



AN ARTS STRATEGY FOR EAST BELFAST

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 OVERVIEW

Courtney Consulting was commissioned by the East Belfast Partnership in September 2013 to:

- Develop a strategic plan for arts development in East Belfast taking account of existing challenges and assets within the area
- Produce an associated implementation plan that will clearly set out how the strategy can be delivered
- Develop a funding strategy and plan which will clearly identify how existing and new sources of funding can be accessed and used to implement the strategy

The following methodology was undertaken in order to deliver the outputs which form the body of this report:

- A comprehensive desk research audit of existing reports and research related to the strategic context of East Belfast and its hinterland
- Fifteen one-to-one stakeholder consultations
- Thirty-nine one-to-one in-depth interviews with target audiences and participants including those representing local business and the artistic community
- A dedicated volunteer consultation event
- Benchmarking against similar strategies locally and nationally

(A full consultation list is available at appendix 2).

1.1.1 THE NEED FOR AN ARTS STRATEGY FOR EAST BELFAST

It is important to address the question of why an effort should be made to develop and implement an arts strategy for East Belfast.

There have been incredible changes in the arts scene in Belfast over the past decade. In North Belfast, the MAC has been built in the Cathedral Quarter; in South Belfast, the Lyric Theatre has been rebuilt and the Crescent Arts Centre has been completely refurbished; in the city centre, the Grand Opera House has been extended and expanded with the addition of the Baby Grand studio theatre and the Ulster Hall has been comprehensively refurbished. There have also been many other positive developments for the arts in Belfast that have not involved capital projects.

However, to date, East Belfast has seen limited benefit from these major developments. There is no theatre or dedicated arts centre or venue in East Belfast and despite having a population of almost 100,000 only 4% of Belfast’s art budget goes into East Belfast.

Although on average 21% of households in Belfast book at least one arts event during the year, in the main wards in inner East Belfast (full population statistics for these wards are included in strategy appendices available at www.eastsidearts.net), the figures are 12% (The Mount), 13% (Ballymacarrett) and 14% (Woodstock).

Conversely, in some parts of outer East Belfast, where the residents are financially more able to attend arts events in juxtaposition to central and south Belfast, participation in the arts is above average: 37% (Stormont); 35% (Ravenhill); and 31% (Ballyhackamore).

Here, the most common arts attenders are older, married, educated ABC1s with higher household incomes classified as: “Aging Suburbanites, “Wealth & Wisdom” and “Better Off Families.”

There have, however, been significant developments that suggest that the time is right to invest energy and resources into making East Belfast a vibrant centre of creativity and artistic expression, based on its rich heritage, wealth of native talent and ambitious vision for the future.

The development of the Connswater Community Greenway, particularly focused on C S Lewis and George Best, provides an important launch pad. But there are other important initiatives including and not limited to:

- The establishment of the fledgling East Belfast Arts Festival
- The success of the Woodstock R & B Festival
- The Titanic Yardmen cycle and walk event
- Public art installations, including The Yardmen on the lower Newtownards Road
- The faith-based Skainos community scheme on the Newtownards Road
- The planned transformation of the Strand Cinema to an arts venue
- The development and potential impact of the Titanic Quarter
- The strong historical and contemporary background in film-makers and the fact that East Belfast has become an important location for filming major films like *City of Ember* and *Your Highness* and the successful series *Game of Thrones*; and the shooting of the film *Dracula* in East Belfast by Universal Pictures
- Van Morrison, who originates from East Belfast, continues to have world-wide recognition as a musician and song-writer and will soon be celebrating his 70th birthday
- In addition to C S Lewis, Van Morrison and George Best, many talented artists and personalities of the past and present have been born, lived in or had important links with East Belfast including Forrest Reid, E.M. Forster, Samuel Beckett, James Ellis, Marie Jones, Peter Corry, Gary Lightbody, Dan Gordon, Noel Thompson, Julian Simmons and Christine Bleakley

1.2 THE BENEFITS OF AN ARTS STRATEGY FOR EAST BELFAST

This Arts Strategy, however, is not only about artists and art organisations from and in East Belfast. It is a bigger picture plan to deliver a legacy for an East Belfast that will be known and celebrated in the future as:

- Diverse and inclusive by celebrating and communicating cultural differences and crossover through the arts e.g. festivals, carnivals, commissioning and public arts
- Demonstrating community pride through its cultural assets, audience engagement and civic awareness through its galleries, indoor and outdoor performance venues, public art and festivals
- Increasing inward investment and funding to the area via grants, awards, sponsorship, employment, commissioning and secondary spend to the economy from attending events, festivals and performances
- Attracting and incubating innovation and excellence through provision of arts advice, support and programmes in schools, Belfast Metropolitan College, arts organisations, studios and workshops and retaining the best practitioners to contribute to East Belfast's economy, growth and regeneration.

Building a vibrant arts sector in East Belfast will facilitate:

- More opportunities for engagement and participation in the arts
- The opportunity for the arts and creative industries to be at the forefront of economic development in East Belfast
- Improved quality of life and civic pride for the citizens of East Belfast
- Increased arts-driven tourism by promoting East Belfast as an exciting, vibrant and modern destination which attracts young, fun-loving visitors
- Building a positive, creative identity for East Belfast
- Recognition of the skill and creativity of the people of East Belfast
- More activities for children and young people
- Opportunities for young people to build their skills and knowledge leading to employment or self-employment in the arts
- Increased community cohesion

1.3 VISION, MISSION AND VALUES OF THE EAST BELFAST ARTS STRATEGY

The research and consultation for this strategy has informed the following vision, mission and values which form a framework and guiding focus for the strategic and operational plans.

1.3.1 VISION

Our vision is for East Belfast to be known, respected and loved locally, nationally and internationally as a vibrant, creative and inclusive part of Belfast, with thriving arts and creative industries.

1.3.2 MISSION

In delivering our vision we will work in partnership with artists, organisations, the local community and the business sector to deliver and promote an outstanding and ongoing creative offer in and for East Belfast.

1.3.3 VALUES

The following four values will underpin, shape and be reflected in all aspects of the Arts Strategy for East Belfast:

Creative Led Regeneration

Creativity and the arts will lead the regeneration of the urban environment and economy finding inspiration from all of East Belfast's rich cultural assets.

Hospitality

Being welcoming on every level will be evident to everyone who experiences the creativity and culture of, and in, East Belfast.

Community Relations & Diversity

Strong community relations and openness to diversity are integral and imperative to everything the strategy delivers.

Authenticity

All arts and creative activities will deliver a distinctive sense of East Belfast - its past, present and future.

1.4 AIMS OF THE EAST BELFAST ARTS STRATEGY

The following summarises the aims of the East Belfast Arts Strategy. The strategic and operational plans set out the Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound (SMART) objectives and actions to deliver these overarching aims.

Promote creativity and enjoyment of the arts in East Belfast

- To demonstrate, promote and celebrate the experiences, creativity, skills, rich heritage and creative potential of East Belfast

Regeneration

- To actively promote the regeneration of East Belfast Arts led Tourism
- To welcome visitors to East Belfast in a way that will ensure that they will want to come back and support the development of East Belfast as a cultural tourism destination

Social Inclusion & Diversity

- To promote social inclusion and the celebration of diversity

Community participation

- To provide a diverse range of opportunities for community participation and personal expression and engagement through the arts and creativity

Collaboration & Partnership

- To promote sharing between the arts, creative industries and the built environment in all sectors

Income Generation

- To generate sufficient income to achieve the sustainable development of the arts in East Belfast, and ensure these resources are managed effectively and efficiently

Organisational Development

- To ensure the development of the appropriate plans, skills and infrastructure to achieve the agreed aims and objectives
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1.5 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

In order to deliver upon the vision and aims above the research and consultation has identified some key critical success factors that must be addressed through the East Belfast Arts Strategy:

- It needs to bring together and focus the energy and resources of all those interested in the development of the arts in East Belfast around a *shared* vision and plan
 - It needs a *long-term investment* in the development of the arts in the area—there is no quick fix
 - It needs to *reflect the nature of East Belfast* as a network of villages with their own distinctive character and identity
 - It needs to win *hearts and minds*
 - It needs to *combine excellence and participation*
 - It needs to *reflect the rich and distinctive cultural heritage of the area and not just import offerings* that work in other parts of the city
 - It needs to *start where people are* e.g. in schools, churches, leisure centres, pubs, etc.
 - It needs to *involve children and young people*, not just be directed at adults
 - It needs to *engage people as participants*, not only as audiences
 - It needs to *promote social inclusion and reflect the diversity of East Belfast* in terms of ethnicity, religion, disability, etc.
 - It needs to be *linked in to what is happening more widely in Belfast* and beyond and not be insular
 - It needs to provide *mutual benefits* for the citizens of East Belfast, promoters, artists & venues
-

CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTS STRATEGY

The following sets out a three-year strategy for the arts in East Belfast. The strategy was commissioned by East Belfast Partnership (EBP), which is a broad-based social partnership with community, statutory, political and business members who are dedicated to the regeneration of East Belfast.

It was formed in June 1995 to get stakeholder organisations to work together to develop and implement plans for social, economic, environmental and cultural regeneration of East Belfast (EBP).

The Arts Strategy has been funded by Department Culture Arts & Leisure (DCAL) through the Arts Council for Northern Ireland (ACNI). Both the Arts Council and Belfast City Council (BCC) were represented on the Steering Group, along with EBP. The strategy was developed following a series of discussions with over fifty key individuals and organisations.

(A full consultation list is available at appendix 1).

We are grateful for the willingness of all these consultees to engage in this process and share their ideas about the way forward for the arts in East Belfast. It became clear very early on that there is a real enthusiasm to transform the arts in East Belfast, which needs to be harnessed in this strategy.

2.2 INTRODUCING EAST BELFAST

East Belfast became part of the city following an extension of the municipal boundary to take in the old townland of Ballymacarrett on the County Down bank of the River Lagan in 1853.

However, Ballymacarrett had been part of Belfast in all but name since its purchase and inclusion in the Chichester estates in 1787. It was, from the beginning, a crucial contributor to the industrial success of the city with a glassworks and foundry, and became pre-eminent with the growth of its shipyards.

The shipyards gave a unique, close-knit character to the local community. Literally thousands of households were linked by having members working in what was, at one period, the world's

largest single shipyard, Harland & Wolff, which at its peak had over 30,000 employees, building the world's largest ships, including the Titanic. Although East Belfast no longer rings to the sounds of shipbuilding the special community identity is still strong and the skyline is still dominated by the huge yellow cranes, Samson and Goliath.

The area, subsequently extended to absorb the villages of Sydenham, Strandtown and Knock, giving the area the feel of a group of linked villages, has other claims to fame. It had the world's largest ropeworks and is the home of Short Brothers (now Bombardier), pioneers in aviation and builders of the Sunderland flying boat and the Stirling bomber, which established their aircraft factory in 1936 and is now part of a leading international aviation company, and to George Best City Airport. East Belfast is home to the Northern Ireland Assembly which meets in the impressive Parliament Buildings at Stormont Estate. The Connswater Community Greenway (CCG) is a £35 million investment developed by the EBP, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, Belfast City Council and the Department for Social Development. The CCG will create a 9km linear park through East Belfast, following the course of the Connswater, Knock and Loop Rivers, connecting the open and green spaces and remediating the Connswater River itself. The Greenway will reconnect the communities of East Belfast and restore the rivers as community assets. It will create vibrant, attractive, safe and accessible parkland for leisure, recreation and community events and activities. It will also potentially provide immediate benefit to the 40,000 people living in the wards adjacent to the river, improving the living environment, reinstating a valuable amenity for local people and providing opportunities for improving health and wellbeing, acting as a catalyst for physical and economic development and improving access and connections for local communities to open spaces.

There are a number of existing open spaces along the course of the river which are underused because they are inaccessible, unsafe and unconnected to the communities in their hinterland. Local people turned their back on the river which is currently dirty and smelly and inhibits positive uses. This Project should deliver benefits from the Castlereagh Hills to Belfast Lough and beyond, turning a seriously underused landscape into a community asset. Phase 1 construction in Orangefield and Victoria Parks has commenced with a completion date of Spring 2014. Phase 2 will commence Spring 2014 with construction due to be completed at the end of 2015.

This presents great potential in promoting and celebrating the arts and East Belfast's rich heritage. By the end of 2014, the establishment of "Best of East" tourist information centre in Holywood Arches will be a vital staging post for the arts in East Belfast and provide important ticketing capacity for events and the proposed outdoor space (the new C.S. Lewis civic square as part of the CCG project) will enable concerts to take place with audiences of up to 2,000, as well as other activities such as markets.

2.3 EAST BELFAST ARTS FESTIVAL

In 2012, East Belfast Partnership, the key non-profit regeneration agency for East Belfast, concerned with the lack of development in the arts in the area, supported an initiative by a number of local people to organise an arts festival, with a range of events and art forms over a 5-day period, organised primarily by the staff of East Belfast Partnership.

As the newly-formed East Belfast Arts Festival company had no financial resources, the Partnership, through a trading company, agreed to organise an outdoor concert by Van Morrison as part of the inaugural festival. Despite a successful concert, insufficient ticket

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sales resulted in a substantial financial loss for the Partnership. In 2013, with East Belfast Partnership not in a position to risk any further financial resources, the East Belfast Arts Festival company, now chaired by Mimi Turtle of the Strand Cinema, ran the Festival with very limited resources, albeit increased from 2013.

Three months before the Festival, a Festival Organiser was recruited, although most of the volunteer input was again from East Belfast Partnership staff. To limit the financial risk, venues were again asked to organise their own events. The role of the Festival Organisers was mainly in terms of promotion of the Festival brochure, which was distributed late due to an error in the content. Event sales were generally satisfactory, with a number of events attracting good audiences, including a few sold-out shows, but alongside this various events had to be cancelled and some others had very small audiences.

Some of the lessons from the 2012 and 2013 East Belfast Arts Festivals would appear to be:

- It is difficult to organise a Festival without an existing vibrant arts scene on the ground
- East Belfast has very limited arts venues, with established audiences. Some Festival venues were almost entirely new to the arts
- There are significant limitations in simply delegating the organising of events (and the financial risk) to local venues, with no track record in organising arts events
- The timeline for organising a Festival and secure attractive artists, etc. needs to be at least 12 months, not three months. Funding and staffing needs to reflect this
- The effort required to market a festival without an established audience is much greater. The marketing budget needs to reflect this
- A Festival brochure needs to be distributed extensively and well in advance of the festival dates.

In some ways, it could be argued that there has been an heroic attempt to put a roof on the house (the East Belfast Arts Festival), without building the walls first. This strategy will explore how this issue might be addressed.

DEVELOPING AN ARTS STRATEGY FOR EAST BELFAST

3.1 DEFINITION OF THE ARTS

For the purposes of this Strategy, Art is defined as:

“The development and application of a creative skill in a form that, regardless of functionality or monetary value, can be appreciated for its: Beauty; ability to move, inspire, challenge, give enjoyment; and/or expression of ideas, feelings, personal or cultural identity.”

The ‘arts’ includes but is not limited to the following art forms:

Literature / Poetry / Fiction /

Performing Arts / Dance / Drama / Music /

Creative Industries / Film & TV / Craft / Digital arts /

Visual Arts & Craft / Public Art / Visual Arts / Top of Form /

Participatory Arts / Circus & Carnival Arts / Community Arts /
Voluntary Arts / Youth Arts / Arts & Disability / Arts & Health /
International & Intercultural Arts

We can experience the arts as an audience member or as an active participant.

3.2 WHY DEVELOP AN ARTS STRATEGY FOR EAST BELFAST?

It is important to address the question of why an effort should be made to develop and implement an arts strategy for East Belfast.

There have been incredible changes in the arts scene in Belfast over the past ten years. In North Belfast, the MAC has been built in Cathedral Quarter; In South Belfast, the Lyric Theatre has been rebuilt and The Crescent Arts Centre has been completely refurbished; in the city centre, the Grand Opera House has been extended and expanded with the addition of the Baby Grand studio theatre and the Ulster Hall has been comprehensively refurbished. There have been many other positive developments in the arts in Belfast that have not involved major capital projects.

However, to date, East Belfast has seen limited benefit from these major developments. There is no theatre or dedicated arts centre or venue in East Belfast, and despite having a population of almost 100,000 only 4% of Belfast's art budget goes into East Belfast. Although on average 21% of households in Belfast book at least one arts event during the year, in the main wards in inner East Belfast (see the population statistics for these wards (A full consultation list is included in strategy appendices available at www.eastsidearts.net), the figures are 12% (The Mount), 13% (Ballymacarrett) and 14% (Woodstock).

In the wealthier parts of outer East Belfast, where the residents are financially more able to attend arts events in central and south Belfast, participation is above average: 37% (Stormont); 35% (Ravenhill); and 31% (Ballyhackamore). The most common arts attenders are older, married, educated ABC1s with higher household incomes of £25,000 and above, which can be segmented as: "Aging Suburbanites", "Wealth & Wisdom" and "Better Off Families."

There have, however, been significant developments that suggest that the time is right to put energy and resources into making East Belfast a vibrant centre of creativity and artistic expression, based on its rich heritage, its native talent and its ambitious vision for the future.

The development of the Connswater Community Greenway, building on the rich heritage of East Belfast, particularly focused on C S Lewis and George Best, provides an important leaping off point. But there have also been other important initiatives: The establishment of the fledgling East Belfast Arts Festival, the success of the Woodstock R & B Festival; the Yardmen walking and cycling event; public art installations, including the Yardmen on the lower Newtownards Road; the faith-based Skainos community scheme on the Newtownards Road; and the planned transformation of the Strand Cinema, which is in an ideal location and to which most people in East Belfast have visited on many occasions throughout their lives, into an Arts Centre, all suggest that there is the potential to really expand the arts in East Belfast.

The strong historical and contemporary background in film-makers (see below), and the fact that East Belfast has become an important location for filming major films like *City of Ember* and *Your Highness* and the successful series *Game of Thrones*; and the shooting of the film *Dracula* in East Belfast by Universal Pictures, suggests that film and television could be an important part of the arts development in East Belfast. Van Morrison, who originates from East Belfast, continues to be have world-wide recognition as a musician and song-writer and will soon be celebrating his 70th birthday.

Important artistic heritage

In addition to C.S. Lewis, many important artists of the past have been born, lived in or had important links with East Belfast, including:

Writers

E.M. Forster, Samuel Beckett, Stewart Parker, Forrest Reid, St. John Ervine, George A. Birmingham, Stephen Gilbert, James Simmons, John Boyd, Sam Hanna Bell, W.R. "Bertie" Rodgers, Robert Greacan and John Hewitt.

Musicians

Joseph Locke, David McWilliams, Joseph Campbell, Derek Bell, Gary Moore.

Painters

J.W. Carey, John Luke.

Film

William MacQuitty (Producer: *A Night to Remember*, *The Happy Family*, *Street Corner*, *The Beachcomber*, and *Above us the Waves*) and Brian Desmond Hurst (Director: *A Night to Remember*, *Letter from Ulster*, *Theirs is the Glory*, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, *Scrooge* (1951 version), *Malta Story*)

Current Artists

There is also no shortage of artistic talent in East Belfast, much of it below the radar. Many current internationally recognised artists, in various art forms, also were born, brought up, or live/lived in East Belfast, including:

Musicians

Van Morrison, Gary Lightbody, Nathan Connolly and Jonny Quinn, James Galway, Duke Special, Gareth Dunlop, David Holmes, Peter Corry, and Foy Vance..

Writers

Glenn Patterson, Gerald Dawe, Lucy Caldwell, Marie Jones, Stacey Gregg, Brian Keenan and David Park.

Visual Artists

Brian Ballard, Ross Wilson.

Film

Andrew Eaton (Producer: *Resurrection Man*), Nick Hamm (Director: *The Hole*), Dudi Appleton (Director: *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland*); Mark Huffam (Producer: *Saving Private Ryan*); Glen Leyburn (Producer: *Good Vibrations*).

Actors

James Ellis, Stephen Rea, Ian McElhinny, Charlie Lawson, Dan Gordon,

Television Journalism

Noel Thompson, Gordon Burns, John Irvine, Ivan Little, Julian Simmons and Christine Bleakley.

Other

Tim Martin, (founder and current Chairman of JD Wetherspoon), Paul Bew (scholar and life peer), Michael Hoey (golfer), Tim Collins, Andrea Catherwood and Roy Walker. There are undoubtedly many others.

3.2

As a result of this depth of creative talent, there are various significant anniversaries in the next 3 years that could be celebrated to help change the image of East Belfast to one that recognises and celebrates the creative talent that has come out of the area, including the following:

2014	
1964	Them (Van Morrison) singles “Gloria”, “Baby, Please Don’t Go” – 50th anniversary
1989	Samuel Beckett died – 25th anniversary
2004	William MacQuitty died – 10th anniversary
2015	
1865	George A Birmingham born – 150th anniversary
1875	Forrest Reid born – 140th anniversary
1895	Brian Desmond Hurst born – 120th anniversary
1905	William MacQuitty born – 110th anniversary
1931	James Ellis born – 85th birthday
1935	Derek Bell born – 80th anniversary
1945	David McWilliams was born – 70th anniversary
1945	Van Morrison born – 70th birthday
1965	Them (Van Morrison) single “Here comes the night” – 50th Anniversary
1965	Sam Thompson died – 50th anniversary
1990	Sam Hanna Bell died – 25th anniversary
2005	George Best died – 10th anniversary
2016	
1906	Samuel Beckett born – 110th anniversary
1916	Sam Thompson born – 100th anniversary
1941	Stewart Parker born – 75th anniversary
1946	George Best born – 70th anniversary
1986	Brian Desmond Hurst died – 30th anniversary
2017	
1917	Joseph Locke born – 100th anniversary
1947	Forrest Reid died – 70th anniversary of his death
1964	Van Morrison single “Brown-eyed girl” and LP “Blowin your mind!” – 50th anniversary

Arts Organisations in East Belfast

The following arts bodies (some are simply individuals who run an arts programme, others are very small) are also currently based in East Belfast:

- **Replay Theatre Company**
- **Belfast Operatic** (formerly Ballymacarrett Choral Society)
- **Creative Exchange Artists Collective and Studios**
- **The Engine Room Gallery**
- **Terra Nova**
- **Ossia Unhinged/Music School**
- **Skewiff Theatre**
- **Clarence Players**
- **NIStars**
- **Agendance**
- **Vibe Dance Academy**
- **Belfast School of Performing Arts** (Cregagh)
- **Seedhead Arts**
- **Prime Collective**

However, it is important that these organisations are supported to expand and develop and increase their engagement with the public in East Belfast. There may also be other arts organisations which would be willing to move to East Belfast, given the appropriate premises.

This Arts Strategy, however, is not only about artists and art organisations from and in East Belfast, it is also about promoting East Belfast as part of Belfast as a whole; enabling the people of East Belfast to experience the highest quality art from other parts of the UK and Ireland and internationally; as well as welcoming an increasing number of visitors to the area to have an enjoyable and enriching experience, focused on what the area has to offer in terms of arts.

3.3 THE BENEFITS OF AN ARTS STRATEGY FOR EAST BELFAST

The research indicates that the benefits of building a vibrant arts sector in East Belfast are likely to include the following:

- More opportunities for engagement and participation in the arts
- The opportunity for the arts and cultural industries to be at the forefront of economic development in East Belfast
- Improved quality of life and civic pride for the citizens of East Belfast
- Increased arts-driven tourism by promoting East Belfast as an exciting, vibrant and modern destination which attracts young fun-loving visitors
- Building a vibrant, creative identity for East Belfast
- Recognition of the skill and creativity of the people of East Belfast
- More activities for children and young people
- Opportunities for young people to build their skills and knowledge. leading to employment or self-employment in the arts
- Increased community cohesion.

The East Belfast that the arts strategy will promote is one that is:

Diverse and inclusive by celebrating and communicating cultural differences through the arts e.g. festivals, carnivals, commissioning and public arts

Demonstrating community pride through its cultural assets, audience engagement and civic awareness through its galleries, indoor and outdoor performance venues, public art and festivals

Increasing inward investment and funding via grants, awards, sponsorship, employment, commissioning and secondary spend to the economy from attending events, festivals & performances

Attracting and incubating innovation and excellence through provision of arts advice, support and programmes in schools, Belfast Metropolitan College, arts organisations, studios and workshops. Leading to retaining the best practitioners to contribute to East Belfast’s economy, growth and regeneration

We want to see an East Belfast:

- where talent and artistic excellence are thriving and celebrated
- where East Belfast's rich heritage is acknowledged and promoted
- which is outward looking and reaches out to other parts of Northern Ireland
- where there is effective collaboration between organisations and sectors
- where the arts sector is sustainable, resilient and innovative
- where the arts leadership and workforce are diverse and highly skilled

As a result of this arts strategy we want to ensure that more people in, and visiting, East Belfast (adults, children & young people) will:

Experience excellence by arts professionals in community and local settings; being inspired and positively influenced leading to aiming high and working towards high standards

Get involved in enhancing and informing their communities and East Belfast to make it better and be a place to be proud of

Become positively and regularly engaged in artistic or creative activities in dance, music, art, writing, performing and many other cross-art form pursuits

Improve ways of communicating using expressive art forms and visual language

Increase their confidence and self-esteem through practical and creative activity that focuses on individual and personal best

Learn by doing through practising and improving skills leading to enhanced career opportunities

Engage in healthy physical pursuits such as dance, drama, performance, singing and engaging in outdoor heritage activities, reducing obesity and leading to a healthier, happier and more fulfilling life

Engage in healthy mental pursuits such as being creative, volunteering, having their voice heard, interacting with others with similar interests, and increasing personal satisfaction and quality of life.

3.4.

SWOT ANALYSIS OF AN ARTS STRATEGY FOR EAST BELFAST

STRENGTHS

Skainos Centre / Belmont Tower / George Best Belfast City Airport / Woodstock R & B Festival / CS Lewis / Van Morrison / Other current & past artists linked to East Belfast / Shipyard & maritime heritage / Stormont Estate / East Belfast Partnership / Good Restaurants, bistros & cafés in the area / Stormont & Park Avenue hotels / TV & film activity in and near East Belfast / Further education dance, drama and creative arts courses

OPPORTUNITIES

Connswater Community Greenway / Civic Square & Best of East Holywood Arches / Refurbishment of the Strand as an arts centre / East Belfast Branding exercise / Artists' anniversaries / Titanic Quarter / Potential partnerships with arts organisations & festivals in Belfast / Artists moving into east Belfast attracted by affordable housing / Synergy between statutory arts, heritage, creative industries and tourism agendas

WEAKNESSES

Current image/branding of East Belfast / No current dedicated theatre or arts venue / Lack of local engagement in the arts / Artists from East Belfast not acknowledging a commitment to the area / Low arts funding base / Some areas perceived as 'no go' areas by some people / Titanic Quarter not being sufficiently linked to East Belfast / Lack of welcoming pubs

THREATS

Negative perceptions of East Belfast / Weak economy / Vacant shops / Political instability and tensions / Harder to get people to leave their own houses—more entertainment choices at home / Poor Tower Street drama and Dance further education venue

3.5 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The above analysis of some of the issues in relation to the arts and East Belfast suggest some key critical success factors which should drive the Arts Strategy, as follows:

- It needs to bring together and focus the energy and resources of all those interested in the development of the arts in East Belfast around a shared vision and plan
- It needs a long-term investment in the development of the arts in the area – there is no quick fix
- It needs to reflect the nature of East Belfast as a network of villages with their own distinctive character and identity
- It needs to win hearts and minds
- It needs to combine excellence and participation
- It needs to reflect the rich and distinctive heritage of the area and not just import offerings that work in other parts of the city
- It needs to start where people are e.g. in schools, churches, leisure centres, pubs, etc.
- It needs to involve children and young people, not just be directed at adults
- It needs to engage people as participants, not only as audiences
- It needs to promote social inclusion and reflect the diversity of East Belfast in terms of ethnicity, religion, disability, etc.
- It needs to be linked in to what is happening more widely in Belfast and beyond and not be insular
- It needs to provide mutual benefits for the citizens of East Belfast, promoters, artists and venues

Following is the East Belfast Arts Strategy. A more detailed Stage 1 implementation plan to March 2015 which will guide the implementation of the strategy has been developed and is available in the document appendices at www.eastsidearts.net (as will implementation plans for 2015/16 and 2016/17).



4 STRATEGIC PLAN & PRIORITIES TO MARCH 2017

EAST BELFAST ARTS STRATEGY VISION

Our vision is for East Belfast to be known, respected and loved locally, nationally and internationally as a vibrant, creative and inclusive part of Belfast, with thriving arts and creative industries.

EAST BELFAST ARTS STRATEGY MISSION

In delivering our vision we will work in partnership with artists, organisations, the local community and business sector to deliver and promote an outstanding and ongoing creative offer in and for East Belfast.

EAST BELFAST ARTS STRATEGY VALUES

The following values should underpin all aspects of the development of the arts in East Belfast:

Creative Led Regeneration

Creativity and the arts will lead the regeneration of the urban environment and economy finding inspiration from all of East Belfast's rich cultural assets.

Hospitality

Being welcoming on every level will be evident to everyone who experiences the creativity and culture of, and in, East Belfast.

Community Relations & Diversity

Strong community relations and openness to diversity are integral and imperative to everything the strategy delivers.

Authenticity

All arts and creative activities will deliver a distinctive sense of East Belfast - its past, present and future.

4.1 THE AIMS OF THE EAST BELFAST ARTS STRATEGY:

The following summarises the aims of the East Belfast Arts Strategy. The strategic and operational plans set out the Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound (SMART) objectives and actions to deliver these overarching aims.

Promote creativity and enjoyment of the arts in East Belfast

To demonstrate, promote and celebrate the experiences, creativity, skills, rich heritage and creative potential of East Belfast

Regeneration

To actively promote the regeneration of East Belfast

Arts led Tourism

To welcome visitors to East Belfast in a way that will ensure that they will want to come back and support the development of East Belfast as a cultural tourism destination

Social Inclusion & Diversity

To promote social inclusion and the celebration of diversity

Community participation

To provide a diverse range of opportunities for community participation and personal expression and engagement through the arts and creativity

Collaboration & Partnership

To promote sharing between the arts, creative industries and the built environment in all sectors

Income Generation

To generate sufficient income to achieve the sustainable development of the arts in East Belfast, and ensure these resources are managed effectively and efficiently

Organisational Development

To ensure the development of the appropriate plans, skills and infrastructure to achieve the agreed aims and objectives

4.2

THREE YEAR PRIORITIES FOR THE EAST BELFAST ARTS STRATEGY

4.2.1

PROMOTE CREATIVITY AND ENJOYMENT OF THE ARTS IN EAST BELFAST

There is an exciting potential to take a major step forward in terms of the development of the arts in East Belfast. Some of the key actions required to make this happen are highlighted in this strategy.

As discussed above, East Belfast has much to give in terms of the skills, heritage and creativity of East Belfast and its people. However, there is a legacy of under-development of the arts in the area, which has affected both the image of East Belfast to outsiders and even how local people see themselves.

There is no silver bullet to turn this around, but it will need much hard work on the ground, and commitment to working collaboratively together towards the same vision, to bring about the changes required.

Some further work needs to be done to identify the artists from, and in, East Belfast and to get them involved in discussions with others about the future of the arts in East Belfast; to get other arts organisations based in East Belfast to help celebrate, entertain and challenge the people of East Belfast; to get other organisations with a Belfast-wide and Northern Ireland wide arts remit to think about what it can contribute to the artistic and creative regeneration of East Belfast; help build the voluntary arts in East Belfast, out of which will emerge the artistic talent of the future.

Having built the infrastructure, leadership and resources for the arts in East Belfast in 2014, it will then be possible to implement a programme of festivals and other arts events, of which the people of East Belfast can be truly proud and will attract visitors to the area.

Aim 1: To demonstrate, promote and celebrate the experiences, creativity, skills, rich heritage and potential of East Belfast

- Priorities for 2014-2017**
- Identify and research key individuals and events that reflect the rich artistic and creative heritage of East Belfast
 - Celebrate the rich artistic heritage of East Belfast through appropriate festivals, arts and other activities
 - Actively promote the voluntary arts in East Belfast

4.2.2

ARTS-LED REGENERATION

The regeneration of East Belfast through the Connswater Community Greenway, and the Skainos Centre provide a crucial potential launch-pad for the wider regeneration of East Belfast, led by the arts.

The developing public art around the area needs to be further developed and co-ordinated better; more venues for the arts need to be developed and the Strand presents an ideal opportunity to transform an existing cinema in a central location into a dedicated arts centre; close partnerships need to be developed with both the Titanic Quarter and Connswater Community Greenway; and East Belfast needs to be promoted as a centre for the creative and cultural industries.

Aim 2: To actively support the regeneration of East Belfast through the arts and creative industries

- Priorities for 2014-2017**
- Promote the establishment of appropriate and co-ordinated public art
 - Promote the development of the Strand as a dedicated arts centre
 - Promote the development of other appropriate venues for arts activities in East Belfast
 - Partner with the Connswater Community Greenway to promote the arts
 - Partner with the Titanic Quarter in the development of the arts
 - Promote the development of the creative and cultural industries in East Belfast

4.2.3

ARTS LED TOURISM

East Belfast is based around what was the industrial heartland of Northern Ireland and was a world leader in many heavy industries: shipbuilding, aircraft building, ropeworks, glass, etc. and although the days of heavy industry are mostly in the past, it is important that they are not forgotten.

East Belfast also has an important legacy of artists, writers and musicians that it should be proud of. Tourism around the world is increasingly being built around cultural heritage. This strategy builds on the potential that this provides.

East Belfast has George Best Belfast City Airport and some excellent hotels and restaurants. It is the birthplace of George Best, C S Lewis, Van Morrison and many others. It has much to offer tourists. However, it has a long way to go before the area as a whole becomes a first choice destination (or even the top 10) for tourists from outside Belfast, with a range of co-ordinated artistic and cultural offers.

The NI Visitor Attitude Survey 2011 suggested that the following are some of the aspects of visiting Belfast generally that needed to be improved:

- The range of things to do on Sundays
- The range of outdoor activities
- The range of things to do in the evenings
- Opportunities to attend local events/festivals
- Somewhere vibrant and exciting

The Belfast Tourism Strategy identifies arts and culture as being one of the key areas for further development if Belfast is to attract more tourists.

It also highlights the need to “utilise art to tell the Belfast story and stimulate both the visitor and citizen’s interest in local areas”.

Tourists need ‘Hot Spots’ they can gravitate towards and they need things of interest within 350 yards along a formal or informal trail.

Aim 3: To welcome visitors to East Belfast in a way that will ensure that they will want to come back and support the development of East Belfast as a cultural tourism destination

Priorities for 2014-2017

- Build appropriate collaborations between tourist accommodation/attractions and the arts in East Belfast
 - Create a programme of appropriate festivals and other activities that would be attractive to tourists
 - Develop venues for arts activities which would be attractive to tourists
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4.2.4 SOCIAL INCLUSION & DIVERSITY

This strategy is designed to build awareness of, and celebrate, the skills, creativity and rich heritage of the people of East Belfast. But it is not an inward-looking strategy. It recognises that East Belfast is a diverse area, with people from many backgrounds, some of whom face greater barriers to participation in the arts than others.

This needs to be recognised as a crucial part of this Arts Strategy, helping to support the creation of a peaceful and tolerant Northern Ireland. Part of the richness of arts is the celebration of diversity.

It is recognised that particular groups in our society find it harder to access fulfilling arts activities as participants or audiences. These include people with a physical, mental or sensory disability, the increasing number of older people, and people from minority ethnic communities, who, because of the availability of affordable housing, have been increasing their presence in East Belfast, particularly from the Polish, Indian and Lithuanian communities. The LGBT community also has a significant presence in east Belfast.

The strategy is based on the concept of hospitality – that East Belfast welcomes those from outside, whether from other parts of Belfast, or Northern Ireland, or some other part of the world. These may be tourists or they may be artists who bring a high quality of artistic input into East Belfast.

Aim 4: To promote social inclusion and the celebration of diversity

Priorities for 2014-2017

- Develop an arts programme for disabled people in East Belfast
 - Develop an arts programme for older people in East Belfast
 - Partner with ethnic minority groups to promote and celebrate cultural diversity in East Belfast
 - Identify and address the needs and aspirations of the LGBT community in East Belfast in relation to the arts
 - Ensure the community of Short Strand are engaged in the development of the arts in East Belfast
-

4.2.5 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

This is not a strategy only aimed at those who already regularly attend arts events and take part in creative events and attractions; it is a strategy for everyone. It recognises that some people are alienated from what they perceive as ‘the arts’.

The barriers to engagement need to be tackled, by developing venues which local people feel comfortable attending and are financially affordable; and by engaging children and young people in participative activities that give them an interest in relevant art forms, both in community and educational settings.

The arts can be a particularly powerful tool in working with marginalised young people at risk of becoming involved in the Criminal Justice System, or at risk of suicide or other mental health problems. It also needs to engage with adult groups within the community in relevant long-term participative arts programmes. There are already fledgling arts activities happening in community centres and other venues in East Belfast that need to be supported and nurtured.

Aim 5: To provide a diverse range of opportunities for community participation and personal expression and engagement through art and creativity.

Priorities for 2014-2017

- Develop a community arts partnership engagement programme that focuses on disadvantaged areas of East Belfast
 - Develop relevant participatory programmes for children and young people
-

4.2.6 COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIP

This strategy is essentially a collaborative strategy. One or two individuals or organisations are not going to make this strategy happen.

It will require a range of people and organisations to work together to promote the common good. Partnerships will need to be developed with and between arts organisations in East Belfast, and with venues, but also with other relevant bodies in Belfast and beyond. This will require the appropriate structures and collaborative leadership. At its heart, this will require a collaborative board of East Belfast Arts (not necessarily the final name) with individuals who are prepared to work together and put time and energy into making the strategy effective.

Aim 6: To promote sharing between the arts, cultural industries and the built environment in all sectors.

Priorities for 2014-2017

- Develop and support appropriate collaborative governance structures to promote the arts in East Belfast, bringing together the key statutory and voluntary bodies
 - Develop appropriate collaborative arrangements in relation to the main art forms, each led by a key ambassador
 - Develop effective collaborative arrangements with arts organisations and festivals in other parts of the city
-

4.2.7

COMMUNICATIONS

Key to the success of the strategy will be effective communications: Communications between all those engaged in the arts in East Belfast; communication with the general public; communication with the key funders and stakeholders in the city.

Aim 7: To communicate the rise of the arts in East Belfast effectively to all the key stakeholders and the general public in East Belfast.

Priorities for 2014-2017

- Develop and actively build a segmented database of all those engaged, or interested in, the arts in East Belfast
- Deliver an effective PR campaign to build public awareness of East Belfast as an vibrant area for the arts and effectively market arts initiatives in East Belfast and beyond
- Communicate effectively with key stakeholders
- Develop and disseminate a regular newsletter about the arts in East Belfast
- Develop, implement and review an effective web, email and social media strategy

4.2.8

INCOME GENERATION

The development of the arts in East Belfast is not going to happen without generating the appropriate resources. As highlighted earlier, the arts in East Belfast have been very significantly under-resourced in terms of public funding.

The income generation strategy needs to include four elements: statutory funding from BCC, ACNI, DCAL, DSD, NITB; grants from charitable and lottery sources; private sector sponsorship including ‘in-kind’ support, such as media partnerships; and sustainable income from ticket sales etc.

The implementation of this strategy will need to happen in several stages. The funding requirements of each stage are likely to be different, as the arts sector in East Belfast grows.

Aim 8: To generate sufficient income to achieve the sustainable development of the arts in East Belfast, and ensure these resources are managed effectively and efficiently

Priorities for 2014-2017

- Substantially increase statutory funding for the arts in East Belfast, including DCAL, ACNI, NITB, BCC, and CRC
 - Generate significant financial and in-kind sponsorship for the arts in East Belfast
 - Generate income from relevant charitable and lottery sources
- Increase the sustainability of income generation for the arts in East Belfast
East Belfast Partnership

4.2.9

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To be effective in developing the arts in East Belfast, there needs to be appropriate structure and leadership to drive and co-ordinate this development. There needs to be respected ambassadors for each of the art forms who will help focus energy and attention on what is required to take the relevant art form forward in East Belfast.

There needs to an appropriate staffing for East Belfast Arts with, in the first instance, full-time Arts Development Co-ordinator, Community Arts Development Officer and financial/ administration support in appropriate premises. Promoting volunteering in the arts also needs to be an important part of the strategy.

Aim 9: To ensure the development of the appropriate plans, skills and infrastructure to achieve the agreed aims and objectives

Priorities for 2014-2017

- Establish and manage dedicated staff resources to promote the arts in East Belfast
- Promote volunteering in the arts in East Belfast
- Recruit and support ambassadors for the arts in East Belfast
- Promote appropriate research and evaluation of the arts in East Belfast
- Ensure the effective and efficient use of resources
- Ensure effective governance of East Belfast Art

The following appendices to the report are available on the website www.eastsidearts.net

1. Consultation List
2. Stage 1 Implementation Plan
3. Statistics of East Belfast
4. Public Policy and Funding Context



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