

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No.3/18

Date: 9 March 2018

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: To inform Members of the continuing progress against Cultural Activities.

Medway's Cultural Strategy 2014-2019 was approved by Cabinet on 28 October 2014

Members of the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee have asked for annual updates on the progress being made in delivering Medway's cultural activities programme.

This briefing note seeks to inform Members of the progress made against each of the 4 strategic priorities of the Strategy, set out below.

1. Stewardship

- The £2.1 million Heritage Lottery funded scheme to renovate the magnificent late 16th Century Grade 1 listed Eastgate House was completed in July 2017. An official launch was held on 18 July, following a press and Member visit during the day. The conservation works have included the essential repairs to the roof, windows and floors, a new heating and lighting system, the removal of unsightly pipe work and wiring, the recreation of historic partitions, the replacement of modern plasterwork using traditional methods which will help the long term conservation of the building and the restoration of wall finishes to their original colour schemes. Improvements to the physical access of the building include the addition of a new lift to the first and second floors of the house, the re-instatement of an internal staircase and protected fire routes throughout the building. New interpretation tells the many stories of the house during its history, including an exhibition about the Mystery of Edwin Drood. The house is also being used for corporate hire and as a wedding venue and promoted Dickensian Christmas event. A series of activities and events are

taking place to tell the story of the house to increase footfall in line with the HLF activity plan. The 16th Century walls on the second floor are undergoing conservation from January to May 2018 allowing visitors to see conservation in action, as part of the visit.

- Upnor Castle hosted the visit of Prince Maurits of Orange Nassau, van Vollenhoven for the official opening of the new Battle of Medway exhibition on 8 June 2017. It was centre stage for the sail and fly by at which the prince took his salute from the bastion. The exhibition was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and in partnership with the Historic Dockyard Chatham whose own temporary exhibition, entitled “Breaking the Chain – the Story of the Dutch Raid in 1667,” was also funded under the same bid. Upnor Castle had its busiest year on record with close to 30,000 visitors. The exhibition is now a permanent part of the castle’s interpretation for visitors.
- Command of the Heights – Following an initial unsuccessful tender exercise to appoint a main contractor for the works (careful demolition of Riverside One, landscaping of public realm, creation of a new entrance to Fort Amherst from Chatham town centre as well as the restoration of the Spur Battery to create an open air performance space), the project team has been reviewing the project to reduce costs and scope of the tender. The updated tender was issued in January 2018. This resulted in a delay of approximately 8 weeks to the project starting on site.
- The old Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre was successfully relocated during the early summer of 2017 to its new premises at the former Strood Library building site on Bryant Road. The official launch was held on 3 July at which Cllr Howard Doe officially opened the new Medway Archives Centre. The old library building has been completely refurbished to provide a state of the art archives centre with suitable storage, new visitor facilities and equipment as well as a welcoming and visitor friendly environment. The archives collection itself is now housed in a bespoke archives strong room with tiered racking which regulates temperature and humidity at optimum levels for the long term safe storage of fragile and delicate archive documentation and records. The archives collection has also this year been digitalized moving from the old Cityark system to the new Adlib system which will allow documentation and records to be viewed online in early 2018.
- The completion of the external refurbishment works to the Brook Theatre has been hailed as a great success and has given new vitality to the venue. The works were completed at the cost of £415k and involved work on the façade, signage and repairs of the clock, as part of the physical refurbishment of the building.

An event, which included an exhibition of elements of the refurbishment, was held at the Brook Theatre on 23 October to celebrate the completion of the works

Work continues to transform the Brook into an iconic powerhouse of creativity – A Quadruple Helix Centre of Excellence for Performance Arts Innovation, which will bring together the public, private, voluntary and University sectors to enable end-to-end culture and arts delivery. Consultation is currently being held with members of the Cultural Partnership, the Arts Council, Universities and other similar venues to acquire as much information and advise to assist with the plans.

Plans are currently being progressed to obtain funding from the Arts Council and the University of Kent, in order to commission an independent study. This will form the basis for a major Capital and Revenue funding bid to progress the development.

The Brook Theatre development is now a major element of Medway's Cultural Strategy, which is led by the Cultural Partnership as part of the Medway 2035 vision.

2. Engagement

The Council provides many activities for young people from arts, events, free swimming to youth clubs. The range of activity is vast and the youth offer campaign will pull all the opportunities for young people together in one place so we co-promote the full range to young people, giving them the opportunity to discover the full range of activity on offer.

- More than 30 days of free festivals every year, one of the largest free festivals and events programmes in the country.
- Work has begun on the processes and major considerations required to transform the Brook into an iconic powerhouse of creativity – the Quadruple Helix Centre of Excellence for Performance Arts Innovation, will bring together the public, private, voluntary and University sectors to enable end-to-end culture and arts delivery.
- Plans are currently being put into place for the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the death of Charles Dickens, one of the countries most famous writers.

3. Economic Prosperity

- The Establishment of a sustainable Christmas Market with over 140,000 visitors attending over the first three week-ends of December now means that

Rochester has become one of the Country's top ten destination for Christmas Markets (6th overall in the Sun Newspaper)

- Tourism continues to grow with a recent economic impact study showing that Tourism in Medway is worth £313 million to the local economy each year, with approximately 4.5 million visitors per annum and accounting for 7% of local employment.
- Work has begun with colleagues in the regeneration and planning teams on establishing a creative quarter in Chatham, through sensitive planning for mix use facilities along the lower high street and the provision of affordable creative workspaces.
- The involvement with the Universities and Private sector organisations in the development of the Quadruple Helix centre of Creative Excellence will encourage the migration of artists and creatives from London, as well as the retention of students from Medway's Universities.

4. Health and Wellbeing

- Medway Sport's new four-year strategy was launched in the summer and indicates how Medway will respond to, and meet the challenges set out in both Sport England's 'Sporting Future Strategy' and its new investment strategy 'Towards an Active Nation'.
- Play, Compete, Spectate, sets out how we will continue to use sport to:
 - encourage active and healthy lifestyles
 - maintain and develop the quality of sports and facilities
 - support and inspire local talent
 - Cement Medway's reputation as a centre of excellence for sport.
- Medway Mile 2017 – more than 3,000 runners and walkers took part in a mass participation running/jogging event, which highlights the benefits of developing a healthy and active lifestyle.

Summary

Much has been achieved, helping to establish Medway as a great place to live, work, learn and visit, but there is still more to do. Working in partnership, activity continues to deliver against all the ambitions set out in Medway's Cultural Strategy 2014-19.

The Cultural Partnership is working to refresh Medway's Cultural Strategy, ahead of the current strategy expiring in 2019.

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