

Great Place Programme Evaluation (England) Final Case Studies

Arts Council England and The National Lottery Heritage Fund

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1. Introduction

Programme objectives and delivery

Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund jointly launched the £15 million Great Place scheme in August 2016. The scheme responded to recommendations made in the government's Culture White Paper (March 2016) and aimed to, *"pilot new approaches that enable cultural and community groups to work more closely together and to place heritage at the heart of communities."*¹

Great Place aimed to ensure that local investment in arts and culture could make the greatest impact on the economy, jobs, education, community cohesion and health and wellbeing of those areas. It piloted new approaches to local investment and sought to nurture long-term impact in places by encouraging cross-sector partnerships and raising the visibility of arts and culture for both policy makers and local citizens.

Grants of £500,000 to £1.5 million were available to partnerships in England.² Following an application process, 16 of an initial 31 project applications were awarded across a diverse range of areas, including rural, urban and seaside places. The vast majority of these places are outside of major metropolitan areas³ and all of them had to demonstrate high levels of socio-economic deprivation and low levels of cultural activity as part of their application process.

By directing support into areas that may have received less direct public investment in culture and have a less well-established cultural infrastructure, Great Place enabled Arts Council and the Heritage Fund

to explore and test the placemaking potential of arts and heritage. This has also been seen through Arts Council's longstanding Creative People and Places programme and the Heritage Fund's focus on outcomes for communities as part of its grant decision making process.

Since the start of Great Place, placemaking, and the role of arts and heritage, has increased in strategic importance for both funders. It underpins Arts Council's 2020-30 strategy *Let's Create* whilst the Heritage Fund prioritise community heritage in their 2019-24 strategic funding framework. With this in mind, the findings of this evaluation can help to understand the role that both funders can play in improving access to high quality arts and heritage nationally in areas that have previously been underserved. We explore the role that Great Place plays in perceptions of areas, community cohesion, and developing strategic and collaborative networks and partnerships in areas, including with local government, local businesses, and cultural and heritage organisations.

Projects were initially scheduled to complete in March 2020. A number of projects requested extensions through to December 2020 and, following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, further extensions were granted on a case-by-case basis, ranging from June 2020 to September 2021. In light of these varied extensions, where we refer to "Year 3", this means all activity from May 2019 until projects completed.

¹ <https://www.greatplacescheme.org.uk>

² separate schemes were later launched for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, run by NLHF

³ Three projects can be considered to be inside major metropolitan areas; the two in London projects and Greater Manchester, whilst Coventry, Sunderland and Reading can be considered adjacent to major areas

Evaluation objectives and approach

Three core questions were set in the Terms of Reference that have guided the programme-level evaluation:

1. How best to re-position culture in local decision-making, planning and delivery?
2. Do new approaches lead to improved social, economic and cultural outcomes for local partners?
3. How do the Heritage Fund and Arts Council work together to support these new approaches in future?

Questions 1 and 2 were addressed through the development of a logic model and evaluation framework that was created in close consultation with the projects. Question 3 was addressed separately, using formal and informal evidence from the projects, and interviews with the funding partners.

BOP Consulting delivered the Great Place programme evaluation (GPPE) in consort with the projects, using mixed qualitative and quantitative methods. These included a number of annual surveys, data tracking and analysis, project and stakeholder interviews, analysis of regional policy/ strategy, annual thematic focus groups, counterfactual case study interviews as well as in-depth, longitudinal case studies of four Great Place projects.

The four case studies are presented in this report, which accompanies the main final Great Place evaluation report.

Case Studies: methodology

As a key element of the programme-level evaluation, four of the 16 Great Place projects were selected as longitudinal case studies to provide further insight into the process and practices involved in delivering change.

These were selected to provide a variety of different governance models, geographic environments and locally specific needs and aims:

Figure 1 Case Study Focus Areas

Project	Geography	Lead organisation	Locally-specific core aims
Herefordshire	Rural, West Midlands	Local media skills charity	Partnership development with the Council and across sector organisations
Tees Valley	Urban, Semi-rural, North East	Tees Valley Combined Authority	Creating a shared, positive sense of place/ identity across the area and enable cultural collaboration across old boundaries
Gloucester	Urban, South West	Gloucester Culture Trust (charity, devolved from the Council in 2016)	Embedding skills in partner organisations, improving city marketing, regeneration and audience engagement

Project	Geography	Lead organisation	Locally-specific core aims
Sunderland	Urban, North East	Sunderland Culture (charity, founded by the Council, Sunderland University, local Music, Arts and Culture Trust)	Improving community cohesion, supporting health and wellbeing, supporting the creative economy, improving availability of cultural opportunities to children and young people

Source: BOP Consulting 2021

For each location, an initial case study was undertaken following year one of the Great Place programme delivery in 2019. These were based on desk research; an initial semi-structured phone interview and research visits including interviews with policymakers, delivery teams, partner organisations and beneficiaries alongside visits to key organisations, localities and events.

In 2021, the case studies were once again approached for interviews with the programme managers as well as interviews and/or focus groups with key partners, stakeholders or participants. Together with updated desk research including review of the external project-level final evaluation reports, this research fed into the final, updated case studies included here.

In addition to updating the sections included in the initial case studies, new sections have been added, exploring the impact of and reaction to Covid as well as the programme's legacy outcomes for each project.

2. Case Studies: key findings

Noticeably, all of the organisations that feature in the case studies were set up in response to changes to the local funding and management of culture, with Councils having to implement significant budget cuts and taking the decision to devolve cultural services to new independent entities. For example, in the case of Gloucester and Sunderland, the programme was run by new trusts/ charities responsible for culture in the area and in the case of Tees Valley by the new Combined Local Authority, while Hereford's project took place alongside the Council implementing cuts and divesting its cultural services. This provided both a need to find and create new approaches, networks and models of working. It also provided impetus to – and the opportunity for – change and improvement. At the same time, there was a sense that the Great Place programmes were part of local longer-term visions shaping the cultural sector around a vision of place, often in connection with past or future City of Culture bids.

In response, while differently grouped, named and focused, there was actually a strong similarity of key aims across the four case studies, roughly focusing on:

- Supporting (new) delivery bodies in testing, networking and embedding themselves
- Building capacity in the cultural, heritage and creative industries sectors to improve sustainability and impact
- Creating a more networked and shared cultural vision and local identity among actors across areas, communities and sectors; and
- Building (new audiences) for culture.

Though implemented through a wide variety of projects and activities across the four locations, this also resulted in some broad similarities in

the types of activities that took place. All included as a core activity networking and partnership building between local cultural services and sector bodies, but also with other funding initiatives (e.g., HAZ in Tees Valley and Sunderland), other sectors (e.g., health and education in Hereford and Sunderland) and with communities. Most projects also provided sector capacity-building support, for example in the form of conferences (e.g., Hereford), development grants (e.g., 'go and see' grants), and the creation of information platforms (e.g., Hereford's The Shire website). In some cases, the projects also addressed gaps in infrastructure in their areas through the creation of new creative workspace/ hubs (e.g., Sunderland's Creative Factory; Gloucester's Jolt)

Lastly, all projects delivered on aims to build audiences – often with a focus on engaging new or 'hard to reach' groups – and with the universal aim to provide communities with a sense of agency, engaging them in deciding and/or commissioning processes. Young people were a key focus here. Alongside offering industry training or insight opportunities specifically for those entering the creative industries, several projects created Young Board or Ambassador groups through which a cohort of young people was able to engage and contribute to local programming choices (e.g., Hereford, Gloucester), to ensure an offer was created that appealed to younger generations.

Legacy

Generally, the four case studies were a little apprehensive about the legacy of both the activities undertaken during Great Place and the level of cohesiveness and networking that had been achieved, once the funding ended. At the same time, there was a clear sense from all projects that the end of Great Place would not spell a 'cliff edge', with lasting systemic change having been achieved, even if specific projects could not be continued.

The ability to react speedily and effectively to the Covid-19 pandemic appears, in several cases, to have highlighted to programmes the scale of what was achieved. For example, networks kicked into place more quickly and efficiently to identify and deliver support measures, due to previous networking activities under the Great Place programme. All projects however expressed the view that their work is an ongoing task, with Great Place part of the pathway – a core step in delivering a process of increasing engagement and capacity.

Looking in more detail, a number of key elements of systemic change achieved through Great Place can be identified across the four locations, and these contribute to the programme's legacy:

- **Development of the capacity of independent new cultural service bodies** that have taken over from previous Council cultural services. Great Place has strengthened them and given them agency by supporting the development of their strategies and governance models and enabling them to test models of delivery and support (e.g., the formalisation of the Hereford Cultural Partnership; the Gloucester Culture Trust identifying itself as an enabler and networker rather than delivery body; Sunderland Culture embedding principles learned through testing out approaches during Great Place, such as the way they work with schools and building their in-house fundraising capacity; and the creation of the Covid Recovery Task Force in Tees Valley). Connected to this, Great Place has:
 - Provided a test bed to experiment and learn from new ways of, for example, supporting the sector and engaging audiences, often based on initial research and consultation. While not all activities will continue, this has **created new models and new knowledge**, some of which will no doubt be used again, contributing to the *“spread of good practice”*.

- Created a **sense of achievement and thus aspirations** among (new) delivery bodies and the wider sector: *“look what can be done, look what's out there”*. This was visible, for example, in **organisations seeking new funding from other funds to continue their work** (e.g., from the HAZ in Gloucester, from the Cultural Compact in Tees, the Coastal Communities Fund in Sunderland, the Towns Fund in Hereford; and a connection with planned or attempted City of Culture bids in several locations).
- **Creation of new Strategies and Action Plans**, which will live on and provide a reference point for ongoing delivery as well as a way to hold Councils to account (e.g., Hereford Cultural Strategy, Gloucester's Audience Development Plan).
 - Connected to this, **increasing understanding of the value of culture among Councils, other sectors and the public**. This was visible, for example, in the inclusion of culture in other local strategies (e.g., recognition of the value of culture in Gloucester's Economic Development Strategy) or culture getting a 'seat at the table' of key local development discussions and fora (Hereford's Towns Fund board, Tees Covid Recovery Programme, Gloucester Covid Recovery Group).
- **Increased knowledge and awareness of one another, among both the cultural sector and across sectors**, via the creation of new networks and partnerships, some of which will last. While not all will remain, in many cases the ground has been paved to pick up networks quickly if needed, as demonstrated by the speedy responses to Covid in several locations (e.g., Tees Valley's Recovery Task Force).

- **Upskilling of sector members**, which will be of value to them in the long run, impacting confidence, skills and employability (e.g., via ARC Stockton or Tees Valley’s *Creative Factory*).
- Empowered communities through the promotion of **increased community engagement and agency** – while not all activity will live on once funding stops, in some cases sustainable ways of engagement have been created or communities have rallied to such an extent that there are plans to continue the forms of engagement created through Great Place (e.g., Gloucester Culture Matson, Gloucester’s volunteering platform, Hereford’s inclusive culture champions and plans to continue the Young Creatives Board, and Sunderland’s work to support schools, e.g., through upskilling teachers): *“People have realised that things can be done”*.

Learning/ Success Factors

Across the four case studies, programmes identified a number of core learning points as contributing to successful delivery and legacy outcomes, which can be grouped into operational and strategic factors:

Operational factors

- Projects found value in a **central management point with a clear role**, with strategic and trusted partnerships linking out from this. The central management point ensured ongoing collaboration and delivery of a consistent programme that was more than the sum of its parts.
 - **This did not necessarily require a ‘Great Place project manager’** that was hired for the project. **Rather, management by people more established in the delivery organisation**, who could feed into the organisation’s leadership, proved effective. This approach allowed for **institutional learning**, with learning and

networks held by the organisation rather than just being vested in one person.

- The work of Great Place relied heavily on the existence of **multi-skilled cultural managers**, who are able to project manage; network; advocate and raise awareness; and engage diverse stakeholders and audiences.
 - Alongside this, projects found that **partnerships with experienced high profile cultural practitioners and organisations bring in new ideas** and expertise to develop local capacity (e.g., Hereford collaborating with the National Trust, Gloucester creating a training programme with The Roundhouse in London).
- To ensure legacy, all projects focused on this from the outset and mainly **conceived legacy as a set of relationships and habits of working. Networking was therefore identified as a priority activity** – in the case of Hereford, for example, as one that was more important than ‘delivery’. In this context, important learning is that:
 - It takes time to set up relationships, requiring preliminary work to engage, raise interest, align objectives and build trust, before joint planning and delivery can begin.
 - Building relationships is an ongoing effort, which will continue post Great Place – linking to the point above about the importance of institutional learning rather than all learning and networks held by one project manager.
 - In building trust and relationships, comms and marketing skills are valuable, as well as one-to-one conversations/ ‘bodies on the ground’.

- Good working relationships with the Council are key, even though there is value in having delivery managed by an independent body that is seen to have no ‘baggage’.
- Projects stressed the **importance of the availability of money through Great Place:**
- Projects’ connecting and brokering functioned best when it was allied with the ability to provide funding opportunities. Not only did it provide crucial resources to pay for capacity on the ground; but also *“grants [and seed funding] bring people in.”*
 - The availability of grant funding allowed projects to test out new approaches, such as working with new target groups or through new collaborations, which under other circumstances may have been deemed too risky or inefficient to be funded.
 - Most value could be achieved where funding was used to **build on existing (cultural) infrastructure**, networks etc., in order to add value, to amplify, or introduce a new cultural strand to existing activity: a *“tool to bring culture to the fore, in conjunction with other funding and opportunities.”* This was more efficient than simply creating ‘new’ cultural infrastructure. But it also responded to projects’ keen awareness of the need to **create a programme from the bottom-up rather than ‘parachuting-in’ initiatives** in a top-down manner, in order to generate local buy-in, involvement, agency and enthusiasm.
- At the same time, projects stressed that **expectation management is crucial in working with communities and sector representatives to avoid disappointment** or a feeling of being ‘let down’ in a context of limited funding. Not everything that is explored can be funded, and not everything can continue once funding is over.

- In terms of sector upskilling and training, projects found that in order to embed learning and maintain it, **it is important to find ways to record new learning and ways of working and repeat learning to embed it.** Some projects, for example, referenced the value of video training, undertaken due to Covid-19 restrictions, in creating a resource that can be re-used.

Strategic factors

- Projects all stressed how long it takes to generate real development, and thus suggested that programmes like Great Place need to **sit within and be a key part of longer-term visions**, acting as a steppingstone in building engagement and capacity. In this context, City of Culture bids, past or future, were seen as key strategic contexts and tools for shaping the cultural sector around a vision of place, to which the Great Place programme could respond or add to. Connected to this:
- Having **‘headline ambitions’ for the programme was hugely valuable in providing a broad direction of travel** throughout the delivery period. At the same time, projects highlighted the importance of avoiding **pre-conceived ideas**: undertaking needs analysis was seen as key, as well as taking a collaborative approach and working with partners to respond to local needs.
- In this context, it was seen as important to adapt concepts and models to local geographical contexts (and for funders to understand this need). For example, ‘diversity’ has a different meaning in rural than urban contexts, and accessibility issues vary across different locations.
- In working with communities, the projects highlighted the importance of finding a **balance between working ‘hyper-locally’ and the need to create area-wide visions, networks and in some cases, local**

identities. In terms of the former, a ground-up approach ensures authentic connectivity, provides activities that meet local needs and interests, and helps to create long-lasting relationships with communities and 'community ownership'.

- Reflecting the sense that it takes time – and thus long-term planning – to create change and develop places, several projects highlighted the importance of **young people as key target/ audience groups**. As the group that is likely to live in the area in the long-term, they have most to gain from an improved and more integrated local cultural offer and represent the future of the area. They are also the group most likely to make decisions in future years as to whether to leave the area or remain, work and raise children in the area – which may be influenced by a vibrant and appealing local cultural scene. For example, Gloucester, a town with a high proportion of young people, viewed their focus on young people not as a separate area of work, but as a 'lens' through which to consider all of their activities.

3. Herefordshire's a Great Place

Figure 2 Children participating in a Great Place activity at the National Trust's Berrington Hall



Credit: Rural Media, 2019

Key facts

Area: Rural, West Midlands

Grant: £748,200

Lead organisation: Rural Media, a local media skills charity, as lead of the Hereford Cultural Partnership Consortium (HCP)

Programme summary: With a focus on placemaking, sector and community engagement, Herefordshire's Great Place programme included grant schemes, networking, and capacity building for the cultural and creative sector. A further aim centred around improving the availability of cultural data. A key focus lay on building relationships between sectors and actors across the area. All activities funded through the programme were guided by a dedicated outcomes framework.

Programme legacy: The programme has resulted in ongoing activity and networking through the HCP, which has become a formalised entity, supported by Arts Council England Cultural Compact funding. Meanwhile, Herefordshire's new Cultural Strategy provides an enduring tool to guide activity and to hold the Council to account with regard to developments in this area. The existence of Great Place also helped to secure further funding, including from the Towns Fund; the Great Place programme manager now sits on the Towns Fund board, demonstrating an increased understanding locally of the cultural sectors' strategic role. Moreover, there are plans to maintain several elements of the Great Place programme, such as the *The Shire* website.

Strategic context of the programme

The *Herefordshire's a Great Place* programme was developed in response to several local strategic contexts:

- Herefordshire Council was forced to make significant budget cuts to its cultural services between 2016 and 2020, following funding reductions from central government. This led to the phasing out of the Local Authority's position of Cultural Development Officer and the controversial announcement to divest its Museums-Libraries-Archives service.

- In response, the Council began seeking ways of supporting its services in new ways to ensure ongoing provision of quality cultural facilities. This was done via the dual approach of:
 - making key investments in existing cultural assets such as the Library, Archive & Record Centre, and local museums to improve the venues’ financial sustainability and independence; and
 - becoming increasingly community-led, reflected in a policy of encouraging Community Asset Transfers. This for example led to the handover of the operation of the Courtyard Centre for the Arts to a Trust and of the management of some smaller facilities to community groups.
- In 2017, Hereford unsuccessfully bid for the UK City of Culture 2021. Whilst initiated by the Council, the process created the Hereford Cultural Partnership Group (HCP) as a way to establish a shared vision for culture in the region. The consortium consists of representatives from major heritage, arts and cultural organisation, local government and businesses. The members decided to retain their partnership going forwards, based on a shared vision to develop Herefordshire as a county which is *“internationally recognised as a beacon for inspirational arts and culture that enhances wellbeing”*. It was this group which saw and pursued the opportunity of the Great Place programme for Hereford in 2016, managed by charity Rural Media on behalf on HCP.
- A new university dedicated to STEM subjects – the New Model in Technology and Engineering (NMiTE) – launched in 2015 and opened its doors to new students in 2021 as the UK’s first new university in 40 years. With a focus on technology, engineering and

employability skills including innovation and creativity, it aims to transform engineering education and address a shortfall in graduates. It is planning to benefit and link in with existing infrastructure in Hereford by working alongside local companies in the sector, bringing in and retaining students and young people, and making use of existing buildings and sites in town.

Key aims and activities of the programme

In response to this context and HCP’s vision and mission, the local Great Place programme was born, with a focus on *“working with diverse communities, volunteers and professionals to put culture at the heart of life in Herefordshire”*. This was based on four core aims⁴:

1. Placemaking – “Cultivate sustainable partnerships with non-arts, heritage and culture sectors”: making Herefordshire a better place to live, work, visit; and reflecting Herefordshire’s arts, heritage and culture in local plans and strategies.
2. Economic and policy development – “Build capacity of arts, heritage and cultural organisations”: boosting the county’s local economy; and providing people with increased skills and knowledge to deliver high quality arts and heritage opportunities.
3. Community development – “Facilitate opportunities for groups and individuals to explore a sense of place through culture and heritage”: widening participation and inspiration through arts, culture, and heritage; with people having experienced and been inspired by arts, heritage and culture.

⁴ ER Arts, 2021, *Evaluation Report, Herefordshire’s A Great Place programme*

4. Arts, culture, heritage, and creative sector development – “improve opportunities for cultural creatives within our communities”: helping the sector become more resilient.

To achieve this, a programme was designed with 18 activity areas, including: public events; an annual cultural conference; grant schemes; the provision of information and tools to support local cultural organisations’ resilience; the creation of new partnerships and working groups to strengthen links between culture, health and wellbeing and economy; and capacity building through e.g., cultural apprenticeships, workshops and grants.

In many ways, Great Place has given capacity for the consortium to do the strategy and the governance. But it also gives tangible examples and activity, so that it’s not just about talk. When you start to have a programme of work with its own funding, it means that it’s real and then it’s worth doing all the paperwork. *(Lauren Rogers, Rural Media)*

Finally, the programme included supporting community asset transfer in order to explore new ideas, with an aim to transfer two cultural assets into community ownership. This area of work was directly funded by Herefordshire Council, which saw this as a good investment in reducing their financial responsibilities over the longer term.

Underlying these activities, a key focus lay on consultation with the sector and public and building relationships between sectors and actors across the area through brokerage and networking.

All activities funded through the programme were guided by a dedicated outcomes framework and were required to achieve outcomes across two or more areas.

We wanted to see whether there was an opportunity for Herefordshire, given the local authority stepping back from culture, to put a programme of new cultural settlement into place. And that underpins the programme. Through Great Place we realised we could do more in terms of raising the understanding and aspiration of communities for Community Asset Transfer. *(Lauren Rogers, Rural Media)*

Reacting to Covid

In finding a way to work around the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown in Spring and Autumn 2020, Rural Media’s Great Place programme manager Lauren Rogers reported that the extension provided to the grantees was essential. It enabled the piloting of new, digital ways of working and galvanised the project through providing it with a few “*bonus months*”.

While the first lockdown in March 2020 meant that some events had to be cancelled⁵ and others postponed, it at the same time allowed the team to deliver new online events with the Young Creatives Board as well as a series of workshops exploring best practice for inclusion and accessibility of cultural sites.

In working around the new challenges, the intensive networking that had been set up as part of the programme over the past years proved extremely valuable, providing a space to have conversations with various sector members over the course of the crisis. One HCP board

⁵ Final ‘Pride of Place’ national conference; a multi-venue exhibition curated by the Young Creatives Board

member for example created a new Collective for performing artists, while community organisations such as volunteer networks responded quickly to provide support where needed. The introduction of a small Great Place-funded grant was considered to provide creative people with “*some space to take stock and consider what to do*”; however, upon consultation with existing grant recipients, efforts were refocused on supporting third parties to deliver revised community activity, such as digital participation, instead. Meanwhile *The Shire* was used to provide information about Covid national Covid support grants. “*The key aim*”, says Lauren Rogers, “*was to provide bespoke and tailored advice and support*”.

Nevertheless, there is ongoing anxiety about the future of local cultural organisations and sector members, with many at risk of not being able to survive, which would inevitably have an impact on the local cultural ecosystem.

Programme highlights across the years

Across the funding period, the programme achieved a number of highlights across its priority areas.

Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) sector networking and support

Key highlights focused on bringing together the local CCI sector in a number of ways:

- The development of the HCP has gone from strength to strength. Started as a “*loose, informal consortium*”, it has become more formalised as a Not-for-Profit through the Great Place programme and “*was key to the programme’s delivery and a big success*”, according to Lauren Rogers. It successfully applied for an Arts Council England Cultural Compacts grant of £20,000 in September

2020 to contribute to its development to become “*the body it needs to be*”; the funding period runs until March 2022.

- HCP together with other partners in 2018 launched Herefordshire’s first Cultural Strategy 2019-2029. Designed to be an accessible document for all, this was officially endorsed by Herefordshire Council’s Cabinet in October 2020. This means that “*it will still be there even if there is political change*”, and that the public can hold the Council to account over its stated commitments.
- A local cultural sector news website, *The Shire*, was launched to promote, celebrate and challenge perceptions of the cultural sector in Herefordshire. This provided a step-change for the previously disconnected cultural and creative industries. The website offered different ways to engage: it promoted Great Place events and programmes as well as providing a general ‘What’s on’ guide to local cultural events; featured profiles of local creative talent; and acted as a tool to make Hereford’s creative community aware of grants and creative employment opportunities. *The Shire* lives on, initially supported by funding through the Cultural Compacts grant until March 2022.
- In 2018, Great Place hosted *Civic Fabric*, Herefordshire’s first national cultural conference with a programme of keynotes, workshops and panels focusing on skills and sustainability of the cultural sector, based on feedback from the sector. The conference attracted over 200 delegates and allowed the local cultural sector to interact with and learn from experts from the National Trust, Herefordshire Council, and the British Museum. The following year, the conference took place under the name *Create/Fuel 2019*, with a focus on highlighting creative pathways for under 30s. This included workshops, speeches and networking; the Young Creatives Board was established through

the 2019 conference. The third conference, *Pride of Place 2020*, was cancelled due to Covid.

- A variety of training opportunities and schemes supported capacity building of the local cultural sector, based on research to understand what skills were lacking. These included:
 - The *Go and See* grant scheme, which provided bursaries of £300 – £500 for Herefordshire-based creatives to learn from best practice in other places of the UK, thereby breaking down the insularity of living in rural areas. Recipients were required to translate that knowledge back within Hereford upon completing their trip and typically became involved in other Great Place programmes from this starting point.
 - Workshops and small bursaries focusing on health and wellbeing activities; and bringing in mid-career professionals to serve as judges for one of the grant schemes, providing training on how to approach such a role.

Spotlight: ‘The Big Conversation’

A key focus of the Herefordshire programme – with one of the smallest Great Place grants – was its prioritisation of building relationships, i.e., partnerships, brokerage and connections. This was a carefully chosen tactic, in contrast to a more delivery-focused approach: *“We thought about something high profile like a community opera, but decided it just wasn’t so important for legacy.”* Rural Media were very conscious that Great Place was about establishing the foundations of a new approach that will last beyond the project period. The approach was ideological as

well as practical: not being the direct deliverers meant *“this is not about hand-holding but about empowering communities.”*

In-person networking was highlighted as particularly important in a rural area, where spending time in different towns and villages was vital to forge trust. Digital communications was also seen as key in a context where physical access can be a major issue. This resulted in the creation of *The Shire* website to *“whet the appetite”* of potential cultural audiences and create a virtual networking-point for sector members.

The project team thus spent a significant portion of time each week attending events and meetings organised by others, both as speakers but also as participants. These ranged from community discussions in local pubs to formal consultation events, covering culture, employment and skills, neighbourhood planning and health.

This approach was also successful in building connections with other sectors and contributed to embedding culture across agendas: *“I attended an intelligence sharing event with health practitioners, and when the event began, people asked if this would be relevant to me as I was from ‘culture’. But at the end I had seven business cards and lots of ‘why haven’t we had this conversation before?’ comments.”* Connection-building and brokerage led to several successful collaborations, such as the Health and Wellbeing Evaluation Bursaries, which were accessed by health practitioners, and the Business and Culture Working Together project: a collaboration between Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, the Herefordshire Business Board, Great Place and Rural Media, which saw the creation of three short films which profile Herefordshire *“as a great place to live, visit and invest in”*, as well as a series of seminars about the power of cross-sector partnerships.⁶

⁶ [Business & Culture Working Together | The Shire \(the-shire.co.uk\)](https://www.the-shire.co.uk)

At the same time, the delivery team were clear that connecting and brokering work best where they are connected with the ability to offer funding opportunities: *“grants [and seed funding] bring people in.”*

Supporting local arts and heritage facilities

Some activities specifically contributed to the resilience of local arts and heritage facilities:

- The *Hidden Gems* grant scheme funded creative projects that brought the arts and heritage closer together, got local communities involved in cultural activity and embraced the use of digital technology to *“raise the profile of Herefordshire’s lesser-known heritage”* ‘gems’. createROSS, a community group and one of the *Hidden Gems* grant recipients, involved communities and schools in recreating historic sites around Ross on Wye using augmented reality.
- An ongoing partnership was developed with the National Trust to activate their property Berrington Hall in Leominster. This included collaborative planning of three programmes of activity, co-designed and run by young people and delivered in 2019-20. The Trust may roll these projects out to other properties if considered successful.
- Meadow Arts and Hereford Cathedral received financial support for their commission of internationally acclaimed artist Yinka Shonibare. Shonibare worked with local art college students and a disability arts group to create a new artwork responding to the Mappa Mundi, the largest existing medieval world map, held in the Cathedral. Shonibare attended the launch and held an ‘in conversation’ event for the public, garnering significant press coverage for the city as a cultural centre.

Community engagement

Community engagement and consultation were key features throughout the programme. The opportunity to ‘test out’ activities provided by the funding *“meant that [we] were able to work with communities who might not identify as ‘cultural groups’”*, says Lauren Rogers. Highlights included:

- Large-scale consultation events and public meetings about the county’s cultural needs, held in the regional centres of Hereford, Ross on Wye and Leominster.
- The programme worked with the Marches Children and Family Network around access and inclusion, and “*had some real success making our spaces accessible to all*” (e.g., for audience members with disabilities that may hinder access). This included running online workshops on inclusion, which were funded by Great Place. As a result, there is now a cohort of a dozen or so *inclusive culture champions* in the county, who identified themselves and are continuing to act beyond the end of the programme – something that the programme manager feels would have been unlikely to happen without the Great Place programme.
- 28 people attended a ‘Discussion Night’ event co-ordinated for members of the public, health professionals and arts professionals to discuss the potential for culture to deliver health and wellbeing outcomes. Speakers from Ledbury Poetry Festival and ArtsLift⁷ introduced their activities, strengths and challenges, and led discussions about how such activity could be developed further locally. This led to new partnership potential amongst participants as well as information published on *The Shire* about Arts on Prescription.
- Some of the Great Place funding was funnelled into the creation of a Creative Careers network for the county aimed particularly at younger creatives. This work also saw the creation of a *Young Creatives Board*, whose members contributed to the development of a local cultural programme for young people, as well as the *Create/Fuel* event for people aged 16-30 in the early stages of a creative career.

The latter aimed to provide inspiration, practical advice, networks and support on how to start a career in the creative industries.

- Throughout, the programme maintained an ‘on the ground’ relationship with the new NMiTE, with students for example helping to design local spaces and programme elements, including getting involved in the Young Creatives Board.

Spotlight: Engaging and supporting young people

As part of the Great Place programme, the delivery team introduced several programme elements targeted specifically at Herefordshire’s younger people, in particular those with aspirations to develop careers in the creative industries. This included the development of the *Young Creatives Board* as well as the *Create/Fuel* conference, an event for 16–30-year-olds interested in creative careers in Hereford. Young people got involved with these opportunities in a variety of ways, often through initial engagement with other activities organised under the banner of the Great Place programme. Most of those who engaged regularly in the *Board* had existing creative interests.

At an initial planning session with Rural Media, the *Board* members were asked what they would like to see happen locally. The *Board* then received funding through Great Place to develop events and collaborations, for example running regular ‘First Friday’ events. These were based on an open call for young artists to create performances, which the Board members selected: “*we were responsible for choosing the piece that we through the rest of Hereford would like to see*”. The events were initially held in person, with the idea of creating collaborations between young people and artists from different areas. They were later transferred to online activity during the Covid-19

⁷ a long-standing organisation which provides arts learning programmes for those with mental or physical illnesses

lockdown, with performances recorded and broadcast. These were successful: *“everyone being at home gave people an opportunity to join in and see talent.”* Among others, the members also delivered an event at a local school, to *“show the pupils about ways to go about the arts – it was fun to get them [to be] creative!”*.

The young members felt that their involvement was hugely important in the programme: *“it acknowledged that young people have voices and opinions and want to have a say in what we see in our homes.”* They felt that their decision would be based on different criteria: *“we didn’t decide because of name value etc., but because we liked the artists’ suggestions”*. Moreover, it provided a way to show young people that a career in the creative sector is possible: *“you need to have access to other people who share the same headspace. It can be quite daunting to be the only [artistic] person surrounded by young people focused on their careers”*.

On a personal level, members reported having an enjoyable time, *“learning a lot”*, and meeting other likeminded people. One of the participants subsequently decided to go to Hereford College of Arts (dropping a previous history course), which he *“never thought would happen”*. Another member ended up doing more media work for Rural Media, having been *“given opportunities to do things and pushed into areas she’d never have tried”*. She has now moved to London to work for the University of the Arts London, using some of these skills on a day-to-day basis. Meanwhile, a third member – an aspiring poet – reported that his involvement helped him with organisational skills and gave him confidence to apply for a course with Soho Theatre, spending a year writing a play: *“a really good starting point for me”*. As someone who is blind, he has also become one of local area’s inclusive culture champions recruited during the Great Place programme.

Programme legacy

Lauren Rogers feels that throughout the programme, *“one thing has led to the next”*, with a legacy that *“there is not going to be a cliff edge”* once the programme has ended. The programme manager highlighted that there is still silo working happening in the area and that this will take more than three years to change: it is an ongoing job, *“there is always networking to be done”*. It is felt, for example, that the arts sector is better connected than the heritage sector at present, which is more reliant on volunteers, who *“connect in different ways to [the] freelancers”* who make up a large part of the local arts sector.

However, *“things are moving together”*. Where *“Great Place was about laying the foundations after X years of neglect, now that we are coming to an end, we are seeing some of those foundations coming to fruition. [The funding] allowed us to try things without the Council being burdened with the testing”*.

Most importantly, the HCP has continued to grow and evolve during the programme and has now become formalised as a Not-For-Profit with *“some capacity”*: as the programme manager summarised, *“basically, Great Place has been great in terms of developing the HCP”*. Ongoing funding through the Cultural Compact grant and the Council (which has agreed to invest £9,000 to support the consortium) means that *“there is a clear path forward for the HCP”*, with available funds to support the partnership to become *“the body it needs to be”*. This is also testament to the fact that overall, the sector’s relationship with the Council *“has improved immeasurably”*.

HCP is in the process of taking on new partners - Ledbury Poetry Festival is now a HCP member, and other local leaders such as Sidney Nolan Trust and Hay Festival are also engaged - and is in conversation about changing to charitable status. It has also been able to bring other

local major partners to the table, such as the National Trust and Hereford Cathedral. In 2020/21 those HCP members who are also Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations established regular NPO networking: “*vital for smaller NPOs in a rural county*”, according to Rogers. HCP members also continue to engage with the West Midlands Cultural Recovery Unit and are forging new relationships with neighbouring councils such as Shropshire and Worcester City Council, to share best practice and tools for strategic cultural development.

The ongoing existence of HCP means that looking forward, “*there is a body that can build on past work rather than having to work from scratch*”, which can continue its “*glue, not do*”-activity of “*matchmaking, seeing the golden threads and connecting the dots*”. HCP has ongoing plans, for example in moving forward the local arts and health agenda and in consulting with other LEPs (Anglia, Cornwall, Cumbria) about their local shadow culture boards – something that does not currently exist locally.

In addition, the new Cultural Strategy for Herefordshire, which will last until 2029, provides a key guideline around which decisions and activities can be based going forward, as well as a tool for the public to hold the Council to account. HCP is now working to “*put the meat on the bones*” of the Strategy, enabled by the Compact funding and the willingness of members to turn strategy into action. An HCP Investment Plan is for example being published in 2022 to identify further investment in cultural development. To support this, a Great Place-funded and HCP-commissioned independent report into growth potential of Herefordshire’s CCIs, published in February 2022, will provide, for the

first time, data on the scale of the local CCI sector along with recommendations for specific interventions to stimulate the sector.⁸

Other elements of the Great Place programme are also still in existence. *The Shire* website is continuing, initially supported by Cultural Compact funding until March 2022. It is also a key part of HCP’s submission to Arts Council England’s Volunteering Futures funding scheme in December 2021. In going forward, the website has been reorientated as the online home of HCP, with a regular “Herefordshire Culture” newsletter from *The Shire* launching in April 2022. HCP and the young people involved in the *Young Creatives Board* and the *Create/Fuel* conference have also had conversations about how to continue these activities. Whilst “*the momentum has petered off a bit*” (with some key participants moving away from Hereford) it has proved to be a valuable piloting opportunity for how to undertake cultural activity with children and young people at the fore and can “*inform actions developed under the Cultural Strategy’s CYP priority*”, says Rogers: “*people have realised that things can be done!*” For example, the success of the Board and *Create/Fuel* conference have contributed to shaping new activities such as Rural Media’s new Point of View creative youth voice programme⁹ as well as Ledbury Poetry Festival’s submission to the Arts Council Volunteering Futures fund, which centres on creating hybrid and digital volunteering opportunities for under 30s.

Spotlight: A responsive approach to Community Asset Transfers (CAT)

Herefordshire’s Great Place programme included a commitment to transfer two cultural assets into community ownership. This area of work was directly funded by Herefordshire Council, which hoped through this

⁸ *Get Creative: 9 ways to supercharge Herefordshire*

⁹ Funded by Esmee Fairbairn Foundation until 2023

to reduce their financial responsibilities over the longer term. This aspect of the programme has changed a lot over the years, as *“the policy didn’t change but the attitudes did”* and has required a nimble and responsive approach.

Great Place’s work in this area began in January 2018 with a series of roundtables for council officers from different teams. Two potential assets were identified for transfer: Hereford Town Hall, a listed building owned by Herefordshire Council, and a cluster of sites in the market town of Kington.

Instead of commissioning a feasibility study for the Town Hall as initially planned, the Great Place team followed this up by first commissioning a wider ‘Cultural Spaces’ research report, to inform future developments and investments made to improve local cultural provision. This aimed to understand the challenges and opportunities of local cultural provision in order to help set the buildings into their wider context, as well as to consider potential approaches to a wider number of spaces including the Town Hall and Museum & Art Gallery. The research supported Hereford in its successful application to the Towns Fund, receiving £22.4m to support post-Covid recovery and enhance economic growth. The Great Place programme manager now sits on Hereford’s Towns Fund board, resulting in being able to *“make sure culture is represented”* and *“confidently keep the conversation going”*.

The approach for the Kington project has been very different. Based on an earlier unsuccessful attempt by the Council to transfer key assets there, the partners were keen to keep the conversation alive, and developed a more long-term transformational programme. This builds on local relationships and identifying *“what people want”*. A new process was set in motion to re-engage the community, starting with a public consultation event which identified a number of priorities, including retaining young people and combatting social isolation. Rural Media’s

independence from the Council helped in this context. *“The lack of previous baggage that local authorities sometimes have means there are fewer blocks in the conversations we want to be having.”* Nevertheless, the Council remain a critical – and positive – part of the process. Great Place subsequently delivered a funding application to Big Lottery’s Awards for All, which is funding a project manager post to deliver events to test the community’s ideas.

Success factors

Throughout the programme, the programme manager identified a number of factors that have been key to the programme’s success:

1. Programmes and concepts need to be adapted for rural areas. ‘Diversity’ has a different meaning in a rural context to an urban one, being predominantly about geography, not ethnicity. Challenges around connectivity and digital access require specific approaches, and time needs to be planned in to access different locations.
2. Each of the Great Place team members has significant expertise in communications, including journalism, marketing and digital engagement. This is critical for connecting people with culture in a rural context and in amplifying the effect of all activities.
4. The creation of a Cultural Strategy, supported by Great Place, was important in giving substance to the plans and activities throughout the programme and moving forwards.
5. To make the most of the available funds and build on what is there as opposed to ‘parachuting in’ new activities, the programme was principally about creating added value, making more of what is already happening through amplification, connectivity or bringing a cultural slant.

6. To be effective, training has to be based on research and an understanding of what skills are lacking locally. It requires scheduled, long-term opportunities rather than one-off activities to be successful.
7. Expectation management was crucial given the nature of Great Place as a pilot programme – this allowed for trying things out, but at the same time meant that not everything may work and not all problem could be solved at once.

With a high level of expectation when you're working on many things simultaneously, you won't be able to please everyone all of the time. So, for the project team, that means having a thick skin and negotiation skills. (*Lauren Rogers, Rural Media*)

4. Great Place Tees Valley

Figure 3 Young people attending Stockton International Riverside Festival



Credit: Stockton International Riverside Council & Stockton on Tees Borough Council

Key facts

Area: Urban; Semi-rural. North East

Grant: £1,332,500

Lead organisation: Tees Valley Combined Authority, leading a consortium of five Local Authorities¹⁰, cultural organisations and Teeside University

Programme summary: The programme's key aim was to use culture to create a shared, positive sense of place and identity across the Tees Valley, as well as to support local economic regeneration, by growing CCI sector capacity and contributing to the spread of good practice. To achieve this, the programme funded local and regional cultural and heritage projects.

Programme legacy: The programme contributed to the creation of networks and models of working and improved Local Authorities' understanding of the relevance of culture to constituents. Whilst there was an initial feeling that more may have been done to create a cohesive programme and share learning and resources, the area's Covid response provided new insight into the programme's legacy. The existence of Great Place Tees Valley (GPTV) helped to quickly bring together the sector to create a response programme, providing a renewed sense that Great Place helped the cultural sector to be better connected as well as be recognised as having strategic influence.

Strategic context of the programme

The Great Place Tees Valley programme was designed to respond and contribute to a number of local strategic developments:

- The creation of the Tees Valley Combined Authority in 2016 brought about a new opportunity to work across geographic boundaries and crystallise the emerging spirit of collaboration between the five local

¹⁰ The Tees Valley Combined Authority was created in April 2016 and is a partnership of five authorities: Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees.

authorities. While there were previous structures for collaboration, the creation of the Combined Authority added impetus to these efforts. Although the new governance layer added new complexity in terms of management, it also created additional capacity and led to a strong awareness of new structures being tested and evolved. Great Place thus came into an enabling environment seeking change and growth.

The title 'Great Place' singular was helpful and fortuitous, marking this as a single area. The habit of working together is important even if individual elements don't work. The growing awareness of shared ambition – not of five different sets of challenges and assets – is important. *(Combined Authority)*

- With the development of the Combined Authority came an increased appreciation of the potential role that the cultural and creative sector may have in the region. The Tees Valley Combined Authority Strategic Economic Plan (2016-2026) for the first time sought to foreground the cultural and creative sector in a discussion about the region's future. Indicatively, all strategic areas were asked by the Director of Investment about their contributions to culture.
- This linked to a growing sense of regional identity, developing in line with political structures and drawing on both contemporary reality and heritage narratives. The idea of 'Tees Valley' as a region had previously felt like a construct. However, at the point when Great Place started, the concept was being brought to life, beginning with the core challenges of providing coherent infrastructures, including transport, across the region.

This is a region that's currently trying to understand itself as a region. The questioning of authentic identities and pluralities

is something only arts and heritage can do. *(Cultural organisation)*

- At the point when Great Place started, discussions were underway regarding a local bid for City of Culture 2025. In this context, Great Place was seen as 'action research' for the bid, developing a shared set of objectives, finding a voice for the cultural sector, working on a cultural strategy from the ground up and providing learning to feed into a potential City of Culture proposal.

Key aims and activities of the programme

The programme's overriding goal was to use culture to create a shared, positive sense of place and identity across the Tees Valley, as well as support the area's economic growth and regeneration. In doing so, the programme had a number of underlying objectives focusing on sector development and community engagement, including:

- to grow capacity in the cultural and creative sector and
- increase partnership and collaboration in the CCIs and spread good practice and delivery across geographic borders within the Combined Authority; and
- to engage all communities in the Tees Valley in its offer – including 'hard to reach communities' – thereby increasing audience participation and enhancing community confidence through engagement with culture and
- increase a positive sense of place and belonging, in particular among children and young people, and challenge the image the of Tees Valley as characterised by industrial decline and post-industrial problems.

To achieve this, the programme brought together the five Tees Valley Local Authorities, as well as Teesside University and key local cultural organisations Stockton Arts Centre (ARC), Theatre Hullabaloo, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (Mima), Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF), The Northern School of Art as well as Tees Valley Arts in a consortium, led by the new Combined Authority (TVCA). Each of the five local authorities as well as TVCA provided £25k match funding, totalling £150k, in addition to “*significant in-kind match funding*”, according to programme manager Christopher Batstone. Together, the partners organised and led a series of projects, including four ‘Settlement Projects’ that took place within a Local Authority as well as a range of Tees Valley-wide projects. The projects were connected by central management and a shared model: a central cultural organisation embedded in an in-need area, building capacity with its local community and taking its expertise and practice across geographic borders. All worked closely with their local communities, involving community members through participatory activities in order to deliver on a series of outcomes such as empowerment, personal development, creative skills and collective voice.

The projects included a range of arts, heritage and cultural engagement activities, with many focusing on audience engagement and sector capacity building (see table below). While embracing and celebrating local heritage and history played a role in many of the projects, overall, the programme aimed to reflect the values of Tees Valley today and its ambitions for the future. Through this varied approach, the programme aimed to develop and extend existing cultural activity, practice and strengths of work in the Tees Valley in a way that responded to local needs and contexts.

Figure 4 Type of project, delivery partners, and project details

Type of project	Delivery partners	Project
Settlement Project	Darlington Borough Council	Heritage on Track: work between artists and schools/communities to build engagement in heritage in lead up to bicentenary of Stockton and Darlington railway
Settlement Project	Hartlepool Borough Council & Northern School of Art	Creative Hartlepool: Community engagement events around town centre regeneration schemes with focus on heritage and cultural assets; creative industries events for young people
Settlement Project	Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art	The Middlesbrough Settlement: Long-term model of collaborations with local residents and organisations to make creative projects around the Settlement model, retelling story of the Boosebeck settlement
Settlement Project	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council / Tees Valley Arts	Community- led heritage programmes based on local steel making history: The Black Path, Celebration of the historic Black Path in South Teesside;

Type of project	Delivery partners	Project
		Reimagining the annual Steel Gala; Social Life of Steel: enable the public to tell their own story
Tees Valley-wide projects	Middlesbrough Council	Creative Factory: Building relationships between institutions and creative practitioners to support sustainability of local practitioners
Tees Valley-wide projects	ARC Stockton	Greater Tees Practitioner Training: training programme for creative practitioners with focus on community engagement including with socially excluded groups
Tees Valley-wide projects	Stockton Borough Council/ Stockton International Riverside Festival/ Theatre Hullabaloo	SIRF shared its professional experience and skills with community groups and cultural organisations across Tees Valley, creating a high quality, vibrant community carnival model + Two new productions by Theatre Hullabaloo drawing on its pioneering child-centred artistic model

Type of project	Delivery partners	Project
		through dialogue between artists and children
Tees Valley-wide projects	Tees Valley Arts/ Real Tees Valley	Young people worked with professional film makers to create short films about young people's views on place and identity
Tees Valley-wide projects	Tees Valley Museums	Consortium of five Local Authority museum services developed three pilot projects to test new approaches to reaching and engaging visitors

Reacting to Covid

Great Place Tees Valley was considerably affected by the Covid-19 outbreak, given in particular the fact that most projects involved close working relationships with local communities. However, rapid contingency planning meant that some projects were able to move to digital/ online provision, whilst others postponed their activity to a later date.

More widely, the Combined Authority, local LEP and Local Authority partners approved a £1m Recovery Programme¹¹ of stabilisation, recovery and development funding for the area's Visitor Economy and Cultural Industries sectors, with the aim of *“supporting Tees Valley sector recovery in-line with other parts of the country and create the conditions for future growth”*. Headed by a Task Force made up of

¹¹ [Visitor Economy and Culture Industries Covid-19 Recovery Programme - Tees Valley Combined Authority \(teesvalley-ca.gov.uk\)](https://www.teesvalley-ca.gov.uk)

representatives of the culture/ visitor economy sectors and chaired by Annabel Turpin, Chief Executive of ARC (one of the Great Place delivery partners), this was a core way to involve the culture and visitor economy in decision-making. Whilst the Task Force's primary job focused on supporting the recovery programme, they have also been invited to consult on the broader local investment agenda. In this, the Task Force *“recognises that the culture sector has a critical role to play in supporting the recovery and wellbeing of communities, rebuilding confidence and routes to participation, engagement and attendance.”*¹²

The Recovery Programme thus aimed to balance short-term support with interventions which create longer-term conditions for growth. Activities were funded through six core programme strands, of which one was the Great Place Tees Valley *‘Reconnecting Communities’* programme. Funded through a re-deployment of an £80k Great Place underspend, the programme was a new strand of the Great Place Tees Valley programme, sitting under the banner of the Recovery Programme. Building on the best practice established through the wider Great Place programme, it aimed to support the recovery of cultural venues and freelancers by developing new ways of reaching and engaging audiences and communities during the ongoing social restrictions. To achieve this, the programme funded projects, pilots and audience development initiatives to re-engage local communities with Tees Valley culture and heritage venues, both through extending existing Great Place projects as well as through new activities. Activities ran until the end of March 2021.

According to Task Force lead Annabel Turpin, the existence of Great Place helped considerably in getting the Task Force and Recovery Programme off the ground: it meant there was existing trust between partners, which enabled the members to *“get going straight away”*. Moreover, Great Place offered an existing *“trusted and effective ‘brand’”* for supporting community engagement and audience participation, which local communities already knew about.

Programme highlights across the years

Great Place Tees Valley achieved delivery of a wide range of public and community events, workshops, training and volunteering opportunities, thereby *“bringing communities together to celebrate local heritage, culture and identity”*. In total, delivery ran across 18 different projects, involving 320 local artists and SMEs as well as around 12,000 local children and families.¹³

CCI sector capacity development

The programme successfully helped to support skills and confidence among sector participants, as well as led to increased collaborative working across the Tees Valley among cultural, creative and heritage sector representatives. In total, 102 community training opportunities were delivered to artists, practitioners and volunteers; 48 artists attended training programmes; 125 took up mentoring opportunities; and 235 local artists or SMEs offered employment via 30 placements.¹⁴ The programme enabled development of successful models of training, providing practitioners with new skills, confidence and the ability to

¹² GPTV Reconnecting Communities Final proposal

¹³ Great Place Tees Valley Evaluation Summary, Teesside University
(https://research.tees.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/25196564/Great_Place_Tees_Valley_Evaluation_Summary.pdf)

¹⁴ Ibid.

secure new work through Great Place or other avenues. Highlights included:

- In response to a realisation that it was hard to find local artists to lead community sessions, ARC ran a series of cohorts of practitioner training using national contacts. These provided participants with new skills to work with particular audience groups or communities. According to GPTV project manager Chris Batstone, this “*gave practitioners the skill sets to deliver the kind of projects we were offering through Great Place*”. Courses for example included learning around arts and disability, how to work with young groups, and working with asylum seekers. There was high demand for the project and learning was brought together with learning from other projects developing artist practitioners, in order to explore how these might be extended and combined. ARC reported that the programme “*demonstrated a strong impact on practitioners’ subsequent employment, confidence and skills*”.

Middlesbrough Local Authority’s *Creative Factory* supported local visual arts practice through providing opportunities for pop-up work etc, focusing on building sector members’ ability to commission work and build their business models. While the Local Authority has not been able to continue their support to Creative Factory, the project has created a “*model for building relationships between independent practitioners and the Local Authority*”, according to Chris Batstone.

Spotlight: Creative Factory, Middlesbrough Council

Original plans for the Middlesbrough-based element of the GPTV programme focused on developing a physical space for creative practitioners. Between the bidding process and programme start, however, property prices rose and a clearer need was identified for artist capacity development. The resulting change of delivery model alongside

a consistent aim of supporting creative enterprise proved hugely positive. “*Saying that this project wasn’t a building, but an umbrella has been the best thing! Spaces are actually popping up organically. [...] If the project had started as a building that would have squashed things.*” The day-to-day priority thus shifted from a physical space to connecting people: the majority of budget spend was on salary, and this allowed for time which leveraged significant resources in-kind as well as developed individuals and created networks.

A key realisation behind the change of project was that what artists most needed was an understanding of creative enterprise: that their work has value, should be paid for and that burn-out is a major risk. Artists were thus supported to establish sustainable working practices, potentially combining other paid work (e.g., in one case, as a postman) with paid artistic work. For example, an apprenticeship scheme was devised with a local manufacturing plant on the docks to train 15 artists, allowing them to work part-time there and part-time on their creative practice. In addition, a bursary scheme supported the import and export of creative practice knowledge into and out of Middlesbrough.

As an example of the success of the *Creative Factory*, a local market established by artists prior to Great Place, Orange Pip Market, which was supported through *Creative Factory* activity, has had a regenerative effect on the town centre and boosted community connectedness. While an original aim was to develop 30 artists, in the first year alone 90 artists received training and mentor support. Meanwhile, community groups collaborated with artists to create a series of new flags for the town hall, raising the profile of arts and culture and celebrating the communities involved.

A further critical element to the *Creative Factory* project was the aim to connect creative practitioners more closely with the Council, helping to network a series of creative practitioners who also work in council roles.

This led to new energy and ambition created by a critical mass of creatives able to navigate council procedures and participate in discussions. This has been able to go some way to providing a corrective to the dramatic drop in arts development officers at the Council (from three to five FTEs, to one). *“Being in the Council, I’ve got a level of access and can make these arguments very quickly. I’ve been completely enthused by the willingness to change and do things differently. We’ve done things in two years that would have taken ten.”*

Overall, whilst it was felt that this model of delivering practitioner support (as opposed to the creation of a specific site) was at greater risk of not attracting ongoing funding – and Middlesbrough Council has indeed been unable to provide ongoing support – the approach felt right and for example received attention as a model of good practice from the Artists Research Group at Leeds University.

Increased collaboration across the sector and local borders

While it took some initial work to get cultural organisations to make time to attend collaborative meetings, this was gradually overcome by the sense of opportunity that the overall programme provided. This was supported through an e-newsletter for the cultural sector, set up to share news and events. According to the project evaluation, collaboration between cultural organisations and other public sector agencies increased on average 12% across the programme period, and 70% of partners reported collaboration as key to success. *“Professional artists have worked extensively as a team, new networks and bonds have been formed and artists have collaborated on projects”.*¹⁵

- One successful project was that of Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF) and Stockton Council, which took SIRF’s expertise

and shared this with different target groups across the Tees Valley. Volunteers were recruited to help develop celebrations, with a small number provided with professional development support as community leaders and creative practitioners, including one refugee. SIRF also collaborated with other cultural organisations, for example a small festival based in Hartlepool, to deliver a carnival in a former retail space on the waterfront. This was kept small-scale to allow the local organisation to rerun activities the following year with less support from SIRF. The small event received good turnout and subsequently resulted in bringing audiences from Hartlepool to the main SIRF event, many for the first time. A bus was hired to facilitate the journey.

- Middlesbrough’s *Creative Factory* developed new working partnerships with Mima School of Art and other new partners including Northern School of Art, Start Studio, Basecamp and Conversations in Painting. Tees Valley Arts reported that *“professional artists have worked extensively as a team, new networks and bonds have been formed and artists have collaborated on projects away from the Real Tees Valley through meeting each other in this project”.*
- The Great Place *Heritage on Track* project – run to support the local Stockton and Darlington railway Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) – provided insight into the challenges and opportunities of bringing together two major funding opportunities and the organisations delivering them locally.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Spotlight: 'Heritage on Track' - combining Great Place and Heritage Action Zone

The Stockton and Darlington Railway HAZ supported by Historic England (2018 – 2023) was established to rejuvenate and restore 26 miles of historic railway, in preparation for its bicentenary in 2025. As one of the main Great Place Tees Valley 'Settlement' projects, *Heritage on Track* aimed to support the HAZ, raising awareness of their heritage with local communities.

All partners saw this as an ideal match, with each programme *"reinforcing"* the other, both practically and politically – the combination brought about extra attention from key sectoral figures. Both complemented and worked alongside each other, with the HAZ focusing on the infrastructure and assets and GP working on telling the story of the assets. Whilst the key criteria for a HAZ are plans to improve the physical environment (there must be buildings on the At Risk Register), there is a strong awareness that a HAZ also needs intangible heritage: a strength of the Great Place programme. Likewise, while a successful HAZ must show that physical assets are conserved, these also need to be sustainable. *"You need local people to feel they own, care about and value that heritage"* – a process which could be activated through Great Place. Culture breaks down perceptual barriers: *"the majority of local people wouldn't go into a 'heritage building' so we have to find ways of involving people, for instance through oral histories or photographic displays or partnerships with MIND groups."*

The coincidence of the HAZ and Great Place funding marked a change from the historic under-investment in culture in the area. This was hugely welcomed, but not without challenges. An investment deficit led to high levels of need, which do not necessarily fit within the funding structures: *"place-based programmes should start with the needs of a place and respond to that – launching schemes and having criteria goes*

against this." There were also challenges around funder expectation, while working within two major schemes brought questions as well as opportunity: *"it is heritage? Is it engagement in culture? A chimaera, but an exciting thing to work our way around."*

In working together, timescales were a further issue: Great Place took place across three years; the HAZ works for five years, with a growing recognition that areas can't demonstrate change within that timeframe. The ambition of both schemes was thus to develop long-term change with short-term funding: more investment will certainly be required. An ongoing key aspect of discussion is therefore how to leverage this. At a senior level, this is about engagement: *"Fundamentally, people who aren't convinced of culture's value will ask for evidence and remain unconvinced – and vice versa. So it's not about the evidence – it's about hearts and minds. The feedback loop of 'buzz' is enough and real."* But at an administrative level, practical issues in unlocking investment persist, not yet adapted to cultural use: *"Internal processes essentially use LEP models and require a lot of evidencing, e.g., expecting business cases and job creation. It's an interesting dialogue for us, how we make economic outputs from projects that don't have economic outputs."*

While *Heritage on Track* ended in late 2019, it was agreed that the team would keep their seats around the table until 2025, in order to be involved in the engagement around the bicentenary. Progress paused during Covid-19 but has now picked up again. Overall, programme manager Chris Batstone is positive about the collaboration: Great Place brought new priorities to the HAZ through focusing on engagement with communities and developed a number of models of good practice in the process.

Reaching out to ‘all’ audiences

Teesside University’s project evaluation found that “*the project had real reach, especially with harder to reach communities*”, including among diverse population groups and across geographies. The research for example found strong involvement from participants from areas of high multiple deprivation across all local authorities: almost 50% of participants came from decile 1-3 and 26% from decile 1, “*surpassing national trends of engagement with arts and culture among lower socio-economic groups*”. Moreover, a significant number of participants (40%) reported that their engagement with a Great Place event marked the first time that they had attended a cultural activity or venue. Such levels of attendance were brought about for example by projects taking their activities into local communities:

- SIRF’s Theatre production ‘*The Glass Ceiling*’ toured each local authority area with a specific story for each town visited, thereby creating local interest. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council reported growing awareness of their project ‘*The Black Path*’ due to “*the continuation of well-promoted workshop opportunities*” and an open day held at a local community centre. ARC Stockton meanwhile exceeded their targets for delivery with disadvantaged community groups, reporting that many groups and participants took part in creative sessions for the first time.
- Tees Valley Arts and Groundwork North East ran the *Heritage on Track* project as a curtain-raiser to the bicentenary of the Stockton and Darlington railway in 2025. Great Place significantly increased their available capacity to work with communities by allowing them to appoint a curator for two years with programming and community

experience. This expertise is now being built into the organisation. As part of the process, an artist was commissioned to work with local communities along the track, allowing them to share stories of their rail heritage. This fed into a general ambition to reshape the local story from a declinist narrative as a former iron-producing area to a richer narrative centred around the local cultural heritage.

The project evaluation moreover found that participation in the programme supported increased community confidence. However, the report also found that while culture and creativity proved a successful way to “*coalesce the Tees Valley despite the area’s varied geography*”, with participants showing a willingness to travel across the area, participation was uneven. Though participants were not confined to major conurbations, these did make out a substantial proportion of participants, with over 50% coming from Darlington and Hartlepool. Moreover, projects found that some communities were significantly harder to engage than others¹⁶, despite targeted initiatives, meaning that some initial programme aims had to be modified.

Impact on children and young people

Lastly, across the programme, the projects resulted in around 3,100 experiences for children and young people. The project evaluation reported a “*transformational*” impact on children and young people. Highlights included:

- the *Real Tees Valley* programme, which brought together young people with professional film makers to create short films about young people’s views on place and identity. Two of the created films came in the last four out of 100 films in the Middlesbrough International Film Festival. The project had a significant impact on participants’

¹⁶ Roma communities and re-settled groups proved particularly difficult to engage with.

confidence, ambition and positive sense of place. Feedback provided evidence that the project assisted participants in *“using creative processes to advocate for a positive narrative about their local place”*.

- Again, projects took their work to their target audiences. Darlington Borough Council for example achieved engagement among young people with the heritage of the local Stockton and Darlington railway through running performances in schools and community settings.
- Mima worked with a local youth group and reported witnessing *“young people’s growing confidence and pride in their community”*.

While GPTV programme manager Chris Batstone thus identified an emerging *“strong narrative about what place is and what it means to them”* among young participants, he cautioned *“vulnerability on some of these projects as funding comes to an end”*.

Programme legacy

Overall, it is felt that the programme has led to the rise of a shared vision as well as an increased willingness among the involved Local Authorities to support and develop an infrastructure for culture. As programme manager Chris Batstone summarised, *“we have made steps in the right direction”*.

Success included the creation of stronger networks for organisations and independent practitioners and the identification of new ways of working which may be used going forward. In the case of Middlesbrough’s *Creative Factory* for example, while the Local Authority was not able to continue its financial support of the project, it has created

a model for building relationships between independent practitioners and the Local Authority, which can be built on. ARC Stockton in turn developed a successful model for practitioner training, not only giving practitioners skills and confidence which will last, but creating a model which could be taken up again in the future. Great Place has thus laid a foundation, *“giving permission for organisations to expand their practice and [providing] resource for them to expand”*, according to Batstone. It also helped to *“mobilise the freelance sector: Tees Valley has lots of independent practitioners that we were not aware of – we are in the process of building stronger networks”*. Moreover, Middlesbrough now has its own Cultural Partnership.¹⁷ While not a direct result of Great Place, the programme helped to bring about the conditions in which it could be set up.

A real joy is seeing people still working together once the funding has been withdrawn – being a connector rather than at the centre is really useful. *(Steering group)*

Looking back, Chris Batstone feels that many of the activities undertaken during GPTV were very local, in part due to areas starting off at different points and activities thus requiring adaptation to suit local needs. This approach had significant advantages from a community-engagement perspective, *“enabling strong local authentic connectivity – particularly for the Local Authorities: they could clearly see the local relevance and impact for their constituents...long-term relationships, engagements, volunteering... [of a] strong heritage or other cultural offer”*.

¹⁷ A collective of arts, heritage & culture organisations, businesses and freelancers *“on a mission to Make Middlesbrough the Most Creative Town in the UK”*, who *“came together as a group of artists, arts and culture organisations and professionals to be a voice for creativity in Middlesbrough”*. (<https://www.boroculture.org.uk/>)

On the other hand, Batstone feels that this hyper-local approach to delivery “*may have hindered cohesive direction*”, leading to a situation in which connecting up the local infrastructure “*did not work as well as it could have*” and where “*there could have been more resources shared, more shared learnings*”. Furthermore, there is a clear sense that many of the activities and new collaborations will not be able to continue without some form of ongoing funding. There is also a growing realisation of the need for more effective mass public transport across the region to enable audiences to travel to cultural events and thereby support cultural regeneration efforts. Connected to this, the area’s City of Culture aspirations, which the Great Place programme had hoped to inform as part of its legacy, have been paused for the time being, with the leadership at the various Local Authorities considering the (financial) commitment as too high at present. Chris Batstone suggests that perhaps, it was “*too big too soon: authorities are still trying to understand where culture fits with regard to their strategic priorities*”. In combination, these factors led to the legacy of the programme feeling “*quite fragile*” pre-Covid-19.

However, although the pandemic has clearly presented a huge, ongoing challenge for the sector, the efforts to address these challenges have now led to new momentum and a new understanding of the programme’s legacy. The speedy creation of the Task Force and the ‘*Reconnecting Communities*’ programme demonstrated the legacy and value of Great Place in paving the ground by creating an atmosphere of collaboration and trust. Moreover, it helped form quick consensus around what was needed and wanted, says Task Force lead Annabel Turpin:

I don’t think there would have been the same level of openness, trust and generosity without Great Place – the spirit wouldn’t have been the same – less collaborative. I also

don’t think we’d be as clear about what we wanted to do and what the shared needs and agenda for Tees Valley are and should be. (Annabel Turpin)

This was echoed by Chris Batstone, who noted that “*Great Place is hardwired into the legacy of the Covid-19 recovery work*”. The Covid-19 recovery programme “*galvanising [the sector] to get on with stuff*”, while the Task Force has resulted in “*a clear need rather than a nebulous cultural vision*”: it is now also in the position to make recommendations about larger investments needed in the long run.

Paradoxically, the pandemic has ensured that Great Place has had a stronger legacy – it has forced people to look at some of things the programme was already active in doing and has offered a solution and a way forward – we have people around the table who have experience of Great Place. (Chris Batstone)

The cultural sector having a seat at this table is thus seen as a key result of the Great Place programme – and one which may have real implications. In this sense, Chris Batstone feels that the programme and its legacy should be seen as a process rather than a discrete project: Great Place was one way of funding an ongoing process of increasing engagement.

This is a big shift for us – [the cultural sector] is now seen as a sector with strategic influence rather than behind closed doors. Structurally, we have a stronger position to be able to build connections and support the emergence of networks and bring localised partnerships together thanks to Great Place. It has had a development role and there will be a good

legacy, as long as there is understanding of what the benefit is. *(Chris Batstone)*

Success factors

Throughout the programme, the programme manager and steering group identified a number of factors that have been key to the programme's success, as well as learning points to consider in developing future activity:

1. Money was key to bringing people together around the table. While the habit of collaboration is expected to endure beyond the programme, it is felt that further investment will be required to support this and build on the achievements of the Great Place programme.
2. Echoing this, placemaking requires multiple sources of investment over a sustained period. This brings challenges of matching expectation, evidence and approaches across different agendas and organisational norms. Among others, it is important to be honest and ensure awareness of funding realities to ensure communities do not feel let down (when funded activities end).
3. A central management point ensures collaboration and that the programme is more than the sum of its parts. However, the strategic partnerships and agreements linking out from this, which help deliver the programme, take time to put into place: it took around six to twelve months preliminary work to develop the required strategic partnerships with, as well as buy-in from, the Local Authorities and LEP.
4. A ground-up approach brings a focus on individuals and local groups and with it, creates incremental capacity-building for long-term growth. In this, community ownership is very important, allowing

communities to see their work as part of a bigger project. Young people are often engaged around a key cause.

5. This goes hand-in-hand with avoiding pre-conceived ideas at the beginning of a programme – it is important to understand the baseline from which activity is setting out. Needs analysis should be an ongoing part of delivery.
6. Relationship building – with partners and communities – should be seen as an ongoing effort and to ensure this, building trust should be considered as an explicit outcome of projects.
7. Cultural producers and artist practitioners delivering on social agendas are a key ingredient in delivering cultural work in other sectoral contexts. Great Place Tees Valley invested in training and supporting these people and in demonstrating their influence within organisations.
8. Linked to this, repetition is important to embed: learning needs to be applied and reapplied. How ways of working could be recorded in order to be distributed and kept for future use should be considered.

5. Gloucester – A Proud Past

Figure 5 Participants at the first Gloucester Rooftop Festival, 2018¹⁸



Credit: Hollie Smith-Charles

Key facts

Area: Urban, South West

Grant: £1,489,200

Lead organisation: Gloucester Culture Trust (GCT)

Programme summary: Building on its new Cultural Strategy, the Gloucester Great Place programme had seven strands of work corresponding to local strategic priorities. These were focused around

the themes of sector development; city marketing; regeneration through heritage; and engaging communities. An eighth strand – ‘interconnectedness’ – drew the other seven strands together to ensure that the programme achieved more than the sum of its parts.

Programme legacy: There is significant positivity around the programme’s legacy, including the creation of lasting new offers (e.g., a new cultural entrepreneurs’ hub) and improved networking; as well as strategic impacts around the Council’s recognition of the value of culture. The latter is evident in for example the formalisation of culture in strategies including the Council’s Economic Development Strategy and the identification and recognition of the role of the new Culture Trust as ‘connector and enabler’.

Strategic context of the programme

Gloucester’s Great Place programme responded to a number of contextual factors that shaped the programme’s aims and delivery:

1. Gloucester City Council’s Cultural Vision and Strategy 2016-26, which had just been introduced when Great Place began, aims to “*put culture at the heart of Gloucester for the good of all.*” Work on this ten-year vision was underway prior to Great Place, but the Great Place programme is seen as having “*turbo-charged*” delivery by acting as a delivery agent. Key aspirations from the Strategy became the strands of the Great Place programme.
2. The Strategy laid out ambitions for cultural activity to be joined-up, for the sector to develop a new model of leadership and to explore new models of governance, strategy development, fundraising and

¹⁸ The festival took place on the roof of Kings Walk Car Park and was programmed and produced by the Gloucester Roundhouse Exchange partners.

delivery, with the outcome of broadening the local cultural offer and developing a vibrant city that put Gloucester on the map. Out of this ambition, the strategic body Gloucester Culture Trust was created in 2016. In March 2018, it became a formal entity as a charitable incorporated organisation and assigned lead body for the Great Place programme.

- At the point when Great Place started, Gloucester was considering bidding in the next round to become UK City of Culture 2025. The work of Great Place was thus seen as a proving ground for that ambition and a chance to demonstrate that change is already happening. The bid was seen as a way to change perceptions of Gloucester and to drive economic regeneration.

We often ask ourselves ‘would a credible candidate for the City of Culture do this?’ (Cultural partner)

Key aims and activities of the programme

Gloucester’s Cultural Strategy provided the Great Place programme with an overarching framework, enabling the project to hang together and providing a useful reference point, according to the GCT team.

Programme activity was based around seven main strands, which focused on developing and harnessing local cultural and heritage talent, engaging communities, developing the festivals and outdoor events programmes and improving destination marketing. A number of key activities were funded by Great Place within each of the seven strands:

Figure 6 Great Place key funded activities by strand

Strand	Key Activities
1. Develop city’s capacity for cultural leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Development of Gloucester Culture Trust — Young trustees programme
2. Develop and support local culture sector infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Partnership and exchange between Roundhouse and Gloucester partners: The Music Works, Strike A Light, Guildhall and Your Next Move. Co-funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation)
3. Creative commissioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Working and co-creating with communities, especially Culture Matson — Cross-sector partnerships around maximising social and well-being impacts — Led by Create Gloucestershire
4. Destination marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Commission for destination marketing delivered — Led by Marketing Gloucester/ Visit Gloucester
5. ARCH: Achieving Regeneration in the City through Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Collaboration with the Council and Gloucester Heritage Forum to develop the city’s first Heritage Strategy — Application for a Heritage Action Zone
6. Revising festivals and events programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Marketing, programming and development support for key city

Strand

Key Activities

	Festivals, e.g., Gloucester History Festival
	— Included major new commissions for the city, e.g., Of Earth And Sky

7. Cultural entrepreneurs' hub	— Known as 'Jolt'
	— Delivered by Gloucester Culture Trust with connections and support from University of Gloucestershire

An 'eighth strand' of interconnectedness aimed to bring the seven strands together, while the aim of widening access to cultural activity ran across all project strands and activities, including both public-facing and sector-facing activity.

Indicatively, according to the project evaluation¹⁹, the project partners decided on a number of indicators of success that related to the seven strands:

- Residents and visitors view Gloucester as culturally distinctive and exciting, with a diverse, high-quality arts, heritage and creativity offer.
- Arts and heritage are valued and engaged with throughout Gloucester, including among those in 'non-arts' roles, with recognition of their economic, social as well as cultural benefit.

- Residents from neighbourhoods that have not traditionally taken part in arts activity feel more engaged in the cultural life and feel confident to lead it.
- The city's young people have more opportunities to take part in shaping local creative activities, and to realise their own ambitions in the CCIs.
- Cultural practitioners and organisations feel more confident, inspired and connected.
- The ongoing regeneration of the historic city centre has been enhanced by strategically connecting arts and culture with city partners.
- Arts and heritage in Gloucester attracts investment and support from a wider variety of channels.
- The visitor economy is strengthened through the appeal, diversity, quality and coordination of the city's heritage venues, cultural festivals and events.
- New, collaborative and people-led methods of delivering and evaluating culture are established and embraced in the city.

Reacting to Covid

The delivery partners were able to quickly adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown periods, adjusting their activities to the new circumstances. According to GCT, "*we really pivoted over the summer*". This was aided by the existence of the project's widening access programmes (e.g., Strands 3 and 6), which meant that the team

¹⁹ Annabel Jackson Associates, 2020
<https://democracy.gloucester.gov.uk/documents/s53669/Appendix%201%20Great%20Place%20Evaluation%20Summary.pdf>

had well-established connections with to different neighbourhoods and community groups.

For example, 14 artists were commissioned to create 25 different art packs and then worked with community partners to distribute 850 of these to different groups including families, teenagers and care homes. *“It was a nice thing to do very quickly and very positively. Sticking to our values and outcomes, but delivering them in a different way”.*

Some of the project’s sector development activity was also adapted, with the creation of a specialised marketing online training course for 20 arts and heritage organisations across the city. These were run by a professional arts marketer, who spent additional time mentoring six of the organisations, looking at their marketing plans while keeping the consequences of the pandemic in mind. This was a good way to *“keep one eye on resilience and the long-term”*. It helped the organisations to understand the importance of marketing and how to most effectively utilise time efficient methods.

Programme highlights across the years

Over the four years, the programme resulted in a number of highlights and impacts across the seven strands, which have here been grouped into the two key areas of i) audiences, participation and community engagement and ii) sector development.

Audiences, participation and community engagement

Overall, the findings from the project evaluation suggest that local residents not only valued and perceived an increase in cultural activity during the Great Place programme but also that more audiences attended events. This indicates both increased availability as well as awareness. For example, all local festivals reported increased attendance between 2019 and 2020, and across the same period there

was a slight increase in the proportion of local survey respondents who agreed that ‘there was more to do in the city centre than a year ago’.

A number of projects across the seven strands successfully increased collaboration between communities and the arts sectors, actively bringing in local community members to engage with, support or even run cultural activities. For example:

- Create Gloucestershire, a network of arts and cultural sector partners, was funded by Great Place to test new ways of working with local communities. It brought together professionals and local people *“to make positive change”* in equal and evolving partnerships that *“respected the skills and knowledge of all involved”*, according to the project evaluation. Among others, Create Gloucestershire helped to set up *Culture Matson* on the Matson estate, looking at finding ways in which culture can help tackle key issues around social deprivation. This was a huge success and has morphed into a regular community forum, leading to the creation of a new neighbourhood festival run by two residents.
- GCT launched the Creation Fund, an initiative that provides small grants up to £2,000 for local artists and creatives to create new events and projects with communities. Following Great Place, Gloucester City Council have financially supported this initiative.
- Create Gloucestershire received £200k from the NHS to work with five arts organisations to focus on audiences with health or special needs, including young people with diabetes or chronic illness, and those with learning disabilities. These projects were overseen by a new Arts and Health board.

Spotlight: Culture Matson – actively engaging local neighbourhoods

The neighbourhood of Matson is home to Gloucester's largest area of social housing, but until recently it lacked significant funding for arts and culture. Pippa Jones from Create Gloucestershire was asked if she could bring in artists to the area and began engaging by meeting local teachers and parents and bringing in NPO and cultural event organisers Strike a Light. *"Very organically, people started to meet"*, and *Culture Matson* started off as a group of 3-4 people who wanted to set up an after-school arts club locally.

"It wasn't set up as a culture board, there was no strategy – it was a group of people within and outside the community making steps to bring in culture and taking it step by step – it arose organically from what the group wanted and needed." The group talked about how to create a generational shift in programming arts and culture, aiming to reach parents who were engaging through their children. A 'common thread' was the lack of hierarchy: the shared value was that everyone wanted to make Matson a better place.

Increasingly, the group linked in with the community via local schools, libraries and other festivals, connecting and working collaboratively and thereby adding value. The team also built-up social capital by providing cooked food at a youth club each week.

Culture Matson organised three projects with local audiences, all supported by Great Place, including a dance project across six schools; a '*Culture Bank*' which provided vouchers, as well as a volunteer to accompany people to cultural events; and a leadership programme which aimed to diversify who sees themselves as leaders. One huge success story was *Culture Matson*'s support, in partnership with Strike A Light, of two local mothers who started promoting shows through their engagement in *Culture Matson*, and subsequently decided to set up a

local independent contemporary theatre festival, GL4. This is now Arts Council England-funded and programming ongoing work across the estate. According to Pippa Jones, this is *"a fantastic legacy: it's extraordinary for people to see theatre programmed by people from the estate"*. This is exemplary of the infrastructure *Culture Matson* provides, which is helping local people *"do more if they want to do more"*: it provides *"a lot of the stuff you need that takes time"*, such as getting to grips with child protection, safeguarding, in-kind support on the producing side, etc.

Great Place provided crucial initial investment over for years to provide capacity on the ground, and a catalyst in the shape of Pippa's role, who was able to bring in a variety of partners and begin a conversation. The group was *"able to embed itself and consolidate and prove the potential of arts and culture to generate positive change"*, including to investors. *"Community forums are so important – that's what we've proven through Culture Matson and Great Place"*. Moreover, it provided seed funding for some of the enterprises that have come out of *Culture Matson*, like GL4: *"we've been able to use GP funding carefully to level in additional funding – it was always used to leverage additional funding and investment"*.

Going forwards, Pippa had some capacity from Great Place to *"argue and advocate"* for *Culture Matson* to provide an alternative commissioning model with police, social care, the NHS, etc. which is under consideration. To do so, funding was being sought to understand *"what Culture Matson need to do better"* in order to match service's requirements. In any case, *"the richness of connectivity is a really important legacy - relationships have been built which means now there is a real ecosystem rather than just a set of buildings"*.

- Artist Luke Jerram was commissioned by the city to work with local spoken word artist JPD and thirty Gloucestershire poets (from over 80

entries) to create ‘*Of Earth and Sky*’, lines of poetry in 31 locations across the city. This resulted in a “*really high-profile event and has become a really big community event*”. 30 volunteers were involved in the installation and its maintenance. The team was able to adapt and maintain the project over lockdown, with 11 funding partners from the culture, heritage, sport and retail sector supporting the commission.

- As a further example of aiming to diversify the cultural offer to bring in new audiences, grant funding supported the ‘*King’s Jam*’ urban hip hop music festival as part of a wider mission to embed an understanding of diversity more widely across cultural organisations.
- Young people were successfully involved in helping to shape the city’s cultural offer; through programmes such as the Future Producer’s programme, which for example had a central role in developing two of the period’s flagship festivals. Indicative of its perceived value, the programme successfully managed to raise additional funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to continue. In addition, the Culture Trust established a Young Creatives Network for emerging artists (based on feedback from young people), which feeds into the Trust’s strategic planning. Two members have led on the creation of a new magazine (*Skella*²⁰) for the city’s young & diverse audiences, with contributions from the wider network and communities. The group is now supported by Jolt, and meets monthly as Jolt Co-Lab.
- A member of staff at Gloucester Cathedral created a new educational online resource²¹ bringing together the local heritage/ history offer for schools and parents to help make information about ‘what is out

there’ more accessible: previously, “*you had to know what you were looking for – you would have to call the Cathedral, etc.*”.

In addition to the above, the programme enabled a real development of the volunteer sector for the local culture and heritage sector. This was galvanised by bringing in a new member of staff at Gloucester Cathedral to pull together a new volunteering portal, *Engage in Gloucester*. This enables prospective volunteers to work across a number of organisations rather than focusing on one particular organisation. This successfully brought in many new volunteers for heritage organisations, including younger volunteers. According to the project evaluation, it for example led to 12 volunteers carrying out a local listing process, which generated a list of 147 places and 130 buildings.

Spotlight: Engaging the city’s young people and supporting young creatives

A key issue for the city – and for its Great Place programme – was its high percentage of young people, matched with a cultural offer that does not meet their needs: “*opportunities for culture for young people haven’t been that great in the past.*” For the Great Place programme, a focus on young people was therefore not a separate area of work but a ‘lens’ through which to view everything they did.

Creative consultation activity thus focused on young people. To ensure that young people’s voices guided the programme, a group of young trustees were recruited as well as a *Young Creatives Network* to help steer the Cultural Trust’s direction. A partnership with the Roundhouse brought learning around how to bring on and support the young trustees and leaders. This activity fed into the wider ambition to

²⁰ *Skella* magazine link: <https://www.desertcitynews.com/about>

²¹ Available under: <https://gloucesterculture.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Gloucester-City-Education-Brochure-version-1st-Nov-2019.pdf>

develop cultural leadership in the city, and to look towards the future and a City of Culture bid: *“they are part of the investment we are making into the future as well as challenging our work now.”* The young trustees were equally clear that their role was to challenge the status quo: *“Gloucester needs to put on events that young people want to go to. We have an audience development problem. Gloucester is culturally timid.”*

In committing funding to local cultural activity, Great Place prioritised either events which already focused on youth audiences, such as Strike A Light’s year-round programme, King’s Jam Festival, or on events which were able to develop an offer for young people, such as Gloucester History Festival. Neither approach was straightforward: collaboration between the professional marketing organisation funded to promote the youth festivals initially struggled to build a working relationship, and a young trustee described working on the History Festival as *“hard work”*. It took time to break down differences in perspective: *“people say things like ‘1970s isn’t history’ but we are living in a city where 25% of people weren’t born in 1998!”*

As well as a cultural offer, the programme worked to develop cultural infrastructure for young people. This process in many ways had to start from scratch: *“every creative person in Gloucester has to go elsewhere to develop their skills”*. A new music studio and hub, run by The Music Works, was thus supported in Gloucester as a starting point to try and ensure a consistent offer. This was part-funded by Great Place, but also awarded an ACE small capital grant and significant other funding.

Similarly, the programme initiated the development of a creative enterprise hub as a place for young people to create and grow their creative industry businesses. Based on research with university students

and other residents to find out what young people need to develop creative enterprise in the city, the core requirement identified was confidence: *“There is a massive lack of confidence and self-belief and a lack of understanding of that being normal.”* With this learning, the programme took a two-phase approach to developing a creative enterprise hub (chiefly for) young people with the aim of developing Gloucester’s next generation of artists and creatives. Working initially out of temporary space provided by the University and now installed in a town centre location on a 20-year peppercorn lease from the Council, the hub, *Jolt*, continues to support young creatives through the provision of space and support, including e.g., business support, training programmes and networking.²²

Overall, it is a process not a project: *“we’re not sure what Gloucester’s place and strengths are in the creative industries yet – we are finding its place.”*

Sector professionalisation, networking and investment

The programme also supported the local cultural and heritage sectors in a variety of ways. Across various activities, this has had an impact on the city’s ability to market itself as a cultural hub as well as to improve evaluation. A core way in which this has happened was to support new networks and partnership working across Gloucester. Great Place enabled the Culture Trust to bring together cultural organisations of varying sizes, including new collaborations between heritage, arts and culture; as well as to strengthen connections to other sectors, such as health. In doing so, the project evaluation found that *“Great Place has created a network of artists, businesses, local authority officers and*

²² <https://gloucesterculture.org.uk/projects/jolt/>; <https://joltgloucester.com/>

*cultural and heritage organisations, and created structures for and a habit of collaboration*²³. Highlights in this area included:

- The Gloucester Roundhouse Exchange project, a partnership between Gloucester Culture Trust, the Roundhouse in London, Strike A Light, The Music Works, Guildhall/Gloucester City Council and Your Next Move, which received an additional investment of around £500,000 from Paul Hamlyn Foundation.
- Support to the Gloucester Heritage Forum, which gives a collective, cohesive and higher profile approach to heritage planning and delivery, including enabling the History Festival to expand. Meanwhile, the programme helped put Gloucester Cathedral in touch with *“people working in really creative ways, not just heritage – this really helped us with [...] promotion and attracted a different kind of visitor to the Cathedral.”*
- Great Place also enabled the Trust to create the new post of Strategic Creative Producer, to connect across a range of festival organisations and support joined up planning, training and delivery, and to raise confidence, ambition and quality. In addition, the Trust supported commissioned an consortium to write an Audience Development & Participation Report plan, which provided the impetus for a range of new joined up activities.
- As outlined above, *Jolt*, a co-working and acceleration space for (young) culture and creative practitioners, has been established; home to co-working spaces, meeting rooms, rehearsal spaces and 24 incubation studios. The 6500ft² hub was obtained on a 20-year peppercorn lease, thanks to Gloucester City Council, to ensure the

ongoing sustainability of the creative sector in Gloucester. The physical hub acts as the vehicle for the *Jolt Programme*, a creative acceleration offer that supports start-up creatives through the process of building sustainable independence businesses and organisations. The programme includes One-to-one business mentoring, workshops, networking events and access to opportunities that help build capacity in the new ventures.

- Visit Gloucester emerged in early 2020 as a new body for the city’s place marketing function. Great Place investment has helped to significantly improve the promotional platforms available, including a new Visit Gloucester website and digital signage – now managed by Gloucester Business Improvement District – around the city.

We can be proudest of the partnerships. It felt like the work of Great Place enabled us to work with partners cross-sector across the city. A lot of Great Place has been as partnership: we have set up a festivals and events forum through Great Place, we meet monthly to talk about what everyone is doing. That network didn’t exist previously. (Cultural partner)

Spotlight: The Roundhouse Relationship

Great Place and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation jointly funded an innovative initiative to partner London’s Roundhouse – the well-known Camden-based arts venue and centre for young creatives – with Gloucester’s cultural sector. Participants included the Roundhouse and Gloucester Culture Trust, Strike A Light, The Music Works, Guildhall/Gloucester City Council and Your Next Move

²³ Annabel Jackson Associates, 2020
<https://democracy.gloucester.gov.uk/documents/s53669/Appendix%201%20Great%20Place%20Evaluation%20Summary.pdf>

The aim of the partnership was “*genuinely two-way*”: for the Roundhouse, it was about understanding a different environment for developing new talent and managing projects, while for Gloucester it was about benefitting from the chance to learn from an established youth-focused organisation. Overall, the collaboration was considered as “*a potential game changer as to how arts organisations work together.*”

The first year of the partnership created both some great delivery and some great learning. The Rooftop Festival – music and performance events which took place on a car park rooftop in the city centre – was “*the first public presentation of what is meant by the Roundhouse exchange and what it actually delivers.*” The event was well-received as a sign of new vigour in the youth culture scene. Ticket sales were “*fine – but they weren’t great.*” Feedback and discussion identified three issues: that Gloucester doesn’t have a reputation as somewhere you go to for high quality cultural events; there are negative perceptions about safety in the city centre; and publicity could have been more effective.

Going forward, the focus shifted to developing capacity and skills firstly in the Guildhall, and in developing a stronger infrastructure to support activity. Skills needs analysis was undertaken to support the Guildhall’s professionalisation, alongside consideration of appropriate governance for the venue and the pros and cons of Council ownership / management. A complementary demand analysis, undertaken through monthly partnership meetings, considered the potential for an additional cultural venue in Gloucester. This intended to ensure that the activity was “*really embedded in people’s priorities and that there is collaboration between lots of different organisations.*”

Overall, the Roundhouse activity was considered as a clear example of “*the relationship between activity and strategy*”, which the GCT were keen to explore throughout the Great Place programme.

In addition, cultural and heritage sector members and organisations were supported in building their capacity in a variety of ways:

- Gloucester History Festival was professionalised. With investment from Great Place, moved from being volunteer-run, managed by the Council, to hiring an experienced curator and being run by the newly-established Gloucester History Trust. This also enabled the Festival to finance a new business plan, which has helped to spark the idea that it is something to invest in. The Festival has now begun fundraising. Meanwhile, the programme has been enhanced with greater support for bottom up, community-led elements (‘City Voices.’). Throughout the Great Place period, the Festival has grown each year, and has seen its ticket sales quadruple. Indicative of its successful development, since the pandemic, it has received emergency funding from Historic England, enabling it to produce online talks and commissioning artists for new works. With a small, committed team combining heritage and arts, “*this is a real legacy of the programme*”.
- Great Place supported artists through activities such as the Creative Leadership Programme; shadowing and mentoring through e.g., the Gloucester Roundhouse Exchange; training in for example marketing, fundraising, business skills, environmental sustainability and responses to Covid-19; and the creation of shared systems such as that for volunteer recruitment and support.

What has transformed things for me has been the marketing training that was offered to organisations across Gloucester – a series of online sessions learning about marketing – I didn’t know anything about that and haven’t been supported before – it was really helpful to learn a lot more. (*Participant*)

The mentoring opportunity has transformed what we've been able to do with the History Festival and will be something that will continue to make a difference in Gloucester. *(Participant)*

- In some cases, organisations received funding to pay for additional posts, including for example Guildhall's Marketing Apprentice and four 'Creative Leadership Trainees', year-long placements based at city arts organisations: Three Choirs Festival, Art Shape, Gloucestershire Libraries and Gloucester Culture Trust.
- The Culture Trust developed a range of tools to support festivals and events, including a cross-city evaluation strategy; audience development strategy; fundraising strategy; and an innovation and commissioning fund.

Finally, a number of key programme elements have contributed to improving the city's heritage sector and its role in city centre regeneration, as well as to improving visitor access:

- New capacity to achieve regeneration in the city centre through heritage was delivered in the form of a full-time post at the Trust with a remit to reach out to volunteers and make wider connections between heritage and other cultural organisations.
- The Council drafted its first Heritage Strategy, and with support from the Culture Trust enabled a consultation process and broadened the definition of heritage used in the first draft to include culture/arts. A HAZ application was successfully made, securing £2m for the Gloucester Cathedral Quarter High Street Heritage Action Zone; and the regeneration plan for Kings Quarter has shifted from retail- to culture-led.

Programme legacy

The team at Gloucester Culture Trust cautioned that building trust and understanding between organisations and in particular strategic alignment in the face of differing strategic objectives between partners *"takes so much more time than you think. It takes time to research; the partners coming together takes time; [for partners] to understand the value of Great Place and being part of a collaborative project like this"*. They felt that the extension they received for their activities helped to secure relationships, but highlighted that the complexity of delivering developmental grants needs to be recognised by funders.

That being said, there is significant positivity around the legacy that the Great Place programme has left in Gloucester. The team describes Great Place as an *"action learning programme – we had all these words on a page, but Great Place was the funding to test these. It has helped demonstrate what the Strategy means... and [was] a chance to say look what can be done, look what's out there"*. Thinking of the Strategy as the first step, Great Place was 'Phase 2 of the Strategy'. The actions based on the Strategy were reviewed and updated in 2021 and *"Great Place helped us to think 'what do we need to consider and what do we need to update'."* For the Trust, the legacy of Great Place - how to continue partnerships as well as engaging in fundraising from the Council and others to maintain the Great Place team - is now 'Phase three' of the Strategy.

The project evaluation summarised the impact of the programme as creating a *"cultural offer that is more coherent, joined up and high profile"*. It has brought the cultural sector closer together and supported the creation of more strategic activity, including a more strategic approach to targeting audiences. This was based on consultations with a variety of groups, and the commissioning of new research, such as on local festivals' strengths and weaknesses. This has been supported by

activities with lasting effect, including supporting artist and organisations' professionalisation and skills; creating new audience groups including young people; and creating lasting collaborations. One of the main objectives of Strand 7 to create a new cultural entrepreneurs' hub has also been met with the creation of *Jolt*, "Gloucester's dedicated hub for arts, creativity and collaboration", whose long-term future has been secured by being granted a 20-year peppercorn lease from the Council. Meanwhile, the volunteer sector has been galvanised, providing existing and prospective volunteers with easier ways to engage.

In terms of strategic impact, the programme enabled the creation of ongoing Action Plans and Strategies. Linked to this, the value of culture has been more clearly and formally recognised by the City Council, which, according to the project evaluation, in turn has strengthened its commitment to the cultural and heritage sectors. This is for example demonstrated by the new Heritage Strategy, which has been recognised by the Council and provides an ongoing direction of travel for the sector as well as a way for it to demonstrate its contribution to wider city priorities. Culture is now also mentioned in the Council's Economic Development Strategy (which was not previously the case) while the Local Industrial Strategy references Gloucester's culture offer as an asset. Moreover, the Culture Trust now sits on the Council's City Centre Commission on regeneration as well as on the Culture and Visitor Economy Recovery Group. As the Trust summarised, the City Council now consciously plays an enabling role, aiming to create the conditions for culture to thrive and *"that's becoming embedded in the Council and will be a vehicle for legacy – this will be a really crucial enabler"*.

Meanwhile, the Culture Trust, now five years old, was able through the Great Place programme to identify and strengthen its key role as connector, enabler and champion, focusing on delivery only where needed, while keeping *"one eye on the city-wide long-term vision"*. This

has created a strategic organisation at relatively little cost. According to the team, *"the legacy is the learning that we've got and the experience we've had about what it means to be a connector, enabler – there has been a lot of learning that will help to deliver the Strategy going forward"*. At the time of the final round of interviews for the case study in 2021, they were still considering moving ahead with a City of Culture bid, but this did not go ahead, as it was felt by partners that resource needed to develop a bid was better invested into the recovery of the city following the challenges of the pandemic. However, bidding for 2029 remains on the table. *"Great Place helped us to lay the groundwork for a successful bid – it's helped us broaden our reach, raise aspirations, there is more joined up working"*.

There is something about the ambition [...]. It feels like Gloucester is on a journey now. It feels like there is momentum built through Great Place that is continuing: culture-led recovery is really high up on the recovery agenda for the Council – seeing the value of culture has been really key. That partnership working is transformational – arts, heritage, sports, community – we are all talking to each other now in a way we weren't before (*Cultural partner*)

Success factors

Over the years, the team identified a number of success factors and learning points from their delivery of the programme:

1. A close partnership between Gloucester Culture Trust and the Council was important, developed through conversations over time, overcoming false starts and catalysed by shared strategic deliverables. However, the fact that the Trust is not the local authority but independent, was a critical distinction.

Getting the Great Place money proved to the Council that there is money in culture: people sit up and pay attention.
(Cultural partner)

2. Gloucester Culture Trust was able to find clarity about its role: it established that it is a strategic, not a delivery body, and is building relationships of trust with partners who will deliver. This is balanced by a recognition that in some cases, the Trust will need to deliver directly, but only where no suitable partner already exists locally.

The Cultural Strategy was very clear that the Trust should be an enabler, not a delivery body. What Great Place has done is to test that and find how it actually works. *(Cultural partner)*

3. Partnership with an established national cultural organisation such as the Roundhouse has been an effective way to develop local capacity.
4. In making change in the sector, it is vital to go where the energy is, irrespective of whether these are independents or council-run organisations; people who identify as artists and producers and those who perhaps do not, yet.
5. One-on-one conversations are the best way to identify the people who can make things happen.
6. The focus on young people was not a separate set of projects but a lens across everything they did.

6. Sunderland Comes of Age

Figure 7 Participants in the *Who Do You Want To Meet?* sharing event at St Luke's Church Hall, Pallion



Credit: Steve Brock

Key facts

Area: Urban, North East

Grant: £1,249,900

Lead organisation: Sunderland Culture

Programme summary: Sunderland's Great Place programme focused on four delivery areas, cutting across the themes of creative economy

development; improving community cohesion; supporting health and wellbeing within socio-economically deprived communities and improving the availability of cultural opportunities for children and young people. Each had a different geographical priority focus. A fifth strand of work developed communications and capacity (i.e., networks, partnerships, funding) around a city-wide vision for culture.

Programme legacy: Great Place impacted on Sunderland Culture's capacity, enabling it to embed the principles learned during the delivery of Great Place and supporting its fundraising, communications and relationship building. This helped to shape the Trust into a resilient organisation with reach and impact. Furthermore, impact and organisational development were achieved across the priority areas, which can be built on going forward, while engagement in Great Place also helped to tap into additional, ongoing funding.

Strategic context of the programme

Sunderland's Great Place programme was shaped within and responded to the context of a number of key local developments:

1. A new Sunderland Cultural Strategy was published by the Sunderland Cultural Partnership in October 2014 to set a "*a clear direction for the city's cultural development for a 12-14 year period*". Recognising the social, educational and economic role of culture, including its value to the city's sense of pride, the Strategy focuses on the three connected aims of raising awareness and understanding of the city's diverse cultural offer; developing audiences and 'confident consumers' of culture; and of developing and expanding the cultural offer and assets to enhance its economic and social benefits and "*use culture to create an enterprising, creative and innovative local economy*".

2. Sunderland made a bid to become the 2021 City of Culture. While not successful, the process of bidding became a touchstone for a change of mindset locally and catalysed conversations around culture and the potential to take pride in the city. Whilst the initial local response to the idea of bidding for City of Culture had been sceptical, the process of bidding galvanised local people.

If you're not in the cultural sector you might not ordinarily consider that health and wellbeing were part of the cultural brief, but since '2021' these conversations are happening.
(Sunderland Culture)

2. The creation of Sunderland Culture out of a partnership between Sunderland City Council, University of Sunderland and the Music, Arts & Culture Trust²⁴ in 2016/17 was not just about efficiencies but also about raising ambition. The new organisation is independent and can take risks and be agile in a way that some larger institutions cannot. But the local authority is *"in the new organisation's DNA"* and is still critical, for example in relation to town centre development or flagship events (e.g., the 'Tall Ships' event). Sunderland Culture's receipt of both Great Place and NPO funding marks a step change for arts investment in the city and enabled the new organisation to trial new forms of governance.

We're not seeing Great Place as a separate project, it is integral to what we do. We would struggle to make Sunderland Culture the viable organisation that it is with a

place-based, city-wide vision without Great Place.
(Sunderland Culture)

3. *'Cultural Spring'*, Sunderland's nine-year programme funded by Arts Council England's 'Creative People and Places' programme, was formed in 2014 to help more people in Sunderland and South Tyneside to experience and be inspired by arts and culture. As such, it provided a model of practice for how to build participation in the arts, a network of community contacts and several key team members which Great Place could build on. Both programmes shared two core partners: the University and MAC. However, whereas *Cultural Spring* focuses on building an appetite for arts and culture, the local Great Place programme was *"about asking people what culture they want"* and understanding how residents feel culture can address local challenges.
4. In 2017, the Council established Sunderland's Historic High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) after a successful bid to Historic England. This focuses on sustaining the historic city centre and addressing various properties on the Heritage at Risk register; thereby providing a catalyst to stimulate the area's wider economic growth.

Key aims and activities of the programme

The Sunderland Cultural Strategy was already in place when the Great Place programme was developed. The advance work on the Strategy both helped the Great Place team to *"get up and get going sooner"*, according to the Creative Director of Sunderland Culture and Great

²⁴ Charitable organisation catalysing music, arts and culture in Sunderland. <https://www.mactrust.org.uk/>

Place programme manager Rebecca Ball, as well as providing a common vision on which to act.

The Great Place programme centred around four core strands, which focused on creative economy development ('Unlock'); improving community cohesion ('Unify'); supporting health and wellbeing within socio-economically deprived communities ('Unleash'); and improving the availability of cultural opportunities for children and young people ('Uncover'). Each of these strands focused on a particular geographical focus area where a key need had been established, as well as feeding into the Cultural Strategy's interconnected aims of audience and cultural sector development. Alongside the four core strands, a fifth strand of work focused on improving communications and capacity-building (i.e., networks, partnerships, funding) around a city-wide vision for culture. This included four large-scale marketing campaigns based around cultural events.

Figure 8 Sunderland's Great Place projects

Project	Theme	Geographic focus	Issue
Unlock	Creative Economy	City Centre Heritage Action Zone (HAZ)	Sustainability of the local creative economy; opening up underused spaces for cultural activity
Unify	Community cohesion	Southwick, Castletown, Millfield, Pallion	Need to create community relationships enabled by new bridge opening
Unleash	Health and well-being	Coalfields	Socio-economically deprived area with high levels of social

Project	Theme	Geographic focus	Issue
			isolation, mental health issues, obesity and holiday hunger
Uncover	Education and schools	Washington	Lack of cultural opportunity for children and young people, with little within curriculum or links to local arts offers

Reacting to Covid

While the programme was intended to wrap up in September 2021, Covid-19 meant that an extension was necessary to complete the planned work. In finding ways to support the sector during the pandemic, Rebecca Ball felt that *“our response has definitely been better thanks to Great Place”*. Support work focused on two areas: artist development and wellbeing. In terms of the former, the 'Unlock' strand of the programme provided resources, which enabled the provision of support to artists and freelancers. The team were able to move planned artist development work *“really nicely online”*, which provide a valuable resource: *“it enabled us to talk to the creative community and say: ‘what is it you really need now, how can we support you’”*. As a result, they rethought the programme, putting on seminars on adapting to change and on the use of the Cultural Emergency Fund. *“We were able to be really reactive and that felt really good”*. This online work tapped into the programme's 'Unify' strand, which had the aim of bringing communities together.

In terms of wellbeing (the 'Unleash' strand), this carried on with work with groups that were shielding or less likely to be able to meet on zoom. With the help of producers who *“have an expertise and interest in wellbeing and broader ways to engage”*, takeaway packs and

downloadable packs were created, which were available to everyone. However, while the wellbeing work during lockdown was a success, Ball noted that they were not able to undertake all activities that had been identified as important, due to difficulties in engage partners during the pandemic.

Programme highlights across the years

Over the four years, the programme resulted in a number of highlights and impacts across the five strands.

Creative Economy ('Unlock')

Activity in this area focused on supporting the sustainability of the local creative economy including through opening up underused spaces for cultural activity. This area of activity was strongly aligned with the aims and activities of the local Heritage Action Zone. Successes included:

- Initially, to successfully align the Great Place and HAZ project ambitions to focus on reactivating city centre heritage buildings for cultural use. As Rebecca Ball summarised, *“having that alignment with the HAZ around heritage buildings needing regeneration – the alignment with our priorities to highlight CCIs in the city has been really valuable”*.
- Through this partnership, Mackie’s Corner, a Grade II listed city centre building which had been lying derelict since the early 2000s and for which it was a priority for HAZ to help the landlord find a new way to activate the building, was turned into a pop-up gallery for emerging artists. ‘Unlock’ programmed pop-up galleries here throughout 2019, *“providing space and support for 37 artists,*

collectives and organisations in the city to show their work and hold workshops and events”²⁵. This had a big impact on emerging artists as well as *“galvanising the search for the next [business on site]”*, so Ball. Sunderland Culture also created a connection with Sunderland University, using the site to host the end of year exhibitions by Fine Arts students, thereby providing them with ‘real world’ experience. According to the final evaluation, *“this ‘meanwhile’ type of provision for performance and exhibitions has proved very successful, clearly meeting a need and bringing arts and culture into the civic world and to audiences in the centre of the city”*. With grant support from HAZ, the building has now been restored and a number of new businesses have moved in, with plans by the landlord to gradually bring the whole building back into use as a mixed-use property.

- The partnership collaborated on bringing creatives into the Athenaeum Building, originally opened in 1841 as the town’s first museum and later home to the Sunderland and North Durham Liberal Club. Funding was found to pay for capital works to redevelop the building; it is now home to new gallery and studio space Abject Gallery, run by Breeze Creatives, and includes studios, creative workspace, offices and an exhibition space for local artists and creatives.
- The partnership collaborated on the HAZ’s theme of ‘People power’, looking at *“what other stories could be told about the city’s heritage”*. This was used to focus on the ‘Rebel Women of Sunderland’ as part of the Heritage Open Day 2019 celebrations. Following an open call, two artists were commissioned to tell a number of stories about local women, including about the first female MP and a woman who set up the first pharmacy school. The resulting exhibition toured local

²⁵ Great Place Evaluation, Final Report July 2021, ERS Research & Consultancy

community venues and was also used to mark International Women's Day in March 2020. Enabled by the partnership, the programme was highly successful: *"it has run and run and become part of our ongoing programme"*.

Spotlight: The value of partnerships within the Heritage Action Zone

Sunderland's 'Historic High Streets' was one of the first 14 areas to be granted Heritage Action Zone funding by Historic England, with a grant of £881k. The Council committed up to an additional £566k, whilst the Heritage Fund made a significant investment in a building project within the zone. The HAZ is being led by the Council, whose conservation team has proactively used their power to prosecute landlords in the zone for buildings neglect and are working with a range of chiefly private landlords to develop the area. Whilst one key landowner (of landmark building Mackie's Corner) is a local family and highly dedicated to the area, other landlords are less interested.

Great Place funding enabled Sunderland Culture to dedicate resources (including a 0.6 staff post) to developing creative enterprise within the HAZ, both bringing in new activity (such as pop-up events in meanwhile spaces facilitated by Great Place) and increasing visibility of what is already there through new signage, networking events for creatives and public-facing activities.

A key anchor organisation for this project was Pop Recs, a community interest company run by entrepreneurial musician and community organiser Dave Harper and his bandmate Michael McKnight (of band Frankie & The Heartstrings). Harper set up the original Pop Recs – a record shop, café, gallery, drop-in centre for MIND and event space – five years ago in response to a feeling of negativity about the city: *"I read about people's views about the city and it's not the same as*

mine." The venture was supported by local, national and international talent (such as photographer Keith Patterson, and band Badly Drawn Boy) and has become a key feature of the local arts scene.

During the programme period, Pop Recs was supported in relocating to a new (cheaper, larger) location in the HAZ – a Grade 2 listed building which used to house Binn's first department store. The move was a tribute to networks and partnership: Pop Recs was suggested as a potential new occupant for the previously derelict High Street West buildings by the Sunderland 2021 bid team to the Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust (TWBPT). It was subsequently supported to get a 'Fresh Ideas' grant from the Northern Rock Foundation, which included capital funding and support for business planning. Sunderland Culture meanwhile ensured that the plans for the High Street West buildings aligned with HAZ plans. In 2018, TWBPT, supported by the Great Place programme, successfully secured £45,000 funding from the Coastal Revival Fund for a 'Living Classroom' project in High Street West, partnering with Sunderland College to supply trainee labour for the building renovation, which Harper himself is also working on.

The project has required personal passion and dedication from a determined individual; the networking resource from Sunderland Culture's Great Place; and the opportunity to tap into institutional funding and support from a range of organisations.

Community cohesion ('Unify')

Activities focused on the areas of Southwick, Castletown, Millfield and Pallion to the north and south of the new Northern Spire Bridge across the River Wear, with the aim to create new community relationships enabled by the opening of the bridge in 2018. The new bridge means that communities on either side of the river for the first time have easy access to each other. Projects were based on collaborations with

Cultural Spring, Sunderland's nine-year Creative People and Places project, which aims to build engagement in the arts. According to Rebecca Ball, "having that [existing] capacity within the city to lead on that participatory [element of the programme] has been really valuable – there is a sharing of best practice and support, [and] a lot of shared objectives. It was a really valuable partner". Highlights included:

- As a key community commissioning/ community-led activity under this strand, the partners worked together on the *Wonderlooper* project. This saw participants jointly produce a brief for an artist and putting out calls to community groups, asking 'would you like to work on a partnership': "it felt more community-led rather than community-commissioned". The resulting project saw artist Di Mainstone work with communities on both sides of the Wear to create musical instruments out of leftover materials from the new bridge's steel cable casings.²⁶ Fourteen instruments were installed on the new bridge for visitors to interact with, "inviting people to 'play' the bridge in a unique way". A thousand tickets for the event were bought within hours of being made available. According to the artist, "the Wonderloopers will channel, mix and meld the dreams, hopes and visions of Sunderland's people via the city's newest futuristic beacon. Once the visitor is inside the Wonderlooper, they will see the bridge fragmenting and hear magical soundscapes, created from interviews with members of the community".²⁷

However, while the opening attracted considerable media attention, reviews of the project among volunteers and visitors were mixed. Some volunteers felt that it didn't quite end up as they had expected based on their own work at the community workshops, while visitors

felt they would have preferred a closer link to Sunderland's industrial heritage or the bridge's construction. Reflecting this, resident feedback at the interim evaluation "indicated [that] projects to improve connectivity and cohesion across the city should be at a more relatable scale, relevant to local communities".²⁸ This feedback resulted in subsequent 'Unify' activities focusing on smaller, community-led projects.

- The 'Who do you want to meet?' project, which took account of the feedback from *Wonderlooper*, aimed to engage groups not normally reached. Projects were community-led, asking people who they would like to meet and what they would like to do through an inclusive call-out process and promotional drop-in sessions. Sunderland Culture offered awards of £3,000 to successful projects and offered practical help in the delivery, thereby providing training and experience for community groups and "creating a legacy of increased capacity for planning and delivering projects amongst local groups". Across two rounds, selected projects included: collaboration between an over 65's dance group and an asylum seeker support group; joint writing created by a local writers' group and asylum-seeking men; social housing residents collaborating with young adults from Young Asian Voices; a watercolour painting group collaborating with a mental health support group and members of a photography club for deaf photographers and the over 50s users of the Sunderland Deaf Centre co-producing a book about the local deaf community.

²⁶ The instruments were manufactured by FabLab Sunderland following two hackathons hosted by the artist and attended by musicians, engineers and technologists.

²⁷ <https://sunderlandculture.org.uk/countdown-to-wonderlooper/>

²⁸ Great Place Evaluation, Final Report July 2021, ERS Research & Consultancy

Spotlight: Learnings in community engagement

The 'Unify' project focused on Sunderland's new river bridge, the Northern Spire, which for the first time created a connection between the communities living on either side. This was a highly anticipated new landmark development and the opening in 2018 provided an ideal focal point for the Great Place themes of building pride in the city and empowering communities. The project was in many ways a big success: the community commissioned, site-specific *Wonderlooper* project saw communities on both sides of the bridge collaborate with an artist to mark the bridge opening through the creation of musical instruments installed on the bridge. This generated considerable local and national press coverage as well as many hours of commitment from a large group of volunteers, who participated in the events both operationally and artistically.

Sunderland Culture, however, also felt there were things which could have gone better and in response, reflected on and refined their approach to community commissioning. Their key learnings:

- Early attempts to recruit volunteers through workshops, drop-in sessions, social media, etc. by Sunderland Culture were unsuccessful. But when they passed information on via one-to-one contact with existing community leaders (e.g., church groups) and gave them time, these contacts were able to leverage their relationships of trust across their networks, leading to successful recruitment.
- The ambition of the community commissioning group in selecting an innovative, nationally-known artist was exciting – but such commissions also bring challenges, as projects adapt to developing visions and circumstances. Following the commission, ongoing conversation was needed for the group to stay involved with changes and to manage their expectations.

- Whilst the choice of the ambitious project proposal belonged to the community, there was a tension in the resulting project between artist-led work and genuinely grassroots, accessible activity. *"The artist got community consultation but not 360-degree community engagement"*.

Subsequent projects built on this learning, moving to a different practice model to achieve more on Sunderland Culture's ambition for community-led arts. At a practical level, this included use of the project's (highly protected) contact database, noting the interests, needs and abilities of community members. This database has been a key tool, for example identifying one woman as keen and able to develop a community arts centre. Contingency funds in the project budget were used to pay for her training in essential skills.

The key issue for the community engagement strand was time: *"Five years would have been more comfortable."* But the project remained confident of achieving lasting change in community expectation around arts provision within the timeframe. This was helped by the groundwork laid by – and collaboration with - Sunderland's parallel-running nine-year Creative People and Places project *Cultural Spring*.

Health and well-being ('Unleash')

This strand focused on cultural activity in the Sunderland Coalfield villages, with the aim of creating a relationship and trust with isolated examining communities in the area through linking with existing organisations. A focus lay on younger and older generations through the themes of food, heritage and creativity, with the goal of positively impacting on health and wellbeing. The strand consisted of a wide range of varied activities, with highlights including:

- Collaboration on the Hetton Lyons Country Park Carnival – a longstanding event which was relaunched in 2016 by a local events company after an absence of 20 years – to change the model of

community-commissioning to make it more community-led. According to Ball, *“maybe we would have made the transition more slowly, but it felt like a necessity to ensure legacy. The driver for this has been that we need to ensure legacy. It’s a little early to say what the outcome has been.”* In 2018 and 2019, Sunderland Culture established a ‘Culture Village’ on one side of the carnival site featuring interactive arts, culture and health-related activities, which included hens for cuddling, baby vegetables to care for and actors as ‘doctors’ offering ‘cultural health checks’. They aim is for Culture Village to become community-led as part of Great Place’s exit strategy, with the transition supported by the creation of a community group which should be able to apply for funding going forwards.

- Sunderland Culture helped set up a Young Carers arts club, which enabled young carers to get involved in a glass-blowing project at a local library and the National Glass Centre in Sunderland, allowing them to try out new art techniques. The Group was also involved in Hetton Carnival, where they engaged with the general public. Feedback suggested that participants gained confidence and new skills through an opportunity they would not otherwise have had. In addition, the project strengthened the links between Sunderland Carers’ Centre and local cultural institutions, *“providing an opportunity [for the Centre] to introduce young carers to local arts and culture experiences”*.²⁹
- A partnership project with charity Hetton New Dawn to address food poverty through work on an allotment and the creation of relationships with community pharmacies, which have stepped forward as the best partners for trialling social prescribing, given their existing relationships with local people and available time to spend with them.

The aim of this project was to trial culture and health projects with a view to demonstrating their value to local GPs.

- Project ‘Looking Out, Looking In’ responded to Covid-19 restrictions, with two artists setting the community a series of creative lockdown challenges (e.g., origami), with instructions and a video tutorial as well as hard copy resources for those without online access. The resulting art was shared at an outdoor exhibition.

Education and schools (‘Uncover’)

The Great Place programme also aimed to create new cultural opportunities for children and young people who have few existing opportunities to engage in local arts offers, working mainly through local schools. The project evaluation reported that *“interviews and observations indicated that [these activities] and the approach adopted by Sunderland Culture has widened access to arts and creative activities and provided tangible benefits for children and young people’s health and wellbeing”*. Activities included:

- Three schools (one primary, one secondary, and one SEN school) were recruited for a pilot scheme to develop each school’s capacity in arts and culture, including CPD for teachers, activities for children, and links with the city’s arts organisations. Although the primary school was struggling for funds and has a very high percentage of pupils on the at-risk register or with special needs, they leapt at the opportunity, seeing arts and culture as the best way to provide enrichment for the children. For the secondary school, the pilot provided a corrective to the squeezing out of arts from the curriculum in favour of STEM subjects.

²⁹ Ibid.

The most important thing isn't the staff training or the money or the funded activity, it's the widening experience and aspiration for the kids. (*Primary School*)

- *ArtsFix*, a digital toolkit was developed, focusing on three hubs: schools, teachers and school staff; children and young people; and families. The toolkit provided resources for teachers to help them improve or add to their school's arts offer; information on local cultural opportunities and creative careers for young people; and a "*one stop for creative family activities*" including information on local creative activities and venues, for families. The project evaluation reported that the lasting benefits of *ArtsFix* were considered 'expansive', providing a more intimate relationship for children and young people with arts and culture, either through their own activity or via their teachers and care givers.
- CPD opportunities for school staff focused on how to embed creative practices in the classroom, whilst an audit of local cultural venues assessed organisations' capacity for working with schools and helped them make changes. These focused in particular around working with young people with autism or other additional needs.

Communications and capacity building

Lastly, the cross-cutting fifth strand of work, which aimed to build links and capacity across the city around a city-wide vision for culture, resulted in a number of campaigns and activities. A key aim here was to address a previous issue of a lacking clear communication of the city's cultural offer and to raise and improve Sunderland's profile and reputation. Overall, Rebecca Ball reported that "*Great Place allowed us*

to tell a more holistic story about cultural life, opportunities and impact. It enabled us to take our marketing up a level to a more strategic level – we have raised the bar." (Rebecca Ball)

- Sunderland Culture as a new key organisation is now 'at the table' with strategic leads from a wide range of local organisations and institutions, including the Council, University, BID, the local social housing provider, local shopping Centre, Public Health, etc. Together, they have worked to develop the 'city brand' across arts and culture, health and wellbeing and the economy.³⁰ Alongside this, the Great Place team led on or participated in a wide range of city-wide groups including e.g., the Vibrancy Group (made up of eight local businesses who share their marketing budgets to improve the city's vibrancy), Active Sunderland, Sunderland Cultural Education Partnership, and worked with the full range of Council departments, including health and regeneration, throughout the programme period.
- Three major campaigns were delivered with the aim of promoting Sunderland's cultural identity and bring people into the city centre. These hooked around the '*Tall Ships*' event (in the Summer of 2018) and a major Da Vinci exhibition, *Leonardo*, on loan from the Royal Collections Trust to 12 locations across the country to mark the 500-year anniversary of the artist's death. Connected to this, the project evaluation found that "*the investment in partnerships and developing joint-up activity paid off*", with Sunderland Culture's partners for example cross-promoting the event to their own audiences. Over 22,000 tickets were sold, and almost 4,500 children and young people under the age of 18 attended. Following the event, Sunderland Culture became a National Partner (NPP) with Arts Council England for the national collection, bringing in a group of local residents as 'Art

³⁰ Ibid.

Champions' to work on the development of the three-year NPP programme.

- The delivery organisation received small but significant funding from a number of partners including Public Health, the Business Improvement District and Tyne and Wear metro (Nexus).

They're not huge sums but they represent commitments and recognition – reassurance that it's not entirely on our shoulders. (Sunderland Culture)

- Great Place facilitated the trialling of new governance models for arts and culture, following a long period of austerity. Through doing so, *“it enabled an innovative governance model to be developed [for Sunderland Culture], between the local authority and the University and, more unusually, a philanthropic business group via the MAC Trust, to support the creative sector to thrive and grow.”* While the partnership and ambition existed before Great Place, Great Place *“provided the resource to help test and establish the model – so it was really timely”*, explains Ball. According to the project evaluation, *“there is considerable positivity amongst strategic partners about the governance model's efficacy, particularly in terms of its overarching approach to arts and culture in the city.”*

Programme legacy

Looking back, programme lead Rebecca Ball feels that the programme delivery has shown that *“seeing change takes a long time”* – an insight that was heightened further in the difficult period when the Covid pandemic started. As such, *“if we could do it again, having five years would be better”*.

Nevertheless, she feels that the programme has had a significant and lasting impact on the city, both in terms of capacity-building generally and across the strands of activity/ priority areas.

Most fundamentally, the programme – set up at the same time as Sunderland Culture was being established – has had a *“significant impact on [the organisation's] capacity”* in the long term. It enabled Sunderland Culture to test priority areas, spark projects as well as to develop the organisation, through capacity-building, fundraising, marketing and comms. Says Ball: *“Sunderland Culture was set up as a long-term organisation. It was about building something that was resilient and had reach and impact”. Set up as it is now, “it is absolutely fundamental – a driver in the city. It is a long-term partnership [between the founding members] to bring about cultural change.”*

Beyond that, Ball feels that the programme has had a *“massive impact”* in terms of its breadth, with lasting results across the priority areas of the development of the local creative industries, arts and health, and creative learning. Great Place enabled the delivery team to *“build on all of these areas”*, leading to organisational development across the board. Community capacity has also been improved, with communities better able to lead on practice themselves – here, *“partnerships that have developed through Great Place will still be in place”* going forward. Supporting this, Sunderland Culture used the time to create, through the ArtsFix platform on their website, *“an emporium of resources”*, providing a pathway for families, young people, schools and any other organisations interested in arts for young people, with the hope that this will enhance their reach. Across the priority areas, then, *“the way we take our ambitions forward will be different – we hope to embed the principles we've learned from Great Place – e.g., the way we work with schools, the scale and the reach.”*

Throughout, relationships on the ground have been key to this success. Covid-19 led to some challenges for the planned strategies for legacy, says Rebecca Ball, meaning that *“the way we had seen the ending/ handing-over [of the programme] has changed significantly”*. Partner organisations in the communities such as Public Health have had to prioritise differently, leading to more challenges in maintaining partnerships. Similarly, partnerships with schools were strained by the rules around limiting access from third parties into schools and not undertaking cultural trips. However, the fact that relationships had been established during Great Place has helped to maintain them to some degree during the pandemic: *“although conversations are difficult, those relationships are already there. The Local Cultural Education Partnership have kept meeting, and we have been having honest conversations about what they need.”*

In addition, the Great Place period also helped bring in additional funding which will run beyond the Great Place programme. Sunderland Culture took the decision to hire a new Development Manager who has hugely supported their ongoing fundraising efforts, for example bringing in new income sources for the creative economy support strand (‘Unlock’). Additional funding was also successfully applied for from the Coastal Communities Fund, although a bid to the Cultural Development Fund to support town centre regeneration was unsuccessful. Meanwhile, *Cultural Spring* also successfully applied for a further funding round of two years, although the money allocated by Arts Council England was dramatically tapered down from the previous funding round, leading to some challenges.

Together, these various successes mean that *“Great Place strengthened our core and has enabled us to test a number of areas for our values and mission”*, according to Rebecca Ball.

Success factors

Throughout the programme, the delivery team identified a number of success factors and learning points:

1. The independence and cultural focus of Sunderland Culture are critical in giving it freedom, flexibility and the ability to forge partnerships that would not be available other larger institutions.
2. Great Place is a process not a project: it’s about capacity building for the long-term.

We have always seen Great Place as capacity building. [...] Great Place is £1.5 million over three years but it is basically part of a £60 million vision over seven years. (Sunderland Culture)

3. The project is built on a recognition of the importance of ‘bodies on the ground’: human resources who can build trust and put people in touch with funders, arts organisations, other groups, artists etc, creating networks which will endure after project funding is past.
4. Many of the key staffing roles are held by ‘cultural producers’, individuals with expertise both in artistic practice and in project management.
5. Great Place funding is a tool for bringing culture to the fore, which works best when used in conjunction with other funding and opportunities, as seen with the HAZ or the collaboration with *Cultural Spring*, providing a platform to share best practice and support.
6. In creating the programme, the articulation of headline ambitions at the outset was *“really valuable”* in providing a direction of travel; however, the detail sitting underneath these ambitions needed to be local, developed with partners in the city as the programme

developed, in order to *“really respond and adapt to the needs of communities and partners”* that the programme worked with.

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