



**CULTURAL
STRATEGY FOR
SHROPSHIRE
2021-2031**

VIBRANT SHROPSHIRE

Independent
by nature

UNPRECEDENTED

Forward

Unprecedented. Not a word that's usually banded around much but 2020, after all, was an 'unprecedented' year. In February 2020, Shropshire was hit with the worst flooding in 20 years, with residents and businesses evacuated from Shrewsbury and Ironbridge following two severe danger-to-life flood warnings.

Then came the Coronavirus lockdown. From 23rd March 2020, all non-essential organisations were closed, including cultural venues, leisure, hospitality and retail.

After that, the world changed for all of us.

This Cultural Strategy for Shropshire therefore comes at a challenging time. Culture has been, more than ever, accessed on line and through the TV and outdoor spaces have become a lifeline for many. There are also unprecedented opportunities. With the lockdown, we have had the time to reflect on what happens next, as individuals and cultural providers.

We have set out unprecedented aspirations for the development of culture in Shropshire - for residents and visitors to the county. This follows extensive consultation with a broad range of people involved in culture across Shropshire and beyond and has been developed in partnership with organisations from across the sector.

Our strategy lays out Shropshire's cultural priorities for the next ten years.

Cllr Lezley Picton, Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Waste and Communications, Shropshire Council, July 2020

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Sleeping on the
Hills of South
Shropshire.

Front Cover:
'Shropshire Boys
Dancing'. Photo by
Mark Anderson.

Introduction

Welcome to a new draft Cultural Strategy for the unitary area of Shropshire. This document sets out the ambition and strategic priorities for the cultural sector for the next 10 years.

This strategy will help deliver the planned Community and Rural Strategy for Shropshire, focusing on keeping people happy and healthy helping people who are lonely to connect with others, embracing the skills and experience of the older generation, attracting and keeping young people in the county.

It was developed in partnership with a range of stakeholders, through the Cultural Strategy Working Group; the membership of which is shown at the end of this document. It follows one to one consultation with sector leaders and three workshops with individuals representing the wider cultural sector, which were held in Craven Arms, Shrewsbury and Wem. A total of 70 individuals took part in the workshops. Thank you to those that took part.

The draft Cultural Strategy will be available for public consultation between September and December 2020.

Once published, an Implementation Plan will be created, setting out the actions across a range of partners for the next three years. This will be monitored annually, and a report will be published that sets out the progress against the priorities set out in this document.

'Thinking Path' by Shirley Chubb (2004) at Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery.



UNIQUE SHROPSHIRE

Shropshire is a unique and diverse county with a rich blend of natural, industrial and social heritage.

Cultural vibrancy flows across Shropshire from the distinctive county town of Shrewsbury with its major cultural assets including Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery and Shrewsbury Market, to its sixteen market towns each with active cultural communities and distinctive stories to tell. The county is home to four Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations: Arts Alive; DASH (Disability Arts Shropshire); Meadow Arts and Pentabus Theatre.

Farming diversification has nurtured a high-quality artisan food and drink sector, which in turn supports a highly independent retail and leisure offer for residents and visitors supported through food markets and food festivals.

Almost a quarter of the county is designated as the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the fascinating heritage of the Industrial Revolution is recognised in two World Heritage Sites - The Ironbridge Gorge and Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal in Llangollen. There are over 3,600 miles of Rights of Way, 29 rivers and 35 miles of canal, 51 museums and heritage attractions including RAF Museum Cosford, Severn Valley Railway, Ludlow Castle and Ironbridge Gorge Museums and over 400 hundred sports facilities and leisure centres.

Bordering Wales, with good connections to major cities in the North, South West and Midlands, Shropshire has an enterprising and independent spirit that manifests in higher than average numbers of small businesses and self-employed people and strong arts, music and creative industries, heritage, leisure and visitor economies - many with potential for growth.

CULTURAL OFFER



There were 2,346,896 visits to council facilities over 2018/19

- There were 918,755 Library visits
- There were 182,728 Museums visits
- There were 977,522 Outdoor Recreation visits
- There were 199,362 visits to Theatre Seven
- There were 68,529 visits to The Old Market Hall

Local communities

- Population of 323,136 people
- 83% of local people rate their life satisfaction as Good or Very Good
- 79% of local people engage with arts, museums and libraries

Regional, national and overseas visitors

- Over 11 million visitors a year to Shropshire
- Tourism spend of £539m, indirect impact of £200m and support for 14,767 jobs
- Ranked 40th out of 50 most visited county in the UK

BBC Midlands Today filming the archaeological excavations in the grounds of Shrewsbury Castle, 2019.



Rhyme Time at Shrewsbury Library.



Shropshire's cultural offer

WHAT IS CULTURE?

At one level, 'culture', is about those special places to go and things to do that attract and inspire visitors- both local and from further afield. Culture includes arts and craft, museums, heritage, history, archaeology, architecture, open spaces, countryside recreation, sport, hospitality, cafes and restaurants, visitor attractions, locally produced food and drink. It is that unique blend of experiences that gives a place its own sense of spirit and identity.

Culture is also about much more than this. It is about what is special to us as a community and as individuals.

It can characterise:

Our sense of self

by developing our spiritual, intellectual and emotional wellbeing and connection to others

Our sense of place

and the way we feel about places to make them somewhere we want to live, work and visit

Our sense of purpose

by connecting us to traditions, beliefs, values and shared stories



Shropshire Libraries
Reading Group.

D. Davies, Dining Rooms, 13 Castle
Gates, Shrewsbury. Photograph
by Joseph Lewis Della Porta,
1888. Shropshire Archives ref:
8877/143013

Late third century AD
silver Roman mirror
found at Wroxeter,
from the collections at
Shrewsbury Museum &
Art Gallery



DASH (Disability
Arts Shropshire)

VIBRANT SHROPSHIRE

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Our Vision

By 2030, Shropshire's vibrant culture will be inspiring more people – both local communities and visitors alike - to explore, create, be active and enjoy themselves. It will enhance lives and nurture the environment for all our futures.

Our Ambition

In 10 years, our ambition is to create a place where extraordinary and everyday cultural experiences are a source of inspiration for all. The importance of culture to quality of life, health and wellbeing and the economy is reflected in happier and healthier communities and cultural venues and activities lead the way for climate and environmental change mitigation.



Summary of our priorities

Several key priorities have emerged as instrumental to the development of a vibrant, healthy, prosperous culture for residents and visitors to Shropshire. Their implementation will be phased over the next 10 years.

Create

Culture better supports the growth of the local economy and creates more opportunities to earn a living

Explore

Delighting and surprising visitors and residents with independent, authentic experiences

Enjoy

Using culture to support people to be active, happy, healthy and connected

Live

Harnessing the power of distinctive places for the benefit of all

Nurture

Shropshire's high-quality natural landscapes are valued and enhanced for future generations

Innovate

Driving digital development to enhance cultural experiences, improve physical and intellectual access and tackle social isolation

Connect

Forge strong partnerships to drive forward our shared cultural ambition

Cross-cutting themes

We developed a number of cross-cutting themes to help ensure that the priorities address Shropshire's core challenges:

Climate and environmental change mitigation – Everyone needs to do their bit to address the climate and environment emergency to ensure a happier and healthier future for all. Culture can help us engage with these challenges creatively together

Developing volunteers – Supporting volunteers through promoting good practice, providing opportunities for training and development and recognising their achievements

Young people's skills and learning – Engaging young people in all of our priority areas and providing clear pathways into all of the cultural sector

Marketing and communication – Ensuring that there is a joined-up marketing and communication strategy to promote greater joint working and reach new audiences

Who will we focus on?

Culture is for everyone and we will ensure it is as accessible to as many people as possible.

Shropshire has a higher than the national average older population, which offers advantages in terms of skills, expertise and a good volunteer base but presents longer-term challenges around health and wellbeing. As a largely rural county, access to culture for all can be a challenge in Shropshire, and this will need to be addressed through this strategy. We also need to do more to facilitate younger people's engagement with culture as audiences, participants, leaders and makers.

We will work with Shropshire children and their families, young and older people, public sector and community organisations to make sure that cultural activities are available to everyone.



Shrewsbury Folk Festival, Amadou Diagne and Mordou N'Diaye. Photograph by Steve Oliver.

The visitor economy in Shropshire is growing, especially following the Covid-19 pandemic. There is still room for growth and improvement of tourism. Shropshire is valued for its authentic experiences and off the beaten track vibe and independent visitors of all ages will be targeted in the future.

We will ensure awareness of Shropshire's rich vibrant culture grows and more visitors are attracted from wider catchments. Visitor experiences, products and services will be developed 'Independent Explorers' in line with the Marches Visitor Economy Strategy, and we will work with arts, creative and heritage businesses to help them innovate, grow and thrive.



Shrewsbury Severn Bridges 10K Road Race.



Heyday arts activities at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery.

'In The Hands of Boys'
dance project, at RAF
Cosford. Photograph by
Mark Anderson.



OUR PRIORITIES



CREATE

Culture is made by people. Our principle is to support the people that make and look after our culture and to develop new talent for future generations. Shropshire has award-winning visitor attractions, internationally recognised heritage locations, a vibrant independent arts, crafts and retail offer and a renowned foodie culture. For Shropshire to thrive the focus will need to be on investment and funding for those businesses and professionals that make up the county's cultural economy which will include the development of products, services and experiences for residents and visitors alike.



We will...

- Support new and existing cultural organisations in the sector, working with the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
- Develop stronger links to professional practice including research with University Centre Shrewsbury
- Provide a training programmes for cultural organisations to support innovative and sustainable practices – commercially, environmentally and technologically
- Explore affordable, flexible co-working space in key locations
- Promote opportunities for volunteering, work placements and apprenticeships
- Better understand the value of volunteering in supporting economic and social outcomes



Embroidery workshop at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery.



Poles Coppice installation.

"There's a wealth of creativity in the region - a lot of self-starters who have moved here as well as creative locals. Often the more rural, the more creative - simply because they've had to be more inventive with their resources!"

**Consultee,
Shropshire Culture Workshop**



EXPLORE

Ludlow from Whitcliffe at sunrise. Photograph by Jon Hodgson.



Play area at Severn Valley Country Park.

Culture inspires, delights and surprises us. It is an expression of shared human experience seen through the distinctive lens of a particular place. There is a strong cultural tourism market in Shropshire, with a huge variety of things to see and do. These drive high levels of local engagement and are much loved by Shropshire people. We also recognise that much more could be done to attract visitors from elsewhere to explore all the county has to offer.

We will...

- Agree branding and marketing for the county that promotes Shropshire as a cultural destination for local, national and international visitors
- Encourage joint promotion of local cultural activities that celebrates variety and diversity linked to sustainable transport and digital access
- Encourage a more sustainable approach to tourism including behaviour change, nature recovery approaches, energy efficiency, and carbon off-setting
- Develop outdoor adventures and experiences
- Develop activities based on influential Salopians and what they represent
- Promote artisan producers of local food and drink through markets, festivals and business support



Acton Scott Historic Working Farm.

ENJOY

Culture makes us feel good and there is growing evidence that it can also help prevent, manage and treat a range of public and individual health problems. This is already happening in Shropshire - from supporting mental health in young people and adults to volunteering in nature and creating regular events for families affected by dementia to read, sing or dance together. The county's cultural sector helps young and old, and everyone in-between.

We will...

- Continue support for existing health and wellbeing projects
- Collaborate with youth providers to ensure countywide inclusion in culture for young people
- Continue to develop families and school's programmes at key cultural venues and sites to foster an active love of culture from an early age
- Invest in and support cultural hubs to increase the opportunity to take part in culture across the county
- Better understand and respond to the aspirations of under-represented groups in Shropshire and help address cultural diversity
- Transform leisure provision in Shropshire, so that there is a more joined-up, commercial approach that works with local communities for the benefit of all



A school group visiting the conservation department at Shropshire Archives.

Late 20th Century painting entitled 'House of Birds' by John Farrington, from the collections at Shrewsbury Museums & Art Gallery.

Inclusive cycle trail at Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre.



Shrewsbury 'Walking for Health'.

"It's great to feel happy – participating in cultural activity, going out, joining in gives you a good feeling"

Consultee, Shropshire Culture workshop



LIVE

The most successful places have a strong 'sense of place' forged through distinctive natural and built environments and the interactions of people with them, and with each other. In other words, Culture Makes Place. Shropshire has a wealth of cultural assets and activities across its towns and villages, with a strong foundation in its rich heritage and rural traditions. There is huge potential for people-led place-shaping, supported by creative communities and businesses.

"The best kept secrets are the unlocked potential of our village halls and our historic churches."

**Consultee,
Shropshire Culture workshop**

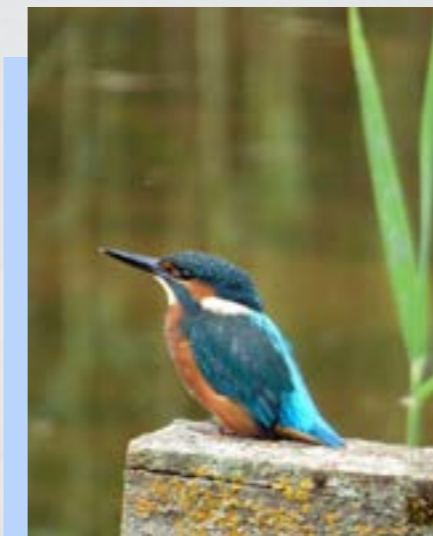
We will...

- Support the successful delivery of Place Plans including the Oswestry Heritage High Street project and Shrewsbury Big Town Plan
- Explore investment for re-purposing heritage buildings for example creative workspace and music venues
- Ensure existing venues are energy efficient and accessible
- Create a network of community cultural hubs and help ensure good transportation, access and facilities
- Encourage cultural diversity through providing opportunities for more communities and communities-of-interest

NURTURE



'Love the Shropshire Hills' by Ben Osborne.



Kingfisher at Severn Valley Country Park. Photograph by Tony Colton.

"Shropshire has an active environmental campaigning network, independent whole foods suppliers, green party. Linked to the fact it appears to have a good percentage of culturally switched on people there is room here for something unique and important."

Consultee,
Shropshire Culture workshop



Horse riding through Eastridge Wood, Stiperstones.

Shropshire's natural assets are some of the most magnificent in the country. They are supported by strong local partnerships and have global recognition. These assets give us the opportunity to focus on nature recovery and climate change mitigation, alongside on-going habitat management and public engagement. Following the Coronavirus outbreak, the importance of our outdoor spaces has been reaffirmed.

We will...

- Develop and promote sustainability and nature as a core part of the Shropshire destination brand
- Use culture to foster an active love of nature that helps more people engage with the environment in a sustainable way
- Help ensure the Shropshire Hills AONB is recognised for its high-quality environment and supported so that this is sustained and enhanced
- Develop habitat conservation and enhancement projects for key sites including in towns



Above:
Volunteers working to maintain Shropshire woodland.



Left: Children pond dipping at Severn Valley Country Park. Photograph by 'Marketing at the Mill'.

INNOVATE



A child explores Shropshire using virtual reality.

Innovate

In the early eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution was built on Shropshire's innovation, resources and entrepreneurial spirit. Today's cultural practitioners have the opportunity to embrace the 4th industrial revolution in how they shape products and services and engage with people. Social media, live streaming and the possibilities of virtual and augmented reality all came to the fore during the Coronavirus lockdown months in 2020. There are a good number of tech companies in the county and excellent connectivity in most areas, which together present a great opportunity for Shropshire to develop its capacity, profile and reach, and open-up new income streams for culture.

We will...

- Embed digital knowledge in the cultural sector through better engagement with creative tech companies to develop new cultural experiences
- Develop digital capacity through events and training programmes for cultural participation
- Utilise technology to make sites more accessible to encourage greater use by those with specific needs
- Present culture in a way that is relevant and exciting for new audiences by making better use of digital media
- Increase digital capacity of staff, volunteers and audiences
- Ensure that there is fit-for-purpose digital connectivity across the county

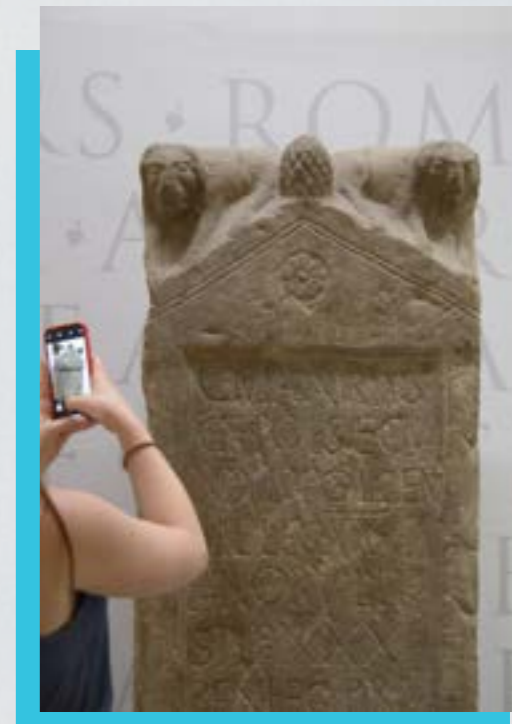
“Shrewsbury is becoming a base for co-working and creative enterprise being driven by both private and social enterprises”

Consultee, Cultural Workshop

Top: The Roman tombstones on display at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery.

Middle: Digitisation of historic documents at Shropshire Archives.

Bottom: 'Hello World' by Thompson and Carighead (2014) at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery.





CONNECT

Map of Shropshire by John Rocque, 1752, from the collections at Shropshire Archives.



'In The Hands of Boys' dance project. Photograph by Mark Anderson.

Culture is about connecting people. Existing partnerships bring together organisations to agree shared ambitions and priorities that help shape the landscape of culture in Shropshire. There is also a strong tradition of effective collaboration and partnership working. There is however a need to establish a dedicated partnership to develop and deliver the Cultural Strategy.

We will...

- Develop a Cultural Partnership which brings together a range of organisations and networks in the county representing all sectors
- Develop a Community Forum for grass roots cultural organisations to network and share practice – and connect this to the work of the Cultural Partnership
- Scope out a potential Tourism BID proposition
- Develop a core Place proposition - a major county-wide project that delivers the Cultural Strategy and enables employment of paid professional staff
- Develop a Cultural Compact with ACE and partnership agreements with National Lottery, Sports England and others
- Develop a framework to create better data about how culture impacts positively on economy, health and wellbeing and the environment
- Explore the development of the Partnership into a Cultural Trust to enable greater fund-raising and protection of assets.



Volunteers at Severn Valley Country Park, a Green Flag Award winner. Photograph by James Brookes.



"Personally, I'd like to see Shropshire regarded as the Cultural Capital of the West Mids"

Consultee,
Shropshire Culture workshop

HOW WILL WE MEASURE SUCCESS?

Walking on the Offa's Dyke path.
Photograph by Jim Saunders.

A detailed evidence base has been commissioned to build the foundation for this Cultural Strategy. This provides a good snap-shot of where we are starting from.

It includes national data from:

- Visit Britain - Day visits and overnight stays
- MENE data - Visits to the natural environment and environmental attitudes
- Active Lives survey - Children and adult engagement with arts and culture, sport and volunteering
- Lottery and Arts Council England investment - Amount of funding invested in the county
- Health profile - Health of the population
- ONS survey - Levels of Wellbeing and Life Satisfaction.

We will monitor local data held by Shropshire Council including:

- Numbers of unused/underused buildings
- Energy and water monitoring.

We will conduct local research on progress to date including the numbers and locations of:

- Creative businesses and cultural enterprises, including charities and CICs
- Cultural Venues and workspaces
- Festivals.

We will also work with partners to develop a local framework of indicators to include:

- Investment in environmental change mitigation projects
- Visitor numbers to key destinations
- Number of volunteers
- Number of children and young people involved
- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Investment and finance metrics

A performance of
Mother Goose at
Theatre Severn,
Shrewsbury.

Delivery and ownership

This Strategy has been adopted by Shropshire Council and is supported by a range of strategic partners through the Cultural Strategy Working Group.

A new Cultural Partnership will be set up to guide the delivery of this Strategy, whose purpose will be to connect the cultural sector in the county, creating opportunities for engagement and enabling collaboration with partners.

The Strategy will work alongside the individual business plans and artistic ambitions of the cultural sectors, the strategic plans of key stakeholders such as Arts Council England and Historic England, and Shropshire Council's Corporate Plan.

Delivery of the Strategy will adapt and respond to local, regional, national and international policies to ensure the vision and priorities remain valid.

An implementation plan sets out detailed outcomes under each of the high-level priorities. The plan will be published online and will be a live document.

The vision and key priorities of the Strategy should also be viewed alongside plans from other stakeholders, in particular the Marches LEP Local Industrial Strategy, Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy, Shropshire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan, the Actively Improving Lives Strategy and the Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy.



The Hoffman Kiln at Llanymynech.



Charter of King John, 1200.
Shropshire Archives ref: 3365/3.

Resources

The impact of Covid on the economy is likely to be felt for the lifetime of this strategy.

Given the ongoing local authority funding pressures, the development of culture in Shropshire cannot be reliant on Council revenue funding. For the Strategy to be delivered, we will need to work collaboratively with the private sector, charitable donations and grant giving bodies on innovative funding and investment models. Funding sources may include Arts Council England Cultural Development and Investment Funds, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, DCMS Tourism Action Zone and the potential development of a Tourism Improvement District, alongside opportunities for business sponsorship, Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG) investment, planning gain, carbon off-setting and a range of other funding.

The effective fundraising activity of volunteers and Friends Groups has and can continue to play an important part in this.

This will require a true partnership approach to share staff resources, reducing competition for funding and minimising duplication of effort.

CULTURAL STRATEGY WORKING GROUP

Organisation	Key interests	Representative
Arts Council England	Arts and culture funding and development	Alison Vermee
Caring for God's Acre	Museums, industrial archaeology, built heritage, conservation, designed landscapes and regeneration	Harriet Devlin
Culture Consortium Shropshire and Shropshire Council Arts Development	Cultural activities for young people and schools, specialising in the arts	Alexa Pugh
Energize Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin	Sports and leisure	Chris Child
Health and Wellbeing Board	Health and wellbeing	Susan Lloyd
Historic England	Historic buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments	Bill Klemperer
Local Enterprise Partnership/ Landau	Economic growth, employment and young people	Sonia Roberts
Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Steering Group	All aspects of culture and heritage- focus on people	Marion Blockley
National Trust	Historic buildings, special landscapes, outdoor activities	Marcus Halliwell
Natural England	Natural heritage	Mike Robinson

Rural Services Network	Rural communities	Cecilia Motley
Shropshire Council	Culture, Heritage, Leisure, Libraries, Outdoor Activities, Shropshire Hills AONB	Cllr Lezley Picton
Shropshire Council	Communities	Cllr Gwilym Butler
Shropshire Council	Culture Leisure and Tourism	Sue Finnigan and Clare Featherstone
Shropshire Council	Shropshire Libraries	Michael Lewis
Shropshire Council	Insight and Intelligence	Tom Dodds
Shropshire Council	Economic Growth Place Planning and Shrewsbury Programme	Sarah Hughes and Tim Pritchard
Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy Board	Outdoor activities, country parks, Rights of Way	Alex Carson-Taylor
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership	Cultural and natural heritage	Phil Holden
Shropshire Wildlife Trust	Natural heritage and outdoor activities	John Hughes
University of Chester	Culture and Humanities	Prof. Tim Jenkins

