

ASHFORD ARTS STRATEGY

**Responding to the
ASHFORD ARTS MANIFESTO
to
GROW THE ARTS**

Ashford Borough Council

December 2010

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“Top marks for the Create Festival”

Ashford Resident, July 2010



Over 11,000 local people enjoy our Create Music Festival, Victoria Park, Ashford, July 2010

FORWARD

By Councillor Bernard Heyes Portfolio Holder for Culture

It is important that as Ashford continues to grow, we need to make sure that in 5-10 years time we have a fully rounded offer, creating the kinds of communities that people want to live in. My role as Portfolio Holder for Culture is to ensure the Council and its partners provide the cultural scene which will forge a new sense of belonging and provide an attractor for new people and businesses to locate in Ashford.



I believe it is important that this strategy rises to the challenge and responds to the arts manifesto “Grow the Arts”. It sets the scene for the future by recognizing and building on the assets and opportunities we already have, but importantly also seeks to address the cultural deficit that will be exacerbated by a rapidly growing town. There is real opportunity to improve the quality of the arts in Ashford which can be achieved with the Council's leadership, confidence and willingness to succeed.

I look forward with optimism to fulfilling these ambitions and goals as we bring them to realization, making Ashford truly “*Best Placed in Britain*”.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "B J D Heyes". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Cllr B J D Heyes

OUR VISION

This strategy is Ashford Borough Council's response to 'Grow the Arts', a manifesto developed by artists, arts organisations and event organisers that live and work in the Borough. 'Grow the Arts' sets out three main themes to make Ashford best placed for the arts and create an influential, connected and confident local arts sector. The current themes of the manifesto are: Claim our Space, Make the Connection, and Value the Mix.

We are grateful to all those who helped shape the direction of this strategy. Over 1000 public responses were received in a borough wide consultation, along with workshops conducted for Councillors, artists, arts organisations and strategic partners. Artist Nayan Kulkarni led many of the workshops, whose work was supported by Arts Council England and Tourism South East. Throughout this strategy are illustrations of our achievements over the last few years.

Ashford Borough Council's vision is that by 2021, the arts in Ashford is seen as thriving and well connected. Where communities are involved, enthused and proud to be part of our cultural life.

Our ambitions are for Ashford to:

- **provide spaces to enrich the local arts scene, develop civic pride and arts appreciation.**
- **be seen as an arts destination with a strong connected local arts scene.**
- **have a creative buzz, where the arts are valued and recognised as being part of everyday life.**



PARTNERSHIP & INVESTMENT

We know that without an ambitious and bold strategy, supported by an investment plan, we will not capture the external funding and commitment available from all of our potential partners.

Whilst the current economic climate may be challenging for all at present, it is vital that Ashford Borough Council improves its investment and draws upon various sources including developer contributions, strategic tariff, regional growth funding, direct commercial investment and other lottery sources post London 2012.

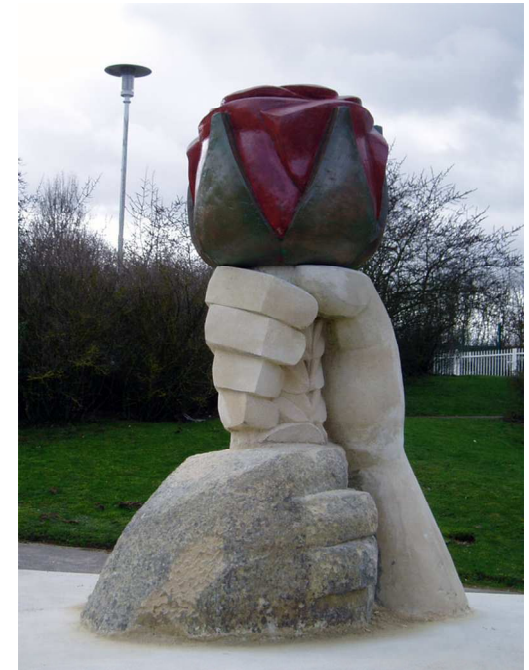
“We recognise that this represents the beginning steps of a journey for Ashford Borough Council, and one that will take time and practical resources to achieve”

Arts Council England, 2010.

“Great aspirations – a vibrant cultural offer improves the life experience for the existing residents, encourages community spirit and pride, and attracts investment and development from outside”

Ashford Resident, 2010.

External funding secured for the repair and re-launch of the Julie Rose Stadium Sculpture ‘Partnership’, by David Parfitt
April 2010



Artists secured and integrated into the design of Ashford’s new development sites such as Victoria Way and the John Wallis Square (ongoing – part of the Public Art Strategy for Ashford)



Our Role

Our key role is to provide leadership as well as encourage and enable resources to create new opportunities that meet Ashford's cultural ambitions. We must continue to embrace partnership working and collaborate with providers, promoters and investors.

To manage this effectively, the small arts team will seek specialist support both internally and externally to influence, champion and promote the local arts scene.

We can and do take a strategic lead in establishing arts priorities but we believe that impartial, timely and authoritative leadership is required.

Investment to appoint Arts Leaders, Laureates and Creative Directors could play an instrumental, even pivotal role in strengthening Ashford's arts scene, programme and network, being a creative channel between key cultural and educational bodies in the borough and helping to raise the bar.

Influential roles such as these can support our goals as they may well secure additional funding and develop relationships with relevant public authorities at local, national and European levels, and with the private and business sector.

Combined with stronger leadership - arts partners and collectives from different art forms and backgrounds can become influential creative bodies, recognised as local champions for the arts in Ashford.

“The Council definitely needs to encourage local people or entrepreneurs to do more to cultivate a cultural scene in the area as it is currently severely lacking”

Ashford Resident, 2010.



Artist Nayan Kulkarni leading an Arts Stakeholder workshop to develop the Ashford Manifesto, April 2010



**“Encourage more use of Ashford open spaces
e.g. High Street, Victoria Park etc”** *Ashford Resident, 2010*

The Ashford Borough Council led Visual Arts & Architecture Festival - Shared Space Dance curated by Cathy Streeter, Sept 2010

Ashford Arts Manifesto – *Grow the Arts*

The Ashford Arts Manifesto has been developed by practicing artists and event organisers in the borough. It has been created to help stimulate interest and discussion and to help plant the ideas around which the arts in Ashford can grow.

Grow the Arts is a call for action to the arts sector, its partners and the local community to uncover and stake a claim on spaces for the arts, exploit connectivity and collaboration, embrace new creative ideas without forgetting the old and promote Ashford's potential and diversity of place.

Claim our Space

We need places where the arts in their many forms are cultivated, exploited, explored and experienced. We want artists to uncover, express and re-invent the assets of place – buildings, public spaces and landscapes.

We will:

- ◆ Take to the streets
- ◆ Open up locations for artists
- ◆ Stake a claim and live up to it

Make the Connection

We know that we have unique transport routes which artists can use, reinforce and promote. We want artists to create connections and collaborate with communities, audiences and with each other, to awaken the dormant and travel.

We will:

- ◆ Bring in and export
- ◆ Make connections
- ◆ Share the journey

Value the Mix

We know that a dynamic arts scene has choice, creative risk and inspires audiences. We want a rich mix of amateur and professional arts, in the rural and the town, which is the everyday and has the spectacular.

We will:

- ◆ Love what we've got everyday
- ◆ Create spectacle
- ◆ Mix it up

CLAIM OUR SPACE

Our Ambition

Provide spaces to enrich the local arts scene, develop civic pride and arts appreciation.

We know:

- ◆ Serious arts audiences want quality arts product and to experience it in surroundings that enhances their enjoyment. The St Mary's Church Arts and Community Project will transform the town's iconic church into quality space for the arts. Investment in the space combined with a quality arts programme will provide a range of performance and exhibition that will be a source of enjoyment and pride for large, diverse audiences.
- ◆ The community demands arts-oriented facilities and dedicated arts venues to participate and engage in the arts. Whilst there is a call for a large arts venue, it will only be possible through the opportunity that growth provides. It is preferred that we look to mend and extend the buildings and spaces that we've got to provide medium scale flexible spaces dedicated for performance and visual arts.
- ◆ Artists need spaces to work in such as studios, performance spaces, and galleries. We want to work with artists and partners to secure spaces that provide a chance to develop

talent, imagination and creativity. New developments such as the Commercial Quarter and Elwick Place in the town are well placed to accommodate arts space that in turn will give it a creative energy and identity.

- ◆ Our rich and diverse environment provides a wealth of inspiration for artists to uncover and engage with communities. We want to encourage artists to explore our place and claim spaces such as heritage sites, sporting venues, leisure centres, parks and public squares etc as creative platforms that will provide outstanding arts experiences, different to what is on offer elsewhere.

Our 5 year Goals:

- ◆ An established quality arts programme at St Mary's Church that is well managed, well respected and is owned and enjoyed by the local arts sector and community.
 - ◆ Investment secured to provide a medium sized arts space for the borough.
 - ◆ A range of new and existing spaces that invite, support and promote artists to create and showcase work.
-

MAKE THE CONNECTION

Our Ambition:

For Ashford to be seen as an arts destination with a strong connected local arts scene.

We know:

- ◆ Ashford is well placed to connect and draw from the best of European and UK arts. Our travel routes and connections makes for an ease of access to our local arts scene rarely found elsewhere which should be reinforced and promoted and used to position us as an arts destination.
- ◆ We need both art projects and arts leaders to celebrate and promote our connectivity with major events. Ashford based arts organisations such as Stour Valley Arts that commission artists worldwide develops local creative exchange, that helps build our reputation as 'Best Placed in Britain' and raise confidence in the local arts scene.
- ◆ Artist led projects that build deep relationships with different communities - involve and inspire groups of people to learn and contribute - like the Visual Arts Festival, connects with audiences and should be valued and encouraged if we are to awaken the dormant.
- ◆ There is value in the arts sector connecting and collaborating; learning and sharing experiences within projects such as Ashford Summer Sounds. We want to support local arts providers to collaborate, share marketing and local audience intelligence to benefit the local arts scene.

Our 5 year Goals:

- ◆ Imaginative and established cultural exchange programmes that have the power to inspire people to create, learn, network and collaborate.
- ◆ Flag ship promotion and opportunities that connects creative effort and raises the bar to benefit the local arts scene.



Ashford Sumer Sounds flyer, July 2010: Example of a unique partnership and joint marketing project between summer festival and event providers.

VALUE THE MIX

Our Ambition

Have a creative buzz, where the arts are valued and recognised as being part of everyday life.

We know:

- ◆ There is resounding support by our community to provide a variety of new spectacular cultural events alongside a regular arts programme for a broader range of audiences. To become a renowned location for the arts nationally and locally, we must embrace this aspiration. We need to organize multi-partner major events without forgetting the value of existing local festivals that reflect the best of what is on offer like Stour Music. Others such as the Create Music Festival, Festival in the Park and the Tenterden Folk Festival provide important participation opportunities where people take part, debate, create and even control.
- ◆ Whilst maximising what we've already got, and building on strengths, we must also look to provide a regular programme of events that audiences will love. Providing a dedicated medium sized space as well as Arts at St Mary's and other small places (such as heritage sites) where the arts can be

experienced is vital and will help us showcase a range of touring arts product catering for different interests and tastes.

- ◆ More choice, surprise and opportunity to participate is needed, especially by young people and is what we want to encourage. We need to provide participatory opportunity across the widest range of the arts for all our communities - in their village, town, school, workplace and in the wider environment. We need to support projects that provide ritual, repetition, expectation and rhythm.
- ◆ Promotion is not reaching all. By extending Ashford Borough Council's arts web pages, taking full advantage of technology, and pursuing fruitful ways to promote the local arts scene we will improve perceptions and help build an Ashford that takes pride and ownership in its local arts.

Our 5 year Goals:

- ◆ Provide new major events that promote Ashford nationally and locally that inspire future audiences and the next generation of artists and arts leaders.
- ◆ Exciting Community-led participatory community arts projects such as festivals, local celebrations and exhibitions that allow people to shape their own arts offer.



“Having delivered St Mary’s, this venue should be the arts focus with complimentary street events”

Ashford Resident, 2010.

£1.68m investment secured to establish a quality arts space at St Mary’s Church. Juan Martin performs at Ashford’s St Mary’s Church as part of the Shiva Nova Equator Series.