

# Cultural Strategy

Enriching our Communities through  
Culture and Creativity

Somerset West  
and Taunton



# Contents

<b>04</b>	Introduction
<b>08</b>	The Vision
<b>10</b>	Benefits
<b>12</b>	Place
<b>14</b>	People
<b>16</b>	Prosperity
<b>20</b>	Leadership and delivery
<b>22</b>	Photo credits
<b>23</b>	Glossary and definitions



The Doubles Performance, Goodland Gardens, Taunton  
Somerfest 2018, aKa Dance Theatre Company

# Caroline Ellis

**Councillor,  
Somerset West  
and Taunton  
council**  
Executive Portfolio  
Holder for Culture



Culture and creativity make life worth living, shape who we are and keep our district prosperous.

Our district has cultural, heritage and natural assets as well as energy, creativity and community spirit in abundance. We have legions of artists and creatives, designers, artisans, street fairs, wassails, carnivals and festivals. We have cultural and creative hubs not just in our county town Taunton (with its acclaimed theatre, museum, arts-led University Centre and so much more) but also in Minehead, Dunster, Porlock and Watchet on our beautiful coast, Dulverton, Wellington, Wiveliscombe and the 10 Parishes. It's why people like me return home, to where they grew up, to get a better quality of life for their children, set up business and be part of a community.

As a council we are the lynchpin of a strong partnership of district-wide arts and culture groups determined to build on this richness. We step in when heritage assets are at risk. We enable access to sites and open spaces for innovative arts projects. We demand good design to preserve the beauty of our built environment. We champion the cultural sector and creative industries. We invest strategically, where it really matters. Above all we bring people together and provide leadership.

Together we are on a mission to ensure everyone - no matter their income or background and no matter where they live - can enjoy inclusive and relevant culture whether in the form of theatre, art, laughter, live music, stories, film or dance. We want people of all ages and backgrounds to be able to express their own creativity - whether that is building a career in the creative industries or simply for confidence and wellbeing.

This cultural strategy is a springboard to a better future. Help us make it happen.



## “Supporting the enhancement of culture provision within the District”

### Introduction

Somerset West & Taunton has the energy and leadership to make a vibrant creative and cultural offer to meet our ambitions. Our Corporate Strategy 2019-23 firmly states this intention to **“support the enhancement of arts and culture provision within the District”**

The process of writing this strategy and its action plan has thrown a spotlight on the creative and cultural assets we have and what we need to do to support them in becoming a corner stone for our ambitions. It has enabled us to take stock and lay out how we can achieve **“a dynamic and prosperous community founded on knowledge, culture and business”** (Taunton Garden Town Vision).

As the UK faces the challenges of the 21st century, 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 our place resilient and outward looking depends on creative activities of all kinds – in our professional and personal lives, in the local economy and civil society.



The 10 Parishes Festival is firmly established as a major West Somerset celebration of the visual and performing arts

Government funding has been directed into cities and failing coastal towns where cultural consortia and strong local government leadership have seized the opportunity to fashion fresh identities, strengthen the economy and imbue a sense of pride and place for their localities. It is envisaged that the Government's funding focus will shift to benefit towns and rural areas, and together with emergency Covid-19 support funding, this could present funding opportunities for Somerset West and Taunton. This strategy is however being written within a challenging funding context that sees strained local government funds, relatively low levels of Arts Council England (ACE) funding directed to rural areas compared to urban and cities.

This strategy aligns with ACE's 10 year strategy 2020-2030 - 'Let's Create'. SWT council hopes to demonstrate its understanding of the national significance of a local cultural strategy, therefore increasing the likelihood of funding from ACE.

The three themes within this cultural strategy also align well with 'Let's Create' themes of Creative People, Cultural Communities and a Creative and Cultural Country, as well as the ACE investment principles of inclusivity and diversity, dynamism and innovation and environmental responsibility.

Somerset West & Taunton's Corporate Strategy and Taunton Garden Town Vision have recognised the long-term challenge of **climate change** and our geography is

particularly vulnerable with a coastline, waterways, flood plains and agricultural industry. SWT was among the first 500 regional councils worldwide to declare a climate emergency and mitigating policies and strategies are in place to define our actions. Treating climate change as a 'cross-cutting' theme, we see that the creative industries can help convey complex messages about climate change to communities and want to foster relationships between environmental and creative partners that can result in projects that enhance our environment whilst promoting sustainability.



Public art enhancing Minehead's sea front



## Why a Cultural Strategy?

Creativity and culture can bring prosperity, enhance health and wellbeing and create a sense of place. Somerset West & Taunton want to grow a vibrant creative and culturally rich environment that will help achieve the vision and ambitions we have for our District and Taunton Garden Town.

The Council's Corporate Strategy 2019-2023 states the Council's intention to **support the enhancement of arts and culture provision within the District.**

This strategy further sets out that strategic commitment to shaping our District around a Creative Economy that includes harnessing the power of our Arts and Heritage and supporting local creative industries – with refocused objectives to respond to the economic and social recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Who is this strategy for?

Representatives from key cultural organisations across Somerset West and Taunton have a shared recognition of a need for a cultural strategy, and have come together with the council to form a Cultural Forum to shape this strategy. This strategy is therefore for the council and its partners and stakeholders to establish culture as a shared strategic agenda, and to further develop goals and a delivery plan – with alignment to and support of key stakeholders and funders at national (eg Government, Arts Council England), regional (eg Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership) and local level.

## What area does this strategy relate to?

The area is diverse in its characteristics – national parks and areas of outstanding beauty, heritage sites, protected coastlines, harbour towns and characterful market towns and the County town of Taunton. This cultural strategy's action plan will support the Taunton Garden Town's vision in creating a dynamic and prosperous community founded on knowledge, culture and business. It will also support and help sustain the locally led, culture-focused recovery partnerships and initiatives in our other key town centres which we have assisted with funding from our economic growth and prosperity fund. Our strategy focuses on the areas of cultural regeneration that will be most effective in the short, medium and long term with achievable deliverables.



# The Vision

The Wellington Monument is a Grade 2 listed heritage asset and has been recently repaired



## What do we want to achieve?

Through harnessing our creativity and cultural assets we want to create:

- A place where people of all ages and backgrounds can experience quality culture on their doorstep; be creative, entertained, inspired and challenged
- A place to learn new skills and find rewarding careers; or simply socialise and play, feel fulfilled and breathe fresh air
- A place with a distinct and positive identity where people and creative enterprises want to put down their roots, grow and blossom



Taunton Flower Show, or "The Chelsea of the West", is held at Taunton's stunning Vivary Park



The Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre is a significant cultural asset and well-loved venue with a diverse artistic offer that is rooted in its community - the cultural heart of Somerset



High quality Rural Touring performances - taking arts to where people live, and enabling rural communities to re-engage with social and cultural life within the safety of their own locality

# Benefits

Creative industries and wider creative economy have an impact across many agendas and can help in the development of solutions to the grand challenges that society faces today – health and wellbeing, inclusive or 'good' growth, environmental issues, regeneration of rural areas, towns and cities – as well as rebuilding strong and resilient communities.

There are intrinsic 'cultural impacts', such as people having the opportunity to be creative or enjoy culture and entertainment. But there are equally some key extrinsic social, economic and environmental benefits resulting from in a strong local creative economy.

More detailed work and data research is still needed on measuring the impact

and value of investment in the cultural sector, however the following are the 6 Value Domains which can be measured to gauge the value of investment and impact on the wider community:



Hestercombe House and Gardens has undergone acclaimed restoration works and continues to develop and grow giving visitors a stunning setting to explore, learn and relax



'Cultural activity is what makes us human' – Dunster by Candlelight is one of the cultural highlights of the year. A magical festival with a famous lantern procession through the beautiful medieval village, providing entertainment for all with street performance, folk music and carol singing.



**Personal** value (contribution to personal enrichment and wellbeing) – fun and pleasure, personal enrichment

**Cultural** value (contribution to culturally rich and vibrant communities) – cultural heritage, sense of place

**Social** value (contribution to healthy, safe, inclusive communities) – social cohesion, respect and tolerance

**Civic** value (contribution to democratic and engaged communities) – civic image and reputation, community pride

**Environmental** value (contribution to sustainable built and natural environments in communities) – respect for environment, balanced development

**Economic** value (contribution to economically prosperous communities) – local employment and enterprise



# Place

## Create a sense of place and belonging

We have wonderful natural resources and some great cultural assets and heritage and people can easily access countryside on foot or cycle directly from our towns. A new administrative council has brought stronger leadership and fresh energy to match the vigour and a determination of our creative and cultural sector to enliven and enrich our area.

### Our key challenges and opportunities are to:

- Harness our natural, arts and heritage assets to define our distinctiveness and increase our cultural profile
- Be ambitious for our cultural venues and support them in delivering quality
- Provide the kind of cultural environment that attracts young people and skilled workers
- Provide high quality, sustainably designed buildings that allow new and existing communities to create distinct neighbourhoods

### The priority objectives to address these challenges are to:

- Articulate a narrative that tells the story of our landscape, independent history and cultural heritage that will give our district a strong identity that people can relate to and find compelling
- Germinate and grow sustainable arts and cultural venues as hubs that foster excellence in the region

- Enable our creative sector to input influence and shape our built environment and public realm
- Enrich our public realm by joining up our green spaces, waterways, parks and play spaces, planting more street trees and woodlands and managing our water imaginatively with wetlands and rain gardens for recreation, tourism and wildlife



Willow Cathedral (Longrun Meadow, Taunton) - "we have wonderful natural resources and some great cultural assets"

# People



Fuse Outdoor Arts Somerfest – “Together we are on a mission to ensure everyone – no matter their income or background and no matter where they live - can enjoy inclusive and relevant culture” (Cllr Caroline Ellis)



## Nurture and thrive

We know that from speaking to people that there is appetite for cultural activity - people want the intellectual and creative stimulation that nearby cities provide. The performing arts and particularly music attract most engagement and participation from our communities.

As industry changes, there will be a need for people to acquire different skills and among them will be critical and creative thinking skills; we need to help provide opportunities to acquire and practice these skills. We must also do more to increase the wellbeing of our people and provide reasons to settle and stay.

Over the last ten years, creative subjects have been squeezed in the educational curriculum resulting in limited access to arts in schools. Yet we know that cultural activity enables young people to grow in confidence and find their own identity.

### Our key challenges and opportunities are to enable:

- Fair access to culture for all communities across our area and for all people regardless of socio-economic background, gender identity, sexuality, disability or ethnicity

- Young people to gain employment skills for the industries of the future, find creative pathways and fulfilling careers
- Everyone to lead an active, healthier and happier life
- Creatively-inclined returners or unemployed workers to retrain for work in the cultural sector or creative industries and set up creative micro-businesses

### The priority objectives to address these challenges are to:

- Support our creative, arts and heritage sectors so they are able to provide quality cultural experiences for people of all ages and backgrounds
- Provide the cultural activity young people want and need and offer them pathways to creative careers
- Attract entrepreneurs to support greater numbers of start-ups and nurture innovation and collaboration amongst the business and cultural community
- Encourage healthy, active lifestyles and positive emotional wellbeing by harnessing the power of nature and

creativity. For example, we can use the arts to drive engagement with our beautiful landscape and treasured blue and green spaces (many of which are art forms in their own right!) – something which can boost physical and mental health, strengthen the desire to protect our environment while also inspiring creativity

- Work with and support our creative and cultural sector, enabling input into the design and delivery of projects that enhance the public realm and offer health and wellbeing benefits

# Prosperity

## Restart, Revitalise, and Grow

The **Cultural sector** (non-profit) and **Creative industries** (commercial) have been hit hard by Covid-19 and the ill-effects will last longer than for other sectors of the economy. Equally, the Council recognises creative enterprises and freelancers will have a huge part to play in leading the country out of the crisis, and as we move into the recovery phase, it will be important to remember the role culture and creativity have played during lockdown and consider how they can be used in rebuilding our way of life.

Culture-led regeneration has been shown to deliver a broad range of social

and economic impacts. Gaining Garden Town status also means Taunton is in a stronger position to attract inward investment that will support our ambition to make our county town a cultural hub in the region. At its centre Taunton has the world class Somerset County Cricket Ground, Brewhouse Theatre and Museum of Somerset. The potential for a new performing arts centre is being explored to match a dedicated cultural quarter. Projects are underway or planned elsewhere that include: the provision of a state of the art creative hub at the historic Watchet Harbour; the creation of a new Country Park on the outskirts of Taunton; the development of Hestercombe House and Gardens; the potential development of Wellington Tone Works and Tonedale Mill and a new place and people oriented economic development plan for Minehead with culture at its heart.



Wellington Tone Works is an important Heritage at Risk site (along with Tonedale Mill) with exciting potential for development in the foreseeable future as new cultural and commercial asset, eg space for performance, exhibitions, creative industries / workshops etc



### Our key challenges and opportunities are to:

- Create a dynamic and prosperous district founded on knowledge, culture and business
- Facilitate the growth of the creative industries and arts and heritage sector
- Provide better visitor experiences and strengthened evening economy through a broad range of cultural offers
- Ensure a better quality of life for people in the round, beyond what can be measured by GDP

### The priority objectives to address these challenges are to:

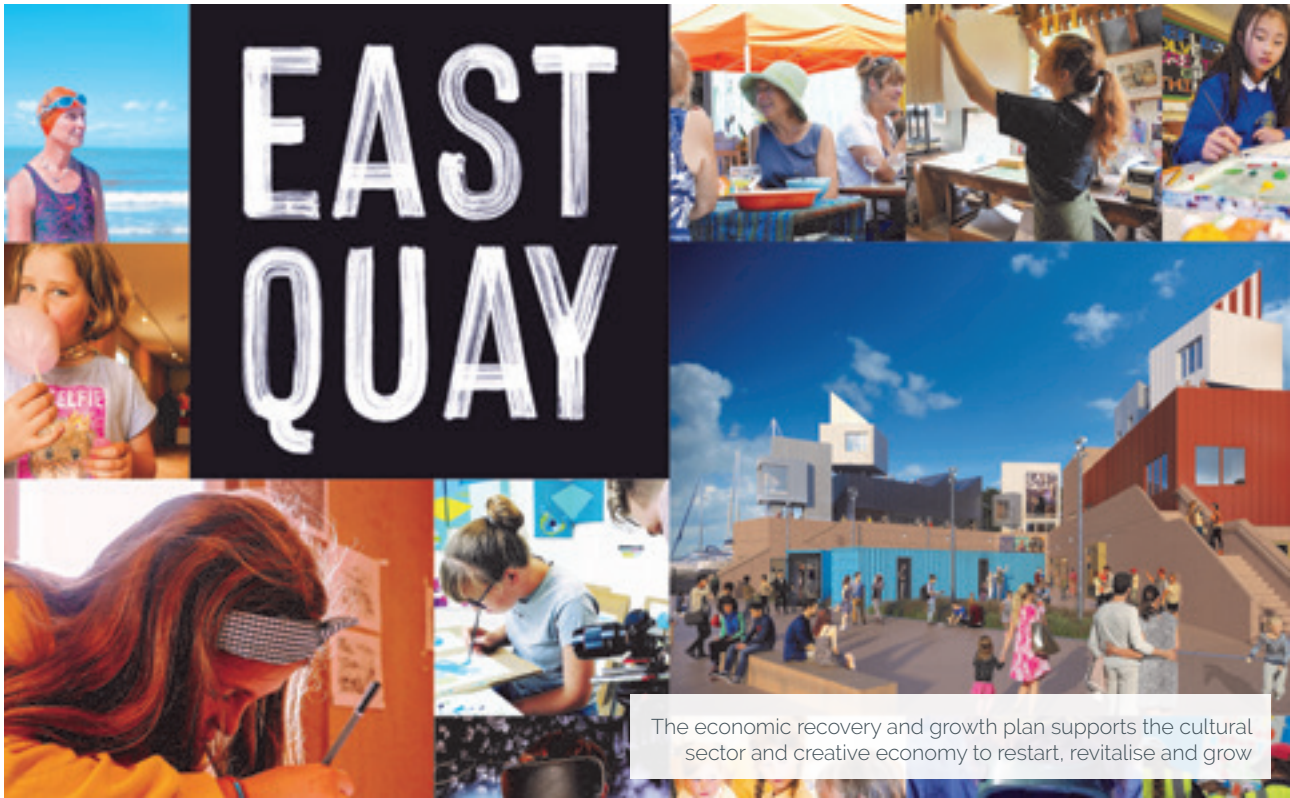
- Value health and wellbeing as well as GDP ensuring people can access

the cultural experiences they need to bloom and prosper

- Ensure that the Covid Economic Recovery and Growth Plan for the County and our District supports the Cultural sector and Creative Economy to restart, revitalise and grow – through activities and interventions that:
  - Support employment, skills and economic inclusion
  - Help business and the sector to grow and become more productive
  - Provide the infrastructure needed to enable growth

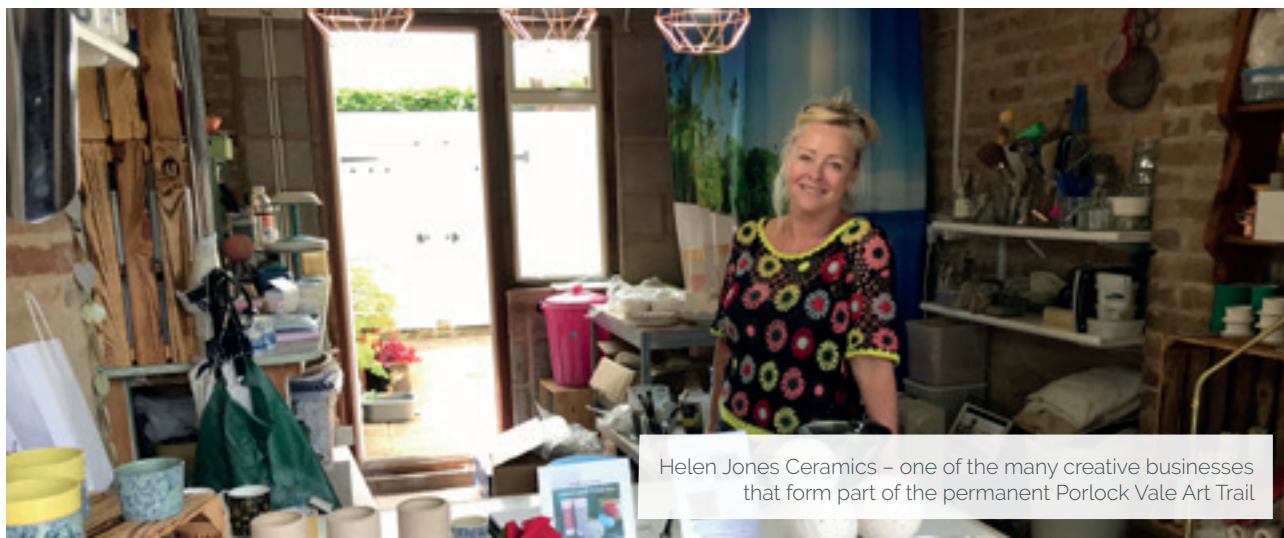
- Create attractive places and homes to live in

- Be bold, ambitious and strategic and invest in our cultural assets, and work with other building or land owners to make sure the needs of creative enterprises are considered
- Attract entrepreneurs to support greater numbers of start-ups and stimulate innovation and collaboration amongst the business and cultural sector
- Ensure equality of access to quality creative and cultural experiences for communities and audiences across Somerset West and Taunton



The economic recovery and growth plan supports the cultural sector and creative economy to restart, revitalise and grow

Artist's Impression of  
Riverside, Coal Orchard



Helen Jones Ceramics – one of the many creative businesses  
that form part of the permanent Porlock Vale Art Trail



# Leadership and delivery

## To be successful we recognise we have to change minds and working methods and adopt creative ways to support the sector

To do this we will:

- Promote understanding and respect for the creative industries and arts and heritage sector and the role they play in creating place, driving economy, health and wellbeing
- Advocate for our outstanding cultural partners across council, the region, nationally and internationally
- Cultivate sustainable working relationships with the creative industries and arts partners
- Model and promote joined up working across council and organisations
- Establish an internal cultural task-force that will ensure cross-department strategic implementation and delivery of our cultural strategy
- Adopt imaginative ways to fund and support our creative industries and arts and heritage organisations and employ transparency in our decision making
- Advocate for the value and importance of creative and cultural experiences



World arts exhibition at the CICCIC celebrating original art from over 30 artists from around the world



Brainchild of local artist collective, Go Create, Taunton's Rainbow Path (the first in the UK) reflects the district's pride in inclusivity and determination to create public spaces that are beautiful and bring happiness



## The delivery plan

Working with our partners and key stakeholders (ie the Cultural Forum), we are developing and starting to implement a clear delivery plan for the objectives in this strategy. In the short-term, the focus is on the 're-start' phase as Covid lockdown measures are eased. Longer-term, as we move into the 'revitalise and grow' phase, it is hoped this strategy will unlock additional local resources – money, skills and property – for strategic creative and cultural projects, and also increase success in attracting additional external resources.

Members of the artistic, cultural and creative industries and communities can support the council with working knowledge and first-hand sector experience. We are embedding a collaborative and partnership approach to harness the wealth of experience available in the district – seeing arts organisations, venues, museums, libraries, gardens and festivals as part of a living organism of culture, each playing a key role in the creative ecosystem.

The Council's role in delivering the strategy will be made clear in terms of the distinction between being an enabler, facilitator or deliverer. This level of detail

will be shown in the delivery plan - there are some things the council will make happen, and there are other things that third parties will do but which the council will seek to support. The council will use the 'levers' at its disposal (ie key policies and strategies, assets and infrastructure, investment and funding, and local capacity building), underpinned by its role in leading and convening to further support the local creative economy.

# Photo credits

<b>Page 03</b>	Fuse
<b>Page 05</b>	Aga Karmolinska
<b>Page 06</b>	SWT/Paula Kirby
<b>Page 07</b>	Quantock Hills AONB
<b>Page 08</b>	National Trust Images/Chris Lacey, SWT/Craig Stone
<b>Page 09</b>	Taunton Theatre Trust, Brewhouse, Take Art/Darren Honeywill
<b>Page 10</b>	Hestercombe Gardens Trust
<b>Page 11</b>	Liz Mitchell
<b>Page 13</b>	SWT/Craig Stone
<b>Page 15</b>	Clayton Jane/Fuse
<b>Page 17</b>	Claire Fear
<b>Page 18</b>	Onion Collective CIC, Contains Art CIO, Jesse Roth, Ellis Williams Architects, Two Rivers Paper
<b>Page 19</b>	AHR & Lavigne Lonsdale, Deborah Stanyon
<b>Page 20</b>	CICCIC
<b>Page 23</b>	Take Art

Take Art Louder is not Always Clearer – Mr and Mrs Clarke, Churchinford Village



# Glossary and definitions

## Culture

We define **Culture** as:

**The things that define who we are, encompassing actions and activities\* which have the capacity to transform, challenge, reassure and inspire and that give a place and people a distinct identity.**

\*activities include but are not exclusively limited too: the recreational, educational and professional engagement and participation in the all the creative arts, performing arts and music, craft, design and heritage.

## Creativity

Our definition of **Creativity** adopts that of Arts Council England:

**Creativity describes the process through which people apply their knowledge, skill and intuition to imagine, conceive, express or make something that wasn't there before.**

## Creative industries

Our definition of the **Creative Industries** follows that of the UK Government Department of Culture, Media and Sport:

**Creative Industries are those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.**



# Contact Us

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