

BLACKPOOL ARTS AND

CULTURAL STRATEGY

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Blackpool's Arts & Cultural Strategy

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• **S E C T I O N 1 - I N T R O D U C T I O N**

In December 1996 Positive Solutions was commissioned by Blackpool Borough Council to undertake an audit of arts and cultural activity which would provide the basis of an Arts and Cultural Strategy for the borough.

The audit process addressed the following areas:-

- a survey of existing arts and cultural provision within the Blackpool area
- an assessment of funding and service structures as anticipated within the new Unitary authority
- the identification of particular strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in respect of arts and cultural provision
- the consideration of particular policy issues, arts issues and resource issues as a means of advocating a strategy document

The information was gleaned from focus meetings, questionnaires and one-to-one interviews with local arts organisations, venues (public and private sectors), schools, and council officers.

S T R E N G T H S	O P P O R T U N I T I E S
Amateur arts activity	SRB, generally/artist in residence schemes
Grand Theatre	College move to Palatine site
Grundy Art Gallery	Local Government Review: links to
	educational resources - physical
	- financial
	- personnel
Education work in schools	Available space for expansion at the
	Grundy Art Gallery
Sixth Form College activity/venue	Balancing current investment in
	tourism/entertainment with
	arts/museums/heritage
Out-of-School opportunities for children -	Liaison with outside agencies such as
formal classes	Fylde and Wyre Borough Councils, Lancashire County
Council,	North West Arts Board and Area Museums Service
Dance opportunities at Sports Centre	Arts strategies in place or developing in county and
	adjacent Borough councils
Transport/communications	Possible use of entertainment venues for the arts
Member support	Audit as opportunity to focus future policy/investment
Local authority's engagement with public art	Town Centre Regeneration
Committed private sector	The National Lottery

W E A K N E S S E S (inc. gaps and constraints)	T H R E A T S
<p>Venues - performing arts - amateurs - gallery</p> <p>Lack of focus for - co-ordination - (in/outside L/A) - information - advice</p> <p>Age of audiences</p> <p>Participatory activities for young people</p> <p>Gaps - arts centre - teachers' centre</p> <p>Marketing the existing product</p> <p>Lack of museum?</p> <p>Arts sub-committee - limited agenda</p> <p>End of line (geographical)</p>	<p>LGR - schools - finance - capital stock eg, libraries</p> <p>Image - entertainment/tourism</p> <p>Budget/budget costs</p> <p>Complacency</p>

Since the audit was undertaken Blackpool Borough Council has become a Unitary authority. The Council now has the ability to act in a more integrated way; many of the agencies consulted in the audit process are now Blackpool Borough Council services. A clearer, wider picture is now possible.

The North West Arts Board has provided professional and financial support which enabled the Council to commission the audit and subsequently to appoint an Arts Development Officer on 1 May 1998 to facilitate and implement an Arts and Cultural Strategy.

The strategy builds on the information that the audit produced and includes an element of post-Unitary authority research. The consultation process which has led to the formulation of this strategy demonstrates the Council's commitment to arts and culture and to the involvement of local people in decisions that affect them. The issues identified in this document were raised by local arts venues, organisations and societies, teachers, community groups, Council officers and members, the local business community and other partners, and were additionally informed by a limited sample of 'non-users'. Blackpool Borough Council has listened to the representations of all involved and attempted to incorporate these into the key areas for future development.

The purpose of this strategy document is to set out the intentions of the Council and its partners for the development of arts and culture in Blackpool into the new Millennium.

The strategy focuses on three important intentions:-

- To improve the quality of life for all people in Blackpool by creating opportunities to engage in a wide range of artistic and cultural activities.
- To promote pride in Blackpool by developing and celebrating the borough's unique cultural identity and heritage.
- To nurture arts and culture as progressive and valuable contributors to social and economic regeneration.

Many local authorities are becoming aware of how the arts can be used as a vehicle for delivering the objectives of a range of Council departments, as well as Libraries and Arts.

Arts & culture have a powerful contribution to make to other key policy areas such as public health, community safety, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, economic regeneration and education. This strategy outlines the contribution that arts and culture can make in Blackpool in support of the Council's core values.



• SECTION 2 - LOCAL CONTEXT

The Lancashire region is served by an established, if in many ways modest, professional framework for the arts (Myerscough, 1991). There is no dominating metropolitan centre in the county and thus no perceived nucleus for artistic activity.

In brief, Blackpool's contribution to this regional overview is a receiving theatre, a local authority art gallery, several major venues used for seasonal entertainment, and vigorous amateur arts activity. This provision has the following context:-

- the population density in Blackpool is very high, with the 153,600 residents concentrated within a small land area of only 3,492 hectares
- Blackpool is ranked 51st worst deprived borough in England (Index of Urban Conditions, published by D.E.T.R., 1998)
- Blackpool welcomes 16.8 million tourist visits each year (figures @ 1995)

That Blackpool has such a large population, combined with its unique seasonal fluctuations, means that the arts have potentially a very large audience in Blackpool. Additionally the coastal corridor of which Blackpool is the focus services the populations of Fylde, Wyre and beyond.

Arts and culture is a service which cuts across geography, age, ability, gender, religion and race and embraces cultural diversity. Cultural activity in Blackpool has the power to appeal to both tourists and to residents. Cultural tourism - that is to say holiday packages, special events and attractions linked to heritage and the arts - is well able to provide Blackpool residents and visitors with suitable and relevant opportunities and resources.

Blackpool's recent Community Audit and Needs Study (1998) focused on the four inner wards of Foxhall, Talbot, Claremont and Alexandra, together with Park and Clifton as being in particular need of services and programmes to combat poverty, deprivation and social exclusion. Many of the recommendations contained within the audit report can be addressed through arts and cultural initiatives.

Unemployment in Blackpool is, by the nature of the town as a seasonal resort, a significant problem. In 1997 the average rate was 6.9% in Blackpool compared to that of 6.3% in the North West and 5.6% nationally. The cultural industries which support Blackpool's position as a prime entertainment centre in the North West (eg, dance schools, costume designers, technicians, suppliers of equipment/materials) need to be recognised and developed. The more successful Blackpool's cultural tourism and creative industries are, the more potential there will be for training and employment in this field in the future.

The successful Single Regeneration Budget bid from Blackpool Challenge Partnership Ltd clearly acknowledged the need for social and economic regeneration within the borough. The arrival of Blackpool's First Step centres provide an additional focus for the community. Arts activities can be used in these and other centres to develop creative and practical skills, self confidence and help to generate a sense of well-being within local communities.

• SECTION 3 - NATIONAL TRENDS IN ARTS AND CULTURE

The arts are currently a discretionary area of expenditure for English and Welsh local authorities. This has encouraged a debate around the introduction of a statutory duty for local authorities to support the arts. However, this would not necessarily bring about an automatic increase in financial support for the arts, although it would most likely result in an enhanced profile for the arts in the hierarchy of local authority services.

The majority of the general public (55%) support their local council providing funds for the arts compared to 15% who are opposed to it (Arts Council of England Research Report No 7, 1996), this opposition being more widespread among people aged 65 and over. Most people feel that the arts have a beneficial impact on the area they live in, for example in helping to keep town centres lively and attractive places to visit and in helping to improve the quality of life for local people. A strong cultural climate is of course an important factor in attracting people and businesses wishing to re-locate and thus contributes to inward investment and the prosperity of the town.

The total revenue expenditure on the arts nationally in 1997/98 was £193.7 million with just over half of all local authorities spending less than 0.5% of their total net revenue expenditure on the arts. There has been an increase in capital expenditure, which is anticipated to rise again, due mainly to the matching funding necessary for successful lottery bids. Some increases in arts expenditure have been the result of arts development officers coming into post for the first time.

With the continued increase in leisure time, disposable income and national and international travel, arts and culture are fast becoming one of the UK's most popular pastimes. It is often quoted that 337 million visits to libraries took place in 1996 compared to 33 million attendances at professional league football matches.

Increase in leisure time is often a direct consequence of retirement from work and many older people use this opportunity to engage in the arts for the first time. Younger people in the 16 - 25 age range are more difficult to attract as there are so many other demands on their recreational time. This age range is one of the North West Arts Board's audience development priorities.

The perception of the arts as elitist has led to concerted efforts by various art forms to change their image through user-friendly interpretation, 'discovery centres' rather than museums, interactive displays, education departments within theatre companies, outreach work, classic opera sung in English, marketing slogans, etc. The biggest ever increase in cultural funding announced in July 1998 by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport is further proof of the need to break down the stigma attached to the arts and to increase access, affordability and to develop new audiences in a bid to place arts and culture at the heart of public life and public policy.



• SECTION 4 - KEY ISSUES AND ACTION PLANS

The research undertaken as part of the strategy process identified a number of matters to be addressed in the provision of arts and culture across the borough. In particular the following recurring themes were highlighted:-

- a need to encourage and build on existing artistic and cultural provision
- a lack of arts and cultural opportunities available to residents
- the limited number of community arts initiatives
- a need to use the arts as a tool to achieve broader Council aims
- a requirement for improved and further facilities
- a desire for free-flow of information about the arts among deliverers, organisers, venues and audiences
- no infrastructure for arts and cultural activity in the borough
- the need to celebrate Blackpool's past and present through artistic and cultural activity
- the limited resources available to the arts
- issues of access (both physical and intellectual) need to be addressed
- a need to work in partnership to strengthen resources and expertise
- a genuine wish to establish Blackpool as a creative centre
- a lack of audience development work
- lack of training, personal development and employment opportunities in the cultural industries in Blackpool

To address these matters the following key issues were identified:-

- Arts Development
- Life Long Learning
- Communication
- Facilities
- Partnerships
- Resources

Consideration of these key issues has led to the formulation of a programme of action to enable the Council to achieve objectives in these areas.



• KEY ISSUE 1 - Arts Development

OBJECTIVE

To encourage and develop opportunities within the borough for all members of the community to have access to arts and cultural provision for their personal enjoyment, empowerment and enrichment.

Arts development is essentially a vehicle for encouraging awareness, interest and participation in the arts. Successful arts development is brought about by the development of convenient, well-equipped facilities, of innovative and exciting arts events and initiatives, of good promotion, increased financial resources and strong partnerships.

As sport keeps those who participate in it physically healthy, so the arts address our creative and expressive needs. Direct participation in the arts has the ability to raise the confidence and skill levels of participants, stimulate enjoyment, broaden minds and provide an outlet for creativity. As a result new art works are created, new partnerships are forged and quality of life is improved.

In the move to unitary status the Council has seized the opportunity to develop the arts in a strategic and focused manner. The additional services now provided by the Borough Council, together with the offer of seed funding from the North West Arts Board, have signalled a new beginning for arts and culture in Blackpool.

Much activity and hard work already takes place locally within the arts but it is fragmented and without an infrastructure which would maximise effects and outcomes. There is a definite need both to develop opportunities for participation and to encourage new audiences for the arts.



ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS
1 Identify key locations around the borough which would benefit from the development of community arts and outreach work.	BBC AC/CVS NWLH
2 Identify the needs of Blackpool's communities in respect of arts and cultural provision.	BBC
3 Develop residencies, workshops, courses, classes and festivals as primary methods of arts development.	BBC/ACE NWAB Business Community BBC/TCF/GT
4 Encourage new activities and initiatives within and between existing arts organisations and venues.	BAS/TCF FAA/B&FLO BSO/GT/LP
5 Review Blackpool's current audience for the arts and develop a New Audiences programme.	GT/B&FC/LP PP/TCF/BBC
6 Improve the long term prospects of local amateur arts activity by devising ways in which young people can feed into local arts societies and organisations.	BAS/BBB &FLO/BBC NFMC/GFS

* See Appendix A for full list of abbreviations.

• KEY ISSUE 2 - Life Long Learning

OBJECTIVE

To extend and develop the quality and quantity of the arts within formal and informal education and training.

It is important to understand that education does not necessarily mean formal institution-based learning. Life long learning is something that can be pleasant and which can have a positive affect on us throughout our lives. Aside from the 33 primary schools, 8 secondary schools, 3 special schools, Blackpool Sixth Form College and Blackpool and The Fylde College, there are many organisations which offer opportunities to learn more about the arts in Blackpool. Several schools and adult education centres offer arts based courses to local residents: The Grand Theatre has an active and successful education programme which targets all ages: The Grundy Art Gallery offers regular courses and workshops for adults and children and the town has many private tutors, specialist schools and amateur groups providing a wide range of coaching and experiential learning. Libraries have a particularly important role to play as a resource for people undertaking education and training and increasingly as centres to train people in the use of new technology and access to the information society.

Cultural education and training is the foundation of Blackpool's cultural industries - the businesses and organisations engaged in creativity that provide an income for people. In Blackpool they are professional artists, dance schools, music teachers, craft shops, suppliers of materials and equipment, costume designers, graphic design agencies, architects, musicians, recording studios, librarians, writers ... It is imperative that Blackpool is able to educate, train,



ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS
1 In conjunction with the Education Development Plan and the Schools Advisory Service explore opportunities for the development of the arts in schools.	BBC GTED
2 Encourage the development of community based youth dance, theatre and music groups.	BBC/B&FC/BBB GHS/GTED
3 Promote and encourage the arts as a tool for learning (particularly in connection with rehabilitation and recovery, good parenting, learning difficulties, health promotion, mental health problems and intergenerational work).	AC/NWLH BBC/GTED
4 Support the creation of a Blackpool youth/schools orchestra.	BBB/BSO FAA/GHS
5 Identify opportunities for training and employment within Blackpool's creative industries.	LAWTEC Business Community BBC/BCP
6 Draw upon skills, knowledge and talent of local arts practitioners for teaching, mentoring and training.	Local Artists BAS

* See Appendix A for full list of abbreviations.

• **KEY ISSUE 3 - Communication**

OBJECTIVE

To raise awareness of arts and culture through information and promotion, and to use the arts to enhance Blackpool’s image, identity and environment.

Access to good information will improve the public’s knowledge of the opportunities that there are to participate in the arts locally. It will also provide support to artists, teachers, local arts organisations and the media. Communication is a two way process and depends on all concerned to contribute appropriately.

There are various sources of information and community networks which already exist within the borough. Some are old and require updating, others are new and need yet to fully establish themselves. There are gaps and there is duplication; it is therefore important to develop appropriate methods for information collection, collation and dissemination across Blackpool.

The arts can help Blackpool define and communicate its image. Since the mid 19th century the town has evolved a strong identity as a centre for quality entertainment and popular culture. In the search for sustainable tourism in Blackpool, arts and culture are obvious and suitable partners in the development of important elements of Blackpool’s



ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS
1 Develop a library/database of resource material for the effective development of arts across Blackpool.	BBC
2 Offer advice through the Arts Development Officer in respect of arts and cultural matters.	BBC
3 Facilitate a forum for arts practitioners to meet, exchange and share ideas.	EG/FBC/WBC
4 Establish a plan of action for arts publicity, public relations and marketing.	EG/BBC TCF/GT
5 Prepare a Public Art Policy to guide and advance the development of public art projects across the borough.	NWAB/BBC

* See Appendix A for full list of abbreviations.

• KEY ISSUE 4 - Facilities

OBJECTIVE

To utilise and develop facilities suitable for the presentation and practice of arts and cultural activities in Blackpool.

The upgrading, development and maintenance of facilities in the borough suitable for the practice and presentation of arts and cultural activities is a primary concern. The Borough Council owns and manages The Grundy Art Gallery, runs a comprehensive library service across twelve sites and annually funds The Grand Theatre through a service level agreement (although The Grand is owned and managed by an independent charitable trust). However, there is the potential for arts activities and events to take place in other council-owned buildings operated by other departments (or under CCT arrangements) or in partnership with independently owned premises/sites.



Within the limitations of current resources and indeed the fading capital opportunities offered by the National Lottery it is imperative that all options are considered for 'new' facilities, in particular the suitability of existing buildings.

The borough of Blackpool comprises a number of distinct communities with their own local centres eg, Marton, Layton, Bispham. An appropriate way forward, to ensure a geographic spread of activity rather than focusing on the town centre, would be to treat the borough as one large arts and cultural facility. This approach would promote Blackpool as "more than just a front".

ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS
1 Review the extent, use and adequacy of all buildings and sites currently used for arts activity.	BBC
2 Consider the possibilities of establishing and marketing Blackpool as one large arts and cultural facility.	BBC
3 Investigate the need for a focal flagship venue for the participatory arts in Blackpool.	PP/BCP
4 Consider and report on the physical problems of accessing existing facilities in terms of public transport, car parking, wheelchair access, convenient locations etc.	ABA/BBC NWDAF
5 Take a strategic role in all independent arts and heritage lottery applications to ensure no conflict of interest or duplication exists within the borough.	NWAB NWMS ACE/HLF
6 Carry out an audit of arts organisations who require space or facilities.	B&FC BBC/WBC/FBC

* See Appendix A for full list of abbreviations.

• **KEY ISSUE 5 - Partnerships**

OBJECTIVE

To develop further partnerships with and between the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Arts development in Blackpool will take a pro-active role in forging partnerships with local people and organisations, and stronger links with other council services such as Tourism, Economic Development, Social Services, Education and Planning. In recent years the Council has joined forces to good effect with many organisations where common goals have been identified. This approach offers rewards in terms of expertise, funding, experience and profile.

This strategy document has been shaped by the comments of a large number of local people. This dialogue should continue in order to build on the partnerships formed as a result of this process.



ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS
1 Explore further partnership opportunities within Blackpool communities for a wider benefit.	All
2 Encourage fresh partnerships among artists, arts organisations and venues.	All
3 Strengthen links and improve awareness of the arts internally across council departments and services.	BBC
4 Maintain and develop further links with county, regional and national arts officers.	ALGAO/NWAB C&DAO
5 Develop and extend contact with local, regional, national and international businesses.	BIA:NW/ABSA Business Community
6 Develop the existing partnership with The Grand Theatre.	GT

* See Appendix A for full list of abbreviations.

• KEY ISSUE 6 - Resources

OBJECTIVE

To maximise the use of existing resources and advise the community on funding opportunities for arts and culture.

The arts generally have a history of being poorly funded, receiving patronage and support largely from wealthy benefactors. This situation has essentially remained unchanged even though the arts have gained greater political, social and economic recognition. There is still a belief that the arts are 'non-essential', but the present government has acknowledged openly the contribution that culture can make to society through revised policy and increased spending.



Blackpool Borough Council faces human, physical and financial constraints within the arts as it embarks upon an arts service for the first time. Similarly both amateur and professional arts organisations are, in the main, poorly placed financially to improve their facilities and services from existing budgets. Planning for change may involve amateur groups - and indeed professional companies - merging or forming partnerships in order that their future existence be secured.

The financial resources of audiences and participants is also an issue. The affordability of the arts is a contributory

ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS
1 Explore all means of maximising existing resources and drawing down funding for the arts in Blackpool.	NWAB/ACE/ABSA BBC/HLF/NWMS NOF/MFF
2 Assist local organisations with information about funding opportunities for the arts.	BBC
3 Investigate the possibility of introducing a public art scheme into all new building projects in Blackpool.	BBC/Business Community
4 Develop guidelines and criteria for the public funding of the arts in Blackpool.	BBC
5 Explore further how the arts can contribute to inward investment and income generation.	BBC/TCF Business Community
6 Research the concept of "value for money" within the arts in Blackpool and explore the possibility of an arts element to the Residents Card Scheme.	BBC/GT

* See Appendix A for full list of abbreviations.

• SECTION 5 - IMPLEMENTATION

There is no doubt that this strategy sets out a challenging agenda for all concerned with arts and culture in the Borough of Blackpool. The key to the successful implementation of the strategy will be by working in partnership with the community and combining its resources, knowledge and experience towards the achievements of a shared vision.

Subject to the availability of financial and other resources, Blackpool Borough Council will adopt the principles and priorities of the Arts and Cultural Strategy and its identified priorities.

Much of the Council's initial work will involve formulating and agreeing work programmes or research projects with the key partners in line with the identified areas for action.



• SECTION 6 - REVIEW

It is intended that the Arts and Cultural Strategy will be reviewed on a three yearly basis.

There will also be regular updating via a continuing annual consultative process to keep the strategy on course and a progress report will be produced for consultation purposes.



• A B B R E V I A T I O N S - A P P E N D I X A

ABA	Action for Better Access	GFS	George Formby Society
ABSA	Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts	GHS	Greenlands County High School
AC	Age Concern	GT	Grand Theatre
ACE	Arts Council of England	GTED	Grand Theatre Education Department
ALGAO	Association of Local Government Arts Officers	HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
BAS	Blackpool Art Society	LAWTEC	Lancashire Area West Training and Enterprise Council
BBB	Blackpool Brass Band	LP	Leisure Parcs Ltd
BBC	Blackpool Borough Council	MFF	Millennium Festival Fund
BCP	Blackpool Challenge Partnership	NFMC	North Fylde Music Circle
BIA:NW	Business in the Arts : North West	NOF	New Opportunities Fund
BSO	Blackpool Symphony Orchestra	NWAB	North West Arts Board
B&FC	Blackpool & The Fylde College	NWDAF	North West Disability Arts Forum
B&FLO	Blackpool & Fylde Light Opera	NWLH	North West Lancashire Health Authority
CVS	Council for Voluntary Services	NWMS	North West Museums Service
C&DAO	County & District Arts Officers Group	PP	Phoenix Project
EG	Evening Gazette	TCF	Town Centre Forum Ltd
FAA	Fylde Arts Association	WBC	Wyre Borough Council
FBC	Fylde Borough Council		

• C O N T R I B U T O R S - A P P E N D I X B

In addition to relevant officers from Tourism, Economic Development, Planning, Environmental Health, Social Services, Education, Operational Services, Technical Services and Cultural Services, the Arts & Cultural Strategy reflects the contributions and assistance of the following agencies for which the Council is grateful:-

Arts General

Age Concern
 Blackpool & Fylde Barbershop Harmony Club
 Blackpool & Fylde Historical Society
 Blackpool & Fylde Light Opera
 Blackpool & North Shore Folk Dance Club
 Blackpool & The Fylde College
 Blackpool Art Society
 Blackpool Brass Band
 Blackpool Civic Trust
 Blackpool Festival of Music & Speech
 Blackpool Film Society
 Blackpool Forum
 Blackpool Library Service
 Blackpool Operatic Players
 Blackpool Over 60's Choir
 Blackpool St Cecilia Choir
 Blackpool Symphony Orchestra
 Friends of the Grand Theatre
 Full Circle Arts
 Fylde Arts Association
 Fylde Borough Council
 Fylde Sinfonia
 George Formby Society
 Grand Theatre
 Grundy Art Gallery

Joint Fylde Photographic Societies

Lancashire County Art Unit
 LAWTEC
 May Copeland Choir
 Museum 2000
 North Fylde Music Circle
 North West Arts Board
 Phoenix Project Ltd
 Town Centre Forum
 Wedgwood Ladies Choir
 Wyldfyre Gospel Choir
 Wyre Borough Council

Community/Voluntary Organisations

177 (1st Blackpool) Squadron Air Training
 Blackpool Boys and Girls Club
 Blackpool South Division Guides Association
 Blackpool South Guides
 Boys Work
 Girls Friendly Society
 Grangers Youth Club
 Highfield Youth Club
 Manchester Methodist MA
 2nd Blackpool Boys Brigade
 Park School Youth Club

The Right Company

St Kentigern's Youth Club
 St Mary's Youth Club
 St Stephen's Youth Club
 Whiteholme Youth & Community Centre

Schools

Arnold School
 Collegiate County High School
 Elmslie Girls School
 Greenlands County High School
 Montgomery High School
 Palatine County High School
 St Mary's RC High School

Local Business Community

Blackpool Airport
 Blackpool Pleasure Beach
 Blackpool Transport Services Ltd
 Boots the Chemist Ltd
 Business Travel Plus
 Evening Gazette
 First Leisure plc
 Granthams
 Hounds Hill Shopping Centre
 Midland Bank plc
 Odeon Cinemas
 W H Smith Retail

C O N T A C T

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