

Bournemouth Christchurch Poole Cultural Enquiry



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FOREWORD

By the Partnership



Luke Jerram's Museum of the Moon. This extraordinary installation was presented in St Peter's Church in 2019. It was the headline installation of Dorset Moon – a project produced in consortium by three Dorset festivals - Inside Out Dorset (run by Activate), Arts by the Sea and bSide Festivals. The St Peter's Church event was produced by the Arts by the Sea festival (Sherbourne Abbey by Activate and Nothe Fort by bSide), through the work of Activate Performing Arts and commissioned by the Arts Development Company.

1. Introduction

The Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Cultural Enquiry, which took place throughout 2019, is the first ‘whole place’ process of review, engagement and visioning for culture of any new local authority in the UK. The Cultural Enquiry was established at the same time as the UK’s newest city region came into being, recognising the long-term commitment that each of the three councils has made to culture and the realisation that it will be central to the future success of the new unitary authority of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP).

Darren Henley, Chief Executive of Arts Council England, clearly set out the challenge and opportunity for partners across BCP at the launch of the Cultural Enquiry in February 2019:

“Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole councils have an exceptional track record of investing in art and culture, which can be seen through the superb range of creative work produced in the region. The local government reorganisation presents a unique chance for culture to be put at the heart of this coastal region’s strategy and further develop its sense of place. We’re proud to be supporting this long-term vision for the new unitary authority and we look forward to seeing the recommendations made for the future prosperity of BCP.”

The Cultural Enquiry was founded by an ambitious new consortium of partners – the then three councils (now BCP Council), Arts Council England, Arts University Bournemouth, Bournemouth

University, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, The Lighthouse and Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership. These partners were represented at the Board which oversaw the Cultural Enquiry¹. A wider partnership of cultural and education organisations, enterprises and charities, networks and individuals, also contributed to the Enquiry governance model as the Cultural Enquiry advisors.

The Cultural Enquiry was initiated to shape a shared ambition and collective opportunity for BCP as a place of culture. Together, the three main centres – Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole – have an incredibly rich, diverse, engaging and distinctive cultural offer. With their many neighbourhoods and districts; parks and gardens; heritage assets and contemporary cultural venues, hubs and programmes; and with the beach and coastline that joins them together; the towns of BCP contribute toward a conurbation of culture of a scale comparable to Bristol.

Yet historically, the collective cultural offer has not been coordinated to deliver a ‘whole place’ or conurbation-wide approach to cultural planning, partnership and investment. Arts Council England (ACE) investment in Bristol is 3.6 times more than in BCP (2016-19). This is in the most part due to a relative lack of applications for project and strategic funding from BCP – symptomatic of a capacity issue which is limiting the demand for funding. With the new unitary authority comes a new opportunity: to re-imagine a conurbation-wide cultural offer, to build something bigger and better, to grow capacity and demand, to catalyse new organisations which could one day become national portfolio organisations for ACE, and thus for culture to be impactful across a range of strategic agendas – from health and wellbeing to the economy.

¹ And they commissioned Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy to deliver it: www.tfconsultancy.co.uk

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Parameters of the Cultural Enquiry

The Cultural Enquiry does not operate as a standard 'cultural strategy' where a process of baseline mapping is followed by a range of consultation exercises, which form a set of priorities and actions. Rather, the Cultural Enquiry is a programme of active engagement on the role of and values for culture in BCP. It has involved a facilitated journey of events which were set up to provoke discussion on the relative qualities of culture in BCP, the range of distinctive assets, the set of particular challenges, and the aspirations and ideas for culture to play a central role in place-making for the next generation.

Vitaly, the Cultural Enquiry has explored, with over 1,000 people, what culture means for them. Through a programme of events, workshops and interviews; and via social media and formal written submissions; the Cultural Enquiry has solicited a multitude of perspectives on the role of culture in BCP; and it has sought to grasp how partners can ensure culture plays a starring role in the future.

To inspire, provoke and listen, the Cultural Enquiry has brought a portfolio of cultural experts from across Europe to BCP. This has included leading thinkers on the role of culture for cities and some eminent professionals who have successfully led processes of culture-led change and helped fashion new types of partnership, investment and programming in culture. These experts have helped to generate fresh perspectives on the relative qualities of BCP and to build a sense of urgency and collective ambition for culture across the conurbation.

The Cultural Enquiry culminated in an open workshop and reflection event at The Lighthouse Poole, where participants talked of the

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journey they have been on and of the absolute imperative now to put culture to the heart of the core strategies which will shape the future of BCP. Notably, these are the Local Plan, the Corporate Plan and the Local Industrial Strategy (of the Dorset LEP).

But perhaps most importantly, participants talked of the collective opportunity: to grow from the energy of the Cultural Enquiry and work together to ensure cultural partnerships strengthen. This is to guarantee, from a conurbation level to the neighbourhoods, that culture defines BCP as a great place in which to live, work, visit and invest.



Above: Arts by the Sea – BCP's flagship festival, which is supported by Arts Council England as an NPO. There are plans to extend it across the conurbation as a major producing festival for the region.

Culture at a time of strategic change

This Cultural Enquiry comes at a time not only of considerable strategic change for BCP and Dorset. The establishment of BCP as a unitary authority or a city region of over 400,000 people, makes it one of the largest places in southern England. At the same time, Dorset as a county has become a unitary authority, with the renewed sense of purpose and direction that it brings.

In BCP, the new **Corporate Strategy** and **Local Plan** can, as an outcome of the Cultural Enquiry, put culture front and centre. This is to ensure BCP is a beacon authority in the following areas:

- **Culture and talent:** embracing creative education, building a creative workforce, championing diverse cultural expressions, and enabling people of all backgrounds to actively participate in the cultural life of their communities and the conurbation as a whole.
- **Cultural infrastructure:** with a commitment to building cultural capacity, leveraging the excellence of existing hubs, venues and organisations, and boosting BCP as a place that produces and hosts great art and culture of international significance
- **Culture and place:** embedding culture as a tool for planning, with a focus on nurturing distinctive neighbourhoods, dynamic town centres, accessible and imaginative public realm, urban mobility, and an attention to social cohesion health and wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

The BCP Local Plan will determine how the city region will develop over the coming decades, including how it will meet identified needs for new infrastructure (such as in education, healthcare, homes and social care), improved transportation, sustainable growth, new jobs and stronger communities.

The BCP Local Plan will chart how best it will respond to the challenges and opportunities that it will face over the coming decades. These include demographic change. Dorset has the UK's oldest population and lowest proportion of under 50s with one person working for every pensioner by 2040. Coping with this will require real innovation in housing, health and social care. It will also require an uplift in the capacity of the cultural sector to make a difference to the quality of people's lives.

Related to this is a significant labour market challenge with predictions that half the current workforce may need to be replaced in the next 15 years. Retaining existing workers and attracting new skilled workers to the area is very much a priority and culture can play a compelling role to influence the locational decisions of the future workforce.

In addition, and most urgently, climate change and the need for a carbon neutral future mean that BCP will need to make some brave and imaginative decisions through its Local Plan: to reduce congestion, encourage more eco-friendly and healthier modes of transport with better connected communities. Culture can also play a role here – because environmental responsibility is in reality a cultural proposition – a set of values which inform a set of customs on how to live responsibly.

These demographic and environmental issues are also central to questions of economic growth, notably how to grow both inclusively and sustainably. The **Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership** (LEP)

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is grappling with these issues and is currently developing its Local Industrial Strategy to be agreed with the Government in 2020. This which will steer the economic future of the County and conurbation. The Government's Industrial Strategy sets out five foundations for future growth, which fit the strengths of Dorset well: people, Infrastructure, business environment and place.

The Dorset Local Industrial Strategy will focus on growing and diversifying the established sectors of financial services, tourism and environmental economy and advanced manufacturing, engineering, creative technology and agritech/aquaculture. Together, these industries will grow as the 'Dorset Collaborative Cluster', with 'creative & culture' vital to their innovation, attractiveness and competitiveness:

“Making Dorset a place of exceptional culture and quality, releasing the potential of the very best creative and cultural businesses, and unlocking innovation and imagination in all that we do.”

BCP is the key aggregator for this collaborative cluster. Creative and cultural sectors are particularly strong here, with nearly 4,000 jobs in digital technology generating £363 million in Gross Value Added for the economy² with strengths in visual effects, animation and cyber security.

² Technation 2018 report

³ Including BFX, the UK's largest visual effects and gaming festival; Silicon South, a European funded project designed to provide support for digital SMEs through accelerator activities, investment and specialist support.

The foundations of this are supported by the two universities (Arts University Bournemouth and Bournemouth University) as well as festivals³ and key cultural hubs and venues.

Arts Council England is playing a vital investment and mediation role across these areas of economy, environment and place. Its support for the cultural ecology of BCP is helping talent to flourish, inspiring audiences and enhancing the overall quality of place. Arts Council England currently invests over £18.25 million (2018-21) in 8 National Portfolio Organisations in BCP and environs, each of which is driving innovation and growth across the arts and cultural sector of BCP and delivering a range of social outcomes which are critical to the health, wellbeing, confidence and cohesion of the conurbation.

These shining lights in the cultural ecosystem have also played a starring role in hosting and convening consultations throughout the Cultural Enquiry. They are:

Pavilion Dance South West
Arts by the Sea (via BCP Council)
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra
Poole Museum Service
The Lighthouse (Poole Arts Trust)
Diverse City
Activate
Artsreach.

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In addition, Arts Council England is investing in multiple activities and organisations via its project funding and strategic funds. This includes other shining lights such as Bournemouth Emerging Arts Fringe (BEAF) Festival, with its radical and inclusive programming; and The Arts Development Company (based in Dorchester), which plays a hugely enriching role providing support, advice and network development for the arts and cultural sectors across Dorset. Plus, Arts Council England, with the local authority and via national and European funds, has been an important investor in numerous health, wellbeing and cultural education programmes.

Yet Arts Council England also recognises that BCP can achieve much more through its culture and the scale facilitated by the new unitary authority is a game-changer in terms of the kind of infrastructure, the level of programming, and the social and environmental influence culture can and should have in a city region of this size.

Arts Council England, working closely with partners across BCP, see the Cultural Enquiry as a rallying cry for culture and as an energising process which will help partners in BCP to renew, re-engage and begin 2020 with the launch of the BCP Culture Compact: a new strategic partnership programme that will secure a great cultural future for the conurbation.



The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (BSO), is the only professional orchestra outside the UK's big cities. The BSO's ground-breaking work with professional disabled musicians has provided inspiration to hundreds of children in BCP Special schools, including the Victoria Education Centre in Poole.

Pavilion Dance is the dance agency for the South West, and recently hosted the National Dance Showcase, across Bournemouth and Poole.



2. The Cultural Enquiry Journey

The Cultural Enquiry has worked over 10 months across BCP to facilitate animated conversations which enhance networking, convene purposeful dialogue on the key issues and opportunities for culture, and collect evidence to inform a set of strategic themes and priorities for culture in BCP.

Over 1,000 people have actively engaged in over 50 events and platforms. These included:

February: Launch event at Arts University Bournemouth, including introductions from Darren Henley, Chief Executive of Arts Council England, and Professor Stuart Bartholomew, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Arts University Bournemouth.

March: Technology and the Arts workshop hosted by Pavilion Dance South West, facilitated by Dick Penny of Watershed Bristol.

March: Placemaking and culture open space event, hosted by The Lighthouse, with speakers including Dom Jinks of Exeter Culture, Libby Battaglia from Light up Poole, and Elspeth McBain of The Lighthouse.

April: People and the Arts workshop, hosted by Poole Museum, with a contribution from Oli Rantala of Oulu Municipality, Finland, Colette Bailey of Metal, Southend, Michael Spender of Poole Museums and Phil Hallett of Coda.

May: Health, wellbeing and communities event, hosted by Highcliffe Castle in Christchurch, featuring Val Birchall of Coventry City Council and Ruth Eastgate from Blackpool Grand Theatre.

May: International partnerships and excellence, hosted by the Eco Hub in Poole's Dolphin Centre, with Carlos Martins, ex-Director of Guimarães, European Capital of Culture 2012, and Dougie Scarfe, Chief executive of the BSO.

June: Survey of young people launched – led by Digipigz.

July: Cultural Ecologies and approaches to cultural planning, hosted by Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum with leading international cultural planning expert Professor Franco Bianchini and Director of Coventry, UK City of Culture 2021, Chenine Bhatena.

October: Council member briefing with newly elected BCP councillors, hosted by Pavilion Dance South West.

October: Closing prioritisation workshop, hosted by The Lighthouse, with interventions from a range of key strategic partners.

The process has also included many smaller meetings with local cultural networks and groups, cultural, education and health organisations, plus many individuals, including Power House in Poole and the Bournemouth Emerging Arts Fringe (BEAF) in Boscombe.

The Cultural Enquiry website has provided a platform for dissemination and feedback throughout the process. It also included a Cultural Enquiry Blogspot: www.culturalequiry.co.uk

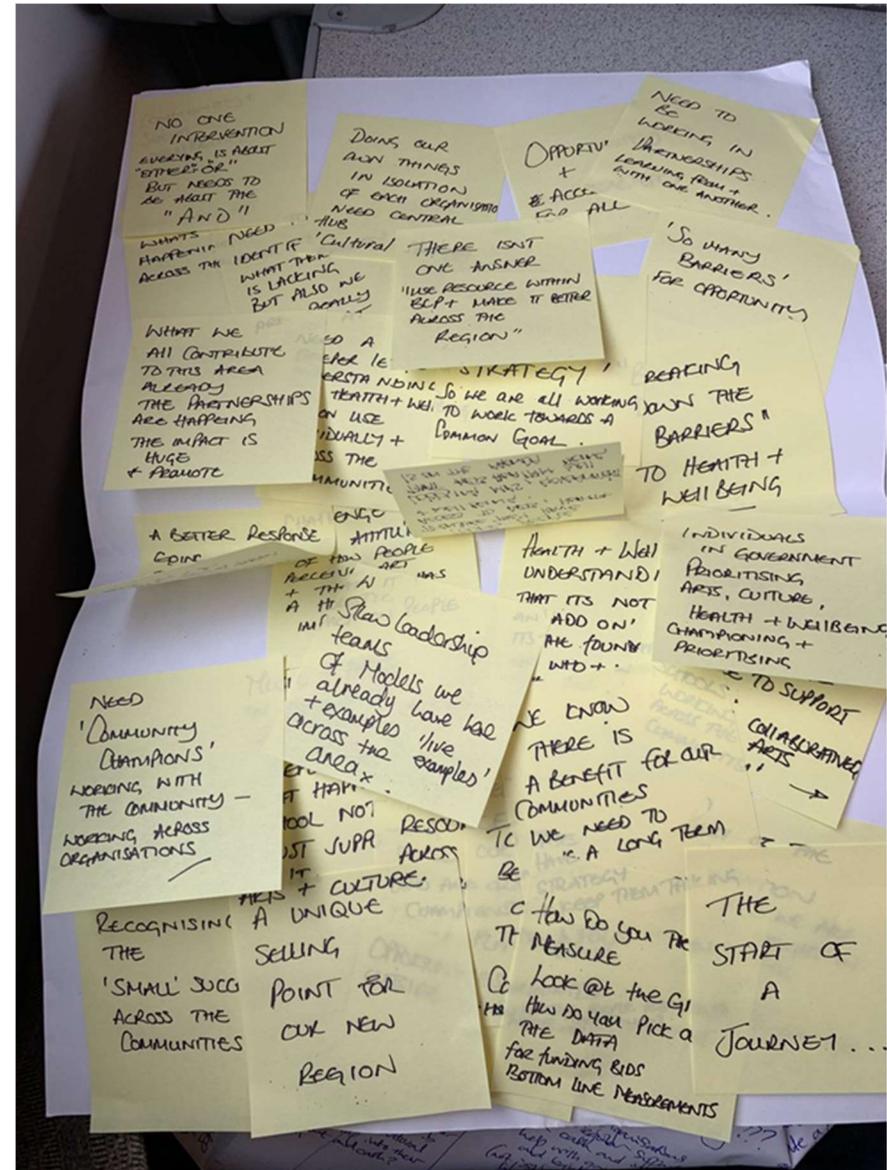
The Cultural Enquiry Twitter platform has generated a rich mix of perspectives: @culturalenquiry

A series of formal 'written submissions' were also provided by individuals and organisations across BCP.

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The Cultural Enquiry involved many events and workshops, including these at Pavilion Dance South West (on art and tech); and at Highcliffe Castle (on culture, health and wellbeing)



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Why Culture Matters

Comments from written submissions to the Cultural Enquiry

“Arts and culture increase cultural tourism which is a big driver for economic growth and creation of jobs as well as the positive knock on effect to hotel bookings, meals out and footfall in towns and shopping centres. Arts and culture help shape a place and in particular local identities – supporting BCP to embrace and promote local distinctiveness whilst being able to develop a new brand and offer for local people/visitors, businesses and people moving to the area.”

Sarah James, Arts Development Company Dorset.

“So, what needs to change? Well here I shall speak from my experience as a visual artist. Practically there needs to be better provision of public exhibition space. It needs to be high quality, designed for the purpose and accessible to local artists.... in these confusing and stressful times, we actually need the arts more than ever, for community cohesion, identity, hope and for very sound economic reasons. The future economy of the BCP area relies on bringing high quality employers to the area. High quality employers with well paid employees who need a healthy creative ecology surrounding them. We have the opportunity to create a bright new future so utterly different from anything we've seen here before.”

Rob Hughes (Artist)



Chaplin's Café, Boscombe

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“BCP has a few established publicly funded arts, culture and heritage organisations - not many considering its size. There is a good range of work covered between them and they interact with residents and visitors to the city in different ways. Pitching BCP as a contemporary, progressive city of the future will be helped considerably by galvanising and shouting about the great cultural offer already available and presenting pretty good value for money. Now is the time to consolidate the prior cultural interests of the independent authorities into this new merged city by finding ways to weave the benefit they bring to the area across other priorities (e.g. innovation, talent recruitment, communities, diversity, health, wellbeing).”

Zannah Doan Artistic Director/Chief Executive, Pavilion Dance South West.

“There is considerable cultural expertise and ability in the BCP area that could be harnessed into delivering a vibrant cultural programme. But that needs to be identified and brought on board. And that hidden capacity will probably need some form of financial investment, support, reward or incentivisation.”

Paul Kelly, Culture Futures and We Write Bids



*Above: BEAF – an independent festival of huge potential.
Below: AUB – a hub for creative talent.*



3. Culture in Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole

The Cultural Enquiry has brought to life what many already know: that Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole have some incredible cultural assets, that the range of distinctive places generate a rich mix of cultural qualities, and that when put together, these contribute toward BCP being a great place to live with an enviable quality of life.

Many people have told the Enquiry that culture is integral to what makes the conurbation and its distinctive places unique, and it is culture which will give the conurbation a shared sense of purpose and belonging in the future.

Many people have also told the Enquiry that too few of these strengths and qualities are well known and valued – both locally and outside the conurbation. There is a story to be told and some significant work to do to build capacity and enhance connectivity across the cultural landscape if BCP is to make the most of its fantastic cultural assets.

The Assorted Cultural Qualities of BCP

Noted qualities and strengths in BCP as a place of culture include:

An established cultural infrastructure

BCP has a set of regionally and nationally important cultural institutions, producing diverse work of high quality. They include the world class Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, the largest arts centre in the UK outside of London, the Lighthouse, and Pavilion Dance South West, which recently hosted the National Dance Showcase. In the Bournemouth International centre (BIC), BCP has an established venue for touring shows, with 4 auditoriums able to take up to 10,000 visitors at a time. Add to this the galleries and conference spaces of the two universities, a fantastic central library in Bournemouth, a Premier League football club (with conference and event facilities), and the built assets of the heritage sector (see below), and BCP has a fabric of cultural infrastructure across its 12 miles of coast and inland to the Dorset heathland.

A strong and varied Heritage offer

The heritage of BCP is incredibly varied and offers a significant resource for the culture and wellbeing of the conurbation. Each of the three major towns has a different heritage journey, from the deep history of Christchurch to Bournemouth's role as a pioneer Victorian resort famed for its clean air and pines. The heritage landscape of BCP is both tangible and intangible. Tangible assets feature the built environment such as Poole Quay, the parks and gardens of Bournemouth or in 18 Grade 1 listed buildings such as castles and houses. These include Christchurch Priory, known as the finest parish church in England and the Gothic revival Highcliffe

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Castle, which has been imaginatively renovated as now serves as a unique venue.

Intangible assets include the folk histories of maritime Poole, the literary lives of the many writers who settled or visited the conurbation, and in the identities of residents, including an increasingly diverse and globally connected population.

The museum sector works hard to uncover and communicate the different heritage narratives of BCP. Museums act as hubs for social and civic history and as safe spaces for cultural dialogue. Key museums include:

- Scaplen's Court Museum, which receives over 5,000 school children a year to its education centre.
- Poole Museum, which is about to be transformed by a major Heritage Lottery fund award.
- The Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum, home to a nationally important collection of Pre-Raphaelite art, is an extraordinary art Nouveau building and major visitor attraction.
- Other museums include the Museum of Design in Plastics and Gallery at AUB, and Red House Museum, Christchurch.

Parks, gardens and nature reserves

Linked by a glorious stretch of coast, knitted together with deep gullies or 'chines', woodland, heathland and parks, and bookended by the beauty of Poole Harbour and Hengistbury Head; the natural and green assets of BCP are central to its culture and way of life.

For example, Bournemouth featured in the original Victorian guide to the Spas of England in the mid-19th century, where its natural advantages and attractiveness were highly praised. Parks gardens

and nature reserves are still highly important and a vital contributor to the quality of place. They stretch from Alum Chine tropical Gardens in the west, to Mudeford in the East, from Bournemouth Gardens in the South to Millhams Mead Nature reserve in the North. The importance of these parks and open spaces as a cultural resource was endorsed through their selection as part of a national programme as a Future Parks Accelerator, which will test how parks can stimulate sustainable growth, improve health and wellbeing, and encourage biodiversity.

Festivals and events – Driving growth, excellence and inclusion in culture

BCP is becoming a major centre for festivals and events. In part this is a legacy of its tourism offer – presenting cultural experiences to visitors. But festivals and events in BCP have moved far beyond the simple presentation of touring shows. Today they have become hubs for innovative practice, key commissioning agents for new culture, and inspiring platforms for active participation in unique locations.

The annual Arts by The Sea, run by BCP Council, is now established as a major cultural festival, with plans to expand across the region and for longer. Light Up Poole Festival has established itself as an important festival for animating the public realm in new ways and is demonstrating that digital light art can be a gateway into the arts for many thousands of residents and visitors.

Activate organise the biennial Inside Out Dorset festival, with events such as the enormously popular Cirque Vost in Poole Park as well as a range of events, including 2019's popular Pollution Pods on Brownsea Island. Bournemouth Emerging Arts Fringe, is an increasingly significant festival championing the grass roots and new talent. It is a particularly vital force in supporting artistic production from 'outsiders' – such as people recovering from

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addiction; and for re-imagining and re-purposing different types of space – such as a large part of the Sovereign shopping centre in Boscombe transformed into a performing arts venue (with the support of the Coastal Business Improvement District).

Nurturing future talent

The festivals sector provides critical pathways into culture for local people and are a mobilising force for volunteering and audience development. They work as an important part of a wider talent development system across BCP.

The conurbation is home to leading organisations which are helping to nurture the talent of the future. In addition to leading cultural organisations who all run education and engagement programmes, there are specific support agencies driving this agenda. These include SoundStorm, one of the largest and most respected music education agencies in the country; Coda Music, which offers tuition and classes for diverse groups, from a converted Victorian Dairy which runs creative projects, training and schools' workshops as well as managing the creative Hub. Diverse City is also a major asset to the area – a national leader in championing diversity and equality in the arts.

Universities and further education

BCP is a creative talent hub which every year contributes some of the best creative graduates into the labour market. The universities and college also play a vital role in the production and presentation of culture, and of course in the cultural life of the conurbation with close to 35,000 students calling BCP their home and with an impressive portfolio of cultural activities that connect university and civic life.

Arts University Bournemouth is one of the leading specialist arts universities in the UK. It has over 3,000 undergraduates and a brilliant roster of leading creative professionals on its staff. It has particular strengths in art, design, craft, fashion and textiles. It specialises in industry collaboration and is currently developing a £2.8 million Innovation Studio which will support local businesses in rapid prototyping and design.

Bournemouth University, with 20,000 students, has highly regarded courses in creative fields including journalism, computer animation, film, media and music. It also partners with Bath University in delivering the Centre for Digital Entertainment (CDE), funding doctoral research into games, visual effects and animation.

The Bournemouth and Poole College, the largest further education provider in the area, with over 11,000 students. It offers courses ranging from digital media to theatrical make up.

One of the key distinctive outcomes of the universities' specialisms in the creative industries is the spike of creative and digital enterprises which have set up in BCP over the last 20 years. BCP is recognised as a nationally and internationally significant cluster of animation and visual effects companies, with 3871 jobs in digital technology. This fast-growing sector saw 72 new business start-ups in 2016, is underpinned by the two universities and amplified by the BFX festival. The Local Industrial Strategy currently being developed by Dorset LEP sees a strong cultural offer as part of the essential enabling conditions which help to attract and retain enterprises in these high value creative and digital sectors.

Health and wellbeing

With an ageing population come systemic issues of health, wellbeing and care. BCP faces some particularly significant challenges in, for example, facilitating preventative care, reducing

loneliness and isolation, and encouraging communities toward ageing well. But BCP is also working as a pioneer place in overcoming such challenges and in innovating to deliver positive health and wellbeing outcomes.

For example, organisations across BCP are increasingly collaborating on programmes targeting health and wellbeing challenges. Initiatives range from the Curiosity Café for older people at the Red House Museum to BSO's ground-breaking work with professional disabled musicians and the Big Night Out Disco curated by disabled DJs. Approaches to social and cultural prescribing are emergent, but there is a collective will to develop a cultural system where health and wellbeing are a real strength.

Libraries – hubs for active cultural lives

There are 24 public libraries across the BCP area. They all support cultural activities and provide access to literature and other art forms. All libraries have an important focus on community arts. The main libraries also run and host larger-scale activities and play an important role commissioning new work. But most importantly, libraries offer a safe space for many people: a place to shelter, to meet, reflect, relax, learn, and share. Their role in providing fluencies for modern life and supporting an increasingly diverse population to feel welcome, is particularly important at this time, with a rise in racism and hostility toward cultural difference.

The Cultural Challenges Facing BCP

While the Cultural Enquiry has encouraged a spirit of positivity with regard to the cultural assets of BCP. It is also important to delve into the more challenging aspects of the conurbation's culture. This is with the spirit of opportunity in mind, with the Cultural Enquiry mobilising a new era of better partnership, imaginative development and smarter investment. It is also with an attitude of realism, given that many of the challenges facing culture in BCP are shared by other places in the UK which have struggled with years of austerity, with the pressures of different types of demographic change, and with the tightly drawn political boundaries which make 'whole place' partnership and investment more difficult.

The Cultural Enquiry has sourced many testimonies and perspectives which have focused on the things that hold BCP culture back. Or in other words, the things which either stop us or hinder progress in making more of the conurbation's many cultural qualities. These include:

Geographical realities and challenges

BCP is a poly-centric conurbation which loses 50% of its hinterland and circulation capacity to the sea. With multiple urban centres and this specific physical geography, BCP suffers from traffic congestion, low density sprawl between main hubs, and the lack of a clear civic, retail, leisure and thus cultural centre. Add to this costly taxi services and an under-integrated public transport system with nodes that, far from enhancing the transport experience, are conducive to a sense of danger or at least a lack of aspiration; and the conurbation really struggles for affordable, accessible, equitable and environmentally progressive mobility.

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This impacts on cultural practice and audience behaviour. In some ways, it designs-in neighbourhood-based cultural activity over conurbation-wide activities which are 'designed-out'. It also influences who is able to travel and where and when. For example, to participate in a diversity of cultural activities across the conurbation without the use of a car would be expensive, unpleasant and hugely time-consuming. While progress has been made in improving cycling infrastructure and softening the access points to town centres, BCP lacks the density and connectivity required to grow from its current cultural asset base.

Additionally, BCP has never been an 'industrial' city, so it lacks those 'post-industrial' spaces (the warehouses, former factories) and 'zones in transition' which elsewhere in the UK now provide homes for creative activity. Furthermore, the strong local property market and limited public land holdings limit access to affordable space and strategic development land. This makes development-led cultural activities more challenging than in other places, although there are major opportunities to anchor town centre renewal activities with a cultural dimension.

A Cultural Productivity Gap

An aspect of the distinctive spatial characteristics of BCP is the relative lack of spaces and places for cultural production. The NPOs play a vital role in commissioning and developing new work, but the conurbation as a whole suffers from a deficit of artists' studios, affordable creative industries workspace (especially for early stage businesses), and flexible rehearsal, development and events spaces. In recent years, retail spaces have offered a 'meanwhile solution', but BCP does not provide the requisite mix of

permanent facilities which will encourage graduates to stay or for incoming artists and creatives to set up and grow their practice.

The festivals sector is playing an important role in championing and nurturing talent and in producing new content. But there is still a relative imbalance of imported Vs home-grown work and BCP has not yet established the range of support infrastructure that is present in other places, such as Brighton or Bristol.

Talent Retention

Associated with this 'production gap', BCP struggles to retain talent (such as from its graduate base) and to attract brilliant talent from elsewhere. It is not sufficiently 'sticky' to give local cultural producers and creatives confidence they can build a career in the conurbation (i.e. access talent, markets and resources); and it does not radiate a compelling narrative to would-be incoming creative talent. Instead, heads are turned by London, Bristol, Manchester or internationally.

Places with high graduate retention rates have developed strong cultural hubs which connect universities to the cultural life of the city as part of a dynamic ecosystem animated by a range of distinctive spaces to make and experience culture. In turn, this facilitates collaborative practice where ideas spread, projects form and vivid cultural scenes germinate exciting creative enterprises.

In BCP, the core location of the Universities – on a campus outside of the main town centres⁴ – creates a specific design challenge for building a dynamic cultural scene. For example, it makes the creation of 'third spaces' which convene both structured and

⁴ Although Bournemouth University has three campuses overall, including a more central Bournemouth location.

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unstructured relationships between people of different walks of life and creative disciplines, much harder to achieve.

The 'invisible city'

BCP, with its elongated urban form and polycentric structure mean the neighbourhood is a disproportionately important unit of scale for cultural development. Add to this the conurbation's unique economic and thus demographic profile – with, for example, an ageing population coupled with a very young and diverse population of students and people working in care and financial services – and BCP can be understood as a particularly complex place to develop and deliver culture.

One participant in the Cultural Enquiry talked of BCP as 'the invisible city', where at different times of the day, many communities are out of sight, invisible (e.g. elderly people lack mobility and care workers are inside looking after the elderly people); or where different neighbourhoods are un-connected to one another, occupying a place in the other's imagination, with very few opportunities or incentives to meet. This 'invisible city' paradigm makes typical approaches to grassroots cultural activity very challenging. Finding shared points of reference, values and ambitions for a place is difficult if communities are invisible to each other.

Culture can of course play a powerful role in tackling this invisibility; but the capacity and resources of the cultural sector are not sufficient to deliver the kind of in-depth and engaging work required to build bridges and make cultural connections. Vital here is the connecting tissue between the NPOs and the community and voluntary sector, with a significant need for community-based hubs and networks, local decision-making in cultural resources, as well as tailored programming which targets intercultural and intergenerational dialogue. Such as aspects should be keenly

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engaged as part of the Local Plan, ensuring transport, planning and place embrace culture to reduce the invisible city effect of BCP of the council.

Young people and diversity undervalued

This invisible city effect means that certain demographic groups find it particularly challenging to find a voice and then have their voice heard in the cultural system of BCP. This is the case for young people and ethnic minorities. Participants in the Cultural Enquiry have talked passionately of the need to open-up the cultural system of BCP, to diversify decision-making, and to support young people and their interests alongside more championing of diversity.

The Cultural Enquiry survey showed that young people want more opportunities to watch live music and performance, more festivals, more international food and a stronger nightlife as well as real improvements in safety and transportation.

Tourism for tomorrow

As a place renowned for its tourism and with its greatest cultural icon being a beach, tourism has featured substantially across the Cultural Enquiry. Although recognised and valued as a major part of the economy, tourism is not widely credited as being a progressive force in the conurbation's contemporary cultural life.

For example, cultural tourism and the positioning of BCP as a creative destination are seen as underdeveloped and undermarketed. BCP's current tourism offer is not widely perceived as positioned to attract the growing market for weekend visitors, looking for new experiences, based on boutique accommodation, food, cultural dynamism, heritage innovation, creativity and the natural environment.

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There have been significant efforts to diversify the tourism offer and narrative – such as through the growth of Arts by the Sea and Light Up Poole as high-quality cultural attractions. But the everyday culture of BCP – from the quality of its hotels to the sense of creative dynamism and buzz – are viewed as challenges rather than assets if tourism is to grow and become higher value.

A Whole Place Approach

While there has been long term commitment to culture from the previous three councils, the lack of a single conurbation-wide vision and approach have been detrimental to cultural provision and development. Without a 'whole place' approach, decision-making and visioning have been too siloed and under-coordinated. This means there are too many 'cold-spots' and areas which lack cultural amenity.

It also means that, both internally and externally, the current creative positioning of BCP is fragmented and not associated with innovation or dynamism. Other places show that positive transformation is possible. Whether it is Margate and is growing recognition as a pioneering town of culture-led regeneration through artistic energy, Turner Contemporary and the revival of Dreamland; or Brighton which has developed an international reputation for its positioning as both a tech and culture centre; or Plymouth which is developing a new reputation for its combination of community arts and new types of cultural infrastructure

The historic lack of a whole place approach has also impacted on the quality and intensity of local partnership – within the cultural sector and with culture as a cross-cutting agenda. A legacy of this means the current cultural ecosystem has not been given a high profile, ambitious civic role which encourages risk taking, exchange and collaboration. While organisations do work together, there is no

overall coordinated strategic approach to growing a cultural ecosystem that can drive innovation and change to the forefront of economic, social and environmental change in BCP.

This, of course, is changing. The Cultural Enquiry and the forthcoming Culture Compact mean that partnership from today will be whole-place, cross-sector, inter-departmental, and have culture to its heart.



Lighthouse – an arts centre of scale and pedigree.

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Young People's Survey

As part of the evidence collection process, the Cultural Enquiry commissioned the Poole-based youth marketing experts Digipigz to survey 16-24 year olds with a connection to BCP. The survey received 58 responses and provides a snapshot of young people who had grown up in or lived in the region.

"We want a happy town with proactive global aware citizens. Not materialistic or shallow".

What do young people value?

Food, music and festivals are the three key areas of cultural importance to young people. The current food offering in BCP is felt to be strong, with over 60% of respondents scoring the variety of food and drink outlets as 8/10 or higher.

"I would love to see the coastline being better utilised but available to all".

Opportunities to see live music didn't score as highly, with only a quarter of respondents providing a score of 8/10 or up. When asked what cultural offering was missing in BCP, music was the most mentioned element. A third of respondents have travelled out of the area to enjoy festivals or music events; and would like to see BCP offering a wider variety of music-based cultural offerings.

The current nightlife offering is also a strong aspect of BCP, with only a third of respondents scoring the offering as 5/10 or less.

The BIC, Pavilion Bournemouth and Lighthouse Poole are the most visited cultural destinations, with Bournemouth Gardens rated as the most visited park.

"We need Markets with cool street art and street food"

The beach is felt to be the best part of BCP, with 71% of respondents identifying it as their favourite aspect. However, there were mixed feelings towards the current cultural activity and events which take place on the beach. Although the majority do not think the beaches should become BCPs 'hub' for

culture, they want them to become livelier with more events and pop-ups by the sea.

What can be improved and what is missing?

The worst things about BCP for young people surveyed include transport and cost of parking. Many people noted that transport links across BCP are poor and that parking expensive.

There were numerous comments on the upkeep of the towns. Many commented on very run-down areas and poor public spaces such as the Poole Bus Station, high street shopping areas and facilities such as public toilets. Safety and crime were also recurrent themes, with multiple mentions of drugs and alcohol related issues.

"The worst things are poor transport, lots of bad behaviour and not a lot going on that is current, in comparison to places such as London. Old fashioned."

"What's missing? More events, large scale, detailed and inspirational gallery showings. Something that makes people WANT to come to BCP."

The top three things young people would like to see:

- Events and cultural activity on the beach. These could be pop up food stalls or unique performances from buskers which add an interesting dynamic to the seafront.
- More opportunities to see live music, drama and theatre. Given that the BIC, Lighthouse and Pavilion are already the most popular destinations, these spaces could be utilised to offer a more diverse, extensive musical and theatrical offering which will appeal to this demographic.
- Regular activities and exhibitions which tap into niche interests will add more diversity to the BCP cultural landscape and provide places for likeminded people to meet.

4. A Whole Place Approach: The Strategic Opportunity for BCP

In December 2019, the urban knowledge exchange platform City Metric⁵ published a somewhat frivolous map of the BCP metro. It represents an ideal-type transport system for a conurbation where the transport system is symptomatic of a lack of ‘whole place’ strategic thinking and investment.

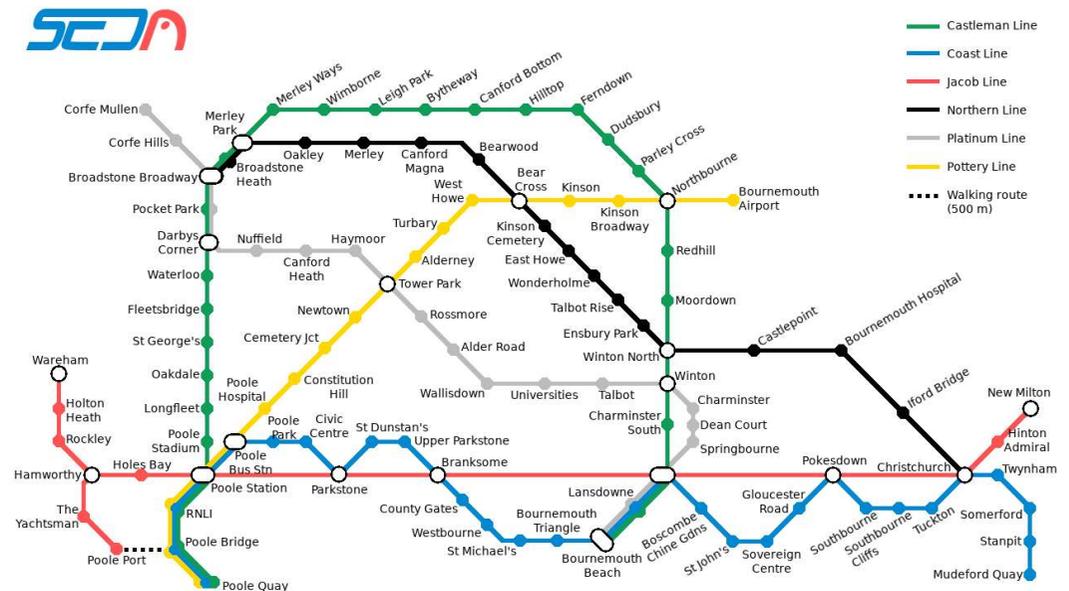
“The South East Dorset (BCP) conurbation, centred on the resort town of Bournemouth and the historic port of Poole, once boasted a tram network. But this was ripped up in the 1930s and today’s inhabitants – numbering almost half a million – are forced to rely on cars and buses. The following proposal is quite ridiculous, as the population is too spread out for mass transit of this nature to be viable. But in my fantasy world, here’s how the South East Dorset Metro (SEDM) would be rolled out”

Transport is rightly a major priority for the new unitary authority in BCP and by working together at a whole place level, an ambitious proposal to Government will ultimately be submitted, albeit without quite such a fantasy dimension as the SEDM (see diagram).

⁵ <https://www.citymetric.com/transport/here-s-fantasy-metro-network-bournemouth-and-poole-4881>

But the same issues which arise for transport apply to culture in BCP. Its relative fragmentation, lack of connectivity, low levels of audience mobility and the lack of capacity; are all symptomatic of a historic absence of ‘whole place planning’. Or in other words, BCP is the size of a city but it is only now that partners are beginning to think like a city and, through their partnerships, also act like one.

This does not require the neglect of the districts and neighbourhoods; rather a more coordinated and ambitious approach which supports each part of a cultural (eco)system.



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BCP's new unitary status as the UK's latest city region gives an opportunity to reset how we think about, plan for and invest in culture. It is an opportunity to shape a radical and fresh approach to culture that could play a major role in shaping a more successful, more cohesive, more open and more equal place (or series of connected places) overall.

In terms of tackling the challenges that hold back culture, the Cultural Enquiry has faced a central question which stems from the unique economic, social and geographic past of BCP; and which pivots toward how best it can face the future:

How can we marry a deep sense of localism across the neighbourhoods that make up a conurbation-wide approach with an ambitious proposition of scale and dynamism that can deliver culture-led transformation in the national interest and of international standing?

Two divergent responses to this question are rehearsed below. These are followed by a proposed preferred pathway for culture in BCP: an **ambitious whole-place approach** where the conurbation has the punch of a city with the sensitivity of a series of towns and neighbourhoods.

4.1 If we just concentrate on the neighbourhoods and grassroots

Tackling the barriers and challenges holding back culture in the neighbourhoods and at the 'grassroots' would deliver a range of transformational opportunities. They include:

- More opportunities for career growth and development for artists at all stages via enhanced creative hubs, new programmes of commissions, scaled-up but locally embedded festivals.
- A higher profile for all BCP's distinctive places through coordinated cultural tourism signing and branding activities.
- More opportunities for local artists to work with local cultural organisations and partners in health and wellbeing, increasing their capacity and enabling them to grow sustainable careers.
- Strategic market and audience development which builds active participation through smarter joint working between organisations.
- More networking, profile raising and information sharing leading to a more cohesive and embedded cultural sector
- Existing health and wellbeing strengths scaled up and coordinated across BCP.
- Enhanced town centres with greater connectivity and access to the historic as well as the contemporary.

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If we delivered on these opportunities, then potential benefits would include: more artists and creative practitioners establish themselves and are able to develop sustainable socially inclusive and engaged careers; more opportunities for local artists to showcase their work with a much more visible creative presence.

These would also include: stronger intercultural and intergenerational dialogue with health and wellbeing impacts such as lowering levels of isolation; growing local markets and audiences for arts and culture as part of a spirit of 'everyday creativity' which enhances the quality of place; and diversified town and neighbourhood centres invigorated by culture.

4.2 If we just go for scale and culture-led city-making

If we go for more high-profile agenda based on scale, coordination and excellence with national and international impact then a broader set of opportunities emerge. In this scenario we would look to:

- Build capacity and expertise in culture and art development at a strategic unitary authority level
- Focus on major cultural infrastructure projects – such as a revitalised BIC and a new destination venue for visual, digital arts and animation. The most radical and ambitious option for the BIC would be to unlock the site to freshly develop statement cultural infrastructure that can drive growth and innovation for the cultural ecosystem of the conurbation and wider region.

- Build the profile of BCP as a cultural and heritage destination where the area's set of distinctive places is viewed as a primary asset
- Innovate in planning and mobility to connect localities and dramatically enhance the public realm in 'gateway' locations such as the main stations.
- Grow and develop festivals and events as accelerators for international quality cultural production and innovation and as marquee attractions for cultural tourism
- Introduce specialist cultural and creative infrastructure capable of driving growth in cultural production and events – with the likely location for these close to main transport hubs and where there is the potential for critical mass – e.g. central Bournemouth.
- Maximise potential of Higher Education: majoring on talent retention and attraction via targeted hub and cluster interventions in key town centre locations.

If we deliver these types of large-scale anchor and catalyst activities, the benefits for the city region could include: a step change in inward investment in culture; stronger, more inclusive economic growth driven in part by the creative industries, cultural tourism, and knowledge-intensive firms delivering higher productivity and skills attracted by the quality and scale of place.

There could be a transformation in the way BCP is perceived internally and externally based on a new narrative of creativity, innovation and inclusion. A dynamic year-round visitor economy

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based on BCP as a place for experiences, diverse encounters and engaging narratives.

This could lead to cultural organisations which are bigger and better, scaling up and diversifying their offer and generating new 'anchor' infrastructure to drive sector development. There could be an active and high-profile role in the national conversation alongside metropolitan areas and medium sized cities and towns (such as the Core Cities Group, which is putting culture to the heart of cities' approach to trade, investment and 'soft power').

4.3 Bringing the Two Together: A Whole Place Approach to Culture

The Cultural Enquiry has enabled the identification and rehearsal of a 'third way' for BCP. One that marries the importance of micro-scale, locally embedded and community-facing activities; to one which thinks and acts big. The opportunity then for BCP is to converge support for a diverse and productive creative ecology, based on local strengths and delivery across the conurbation with an outward facing programme that supports high quality and excellence, gaining national and international profile. Only by doing the two in a holistic way will we deliver the broad range of outcomes that BCP requires if it is to live up to its cultural potential.

The new **Cultural Compact** will play a leadership role in converging these two approaches and coordinating a whole place approach to culture across BCP. It will bring different sectors, places and strategic agendas together and co-design an ambitious investment programme for culture which both requests investment in culture as a priority sector; and advocates for investment in culture as part of a wider approach to planning, community, health and wellbeing and economic development. This is in tune with the

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Dorset LEP's Local Industrial Strategy, which recognises both the direct and spillover benefits of investing in culture.

The Cultural Enquiry has helped mobilise active participation in the process of shaping a cultural agenda for BCP. It has also helped shape three main themes and some potential priority actions which the Cultural Compact can utilise as a terms of reference when it meets from March 2020 onward.

These themes are: **Talent, Infrastructure** and **Quality of Place**
These are introduced in brief below.



A. Talent

By talent we mean arts and creative education, support for artists and creative practitioners at all stages of their careers and a step change in cultural provision and 'everyday creativity'. It means supporting everyone to enjoy a creative life. BCP has institutions that are national leaders in delivering creative education and skills; two excellent universities; and a growing cultural production base that can become a major harvesting programme for talent development.

The Cultural Enquiry has asked partners to concentrate on:

Creative practitioners

Creating more and better opportunities to work, collaborate and innovate through the fostering of a local commissioning culture. Ensuring that creative practitioners are better connected to our existing infrastructure and opening up new infrastructure which can support them. This includes building on and complementing the sector support work of the Arts Development Company and enabling larger cultural organisations to develop a creative and cultural workforce development programme. It also means establishing stronger place-based links between the universities and creative practitioners – such as via 'third space' models and platforms for exchange, R&D and professional development (see creative hubs and studios)

Developing festivals

Building on our current festivals to develop greater scale, pushing for higher quality and excellence, greater innovation, more diversity, and improved production capacity. This positions festivals as the breeding ground for talent development and cultural production – offering opportunities for R&D, skills exchange and professional development. Festivals can also more effectively converge key emergent strengths in BCP: outdoor arts and digital technology, with BCP a potential testbed for VR in the public realm and new immersive approaches to culture.

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This will ensure that festivals are integrated into a re-booted brand narrative for BCP that delivers a longer tourist season and drives growth and innovation in the creative economy.

Creative hubs and studios

Supporting increased access to spaces for cultural expression and new platforms for production, rehearsal and presentation. This means developing the type of creative spaces that deliver collaboration and innovation, by connecting up business, education, culture and technology. It can also mean developing specialist creative and cultural infrastructure to grow the production base – such as a hub for festival development that converges production, rehearsal and presentation space. Or a specialist animation and special effects studio and R&D platform with a strong arts and cultural core – linking the specialisms of the universities to a wider cultural and creative economy opportunity.

Enriched pathways for young people

The cultural narrative for BCP needs to be more expressive of the perspectives and aspirations of young people. This means supporting schools to be champions in arts and creative learning and co-designing cultural infrastructure and programming with rather than for young people. It also means developing dedicated skills and enterprise programmes which open up the possibility of cultural and creative work. This can build on the work of the creative hub(s) (see above) and existing development agencies including SoundStorm and WAVE. This will connect to the Dorset People and Skills Plan ensuring joined-up approach to providing all our young people with opportunities to into employment, education or training.

Access and Diversity

Ensuring that access for everyone and diversity is a core value and strength within BCP. Helping to tackle inequality and ensuring that all our organisations draw their talent from the widest possible work pool, with paid opportunities for internship. This is to make the 'invisible city' one of the most accessible, open and inclusive in Europe.

B. Infrastructure

Here infrastructure refers to scaled-up, diversified and sustainable cultural organisations, venues and platforms across BCP. It means the alignment of spatial planning, transport and culture. It also means 'softer infrastructure' the tools and processes which can deliver the wider economic and social ambitions of BCP.

Priorities for investment include:

Cultural Planning and Design Strategy

Through the Local Plan and subsequent major planning and development programmes, pitch culture as a key factor from project inception to delivery. This requires culture-proofing major planning applications; the development of neighbourhood-based cultural strategies and plans for developments; and a dedicated approach to co-locating new cultural infrastructure at transport interchanges.

It also requires a strategic review of the role and purpose of town centres across BCP. With the decline of retail, demand for housing-led growth and increased relevance of leisure and culture as indicators of vibrancy, partners in BCP need to be brave and ambitious in re-imagining their town centres. Artists and cultural organisations can play a vital role here – in visioning and engaging. But the arts and culture can also be part of the solution – helping to diversify use and bring life into otherwise obsolescent retail-led models.

Aligning Culture and 'Smart City' models

Cultural organisations and creative businesses can work with technologists and planners to envisage new approaches to mobility, energy consumption, and big data approaches to service provision. They have access to audiences, to ideas and to data. They also

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have access to creative thinkers who can connect complex structural systems to social and cultural ones.

Growing and diversifying production and presentation capacity

Building on the approach outlined in Theme A, BCP needs a greater variety and scale of cultural production and presentation capacity. It lacks scale, diversity and specialism (e.g. from wet space to interdisciplinary creative labs). BCP also lacks critical mass – e.g. a cultural district where a range of venues and hubs are co-located. The beginnings of this are apparent in central Bournemouth, but there are currently too many missing pieces or under-leveraged gems. The BIC provides a test-case here, with the potential to become a transformational cross-art-form cultural centre of national significance.

Heritage Innovation

BCP has an enthralling portfolio of heritage assets, but they are under-connected and are not yet playing a dynamic role in the contemporary cultural life of the conurbation. Heritage innovation can involve opening-up heritage to everyone through accessible trails, utilising new and emergent technology and exploring active re-use of heritage assets for contemporary cultural practice. This will build on the work already underway in digitising collections and the National Lottery Heritage Fund project of Poole Museum.

Better connected and networked organisations

Working across BCP in communities, connected nationally and internationally, BCP can become a pioneer for strategic planning and partnership. This can start with knowledge exchange and professional development activities and develop toward shared programming, skills exchanges, coordinated promotion and a collective voice that champions BCP as a critical core to their institutional brands.

C. Quality of Place

This theme is about how culture and creativity can contribute to the quality of place in BCP – that set of sometimes hard to define things that make places great to live in, work in and visit.

Inward investment.

Quality of place means positioning culture to the heart of the BCP strategic narrative. The whole idea of BCP as a place needs to be articulated through culture. This is what defines and differentiates the conurbation; its heritage and modernity; its changing communities; its natural resources; and its cultural and creative industries. Dorset LEP, through its new Local Industrial Strategy, is putting culture to the heart of its inward investment narrative, recognising that it is the quality of place which gives Dorset a competitive advantage. As a new unitary authority, BCP now has the opportunity to build a unified brand and offer through culture. This, some might say, is the art of place-making.

A beacon for health and wellbeing

With systemic demographic challenges, BCP can either work with a perpetual rear-guard action, struggling to make sense of and respond to the increasingly acute needs of its population. Or BCP can innovate to find new solutions and treat its demographic reality as an opportunity for a set of cultural, social and technological solutions. BCP can become a beacon for the integration of culture into health and care practice linking to the Dorset-wide One Health Accelerator which launched in 2019. This large-scale programme promotes interdisciplinary work across human, animal and environmental health; connecting industry, government and academia.

BCP can also target capacity-building and innovation in its cultural organisation and workforce, piloting social and cultural prescribing, volunteering programmes, arts therapy and other activities focussed on

helping people live longer, healthier and more active lives. This can adapt the approach of Wellbeing Exeter⁶ – a prototype for social and cultural prescribing.

Planning and development

This is to ensure planning for future development is ‘culture proofed’, building in space for culture in new developments and the future of high street as multi-purpose destinations where people visit for multiple reasons beyond shopping. It can involve championing the region’s strengths in design and helping create more human-friendly environments.

Responding to Climate Emergency

In July 2016, BCP Council pledged to make BCP Council and its operations carbon neutral by 2030, and to work with the wider community to look at how the conurbation can be made carbon neutral, ahead of the UK target of 2050. Members also called on Westminster to provide the powers and resources to help make the 2030 target possible. As a low density, largely suburban, car-dependent system, is not yet a model for smart and environmentally progressive city-making. But it needs to be. And fast. One approach is to position the cultural sector as environmental pioneers – equipping them with the resources to affect behavioural change across the conurbation. This is a priority area for Arts Council England in its new 10-year plan.

Another approach is to concentrate cultural infrastructure at neighbourhood level, at transport hubs and as nodes in cycle networks. This can involve utilising new spaces, making more of existing spaces (including libraries) and a ‘re-imagining the town centre’ strategic narrative which connects with the technology-driven the Dorset Smart Place initiative which will see £1 billion invested across the county, ensuring that everyone can benefit and access transformative technology.

⁶ <https://www.wellbeingexeter.co.uk/social-prescribing/>

4. Pilot Interventions

The Cultural Enquiry was not set up to source a range of projects. If so, it would have been inundated with pet projects and become more of a wish list than agenda for change. The new Cultural Compact will need to work with the findings of the Cultural Enquiry and seek investment to test and pilot activities capable of driving step-change in the role and value proposition of culture in this new city or conurbation.

However, somewhat irresistibly, some projects have trended sufficiently often to be noted here. They are not as instructions to the Cultural Compact but as insinuations of what partners might explore. For example:

Talent

A BCP Festival development programme.

- A three-year intervention to build a conurbation-wide festival offer, programme and production team – including a growth plan for Arts by the Sea and Light Up Poole and a converged offer with BXF
- Establishment of BEAF as a key independent / fringe festival for contemporary art and culture in southern England.
- Feasibility work for a new festival centre – for production, development and presentation

A cultural excellence platform for BCP

- Professional development, business mentoring, and a co-investment fund for culture working in partnership with the LEP. This is to grow the scale, quality and profile of culture across BCP as an important attractor of talent and investment that directly contributes to the LEP Investment Plan.

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Infrastructure

Position culture as a key theme across the Local Development Plan

- e.g. across town centre redevelopments; imaginative use of design to enhance the public realm; commission across boundaries – toward culture, health and wellbeing infrastructure.

An anchor and catalyst

- Undertake feasibility on establishing a major cross-art-form venue / cluster in central Bournemouth on the BIC site - to generate step-change in the quality and attraction power of culture – e.g. a combined gallery, event and performance space which links to and uplifts existing infrastructure.

Creative and cultural hubs

- A BCP-wide town centre creative hub network – with a progression model from meanwhile use to long-term freehold cultural infrastructure - to spearhead a cultural renewal process where retail has withdrawn.

Quality of Place

Health and wellbeing

- BCP and Dorset as a beacon for integrating culture into health and care

City Region

- Considering a bid as a future City of Culture and / or UNESCO City of Media Arts. Connect with the rural assets - World Heritage status, natural and coastal environment.
- Re-boot the brand narrative via active programming and partnership with core cities and internationally: Acting like a city of culture – irrespective of a bid.

Environment

- Launch a programme of environmental pathfinders which cultural organisations and artists driving behavioural and system change.

5. Onwards and Upwards. What Happens Next?

In April 2019 BCP Council was created, linking the towns of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and providing an opportunity to create a vision for culture across the whole region - a vision for a cohesive and inclusive city region driven by diverse, high quality cultural infrastructure and programming, working with a wide range of stakeholders and drawn together and overseen by an inclusive Culture Board and stakeholder group.

With Arts Council England support, this Cultural Enquiry was launched in February 2019 to enable development of this vision and articulation of the new city region's aspirations, setting a clear and ambitious direction of travel.

The Cultural Enquiry has helped reflect on and describe the key qualities and challenges of the BCP conurbation. It has set out a values-based approach to culture, incorporating wellbeing, inclusive growth, environmental sustainability, and supporting an ambitious talent-led ecosystem that champions local production and is scalable towards grander transformational interventions.

The Cultural Enquiry has also set out firm strategic links to BCP Council's economic and social priorities around culture: a talent pipeline supporting cultural education, emerging artists and innovative work, which feeds directly into the wealth of creative industries based in the region and adds to a diverse and growing economy.

The Cultural Enquiry has described opportunities for culture to be embedded in placemaking projects, expressing the personality of the conurbation and its town centres and neighbourhoods through cultural activity within new developments and through heritage innovation. It has called for culture to be front and centre of approaches to tackle climate emergency.

The Cultural Enquiry has also set out a plea for inclusion, diversity and access. The cultural life of BCP needs to open to all, with opportunities for people from all backgrounds to experience culture, leading to a deeper sense of community cohesion and wellbeing for all those who live, work and visit the conurbation.

The task now is to act on the advice of the Cultural Enquiry and to utilise its three themes – talent, infrastructure and quality of place – to mobilise a new era of partnership and co-investment. This is where the Cultural Compact **Steps in**.

Arts Council England has confirmed its investment in a Cultural Compact for BCP. As one of the first in England, this demonstrates a commitment to BCP as a place of culture and as a potential exemplar for ambitious cultural leadership and partnership.

The Compact, which will launch in March 2020, will involve a new level of strategic partnership which champions culture through a 'whole place' approach. The current Cultural Enquiry Board will expand to include representatives from the business sector (Town Centre and Coastal BIDS), education sector (Bournemouth & Poole College, Wave & SoundStorm), NPOs (Pavilion Dance South West, Arts by the Sea, Poole Museum, Activate), community and diversity-led organisations (Diverse City, Neighbourhood Forums) and healthcare agencies.

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Played right, the Cultural Compact will play a transformative role for the conurbation and wider region – working to support a joined-up ecosystem that connects culture, education, healthcare, business, transport, planning, the environment and tourism.

The Cultural Compact will change how cultural activity is delivered across the conurbation and wider city region and Dorset LEP area. It will support regional and national relationships and activate international ones post-Brexit.

It will also be a catalyst for investment, creating a cohesive vision and delivery plan for culture that will result in much greater impact across the region. To achieve this will require close alignment with the Dorset LEP Local Industrial Strategy, with culture the heart of a wider 'collaborative cluster'.

It will also require a strategic push for central Government investment and investment from lottery distributors and the private sector: to build cultural infrastructure befitting a place of this size and to volunteer as a pilot authority for initiatives in environmental sustainability and smart cities; in cultural tourism and place-making; and in health and well-being.

But the Culture Compact is just part of the story. The wider story involves over 400,000 people who want to improve the place they live in, to have a better quality of life and rosier future. It is a story of hope, of change and of identity. It is a story of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. It is a story of culture.



The Boscombe Dachshund – BEAF 2019.

**Thank you to all who contributed to the BCP
Cultural Enquiry**

Continue the conversation:

@culturalenquiry www.culturalenquiry.co.uk