

Medway Cultural Strategy

2020 – 2030

Foreword from Strategy Drafting Group

Somehow, we found ourselves putting up our hands and volunteering our time to work with GJG Consultancy on the first draft of the Strategy: to take all the incredible conversations that have happened during the first Open Space event at the Corn Exchange and all the strategy theme sessions and shape them into a collective voice we feel the whole of Medway can be proud of.

Only a couple of people in the drafting group work for organisations, one of us is an engineer. The remainder are freelance practitioners operating as sole traders or small companies across film, fashion, theatre, literature, visual arts, education and heritage.

We didn't know one another particularly well when we started but we have gathered on more Zoom meetings with Ruth and with each other than we care to remember. We have even had homework, quite a lot of homework...

What none of us expected when the first draft dropped into our inboxes was to feel so moved when we read it

In this strategy the consultants have captured our need as a Medway community to find new ways to share our resources and to care for one another and this place in a fair, totally inclusive, kind and open way.

This is a fresh start full of hope and aspiration.
Now it is time for every one of us to work together to make it a reality.

Aidan Dooley, Alex Cameron, Christian Caruana, David Stokes, Fiona Watts, Jatin Patel, Kate Mechedou, Lucy Medhurst, Margherita Gramegna, Miriam Dooley and Sam Rapp.

Medway Cultural Strategy Drafting Group

Foreword from Medway Council

Medway is at a crucial point of its creative journey and has the chance to make a lasting change.

There are significant opportunities offered to us on many fronts; through our regeneration ambition, our economic potential, our geographical advantage, our bid to become UK City of Culture in 2025 and our aspiration to become a Child-Friendly City. As Medway Council, we want to advance access for all of our residents to the wealth of culture on their doorsteps, create opportunities for all, for children and young people to be able to consider a sustainable career in the arts, to nurture a sustainable creative economy through support for businesses, the growth of the night-time and digital economies and so much more. All this is underpinned by the recognition and importance of protecting the strong sense of place, as the foundation to build strong, healthy and resilient communities.

Heralding unprecedented levels of collaboration and integration, and as a fully committed cultural partner, we aim to embed culture within our priorities, developing a consistent cross-council approach to culture. This will be a framework for us to work with partners, to understand, promote and secure Medway's cultural and creative landscape now and for future generations.

We would like to thank the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England, and all our creative partners for their support in developing this bold and authentic ambition.

Cllr Howard Doe

Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services



Introduction

Medway's Cultural Strategy is ambitious and forward-thinking, setting the foundations for the next decade of our cultural development. To achieve our vision, we will adopt a radical framework, the Creative Medway Delivery Model, that puts our people at its centre.

Our Strategy is a response to the world we live in, and to the one we want to play a part in creating. It builds on what is already here to make Medway stronger and more resilient. It takes a long-term view because making a difference to the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the belief that when people's voices are heard, powerful and meaningful change can take place.

Our Cultural Strategy is aspirational – with a broad vision which reflects the highest hopes for our place and our people. It puts artists, makers, storytellers and cultural influencers at its centre as the agents of change.

Where are we now?

This is a pivotal moment for Medway; we are ready and able to make a step change in terms of cultural ambition and reach – locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. The next decade will see Medway grow as a creative centre, using its array of cultural assets – existing, hidden and new.

There are many factors that make Medway well placed to develop our cultural ecosystem further and fulfil these ambitions. These include our great location and transport links, our history of creative innovation, and the existing cultural programmes, buildings, public spaces and talent.

Alongside our universities, galleries, museums, theatres, libraries and community hubs, we are home to makers and creators, film sets and festivals, spaces and studios. Yet the sector lacks connectivity and we are an area where arts engagement has been below the national average for some time. This is something we need to turn around.

How will we get there?

This Cultural Strategy shows how important culture and creativity are to our collective future. It foresees everyone having the opportunity to take part in and contribute to, our cultural life. In the short term, it will shape opinions and behaviours, and lead to social and economic benefits. Longer-term, it will transform Medway.

The delivery of the Strategy will be led by Creative Medway, a new and radical partnership that embodies the Values of the Strategy, driving our ambition and the overall delivery of the Strategy; it will be a strong advocate for Medway's culture, at a local, regional and national level, and provides everyone with the opportunity to support the delivery of its vision. Consultation lies at the heart of both the partnership and this new Medway Cultural Strategy.



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Vision

By 2030 Medway will be internationally recognised for its creativity and culture, exemplifying the positive impacts on everyone's lives. Diverse, collaborative and engaged, we will celebrate the strengths and creativity of all our residents.

By 2030 culture will be central to Medway: it will be how we show the rest of the world how proud we are of our home.

Every person has the right to cultural participation and its many benefits. To achieve our vision, we will ensure these opportunities are open to everyone nurturing the positive impact that culture has on other sectors – health and wellbeing, education, regeneration, community cohesion and civic pride.

Our cultural sector is diverse and exciting, reflecting the strengths and creativity of all our places and people. The way we work together makes Medway's brand of culture unique and we will achieve our vision by creating diverse, sustainable partnerships sharing our successes with the world..

Our Themes and Values

Our Cultural Strategy has five thematic areas and is guided by six Key Values. These are core to everything we set out to do.

The Themes are the essential elements that provide the Strategy's structure, support and boundaries. In these sit the high-level business plans that form the basis for the Strategy's delivery. Each Theme has a vision that addresses, challenges or builds on opportunities present today.

The Values shape and guide how we deliver the Cultural Strategy and maintain focus over the next ten years.

Taken together, if we excel in these areas, we will achieve our overall vision.

Medway Cultural Strategy 2020-2030

Values and Themes



Values

We work in partnership

We are generous, open and creative, understanding the needs of others, respecting boundaries and always looking for positives. Progress will come from our collective effort, imagination and generosity.

New sorts of conversations will have to happen – about collective needs and wishes, about roles and responsibilities and about the fair and effective use of resources. This makes the Strategy a collective vision and sets a goal of working together.

We are strategic and think long-term

We think strategically, considering the long-term implications in everything we do. As we plan for 2030 and beyond, we will need leadership, guided by our Values, to provide a consistent sense of direction whilst building ownership of the Strategy. This gives direction, consistency and oversight to the Strategy.

Our actions are environmentally sustainable

We recognise our role in leading change and promoting environmental responsibility. We will consider both the present and future impact of our actions on the environment and make plans to reduce our impact and to measure, understand and report on doing so. This ensures our Strategy is sustainable and environmentally responsible.

We enhance inclusion and access for all

We must reflect all the people of Medway, respect difference and recognise that diversity is an asset and a major opportunity, the source of new ideas and innovation. This is not just about who we are as people, but also socio-economic and geographical factors. It challenges us to remove barriers to participation, tackle disadvantage and ensure that any bias is observed and corrected.

This ensures inclusion, equality of access and participation, alongside equality of opportunity, but also promotes innovation.

We recognise that culture is integral to wellbeing and health

We recognise that culture brings a host of benefits and impacts on people's lives every day, holistically supporting their emotional, physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual wellbeing.

This lets us show how we contribute to a wider health and wellbeing agenda and underlines the practical benefits of culture.

We evaluate impact before we move on

We employ a cycle of designing, testing, analysing and refining to make sure this Strategy can respond to change. Over the ten-year lifetime of this Strategy, many factors may influence change in Medway and this cycle builds in flexibility, learning and responsiveness to new challenges.

A group of dancers in traditional Indian attire, featuring bright yellow and blue saris with gold borders, are performing on a stage. They are captured in a dynamic pose, with their long skirts swirling around them. The background is dark, with stage lights creating a dramatic atmosphere. The word "Themes" is overlaid in large white text across the center of the image.

Themes

Connectivity

By 2030 Medway's cultural sector is fully connected, physically, digitally and philosophically.

Creatives and cultural organisations will feel part of, and have strong links with, Medway's diverse communities. They will have a voice in Medway's cultural future. There will be close links between different artforms, creative disciplines and wider sectors locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.



Challenges and opportunities

- Medway's cultural and creative sector must be more connected and communicate better with other sectors and places.
- There is a need to build new and strategic connections with different sectors.
- Creative Medway enables a more inclusive approach encouraging give-and-take, kindness and trustworthiness within communities.
- Medway is a member of sub-regional, regional and national initiatives that should be further developed.

Delivering the Theme

- Offering clear ways of getting involved: through the Theme Working Groups, open meetings, facilitated in a style which enhances inclusion, or the Creative Congress mailing lists and meetings.
- Coming together regularly to informally share and generate ideas and annually reviewing the Strategy, through Open Space sessions, which allows everyone to contribute to the development of the cultural agenda.
- Through new strategic partnerships, creating a shared understanding of the ways in which cultural investment can add value to education and the economy and can enhance social wellbeing.
- Through openly sharing what we intend to do and what we have achieved, we will encourage others to join in and find their own connections.

Shared Ambition

By 2030 we are recognised for our world leading approach to cultural delivery, and creatives locally and internationally want to make and share work in Medway.

We have achieved this by the way we work together – leading the UK in the level of community buy-in to cultural strategy, and the commitment to making all feel involved and engaged. Culture is intrinsic to our place-making and enhances wellbeing through the unique work inspired and developed through these approaches.



© Alex Brenner

Challenges and opportunities

- Medway has a history of producing world class work; its rich heritage can be an inspiration in the development of future work so we can become internationally recognised for producing work with, and for, our diverse cultures.
- Our position “on the edge” of Kent, of London, the South East and Europe, gives Medway people a distinct ‘fringe’ perspective when viewing the world.
- There is a need for more clarity and shared ownership of our goals.
- Medway’s City of Culture 2025 bid should mirror the values and ambitions identified in this Strategy, using the new collective ways of working as a core resource in winning the bid.

Delivering the Theme

- Working together on the Medway City of Culture 2025 bid, we can use the bidding process as a platform for our growth, not the ceiling of success. We will explore what makes Medway unique and how it can build on this, creating focus and aspiration.
- Planning, developing and producing specific opportunities for large scale events that excite and inspire, creating shared benefit and maximising potential as part of our Vision.
- Developing the ‘Medway Principles’, to share and create agreement on what excellence in cultural delivery looks like for Medway.
- Nurturing selfless and enlightened leadership within the Creative Medway delivery model and beyond, that looks to the collective benefit for all, beyond short-term individual interests.
- Building consensus amongst all stakeholders on the value of cultural investment and strategically plan for long-term delivery.

Spaces and Places

By 2030 Medway has numerous spaces, accessible to all, to design, make and share, and engage with culture.

Beacon Spaces shine out from Medway whilst rooted in their communities. Medway works with partners in the region and beyond to enhance opportunities for inward investment to support spaces for culture.

Throughout their careers, creatives have appropriate spaces, at a variety of scales, that are protected for their social, economic and community value.

© Margherita Gramegna



Challenges and opportunities

- Medway needs more spaces where people can collaborate to design, test, scale and engage with imaginative and enterprising ideas together.
- Medway particularly lacks affordable spaces for the creative sector. Culture is very vulnerable to rises in land values following urban regeneration.
- Managing and supporting these valuable, but fragile, communities is challenging, but crucial.
- Creative spaces should be recognised as assets of social, economic and community value, not just temporary solutions.
- Creative spaces need a wide geography to broaden engagement.
- Cultural delivery needs to happen in spaces and places which are inclusive, where the people we hope to reach can easily find out about it and access it.
- Culture can create a vibrant, diverse night-time economy, and plays a vital role in reclaiming underused in-between spaces and filling in-between times.

Delivering the Theme

- Supporting and developing work that investigates and demonstrates the economic, social and cultural benefits of creative workspaces.
- Encouraging the development of sustainable models.
- Producing long term plans to secure and develop new spaces within Medway for creative practice.
- Developing a resource bank with shared resources both for making spaces accessible and for providing training and skills sharing.
- Defining, identifying and developing Beacon Spaces that can both shine out from Medway and be rooted within their local communities.
- Exploring and piloting design-led vibrant night-time spaces in the town centres.

Creative People

By 2030 everyone's creativity is recognised and supported, from their earliest moments to international collaboration and recognition.

Acknowledging the central role both of creatives and of cultural and educational organisations in the creative ecosystem. A whole life approach is taken that welcomes new talent and supports existing creatives with what each needs at any time. There is a culture of mentoring and curating pathways and opportunities for everyone wishing to broaden or deepen their making, watching or participation in cultural activity. This leads to a stronger economy for Medway as a whole.

© Simon Kelsey



Challenges and opportunities

- We must recognise the gaps in the creative ecosystem, understanding that there are varying levels of support needed for creative people and organisations through different stages of their career and life.
- There is a lack of transparency and universal knowledge of development opportunities which includes progression funding support, micro-grants and other support mechanisms for grassroots culture.
- We should nurture young people from early years up within formal and informal education through a creative curriculum which offers inclusive value.
- Homegrown and new-to-Medway talent can be retained and attracted with the development of post-16 opportunities.
- There are wider regional and sub-regional groups which can offer support for Medway creatives.
- Professional development can link Medway to the rest of the world, providing opportunities to collaborate and to promote Medway.

Delivering the Theme

- Reviewing existing resources, projects and funding sources to highlight gaps in support for the whole ecosystem.
- Making training and development opportunities available based on a cross-generational principle, linking Medway's array of existing talent with the next generation.
- Embedding the principles of this Strategy within schools and youth provision locally.
- Developing and promoting new and existing 'pathways' for the development for creatives, as well as supporting them to choose and develop their own career paths within Medway.
- Taking a transparent approach to all major cultural provision and spend.
- Developing the opportunity for major stakeholders to test new development ideas involving the creative and cultural sector through Theme Working Groups and informal networks.

Community Engagement

By 2030 all of Medway's communities have access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences and opportunities, and everyone has their creativity and diversity valued and given the chance to flourish.

Communities know they have a voice and are architects of the projects that happen locally. Community engagement is recognised as a collective ambition, central to culture, the responsibility of all, and the core around which we galvanise our cross-sector partnership approach.



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Challenges and opportunities

- We are not currently reaching into all parts of the diverse Medway communities.
- Engagement in culture in Medway is currently lower than regional averages.
- Medway has a number of creative practitioners who deliver high quality engagement work with communities across Medway. However, work is often project-based and fragmented.
- Increasing engagement from communities needs to be a long-term activity.
- Increasing engagement in culture can unlock the potential benefits of developing pride of place and driving aspiration and change.
- Community engagement should be a collective ambition; by reaching out collectively we can engage the widest range of audiences and participants.
- In ensuring acceptance and respect, we can move beyond simple tolerance to embrace the rich diversity of individuals and communities across Medway.

Delivering the Theme

- Setting up a shared way to communicate who is doing what and in which communities.
- Auditing the skills within the communities we work with so that they can be recognised and used if they wish.
- Developing a programme of engagement and visible culture, developing arts and culture beyond traditional spaces to our streets and parks and open spaces.
- Establishing metrics that ensure that success and value is measured as much in terms of the breadth and diversity of who engages as in numbers of attendances.
- Working together to link the wider culture and community groups with business, education, regeneration, health and other sectors across Medway.



What's next

Medway's Cultural Strategy will be delivered through **Creative Medway**, a unique and radical framework that puts the people of Medway at the centre of shaping and delivering culture. Creative Medway is open to everyone and at a level and to a degree which suits them best.

The **Creative Congress** is a broad group, open to all interested in culture in Medway. In addition to receiving information and invitations to activities, it meets annually to review, reflect and plan.

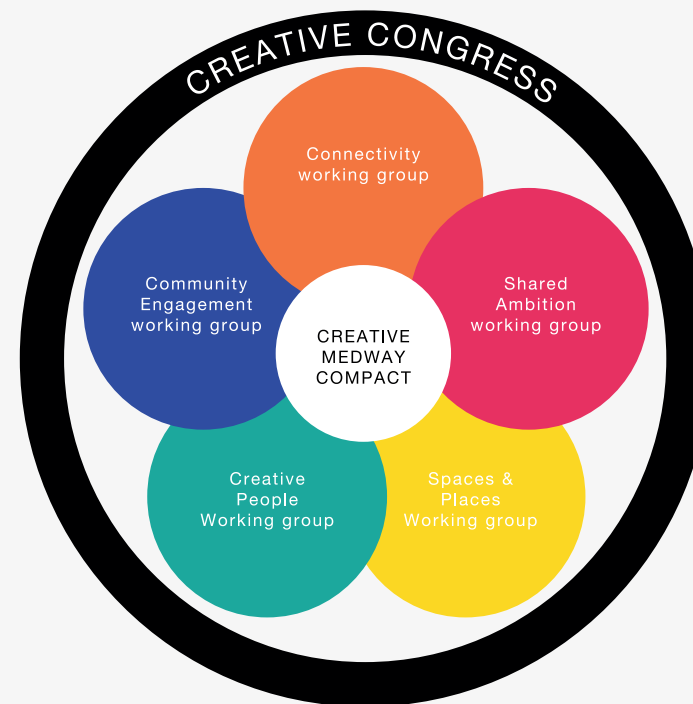
The five **Theme Working Groups** each have members interested in developing or delivering on the work strand for each Theme. Clear Terms of Reference, a Code of Conduct, and defined roles, will help ensure the smooth running of the groups. In particular, we seek to ensure that the right people are in the room, and that no one is there for their own ends.

The core of the delivery mechanism is the **Creative Medway Compact**. This Group acts to:

- Coordinate the Themes
- Monitor the overall performance of delivery of the Strategy
- Broker strategic partnerships with other sectors and advocate for Medway's culture, both within Medway, regionally and nationally.

The membership of this group is made up of the five Working Group Theme Champions, five key stakeholders from other sectors, a Facilitator and the Creative Medway Chair.

Medway's Cultural Strategy will remain relevant and rooted in the local community through an ongoing cycle of setting objectives, planning, delivering activities, assessing results, reviewing and then setting new objectives. This process allows for consultation, engagement and clarity, and creates a shared desire to deliver.



Action Plans will link to each Theme and be carried out on a three-year basis. This provides flexibility and fits with the changing circumstances (following an initial transition action plan of 18 months to cover the Covid19 recovery period). Evaluation will involve:

- Review against clear measures linked to the Action Plans.
- Ensuring our Values remain active and central by doing a self-critique of every proposed project against the 'Values checklists' developed.
- Annual reflective review sessions during the Creative Congress meet-up and Theme Working Group meetings.

The Creative Medway Compact will oversee review and reflection, and it will ensure Medway's Cultural Strategy runs to time.

Medway's Cultural Strategy is for all the people of Medway. Visit medwayculturalstrategy.co.uk to see how you can get involved in helping to achieve our shared vision.



This Strategy was produced in consultation with, and has the ownership of, the cultural sector in Medway and key stakeholders.

Particular input came from sector volunteers in the Drafting Group:

Aidan Dooley, Alex Cameron, Christian Caruana, David Stokes, Fiona Watts, Jatin Patel, Kate Mechedou, Lucy Medhurst, Margherita Gramegna, Miriam Dooley and Sam Rapp.

This Strategy was funded using public funding by Arts Council England and Medway Council and consultation was delivered by GJG Consultancy supported by Ruth Melville Research and The Audience Agency.

This strategy should be read in conjunction with the full Strategy Report, the earlier Consultation Research Report, and within the context of the Action Plans created by each Theme Working Group.

These documents can be accessed via medwayculturalstrategy.co.uk.



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