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Dear partner

### **Public consultation on the Draft Cultural Strategy for Somerset**

It is my great pleasure to bring to you the DRAFT Cultural Strategy for Somerset.

This DRAFT strategy has been developed following a number of consultation events over the summer, and wide ranging discussions with our communities and key local and regional partners.

It is now available for open consultation and your comments are welcome – in particular on the following points:

1. Is the Strategy broadly right for Somerset?
2. Does the action plan accurately address the needs of Somerset?
3. Who are the stakeholder / agencies that need to be involved in implementing these actions?
4. Are there areas which you feel need strengthening within the Cultural Strategy?

**Please note** that the final version will be further illustrated with quotations, case studies and images, as well as a section on each of the five Districts detailing future ambitions, illustrated with local examples of cultural activities.

Comments should be sent in written format either via email or post to

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I am available should you wish to discuss this further, but do request that any questions be directed via email or post in the first instance.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Many thanks,

Rob Jones  
Policy and Development Manager - Arts and Creative Industries  
Somerset County Council

# **Connecting Culture, Connecting Communities, Connecting Somerset**

## **Draft Cultural Strategy for Somerset**

### **Foreword**

There are many definitions of culture. The philosopher Thomas Carlyle said 'Culture is the process by which a person becomes all that they were created capable of being' and TS Elliot went further by describing culture as 'simply that which makes life worth living'.

Following its evaluation of the Cultural Pathfinders initiative, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport advised that 'Culture should be inclusive and reflect the local community's overall way of life, its experiences, activities, choices, values and uniqueness'.

So what does this mean for Somerset?

At a time when major growth is planned for some areas of Somerset, climate change is increasingly becoming a key policy driver and resources continue to be stretched to their limits, there is a growing recognition of the importance of culture. It is central to our lives and embraces a wide variety of beliefs and activities. It is at the heart of a strong and successful community. It helps us to enhance our personal well being through enjoyment and good health, plays a major part in our schools and further education establishments, makes a significant contribution to our economy and supports the tourism industry. Culture helps define the unique character of Somerset and our communities. It is vital in helping to create a sense of place - and of course the unique place that is Somerset has been shaped by our special environment which has a profound influence on our culture.

With this in mind I am pleased that the Somerset Cultural Forum Executive, which represents all six Local Authorities, several providers and other partners; agreed that we should develop a new Somerset Cultural Strategy to reflect the role culture has to play in delivering our partnership and community priorities. The strategy sets out a vision for the long term future and identifies step one towards achieving this through the identification of key priorities for the next three years. It has been informed by the substantial responses we received from the public consultation process undertaken during 2008 and the strategic context within which the Cultural Forum Executive works. It provides a clear framework for the future and reflects the importance that all partners place on the role of culture.

Justin Robinson  
Chair of the Cultural Forum Executive

## Introduction

Whilst culture can mean many different things this strategy focuses on the role of culture within Somerset and in particular the priorities for the Cultural Forum Executive (CFE) as the main strategic partnership body for culture.

Over the last two years the importance of culture in relation to the development and maintenance of sustainable communities has increasingly been recognised at national, regional and local government levels.

In Somerset this has resulted in

- A stronger, more strategic leadership role for the Culture Forum Executive
- Appointment of a Somerset Champion for Culture
- A clear link to the Somerset Strategic Partnership, involvement in the refresh of the Somerset Community Strategy and development of the LAA
- Engagement of a wider stakeholder group through restarting meetings of the Somerset Cultural Forum
- Attraction of external funding to support cultural projects and to provide additional staffing resource
- Improved relationships across the Local Authorities and key partners providing cultural services
- Agreement that a new Somerset Cultural Strategy should be developed and consulted on.

All partners involved in the CFE were determined that the new Somerset Cultural Strategy should be subject to a thorough consultation process. This took place during the summer of 2008. The very positive and wide ranging response illustrated the importance that culture has for our partners, communities and the public. The aim of the process was to enable those involved to share their views on the key issues they felt the Somerset Cultural Strategy should focus on. Whilst there were many different individual views, there were also some key recurring messages that came through strongly and which have shaped this strategy. These are set out in Chapter 2 alongside the priorities and actions for the next three years and can be found under the heading '**You Said**'.

One of the clear messages from the consultation was the need for clarity about the role that culture can play in contributing to the delivery of a wide range of strategic priorities. It underpins so much of what goes on in existing and growing communities and yet its importance is not always clear to those responsible for the future development of those same communities. There are many strategies, policies and targets that are supported by cultural activity and services across Somerset and it would be impossible to include a summary of all of these. Chapter 1 therefore focuses on the key documents that shape the strategic context within which the Cultural Forum Executive and its members work. The connections between these and the action plan is highlighted in more detail in Chapter 2 under the heading 'How does this fit strategically?'

Another message from the consultation process was the fact that many providers and communities do not understand how delivery of cultural services in Somerset is managed or governed. Chapter 1 tries to address this by clarifying how the delivery of the strategy will be governed and monitored.

Chapter 2 introduces The Somerset Vision for culture. Based on the consultation with stakeholders, partners, work undertaken by the CFE and consideration of the strategic context, this chapter provides a summary of the challenges and opportunities for the future and identifies a vision which provides the overall long term direction. It sets out the priorities and actions needed to take step one towards the realisation of this vision – a three year action plan. This initial plan will not deliver everything to which the CFE and local communities might aspire. It is based on actions that are achievable within the current levels of resources and provides a framework for future review and development.

# Chapter One

## Strategic Context

There are three main levels of partnership working which set the strategic context in Somerset; National, Regional and Local.

### National

Nationally the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) provides guidance on government policy and requirements. They have a wide ranging definition of culture;

*'Culture should be taken to include such activities as arts, sports, libraries, museums, heritage, archaeology, archives, architecture, crafts, play, parks, tourism, countryside, recreation, informal leisure pursuits.'*

DCMS Changing Lives and places 2007

Recent government policies have focused on the increasing need for the development of sustainable communities, the involvement of communities in the development and delivery of services and the delegation of service delivery to local levels. This has been accompanied by an increasing awareness of the importance of culture both in terms of its contribution to health and wellbeing, economic prosperity, and its importance to the protection, conservation and development of the natural and built environment. Accordingly there has been an increased emphasis on the need for a more strategic approach to the delivery of cultural services, more rigorous management of performance and an expectation that the role of culture is linked into other related policies and strategies which affect communities.

During 2007/8 Somerset strengthened its links with the DCMS by becoming a Cultural Pathfinder.

The Cultural Pathfinder was an initiative run by the DCMS to give Local Authorities the opportunity to forge stronger links with national and other partners around the Country through a flexible and free flowing approach. Somerset Authorities and partners used this opportunity to review the way in which creative industries are supported and developed. The overall evaluation reflected positively Somerset's contribution to the initiative and the overall improvement in partnership working locally.

### Regional

All regional strategies, such as the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, must now be developed within the context of Just Connect - the Integrated Regional Strategy for the South West.

*Just Connect* focuses on five headline aims for the South West. These are set out in Chapter 2 alongside the action plan for the next three years.

The new Regional Cultural Strategy *A better place to be* focuses on five outcomes that relate to the headline aims in *Just Connect*. These are also set out in Chapter 2. It includes a process through which these outcomes can be achieved through a number of joint programmes including:

- People, Places and Spaces (a cultural infrastructure development strategy)
- 2012 Cultural Olympiad (a cultural programme to celebrate the London 2012 games)
- Culture Module (a joint cultural research strategy to evidence the importance of culture)
- The Creative Economy (a strategy to support development of creative industries)
- Cultural Improvement with Local Authorities (a toolkit to improve performance management)
- Advocacy and Cross Sector Capability Building (improving capacity to engage with priorities in other sectors)

Together with the Regional Spatial Strategy (which identifies where growth of housing, employment land and transport infrastructure will be needed) and the Regional Economic Strategy (which identifies the priorities for improving economic prosperity) these Regional documents provide an important context for the development of our Somerset Cultural Strategy as they identify where the regional priorities and any associated funding is likely to be targeted.

## **Local**

The Somerset Strategic Partnership (SSP) sets out its vision in the Somerset Community Strategy (SCS). This is delivered through an action plan known as the Local Area Agreement (LAA). In the same way as all Regional Strategies must take account of *Just Connect*, all Somerset strategies must take account of the SCS and the LAA.

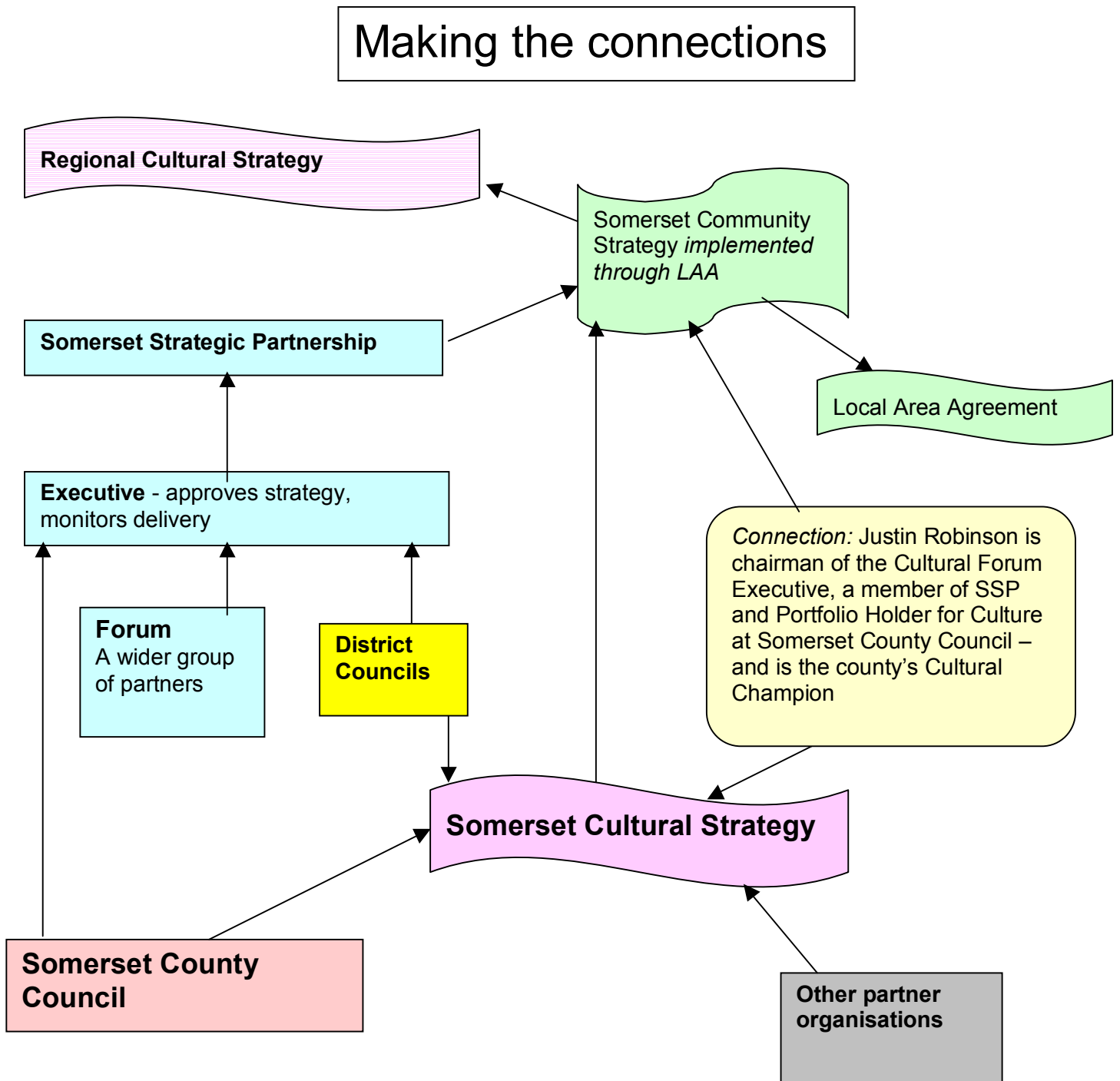
Following a process of consultation in early 2008 the SCS is soon to be refreshed and re-launched. Pending its final approval by the SSP the following outcomes have been agreed and now underpin the LAA 2008 – 2011.

- Making a Positive Contribution
- Living Sustainably
- Ensuring Economic Wellbeing
- Enjoying and Achieving
- Staying Safe
- Being Healthy

Delivery of the cultural services contributes to the achievement of many of these outcomes and the more detailed targets agreed under the LAA.

In addition to these joint partnership outcomes each partner will have priorities for their own communities/organisations/businesses, a range of services that they enable or deliver and their own internal arrangements for managing delivery of these. The main aim of this strategy is to clarify the priorities for the CFE partnership so that partners and communities know where our partnership efforts and resources will be targeted over the next three years.

Diagram 1 shows how the partnership connections work.





## Governance Arrangements

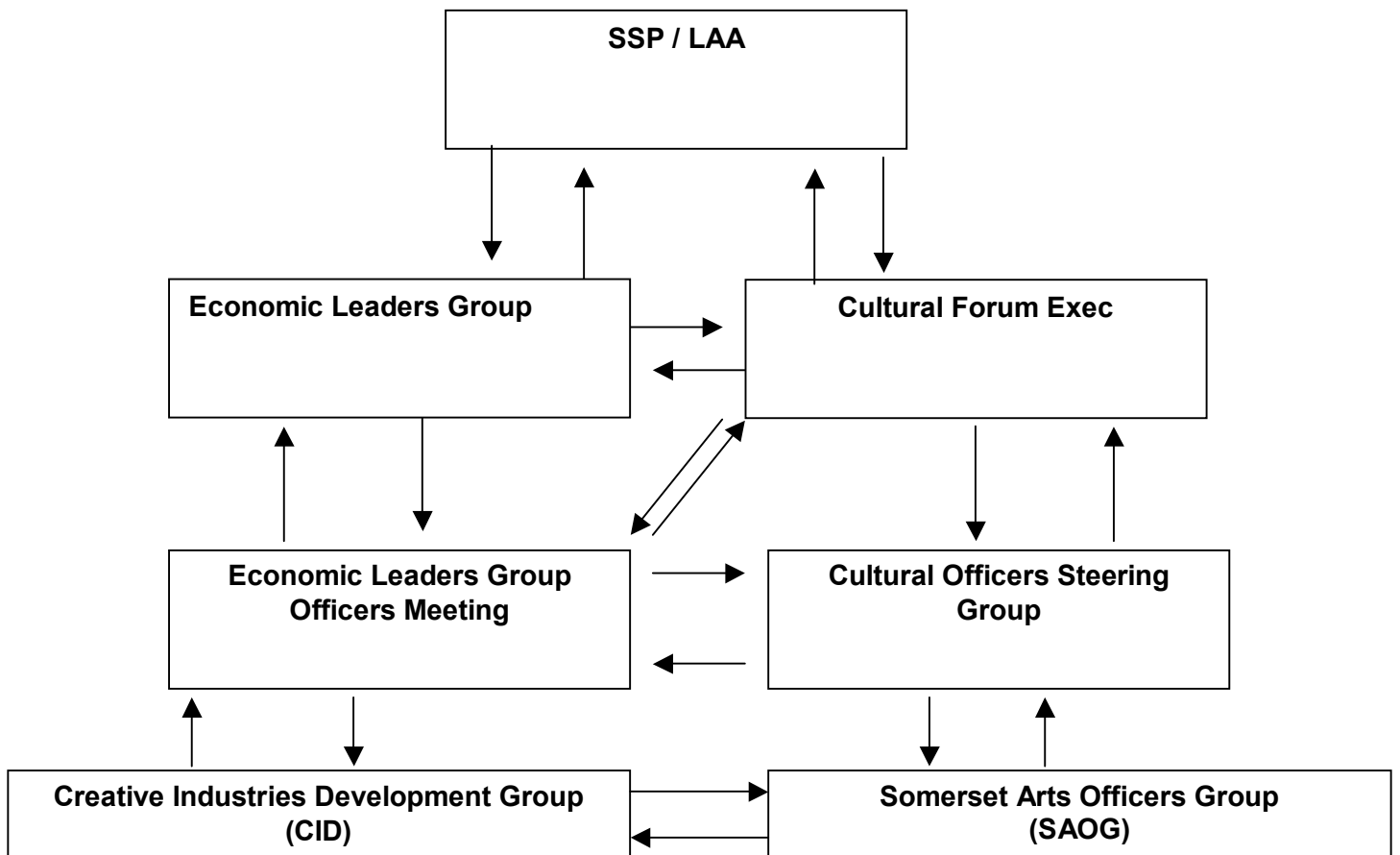
### You said

The Somerset Cultural Strategy should be supported by a holistic, top down, bottom up approach. Many providers and members of the public do not understand how delivery of cultural services is managed or governed. It needs to be simpler and less bureaucratic with more clarity around the roles of the various partnership groups and processes used to determine priorities and funding.

Somerset is a large two tier county with complex needs. For some time work has been underway to develop a partnership approach to the delivery of cultural services and this is managed in a strategic sense through the CFE which is a cross Authority, cross partner group. The CFE reports directly to the SSP.

Beneath the CFE there is an internal governance arrangement which enables the day to day work on the development of strategy and operational service delivery to move forward. This sits alongside and partially links into a similar arrangement for the delivery of Economic Development services as shown in Diagram 2

Diagram 2



Making the connections between all these strategies and the feedback we have received from communities and partners is challenging – even for those of us who deal with it every day! The next Chapter seeks to map the connections and show how this has informed the three year action plan.

## Chapter 2

### **The Somerset Vision and Step One: what we want to see over the next three years**

***‘Somerset the heart of Culture in the South West, location of choice for creative industries and a centre of excellence in cultural activity.’***

This vision provides a direction for the work of the CFE into the future. In common with the SCS it provides a view of Somerset and its cultural role by 2025.

Consideration of the strategic context and the discussions that took place throughout the course of the consultation process led to the identification of several key themes which provide opportunities and challenges for the delivery of culture activity in Somerset and which help to shape Step One – an action plan for the next three years.

### **Theme 1 - Building on strong Foundations**

#### **The current position and future trends**

Somerset has a high quality cultural infrastructure mainly as a result of the creativity and sustainability of its culturally focused businesses, individuals and organisations. Alongside this many local communities and parishes support their own style of events or cultural groups. As a result Somerset has become culturally strong at a grass roots level. Whilst much of this is highly successful, there is a lack of long term networking, communication and in some cases access. The challenge is in developing an appropriate level of support which builds on this existing provision rather than undermining it.

For many the ‘strategic fit’ of culture is unclear and yet it is an increasingly important part of developing sustainable communities. There are several regeneration schemes being progressed in different parts of Somerset and the draft Regional Spatial Strategy suggests a high level of growth in some areas of the County over the next 25 years. These developments should not just be about the provision of new houses, roads and other related physical infrastructure. The opportunity is there to ensure such developments deliver high quality built environments, conservation and protection of important heritage sites and natural landscapes which are so much a part of Somerset and to also consider the cultural elements that provide a sense of place for the existing and growing communities.

**You said:**

There is a need for the role of culture to be better understood at a strategic level and in particular for it to be made clear how culture contributes to the delivery of many other strategic priorities.

There is a need to nurture cultural activity that has developed from grass roots level through the development of better communications networks which would provide access to countrywide support and the opportunity to share good practice. This is a particular issue for four areas –

events, festivals and carnivals  
film and visual media  
locally grown music  
live arts/theatre

**How does this fit strategically?**

***Just Connect*** – headline aims

Enhancing our distinctive environments and the quality and diversity of our cultural life

Harnessing the benefits of population growth and managing the implications of population change.

***A better place to be*** – outcomes

The quality and sustainability of our cultural assets and activities is promoted and improved

***Somerset Community Strategy*** - outcomes

Enjoying and Achieving

Living sustainably

**Step One -What we want to see over the next three years**

- Further development of the quality of Somerset's cultural infrastructure and networks, better communication between groups and clearer access to organisations
- Inclusion of cultural considerations and development as a key component of regeneration and growth projects
- Stronger integration and understanding of culture as a key contributor to other services agendas including, economic development, education, social care, health and wellbeing.
- The importance of quality design, local distinctiveness, heritage and enhancement of the environment is embedded as part of the overall planning process.

## **How we will make this happen**

- Support improvement of new and existing cultural facilities and work with providers to develop greater participation especially amongst new audiences.
- Enhance collaboration between networks, partnerships and organisations of all sizes and sectors to ensure existing cultural resources and expertise are shared more effectively.
- Continue to develop the commissioning of cultural services based on the delivery of LAA and local targets to demonstrate a 'strategic fit'.
- Develop more effective and integrated use of existing culture related websites to improve communication between and with stakeholders and with the public.
- Investigate the potential for improved joint working in the areas of historic environment management, inclusion and delivery of public arts and link this to the planning process.

## Theme 2 - Taking Part

### Current position and future trends

Culture is for everyone. Inclusive activities, initiatives for diverse communities and across all ages, the role of businesses and the third sector should always be considered at both strategic and delivery levels.

Current plans across Somerset to improve key cultural facilities and the work that has already been undertaken to join up delivery across a range of partners and providers in a way which is complementary rather than competitive provide the opportunity to increase participation across a range of cultural activity, to attract new audiences both from within and outside the boundaries of Somerset.

The third sector already makes a significant contribution to the delivery of cultural activity in Somerset. Nationally the importance of this sector is now well recognised and there is a need to consider how best to support and develop the existing provision in Somerset.

#### **You said:**

There is a need to strive for equitable access to enable 'culture for all'. This should include practical help as well as a more proactive approach to enabling everyone to have the opportunity to access cultural activity.

#### **How does this fit the strategic context?**

##### ***Just Connect***

Ensuring that people are treated fairly and can participate fully in society  
Challenging deprivation and disadvantage and reducing inequality

##### ***A better place to be***

Access to and participation in our cultural activities is increased

##### ***Somerset Community Strategy***

Enjoying and Achieving  
Being Healthy  
Making a Positive Contribution

## **Step One - What we want to see over the next three years**

- Improvement in the opportunities to take part in and enjoy cultural activities for all through an inclusive approach which recognises the needs of people of different ages, backgrounds and abilities.
- Levels of physical activity and sport have improved.
- Support for the third sector is clearly demonstrated

## **How we will achieve this**

- Support the improvement of new and existing cultural facilities in a way that is complementary to existing provision across the County. As part of this encourage providers to develop greater participation especially amongst new audiences.
- Review the current level of activity and performance and agree plans to improve this in a way that supports delivery of LAA targets.
- Review the current provision commissioned through the CFE partnership to assess this and develop an action plan which would enable greater involvement in cultural activity in relation to specific age groups, diverse backgrounds abilities and needs.
- Identify key gaps in provision and propose solutions linked to a review of current funding/commissioning arrangements with external service providers and current physical provision.
- Clarify the level of third sector involvement in the cultural sector and determine how best to provide support that will enable this to be sustainable.

## Theme 3 - Promoting Somerset

### Current position and Trends

Somerset hosts a range of cultural activities from big events such as the Glastonbury Festival and Somerset Carnivals to a highly varied and effective number of Countywide, District, Parish and Community initiatives such as Somerset Arts Weeks, Kingsbury May Festival and Chard week of culture. Many of these events attract visitors from outside of Somerset thereby supporting the Tourism and Creative Industries and providing an opportunity to promote Somerset as a vibrant place to work live and enjoy leisure time. There is a need to more effectively recognise the opportunities for development, economic growth and investment which can be attracted / developed by the cultural sector.

#### **You said**

It is vitally important to promote brand 'Somerset' and there is a major opportunity to use cultural services to do this in a substantial way by developing a strong approach to cultural tourism and demonstrating the links to economic development.

#### **How does this fit strategically?**

##### ***Just Connect***

Promoting economic prosperity, quality of employment and employment opportunity

##### ***A better place to be***

The local distinctiveness and rich diversity of cultural life across our region is celebrated and promoted

##### ***Somerset Community Strategy***

Ensuring Economic Wellbeing

### Step One - What we want to see over the next three years

- Clear connections between the Somerset Cultural and Economic Strategies, particularly as it relates to tourism and the promotion of the 'Somerset' brand.
- Clear links between the Visit Somerset website and other related sites which promote Somerset as a place to visit/live/work.
- Use of the opportunity of the Cultural Olympiad to promote Somerset

### How we will achieve this

- Review current internal local authority governance arrangements relating to the delivery of cultural and economic strategies to ensure these are connected more effectively.
- Raise awareness of current events/activities/venues delivered through the cultural sector through better use of existing websites. Link this with the work being done by the Somerset Tourism partnership
- Finalise the programme to be delivered under the banner of the Cultural Olympiad and promote this

## Theme 4 - Enhancing learning and skills

### Current position and trends

Increasingly employers want employees who are creative. It is important that all young people have the opportunity to get engaged in cultural activity. This may be through activities in their community, the creative use of cultural activity to deliver the curriculum, the new opportunities to develop creative skills through the 14-19 diplomas or through outreach work which targets those who are not usually involved because they are disaffected, isolated or excluded.

The recent refresh of the SCS and LAA provides good opportunities to work with the providers of cultural services in Somerset to ensure a strong strategic fit between the needs of young people and the services they provide.

#### **You said**

It is vitally importance to target young people more effectively to get them engaged in all aspects of cultural activity including sport, heritage, arts and education and to enable them to consider future employment within creative industries.

There seems to be a disjoint between the skills creative industries need and the education currently provided as well as a lack of awareness of how cultural activity could be used to enhance learning – particularly for those disaffected/excluded from traditional learning approach.

#### **How does this fit strategically?**

##### ***Just Connect***

Promoting economic prosperity, quality of employment and employment opportunity

##### ***A better place to be***

Culture and creativity are embedded in learning and skills provision for all

##### ***Somerset Community Strategy***

Ensuring Economic Wellbeing

Enjoying and Achieving



## **Step One - What we want to see over the next three years**

- Increased awareness of and greater access to the learning opportunities provided through an integrated cultural offering
- There is clarity about the services/activities commissioned through the CFE and how this results in greater engagement of young people
- The development and delivery of the 14-19 diplomas has been shaped by input from creative industries and reflects the needs of employers in that sector.

## **How we will achieve this**

- Undertake an audit of learning opportunities currently provided, and consider how best to promote these.
- Clarify the services currently commissioned by members of the CFE and review the impact and use this to inform the agreement of future Service Level Agreements.
- Agree a process through which representatives of the cultural sector and particularly creative industries can influence the 14-19 agenda.

## Theme 5 - Economic impact

### The current position

There was some debate throughout the consultation process as to the reasons why culture should form an important part of local service provision. Whilst some feel that it is important for its own sake many felt that the vital role of culture in relation to its impact on the economic prosperity of a community is the most important issue.

The creative industries sector is growing faster in Somerset than in any other County for example a recent economic study shows that in West Somerset 1 in 10 businesses are connected to the creative sector. This growth needs to be sustained and nurtured. It is one of the key priorities within the Somerset LAA.

The many cultural events, significant number of heritage sites and the wonderful natural landscape of Somerset all contribute to visitor numbers and provide the opportunity to attract more. The opportunity of major investment through regeneration projects, external funding and local initiatives also provide the opportunity to boost the local economy.

The opportunity presented by the Olympics 2012 and the associated Cultural Olympiad is potentially huge.

#### **You said**

It is vitally important to promote brand 'Somerset' and there is a major opportunity to use cultural services/activities to do this in a substantial way by developing a strong approach to cultural tourism and demonstrating the links to economic development.

The Cultural Olympiad should be an important part of the cultural strategy.

#### **How does this fit strategically?**

##### ***Just Connect***

Promoting economic prosperity, quality of employment and employment opportunity

##### ***A better place to be***

Our cultural and creative industries are well supported and developed

The quality and sustainability of our cultural assets and activities is promoted and improved

##### ***Somerset Community Strategy***

Enjoying Economic Wellbeing

## **Step one - What we want to see over the next three years**

- A vibrant and thriving creative industries sector is in place and developing
- Cultural considerations are clearly embedded within Regeneration schemes and form part of the delivery of the growth areas in a way that complements existing provision
- By building on existing provision a cultural programme of events and festivals is developed and linked to both the Cultural Olympiad and development of the tourism sector.

## **How we will make this happen**

- Implement the action plan that has already been agreed by the Somerset Creative Industries Development Group as a way of developing the growth of that sector in Somerset.
- Continue the partnership approach to existing regeneration schemes to ensure consideration of the cultural aspects.
- Ensure, through the work of the CFE and SSP, that the impact of planned growth for Somerset includes consideration of cultural issues.
- Identify potential events/festivals that could be incorporated within a programme of events that support the Cultural Olympiad and agree a way of promoting these.