

Banbury Cultural Strategy

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About Banbury

As one of the key towns in the Cherwell District, Banbury has an emergence of cultural assets, makers and promoters with the potential to grow not only the town but also its contribution to the cultural development across the District. The development of a Cultural Strategy was borne out of the increasingly collaborative working by the cultural organisations clustered around the canalside in Banbury and therefore a focus on the place and the cultural lives of its people and communities is at its Heart.

The value of this collaborative working operates beyond Banbury, with many of the Town's Cultural organisations actively working more widely with partners across the District; in programming, delivery and training. Therefore the benefits and learning from success in Banbury will further support increased cultural engagement district-wide.

Assets

Banbury Museum & Gallery

A town centre redevelopment at Castle Quay provided the opportunity to build a new museum, purpose designed, with more space for displays and activities, in the canal-side location. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the community, the new Museum, designed by ECD Architects of London, opened in September 2002.

From the 1940s until 2013, the museum in Banbury was provided by the Local Authority. In November 2013, a new charity, The Banbury Museum Trust, took full responsibility for the Museum. The current Mission is stated as “Banbury Museum & Gallery is a place of new ideas: we reflect world-changing ideas of the past and work with people from all backgrounds to create the future.” Banbury Museum & Gallery offers a year round programme of events and exhibitions, a library, a cafe and shop, school activities and reminiscence, and meeting space for Banbury Historical Society.

The Mill Arts Centre

The Mill Arts Centre is the cultural hub for Banbury and the surrounding area. Run by The Mill Arts Centre Trust, in 2022 The Mill Arts joined the Arts Council England National Portfolio, as the only NPO in the district.

As the only dedicated arts and performance venue in the area, The Mill’s vision is to inspire creativity and enrich the lives of local communities by providing a high quality, varied artistic, education and participatory programme. By offering communities the chance to engage with and be entertained by a variety of art forms, The Mill plays a significant role in the cultural, social and economic development of the town. The Mill Arts Centre Trust position themselves as a strategic cultural leader for Banbury.

The Mill offers an expansive live and participatory events programme including theatre, dance, music, comedy, film, workshops and classes. Alongside this, they run a number of community projects and initiatives with partner organisations. Also on offer is a cafe bar and Gallery showing local artists work. Spaces at The Mill, including a studio theatre seating up to 237, dance studio and artist studio, are used by many local cultural organisations and freelance artists to deliver their activity as well as being available for hire.

The Mill also runs outreach programmes and arts development programmes, particularly around dance development and outreach into Bicester, which does not have a cultural venue in its locality.

At the time of writing, The Mill Arts Centre is located at The Mill by the canalside. The old building, though much loved, has complex access difficulties and regularly floods, making it unsuitable for continued use as an arts centre requiring modern standards of facilities.

In spite of the significant shortcomings of the building, the organisation has seen exponential growth in activity and audiences over recent years, especially post-COVID19 pandemic, and has outgrown a building which no longer has the capacity to support a sustainable model. Therefore, feasibility of re-locating the Arts Centre within the town centre is being actively explored, both to mitigate the risks presented by the current location, but also an opportunity to address the evident need for a larger performance space in the town. Potentially this move, along with the relocation of the library too, will support the development of the town centre cultural zone for Banbury.

People's Theatre Collective

For over twenty years (19 of them as Cherwell Theatre Company) People's Theatre Collective has aimed to empower and inspire young people to be dynamic participants in their own lives and that of their communities through the transformative power of the arts. The Collective works with over 100 young people across Banbury in weekly sessions and Holiday provision.

Specific projects reach thousands of people a year. The young people have co created performances in many venues across Banbury: Castle Quay, The Mill, Broughton Castle, the Market Place, Tooley's Boat Yard, the Town Hall, Peoples Park, Green Spaces on Housing Estates and the old Nuclear Bunker.

The Company tours professional Children's Theatre to primary schools and libraries across the region. Their Park Ranger programme brings environmental arts projects to primary schools across the area, and every two years the Tell Your Story Festival enables young people to take over Castle Quay and The Mill Arts Centre, showcasing creative work by young people from across Banbury, perform new works written by young Theatre Makers and provide arts workshops to inspire more young people to get involved in the cultural life of Banbury.

Based at the Mill, where they work in partnership to support the development of the next generation of young creatives in Banbury, the Collective are looking to secure an additional space in Castle Quay for a Young People's Cultural Enterprise Centre.

Castle Quay, Lock29

Cherwell District Council bought the Castle Quay shopping centre in 2017 when the developer withdrew from plans to develop the centre and in August 2020 the Council opened Lock29 on the ground floor of the former BHS store.

Lock29 has grown into a hub for food, creativity and community with a diverse range of artisan food and drink outlets and independent retailers. The venue provides a space for live music and events which are open to the whole community, as well as a cinema room which can be hired and used for arts, educational or business activities.

Major retail stores have moved out of Castle Quay, leaving empty units. Plans are underway to relocate the library into Castle Quay, and an option to relocate The Mill Arts Centre to Castle Quay is in discussion.

The Light Cinema

The Light opened in 2022 as part of the District Council's Castle Quay Waterfront regeneration project. This exciting three floor entertainment venue is home to a premium seven screen cinema, 10 lane bowling alley, a retro arcade, climbing centre and waterfront restaurants.

Tooley's Boatyard

Tooley's Boatyard is situated in the heart of Banbury on the South Oxford Canal, this has one of the oldest working dry docks on the Inland Waterways, working continuously since 1778. The site also includes a blacksmith's forge and carpenter's workshop. Tooley's Boatyard Trust supports the history and heritage of the site and provides attractions for the general public. They provide guided tours of the boatyard and forge, boat trips and a wide range of unique gifts, souvenirs, canal maps and books are available from the shop.

St Mary's Church

St Mary's Church offers a significant size venue (able to seat 700), where Banbury does not have a similarly large arts venue on offer. St Mary's has launched Arts at BSM, an initiative to bring their community closer together through offering a programme of arts activities and events. The church also has a strong ethos of inclusivity and recognises its role in "contributing to the flourishing of our town and region so that all might have life in all its fullness". The seating capacity is significant but there are limitations for the venue since the seating is fixed and the stage area is not large enough for large casts or performances requiring a larger area such as dance.

Library

Banbury Library has been housed in Marlborough Road, in a building built in 1884 which now restricts the modernisation of the library. Moving the library presents the opportunity to develop a more modern and fit for purpose library.

Organisations

There is a wealth of quality amateur arts and heritage groups and societies in Banbury, as well as some professionally run organisations. A list of organisations and groups is attached in the Appendix 2. The list of arts organisations active in Banbury suggests that the provision for the performing arts is healthy, but other artforms such as visual art and creative writing are under served, and both the offer for audiences and visitors as well as offer for participation are limited for other artforms.

The Mill Arts Centre is the only organisation in the district of Cherwell that is part of the Arts Council England National Portfolio for 2023-2027.

Banbury Museum & Gallery is an NPO Associate of the Arts Council funded Oxford University Museum Partnership.

In consultation, arts organisations have said that there is a lack of professional arts freelancers in the area, making it difficult for organisations to deliver work as there is low capacity of skills to fulfil requirements.

Cultural organisations have come together to form the Banbury Quays Consortium to drive more collaborative working. After a 4 year break, the Banbury Canal Festival returned in 2022 which allowed cultural organisations to test ways of collaborative working that could have greater impact through their working together.

Oxfordshire Age UK is running a project to explore Banbury's heritage, funded by Historic England and working with Age Friendly Banbury. This is a new partnership project that explores how communities can lead heritage projects and research in their local areas to support wellbeing and build positive relationships, supporting older people to become heritage project co-leaders.

Festivals

Fairport's Cropredy Convention

Formerly the **Cropredy Festival**, this is an annual festival of folk and rock music, headed by British folk-rock band Fairport Convention and held on the edge of the nearby village of Cropredy. The festival has taken place in August annually since 1976.

Fairport's Cropredy Convention attracts up to 20,000 people each year. The festival features a single stage at the lower end of the sloping arena field. There are also ancillary events, such as Morris dancing in the streets and live music at the village's two pubs.

Canal Festival and Banbury Town Council events

Organised by Banbury Town Council, the Canal Festival is a free to enter weekend of activity by and on the water. The event celebrates the canal's historic and integral role in the town's growth since its establishment in 1778. The canal features floating markets, fairground attractions, arts performances, music, comedy and theatre, as a fun packed weekend for all the family. The festival involves many of the local venues who host activities as part of the event, including Castle Quay, Lock29, Tooley's Boatyard, The Mill Arts Centre, Banbury Museum, The Waterside Bar, Bridge Street Park and Bridge Street Community Garden.

Banbury Town Council also organise events throughout the year including Food and Drink Festivals in April and August; a Christmas lights switch-on event; and civic celebrations for Armed Forces Day, Battle of Britain Day and Remembrance Sunday parade. Local bands perform at the Banbury Music Mix in Banbury Market Place on a Friday in July.

Tell Your Story

Biennially, Tell Your Story is a weekend of pop ups and a takeover of Castle Quay Shopping Centre and The Mill Arts Centre by young people working with People's Theatre Collective. Young people work with professional artists in community settings across Banbury to devise work, which is then performed or displayed in the festival. Using visual art, comedy and performing arts, young people tell their stories and host activities such as storytelling sessions and craft workshops.

Strategic Context

Cherwell District Council (CDC)

CDC supports cultural organisations in the area with regular funding, including The Mill Arts Centre and Banbury Museum. Nicola Riley, Assistant Director for Housing and Wellbeing (with the responsibility for culture) at CDC is supportive and plays an active role in regularly meeting with and supporting local organisations. However, support for cultural development and activity is focused under the remit for health and wellbeing (Culture comes under the priority of Healthy, resilient and engaged communities in CDC's Business Plan 2023-24), which is important, but there is scope for culture to support more areas that the council has responsibility for. This Strategy could make the case for culture to support the economy (visitor economy and the creative economy), regeneration (contributing towards vibrant town centres), and community cohesion (sharing cultures).

Banbury Quays Consortium

Initially conceived as developing a 'Banbury Cultural Quarter', this group was established in 2020 and formally constituted as a CIC in July 2023 with its charitable aim being "to carry on activities which benefit the community and in particular (without limitation) to transform Banbury into an exciting destination, to offer experiences in a rich cultural environment, and to create pride for everyone in our town."

The Quays Consortium comprises representatives of Banbury Museum & Gallery, The Mill Arts Centre, Tooley's Boatyard, Banbury Historical Society, Cherwell District Council, Castle Quay Shopping Centre and Banbury Town Council. It sees itself as an enabler, and does not employ staff or deliver capital projects itself. The BQC seeks to be an advocate; to commission research; to connect people; to shine the spotlight on issues; to raise the 'cultural' bar.

The Quays Consortium led the argument for development of a Banbury Cultural Strategy, and commissioned this report enabled by funding from The Mill Arts Centre, Cherwell District Council and Banbury Museum & Gallery.

Banbury Business Improvement District (Banbury BID)

Banbury BID was established in April 2018 and is now midway through its second five year term of office. It not only plays a key role in promoting Banbury town centre and its retail, cultural and leisure offer but also runs its own programme of events to increase footfall to and spend within the town centre, creating experiences for people to enjoy and giving businesses the opportunity to gain more customers.

The BID's free to access events include Summer Fest and Winter Lantern Parades and a three day Winter Market as well as popular town centre trail competitions which involve ten primary schools. In both 2023 and 2024 the BID delivered visual arts projects at Banbury Railway Station which were grant funded by Chiltern Railways and garnered participation from artists, residents, businesses and community groups alike in order to be enjoyed by everyone who visits the station.

Banbury 2050

Following the successful opening of Castle Quay Waterfront in 2022, in 2023 Cherwell District Council commissioned Hemingway Design and NewMasterplanning to develop a vision for

Banbury 2050. Cherwell District Council started work on a comprehensive consultation and engagement programme called Banbury Vision 2050 as the first phase of regeneration plans for Banbury. The Vision will help shape the important elements for a thriving Banbury, including retail, culture and tourism, the evening economy, housing, employment, and connectivity.

The Banbury 2050 project responds to the recognition that town centres are changing and must adapt, and this essential project will enable Cherwell District Council and stakeholders to prepare and set a direction of travel for Banbury in the coming years.

Brighter Futures

Brighter Futures is a long term programme of projects designed to relieve deprivation by improving access and opportunity for individuals within Banbury's most disadvantaged areas. The Brighter Futures partnership brings together the anchor organisations working within the three wards – such as schools, sports providers, charities and the police, housing providers, as well as community groups and faith groups.

A steering group of professionals bring together both information and intelligence from residents and service providers to support all the partners. The group is focussed on breaking down barriers which get in the way of actions to break the cycle of deprivation. They aim to support residents in building a strong and cohesive community.

The partnership work focusses on three wards in Banbury: Ruscote, Neithrop, and Grimsbury and Castle. These wards contain areas which rank on the lower end of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and rank amongst the 20 per cent most deprived in the country.

Underpinning all the projects are the aims of increasing opportunity, social sustainability and community cohesion and community resilience. Plans aim to build on our strengths and use lessons learned to make work even more effective than before. The programme aims to improve joint working practices, develop projects in conjunction with the community, and build on community strengths to support people to find their own solutions.

Cultural Education Partnerships

Cherwell's Cultural Education Partnership was initiated in 2017, in step with the Oxford City CEP, to develop a locally specific network for North Oxfordshire (NOxCEP) to strengthen links between the local Arts & Cultural Organisations and freelance Artists with Schools and Further Education, also including some Health and Social Agencies, to help improve access to and experience of high quality arts for children and young people. NOxCEP and OXCEP have since transitioned to join up under the OXYGEN CEP banner to make a county-wide network.

NOxCEP enabled the district arts team to secure ACE funds to develop two major strands of work between 2018 – 2023 with local arts partners and schools in Banbury and Bicester: The Schools Connect and Better Lives through Culture programmes. These were administered and supported by the South East Bridge Organisation Artswork as part of a £1 million investment programme to create lasting impact and strategic change for children and young people. Artswork sets out to

make “arts and creativity available to absolutely everyone” and to “break through barriers and develop new ways for people to discover the success, empowerment and sheer joy that the arts and creativity can bring to classrooms, communities and careers”.

Schools Connect Partnership Investment Programme

11 schools registered for ArtsMark to embed quality arts across their curriculum as part of their School Improvement Plan, 3 achieved Silver status in the course of the programme with 2 re-registering for Gold. 26 new Arts Award Advisors were trained from participating schools and arts organisations and artists, with nearly 1000 children achieving Arts Award Certificates as a result of the new partnerships established in the course of this programme despite the disruption of the Covid outbreak in the final year.

The Better Lives through Culture (BLTC) Partnership Investment programme

This hugely successful programme involved two arts organisations, 18 professional artists, eight Banbury schools and two community settings to engage over 1,200 children and young people in inspiring creative activity including animation, theatre, dance, visual arts, sculpture, carnival and music. The children taking part had all been affected by the Covid 19 pandemic. The results of this programme demonstrated positive effects on children’s wellbeing and education, in line with research findings from the Cultural Learning Alliance. Headteachers from schools in the Brighter Futures wards recognised the value of the project, noting that for some pupils the cultural activities were outside their experience. Headteachers also noticed wider benefits to children, absolutely meeting the brief of “better lives through culture”.

The Mill Community Connections initiative

The purpose of this initiative, is to enable community groups, schools, and organisations in the Brighter Futures wards to access high quality arts and cultural opportunities. This allows residents of all ages living in the three Banbury wards to attend live performances, workshops, and activities free of charge and where transport or accessibility are a barrier, this can be funded too.

The objective of this initiative is therefore to enable residents from target neighbourhoods to access arts and cultural opportunities at The Mill, which they would otherwise be unable to access.

Originally established in 2023 through the District Council’s UK Shared Prosperity Fund monies, the successful initiative has continued beyond the life of the original funding, made possible by customer donations and other project grants secured by The Mill Arts Centre.

The fund is prioritised towards:

- Reaching people who have not previously attended any of The Mill’s programme
- Community groups who have never previously, or haven’t recently accessed The Mill’s programme

- Groups who have enabled their users to choose what they want to access.

Through this programme, The Mill is able to build stronger links with local communities to help shape the future programme, so that it reflects the communities it sits within.

Bridge Street Community Garden

The garden secured a tranche of the District Council's 2022-2025 UK Shared Prosperity Fund monies for projects encouraging new groups to use the garden and have their own growing spaces for their users to access all year round. The funds were also used to develop a programme of skills workshops for Banbury residents to learn and encourage the importance of growing food and accessing nature.

Oxfordshire County Council

Oxfordshire County Council's "Our strategic plan 2023-2025" identifies 3 themes: Greener, Fairer, Healthier; and 9 priorities, however none of these explicitly mention culture.

An up-to-date arts or cultural strategy for the County Council was not available through web searches and does not appear to exist.

OxLEP (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership) does have an Arts and Culture Strategy Framework, written in February 2020 (pre-pandemic), aligning with the newly published ACE Strategy Let's Create, and to be delivered by the Culture and Visitor Economy Sub Group.

The Strategy specifically recognises the important role of The Mill Arts Centre as a cultural driver, Banbury Museum & Gallery and the new Light Cinema, creating a new cultural quarter.

The Framework also identifies one of the priorities for the CEP where young people are not engaging with education, and states work in partnership in Bicester and Banbury to provide life skills through the arts and progression into apprenticeships' and training. The Framework identifies the aspiration to use the cultural assets of Oxfordshire more to connect with young people in areas where they have low access: Point 26 "Oxfordshire is rich in arts and cultural resources, but they do not reach and involve as many people as they should. In particular, children and young people experience uneven access to opportunities to express themselves through creative activities as they are growing up."

OxLEP aims to continue to highlight the global capabilities of Oxfordshire's creative industries through its Showcase. "Inspiring the next generation".

OxLEP have produced a Creative, Cultural, Heritage and Tourism Investment Plan (CCHTIP), up to 2030. The priorities of the CCHTIP were:

- Productive and engaging experiences
- Skills, talent development and business growth
- Creative place-making

It recognises the role of Banbury's cultural assets and regeneration plans to drive more cultural offer in Banbury as a key town in Cherwell. However, it does not appear to suggest more link-up between, for example, some of Oxford's significant cultural assets and Banbury, to benefit Banbury more inclusively in wider plans.

Other relevant County-wide strategies include:

- Libraries and heritage services strategy 2022-27
- Music Service
- OXYGEN Cultural Education Partnership, as noted above

Arts Council England

Arts Council England published their 10-year strategy, Let's Create, 2020-2030. The strategy has three outcomes and four investment principles:

Outcomes:

- Creative People: everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life;
- Cultural Communities: villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture;
- A Creative & Cultural Country: England's cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international.

Investment Principles:

- Ambition and Quality: cultural organisations are ambitious and committed to improving the quality of their work;
- Inclusivity & Relevance: England's diversity is fully reflected in the organisations and individuals that we support and in the culture that they produce;
- Dynamism: cultural organisations are dynamic and able to respond to the challenges of the next decade;
- Environmental Responsibility: cultural organisations lead the way in their approach to environmental responsibility.

Cultural Compacts. In 2019, Arts Council England supported the creation of 20 Cultural Compacts and reviewed their effectiveness. These Compacts are partnerships designed to support the local cultural sector and enhance its contribution to development, with a special emphasis on cross-sector engagement beyond the cultural sector itself and the local authority. The Compacts aim to increase the connectivity between the arts and cultural sector and broader local aspirations and priorities, including local recovery plans within Compact areas through strategic partnerships with relevant sectors. Arts Council England may invest in Cultural Compacts where they see that they can significantly enhance place-making and embed culture into other sectors locally.

National Lottery Project Grants – In 2022 ACE raised the threshold for small grants from £15,000 to £30,000 maximum, and in November 2023 ACE simplified their application process for grant applications under £30,000, making it more accessible to smaller groups. ACE continues to offer larger grants of £30,000-100,000, which can be applied to through their Project Grants.

In Cherwell, between 2019 and 2024, an average of 6.6 ACE Project Grants were awarded each year to organisations or individuals in the District. The majority of these were for smaller grants awards: from 2019 to 2021 the maximum that could be applied for from smaller grants was £15,000; from 2022 to 2024 this was increased to £30,000. In Cherwell, from 2019 to 2021 only smaller grants under £15,000 were awarded. From 2021 to 2024 a few larger grants started to be awarded, however the average was still low at £26,064 and the highest grant awarded was £49,993. Applying for over £50,000 from ACE Project Grants requires a higher level of financial information, which suggests that organisations in Cherwell do not feel confident or do not have capacity to apply for larger grants.

Of the organisations who received Project Grants during this period, 7 were based in Banbury and 2 were individual applicant artists, out of a total of 18 applicants. Of these, People's Theatre Collective secured 4 awards, The Mill Arts Centre 2, and Anjali Dance Company 2 and The Village Butty 2. Organisations who have achieved several awards and thus have a good track record could be expected to start to seek higher amounts, however only The Mill Arts Centre has really built on their achievements by securing the NPO funding from Arts Council. There seems to be more potential in Banbury for organisations to secure more funding from ACE, however they are holding back, either through lack of confidence, lack of knowledge of how to develop a fundraising strategy, or through lack of capacity to apply for or deliver larger projects.

ACE funds music services through Music Hub programmes. For Banbury, this will have been the Oxfordshire Music Hub up to 2024. On 7 May 2024 the new Music Hubs that will start in September 2024 were announced by ACE. The new Music Hub relevant to Banbury is now the Hub for Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, with the lead organisation the Buckinghamshire Music Trust. This is a new era for music services across the two counties, with the potential to share more widely knowledge and expertise, but also with a larger administrative burden to ACE as the funder (as with all other Music Hubs) and requirements to find match funding, which will have implications for the partnership's capacity.

Capital funds that are available from ACE at intervals through the year are:

- Cultural Development Fund (CDF)
- Libraries improvement Fund (LIF)
- Museum Estate and Development Fund (MEND)

Heritage Fund

The Heritage Lottery Fund launched a new 10 year strategy in 2023. The strategy focuses on investing in places, not just projects. It has a long term focus, wanting to invest in activity that will have long term impacts as strategic interventions, transformational long-term projects. The Heritage Fund is interested in supporting more partnerships which will make greater impacts on place. It wants to strengthen heritage's contribution to local economies, and support heritage organisations' resilience.

Through their Delivery Plan, they will offer a Strategic initiative on Place, aiming to identify 20 places in a rolling programme where they aim to invest in heritage.

Their strategy also identified priorities as inclusion, access and participation in heritage, and protecting the environment.

Lottery funding offered through the Heritage Fund changed its thresholds in 2023. Their grants for under £10,000 closed in October 2023 and will be allocated through a partner organisation. Grants from £10,000-£10million closed in November 2023 and reopened in January 2024.

Securing grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund appears to be very low for Banbury; between October 2022 and March 2024 Banbury Museum Trust was the only organisation in Banbury who secured an award, of £9,750 in March 2024 (according to available data on the HLF website). There is more potential for heritage funds to be drawn to Banbury organisations. Again this could be due to low capacity, or low confidence or skills for organisations in Banbury to access these grants.

Consultation

Consultation undertaken

The Steering Group relied on partners to conduct some of the consultation, which was collated and analysed by Art Reach. Consultation undertaken was:

- A workshop, run in partnership with Banbury Vision 2050 and Art Reach, for the cultural sector in Banbury;
- A public survey, launched by Banbury Vision 2050 with additional questions from Art Reach;
- Workshops with young people conducted by People's Theatre Collective;
- A survey aimed at education providers, conducted by Art Reach.

Consultation with Banbury Vision 2050

In 2023 an online survey was conducted for Banbury 2050, in partnership with Art Reach and the Banbury Cultural Strategy commissioners, who integrated questions regarding culture in Banbury into the survey. In addition, Art Reach and The Mill Arts Centre supported Banbury 2050 in running a consultation workshop for the cultural sector in November 2023. The following summarises the findings, with more detail contained in the Banbury 2050 report at Appendix 2.

Summary of survey results

Highlighted the relative strength of the cultural sector as a draw for Banbury, as well as the events, but notes that people still wanted to see it improved and that this would encourage them to visit Banbury more often.

The survey results showed the importance of The Light, The Mill Arts Centre and The Museum as cultural attractions and evening destinations. The old town also provided a second destination, particularly in the evening.

Park and green spaces were identified as strengths and as important elements in the town's cultural and leisure offer.

Summary of Consultation workshop findings

Working with Art Reach, a stakeholder workshop focusing on the issues relevant to cultural and creative organisations was held on November 28th 2023, hosted by the Mill Arts Centre. The purpose was to present key findings and issues coming out of the survey to date and to have the invited guests discuss the findings in a workshop session, responding to a series of questions.

Common themes identified by discussion groups:

- Canal and adjacent cultural spaces are a great asset – needs to complement retail in Banbury, so that the town is a cultural place and destination not just retail. General support for developing Castle Quay with cultural venues.
- Cultural offer needs to have diversity, something for all age groups and demographics.
- There is a need for a larger performance venue – St Mary's has a space that can seat 700 so potential here.
- More coordination of information about cultural activity in Banbury.
- Safety concerns in the town centre – how can cultural activity help address this?

Three words for Banbury vision that were repeated:

- Connected – Inclusive – Vibrant

Young people

People's Theatre Collective conducted consultation sessions with 96 young people across several of their groups in early 2024, to feed into this Cultural Strategy. Details of the feedback from young people are in Appendix 3. Conclusions drawn from the consultation are:

- Young people are concerned about the number of empty shops in the town centre and wish to see them used more.
- The look and feel of the streets is important to them, and they would like to see things better maintained and less litter.
- There is not enough variety, too many coffee shops and not enough activities to do.
- They would like more places to just hang out, relax, including sensory spaces and places for mental health and wellbeing. A centralised hub for young people. They also want activities and clubs where they can make friends, which could include intergenerational groups too – one suggestion was a community garden/ gardening club.
- The Museum, the library and the Mill are all places with the potential to have workshop activity for young people. They like the vibe at the Mill and they have positive childhood experiences of the Museum. Currently they do not see the library as a space for young people.
- They enjoy markets and charity shops because they are cheap and sustainable.
- Museums and history are of interest.
- They would like parks where there are things to do, such as a green gym, spaces for dogs, water parks, trampolines, sports, roller skating, a legal graffiti wall.
- They would like places where they can learn new skills and learn about careers and different jobs.
- Affordability is a concern for activities.
- Outdoor festivals are popular as they are accessible, the canal festival was an example.
- They want more green spaces and places for biodiversity. Taking care of the environment is important to them.
- Performing spaces and opportunities are wanted, for choirs, music and bands, and a theatre. They also would like more touring companies to come to Banbury.
- Ideas for keeping young people engaged with the strategy includes online meetings, Youth Council involvement, and using social media such as Instagram. Young people want to see their impact and would be interested to know more even if they are not actively speaking up. It's important to address young people specifically, social media will work well for this.
- Overall, cultural ambition in young people seems lacking. Their aspirations do not go further than wanting things to do, there is little conversation about creative careers but they do suggest they want to know more about career possibilities. The request for touring companies suggests that they wish to experience more variety of arts. The conclusion is that they have not had the opportunity to experience enough variety of arts or much cutting edge, new art forms, and therefore their cultural horizons are limited.

Education survey

A survey was carried out with the Banbury partners emailing schools on their contact lists to contribute to the survey.

Although the number of respondents was low, some useful insight was received, and comments were backed up by responses coming through in the public survey. The full results of the education survey can be seen at Appendix 4.

Summary of key findings

Both schools and arts partners recognise that they would like arts provisions for children and young people to be part of the wider community more, with programmes that link up schools and communities, all ages and demographics.

“In order for this to be really engaging there needs to be a true integration of arts into the whole community” Arts partner

Schools commented that there needs to be:

“Definitely broadening horizons and making it accessible for more.”

“More advertising so they know what is on offer”

“Work experience opportunities bringing communities together as not enough mixing”

Many of the schools felt there needs to be more on offer for young people that is extra curricular or outside school time, such as after school clubs, Saturday workshops, mini festivals and summer activities.

Schools also wanted to be able to work more with arts organisations, such as working with local artists, more engagement with the Music Service, Theatre In Education exploring current issues for young people etc. One responder mentioned that attracting young people to take part is a challenge, and considered digital engagement as a way to interest them:

“this is really tricky: motivation is the key factor here. Most young people will not want to get involved in opportunities like the ones listed, because they don't recognise what the benefit will be...

maybe make the whole thing instagrammable... as a lever to encourage participation”

The lack of provision of digital arts or moving image is possibly due to lack of skills to teach these or lack of the specialist equipment used for creative new technologies. However, it is likely that children and young people would be interested in engaging creatively with digital and new technologies so this could be an area for particular focus.

There is a recognition that the arts and creativity are also essential for wellbeing, not just about careers or skills development. A comment from a school on the value of arts education explains:

“At Harriers, the Arts are at the heart of our enriched curriculum. We currently provide opportunities for children to develop socially, emotionally and culturally in their learning and believe these contribute positively to children's mental health. The Arts give an opportunity for all children to shine and develop their creativity.”

Conclusions

- The Steering Group organisations wish to create a **Cultural Vision** which inspires greater confidence for Banbury to be proud of its cultural offer as well as being motivated to achieve greater things. They feel a new narrative needs to be generated for Banbury.
- The survey shows that culture is a significant draw for people to visit Banbury town centre, however the potential **economic contribution** of cultural activities and assets for the town has not been fully recognised by stakeholders. There is a stronger case to be made to those who would invest in the town, for example the BID and Cherwell District Council, especially aligned with town centre regeneration plans. Forming a Cultural Compact could be considered as a way of boosting the ability for Banbury to make stronger impact through culture.
- There is significant potential for **collaborative working**, building on partners' involvement in the Canal Festival and the work of Banbury Quays Consortium, as well as good relationships between cultural organisations, Banbury Town Council, the BID and Cherwell District Council.
- Various initiatives (Brighter Futures, Better Lives Through Culture and The Mill Community Connect) are laying good foundations for collaborative working where culture supports community cohesion and wellbeing. Learning from these projects will be invaluable to continue building on **community and culture initiatives**.
- **Young people's cultural ambitions** appear quite low and this could be as a result of them not having enough opportunities to experience the variety of high quality arts and culture that could inspire them. Their comments suggest that they would be interested in widening their horizons and they would be interested in learning more about career options in the sector.
- Young people also recognise the part that arts and culture can play in supporting their **wellbeing** and providing socialising spaces.
- Young people want to be kept informed and **spoken to directly** about opportunities and developments.
- **Minimal funding** is being secured by organisations in the District from sources such as Arts Council England and Heritage Lottery Fund and there could be more growth potential from these sources. Reasons for not achieving more needs exploring with organisations.
- The dominant audience profiles for Banbury and surrounding areas include **families** looking for days out, with taste for mainstream arts, heritage and museums. They are all looking online for activities to do. Wrap around offers are important to provide a full day out, and discounts to encourage families and groups. There are also **affluent audiences** who like traditional and high quality arts and are willing to travel and spend for an exclusive experience. These audience profiles suggest that days such as the Canal Festival or other full-town events will be popular, but that special, high profile events could also bring in the more affluent commuters.
- The audience profile for Oxford City is quite different and it could be difficult to draw audiences to Banbury from this area. The dominant audience segment are younger people seeking contemporary, new experiences. A strategy towards **improving culture for young people** in Banbury would need to start by involving young people in developing their own activities that are more mainstream, such as live music, and developing this over time to

more cutting edge arts such as immersive theatre. At this point, there could be an attraction to audiences from Oxford but it could take some time to develop a reputation for this in Banbury, and the offer would need to be something very unique that is not offered in Oxford. This strategy also reflects a step-by-step approach to increasing the cultural ambition for young people in Banbury.

Priorities and Themes

MADE IN BANBURY:

A Cultural Strategy leading Growth in Banbury and across Cherwell

Creative Banbury is a community of confident innovators, working together to ensure Banbury is a vibrant town of cultural opportunities where people can make their own way and shape their own futures.

Where we want to be

A cultural vision for Banbury can be organised under three priority themes: **Place, People and Partnerships**. Where we envisage we want to be with each theme:

THEME 1: PLACE

DESTINATION – Banbury is a cultural destination that is proud of its distinct heritage and culture and is known for its unique cultural activities and events that cater to a range of tastes.

IDENTITY – Banbury is known to be friendly, welcoming and inclusive, with an independent streak of creative inventiveness and cultural ambition.

ECONOMY – Banbury is attractive as a place to live, work and visit due to its thriving cultural scene which attracts investment and contributes to its healthy economy.

LIVING WELL – Banbury is a place where people want to live, work and play because of its thriving cultural offer.

FACILITIES – Banbury has a well-developed infrastructure of a range of buildings, spaces and facilities which support creativity, learning and creative enterprises to thrive.

THEME 2: PEOPLE

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – the new generations are confident with creative aspirations, supported by Banbury's facilities, safe creative spaces, and opportunities for skills development and progression.

INCLUSION – cultural activity in Banbury supports wellbeing and healthy living through culture for all at any age, and brings people together to share and celebrate the diversity of Banbury's communities.

ENGAGEMENT – Banbury's people are engaged and involved in shaping cultural decisions for their town.

THEME 3: PARTNERSHIPS

COLLABORATIVE – cultural organisations in Banbury work together to achieve more and address gaps in cultural provision for Banbury's people and visitors to the town.

How we will get there

THEME 1: PLACE

DESTINATION

- Banbury will provide a day and evening, wrap-around visitor offer: culture supports the visitor economy + the hospitality and retail offer supports cultural activity = reasons to stay a full day in town.
- Banbury will build on its distinct cultural characters: further develop its unique canal festival, animate its unique heritage, stories and characters, develop the live independent music scene, and assert its own distinctiveness as a visitor destination.
- Banbury will develop vibrancy and variety – of artforms, genres, tastes, experimental and traditional, animating heritage, presentations of cultural diversity, risk-taking and cutting edge activities and events; live activities outdoors and in public spaces that engage everybody.

IDENTITY

- Banbury will project itself through messaging and communications as friendly, welcoming, kind, inclusive, offering something for everybody. All cultural activities, events and spaces will ensure they are as accessible and welcoming as possible to all.
- Cultural organisations in Banbury will confidently invent, be ambitious, and embrace risk taking creative innovation.
- Banbury will promote itself confidently and project its image outwards as a place that creates culture and innovates.

ECONOMY

- Cultural organisations will make the case for culture to support the economy and advocate for this to local businesses and the local authority.
- Cultural organisations will work with the town centre to ensure that cultural offer is a major draw for people to visit the town centre.
- Cultural organisations will work to enable Banbury's talented community to stay and invest in cultural careers in Banbury, building a creative economy.

LIVING WELL

- Cultural groups and organisations will work collaboratively with community services and providers such as Age UK and healthy living services to ensure that cultural activity is supporting wellbeing and cultural aspirations, especially in geographical areas with lower cultural opportunities. They will ensure that opportunities for funding culture that supports community wellbeing are accessed. This builds on and learns from activity already taking place such as Age Friendly Banbury, Brighter Futures, Better Lives Through Culture Partnership Investment Programme and The Mill Community Connect Initiative.

FACILITIES

- Banbury partners will continue to work together to develop cultural spaces in Castle Quays which are fit for purpose with facilities suitable for the expectations of contemporary audiences and participants, and address accessibility.
- Banbury venues and the local authority will work together to ensure that the cultural sector is able to make best use of the variety of spaces on offer including The Mill Arts

Centre, the Museum, St Mary's Church, the Library, Lock 29 event space and empty shops and community spaces.

- Opportunities to respond to the clear ambition for more performance spaces will be considered where feasible to complement existing spaces and add to the range of spaces available to support cultural activity. Spaces that are currently lacking in Banbury include a larger theatre space, significant art exhibition space, smaller spaces for rehearsal, recording studios and making spaces with facilities such as pottery kilns, printmaking equipment and digital suites.

THEME 2: PEOPLE

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- Banbury's cultural community will work together, with schools and within the wider community to develop confidence and aspirations for young people, working towards offering opportunities all year round.
- Banbury will develop spaces for young people which are welcoming, creative and safe spaces that enable young people to create on their own terms.
- Banbury will develop facilities and support for Cultural Enterprise, hubs and satellite spaces, making spaces and rehearsal spaces, digital and new technology facilities and skills development, and joined-up progression routes to learn creative skills.
- Banbury will employ a family-wide strategy to nurture children as cultural consumers and creators of the future, and involving the wider family through their children's engagement.

INCLUSION

- Cultural organisations will work to provide activities that support wellbeing through culture for all, for younger people and older people.
- Cultural organisations in Banbury will create activities that bring people together, mixing ages, sharing cultures, celebrating diversity.
- The effectiveness of activities will be evaluated including for accessibility, and evaluation will inform future planning to continually improve accessibility.

ENGAGEMENT

- Cultural leaders in Banbury will facilitate community panels and open days that engage people in the community in cultural decision making and influence their leadership. Panels and open days will be tried using a range of methods to ensure inclusivity and a range of participants, monitoring those who engage and addressing gaps.
- Cultural organisations in Banbury will seek ways to engage people where they are in their communities, and encourage participation.

THEME 3: PARTNERSHIPS

COLLABORATIVE

- Cultural organisations and education providers will coordinate their offers to provide progression routes for all, addressing gaps.

- Local Cultural Leadership will develop partnerships with smaller organisations in order to continually raise quality and support fundraising.
- Banbury will promote connectiveness, supporting cultural organisations to work collaboratively to achieve greater impact, sharing communications and promotions.
- Culture, community, health and voluntary organisations and Local Authorities will work together more to ensure that culture supports healthy living and feeling good, especially for those at risk of isolation, ill health or who have access needs.
- Cultural organisations, businesses and local authorities work together more to ensure that cultural offer supports economic wellbeing in Banbury.
- Cultural organisations will make the case for culture and advocate for culture to support living well, supporting health, learning and the economy.
- Cultural organisations will respond to the priorities of Arts Council England, Heritage Fund and Banbury's young people by taking a lead on environmental responsibility and encouraging good practice in the sector.
- The Banbury Cultural Strategy will work to support Oxfordshire's strategic priorities where relevant, the OxLEP Arts and Culture Strategy Framework (see Appendix 1 Context), and connect in with NPOs across Oxfordshire.

Actions

This Strategy is ambitious and long-term. Actions towards delivering the Strategy will need to take place step by step over the ten year period, to build towards the vision.

The following are actions that can take place initially, in order to lay foundations and ensure some immediate progress where possible.

Action	Lead	Delivery	Theme	Timeline
Develop the remit and terms of reference for the Cultural Strategy Steering Group	Cultural Strategy Steering Group	<p>The Steering Group will clarify their constitution and remit under the Quays Consortium CIC within their Terms of Reference.</p> <p>The Steering Group will clarify in consultation with partners whether there is an aspiration to work towards forming a Cultural Compact for Banbury.</p> <p>Steering Group remit is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • check on progress, identify areas that need more focus and initiate action with local organisations and groups. • identify task groups and local organisations who can deliver elements of the Strategy, supporting them to do so. • advocate for culture into all areas of life and improve collaboration and alignment between organisations to amplify impact. <p>The Steering Group will seek an Environmental Responsibility expert to join the group as an adviser for all activities.</p>	Oversees all themes	3 Months
Seek local authority endorsement of the strategy, and alignment with policy across resources, transformation and communities	Cultural Strategy Steering Group	<p>Steering group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work with Cherwell District Council and Banbury Town Council officers to seek formal endorsement of the strategy, and advocate for alignment across portfolios. • engage Oxfordshire County Council with the strategy through the Area Oversight Group for Banbury, and advocate for alignment within the Banbury Area Action Plan. 	All themes	6 Months

Action	Lead	Delivery	Theme	Timeline
Identify way to create a single centralised information point for all cultural activity in Banbury to demonstrate and promote the town's vibrancy.	Cultural Strategy Steering Group	Steering Group to explore innovative solutions to achieve core objective through collective promotion of whole Banbury cultural offer. Steering group to identify a structure, capacity and resource to enable this to happen.	Place: Destination Partnerships: Collaborative	6 Months
Advocate for a stronger case for culture to support economy	Cherwell District Council Cultural Strategy Steering Group	Commission an Economic Impact Study to quantify the impact of Banbury's cultural organisations and their activities on the local economy. Work with key partners to demonstrate the impact of increasing the contribution that culture can make in place-shaping and developing the town's economy.	Place: Destination Place: Economy	3 Months
Activity alignments & mapping	Cultural Strategy Steering Group	Steering group to coordinate mapping of cultural organisations' activities to identify alignments with strategy aims, and opportunities for future alignment, coordination and collaboration of activity to amplify overall impact.	All themes	
Continue to work with key stakeholders to identify opportunities to develop cultural	Relevant individual organisations and local authority stakeholders	The Mill Arts Centre relocation and expansion to incorporate developing a larger scale town centre theatre / performance venue in response to consultation feedback. Town centre library development including new digital services.	Place: Facilities	

Action	Lead	Delivery	Theme	Timeline
facilities, venues and assets.		<p>People's Theatre Collective development of a self-curated Young People's Cultural Enterprise Centre in Castle Quay.</p> <p>Opportunities to identify smaller spaces and/or meanwhile use to develop rehearsal spaces or making spaces.</p> <p>Opportunities to develop digital media suites.</p> <p>Supporting local small venues (pubs, cafes) to offer performance opportunities for emerging artists.</p> <p>Support St Mary's Church to make more connections to local organisations who might want to use their venue and raise awareness.</p>		
Map the inclusion of the range of communities resident in Banbury	Cultural Strategy Steering Group	Twice per year, map where communities are being successfully engaged with and where there may be communities not yet engaged. Devise strategy and action plan to connect with those not yet engaged. Explore commonalities through culture.	People: Inclusion	
Make use of annual festivals and events to introduce strategic developments and raise awareness.	October Canal Festival (annual) and Tell Your Story (biennial)	<p>Use key annual events as an opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> involve communities that have not been connected with promote the Culture Strategy priorities try out new initiatives etc. <p>Work with Festival and event organisers to build new offers in to their programmes and evaluate their impact. This in turn will inform development into cultural organisations programmes.</p>	<p>Place: Destination</p> <p>Partnerships: Collaborative</p>	
Work with town centre stakeholders to support sense of	Cultural Strategy Steering Group	Explore how the methodology for the successful "village greens" project by People's Theatre Collective could be applied to the town	<p>Place: Destination</p> <p>Place: Identity</p>	

Action	Lead	Delivery	Theme	Timeline
belonging to the town.		centre, to develop connections and ownership within surrounding communities.	People: Inclusion.	
Explore the appetite for developing Culture Days for schools	Task group to be identified	Test the demand for an initiative to hold an annual Culture Day which invites students and parents/guardians from all schools to meet local arts organisations, connect with them and find out what they have to offer for children and young people.	People: Children and Young People Partnerships: Collaborative	
Keep up to date on available resources and funding opportunities that could support cultural activity, and identify how they can be accessed to support Strategy.	Cultural Strategy Steering Group / Cherwell District Council	Steering Group shares opportunities they have identified at group meetings. Link these to where they fit the Strategy themes. Identify an appropriate task group to take action. For example, S106 funds; new ACE funds or government initiatives.	All Strategy themes	
Develop a website page for the Cultural Strategy which can be updated with current projects.	Marketing task group (to be identified). Website host to be identified.	Promote the Cultural Strategy widely with a link to the website page, encouraging people to see what is in progress and enabling them to link in with projects and appreciate the scale and scope of the cultural offer.	Partnerships: Collaborative	
Launch a public conversation about the Cultural Identity of Banbury.	Cultural Strategy Steering Group / marketing task	The cultural identity of Banbury is still confused in the public perception. Launch an ongoing conversation through media communications and at events to explore this with the public. Feed this into an ongoing marketing process for Banbury.	Place: Identity	

Action	Lead	Delivery	Theme	Timeline
	group (to be identified)	This could be delivered through a creative project, for example planned wall art project by Quays Consortium		
Hold an annual Cultural Strategy review day, inviting all cultural organisations (professional and voluntary)	Task group (to be identified – this could be the local NPOs)	To share achievements, progress, and look at new challenges or opportunities. Involves the wider sector and continues momentum, this could be aligned with an existing event for example Canal Festival.	People: Engagement	
Map the provision of artform education and opportunities for children and young people.	Cultural Strategy Steering Group	Consultation has shown that some artforms (performing arts) are relatively well provided, whereas others have low provision for children and young people. Map where the gaps are and devise strategies to bring in and develop artform skills in Banbury. Focus on one artform at a time.	People: Children and Young People Partnerships: Collaborative	
An aspiration for future years is for cultural organisations to support creative careers routes.	Cultural Strategy Steering Group	A longer term ambition is for cultural organisations to identify ways in which they can support creative careers within Banbury, such as increasing freelance opportunities and providing work placements. Identify opportunities arising from local developments, for example proposed Puy Du Fou park in Bicester in order to leverage opportunities for supporting individuals to aspire to careers within the creative industries locally.	Place: Economy	

Action	Lead	Delivery	Theme	Timeline
Identify targets and measures.	Cultural Strategy Steering Group	Targets and measures will be identified by the Cultural Strategy Steering Group to evaluate activities undertaken. This will ensure that all partners are clear on the impact that activities intend to make.	All themes	Ongoing

List of Appendices

Appendix 1	Audience Profiles
Appendix 2	Banbury List of Cultural Assets and organisations
Appendix 3	Banbury Vision 2050 Cultural Workshop Report
Appendix 4	PTC Consultation with young people report
Appendix 5	Banbury Education Survey summary
Appendix 6	Case for Culture Supporting Economic Development
Appendix 7	Banbury Public Survey summary