

FLOURISHING CULTURE

THE NORTHERN DEVON CULTURE STRATEGY

THINGS
MADE
PUBLIC



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1. WHAT CULTURE MEANS IN NORTHERN DEVON

Culture means different things to different people. For some it is a welcoming and enriching avenue to explore creative expression, for others it's a word that conjures up feelings of elitism, uncertainty and exclusion. There are many that claim to not care for it at all, until you probe a little further and find they have a healthy interest in the live music scene at their local pub.

And that's what makes it so hard to define. None of us really know what culture means to our counterparts. It's personal to each and every one of us. From garden shed dwellers tinkering away with a pile of reclaimed wood, to critically acclaimed print artists utilising their local church hall to make and create masterpieces, from those that find meaning and expression through the land, sharing stories, food, skills and traditions, through to those that feel invigorated by an early morning surf before heading to work.

What we know is that every person, no matter of age, background, ethnicity, religion or financial situation has the right to experience, participate in and enjoy cultural activity, in whichever way they choose to perceive it. It is not something that should feel scary or inaccessible, it shouldn't be laughed at or scorned; instead every last seedling of creativity, no matter how mighty or small, should be cultivated, treasured and celebrated.

When we talk about culture in this strategy, we are talking about this freedom of creativity, interpretation and expression.

2. THE VISION

In the next 5 years, northern Devon will be locally, nationally and internationally recognised as a place where creativity thrives in unison with its landscape and communities.

Northern Devon will be a place where all forms of culture are nurtured and celebrated.

Our region's creativity, rooted in our identity, heritage and environment, will be as breathtaking as our beaches, wild like our seas and as diverse as our landscapes.

The expressions of our culture will be reflective of all that live here, honouring our past traditions, whilst creating a platform for our dreams of the future.

It will be a place where creativity thrives, where all voices are heard and where culture is used as a vehicle for change and action.

We will be unapologetic, we will be brave and we will lead with ambition.

3. AN OVERVIEW OF CULTURE IN NORTHERN DEVON

CULTURAL COMMUNITIES

Culture is embedded in our way of life in northern Devon, not just in our arts centres, galleries and museums, but in community halls, pubs, faith centres and homes. 41% of us spend time doing a creative, artistic, theatrical or music activity or a craft compared with a national average of 34.67%. Whether it is singing in a choir, knitting, writing or gardening, we are making our own culture.

We have a proud tradition of distinctive local celebrations like the Hunting of the Earl of Rone in Combe Martin, the Pilton Green Man Festival, Clovelly Herring Festival and the Turning of the Devil's Stone in Shebbear. These are often volunteer-run and provide touchstones for our cultural life year-after-year.

Organisations like Sunrise Diversity show how culture and creativity are important connection points, welcoming new arrivals to our places and connecting deep local identities with global cultures.

This grassroots community culture is vitally important to our collective wellbeing and our sense of community. Celebrating it, supporting it and ensuring there are opportunities to participate in it regardless of where you live and who you are is a central focus of this culture strategy.

CULTURE AND LANDSCAPE

The relationships between environment, culture and art are deep and intertwined in northern Devon. It is perhaps unsurprising, given the exceptional characteristics of our surrounding natural landscape, that the coastal areas are a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The UNESCO Biosphere designation and Biosphere Foundation were defined by a concept of landscape that embraces people, culture and ways of life and many of northern Devon's conservationist, environmental and nature organisations are directly engaged in cultural activity. Organisations like the North Devon Coast AONB, Exmoor National Park, Quince Honey Farm, Courage Copse Creatives and Rosewater Hall regularly host events that integrate cultural activity into environmental education and awareness

CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DISPARITIES

Northern Devon covers a 2,071 square kilometre area, spanning towns of varying sizes, villages, small settlements and large areas of open countryside. The diversity of our communities is matched by broad variations in wealth, deprivation and education both across different communities and within communities. Together these create a landscape where access, engagement and opportunities for culture differ significantly based on where you live and who you are.

Addressing these disparities and ensuring that culture is addressing the broader social and health challenges in our region is vital. Otherwise even a thriving cultural sector risks being limited to those who can most afford or access culture.

DEPRIVATION & HEALTH

In northern Devon, people in the most deprived communities can expect to die 15 years earlier than those living in the most affluent ones. Factors that influence this are wide ranging and complex, including quality of housing, income, education, access to healthy food, social isolation and access to quality local services. One Northern Devon has been formed in recognition that many of these challenges are inherently place-based rather than clinical. Arts and culture play an important role in tackling some of these issues, including isolation, self-confidence and mental health.

INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING

On average people in northern Devon report being happier and more satisfied with their lives than national averages. However levels have dropped in the last 2 years, in part due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis which has had a disproportionate effect on elderly and vulnerable members of our communities. We also experience higher overall levels of anxiety and mental health challenges than UK averages.

This is compounded by significant pressures from rising housing costs that fail to keep pace with wages and employment opportunities, which is leading to high levels of depression and a feeling for many residents that they are being priced out of the place they call home.

As a place with a significant rurally isolated population, the impacts of community wellbeing on personal wellbeing are amplified. People living in strong communities with a powerful sense of trust and communal identity tend to enjoy better personal health. However, in areas that lack this, people are far more likely to suffer severe loneliness and depression. Community wellbeing, measured by factors such as access to opportunities, sense of place, relationships and trust, varies widely in northern Devon, from a score of 33 in Titchberry to 65 in Braunton against a national average of 52.

A key factor of this in our communities is the impact of population churn and second home owners on community cohesion. Many of our communities feel a sense of community bonds stretching and breaking as rooted residents are pushed out, while some new arrivals can feel a sense of resentment or closure.

The role of culture in crossing social divides and engendering a strong sense of collective is therefore doubly important for us in northern Devon.

YOUTH, EDUCATION & SKILLS

Like many rural and coastal areas, northern Devon faces challenges in the retention of young people. Under 24 year olds make up 24% of our population compared with 31% nationally and there is a significant drop-off in numbers at the 18+ stage suggesting many young people move away from northern Devon either for employment, study or work.

A number of factors, ranging from lack of education opportunities including no university, to low wage prospects (average weekly earnings of £518 are the lowest in Devon) and high cost of living (median house prices in North Devon have risen 46% in 10 years) contribute to this. However, our consultation with young people found that cultural perspectives may also be playing a significant role.

CULTURAL PROVISION

An audit carried out for this strategy suggests there are at least 43 venues where arts and heritage events are regularly taking place, including galleries, museums, theatres and live music venues. Given this does not include the large number of informal venues that play a vital role in cultural consumption across our region such as village halls and pubs this is likely to be an underestimate.

Ranging from large venues such as the Landmark Theatre in Ilfracombe and Queen's Theatre in Barnstaple, through to local arts centres such the Plough Arts Centre in Great Torrington to micro-museums or social clubs putting on occasional live music nights, this infrastructure provides a vital web for our cultural activity.

MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE

The heritage offer of northern Devon is supported by a large number of local museums including 11 accredited by Arts Council England, mostly sustained by local volunteers. There are also a number of independent and commercial museums and tourist attractions.

Northern Devon's museums are embedded in our communities, providing volunteering opportunities and social events as well as bolstering a sense of place and local pride. Their value in supporting wellbeing is significant, particularly in settlements where they are often the only constant cultural presence.

Northern Devon boasts over 4,500 listed buildings, mostly within our coastal and market towns, and more than 300 scheduled ancient monuments. Our townscapes and historic landscapes form the backdrop to our people's lives, with the potential to inspire creativity and belonging. Heritage is integral to northern Devon's regional tourism industry with visitors drawn to major heritage destinations like Clovelly, Lynton and Lynmouth and Hartland Quay.

ARTISTS AND FREELANCE CREATIVES

Northern Devon has an abundance of artists, makers and creative freelancers. ArtMakers network has identified at least 400 artists and makers operating in our region, ranging from internationally recognised to early career practitioners, as well as creative freelancers across other artforms and the creative industries.

The variety and richness of our makers and creators alone blurs the lines between art, craft and manufacturing, from nationally recognised artists such as Merlyn Chesterman, to contemporary ceramicist Taz Pollard, through to instrument makers and surfboard designers.

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Northern Devon boasts a number of innovative creative industry companies in the fields of immersive media, advertising and design. Film is also an emerging sector of potential importance to our region, with northern Devon being used as a filming location for productions such as 'A Very English Scandal', Netflix's production of 'Rebecca' and 'Aquaman 2'.

There are an estimated 345 creative and cultural industries businesses operating in the region employing around 1,250 people or 1.81% of total employment in northern Devon. This is notably under the sector size for Devon (2.54%) and well below the national proportion of 4.57%.



CULTURE HEALTH & WELLBEING PILOT

The Culture, Health and Wellbeing pilot project was commissioned through a partnership of organisations under One Northern Devon to test and embed creativity as a pathway to improved health and wellbeing. At least 80% of participants reported experiencing a positive improvement in their mental health and wellbeing, with 100% improvement in 3 of the 4 target areas.

4 THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF CULTURE IN NORTHERN DEVON

Creative Industries contribute **£82 million** GVA to the northern Devon economy, creating **1250** jobs

Heritage is worth an estimated **£96.6 million** to the northern Devon tourism sector

56,566 people in northern Devon are estimated to participate in some form of creative arts activity at least **3** times a year

96,415 estimated visits per year to accredited museums supported by **550** volunteers

45 Arts Organisations employing **125** people

£86.5 million personal wellbeing value derived from people regularly attending cultural events in northern Devon

80% of visitors to northern Devon do so to experience its natural landscape

Surfing has a value of **£52.1 million** to northern Devon per year

5 MEASURING OUR ACTIONS

Northern Devon's cultural sector already brings enormous value to the region, from direct economic impact, to social and wellbeing benefits, to the way it helps uplift town centres and attract tourism.

Communicating not only the value culture brings, but also the potential benefit it can offer if enhanced is crucial, both for making the case for additional investment in culture, and for monitoring and evaluating the progress of the sector over time.

Below are measurable goals for the future and the value that achieving them will bring to northern Devon.

GOAL	CURRENT METRIC	AMBITION	OUTPUT
Increase the number of people attending more than 3 arts and culture events per year	25.9% of people in northern Devon	30% of people in northern Devon	£13.3m in individual wellbeing value per year
Increase the number of people taking part in more than 3 creative activities per year	33.9% of people in northern Devon	38% of people in northern Devon	£10m in individual wellbeing value per year
Reduce the number of people attending no arts and culture activity per year	Baseline data to be generated: Targeted surveys of rural areas will benchmark this	33% of people in northern Devon	£5m in individual wellbeing value per year
Increase the number of people in rural locations accessing high quality arts and culture	Baseline data to be generated: Targeted surveys of rural areas will benchmark this	10% increase	Increased well being value
Increase the number of people in deprived areas accessing high quality arts and culture	Baseline data to be generated: Targeted surveys of areas with lowest IMD scores	33% Lowered gap between deprived and affluent areas	Increased opportunity and community wellbeing

GOAL	CURRENT METRIC	AMBITION	OUTPUT
Increase the diversity of people (by class, ethnicity and disabilities) accessing high quality arts and culture	Baseline data to be generated through targeted surveys measuring protected characteristics	33% lower gap between people of protected characteristics and other populations	Increased social cohesion
Increase the average projects level of per head funding from ACE Projects Grants and NLHF	£6.12 - 5 year annual average 2015-2020	£8 per head	£1.76m additional earned income catalysed by public investment
Increase the proportion of creative industry employment in northern Devon	1.81% of total northern Devon employment	2.54% of total northern Devon employment	£32.75m GVA uplift
Increase the percentage of artists and makers accessing business support	25.7%	45%	£450,000 GVA improvement
Increase the total floorspace of creative workspaces	Survey required of current creative workspace infrastructure	Benchmark ambition based on survey	3.3% improvement in surrounding property values over 5 year period
Increase the number of young people represented on cultural boards and decision making bodies	Survey of participating cultural organisations needed	5	Leadership skills and diversity of cultural offer
Increase the percentage of young people taking art, design and performing arts subjects at A-Level or further education	Survey of secondary schools and colleges	15%	Larger creative workforce to support the creative economy
Increase the number of followers of northern Devon cultural organisations on social media	Survey of ND Cultural Partnership organisations	20% increase	£25 per 1,000 followers per post in marketing value
Lower collective carbon footprint of board members of the northern Devon Cultural Partnership	Gather from northern Devon cultural partnership using Julie's Bicycle Green Tools	20% reduction	£75 per tonne in improved air quality
Increase the number of national and international cultural partners delivering work in northern Devon	Gather baseline levels from participating northern Devon culture partnership members	20% increase	Raised national profile

6 PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

In order to successfully deliver Flourishing Culture: The Northern Devon Cultural Strategy, organisations and individuals should come together to develop a shared vision for the region, committing time, resources and knowledge to broadening and deepening the cultural provision of the area.

As commissioners of the northern Devon Culture Strategy, North Devon and Torridge local authorities have a key role to play in bringing together organisations and individuals; leading on the formation of a northern Devon cultural partnership that makes space for a balanced and broad representation of the cultural sector and beyond. The partnership should enable multiple perspectives to be heard and valued and ensure that existing community groups, who have already proved the power of collaborative, grassroots community activity, are supported and championed.

Identify a balanced and diverse group of organisations to initiate the formation of a northern Devon cultural partnership.

Define the core vision, principles, values and behaviours that will sit at the heart of the way in which the northern Devon cultural partnership operates.

Facilitate regular meetings of the northern Devon cultural partnership board, which focus on supporting knowledge sharing, coordination of policy and the prioritisation of shared initiatives across the network based on the Northern Devon Cultural Strategy.

Initiate a northern Devon cultural partnership action plan, based on the recommended actions from the Northern Devon Cultural Strategy with assigned responsibility, timelines and resources.

Establish working groups and forums, as needed for delivery, oversight and expert guidance.

Formalise - Once a balanced and active partnership board has been established, collaboratively identify the most appropriate structure and formalise the partnership as an autonomous body with independent trustees. This should have the capacity to fundraise, earn income and support a core staff who can deliver the executive responsibilities for the partnership

Resource seed funding for the first three years of the establishment of the northern Devon cultural partnership, ensuring that the partnership board has the time to build the capacity for self-financing.

Evolve - As the cultural scene of North Devon and Torridge develops so should the northern Devon cultural partnership. Creating an organisational culture of inquisitiveness, innovation and self-reflection is critical to ensuring that the partnership doesn't reinforce traditional power structures and narratives, but instead promotes open conversation, forward facing action and transparent decision making.

7. FLOURISHING CULTURE: KEY THEMES & ACTIONS

NURTURING THE FUTURE

Champion the youth voice in northern Devon whilst actively developing pathways to creative opportunities and sustainable creative careers.

CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS

Ensure northern Devon culture is embedded in regional, national and international networks that expand the reach of its borders, whilst bringing cutting edge culture and knowledge into the region.

MAKING VISIBLE

Collectively celebrate and promote northern Devon culture so that it is a source of pride to local people and attractive for people who visit.

OUR CULTURAL HUBS

Recognise the particularly important role that northern Devon towns play as hubs of cultural activity throughout the region, creating a cultural offering that radiates out of urban areas and into even the most remote rural places.

EXPRESSIONS OF PLACE

Create the conditions for local people to make and experience culture that expresses their connection to the local environment in the places they live.

PROTECTING OUR LANDSCAPE

Recognise the interdependent relationship between people, culture and the environment through cultural activity that acts on the climate crisis.

NAVIGATING THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Use culture to break down the distance between people, both physical and social, by spreading cultural opportunities across northern Devon.

7.1 NURTURING THE FUTURE

Champion the youth voice in northern Devon whilst actively developing pathways to creative opportunities and sustainable creative careers

Northern Devon is recognised as a fantastic place to live, with people from across the country choosing to move here in search of a better quality of life. However, the cost of living and the rising price of property, combined with low wages and precarious employment, makes it a difficult place to build a future, particularly for our young residents.

With limited higher education, there is a regular outflow of young people from northern Devon. This has not only contributed to a gradually ageing demographic, but has also impacted the cultural DNA of our region, where historically social customs and traditions have been passed through communities and generations

A lack of agency to secure a future affects us all; young and old, and it is imperative that we all feel that northern Devon is a place where we can not only build meaningful careers but also actively participate in the unique life and culture that our region has to offer.

7.1.1 AMPLIFY THE YOUTH VOICE

Commit to increasing the representation of young people in cultural decision making. Plug in the sound equipment, run the sound check and ready the stage so that young people can make a stronger, louder and braver sound than ever before.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

Proactively make space for the youth voice in the cultural sector, ensuring that it is not just heard, but is embedded in decision making on a practical and strategic level throughout the region.

In partnership with young people, develop a network for young creatives in northern Devon that has the capacity to advocate for shared needs, facilitate creative career development support and initiate creative projects.

Commit to ensuring that young people are proactively encouraged into roles of cultural delivery and power, such as cultural commissioners and project management

7.1.2 DEVELOP THE TALENT PIPELINE

Enhance the quality of creative and cultural education by providing support for schools and opportunities for young people to gain direct experience with creative practitioners.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

Bring together young people, education professionals and cultural sector partners to develop a northern Devon cultural curriculum that supports young people to explore paths into creativity that aren't currently accessible within the school environment.

Explore formal mechanisms to facilitate work experience and training, focusing on opportunities targeting young people between 15 - 24 years old.

Explore less formal mentoring systems for individual makers and creatives in the region, pairing people who have skills to share with others who desire to learn and develop.

7.1.3 SUPPORT CREATIVE CAREERS

Make it easier for people to pursue creative careers by embedding good practice; including fair pay initiatives, local contracting incentives, maker visibility and business support.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

Support local talent by promoting fair pay, signposting to business support schemes and prioritising local workers for local work.

Bring together venues and producers to create a 'Made in northern Devon' brand to promote locally crafted products, circulating them for sale across the region.

Prioritise shared creative workspace and co-working facilities for a diverse range of creative industries focusing on new developments and under-utilised heritage assets in urban areas.



SWARM

A Pop-up exhibition by Year 7 art students from Braunton Academy

Studio KIND.

Studio Kind. collaborate with local schools including Braunton Academy, Park Community School and Ilfracombe Academy hosting exhibitions of the students' work, often giving the young artists their first experience of seeing their work outside of the classroom in a professional, white cube space.

7.2 CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS

Ensure northern Devon culture is embedded in regional, national and international networks that expand the reach of its borders, whilst bringing cutting edge culture and knowledge into the region.

As well as being a key driver of strategic growth within the cultural sector, partnership working plays a vital role in developing a diverse and distinctive cultural offer.

From 'Hefted', which was performed in North Devon Theatres and produced through the collaboration between Beaford Arts and Multistory, to Red Herring and The Burton's collaboration on 'Seeds of Hope', there are already fantastic examples of collaborative practice between organisations in northern Devon. The Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon's Partridge Family Exhibition and learning programme has enabled the development of relationships with national museums and academics in three continents.

Ensuring that these connections reach beyond northern Devon is vital. Communities of interest that share challenges and opportunities in different geographical locations are becoming a key factor in the development of international cultural policy. Plugging in to activity outside of the region and cultivating connections beyond the borders, ensures that the best of UK culture also feels welcomed into northern Devon.

7.2.1 NATIONAL CULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS

Strengthen the relationships and partnerships between northern Devon cultural organisations and the rest of the UK.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

Utilise the North Devon ACE Priority Place status to leverage relationships with national organisations to bring cultural activity into the region and to increase the opportunities for creative practitioners in northern Devon.

7.2.2 THE CULTURAL BIOSPHERE NETWORK

Utilise the 'UNESCO Biosphere Reserve' status to seek out collaborations and cultural co-commissions with the World Network of Biosphere Reserves that celebrate the uniqueness of the landscapes whilst sharing best practice and knowledge.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

Bring together cultural and environmental partner organisations with the North Devon Biosphere Reserve to explore the opportunities for utilising the World Network of Biosphere Reserves to initiate collaborative, cross sector projects.

Broaden and deepen the conversation around the collaborative potential of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves and the culture sector by hosting a dedicated conference in northern Devon to discuss, debate and share best practice across sectors and across borders.

“I appreciate the move towards partnerships, creativity and inclusivity and the growing informality in individuals and organisations locally (and also hopefully nationally/ globally).” - Northern Devon Cultural Strategy public survey.

THE PARTRIDGE FAMILY OF BARNSTAPLE

The Partridge Family is a major exhibition and learning programme funded by Arts Council and Art Fund Weston loan programme at the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon from May to October 2022. The learning programme includes weaving and dyeing for students in Barnstaple and Mumbai, as well as an adult weekend workshop, and talks from Janice Leoshko from the University of Texas at Austin and Radhi Parekh at Artisans Mumbai among others.



7.3 MAKING CULTURE VISIBLE

Collectively celebrate and promote northern Devon culture so that it is a source of pride to local people and attractive for people who visit.

Whilst 160,000 of us call northern Devon home, over 6 million people visit every year, creating a significant audience pool for cultural activity.

At present, our stunning landscapes, surfer lifestyle and breathtaking coastline sit at the forefront of the regional offer, however it is clear that we have a strong and distinctive cultural brand as well, boosted by our independent spirit, a strong connection to place and areas steeped in heritage and history.

To truly unlock the full potential of northern Devon as a place to live, work, play and visit, it is imperative that the stories that sit behind our region's distinctive cultural DNA are shared both locally and with the wider world.

It is time to celebrate the richness of our cultural offer, to shout about the spirit and tradition that makes northern Devon so special and to shine a spotlight on the plethora of makers, creators and doers that our region boasts.

7.3.1 Northern Devon Culture: The Brand

Develop a distinctive identity and marketing framework that supports northern Devon in showcasing and celebrating local creative expression; inspiring future generations of creators, the development of local audiences and recognition from across the globe.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

Create a cultural brand that is owned by northern Devon; identify who you are and the story you want to tell.

Develop a website where culture from across northern Devon can be celebrated to its fullest, whilst collaborating with regional partners and networks to cross promote cultural activity.

Develop a clear marketing strategy that communicates to global audiences and supports the long-term cultural goals of the region.

7.4 OUR CULTURAL HUBS

Recognise the particularly important role that northern Devon towns play as hubs of cultural activity throughout the region, creating a cultural offering that radiates out of urban areas and into even the most remote rural places.

Our towns have particularly vital roles to play in the creation of a thriving cultural ecosystem across the region. We have three towns of 10,000+ residents, Bideford, Barnstaple and Ilfracombe. The cultural relationship between our urban and rural areas are reciprocal and co-dependent. Ilfracombe shares the same sea with Combe Martin; the waters that flow through Umberleigh and Torrington also flow into Barnstaple and Bideford. What happens upstream impacts what happens downstream and in the case of culture, the river flows in both directions.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

More than ever before, culture is finding itself at the centre of conversations about town planning, high street regeneration and the creation of places that offer a good life for all citizens. It is reflected in central government spending for departments beyond DCMS, including the Future High Streets Fund, Town's Fund, the Levelling Up Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Cultural Placemaking is also becoming central to Arts Council England funding through strategic programmes such as the Cultural Development Fund.

Each of these require individual towns to have a shared vision for culture, how it integrates with wider development and how it can create social, economic and well-being impact.

In order to support this, proposed interventions include:

Putting culture at the heart of place partnerships to integrate culture into regeneration and town development

Making optimum use of existing, owned assets and building relationships with landlords to aid the expansion of cultural infrastructure within towns.

Creating the conditions for attracting and supporting cultural uses within public realm

Key political, town centre management and cultural stakeholders within Bideford, Barnstaple and Ilfracombe come together to develop individual cultural strategies for their towns that directly address the integration, role and infrastructure requirements for culture within development.

District authorities and the northern Devon cultural partnership provide support to parish and town councils within mid-sized towns with populations over 5,000 on working with their cultural organisations to support their roles as regional hubs for culture.



7.5 EXPRESSIONS OF PLACE

Create the conditions for local people to make and experience culture that expresses their connection to the places they live and the wider environment.

Our people live in settlements ranging from isolated farms to middle-sized towns. Over thousands of years, we have exploited our natural resources, shaping the landscapes, creating places for gathering and trade, learning and culture. The network of community museums, local festivals and community groups nurtures and sustains local distinctiveness at village level. Sustaining festivals and grass roots activities at town level is more difficult, but these have significant wellbeing potential for our most deprived communities.

The northern Devon landscape can only be described as an all-encompassing treat for the senses. From our rolling, woodland encased hills and cultivated pastures through to the picturesque sea fronts and architecturally stunning towns, the variety of our surroundings, habitats and communities is rich and invigorating. The significance of this landscape, both natural and human, is recognised through its UNESCO Biosphere designation.

Moulded by centuries of land use and natural processes, our culture has both shaped and been shaped by the landscape. From the village fairs steeped in tradition and local folklore, through to the ever-growing surfer community that can be found catching a wave along the coast, the connection between creative expression and place is integral to the identity of northern Devon culture.

7.5.1 FESTIVALS AND OUTDOOR ARTS

Place northern Devon at the cutting edge of outdoor arts, embedding culture into the landscape and bringing creativity to people's doorsteps.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

Develop a shared vision which positions northern Devon as the Outdoor Arts capital of the UK by building local capacity, mapping existing assets, identifying opportunities for growth and encouraging productive partnerships with national touring organisations.

Utilise existing assets such as public community events, public realm spaces in urban areas and well-known rural attractions to develop and grow the opportunities for platforming and commissioning Outdoor Arts.

Launch a biennial festival that celebrates the diversity of northern Devon landscapes and cultural activity, creating opportunities for bespoke large scale commissions.

7.5.2 MADE BY AND WITH COMMUNITIES

Create a cultural ecosystem that local people have the power to shape and direct. Enabling everyone in northern Devon to decide what culture is, who makes it, where it happens and who experiences it.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

Work alongside Arts Council England to develop a shared understanding of cultural democracy in northern Devon, identifying opportunities to test community decision making practices at both regional and organisational levels.

Refine community decision making processes, relinquishing more power and agency to the community over time by actively promoting and incentivising the integration of cultural democracy into the everyday practices of cultural organisations across North Devon and Torridge.

“North Devon is such a beautiful surrounding which allows plenty of space for creativity and lots of view to use to create art ”

- Northern Devon Cultural Strategy public survey.

GREEN SPACE DARK SKIES

Green Space Dark Skies is a series of 20 events and activities taking place in Dartmoor and Exmoor from April to September 2022. The project aims to enable people from all walks of life to forge new connections with the countryside by supporting those who encounter cultural and physical barriers to experiencing National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to access events.

Green Space Dark Skies, Valley of the Rocks
Photo: André Pattenden



7.6 PROTECTING OUR LANDSCAPE

Recognise the interdependent relationship between people, culture and the environment through cultural activity that acts on the climate crisis.

Climate change is the defining crisis of our time and it is happening even more quickly than we feared. No corner of the globe is immune from the consequences of climate change, however our unique ecosystem in northern Devon makes it particularly susceptible to threat.

The pressures facing the natural environment are already impacting our region and the climate crisis is being felt at a hyper local level, placing communities and traditional ways of life under threat. The Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Biosphere Foundation, National Trust and Exmoor National Park are already actively tackling these threats.

Culture is an avenue through which these complex issues can be explored; it's a tool for championing local conversations and climate education, yet can also be utilised to build connections to places across the world facing similar pressures, in turn inspiring action both locally and globally.

7.6.1 IMPACTFUL ACTIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

We have been told unequivocally; the science is clear, we are facing an unprecedented global emergency. Make a stand as the northern Devon cultural sector and take action on climate change.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

Forefront the climate crisis conversation through the formation of a dedicated Culture & Environment forum within the northern Devon cultural partnership that seeks to identify priority areas and activities that link the cultural and environmental agendas of the region.

Collectively develop a joint statement and action plan that commits to environmentally responsible practices, measurement, accountability and advocacy within the northern Devon cultural sector.

Review and renew the environmental commitments made by the northern Devon cultural partnership on a two year basis.

7.6.2 DISRUPT THE CLIMATE CONVERSATION USING CULTURE

Utilising the natural assets of northern Devon and the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status, develop and commit to cultural commissioning that supports, disrupts and progresses the plight of the environmental sector in the region.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

Form close partnerships with the environmental sector and identify key environmental issues that culture can be utilised to support, disrupt and progress.

Working cross-sector, co-commission cultural programmes that address environmental issues in a brave and ambitious way, with an emphasis on broadening and deepening the conversation, placing education and volunteering at the forefront.

Aim to place North Devon and Torridge as national and international leaders in the field of environmentalism and culture, drawing on the region's outstanding natural assets and diverse cultural practices.

“I want North Devon to focus more on using its geography for climate change initiatives. Make renewable energy accessible to population financially and practically.”

- Northern Devon Cultural Strategy public survey.



BIOCULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM (BCHT)

Working with four Unesco Biosphere Reserves including North Devon, the Marais Audomarois, the Iles et Mer d'Iroise, the Brighton and Lewes Downs; BCHT was an EU Interreg funded project that utilised international collaborative learning alongside the concept of Bio-Cultural Heritage to celebrate heritage and cultural practices linked to the environment.

7.7 NAVIGATING THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Use culture to break down the distance between people, both physical and social, by spreading cultural opportunities across northern Devon.

Northern Devon boasts a diverse and rich landscape, yet the navigation of our terrain can be challenging, time consuming and costly. Participation in cultural activity is undoubtedly impacted by location and accessibility, with many reliant on intermittent public transport or the ability to drive as a means to getting around.

In some areas this is balanced by thriving and diverse local creative and cultural activities. Choirs, craft workshops, art groups and village events and activities play an enormous role in northern Devon culture.

But not every area has these and others are precarious, reliant on single individuals who drive forward community life. We want a place where people make culture and identity on their doorstep. But also a place where great things happening in the region reach every corner and community.

7.7.1 A CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Create a large and established network of community assets across northern Devon, bringing high quality and affordable cultural activity within easy travelling distance of every person in the region.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

Map community assets in rural areas that have the potential to host cultural activity, ensuring an even distribution throughout northern Devon wherever possible.

Build a network of community assets and cultural partners that together can provide a diverse and accessible cultural offer across rural communities in northern Devon, test bedding, developing and growing rural touring projects.

Formalise the rural touring network as an independent organisation capable of self sustaining.

7.7.2 DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES

Develop and establish mechanisms that enable the transmission of cultural activity across the region via digital technology.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

Identify what type of cultural activity already happening in northern Devon would be suitable for live streaming; the organisations and individuals who produce it; and the capacity building required to expand live streaming opportunities throughout the sector.

Build a network of live stream venues and live stream a diverse and experimental programme of cultural events that reflect the broad offer of culture in northern Devon.

Collectively develop a cultural programme created specifically for digital distribution, attracting regional, national and international live stream producers to share work within northern Devon and beyond.

Main barriers to participation in culture in northern Devon:

Transport issues - 37.1%
Cost - 38.7%

- Northern Devon Cultural Strategy public survey.



MULTI STORY

Multi Story was created in 2000 by Bill Buffery and Gill Nathanson inspired by their visits to Canadian Fringes and building on years of touring experience in the UK. A strand of their work since 2002, Multi Story have utilised rural touring to promote some of their most challenging work for adult audiences.

8. CONCLUSION

Flourishing Culture sows the seeds for how a connected cultural sector, working in partnership across public, private and third sectors, can achieve a thriving, sustainable and impactful cultural offer in northern Devon.

Achieving this vision is the work of more than any single organisation. If you haven't been involved as of yet and would like to be part of ensuring this strategy becomes a reality then please email: culture@northdevon.gov.uk

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