tangible contributions, including education and skills which can improve the life chances of children and young people growing up in the city.

Economy

Activity which directly or indirectly contributes to local economic growth, productivity or prosperity. This can include activities which generate revenue, attract investment or grow the size of the city's economy. In addition, this includes activities which help to create or improve the conditions for economic growth, such as improving educational attainment or creating employment opportunities. It is also important to include activities which can strengthen the economic resilience of cultural pathways and create viable employment pathways. The vibrancy and sustainability of the cultural sector locally is an important factor in building confidence in Stoke-on-Trent and attracting investment, employment and new residents and workers.
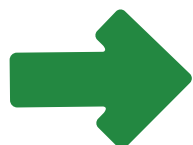
Identity

Activity which helps to define a distinct cultural identity for Stoke-on-Trent and its constituent towns and communities which people can relate to and actively participate in. Cultural activity which strengthens civic pride, improves the way that people (residents and visitors) feel about Stoke-on-Trent and raises the profile of the city and its people to create and reinforce the sense of a unique cultural destination.

The following pages show how high-level cultural priorities for Stoke-on-Trent as a whole translate into more specific approaches and potential areas of activity across localities and communities for each of the four cultural themes.

We are focused on achieving a range of important outcomes involving culture and creativity.

We want to bring communities together and inspire pride in the city.

CULTURE IN COMMUNITIES

One of the key aims of this strategy is to capitalise on and celebrate Stoke-on-Trent's unique, rich and vibrant cultural identity in order to create a defined sense of place, develop opportunities for creative individuals of all ages, bring communities together and inspire pride in the city. Engagement, training, support and cultural activities delivered through schools and libraries will be crucial to achieving our cultural priorities in local communities. When we talk about improving the city's cultural offer and using cultural activities to generate improved outcomes, we need to ensure that local communities and people of all ages and backgrounds within our city will feel the benefits of increased investment in cultural provision and infrastructure at neighbourhood level.

Culture is an increasingly important element of the Government's Levelling Up agenda due to its potentially transformative role in reducing regional equalities and fostering local pride in place around a defined local cultural identity. The vital tasks of building pride in place and using culture to transform life chances and employment opportunities have to start in communities because that is where their impact will be felt and where the direct and associated benefits will have the potential to do the most good. Involving communities in decision-making about cultural provision and approaches to cultural engagement and participation will be crucial to the strategy's ability to influence this priority. It will also be vital to align cultural objectives and activities to improving education attainment and skills levels in the city, as this is an area where culture is already making a difference and highlighting the enormous potential that can be unlocked with increased investment and collaboration.

Priority	Approach	Potential areas of activity
Enabling greater access to, and engagement in, creativity and culture within schools	Improving integration of creativity and culture across the curriculum	Expand links between cultural and educational partnerships
Raising the skill levels of adults in Stoke-on-Trent and improving employability	Using cultural development and expansion to create attractive employment and development opportunities within creative sectors and organisations	Identify and develop opportunities to use cultural activities to engage adults in a broad range of skills training provision.

Priority	→	Approach	→	Potential areas of activity
Improving health, wellbeing and quality of life outcomes for city residents of all ages and backgrounds		Developing and expanding opportunities to access and engage in cultural activities (e.g. through education or volunteering) that can benefit physical and mental health and wellbeing		Explore opportunities for increased engagement between cultural partnerships and health bodies.
		Creating and delivering opportunities for culture to contribute to social programmes across the city		Incorporate elements of culture and creativity into the delivery of interventions and support programmes such as Family Hubs, carer support and help for people with dementia.
Create more opportunities for residents of all ages to access culture within their local areas		Working with the full range of national cultural organisations to ensure an equitable cultural offer across Stoke-on-Trent		Develop and deliver new Libraries Strategy for the city. Work with Arts Council England to secure funding for our library service to deliver against cultural aims. Incorporate cultural offer and accessibility into public transport improvement work.
Increase volunteering levels and involvement in community improvement activities		Developing and sustaining a flourishing cultural and creative ecology within the city which generates and promotes a diverse range of rewarding opportunities for voluntary participation at local level		Develop participatory management processes to facilitate and coordinate community involvement in cultural activities and projects.
Deliver and support cultural placemaking in local communities to foster pride in place		Exploring opportunities to deliver or enable community-led improvement projects involving cultural elements		Establish 'cultural action zones' such as the Portland Inn project in Cobridge.

Priority	Approach	Potential areas of activity
Provide transparent and accessible support to enable cultural activities and projects to flourish in local areas	Implementing a robust and transparent mechanism to support local cultural activities through the city council's cultural grant fund	Use links to national cultural bodies to explore potential funding streams for grassroots cultural groups and activities.
Ensure that communities feel welcome into cultural and heritage spaces and can play a custodian role	Working to understand potential barriers to community involvement with, and ownership of, local cultural and heritage places and projects in order to boost engagement across a wider range of communities	Encourage and support increased community involvement in decision-making about cultural and heritage projects to enhance a sense of community ownership of places

Heritage is arguably the strongest element of Stoke-on-Trent's current cultural offer.

HERITAGE AND HISTORY

Heritage is arguably the strongest element of Stoke-on-Trent's current cultural offer. Stoke-on-Trent is steeped in industrial history and boasts a remarkable range of historic and architecturally significant buildings and sites which stretch right across the city, as well as a large number of waterways, pathways and other heritage infrastructure. In recent years, the city has achieved some notable successes in terms of delivering heritage-led regeneration projects, including securing more than £6 million from Historic England since 2005, and becoming the first UK city to secure two Heritage Action Zones to facilitate and incentivise vital repairs to heritage townscape buildings. This proven ability to use heritage to drive regeneration is one of the city's core strengths and provides an important opportunity to secure addition funding for future projects.

Stoke-on-Trent's physical and natural heritage assets, including parks and waterways, combine with less tangible forms of cultural heritage (such as shared experience, diversity, education and creativity) to connect local communities to each other and the wider city. A variety of urban routeways also serve to connect people to heritage and visitor attractions around the city. Stoke-on-Trent is home to nine museums and numerous heritage attractions which collectively make a significant contribution to the visitor economy and the unique historical culture of The Potteries. The challenge set out in this strategy is to use Stoke-on-Trent's rich heritage to strengthen the cultural ties between communities, foster pride in the city, encourage active participation in cultural activities and contribute to the creation of thriving places and economic growth through cultural placemaking.

Priority	Approach	Potential areas of activity
Using heritage and history to create connected communities	Harnessing the potential of heritage and history to enhance both civic pride and external perceptions of Stoke-on-Trent	Support initiatives that bring together arts and heritage activities at both community and citywide levels.
	Enabling and supporting plans to transfer heritage assets to community groups	• Develop and communicate navigable pathways for asset transfers to communities to improve knowledge and awareness of the process. • Creating opportunities for volunteering and learning in relation to heritage skills (e.g. via events celebrating industrial and community heritage)
	Working across the city to make vital connections between community groups and existing cultural organisations	Build stronger partnerships with communities. Sharing vital learning about community participation and involvement with heritage
Encouraging and supporting active participation in shaping, delivering and enjoying activities which highlight and celebrate our city's unique and varied cultural heritage	Establishing the Heritage Congress and a Stoke-on-Trent Preservation Trust	• Incorporate community involvement where possible in deciding the future of heritage assets. • Bringing together local and national heritage stakeholders, private developers and heritage property owners harness capacity and capabilities to help find solutions for buildings and places which are at risk

Priority	Approach	Potential areas of activity
Encouraging and supporting active participation in shaping, delivering and enjoying activities which highlight and celebrate our city's unique and varied cultural heritage	Using heritage assets to create new cultural spaces	• Create more affordable and accessible spaces which local cultural groups and artists can use. • Share responsibility for heritage assets with engaged stakeholders, including enabling communities to own and use them
Capitalising on Stoke-on-Trent's rich industrial, natural and social heritage and shared history to help transform our towns and communities into thriving places	Collaborating with people and partners to secure vibrant and sustainable futures for historic places	• Build on the legacy of area-based schemes to work with local businesses to support the preservation and regeneration of the city's heritage townscapes. • Identify and prioritise future heritage-led regeneration projects. • Engage with national bodies regarding additional investment in city museums and collections.
Capitalising on Stoke-on-Trent's rich industrial, natural and social heritage and shared history to help transform our towns and communities into thriving places	Building on the role of museums in enabling access to culture in the city	• Prioritise the preservation of designated collections and improving community access to them. • Focus on celebrating what is happening in the city in terms of culture (e.g. local collaboration and Arts Council funding). • Improve community engagement and participation.
Capitalising on Stoke-on-Trent's rich industrial, natural and social heritage and shared history to help transform our towns and communities into thriving places	Delivering the city's museums transformation programme	• Strengthen curatorial expertise. • Improve the venue and events programme.

The digital creative sector is one of the most important, and potentially transformative, emerging elements of Stoke-on-Trent's rapidly expanding economy.

DIGITAL CREATIVITY

The digital creative sector is one of the most important, and potentially transformative, emerging elements of Stoke-on-Trent's rapidly expanding economy. The city has embarked on an innovative programme of investment and development to transform Stoke-on-Trent into one of the UK's most advanced digital cities. The Silicon Stoke programme aims to unlock a wide range of important benefits for the city, its inhabitants and local businesses. A number of the digital opportunities which Silicon Stoke aims to deliver will have direct and indirect implications for culture and creativity. These include expanding the city's offer and reach with respect to game-making and digital production, enhancing the city's educational offer through improved digital connectivity and first-class digital education, as well as growing the SME sector and expanding digital vocational skill provision. The Cultural Strategy aims to highlight potential opportunities created through the delivery of the Silicon Stoke programme to encourage and support digital creative activity in the city, as well as exploring ways of using digital technology and channels to widen participation and engagement in relation to culture.

The digital creative sector in Stoke-on-Trent has become established and expanded very quickly since the previous Cultural Strategy was launched. It is now very much at the forefront of commercial expansion and innovation and is beginning to have an impact on job creation, skills and the further and higher education sectors, with Staffordshire University emerging as an important national centre for digital film, gaming and animation courses. Notable successes include city-based digital production company Junction 15, which won an Emmy award for its work on the Beijing Olympic Games. The continued expansion of this sector, and its potential impact on Levelling Up Stoke-on-Trent, will be dictated by its ability to access a highly-skilled and talented creative workforce, as well as state-of-the-art production facilities located within a sectoral cluster.

Priority	Approach	Potential areas of activity
Establish Stoke-on-Trent as a national hub for digital production and gaming	Developing and promoting the city's offer to digital production firms	• Work with Arts Council England and other national bodies to develop creative media opportunities related to gaming
	Supporting the creation of a gaming hub and creative digital enterprise spaces at the Spode Site	• Work with both universities and the city's further education colleges to develop a compelling offer around specialist digital skills
	Providing high-quality digital skills education to enable our college leavers and graduates to secure good jobs in the digital sector	

Priority	Approach	Potential areas of activity
Enable the digital creative sector to develop and expand	Investing in digital and cultural infrastructure to support the expansion and proliferation of digital creative enterprises	Support and encourage engagement with local digital heritage projects.
Develop and capitalise on the role of libraries, schools and museums in driving digital engagement, skills and creative activities in local communities	Working with local and national cultural and creative organisations to develop more engaging digital opportunities within our local communities	• Build digital engagement and creativity into the city's revamped libraries offer. • Work closely with schools to identify opportunities to involve families in digital engagement and creative activities. • Use digital technology to enhance access to, and engagement with, cultural artefacts and collections in museums
Develop creative pathways in digital industries to boost employability	Working with the digital creative sector and skills providers to identify appropriate pathways	• Work with national cultural organisations to develop links with creative industries linked to film and TV production. • Incorporate digital creative employment pathways into careers education and advice. • Work with schools, FE and other skills providers to develop skills offers around digital creative pathways
Tackle digital poverty to enable more of our residents to access online cultural resources and activities	Exploring how to make the best use of City Council and partner services in local communities to enable more affordable and convenient online access	• Identify the scale and nature of the problem and its impacts on specific groups and communities. • Work with partners to devise targeted interventions which incorporate culture and creativity

Priority →	Approach →	Potential areas of activity
Establish Stoke-on-Trent as a nationally important location for TV and films	Exploring the possibility of establishing a city film office or equivalent body to engage and work with production companies	• Explore options around the creation of an online register of citywide historic locations that could be or have been used in filming. • Assess the merits of establishing a film office, or similar organisation, to engage with production companies and co-ordinate filming access.
Create digital innovation and cultural venues in our town centres	Building on the delivery of the Silicon Stoke programme to deliver digital creative attractions and facilities in accessible high street locations	• Identify former retail sites in town centres which would lend themselves to creative digital uses. • Work with digital creative businesses and organisations to develop viable schemes for repurposing high street sites as digital hubs or cultural venues. • Work with national and regional cultural and creative bodies to design engaging schemes and identify potential funding and support to deliver them

We want to ensure that Stoke-on-Trent is able to fulfil its potential as a nationally important cultural destination.

ARTS, CREATIVITY AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

One of this strategy's key aims is the ambition to ensure that Stoke-on-Trent is able to fulfil its potential as a nationally important cultural destination. We aim to use culture and creativity to transform perceptions of Stoke-on-Trent and foster pride in place. A number of factors will be critical to achieving these aims, including developing a whole-place understanding of what culture means to our residents and communities, and how people wish to engage with, appreciate and participate in cultural activity. We will need to involve local residents and communities in developing a place-led, grassroots understanding of what constitutes culture in Stoke-on-Trent in 2022 and how it can flourish. We will also need to support local cultural organisations and individual artists to navigate the complex funding landscape around culture and Levelling Up and secure greater input from national cultural institutions to help us develop and strengthen vital local cultural infrastructure and transform our future cultural offer to the city and the UK as a whole. In addition, all of these aims will require the development of a strong and joined-up approach to marketing Stoke-on-Trent's enhanced and growing cultural offer and the factors which combine to make the city a national cultural destination.

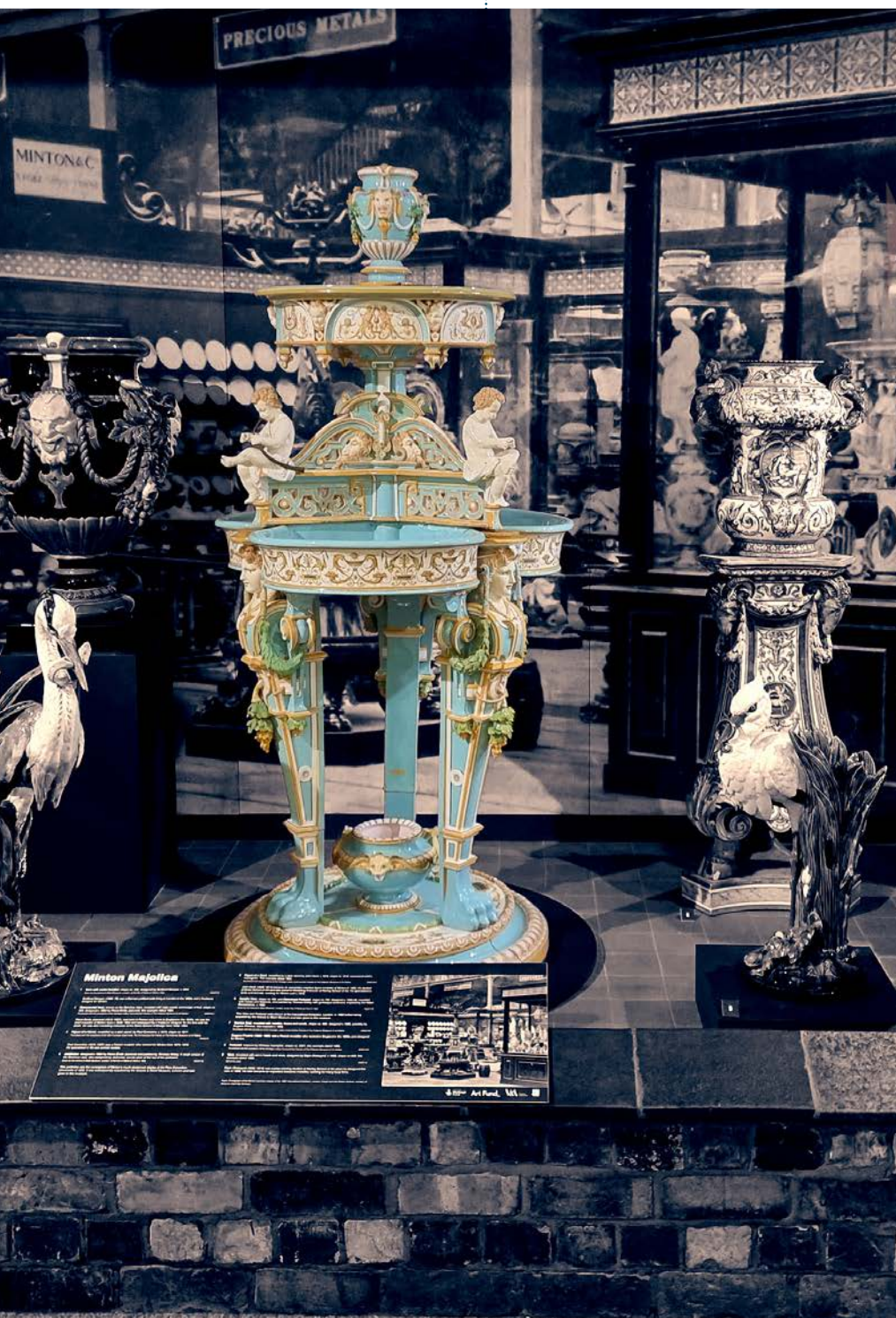| Priority	→	Approach	→	Potential areas of activity
Enabling and supporting community-led cultural activity which will help to improve Stoke-on-Trent's overall cultural offer		Providing a diverse and engaging cultural and creative offer which appeals to different demographic groups		• Work with local cultural groups to identify and nurture homegrown artistic talent. • Expand and improve the cultural offer to local communities. • Support more user involvement in shaping and developing the city's cultural offer.
		Identifying sources of capital investment and revenue finance to support and expand the city's cultural and creative offer		• Use part of the city's UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation to invest in additional cultural and heritage provision and infrastructure. • Continue to lobby for a broader definition of cultural activity in order to secure more funding for local cultural groups and artists.
Deliver additional exhibition and performance spaces for cultural events		Delivering a new indoor arena in the City Centre as part of the proposed Etruscan Square development		Work with partners and cultural organisations to identify ways to maximise the potential cultural value of Etruscan Square.
Deliver additional exhibition and performance spaces for cultural events		Creating additional exhibition spaces for visual arts which are appropriate, affordable and accessible		Explore potential future and 'meanwhile' uses for heritage buildings, spaces or assets as 'pop-up' cultural venues before, during and after restoration work.
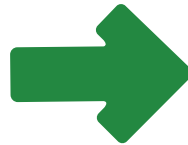
Priority → **Approach** → **Potential areas of activity**

Improve Stoke-on-Trent's appeal as a cultural destination by working more closely with national cultural institutions

Attracting national and international cultural organisations to work in the city to strengthen the cultural and tourism offer and enable local artists to learn and take inspiration from leading artists and performers

- Establish collection loan agreements with national museums.
- Work with national organisations to address areas where our offer is less than it should be for a city of our size and reach (e.g. touring national theatre and dance productions; highest level classical music)
- Secure or commission more high-quality shows and exhibitions which can tell the unique story of Stoke-on-Trent to local and external audiences.
- Use visiting artists to promote and showcase our most important town/City Centre cultural assets.
- Support the creation of local connections with educational, social enterprise, arts and entrepreneurial partnerships.

KEY OUTCOMES LINKED TO CULTURE

Theme: Culture in communities

Placemaking	Economy	Identity
• Culture contributes to improved community cohesion; • Cultural activities in green spaces and public spaces help to improve outdoor leisure participation levels and boost visitor numbers; • Communities benefit from having a wider range of cultural venues, spaces, attractions and activities for people to enjoy and participate in; • Culture plays an important role in improving health and wellbeing levels; • Enabling and encouraging different communities to share their cultural heritage creates awareness of stories and origins that enrich and strengthen the cultural and heritage fabric of the city; • Cultural events and attractions help to make high streets, town centres and the City Centre more vibrant and welcoming to residents, workers and visitors; • Community-led cultural projects and interventions help to improve the look, feel and quality of life in previously deprived parts of the city; • Involving children and young people in cultural and creative activity leads to improved health, wellbeing and happiness levels for children and young people.	• More creative businesses and sectors choose to be based in Stoke-on-Trent, bringing employment and skills opportunities to all areas of the city; • Local communities benefit from increased prosperity due to the expansion of creative sectors and the economic growth of Stoke-on-Trent; • Local businesses benefit from increased footfall and spending due to the provision of quality cultural and creative activities and attractions in all parts of the city; • Earlier engagement with creativity and culture raises awareness of potential pathways to employment and enhanced life chances.	• Culture helps to define and celebrate individual communities' identities, highlighting and enriching their vital contribution to the cultural identity of the city; • Cultural events and attractions in local areas help to showcase the cultural offer of individual towns and localities to a wider audience, generating greater pride in place at local level; • The growth of the cultural offer in towns and localities helps to redefine the aspirations of local people in terms of what they can achieve and the future of their local areas; • The contribution of children and young people leads to a more vibrant and enriched cultural identity reflecting specific communities and the wider city.

Theme: Heritage, architecture, history and archaeology

Placemaking	Economy	Identity
• Preservation of heritage and architectural sites and assets; • Heritage-led regeneration projects transform key sites around the city; • Heritage and cultural assets are put to the best possible use; • Creation of a strong sense of place through the preservation, utilisation and presentation of heritage, cultural and architectural assets; • Museums, libraries and other venues use cultural activities to enhance quality of life; • A high-quality environment builds confidence in an area and encourages people to visit, live and work in the city.	• Heritage assets contribute effectively to the city's visitor economy by creating a more compelling attraction and increasing visitor dwell time in the city, which pushes up visitor spending levels; • Heritage-led regeneration secures investment and creates commercial and employment opportunities; • The preservation and utilisation of heritage assets helps to attract more people to high streets and town centres; • Museums and other cultural venues use cultural offer and activities to drive up City Centre footfall and spending.	• Heritage buildings and sites are better utilised, maximising the contribution they make to inspiring people's pride in place; • Heritage and history are celebrated and promoted to improve knowledge about, and pride in, individual towns and the wider city; • Heritage-led regeneration transforms the look and feel of Stoke-on-Trent and inspires pride in the city and local areas; • Participation in managing, conserving and enjoying heritage buildings and places increases physical activity, reduces loneliness and stress and enhances the well-being of the city's people; • People explore and share their heritage and culture and feel a greater sense of ownership, custodianship and belonging.

Digital creativity

Placemaking	Economy	Identity
• Stoke-on-Trent builds on digital infrastructure and connectivity in order to progress towards becoming a Smart City; • More people are able to access cultural and creative content via digital means; • More digital and creative businesses are established in the city, creating a thriving cultural sector.	• Improved digital infrastructure and connectivity attract creative businesses and investment to Stoke-on-Trent; • Digital and creative sectors grow, creating more higher-value jobs in the city; • The expansion of digital creativity contributes to the transformation of skills, employment opportunities and life chances.	• The delivery of Silicon Stoke contributes to the creation of a new identity for the city as an important hub for digital creativity and innovation; • Digital creative activities and achievements reshape perceptions of Stoke-on-Trent and inspire greater pride in place.

Arts, creativity and cultural experiences

Placemaking	Economy	Identity
• Stoke-on-Trent exploits the cultural potential of public places, parks and green spaces; • Culture is used to make town centres and the City Centre more vibrant and appealing to workers, shoppers and visitors. • A vibrant programme of cultural events and experiences, as well as new and repurposed venues and spaces, transform the city's cultural offer, raising the city's profile and reshaping perceptions of Stoke-on-Trent as a place to live, work and play; • More national and regional cultural organisations have a presence in the city.	• More visitors are attracted to Stoke-on-Trent's vibrant cultural attractions, diverse experiences and stunning venues, growing the night time and visitor economies and the hospitality sector; • The creation of cultural attractions and experiences in towns centres drives increased footfall and spending, making local centres more prosperous; • Transformation of employment and skills opportunities in the city leads to increases in higher-value jobs and prosperity.	• Stoke-on-Trent develops to become an established national cultural destination with a diverse and attractive cultural offer to visitors and residents of all ages; • The growth and quality of Stoke-on-Trent's cultural offer changes external perceptions of the city and inspires greater pride in place among residents; • • National and regional cultural organisations and events contribute to the city's cultural offer and help to augment, promote and celebrate Stoke-on-Trent's cultural identity at a national level.

City of
Stoke-on-Trent