

REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 JANUARY 2022

ATTENDANCE OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Portfolio Holder: Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe
Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive

Summary

This report sets out progress made within the areas covered by the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services Councillor Doe which fall within the remit of this Committee.

1. Background

1.1 The areas within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee covered by the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services Councillor Doe are:

- Archives
- Armed Forces Covenant
- Events and Festivals
- Greenspaces
- Heritage
- Leisure Services
- Sporting Legacy
- Theatres and Arts
- Tourism

1.2 Achievements for 2021 are detailed by service area below.

2. Medway Archives Centre

2.1 [Medway Archives Centre](#) (MAC) continues to be the core location for any resident who is keen to explore the history of Medway and its people.

- 2.2 MAC gradually reopened to the public at 'step 2' of the 'roadmap out of lockdown' (opening of non-essential retail) in April and is now offering a full service at normal opening hours with drop-in and pre-booked visits.
- 2.3 MAC have hosted several onsite exhibitions, curated by staff and external partners:
- 'Pestilence to contagion: plague to COVID-19' examined the diseases and viruses that have affected Medway in the past.
 - 'Health matters: corridors of care' looked at the histories of institutions which provided comfort and care in Medway from the 16th century through to the 20th century.
 - 'The Medway Heritage Bus: Bringing the past alive' by the Friends of Chatham Traction.
 - 'Industry on the Medway: A Photographic Display' a photographic exhibition by our Kickstart Digital Archive Assistants.
- 2.4 ['Pestilence to contagion: plague to COVID-19'](#) and ['Health matters: corridors of care'](#) exhibitions were also available online alongside research guides for researching your house history, researching non-conformist history, and we have forthcoming guides on the newspaper collections at MAC and researching Medway's industrial history.
- 2.5 MAC's online resources have continued to be popular, with around 12,000 unique page views to the online archive catalogue, which provides free online access to historic parish registers, a rich family history source, and over 25,000 unique page views to our 'Medway Images' website of historic local photographs.
- 2.6 Between April and the end of October we have answered over 900 enquiries from remote users, who contact us in writing or by phone. These enquiries can range in duration from a minimum of 15 minutes, to answer a basic enquiry, to an hour for more detailed research enquiries.
- 2.7 We've helped with over 25 internal enquiries from Medway Council colleagues in the Planning Service, Communications, Libraries, Regeneration, Adult Education, and Greenspaces that have involved research, provided copies of documents, or facilitated onsite access to collection material.
- 2.8 We have continued to support Council-run/partner projects such as Gillingham Women, High Street Heritage Action Zone and Adult Education in the delivery of important projects across Medway.
- 2.9 MAC has hosted two young people under the Kickstart scheme between April and October, creating work placements for Digital Archive Assistants. The two assistants did fantastic work on listing and digitising sections of the Local Studies Photographic Collection, that included the 'Industry on the

Medway' exhibition and on transferring our digital records currently held only on 'removable media' (CDs, DVDs, external hard drives). MAC has been digitising material since 2005 and owns a large collection of digital records. It is important that we proactively look after these and have workflows in place for bringing new digital records (such as digital photographs) into the collections. This proactive approach to managing your digital records is called digital preservation, and the ultimate aim is to ensure that digital records remain accessible and usable over time. In the six months that Digital Archive Assistants ensured that over 50,000 records, previously held on CDs and other removable media, were logged and backed-up, to ensure other copies of the records exist in case of any disk failures. We are hoping to get another two Kickstart placement employees in 2022 to continue this work and to help with archive cataloguing.

- 2.10 A survey of our remote users, conducted between April and July, showed the overall satisfaction with Medway Archives Centre amongst users is high. Over 83% of respondents scored their overall experience as 'good' and 'very good'. A selection of comments from the survey is below:

"It is very nice to get a personalised response from someone who has obviously gone to the trouble to research an individual query for which I am grateful as it always brings forth information I did not know before, even though I have been doing family history for twenty-five years now so please keep on with your brilliant personal responses because they are most informative and very nice to experience."

"Excellent service, both in-terms of advice and speed of response, extremely helpful and knowledgeable."

- 2.11 We are very pleased to say that after many months of hard work by MAC and after formal inspection from [The National Archives](#) that Medway Archives Centre has achieved [Archive Service Accreditation](#) status. This high-profile industry award is the UK standard for archive services and recognises that the centre is providing a top quality, professional service worthy of being a place of deposit for public records and demonstrates a visible and long-term commitment to our collections.

- 2.12 The inspectional panel were very impressed by ongoing improvements at the Archives and the strong support from senior staff and elected members.

3. Armed Forces Covenant

- 3.1 Medway Council has continued to uphold the armed forces covenant and support the armed forces in line with our Employer Defence Recognition Scheme, Gold Award. This included a reservists recruitment day taking place in Gun Wharf in October 2021. Medway Council remain active participants in the Kent & Medway Civilian Military Partnership Board.
- 3.2 Medway Council also secured £10,000 to run an Armed Forces Veterans Hub, which will be a place for all veterans and their families to attend, the Hub is

being launched in November 2021 and will be co-located between Fort Amherst and MidKent College. Initial focus has been on securing support within the veteran community to ensure the hub has continued sustainability when the funding has been used.

4. Events and Festivals

4.1 From August 2021 we saw the delivery of many events as part of the Covid safe alternative programme, delivered in partnership with local organisations.

4.2 Festival at the Fort, 14 & 15 August, Fort Amherst

4.2.1 In partnership with Mid-Kent Collage [Glassbox Theatre](#) and [Fort Amherst Heritage Trust](#) the festival had 1,000 people attend in the first real festival to be held in Medway since the pandemic. The festival had a range of high-quality performances and activities in the amphitheatre and in areas around the Fort in a relaxed and family friendly atmosphere with one visitor saying:

“I have lived in Medway 30 years, and this is the first time I have come up to Fort Amherst”.

4.3 Electric Medway, 21 to 31 August, Live and online across Medway

4.3.1 In partnership with [Sparked Echo](#) and supported by Arts Council England and [Creative Estuary](#), [Electric Medway](#) delivered an ambitious ten-day programme of digital arts festival in libraries, galleries, heritage sites, cafes and online. 64 artworks and activities including virtual reality, streamed events, animation, projection and sound were enjoyed by audiences of over 14,000. The festival included a specific young people strand across our libraries, Medway Hack are a series of live play space events where you could learn about immersive technologies and five ‘Conversations’ are a collection of stimulating discussions led by local and international speakers, that explored digital culture and creativity.

4.4 Medway Festival of Literature, 21 to 28 August, Across Medway

4.4.1 Led by the Library Service the festival offered events for all ages and a mixture of performance, workshop and have-a-go events all celebrating reading and an escape into the world of the imagination. All the events were much enjoyed by those that attended. Across the 14 events that took place, many of the events were booked to capacity, with 82% capacity achieved overall.

4.5 Medway Pride, 21 August, Doust Way, Rochester

4.5.1 In partnership with [Medway Pride Community Interest Company \(CIC\)](#) and supported by Countryside and Hyde Housing over 1,000 people attended Medway’s first Pride event. The festival included a main stage with high-quality performances including Drag Race UK star River Medway, arts and

craft workshops, over 30 stalls from local services and organisations including Kent Police and Kent Fire and Rescue. The festival also had activities taking place around the main event including LGBT+ history walks, an exhibition at Intra Arts that was also part of Electric Medway and a comedy night and river trips.

4.5.2 The festival generated regional and local television and radio coverage.

4.6 [Gillingham POW!](#), 28 August to 31 October, Gillingham High Street

4.6.1 This Gillingham High Street take over was in partnership with Medway artists [Wendy Dawes](#) and [Mark Barnes](#). It launched on 28 August; Wendy and Mark along with other nine other local artists created a public gallery that fills the high street with artworks themed on:

- Local legends and heroes
- Everything that makes Gillingham special.

4.6.2 Each piece has been specially commissioned to bring this exciting new cultural offering. The artworks were available to see from Saturday 28 August 2021 in and around Gillingham High Street.

4.7 Welcome to Cloisterham, 30 August, Rochester Castle Gardens

4.7.1 In partnership with [Wordsmithery](#) this was a free day-long celebration of Charles Dickens' life and work with a 21st century twist. This relaxed, bring-a-picnic event attended by 2,500 people took place in the Castle Gardens at Rochester on a rather cold and grey Bank Holiday Monday.

4.7.2 The programme was made up of an exciting line-up of prize-winning writers and poets who delighted audiences performing over four distinct areas of the gardens. There were lots of activities for children including puppet making, Anne Pratt's Botanical Tattoo Studio and a Dickens themed treasure hunt. We await the final evaluation report, but one visitor commented:

"The event was exceptionally well planned and executed with a refreshing approach to a classic literature figure."

4.8 Rochester Castle Concerts, 17 to 19 September, Rochester Castle Gardens

4.8.1 Rochester Castle Concerts were delivered by [AGMP](#) for the first time after being delayed 4 times because of the pandemic. Over 11,000 people attended the three concerts. There were some issues with counter-terrorism barriers and road closures around the castle with Traffic Management and Events teams having to work closely with the promoters to rectify some issues. Social media response has been very positive about customers experiences of this new model of delivery and even though there have been many lessons learnt, the promoters are keen to build on their experience and move forward with plans for future years.

4.9 Festival of Chatham Reach, 18 & 19 September, The River Medway and Sun Pier House

4.9.1 In partnership with [Sun Pier House](#) and [Tiller and Wheel](#), this wonderful event had a country fayre atmosphere that focused on the heritage of River Medway and river vessels, with activities located alongside and on Sun Pier in Chatham. Over 4,000 attended the festival with over 650 free trips with Edith May and Jet Stream Tours, and over 100 people went on four fully booked river heritage walks. In the lead up to the festival, 36 young people from 3 schools and a Pupil Referral Unit had a bespoke sailing trip on the Edith May sailing barge.

4.10 Medway Pavilion, TOGETHER, 24 September to 10 October, Chatham Riverside

4.10.1 In partnership with [Lucid Creates](#) and co-commissioned with [Culture Liverpool](#), Together launched on Friday 24 September. A spectacular new light art pavilion saw 200 people gathering to see the artwork illuminated; the public were asked to contribute memories of Medway which were weaved into the art piece and viewable on the video screens on the inner face of the three rings, intertwined with moving visuals.

4.11 Medway Fun Palace, 2 October, The Pentagon Centre

4.11.1 In partnership with Nucleus Arts, [Medway Fun Palace](#) is part of the [nationwide Fun Palaces programme](#) that bring together communities to create events that bring together arts and sciences. It was a fun, exciting and above all chaotic mix of activity that showcased Medway at its best, including:

- science shows
- hands-on activities
- stalls and stands
- art workshops
- interactive installations
- theatre
- flash mobs
- choirs
- dance troops.

4.11.2 The event was very successful with footfall in the Pentagon on Saturday increasing by 18% to almost 27,000, an increase of 4,000 people on the previous week.

4.11.3 Alongside this, Medway Fun Palace supported the 15 library events and distributed 5,000 magazine – based, home Fun Palaces too.

4.12 Fireworks Night, 6 November, Great Lines Heritage Park

4.12.1 The Great Lines Firework night was back with a bang this November. This year's display included a fantastic fireworks and lasers show all choreographed to music from movie soundtracks.

4.12.2 Over 25,000 people attended making it the largest crowd in the last ten years.

5. Theatres

5.1 In March 2020 the international pandemic closed down theatres across the globe including The Central and The Brook. The resourceful Theatres Team continued to be creative in the delivery of services and worked collaboratively with other teams to deliver essential services to residents.

5.2 As the impact of Covid-19 took hold, the Theatres Team had the daunting task of contacting around 7,600 customers to manage over 32,000 tickets for 116 shows and had amazing feedback from customers.

5.3 Alongside this, The Brook Theatre became a centre for food and PPE distribution. With Public Health and Category Management, the Theatres Team controlled and allocated PPE and supported the successful food package programme. The Theatres technical team also supported the library service filming of story-times and digital content for their customers; and staff were also redeployed and worked for Customer Services, Registrars, Revs and Bens, Public Health, Environmental Health, processed small business grant applications, facilitated the use of venues as pop-up testing centres and supported Operation Stack and Medway Greeters.

5.4 In the summer of 2021, The Central Theatre stage was opened for professional rehearsals. This allowed Medway creatives to rehearse and develop their work with the support of the theatres technical team.

5.5 During August, The Brook Theatre successfully worked with external partners to deliver summer workshops to over 100 young people aged between 5 and 18; and in line with the government guidelines we were able to allow showcases which parents attended at the end of each weeklong workshop.

5.6 The first public event at The Brook Theatre was the first City Hall event for Child Friendly Medway, attended by over 100 young people and was very well received. The Theatre staff continue to support and work with the Child Friendly Medway.

5.7 Since opening in mid-September the theatres have seen over 14,000 customers return to see 38 shows that included comedy from John Bishop and Jason Mansford, music shows from Boyzlife and Whitney Queen of the Night, and community hire show of Annie.

5.8 The Brook Theatre in line with COVID-19 compliance's, hosted educational dance and drama classes in a socially distanced manner, and from September 2021 classes resumed at full capacity.

- 5.9 Since room hire at the theatres has re-started at full capacity, we have a new mental health support group and a children's drama group using the venue.
- 5.10 The energy reduction Re:Fit programme will invest reduced energy lighting and heating in The Brook and Central Theatres, works on this is expected to start in early 2022.
- 5.11 After the Future High Streets and Levelling Up Fund awards, an unprecedented £6.8million will be invested in The Brook Theatre over the next three years.
- 5.12 Our vision is that The Brook will be the heart of a new vibrant city centre, leading the growth in Chatham's evening and weekend economy. The Brook will be an inclusive and accessible city centre destination, offering an amazing public programme of performances and workshops inside and out that brings together new residential riverside living, animated public space filled with markets, events and public art and exciting food and social experiences.
- 5.13 The Brook will play a vital role in the growth of Medway's cultural infrastructure and creative sector. It's remodelling, refurbishment and future proofing will cultivate a flexible and mutually supportive environment where emerging and thriving creative businesses can flourish. The creative community will have access to contemporary, affordable office and co-working facilities alongside digitally enhanced rehearsal and performance spaces to develop their practice and enhance their business.
- 5.14 It is important to note that the speed of progress, and therefore timelines, could be impacted by the ongoing Covid-19 situation and future guidelines set by Central Government. As a result of the work that went into planning and responding throughout 2020 and 2021, Medway is in a strong position to react to any such changes, and the situation is monitored regularly.

6. The Rochester Corn Exchange

- 6.1 The Rochester Corn Exchange is recovering well following the pandemic and held its first function since easing of full restrictions on 1 August 2021. Following the Governments lifting of all restrictions the enquiry rate for hires has increased significantly. Guests are returning to the venue in larger numbers enabling family groups and friends to celebrate their life events as they had hoped.
- 6.2 The bar provision has been completely re-evaluated and now offers an even wider selection of premium and house alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. The demand for adult non-alcoholic drinks is ever increasing and the bar has introduced a selection of zero alcohol beers and ciders as a result. To compliment the high-class venue a range of champagnes are now available to purchase.

- 6.3 The capital investment programme of £470,000 is now complete and the venue has been successfully transformed, keeping its elegant characteristics and charm. The building has benefitted from updated audio visual and Wi-Fi provision allowing the venue to compete with other business and meeting venues.
- 6.4 A new five-year business plan for the Rochester Corn Exchange has been developed that positions the venue as an exclusive location for weddings, business events and celebrations. A new brand has been developed that connects a new website and digital assets with traditional marketing, alongside a strong public relations plan to ensure the venue is strategically positioned in this competitive market.
- 6.5 The Rochester Corn Exchange launched its own [dedicated website](#) in May 2021, allowing the venue to reach a greater number of potential clients whilst aligning itself with industry competitors. Website users are increasing with data being collated monthly in relation to how people are using the site and most popular pages.
- 6.6 The Rochester Corn Exchange is active across both Facebook and Instagram which allows a greater number of people to access information whilst using their own social media channels. As a result, the venue has benefitted from a greater amount of indirect marketing and promotion from suppliers, hirers and their guests.
- 6.7 The Rochester Corn Exchange has recently been awarded [AiM accreditation](#) through the [Meeting Industry Association](#). This accreditation is the UK's only recognized quality standard for the meetings industry. AiM undertakes checks for legal compliance; enforces a strict code of conduct and assesses facilities. AiM accreditation is the trusted measure of standards for conference and meeting facilities and suppliers to the industry. When accredited the venue has passed checks to ensure that we are demonstrating operational excellence and commitment to continuous improvement.

7. Culture Development

- 7.1 The Culture Development Team supports and works in partnership with artists, companies, organisations and internal departments from across the Council to enable them to deliver creative projects and activities that form part of Medway's cultural offer. By nurturing and developing the cultural and creative sector, we also ensure that our communities have access to a high quality, meaningful and diverse cultural offer.

Rochester Art Gallery

- 7.2 In 2021, Rochester Art Gallery rose to the challenges presented by Covid-19 lockdowns and turned them to our advantage.
- 7.3 '*Pattern & Beyond*' - The gallery re-opened on 18 May with a pop-up show of printed textiles by BA and MA students from UCA, who had sadly missed the

opportunity to show their final coursework because of the pandemic. The exhibition also provided a timely tonic for students, staff and the creative sector as they processed the news that UCA would be leaving Medway. The gallery saw encouragingly high footfall figures – more than 700 in the three weeks the exhibition was open.

- 7.4 *'Last Dream of My Soul'* - The long-awaited exhibition ran from 26 June to 26 September – the result of the Dickens150 Print Open Call competition where entrants were asked to respond to themes of Dickens, Death and Dood. Originally planned to mark the 150th anniversary of Dickens' death in June 2020, the show's 50 artists created 100 individual artworks for the exhibition. During the exhibition we partnered with Wordsmithery and their Empty Chair Dickens literary trail, hosting a poetry reading event, and Electric Medway who commissioned a digital soundscape. Jeremy Clarke, Education Officer at the Guildhall Museum also made a great film to accompany the show.
- 7.5 *'All That Remains - Thirty Years in the Making'* - The current exhibition by Neil Bottle takes us to the end of the year and explores family stories, nostalgia and memories using exquisitely layered, cutting-edge digital design and precious fragments of the artist's archive of family photographs. Neil Bottle is the programme director of printed textiles for fashion and interiors at UCA. As well as the artworks a range of scarves and cushions by the artist are available for sale.
- 7.6 *'Unknown Soldier'* is our first exhibition for 2022 by David Tovey. This powerful exhibition shares his personal experiences of homelessness, mental and physical health difficulties and addiction, as a former member of the armed forces. We are working closely with the Housing Team, Homelessness organisations, Royal Engineers and Public Health, to build an engagement programme of education, inclusion and support around this exhibition.

Medway Print Festival 2021

- 7.7 The Culture Team was delighted once again to support Medway Print Festival (MPF) to happen. One of Medway's USPs is our unusually high volume of print artists, so we seek to celebrate and platform this through MPF. Normally taking place over two weeks, this year the festival took place throughout June to allow for more activity just as COVID restrictions began to ease and to accommodate exhibition schedules across multiple venues as they gradually reopened.
- 7.8 In total there were 6 exhibitions, 14 workshops across 10 venues, 11 films to be enjoyed, 130 printmakers/artists involved and more than 2000 people engaged in the festival as audience or participants.
- 7.9 In addition, some MPF budget was used to provide workshops later in the year as part of Medway Pride. Visitors were invited to print flags, badges, bags and postcards as a souvenir to keep from this colourful event in August.

- 7.10 The Culture Team will be supporting MPF 2022 with its theme around the Platinum Jubilee.

Dickens150 - The Empty Chair

- 7.11 The end of lockdown saw Wordsmithery's writing, poetry and spoken word project resume. Originally planned to mark Dickens150, the project commissioned ten professional writers to respond to places of significance to Dickens and his works. The writing has now been installed on a trail of poetry panels in the places that inspired them, including Cooling Church, Eastgate House, The Vines, The Guildhall Museum, Chatham Historic Dockyard, Gads Hill School, Chalk Village Hall. A local print artist was commissioned to produce a beautiful map for people to follow to the ten locations.
- 7.12 The poetry trail launched to coincide with The Last Dream of My Soul at Rochester Art Gallery, with Wordsmithery held a spoken word event and a writing workshop in the exhibition space. Further Empty Chair workshops and events linked to the trail are currently planned to coincide with Dickensian Christmas and the opening of the new dedicated Dickens exhibit at the Guildhall Museum. The trail remains in place until February 2022 in order to coincide with Light Nights.

Dickens150 – Medway Light Nights

- 7.13 We were successful in our application for £40,000 Arts Council England (ACE) funding to supplement the budget already committed by Medway Council for this exciting event due to take place in February 2022. We are supported by a strong strategic partnership of University of Kent ICCI, Rochester Cathedral, Ideas Test, Cohesion Plus and Ideas Test. The event will include curated and newly commissioned light-based artworks and illuminated installations inspired by Dickens life, works, contemporaries and social commentary, to be installed in the centre of Rochester. The event also includes significant engagement opportunities for schools and the wider community which have already begun in preparation for this exciting event. The project being produced by Emergency Exit Arts, will also feature small commissions from local artists, a Light Up the South conference, a special new show from Icon Theatre entitled 'If Not Now', and we have ensured that Light Nights coincides with Rochester Cathedral's showing of Luke Jerram's 'Gaia', sister show to 'Museum of the Moon'.

Theatre31

- 7.14 Theatre31 is a £1m, ACE Youth Performance Partnership Fund (YPPF) youth theatre project running across Medway and Sheppey until December 2022. Medway is one of only five places nationally to receive the funding and the programme is being delivered by Medway's Icon Theatre.
- 7.15 Theatre31 focuses on authentically co-creating impactful youth-led performance projects with partners, introducing and exploring new writing, performance and stagecraft across areas of Medway and Sheppey with low

cultural exposure, higher than average deprivation and increasing levels of social isolation.

- 7.16 2021 has seen delivery of year two of the three-year project. Delivery of activities was able to resume in-person post-lockdown, but where appropriate Icon Theatre have continued some online/digital participation opportunities, as it has been found to reduce barriers to attendance such as finance, transport, fitting in around homework and other clubs or activities. Activities have included:
- Two digital commissions *Medway Monoliths*, a digital film installation with Sparked Echo/Electric Medway, and a sea shanties project in Sheppey.
 - A digital schools programme – *Tropical Tours* which involved digitally delivered drama workshops via Zoom.
 - Open-air Drama Taster Days and Play in a Day projects in local parks over the summer holidays.
 - School assembly visits and theatre shows in playgrounds were also offered before the schools broke up for the summer.
- 7.17 These outreach offers were designed to be delivered in a Covid-safe way, outdoors in fresh air and in large spaces where distancing was possible. They were well attended and resulted in more young people signing up as new members of the Theatre Bases (weekly youth theatre clubs) that started up at the beginning of September.
- 7.18 Icon Theatre have developed links with the Medway Light Nights, HSHAZ Cultural Consortium, the Prison Library Service and D-Live to develop deaf-accessible workshop and performance opportunities. Despite the challenges of Covid, the project is performing well and has surpassed many of the performance indicators for the total three-year project in years one and two alone. Of the required 2,000 participants, they have actually worked with over 6,000. Of the three required Youth Theatre Bases, they have actually now established five.
- 7.19 Icon Theatre have been supporting Medway schools to gain Artsmark status, producing a resource pack and providing subsidies for schools wanting to sign up to gain this special status. Take-up from schools has been very positive and ACE are pleased to see culture regarded so highly by schools in Medway.
- 7.20 Icon Theatre are using their experience and evidence from their work on Theatre31 to strengthen their application to be an ACE National Portfolio Organisation.
- UK City of Culture 2025 bid
- 7.21 Throughout 2021 the Culture Team provided ongoing support to the City of Culture Bid Team. While we share everyone's disappointment at not progressing to the next stage, we firmly feel that opportunities have been afforded to Medway that we might not otherwise have enjoyed, had we not so

boldly declared our ambition to be UK City of Culture 2025. This includes our successful Levelling-Up Fund bid to the Department for Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities that granted significant capital investment to three cultural projects across Medway, the Brook Theatre, the Docking Station and stage two of the Fitted Rigging House at Chatham Historic Dockyard.

Arts Council England

- 7.22 Our ambition and our genuine belief in the value of culture has undoubtedly led to ACE naming Medway as one of ten priority places in the Southeast. One of 54 in England and only ten in the Southeast, Medway's Priority Place designation recognises the need for cultural investment, and it will give more people the opportunity to enjoy excellent cultural experiences in their communities and neighbourhoods. In the coming months ACE will work closely with us to develop new opportunities for investment, both from ACE and other partners continuing the momentum required to deliver the new cultural strategy and galvanise the future of Creative Medway.
- 7.23 The learning gained through the process of bidding for City of Culture, even to this early stage, has provided invaluable knowledge and assets that the Culture Team is now supporting Creative Medway (to receive by way of hand-over from the bid Team), in order to strengthen their work in delivering the new cultural strategy and supporting a number of Medway organisations in their applications to become ACE National Portfolio Organisations.

Cultural Strategy & Creative Medway

- 7.24 Throughout 2021, the Culture Team has supported Creative Medway, the new Cultural Compact who are leading on the delivery of the new Cultural Strategy for Medway. This has involved providing support, advice and expertise at Executive Compact meetings, Theme Group meetings (Connectivity, Creative People, Community Engagement, Spaces and Places and Shared Ambition), and one-to-one support for the Creative Medway Chair. The Culture Team has secured £45,000 from ACE and other sources to fund important next steps in the transformation of Medway through culture.

Creative Estuary

- 7.25 In early 2019 the University of Kent was awarded £4.3m (total project cost £6.7 million) on behalf of a consortium of public sector and cultural organisations, working together to support the delivery of the Thames Estuary Production Corridor (TEPC). They include the South East Local Enterprise Partnership, Kent and Essex County Councils, the Greater London Authority, 11 Local Authority areas and Opportunity South Essex, South East Creative Economy Network (SECEN), University of Kent, University of Essex, Locate in Kent and cultural organisations Metal and Cement Fields.
- 7.26 The ambition is simple: to transform 60 miles of the Thames Estuary across Essex and Kent, unlocking its potential as an international production hub and a collaborative, inspirational space for a new generation of creative talent.

- 7.27 There are several strands to the programme with key progress including:
- Creative Estuary Co-commissions - Support to develop the commissioning and producing capacity of cultural organisation across the estuary, from small scale grassroots commissions for emerging artists to large scale commissions. Alongside [Ebb & Flow Festival](#) in May the funding supported [Electric Medway](#) in August delivered an ambitious 10-day arts programme that will exist in different spaces, tell new stories, and nurture digital creativity.
 - Estuary Place Promotion - A distinctive and consistent cultural identity for [Creative Estuary](#) has been developed. The brand's vision and values have been built on feedback from stakeholder workshops and audience research studies and be fed by authentic user generated content from the people living, working and learning in the area, to ensure the brand reflects the spirit and aspirations of the Estuary's people.
- 7.28 The brand campaign will be supported by a wide-spread promotional campaign including advertising, PR, events, our website and social media channels, with a new bank of high-quality images, content and video from across the Estuary for the public and press to share.
- 7.29 The Council are looking at ways to integrate this into its own branding hierarchy.
- 7.30 Creative Asset Development – The Council are working with the Creative Estuary Team to identify buildings, spaces and development opportunities across Medway that could support creative industries of differing sizes and scales. This includes identifying a major creative production hub as part of the Thames Estuary Production Corridor feasibility study, relocating Emergency Exit Arts an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation to Medway and reviewing co-location models to further benefit future investment in community hubs and libraries.

The Docking Station

- 7.31 Part of Creative Estuary's Cultural Co-Location strand looks to establish best practice in ensuring art and culture play a key role in civic planning and placemaking; The Docking Station is a partnership project led by the University of Kent (UoK) with key partners Medway Council (MC) and Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust (CHDT).
- 7.32 The Docking Station will transform the Police Section House located on the Interface Land at the CHDT, into an environmentally sustainable, innovative and dynamic 'University of the Future'. It will unite industry, creatives, students, academics and young people in state-of-the art digital facilities, co-working space and innovative research and development space. It will offer digital skills development, knowledge exchange, and drive innovation, fuelling the growth of the Medway creative economy.

- 7.33 The project will include a significant extension of the original property that will ensure the creation and safeguarding upwards of 272 jobs, assist up to 8,000 learners, provide business support for up to 40 business, and create vital new creative workspace and R&D facilities.
- 7.34 [Feilden Clegg Bradley LLP](#) have been selected as the architects through an open design competition.

Old High Street Intra High Streets Heritage Action Zone

- 7.35 The Culture Team has helped to set up a Cultural Consortium for the High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ). This is now well established with a core group of 21 people, made up of a mixture of local artists, creative organisations, businesses, residents, community champions and local historians.
- 7.36 The Culture Team secured a £10,000 pilot grant from Historic England, enabling the set-up of the Consortium and six micro commissions including:
- *'Cathedral of Community'*, a stained-glass window project capturing the images of local residents, visitors and business owners from Intra.
 - *'Litterarma'*, a series of artworks using plastics recovered from the river
 - Medway Pride Radio, setting up this valuable local resource in the heart of Intra
 - *'Intra Poetry Trail'*, a series of QR codes which allow passers-by to listen to poems created by the community in response to the different places and history of Intra
 - *'St Bartholomew's Project'*, a research project about the history of the hospital, with creative activities that responded to the findings
 - *'Closer Than You Think'*, an archives and art project by partners at Medway Gender and Sexual Diversity Centre, The Synagogue and INTRA Arts, marking Holocaust Memorial Day and LGBT History Month and exploring the shared experiences of these two communities in Intra.
- 7.37 In a further £80,000 bid to Historic England for a cultural engagement programme in Intra was successful and will be delivered over the next two years. The Consortium is working with local partners to deliver this, including Medway Open Studios, Medway Print Festival, Ebb & Flow Festival, Medway Pride, Heritage Open Day events, The Festival of Chatham Reach and with Icon Theatre Negotiations are now underway for a large-scale commission in Summer 2022.
- 7.38 September saw the delivery of a new play, *The Showman and the Chartist*, produced in partnership with the Medway African and Caribbean Association and Mrs Baker's Medway Theatre Company. The play invited the audience to observe and imagined conversation between Charles Dickens and William Cuffay, chartist activist, campaigner for workers' rights, son of a freed

slave. Both men lived in Medway and both men died in 1870, with 2021 the 150th anniversary of both their deaths.

- 7.39 Attended by representatives of Historic England, the final performance was followed by a Q&A during which there were calls for the play to be developed into a programme for schools to teach them about their local heritage and heroes. The play was performed again in October at Commissioner's House in Chatham Historic Dockyard where a commemorative plaque was installed in July for William and his father Chatham Cuffay.

Chatham Public Art

- 7.40 The Culture Team is supporting Medway Development Company and Francis Knight to deliver two public art commissions as part of the regeneration of Mountbatten House and the Chatham Waterfront. This has included the establishment of an Advisory Group to help shape the project and shortlist/select the artists, ensuring that this was representative of the broad community in Medway. The Pumping Station commission has now been awarded to an exciting international partnership between Nicole Mollett and Dutch artist, Jose Den Hartog.

- 7.41 The next project is a large-scale piece for Mountbatten House that begins in 2022.

Advice, support, capacity building

- 7.42 The Culture Team has provided hundreds of hours of direct advice and support to creatives and organisations alongside digital newsletters, social media channels, open calls, commissions and training, securing many local and national partnerships with the likes of ACE, Historic England, Youth Music and Live Music Now, funding over £250,000 of additional arts funding to Medway and the £14.5m of Levelling-Up Fund investment. The Culture Team have played a key role in distributing more than £2m to support the recovery of Medway's culture and creative, hospitality and weddings sectors through funding from the Additional Restrictions Grant. More than 150 businesses have been able to benefit after applying for assistance.

8. Greenspaces

- 8.1 Greenspace Development was successful again in securing eight Medway Green Flag Awards. The eight Green Flag sites are Hillyfields, Gillingham Park, Broomhill Park, The Vines, Capstone Farm Country Park, Great Lines Heritage Park, Riverside Country Park and Ranscombe Farm Reserve, which is managed by Plantlife. Due to Covid-19, judges only carried out mystery shop visits to the sites. The Green Flag Award is a national award scheme which recognises high quality parks in the UK and abroad. The parks are judged on eight criteria which includes biodiversity and community involvement.

- 8.2 The customer experience of Medway's three country parks remains high. Trip advisor for Riverside Country Park supports 436 reviews, of which 89% were either 'excellent' or 'very good' and is rated as the No.2 things to do in Gillingham. Capstone Farm Country Park received 223 reviews of which 84.5% were either 'excellent' or 'very good'. Capstone is rated as the No. 3 thing to do in Chatham. Of the reviews received for Ranscombe Farm Reserve (managed by Plantlife) 79% were either 'excellent' or 'very good' – up from 66% in 2019. Ranscombe is rated as the No. 2 thing to do in Cuxton. All three country parks played a very important role for local people in 2020 and 2021 during the period when travel was most restricted. All three sites have since reported an increase in visitor numbers.
- 8.3 Greenspace investments
- 8.3.1 Medway's Priority Play scheme has seen capital improvements at Maidstone Road Sports Ground in Chatham and Heritage Drive in Gillingham (completed March 2021). Seven sites will see £275k of capital improvements in spring 2022 with play refurbishment at Crestway, Low Meadow, Iona Close and Whimbrel Walk, Lamplighter Close, Hamilton Road and Borstal Recreation Ground. With other funding from various s106 contributions we were able to improve play areas at Cliffe Woods Recreation Ground, Perry Street and Chalk Pit Hill. The total cost of the play improvements were £58,249.49.
- 8.3.2 Horsted Valley: This project funded by S106 saw the installation of 7 interpretation boards across the site in August 2021, from Luton to Rochester South. Along with 4 welcome signs at the main entrances. The boards focussed on the ecology of lowland chalk grassland, ancient woodlands and the surrounding history of places like Fort Luton and Fort Horsted. Now in the final stages we are supporting the re-establishment of the Friends of Horsted Valley Group with their first AGM being held on 27 November.
- 8.3.3 Berengrave LNR: improvement works are funded by S106. In May 2021 work was completed to replace the rotten steps along the well-used path from the main entrance at Lower Rainham Road to Berengrave Lane, installing new sleepers and hand rails. Ecology surveys have been ongoing all year with bat, small mammal, reptile, bird and plant surveys being undertaken. We have also been working with consultants to assess the best options for access improvements taking into account the ecology and seasonal flooding of the site.
- 8.3.4 Cherry Trees improvements: In October 2021 letters were sent out to over 800 residents inviting them to a drop-in session on 16 October and an online questionnaire was also made available. Funding from S106 is allowing improvements to be made to this site with the project generating much attention from local residents. Over 60 residents attended the drop-in session and 108 respondents filled in the questionnaire. We are using the responses to plan improvements, with the majority of respondents wanting improvements ranging from more benches, play equipment and bringing the old orchard back into management. A number expressed an interest in setting a Friends Group.

- 8.3.5 Signage is being improved at 16 sites to make the entrances more welcoming and provide visitors with up-to-date details on the park, contact information and the most update-to-date council branding. Further Section 106 improvement projects currently in progress include Northcote Recreation Ground, Rede Common, Capstone Farm Country Park, Great Lines Heritage Park, Town Hall Gardens and Cozenton Park with work anticipated to be underway later in 2022.
- 8.3.6 Further Section 106 improvement projects currently in progress of being developed include Northcote Recreation Ground, Rede Common, Capstone Farm Country Park, Great Lines Heritage Park, Town Hall Gardens and Cozenton Park with work anticipated to be underway later in 2022.
- 8.4 Community engagement: The Team continued to support a suite of “Friends of” groups including the Medway Urban Greenspace Forum (MUGS). Covid-19 delayed active volunteering tasks in Medway, but volunteers were still able to meet virtually to carry out research and surveys through MUGS. Various community events (Covid-19 compliant) took place in summer 2021 at the Green Flag Award parks including building bird feeders, wildlife craft days and picnics. Management plans are being updated for Watts Meadow and Rede Common working in partnership with the Friends groups at these sites.
- 8.5 As part of the Housing Infrastructure Fund scheme (HIF), Greenspace Development appointed and worked with consultants on proposals for a new 50-hectare parkland in Hoo (Cockham Community Parkland). Consultation took place from July to September 2020 which helped inform the design of the proposed parkland. Planning Permission was granted in July 2021, allowing this project to progress to its next development stage with work beginning on site in 2022 and the park completed in 2024.
- 8.6 In 2020 the council was successful in securing funding from the Forestry Commission as part of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund to plant over 13,000 trees in Medway’s open spaces. Covid-19 meant planting could not be completed with volunteers or schools as previously planned but with help and support from Medway Norse all the trees were planted during Feb 2021 and have been looked after by volunteers from the Friends Groups. The majority of the trees survived and have established new growth in their first season since being planted.
- 8.7 Greenspace Development led on the establishment of a new event at Capstone Farm Country Park. Wild About Capstone celebrated the countryside, wildlife, local produce and quiet informal recreation at this flagship country park. Over 2000 people enjoyed the event that exceeded the original target of 1700. Its success will lead to this becoming an annual event that we hope will grow to offer more countryside activities and rural crafts.
- 8.8 The Bird Wise project, funded by SAMMS contributions, continues to educate visitors to Medway’s coastline on the importance of the area for

migratory birds and other wildlife. Despite restrictions on face to face activity, the ranger team are back on site and engagement through their social media pages and website has increased by 34% in 2021. A Coastal Codes booklet has been produced for a number of coastal recreational activities and information signage is being installed at key locations this winter.

9. Sport and Leisure

- 9.1 The Council directly operates four sports centres across Medway, plus The Strand seasonal open-air swimming pool. In addition, the Council works in partnership with external providers on a further two community facilities at Lordswood and Kings Rochester.
- 9.2 The sport and leisure teams offer a range of facilities, programmes, projects and events to maximise opportunities for residents to Play – Compete – Spectate, including bringing national and international sporting events to Medway and staging an array of activities from mass participation events such as the Medway Mile through to the annual Mini Youth Games primary schools' competition throughout the year.

Reopening facilities

- 9.3 Medway Park, Strood and Hoo Sports Centres began reopening in April 2021 in line with Government guidelines and have been fully reopen since July 2021.
- 9.4 While not yet back to pre-Covid levels, membership numbers and income has grown steadily since the centres reopened. Memberships were up 37per cent in November compared to April and monthly membership income up 42 per cent in the same period.
- 9.5 A marketing campaign was launched post-Christmas and will continue throughout this quarter to encourage more residents to make use of Medway's exceptional sports centre facilities.
- 9.6 Swimming lessons have proved extremely popular across all centres with occupancy in lessons for the September to December 2021 term above 90 per cent. Further lessons have been added to the programme at each centre for the January to March 2022 term.
- 9.7 Large-scale events, such as swimming galas and competitions began to return in September 2021, and the schedule for the next financial year is nearing capacity.

Splashes

- 9.8 The multi-million pound redevelopment of Splashes Sports Centre in Rainham is progressing to timetable, with essential stages of the project coming forward in the coming months.

- 9.9 Demolition of the previous centre has begun and is scheduled for completion in mid-February 2022.
- 9.10 The architects and associated design team were appointed in November 2021. Space&Place are one of the leading companies in the design of sports centres with a range of projects nationwide and are committed to delivering the Council's wishes for a fun family-friendly centre.
- 9.11 The detailed planning application is scheduled to be submitted this Spring, and an exhibition will be held in Rainham to inform local residents of what is proposed.

The Strand

- 9.12 The Strand opened throughout the summer season, with customer numbers gradually increasing as Government guidelines permitted.
- 9.13 In line with requests from Members three trials were undertaken to try to improve the offer to customers.
- 9.14 A pre-booking and payment system was introduced, to try to eradicate lengthy queues on hot, sunny days and to avoid customers turning up only to find the pool was full.
- 9.15 The system operated throughout the Strand's season and proved very popular, allowing customers to know they had a reserved space and pre-payment negating the need for queues to develop while payment was being taken.
- 9.16 This was supported by the introduction of two-timed sessions per day, to try to maximise the number of customers able to access the pool. Combined with the pre-booking system the sessions worked well with a number of compliments from customers.
- 9.17 Members also asked for the introduction of evening sessions, and these were trialled each Wednesday (4.30pm-7.30pm) throughout the school summer holidays. We compared the customer numbers with both the normal afternoon sessions on other days in the same period and also with the earlier session on the Wednesday. The average number of customers for the evening session was 60 per session. The average number for the early Wednesday session was 221 per session. The average afternoon session was 116 per session. Given the low demand for evening sessions and the greater public interest in other sessions it is not anticipated this trial will be continued.

Major Events

- 9.18 Since events began to return, Medway has staged a number of major events which have attracted national and international publicity.

- 9.19 As the home of England Wheelchair Rugby League, Medway Park hosted the annual end-of-season Grand Final in September 2021. This was shown live on Sky Sports, the first time a wheelchair rugby league match has received live TV coverage.
- 9.20 In November 2021 there was extensive further coverage – this time on the BBC – when England WRL hosted world champions France at Medway Park in front of a capacity crowd. It was the largest crowd for a Wheelchair Rugby League match in this country since Medway Park hosted the World Cup final in 2013.
- 9.21 Medway Park also entered the world of dance in September when it staged the International Dance Championships jointly with the Royal Albert Hall. The event brings established stars and the best young talent from around the world for a week of competition and is the first time Medway Park has been chosen as a joint host. The event is already booked in for 2022.
- 9.22 Keeping the dance theme going, he may not have won Strictly Come Dancing but triple Olympic Gold medallist Adam Peaty was the star of the show when he bought his race clinic to Strood Sports Centre in August 2021, offering expert guidance to Medway’s most promising swimmers.

Child-friendly Medway

- 9.23 In addition to the development of Splashes Sports Centre, the Medway Sport team have put a huge amount of time into supporting the Council’s child-friendly city initiative. Programmes being run include junior sports centre memberships; swimming lessons; school swimming; Mini Youth Games; PE and school sport coaching; disability and sensory swimming; daily school Medway Mile; Park Miles; holiday sports camps; tots sports; and holiday activity and food programmes in partnership with colleagues in Public Health.

Medway Mile

- 9.24 The annual Medway Mile made a successful return in 2021, with the aim of making it a true Medway event. The revamped event will be staged at different venues each year, ensuring all areas of Medway become home to the Mile. This year (2022) it will be in Gillingham, with the precise route to be announced later.

10. Tourism and Heritage

- 10.1 Prior to the impact of the pandemic Medway’s tourism sector had shown consistent growth for a number of years. The total visitor spend in 2019 was £358 million compared to £333 million in 2017. It is estimated there were approx. 5 million trips to Medway in 2019 and there were 7,000 tourism related jobs in Medway (Cambridge Economic Impact Study).
- 10.2 Working with colleagues and external partners such as Visit Kent, considerable activity was undertaken to encourage visitors back to Medway

as attractions began to reopen from May 2021. This work will continue throughout 2022 as Medway seeks to maximise opportunities to continue its evolution as a great place to visit.

Rochester Castle

- 10.3 Rochester Castle continues to be the most popular visitor attraction managed by the Council and witnessed a promising return to popularity over the summer. This year there will be a focus on improving the interpretation and activities within the castle and grounds to give those who have previously visited a reason to return, and also to attract new visitors. This also forms part of the build-up to the Castle's 900th anniversary in 2027.

Upnor Castle

- 10.4 Along with Rochester Castle, Upnor showed a welcome return in visitor numbers as the summer progressed, and also proved popular as a wedding venue. Plans have been put in place to both attract more day visitors and to continue to grow its appeal for weddings. Improved interpretation will once again be an important development of the castle's appeal.

Dickens Gallery

- 10.5 The long-awaited Dickens Gallery will open at the Guildhall Museum in February, celebrating the birth of Charles Dickens and aligning with the Light Nights festival. The gallery will tell the story of Dickens the man and his links to Medway throughout his life and career.

Visit Medway

- 10.6 Changing visitor habits continue to place ever greater importance on a successful Visit Medway website, to showcase the myriad things Medway has to offer and to provide a one-stop shop for both visitors and tourism-related businesses.
- 10.7 Visitor content is constantly being updated and improved to ensure up-to-date and visually appealing information is provided. This is now supported by a dedicated Visit Medway Business Hub on the website, ensuring businesses have up-to-date information as well as access to key marketing material to help promote Medway.

Grant Funding

- 10.8 The Sport Leisure, Tourism and Heritage service played a key role in distributing more than £2m to support the recovery of Medway's hospitality, culture and creative, and weddings sectors through funding from the Additional Restrictions Grant. More than 150 businesses have been able to benefit after applying for assistance.

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Appendices

None.

Background papers

None.