

Annual Report of the Portfolio holder for Arts, Culture, Leisure and Wellbeing 2022-2023

Last year my report came at a time when we could celebrate recovery and emergence from the impact of the pandemic. Our venues and services were able to start up again and look forward to regaining lost ground, which they certainly have done. So much has happened during the year. I can only pick out some highlights.

Development of the Council's strategic vision for culture and heritage.

Last year the Council commissioned the independent consultancy Counterculture to research and provide us with an evidence base for a cultural strategy. A summary of the data and analysis was presented to the first meeting of the Culture and Heritage Advisory Group in November and informed the drafting of a cultural strategy for the district with the working title *A Place to Create*. The Advisory Group which I chaired was well attended by many cultural and heritage practitioners across the district, keen to engage with the Council. The draft of the strategic framework was presented to the second meeting of the Advisory Group and to Cabinet and should be available soon in an on-line version. One compelling commitment in the Strategic framework is to "Broad, deep engagement, participation and inclusion in creativity and culture and heritage across all our neighbourhood communities". Many thanks to Richard Hammond, Service Manager, Culture and Heritage, and his colleagues, for their support and vital contribution to the formation of the strategic framework and the advisory group.

Events and festivals supported by the Council

- **Light Up Lancaster**, supported by the Dukes, Lancaster BID, the Arts Council and the Council, extended its range and innovative creations. It attracted an audience of over 55,700. 87% of respondents to a survey agreed that the event made them feel proud of Lancaster and there was much appreciation of the attention to access and participation. The festival generated close to £924 000 of economic impact.
- **Morecambe Sparkle's Baylight** in Morecambe. It was so exciting to see the first year of this light event which confidently met its target of over 10 000 visitors. Even in the rain the Promenade was alive and bustling.
- **Vintage by the Sea, conceived by Déco Publique**. This is such a vibrant asset for Morecambe. This year over £1.5m was generated with an audience over 45 000, nearly half coming from outside our District. The event celebrates all the beautiful things about Morecambe.
- **More Music's Catch the Wind Kite Festival** attracted 22 000 visitors, welcoming back the giant kites to the beach and the dance and music performances along the promenade.
- **Litfest** offered an intriguing and varied range of speakers and events. Events were free this year and could be accessed on-line as well.
- **Lancaster Grand Prix Cycle Race**. The 100 mile strenuous ride from Williamson Park attracted huge numbers to the Park to see them off and welcome them back. This year there was a women's race as well, so double the enjoyment.
- **Other successful events** supported by the Council: Brass bands in Happy Mount Park; Highest Point Festival; Pride in Lancaster and Morecambe; BBC Radio Lancashire Awards.

Venues We Support

- **The Platform**. Performances and events at the Platform achieved audiences of over 22 000 (excluding festivals), with 79 shows, 105 tremendously varied community events, 5 conferences, 11 shows for private hirers, plus the festivals. Arts Council funding was secured to attract a wider audience and was used to present new artists

and purchase a motorised access lift for artists in wheelchairs to access the stage independently.

- **The Dukes Theatre** Park show was a huge success with every ticket sold and 5* reviews. Community work includes the young carer programme working with the Barnardo's team, offering workshops and films for young carers. There are Globes link weekly music sessions free for refugee families, with supporting conversation and access to services.
- **More Music's** focus this year in their Arts Industry Week was on Climate Responsibility and environment practice within the arts. More Music has a Social Prescriber working with young people to identify activities to improve health and wellbeing. Sessions for older people help to combat loneliness, with tea, cake and music at Seagull Café.
- **Ludus dance** is developing its popular Public Health Dance and Education Project for Primary Schools, *The Alien needs our help*, and is planning a regular programme of dance activities with Ryelands Residents Association initiated with the Miss Baines project.
- **Our museums** have had a very busy year with the majority of work supporting the Council's Healthy and Happy Communities priority. Some of the many projects focusing on equity, diversity and inclusion:
 - a) Feeling as Seeing project, a £16 000 project in partnership with the School of Engineering at Lancaster University and Galloways Society for the Blind to develop 3D printed tactile relief versions of works of art;
 - b) Slavery Family Trees exhibition – partnership with the Lancaster Black History Group building on local community research
 - c) Abyssinia project – partnership with the King's Own Royal Regiment Trustees to explore a new understanding and interpretation of the controversial Napier Expedition in Ethiopia in 1867-8.
 - d) Hinge of Fate project working with Global Link on refugee experience in Lancaster in the second world war.
 - e) Dino Fest – partnership with the BID to attract people to visit the fossil experts in the City Museum. Dino Fest was a finalist in the Lancashire Tourism Awards.
 - f) An active and lively History Detectives Club.

Further work on the archaeology of the Roman fort site, covering the Bathhouse, Vicarage Fields and Quay Meadow, has seen the publication of the report into the Roman history of the site (and a likely discovery of a rare northern Romano-Celtic temple) and the formation of a Research Framework for the site by an expert Advisory Group.

- **Salt Ayre Leisure Centre's** attendance and membership now far exceeds pre-Covid levels and its wide-ranging and innovative offer serves the community in many ways:
 - a) Admissions since April 2022 are over 930 000; over 3700 members; 18 primary schools attend weekly for swimming lessons; 26 000 children have enjoyed energy soft play; income levels in key cost centres have increased by over £406 500; over 460 attending the Multisport SEN sessions.
 - b) An increase in the number of clinics for Community Midwives, supporting parents, with 30 babies welcomed each week.
 - c) Support sessions to Matilda's mission offering baby loss and child loss support.
 - d) Full involvement in Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme with exciting activity plans during school holidays, including den-building.
 - e) X-height indoor climbing with local primary schools and a bespoke SEN climbing club.
 - f) Working with the Housing Options Team to provide free physical activity for residents in supported accommodation.
 - g) Free membership to victims of domestic abuse.

- **The Storey.** This year the Storey has hosted many art exhibitions in its beautiful rooms and was involved in four major festivals. There is 100% occupancy for the tenanted spaces for those working in the arts and technology sectors. The reputation of the Storey was boosted by filming within the building for both Jonathan Ross and BBC Strictly Come Dancing.
- **Visitor Information Centres** Both VICs have been busy with over 55 000 visitor enquiries and an estimated gross income of £185 000. Eighty tourism and local businesses have been supported and event organisers have been able to work with the VICs to boost publicity and attendance. Facebook pages for Lancaster VIC reach nearly 105 000 and for Morecambe VIC it is over 144 000.
- **Morecambe Winter Gardens.** I am delighted to have helped ensure the financial support from the Council for the Winter Gardens Theatre that enabled it to secure over £2.7m from the Cultural Development Fund for its ambitious and exciting restoration and development plans.

Wellbeing. I attended regularly meetings of these organisations:

- **Lancaster District Food Justice Partnership.** This changed its name to reflect the need both to support those in food poverty and to campaign to end the reliance on food banks and to reduce food insecurity. One of the roles of LDFJP is to help administer the Household Support Fund which has been particularly important in enabling food clubs to continue operating and to encourage membership of the food cooperative Eggcup. A report documenting the impact of the cost-of-living crisis in our district has just been produced.
- **Health and Wellbeing Partnership.** This is contributing to the development of an Integrated Care Strategy, covering all the factors which affect the health and social needs of our local population. There is a focus on understanding the causes and tackling the inequalities which affect health. A recent health survey of the wards in Lancaster indicated very evident health inequities such as in respiratory diseases.
- **Community Safety Partnership.** There are regular briefings on areas of concern. Recently the focus was on the offence of Violence Against Person, mostly drink related, and the high rates in some wards. The Fire Service are working to improve vehicle and road safety and have been campaigning in schools for pupils to appreciate the impact of a car crash. Officers have been working on a Suicide Action Plan, to reduce suicide and support all those involved and affected.
- **Police and Crime Commissioner Panel.** I joined a Task and Finish Group of Panel members to scrutinise the work of the PCC in responding to Violence Against Women and Girls. One important aspect is ensuring confidence and trust in the victim support units. Currently there is lower confidence recorded by Domestic Abuse victims and it is important to understand the reasons, as victim support is needed to achieve successful prosecutions.

In February there were budget cuts to some of our arts and cultural Council services and venues. This was a very difficult decision, necessitated by government cutbacks, and has been hard for many to accept. I hope that the impact of the cuts will not be long-term and that alternative solutions are applied soon.

Cllr Sandra Thornberry
Cabinet member for Arts, Culture, Leisure and Wellbeing

April 2023