

STEVENAGE RE-IMAGINED

MAKING
STEVENAGE
A DESTINATION
CREATIVE TOWN



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Part 1:

Introduction: making history

It's an exciting time for Stevenage



Cllr Richard Henry
Portfolio Holder -
Children, Young People,
Leisure and Culture

Just over 70 years ago Britain's First New Town was created in Stevenage. We have recently announced plans for the first phase of Town Centre regeneration - SG1, to take us into a new era. SG1 is set to transform the town centre creating new homes, shops and restaurants in the heart of our town.

Our regeneration plans also aim to highlight the town's heritage and culture as a place where music and the arts can flourish. We have a real opportunity to revitalise and highlight Stevenage as a cultural destination with a fascinating past and an exciting future.

This summary outlines our strategy for arts and heritage as we strive to deliver our cultural ambitions for Stevenage.



Stevenage boasts an abundance of natural heritage which includes Whitney Wood and the gateway to Forster Country. Fairlands Valley Park offers an exceptional landscape environment of 120 acres, also complimenting the extraordinary network of cycle pathways (45 km) – a visionary resource unmatched by other British towns at the time of its creation.

Stevenage also boasts the heritage of public art (primarily sculpture) commissioned and installed in the late 1950's as part of the New Town development and including work from Henry Moore (relocated inside Barclay School) and the Franta Belsky Joy Ride in the Town Square. Stevenage has also been a popular venue for live music - The Rolling Stones played in the town's Lorcano Ballroom in the 1960s. On the edge of Stevenage lies Knebworth House renowned for festivals and legendary sell-out performances by the likes of Oasis and Robbie Williams.

The architecture of the New Town is rooted in mid-20thC design, with its use of materials like concrete alongside modular panels that provide "pops" of colour. This is most visible in the Town Square which is recognised by Heritage England for its unique place as England's first pedestrian shopping centre.

Stevenage town centre is a conservation area, reflecting the value placed on the architecture and town layout that created the first New Town development in the late 1950s/early 1960s. Current regeneration plans place value on the New Town heritage and will see restoration and regeneration to make a vibrant and iconic environment.

A New Town with a rich heritage



Stevenage has a longstanding history and heritage.

In addition to being the country's first New Town, the original Roman Way, which became the Great North Road, passes through the town and alongside the Six Hills, the largest surviving Roman Barrow group in England and a scheduled monument.

Stevenage Old Town dates back to the medieval period with many old coaching inns, and latter buildings dating from the Victorian era. Alongside is the site of the Vincent Works, where the famous Vincent Motorbikes were made between 1928 and 1961.





Part 2:

Making a destination creative town

Our Vision

We aim to build on this unique heritage to make Stevenage a destination town that attracts visitors from Hertfordshire, London and beyond to a thriving creative environment with:

- Flagship performing arts, museum and heritage facilities
- An iconic public realm arts programme
- Creative industries spaces and hubs, including digital media, to attract and develop talent
- Support for wellbeing, skills development and economic growth

We believe that realising our vision can have far reaching impacts for the people of Stevenage improving local quality of life and health, benefitting businesses and the economy and engaging our children and young people.



It belongs to us all: a collective strategy for Stevenage

This strategy has been developed for and with the input of a whole range of Stevenage's existing cultural organisations, and is supported by Arts Council England. It belongs to the people of Stevenage. The council's role is to facilitate and enable it to get off the ground.



“ A properly run live music venue has been much needed within Stevenage in all my years of living here. It would provide a home venue to showcase the talent that Stevenage has in abundance, but end up playing further afield due to lack of local opportunity/platform. ”

“ There is a lot going on in the town but the various groups need to work together to get the maximum results. ”

Our cultural ambitions



We will work together to achieve our collective ambitions. Through Stevenage Re-Imagined we will:

Plan and deliver a major public art programme and trail, enhancing the town centre and Old Town public areas, parks and opens spaces, and the extensive network of cycle paths across the town, helping build an exceptional creative profile for Stevenage

Encourage the establishment of artist studios and creative industry hubs, including digital media, to support local talent, stimulate employment, and build a strong local pool of creative practitioners and artisans

Enhance the depth and artistic quality of Festivals and events, maximising the opportunity to enliven the town centre, the Old Town and Fairlands Valley Park, and promoting a unique festival offer for Stevenage

Enable a major upgrading of the Gordon Craig Theatre to meet the needs of the 21st century Stevenage population and creating a facility to attract and inspire visitors

Facilitate a new central Stevenage home for the Borough Museum, with an aspiration to develop the First New Town Museum

Encourage the provision of high quality music facilities for the town that build on Stevenage's musical traditions and enable young talent to access skills development and career opportunities

Link arts and heritage with sport to build on the town's substantial sporting heritage, and encourage joined-up events, activities and festivals

Support innovative Arts and Health projects that use creativity to enhance well-being and quality of life, and support the Borough's Health and Wellbeing Strategy – Healthy Stevenage.

Ensure the Hertfordshire Cultural Education Partnership is able to widen levels and richness of engagement to maximise opportunities to engage all of the Borough's children and young people

In Stevenage the arts and heritage will be accessed and valued by everyone in the community and will become a magnet to attract visitors.



Our priorities

These ambitions have been shaped by the priorities identified by the cultural sector and the local community in response to the current position of Stevenage's cultural offer. There is a clear need to:

- Widen the cultural offer to meet the needs and interests of existing Stevenage residents and future new residents
- Increase cultural engagement and ensure everyone is actively encouraged to access cultural opportunities, irrespective of background, social or economic circumstances, health issues, or any disability.
- Connect and advocate cultural opportunities to create a clear overarching cultural offer
- Celebrate the heritage of Stevenage
- Develop opportunities for children and young people
- Improve health and wellbeing





Part 3:
Making it happen

What do we need?

Big ideas are important, but they do need resourcing. Implementing the aims of this strategy requires:

- Some initial capacity and support to help drive strategy implementation
- Funds for public art commissioning
- Provision of space for artist and creative industry studios
- Funds and capacity to develop the festivals offer
- Support-in-kind time and space from schools to build cultural opportunities for children and young people
- Funds to enhance participatory opportunities as part of Hertfordshire Cultural Education Partnership initiatives

- Funds to facilitate arts and health initiatives
- Support-in-kind time from arts and heritage sector organisations to facilitate a Stevenage Forum
- Capital funds for theatre redevelopment, museum relocation, music facility enhancement and for any space refurbishment or new build to make a creative hub

The resources to initiate the big ideas can be sourced through the following:

- Partnership working
- Commercial business contributions
- Collaborative fundraising
- Regeneration funds
- Lottery applications

Mapping the route: key milestones 2018 – 2022

The first key milestones for 2018 will focus on:

- Seeking support to contribute towards resources to initiate the strategy which includes specialist cultural “enabler” expertise
- Development of two funding bids to contribute to the implementation of the Fundraising Strategy
- Establishment of the Arts and Heritage Forum for the town
- Advocacy to the business community to highlight the aspirations of the strategy

Key milestones thereafter will include:

2019

- Putting a forward plan for a museum offer in place
- Definitive decisions on plans to upgrade the Gordon Craig Theatre
- Establishment of temporary artist studio facilities in empty space
- Stage One commissioning of art in the public realm
- Pilot arts and health on Prescription programmes
- Stage One enhancement of the Stevenage Day, Stevenage Festival (25th anniversary) and Charter Fair events

2020

- Potential introduction of a new outdoor event/festival in Fairlands Valley Park (50th anniversary of the Park)
- Enhanced programme of performance activity in the Valley School Theatre, Stevenage Music Centre and Barclay School Drama Centre
- Focus on new initiatives to support cultural entitlement for children and young people – supporting a possible Hertfordshire Year of Culture
- Further enhancement of Stevenage Day and the Charter Fair
- Full programme of arts and health activity

- Revitalisation of existing sculpture trail and link to heritage, with the potential for heritage guided walks

2021

- Stage Two commissioning of Art in the Public Realm (including additional underpass artwork)
- Further enhancement of the Stevenage Festival
- Creation of more substantial and permanent/semi-permanent artist and creative industry spaces
- Development of music facilities in the town (including facilities for performance)
- Focused festival of work at Valley School from companies engaging learning disabled artists
- Enhanced arts and heritage programme to celebrate 75 years of the Borough

2022

- Progression of new Gordon Craig Theatre offer
- Vibrant programme of theatre and music within other facilities to complement Gordon Craig delivery
- Review strategy achievements over the first five years

A co-operative responsibility to deliver for Stevenage

Stevenage Re-Imagined belongs to the people of the town and the creative sector, as well as to the council and other public bodies. As such there is shared responsibility to ensure delivery, and this includes a commitment to fundraising.

An Arts and Heritage Forum, open widely to the sector, and including professional, amateur and community organisations, will be initiated to launch the Cultural Strategy. It will subsequently be self-managed/ coordinated by member groups, in partnership with the council.

The Strategy implementation will be supported and monitored by the Culture, Wellbeing and Leisure Team. Individual strands of activity, projects and programmes will be the responsibility of organisations as identified in the accompanying Action Plan.

The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated annually by the council in dialogue with the established Arts and Heritage Forum.

Increasingly it is anticipated actions to implement projects and activities identified in the strategy will be driven by partner organisations and by individual artists or practitioners, or by collaborative action.

The council will work hard with national funding bodies and local commissioners to enable resources to further drive our cultural ambitions.

For more info:

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Some of our key Cultural Stakeholders



Stevenage
Arts Guild

Stevenage
Museum



Gordon Craig
Theatre

North
Hertfordshire
College/
UH Arts



Hertfordshire
Libraries &
Heritage
Services