

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No.03/19

Date: 13 February 2019

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.

Members of the Regeneration, Culture, 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.

Medway's Cultural Strategy 2014-2019 is to be reviewed and refreshed and the Medway Cultural Partnership under a new Chair – Liz Moran, Director of Arts & Culture from the University of Kent has established an Executive of the Partnership to progress proposals. The Chair proposed that Medway could and should bid for the 2025 UK City of Culture.

1. Stewardship

- 1.1 The £2.1 million Heritage Lottery funded scheme to renovate the magnificent late 16th Century Grade 1 listed Eastgate House was completed and launched in July 2017. The House has been open to visitors since the launch and feedback from visitors has been very positive. The final element of the conservation work was completed in 2018 with "in resident" conservators on the second and third floors revealing and conserving Sixteenth and Seventeenth century wall paintings. The second floor paintings comprise of a repeated intricate pattern and the third floor revealed two knights in armour with pennant flags and swords. More research into the significance of the mysterious third floor paintings will be undertaken. A rich programme of events, exhibition and talks took place in 2018 culminating in a successful

- Christmas programme including Victorian Father Christmas – adult and childrens’ trails about the house, and immersive Christmas Carol performances in the lead up to Christmas.
- 1.2 A Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid was submitted in August 2018 for the relocation and restoration of Charles Dickens’ Writing Chalet which is located in Eastgate House Gardens. This bid included the relocation of the Chalet to a more visible location within the gardens, a complete programme of renovations, the development of a performance space in front, interpretation and a series of community activities and events. Unfortunately the bid was not successful. The Council is now looking at future potential bids as well as other funding opportunities.
- 1.3 The Guildhall Museum was successful in obtaining National Portfolio Organisation status in partnership with the Historic Dockyard Chatham, Tunbridge Wells Museum and Canterbury Museum. This status levers in funding for a new visitor experience officer post and some additional funding to develop an interpretation plan for the Guildhall Museum, develop a staff training programme and implement best practises from across the museum sector at the Guildhall Museum. The project runs until March 2022. Exhibitions at the Guildhall Museum in 2018 included a Knights Templar exhibition and several World War One commemoration projects and activities.
- 1.4 The Council continues to work closely with English Heritage renegotiating a new Local Management Agreement which includes operational agreements as well as developing planned property maintenance and works programmes for Rochester Castle, Upnor Castle and Temple Manor. In 2018/19 major works are being undertaken to redevelop the visitor viewing platforms at Rochester Castle. HLF under the Young Roots programme provided funding to improve interpretation at Temple Manor in Strood. New panels, dressing up costumes, and educational interpretation were all part of the improvements. The funding also enabled the development of 3D virtual renditions of the building as it would have been in 1240 which visitors can view on iPads.

2. Engagement

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 The service continues to deliver high quality successful activities for the people who live in and visit Medway. More than 30 days of free festivals

every year, one of the largest free festivals and events programmes in the country. The following highlights are an indication of some of the achievements of the service, this year, which is helping to gain the reputation for the area as one of the regional leaders in the creative and entertainment sector:

- The English Festival - The numbers attending represented an increase on previous years with an estimated 15,500 visitors in 2018.
- McCudden Commemoration - This event commemorated the 100th anniversary of Major James McCudden being awarded the Victoria Cross. A plaque was unveiled creating a legacy for years to come of the Major and his connection with Medway.
- Sweeps Festival - Now in its 38th year, the three day Sweeps Festival continues to celebrate Morris dancing and folk music throughout Rochester. The recently added Artisan Produce Fair, which was brought in to supplement the existing Record and Musical Instrument, Psychic and Folk-Art Fairs has proved extremely popular. Approximately 80,000 visitors attended over the 3 days which is the best attendance since 2014.
- Dickens Festival - The 40th Dickens Festival continued the tradition of attracting visitors from as far afield as Japan, Australia and Europe as well as across the whole country. The festival is still regarded as the best tribute to one of the country's greatest writers. This year, the festival returned to its traditional dates of the last weekend of the school half-term. However, restricting the event to two days has allowed the standard of the entertainment to be raised without increasing the budget. Attendance figures were on par with previous years with an estimated 38,500 visitors over the weekend.
- River Festival - In 2018 the River Festival was held at the Chatham Historic Dockyard, 8,500 visitors attended. Entry was free to all visitors and allowed many Medway residents to access the Dockyard and enjoy the exhibition galleries free of charge, but also capturing visitor contact details for future promotions. Both land and water based activities were provided within the Dockyard complex and in the Mast Pond. A return to Chatham Waterfront in 2019 will reconnect the River Festival with much more of a view of the River activities.

- Armed Forces Day - This event is now regarded as the most prominent in the region and is regularly attended by visitors and military personnel alike. The event is used to promote the close and special relationship between the people of Medway and Her Majesty's Armed Forces. It is also used to celebrate the commitment of Medway Council to the Armed Forces. This was illustrated in a speech by the Leader of Medway Council. An estimated 11,000 visitors attended the event.
- Freedom March (The Princess of Wales Royal Regiment) - Freedom of Medway Status was conferred on The Princess of Wales Royal Regiment, which resulted in a ceremonial march through Chatham with a salute being taken by the Mayor of Medway, followed by a civic lunch where the ceremonial casket was presented to the Regiment. The Freedom March took place in Chatham town centre and proceeded along Dock Road, where a salute was taken by The Worshipful Mayor of Medway accompanied by other civic and military dignitaries.
- Castle Concerts - Following five nights of Concerts in 2017, the 2018 programme also provided five nights of live music at the Castle. However, all but one of the acts did not sell out.
- Will Adams Festival - Approximately 3,200 visitors attended which is less than 2017. However the inaccurate weather forecast didn't help. It didn't stop those attending enjoying Japanese culture through demonstrations, performance and hands-on activities, including Martial Arts demonstrations; calligraphy; origami and Taiko Drumming as well as displays, stands and exhibitions of Japanese life and culture.
- Focus On Festivals - The Focus On Festivals were planned as new events for Medway in 2018 to celebrate the individual local areas with community participation at their heart. These events complimented the diverse range of free events produced by Medway Council predominantly in Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham. Three out of four of the events had good weather and the Focus On Rainham event also screened the Royal Wedding.

* The Focus On Hoo event was subject to wet weather and very poor weather forecasts, which impacted on visitor attendance.

Medway Sport staff also attended all the Focus Festivals this year to support local communities and encourage activity.

Attendance:

Event	Visitor Attendance
Focus On Rainham – Sat 19 May at Cozenton Park	5,000
Focus On Walderslade - Sat 1 September at Hook Meadow Recreation Ground	3,000
Focus On Strood – Sat 15 September at Northcote Recreation Ground	2,100
Focus On Hoo – Sat 22 September at High Halstow Recreation Ground	550*
Total	10,650

- Capstone Festival - This event focusses on a ‘celebration of outdoor pursuits’. However heavy rain led to the cancellation of this event.
- Bonfire Night - The build up to the event was beset by very wet weather however the day and night of the event was dry and as the wind dropped the crowds enjoyed the bonfire and traditional firework display. Despite the previous poor weather the event attracted circa 22,000 visitors.
- Dickensian Christmas Festival & Rochester Christmas Market - The 2018 Dickensian Christmas Festival was attended by one of the largest numbers of people, (over 40,000 per day) in the history of the two day festival. Over 150,000 in total attended the Christmas Market, which ran over three weekends prior to Christmas:
 - 24 and 25 November
 - 30 November, 1 and 2 December
 - 7, 8 and 9 December

2.3 Work has begun on the processes for developing options for the Brook as a centre of creative excellence and community.

2.4 During 2018 the Heritage Team developed a series of children’s craft activities throughout all the school holidays across all the heritage sites. The Heritage Education Team with the aid of Children and the Arts Funding are working with hundreds of local school children teaching them about the museum collection and linking this work with local artists.

2.5 In commemoration of the ending of World War One the Heritage Team were successful in obtaining HLF to develop a project called “Soldiers On

Our Streets” working with the Friends of Medway Archives and involving the local schools and the community to further research local people who died during World War One. Another project called The ‘Lost Helmet’ enabled 1000s of locals to have their picture taken wearing a WW1 helmet against a backdrop of the trenches.

- 2.6 Plans are currently being put into place for the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the death of Charles Dickens, one of the country’s most famous writers with an extended Dickens Festival in summer 2020 and also Dickensian Christmas with ambitions for a programme of highlight events pending successful external funding.
- 2.7 Libraries and Community Hubs have a critical role to play in developing cultural activities right across Medway. To develop and enhance resident’s literacy skills by fostering a love of reading from infancy and throughout life, the Service provides a whole range of activities, including:
- A programme of regular weekly in-library fun activities for babies and toddlers, with a monthly average attendance approaching 2000:
 - Baby bounce and rhyme
 - Story time
 - Toddler, shake and boogie
 - Teenage reading groups, homework clubs and chatterbooks sessions are provided for older children.

The library service ran three reading challenges during the summer:

- The Summer Reading Challenge for children, with over 3000 taking part and which realised an over 55% finisher’s rate, the highest figure in the history of the scheme in Medway. National evidence is very clear on the value of this activity to schools, in that it has a major impact on children’s reading.
- The Teen Reading Challenge for teens which saw 166 teenagers take part and just under 50% complete the challenge.
- The Rewarding Reading Challenge for adults was again very popular with 453 taking part, and just under 50 % completing. Feedback has illustrated to the team that families really like the idea of being able to read together with the provision of these three schemes.

Medway Libraries also runs a yearly reading challenge; the Reading Ahead Challenge in partnership with Medway Adult Education. The challenge this year which started in December 2018 and runs to the end of June 2019 is aimed at helping participants improve their reading skills, gain reading confidence or for those who want to get back into reading.

The yearly Children's Book Festival ran in May 2018, 10 authors, illustrators and a poet visited Medway meeting 1144 children, aged between 5 and 15 years, in their local library.

Our author events have attracted a national profile, recent high profile author events include Susan Lewis, Rosie Goodwin, Gerald Seymour, Elly Griffiths, Saul David, Ben Kane, Lesley Pearce, Karen Maitland and James Swallow. As Medway is able to guarantee a large audience (often around 200 residents) publishers are happy to provide these authors at no cost, often to launch a new title.

Medway Libraries this year will continue to be venues for major authors such as James Oswald, Elizabeth Chadwick, Giles Kristian, Ben Aaronovitch and Milly Johnson.

The Library Service also hosts the very successful Wigmore Lectures, now also extended to other venues, with the Wigmore lectures on tour.

Reading Groups continue to capture the imagination of the residents of Medway and the library service provides a whole range, including crime readers, poetry, visually impaired customers, those customer that are hard of hearing and of course many general readers groups.

3. Economic Prosperity

- 3.1 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 best Christmas Markets.
- 3.2 Tourism continues to grow with a recent economic impact study showing that Tourism in Medway is now worth £333 million to the local economy each year, with approximately 4.9 million visitors per annum and accounting for 7% of local employment. (Cambridge Economic Impact Study 2017 results).
- 3.3 Work has begun with colleagues in the regeneration and planning teams on establishing a Creative City, through sensitive planning for mix use facilities along the lower high street and the provision of affordable creative workspaces.

3.4 Working with the University of Kent on a potential new-build to harness a creative industries incubation space with the “Docking Station. Funding for feasibility and testing has come from a successful bid to the Cultural Development Fund by the Thames Estuary Production Corridor.

4. Health and Wellbeing

4.1 Medway’s Sporting Legacy strategy continues to guide work programmes and indicate 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’.

4.2 Play, Compete, Spectate, sets out how Medway will 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.

4.3 The annual Medway Mile at Rochester Castle in July continues to be a flagship community event with more than 3,000 runners and walkers taking part.

4.4 The Medway Cycling Festival was staged in June to coincide with National Cycling Week and involved a number of internal and external partners combining to provide a 9-day programme of activities across Medway enjoyed by hundreds of residents.

4.5 Medway Sport staff also attended all the Focus Festivals this year to support local communities and encourage activity.

4.6 Investment in facilities this year has seen Medway Park refurbish and re-line its main sports hall to support International, regional and community sporting events.

4.7 The Medway Sports Awards in December celebrated local sporting success and highlighted the achievements of Medway’s clubs, teams, individuals, coaches, volunteers and schools. Double Olympic champion Lizzy Yarnold, the most successful Winter Olympian in British history, was the guest of honour.

4.8 Medway Park has hosted a range of International, National and Regional Sporting events including international table tennis, the GB Wheelchair Rugby National Championships, the wheelchair rugby league Grand Final, European handball and veteran’s international badminton.

